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[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

The memory of ancient Greek *demokratia* survives in the name of our modern "democracies". Although the former was a short-lived, remote experience, the latter have often regarded it as a source of inspiration. But is it possible to develop its pattern as a theoretical pattern? In other, more platonic, words: can *demokratia* be taught? (D. Musti, *Tavola rotonda*, p. 427) This book gives anyone willing to attempt answering such a question a wide collection of resources: it contains the proceedings of an international conference held at the Chieti University (Italy) that hosted an interdisciplinary discussion among historians, philologists and philosophers on Greek democracy and its opponents. Its editor, the historian Umberto Bultrighini, has chosen to publish not only the congress papers, but the accounts of the discussions in each session and of the final round-table conference as well. The resulting text is useful to provide readers with a bird's eye survey of the state of the art scholarship on this subject.

Ancient democracy was performed in action before being comprehended in theory (E. Lévy, *Tavola rotonda*, p. 424): its political pattern was so groundbreaking that it received a theoretical conceptualization only from the hand of Aristotle, when it had already lost its freshness (S. Fuscagni, *Tavola rotonda*, p. 417). It has been said that there does not survive any ancient statement of democratic political theory (A. H. M. Jones, 'The Athenian Democracy and Its Critics,' *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 11, 1953, pp. 1-26): we can rely only on some passages of Herodotus and Thucydides, among which the most famous and complete is Pericles' Funeral Speech, whose thesis can be compared with the ideas of Plato's Protagoras (M. Ostwald, *The Sophists and Athenian Politics*, pp. 35-51). On the contrary, we do possess many antidemocratic theoretical testimonies, from the anonymous *The Constitution of Athenians* to Plato's and Xenophon's writings. Although modern scholars have often tended to defend the Athenian democracy without taking seriously their charges, a more accurate and less prejudiced scrutiny shows that the Athenians themselves did sometimes accept these criticisms, by passing laws to minimize the problems they pinpointed. For instance, they drew up the charter of the Second League to avoid both the danger that an ally might dominate over the others and the charges of imperialism they received for hegemony over their first (the Delian) league (E. M. Harris, *Was all Criticism of Athenian Democracy Necessarily Anti-Democratic?*, pp. 11-23).

We can explain such a responsiveness to criticisms because democracy, at its beginnings, was not born as a stiff procedural system: its practice came before its conceptualization. To quote D. Ambaglio (*Prima di una democrazia delle regole: qualche appunto*, pp. 1-10) Athenian democracy was not without rules, but "before the rules". In ancient texts it is easy to draw a sharp distinction between democracy and antidemocracy by species only when the former is opposed to tyranny. Otherwise it is possible to draw only a quantitative distinction between democracy and oligarchy. The most ancient text that mentions a *kratos* of the *demos* is perhaps the Spartan *Rhetra*, reported by Plutarch (*Lycurgus*, VI): Sparta, which is an aristocracy for modern historians, intended itself as a "democratic aristocracy" (D. Musti, *Tavola rotonda*, pp. 396-398).

We should not be surprised, therefore, if a word like *isonomia* - equality of laws - is used both to praise democracy, in the speech of the Persian Otanes reported by Herodotus (III.80.2), and to describe a fair oligarchy. For instance, the Thebans refuse to be taken as responsible for the alliance of their city with the Persians, because at that time they were ruled neither by a democracy nor by an "isonomic oligarchy" (Thucydides, III 62.3). According to E. Lévy, the word *isonomia* might be intended as a less fortunate synonym of "moderate constitution" (*Isonomia*, pp. 119-137).

The idea that ancient democracy is only one of the possible versions of a unitary pattern is clearly shown by P. Carlier's interpretation of Aristotle. In the *Politics*, Aristotle gives a systematic account of the traditional classification of six government systems. There are three straight systems, in which the rulers govern according to the common advantage: monarchy if the ruler is one person, aristocracy if the rulers are a group, and *politeia* if the multitude is in power. There are also three diverging systems, structured to operate to the advantage of the rulers: tyranny, oligarchy and democracy, which is rule to the advantage of the poor (1293a ff). Aristotle devotes to kingship and tyranny two distinct but concise analyses. Kingship was infrequent in the fourth-century Greek city-states; moreover, according to Aristotle, it was hardly a constitution. The Spartan kingship is simply a civic magistracy, that is a part of a constitution; the early Greek and barbarian kingships are only pre-political extensions of paternal power, and can be legitimized only on the basis of the subjects' minority. The *pambasileia* or absolute monarchy can be justified only if there is an extraordinary person, like a god among men, that puts an end to natural community because of his utmost inequality. Tyranny, as a despotic authority, is in itself the contradiction of a civic community. The two remaining constitutions, oligarchy and democracy, are discussed extensively in books IV-VI: however, according to Aristotle, it is more accurate to state that there is only one well organized constitution, the *politeia*, which is midway between democracy and oligarchy (1265b: 26-28), and the others are deviations. In a *politeia* the needs of the poor and of the wealthy are met so well that the former believe they live in a democracy, and the latter in an oligarchy. Democracy tends to magnify the power of the Assembly and to reduce the importance of magistrates, while aristocracy is inclined to do the opposite, but *politeia* is more similar to a moderate democracy than to a moderate oligarchy, because of its geometrical equality and accordance with laws (P. Carlier, *Démocratie et oligarchie dans la Politique d'Aristote: Quelques observations*, pp. 263-275).

Moreover, as is shown by the political history of Syracuse reported by S. N. Consolo Langher (*Democrazia e antidemocrazia a Siracusa: isotes e ges anadasmos nelle lotte sociali del IV secolo*, pp. 235-250), the confrontation among the poor and the wealthy is constantly articulated in political terms, even when it has to deal with the substantial equality question. In Syracuse it was possible to put the land redistribution question on the political agenda, and even to adopt it in the frame of Timoleon's moderate, reconciling policy, just because the city

was born as a colony, whose original political act had been the partitioning of land into equal shares.

After the democratic restoration of 403 BCE followed the short-lived Thirty Tyrants' government, no active political party in the fourth century ever disputed the current constitution, which continued to be discussed only in philosophical circles. After 350 some constitutional reforms were made, like for instance the detachment of the generalship from the ten tribes, the creation of a theoric fund with a reeligible powerful treasurer, the revival of the Areopagus; in c. 335 the *ephebeia* was reformed as well, to promote *sophrosyne* and *kosmiotes* -- virtues that used to be associated with Sparta. Some of these modifications tended to concentrate more power in the hands of magistrates at the expense of its being shared among the citizens. They were proposed, however, with the purpose of improving democracy by restoring its "good old days" spirit, not to undermine it. After Alexander's death in 323, Athens tried a new uprising, but was defeated and reached a settlement with Antipater, on the basis of which the citizen body was limited to 9000 by a property qualification, to rule the state in accordance with the laws of Solon. Even such a settlement was not advertised as an oligarchic restoration, but as a return to the ancient Athenian traditions. In other words, democracy did not fade out because, in Athens, it had strong opponents, but because of its weak supporters. The latter, in spite of Demosthenes, were incapable of identifying democracy as such and inclined to imagine Athens' glorious past as connected to a more restrained regime (P. J. Rhodes, *Democracy and its Opponents in Fourth-Century Athens*, pp. 275-289).

However, although democracy disappeared very soon as a political system, its procedures survived until late antiquity as rules for administrative practice. In the Middle Ages, democracy had a theoretical revival under the name of *gubernatio popularis* because of the rediscovery of Aristotle (L. Bertelli, *Tavola rotonda*, p. 439).

In this perspective, the theoretical weakness of ancient democracy is the basis both of its political fading and of its administrative persistence. The very model of direct democracy, which we are accustomed to associate with antiquity, was conceptualized only in the Modern Age, especially in the Eighteenth Century, when scholars realized that such a political system, which presupposed citizens with a lot of spare time, could be achieved only in a slave-owning society (G. Cambiano, *Tavola rotonda*, p. 437). According to G. Cambiano, in the Modern Age no one proposed to adopt as a normative pattern the ancient model as a whole. Rousseau himself asserts, in his *Encyclopédie* article on political economy, that Athens was a tyrannical aristocracy ruled by orators. In the *Social Contract* he adds that it is impossible to imagine people remaining *assemblée* all the time to deal with the public affairs. When European culture takes inspiration from antiquity, it selects only single facets to develop constitutions that, properly speaking, are republican or "mixed", in the tradition of Aristotle and Polybius (G. Cambiano, *Tavola rotonda*, p. 407-411).

Such a free attitude towards the experiences of the ancients is indeed close to the spirit of ancient democracy. Democracy was simply the expression of the *polis* and is clearly opposed only to tyranny, which is in itself the very negation of politics. As a "political" regime, democracy endeavors to gather together the interests of its various parts: in Athens it does it in accordance with Pericles' spirit of reconciling public and private, in Sparta in a more collectivist way. The republican expression *res publica* itself is derived from *res poplica* or popular (D. Musti, *Tavola rotonda*, pp. 443-444). Thus the true democratic paradigm we received from antiquity is not an abstract theoretical model, but rather the belief that, every time a government is not private but public, it is a political government that involves the possibility of democracy *stricto sensu* as well.

Finally: can democracy be taught? In Plato's *Meno*, which deals with the possibility of teaching virtue, Socrates praises the Athenian politicians ironically because they had been righteous without science, that is without knowing what they were doing. If it is true that ancient democracy was above all a practice, we can imagine that the most important lesson of antiquity is not a theoretical democratic pattern, but the empirical belief that democracy should be neither taught nor exported, because it has first to be practiced. And it is practiced every time there is a *res publica* and a community of citizens willing to care publicly about their administration; it is not practiced any longer when, despite legal procedures, power becomes private and concealed, and politics disappears.

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