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Tyranny and terror: the failure of Athenian democracy and the reign of the Thirty Tyrants

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TYRANNY AND TERROR:

THE FAILURE OF ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY AND THE REIGN OF THE THIRTY
TYRANTS

A Thesis

Presented to

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, WA

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Lucas D. LeCaire

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Athens, a polis long governed by its proud and unique democracy, was governed by an oligarchy consisting of Thirty Athenians of the aristocratic class, from 404 B.C. when Athens surrendered to Sparta to end the Peloponnesian War (431-404).¹ The “Thirty” were entrusted by Sparta to codify the laws of the city for the creation of a new constitution, both oligarchic and loyal to Sparta. The resulting oligarchy, however, did not succeed in drafting a constitution. The extreme policies and actions of the oligarchs which included the imprisonment, execution, and disenfranchisement of hundreds of Athenian citizens, contributed to their eventual overthrow and earned them the nickname, “the Thirty Tyrants.”² Their iron-fisted rule over Athens lasted only six months, when they were overthrown by an army of exiled Athenian democrats led by the Athenian general, Thrasybulus.

This brief period represents the final climactic episode in the history of Athens’ so called ‘Golden Age’, which included the height of Athenian radical democracy, imperial power, and a cultural flourishing in the fifth century B.C. My research on this period has led me to trace the political history of Athens in the fifth century in order to illuminate the transformation of Athens from an independent polis to the capital of a maritime empire. The combination of Athens’ unmatched naval superiority in the Aegean Sea along with the increased democratization of the government allowed the citizens of Athens to make decisions not only regarding the matters of the polis, but the complex affairs of maintaining a naval empire. This was the first time in history that ordinary men wielded so much influence on the affairs of other *poleis*. It is partially from the

¹ All dates unless otherwise specified are B.C.

² The ‘oligarchy of the Thirty’ and simply the ‘Thirty’ are used interchangeably throughout the text. ‘The Thirty’ refers to the title of the government of Athens as a single entity, but it has been used to refer to the thirty men collectively. This same distinction applies to the rule of the ‘Four Hundred’ and later the ‘Three Thousand’.

enmity held by the aristocratic elements of Athenian society toward the power invested in the perceived Athenian 'mob' which the high point of radical democracy began to crumble at the end of the fifth century. The decade immediately prior to the end of war was especially important. It begins with the disastrous Athenian expedition to Sicily in 413 B.C., followed by an oligarchic coup in 411 B.C., and finally the subject of this thesis, the oligarchy of the Thirty. Their actions were fundamental in the undermining of the democratic institutions of Athens.

An examination of the ways in which the Thirty oppressed the Athenians and the changes which they made to the governmental organs of the state will relate the history by which the democratic system failed to be effective. These challenges to democracy include the paradoxical existence of an Athenian empire. It was from the creation of this empire that the sovereign Athenian *demos* gained the authority to exercise the will of Athens over other Greek states and not just her own. The Peloponnesian War presented a number of challenges to Athens' democracy, most important of which was the ability of the Athenian *demos* to make sound decisions in the face of large scale war abroad and governmental erosion in the form of factional strife and conspiracy at home. The final challenge to democracy that will be emphasized here is the aristocratic section of Athenian society, those who were responsible for the first oligarchic coup of 411 and later the oligarchy of the Thirty, who were fundamental in the undermining of the democratic institutions of Athens.

The Athenian democracy was fragile; indeed few poleis granted such wide power to the full range of their citizens. The oligarchy of the Thirty represents a transitional period which links the previous hundred years of Athenian democracy to the second phase of democracy, which was structured differently from the former. This is one of the few times in history that a

democratic society has essentially been taken hostage by an oppressive few who wish to completely reverse the social and political norms of the time. Yet the outcome is a tribute to the resiliency of the system of democracy both ancient and modern. Even after oligarchy was firmly in power, and the chief leaders of the popular party were dead or imprisoned, the people of Athens were able to take back their city and restore the earlier form of government.

This topic is especially relevant to the world in which many of us live today; that is, a world we consider to be equal and democratic. There are, of course, many similarities between Athens in the fifth century B.C. and modern political systems. For example, politicians arranged along factional lines debate each other over many of the same issues as did Athenians in the fifth century. In both ages, they argue over what is ‘constitutional’ and the ongoing anxieties of being locked in incessant warfare. Other dilemmas like “whether to go to war in some far-off land; how to lessen the inequalities between, or reconcile, the rich and poor; how to decide on who could be a citizen and what that status entailed; how far democratic practices such as rotation in office and selection by lot should extend, and how to administer an empire” are significant parallels.³ Athens, like America, fostered its democratic growth by overthrowing the social and political restraints associated with a monarchical system, in exchange for a system that nurtured individuality. Historically, there are similar events that led to similar outcomes for both Athens and America. The Athenians and the Americans were both challenged by a high-stakes war whose victor would be left standing as a superpower of the world, as well as a leader of cultural influence for the next several decades. For Athens and America, the victory in war gave each country the power to control not only their own policies but to apply these policies unto others.

³ See J. Peter Euben, John Wallach, and Josiah Ober, eds., *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 5-19.

Yes, the outcome of the Persian Wars of the early fifth century left Athens in a similar situation as America in the years following World War II, although history does not repeat itself to the exact detail. These comparisons can be somewhat illusory given the enormous difference in time, yet the comparisons do exist and more of them continue to emerge as world governments evolve, for better or for worse, in the 21st century. For these reasons, it is important to notice the familiar growth, decline, and collapse of the Athenian system.

Athens reveals both the fragility of the democracies and the recognition that citizens of current democracies can benefit from knowledge of the past. Consequences of the lack of knowledge, as will be presented here, can be violent and oppressive. Plato commented that the oligarchy of the Thirty made the previous democratic government look like gold in comparison (*Epist.* 7.324d). The lesson here should prompt the importance of a stabilized government with the necessary checks and balances, regardless of democratic or oligarchic preference. The events of the final stages of the Peloponnesian War created a dark and terrible period for the Athenians, but even after being utterly defeated in war, and rendered helpless in the changing of the constitution, Athens' democracy was restored anew by the efforts of her democratically fervent citizens. The goal of this thesis will be to offer this democratic renewal as an example to be considered by modern readers.

Sources

Like most works concerning the Peloponnesian War and the latter half of the fifth century B.C. in general, Thucydides is the earliest and most reliable of our ancient sources. His value of course lies in his masterful retelling of the history of the Peloponnesian War. For the purposes of this thesis, I reference his account on the *pentecontaetia*, or the fifty years in between the

conclusion of the Second Persian War (479 B.C.) and the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. In this portion of his account we see his interpretation of the events which led to the rise of Athens from the leader of maritime alliance of city-states to the head of an empire which ruled its subjects by enforcing them to pay tribute to Athens annually. Although this section is an intentional digression by Thucydides, in order to explain the state of Athens and Sparta by the outset of the war, it retains the value of being one of the only comprehensive narratives of this period. Thucydides' account ends abruptly in the year 411 B.C., after the first oligarchic coup. It is unfortunate that we do not have Thucydides' account of the final ten years of the war, and with it the surrender of Athens and the rise of the Thirty Tyrants. For this latter period we must be content with the work of our second primary source by a somewhat less skilled historian, Xenophon.

The Athenian historian Xenophon, writing in the early half of the fourth century B.C. is considered the earliest historian to produce an account of the reign of the Thirty Tyrants of Athens. His work entitled *Hellenika*, which, in addition to being the earliest account, carries the added benefit as an eyewitness account to the events. He was presumably living in Athens at the time of her defeat and surrender to Sparta, and the resulting institution of the Thirty. His status as a well-to-do citizen and cavalryman naturally would have placed him within the ranks of the Thirty's supporters, the Three Thousand. Xenophon does not discuss his own personal role in the events however. This is to be expected; he was like many of the other Athenians of the aristocratic class, who wished to purge themselves of any association with the 'Thirty Tyrants' and their government.

Xenophon's *Hellenika* has been criticized for various reasons which include his omission of certain events and, overall, the lack of serious historical purpose and detail which can be found in his predecessor, Thucydides. Although Xenophon was an Athenian citizen, his stance as a Laconophile and oligarchic supporter should be considered.⁴ Xenophon was known to have spent much of his life in Sparta when he was exiled from Athens between the years of 399 and 394.⁵ He was even made an honorary Spartan thanks to his relationship with the King Agesilaos. His exile was a reaction to his involvement as a cavalryman under the rule of the Thirty. While his reputation as a lover of Spartan society would seem to bias his account and limit his credibility as a source, his narrative of the events and especially the speeches which he preserves of the two leaders of the Thirty, Critias and Theramenes, are invaluable sources of information that are not to be found elsewhere.

A significant amount of our knowledge comes down to us from the works of Athenian orators, the most important of whom was Lysias, an Athenian metic, orator, and speech writer who contributed to the history of this period by preserving his own personal indictment against a member of the Thirty, one *Eratosthenes*. In his speech, *Against Eratosthenes*, Lysias recalls the time when the Thirty was targeting the foreign population of Athens for their wealth and property. In his story, which details the arrest of himself and his brother, Lysias creates a strong and vivid case for the cruelty of the Thirty and their motivations for their behavior, which can hardly be found anywhere else with such personal enthusiasm for the Thirty's punishment.

⁴ For a critique of Xenophon's stance on democracy, See, Robin Seager, "Xenophon and Athenian Democratic Ideology," *The Classical Quarterly* Vol. 51, No. 2 (2001): 385-397.

⁵ David Thomas in *The Landmark Xenophon's Hellenika*, ed. Robert B. Strassler (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), xviii.

Lysias provides supplementary accounts of both the coup of 411 and the oligarchy of the Thirty in 404. We know that he took part in the democratic resistance led by Thrasybulus, in which he used his wealth and his family's shield workshop to support the effort. Like most orators, we must understand that Lysias was a speech writer by profession and, like most litigants, he was constructing cases that would persuade jurymen and assembly to certain courses of action.

The political writings of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) and his students provide the researcher with a wealth of information theorizing democratic and oligarchic ideology in fourth century B.C. Greece. The primary works in focus for this paper are the Aristotelian *Constitution of Athens (Athenaion Politeia)*⁶, along with his *Politics*. The *Ath. Pol.* describes the constitutional history of Athens and is one among 158 similar treatises attributed to Aristotle which were known to have been in existence but, subsequently, have become lost.⁷ The *Constitution of Athens* is useful because of its value as a complete account of the Athenian constitution; specifically it contains one of the few accounts of the Thirty at Athens. P.J. Rhodes' commentary on this work does an excellent job of cross-referencing nearly every line in the *Ath. Pol.*⁸

The *Ath. Pol.* is significant for its explanation of the functions of Athenian democracy, however, its credibility as an accurate source for the Thirty at Athens must be considered. First we must come to terms with the dating of Aristotle's work. Unlike Xenophon, Aristotle does not have the benefit of being an eye-witness to the events in Athens during the rule of the Thirty.

⁶ This will be appropriately abbreviated, *Ath. Pol.*, throughout the text.

⁷ Hansen, 8.

⁸ P.J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

Aristotle was born roughly ten years after the Thirty and therefore his descriptions of the terror enforced by the Thirty should not be held higher than those of Xenophon, who can attest to witnessing the events.

In examining the *Ath. Pol.*, it is important to understand its disagreements with the other sources on the chronology of specific events. Most historians have judged the *Ath. Pol.* to be incorrect.⁹ This judgment stems from the *Ath. Pol.*'s dating of the arrival of the Spartan garrison, the execution of Theramenes, and the seizure of Phyle by Thrasybulus. The *Ath. Pol.* places the seizure of Phyle earlier than the other events, thus giving the Thirty the excuse to kill Theramenes and disarm the citizens of Athens. After the execution of Theramenes, the *Ath. Pol.* reports "the savagery and wickedness of their regime increased considerably" (37.2). The Spartan garrison was established not to enable the Thirty to do as they pleased, but in a reaction to Thrasybulus' seizure of Phyle. The *Ath. Pol.*'s version explains these actions as due not out of the selfish greed of the Thirty but as precautionary steps in response to the opposition of the democratic exiles at Phyle.¹⁰

The later account of Diodorus Siculus, who authored a universal history in the first century B.C., contains much of the same information as Xenophon and Aristotle, although it is notably shorter, with an obvious anti-Thirty bias in the writing style (14.3-6). Diodorus' account is derived from the fourth century historian Ephorus, much of whose work has been lost.

Analyses of Diodorus have shown that he follows the account of both Xenophon and Aristotle in

⁹ P.J. Rhodes, 422; C. Hignett, *A History of the Athenian Constitution to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 289; Andrew Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat: Civil War and Civic Memory in Ancient Athens* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002): 219.

¹⁰ Wolpert, 219.

specific instances of his narrative.¹¹ Thus, Diodorus provides a third account of the Thirty at Athens to be compared with the two fundamental works of Xenophon and Aristotle.

A fourth narrative of the Thirty at Athens is offered by the Latin historian, Justin, who lived under the Roman Empire. Not much is known about Justin except that he wrote a history of the events leading up to the rise of Macedon in the fourth century B.C. He used the work of the historian Pompeius Trogus, who lived under the Emperor Augustus. The importance of this account is its transmission from the historian Ephorus, who serves as the source for Diodorus as well.¹²

The amount of work written on the rise and fall of the Athenian state in the fifth century B.C. is immense. The core of my research comes from a handful of reliable sources which focus on the constitutional history of Athens, with special attention paid to the short period of oligarchic rule at the end of the fifth century. For this period, the works of Hignett, Ostwald, and Krentz have been most useful.¹³ For my investigations into the period of Thucydides' *Pentocontaetia* and the rise of the Athenian Empire I have used the work of Meiggs.¹⁴ In addition, I have used the work of Hansen in describing and interpreting the fundamental organs

¹¹ Krentz, 134.

¹² Ibid, 143.

¹³ Hignett, 1967; Martin Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law: Law Society and Politics in Fifth Century Athens* (London: University of California Press, 1986), 470, 485; Peter Krentz, *The Thirty at Athens* (London: Cornell University Press, 1982).

¹⁴ Russell Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

of the Athenian state; this work has been essential in my understanding of the workings of the Athenian state.¹⁵

¹⁵ Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy In The Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles and Ideology*, trans. J.A. Cook (Oxford: Blackwell Ltd, 1991).

The Growth of Athenian Democracy and its Challenges

The Golden Age produced by the surprising victory over the massive Persian attack in 480-79 was possible in large measure due to the young democracy of Athens. After 479, the other poleis returned to their original life but Athens initiated an effort to free Greek states still under Persian Rule. In Book One of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides narrates his version of the circumstances and events which placed Athens in a position to acquire power (1.89). The section titled the *Pentecontaetia* covers the fifty year period between the repulsion of the Persians and the beginning of the Peloponnesian War.

Following the repulsion of the Persian invaders in 479, the Athenians began to rebuild their destroyed city. Thucydides reports that “only isolated portions of the circumference had been left standing, and most of the houses were in ruins” (1.89.3). It was the Athenian statesman Themistocles who advocated the reconstruction of the Long walls of Athens. The original walls of Athens had been destroyed by the Persians, but the importance of reconstructing them was expressed by Themistocles who realized the potential of Athens in becoming a naval empire. “For he [Themistocles] first ventured to tell them to stick to the sea and forthwith began to lay the foundations of the empire (1.93).” The Long walls fit well with the geography of Athens and the harbor town, Piraeus. They completely circled the city proper and extended south for seven miles to Piraeus, where, upon completion, they encircled the three natural harbors. The reconstruction of the walls was opposed by the Spartans. They did not wish to see Athens so fortified that it could possibly be used a base of power for the Persians, should they decide to attempt another invasion of Greece. Themistocles and the Athenians were not deterred by this

fear however. They correctly predicted that the long walls would secure Athens to allow her navy to thrive in the Aegean.

In the spring of 478, the allied Greek *poleis* led by Spartans and their King Pausanias, launched an expedition to the island of Cyprus to continue the war against Persians. The mission was to insure the defeat of Persian influence in the Aegean Sea by continuing the Persian war at sea, where the might of combined allied naval forces would continue to be victorious following the recent naval triumph over Persia at Salamis. The expedition travelled to Byzantium after successfully subduing most of the island and barring off the Persians from the sea. At this point Thucydides reports that Pausanias' violent and arrogant nature as commander impelled the allies, especially the Ionian Greeks, to request new leadership. The charges brought against Pausanias appear to have been on the account of his oppressive nature toward his own troops, and his adoption of Persian customs and style (1.95.1) The corruption of Pausanias along with the recent unpopularity of the Spartans as the leaders of the allied naval force, were good enough reasons for Sparta to back out of their command and let the Athenians take charge. The Spartans were not usually prone to long term warfare as it was, and additionally, they feared that those who they sent would succumb to a similar deterioration as in the case of Pausanias.

The resignation of Sparta allowed Athens to succeed to the supreme position of the allied forces of Greece. The decision to make Athens the leader was reinforced by the nomination made to them by their kinsmen, the Ionian Greeks, who lived on what is called the Ionian coast, the westernmost coast of Asia Minor. The Athenians proceeded to lay out the framework for their new alliance against the Persians by "determining which cities were to contribute money against the barbarian, and which ships; their professed object being to retaliate for their

sufferings by ravaging the King's country" (Thuc.1.96). The Athenian statesman, Aristides, was placed in charge of assessing the tribute to be paid by each city.¹⁶ The treasury of the new naval league was established on the sacred island of Delos, and thus the modern understanding of this first league as the 'Delian League.' The treasury was kept and administered by Athenian officials called *Hellenotamiai*, or, 'Treasurers for Hellas.'

At the outset, the professed object and legitimacy of the League as described by Thucydides was the "emancipation of the allies from Persian rule and the repulse of any Persian invader" (Thuc. 3.10).¹⁷ The years following the creation of the League yielded successful results in the war with Persia. The Athenians led the allied navy on a string of victories which included the capture of several Persian controlled *poleis* (Thuc. 1.98). In 467, the Athenians and their allies, led by the prominent Athenian general Cimon, embarked on a campaign to the Eurymedon River on the southern coast of Asia Minor to engage the Persians on both land and sea. The expedition was wildly successful as Cimon managed to win two battles on the same day, capturing and destroying the Phoenician fleet which consisted of 200 ships (Thuc. 1.100). The operations of the League soon dominated the activity in the Aegean Sea.

The popularity of Athens as the head of the Delian League declined as the threat of Persia in the Aegean diminished. Many of the allied states opted to serve the League by contributing money rather than ships and military service. The contribution of money was popular among the smaller states which were less capable of outfitting naval warships than the larger states.

Monetary contributions were also a popular option for those whose members who did not wish to

¹⁶ Thucydides estimates the original tribute amount to be fixed at four hundred and sixty talents (1.96.2)

¹⁷ Gustav Gilbert, *The Constitutional Antiquities of Sparta and Athens*, Trans. E.J. Brooks and T. Nicklin. (Chicago: Argonaut Publishers). 416.

leave their homes for naval service. This pattern of monetary contribution among the allies served to strengthen the already powerful navy of Athens. While most of the members opted out of naval service, Athens' navy grew larger due to the contribution in funds and the skills of her rowers and generals became more adept at naval warfare.

The Athenian navy was in a position of unmatched superiority due to the tribute collected by the allied states every year. The Athenians took harsh action against recalcitrant members. Many member states attempted to remove themselves from the League, which they saw was rapidly exhibiting imperialistic qualities. The first state to attempt leaving the League was Naxos in 470. Athens responded by bringing the full might of the navy to the island and forcing the Naxians to surrender. "Their position in the League was thus lost, and they became subjects of Athens on conditions determined in each case by a special treaty."¹⁸Thucydides reports this being the "first instance of the confederation being forced to subjugate an allied city, a precedent which was followed by that of the rest in the order which circumstances prescribed (1.98)." The fate of Naxos was in fact repeated by the revolt of Thasos in 465 and several others allied states who wished to be free of the subjugation placed on them by the Athenian League. The Athenians defended their actions by asserting that the desertion of membership and tributary obligations was the same as the desertion of the allies. By 454 the Delian League looked much more like an Athenian empire than an allied league. "All the allied states (except Samos, Lesbos, and Chios, which had separate treaties with Athens) had ceased, either of their own accord or under compulsion, to furnish contingents of their own, and had become tributary."¹⁹ Due to this

¹⁸ Gilbert, 418.

¹⁹ Gilbert, 418.

imperialistic policy, the Athenians decided to move the treasury of the League from Delos to Athens, in recognition of it as an Athenian treasury.

The peak of Athenian imperial oppression was perhaps best exhibited in the Melian Dialogue recorded by Thucydides (5.85). In 416 Athens sent envoys to the island of Melos, a colony of Sparta, to inquire about their bold refusal to submit to the Athenians, and their decision to remain neutral in the current Peloponnesian War. The exchange between the Athenian envoys and the Melian representatives illuminates imperialistic attitude expressed by Athens at this point in the war. The Melians agree to talk to the Athenian envoys although they are sure that the only choices offered by Athens will be war or slavery. The Athenians justify their actions by expressing the argument that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must (5.89). The Melians put forth the argument that Athens' fabricated morals will mean nothing to them if and when their empire is lost, and that her present policy will only create more enemies for her. The Melians stood by their decision to adopt friendly neutrality toward both Athens and Sparta, even though their own ruin was at risk. Following the ominous negotiations, the allied Athenian force began siege operations on Melos. The Melians held off Athens with some initial success, yet this only proved to provoke Athens to carry out the siege more vigorously. Realizing their inevitable defeat, the Melians surrendered to Athens, who proceeded to apply the ultimate punishment to the Melians. The Athenians "put to death all the grown men whom they took, and sold the women and children for slaves, and subsequently sent out five hundred colonists and settled the place for themselves" (5.116).

The growth and transformation of the Delian League into an Athenian empire was mirrored by substantial development in the Athenian democracy. The transformation of Athens

from a land power to a sea power by means of the League led to a shift in the internal balance of power. The middle class of Athens predominantly consisted of men who could afford their own weapons and armor, that is, the *hoplite* class, whereas the navy was manned by the poor *Thetes*. The roles of the main political organs of the state (the Assembly, Council, and Courts) became more complex as matters concerning the administration of a maritime empire became of chief importance. The reforms of the statesman, Ephialtes, in the 460's paved the way for the 'radical democracy' of Pericles' time. His chief reform was targeted at the archaic institution of the Areopagus. Traditionally the Areopagus was entrusted with "oversight of the laws, the magistrates, the politically active citizens, and the general conduct of all Athenians, and it could pronounce judgment, not excluding the death sentence, in political trials."²⁰ Ephialtes, along with his predecessor, the young Pericles, set about enacting the 'radicalization' of the democracy by removing the aristocratic institutions which limited the potential of the government. In 462, they succeeded in reducing the power of the Areopagus to the single function of being the court for homicide cases.

Following in the footsteps of Ephialtes was Pericles. After the murder of Ephialtes²¹, Pericles quickly proved his prowess to the Athenians with his exceptional oratory skills as well as his distinguished military background, to become the 'leader of the people' in Athens for the next thirty-two years.²² With his ascendancy to the focus of the public eye, Pericles initiated the further 'radicalization' of the democracy by instituting pay for political service (*Arist. Ath. Pol.*

²⁰ Hansen, 37.

²¹ The details of Ephialtes' murder are unknown; however, it is likely that his assassination originated from the oligarchic elements of Athens who were undermined by his political reforms.

²² Hansen, 38.

1274a8-9). The surplus funds collected each year from Athens' subject states were used to pay ordinary citizens' participation in the democracy. New pressures brought on by the complications of an empire were faced by the Council and Courts, which required an increase in the number of meetings. The introduction of pay for participation alleviated the concerns of many Athenians of the lower class who could not afford to miss a day of work to travel to an Assembly meeting. The second major reform of Pericles was the limits which he placed on the criteria for Athenian citizenship. With this reform, Pericles managed to define Athenian citizenship as those men who were born of Athenian parents on both sides of the family. This reform served to consolidate the present citizen population of Athens. It can also be seen in relation to Pericles' earlier law that gave pay for jury service. By the year 460, due to the reforms of both Ephialtes and Pericles, Athenian political life was dominated by ordinary citizens who fully shared in the decisions of Athens, just as they shared in the dangers of their service with the Athenian navy.

By the outset of the Peloponnesian War, the 'Golden age' of Athenian democracy was in full swing. Ushered in by the reforms of Pericles and Ephialtes in the middle of the fifth century, this was a most prosperous time for the Athenians. At the height of this prosperity, Pericles took steps to 'beautify' the city by using funds taken from the annual allied tribute to begin construction on the Parthenon in 447. This act was met with severe criticism, especially among the aristocracy, who condemned the use of League funds for anything else than the security of her empire from enemies. Pericles responded with the announcement that as long as Athens put forth the majority of work needed to protect the allies, she would do with the funds as pleased. The *Thetes* of Athens enjoyed their empowered position in Athens. The poorer citizens gained pay by means of the navy, where they were employed as rowers. In this spirit, the Athenians

were encouraged to identify their democracy with their empire.²³ While Athens reaped the rewards of imperial control over her former allies—now virtually reduced to subjects—the allied states struggled to remain autonomous under Athenian hegemony.

The Peloponnesian War was fought between Athens and Sparta, states that were polar opposites of each other militarily, culturally, and politically. It is important, first, to establish the definitions and characteristics of the political institutions which are most prevalent in the Greek world during the fifth century B.C. We must examine how the war was fought ideologically between the principles of democracy and oligarchy. The resentment shared between the advocates of both governments constitutes the heart of the conflict between the oligarchic Thirty Tyrants and the majority of Athenians who were accustomed to living under a democracy.

Democracy as it was practiced and developed in Athens, was a much different concept than the way it is normally perceived in the modern world. The first glaring difference of course is the requirements placed on citizenship, which “was limited to adult males of Athenian ancestry, and therefore excluded not only children but also women, immigrants and slaves.”²⁴ Comparatively, however, the constitution of Athens was more politically inclusive than the structures of most Greek city-states, which had gone through similar political upheavals and transformation including periods of tyrannical rule which passed into broader forms of oligarchy based on wealth.²⁵ In Athens the people decided to create a new type of government to curb the power of the wealthy elites and provide representation to adult men of every class within the

²³ Munn, 47.

²⁴ P.J. Rhodes, “Political activity in Classical Athens,” In *Athenian Democracy*, ed. P.J. Rhodes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 3.

²⁵ Peter Krentz, *The Thirty at Athens* (London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 18.

state; this system came to be known as democracy. The term from the Greek, *demokratia*, does not appear in the sources until the second half of the fifth century, and many scholars have concluded that the term only began to be used in that period.²⁶ Yet scholars agree that the nature of the original democratic government created in 508 B.C. by the Athenian, Cleisthenes, was the earliest form of what would become the ‘radical’ democracy of Pericles’ time. In this early form of democracy, power was not held exclusively by the common people. Rather, citizenship and voting rights were extended to the common people, but the aristocratic portion of Athenian society did not consider themselves ‘equal’ with the common people.²⁷ The aristocracy was content with this system as long as their influence in city politics remained strong. As we shall see however, the events which unfolded in from the middle of the fifth century on led to rise of the poor class in Athenian politics which in turn led to the discontent of the aristocracy.

The system of oligarchy, or ‘rule of the few’ is represented and advocated by the richest class in Athens, otherwise termed the aristocracy. It must be established that the two political systems, democracy and oligarchy, are not complete opposites. Athenian democracy was not based not on the ‘rule of the mass’, as a *plethocracy* would define. Instead, the *demos* is understood as “the ‘common people’ and not ‘the whole of the people’, and the democracy is consequently seen as ‘the government of the poor’ instead of the ‘government of the people’”.²⁸ Thus, it is possible to imagine a democracy where the rich are many, the poor are few, and power

²⁶ Hansen, tracing the use of the word, concludes that it was used in a favorable sense by democrats as early as the 460’s. 70.

²⁷ James O’Neill, *The Origins and Development of Ancient Greek democracy*, (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993).

²⁸ Hansen, 5.

is held by the poor few.²⁹ Despite the negative connotations associated with oligarchy, most *poleis* in the Greek world were governed by an oligarchy of one form or another. Typically oligarchies were comprised from the richest or most noble families in society; however, most did not exercise the type of tyranny over the population that we shall see with the ‘oligarchy of the Thirty.’ Citizenship was typically extended to a significant, ‘middle’ portion of the state, or those who owned land or could afford their own arms.

In Athens, the aristocracy managed to exist in relative harmony under a democratic government despite the belief that political power should be held by those men who were raised with the proper education to do so. It was not until the late 440’s that the Athenians became conscious of the “democracy vs. Oligarchy” dichotomy.³⁰ The challenges presented by the Peloponnesian War did much to polarize Athenian society between the poor and the rich. Athenian landowners were disaffected when they were forced to abandon their estates and farms as the Peloponnesian armies ravaged the Attic countryside annually. The plague which struck Athens in the early years of the war took the life of her strongest leader, Pericles, as well as about one-third of the population.³¹ Following the death of Pericles, Athens saw the rise of new leadership in men like Cleon, Nicias, and Alcibiades. The catastrophic losses yielded by the failed expedition to Sicily in 413 B.C. seemed to complete the schism forming between the

²⁹This is the explanation given by the author of the *Aristotelian Politeia 1279b: 20-1280a6*.

³⁰ Vincent J. Rosivach, “The Tyrant in Athenian Democracy,” *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1998), 52.

³¹ Robert J. Buck, *Thrasylbulus and the Athenian Democracy: The Life of an Athenian Statesman*, (Historia: Stuggart, 1998) 8.

frustrated aristocracy and the leaders of the popular party.³² “The Athenians were deprived of the use of land in Attica and of a land route to resources in Euboea by the Spartan King Agis at Decelea; they were short of trained men, ships and money; most of their tribute-paying allies were planning revolt in co-operation with Sparta.”³³ The culminating effect of all these challenges was the demoralization of the population. With all this hardship passing under the sign of a democratic state, it is easy to see why there was a growing disillusion with democracy in Athens.

The oligarchic revolution of the Thirty in 404 should be studied in the context of this broader oligarchic movement whose origins began in the 460’s with the reforms of Ephialtes, but was not enacted until 411 B.C., when a group of oligarchs managed to abolish democracy and establish an oligarchy in Athens. The disaster at Sicily severely weakened the naval forces of Athens and turned the tide of the war to Sparta’s advantage. The oligarchs took advantage of the Assembly’s vote to undertake the expedition, and blamed the leaders who persuaded the people as well as the people themselves.³⁴ An alliance with Persia gave Sparta the financial resources to build a fleet on par with Athens. The Athenian statesman, Alcibiades, who was in exile for his probable involvement in a series of religious desecrations, contacted the oligarchs in Athens and promised that if they could install an oligarchy in Athens, an alliance could be made with the Persian king that would peacefully end the Peloponnesian War. With hope of victory

³² Buck, 8. The Sicilian Expedition cost Athens 4,000 hoplites and cavalry plus an unknown number of Athenian sailors, plus thousands of allies, and some 200 ships.

³³ Andrew Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City: 750-330 B.C.*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 135.

³⁴ Hansen, 40.

diminishing, the Athenian Assembly passed a motion to put the administration of Athens into the hands of a council of 400 oligarchs.

The 400 oligarchs were pulled from the aristocratic portion of Athenian society. It is significant that the vote which empowered the government of the Four Hundred came at a time when the majority of Athenian *Thetes* were away with the fleet on the island of Samos. Thus, the assembly must have consisted mostly of Athenians of the upper class. Of the oligarchs themselves, we know that Theramenes was one of the leaders of the Four Hundred, just as he was among the oligarchy of the Thirty. Another oligarch, Phrynichus, was the only one to oppose the plan of Alcibiades. “He did not believe that oligarchic government would help them to retain the empire, nor did he think that Persian aid would come.”³⁵ It was the oligarch, Peisander, who proposed the abandonment of the current government in replace of an oligarchy. Despite a significant amount of opposition towards the proposal Peisander argued that “We will not achieve our aim without a more disciplined and responsible political framework, confining public office to a more limited circle of people and thinking of survival first rather than politics. For we will be able for sure to make adjustments of anything that is unsatisfactory later.”³⁶ The government lasted only a few months when a conspiracy hatched by the extreme oligarchs to surrender the city to Sparta was unearthed and halted by Theramenes and his followers.³⁷ Following this development, the oligarchy passed into a broader system of 5000 that could hold

³⁵ Lintott, 136.

³⁶ Lintott, 137.

citizenship.³⁸ Alcibiades was unable to fulfill his promise however. When the remainder of Athens' naval force stationed on Samos did not approve of the constitutional changes in Athens, a disagreement as to how exclusive the government of Athens should be also created serious contention within the ranks of the oligarchs. The contention between moderate and extremist oligarchs was a leading cause in the failure of the 400, and one that would reemerge seven years later when the oligarchy of the Thirty ruled Athens.

Conclusion to the Growth of Athenian democracy and its Challenges

The surrender of Athens to Sparta in 404 officially ended the Peloponnesian War. Under the conditions of surrender, the Athenians were required to give up their navy, the control of their empire, and, as is the focus of this current work, their democratic freedoms. Athens' new constitution was dictated by the victorious Sparta, itself ruled by a dual kingship, with a small, oligarchic advisory body. Under Sparta's direction, thirty men were selected among the oligarchs in Athens to create an oligarchic constitution which was fundamentally pro-Spartan. These men were collectively labeled the 'Thirty Tyrants'. The term tyranny categorized a title stemming from the brutal, autocratic nature of their rule. It was a complete reversal of the democratic principles practiced in Athens for at least a century.

The Tyrants went far beyond their mandate of creating a new constitution. The rule of the Thirty rapidly descended into an internecine civil war. For eight bloody months, beginning with their inauguration in September of 404, the Thirty instituted what can only be termed, a

³⁸ Raphael Sealey, "Constitutional Changes in Athens in 410 B.C.," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* Vol. 8 (1975): 271-295.

reign of terror throughout the city of Athens.³⁹ Under the protection of a Spartan garrison, the Thirty arrested and executed hundreds of Athenians for their democratic politics, and hundreds more regardless of class or politics. Additionally, they confiscated the property of their victims, more specifically that of the foreign resident population, the Metics. The constitution of the Thirty was so unpopular that these oligarchs were forced to drive the lower and middle class of Athens out of the city, limiting the citizen population to a privileged class of 3,000 Athenians who retained a share in the government. The rule of the Thirty was overthrown following a brief civil war between the expelled Athenians led by the general, Thrasybulus, and the Thirty with support from the Three Thousand and the garrison. After losses on both sides, the Spartan king, Pausanias, seeking to prevent another lengthy conflict with Athens, intervened and arbitrated a settlement with Thrasybulus and the exiles, allowing for the restoration of democracy in Athens.

The oligarchy of the Thirty was in power for only eight months before it was overthrown. In context of Athenian history, it is often treated as a brief intermittent period of chaos before democracy was restored and conducted more akin to earlier practices. As a result, much of modern scholarship focuses on the aftermath of the Thirty's reign: the struggle of Athens to restore her democracy and regain political and social stability in light of the recent atrocities of the Thirty.⁴⁰ With the exception of Peter Krentz's *The Thirty at Athens*, now over thirty years old, there has not been a detailed study of the rise and fall of the Thirty Tyrants in recent time.⁴¹

³⁹ The ambiguous motivations behind their use of terrorism have been the subject of scholarly debate: Andrew Wolpert, "The Violence of the Thirty Tyrants," In *Ancient Tyranny*, ed. Sian Lewis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

⁴⁰ Barry S. Strauss, *Athens after the Peloponnesian War: Class, Faction and Policy 403-386* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987); Alfred P. Dorjahn., *Political Forgiveness in Old Athens: the amnesty of 403 B.C.* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1946).; Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in*

During this short period of time a democratic conspiracy took place shortly after the Thirty's rise to power (Lys. 13.13-15). This development reveals well the nature of reaction by the Thirty. When the plotters were apprehended, the Thirty ordered their execution, setting a ruthless example for their treatment of dissenters and other political opponents. Furthermore, the Thirty continued the streak of violence in Athens by rounding up and executing people who had gained reputation in the former radical democracy as professional accusers, rabble rousers, and mischief makers. Collectively, these types were called sycophants (Xen. 2.3.12; *Ath. Pol.* 34.3). The execution of the sycophants was, as we shall see, accepted with general public approval but nevertheless, exemplifies the brutality and vengeance which the Thirty displayed.

The Thirty went even farther with the absolute power they possessed by reducing the number of full citizens in Athens. The Three Thousand (Xen. 2.3.18; *Ath. Pol.* 36.1), an official list of 3,000 Athenians who retained their full rights as citizens and a share in the government, was drafted by the Thirty. This list revoked the citizenship of hundreds of Athenians and, thus, was perhaps the most crucial step in the process of dismantling democracy which the Thirty had yet instituted. It deserves detailed examination as it was an important step in the creation of oligarchy. It also pertains to an interesting theory which explains the creation of the Three Thousand to be the base of a new constitution in Athens on a model similar to that of Sparta.⁴² The theory deserves fuller discussion both for the goal of making Athens more oligarchic, as well as its overall effect on those Athenians whose civic rights were revoked.

Ancient Athens (New York: Zone Books, 2002); Claude Mossé, *Athens in Decline, 404-86 B.C.* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973).

⁴¹ Peter Krentz, *The Thirty at Athens* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982).

⁴² Krentz, 64; Ostwald, 470, 485; Robert Garland, *The Piraeus: From the Fifth to the First Century B.C.* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 183.

The last action in the Thirty's measures to limit government was their decree to evict from Athens all those not included on the list of the Three Thousand (Xen. 2.4.1). This act, combined with the drafting of the list of Three Thousand and the disarming of the disfranchised Athenians was the most significant sequence of events by the Thirty. As we shall see, it drove a wedge between the Thirty and their supporters, the Three Thousand, and the rest of the Athenians.

The third section examines the internal reasons for the failure of the Thirty. In order to understand the reasons, we must identify men who composed the Thirty and how their conflicting political interests contributed to their downfall. Xenophon (2.3.10) provides a list of all thirty men selected to share the ruling of Athens, but for the purposes of this thesis I will discuss in detail the two most important members, Critias and Theramenes.⁴³

Critias and Theramenes are treated as the most prominent characters in Xenophon's account: the former, an extreme oligarch and *de facto* leader of the regime, the latter, a moderate oligarch whose political record and involvement in the oligarchy of the Four Hundred cast doubts on his loyalty to the regime of 404. They clashed over the methods of administration, which contributed to a division in the ranks of the Thirty, ultimately resulting in the official condemnation of Theramenes and his execution. The power struggle between the two men represents a larger factional conflict between the moderate oligarchs who followed Theramenes, and the extremists, led by Critias.

⁴³ For a biographical compilation of the individual tyrants see, Gabriel Adeleye, *Studies in the Oligarchy of the Thirty* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI dissertation services, 1979).

The final section examines external pressures as a reason for the failure of the Thirty. It focuses the civil war between the Thirty and their supporters, the Three Thousand, and Thrasybulus and his army of exiles which led to the death of the Thirty's leader Critias, and the overthrow of the regime. This military achievement of the exiled democrats was obviously one major reason for the collapse of the Thirty. Another external factor was the activities of the Spartan state. The Spartan King, Pausanias, and the nature of his intervention in the civil war between the exiles and the Thirty effectively ended the rule of the remaining members of the Thirty and halted the hostilities. The sudden widespread support for Athens by the neighboring cities of Thebes and Megara in her struggle with the Thirty, constitutes the last contribution to the dissolution of the Thirty.

The Reign of the Thirty

The rule of the Thirty at Athens is most often identified as a period of political corruption in which thirty oligarchs seized control of the Athenian state and led a brutal campaign of judicial murder, oppression, and fear. The actions of this campaign can definitely be defined as acts of terror. I will argue that these acts were meant to intimidate, oppress, and punish the residents of Athens.

The aristocrats in Athens at the time of her defeat in 405 B.C. knew that Sparta—in drafting the conditions of Athens’ surrender—would not allow democracy to continue as the current system of government in Athens. The imperialistic policies exercised by Athens on her subjects throughout the course of the fifth century were considered by Sparta to have been the primary cause of the Peloponnesian War and when Athens was finally defeated, it was assumed that at the very least Athens would be forced to change its constitution to a system that could be controlled by the power of a few men who would promote loyalty to the will of Sparta. Consequently, the oligarchs had their second chance to seize power since the oligarchic coup of the Four Hundred in 411 B.C. had failed. After the climactic victory at Aegospotamoi, the Spartan fleet sailed into the Piraeus to discuss Athens’ terms of peace (*Lys. Agor.* 13.8). The Spartan emissaries stated to the Athenian assembly that peace would be made on the condition that the Long walls were demolished. Many Athenians strongly opposed this, fearing that the walls would be destroyed in order that the city could be completely destroyed by the Spartans. Cleophon, a democrat and anti-Spartan orator openly protested this motion in the assembly. The meeting concluded with the appointment of Theramenes, an oligarch who would later be one of the Thirty, as an ambassador to meet with Lysander and learn why the Spartans insisted on the removal of the Long walls.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Theramenes promised to try to arrange better terms, in which the walls of Athens would not be dismantled.

Theramenes was gone for four months (*Xen.*2.2.16-17; *Lys.* 13.11). In his absence, Athens was left under siege by the Spartan fleet which blockaded the Piraeus. The Athenians could not leave the city where living conditions were abysmal with increasing numbers of people

⁴⁴ Lawrence A. Tritle, *A New History of the Peloponnesian War* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 217.

dying of plague and starvation. The extended absence of Theramenes during this period raises some intriguing questions regarding his own motives and allegiances. Why was Theramenes away for such long time? Four months would have seemed even longer to the people of Athens who were trapped in a state of siege. This question has been approached by modern scholars.⁴⁵

When Theramenes returned from his time with Lysander, he claimed to have been detained by the Spartan admiral against his will. This explanation is denied by both Xenophon and Lysias who assert that Theramenes was waiting for conditions in Athens to become dire enough that the Athenians would surrender under any terms (*Hell.* 2.2.16-17; *Lys.* 13.11). This reasoning seems valid. Theramenes was known to be a supporter of oligarchy and was in fact one of the leaders of the previous oligarchic coup in 411. Additionally, his involvement in the scandalous trial of the Athenian generals after the battle of Arginusae did not improve his reputation with the vast majority of Athenians. Both these events are important instances of the failings of democracy: the former was an actual replacement of democracy, the latter was the regretful subversion of the judicial process which resulted in the execution of a board of victorious Athenian generals. Thus, it is easy to consider Theramenes' character at the very least to be untrustworthy.

New light shed on the character of Theramenes, however, has challenged the old explanation for Theramenes' extended leave of absence. The politics of Persia and Sparta also must be examined. What if Theramenes was waiting for something to happen which would provide the best possible outcome for Athens? "By staying away from Athens for three months,

⁴⁵ Krentz, 35; Munn, 203-6.

Theramenes *prevented* the Athenians from surrendering”, says Peter Krentz.⁴⁶ His intentions may have been the very opposite of Xenophon’s and Lysias’ accounts. The Great King of Persia, Darius II, had become increasingly ill. The death of the king of Persia was sure to leave a vacuum of power which the king’s two rival heirs, Cyrus and Artaxerxes, would move to fill. The outcome of the death of the present Persian king was of considerable importance to the Spartans: The financial and military support of Persia largely helped to ensure Sparta’s success in the Peloponnesian War. Cyrus was known to have been a supporter of the Spartan cause, as well as having personal ties with Lysander. The death of the king would at least mean the relocation of Cyrus to Sardis, at the heart of the Persian Empire, thus limiting his support to Sparta or perhaps dropping it altogether.

The waiting game played by Theramenes then, may have been intended to preserve the independence of Athens. If Darius had died, Theramenes’ plan may have worked as he intended: “the Ionians would have to defend themselves against the Persians, and to do so would have to withdraw their contingents from the Spartan navy. Or if they joined the Persian Empire peacefully, they would be under a new leader who could be expected to return to the earlier policy of playing Sparta and Athens off against each other.”⁴⁷ The timing of this plan failed and the result was harmful for Theramenes’ character.⁴⁸

This transitional period between Athens’ defeat and her formal surrender is reported by Xenophon (*Hell.* 1.7.35), to be a time of “stasis” or factional strife. The remaining democratic

⁴⁶ Krentz, 36.

⁴⁷ Krentz, 39.

⁴⁸For an analysis of the negotiations between Lysander and Theramenes See, J.A.R. Munro, “Theramenes Against Lysander,” *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1(Jan. 1938), 18-26.

statesmen in Athens were locked in a stalemate with the remaining supporters of oligarchy until the official surrender and its consequences. Many of the democratic leaders such as Thrasybulus, had simply not returned to Athens after the defeat at the battle of Aegospotomai. Similarly, many oligarchs, like the leader of the Thirty, Critias, were also in exile. “In anticipation of the change, the supporters of oligarchy and of alliance with Sparta began to arrest, try, and execute the most outspoken of their opponents.”⁴⁹ In their plot for the inevitable collapse of the democracy and its replacement with oligarchy the oligarchs began by targeting their democratic opponents who would undoubtedly attempt to preserve the democracy and block the opportunity of the oligarchs.

This instance of political violence was waged between the aristocrats and democrats, and is not unlike the previous oligarchic coup of 411, which witnessed similar acts. Thucydides reports, “some of the younger men had formed a group among themselves and had murdered without being detected a certain Androcles”(8.65). The passage goes on to report that this individual was assassinated for being a demagogue as well as for his status as one of the chief leaders of the popular party. The passage also mentions the murder of other individuals deemed ‘undesirables’ by the oligarchic party.

The first victim in this revival of political violence was Cleophon, the man who had protested the destruction of the Long walls (*Lys. Agor.* 13.12). He was arrested ostensibly for the crime of deserting his post but, in reality it was his protest against Spartan peace terms.⁵⁰ He was brought before a court of oligarchic sympathizers and condemned to death after his indictment

⁴⁹ Mark Munn, *The School of History: Athens in the Age of Socrates* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 207.

⁵⁰ George Miller Calhoun, *Athenian Clubs in Politics and Litigation* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 106.

by Satyrus, a future member of the Thirty.⁵¹ Cleophon's death illustrates the strength of the oligarchic influence present in the Athenian Council even before the appointment of the Thirty. That speech is described by a contemporary—Lysias—in his prosecuting speech, *Against Agoratus*, dated from the time of restored democracy following the reign of the Thirty: “The Council which held session before the time of the Thirty had been corrupted, and its appetite for oligarchy, as you know, was very keen. For proof of it you have the fact that the majority of that Council had seats in the subsequent Council under the Thirty” (13.12). Cleophon's death, however, did not stop a group of prominent democratic generals and politicians from hatching a plot to prevent the oligarchs from subverting the democracy.

In this group were former generals, such as Strombichides⁵² and fervent democrats, including Dionysodoros. When Theramenes returned to Athens with the final conditions of surrender—which included the complete destruction of the Long walls and the surrender of the remaining ships in Athens' fleet—the democrats, planned to undermine the oligarchs and their supporters, in order to prevent the dissolution of democracy. The oligarchs learned of this plot and hired an informer, Agoratus, to identify the individuals involved in the plot in order to betray them to the oligarchs. The oligarchs in favor of the peace terms sought him out and used him as a serviceable informer to the resistant group of democrats.

On learning the identities of the democratic leaders through Agoratus, oligarchic members of the Council arrested many of them and, as well, Agoratus along with Nicias, Nicomenes, and some others (Lys. 13.23). When Agoratus was interrogated in front of the

⁵¹ Munn, 207.

⁵² Thuc. 8.16. Identifies Strombichides as one of the generals stationed at Samos with Thrasybulus in 411 B.C.

Council he—according to plan—revealed the names of the democratic conspirators. Those involved in the conspiracy—Dionysodorus, Strombichides, Nicias, Nicomenes, Aristophanes of Cholledai, Eucrates, Hippias of Thasos, and Xenophon of Kourion—were all subsequently arrested and imprisoned for the charge of intriguing against the democracy.⁵³ While the conspirators were in prison, the peace terms brought back by Theramenes were accepted and, after some deliberation, the Thirty were installed to rule over Athens. The timing of this series of events is critical, as the democrats were imprisoned, technically, under the democracy. As soon as the rule of the Thirty was installed, these men were brought before the new Council created by the Thirty which was composed, essentially, of oligarchic supporters. The conspirators were condemned to death in an open ballot.⁵⁴ It is significant that this particular trial was not held in the traditional location on the Pnyx hill which was closed for reconstruction. The reconstruction had been delayed due to the financial crises brought on by the war. The Assembly instead convened in the theatre of Munychia, in the Piraeus. This location was significant for it was now in full view for the Spartan occupiers. “Thus placed in unusual surroundings, and mindful of the presence of a new form of power in Athens, the Assembly heard the formal denunciation of the generals and officers, and it passed a resolution calling for their trial.”⁵⁵

This form of trial was usually conducted by the People’s Court, not the Council; however, the Thirty disabled the power of the old Council, leaving it as a symbolic body of legislation which, in reality, had no real authority. The quick and deliberate execution of the

⁵³ Krentz, 60.

⁵⁴ Andrew Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife, and Revolutoin in the Classical City* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), 162.

⁵⁵ Munn, 212.

democratic conspirators sent a message to any potential leaders of opposition that the Thirty were now the judge and jury for all cases, and they did not tolerate treachery within the new Athens.

Eliminations of the objectors to the oligarchic rule continued. The Thirty declared that Athens “must be purged of unjust men and the rest of the citizens inclined to virtue and justice” (Lys. 12.5). They therefore arrested and executed those men who, under the democracy, made their living as informers, the sycophants. The sycophant, (*sykophantes*) in Athenian democracy was someone who made a living as a professional accuser.⁵⁶ The word has acquired a different meaning in modern English; in Greek it translates to ‘fig-revealer’, and is supposed to have “originally referred to someone who shakes a fig-tree to get down the fruit.”⁵⁷ In Athens the term was used not to denote a particular party or group, but rather it was a disparaging label for someone who worked the judicial system of Athens to his advantage. Though the sycophants were within their legal rights to accuse individuals for crimes, by the latter part of the fifth century they had forged a bad reputation for prosecuting anybody—innocent or guilty—for personal profit. Their reputation led Aristotle to refer to them as “wicked mischief-makers who flattered the people to their disadvantage” (*Ath. Pol.* 35.3). Hostility toward sycophants survived into the fourth century to the extent that one litigant felt it necessary to begin his speech with: “that I am not acting as a sycophant...”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Hansen, 194.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 194-5.

⁵⁸ Anton Powell, *Athens and Sparta: Constructing Greek Political and Social history from 478 B.C.* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 315.

Under the Athenian democracy, any citizen had the right to prosecute another for a crime. Athenians were actually encouraged to act as accusers when they were in the right to do so. This system worked well for a state like Athens, which had virtually no police force.⁵⁹ The state even provided pay for the volunteers who took the time to act as an accuser. The amount of pay awarded to the successful prosecutor naturally depended on the type of case. Many Athenians consequently made their living as speech-writers (*logographoi*) who represented their clients in court in exchange for a fee. Hansen explains that although logography was legal, it “represented a breach of the Athenians’ fundamental principle of protecting the democracy from professionalism and making every citizen present his own case.”⁶⁰

The sycophant was known to exploit the system by using his legal right to prosecute without justification and for personal gain. This was a common avenue for young, up-and-coming politicians in Athens. Sycophants utilized several different strategies to make their living as accusers. In some instances, they would harass an innocent person with the false conviction of a crime the defendant then had the choice to give in to blackmail and bribe the sycophant to drop the case, or take the chance of holding his own in court against an experienced orator.⁶¹ Sycophancy was practiced to such a degree in Athens that it represented a clear problem to the judicial system. Munn notes that the problem of sycophancy had increased considerably since 407 when an influx of political rivals sought to fill the leadership vacuum left by

⁵⁹ Douglas M. MacDowell, *The Law in Classical Athens* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), 62.

⁶⁰ Hansen, 194.

⁶¹ Hansen, 195; MacDowell, 62.

Alcibiades' voluntary exile.⁶² In an attempt to curb the activity of sycophants, penalties were introduced to prosecutors in public cases who obtained less than one-fifth of the jury's votes.⁶³

The sources agree that the arrest and execution of sycophants was generally well received by the people of Athens (Xen. 2.3.12; *Ath. Pol.* 35.3; Diod. 14.4.2; Lys. 25.19).⁶⁴ Xenophon claims that "...they [the Thirty] arrested and executed those who everyone knew had made their living, during the time of democracy, by being informers and who had caused much trouble for the noblemen" (2.3.12). Aristotle adds that "their aim was to eliminate opportunities for informers" (35.3). Our sources indicate a certain feeling of justice shared by the people when the sycophants were executed. However, many Athenians were likely indifferent on the matter, especially if they did not share any personal contempt for the sycophants themselves. Many of the wealthier aristocrats who comprised the Thirty had personal antipathies with the sycophants due to their tendency to harass the aristocracy.⁶⁵ This antipathy arose from the frustrations of the aristocracy who claimed to be bearing the brunt of the Peloponnesian War.⁶⁶ Sycophancy was certainly damaging to the aristocracy; however, Xenophon's statement describing the public approval of the Thirty's actions to execute the sycophants should not be misleading. Sycophancy was a democratic institution filled with men also considered to be honorable citizens.

⁶² Munn, 223.

⁶³ MacDowell, 64.

⁶⁴ Hignett, 288; Powell 315.

⁶⁵ Ostwald, 480.

⁶⁶ Richard Garner, *Law & Society in Classical Athens* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 65.

To understand the motivations behind the execution of the sycophants we must understand also that the Thirty were in the process of removing democratic elements from the city. If Athens was indeed going to be run by an oligarchy, there was no longer a place in the government for personal prosecution. The Thirty and, to a limited extent, their supporters who comprised the Council were the only branches of government in Athens. Thus, a combination of personal enmity and political reorganization constituted the Thirty's decision to kill the sycophants.

The narrative sources of Xenophon, followed by Diodorus, illustrate the early period of the rule of the Thirty to be reasonably receptive despite the violent crackdown on the sycophants (2.3.13; 14.4.3). The Thirty did find it necessary, however, to summon the aid of Sparta to help them maintain military control over Athens. It was at this juncture in their rule that Xenophon claims, the Thirty "...began to scheme about what steps they might take that would permit them to run the city however they liked" (2.3.13). Two members of the Thirty, Aeschines and Aristoteles, were sent to Sparta to persuade Lysander to establish a garrison to protect and assist the Thirty, until "...they could do away with the wicked..." claims Xenophon (2.3.13). Sparta responded to the Thirty's request by deploying a garrison of 700 hoplites⁶⁷, led by the Spartan general, Kallibius.

The date of the arrival of the Spartan garrison is crucial when interpreting the motives of the Thirty's actions. The above quotes by Xenophon indicate that the Thirty expected some opposition from the public for the deeds they were planning. Diodorus further accentuates this claim: "This was because they knew that without foreign arms they would be unable to carry out

⁶⁷ Standard heavy infantry type of the Greek world, equipped with a large round shield and a spear.

any murders, since all citizens would combine to ensure their own common security” (14.4.3). Thus, we have two accounts which rationalize the summoning of the garrison in preparation to the violent acts to come. A third account, the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia*, differs from those of Xenophon and Diodorus; it places the arrival of the garrison at a later date, which in effect alters the interpretation of the garrison’s function (*Ath. Pol.* 37.2). Aristotle’s version presents the garrison as a reaction to opposition forming in Athens in response to the seizure of the fort of Phyle, by Thrasybulus. The Thirty’s execution of one of their own, Theramenes, also contributed to the dissension of the Athenians from the regime. Aristotle’s account assumes that the Thirty were able to rule over the city relatively unprotected even with the constant threat of a revolution from the Athenians.

Modern scholarship on the Thirty provides interesting interpretations of this chronological problem. In dating the Spartan garrison, the majority of modern scholars have judged Aristotle’s account to be in the wrong.⁶⁸ In his commentary on the *Athenaion Politeia*, P.J. Rhodes argues that it is “highly implausible that the Thirty should have first eliminated Theramenes, next disarmed the unprivileged, and only after that obtained the support from a Spartan garrison.”⁶⁹ C. Hignett shares this view of the ‘early date’, arguing that the Thirty realized that they could not achieve their object with their present forces.⁷⁰ The confidence in the legitimacy of this interpretation, however, has not curbed strong arguments for a ‘late date’ of the garrison. Peter Krentz chooses to interpret the summoning of the garrison in response to the rising threat of Thrasybulus and his exiles at Phyle, rather than as a precautionary action to

⁶⁸ Rhodes, *A Commentary*, 422.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Hignett, 289.

ensure the safety of the Thirty as they carried out their brutal policy against the Athenians.

⁷¹Martin Ostwald agrees with the view of the ‘late date’, arguing that Xenophon’s early dating does not explain the apparent inactivity of the garrison. ⁷²

While both the ‘early’ and the ‘late’ dating of the garrison are plausible, for the present purposes I adhere to Xenophon’s early dating of the Spartan garrison, which carries the advantage of being an eye-witness account. The ‘early date’ also reinforces my argument that the Thirty planned to use violence as a means of terrorizing the Athenians to conform to life under an oligarchic regime; the ‘late date’ of the garrison implies that the Thirty were reacting to the internal pressure of the oppressed citizens, as well as the external pressure of Thrasybulus and his band of democratic exiles.

The decision of the Thirty to execute a number of Athens’ foreign residents was arguably the most ruthless act of the regime to date. The metics (*metoikoi*), most often translated as “resident aliens”⁷³, were a large and important group in Athens. By providing revenue in the form of direct taxation they were an economically important group to the state. Though they did not receive rights of citizenship, a few of them became extremely wealthy in the burgeoning economy of democratic Athens in the fifth century. For example, one prominent metic, Polemarkos, had “120 slaves working in his shield factory; the family property seems to have

⁷¹ Krentz, 9.

⁷² Ostwald, 488-9.

⁷³ Raphael Sealey, *The Athenian Republic: Democracy or the Rule of Law?* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), 7.

raised the enormous sum of 70 talents...”⁷⁴ The most important metic under investigation is in fact Polemarkos’ brother, Lysias. His testimony against Eratosthenes, as will be presented later, is a useful speech that stands on its own as a source for the actions of the Thirty. Also important is the fact that his family supported the exiled force of Thrasybulus by providing shields from his family’s factory.

Unlike the previous condemnations of the democratic conspirators and sycophants, which were more or a less a reaction to those democratic elements in Athens that would undermine the existence of an oligarchy in the city, the motives behind the Thirty’s attack on the metics were more ambiguous. There were two fundamental motivations for the decision to execute a number of the metic population of Athens.⁷⁵ Perhaps the most important were the financial reasons; the Thirty by this time were certainly desperate for money. The Spartan troops hired to garrison the acropolis would have to be paid. If one chooses to adhere to the ‘early date’ of the Spartan garrison, as I have here, the garrison would have arrived in Athens after the execution of the sycophants but before the Thirty’s plot to kill the metics (*Xen. Hell.2.3.14*). Diodorus follows the narrative of Xenophon that the plot to kill the metics was “in order to raise money to pay the garrison” (*Diod. 34.5.5; Xen. Hell. 2.3.21*). Aristotle’s account insists on the ‘late date’ of the Spartan garrison, but he does, nevertheless, stress the desire of the Thirty to confiscate the property of their victims: “They killed those remarkable for wealth, family or reputation, aiming to remove any potential threat and to lay their hands on their property” (*Ath. Pol.35.4*).

⁷⁴ Powell, 326.; Strauss, ix offers a rough guideline for making sense of Athenian currency: “a man with resources of 1 talent may be considered a member of the propertied class; Athens’ imperial tribute in the year 413 was c. 900 talents.”

⁷⁵ Reporting on the number of metics targeted by the Thirty varies: *Lys. 12.6-7* puts it at ten, *Xen. Hell. 2.3.21* at thirty, and *Diod. 14.5.6* at sixty.

The second reason for the attack on the metics, was the Thirty's understanding that some of the metics were attempting to undermine the regime by lending aid to the Thirty's enemies who were currently forming a resistance at Phyle.⁷⁶ Specifically, this claim applies to Lysias and his brother Polemarkos—the shield maker—from whose shield factory the Thirty confiscated 700 shields (Lys. 12.19). “Lysias was known to have helped Thrasybulus with mercenaries, money, and at least 200 shields...”⁷⁷ From the perspectives of the oligarchs, who equated Lysias' actions to that of a traitor, the attack on the metics was also an attack on oligarchic opposition.

Our main source for the attack on the metics is Lysias, a metic himself who was targeted along with his brother Polemarkos and only barely managed to escape his pursuers; Polemarkos was not as lucky as his brother, he was captured by the Thirty and forced to drink deadly hemlock, the standard method of execution at this time. Lysias made his living as a speech writer for litigants in various cases in the Athenian lawcourts. In the period of restored democracy, after the Thirty were subsequently overthrown, Lysias recounted many of the Thirty's actions in a prosecuting speech against one, Eratosthenes, who was among the Thirty and who, at the fall of the Thirty, was now on trial for his actions. Regarding the origins of the plot, Lysias suggested that it was on the suggestion of Theognis and Peison—two members of the Thirty—that the Thirty could make money by executing wealthy metics.

The final atrocity carried out by the Thirty happened at the neighboring town of Eleusis. The democratic exiles led by the general Thrasybulus, had grown from 70, when he left the city of Thebes, to 700, when he and exiles had taken up a strategic position at the fort of Phyle, located several miles north of Athens on the frontier of Attica. This threat was further amplified

⁷⁶ Krentz, 81.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

when the Thirty suffered a devastating defeat in the attempt to besiege the fort. Feeling insecure in their rule, the Thirty sought out a place of refuge. It was also in the interest of the Thirty to secure Salamis and Eleusis from the influence of the exiles in Megara and Boeotia.⁷⁸

The Thirty travelled to Eleusis accompanied by the Athenian cavalry, the last and most reliable military arm Athens now possessed. Here the Thirty conducted an organized review and registration of the Eleusians. The registration's purpose, announced by the Thirty and reported by eye-witness, Xenophon, was "so they could figure out how many additional men would be needed for a garrison [at Eleusis]" (*Hell.* 2.4.9). However, this was only a cruel ruse; the real purpose was described by Xenophon:

As each man registered, he had to leave through the small gate in the wall facing the sea. On the seashore they had posted the cavalymen on either side, and, as each man came out, he was seized and bound by the servants in attendance on the cavalry. When they had all been seized, the Thirty ordered Lysimachus, the cavalry commander, to take them to Athens and hand them over to the Eleven (*Hell.* 2.4.8).

In this way, the Thirty eliminated 300 of the most capable men in the town of Eleusis for the purpose of solidifying Eleusis as their place of refuge. The next day Critias addressed the 3,000, and called for their support in the condemnation and execution of the 300 men of Eleusis. Xenophon presents the speech given by Critias: "No less for you, gentlemen, than for ourselves are we establishing this government, and so it is necessary for you to share in the dangers, just as you share in the benefits" (2.4.9). It is clear at this point that there is no shame taken by Critias in his actions. "The Eleusians captured here must be condemned, so that both you and we may take confidence in, and draw fear from, the same deeds" (2.4.9). Critias is saying that if those present share in the deed, there will be

⁷⁸ Munn, 231.

less likelihood that they will in the future either inform on the Thirty or bring some legal action against them.⁷⁹

In order to fully understand the way in which the regime of the Thirty failed, we must first examine the how the Thirty Tyrants politically and socially isolated themselves by undermining the previous democratic institutions and limiting the number of citizens of Athens. When the oligarchs who made up the regime of the Thirty were chosen, several modifications needed to be made if Athens was to be run as an oligarchic state. The three main organs of Athenian democracy—the Assembly, the Council, and the Peoples Courts—needed to be restructured for the purpose of making them less democratic.

The Assembly (*Ekklesia*) was the largest legislative body in Athens. Every male citizen of Athens automatically became eligible to attend meetings of the Assembly on his eighteenth birthday. The function of the Assembly was for Athenian citizens to vote on laws, decrees, and motions, placed before them by the narrower body called the Council (*Boule*).⁸⁰ Matters passed in the Assembly were considered decisions made by the entire Athenian population; however, in practice only a quorum of 6000 was required, indicating that citizens living throughout the 1550 square miles of Attica could not and did not regularly attend. Much of the population of Athens did not live in the city proper, but in the surrounding countryside where livelihood was based on agriculture and herding. Thus, it was a difficult decision for an Athenian farmer to leave his fields to commute to Athens and participate in the Assembly at certain seasons of the agricultural year. Also some citizens would be away with the fleet. And since the agenda for a meeting was

⁷⁹ Robert B. Strassler, *The Landmark Xenophon's Hellenika*

⁸⁰ M.I. Finley, "Athenian Demagogues," in *Democracy Ancient and Modern*, 2nd edition (Hogarth Press/ Rutgers University Press, 1985), 170. It is estimated that at the outset of the Peloponnesian War, there were as many as 60,000 members of the Assembly.

posted five days before the date, citizens could decide which meetings were especially important for them.

The makeup of the Assembly was especially democratic because of the sheer diversity of its members, which included citizens of vastly differing social classes and backgrounds. The oligarchs who seized control of Athens in 411 and again in 404 saw the diversity to be altogether too inclusive. Oligarchs argued that only those with the proper education should be allowed to make decisions affecting the state. They argued also that because the wealthy contributed more to the state in the form of theatrical performances, athletic games, and property taxes, they therefore should receive a greater share in the decision making of the state.⁸¹ This sentiment was not limited to the wealthy or the oligarchs. Athenians of the middle class i.e. the hoplite class, who could afford their own arms and equipment, saw this as a flaw in the functioning of the Assembly. Xenophon has Socrates describe the Assembly as, “an audience of mere dunces and weaklings... the fullers or the cobblers or the smiths or the farmers or the merchants... men who never gave a thought to politics.” (Xen. *Mem.* 3.6-7).⁸²

Four months into their reign (December), the Thirty drew up a list of 3,000 Athenians who were to share in the government (Xen. 2.3.18; *Ath. Pol.* 36.1). Individuals on this list became a political body that replaced the former Assembly by drastically reducing its numbers and replacing its members with people loyal to the oligarchy. The sources indicate that the list was made in response to the growing discontent of the Athenian people in regard to the brutal policies of the Thirty. Xenophon claims that “... the Thirty continued to put many people to death

⁸¹ Krentz, 20.

⁸² Ibid, 21.

unjustly and many citizens were openly joining together wondering what would become of the state...” (2.3.17). Aristotle emphasizes the mood of brutality stating that: “when the Thirty had tightened their grip on the city, there was no type of citizen they did not attack (*Ath. Pol.*35.4).” Fearing that their policy of terrorism might ignite a large scale rebellion in Athens, the list of the Three Thousand was intended to be a list of the men whom Critias saw as the “good” men of Athens. When instituted it was an oligarchic version of the democratic Assembly. However, it was only an illusion of the former Assembly, which had represented and constituted the whole people. Its main function was to act as a buffer between the body of the Thirty and the rest of the Athenians. The Thirty had selected men whom they knew were supportive of oligarchy and opposed democracy.

We cannot reasonably claim that every individual member of the Three Thousand was decidedly pro-oligarchy. The number 3,000 was not selected because this was the number of oligarchic supporters in Athens at the time. The exact number is unknown. Athenian politicians were not organized into distinctive parties akin to many modern democracies. Instead, Athenian politicians were members of political “clubs” with likeminded people thus their collective political beliefs might incline toward democracy or oligarchy or somewhere in between. The number 3,000 was most likely an estimated number based on other oligarchic governments, such as Sparta’s. Members would have been from the middle class of Athens or, the ‘hoplite’ class. The Thirty included them in the Three Thousand not because of their political preference, but more importantly because of their ability to become heavy infantry if needed. Given the distressful circumstances of the time, it does not seem surprising for a typical citizen of the hoplite class to accept enrollment in the Three Thousand if it meant security of his own life or the lives of his family members.

The list of the Three Thousand also included the stipulation that those excluded from the list were no longer citizens of Athens. The effect was a sharp division in Athenian society between the upper and middle class of Athens—which now constituted the Three Thousand—and the lowest class of Athens (*Thetes*). The list worked to the benefit of the Thirty because it split the hoplite middle class and the lower class into two opposing sides. The middle class joined the upper class to form the Three Thousand while the effect for the poorest Athenians was social and political isolation.

Another motivation contributing to the drafting of the list of Three Thousand was the growing discord between the Theramenes, the ‘moderate’ oligarchic leader, and the ‘extremist’ oligarch, Critias. Initially, Theramenes and Critias were on friendly terms and cooperated in establishing the regime. Theramenes however, soon disagreed with the brutal tactics that the Thirty imposed on Athens. He opposed Critias on both political and moral grounds, arguing that unless they allowed additional suitable men into the government the regime could not possibly survive (Xen. 2.3.17). Critias and the other oligarchs feared that Theramenes’ moderate disposition might gain popularity and inspire hope in the people, possibly resulting in his use of influence to lead the masses against the Thirty. This example of internal dissent of the Thirty, represents the larger conflict between moderate and extreme oligarchy and will be discussed below.

It is difficult to calculate how many people were actually excluded from the list. If we consider the estimated number of Assembly members in the time of Pericles—35,000-40,000⁸³—we can conclude the majority of the Assembly members at the time were cut out of

⁸³ Finley, 170.

the political process. It was a monumental blow to the democratic element of Athens, shifting Athenian society toward an oligarchic framework.

The creation of the list of Three Thousand enabled the Thirty to disarm those Athenians who were excluded from the list. Xenophon places this event just after the list was drawn up. “The Thirty ordered the soldiers of the garrison and some citizens who were partisans of the Thirty to remove all the arms, except for those of the Three Thousand, and so they took the confiscated weapons to the Acropolis and deposited them there in the temple (*Hell.*2.3.20).” Krentz reminds us that this act helped cement the Thirty’s reputation as ‘tyrants.’ “The excluded were disarmed by a stratagem reminiscent of the tyrant Pisistratus.”⁸⁴

The narratives of Xenophon and Aristotle differ on the reason for the decision to disarm the excluded. Xenophon reports the disarming to have happened in conjunction with the release of the list of the Three Thousand (*Hell.* 2.3.20). Aristotle reports the disarming to have occurred in response to the Thirty’s failure to defeat the exiles at Phyle. The first scenario depicts the Thirty as ‘tyrannical’ as they carry out the act as a necessary condition of reorganizing the state into distinct classes based on wealth and merit. Aristotle’s version appears less tyrannical because the event occurs in response to external pressure from the exiled democrats. Although both accounts are plausible, it is important to know that Aristotle’s account assumes that the disarming of the excluded happened without the help of the Spartan garrison, which is present in Xenophon’s account. I tend to side with Xenophon, as he bears credibility as an eyewitness to the events and, in fact, he was most likely a member of the Three Thousand.

⁸⁴ Krentz, 78.

Regardless of the problems with the sources, they all agree that the expulsion from the city proper followed the disarmament. The Athenians had three possible options in their interaction with the Thirty. “The first was to fight the unwanted government with force,” the second, “to work with it to ameliorate its extremes as much as possible,” the third was “since either resistance or limited compliance was risky—to do nothing or run away.”⁸⁵ Many Athenians sought refuge in other parts of Greece. The cities of Thebes, Megara, and Corinth were most notable in their acceptance of Athenian refugees. Despite a decree issued by Sparta, dictating that any Greek cities found to be harboring Athenian exiles would be compelled to pay a fine, these three cities welcomed the oppressed Athenians (Diod. 14.6.1-3; Justin 5.9.4). Some Athenians joined Thrasybulus and his democratic exiles at Phyle. Many Athenians affected by the decree sought refuge in the port town, Piraeus, essentially creating a physical buffer between themselves and the Three Thousand and the rest of the Athenians they deemed unqualified to share in the government.

The democratic Council of Athens (*boule*), otherwise known as the ‘Council of the Five Hundred,’ is the second of the three most important democratic bodies in Athens. The traditional function of the Council was to prepare matters to be voted on by the decision-making organ of the state, the Assembly.⁸⁶ While all citizens above the age of 30 were eligible to serve on the Council twice in their lifetime, it was a smaller body and was constantly engaged in supervising the demands and needs of the entire polis. It could not initiate policy but acted as a steering committee of the assembly. The Boule of 500 members had ten artificial subdivisions of 50

⁸⁵ Krentz, 69.

⁸⁶ Hansen, 246; A.H.M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy* (New York: Frederick A Praeger, 1958), 46.

members who were chosen by lot from regional areas from all parts of Attica. Each of the small divisions of 50 members was on duty for one of the ten months of the calendar with rotation decided by lot. Meetings of the 50 were each week-day that was not a holy day and 1/3 of its members spent the night in a common building in order to be present should an emergency arise. The duties of the Council seem to have been involved in all spheres of Athenian life and included “the control of all sanctuaries in Athens and Attica and the running of many of the religious festivals; the inspection of all public buildings, most notably the defenses of the city and the Piraeus; for the navy and the naval yards, building of new vessels and the equipping and dispatch of fleets, and oversight of the cavalry.”⁸⁷ The importance of the Council in the functioning of Athenian democracy was crucial and even more noticeable when that power was subverted by the Thirty.

Upon the appointment of the Thirty, the Council remained intact, although compromised by the oligarchs in charge, as Xenophon reports at the beginning of his account: “...they established a Council and other offices in an arbitrary manner, as it seemed best to them”, (2.3.11). Aristotle offers more detail: “...they disregarded the proposals which had been passed about the constitution except for appointing five hundred members of the *Boule* and the other magistrates from a group previously elected from the thousand (35.1).” The ‘thousand’ of which Aristotle speaks may be in reference to the 1,000 *hippeis*⁸⁸ known to have been present in Athens.⁸⁹ This was the cavalry force of Athens, whose ranks were predominately filled by

⁸⁷ Hansen, 259.

⁸⁸ Literally, “cavalrymen.”

⁸⁹ Krentz, 57.

aristocrats and those who could afford the luxury of owning and maintaining horses. For our subject, we learn that the makeup of the Council was indeed corrupted by the Thirty who removed democrats from the Council and replaced them with oligarchic supporter. Xenophon reported on the execution of the sycophants that: “The Council condemned these men with pleasure...” (2.3.12). Lysias, in his account of the democratic conspiracy, also identifies this ‘Council of the Thirty’ to be the same Council which condemned Strombichides, Dionysodoros and their group of conspirators (Lys.13 *Agor.*).⁹⁰

The Council was modified in a way that allowed only the election of oligarchs. Furthermore, its former importance as the coordinator of the administrative machinery of Athens ceased. The real power of decision making was in the hands of the Thirty. Despite revoking its administrative power, the Thirty did use the Council to pass at least two new laws into effect. The first gave the Thirty the power to execute any citizen whose name was not included on the list of the Three Thousand. The second deprived of all rights under the present constitution anyone who had taken part in the destruction of the fort at Eëtioneia, or had acted in any way in opposition to the previous government of the Four Hundred, (*Ath. Pol.* 37.1). These laws were not arbitrary; rather they were specifically aimed at Theramenes, who was guilty of the latter and fell victim to the former when his dissent from Critias and his tyrannical behavior, resulted in his execution.

The third of the three main branches of democratic Athens was the ‘Peoples Court.’⁹¹ Translated from the Greek word *dikasterion*, literally meaning court of law, the Courts of Athens

⁹⁰ Rhodes, 428.

⁹¹ Hansen, 178.

were fundamental to the standard of democracy upon which Athens stood in the period preceding the Peloponnesian War. The Courts were an intricate, and, consequently, a peculiar institution for a modern observer to comprehend. There was no judge to preside over cases, administration was handled by magistrates who were chosen by lot for one year without possibility for extension, and it was illegal for one to hire another to appear in court as an advocate.⁹² Even from a contemporary view point, the court system in Athens was fundamentally democratic. Cases were settled by large juries consisting of Athenian citizens from every social background. Lawsuits were conducted on an individual basis. One party would have to accuse the other party of the crime in person. Further, the democratic principles of the system did not allow for the individual to hire expert litigants to help them win the case.

The impact of the Thirty Tyrants on the People's Court would undermine its democratic principles and practices under which the Athenians had lived for so long. The Thirty had demonstrated their contempt for the legal system in Athens from the outset of their rule when they bypassed standard legal procedure to execute those involved in the democratic conspiracy, which aimed to prevent Athens from consenting to Sparta's peace conditions. Instead of altering the size or character of the People's Court, as was done with the Council and the Assembly, the Thirty set out to abolish the courts completely. This is evident in the *Athenaion Politeia* which reports that the Thirty "abolished the power of the *dikastai*" (35.2).

In the same passage the *Athenaion Politeia* also reports that the Thirty "took down from the Areopagus the laws of Ephialtes and Archestratus..." The council that met on Areopagus, or, the Hill of Ares was the most important political council in Athens. Hansen has described its

⁹² Ibid, 180.

responsibilities as the “oversight of the laws, the magistrates, the politically active citizens, and the general conduct of all Athenians, and it could pronounce judgment, not excluding the death sentence, in political trials.”⁹³ The council consisted entirely of former Archons of Athens who, upon their departure from office and after a review of their performance, were accepted into the prestigious council as lifetime members.

By the middle of the fifth century the increasingly democratic nature of Athens subverted the dominance of the Areopagus. In 462 B.C. a group of democratic statesmen, led by Ephialtes and Archestratus, made successful reforms that relieved the Areopagus council of most of its former powers except for the role of conducting homicide cases. This reform swept away the last political foothold of the Athenian aristocracy. Thus, the Athenian state became more democratic as the powers of the Areopagus council were divided between the Assembly, the Boule, and the People’s Court.

The Thirty repealed these laws not to return the Areopagus council to function as it had in Archaic times—or if they did intend this there is no evidence to support it—but as a symbolic gesture. The proud Areopagus council that was suppressed by democracy was restored by the oligarchic Thirty who saw the institution as a bulwark of the aristocratic element of Athens. Yet, as our main narratives have provided little evidence to support the view that the Thirty were indeed attempting to restore full powers to the Areopagus council, we must adhere to the more likely explanation that the gesture was symbolic. Hignett supports this position, arguing the repeal of these laws to be “mere propaganda, for they had no intention of restoring the

⁹³ Hansen, 37.

Areopagus council to its old predominance to the state”.⁹⁴The *Athenaion Politeia* attributes this and other reforms to be for the purpose of “correcting the constitution and removing ambiguities” (35.2). This was common rhetoric used by the oligarchs in order to avoid criticism. In the phrase ‘correcting the constitution’, the Thirty were promoting the concept of *Patrios Politeia*, or the ‘ancestral laws’.

As with the Boule and the Assembly, the main oligarchic criticisms concerning the People’s Court dealt with the fact that participation was open to citizens of all backgrounds and education. The oligarchs believed that judicial matters, like other matters concerning the state, should be left to those with the proper training. This was a common view of the aristocracy, that only those with the education and intellectual ability deserve the right to rule. The argument is logical; however, it is completely in favor of the most elite men in Athens. The focus of this study is the fundamental conflict between democrats and oligarchs; the former argued that every citizen, rich or poor, had the opportunity to hold offices while the latter argued that only the rich and educated should hold magisterial positions. By the time of the first oligarchic revolution in 411 B.C., the oligarchs had seen enough to determine that the People’s Court was being abused by the sycophants, who worked as professional accusers and orators to their own financial gain. Furthermore, the oligarchic view was that the legal system was inherently unjust because verdicts were given by an unruly mob.

The Thirty abolished the People’s Court completely and all judicial powers were in effect transferred to them. When the Thirty took power, they assumed the roles of the judges and juries of Athens. It is up for speculation whether the Thirty had any plans to restore the courts or to

⁹⁴ Hignett, 288.

create a new system of their design. Countless people were put to death by order of the Thirty with disregard to any formal judicial process.

All three institutions of Athenian democracy were altered or suppressed but in different ways. The People's Court was completely dismantled, leaving the Thirty to act as the sole judicial body; the Council was left intact, although it was now dominated by oligarchs and supporters of the Thirty; the Assembly which formerly included all citizens of Athens was severely reduced to a body of 3,000 citizens and its powers were nullified to the advantage of the Thirty.

The ancestral Constitution or *Patrios Politeia*, was an important political ideal that both democrats and oligarchs claimed to pursue. However, by the time the Thirty gained control of Athens, the ancestral constitution was an obscure concept. Yet, as Munn has argued "all hopes and fears for the fate of the city focused on the interpretation of the *Patrios Politeia* guaranteed to the Athenians by the terms of their surrender."⁹⁵ The Thirty made all their political reformations while promoting a return to the 'ancestral ways'. But what were those 'ancestral ways' and did they include practices that the Thirty used? "The nature of this debate has been obscured by the retrospective accounts of orators and historians who sought to lay blame on certain individuals or groups for the cold-blooded violence that soon took hold of Athens in the name of the *Patrios Politeia*."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Munn, 209.

Both sides interpreted the idea to meet their own desires to preserve democracy or destroy it. “Champions of the *demos* argued that complete democracy, the legacy of Themistocles and Pericles, *was* the ancestral constitution of the Athenians...Oligarchs argued that the enactments of such men had perverted the more ancient laws and practices of the age of Solon and earlier, when office and authority was the exclusive reserve of ‘respectable Athenians.’”⁹⁷ The constitutional debate began during the coup of 411. These oligarchs also promoted the ancestral constitution to persuade the *demos* that it was the correct way to govern Athens. “Cleitophon had already distinguished himself on the eve of the oligarchy of 411 by proposing that the ‘ancestral laws established by Cleisthenes,’ chronologically intermediate between Solon and Themistocles, should be studied as a guide to what was both ancestral *and* democratic.”⁹⁸ The ambiguity of what is considered the ‘ancestral laws’ allowed both sides to claim preference to it, while also changing its properties to suit their own desires.

Conclusion to the Reign of the Thirty

While in power, the Thirty consolidated their rule by purging the city of all democratic elements. The historical tradition of these events is consistent in emphasizing the magnitude of their atrocities.⁹⁹ Altogether the Thirty killed over fifteen hundred Athenians, many of whom were recognized for their prominence in wealth, birth, and reputation. They purged the city of all those whom they considered a threat to their position. These included the remaining democratic statesmen and the sycophants. The terror of their rule increased when they acquired a garrison of

⁹⁷ Munn, 210.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 231.

hoplites from Sparta. They began to target wealthy individuals in order to confiscate their property. The final act of judicial violence, the execution of the Eleusians, occurred as a reaction to the external threat of Thrasybulus and his army of exiles.

Constitutionally, the Thirty made several reforms in order to transform Athens into a state fit for an oligarchy. They reorganized the Council, installing their own friends and those who would not oppose their authority. Aristotle says that they “abolished the power of the *dikastai*,” effectively making themselves the judges and jury of every case (*Ath.Pol.* 35.2) “They arrogated the prerogative of prosecution and judgment to them in what, on the democratic view, inevitably became an orgy of official lawlessness”.¹⁰⁰ Most importantly, they disbanded the former Assembly, replacing it with 3,000 citizens who would share in the government with the Thirty. The citizens, who were former members of the Assembly, were revoked of their citizenship, disarmed, and evicted from living in Athens proper.

The reign of the Thirty was the end result of the conflict between the aristocracy and popular party in Athens. The contention between these two factions had been present for as long as it was a democracy. Yet, these two groups were able to live harmoniously in Athens without any major conflict until the last ten years of the Peloponnesian War. Cohen notes that “In the modern context, factionalism is understood as arising when two or more groups with competing interests threaten to push society into civil war by pursuing those interests too vigorously”.¹⁰¹ The failures of the Athenian democracy to effectively control the empire, and the staggering financial investments made to wage war, contributed to the decline of democratic efficiency.

¹⁰⁰ Cohen, 53.

¹⁰¹ Cohen, 29.

However, the oligarchy of the Thirty rendered its own conflicts among its own members, which contributed to its eventual failure.

The Internal Struggle of the Thirty

In addition to rising resentment of the ways in which the Thirty consolidated their control over Athens by purging the citizens of political roles and altering democratic institutions, conflicts within the Thirty itself weakened their own rule and undermined their own power. An understanding of the collapse of the Thirty requires some understanding of oligarchies in general. In *politics*, Aristotle denotes some key differences between oligarchy and democracy, and how these differences contribute to the instability of the state. “Oligarchies and democracies,” he argues, “are generally distinguished by a sharp division between the many who are poor and the few who are wealthy. Such states are inherently unstable because the poor envy the wealthy and the wealthy despise the poor (1295b19-29).” “...the oligarchic version of equality, maintains that those who are better (e.g. wealthier) deserve a greater share of power and influence. When denied that greater share under a democratic constitution, such individuals feel insulted by being placed on an equal footing with their inferiors. These competing notions of equality thus produce different answers to the most basic political questions of who should rule.”¹⁰²

Oligarchic supporters are not of identical views but are divided into two camps, moderates and extremists. Both parties existed in Athens and both were on the fringe of democratic Athenian politics. When Athens was defeated in the Peloponnesian War, it created a power vacuum which both moderates and extremists scrambled to fill. A list of the Thirty individuals chosen to govern Athens is given by Xenophon and the sources indicate that the Thirty consisted of both moderate and extreme oligarchs, However there is little evidence to discern the number of extremists and the number of moderates that made up the board (*Hell.*

¹⁰² Ibid, 29-30.

2.3.1). Lintott provides a list of the thirty men elected and their status: “Theramenes and Drakontides; Critias and Eratosthenes, leaders of the new oligarchic conspiracy; Aristoteles, once a member of the Four Hundred and until recently an exile, who had been used as an agent by Lysander; Onomakles, another member of the Four Hundred and ex-associate of Antiphon; Melobios, a promoter of the Four Hundred; and Charikles, a man who had helped Peisandros in the days when they were both apparently democrats.”¹⁰³

The Thirty was led by two men, one of each stance: Theramenes the moderate, and Critias the extremist. We have already discussed the role of Theramenes in his peace negotiations with Lysander, and his involvement with the coup of 411 and the trial of the generals in 408. Critias, however, does not appear in our sources at either of these events. The *Athenaion Politeia* notably does not mention Critias’ name. Perhaps this omission is likely due to the Platonic schools’ desire to protect his reputation.¹⁰⁴

Critias is a tenuous relative of Solon, the Athenian law giver of the sixth century B.C. An aristocrat from one of the oldest noble families in Athens, it is known that Critias was the cousin on his father’s side to the mother of Plato, and on his mother’s side to the father of Andocides.¹⁰⁵ His relationship to Plato is even more interesting when we consider the invitation he extended to Plato to join the ranks of the Thirty and share in the oligarchy. Plato writes, “Some of these [oligarchs] happened to be relatives and acquaintances of mine, who accordingly invited me forthwith to join them, assuming my fitness for the task (*Epist. 7*).”

¹⁰³ Lintott, 161.

¹⁰⁴ Rhodes, 229-230.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 429-430.

It is also widely known that Critias was a student of Socrates (*Xen. Mem.* 1.2.12, A. 1. *Tim.* 173). His identification as a student of Socrates is unsurprising, considering Socrates' tendency to engage aristocratic citizens in his dialogues. It is important to understand however, that Socrates was in no way collaborating with the oligarchs in overthrowing the democracy. There is even evidence that shows Socrates' refusal to carry out the Thirty's order of arresting Leon of Salamis, a Metic in Athens.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the Thirty's law forbidding the teaching of the art of words in Athens, contributed to the 'falling out' between Critias and Socrates.¹⁰⁷

As Xenophon reports, Critias and Theramenes were initially not at odds with one another and cooperated to establish the oligarchy (*Hell.* 2.3.15). However, when Critias' tyrannical policies seemed to Theramenes to be undermining the strength of Athens, a rift was created between the two men. The disagreements between Critias and Theramenes reflected the larger division between moderate and extremists.

The first sign of the schism between the two men as reported by Xenophon, is when "Critias proved to be keen on putting many men to death" (*Hell.* 2.3.15-16). Theramenes objected to this policy, saying it was "not reasonable to execute men who had done no harm to the upper class simply because they were honored by the people". "Even you and I," he said "have done many things in order to gain favor with the people." Critias replied that "men who wanted more power for themselves could not avoid doing away with those who were most able to stop them. And if you think that because we are thirty and not one we can take less care to protect our rule than if we were simply a tyranny, then you are a simpleton" (*Hell.* 2.3.16). This

¹⁰⁶ Krentz, 83.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

is reportedly in the early stage of the Thirty's rule, when democratic supporters were still being arrested and executed. Critias may have believed he was consolidating the power of his regime. Although his actions were extreme, his exile from Athens in addition to the recent attempt by the democratic leaders to stop oligarchy in Athens explains his apparent hatred for democracy and its supporters.

The schism between the two men was further exacerbated when more men continued to be put to death unjustly (*Hell.* 2.3.17). The people of Athens were now wondering what would become of the state. When Critias drew up a list of Three Thousand who would share in the government, Theramenes spoke in opposition, warning that “unless they [Thirty] brought in additional suitable men to share in the government, the oligarchy could not possibly survive” (2.3.17). Theramenes' opposition sparked the feud between himself and Critias. The list of the Three Thousand was in part a response to the notoriety of Theramenes as a leader of the people. Critias and the extremists feared that Theramenes would appear to be a beacon of hope for the Athenians. He opposed the list of Three Thousand for two reasons, reported by Xenophon (2.3.17): “first, that they should arbitrarily limit the number of ‘good’ men with whom they wished to share the rule of the city to no more than three thousand, as if that number must of necessity include all of the city’s noblemen, and that there would be no good men left outside this group, nor scoundrels within it”; and second, he said, “I see us pursuing two contrary and opposed policies: establishing our own rule by force while rendering it weaker than the people we are governing.”

When the Thirty began to put people to death out of personal enmity and to acquire their property, Theramenes again spoke out in opposition. When ordered by the Thirty to seize one

resident alien (Metic), execute him, and confiscate his property, Theramenes answered, “but it doesn’t seem respectable to me for people who claim to be the best men to actually behave more unjustly than the informers. For those men at least allowed those from whom they extorted money to go on living, whereas we kill men who have done nothing wrong just so we may take their money and property. How is this not in every way more unjust than what the informers did” (*Hell.* 2.3.22)?

The opposition of Theramenes led to his condemnation by Critias and the Thirty. The Thirty considered that Theramenes was attempting to prevent them from doing what they wished, began to plot against him and slander him in private, one man talking to another and saying that he was spoiling the government they had established (*Hell.* 2.3.23). After ordering his arrest, the Thirty called together the Council to put Theramenes on trial.

The ensuing trial seems to have been little more than a formality to give Critias sufficient legal clearance to execute Theramenes. The laws enforced by the Thirty gave them the authority to execute anyone who was excluded from the list of Three Thousand; because Theramenes was one of the Thirty, a trial was first necessary to publicly condemn him. Both men made speeches addressed to the Council. Critias first attacked Theramenes, accusing him of treason while emphasizing his tendency to switch sides when matters become dire: “it was he who began to trust and treat the Spartans as friends, and it was he who began the effort to overthrow the democracy, and it was he who especially advocated punishment for those who were first brought before you for trial; but now that you and we are open enemies of the people, our present state of affairs is no longer pleasing to him, and he is trying to make himself safe while leaving us to pay

the penalty for what we have all done” (*Hell.* 2.3.28). Critias goes on to mention Theramenes’ involvement in establishing the coup of 411 and then his betrayal of that same government.

Theramenes spoke in his own defense after the speech of Critias. After defending himself from accusations of treason in the past, he counter attacked Critias as the instigator of policies that were alienating the government’s friends and strengthening its enemies. “When these Thirty began to arrest the noblemen, at that point I began to hold opposing views” (*Hell.* 2.3.38). He went on to explain his disapproval of each act of the Thirty by naming the unjust deaths of specific men.

For when Leon of Salamis—a man who was both thought to be and actually was meritorious, and one who was completely innocent of any wrongdoing—was put to death, I knew that those like him would grow fearful and become hostile to this government. And I knew, too, that when Niceratos son of Nicias was apprehended—a wealthy man and one who, like his father, had never displayed any populist leanings—that this would lead men like him to become our enemies (*Hell.* 2.3.39).

Theramenes successfully defended every point brought against himself by Critias. He ended the speech by maintaining his stance as an Athenian moderate, who did not necessarily strive for extreme democracy or oligarchy.

I always do battle with extremists, Critias, whether they are men who think that a good democracy must allow slaves and those so poor they would betray the state for a drachma to have a share in government, or whether they are men who think you cannot have a good oligarchy unless you bring the state under the tyranny of a few men. I thought in the past that the state was best served by those who could offer their abilities, be with horses or with shields, and on that point I do not change my mind even now (*Hell.* 2.3.38).

Theramenes’ defense is reported to have successfully swayed the minds of the Council, “which indicated its goodwill toward him by shouts of support” (*Hell.* 2.2.50). Ultimately his defense was in vain. Critias, realizing that the Council would acquit Theramenes of the charges if given

the opportunity, struck Theramenes from the list of Three Thousand, revoking his right to a trial. Then, according to Xenophon, Theramenes was seized and handed over to the eleven for execution by drinking hemlock. In fact, Xenophon's account describes Theramenes' resistance in dramatic detail. When Critias announced his fate, he leaped to the altar and asked for justice.¹⁰⁸ The Eleven entrusted with executions seized Theramenes and dragged him from the altar despite his pleas. When his friends tried to help him, he refused them in order to free himself from the responsibility of their own deaths. His last words before being forced to consume the deadly hemlock were directed toward Critias, whom he toasted while throwing away the last dregs of the drink: "here's to that fine fellow, Critias."¹⁰⁹

The trial and execution of Theramenes demonstrated a common conflict within oligarchic governments, that is, the division between small ruling bodies. Aristotle in *Politics* explains the two conflicts most common to an oligarchy: "Conflict between the oligarchs themselves and conflict between the oligarchs and the people. In a democracy, however, there is only conflict between citizens favoring democracy and citizens favoring oligarchy, as no serious factional conflict arises in the people [that is, those favoring democracy] against themselves" (1302a). With Theramenes' execution, the extremists were free to act as tyrants without fear (*Hell.* 2.4.1). Theramenes, the last moderating influence in Athenian government, had been executed by his own government simply for disagreeing with its violent nature.

The speeches made by Critias exemplify the aristocratic admiration for Sparta and the Spartan government as well as a hatred for democracy. This admiration can be spotted

¹⁰⁸ Krentz, 76.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 77.

throughout his speech when he refers to the Spartans as their ‘preservers.’ Later, to convince the Council of Theramenes’ guilt, Critias freely talks about his admiration of Sparta: “The finest constitution is reputed to be, I suppose, that of the city of Sparta” (*Hell.* 2.3.34).

The idealization of the Spartan system is argued by some modern scholars to be in accordance with a ‘master plan’ by the Thirty to remodel Athenian government and society to mimic that of Sparta’s.¹¹⁰ The Spartan model theory attempts to explain the ultimate goal of the Thirty in the absence of any rational excuse for the extreme violence and terror of the regime. The theory has been suggested by scholars from as early as 1932.¹¹¹ Whether or not this is what the Thirty were striving for is unknown; however, the supporting evidence does make a strong case. The Spartan government was structured by two kings, a board of five ephors whose function was to keep the power of the kings in check. A *gerousia* consisting of approximately thirty elders, including the two kings, was the primary legislative body in Sparta. The *homoioi* constituted the full citizens of Sparta, otherwise known as the Spartiates. At any given time this body consisted of about 3,000. The *homoioi* did not have authority to propose legislation to the *gerousia*, only to vote on proposals made by the *gerousia*. The last social class in Sparta, the *perioikoi*, or ‘the dwellers around’, were a secondary class in Laconia that did not possess a share in the government as the *homoioi* did.

Supporters of the Spartan model theory, recognize the reforms made by the Thirty to be in accordance with restructuring Athenian society and government to imitate that of Sparta. The

¹¹⁰ Krentz, 64; J.K. Davies, *Democracy and Classical Greece*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 143; Ostwald, 485-488.

¹¹¹ Ostwald, 485.

first clue appears after the peace with Sparta was made, with the “appointment of five ‘ephors’ by the *hetaireiai* indicates that the extremists envisaged a Spartan model for Athens well before the Thirty were installed and that Theramenes may well have gone along with the idea of restricting full citizenship.”¹¹² The number thirty seems to have been chosen arbitrarily, yet it is the same number of men in Sparta’s *gerousia*. The list of the Three Thousand was the approximate size of the *homoioi* class in Sparta; both of which retained the right of participation in government. “The body of Three Thousand included the Athenian cavalry, and were claimed to be the ‘best men’ or the ‘suitable men’ (*hoi beltistoi, hoi kaloi kai agathoi, and hoi epiekeis*)” (*Hell.2.3.19; AthPol.36.2*).¹¹³ When the Thirty announced the eviction of all those excluded from the list, they essentially created a version of the Spartan *perioikoi*. Krentz argues that the forced eviction of the excluded would help to orient Athens toward the land. In Athenian democracy, the connection is with the sea and naval power. It was a preference by most oligarchs that power be held in the hands of the farmers. The loss of the Athenian empire would have prompted the Thirty to reorient the people back into the agrarian lifestyle which dominated archaic times. This was also a necessary action due to the fact that Athens was no longer importing food from foreign places.¹¹⁴

Certain elements of the Spartan system could not be transplanted to Athens. “There was nothing in the Athenian social structure on which to graft a dual kingship, and nothing that could

¹¹² Ostwald, 485.

¹¹³ Krentz, 65.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 66.

be transformed into a helot class.”¹¹⁵ In spite of the inability to include certain elements of the Spartan structure, Davies also notes that the relationship between the Thirty and Lysander must be considered alongside the relationship between the Thirty and the Spartan admiral Lysander. When one considers the power invested in Lysander after the war, it is understandable that the Thirty would not have refused taking orders from the Spartan. “The Thirty worked for Lysander and therefore may have been trying to replicate the Spartan government.”¹¹⁶

Conclusion to Internal conflict

The internal conflicts which drove the moderate and extreme elements of the Thirty against each other, namely, Theramenes and Critias, did not develop until the Thirty were firmly in power and actively targeting their enemies. The brutal policies of Critias were opposed by Theramenes who appeared to be creating a following for himself by speaking out against his own government. The trial and subsequent execution of Theramenes suggested the deliberate attempt by the extremists to quell any notions of a broader more inclusive government. Theramenes remains an enigmatic figure. His associations with both the oligarchic coup of 411 and 404 have legitimized his labeling as an oligarch. Furthermore, his tendency to switch sides harmed his reputation, branding him with traitor status. His long absence from Athens while he was acting as the negotiator of peace terms had not helped his image but the terrible memory of the Thirty did help to redeem his image.¹¹⁷ In the end, he was executed for his opposition to the policies of the Thirty when he saw the direction in which the extremists wanted to lead Athens. Theramenes

¹¹⁵ Ostwald, 485.

¹¹⁶ Davies, 143.

¹¹⁷ See, Bernadotte Perrin, “The Rehabilitation of Theramenes,” *The American Historical Review* Vol. 9, No. 4 (Jul. 1904): 649-662; Phillip Harding, “The Theramenes Myth,” *Phoenix* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring, 1974): 101-111.

was a moderate who chose to tow the middle line between the two extremes: radical democracy and narrow oligarchy. His delayed negotiations with Lysander were more driven by saving Athens from slavery or destruction than starving the Athenians into surrender. His membership in the regime of the Thirty does not indicate that he wished to oppress the people as Critias did. In actuality, he was a proponent of implementing a broader based form of oligarchy or democracy; his interpretation of the 'Ancestral Constitution.'

It is evident that the aristocrats who made up the Thirty were intellectuals who admired the Spartan system. Modern theories suggest the imitation of the Spartan system to be, at least in part, the ultimate goal behind the Thirty's extreme reforms. The evidence makes sense however, if this was indeed the Thirty's plan it was not successful. The Thirty were a group of Athenian intellectuals who shared the common admiration for Spartan government and society, a typical trait among the aristocracy. The respect for Sparta may have influenced the size of the reformed political bodies and their functions, but it is impossible to prove that there was an 'ultimate plan.' Perhaps, if events had played out differently, Athens could have grown into the role of a second Sparta. As it was the external events happening in Greece greatly diminished the prospect of the Thirty's survival.

External Pressure on the Thirty

The Thirty did much to undermine their own power in Athens. Theramenes argued that the current policy of executing men simply because they were supporters of the former democracy and the arbitrary list of the Three Thousand to participate in government would not strengthen the Athenian state. He argued that the state needed more men eligible for citizenship to remain strong while the exclusionist policy of the Thirty was in fact strengthening their enemies. The actions of the Thirty resulted in the alienation of the majority of Athenians. The expulsion of the disenfranchised from Athens, as we have seen, prompted the mass migration of Athenians into other parts of the Greek mainland. The resulting pressure was partially initiated by the Thirty themselves when they continued to oppress the Athenians and, most importantly, when they purged the Athenians of their citizenship and homes. These pressures would destroy the Thirty's government.

The Thirty reformed Athens in the ways that suited an oligarchic government which was loyal to Sparta. Throughout the course of their rule however, their largest problem was the democratic resistance forming outside Athens. Thrasybulus was a prominent democrat in the last decade of the Peloponnesian War. He was a trierarch with the navy at Samos during the revolution of 411.¹¹⁸ He also served as a trierarch at Arginusae along with Theramenes in 406. After the defeat of Athens in the war, Thrasybulus and a small band of democratic exiles set out from neighboring Thebes, to embark on a campaign to overthrow the oligarchy. The number of

¹¹⁸ Krentz, 70.

supporters is said to have grown to 70 when they occupied the hilltop fort north of Athens known as Phyle in January of 404/3.

In an effort to put down the resistance, the Thirty launched an attack on the fort with the full force of the Three Thousand, which included the elite Athenian cavalry. The oligarchic force attempted to blockade the hill to prevent the democrats from receiving provisions and reinforcements. An unexpected snowstorm however, forced the oligarchs to move their camp. The snowstorm carried on into the next day, prompting the Thirty to withdraw back to Athens. Thrasybulus' forces were able to harass the oligarchs with some success as they fled back to the city. This was a small victory for the democrats but it proved that the oligarchy was weak enough to be overthrown by force.

The number of exiles joining the resistance increased as the Thirty forced the Athenians out of the city. It is reported by Lysias that the number grew to 700 by the end of April (*Lys.* 31.8-9). We must realize that this resistance did not consist of Athenians exclusively. In fact, only a few more than 100 were Athenians. Krentz recognizes that the Metic population of Athens was essential in aiding the exiles with their campaign. "Several hundred were mercenaries hired by Lysias from Aegina, probably 300 in all, and another 300 were foreigners."¹¹⁹ This fact undoubtedly influenced Thrasybulus' proposal to give citizenship to all who returned from the Piraeus in the autumn of 403 (*Ath.Pol.* 40.2).¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Krentz, 83.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

If we observe the political status of the larger Greek world, especially the diplomatic tensions between Athens, Thebes, and Sparta, we can isolate the political reasoning which contributed the Thirty's downward spiral. Paul Cartledge stresses that "it was in the interest of each (Athens, Sparta, Thebes) to keep the other two at each other's throats or at least sufficiently preoccupied with each other to allow space and time for a third party to pursue its own hegemonial ambitions."¹²¹ Thebes and Sparta joined forces in the last phase of the war against Athens. "During the Decelean War 413-404, the Thebans made a handsome profit out of slaves and other war-booty from Attica."¹²² Xenophon notes that "this increase in wealth had encouraged Thebes' desire for extending her power in Boiotia" (Xen. Mem. 3.5.2). The rising power of Thebes' military was undoubtedly recognized as a potential threat to Sparta despite the alliance between the two states. Indeed, this rising power helped inform the decision of Sparta to keep Athens intact and stable in the post-war Greek world. The geographic location of Athens was vital in this decision. The complete destruction of Athens was considered by Sparta and certainly was supported by many Greek poleis which sought to see the city burn. Ultimately it was decided to be in Spartans' best interest to keep Athens intact to provide a cautionary buffer between themselves and the new threat of Theban expansion.

After the Thirty came to power in Athens, Thebes shifted from its alliance with Sparta to openly support the plight of the Athenian refugees and democratic exiles. A decree announced by Sparta prohibited her allies from harboring Athenian refugees. The decree, however, was not accepted by Thebes and Megara, who welcomed the Athenians. Thebes went one step further,

¹²¹ Paul Cartledge, *Agisalaos and the Crises of Sparta*, 279.

¹²² *Ibid*,

issuing a counter-decree which prohibited the refusal of Athenian refugees. This act deliberately undermined Spartan authority and illustrates the condemnation of the Thirty felt not only by the Athenians whom they oppressed, but by the broader Greek world.

If we shift our attention to the politics of Sparta, we see that Sparta itself is in a state of decline caused by the very power it acquired by defeating Athens.¹²³ At the conclusion of the Peloponnesian War the future of Sparta's foreign policy was poised to go in one of two directions. The first was for Sparta to remain the reclusive yet stable powerhouse she had been in the past. The second option, which was adopted, was imperialistic. The Spartans would use the naval strength gained in the war to enforce hegemony on Athens' former subjects to maintain their own naval empire. The current imperialistic policy was supported by King Agis and carried out by the Spartan admiral, Lysander.

After his victory over Athens at Aegispotomai, Lysander, propelled by his fame and prestige, enforced the authority of Sparta onto Athens' former subjects by installing his own puppet governments.¹²⁴ These decarchies, or governments ruled by ten men, consisted of Lysander's personal friends and did little to generate respect for the Spartans in their new role as rulers of an empire. In fact, the former Athenian subjects were dissatisfied with the oppressive policies of Lysander's governors.

¹²³ M. Austin and Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece*. (Batsford, 1977) 132.

¹²⁴ For a detailed discussion on the ambitions of Lysander See, A. Andrewes, "Two notes on Lysander," *Phoenix* Vol. 25, No. 3 (Autumn, 1971): 206-226; R.E. Smith, "Lysander and the Spartan Empire," *Classical Philology* Vol. 43, No. 3 (Jul., 1948): 145-156; William K. Prentice, "The Character of Lysander," *American Journal of Archaeology* Vol. 38, No. 1 (Jan.-Mar., 1934): 37-42.

Under Lysander's imperialistic direction, the public support for a Spartan led empire in Greece began to wane. In Sparta, King Pausanias was outraged and jealous of Lysander's new power. In Spartan terms, Lysander's behavior appeared to undermine the power of the kings and their ability to manage the state in its traditional way. The circumstances of the Peloponnesian War had allowed for Lysander to become the *de facto* war leader in Sparta. However, Lysander's new fame aroused opposition in some Spartans who did not like seeing power concentrated so heavily in one man. One of his bitterest opponents was King Pausanias.¹²⁵

As victors in the Peloponnesian War, Sparta inherited the remnants of Athens' former Empire and with it all the responsibilities of managing it. Sparta throughout its history seldom exhibited the desire for an overseas empire with tribute paying subjects as Athens did. The Spartans were perfectly content with an insular existence. Indeed, their system was based around the constant attention of military training in order to suppress their Helot slaves who sustained their economy by managing their agricultural production. For this reason, the Spartans were always reluctant to stray too far from home, as they lived under the constant threat of a Helot uprising. Sparta's victory triggered a major transitional period in both her economy and military organization. Economically, Sparta for the first time in history inherited the wealth of Athens as well as the hegemony of her subject states. On the effect which wealth had on the Spartan social system, Austin and Naquet agree: "With the victory of 404 the whole Spartan system was put to the test. The wealth drawn up by a minority from the empire contributed to the aggravation of existing social inequalities and encouraged the concentration of landed property among an ever-

¹²⁵ All sources speaking of Pausanias' intervention at Athens refer to his envy of Lysander (*Hell.* 2.4.29; *Plut. Lys.* 21. 4; *Diod.* 14. 33.6).

decreasing number of citizens with full rights.”¹²⁶ Militarily, the Spartans, with hefty support from Persia, were compelled to build up a naval fleet in order challenge Athens at sea. This transition from Sparta’s traditional emphasis on phalanx warfare, however, required more men and a different type of military focus. The maintenance of a navy was successful for Athens whose poorest citizens could serve as rowers in the fleet with the benefit of having a voice in their government. Sparta’s government on the contrary, could not produce sufficient numbers of rowers without the help of Persia’s naval resources. Charles D. Hamilton has identified three political factions in Sparta which fought for power in immediate post-war period (405-401). This evidence helps to explain the failings of Spartan imperial policy.¹²⁷

The failure of the Thirty to defeat the democratic exiles at Phyle sent a message to the rest of Greece that the regime of the Thirty was not secure, even with the presence of a Spartan garrison. Moreover, as argued above, Sparta itself was in difficult circumstances. Out of desperation the Thirty, during parleys over prisoners at Phyle, asked Thrasybulus if he might share in the government of the Thirty. The idea of such an offer, whether or not it was actually made, illustrates how readily men seen from one side as the champions of democracy could be recognized from the other side as disgruntled aristocrats seeking redress for personal grievances. Considering the vacancy to the regime was made by the execution of one of their own, Theramenes, Thrasybulus was inclined to refuse the offer to join the Thirty.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Austin and Naquet, 134.

¹²⁷ Charles D. Hamilton, “Spartan Politics and Policy, 405-401 B.C.,” *The American Journal of Philology* Vol. 91, No. 3 (Jul., 1970): 294-314.

¹²⁸ Munn, 238.

Thrasybulus and the exiles gained momentum from the victory at Phyle and the confidence to attempt an attack on the Thirty at Athens. The longer Thrasybulus waited, the more likely Spartan intervention would occur. Impelled to bring the conflict of factions to a head, Thrasybulus moved his army, now numbering over 1,000, down into the plain of Athens, past the city, and into the Piraeus, where he found support in the massive number of disaffected Athenians.¹²⁹ Xenophon reports minor skirmishing as the exiles approached the Piraeus; the numeric advantage of the Thirty, along with the Three Thousand, compelled Thrasybulus to position his army in close quarters on the Hill of Mounichia.¹³⁰ He ordered his followers in battle formation, fifty men deep (*Hell.* 2.4.11). The men of Phyle were sufficient to be arranged only ten men deep but the combined force of the present Athenians behind them created a large force of peltasts and light armed javelin throwers (*Hell.* 2.4.12).

As the enemy approached their position, Thrasybulus called out to his troops to consider the nature of the men they were about to engage. “Those stationed at the end of their line on the left are the very Thirty who have deprived us of our city, although we had committed no wrong. These are the men who drove us from our houses and who condemned our dearest relatives and friends” (*Hell.* 2.4.13). The elevated position of the exiles supported by the mass of missile troops gave Thrasybulus the upper hand. The front ranks of the Thirty’s men were cut down and their massed formation broke and ran. Among the dead were Critias himself, Hippomachus among the Thirty, and Charmides among the Ten overseers of Piraeus.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Ibid, 238.

¹³⁰ On the battle of Munichia, see Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.10-22; Diod. 14.33.2-4; Justin 5.9.14-10.3; *Ath.Pol.* 38.1.

¹³¹ Munn, 239.

The victory of Thrasybulus meant the end of the Thirty's power. The two sides remained opposed camps, one in Athens, the other in Piraeus. Appeals for reconciliation were confessed by Thrasybulus' followers on the basis of the common bonds of kinship, marriage, fellowship and communion in a range of social, civic, and religious institutions.¹³² The following day, while the remaining members of the Thirty met in the Council Chamber, the Three Thousand met at the Agora to decide whether they should continue to follow the orders of the Thirty, now that the oligarchy which they created had been defeated on the battlefield for the second time. Some wanted to depose the Thirty, and some insisted that they continue to resist the men in the Piraeus.¹³³ Those who were responsible for any violent acts in association with the Thirty were especially afraid of the consequences of an attempted reconciliation (*Hell.* 2.4.23). They eventually decided to disband the Thirty and elect a board of Ten to rule the city.¹³⁴ This board was elected with the promise that they would put an end to the war between the men of Athens and the men of Piraeus.

Conclusion

The civil war between the two sides lasted into the summer of 403. The Ten, along with the Three Thousand, attempted to maintain the oligarchic framework which was put in place by the Thirty. They continued a harsh policy on dissidents within and without the city.¹³⁵ Their brutality is demonstrated by the execution of Demaratus, a prominent citizen (*Ath.Pol* 38.2).The

¹³² Munn, 240.

¹³³ Krentz, 92.

¹³⁴ Xen. 2.4.23; *Ath.Pol* 38.1; Diod. 14.33.5; Justin 5.10.4-5; Lys. 12.54-55.

¹³⁵ Krentz, 94.

external threat from Thrasybulus remained constant. His rebel force had grown to include approximately 900 foreigners who joined the cause of the exiles after Thrasybulus declared citizenship in return for help. In response to the threat posed by the men of Piraeus, the men of the city requested aid from Sparta. An expeditionary force led by Lysander was sent to support the Ten and to put down the rebellion coming from Piraeus. This force, however, was immediately followed by King Pausanias with his own army, who sought to undermine Lysander's command and bring civil war in Athens to end favorably to Sparta. This end was not necessarily to take the form of a narrow oligarchy in Athens. Pausanias and his fellow Spartans recognized that Lysander's friends were not the only Athenians worthy of friendship with Sparta. A more broadly-based and therefore stable Athenian oligarchy could still be a dependent ally of Sparta.¹³⁶ Equity between the two factions was assured by the election of ten men from the partisans in Piraeus to join the Ten of the city in a new steering committee of twenty, "to superintend the city until the laws were established."¹³⁷ Eleusis became a refuge for those most responsible for the judicial murders carried out over the previous year. These included most survivors of the Thirty, of the Eleven, and of the Ten of Piraeus.¹³⁸

After the peace was made, there remained the matter of the constitution to replace the oligarchy of the Thirty. Extreme oligarchy as supported by Lysander and carried out through Critias and the Thirty had failed. At the opposite end of the spectrum, radical democracy was also not a viable option in the view of Sparta. The decision on the appropriate form of moderate

¹³⁶ See, Phillip Harding, "King Pausanias and the Restoration of Democracy at Athens," *Hermes* Vol. 116, No. 2 (2nd Qtr. 1988): 186-193.

¹³⁷ Munn, 244.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 244.

oligarchy would be left for the Athenians to decide themselves. As in 411 and 404, the debate concerning the terms of an ‘ancestral constitution’ arose. This time however, it was evident that this ideal meant neither a pro-Spartan oligarchy, nor a radical democracy. The re-unification of Athens also marked the declaration of an amnesty to protect all those who may have been implicated in the previous regime.¹³⁹

With the restoration of democracy in Athens, the people found a new appreciation for democracy and a bitter resentment toward oligarchy which extended into the fourth century through the rhetoric of Athenian orators.¹⁴⁰ One of the results of this resentment of course was the labeling of the oligarchs of the Thirty as the “Thirty Tyrants”, a nick name which associated the Thirty with Athens’ most hated political concept, tyranny. The failure of the Thirty to maintain control over Athens in turn represented the larger failings of Sparta in maintaining the former empire of Athens. The Spartans upon their victory were seen as the ‘saviors of Greece’ (*Hell.* 2.2.23). For many states this represented freedom from the yoke of the Athenian empire. In less than a year the poor conditions inside Athens and the oppression of the Thirty prompted the rebellion of the remaining democrats, as well as the widespread support of other poleis, most importantly Thebes, a former ally of Sparta.

The oligarchic revolutions which happened in the last ten years of the Peloponnesian War resulted from the conflicting interests of the oligarchs and the leaders of the popular party, the

¹³⁹ Edwin Carawan, “Amnesty and Accountings for The Thirty,” *Classical Quarterly* Vol. 56 (2006):57-76.

¹⁴⁰ Cohen, 52. In a fourth century speech made by orator, Demosthenes, he praises the Athenian rule of law and condemns the institution of oligarchy: “whereas oligarchs view themselves as above the law and change it retrospectively as they please to suit their interests, democracies preserve their freedom by living under the laws they have established (*Demos.* 24.75-6). The orator Aeschines similarly states: “autocracies and oligarchies are administered according to the tempers of their lords, but democracies according to the established laws... In a democracy it is the laws that guard the person of the citizen and the constitution of the state (*Aesc.* 1.5).

former group embodying the aristocratic elements of Athens, the latter being the statesmen who had established themselves under the banner of radical democracy. As we have seen, the aristocracy was able to tolerate the inclusion of all Athenian males as long as the democratic system did not compromise the influence of the aristocracy. By the 460's the reforms of Ephialtes and Pericles completed the 'radicalization' of democracy by offering additional benefits to participating citizens and revoking the last bastion of aristocratic power, the Areopagus council. Due to the costs incurred by the Peloponnesian War, new efforts began by the exclusive aristocratic clubs (*hetaireai*) to take back Athens for the "beautiful and the good" (*kaloï k'agathoi*).¹⁴¹

In less than a century the Athenian democracy grew to include all male Athenians, a constitutional accomplishment which had yet to be seen in history. The growth of democracy in Athens was spurred on by the successes of her naval league and the tribute which her allies paid annually for the maintenance of the navy. Athens' navy soon became strong enough to enforce the allies to remain in the league, even after the objective of continuing the fight with Persia was over and unimportant. In this century we witness the power obtained by Athens over her subjects and the effect of maintaining this empire had on the sovereign *demos* of Athens. Athenian citizens were encouraged to identify with their empire and take responsibility for its maintenance. Consequently, the Athenians were inclined to apply tyranny—a most hated concept by the Athenians—to their own subjects.¹⁴² By the time of Pericles, the Athenians exercised

¹⁴¹ Munn, 52.

¹⁴² A.H.M. Jones, "The Athenian Democracy and Its Critics," *Cambridge Historical Journal* Vol. 11, No. 1 (1953): 20. Jones indicates that Cleon, in the debate on the fate of the Mitylenaeans, declares that the empire is a tyranny which must be maintained by terror (Thuc. 3.37-40). A proclamation is also made by Pericles upon the second invasion of Attica, that the empire is a tyranny (Thuc. 2.63).

unabashed imperialism over her subjects by putting down attempted revolts and misusing the allied tribute to beautify the city.

Representing the height of Athenian democracy this period has been called a 'golden age.'

Golden because of the great strides made in virtually all realms of Greek culture. Athens for a brief moment was perhaps strongest state and most culturally affluent city in the Mediterranean world. We must remember that this golden age of democracy came to a dark and violent end, climaxing in the utter defeat of Athens, the loss of her infamous navy, the revolt of her subjects, and the reins of the city handed over to a small group of aristocrats who cared nothing for the common people in Athens and bowed down to Spartan authority. This episode should communicate the potential consequences of imperialism and fragility of the democratic system, as well as the dangers of an unchecked aristocracy. But the reign of the Thirty did not last long. The oligarchs did not succeed in establishing a new government and social order in Athens. The reaction of Athenians toward the regime clearly indicated their hostility to a government that would revoke the freedom of the common people. Their hostility is, I think, best expressed by Thucydides: "it was no light matter to deprive the Athenian people of its freedom, almost a hundred years after the deposition of the tyrants, when it had been not only not subject to any during the whole of that period, but accustomed during more than half of it to rule over subject of its own" (8.68.4).

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