

Introduction: Greeks Drawing Lots: The Practice and the Mindset of Egalitarianism

1. An egalitarian mindset

Ancient Greeks drew lots within an astonishingly broad spectrum of practices and conventions. The drawing of lots reflected the values, practices, and egalitarian mindset that were prevalent for nearly three centuries before the most famous appearance of the lot as the salient feature of Athenian democracy. Greeks often turned to random choices by drawing lots to ensure equality and fairness and avoid undue influence and corruption. Without the wide-ranging use of lotteries in the archaic period, classical democracy would never have emerged as it did: reshuffling the entire citizenry by lot and gradually expanding its use for governing posts. We shall observe the drawing of lots in archaeology, myth, poetry, drama, ritual, historiography, and political thought and practice. The pre-democratic range is impressive and apparent in the earliest Greek literature.

Modern democracies have mostly abandoned the drawing of lots for citizens' social, economic, judicial, and political involvement—salient features, as I hope to show, of the ancient Greek world. Instead, when modern democratic regimes opted for elected representation, they probably did not foresee its attendant risks, familiar today, of distaste for politics, political ignorance, alienation, elitism, sectionalism, and the ever-present danger of undue influence. Moreover, representative government and political parties in modern democracies often stand for discrete sections of society (real or imagined), deepening internal divisions. By contrast, one salient feature of drawing lots in ancient Greece is a social *mixture*, when randomly chosen citizens find themselves doing something together. Today, such random selection by lot is rare, apparent in jury selection and experiments of citizen committees. Representation, even if limited in time and subject to rotation, implies some form of top-down governance. By contrast, when Greeks drew lots, their vision of society was horizontal rather than vertical, and participants were interchangeable and hence perceived as equal individuals.

The following categories of drawing lots are apparent during the archaic, classical, and early Hellenistic periods of Greek history (ca. 750–150):

- *Distributive* lotteries define the contours of the relevant group (or community), which is also sovereign to decide the action of drawing lots. They express a “horizontal” vision of society, the reverse of a vertical, top-down view of authority. Distributive lotteries were employed to distribute inheritance, sacrificial meat, colonial lands, booty, catch, and positions in the state; even the entire cosmos and the provinces of the gods were believed to have been distributed by lot by and among the Greek gods.
- *Selective* lotteries too imply the contours of some groups, when picking soldiers for military campaigns, colonists for new settlements, warriors for particular tasks, and at some point even sorting out who were to be worshiped as ancestral tribal heroes at Athens.
- *Procedural* lotteries were especially useful for rotation and turns, such as guard shifts, stations on a race course, allocation of court cases, and rotating days of the presidency of the Athenian Council (*boulê*). In the fifth century, even entire theatres of war were sometimes assigned to generals by lot.
- *Mixture lotteries* were used to “homogenize” the mother cities at the time of the foundation of new colonies and to do the same in the colonies, mixing the nucleus of settlers from a specific mother city with other Greek immigrants who joined a foundation. Sometimes they “mixed” the people to avoid discord and civil strife and, specifically in Athens, to reshuffle the deck of citizens to create the basis of Athenian democracy.
- *Divination by lot* (lot oracles) was a discrete category for divining the intention of the gods for *ad hoc* issues, prevalent at the oracles of Delphi and Dodona.

Drawing lots drew a line around the community: it defined communities and groups in terms of access (and exclusion), with each participant considered equal, equivalent, and interchangeable before the chance, and therefore as a recognized individual.¹ The lottery implied, sometimes expressly, an emphasis on equality and equity or “fairness.” Before lots are drawn, the chance is equally fair, but Greeks often tried to have equal outcomes. A history of the lot is how people distribute things, how they regard and select individuals, how they take turns, how they inherit, and how they mix to form a more cohesive community or, sometimes, avoid civil strife. It is also a history of the ideas of equality and

¹ I do not enter the discussion about the individual as distinguished from a “person”; in terms of social and political life—which are the ones that concern us here—no one is “an island”; cf. Vernant (1989); note the implicit understanding of the role of distribution: de Polignac and Schmitt-Pantel (1998) “*idios en effet ne designe pas l’individu en tant que “personne” . . . mais en tant que détenteur d’un statu social déterminé par sa position dans cet espace de distribution.*” Cf. Müller-Prost (2002).

fairness, or fairness as close as possible to equality. Drawing lots was a salient feature of the ancient Greek mindset or worldview, a perspective mostly lost today.

It is a story of the idea of a *horizontal community*. Like everybody else, Greeks knew elites and top-down rule, but unlike most societies throughout history, its opposite, a *horizontal* vision of society, was never out of their frame of reference. In my view, a constant vector was at play in archaic and classical Greek history, oscillating between the vertical/elite (top-down) and the horizontal/egalitarian. In Greek colonies (ch. 6), for example, egalitarianism was expressed in a distinct category of “equal First Lots” (*protoi kleroi*). Those were distributed by lot during the first generation of foundation (the “egalitarian vector”). However, the “elite vector” would prevail within one or two generations, and social and economic differentiation arose.

The history of drawing lots is one of a community that recognizes itself as a community (not necessarily a political one), making sovereign decisions about and for itself, with no recourse to external authority. Access to a distributive lottery defines, exclusively, the contours of the group of “sharers”: who is in, who is out. Drawing lots implies “members only”: the “group” might be tiny, for example, two brothers sharing partible inheritance by lot (ch. 4) or seven brothers who draw lots to send one of them to war (ch. 1). It can also be substantial, such as an entire home community drawing lots to select settlers for a new colony; or the community of colonists, with each getting by lot (*kleros*) an equal portion of land (*kleros*, again; ch. 6); or citizens—not outsiders—deserving equal “portions of law” in a democracy (ch. 7).

With distributive lotteries, whether among Olympian gods who allot the sea to Poseidon by lot or among humans, the source of authority is not external to the group of participants and draws its legitimacy from inside. For the most part, Greeks did not turn to the lot to “reveal the will of the gods,” as I shall demonstrate (ch. 2). No oracle, to my knowledge, had ever commanded any Greek to hold a lottery; it was always a human decision to turn to random devices, including lot oracles, which, as a discrete category, were indeed a device of divination. We might need to take a moment to realize how remarkable it was to turn to the lot *not* for the sake of divination. Most lotteries had not been to reveal something divinely predetermined, nor do we hear of any ancient Greek claiming that. Athena did not select Athens’s magistrates and judges; the Athenians did that, and by lot.²

² See ch. 8 (with the possible exception of priests chosen by lot from a *genos*). Cf. Hansen (1999) 74–76.

Before the lot became political, drawing lots and establishing a mindset of equal chances and portions were already ubiquitous during the centuries before Cleisthenes laid the foundations for democracy in 508. They touched upon a whole spectrum of life and death, both private and public. They expressed values of individuality, fairness, and equality. Moreover, the “archaeology of equality” (such as equal plots in new settlements, ch. 6) seems to support the notion of equal distribution by lot.

2. From egalitarianism to democracy

As a history of Greek values and practices associated with drawing lots, this book could stand alone without mentioning drawing lots in Athenian democracy or governance in general. On the other hand, teleology aside, the transition to the political sphere (ch. 7) is better understood with the earlier history of drawing lots. For example, mixtures by drawing lots (chs. 2, 4, 6) were politically first expressed in Cleisthenes’s reforms. The selection of magistrates was preceded by centuries of selective lotteries (chs. 1–6); procedures in the Athenian democracy, such as the rotating Chair of the Council, are already evidenced in Homer. Distributing equal concrete portions by lot, “equally and fairly,” seems to explain the transformation to the abstract level of “equal portions of law” (*isonomia*; the term “democracy,” its equivalent, appeared somewhat later). The expression *metechein tes poleos*, “sharing in the state,” is apt for the notion of citizenship (each citizen, as it were, having an equal portion of it). Aristotle, with good reason, defined the state as a “partnership” (*koinonia*).

Distributive lotteries, in particular, had been defining the contours of the group or community for centuries: The “whole” among which a distribution by lot is made is the exclusive group (e.g., a family, an army, a community); inside, the individual must be recognized and counted (outsiders may not share) and becomes a “sharer.” The “unit,” the individual (or the individual household, *oikos*), deserves a portion. That is no trivial matter: the stress on the one-to-one relations (one portion / one individual) will prove consistent from the eighth to the fourth centuries, expressed in a whole spectrum of “portions.”

Sharing equally in the state overlapped with the idea that a state should consist of a precise correspondence between the number of households (*oikoi*) and the number of *kleroi* (*kleros*: lot; a plot of land). Revolutionary cries—for example, at Sparta, Leontinoi, Syracuse, and Herakleia Pontike (ch. 6)—were sometimes framed as a call for a reshuffling of the deck of citizens and redistribution of equal plots of lands (*ges anadasmos*), reverting to some ideal and primordial past when that supposedly had been the case.

3. What is new about this book? The previous discussion of the field of inquiry

This book claims to open a window on a new area of observation and analysis, which, in my view, is a key to understanding ancient Greek civilization, aside from the specific question of democracy and governance. Although classics is the oldest academic discipline, no one to date has written a comprehensive study of the drawing of lots in ancient Greece.³ Faced with much fewer sources of knowledge than other historical disciplines and taking note of the continuous and exhaustive work to extricate the maximum from them, one would think that no new fields are left to explore. Our dialogue with the past is ever-changing, but here we have an entire field of inquiry that has never received sufficient attention or recognition. The last word on the subject in book form was *Election by Lot at Athens*, the first draft of which had been written before the discovery of the “Constitution of Athens” (*Athenaion politeia*, a fundamental text about the Athenian regime).⁴ This excellent monograph by James Wycliffe Headlam was published in 1891 and was chronologically restricted to Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries. The studies that followed Headlam, such as those by Mogens H. Hansen and Bernard Manin, never attempted anything comprehensive. They, too, are restricted to politics while entirely missing out on centuries of the use of the lot before it became relevant to democracy. By contrast, in this book, the substantial section on democracy by Josine Blok, a true expert on ancient citizenship and Athenian democracy, comes at its end; it is also chronologically the latest. In short, the subject needed identification and research of an entire field that no one had ever treated comprehensively. One of my conclusions is that it ought to have been. Historians like to privilege their subject choices, and I am consciously doing the same, hoping to justify that endeavor. The result presented here is a history of a significant institution that permeated the lives of Greeks during the archaic period and impacted how they saw human society and structured their expectations and behaviors.

The political reawakening of interest in the use of the lot and sortition goes hand in hand with a renewed interest in the ancient Athenian democracy and the use of the lot in governance.⁵ Yet the first constitutive act in the foundation

³ Other studies either concentrate on Athens in the form of chapters or articles: de Coulanges (1891); Ehrenberg (1927); Hansen (1999); Manin (1997); or in general encyclopedia articles, Glotz (1907); Ehrenberg (1927). Cf. Demont (2010); Buchstein (2009); Blok (2017); Sintomer (2011); (2020). See ch. 9 and *Envoi*.

⁴ See ch. 9, Endnote.

⁵ The list is constantly growing, e.g., Goodwin, B. ([1992] 2005); Dowlen (2008); Stone (2011a); Sintomer (2007); Dowlen, Delannoi, (eds.) (2010); Sintomer and Lopez-Rabatel (2020); Demont (2010); Van Reybrouck (2016); Fishkin (2018); see also <https://www.sortitionfoundation.org/>.

of democracy in Athens by Cleisthenes was not to apply the lot to selecting magistrates; he implemented a mixture lottery on a vast scale, creating a new basis for the political citizenry. He replaced the “strong ties” of localism, patronage, and kinship, which often threatened to fragment the society, with a cohesive network of citizens.⁶ On the other hand, regardless of the democracy that he founded in 508, it was already Solon (ca. 594) who introduced allotment to public offices (see ch. 7): the magistracies of the Nine Archons, and the *Tamiai* (treasurers) of the goddess Athena, who were to be drawn by lot from a preselected group. About a century later, the Athenian democracy adopted the practice, gradually extending it from preselected groups to “from everyone” (*ex hapanton*). The ancient Athenian democracy falsifies any claim of inefficiency: with a population nearing the size of modern Iceland, it was run efficiently by lot, fought and won wars, and managed its economy. Athenians did not need computers: a block of stone (a *kleroterion*) with drilled vertical shafts and white and black balls running through them was sufficient.⁷

Can the drawing of lots work in modern, contemporary democracies? People rarely believe facts, says the Nobel Prize laureate Daniel Kahneman.⁸ They would rarely believe the straightforward answer: it can work today, and it did in antiquity. The experiment had been successfully conducted and proven in ancient Athens (and to a degree in some medieval Italian republics).⁹ Yet, the typical reaction I encounter to introducing lotteries to contemporary politics is condescending, uninformed ridicule: it was all very well for them back then, but today? We seem to adhere to the notion that elections and representation are the salient democratic feature, but are they? We rarely consider that our system of representative democracy in France and the United States was the late-eighteenth-century reaction *against* democratic forces.¹⁰

A representative government retains the vertical *direction* of a top-down rule while drawing its authority from “the bottom.” By contrast, the horizontal perspective expressed in drawing lots engages people, keeps them informed, and frees them from manipulation. The drawing of lots expressed respect for politics and suspicion of politicians. It succeeded in enhancing public involvement and eliminating sectarianism. There was no room for political lobbies because nobody knew whom to influence or bribe. Significantly, lotteries prevented resentment against a person chosen for a post and generally provided a sense of equality and fairness. They were efficient, fast, and very cheap. However, there is not much point in contemporary suggestions to reintroduce the lot into politics¹¹ merely as a mechanism *à la grecque*.

⁶ Cf. Granovetter (1973) on strong and weak ties in a society; Ismard (2010)

⁷ Kosmetatou (2013).

⁸ Kahneman (2011).

⁹ Sintomer (2011; 2020).

¹⁰ Manin (1997); van Reybrouck (2016).

¹¹ Van Reybrouck (2016).

We need to understand the Greek world of values, the frame of reference, and the egalitarian mindset associated with the lot. These features made its wide-ranging use possible and desirable in antiquity, as it may be today.

In archaic Greek culture, a discrete “portion” and a discrete individual seem to overlap. A *moira* (portion) could be a portion of a cow in the form of sacrificial meat, which an individual gets by lot (ch. 3); on a metaphoric level, *moira* may also mean the “fate” of that individual. However, of what is it a portion? What is the “whole” to which it relates? Let us stay with cows for a moment, starting with a non-Greek contrast. In the book of Genesis, we meet the clever Joseph, who convinces Pharaoh to create grain stores for the forthcoming seven bad years, represented by the seven lean cows that devoured the seven fat cows that the pharaoh had seen in his dream. Once the lean years arrived, the pharaoh made a huge profit selling the grain Joseph had stored in central granaries (Genesis 41). The “whole” of those grain gifts were “portions” that belonged to the divine ruler. The portions came trickling vertically from above, top-down, whereas the “whole” had never belonged to those finally sharing in some of it.

Let us divert our gaze from an Egyptian cow to a Greek one. We now observe an opposed notion of “portion.” When Greeks ate meat, it was usually in the context of a sacrifice. After an honorary portion (*geras*) had been set aside for the priest performing the sacrifice, on most occasions, the rest of the cow was divided into equal portions of roasted or cooked meat and apportioned by lot among a predefined group of sharers (see ch. 3). Unlike the pharaonic “whole,” whence top-down portions would drop down, the Greek “whole” (in this case, the cow) belonged, *a priori*, to the entire, predefined group. The vision is not top-down but *horizontal*: not the pharaoh, but the group, or the community, conducts the sacrifice and the distribution of portions by lot.

Was the drawing of lots a value as such? Greeks stored much importance in the *collective distribution of equal portions*. Drawing lots was but a device to implement this. In distributive lotteries, sometimes one draws a lot because of the *difference* in the value of each portion. For example, the equally sized *kleroi* (plots of land) distributed by lot to new settlers were equal in size but not in the soil quality or distance from the center.

When Odysseus distributes a booty of captured goats, each ship gets nine. Yet he conducts a lottery “so that no one will be deprived of his equal share.” Why draw lots if each crew would get its nine goats anyway? However, a simple arithmetical distribution would have been unfair to those resenting getting the old and skinny goats. The lot expresses justice because it is arbitrary, and being impersonal, it eliminates resentment toward anyone except one’s “luck.”

Drawing lots was not a value; the collective distribution of equal portions was. We can demonstrate this in cases of collective distributions when drawing

lots became unnecessary. When an exact equivalence was possible, drawing lots became superfluous. The Greeks knew that. The Siphnians, for instance, distributed to each citizen the income from their gold mines, and the Athenians considered doing the same with their silver mine at Laurion. However, in contrast to equal units of gold and silver, most objects for collective distribution could not be split into units of precise equivalence, such as “ten drachmas for each Athenian.” Thus, recourse to the drawing of lots became frequent and ubiquitous (see ch. 6). Such insistence on equality of both chance and result within the framework of distributive lotteries reveals an egalitarian mindset. Let there be no confusion: egalitarianism and equality are not synonyms. Homeric society provides a good illustration (ch. 1): in the *Iliad*, the leaders (“Kings”) are unequal compared to the rest of the soldiers. A hero may enrich himself privately by grabbing *enara*—that is, personal captures, such as weapons, horses, or ransom. Publicly, however, a hero expects a *geras*, a special honorary gift, ostensibly from the army; otherwise, booty is brought “to the middle,” to the “common store,” whence it is redistributed by lot as individual portions. The “group” is comprehensive since leaders also participated in the general lotteries. Therefore, the distributive lottery is egalitarian, while the status of influential leaders and heroes is unequal. The “companions,” *hetairoi*, of Odysseus appear equal among themselves yet inferior to the leader. In contrast to the “World of Odysseus,” the historical, archaic Greeks hardly knew any kings, the *geras* was shifted to the priests, and when booty was concerned, the gods received a tithe (*dekate*), a practice unknown to Homer.

In short, instead of a top-down approach, the lottery and its vocabulary reflect a lateral or horizontal view of society more than any other institution in ancient Greece. It is the reverse of the vertical, hierarchical mode of authority. One might argue it is a question of degree, but the degree is significant. Greeks, too, knew top-down types of control (e.g., elites, tyrants, oligarchies). Still, the language, instruments, and power structure differed from the top-down Ancient Near East. With some exceptions around oracular institutions, ancient Greeks had no castes of priests, kings were exceptional, and tyrants were considered illegitimate. As some medieval Italian states illustrate, nothing inherent in a city-state should prevent authoritarian rule, and Greeks also knew tyrants. Greeks were also familiar with oligarchies, except that oligarchies too expressed an egalitarian mindset and were willing to share power equally, yet among a restricted group.

We should remember that the peculiar structure and cohesiveness of the Greek world discouraged centralism and encouraged horizontal perspectives. There never was (until 1821 CE) an actual country named “Greece.” By the time Alexander the Great had died (323), there were over one thousand Greek city-states (*poleis*), often with no contiguous borders, sprinkled along the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, from what are today Georgia and Ukraine

in the east to Spain in the west. About a third were founded between the late eighth century and the sixth. They illustrate the “frontier aspect” of ancient Greek colonization: the option to leave an oppressive background.¹² Despite geographical distances and differences in dialects, and although most Greeks lived side by side with hinterland Barbarians, they recognized themselves and were so recognized by others as Greeks. It may seem a historical paradox, but the fact is that Hellenicity crystallized and spread during the archaic period, right at the time when Greeks were distancing themselves from each other as far as possible. It was a process of civilizational convergence through geographical divergence. I have argued elsewhere that Greek civilization emerged the way it did, not despite those differences and distances, but because of them.¹³ The “self-organization of a complex system,” or the network dynamics of the “small Greek world” (“small worlds” is a crucial term in network theory) that operated among the nodes of the “Greek web” enhanced Greek commonalities of practices and values, especially those associated with the drawing of lots. This “small world” (where distances are measured not geographically but by the number of links and the flows of content) also enhanced specific, common *attitude d’esprit* against a top-down approach. The instrument of the lottery came closest to actualizing it

Using the lot among Greeks was a norm rather than an exception. Remarkably, we may observe it throughout the Greek world, despite the heterogeneity of that world and its numerous, geographically disconnected city-states. Moreover, Greeks recognized sub-ethnic identities and spoke a variety of dialects. Under such conditions, commonalities of value and practice are all the more remarkable. The concepts and practices related to the lot are apparent throughout those vast spaces dotted with Greek *poleis*. They are often embedded in the ancient Greek vocabulary, with a primarily consistent set of verbs and nouns that reveal the associated concepts and perspectives (below).¹⁴ The full spectrum of drawing lots is apparent already in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the earliest extant Greek literature. I aim to unravel a significant aspect of the life experience of ancient Greeks and perhaps add it to “the list of legacies” of classical Greece. In addition, if this reconstruction also helps to explain why both Herodotus and Aristotle regarded the drawing of lots as defining what democracy was all about, all the better.

I wish to explore, expose, and restore practical and mental uses of the lot. Whereas in the earlier archaic period, we may speak of a “mindset of the lot,” in the later, classical Athenian democracy, the mindset had become something close to an “ideology.”¹⁵ That is not the ideology of modern political parties, but

¹² Hansen (2006) 84; Purcell (2005) 121–122 (following Ettore Lepore’s discussion of Turner’s thesis of the frontier in American history ([1921] 1962).

¹³ Malkin (2011).

¹⁴ See Iaffe, Appendix.

¹⁵ On mentalities and ideologies, see Vovelle (1990).

the abstraction of the practices associated with the lot into an idea that, by the later fifth century, could become the very definition of democracy. But what was this mindset? How does one go about asking questions about it?

4. A mindset for drawing lots

A collective mindset is a common mental frame of reference that endures through time and is expressed when reacting to similar contexts and issues. It may be self-aware or not and can be articulated in language, values, myths, collective representations, and implementation in practice. A mindset is equivalent to “that is how we do things,” based on values, customs, and traditions that form a worldview. For example, when distributing something such as booty, meat, land, and inheritance, “we” (= Greeks) think in terms of *equal or equitable portions* and turn to the lot to actualize the distribution. It is a mindset where the relational idea of “equal portions” of some “whole” implies a horizontal view of a group or society. That “whole” may be expressed concretely, such as portions in partible inheritance by lot (ch. 4); it may be abstract, such as “the state,” where the entire community shares equal “portions,” expressed in allotted, rotated political posts. As noted, that is probably how we should understand the semantic field of *isonomia*: an equal portion of “law” for every participating citizen, what we might call “equality before the law.”

This book is not a general *histoire de mentalités*. It does not claim to reconstruct a general “Greek mentality,” nor do I think it possible. I wish only to expose and articulate a Greek frame of reference that has been ubiquitous and consistent for several centuries. The framing of the question above is meant to avoid confusion with trends in historiography that have different aims, as can be observed when following the trajectory of *histoire de mentalités* through the works by, for example, Lévy-Bruhl, Mandrou, Vernant, Le Goff, Chartier, Burke, and (the critical) Lloyd.¹⁶ Remarkably, there is significant overlap among key terms employed by those historians, such as those revolving around “thought”: “systems of thought,” “cognitive systems,” “modes/styles of thought (*manières de penser*),” “mental habits,” “collective representations,” and *imaginaire collectif*. To the extent that those terms come close to the idea of a mindset defined earlier, I am happy to acknowledge an intellectual debt. Despite much valuable criticism, mainly by Geoffrey Lloyd, Peter Burke is right to claim, “Something is needed to occupy the conceptual space between the history of thought and social history.”¹⁷ Instead of

¹⁶ Lévy-Bruhl (1910); Mandrou (1961); Vernant (1965b); Burke (1997a; 1997b); Lloyd (1999); Chartier (2015); Le Goff (1974). Cf. Hutton (1981).

¹⁷ Burke (1997b) 165 wishes to “avoid having to choose between an intellectual history with the society left out and social history with the thought left out.”

the “Greek worldview,” I wish to observe a discrete yet common attitude of mind toward the same phenomena and problems that influenced emotions, thoughts, and understanding of a situation and its potential, and actual practices.

5. Vocabulary and mindset

One way to reveal the lottery mindset among ancient Greeks is to examine the relevant vocabulary as individual words in conjunction with each other and the context of their semantic fields. Certain words will prove more prominent than others, but all relate to notions of distributing and giving, equality and fairness, and the actual working of the lot. The ancient Greek vocabulary best illustrates the wide-ranging uses of the lot, the type of practices associated with it, and the associated values that guided it. By examining discrete uses and, more significantly, when lot-associated words appear together, a salient trait of a Greek worldview comes into relief. Unfortunately, for the history of scholarship and its moods, those keenly interested in the Greek vocabulary of sharing were Marxist historians writing at the height of the Cold War. Their work is mostly ignored or, because of some unconventional terminology (e.g., “primitive communism,” “tribalism”), their ideas sometimes appear bizarre. That should not be the case, however; George Thomson (1972; 1978), and especially his student Bořivoj Borecký, understood this. In particular, the latter followed up the ancient Greek vocabulary of lotteries, distribution, sharing, and equality, as illustrated in his cumbersome yet informative title: *Survivals of Some Tribal Ideas in Classical Greek: The Use and the Meaning of Lanchanō, Dateomai, and the Origin of Ison Echein, Ison Nemein, and Related Idioms* (1965). His work needed updating and the inclusion of more epigraphical evidence, a project effected with Elena Iaffe, which we have tried to complete here (see the appendix and the dedicated internet site *kleros.org.il*. Borecký was the only one who did in-depth research on the distribution vocabulary with an eye to social implications. He saw one of the most important implications: the direct connection between equality, fairness, and the lot.

I have expanded and updated his research to include more terms and additional types of evidence, observing and analyzing semantic fields and metaphoric uses. One conclusion stands out immediately: the two more frequent and significant words—the noun *kleros* and the verb *lanchano*—are primarily associated with the lot, although both can have other meanings. For example, the *Greek English Lexicon* gives the sense of the verb *lanchano* as “to get by lot” as well as “to get,” *tout court*. Our study confirms the lottery associations and demonstrates that about 73 percent of the uses of the verb *lanchano*, down to and including the first half of the fourth century, are directly associated with drawing lots.

Such findings imply that we may translate specific texts more accurately and pursue them as further evidence, especially when a context is missing. The appendix provides the research results, and the dedicated internet site now provides an accessible database of forty lemmas dating to the early Hellenistic age. The database collects all the literary and epigraphic evidence for political, legal, religious, military, and civic lottery practices.¹⁸ At the risk of losing some ambiguous examples, we listed only the ones associated with lottery practices.¹⁹ For example, especially in lyric poetry, the verb *lanchano* is mainly used in the metaphoric sense of “fate” or “one’s lot in life,” completely disconnected from an actual lottery practice (yet semantically linked with *moira*).

Another illustrative case concerns verbs of giving and distribution. In Homer and Hesiod, most allotments seem to be accompanied not by a verb of direct giving, *didomi*, but of distributing *dateomai* (cf. *dasmos*, the act of distribution). English does not have the middle voice in which we find most occurrences of such distributions, mainly in the plural. The participants are giving/distributing to themselves, expressing the opposite of a top-down approach.

The Athenians invented the lottery machine, apparently called a *kleroterion* (the evidence for the term is late). The word constitutes another critical term for understanding ancient practices and mindset: *kleros*, a piece of material used as a lot in a lottery. The verb *kleroō* signifies “to draw lots,” while *klerosis* is the lottery itself. However, *kleros* can also mean a landed estate. The word illustrates the shift, back and forth, between the lot (*kleros*), the drawing of lots (*klerosis*), and its result (*kleros*, again). In inheritance laws (ch. 4), the land may be divided into equal parts and distributed by lot. The result, the landed estate, is also called a *kleros*. We also find such *kleroi* in colonies (ch. 6), where settlers got equal *kleroi* (plots of land) by lot (*kleros*). Chantraine defines its meaning as “an object representing a person participating in a lottery, hence sortition (. . .)” “that which is allotted by the lot, hence “a section of land, property, etc.” Originally, says Chantraine, the *kleros* signified an object (such as a stone or a piece of wood) used for the lottery. In short, *kleros* in the sense of “lot” is primary, whereas *kleros* in the sense of a portion of land is secondary²⁰ (see further discussion in ch. 6). Semantically,

¹⁸ The database was researched and prepared by Elena Iaffe as part of a research project financed by the Israeli Science Foundation project no. 1033/17, the Gerda Henkel Foundation, and the School of History at Tel Aviv University. See the appendix to this volume.

¹⁹ *λαγχάνω group*: λαγχάνω, ἀπολαγχάνω, διαλαγχάνω, ἐπιλαγχάνω, ἐκλαγχάνω, μεταλαγχάνω, προλαγχάνω, συλλαγχάνω, λάχος, λῆξις/λάξις, σύλληξις; *κληρώω group*: κληρώω, ἀποκληρώω, διακληρώω, ἐπικληρώω, συγκληρώω, κλῆρος, ἔγκληρος, ἀπόκληρος, σύγκληρος, προκληρώω, κλῆρωσις, διακλῆρωσις, κληρωτός, κληρωτήριον, κληροπαλής, ἀνεπικλῆρωτος, ἄκληρος, κληροπαληδός; *κυαμεύω group*: κυαμεύω, κύαμος, κυαμβόλος, κυαμευτός, ἀποκυαμεύω (epigraphy); *καυνός group*: καυνός, διακαυνιάζω; *πάλλω group*: διαπάλλω, πάλος; *πίπτω group*: πίπτω, πότμος.

²⁰ Ménager (1987) 112, quoting Chantraine (1968-1980) who seems in agreement with both ancient and modern dictionaries. Hesychius, s.v. *kleros*: “a thing thrown in lottery, or a stone, or a property, or a portion.” See Beekes (2010), s.v.: “lot, allotment, inheritance, piece of ground”

one may point out parallels in Latin (*sors*) and Biblical Hebrew (*goral*); both can mean the material “lot” (e.g., a marked pebble placed in a helmet), the lottery, and the result (e.g., a portion of inherited land). Such parallelism with *sors* and *goral* may need further study.²¹ Our study of *kleros*, therefore, should demonstrate the overlapping, integrated meanings of the lottery and its outcome, with a clear primary sense of a lot.

6. Portions and fairness

As noted, what gets distributed by lot are “portions,” often perceived as *equal*. A portion is *moira*, but it is not the same as a “portion of life” (again, *moira*) allotted by the “fate” *moirai*-goddesses, which is individual and hence variable. More often than not, *moira* relates to the length of one’s life rather than its content (“destiny”). However, whereas “fate”-oriented *moira* varied individually, when it was the human decision to draw lots for portions (*moirai*), Greeks tried to level the field by applying their notions of equality and fairness: the concrete portions were to be equal or equitable. To illustrate: In some cultures, it is considered fair that the eldest son should inherit all or get the lion’s share (primogeniture). He is “lucky” to be the firstborn, and because he is firstborn, he “deserves” that lion’s share. However, with the Greek practice of partible inheritance by lot, all brothers are equal before the chance, all equally deserve, and all receive equal or equitable portions, agreed upon in advance, before the drawing of the lots.

In general, there are two competing notions of fairness: one relies on a status where fairness is *proportionate*, according to one’s position or state: if we are to have a *fair* race, the turtle ought to have a different starting point from Achilles. However, as we will see, for many Greeks, fairness was not in what was “proper to one’s station” but in equality. In other words, Greeks often saw equality as overlapping with equity, a recurring theme in this book. There must have been some mental implications for young men expecting equal portions assigned to each by lot (inheritance, colonization). Life decisions determined by lot were on

Etymology: “originally a shard of stone or a piece of wood that was used as a lot.” Frisk (1960): “lot, portion, inheritance, portion of land”; Gaisford ([1848] 1994): “a piece of wood or a stone with engraved sign (name) used in lottery to designate the participants; or property, or a portion of land.” In Biblical Hebrew, *goral* has a similar history: a material such as a piece of wood, then the “lot,” and then the portion of land; see Bar-On (2020). Latin *sors* has also a similar pattern. Cordano and Grottanelli (2001). See also ch. 1, Endnote 2. See also López-Rabatel (2019).

²¹ Cf. Bar On (2020). Etymologically the Latin *sors* is also parallel to the Gallic *clar* (lot). Bar-On (2020); Ménager (1987) 112; Chantraine (1968-1980) 542–543. On Accadian *isqu*, see ch. 8, Endnote 4.

their horizon of expectations, implying their awareness of the values of equality and fairness and their connection with drawing lots.

Is fairness proportionate or equal? The question is not new. In the Pirate Code of Henry Morgan (1678 CE) it is considered *fair* that the captain should get more portions of booty than the cook. However, Greeks saw it differently: in the *Iliad*, booty was instead distributed by lot (ch. 1). I do not claim unanimity of thought among the Greeks. Homer's Achilles protests: "Stay at home or fight your hardest—your share will be the same. Coward and hero are given equal honor."²² However, the protest testifies to an accepted custom. When Odysseus, for example, returns to the men left behind while he was busy at the cave of the Cyclops, he distributes the captured flocks among all his men, both to those who witnessed the harrowing cannibalism at the cave and those who were happily sunbathing while waiting for him.

Fairness and justice are close concepts. Settlers for a new colony, for example, would sail on "equal and like" terms (*isai kai homoiiai*), signifying "equal and equitable" or "fair," sometimes even "equal and just" (*dikaios*). It is remarkable how close Greek ideas of justice and fairness were, and how close the notion of fairness was to that of equality.²³ At Athens, in the classical period, the political values of liberty (*eleutheria*) were identified with *isos*-compounds, notably *isokratia* (equal powers), *isegoria* (the right of free speech for every individual citizen), and *isogonia*, the claim that all Athenian citizens were originally descendants of a common ancestor, hence equal.²⁴

Archaic Greeks were well aware that being equal did not mean being identical. People are simply different in terms of age, wealth, weight, and so on. They found a solution in the formula "equal and like" (*isos kai homoiios*), with the latter qualifying the former: equality, but only concerning specific issues, such as civic status. "They shall sail on equal and fair terms [*isai kai homoiiai*]" is a formula found in a fourth-century copy of the foundation decree of Cyrene, a point paralleled by Herodotus's account of the episode (ch. 6). The "terms" seem to relate to the *kleros* each settler would receive. The first extant evidence for the collocation (pairing combination) of the two adjectives *isos* and *homoiios* is in inscriptions from the classical period. However, its use as a formula seems to go back much earlier: by the time we encounter it, the adjectives have no specific subject (equal and like *what?*). In later periods, it was also the formula for admitting new citizens into a *polis*, followed by *epiklerosis*, a lottery to place them in civic units (see ch. 7). Homer already uses *isos* as an adjective or an adverb in

²² *Il.* 9.318–20; cf. Arist. *Pol.* 2.1267a1–2 who cites Achilles's complaint and states that upper classes are unhappy that the *timai* are *isai*, and the masses complain inequality (*anison*) in distribution.

²³ For modern attitudes to fairness between deserts (equity) and equality, see Rawls (1985): the equality principle is the component of justice as fairness establishing distributive justice.

²⁴ *Isokratia* Hdt. 5.92.1; See Loraux ([1984] 1993); Hansen (1999) 81–85.

distribution contexts, especially in the formula “so that no-one is deprived of an equal share” (e.g., *Od.* 9.42). The earliest instance of *homoios* appears with the distributive formula *emmore times* that connect “portion/part” with *time* (“honor,” “realm of power”).²⁵ Therefore, *isos* and *homoios* appear in our earliest Greek texts as criteria for equal and fair distribution.²⁶

7. Equality and the “middle”

Equality is linked in Greek thought with the notion of “the middle.” J.-P. Vernant and Marcel Detienne perceive the idea of “the middle” (*to meson*) as a pattern of thought in early philosophy with some concrete expressions.²⁷ The middle, says Detienne, is equidistant by definition. It is where the “common store” is placed, whence it is distributed (*dasmos es to meson*), “radiating” from the center. The middle validates; it is transparent, public, and open. A public speaker stands there; prizes of competition and booty are “brought to the middle,” in the public eye, witnessed by the assembly.

Drawing lots, equal distribution, and the idea of “the middle” seem to be joined in early Greek thought and practice. A collection of early poems (seventh–sixth centuries) attributed to Theognis connects the social order with allotment. It employs the metaphor of the “ship of state” and complains that

they have deposed the noble helmsman who skilfully kept watch, They seize possessions by force, and discipline (or “order,” *kosmos*) is lost; no longer is there an equal distribution in the common interest (literally: “when the sharing out, *dasmos*, is still brought to the middle, *es to meson*, to be shared out equally, *isos*). (trans. Douglas E. Gerber, Loeb-ed.)

The poetic persona of the snobbish Theognis laments the disappearance of the old social distinctions. Theognis is certainly not egalitarian, but he is precisely that concerning his own narrow circle within which equal distribution ought to be the standard. Theognis here is significant for the values implied in *es to meson* and the equal (*isos*) distribution (*dasmos*) within a defined group; an alternative adverbial reading (*isos* instead of the adjective *isos*), “distributing equally” among members of a defined group, signifies the same for our purpose.²⁸ The point about Theognis’s equal *dasmos* is which circle deserves *equal* distribution. In the

²⁵ *Il.* 1.278: ὁμοίης ἔμμορε τιμῆς. Finkelberg (1998).

²⁶ Compare the material evidence on the ground dating to the late eighth century for equal demarcation of plots of land (ch. 6).

²⁷ Vernant ([1963] 1983; 1965a); Detienne (1965).

²⁸ Theognis 678. Cf. Cerri (1969). Some mss. have *isos* (“equal”), not an adverb (equally) [*isos*]), but the general meaning is the same. Nagy (1985) nn. 8, 9. I thank William Mack for discussing this passage with me. Cf. Borecký (1965) 73; Figueira and Nagy (1985) 112–158. Note Edmond’s

cited passage, Theognis complains about the disappearance of clear demarcating lines of inclusion and exclusion when those undeserving “take possessions by force” (*bia*) instead of the “equal distribution.” In that sense, it may be comparable to the *symposion*, namely a narrow, elitist, exclusive, snobbish circle among whose members distribution should be equal. It is the very narrow circle’s egalitarianism, but it is all the same.

The expression *es to meson* is literally “directed at the center,” referring to the communalization of possessions that are marked for orderly distribution by the group/community (see more below).²⁹ Gerber metaphorically translates *es to meson* as “in the common interest.” The expression indeed can work that way. However, within the more comprehensive metaphor used by Theognis for the “ship of state,” *es to meson* forms a concrete image: it is that of a concrete convergence of the tangible stuff to be distributed “in the middle [of the ship].” Thus *es to meson* retains its concrete aspects (e.g., bringing gain “to the middle” whence it is distributed by lot; see ch. 1) that overlap with its social image and implications.

The idea of the middle can be politically significant. For example, when Cyrene underwent a reform by Demonax of Mantinea, he transferred power to the people: “to be held by the people in common (literally, “the middle”).”³⁰ Herodotus says that at Samos, Mariandrios attempted to “return power to the people” (literally, “to bring it to the middle,” *es to meson*). He did this, says Herodotus, because he thought “people should be *homoioi*,” “equal” (i.e., “like” each other concerning their political status, as they had been before the tyranny).³¹ The Spartan “equals” (*homoioi*, perhaps better translated as “peers”) imagined the origins of their *polis* and its regime in terms of colonization (“a colony, *apoikia*, of the Dorians”)³² and a drawing of lots on a large scale: an initial redistribution by a lot of equal portions of land, *kleroi*, providing the basis for Spartan egalitarianism. When recounting the actions of the semilegendary Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus, Plutarch’s words reflect the actual practices of the foundation of new cities. In the *Life of Lycurgus* he says, “He persuaded his fellow citizens to make one parcel of all their territory [the text says “to bring it to the middle, *es meson*”] and divide it up anew (*ex arches*).”³³

The middle implies a definition of the exclusive contours of the predefined group. the middle, being “middle,” is perceived as “equidistant” from all

translation (Loeb-ed.): “they seize the cargo perforce; order there is none, and fair division for all is no more.” See also Figueira (1985).

²⁹ Cerri (1969).

³⁰ Hdt. 4.161.

³¹ Hdt. 3.142.3. I thank the anonymous reader for clarification on this.

³² Pind. *Isthm.* 7.12–15, with Malkin (1994a) ch. 1.

³³ Plut. *Lyc.* 8.1.

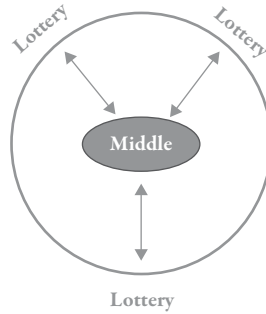


Figure I.1 The Middle. Radiating outward, the Middle “defines” the group from within; the drawing of lots, with a view “inward” toward the Middle, depends on the exclusive predefinition of the relevant group or community.

participants; when the lot is employed, it also implies the equality of chance for those participants. Since participants must be predefined before a distributive lottery, emphasizing equal access implies another aspect of exclusiveness and access. In other words, whereas the drawing of lots defines the community from the circumference, the middle indicates that same circumference. It “observes” the community from a point radiating outward, whereas the drawing of lots does the same in reverse. See figure I.1

8. Mixture lotteries and the egalitarian mindset

Mixture lotteries “reshuffle the deck” of a community. In 508 Cleisthenes refounded Athens by creating ten new tribes (*phylai*) and distributing the citizens by a lot over and among them (ch. 8). Cleisthenes submitted a list of one hundred heroes to the Pythia at Delphi, and she drew lots to select ten eponymous tribal heroes (chs. 2, 8). Such a mixture over and within “tribes” is also a salient feature of new foundations: either a *synoikismos* (a new settlement created through a political merger of existing components) or by founding a new colony *ex nihilo*, mixing Greek settlers of various origins and traditions to align with the organized nucleus of colonists. Mixture lotteries provide yet another horizontal perspective, counterbalancing top-down inclinations. In Cleisthenes’s reforms, mere residents became citizens (a one-off application of *ius soli*, not repeated), and citizens from different locations in Attica were shuffled into the new tribes. It was a deliberately complicated and effective system of dissemination. Moreover, with that action, Cleisthenes, in one stroke, cut off many of the traditional, local ties of allegiance, dependency, and patronage.

Cleisthenes did not invent this. Incorporating settlers into “tribes” probably had been going on for two centuries previously (the pattern of three or four tribes is consistent in colonies).³⁴ Some forty years before his reform, the Delphic oracle directed the conflicting Cyrenaeans to invite Demonax of Mantinea as an arbitrator in their civil strife at Cyrene (ca. 550). He kept the framework of the three tribes (common in Greek-Dorian communities) and “reshuffled” the existing population into the reconfigured three tribes (Herodotus does not report their names).³⁵ Notably, Diodorus calls him an arbitrator, *diaitetes*, a word that belongs to the semantic field of distribution. We do not know how Demonax allotted citizens to tribes, but a mixture by drawing lots is highly probable.³⁶ When Aristotle speaks of Cyrene as if the association is self-evident, he proceeds to generalize about the need for mixture: “every device must be employed to make all the people as much as possible *intermingled* with one another, and to *break up* the previously existing groups of associates.”³⁷

The network theory of “weak and strong ties” further validates those words of Aristotle. Networks of various kinds exist in every society: family and kin-oriented or based on locality and region, cult, commerce, patronage, and so on. Sometimes, discrete networks might undermine, prevent, or even eliminate the cohesiveness of society. What holds a community (or a “nation”) together is a much-discussed question I shall avoid;³⁸ what breaks it up structurally is often more apparent. When personal, sectarian, or local interests predominate, society might fragment into various components. Discrete, specific networks constitute what Mark Granovetter calls “strong ties.”³⁹ Since circles of strong ties are often relatively small, reaching out to them is difficult. A society where mostly strong ties predominate is weak and fragmented. It is instead the “weak ties” (of the type: “someone who knows someone who knows someone”) that hold it together. The weak ties exist in a “low-density network” and form a crucial link between the densely knit, discrete clusters of close kin, friends, or dependents. Social systems with strong ties and lacking weak ones, says Granovetter, will be fragmented and incoherent; new ideas will spread slowly, and scientific endeavors will be handicapped. In other words, the “strength of weak ties” may explain how large networks that extend beyond the realm of strong, fragmenting ties can have all-encompassing dynamic connectivity within a society. The mixture type of lot drawing enhances the overarching network of “weak ties.”

³⁴ Generally speaking, the *phylai* were “born with the city”; Roussel (1976) 265, 365. Cf. Hölkeskamp (1993) 409–421. Tribal reshuffling did not necessarily imply equality, as the case of Cleisthenes of Sikyon who—privileged one tribe over the others—illustrates. Hdt. 5.68.

³⁵ Malkin (2023) and section 8.2.2.3 of this volume.

³⁶ Hdt 4.161; Diod. 8.30.2.

³⁷ Arist. *Pol.* 1319b, trans. H. Rackham (Loeb-ed.).

³⁸ See Tamir (2019).

³⁹ Granovetter (1973; 1983).

A mixture by drawing lots works on various levels, sometimes simultaneously: individual families are “internally mixed” when brothers share equitable portions of their inheritance by lot, with no regard for primogeniture. On a communal level, families are also internally mixed when a drawing of lots within each household (*oikos*) sorts out from among brothers, soldiers, or colonists. In all of the above, each son is interchangeable with another. Hence each son is considered equal. War and colonization are communal projects. When a household with more than one son was drawing lots, at the same time, other households were doing the same for a communal purpose that transcended the single *oikos*.

Knowing which household would have more than one son requires a comprehensive community vision, as we shall see with Thera (ch. 6). It follows that the contours of entire communities are defined by identifying the households within them, then distinguishing which households have more than one son. In short, it implies a kind of census. One might wonder how that was possible, but it seems probable that some form of “citizen registries” did exist early on. Moreover, we now know that archaic Greeks had a much higher literacy level than previously thought, based on erroneous Medieval *comparanda*. In the mid-sixth century even shepherds at the outlying reaches of Athens could read and write.⁴⁰

Sectarianism, segmentation, and fragmentation pose a grave danger to any political community, whether ancient or modern. Every society has dividing lines and distinct identities, such as local interests, cults, classes, clans, patronage, and so on. If the dividing lines become too entrenched, priorities change, and “civil strife” might be imminent. The Greek countermeasure, that is, mixing up the entire community through drawing lots, reached beyond such dividing lines. Such lotteries create artificial ties (e.g., Cleisthenes’s tribes) that transcend entrenched political and social clusters. A lottery that reshuffles the citizen body bypasses deeply rooted, preexisting lines of separation. It implies an overarching homogenization of society in contrast to deep-seated local positions of power and relations of patronage.

On the one hand, the strong local ties and local power bases have been working at Athens in the direction of fragmentation, as was the case before democracy; on the other hand, by mixing up the citizens, the drawing of lots worked toward homogenization and cohesiveness. Today, perhaps, it is a lesson to remember: identity politics threaten to split modern democracies into smaller and smaller components. At the same time, collective foci, such as “party,” “class,” or “nation,” are being diluted or disappearing altogether. The mixture by lots broke

⁴⁰ Herders: Langdon (2015); van de Moortel and Langdon (2017). For an eminently convincing study of citizen-registries, see Faraguna (2015). For literacy at Thera ca. 600, see von Gaertringen (1899; 2014).

up or bypassed discrete “strong ties” to make the *polis* a stronger political community, a network with, ideally, no hubs, based on the randomization of the lot.

The mixture by lot was also a device for settling civil strife, as we shall observe in the cases of Herakleia on the Black Sea and Nakone, where external arbitrators forced two quarreling factions to mix up into a more cohesive community by drawing lots. Significantly, at Nakone, the successful mixture was concluded with a newly established cult of Harmony (Homonoia). Therefore, such lotteries function as impersonal arbitrators, with all sides to a conflict agreeing to accept their results in advance. It is a fact (hopefully borne out by this book) that a whole spectrum of lotteries arbitrating results kept appearing in various aspects of life, at least since Greeks were listening to the Homeric epics. Therefore, conducting lotteries and accepting their outcomes became conventions or norms in their own right. With accumulated practices, the authority of the lot was augmented, enhancing a mindset willing to accept randomness as an expression of values and desired (or at least acceptable), nonresentful outcomes.

9. Mixture, equivalence, and interchangeability

The mixture lotteries are yet another illustration of interchangeability, with the immediate implication of each one’s equality and discrete individuality.⁴¹ The idea is first apparent in the *Iliad*, where the lot chooses one son out of seven to go fight at Troy.⁴² It would be hard to exaggerate the significance of interchangeability since participants are equal with respect to the specific purpose of the lottery, be it selective, distributive, or procedural. The assumption of interchangeability, expressed in the wide spectrum of drawing lots, is perhaps the most significant base for Greek egalitarianism.

One might object to the idea of interchangeability: the existence of property classes at Athens, for example, could argue against it. For instance, when archons (annual chief magistrates) began to be selected by lot (487), they were sorted out from a preselected group drawn only from the top economic class. Yet within that class, all were interchangeable concerning the lot, so the idea was waiting for its extension to other political community members, as it eventually did. Moreover, Solon introduced property as the criterion for “class,” allowing for upward or downward economic mobility. Mobility assumes an equal (potential) value for each person without presumption of *inherent* inequality based on “blood.”

⁴¹ On Greek relational individuality, see Eidinow (2013) esp. at 21–29.

⁴² *Il.* 24.399–400, trans. R. Lattimore (1949). The “soldier” is in fact a deity in disguise, but the lie attempts to resemble truth, which is what matters here.

As noted, the extension of egalitarianism also applies to a similar extension with the notion of *isonomia*. The term, which came to denote “democracy,” appeared earlier yet was restricted to upper-level circles. Athenian elites celebrated the “tyrant slayers,” Harmodios and Aristogeiton, for making “the Athenians” *isonomoi*, apparently referring to themselves.⁴³ An oligarchy could also be perceived as an *isonomos oligarchia*.⁴⁴ By contrast, Cleisthenes extended *isonomia* to incorporate the entire *demos*. In short, equality and interchangeability had been around for a while, arriving at the fullest extension of their political implications under classical democracy. As Josine Blok shows, the more democratic Athens became during the fifth and fourth centuries, the more the dividing lines between those classes blurred, with the ever-widening use of drawing lots and minimizing or abolishing criteria of property for the definition of the “group.” Eventually, the entire citizen body would become the predefined group.

10. Did Greeks draw lots to divine the will of the gods?

We are not ancient Greeks and should not make assumptions that too easily bridge the gap between now and then. It is a mistake to have too much intellectual empathy: ancient Greeks did not necessarily think like we do, nor did they share our attitudes and worldviews.⁴⁵ However, whereas we may have enormous empathy with Greek “reason,” “philosophy,” and “theater,” drawing lots—the origin of democracy—has been out of our field of vision. Lotteries might seem weird, perhaps distasteful, smacking of the ill repute of gambling. I find that drawing lots is often explained away as “religion,” as if religion was an answer instead of a question. Paradoxically, some admirers of Greek rationality, perhaps uneasy with all those lotteries (especially at Athens, that “city of reason” of Jean-Pierre Vernant), try to save ancient Greek rationality by claiming that Greeks drew lots *irrationally* as a tool for divination in many areas of life. However, Greeks did not live like Luke Reinhard’s *Dice Man* or Borges’s *Babylonian Lottery*.⁴⁶ Let me be

⁴³ Ath. Deipn. 15.50 = *Carmina convivialia* (Page 1962 *Poetae Melici Graeci*) frs. 9–12.

⁴⁴ Thuc. 3.62.3. “Thucydides’s oligarchic Thebans . . . emphasize their distance from tyranny and *dunasteia*, applying to their *oligarchia* a concept normally associated with democracy in the fifth century, *isonomia* or “equality under the law.” Simonton (2017) 77; cf. Ostwald (2000) 25.

⁴⁵ Cornford (1991) 1–72; cf. Murray (1990); (1996); Detienne (2007).

⁴⁶ Luke Reinhard (George Cockroft) (1971). Jorge Louis Borges’s *The Lottery at Babylon* ([1941] 2015) comes to mind, except that its framework is the sale of lottery tickets. Cf. “Plato (*Rep.* 10.604c) . . . compared life to a game of dice, in which we must try, not only to throw what suits us best, but also, when we have thrown, to make good use of whatever turns up.” Cf. Plut. *On Tranquility of Mind* 467a; Terence *Adelphoi* 6.737–741.

clear: Those ancient, rational Greeks made a rational decision to apply a *random* device to so many aspects of their lives, and reasonably so.⁴⁷

There is a difference, however: with the Dice Man, who lets the dice throw determine his choices, it is the blind chance that rules his life, and the view of the lot is more akin to certain late Hellenistic notions of blind Tyche or Roman Fortuna. On the other hand, divine will and intention are another matter, even if the relation between the Olympians and *moira* seems ambiguous (ch. 2.9) However, Greeks did not spend their lives following paths in the dark forest of determinism, even when they used lot oracles explicitly for divination. To anticipate my conclusion: depending on the specific context of the use of the lot, the gods were “present” on a *spectrum* from a mere invocation or prayer (in most cases) to expressing their direct will through the medium of the lot oracle. This is not a question of religion versus secularism since the gods were never absent for Greeks. Let me clarify my position: On one end of the spectrum, we find “lot oracles,” the explicit purpose of which was precisely to divine the gods’ will. On the other end of the spectrum, the gods remain in the background, and the drawing of lots could occur “under their auspices” without expecting divine intervention. The gods may preside over any public procedure, but they do not decide its outcome. The *decision* to draw lots never followed divination: no god ordered anyone to draw lots. The decision to do so depended on the *sovereign* “group.” In myth, which is a human projection (see below), the Olympian gods distribute realms of power among them: clearly, the purpose of *their* lottery was *not* to divine the will of yet other gods. I return to this issue later.

It is curious how modern ancient Greeks become when we want them to be (they knew the earth was round) yet how alien when we prefer to gaze at those “dark shadows” behind the bright stage that so attracted Jane Ellen Harrison of the Cambridge School. One suspects that some of those attitudes stem from the legacy of Christian morality. Christian thinkers often considered all lotteries a type of divination;⁴⁸ since God directs everything, the lottery is a device for making God speak.⁴⁹ However, because of that, says Thomas Aquinas,⁵⁰ lots should be employed as a last resort, and Protestant thinkers objected to the casual summons of God. Today we may suspect lotteries of trivializing matters, but medieval thinking warned against the opposite: its use for trivial questions. That is also one of the reasons why chance games were regarded as blasphemous.

⁴⁷ Not all Greeks were happy with the idea of randomness. Leucippus claimed that “Nothing happens at random; everything happens out of reason and by necessity.” Leucippus (fr. 67.B.2 Diels and Kranz (1956). In general, Greeks had no theory of probability; Bennett (1998) Kindle location 598.

⁴⁸ Duxbury (1999) 16–23; Demont (2020).

⁴⁹ David (1962) 13–20 (referring to the sentence above).

⁵⁰ *Summa Theologiae* II.ii.95.8; cf. Aquinas (1963) and see ch. 1.

However, in 1627 Thomas Gataker published his *On the Nature and the Use of Lots: A Treatise Historicall and Theologicall*, where he argues against the idea that the will of God is expressed by the lot and therefore denies it the aspect of divination.⁵¹ Lots, after all, produce unexpected and contrary results every time and thus cannot be identified with God, he claims, unless we suspect God to be as capricious as the dice. The point is famously echoed in Einstein's dictum that "God does not play dice with the universe." Says Gataker, "Is it not frivolous, if not impious, therefore to say, that upon every second shaking or drawing God alters his sentence . . . and so to charge him with contradiction or contrariety?"⁵²

Ancient Judaism had no problem with drawing lots. A fascinating study by Shraga Bar-On on the use of the lot in ancient and medieval Judaism traces its various usages in the Old Testament up to the medieval sages. The scope of its application was surprisingly broad, although negative attitudes became more explicit in later Judaism. For example, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew tribes were assigned their lands by lot; the lot was used to flush out both the criminal Achan (who took unsanctioned booty, Joshua 7) and the prophet Jonah (Jonah 1:7), Saul, Israel's first king, was also chosen by lot (1 Samuel 10). Note, too, that one of the twelve apostles, Matthew, was chosen by lot to replace Judas (Acts 1:17, 26). Other ancient societies, such as the Hittites, used the lot too, but nowhere was its application so wide-ranging and ubiquitous as it was among ancient Greeks.⁵³

The best place to observe a mindset is myth, which also reveals the limits of the imagination. Greek myths about the powers of the gods demonstrate the horizontal aspect of drawing lots with not even a hint of employing lots to seek external, top-down authority. When the gods decide to hold a lottery and abide by its outcome, it is their own decision. It emanates from the participants who are, in that sense, sovereign, as would be the case among historical Greeks. Greeks did not have a transcendent God as a subject for whom the world was an object. The Olympians (third-generation divinities) did not create the world; they were born into it and won their supremacy by violent revolution. The *Iliad* tells us how Hades, Zeus, and Poseidon drew lots: Zeus got heaven; Hades, the underworld; and Poseidon, the sea. It is absurd to imagine that these three Olympian deities were conducting a lottery to "reveal the will of the gods" since they were the gods. As with most selective, distributive, and procedural lotteries—that is, human lotteries—the three brothers were the "sovereign group" to decide on the

⁵¹ See the excellent and detailed discussion by Demont (2020).

⁵² Quoted by Duxbury (1999) 21, from Gataker (1627) 159. For a thorough discussion of Gataker and its relevance to the ancient Greek context, see Demont (2020), quoting Gataker: "the casualty of an event does not simply of itself make it a work of God's special or immediate providence."

⁵³ Bar-On (2020); cf. Londblom (1962); Taggar-Cohen (2002); Champeaux (1990); Hurllet (2017). Roman sortition: Hurllet (2019) cf. Johnston (2003).

drawing of lots, conduct it, and abide by its decision, which became equivalent to their own.

Zeus was undoubtedly the king of the gods, a position to which the other Olympian gods chose him, says Hesiod; by contrast, he got his own specific realm, the sky, by lot. Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns mention more divine lotteries and sometimes not Zeus alone, but “the gods” become the agents of distribution: the group distributes to itself, while Zeus presides but does not determine the result. We shall note that the appropriate verb for such distribution, *dateomai*, usually appears in the middle voice plural, denoting a distribution by the group of participants to its members.

Despite the Greek world’s geographical, ethnic, and linguistic fragmentation, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were common to all Greeks. I feel safe to assume that the epics reflected attitudes and values (sometimes “distanced” on purpose to a heroic past) that were current or, at least, familiar in the eighth and seventh centuries. A common argument in Homeric scholarship is that the memory of “things” (e.g., a boar-tusk helmet) may have been floating down the river of oral poetry for centuries, whereas terminology, values, and attitudes needed to conform to contemporary audiences of the early archaic period (eighth and seventh centuries) to be understood. In short, in terms of an archaic Greek frame of reference, the Homeric epics provide significant evidence.⁵⁴ The epic poems alluded to well-known myths, shaping them into a common reference point.

Homer’s myth of the Olympian distribution (*Il.* 15. 185-210) encapsulates the vocabulary, practice, purpose, and values of human lotteries. The entire set will prove consistent and frequent throughout archaic and classical Greek history. Remarkably, the Homeric myth also expresses the tension between egalitarianism and authority: Poseidon has an equal share (*isomoron*) but not equal power. We shall observe a common Homeric expression, *emmore times*, that combines the notion of “portion” (*meros*) and “honor” *time* in the sense of a realm of authority, domain, or “honor”). *Time* expresses a *distributive* value.⁵⁵

So, when did the gods express their will via lots? In my view, a discrete category of divination through lot oracles (ch. 2) distinguishes it from distributive, selective, procedural, and mixture lotteries. However, views expressed around one century ago that still prevail saw all uses of the lot as the expression of the “will of the gods.” This view was supported from different angles (with some circular presuppositions) by Numa-Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1864; 1891), followed by Gustav Glotz (1907) and Victor Ehrenberg (1927). Headlam (1891), on the other hand, was on the secularist side. The discourse, however, has been limited: since the nineteenth century, the discussion has been about Athenian

⁵⁴ Malkin (1998) 259–273 for my position on Homeric issues.

⁵⁵ Finkelberg (1998) 15 with n. 1. Distributive value: “he/she has been allotted a *time*.”

politics, although the latter is a late addition to centuries of the previous, wide-ranging uses of the lot.⁵⁶ In short, we should not turn to the Greek gods to block our thinking.

In sum, we cannot be sure how precisely Greeks understood the gods' involvement in drawing lots, except to assess degrees on the spectrum. As Josine Blok demonstrates (ch. 8), the gods' involvement becomes somewhat more explicit in the choice of priests by lot. The distinction between drawing lots for divination and its "civic" uses is apparent, as we shall see, even at Delphi, Apollo's famous sanctuary and oracle: aside from drawing lots for divination, Delphians were drawing lots for turns for inquiry with the Pythia, Delphic personnel was selected by lot, and in myth (Aeschylus), the oracle kept changing hands among several gods by lot. Apollo is its most recent possessor.

In a Greek world "full of gods,"⁵⁷ there was no clear distinction between secular and religious spheres. Whereas at one end of the spectrum, the explicit purpose of divination-by-lot was to reveal the will of the gods, at the other end, the annual selection by lot of six thousand judges at Athens and the daily procedural lotteries for selecting *ad hoc* panels from among them, and then to assign them by lot to court cases, was on what *we* would call the "secular" end of the spectrum, with the gods merely "invoked." There is no point in introducing a dichotomy in the form of a secular category where it never existed. The gods were "present" in all public affairs that were always conducted under their auspices; however, such matters were not subject to constant, active divine intervention.

What about *moira*? One might argue that the notion of *moira* in the sense of fate or destiny points to a divine determination of the results of drawing lots. However, the only divinity perceived by ancient Greeks as directly involved with drawing lots, the goddess who also assures the commitment to follow the result, is the goddess Lachesis, one of the three *moirai*-goddesses. Her very name signifies a "goddess of casting lots" (the verb related to her name is *lanchano*, "to get by lot"). However, she neither determines nor intervenes in the results but witnesses the procedure. A discussion of *moira* follows in a separate section of chapter 2. I shall lay stress on the overlap between concrete and metaphoric "portions" (*moirai*), the related semantic fields of *aisa* (an equivalent concept), and the implications for social values of distribution, fairness (*kata moiran*), and equality. "Portion," I argue, is a critical term in archaic Greek thought and practice. Greeks concretely and metaphorically expressed it as *moira*, *aisa*, or *meros*. The distribution and allotment (*dateomai*, *nemein*) of equal portions by drawing

⁵⁶ Recently, Paul Demont (2020) has also expressed a general, vague notion of the role of the gods as being somehow in the background, which I find unhelpful, as noted earlier: the statement is always true, yet unless specifically qualified is of little significance.

⁵⁷ "Some think that the soul pervades the whole universe, whence perhaps came Thales's view that everything is full of gods." Arist. *De An.* 411a7–8 = DK 11 fr. A22.

lots overlap with notions of fairness and equality. The use of those terms across a comprehensive spectrum, from the family to the community, confirms the expression of the mindset of egalitarianism, which was often at odds with the competing vector of elitism.

11. The lot and democracy, ancient and modern

Today it would be hard to imagine that a state lottery could determine the order of your day. This happened in the flourishing Athenian democracy, characterized by Herodotus as a regime where “The rule of the people has in the first place the loveliest name of all, *isonomia* [‘equality before the law’; the term ‘democracy’ came later]. . . . *It determines offices by lot*, and holds power accountable, and conducts all deliberating publicly” (Hdt. 3.80.6). The inception of their democracy (508) was marked by extensive use of the lot to mix and reform the citizen body. In the next two centuries, the Athenians kept extending the use of the lot for governance and allotment for offices, as well as expanding the circle of participants until they eventually included the entire *demos*. By Aristotle’s time, except for a limited number of elected positions, most governance was run by lot, from specific citizen boards responsible, for example, for the docks of the Piraeus, all the way to priests, the council (*boule*) members, and even the state ministers (archons). We need to remember, however, that the sovereign body to enact laws was not a citizen body drawn by lot but the citizen assembly, the membership of which was universal (ch. 7). Aside from the *mixture* and homogenization of the citizen body and *selective* lotteries and allotment for office, *procedural* lotteries determined order and rotation: for example, assigning fields of operation to generals by lot, or determining office rotation. For example, by the fourth century, the chair of the council would be replaced daily by lot.

In what sense was the drawing of lots democratic?⁵⁸ On the one hand, at least in the way the Athenians practiced it, its democratic aspects were enhanced because of the constant, rotating mixture of citizens that kept “arching” over sectionalism and particular interest while encouraging citizen engagement with equal chances for sharing in the community. Drawing lots was cheap, efficient, quick, and decisive. On the other hand, it was democratic because drawing lots would prevent resentment *ad hominem*. It was also an excellent device against undue influence, bribery, corruption, lobbying, sectarian or local interests, and even the emergence of political parties in the modern sense. Take lobbies, for example: Because of the large numbers involved and frequent rotation, it would have been close to impossible, as it is today, to invest in long-term influence.

⁵⁸ See also below, ch. 9 and *Envoi*.

There would have been no point in forming any lobby—that bane of modern democratic politics—in the first place.

Conversely, elections were a different matter, and influential and affluent Athenians vied for the few remaining elected posts, notably the *strategoí* (a body of ten generals). To illustrate, Claire Taylor has brilliantly shown that elected persons came from the wealthiest quarters of Athens (i.e., personal influence). In contrast, those selected for office by lot hailed from all over Attica (i.e., a more democratic cross-section of the entire political community).⁵⁹ The lottery, implying constant mixture and rotation in the allotment for offices, worked against the emergence of the entrenched elite of the rich and powerful exercising power, either officially or behind the scenes, through networks of dependents. By the later fourth century, the institution of drawing lots in governance at Athens and elsewhere reached its fullest, comprehensive application (ch. 8).

Today, some suggest reintroducing the lot to modern politics, often referring to the ancient Athenian example. However, it would be a mistake to consider drawing lots as only a *mechanism* that improves efficiency, enhances stability, prevents corruption and lobbying, and enlarges public participation. One purpose of this book is to understand better the practical and mental world involving the use of the lot and perhaps call for adopting not just the mechanism but also the Greek horizontal mindset and the implied values. Those include public engagement, equality, fairness, and the prevention of implied opposites: apathy, unfair advantage at the starting points of wealth and status, party-backing, and political deals.

What about elections, an institution many would regard as defining democracy? In elections, one elects “representatives” who would be the “best men” to do the job, as Thomas Jefferson thought. He believed in the natural existence of “best men” and wrote to John Adams about “a pure selection of these natural *aristoi* into the offices of government.”⁶⁰ In ancient Greek, the “rule of the best” spells “aristocracy,” *aristokratia*. So instead of a top-down rule of kings in the grace of God, we now have a top-down power by elected officials (for fixed terms), drawing their authority from “the people.” However, the vertical direction, top-down, has remained the same since the time of the pharaohs. As Bernard Manin has shown, both the French and the American Revolutions preferred elections to the equality of democracy: “Representative government was instituted in full awareness that elected representatives should be distinguished citizens, socially different from the ones who elected them.”⁶¹ By contrast, Aristotle thought

⁵⁹ Taylor (2007).

⁶⁰ A letter to John Adams, Monticello, October 28, 1813, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/thomas-jefferson/letters-of-thomas-jefferson/jefl223.php>. It is remarkably similar to the speech of Magbyzos in Herodotus 3.81 that extols oligarchy: to “pick out a company [*homilie*] of the best [*aristoi*] men and hand over power [*kratos*] to them.”

⁶¹ Manin (1997). Quoted and translated by van Reybrouck (2016) 62. See also below, ch. 9.

there should be no distance: political freedom consisted of governing and being governed in turn. Instead of the top-down approach, using the lot in politics implies a horizontal view of society with constant rotations, governance truly by the people, and involving all citizens who are the source of power and sovereignty. The people's assembly, the sovereign body to enact laws, was neither elected nor selected by lot.⁶² It was supposedly comprehensive. Nobody summed it up better than Aristotle: elections are the salient feature of oligarchies, he says, whereas democracies are based on drawing lots.⁶³

Democratic Athens kept extending the use of the lot, administering the state efficiently in this way for about two centuries before outsiders curtailed the system. Should we follow its example and reintroduce the lot into politics? Drawing lots would undoubtedly be an excellent tool to increase "sharing in the *polis*." Some current thinkers, mainly with a political science orientation, recommend precisely that, pointing out the obvious advantages of using the lot as a corrective mechanism of the system.⁶⁴ Suggestions range from revising the existing political mechanisms to introducing new buffering organs into politics. Citizen assemblies or committees chosen by lot, for example, could function as a buffer between politicians and the public.⁶⁵ Nobody has proven that large numbers of intelligent people are any less efficient than problem-solving by a few "best and brightest." The latter can hardly be charged with cognitive diversity, which is what groups of large numbers of citizens selected by lot may demonstrate, if only because they would be diversely composed.

The lot does not select according to merit or expertise, a sore point of criticism already in antiquity. Socrates objected to the use of the lot, saying he would prefer a professional captain of a ship rather than a captain chosen by lot.⁶⁶ Wrong, would reply most Athenians; governance (with some exceptions such as elected *strategoí*) must be in the hands of the nonprofessionals, who would be the ones in charge of the expert captain or navigator.

The criticism, often justified, against drawing lots for governance concerns inefficiency, lack of professionalism, and lack of long-term planning. We may need to consider combining the lot with elections, as the Athenians and several thinkers today have suggested. I am not a political scientist and would

⁶² There were areas of overlap, e.g., the Athenian *boule*, the council selected by lot, which also prepared proposals for the assembly. Here I am drawing basic distinguishing lines. See Rhodes (1972).

⁶³ Arist. *Pol.* 4.1294b–e. But for nuance of this statement, see below, ch. 8.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., <https://www.sortitionfoundation.org/>; cf. Sintomer and Lopez-Rabatel (2020).

⁶⁵ See, e.g., van Reybrouck (2016); <https://www.sortitionfoundation.org/>. No such buffer had existed with the British Brexit (52 percent voted to leave the European Union, many admitting to ignorance), whereas the two Irish referenda of 2015 and 2018 that permitted same-sex marriages and abortions had been prepared by citizen-committees chosen by lot that informed and involved the public, with the astonishing result for Catholic Ireland of almost 70 percent in favor in both referenda.

⁶⁶ Xen. *Mem.* 1.29.

hesitate to provide specific recipes. Drawing lots is more than just a mechanism. Whatever our thoughts on the matter may be, we should take note of the egalitarian mindset and values that concern the “equal and like” portion of a citizen as articulated by the ancient Greeks. It would behoove us to remember those who created the first democracy, especially the mindset that led to its birth: The ancient Greek frame of reference with its egalitarian values and the idea of citizens as *sharers* that made the ancient democracy possible. The lack of such values today might disintegrate our own.

12. Contents and contours: Parts I and II

Chapter 1 discusses the drawing of lots in the Homeric epics and Hesiod’s poetry, emphasizing distributive, selective, and procedural lotteries among gods and humans. The lot-related vocabulary reveals the salient features of drawing lots and implied egalitarian values. Homer and Hesiod represent the gods as a sovereign group that decides to draw lots, sometimes with Zeus presiding over the procedure, to distribute realms of power and “honors” (*timai*). No authority external to the “group” is ever imagined, thus expressing a horizontal mindset and values of equal chances.

The parallelism with the poetic representation of how human beings draw lots is striking. It is most evidenced in the distribution of booty by lot, often expressed with a plural form of the verb of distribution (*dateomai*) in the middle voice (i.e., a group distributing to itself). I argue against top-down distribution and stress the role of the community or army that gives a *geras* (honorary gift) to the leaders in the field or land (*temenos*) back home. Aside from the *geras* and private booty (classified as *enara*), booty is brought to the “middle” (*to meson*), whence it is distributed by lot to all, including the leaders. I place a particular emphasis on the meaning of the drawing of lots (*lanchano*) and values of equality (e.g., *ep’ises*).

Procedural lotteries appear self-evident, as they also function in current sports events,⁶⁷ such as drawing lots for positions in a chariot race or establishing turns by lot in an arrow-shooting context. Selective lotteries relate to both heroes, such as Aias (lots shaken in a helmet), and ordinary soldiers, such as companions of Odysseus selected by lot to spy on the land or blind the Cyclops. Selective lotteries also appear within individual families, such as a soldier (Hermes in disguise), chosen by lot from among his brothers to go to war, similar to how colonists (ch. 6) could be selected by lot from households with more than one son.

⁶⁷ See Ajootian (2007). Since the procedural use of the lot in sports is quite similar to its use today, I shall not be discussing it in depth. For the role of the lot in ancient sports, see Mann (2017).