

GREEKS DRAWING LOTS: UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN A PANHELLENIC MINDSET AND PRACTICE¹

By Irad Malkin & Josine Blok

Summary: The drawing of lots in ancient Greece was an institution that expressed the egalitarian values, practices, and mindset apparent for three centuries before the emergence of the Athenian democracy. Constituted by a large-scale mixture lottery, classical Athenian democracy with its choice of magistrates by lot, would never have seen the light of day without the broad spectrum of drawing of lots that preceded it. The first part of this article, by Irad Malkin, presents drawing lots' distributive (e.g., land, booty, catch, inheritance, colonial plots), selective (e.g., magistrates), procedural (e.g., taking turns), and mixture functions. The concept of 'equal portions' moves from the concrete equal sharing of portions (*isomoiria*) to the abstract sharing of equal portions of the law, *isonomia*. A mindset with strong egalitarian features is revealed with a tendency to make equality and equity as close as possible: Equal chances before the lot and, when possible, equal outcomes. The role of the gods is mostly not to determine results, but to grant validity and legitimacy to a procedure under their auspices. The following section, by Josine Blok, examines why drawing lots for office created difficulties not encountered in the other, common uses of lots, how nonetheless this practice spread across the Greek world and due to the variety of political systems of the *poleis* came to highlight the diversity in ancient Greece.

- 1 The following texts by Irad Malkin and Josine Blok sum up several points relevant to the issues of unity and diversity from our forthcoming study *Drawing Lots: from Egalitarianism to Democracy in Ancient Greece*, now in press with Oxford University Press. For this reason, the article contains only a limited number of footnotes. – A note on terminology: There are various available terms in English, such as 'drawing lots', 'lotteries', 'casting lots', and 'sortition'. Each term evokes a different mental image (e.g., 'casting' conveys throwing, whereas 'drawing' conveys pulling or lifting). Since our emphasis is not on the precise protocols of using lots but on the institution, we opted, somewhat arbitrarily, for 'drawing lots' and 'lotteries' interchangeably.

Irada Malkin

I.1 Drawing lots in the archaic and classical Greek world: A commonality of practices and values

To ask about the drawing of lots in ancient Greece is to ask about the values, practices, and mindset apparent for three centuries before the emergence of the Athenian democracy. Classical Athenian democracy would never have seen the light of day, were it not for the very broad spectrum of applications of the drawing of lots that preceded it. Some would recommend applying the ancient device to modern politics, but there is no sense in contemporary suggestions to reintroduce the lot into modern politics without an understanding of the Greek world of values, frame of reference, and state of mind that have been associated with drawing lots in ancient Greece. A history of the lot is a history of how people distribute things, how they select individuals, how they take turns, how they inherit, and how they mix to form a more cohesive community. It is also a history of the ideas of equality and fairness, or rather fairness as equality.

It is also a history of the idea of a horizontal community: A community that recognizes itself as such, making decisions about and for itself, without recourse to external authority. For example, access to a drawing of lots to distribute booty, defines, exclusively, the contours of the group of 'sharers': Who belongs and who is excluded from the circle. A drawing of lots implies 'members only': The 'group' may be tiny; for example, two brothers sharing a partible inheritance by lot, or seven brothers casting lots to send one of them to war in the *Iliad* (24.399-400). Or it may be very large, such as soldiers deserving equal chances in the distribution of booty, or settlers obtaining equal portions of land, *kleroi* (a word which primarily means 'lot'). The group may also consist of 'citizens' – not 'foreigners' – deserving 'equal portions of the law', *isonomia*, in a democracy.

With distributive lotteries, whether among gods or humans, authority is not external to the group of participants and draws its legitimacy from the group itself. When, in the *Iliad*, Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus use the drawing of lots to divide and share the world between them (15.185-210), they were not asking another god to tell them what to do. No oracle, to

my knowledge, ever ordered a drawing of lots; it was always a human decision to turn to random devices, including the drawing of lot oracles. Athena did not choose the magistrates and judges of Athens; the Athenians did, and by lot.

Lotteries were ubiquitous for some three centuries before the birth of democracy, establishing a state of mind of equal opportunity and equal portions. They affected a whole range of lives and deaths, private and public: The lot was used to determine matters such as inheritance, where lots were drawn for predefined fair shares; for the distribution of booty, plots of land in colonies and portions of sacrificial meat; for the selection of mythical heroes and historical colonists; for the mixing and homogenization of society by lot, and for divination oracles. Their mentions are found in epigraphic documents and formal decisions, in historical and quasi-historical accounts, and in myth and poetry. In addition, an ‘archaeology of equality’ in the colonial world, where we find equal plots, can sometimes support the notion of equal distribution by lot. Finally, the casting of lots is at once a salient feature of the entire Greek world, pointing to a major aspect of civilizational unity, while at the same time illustrating the diversity of communities the contours of which could be defined by the drawing of lots.

I propose the following categories for uses of the drawing of lots:

Distributive lotteries were used to distribute inheritance, sacrificial meat, colonial lands, booty, and positions in the state; it was even believed that the entire cosmos and the provinces of the gods had been distributed by lot by and among the Greek gods.

Selective lotteries chose soldiers for military campaigns, settlers for new colonies, and warriors for special tasks, and positions in the state.

Procedural lotteries were particularly useful for rotations and establishing turns, such as guard shifts, positions on a racecourse, and days of rotation of the presidency of the council (*boule*).

Mixture lotteries were used to alleviate dissensions and homogenize the community in mother cities when those were founding new colonies and to do the same in the colonies, mixing the core of col-

onists from a specific mother city with other Greek colonists; mixing the people to avoid civil wars and mixing Athenian citizens into the ten tribes to create the basis of the Athenian democracy.

Lot divination (lot-oracles), a discrete category, is evident above all in the oracles of Delphi and Dodona.

The following guiding notions are apparent in all those categories: First, equality of opportunity before the chance (especially in selective, distributive, and procedural lotteries). Where possible, the aim was also equality of outcome, such as equal shares of partible inheritance by lot.

Only in the context of the distribution of equal shares by lot, ‘equally and fairly’, can we understand the political leap, at the end of the sixth century BCE, from the concrete to the metaphorical level, from *isomoiria* to *isonomia*, to the ‘equal portions of law’, and eventually to ‘democracy’ (called, initially, *isonomia*). The concrete and the conceptual are never far apart and tend to overlap. Let us remember that at the same time as Kleisthenes established political *isonomia*, the Athenians conquered Euboea and divided its land into 4,000 (apparently equal) units on which they settled possessors of *kleroi*, or *klerouchoi*. We have few details, but it seems that while a political *isonomia* was being established by Kleisthenes, a very concrete *isonomia* was being practiced on the ground, allocating equal shares to settlers probably chosen by lot.²

Although Classics is the oldest academic discipline, no one to date has written an in-depth study of the lot. Here we have a whole field of investigation that has never received sufficient attention or even recognition. The most recent monograph was written by James Wycliffe Headlam before the discovery of the *Athenaion Politeia* and was published in 1891 (first edition). It is chronologically limited to Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Other studies in chapter form have been similarly restricted.

2 The lexical family from the Indo-European root **nem-* and the Greek verb νέμω have been shown to mean, already in Homer, ‘to distribute’ (Emmanuel Laroche, *Histoire de la racine nem- en grec ancien* (Paris, 1949) 8; see also Bořivoj Borecký, *Survivals of Some Tribal Ideas in Classical Greek: The Use and The Meaning of λαγχάνω, δατέομαι, and the Origin of ἴσον ἔχειν, ἴσον νέμειν, and Related Idioms* (Prague, 1965).

In archaic Greek culture, the notion of the discrete ‘portion’ and the discrete individual person seemed to overlap. Philosophers, for example, recommended an overlap between the number of citizens and the number of *kleroi*. A *moira* (portion) can be part of a sacrificial cow, which an individual obtains by drawing lots; metaphorically speaking, *moira* can also mean that individual’s ‘destiny’. But what does it mean? What ‘whole’ does it refer to? When the Greeks ate meat, it was usually in the context of a sacrifice. Apart from a *geras* to a priest, the rest of the cow was usually divided into equal portions of roasted or cooked meat and distributed by lot among the predefined group of sharers. This was not a hierarchical distribution from top to bottom. The whole (in this case, the cow) belonged *a priori* to the whole of the predefined group. The vision is horizontal: The group, or community, distributes portions by lot.

Such insistence on equality of opportunity and outcome in distributive lotteries reveals an egalitarian mindset. Egalitarianism and equality are not synonymous. Odysseus, for example, was the chief, but his *hetairoi* were equal among themselves. Homeric society provides a good illustration: In the *Iliad*, the heroes are clearly unequal to the rest of the soldiers. Heroes take private booty, *enara*, equivalent to the biblical BIZZAH, a category neglected in Homeric scholarship. This includes weapons, horses, or captives for ransom. In public, however, equivalent to the biblical SHALAL, we observe egalitarianism: Apart from the *geras*, which is a gift from the army to the chief, the booty is brought ‘to the middle’ from where it is redistributed by lot into individual portions.

When Odysseus raids Ismaros in Thrace, he takes care to oversee the distribution of the booty equally among his companions (*hetairoi*), so that “none might go cheated of his ‘equal’ (or ‘fair’ (*ise*)) portion” (*Od.* 9.39-42; trans. Lattimore (adapted)). Similarly, Odysseus says: “Now there were twelve ships that went with me, and for each one nine goats were portioned out by lot (*lanchano*)” (*Od.* 9.159-160, trans. Lattimore; cf. *Od.* 9.548-552; 14.229-233).

Portions were individual and distributed with each individual facing equal chances while being recognized as an individual and a ‘sharer’ in the process. In selective lotteries each individual is considered interchangeable with another, hence equal. The emphasis on ‘one-to-one’ relationships (one portion/one individual) would prove consistent from

the eighth to the fourth century BCE. Instead of a hierarchical approach, more than any other ancient Greek institution, the lottery, and its vocabulary reflect a ‘lateral’ or ‘horizontal’ vision of society (see now kleros.org.il, a database of lottery-associated vocabulary).

Of course, there is nothing fundamentally democratic about egalitarianism. The oligarchy of Thebes, for example, might have been called an *isonomia*, expressing an egalitarian state of mind but within a restricted group. When Kleisthenes came along, he widened the political circle by adding the *demos*. It is a question of degree and comprehensive numbers, and the degree is significant. The Greeks, too, knew the top-down types of authority (elites, tyrants, oligarchies), but the language, instruments, and structure of power were very different from those in the ancient Near East, for example.

We must remember that the structure of the Greek world discouraged centralism, illustrating the web of unity and diversity. There were over a thousand Greek city-states (*poleis*) scattered along the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts. It may seem like a historical paradox: Hellenicity crystallized and spread at the very moment when Greeks were distancing themselves from each other as much as possible. In my book, *A Small Greek World* (2011), I argued that Greek civilization was born not in spite of distances, but because of them. A process I called *convergence through divergence*. The network dynamics that operated between the nodes of the ‘Greek web’ reinforced Greek commonalities of practices and values, such as partible inheritance by lot.

My aim is to explore, expose and restore the mental and practical uses of the lot. Whereas in the earlier archaic period we can speak of a ‘state of mind of the lot’, in the later classical Athenian democracy the state of mind had become something close to an ‘ideology’. Not the ideology of modern political parties, but the abstraction of the practices associated with the lot into an idea that, in Herodotus’ time, could become the very definition of democracy:

“... 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).

1.2 What was this state of mind?

A collective mindset is a common mental frame of reference that endures over time and is expressed in response to similar contexts and problems. It can be self-conscious or not and can be expressed in language, values, myths, collective representations, and implementation in practice. A state of mind is equivalent to ‘this is the way we do things’, based on values, customs, and traditions that form a worldview. For example, when distributing something like booty, meat, land, and inheritance, ‘we’ (= Greeks) think in terms of fair shares and look to the lot to actualize the distribution. It is a state of mind where the relational idea of ‘equal shares’ of a ‘whole’ implies a horizontal view of a group or society as a whole. This ‘whole’ can be concrete or abstract, like the ‘state’, where members of the whole community share equal ‘portions’ expressed in assigned political positions. This is probably how we should understand the semantic field of *isonomia*: An equal share of ‘law’ for each participating citizen.

We can observe certain stable mental patterns when they are integrated into language, concepts, and practice. Reactions to new situations, such as the creation of a colony or the re-shuffling of the body of citizens for the sake of political reform (e.g., Cyrene, Athens, Herakleia on the Black Sea, Nakone) were conditioned by pre-existing mental structures and images, or mentalities. These included terms, values, and implicit understandings of how things should be done because of previous choices, instruments, conceptual categories, and behavior. In this sense, the lot was an ‘institution’.

1.3 The vocabulary of the lot: Modes of thought and perception

One way of revealing the Greek mindset of drawing of lots is to examine the relevant vocabulary both as individual words, in conjunction with each other, and the context of their semantic fields. Some words will prove more important than others, but all relate to notions of distribution, equality, and fairness, and the actual workings of the lot. Ancient

Greek vocabulary best illustrates the multiple uses of the lot, the type of practices associated with it, and the associated values that guided it.³

One conclusion is immediately obvious: The two most frequent and significant terms, *kleros* and *lanchano*, are clearly linked to drawing lots, although both may have other meanings. For example, the *Greek-English Lexicon* (LSJ) gives the meaning of the verb *lanchano* as ‘to obtain by lot’ and ‘to get’ in short. Our study seems to confirm the associations of drawing lots with *kleros* and shows that around 73% of uses of the verb *lanchano* up to the mid-fourth century are linked to the drawing of lots. The direct implication of such discoveries is that we can translate certain texts and inscriptions more accurately and pursue them as further evidence, particularly where a context is lacking.

I.4 Portions, fairness, and egalitarianism

The concept of equal portions implies a specific notion of equity. For example, in some cultures, it is considered fair for the eldest son to inherit everything (primogeniture). However, with the Greek practice of partible inheritance by lot, all brothers are equal before chance and all receive equal or fair shares, agreed in advance. So, fairness is not proportionate: It does not mean that you get what you deserve according to your status, but rather fairness is equality. We also see this in other types of distributive lotteries. Where possible, equality also means equal results. This also has psychological implications: Life decisions to be determined by drawing lots were on the horizon of any son’s expectations, and he would not have had to wait for his parent’s demise to realize the importance of the values of equality and fairness and their link to the lot.

A recurring expression is *isos kai homoios*, ‘equal and like’, or equal and just, i.e., ‘fair’. For example, equal portions of sacrificial meat or portions of land in a settlement could be equal in size or weight (*isos*) but only ‘similar’ to each other (*homoios*) since they were different in terms of meat quality or land location. New settlers, for example, sailed overseas to colonize on ‘equal and like’ terms (*isai kai homoiiai*), meaning ‘equal and

3 For the complete database, see kleros.org.il and the appendix by Elena Iaffe in our *Drawing Lots* (see note 1).

fair' (sometimes even *isos kai dikaios*). As noted, Odysseus and his companions distribute booty made up of captured goats. Odysseus organizes a drawing of lots "so that no one is deprived of his equal share", distributing nine goats per ship by drawing lots. He could have made a simple distribution while keeping the arithmetic equal, but that would have been unfair to those who got the skinny old goat instead of the delicious fat one. The lot is used because it is arbitrary and, being impersonal, it eliminates personal resentment.

The conflict between the two notions of fairness, proportionate fairness, and fairness as equality, is also evident in the *Iliad*; here is Achilles' protest:

"Stay at home or fight your hardest—your share will be the same. Coward and hero are given equal honor" (*Il.* 9.318-319).

The protest is, in fact, proof of the accepted custom: These distributive lotteries are all-inclusive.

In the *Iliad*, a brother was chosen by lot to go to war, and in Herodotus' account of the colonization of Cyrene, there was a state-wide drawing of lots at Thera among all *oikoi* that had more than one son, to choose who would go and settle overseas. Equality is thus also expressed interchangeably: Any brother can be chosen by lot to fight in the war or colonize overseas; any Athenian citizen could hold office, etc. The use of lot reveals a fundamental vision of equivalence between members of society, a horizontal society, and a significant mental foundation on which to build notions of political equality in the centuries to come.

The equal portions of land discovered at the settlement of Megara Hyblaia that belong to the first founding generation express, in concrete terms, the idea of *isai kai homoiai* even if the formula did not exist so early. Equal plots were a special category of *protoi kleroi*, the 'First Lots', that constituted the minimum landholdings of the community's sharers. Again, egalitarianism did not mean absolute equality. Settlers could own personal *chremata* and buy or acquire more land. Yet significant social stratification in Greek colonies is generally only evident two or three generations after their foundation, implying more equal antecedent conditions. Archaeologists who argue against absolute equality in the Greek

colonies must realize that they are arguing against an assertion that nobody is making (the first lots were a minimum ‘entry ticket’, not a maximum holding). Equality consisted in *protoi kleroi*. We can assume that these portions of land were distributed by lot, since Archilochos, writing in the middle of the seventh about Syracuse (which had been founded in the eighth) speaks explicitly of these *kleroi* (fr. 293 (West)).

1.5 The gods and the moira: Was lot an expression of the divine?

We are not ancient Greeks. It is a mistake to have too much intellectual empathy: The ancient Greeks did not necessarily think like us, nor did they share our attitudes and worldview. However, while we may have enormous empathy for Greek ‘reason’, ‘philosophy’ and ‘theater’, we apparently do not like to deal with lotteries. They may seem strange, perhaps unpleasant, due to the bad reputation of gambling. So why did the Greeks use the drawing of lots? The facile answer has often been: Because they wanted to know the will of the gods.

However, religion is a question, not an answer. Paradoxically, some admirers of Greek rationality seem worried about lotteries in Athens, that ‘city of reason’ conceived by Jean-Pierre Vernant. They try to save ancient Greek rationality by claiming that the Greeks used lots irrationally as a tool of divination. But the Greeks did not live like those in Borges’ Babylonian Lottery. Those ancient, rational Greeks made a rational decision to apply a random device to so many aspects of their lives, and reasonably so.

The gods were ‘present’ on a spectrum ranging from a simple invocation or prayer (in most cases) to expressing their direct will through the lot-oracles. Greek myth reveals a state of mind that demonstrates the horizontal aspect of lotteries. The Greeks had no transcendent God as a subject for whom the world was an object. The Olympians (third-generation deities) did not create the world; they were born into it and gained their supremacy through violent revolution. In the *Iliad*, we are told how Hades, Zeus and Poseidon conducted a drawing of lots: Zeus got the sky, Hades the underworld, and Poseidon the sea (15.185-210). It is absurd to imagine that these three Olympian deities organized a drawing of lots to

‘reveal the will of the gods’. As with most selective, distributive, and procedural lotteries, i.e., human lotteries, the three brothers were the ‘sovereign group’ to decide upon the drawing of lots.

Zeus was undoubtedly the king of the gods, a position he did not obtain by a lot but to which he was elected by the Olympians, says Hesiod (*Theog.* 881-885); on the other hand, Zeus obtained his domain, heaven, by lot. Archaic Greek poetry, notably Hesiod and the poets of the Homeric hymns, also speak of divine lotteries:

“Tell how at the first gods and earth came to be, ... and how they [the gods] divided [*dateomai*] their wealth among themselves, and how they shared their honors [*timai*] amongst them [*hos timas dielonto - di-airo*] ... ” (*Theog.* 108-113, trans. Evelyn-White 1914).

Zeus presides over such lotteries; he does not determine their outcome. Otherwise, ‘the gods’ (plural) do the distributing. The relevant common verb in the middle voice (*dateomai*), and the result, what is awarded (*dasmos*), denote a distribution by the group of participants for themselves.

In a Greek world “full of gods” (Thales), there was no clear dividing line between what we might consider the secular and religious spheres. This is precisely where we need to pay attention: Divination via lot-oracles existed at one end of the religious spectrum. By contrast, the annual selection by lot of 6,000 judges in Athens; the daily procedural lotteries for the selection of ad hoc juries; and the allocation by lot to court cases, were at what we would call the ‘secular’ end of the spectrum, with the gods merely ‘invoked’. The gods do not decide; they preside. There is no point in introducing a dichotomy in the form of a secular category where it has never existed. The gods were ‘present’ in all public affairs, which were always conducted under their auspices; however, such affairs were not subject to constant, active divine intervention.

As historians of the past, we are inevitably also citizens of the present. If we are ever to adopt, once again, that salient feature of ancient egalitarianism, the drawing of lots, we must remember that it was never simply a mechanism, but an expression of a Greek egalitarian mindset and its ideal of a horizontal society as expressed in distribution, selec-

tion, procedure, mixture, and divination through lot-oracles. Such characteristics and their associated values of *isos kai homoiος* were embedded in Greek society throughout the archaic period and found expression in forms of governance, as Josine Blok eminently demonstrates.

Josine Blok

II.1 Diversity: Drawing lots for political office

In the first half of this diptych, Irad Malkin has shown how for the ancient Greeks drawing lots was the default method for the distribution of land, booty, sacrificial meat, and inheritance, for setting turns, for mixing groups, and selecting individuals, and for divination. As a social practice embedded in egalitarian values, drawing lots was a leading element of the Greek mindset and foundational to Greek societies from the early archaic period down to Roman Imperial times across the Greek world. In other words, drawing lots was a salient, structural factor of the unity, or rather commonality, of the Greek world.

Yet, drawing lots also was a salient factor in the diversity of the Greek world, and in the following, I will examine why and how this was the case. In a nutshell, this diversity reflects the variety among *poleis* in their use of the lot for assigning *polis* office. The differences between Greek *poleis* became more pronounced from the archaic age on, due to contingent factors such as location, economic potential, and social composition. By the classical age, this diversity had crystallized into a diverse political landscape, each *polis* having its own political structure, habitus, culture, and social climate, in other words its own *politeia*. Depending on the grain of the picture we make or on the distance from which we look at this political landscape, we see notable similarities between the *politeiai*, such as the preference for republican government in multiple bodies, and between clusters, such as of largely democratic or oligarchic *politeiai*. By contrast, when zooming in, the differences between the *poleis* come more sharply into view and here the use of the lot for *polis* office comes into play.

Let me first take one step back. *Poleis* also adopted the drawing of lots for many other aspects of their governance, namely for the purposes for which the practice traditionally was used, as Irad Malkin demonstrates, that is selection, distribution, procedure, mixing, and divination. *Poleis* used drawing lots for selecting individuals, for instance to found a colony or to serve as judges for arbitration, for the equal distribution among the citizens of land, booty and sacrificial meat, for setting turns, for instance in duties such as standing guard, for mixing citizens into new subgroups and for distributing new citizens over subgroups, such as Kleisthenes did in Athens in 508/7, and for consulting the gods about the best policies. It seems that using these traditional applications of the lot now under authority of the *polis* elicited few to no concerns. Nor were these applications of the lot considered distinct features of a *politeia*. But drawing lots for political office marked the political nature of a *polis*, and it was a topic of debate and even a source of discontent. To be more precise, no one objected to the use of the lot itself, which was a familiar practice, but the problem concerned its application to *polis* office and the composition of the group of candidates. The debate focuses on the political offices, but the cultic offices such as priesthoods should also be relevant.

The fact that drawing lots for office was so problematic may come as a surprise, given that precisely this practice was such a conspicuous feature of Greek governance. About half of all Greek *poleis* in the classical age were democracies, and in the Hellenistic period even more called themselves democracies, even if in fact their political system gave priority to elites in the assignment of offices. In many (but certainly not all) democracies at least some offices seem to have been distributed by lot, notably the jury courts, albeit direct evidence is scarcer than we should like. Above all, the massive scale of drawing lots in the democracy of classical Athens has captivated observers both in antiquity and today. How to account for this apparent paradox?

In this section, I will give a bird's-eye view of the spread of drawing lots for *polis* office across the Greek world and attempt a brief explanation for it. However, except for democratic Athens, the evidence is scarce and disparate, partly due to the uneven epigraphical habits in the Greek world. Often, we must make do with incidental remarks in historical or

philosophical writings. But I think the erratic evidence is also representative of the highly uneven spread of the practice itself in the Greek political landscape. This fact confirms our surmise that drawing lots for *polis* office is a special case, both from the perspective of *polis* governance and from the perspective of drawing lots itself. The question why this is the case, I will now first discuss in some detail.

II.2 Why and how was drawing lots for office a special case?

Whereas none of the other applications of the lot seems to have raised serious controversies, only its use for *polis* office has a history of checkered application and of recurrent contestation. Why this difference in a world where drawing lots was part of the mindset?

Drawing lots, when applied in societal contexts, is an instrument applying equality of chance for all participants in specific forms of decision-making. It takes place in definite social settings, but it also creates such a setting itself by the mechanisms of the procedure; it is based on shared values about its use, and it shapes the expectations and conduct of the (section of) society where it is applied. The social and political meaning of drawing lots depends on two crucial factors: One, the choice to apply the lot with its inherent equality of chance, instead of any other means, for the decision-making; and two, the composition of the group participating in the procedure. Whoever is in, shares in the distribution on equal conditions; all others are out. In ancient Greece, and also today, the members of the group sharing in an allotment are considered to be largely similar and equivalent (in Greek: *homoios*) in the terms relevant to the decision – it is one among several reasons why the lot is chosen as a method – but the framework of the allotment itself makes them all truly equal (in Greek: *isos*) in the equality of the chance.

Psychological research by the Dutch social-psychologist Hofstee shows that in present day western societies people can easily accept distribution by lot of goods that are not considered a reward for individual

qualities, in other words for which the recipients are equally qualified.⁴ By contrast, the distribution by lot is considered unjust if it concerns desirable goods that one normally receives due to one's merit, in other words for which normally the recipients need to be better qualified than the rest. For the stability and continuity of any state, group or organization, its members must sense that the distribution of privileges and duties is, by and large, just. Quite a substantial section of the literature on distribution by lot today is concerned with the issue of justice, notably for the allocation of desirable goods that are too scarce to supply everyone with to the same measure. Political office is a desirable good because it is a privilege: It elevates its holder and gives her or him authority over others, and conventionally, in most societies, it is assigned on perceived superiority. Hence, its distribution by lot creates tensions in the sphere of justice, at least to people's feelings.

Although in ancient Greece, unlike in modern western societies, distribution by lot was common and entrenched in the sociocultural mindset, the ideas about justice in the allocation by lot of political office seem to have been similar. In the Greek world, as in fact almost universally, political office was an honor (*time*) and political offices were positions of authority (*arche*) over other citizens. *Polis* office, then, was an immaterial good for which traditionally not all members of the group were considered equally qualified. It was assigned on perceived differences in merit, birth, or wealth (also called *time*, in the meaning of *value*); in other words, *polis* office was based on inequality. This deeply ingrained value system was difficult, if not virtually impossible, to reconcile with the principle of equality governing the drawing of lots.

Besides the inherent incompatibility of equality and inequality, drawing lots for office also sits uneasily among the other applications of the lot, from which it differs in several important respects. This difference has, again, much to do with the conception of office as an honor, a fact that also renders the composition of the group of candidates far more difficult than in the other cases of selection by lot. Let us first compare allotment for office with other applications of the lot, and next look into the problems of the group of candidates.

4 Willem K.B. Hofstee, 'Allocation by Lot: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis' *Social Science Information* 29.4 (1990) 745-63.

Is drawing lots for office a form of selection? Allocation of office is not exactly a form of selection by lot, a term we use in our book for the selection of an individual or a limited group of individuals for a specific, occasionally ad hoc, task. Instead, *polis* office was a regular, recurrent duty of several, even many people, lasting for a fixed term and then assigned to a new group by lot. Unlike the roles assigned by lot as 'selection', office holding was based on rotation.

Is it a form of distribution? Depending on the *politeia* of the *polis* in question, the number of citizens eligible for office could be large or small, and the lot would distribute them randomly over the available offices. Yet, allotment for office is not a clear case of distribution by lot either. Normally in such cases, everyone in the group was equal in the participation and in the results, all receiving an equal share of land, booty, or sacrificial meat. But *polis* office was an immaterial good that was never 'equal'; within a single board all office holders were equal and held equal 'portions' of authority, but not all boards were equal in authority. Equality primarily resided in the equal eligibility for office, either of a particular group or of all citizens, but the office itself elevated one, or rather a few of them, temporarily above others and gave them authority over all others.

This temporary quality is a further complicating factor. All other distributions by lot concerned goods the recipient was to keep, either forever or to enjoy on the spot. Office, by contrast, was a good an individual could not keep, but only hold for a limited amount of time. It was a share in the self-governance of the community, and the principle of rotation was essential: After each term of office, others would fill the positions left by their predecessors. On the one hand, the rotation amongst the group reinforced the sense of equal sharing and coherence, brought further into effect over time, but on the other hand the temporal restriction of its enjoyment intensified the competition for the offices, at least for the coveted ones, a competition that distribution by lot would reduce. After a year of holding office, a citizen reverted to equal status with the others, a fact that might restrain him while in office or might stimulate him to make optimal use of it for his own benefit (Greek office holders were invariably suspected of doing the latter).

Finally, we might consider allotment for office to be a distribution by lot of turns (so a form of procedural lottery) but even this solution is not entirely satisfactory, because some people might never get a turn. In sum, distribution of office is unlike other applications of the lot.

The second issue concerns the composition of the group and the effects of allotment. Because holding office was an honor, an expression of the value (*time*) the *polis* assigned to an individual, the means of selection for office had a deep impact on the political climate of a *polis*. Since all eligible candidates vied for honor, election stimulated the competition between them, because votes clearly showed who was favorite in the *demoi*' esteem to hold power, and who was not. By contrast, drawing lots in principle would reduce the competition, because this selection method removed all arguments pro and con, all love and hatred, from the selection procedure and its results. This system only could work if all candidates were more or less equal (*homoios*): The outcome of the lottery for office would create an inequality among them that was only temporary, for rotation would bring another group to temporary prominence, and ultimately, perhaps, all would have had their turns. Agreement as to who was included in the group of candidates, was therefore vital. In other words, when political office was distributed by lot, it rendered the problem who was to be included in the group of candidates arguably even more pressing than in other distributions by lot, because inclusion provided an equal chance to be elevated, if only for a limited time, to honor and authority over the others. As the social distinctions between groups and between individuals in the *polis* were constantly shifting, every *polis* had to assess and reassess who had access to the honors of the offices and on which conditions. Finally, with 'inequality' writ large over *polis* office itself, over time the rotation among the eligible, *homoios* citizens created an absolute equality (*isotes*) among them. The equality of chance would reduce the competition for office, but the steps preceding the actual drawing of lots made the tension between (political) equality and (social) inequality manifest.

Given this crucial role of the group of candidates, an unmistakable connection existed between the methods of selection for office of a *polis* and its rules for access to citizen status. Pericles' Citizenship Law of 451/0

marks such policies in Athens, but all *poleis* implemented citizenship policies. For reasons of space, I cannot further discuss this point, but it needs to be kept in mind.

In sum, drawing lots for the assignment of political office was an innovation in both domains – politics and drawing lots. So, we may wonder how drawing lots, which would seem to be essentially unsuitable for *polis* office, came to be introduced in the domain of politics at all and ultimately became a successful innovation in a substantial number of *poleis* and in multiple forms. However, not a single source explains why drawing lots was introduced and why it was to be the preferred method of selection for office. I shall come back to this issue in the final part of my paper; let us first look at some cases.

II.3 The spread of drawing lots for political office in the Greek world: A bird's-eye view

That there is something special about drawing lots for office is borne out first of all by its relatively late appearance on the historical scene. Whereas the drawing of lots for other purposes had been common in the Greek world since the eighth century, the earliest attested case of assigning office by lot appears in Athens shortly after 594, when the lawgiver Solon introduced the method for two high offices, the Nine Archons and the Treasurers of Athena. The procedure entailed drawing lots from pre-selected candidates (*klerosis ek prokriton*) from among the wealthiest citizens, and for the election of the Archons the two wealthiest classes were mixed to form one group of candidates. The source of inspiration and of legitimacy for Solon's innovation may have been the selection of priests among the *gene*, Athenian families of so-called pure birth. They assigned the cultic offices by lot among themselves as a distribution of their inheritance, with a tinge of divine selection. However, Solon's innovation was only partially successful: For the Nine Archons, the stage of drawing lots was abandoned after just a few years, only the election remained. It took about a century before the Athenians reinstated Solon's system (487), and another twenty years (after 462) until the practice began its growth into the large-scale allotment from all for which the city became renowned.

In other *poleis*, no drawing lots for office can be confidently identified before the second quarter of the fifth century. By the fourth century, the practice was more widespread. In Aristotle's *Politics*, written in the later fourth century, selection for *polis* office by lot is typical of two types of *politeia*, oligarchies and democracies.⁵ What is striking in this section of Aristotle's treatise and the collection of *politeiai* on which it drew, is how self-evident the lot had become since the time of Solon, as a method for selection for political office, next to election. Yet its actual use was quite unevenly spread, as a bird's-eye view shows.

First, democracies. Overall, the label 'democracy' covered a wide range of *politeiai*, some of which should better be classified as broad oligarchies. Radical democracies like Athens were the outcome of deep social, economic, and military changes, as Maurizio Giangliulo has argued, and our evidence suggests that Athens was not only the most radical democracy but also exceptional, in the combination of its economic and military power and *politeia*.⁶

Athens was instrumental in the introduction of the lot for at least some offices in some of its 'allies', in the fifth century: by force in Erythrai and Miletus, by invitation in Byzantion and possibly Chalcedon. Other *poleis* within the power orbit of Athens, for instance Delos, have no evidence of allotted offices, except for the courts. The absence of any evidence for drawing of lots in Thurioi, founded around 444 as a model colony by Sybaris and Athens, can be the result of coincidence, but also of a deliberate differentiation from the Athenian system, due to preference of its legislator Protagoras for a balanced democracy based on 'ancient' models. Argos turned democratic of its own accord after the 490s and became an ally of Athens, but there is no evidence of allotment.

Several *poleis* on Sicily and in southern Italy saw periods of democratic rule, without any plausible influence of Athens. In Syracuse, drawing lots for offices was applied widely between 412 and 405, so for seven years. Taras became democratic in the mid-fifth century, and in the first half of the fourth century (probably) Archytas introduced a system, in which

5 Arist. *Pol.* 1300a13-1300b5; among pre-selected few, election is 'aristocratic' (sc. by deliberate, qualitative selection); cf. 1273a26-27: election by wealth is oligarchic; election by merit (*arete*) is aristocratic.

6 Maurizio Giangliulo, *Democrazie greche: Atene, Sicilia, Magna Grecia*, Rome, 2015.

half the offices were elected, and half allotted. In Croton, democratic between the 440s and 410, allotment from all may have been practiced, according to much later sources. In the fourth century and the Hellenistic era, many *poleis* of the Greek east claimed to be democracies. Their offices were overall not distributed by lot but elected by the *demos*. In this type of democracy eligibility was in effect limited to the elite and allotment from all was applied only for the jury courts.

No firsthand attestations of allotment exist for oligarchies, since they had little reason to publicize their policies in inscribed decrees. The *Athēnaion Politeia* provides some details of the regime in Athens of 411, both for how they actually used the lot for office and procedure, and for their *politeia* for the future. The system leaned heavily on the previous, democratic practices, but now restricted to a limited group of wealthy citizens. For other oligarchies, drawing lots for office is only attested incidentally by historians and by observers such as Anaximenes of Lampsakos, if he was the author of the *Rhetoric for Alexander*, and Aristotle in his *Politics*. We are slightly better informed about the governance of some of the leagues created or reinforced from the fourth century on. The council of the Boeotian Confederacy was drawn by lot, and so were the members of the board of the league set up by Demetrios Poliorketes in 302. In these boards, allotment was meant to get an equal representation of the members of the leagues and mix them. Democracy had nothing to do with it.

II.4 Why and how did allotment for office spread in the Greek world?

Drawing lots for *polis* office meant that this method was transposed from domains where it was considered the just method for distribution, selection, or procedure, to a domain where its application was traditionally felt to be unjust. The evidence shows that this tension between what was considered just and unjust never fully disappeared, even when the practice had become widespread. No ancient source explains why using lots for office is a good idea to reduce strife, why it implements citizens' equality, let alone how it was introduced in any given *polis*. Critics of the system cover more text than its advocates. A few lines in Herodotus' fictional 'Constitutional Debate' (3.80-83) are the only recommendation

(see Malkin above). This passage must reflect the common democratic viewpoint in Herodotus' day, but any reconstruction of why and how the practice spread depends entirely on our own conjectures. So here, briefly, are mine.

In Athens, in Solon's *klerosis ek prokriton* (drawing lots from preselected candidates) the *prokrisis* formally established and publicized the elite prerogative of holding *polis* office. To persuade them to accept the drawing of lots among the elected candidates, Solon probably drew on the standing of the *gene*, with their distribution of office by lot as their inheritance with a dint of divine selection, as I just mentioned, and perhaps on the Homeric selection of heroes discussed by Irad Malkin. In 487, Solon's system was back on the political stage, with his venerable name attached to it; just as for Solon himself, the method was not meant to bring equality as a political principle into effect, but to reduce inter-elite competition. When in the late 460s a reform for further democracy took place associated with Ephialtes, drawing lots had become a familiar custom associated with the highest offices and carrying the hallmark both of Solon and the archonships. Due to his institution of regular allotment of councilors and jury courts, a far larger section of the male citizen body than before acquired the experience of selection by lot and of involvement in the government. Introducing the lot also into the meeting procedures of the council, the reform of the late 460s made drawing lots a central feature of the Athenian governance.

Seen from this outcome, in Athens drawing lots for political office became an accepted and even normative practice in several stages. In each stage, the high standing of the context where it was previously used facilitated introducing the method in a new context. For the method to be acceptable in that new context, it had to draw, on the one hand, on the familiarity with the institution of drawing lots in other domains of life, and, on the other hand, on its accommodation in societal values more broadly: The willingness to reduce competition as a source of civic strife, and on an ideology that increasingly combined recognition of differences in *time* (value, honor) with the principle of political equality.

For other *poleis*, we may conjecture two interlocking processes. Using the lot for distribution of *polis* offices was an idea that appears to have been carried from one place to another: We cannot see how exactly it

happened, only the results. Throughout Greek history persons, knowledge, laws, practices, skills, and cultural features travelled across the Greek world through the intensive networks and peer polity interaction between *poleis*. All this intensive travel brought ideas and practices into wide circulation. If this wide connectivity was indeed the way the idea of drawing lots for office was spreading, we must assume yet another process for its actual application. Someone had to propose using it in the governance of his *polis*. Next, just as in Athens, to get this new application of the lot accepted, it needed familiar ground and a political climate conducive to a method of allocation based on cohesion among equals. Again, this familiar ground probably consisted of the traditional applications of the lot for other purposes, for instance the distribution by lot of *kleroi*. In some *poleis*, these contingencies worked, in others they did not. Drawing lots for *polis* office thus came to mark the political diversity of the Greek *poleis*.