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## Demagogues and Demagogy in the Attic Orators

### 1. Introduction

Demagogy is a typical phenomenon of the Athenian radical democracy and its general characteristics have been widely studied<sup>1</sup>. The traditional view is that the demagogues were uncultured men and bad politicians of the post-Periclean age, who acted for their own interests rather than for the sake of the whole city<sup>2</sup>. The terminology, strictly speaking, is quite limited: we have a couple of nouns, δημαγωγός and δημαγωγία, the verb δημαγωγεῖν and the adjective δημαγωγικός. We find the first instance of this terminology in Aristophanes' *Knights*, staged at the Lenaea of 424<sup>3</sup>, but we do not know when it first appeared. As a matter of fact, the phrase προστάτης τοῦ δήμου is more common for defining a democratic political

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<sup>1</sup> FINLEY 1962, 3-24; LOSSAU 1969, 83-88; CONNOR 1971, 109-110; RHODES 1981, 323-324; OSTWALD 1986, 201ff.; OBER 1989, 91-93, 106-107, 122-124; CANFORA 1993, 9-20; MANN 2007; MORWOOD 2009, 353-363; LANE 2012, 179-200; CORBEL-MORANA 2014, 205-219; SALDUTTI 2015, 81-110; VANOTTI 2015, 109-129; RHODES 2016, 243-264; PEONIDIS - GIANNAKOPOULOS 2018; CAIRE 2019, 137-167.

<sup>2</sup> This view has been recently questioned. MANN 2007 challenges Thucydides' view of a radical change in the political leaders of Athens after the death of Pericles (45-96) and examines the social status of the politicians defined as demagogues, concluding that a distinction between the old traditional politicians, aristocratic and well-educated, and the uncultured "new politicians" is misleading (97-190). According to PEONIDIS - GIANNAKOPOULOS 2018, the traditional view of the demagogues is mistaken: actually, they would be champions of the democracy and the charges brought against them by their political opponents are to be considered baseless and biased. I am not entirely convinced by the assumption of these three scholars, but this is not the place to discuss their views.

<sup>3</sup> Ar. *Eq.* 191, 217. See SALDUTTI 2015, 81-82, 84-87; VANOTTI 2015, 114-116; CAIRE 2019, 142-144. For the stereotypes on demagogues in Attic comedy, see CORBEL-MORANA 2014, 205-219.



leader and with this meaning it is used by Aristotle in the list of democratic politicians provided by him in *Ath. Pol.* 28: but while this phrase is mainly neutral in its significance, it is disputed whether the concept of demagogy has in itself a pejorative connotation or not<sup>4</sup>.

The Greek orators refer to demagogues and demagogy not infrequently and the aim of the present paper is to enquiry about their use of this terminology in their interpretation of Athenian policy of the past and of their present days<sup>5</sup>. Both aspects present interesting features: the first one, because it shows the meaning of the concept of demagogy according to the orators, and its neutral, positive or pejorative connotation as well; the second one, because it reveals how this terminology, which is characteristic of the post-Periclean political struggle, was reused and reinterpreted in the fourth century.

## 2. *Demagogues and demagogy in the past*

2.1. The Attic orators use the terminology of demagogy in reference to three stages of Athenian policy of the second half of the fifth century: in reference to Pericles, to Alcibiades and to the two oligarchic regimes of 411 and 404. Pericles is labelled as *δημαγωγός* by Isocrates in two orations. In a section of the oration *On the Peace* in which the terminology of demagogy recurs more than once, Isocrates is dealing with the *πονηρία τῶν ῥητόρων*, due to which many citizens have become poor, while the *ῥήτορες* have gone from poverty to wealth: Pericles, instead, who was *δημαγωγός* before these men, not only did not strive for personal gain and even left a fortune lower than that he inherited from his father, but also brought eight thousand talents into the treasury on the Acropolis (Isoc. 8, 126). In the *Antidosis*, Isocrates attempts to prove that oratory does not get men worse, but rather can make the city stronger: this can be shown by “politicians (*πολιτευόμενοι*) who are currently in public life or just recently deceased”, such as Solon (defined as *προστάτης τοῦ δήμου*), Cleisthenes, Themistocles and Pericles. The last is defined as *καὶ δημαγωγὸς ἀγαθὸς καὶ ῥήτωρ ἄριστος*, and he is reported both to have enriched the city with temples and monuments, so much that he is considered worthy of ruling over all the

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<sup>4</sup> For the difference between the phrase *προστάτης τοῦ δήμου* and the term *δημαγωγός*, see CAIRE 2019, 162-165. For the issue of the pejorative connotation of the concept of demagogy, see below, mainly par. 4 and n. 52.

<sup>5</sup> Concerning the use of the past by Greek orators, see: PERLMAN 1961, 150-166; NOUHAUD 1982; WESTWOOD 2020, 9-80; cf. also STEINBOCK 2013, 1-47 and CANEVARO 2019, 136-157.



people, and to have brought to the Acropolis no less than ten thousand talents (Isoc. 15, 234)<sup>6</sup>. In these two passages Pericles is presented as a good leader<sup>7</sup>: he is an excellent orator, he never stole the riches of the *demos* and he rather increased the wealth of the city, bringing to the Acropolis a large amount of talents (eight or ten thousand); in the first passage, he is set against the other ῥήτορες, who aim only at enriching themselves, while in the latter he is placed in a list of good leaders<sup>8</sup>. With regard to terminology, δημαγωγός seems a synonym for ῥήτωρ and προστάτης τοῦ δήμου (and also πολιτευόμενος, *i.e.* a man who takes part in the government), referring to a political leader just in a neutral sense; in fact, the overall description of his activity provided by Isocrates and the adjectives used as well allow us to conclude that here δημαγωγός has to be intended in a positive sense, referring to a good popular leader, who uses politics and his oratorical skills in order to enrich not himself, but the entire city. Isocrates seems to have been the first one to define explicitly Pericles as δημαγωγός. We find the same definition both in fourth-century sources, like Theopompus (*FGrHist* 115 F 91, in the context of the excursus on the Athenian demagogues)<sup>9</sup> and Aristotle (*Ath. Pol.* 27, 1, with a neutral meaning), and, later, in Plutarch (*e.g.* *Per.* 10, 4; *Nic.* 2, 2)<sup>10</sup>.

The terminology of demagogy is used also with regard to Alcibiades<sup>11</sup>: in the oration *Against Alcibiades* (4, 27), attributed to Andocides, but actually apocryphal and possibly written between the end of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth century<sup>12</sup>, the author states that Alcibiades is a thief,

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<sup>6</sup> For these two passages of Isocrates, see NOUHAUD 1982, 221-223, CAIRE 2019, 153 and BEARZOT 2020, 121-122. About Isoc. 8, 126, see also SALDUTTI 2015, 90-92: he offers an interesting comparison with the negative image of Pericles provided by Plato (*Grg.* 503c; 515-517a). About Isoc. 15, 234, see also TOO 2008, 204-205.

<sup>7</sup> Enthusiastic remarks on Pericles made by Isocrates can be found also *e.g.* in 15, 111 and 16, 28.

<sup>8</sup> About the interactions of Pericles and the assembly, see recently RHODES 2016, 254, 256-257 and CAIRE 2019, 147-150.

<sup>9</sup> The fragment is too short for any consideration; but for the Theopompean (negative) picture of Pericles the remarks of FERRETTO 1984, 26-27, 76-81 are still valuable.

<sup>10</sup> For the notion of demagogy in Plutarch, see LANE 2012, 192-200 and URSO 2019, 97-105. For some assumptions about Pericles in Idomeneus' work *On the Athenian Demagogues* (especially from *FGrHist* 338 F 8-9), see COOPER 1997, 476-479 and COOPER 2014, Commentary on F 8 and 9. About Pericles "the demagogue", see also AZOULAY 2014, 42-44.

<sup>11</sup> Concerning the presentation of Alcibiades by Attic orators, see NOUHAUD 1982, 292-297, but the specific passage here discussed ([And.] 4, 27) is not considered.

<sup>12</sup> This is the opinion of COBETTO GHIGGIA 1995, 69-121 and GAZZANO 1999, LVI. More precisely, Cobetto Ghiggia dates the *Against Alcibiades* to the period before 390 or 396, but he does not exclude that the work could have been written shortly before the ostracophory of 415; and Gazzano believes that the oration was composed in the year 415. EDWARDS 1995,



gets money from citizens, hits some of them and, ultimately, does not care for democracy (οὐδενὸς ἀξίαν τὴν δημοκρατίαν ἀποφαίνει); in short, he speaks like a demagogue, but acts like a tyrant (τοὺς μὲν λόγους δημαγωγῶ τὰ δ' ἔργα τυράννου παρέχων). We can see again the strong link between demagogy and speaking to the *demos*, but this time the picture of the political leader is undoubtedly negative: this is clear not only from his behaviour, but also from the combination with the figure of the tyrant. We can wonder again whether the term δημαγωγός has in itself a pejorative meaning or not: in this case it is not completely clear, because on the one hand the author states that when Alcibiades spoke to the *demos* he gave bad advice (4.11 and 16) and this would lead to the traditional picture of the demagogue who deceives the assembly, but, on the other hand, since the passages recall Alcibiades' actions rather than his speeches, it seems that acting like a tyrant is what primarily makes him a bad politician, rather than speaking like a demagogue. Pseudo-Andocides' oration is the oldest source who identifies Alcibiades as a demagogue, a categorisation that will recur also in Plutarch (*Alc.* 6, 4; 13, 1; *Nic.* 9, 1).

The terminology of demagogy appears also in connection with the two oligarchic regimes of 411 and 404 in a couple of passages of Lysias and Isocrates<sup>13</sup>. Lysias in the oration *Defense Against a Charge of Subverting the Democracy* (25, 9), after claiming that no man is by nature either oligarchic or democratic but just wishes the constitution more favourable to him, states that the supporters of the two oligarchies often changed sides and in this regard mentions "Phrynichus, Peisander and the demagogues who were with them" (οἱ μετ' ἐκείνων δημαγωγοί): they moved from democracy to oligarchy, the author blames, because they were afraid of the crimes they committed against the *demos*. In this passage, which does not seem to blame demagogues as such, but especially those who acted as turncoat for personal interests, δημαγωγοί are bad democratic leaders like Phrynichus, Peisander and others not named, who supported oligarchic revolutions in order to cover up their past wrongdoings. Although it is strange that Lysias does not mention here either Theramenes, or individuals involved in the incident of 404, his opinion is quite clear: many protagonists of the oligarchic regimes of 411 and 404 had been democratic leaders before. This view is shared also by Thucydides, who, concerning the events of 411, states that in the ranks of the conspirators there were also persons whom no one could ever have believed

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131-136, instead, thinks differently: he suggests that the *Against Alcibiades* is a literary exercise composed during the fourth century or possibly later.

<sup>13</sup> About the presentation of the oligarchic revolutions provided by Attic orators, see NOUHAUD 1982, 282-285, 301-313 and SIRON 2017, 97-116.



capable of joining an oligarchy (8, 66, 5); moreover, also Aristotle defines Phrynichus as a δημαγωγός, presenting him unfavourably as an example of oligarchic demagogue (*Pol.* 5, 1305b).

The relation between demagogy and oligarchy appears also in a passage of Isocrates' *On the Peace* (8, 121-123)<sup>14</sup>, where the orator warns the Athenians against those who φιλεῖν τὸν δῆμον φάσκουσιν, but actually damage the polis: "as seen also in the past" (ὡς καὶ πρότερον), these men, after achieving τὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος δυναστείαν, brought confusion into the city; and, Isocrates continues, it is amazing that the Athenians "elect" (προχειρίζω) as δημαγωγοί not those who share the same ideas of the men who made great the city in the past, but those who speak and act in the same manner as the men who destroyed it; moreover, under the leadership of the good politicians of the past, democracy has never been at risk, while under the others it has been overthrown twice. This passage contains a precise definition of demagogy, which is represented as ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος δυναστεία and, therefore, on the one hand it ties clearly demagogy and oratory and, on the other, emphasises the importance of the relationship between the leader and the *demos*. Besides, it is very interesting also because it connects politicians of the past and of the present, remarking that in Isocrates' time the Athenians choose bad politicians and have not learnt from the mistakes committed in the past. And the mistake to which Isocrates explicitly refers is that of the two oligarchies of 411 and 404: unlike Lysias, Isocrates does not provide the name of any politician involved in the two coups d'état, but his remarks are similar to Lysias' ones, because both of them believe that bad demagogues were responsible for the overthrown of democracy<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore, in Isocrates' passage, demagogy seems to be inherently neither good nor bad: rather, its connotation depends on the politicians who dominate the speakers' platform. In fact, Isocrates is assuming that there is a possibility of choosing between sensible and ruinous demagogues. If this interpretation is correct, δημαγωγός is used in Isoc. 8, 121-123 as a neutral term which refers to the leaders of the *demos*, men who have control over the assembly and have been "elected" to this "office"<sup>16</sup>: they can be either good

<sup>14</sup> See also SIRON 2017, 104-105, CAIRE 2019, 152-153 and BEARZOT 2020, 121-122.

<sup>15</sup> The same idea occurs also shortly before (Isoc. 8, 108), where the orator claims that ἡ τῶν δημηγορούντων πονηρία induced the Athenians to choose the oligarchy of the Four Hundred. Here Isocrates does not use the term δημαγωγός, but a form of the verb δημηγορέω (see also below, n. 50).

<sup>16</sup> The verb προχειρίζω may be actually interpreted as a synonym of "choose". Clearly it does not refer to a proper "election" to a political office.



or bad politicians; they are bad if they just claim to love the people, but what they say and do actually destroys the city.

2.2. But Attic orators anachronistically use the terminology of demagogy also with reference to the distant or even mythical past<sup>17</sup>: Isocrates with regard to the monarchical period and to Peisistratus, while Demosthenes to the times of Solon. In the *Encomium of Helen* (10, 36-37), Isocrates states that Theseus τὸν δῆμον καθίστη κύριον τῆς πολιτείας, but the Athenians decided that he was the only one worthy to rule, because they believed that πιστοτέραν καὶ κοινοτέραν εἶναι τὴν ἐκείνου μοναρχίαν τῆς αὐτῶν δημοκρατίας; in fact, he did not act like other rulers, but he took risks for himself and shared the benefits with all the people; therefore, his rule was not protected by a military force imported from abroad, but guarded (δορυφορούμενος) by the goodwill of his own citizens; in short, in terms of authority, he was an absolute ruler, but, in terms of good deeds, a leader of the people (τῇ μὲν ἐξουσίᾳ τυραννῶν, ταῖς δ' εὐεργεσίαις δημαγωγῶν)<sup>18</sup>. This praise of Theseus is based on the contrast between absolute power on the one side, marked by terms as μοναρχία, τυραννεύω, δορυφορέω, and popular rule on the other side, to which terms like δημοκρατία and δημαγωγέω are associated. This oxymoronic picture, which in some respects recalls that of the Thucydidean Pericles, anachronistically uses the terminology of demagogy to outline the image of Theseus, who is depicted as a good and appreciated popular leader: the outcome is a sort of “popular monarchy”, which obviously is an utopian theorisation, that, in some respects, recalls the role of Theseus in Euripides' *Suppliants*. With regard to the terminology of demagogy, this passage not only confirms that it is used by Isocrates in a neutral sense, but also shows that it can be borrowed also to reinterpret remote (or even mythical) events in the light of more familiar categories. King Theseus is called demagogue also by Theophrastus and Philochorus: the former provides a negative presentation of him on the political level as the beginner of all the evils of the city, while the latter supplies a positive presentation as the killer of the Marathonian bull<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> STEINBOCK 2013, 26-27 remarks that in the orators the border between myth and history is rather fluid. Concerning references to myth in Attic orators, see GOTTELAND 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Concerning the presentation of Theseus in the *Encomium of Helen*, see: BEARZOT 1980, 117; GOTTELAND 2001, 277 ff.; KUHN, 2013, 257-276; ATACK 2020, 77-82. SALDUTTI 2015, 89 emphasises the paradoxical nature of Isocrates' statement. See also CAIRE 2019, 153-155.

<sup>19</sup> Theophrastus (*Char.* 26, 6) provides a negative presentation of Theseus because he reduced the cities of Attica from twelve to one and, in doing this, he destroyed the monarchy; therefore, quite rightly, he was the people's first victim (see also below, par. 4 and n. 36). According to Philochorus (*FGrHist* 328 F 109 = Plu. *Thes.* 14, 1), Theseus,



In the oration *Against Aristogeiton II*, Demosthenes (or rather the actual author of the oration), after recalling that the wrongs committed by private citizens affect only themselves, while those accomplished by ἄρχοντες and πολιτευόμενοι damage the whole city, states that for this reason Solon determined slow punishments for private citizens and rapid ones for ἀρχαί and δημαγωγοί; in fact, once the constitution had been overthrown, there would be no opportunity to punish any more (26, 4). On this occasion, the orator applies the terminology of demagogy to the age of Solon: demagogues are one of the two categories of politicians considered by the author of the oration; in fact, through the terms ἄρχοντες and ἀρχαί the orator refers to those who hold political offices (included the archonship itself), while through πολιτευόμενοι<sup>20</sup> and δημαγωγοί, two words which hence must be considered here as synonyms, to leaders of the *demos* without official positions. Obviously, it is hardly conceivable that in the age of Solon “popular leaders” who were accustomed to speak in the assembly existed, if only because at that time the assembly had a much lower relevance than in democratic period: hence, the use of the term δημαγωγός is anachronistic, but equally interesting because it reveals that, in the intentions of the orator, that definition was employed just to refer to political leaders. In addition, it should be noted that also in this case the terminology is used in a neutral sense, just as the meaning of words like ἄρχοντες and ἀρχαί is neutral: the fact that magistrates and popular leaders could commit wrongdoing does not imply that these terms had inherently a pejorative meaning.

The last passage comes from Isocrates’ *Panathenaicus*: the orator states that the Athenians had a democratic government for no less than a thousand years until the time of Solon and of Peisistratus’ δυναστεία<sup>21</sup>; the latter, δημαγωγός γενόμενος, outraged the city, exiled τοὺς βελτίστους τῶν πολιτῶν ὡς ὀλιγαρχικούς ὄντας, and eventually τὸν δῆμον κατέλυσεν καὶ τύραννον αὐτὸν κατέστησεν (12, 148). Peisistratus is represented as a demagogue, opponent both of the oligarchs and, later, of the *demos*: in this way, coming from demagogy, he achieved tyranny. Many sources share this point of view: Androtion and Aristotle (in the *Athenaion Politeia* and *Politics*) label Peisistratus as a δημαγωγός καὶ στρατηγός who became tyrant<sup>22</sup> and

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“δημαγωγῶν”, *i.e.* behaving as a leader of the *demos*, rescued Attica by his killing of the Marathonian bull.

<sup>20</sup> The same term occurs in Isoc. 15, 234.

<sup>21</sup> That thousand year period is approximately calculated starting from Theseus, who is championed as the father of Athenian democracy in Isoc. 12, 130.

<sup>22</sup> *FGrHist* 324 (Androt.) F 6; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 22, 3; *Pol.* 5, 1305a (with DE LUNA 2013, 91-92).



also Diodorus states that he, acting as a demagogue, was on the way towards tyranny<sup>23</sup>; moreover, Theopompus and Idomeneus mentioned Peisistratus and his sons in their works about demagogy<sup>24</sup>. Yet, Isocrates and Aristotle differ from each other not only because the latter (and Androtion as well) presents Peisistratus also as a general, but, above all, also because they provide a different assessment of the tyrant: while Aristotle's opinion about Peisistratus is positive<sup>25</sup>, Isocrates' one is completely negative and, consistently, negative in this case is also the meaning of the term *δημαγωγός*<sup>26</sup>.

2.3. Some concluding remarks. The orators who use the terminology of demagogy with reference to the Athenian past are Lysias, Isocrates, Demosthenes and the authors of the *Against Aristogiton II* and *Against Alcibiades*. Isocrates' orations provide the highest number of occurrences of demagogy-related terms (five out to eight): this is not surprising, as a result of his interest in history.

In some cases, the orator is dealing with a very recent past: Lysias' oration *Defense Against a Charge of Subverting the Democracy* is the closest to the events and to the "demagogues" mentioned by him, and hence in this case the orator deals with a very recent past. Also the oration *Against Alcibiades*, which purports to be delivered on occasion of Hyperbolus' ostracism<sup>27</sup>, deals with a politician whose activity was not so far from the circumstances in which it has supposedly been written. Besides these cases, concerning Phrynichus, Peisander and Alcibiades, also the case of Pericles is approximately related to the period traditionally characterised by the phenomenon of demagogy, given that this phase is usually placed after his death. Instead, other instances, *i.e.* those of Theseus, Peisistratus and the politicians of the times of Solon, pertain to the distant or mythical past.

The presentation provided for all these "demagogues" is interesting, because it reveals the interpretation of the past supplied by the orators: king Theseus is deemed a demagogue for his *εὐεργεσία*; Peisistratus as an opportunist who acted as demagogue only in order to achieve tyranny; Pericles' demagogy is highlighted in his activity as a *rhetor*, in his integrity in handling public money and in his policy of embellishment of Athens;

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<sup>23</sup> Diod. Sic. 9, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Theopompus: *FGrHist* 115 F 135; Idomeneus: *FGrHist* 338 F 3.

<sup>25</sup> See especially *Ath. Pol.* 14-17.

<sup>26</sup> About Peisistratus' presentation in Isoc. 1, 148, see CAIRE 2019, 154-155. According to SALDUTTI 2015, 92-93, Isocrates' thought is influenced by Plato's reflection on tyranny.

<sup>27</sup> See above, n. 12.





Alcibiades is considered a demagogue for his way of speaking to the *demos*; Phrynichus and Peisander are presented as turncoats.

Some of these features are typical characteristics of demagogy: this is the case of their role as speakers in the assembly, though this is presented not only in a bad way (for Alcibiades and the demagogues to which Isocr. 8, 121-123 alludes), but also in a positive sense (for Pericles, ῥήτωρ ἄριστος).

In fact, sometimes it is pointed out that the demagogue acted as a good politician, and this occurs in the cases of the εὐεργεσίαι of Theseus and of the embellishment of Athens by Pericles. This presentation sounds somehow odd compared with the traditional negative vision of demagogy, also because the demagogue is generally depicted more as a politician who speaks publicly than as one who acts concretely. But this aspect anyhow pertains to the relationship between the demagogue and the *demos*, which is a typical feature of demagogy: in the case of Theseus, it displays almost an aristocratic colouring, that of the nobleman who takes care of his people; in that of Pericles, it shows the skill of a good administrator. Besides, in both cases, one of which, it should be reminded, concerns the mythical past, the orator (Isocrates) aims at providing a laudatory presentation of the individuals at issue, which corresponds to a particular ideological vision of the good leader.

In other cases, demagogy is presented as just a cover for true opportunism: this is the cases of the demagogues involved in the oligarchies of 411 and 404, including Phrynichus and Peisander, but also of Peisistratus, who, according to Isocrates, became a demagogue only in order to achieve tyranny. As noted above, both instances are close to similar interpretations provided by Thucydides (8, 66, 5) about the political background of the conspirators of 411 and by Aristotle (*Pol.* 5, 1310b) about tyranny originating from demagogy.

The Attic orators are an important source for Athenian demagogy also because in some cases they are the only or the oldest source which labels a politician as a demagogue: within the framework of the classical literature, Lysias is the only author who defines Peisander as a demagogue and the oldest one who uses this term for Phrynichus<sup>28</sup>. Also the representation of Pericles as δημαγωγός in Isocrates' *De pace* is earlier than Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia*.

Besides, the passages considered show that in the orators the lexical family of δημαγωγός may have a neutral meaning of political leader, devoid of any pejorative evaluation, or may even be used in a positive sense. This is

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<sup>28</sup> About Peisander, the only other case is *schol. in Aeschin.* 2, 175. But see Xen. *Symp.* 2, 14, 1: δημηγόρος.



particularly clear in Isocrates, since in some passages coming from three different orations (8, 126; 10, 37; 15, 234) he uses this terminology in a positive sense, in the last case even accompanied by the adjective ἀγαθός. This suggests if not that the neutral meaning was the original one, at least that in the fourth century the terminology of demagogy could be used in that way too.

As a final remark, it should be noted that in three out of eight passages demagogy is accompanied by a reference to tyranny: in Theseus the two sides are joined and refer respectively to his good deeds toward the *demos* and his monarchical power; in Peisistratus demagogy is the stratagem used to achieve tyranny; and for Alcibiades demagogy appears in his way of speaking, while tyranny in his way of acting. This three cases are different, but it seems interesting that the orators (Pseudo-Andocides and Isocrates) feel demagogy and tyranny as two aspects in some ways related to each other. Apparently, δημαγωγεῖν created a special relationship with the *demos*, that could evolve into tyranny or into a sort of personal rule possibly even welcomed, like in the instances of Theseus and Pericles.

### 3. *Demagogues and demagogy in the current political situation and in generic references*

The Greek orators provide also many passages in which the terminology of demagogy is used either with reference to contemporary politicians, or in a generic way. The first type is that of Demosthenes: as far as we know, he is the only fourth-century politician designated as δημαγωγός by the orators, and we find this characterisation in Hyperides' and Deinarchus' *Against Demosthenes* and also, indirectly, in Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon*<sup>29</sup>. We face two different typologies: in some passages Demosthenes is explicitly labelled as δημαγωγός (Aeschin. 3, 78; Din. 1, 1, in an extremely visible position, at the very opening of the speech; 1, 10; 1, 31; 1, 53), while in other cases we find generic charges against demagogues in which however the ultimate target is obliquely still Demosthenes (Aeschin. 3, 134; 3, 226; Din. 1, 99). There are also cases in which the fragmentary condition of the text does not allow us to reconstruct the context (Hyp. 1, fr. 4, 16b, 26 and fr. 5, 22, 22 Jensen)<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> For the presentation of Demosthenes in Din. 1, 1, see WORTHINGTON 1992, 122-123. For the use of the past in Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon*, see WESTWOOD 2020, 275ff.

<sup>30</sup> See also Demades *BNJ* 227 F 114, but we do not know anything about the context of this fragment.



With regard to the first typology, it is stated that Demosthenes has been a bad father and hence he can not be a δημαγωγός χρηστός (Aeschin. 3, 78); he is used to speak often in the assembly, but as a δημαγωγός he has never been helpful to the city (Din. 1, 31); he is a corrupt demagogue and he has been caught in the act of taking bribes (Din. 1, 53); for these reasons, the city must get rid of this demagogue and punish him (Din. 1, 1). The term δημαγωγός is extensively used with regard to Demosthenes and this terminology was clearly employed by his opponents as a tool of accusation. In this sense, the term δημαγωγός was (at least partially) in use in the contemporary political debate and it was employed mainly to remark that Demosthenes was a bad adviser for the *demos* and that he took bribes: these two aspects seem to be traditional in the presentation of fifth-century demagogy and hence Demosthenes' opponents just relocate the typical idea of demagogue from its original context of the fifth century to that of the fourth.

With regard to the second typology, Aeschines states that Hesiod recommended to the cities not to accept τοὺς πονηροὺς τῶν δημαγωγῶν (3, 134)<sup>31</sup> and wonders what kind of a politician (δημαγωγός) would be the man who is able to ingratiate himself with the people but sells off the opportunities to make the city secure and prevents any wise man from giving useful advice (3, 226). Hypereides claims that the δίκαιος δημαγωγός must be the saviour of his fatherland (1, fr. 4, 16b, 26) and criticises the city for choosing as δημαγωγοί, στρατηγοί and φύλακες τῶν πραγμάτων men who fatally make the city feel ashamed in front of the other Greeks (1, fr. 5, 22, 22). And Deinarchus complains about the fact that ἡγεμόνες and δημαγωγοί take bribes and overlook the interests of their homeland (1, 99). Although between the lines the target of these accusations should be indirectly Demosthenes, this second series of passages contains generic references to demagogy that could be suitable as much for the fourth as for the fifth century. In fact, they provide the traditional negative portrait of demagogues and demagogy under several aspects, notably the relationship with the *demos* and the charges of enrichment. And it could be curious that the criticism expressed by Aeschines in 3, 226 is very similar to a passage in Demosthenes' oration *On the Chersonese* (8, 34), where the latter remarks that politicians (οἱ πολιτευόμενοι), speaking as demagogues in the assemblies (δημαγωγοῦντες) and currying people's favour at most (χαριζόμενοι καθ' ὑπερβολήν), flatter the citizens telling them whatever they want to hear, but they actually jeopardise public affairs.

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<sup>31</sup> Aeschin. 1, 135 quotes Hes. *Op.* 240-243, 246-247, but in these verses the term δημαγωγός is not used.



But the orators provide generic references to demagogues and demagogy also in works not related to Demosthenes: this is the case of a few passages by Lysias and Isocrates. In the oration *Against Epicrates*, Lysias states that during the war (probably the Corinthian war) the defendants became rich thanks to the wealth of the Athenian citizens, who in turn became poor: but, the orator remarks, the duty of good leaders (ἀγαθῶν δημαγωγῶν) is not to steal people's properties, but to place their own property at the disposal of the state in case of misfortune (27, 10)<sup>32</sup>. Besides, Isocrates provides some generic remarks about good and bad leaders. He advises the Cypriot king Nicocles that the good demagogue does not allow the multitude to commit outrage or to be outraged and assigns public offices to the βέλτιστοι: in doing so, he realises a χρηστὴ πολιτεία (2, 16). In another passage, coming from the already mentioned oration *On the Peace*, the orator states that no one is more hostile to the citizens than πονηροὶ ῥήτορες καὶ δημαγωγοί, because they want the people to be in need of the daily necessities: in fact, they know that a man who has his own resources relies on the orators who give wise advice (οἱ τὰ βέλτιστα λέγοντες) rather than on the bad ones (8, 129)<sup>33</sup>.

In conclusion, the passages concerning (explicitly or indirectly) Demosthenes and those with generic references show similarities and differences. Both instances are linked with the current political situation, in the first case more directly, but also generic references are naturally generated by the political circumstances in which the orator lives. The opposition between good and bad demagogues is still apparent, but it must be admitted that, concerning fourth century policy, we miss references to actual individuals designated as good demagogues (like Pericles for the previous century). On the contrary, Demosthenes is presented as a perfect example of a bad demagogue; the main features of this pattern are the fact

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<sup>32</sup> According to SALDUTTI 2015, 89, this passage suggests that the “good demagogue” actually does not exist and that it is a pure abstraction. I do not agree with this interpretation: resorting to a non-existent notion would sound strange to the ears of the audience and would weaken the argumentation of the orator (see also below, par. 4 and n. 56).

<sup>33</sup> On Isoc. 8, 129 see also CAIRE 2019, 151-152 and BEARZOT 2020, 122. There could be one more allusion, in Isoc. 8, 133: in this passage the orator states that the citizens must look for good and not bad politicians (τοὺς χρηστοὺς ἀντὶ τῶν πονηρῶν), as in the past (ὥσπερ τὸ παλαιόν); thus, the citizens could take advantage in the best way “both of the demagogues and the politicians” (βέλτιον ἔξετε χρῆσθαι καὶ τοῖς δημαγωγοῖς καὶ τοῖς πολιτευομένοις). Yet this passage, that is given in the edition of *Bibliotheca Teubneriana* by B.G. MANDILARAS (ed. 2003, vol. II, p. 230), does not occur in all the editions of the oration *On the Peace*: e.g. it is omitted in the edition of the Collection des Universités de France, by G. MATHIEU (ed. 1991<sup>5</sup>, vol. III, p. 47).



that the demagogue does not provide good advice to the city and gets rich thanks to the resources of the citizens. Also other fourth-century or slightly later sources define Demosthenes as a “demagogue”: Diogenes of Sinope in a derogatory sense, while Duris of Samus and Idomeneus of Lampsacus in the neutral sense of politician<sup>34</sup>. Besides, the orators often remark that the citizens are not able to choose their political leaders in an appropriate way: the fault lies not only in the demagogues, who deceive the *demos*, but also in the Athenians themselves, who do not sufficiently beware of bad demagogues.

#### 4. Conclusions

The Greek orators refer not infrequently to the notion of demagogy, and provide a large portion of references to it among fourth-century sources. Among the other authors of the same century, Aristotle is the one that uses more frequently the terminology of demagogy<sup>35</sup>: in the *Athenaion Politeia*, where a neutral meaning prevails, and mainly in his *Politics*, where instead it is often used with regard to the degeneration of democracy. Also Theophrastus<sup>36</sup>, Aristotle’s pupil, provides a bad presentation of demagogy and states that the king Theseus, “the beginning of the evils for the city”, was deservedly the first victim of demagogues (in contrast with Isocrates)<sup>37</sup>. Moving to treatises about demagogy, we should consider at least

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<sup>34</sup> Diogenes: *SSR* 5, B, 502 (= Diog. Laert. 6, 34-35). Duris: *FGrHist* 76 F 39. Idomeneus: *FGrHist* 338 F 11. See also Diod. Sic. 17, 3, 2 and some occurrences in Plutarch’s *Demosthenes* (e.g. 12, 4). About a supposed definition of Demosthenes as “demagogue” by Theopompus and the evaluation of the orator by this historian, see SHRIMPTON 1991, 171-173 and POWNALL 2004, 159-162 (and also FLOWER 1994, 136-147); in any case, the five fragments of Theopompus in which Demosthenes is mentioned by name (*FGrHist* 115 F 325-329) provide no book attribution and therefore it is not sure that the historian mentioned Demosthenes also in the excursus of the tenth book.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Arist. *Pol.* 2, 1270b (for the verb) and 4, 1292a (for the noun δημαγωγός). *Ath. Pol.* 26, 1; 27, 1; 28, 1 (for the verb) and 22, 3; 41, 2 (for the noun δημαγωγός). See also *Rh.* 2, 1393b. For the notion of demagogy in Aristotle, see: ZOEPFFEL 1974, 69-90; RHODES 1981, 323; CANFORA 1993, 13, 15; LANE 2012, 190-192; DE LUNA 2013, 85-106; SALDUTTI 2015, 95-99; VANOTTI 2015, 119-120; MOLITERNO 2016, 376-377.

<sup>36</sup> Theophr. *Char.* 26, 6. See also above (par. 2.2 and n. 19) and CAIRE 2019, 159-160.

<sup>37</sup> In the philosophical field, for the period at the turn between the fifth and the fourth century see also Antisthenes of Athens (*SSR* 5, A, 204 = Athen. 5, 220d) and Diogenes of Sinope (*SSR* 5, B, 501 = Diog. Laert. 6, 41; about Diogenes of Sinope see also above, n. 34), with SALDUTTI 2015, 94-95 and VANOTTI 2015, 121-122. It is curious that Plato never uses the terminology of demagogy, but he prefers the term δημηγόρος and his cognates (LANE 2012, 189-190). For the idea of demagogy in Plato, see e.g. LANE 2012, 189-192 and MOLITERNO 2016, 363-380. But the notion of demagogy occurs also in fourth-century historical works: Xen. *Hell.* 2, 3, 27; 5, 2, 7; *An.* 7, 6, 4 (see SALDUTTI 2015, 87-88 and VANOTTI 2015, 117-118).



Theopompus and Idomeneus, both providing a deeply negative portrayal of it<sup>38</sup>. The former devoted the tenth book of his *Philippica* to the Athenian demagogues (*FGrHist* 115 F 85-100)<sup>39</sup>: in the fragments not only many politicians of the fifth (Cleon, Hyperbolus) and of the fourth century (Callistratus, Eubulus) are explicitly labelled as demagogues<sup>40</sup>, but also references to many other politicians appear (*e.g.* Cimon, Pericles)<sup>41</sup>. With regard to Idomeneus, we have some fragments of his work *On the Athenian Demagogues* (*FGrHist* 338 F 1-15), which spread from the time of the Pisistratids to that of Phocion<sup>42</sup>; the only politicians who are explicitly labelled as demagogues are Ephialtes (for the fifth century) and Demosthenes, Lycurgus and a few other (for the age of Alexander the Great)<sup>43</sup>. This is not the place to conduct an overall enquiry about the works of Theopompus and Idomeneus, but it seems noteworthy that the only three fragments in which fourth-century “demagogues” are explicitly mentioned by name (Theopompus’ F 97 and 99 about Callistratus and Eubulus; Idomeneus’ F 11 about the demagogues of the period of Alexander) do not provide an unfavourable presentation for these men, at least from the political perspective: admittedly, Idomeneus’ fragment is too short for offering any remark, but Theopompus states that Callistratus was τῶν πολιτικῶν πραγμάτων ἐπιμελής (although incapable of self-control) and Eubulus ἐπιμελής τε καὶ φιλόπονος. The loss of Theopompus and Idomeneus’ works is particularly serious, because they would have provided an interesting comparison with the orators in regard to the presentation of the demagogues both of the past and of recent times.

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<sup>38</sup> For a short but convenient presentation of this kind of treatises, see VANOTTI 2015, 121-126. Also Demetrius of Phalerum wrote a work Περὶ δημαγωγίας in two books (*BNJ* 228 T 1 = Diog. Laert. 5, 80), but nothing is known about it.

<sup>39</sup> This is not the place to provide a full bibliography about Theopompus. I shall confine myself to a few mentions, mainly focused on the excursus about Athenian demagogues: CONNOR 1968, 19-76; FERRETTO 1984; SHRIMPTON 1991, 70-72; POWNALL 2004, 156-175; MORISON 2014, Commentary to F 85-100; SALDUTTI 2015, 99-101; VANOTTI 2015, 122-123; DAVIES 2016, 95-112.

<sup>40</sup> Callistratus: *FGrHist* 115 F 97. Eubulus: *FGrHist* 115 F 99. See also Crobylus (*FGrHist* 115 F 404), but it is disputed whether the fragment should be assigned to Theopompus or to Theophrastus: see MORISON 2014, Commentary on F 404; Crobylus is the nickname of the orator Hegesippus, an associate of Demosthenes.

<sup>41</sup> Themistocles: *FGrHist* 115 F 85-87. Cimon: *FGrHist* 115 F 88-90. Pericles: *FGrHist* 115 F 91.

<sup>42</sup> See COOPER 1997, 455-482; COOPER 2014; SALDUTTI 2015, 101-102; VANOTTI 2015, 123-124.

<sup>43</sup> See respectively F 8 and F 11 (but this fragment raises many problems: see COOPER 2014, commentary to F 11).



Anyway, within the framework of the preserved texts, the orators play a very important role not just because among fourth-century sources they, counted altogether, provide the highest number of occurrences of the terminology of demagogy (only Aristotle provides a similar number), but mostly because their orations preserve the highest number of politicians explicitly labelled as demagogues (Aristotle, instead, supplies many generic references to the phenomenon of demagogy).

The earliest texts are the orations of Lysias and Pseudo-Andocides, if its early datation is correct: in particular, Lys. 25 and [And.] 4 provide the main mentions of demagogy in the recent past by Attic orators, respectively about the oligarchic coups of 411/404 (and notably the “demagogues” Phrynichus and Peisander) and about Alcibiades. These texts reflect the delicate period of the end of the fifth century, when Athenian policy was shaken by personal ambitions and attempts to overthrow the democratic regime. In these cases, the meaning of the term demagogue seems conventional, and, besides, Lysias’ interpretation about democratic leaders who supported the oligarchic regimes is consistent with that of Thucydides.

The orator who more abundantly employs the terminology of demagogy is Isocrates: he defines as demagogue not only Pericles, but also Peisistratus and the (mythical) king Theseus. While the tyrant is presented as a bad example of demagogue, because he made use of the support of the *demos* only in order to achieve an autocratic rule, Theseus and Pericles are praised as the best *δημαγωγοί*, due to their relationship with the *demos* and their honesty. Isocrates distinguishes between good and bad demagogues also when he speaks more generally, without specific references to single politicians. In particular, Isoc. 2, 16 and 8, 129 (see above, § 3) are interesting also because they show an aristocratic vocabulary in the adjectives *χρηστός* and *πονηρός*: this confirms that Isocrates’ view about demagogy is that of an aristocratic leadership in which there is no room for *πονηροὶ ῥήτορες* and the demagogue suggests *τὰ βέλτιστα*; and this regime, in which the *βέλτιστοι* hold political offices, is called a *χρηστὴ πολιτεία*. Clearly, the term *δημαγωγός* has a meaning which is far from that of the actual political context of fifth-century Athens, but which, not surprisingly, is perfectly consistent with Isocrates’ portrait of Pericles and Theseus as good demagogues: in other words, Isocrates relocates and redefines the notion of demagogue in the framework of his thinking about the good ruler.

Demosthenes very rarely uses the terminology of demagogy, while his rivals Aeschines, Hypereides and Deinarchus make a wide use of it with the purpose of attacking, directly or indirectly, Demosthenes himself, the only politician of the fourth century who is labelled as a *δημαγωγός* by the



orators. In this case, this terminology is reused with some of the traditional negative features connected with the fifth-century bad *δημαγωγός*: Demosthenes does not provide useful advice for the city and he gets rich taking bribes. Hence, oratory is an important witness of the persistence of the terminology of demagogy used, at least in the case of Demosthenes, as a political attack in the fourth century just as in the second half of the fifth.

Some features of demagogy in Greek orators deserve further insight. First of all, the terminology<sup>44</sup>: in the about thirty occurrences considered, the orators do not use the abstract noun *δημαγωγία* nor the adjective *δημαγωγικός*, while only a few times we find the verb *δημαγωγεῖν*; it follows that the term *δημαγωγός* is the far most used by the orators. The occurrences show basically three main meanings: *δημαγωγός* could be a man who speaks to the *demos*, a politician, or a leader either of the citizens, or of the democratic faction. In the passages considered, the politicians are named with a number of other different expressions: some of them seem more generic, like *πολιτευόμενοι* and *φύλακες τῶν πραγμάτων*; others are more related to the military field, *i.e.* *στρατηγοί* and perhaps *ἡγεμόνες*; the reference to the *demos* appears in *προστάται τοῦ δήμου* and *δημαγωγοί*, but while the former phrase is more generic and above all extremely rare in the orators<sup>45</sup>, the latter term is specifically related to the *ῥήτορες* who speak to the *demos*. On the one hand, this framework reflects the typical fourth-century political context, which is characterised by its well known separation between those who make policy in the institutional places, like the council, the assembly and the court, and those who fight in the battlefield<sup>46</sup>. On the other hand, there is an interesting distinction in Dem. 26, 4 (see above, § 2.2), where the terms *ἄρχοντες* and *ἀρχαί* are placed next to the terms *πολιτευόμενοι* and *δημαγωγοί*: this seems to suggest that, at least for this author, the demagogue is a politician who may also not hold specific political offices<sup>47</sup>.

It should be added that *δημαγωγός* seems almost a synonym of *δημηγόρος*, which literally refers to those who speak to the *demos*. But the

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<sup>44</sup> Concerning the terminology of Athenian politicians, see *e.g.*: CONNOR 1971, 108-119; OBER 1989, 105-108; HANSEN 1991, 268-271.

<sup>45</sup> To my knowledge, the only occurrence is Isoc. 15, 232, where it is referred to Solon (see above, § 2.1).

<sup>46</sup> See *e.g.* HANSEN 1983a, 151-180 and HANSEN 1991, 268-277. See also OBER 1989, 91-93, 119-121 and MUSTI 1995, 208-216.

<sup>47</sup> CANFORA 1993, 10 provides a different interpretation: moving from Thuc. 4, 21, 3, he assumes that the phrase *ἄνθρωπος δημαγωγός* could imply a formal role, because it recalls the expression *ἄνθρωπος στρατηγός*. I do not share this view (see also OSTWALD 1986, 202; SALDUTTI 2015, 85-86).





term *δημηγόρος*, which is (moderately) used by other fourth-century sources<sup>48</sup>, is not used by the orators<sup>49</sup>, who instead provide a significant number of occurrences of the verb *δημηγορέω*<sup>50</sup> and of the abstract noun *δημηγορία*<sup>51</sup>. This allows us to neglect the term *δημηγόρος* in the present paper, because the orators do not use it as a technical term to define politicians who address the assembly.

In this variety of terms and phrases, *δημαγωγός* shows two main features: the relationship of the politician with the *demos* and his oratorical skills. These characteristics are obviously in line with the classical picture of fifth-century demagogy, while other aspects of it are missing, like the criticism about the origins of the demagogue.

This leads us to consider the controversial problem whether the term *δημαγωγός* has in itself a pejorative connotation or not, also because the traditional opinion of Finley, according to which that word had a derogatory meaning, although questioned by many scholars, has recently been revived by a deep analysis conducted by Saldutti<sup>52</sup>. The survey conducted in these

<sup>48</sup> E.g. Xen. *Hell.* 6, 2, 39; Pl. *Lg.* 10, 908d; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 15, 4.

<sup>49</sup> This is the result of an enquiry conducted through *Tlg.* See also HANSEN 1983b, 47 n. 41 and LANE 2012, 187.

<sup>50</sup> E.g. Lys. 16, 20; [And.] 4, 22; Aeschin. 1, 1; Dem. 18, 60. Participial forms could be of some interest, because of the equivalence οἱ δημηγοροῦντες = δημηγόροι, but this paper is specifically focused on the term “δημαγωγός” and not also on its synonyms. In any case, it may be noted that often in Isocrates the participial form is used in a derogatory sense: see e.g. Isoc. 8, 9 (those who speak to the *demos* πρὸς ἡδονήν); 75 (Ἀριστείδης καὶ Θεμιστοκλῆς καὶ Μιλτιάδης ἄνδρες ἀμείνους ἦσαν Ὑπερβόλου καὶ Κλεοφῶντος καὶ τῶν νῦν δημηγορούντων); 108 (ἡ τῶν δημηγορούντων πονηρία induced the Athenians to support the Four Hundred; see above, n. 15).

<sup>51</sup> E.g. Aeschin. 2, 130; Dem. 24, 161; Din. 1, 31.

<sup>52</sup> FINLEY 1962, 3-24; but on p. 19 he seems to admit the use of the word *δημαγωγός* “in a neutral sense”. SALDUTTI 2015, 81-110: according to him (p. 86), “la coerenza e l’univocità” (consistency and unambiguity) of the use of the demagogue-vocabulary at the end of the fifth century suggests that those terms were used for bad politicians rather than for any democratic leader (but, in my opinion, apart from the interpretation of the various passages, the number of the occurrences for the end of the fifth century is too scarce for a similar conclusion); and, in Saldutti’s opinion (p. 103), during the all classical age these terms are unequivocally connoted in negative sense. According to ZOEPFFEL 1974, 79-84 (see also RHODES 1981, 323), the term *δημαγωγός* originated with a pejorative sense, but later, in the fourth century, the meaning changed. Other scholars believe that the demagogue-vocabulary does not have inherently a derogatory meaning: CONNOR 1971, 109-110; CANFORA 1993, 10-12 and mainly 14-15 for the Attic orators; HANSEN 1983b, 46 n. 40 (according to him, the term *δημαγωγός* could be used in neutral, positive and pejorative sense); OSTWALD 1986, 201; OBER 1989, 106-107; HANSEN 1991, 268; LANE 2012, 179-200 (according to her, the pejorative meaning became standard beginning with Plutarch, on the basis of Plato and Aristotle); DE LUNA 2013, 99 n. 40; VANOTTI 2015, 111-120; MOLITERNO 2016,



pages suggests that in fourth-century Greek oratory that noun is indifferently used with a negative, neutral or even positive meaning<sup>53</sup>. This is implied not only by the fact that the orators both praise and criticise either a specific “demagogue” or generically the image of the demagogue, but also by the fact that we find some cases in which the noun is accompanied by an adjective. A favourable connotation is provided by adjectives like ἀγαθός, χρηστός, δίκαιον (and also by the adverb καλῶς)<sup>54</sup>, while a negative one by the aristocratic term πονηρός<sup>55</sup>. Hence, in the usage of the orators, the terminology of demagogy is not employed exclusively to define a bad political leader. It is true that sometimes we find the mention of a “good demagogue” only in an abstract way and/or in order to point out that, according to the orator, the politician is not a good demagogue<sup>56</sup>; but this does not imply that a demagogue must necessarily be a bad politician, because in that case resorting to a non-existent notion (that of a good demagogue) would sound strange to the ears of the audience and would weaken the argumentation of the orator.

I do not wish to extend the results of this survey to all occurrences of the terminology of demagogy in Greek literature, but with regard to the orators it seems to me hard to deny that δημαγωγός is an ambivalent term. If, as some scholars assume, the term was originated with a negative meaning (which however is disputable), on the one hand it might seem odd that later it lost that stigma, because it is perhaps more probable that a term without any connotation could assume over time a negative meaning rather than vice versa; but, on the other hand, it is however likely that the term demagogue, being used in a deeply changed political situation, lost its

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363; CAIRE 2019, 151 (the demagogue “peut être bon ou mauvais, en fonction de ses origines, de ses méthodes ou de ses buts”) and 163-164, 165-166. According to MANN 2007, 15 n. 3, the term δημαγωγός has a derogatory meaning in the authors who are critical toward democracy: I agree with this opinion.

<sup>53</sup> Also MANN 2007, 15 n. 3 states that the orators use δημαγωγός in a neutral sense, but he does not provide a close scrutiny of the sources. According to Lane 2012, 187-188, the orators never use δημαγωγός in the pejorative sense, but this opinion (which is not substantiated by an extensive discussion of the sources) seems to me groundless.

<sup>54</sup> Ἀγαθός, *Lys.* 27, 10, *Isoc.* 15, 234; χρηστός, *Aeschin.* 3, 78; δίκαιος, *Hyp.* 1, fr. 4, 16b, 26; καλῶς, *Isoc.* 2, 16.

<sup>55</sup> *Aeschin.* 3, 134. See also *Isoc.* 8, 129, but admittedly here it is not clear whether in the phrase πονηροὶ ῥήτορες καὶ δημαγωγοί the adjective refers only to the first noun or to both of them: in the former case, the consequence would be that the term δημαγωγοί is intrinsically negative, while in the latter that it needs an adjective to connote it.

<sup>56</sup> Moving from these remarks, SALDUTTI 2015, 81-110 concludes that (in oratorical as much as in non oratorical texts) the demagogue must necessarily be a bad politician.



negative connotation and was used with a wider range of significances. But these considerations go beyond the purposes of the present paper.

We could wonder why the orators use the terminology of demagogy in times that are often far from the ones in which that phenomenon is traditionally placed, *i.e.* the post-Periclean age. First of all, as observed above, also in the historical and philosophical fields this terminology is still in use during the fourth century and therefore oratory is not an exception. Having said that, the impression is that, when the term demagogue is used with a generic and not politically charged meaning, no particular references to specific political contexts or historical events have to be traced in order to explain the choice of this terminology on the part of the orator: it is just a basic term employed to identify a politician. When, conversely, the term demagogue is used in the pejorative sense, the author wishes to recall (and to take advantage of) a particular (and oligarchic-originated) tradition that combines demagogy with the degeneration of democracy, in order to give greater weight to his allegations against the politician: the typical example is that of Demosthenes, labelled as demagogue by his opponents.

At this point, we should conclude by remarking the main features of the good and of the bad demagogue according to the orators. The sources supply only two names as examples of a “good demagogue”, Pericles and Theseus, both provided by Isocrates. It may be remarkable that there are no concrete examples of leaders of the recent past who are called good demagogues. With regard to the features of the good demagogue, some of them are generic: the demagogue is a ῥήτωρ ἄριστος (Isoc. 15, 234), he does not steal people’s properties (Lys. 27, 10), he is a defender of the multitude (Isoc. 2, 16) and a saviour of his homeland (Hyp. 1, fr. 4, 16b, 26). Other characteristics correspond rather to a paternalistic and aristocratic vision of the policy: the demagogue places his own properties at the disposal of the state (Lys. 27, 10), performs good deeds (εὐεργεσίαι) for the people (Isoc. 10, 37), enriches the city with temples and monuments (Isoc. 15, 234), assigns public offices to the βέλτιστοι (Isoc. 2, 16) and, towards the citizens, he is like a father who loves his sons (Aeschin. 3, 78). In this case, the picture of the demagogue is far away from the negative sense of this terminology and rather recalls the debate about the good ruler typical of the fourth century.

With regard to the “πονηρός demagogue”, the contemporary reference is to Demosthenes, who actually is the only fourth-century “demagogue” mentioned by the orators. But negative pictures of demagogues are also those of Phrynichus and Peisander, as depicted by Lysias, of Alcibiades, by Pseudo-Andocides, and Pisistratus, by Isocrates. Hence, actuality, recent past and distant past are equally represented in this



meaning. Recapitulating here the features of the bad demagogue would be unnecessary; I will just point out a few aspects, beginning by remarking the fact that the adjective *πονηρός* seems to be itself a mark of an aristocratic point of view. The bad demagogue is a leader who, far from engaging in improving people's conditions, rather tries to keep the people in a state of need so that they are compelled to apply to him (Isoc. 8, 129). Besides, charges concerning money such as embezzlement and bribes are quite frequent<sup>57</sup>: this characterises politicians who care more for their own interest than that of the *polis*. In fact, the demagogue is often marked out as an opportunist: this occurs both for Phrynichus and Peisander, who, being formerly democrats, became oligarchs (Lys. 25, 9), and for Peisistratus, who used demagogy to seize tyranny (Isoc. 12, 148). And precisely a certain relationship between demagogy and tyranny is another aspect that seems noteworthy: this happens not only when the orator refers to an actual tyrant, like Peisistratus (Isoc. 12, 148), but also with regard to leaders who hold broad personal powers either legitimately, like the king Theseus (Isoc. 10, 37), or not, like Alcibiades ([And] 4, 27). In other words, a close connection with the *demos* implies a high risk of turning into some form of "tyranny", *i.e.* personal rule.

To conclude, the orators make a wide use of the notion of demagogy, applying it to the mythical period as to the historical past and also to their own times. In the few cases in which it is used with regard to the recent past, it is interesting that we find some coincidences with remarks provided by contemporary historians like Thucydides (both about Phrynichus and Peisander, and about Alcibiades). In the other cases, we face a reinterpretation of the character of the demagogue or an adaptation of it to historical and political circumstances that were very different from those of the period of "classical" demagogy of the late fifth century. The orators, hence, use this terminology in a polysemic way and this shows how much this notion has been important and how deeply in Athens it affected both political debate and theoretical reflection concerning political leaders and their relationship with the *demos*.

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<sup>57</sup> Lys. 27, 10; Isoc. 8, 126; Din. 1, 53; 1, 99.

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### Abstract

The paper focuses on the figure of the demagogue and the phenomenon of demagogy in the ancient Greek orators. They make a wide use of the notion of demagogy and apply it both to the historical or even mythical past, and to their own times. In the cases in which this terminology is used with regard to the recent past, it is interesting that we find some coincidences with the remarks provided by contemporary historians like Thucydides. In the other cases, we face a reinterpretation of the figure of the demagogue or an adaptation of it to historical and political circumstances that were very different from those of the period of “classical” demagogy of the late fifth century. The terms considered can on the one hand be used with the neutral meaning of “leader of the *demos*”, but, on the other, they can obviously also contain a political judgment, either negative or positive (a bad or good leader). The orators, hence, use this terminology in a polysemic way, and this shows how much this notion has been important and how deeply it has affected at Athens both political debate and theoretical reflection about political leaders and their relationship with the *demos*.

Keywords: Demagogue, demagogy, Isocrates, orators, Theopompus

Il presente lavoro studia la figura del demagogo e il fenomeno della demagogia negli oratori greci. Costoro fanno ampio uso del vocabolario della demagogia e lo applicano sia al passato storico, sia al mito, sia ai tempi a loro contemporanei. Nei casi in cui questa terminologia venga impiegata in riferimento al passato più recente, è interessante notare che si riscontrano alcune coincidenze con autori come Tucidide. Negli altri casi, ci troviamo di fronte a una reinterpretazione della figura del demagogo, o a un suo adattamento a un contesto storico e politico che è molto differente rispetto al periodo più “classico” della demagogia, cioè la fine del V secolo. Il termine “demagogo” in alcuni casi è impiegato dagli oratori per riferirsi in modo neutro a un “capo del popolo”, mentre in altri è connotato da un giudizio politico, che può essere negativo o persino positivo. Dunque, gli oratori usano la famiglia lessicale della demagogia con un’accezione polisemica e ciò dimostra quanto questa nozione sia stata importante e quanto ad Atene essa abbia influenzato sia il dibattito politico, sia la riflessione teorica sulla figura del leader e sul suo rapporto con il *demos*.

Parole chiave: Demagogo, demagogia, Isocrate, oratori, Teopompo