

Towards a Unified Theory of Greek Citizenship as *Timē*: Worth, Rights, Social Performance, and Political Participation

Mirko Canevaro*

University of Edinburgh

ORCID: 0000-0001-5884-1839

DOI: 10.54103/milanoup.292.c742

ABSTRACT:

This chapter proposes an approach to Greek citizenship centred on the concept of *timē*. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory, it argues that the Greeks conceptualised citizenship not only through metaphors of sharing, but also through *timē* and *axia* as value from which rights and entitlements flow. This framework bridges seemingly competing scholarly approaches – performative, institutional, network-based – as they all express the same underlying dynamic of socially recognised worth. The chapter also addresses why citizenship crystallised as a binary, non-graded category centred on political participation despite the open-endedness of its conceptual foundations. It argues that democratic notions of citizenship became hegemonic, constraining even oligarchic regimes and non-democratic theorists.

KEYWORDS: Greek citizenship; *timē*; conceptual metaphors; political participation; democracy.

1. Introduction

In a famous essay titled *Our Words, and Theirs: A Reflection on the Historian's Craft, Today*—in dialogue with Marc Bloch, Kenneth Pike, and Arnaldo Momigliano—Carlo Ginzburg characterises the work of the historian as at the intersection, precisely, of our words and theirs, of the etic and the emic, in a productive back and forth between the two.¹ The project of which this volume is the culmination seems to me to have been resolutely devoted to clarifying one end of

* The work for producing this chapter was funded by UKRI through the Horizon Europe Guarantee for the "Class Struggle in Ancient Greek Democracy" project (EP/Z000084/1). Much of the underlying research was funded by the ERC Advanced Grant "Honour in Classical Greece" (741084).

1 Ginzburg 2012. For the emic/etic distinction see Pike 1967², on which I elaborate in Canevaro 2026, 4-6, 21-5. See also, for a recent application of the emic/etic distinction to Greek social categories of slavery and freedom, Lewis 2025, 38-9.

this back and forth. If we take a look at the website² and at several connected publications,³ we see that what it brings to the table is a more complex, nuanced, refined understanding of how the Greeks talked about *what we call* citizenship.⁴ Not just *politēs* and *politeia*, but much more. The relevant terms and expressions are manifold and all, in different ways, help us get closer to what *they*—the Greeks—meant when they spoke of citizenship.

There is little doubt that many of these terms, *astos* and *politēs* first and foremost, imply a conceptual trajectory which maps physical presence in a physical place—the city, *polis* or *asty*—onto membership of a (political) community centred around that physical space.⁵ In this case, the trajectory is a metonymical one: it is through a conceptual metonymy that citizenship as membership of a community is initially conceptualised—being a citizen of a *polis* as living in one place. This is the usual conceptual trajectory from the more concrete to the more abstract typical of concept formation and meaning-making in every culture, as shown famously by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. The main cognitive tool to approach an abstract concept, however, is more frequently not a metonymy but a (conceptual) metaphor.⁶

Conceptual metaphor theory posits (and, in fact, demonstrates) that metaphors are not just poetic, decorative language, but fundamental cognitive structures. They shape how we think and understand the world. Lakoff and Johnson show that we systematically use more concrete, physical experiences to comprehend abstract concepts—for example, understanding arguments through the metaphor of war (defending a position, attacking weak points). These metaphorical mappings are largely unconscious and culturally embedded, influencing not just our language but our reasoning, perception, and action. This kind of metaphorical thinking, that is, is central to human cognition and meaning-making.

Once we establish, then, that the basic Greek citizenship terminology maps physical presence in a physical place onto membership of a (political) community, the next question is, of course—at the cost of infinite regression—how did they conceptualise membership? Here, the very title of this volume, as well as the titles of two of its chapters,⁷ show the way: sharing in the *polis*. Kuba Filonik has well explicated in a recent essay the conceptual implications of the relevant Greek (metaphorical) expressions.⁸ *Metainai*, *metechein*, *metadidonai* of the

2 <https://politeia.unimi.it>, checked on 28 November 2025. See also Appendix to this volume.

3 E.g. Erdas 2024; Falco 2024; Faraguna 2024; 2025a; 2025b; Loddo 2024; Poddighe 2022.

4 Cf. also Blok 2025, 21–5, who argues that while modern concepts require historicisation, they can serve as useful heuristic tools when adapted critically to the ancient context.

5 E.g. Lévy 1985; Frullini 2023.

6 Lakoff, Johnson 1980. See also Lakoff 1987; Lakoff 1995.

7 Those by Filonik and Poddighe.

8 Filonik 2022; 2023. See also Filonik in this volume (Filonik also applies cognitive semantic methods, particularly Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Critical Metaphor Analysis, to trace

polis or of the *politeia* (or of its offices, its privileges, its resources) map onto the target domain of what we would call political or civic membership the source domains of having, owning something alongside others, along with others. Sharing something—the *polis*, citizenship, the constitution—as a joint possession with fellow citizens or as the possession of something that other citizens also possess alongside you (a conceptual metaphor derived from the more basic ontological metaphor that the *polis* is an object that can be divided into parts). Not only that, but being a citizen is also being (part) of the city alongside others like you, a matter of belonging to the city. And the relevant source domain, as Filonik has astutely pointed out, is not just that of ownership/property, but also, for instance, that of the banquet (*dais*), of the *symposion*, of the common messes, of the feast, whereby people have a share of food and drink alongside others like them (equally or otherwise).⁹

Lakoff and Johnson show very well, however, that complex, abstract intellectual notions (such as the political and social ones that we are exploring) are often not exhausted, in any given language or culture, by one or two conceptual metaphors or framings. They are more often approached through multiple conceptual framings, sometimes overlapping and sometimes less so.¹⁰ And it is by appreciating the implications of these multiple framings that one can get closer to an emic understanding of ancient (or even just alien) conceptualisations. One example should suffice to clarify what I mean. Consider how we speak in English (and in Italian, in fact), unthinkingly, of social hierarchy and social stratification. We do so normally through spatial metaphors: we speak of a social ladder, of a pyramid, and of different roles, dignities, ranks as being higher or lower. James Cagney's Cody Jarret, in the classic noir film *White Heat*, famously shouted: "Made it, Ma! Top of the world!". Social hierarchy, then, as up and down—everyone at a different point of some notional (metaphorical) vertical structure. But we also say, for instance, that someone who is socially successful is ahead of someone else, or got ahead. The spatial metaphor here is different and social space is conceptualised as horizontally linear—striving for social distinction is in this case a race, as it were. The implications are different and elucidate different nuances of how we conceptualise social inequality. I could provide more examples but I think the point is clear enough already.

the experiential roots of the "sharing" metaphor in sacrifice, commensality, and land ownership). See, previously, e.g., Walter 1993; Ostwald 1996.

9 Filonik 2023, 275–80. On public meals and citizenship, see fundamentally Schmitt Pantel 1992; on the Spartan *gysistia* as a criterion of citizenship, Singor 1999; on the rise of aristocratic banqueting, Węcowski 2014; on Cretan *andreia* and citizenship, Whitley 2018; Seelentag 2023. For the banquet in Homer see Sherratt 2004.

10 See also Lakoff, Johnson 1999, and Lakoff 1995, an applied case study which shows, for instance, how political thought (today) is structured by multiple family/strict-father/nurturant-parent metaphors.

In this chapter, I aim to zoom in on a further, key way in which the Greeks thought of citizenship, both linked to, and independent from, those that I have summarised so far—one that has been at the centre of much of my research in recent years. I want to concentrate on citizenship as a certain *timē* (or *axia*) from which descend certain *timai*.¹¹ I want to explore, that is, what the semantic range of these terms (as they are applied to citizenship) is, whether and to what extent metaphorical mapping can occur in their actual usage, and what the implications are.

2. Citizenship, *timē*, and *axia*

I shall not spend too much time trying to argue anew that *timē* is relevant to Greek conceptualisations of citizenship, because it is rather obvious. Aristotle explicitly states in *Politics* 3.5 that citizenship is about participating (*metechein*) of the *timai* of the city.¹² Some (e.g. Schütrumpf) have read *timai* here as a synonym of *archai*, so this would be specifically about offices,¹³ along the lines of his famous definition of citizenship at *Politics* 3.1 as the right to participate in *archē*.¹⁴ But note that while *archai* are indeed often called *timai* (in Aristotle, Herodotus, and beyond), this is not because the two terms are perfect synonyms. All *archai*, as it were, are *timai*, but not all *timai* are *archai*. And Aristotle makes clear in many other passages that when he speaks of struggles over *timē* and *timai*, he is not just talking about public offices (although he is certainly talking *also* about them).¹⁵ In *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.3 he explains, for instance, that *axia* is the standard on the basis of which different groups and individuals, within the city, lay their claims to *timē* and other goods (primarily material ones),¹⁶ and in *Politics*

11 For the approach to *timē* that I have advocated in recent years (together with Douglas Cairns and an Edinburgh project team) see e.g. Cairns 2011; 2019; Canevaro 2020; Canevaro 2025; 2026; Cairns, Canevaro, Lewis 2025; Mantzouranis 2026.

12 Arist. *Pol.* 3.5.1278a30–6: “It is evident from these considerations, therefore, that there are several kinds of citizens, and that the one who participates in the *timai* is particularly said to be a citizen, as Homer too implied when he wrote: “like some alien without *timē*”. For people who do not participate in the *timai* are like resident aliens” (tr. modified from Reeve, here and below).

13 Schütrumpf 1991b, 441. *Contra* Whitehead 1991, 139–40 (in line with what I argue here), who describes *timē* here as “a term left undefined but evidently one that encompassed all possible political prerogatives and perhaps economic and religious ones too”.

14 Arist. *Pol.* 3.1.1275b 18–20. On the meaning of *archē* in Aristotle’s definition of the citizen—whether magistracy or more broadly power/government/authority—see Schütrumpf 1991b, 389–92; Fröhlich 2016, 114–16; Maffi 2018, 36–7 with n. 5; Faraguna 2025a, 215 n. 3. On the distinction between participation in magistracies proper and the deliberative/judicial functions, see Terrel 2015, 74–5.

15 E.g. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 5.2.1130b 30–2: “One form of the justice that is a part, and of the just in this way is the one found in the allocations of *timē*, wealth, or any of the other things that are to be divided among those who share in a *politeia*” (tr. modified from Reeve, here and below).

16 Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 5.3.1131a 19–27: “Further, this is clear from its being in accord with worth; for everyone agrees that the just in allocations should be in accord with some sort of *axia*.

5.1-3 he argues that *stasis* and *metabolē politeion* occur over membership and ownership of the *politeia* when different individuals and groups have different notions of what a just distribution *kat'axian* of *timē* and material goods should amount to, based on different notions of what the correct basis of *axia* is—e.g. sheer freedom, wealth, nobility, virtue or whatever.¹⁷ The examples he provides at *Politics* 5.3 of the occasions of *stasis*, far from being all about allocation of offices, have to do with basic respect, with equal treatment in the lawcourts, with spite and contempt, with (sanctioned and unsanctioned) self-aggrandising behaviour beyond accepted norms of equality.¹⁸ When Aristotle speaks of *timē* and *timai* he is thinking, of course, of access to political deliberation, to judicial institutions, to public office, but also of wider notions of dignity and rights (including, notably, property rights, and the right to own land).¹⁹

The same emerges by looking at other evidence. *Timē* is used already in Homer and Hesiod to indicate the office (in fact, the role and status) of god or king,²⁰ and so is used consistently in Herodotus to indicate the dignity of the Persian king²¹ and in Isocrates, for instance, to indicate the status and role of the king of Salamis.²² It is also standard in Classical Athens to indicate, indeed, public offices, as in Lysias where the offices of commander of the cavalry, *stratēgos*, and ambassador are described as the greatest *timai*.²³ But it is also commonly used to indicate the basic status, role, and dignity of citizens. Demosthenes uses *timē* to indicate the overall status, the role and dignity of the Athenian citizen—presented, ideologically, as the highest attainable.²⁴ And in a number of *poleis* (Delphi, Delos, Cos, Samos, Magnesia, Massalia, Milasa,

But they are certainly not all speaking about the same sort of worth. Instead, to democrats, *axia* lies in freedom; to oligarchs, in wealth; to others, in good breeding; and to aristocrats, in virtue”.

17 See Cairns *et al.* 2022 for full discussion of this Aristotelian analysis.

18 See particularly Cairns *et al.* 2020 for these “occasions” of *stasis*.

19 For Aristotle’s conception of citizenship beyond narrow political participation, see Faraguna 2025a, 216-17, 220-6, who emphasises the tension between Aristotle’s narrow definition of the *polites* and the broader *polis*-society encompassing family, religious, and economic dimensions. For Aristotle’s treatment of property (land ownership) as intimately connected to citizenship—despite its absence from the formal definition in *Politics* 3.1—see Faraguna 2025a, 229-30 with reference to 2.6-12 and 7.9-10; also Faraguna 2024 for full treatment. See also Canevaro 2026, 27-76, 77-85 for the rights (*timai*) of citizenship in Aristotle (and beyond).

20 E.g. Hom. *Il.* 15.188-90 (the division of *timai* among Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades); *Il.* 1.278-9, 2.197, 6.193, 9.616, 20.180-1; *Od.* 1.117 (for the *timē* of kings conferred by Zeus or transmitted among *basileis*). For the *timē* of the gods in Hesiod, see Hes. *Theog. passim* for the dynamics of distribution of roles and status among divinities.

21 Cairns 2019 (for a full discussion of *timē* and kingship in Herodotus, with particular attention to the Persian king’s *timē* as status, role, and dignity entitled to deference); also Cairns 2025.

22 Isoc. 2.37.

23 Lys. 26.20.

24 E.g. Dem. 23.23-4. I analyse this passage and its implications in detail in Canevaro 2025.

Naucratis, Lebedos, Miletos, Priene, and Teos) we find the word *timouchoi* in inscriptions to indicate either particular magistrates or, simply, the citizens themselves (as shown by Giangulio).²⁵

And the connection of other cognate terms with the domain of citizenship cannot be doubted. One just needs to think of *epitimia*, to which the *Politeia* project has dedicated an excellent entry.²⁶ Being *epitimos*, i.e. being in full possession of your *timē*, meant having full legal standing, with complete rights. Demosthenes provides a vivid example in the *Against Meidias*. There, his *epitimia* is presented as something that, if Meidias had been successful in his attempt to have him convicted of desertion, he would have lost along with his city, his family, and his prospects.²⁷ Here losing *epitimia* as losing the *timē* of the citizen is the same as losing the *polis*, just as having the *timē* of the citizen is the same as *metechlein* of the *polis*.²⁸ Earlier in the same speech, Demosthenes described himself with the adjective *epitimos* to indicate that he was a full citizen, as opposed to others who were not.²⁹ The opposite concept, *atimia*, makes the point even more clearly. This was a legal penalty involving the loss or diminution of one's *timē*, and therefore the loss of some or all of the rights and prerogatives attached to that status—citizens who lose their citizen status become, significantly, *atimoi*, and the presence of *atimoi* is naturally a factor of instability for any *politeia* because *atimoi* want to have their citizen status restored at all costs—even at the cost of *stasis*.³⁰

As we have seen, Aristotle often chooses to use the term *axia*, and he uses it, effectively, as synonymous of *timē* in one of the latter's senses (i.e. the sense of the quality—the “worth”—that attracts respect), to indicate also the *timē/axia* of the citizen (or of the free).³¹ This is a use that we find also in the orators. There, the *axia* of an Athenian citizen—what they are *axioi* of—is their civic dignity.

25 Günther 1967; Giangulio 2018.

26 Appendix, s.v. *epitimos*.

27 Dem. 21.106: “I think that he has actually murdered me by these tactics... he has abused my city, my family, my *epitimia*, my hopes. If he had succeeded with just one of his plots against me, I would have been robbed of everything and would not be allowed to be buried at home” (tr. Harris, modified).

28 Cf. Aeschin. 1.160: “If any man in his youth abandoned noble ambitions for the sake of shameful pleasure, he believed that this man should not in later years be considered *epitimos*” (tr. modified from Carey).

29 Dem. 21.61: “Meidias, though only a private citizen who has spent nothing, runs into someone who happens to be an enemy, he humiliates him—a man who is spending money, serving as chorus leader, and is *epitimos*—and beats him in utter disregard for the festival, the laws, your reaction, or the god!”

30 On *atimia* within this framework see Rocchi 2022; 2025b (who stresses that *atimia* was not just applicable to citizen status, but was the loss or diminution of any *timē*, whatever that may be for any given individual, including foreigners and women; here I concentrate of course on citizens). See also Canevaro 2026, 67–76.

31 See Rabbås 2015, 633–4; Cairns, Mantzouranis forthcoming; Campeggiani forthcoming; and particularly, now, Mantzouranis 2026, 28–38.

Demosthenes argues, for instance, that introducing laws creating differential treatment between citizens is both illegal and unjust. Athens has a democratic law prohibiting *ad hominem* legislation precisely because, as each person shares equally of the *politeia* in general [that is, of democratic citizenship], this law judges each person worthy (*axios*) of having equal access to the laws.³² Sharing equally in the *politeia* is equivalent to having equal *axia*, which involves equal access to the laws. Isocrates makes a similar point when he condemns as absurd that citizens in a democratic city should not have access to the same things—the same prerogatives and rights. There is, he argues, a fundamental contradiction in judging all citizens worthy (*axioimen*) of sharing equally in public offices while simultaneously denying equal access to justice by privileging the wealthy.³³ *Axia*, like *timē*, is how the Greeks (the Athenians in this instance) conceptualised both what they really shared in being citizens of one *polis*, and why they were entitled to share it—what citizenship really amounted to.

3. Citizenship, value, and claims

I have touched upon how the Greeks conceptualised citizenship through spatial metonymies (being *of* the city) and through metaphors of sharing and possession (having a portion *alongside* others). What are, then, the implications of conceptualising citizenship in terms of *timē* and *axia*? And what does it tell us about Greek citizenship?

Both concepts are, in fact, often applied to rather more “material” contexts and dynamics than citizenship: they often have to do with the “value” of exchanged commodities.³⁴ In Homer, *timē* indicates the material worth of compensatory payments – the value in oxen of the bronze and gold offered to Odysseus by the suitors,³⁵ or what Menelaus might receive as compensation for Helen’s abduction.³⁶ Similarly, *axia* and *axios* denote equivalence in value: a cauldron worth (*axios*) one ox in the *Iliad*,³⁷ or the gold that Carthaginian merchants

32 Dem. 24.59: “This law forbids the enactment of any law that is not the same for all citizens; its provisions are good and democratic. Just as each man shares equally of the *politeia*... this law judges each person worthy (*axios*) of having equal access to the laws”.

33 Isoc. 20.20: “It would be most terrible of all if in a democratic city all people should not enjoy the same good fortune, if judged all citizens worthy (*axioimen*) of sharing equally in offices yet robbed ourselves of justice under the laws”.

34 See in particular Cairns 2019; 2025; Canevaro 2026, 27–76; Mantzouranis 2026, 9–58; Cairns, Mantzouranis forthcoming. Also Azoulay forthcoming, and already Chantraine 1977; Beekes 2010, *s.v.* *timē* and *axios*. Arguing that such domains are *more* concrete does not mean implying that the realm of (economic) exchange is not itself socially constructed – concreteness here is a matter of perception, of proximity to material experience. Cf. Cairns forthcoming and, more generally, see Graeber 2001.

35 Hom. *Od.* 22.57.

36 Hom. *Il.* 3.285–9, 458–60.

37 Hom. *Il.* 23.705.

judge equivalent (*axios*) to their cargo in Herodotus' vivid account of silent trade beyond the Pillars of Heracles.³⁸ In Classical and Hellenistic Greece, *timē* remains the standard term for price,³⁹ while the verb *timaō* means to assess value – as when Protagoras (in Plato's dialogue) invites his students to estimate (*timesai*) the worth (*axia*) of his teaching and pay accordingly.⁴⁰

This more concrete sense of the value of commodities needs to be kept in sight when we deal with *timē* and *axia* used to indicate the value of individuals. A "bridging" usage is found already in Homer, where we find the worth (*axia*) of war captives determining their ransom,⁴¹ or slaves being sold for a price corresponding to their value (*axion ōnon*)—*axia* is here not only the value of things but also that of human beings (still, as commodities).⁴² But the crucial usage is, of course, the application of this value-language to free persons in their social and civic capacities, as Homer already did when he spoke of *timē* as the honour of the *basileis* or the gods. Likewise, when the Athenians spoke of the *timē* or *axia* of the citizen—as they so often did—implicit was a conceptual similarity between the idea that a citizen is someone who has a certain "value" (and from this flow certain entitlements), and the parallel idea that commodities have a certain value.

It is, in fact, immaterial whether the use of *timē* and *axia* to indicate the "value" of individuals constitutes *a priori* a case of straightforward metaphorical mapping of the domain of economic exchange onto that of social relations. As discussed by Cairns (forthcoming), it is also, perhaps, possible that we are dealing here with terms—*timē* and *axia*—that indicate "value" across domains, without one being necessarily prior. But it is nevertheless clear that this similarity between two "kinds" of value did often give rise to such metaphorical mappings in how forms of social *timē* (e.g. citizenship) were expressed and conceptualised. The parallel realm of economic exchange was often an obvious conceptual parallel or referent.

To simplify, just as a merchant who brings goods worth a certain amount can justly claim payment of equal value, so too the person who possesses a certain *timē* or *axia* can justly claim the prerogatives—the rights—that correspond to that worth. If we conceive, that is, as e.g. Aristotle clearly does (see above), of civic membership as possessing a certain worth, then claims to political participation, legal protection, and material benefits follow as naturally as, for instance, a merchant's claim to payment. The *timai* that citizens share are not just honours or privileges (or offices, or chances of political power) granted by the community's grace, but entitlements that correspond to their worth. This is

38 Hdt. 4.196.

39 See Müller forthcoming.

40 Plat. *Prot.* 328b. For the centrality of "estimation" to the vocabulary of *timē* (and its wider ideological and institutional implications) see in particular Azoulay forthcoming.

41 Hom. *Il.* 6.46.

42 Hom. *Od.* 15.388, 429.

fundamental to the notion of value itself, and further strengthened, in usage, by the constant possibility of mapping (through conceptual metaphors) economic/exchange value onto citizenship (and other social roles), described with the very same language. Understanding this brings us closer to grasping how the Greeks experienced citizenship not just as belonging or sharing, but as a value that rightfully demanded recognition from others (and from the institutions of the city) in the form of concrete rights and protections.

This necessary correspondence between one's worth, one's value and the rights, claims entitlements, prerogatives that descend from it governs the very semantic range of the terms *timē* and *axia*. Because these terms, in different configurations, do not indicate just one's worth, but also the very rights and entitlements one can justly claim on that basis. If we take a step back and examine critically the ways in which we use the term rights—along the lines of Wesley Newcomb Hohfeld's famous taxonomy⁴³—we can easily see that both *timē* and the verbal cognate of *axia* (*axioō*) can easily cover all the relevant senses, and are in fact normally used in Greek to indicate all the nuances of how we talk about subjective rights, underscoring their tight connection with the value, the worth (we would say, today, the dignity) of the relevant subject which constitute their normative basis. I made this argument at length in a recent book, so I shall only summarise it now.⁴⁴

For Hohfeld, by right we normally understand first and foremost a claim, which consists in the fact that someone is bound to active or omissive conduct towards the holder of the claim itself. Thus my right as a claim to physical integrity, or to property, requires that no one use violence against me, or deprive me of my property. This type of right, in Athens and in many Greek *poleis*, is indeed defined as one of the *timai* of the citizen (or of the free person), and conduct contrary to this right is understood as illegitimately (illegally) disrespectful of this *timē*. The right to own land and house (*enktesis*) is conceptualised as a *timē* of the citizen protected by a number of laws, and which can be granted to others.⁴⁵ The right to physical integrity—another instance—is defended by a specific legal action for private violence which protects that *timē*,⁴⁶ and the outcome of a successful *dikē aikeias* is, in fact, *timōria*, which indicates precisely the restoration of the relevant *timē*.⁴⁷ Another Hohfeldian position is privilege (or liberty): the possibility on the part of the privilege-holder to do something,

43 Hohfeld 1919, on which see e.g. Celano 2013, 17–84 and also my reflections in Canevaro 2026, 27–32 and *passim* (also Ando *et al.* 2025).

44 Canevaro 2026 (see also Canevaro, Rocchi 2025) for full discussion and references.

45 See Canevaro 2026, 77–85, 94–9. See also Faraguna 2024 and in this volume.

46 For the *dikē aikeias* (action for assault/battery) as protection of the *timē* of free persons, see Rocchi 2025a. Our sources often connect physical integrity with the distinction between free and slave status, e.g. Dem. 8.51, 21.180, 22.55; Isoc. 20.1, 6. Being liable to physical punishment and torture, as a matter of legal procedure, was a mark of slavery: Dubois 1991.

47 See Cairns 2015 and Canevaro 2026, 85–94.

or the possibility of not doing something. Thus, for instance, my right to enjoy my (landed) property freely, without interference, is defended as the *timē* of the citizen by a private action for damages. The third position is power: the possibility, on the part of its holder, to modify another's legal position, or indeed one's own. Here the emblematic case is access to the power of the public official, or the power to speak in the Assembly, to serve as judge, to have access to the courts. In the Greek *poleis*, once again, both access to magistracies and the rights of political access were explicitly described as *timai* and, when they were suspended or revoked, this was called *atimia*.⁴⁸ The final Hohfeldian position is immunity: the impossibility, on the part of third parties, of affecting a subjective position of the holder of the immunity itself. This is the case, for example, of tax exemption (honorary, or due to excessively low income): in Athens *ateleia* (tax exemption) is indeed a *timē*, which citizens are entitled to (*e.g.* exemption from the *metoikion* or from the market tax) and which can be granted to foreigners for particular benefits.⁴⁹

The same goes, in fact, for *axia*, but here claims, rights are expressed not by the noun itself but by the corresponding verb: if *axia* expresses one's value, worth, including the citizens', *axioō* expresses claims that are founded upon that value. Every form of claim contemplated by Hohfeld can be—and indeed is—expressed in Greek by the verb *axioō*. One just needs to think, in this sense, of Demosthenes repeated use of *axioō* to claim his right to speak with *parrhēsia* in the Assembly—to tell the truth—and to be heard by his fellow citizens.⁵⁰ Similarly, in the speech *On the crown*, Demosthenes claims (*axio*) his right to be heard with impartiality and equanimity by the judges, as established by law. And this is a right explicitly affirmed in the oath that all Athenian judges must pronounce before taking office, “which in its wording [...] also provides for the obligation to listen impartially to both parties”.⁵¹ Demosthenes has the right to speak freely in the Assembly, with *parrhēsia*, and to be heard impartially by the judges in court, as an Athenian citizen. The principle is the same as that affirmed by Aristotle when he notes that, in *poleis* founded upon the principle of equality, citizens demand, claim the right (*axiousin*) to hold public offices in turn.⁵² It is a claim founded upon a title—upon citizenship, which gives them the right to serve as magistrates.

48 Again, see Rocchi 2022 on *atimia* within this framework.

49 See *e.g.* MacDowell 2004; Migeotte 2014, 102-19, 458-67; Canevaro 2016, 55-6.

50 Dem. 3.3: “I demand (*axio*: I claim the right) that you should listen to me as I speak frankly” (tr. Trevett, modified). Cf. Dem. 9.3. For *parrhēsia* see *e.g.* Filonik forthcoming (a), ch. 5, and also Momigliano 1980; Foucault 1996; Scarpato 2001; Sluiter, Rosen 2004, for standard references.

51 Dem. 18.2, also 5-6: “I demand (*axio*: I claim the right), Athenians, that if I utter some home-truths with freedom, I shall not thereby incur your displeasure” (tr. Yunis, modified) and 2 for the reference to the oath.

52 Arist. *Pol.* 3.6.1279a 8-10: “That is why, in the case of political offices too, where they have been set up in accord with the equality of the citizens and their similarity, the citizens claim

4. The debate about Greek citizenship ... from the point of view of *timē*

Now that I have established how the Greeks conceptualized citizenship (also as a form of *timē* as worth/value (with the entitlements that descended from it), I want to turn to examining what difference this emic understanding makes in light of current scholarly debates about the nature of Greek citizenship.⁵³ Taking seriously the real semantic range of *timē* as “value”, with the (economic) conceptual metaphors it gives rise to—as well as its implications for how rights, duties, and social standing were understood as flowing from one’s worth—offers, I believe, a way to bridge what have often appeared as competing or incompatible approaches in modern scholarship.

Let us consider the current, widespread scholarly emphasis on the performative dimensions of Greek citizenship—particularly prominent in studies of the Archaic period but increasingly recognised as decisive throughout the history of the *polis*.⁵⁴ This has often been framed as a perspective alternative and even incompatible with more traditional approaches to Greek citizenship as made up of (political) rights and prerogatives.⁵⁵ The fact is, however, that if we keep our focus on citizenship as *timē*, we can easily see that—in Greek emic conceptualisations—the performative aspects and requirements of citizenship find their conceptual grounding in the very same notion that underpins citizenship as access to legal and political rights: *timē* itself. Because, far from being a static attribute conferred once and for all by birth or legal status, *timē* (as one’s worth) was inherently dynamic and performative, requiring constant enactment and validation through social behaviour.⁵⁶

This performative quality stems from the fundamentally intersubjective nature of *timē*. As a form of socially recognised worth, *timē* exists only in relation to others, in their valuations in dialogue with our own—it must be acknowledged

the right (*axiousin*) to rule in turns”.

53 Filonik *et al.* 2023, 7-8 as well as Cecchet, Lasagni 2025, 7-11 provide useful surveys of recent methodological shifts in the study of Greek citizenship, noting the move away from nineteenth-century legalistic approaches (*e.g.* Szántó 1892) toward recognition of the performative, religious, and network-based dimensions of citizenship.

54 See *e.g.* Duploux 2018a; Duploux 2018b; Duploux 2019; Giangiulio 2017.

55 *Contra*, on the relationship between performative and institutionalist approaches to citizenship, Faraguna 2025a, 235-7, who argues that these are not incompatible but “complementari e strettamente solidali” (226). Blok 2025, 27-8 also provides a critical assessment of the performative approach (yet from a different perspective, centred on overlapping memberships and religious participation). She argues that, while performance was important for the assessment of individual citizens’ integrity, it alone cannot provide the “stable conception of membership” that is essential to citizenship as a formal institution. She contends that even in the Archaic period, ritualised customs (phratry membership, commensality, etc.) provided institutional anchors for citizenship beyond mere performance.

56 Cf. Canevaro 2025, 96-9 and *passim*; 2026, 111-30.

and respected within the community. The worth of a citizen, with all its attendant prerogatives, stands in constant dialogue with the worth and claims of others. This bidirectional character means that maintaining one's *timē* requires not just asserting one's own rights and prerogatives, but also recognizing and respecting those of fellow citizens and behaving in accordance with widely recognised and upheld social norms of honourable behaviour.⁵⁷

The implications of this are profound. While the *timai* of citizenship—access to the Assembly, participation in the courts, eligibility for office, sharing in religious rituals—might be acquired by birth, their continued possession depended on honourable conduct. The most vivid illustration of this principle is found in Aeschines' *Against Timarchus*, where certain forms of dishonourable behaviour are shown to disqualify citizens from the *timai* to which birth would normally entitle them. Athenian law, in fact, specified numerous dishonourable acts that resulted in *atimia*—the loss of one's *timē* and of all or certain attendant *timai*.⁵⁸

Understanding citizenship as *timē* thus reveals why performative approaches to Greek citizenship capture something essential: citizens had continuously to perform their worth through appropriate behaviour *to be citizens*. The kinds of social performance that scholars have identified as central to citizenship—from elite display in the Archaic period to a certain decorum, religious conduct, and democratic participation in Classical Athens and in the Hellenistic *polis*—were not merely expressions of citizen status but constitutive of it. One remained a citizen, possessed of citizen *timē*, only by acting as one who continuously deserved that worth. But, by the same token, that worth was not exhausted in the performance itself—the performance confirmed and lived up to one's worth as defined by law, by birth, by legitimacy and so on. Performance and legal and political status, behaviour, and dignity/rights were inextricably linked through the conceptual framework of *timē*. They were conceptually and practically linked precisely because they were conceptualised within that framework.

A further major strand in current scholarship on Greek citizenship—which emphasises religious membership and participation in multiple interlocking social networks—likewise can be reintegrated with the other focuses through the lens of *timē*.⁵⁹ Scholars who resist overly political definitions of citizenship have pointed to the centrality of religious participation and the multiplicity of social spheres and networks in which the ancient Greeks enacted their civic identity.⁶⁰

57 Cairns 2019, 75-7; Canevaro 2025, 91-3; Cairns *et al.* 2025, 13-17 (also Scodel 2008). Also, already, Pitt-Rivers 1965, 21 (yet within a vastly different framework). Cairns' and Canevaro's approach builds here particularly on Goffman 1967.

58 See in general Fisher 2001, and Rocchi 2022, 52-5, 145-8 for *atimia* in this speech.

59 As Blok 2017 (also 2025, esp. 32-5) does explicitly, by stressing the centrality of *timē*, which she understands as an institution, to Athenian and Greek citizenship while refocusing her account on religious membership and participation (beyond the adult male citizen body).

60 I cite here, as a sample of prominent examples of both focuses, Taylor, Vlassopoulos 2015; Blok 2017; 2025; Sebillotte Cuchet 2017; Ismard 2010; Gottesman 2014; Steinhauer 2014.

What the concept of *timē* reveals, however, is that these apparently diverse domains were not perceived by the Greeks as fundamentally different types of sociality, membership, civic agency, but rather as manifestations of the same underlying dynamic of worth and its recognition.

Timē in fact operated as a transversal concept that could indicate claims, rights, and prerogatives across all spheres of social life—political, legal, familial, religious, and economic.⁶¹ This conceptual flexibility was not accidental but reflected the very pluralism of its fundamental meaning of “value”—and of the conceptual metaphors that originated from it. Just as worth/value in exchange contexts could apply to different types of goods and transactions, so too could civic worth manifest in different social contexts while remaining fundamentally the same phenomenon. Citizens’ *timē* entitled them to participate in religious festivals, hold priesthoods, join in sacrifices, and share in the sacred meals of the community. These religious *timai* were not categorically different from political ones—they flowed from the same source of recognised worth.

This continuity across spheres becomes particularly clear when we consider exclusion. Being barred from religious participation, from family rituals, from land property, from economic transactions, or from social networks was experienced through the same conceptual framework as political exclusion. In each case, it represented a denial of one’s *timē*, a form of institutionalised disrespect that was demeaning to one’s worth. The term *atimia* itself, which we tend to translate narrowly as loss of citizen rights, could in fact apply to disabilities in any of these spheres.⁶² This linguistic fact reveals that, for Greek speakers, exclusion from a cult, denial of commercial privileges, or social ostracism were not merely analogous to political disenfranchisement—they were manifestations of the same fundamental phenomenon of having one’s worth denied or diminished.

The multiple networks and identities that recent scholarship has emphasised—membership in phratries, demes, religious associations, professional groups, and social clubs—thus appear not as alternatives to political citizenship but as complementary expressions of the same civic *timē*. Citizens’ worth manifested in their recognised right to share in all these interlocking spheres, each with its own specific *timai* that nonetheless derived from the same fundamental

For critical assessments of Blok’s argument that religious participation, rather than political rights, constituted the primary marker of citizenship, see Faraguna 2025b about Archaic citizenship and Faraguna 2025a, 232–5, where he argues that for Aristotle, religious functions were “incorporat[e] nella—e subordinat[e] alla” political sphere (234), and that Aristotle’s relative silence on religious dimensions reflects his view that cult participation was integrated within political *archē* rather than constituting a separate criterion of membership.

61 For *timē* as relevant to different social contexts, different spheres of sociality, and different normative systems, see Canevaro 2018b, 121–2; Cairns *et al.* 2025, 8 with n. 31 (relying on Goffman 1967; Bourdieu 1977; Origgi 2018).

62 This is one of the key findings of Rocchi 2022 (also 2025a).

timē/axia. The apparent logical and conceptual continuity between realms that puzzles modern observers, accustomed to sharp distinctions between political, religious, and social spheres, was natural for the Greeks, who understood all these memberships as flowing from their recognised worth as citizens. This understanding helps explain why ancient sources move so fluidly between different types of civic participation (one just needs to think of Euxitheus in Demosthenes *Against Eubulides* [57] jumping around between city-level offices, familial relations, religious engagement, deme-level activity, and generic conduct to prove that he is a citizen!).⁶³ Seen through the lens of *timē*, these were not separate categories requiring different theoretical frameworks, but varied expressions of the same fundamental relationship between one's social worth, social recognition for that worth, and entitlement that defined what it meant to function socially, within the *polis*.

5. The paradox of Greek citizenship: political participation and citizen gradations?

If my analysis thus far holds water, we are left with something of a paradox. The conceptual metonymies, metaphors and framings that shaped Greek understandings of citizenship—spatial belonging, shared possession, and worth/value—do not necessarily entail an in/out binary—citizenship without gradation—, yet such a binary is what we find, by and large, in the evidence for Greek conceptions of citizenship. And they do not inherently privilege political participation or governmental authority. Yet political participation and governmental authority loom very large in ancient discussions of citizenship.⁶⁴

Let me explain what I mean more clearly. The first part of the paradox that I am trying to thematise has to do with citizenship as a binary, in/out category which does not admit of gradation. This is also *prima facie* puzzling, given citizenship's conceptualisation as a form of *timē*. Because, as a matter of fact, *timē*, as value, naturally admits of gradations (and so, really, does “sharing”). People can possess (or share in) different levels of worth, both informally and, more significantly for our purposes, institutionally. Such variations in *timē* entail different packages of *timai*: distinct sets of rights and prerogatives, as we see with metics, *xenoi*, and various non-citizen categories.⁶⁵ Yet Greek citizenship itself,

63 See Loddo, Poddighe 2022 for what is now the best discussion of this speech (this is also the speech from which the analysis of Blok 2017 moves).

64 Metaphorical mapping is, in fact, one of the mechanisms that shape prototype effects, which in turn govern how we construct and understand concepts and categories. For psychological confirmation of prototype theory through empirical survey experiments, see Rosch 1975; Rosch & Mervis 1975.

65 See Canevaro 2025, 99-100; 2026, 72-4 (cf. Finley 1981, 148-9).

as crystallised by the Classical period and described then in Aristotle,⁶⁶ appears to emerge as a category which resists to gradation. As George Lakoff observed about categorical structures, some categories lack gradations of membership, whereas others are graded. The category U.S. Senator is clearly defined, in that one either is a senator or is not.⁶⁷ Being a citizen of a Greek *polis*, in the standard conceptualisation expounded by so much scholarship, is a bit like being a US Senator: either one is a citizen, or one is not.⁶⁸

The second part of the paradox has to do with the centrality of political and judicial participation. As I have explained, *timē* as “worth” underpinning *timai* (as rights, prerogatives, spheres of agency) can apply (and does apply) across all domains of social activity—religious, associative (*i.e.* networks, private associations, subdivisions), economic, informal—not merely to political rights of participation in communal decision-making. All these spheres involve questions of *timē* and *timai*. Yet, despite the conceptual openness of the metonymies, metaphors, and framings underlying citizenship, there is also little denying, as far as I am concerned, that the right (*timē*) of access to political and judicial decision and to political office loomed very large—largest than any other consideration, as far as we can tell from our sources—in the Greeks’ considerations about, and struggles over, citizenship. This is true from the very early (Archaic) evidence, as shown recently in methodologically different yet ultimately complementary contributions by Giangiulio and Faraguna. Giangiulio has shown, in particular, that what have often been interpreted by historians as Archaic “oligarchies of fixed number” (such as in Colophon, Aeolian Cyme, Croton, Locri, Rhegium, Opous, Massalia) are in fact “entire” citizen bodies, in formation.⁶⁹ The delimitation of who the insiders (and the outsiders) are included various spheres of participation, yet political and judicial participation were absolutely central to the definition of these “early” citizens—citizens were, already at such an early stage, those who (among other things, certainly) had access to political and judicial decision, and office. And Faraguna has shown with plenty of evidence and a recourse to categories of (progressive) institutionalisation that defining who belongs to the community in terms of who can participate in its political

66 For analysis of the tensions and aporias in Aristotle’s discussion of citizenship in *Politics* 3, including the “carattere aporetico” of the investigation and the shifting definitions, see Faraguna 2025a, 217–20 and *passim*.

67 Lakoff 1987 (see also Lewis 2025 for such categorical structures applied to Greek slavery). For the application of Lakoff’s work on categorisation to Greek social statuses, including the distinction between “classic” checklist definitions and prototypical approaches, see Lewis 2025, 40–44.

68 Poddighe tackles in her chapter in this volume precisely this issue: how Aristotle strives to accommodate degrees of citizenship within his theoretical framework. Cf. also Faraguna 2025a, 219–20.

69 Giangiulio 2018.

and judicial institutions is the primary concern of Archaic *polis* inscriptions.⁷⁰ As for the Classical period, here I declare myself squarely on the side of those like Pierre Fröhlich, John Ma, and Michele Faraguna who have striven to defend the poignancy of Aristotle's definition of citizenship, as an accurate outline of what were in his time the priorities, or at the very least the red lines, which made a citizen *truly* a citizen.⁷¹ This does not mean that Classical Greek citizenship was *solely* about political and judicial participation. But these historians have shown, as far as I am concerned, that any attempt to sideline political and judicial participation and make it into an inessential, lateral feature of Greek citizenship runs into intractable problems and is contradicted by too much of the evidence.

All this, however, presents us with a genuine historical question requiring causal explanation, and here I can only gesture in the general direction of such an explanation. If we agree, that is, as I think we should, that none of the key conceptual metonymies, metaphors and framings underlying Greek citizenship—not the spatial one of the inhabitant of the city as place (*astos*, *polites*), not that of sharing with others, of having something alongside others, not even that of citizenship as value, as worth which creates entitlements—have any particularly prominent link with the issue of political power and participation; and if we also agree, as, again, I think we should, that political power and participation were in fact central to what it was (believed to be) to be a citizen, then we are left with the question of how sharing in a certain *timē* and in certain *timai*, by virtue of belonging to a community centred on a place, came to be understood so as to include, so quintessentially, necessarily, sharing in political power.

It is, in fact, not obvious that it should. The issues of citizenship and of direct political power and participation are both very important in many societies, but they are not normally conflated into one—they remain distinct concerns. Consider debates and struggles over citizenship in our day: they have to do with rights of residence, with legal rights, with certain economic perks, with access to welfare and to particular privileges. Yes, voting is part of it, but it certainly is not the key issue—all the more now that there is widespread disillusionment with the democratic process and people widely believe that (political) power resides elsewhere, far away from elections and citizen political engagement.⁷² There are struggles over political power, for sure, and they are important, but these are

70 Faraguna 2025b.

71 Fröhlich 2016; Ma 2024; Faraguna 2025a; Faraguna 2025b. *Contra*, most recently, Blok 2025, 30 n. 35, who states that “Aristotle’s philosophical definition of the citizen as someone entitled to holding political and judicial office (*Pol.* 1275a22-24; 1275b18-22)” was “recently defended by Fröhlich 2016 as historically correct, despite the evidence to the contrary”. She argues (as she did in Blok 2017) that equality and political rights are not inherent to citizenship across the historical board.

72 The introduction to Filonik *et al.* 2023 (1-2) dwells usefully on the different meanings of citizenship in antiquity and modernity, and discusses the current focus(es) in studies of modern citizenship.

very much not the same as struggles over (and for) citizenship. Or think about Rome: in Rome, citizenship was all important but, first, it very much came in degrees; second, it was certainly not identified with the right of access to political and judicial decision and to office (and deemed valuable because of these).⁷³ Rather, it centred on legal rights, property protections, economic advantages—features that have led scholars such as Benjamin Straumann and Dan Edelstein to draw parallels with notions of “negative rights” in classical liberalism.⁷⁴

Greek citizenship developed differently. Despite the open-ended nature of its conceptual foundations, it crystallised around a notion of membership in the community which did not admit of degrees and *had to* include political power and participation: either you were in and shared in government, or you were out. This is the notion of Greek citizenship which is omnipresent in our sources, well beyond Aristotle, and which stresses the centrality of access to political decision-making and to public offices.⁷⁵

This notion is central—omnipresent—despite being very hard to apply effectively to oligarchic (and more generally timocratic, rank-based) regimes.⁷⁶ This conceptual difficulty emerges strikingly in the *Rhetoric to Alexander*, probably written by Anaximenes of Lampsacus. There, in discussing how oligarchies should protect the masses from elite abuse, the author argues that “in oligarchies there should be the greatest penalties laid down against those attempting to commit *hybris* against certain of the citizens [*hoi politai*]: for the masses [*to plēthos*] are not so aggrieved at being denied the magistracies [*hai archai*] as they resent being mistreated”. The masses, *to plēthos*, are here unambiguously numbered among the *politai*. Yet elsewhere, when discussing how oligarchic laws should restrain elite misconduct, the same author states that “the laws ought to deter those partaking of the constitution [*tous tēs politeias metechontas*] from committing *hybris* against those weaker than themselves”.⁷⁷ Here it is the oligarchs alone who partake of the *politeia*, while the *dēmos*—the “weaker”—apparently do not. Somehow, members of the *dēmos* under an oligarchy can simultaneously

73 There is even a debate on whether, in Rome, it is only Roman senators, really, who should be considered citizens proper, in the Greek sense (following Aristotelian categories), as the role of Roman assemblies, in terms of citizen political participation, was so very limited. See e.g. Gauthier 1974; 1981; Jakobson 1999; Millar 2002, 2005; Tatum 2009; Filonik *et al.* 2023, 4–5; Sehlmeier 2023.

74 Edelstein, Straumann 2022; Edelstein, Straumann 2023; Straumann 2025.

75 Faraguna 2025a, 231–2 specifically addresses the issue of whether Aristotle’s definition is merely formalistic or reflects lived experience, concluding that the political definition “rispondeva ad una visione della realtà che questi attingeva direttamente dal mondo in cui viveva” (235).

76 See also Simonton in this volume, who admits that Aristotle’s definition reflected widespread realities, while noting also that the connection of citizenship and political power was problematic in oligarchies.

77 [Arist.] *Rhet. ad Alex.* 2.19–20 Fuhrmann. See also Simonton in this volume, about this passage.

be *politai* and yet not *metechein* of the *politeia*. The problem is that the author seems to have here no coherent—standard—vocabulary to describe gradations within citizenship, because the dominant conceptual framework resists such gradations. And, moreover, that he appears to have some difficulty truly considering those who do not yield political power as citizens “partaking of the constitution”...

We find similar issues when the standard framework of Greek citizenship needs to be applied to actually existing oligarchies.⁷⁸ How could it apply fully, for example, to the oligarchic *koinon* that ruled Boeotia from the mid-fifth to the early fourth century BCE, where each city had four councils as its main decision-making body, “in which it was not possible for all the citizens [*politai*] to participate [*metechein*], but only those who possessed a certain amount of property [*plēthos ti chrēmātōn*]”?⁷⁹ Here *politai* are explicitly (also) those who cannot participate in political decision-making. Or in what sense could it apply to Cyrene under Ptolemy I’s *diagramma* of 320? There the *politai* of Cyrene are defined by descent: those born of a citizen mother and citizen father. The *politeuma*, however—the body with access to authoritative magistracies—is an entirely different group, delimited by a property qualification (*timēma*). Moreover, those among the Ten Thousand of the *politeuma* who “perform for the city the duties of doctor or gymnastics instructor, or teach archery, riding, or fighting in heavy armour, or serve as herald in the *prytaneion*... shall not have access to the magistracies of the Ten Thousand”. And yet they are explicitly said to belong to the *politeuma*. These are clearly high-profile, well-paid positions which allow their holders to qualify for the *politeuma* on the basis of their wealth, yet they are occupations in which one constantly works for others, is employed by others—even if by the city. These are, that is, essentially jobs and, as a result, they attract the ideological taint of *banauistic* work. So their holders, while making the cut for the *politeuma*, cannot reap the full benefits in terms of citizen rights and entitlements. Are they citizens, then? In what sense? The *diagramma* effectively describes gradations of citizenship, yet in a rather confused manner, in the absence of a convenient framework (more similar for instance to the Roman one) to accommodate them organically.⁸⁰

Aristotle’s (rather confused) taxonomy of oligarchic forms in *Politics* 4.5–6 (1292a39–1293a34) displays similar problems, as it is in fact very much concerned with issues of (oligarchic) gradation. In his account, what distinguishes oligarchic forms is precisely the level of internal stratification within the oligarchic *politeuma*.⁸¹ The first “kind” of oligarchy is one in which access to the

78 See e.g. the remarks of Rhodes 2023a, 38–9.

79 *Hell. Oxy.* 19.2 (tr. Chambers), with Simonton 2017, 39, 80–3.

80 *SEG* 9.1 (IGC_{jr} 010800) lines 2–15 and 43–5, on which see Bencivenni 2003, nr. 5 and Rosamilia 2023b, 233–40 and *passim* (with full previous references).

81 For Aristotle’s discussion of types of oligarchy see Ostwald 2000, 31–77; Caire 2016, 59–90 (also on other fourth-century taxonomies).

archai (described also as *timai*) is restricted *apo timēmatōn*, so that *hoi aporoi* do not have access while the men of substance do—all of them (5.1292a 39–41). The second kind appears to be characterised by an even higher census for access to the main offices, from which part of the wealthy citizens are now excluded. At the same time, some “remaining offices” appear to be selected by these very people of higher census either among all (presumably all citizens, as in, all the men of substance—those who make a lower cut) or from a specific subgroup of these (1292a 41–b 4). What we see here seems to be a form of co-optation by which a super-elite raises certain members of a lower elite to higher office. A third kind of oligarchy is characterised, in addition to a very high census (and to an even higher concentration of wealth), by the fact that *timai* and *archai* are passed on from father to son (1292b 4–5)—here we have a hyper-exclusive super-elite which effectively produces a *serrata* not only against the masses (as in all kinds of oligarchy) but against the wider elite of the generally wealthy members of the *politeuma*. (The fourth kind of oligarchy occurs when even the pretence of legality is abandoned, 1292b 5–10).⁸² Faced with such oligarchic constitutional confusion, it is then no surprise that Aristotle’s discussion of the *politeuma* (as the politically active segment of the citizen body) and of the problem of the *archomenos politēs* in book 3 of the *Politics* brings this tension—between widespread notions of what Greek citizenship really is (*i.e.* access to decisions and office) and its defective (graded) articulations in non-democratic regimes—to the fore.⁸³ Whatever his attempts to hold tight to a standard understanding of Greek citizenship while making room for nuances and *aporiai*, it is extremely significant that in *Politics* 7, when Aristotle delineates prescriptively what the “*polis* of our wishes”—the ideal city—should look like, his preference is to cut this Gordian knot altogether by having only the leisured and virtuous (that is, the wealthy) be citizens at all—with full membership and full rights of political participation—while everyone else is reduced to the status of slave.⁸⁴ There is no room in his ideal *polis* for “passive” citizens, who are citizens, perhaps, but somehow do not rule and are only ruled.

82 For a discussion of this passage with previous bibliography see Besso *et al.* 2014: 214–18, as well as 228–30 on 6.1293a 12–34, whose types of oligarchy map onto those of 5.1292a 39–b 10 (albeit with a stronger focus on socioeconomic motives and differentiations behind the different forms).

83 See esp. Faraguna 2025a, 219–20 on Aristotle’s gradations of citizenship and the category of *archomenos politēs* (as “passive citizen”) who possesses certain rights but lacks full political participation—Faraguna speaks of a “zona grigia” between full and non-citizenship. See further, on the *archomenos politēs*, Mossé 1979; Gallo 2004; Simonton 2017, 37–40. Also Faraguna 2025a, 221 on the notion of *politeuma* as the politically active segment of the citizen body—the “zona grigia” is composed of citizens who are legally members but excluded from political participation. See further Maffi 2018, 36–8; Lévy 1980, 237–40.

84 Arist. *Pol.* 7.9.1329a 17–26; 10.1329b 36–38; and more generally 7.8–10, with the commentary in Bertelli *et al.* 2022, *ad loc.*

My tentative explanation of this tension refrains from disqualifying Aristotle's definition as idiosyncratic—because it has been shown that it is clearly not—and requires us, instead, to take a key observation that he makes more seriously than we have usually done. At *Politics* 3.1.1275b 5-7, immediately following his famous definition of citizenship, Aristotle remarks that “the citizen of whom we spoke above is first and foremost a citizen in a democracy”. Aristotle is not here merely acknowledging the limitations of his definition. He has, in fact, been adamant that he is extracting his definition from widely held *endoxa*...⁸⁵ He is signalling, rather, something that is, for us, very historically significant: that the fundamental understanding (i.e. the prototype as “best example”) of what a citizen is in his day (and before his day, in the authors and cities that he reviews for relevant *endoxa*)—of the kind of *time* that it entails, and of what *timai* one shares in by virtue of that *time*—is essentially democratic.⁸⁶

The implication, that is, is that democratic notions, which naturally (for democracy) but idiosyncratically (for other regimes) consider political power and participation among the citizen's most essential *timai*, were in the Classical period (and certainly by the second half of the fourth century BCE) hegemonic. They were, in fact, hegemonic to such an extent that even non-democratic regimes (which might have benefited from more “Roman” notions of graded citizenship) and thinkers imagining non-democratic ideal polities (such as Plato and Aristotle himself) found themselves constrained by this democratic conceptual framework.⁸⁷ How did this come about? Two related historical developments, I suspect, converged to produce this outcome.

The first has to do with the reactive, indeed reactionary, nature of Classical oligarchic regimes. As Simonton has convincingly shown, Greek oligarchies in their Classical form emerged as reactions to the spread of democracy—they were, from the outset, fighting democracy, as it were, on democracy's terms.⁸⁸ This meant that oligarchies inherited democratic notions of citizenship—within which they moved, adapting them and contesting them—without ever fully, organically, developing their own. In practice, many oligarchies did have grades

85 For Aristotle's method in the *Politics* see now Bertelli 2025 (see Borçin 2004, 201-3 for other positions, and Natali 2017 on the method in Aristotle's two *Ethics*).

86 Cf. Filonik 2023, 275 for the democratic, Athenian subtext of the language of sharing.

87 In cognitive semantic terms, the democratic model of citizenship had become prototypical (in the sense of Lakoff 1987 and Rosch 1975; Rosch, Mervis 1975): because of its growing hegemony, it came to function as the “best example” of the category, exercising a prototype effect on how Greeks conceptualised citizenship. Other forms of citizenship (oligarchic, timocratic) remained within the category through family resemblance to the democratic prototype, but were structured radially around it and, at times, were perceived by some as so peripheral that their very “citizenshipness” was questioned, measured against the prototypical democratic model. For the application of prototype theory to Greek social categories, see now also Lewis 2025, 40-4 (on slavery).

88 Simonton 2017.

of citizenship: all citizens by descent, for instance, but only the wealthy having access to decision and office. Yet this was not grounded in a principled view that one need not be politically active to be a citizen. Oligarchs tolerated, and even peddled, confused notions of “passive” citizens for pragmatic reasons: because there were many people who would be incensed if told they were not (or no longer) citizens under that regime. The result was not a pacified, consensual arrangement but a compromise solution which neither party ever fully accepted. Many a “passive” citizen believed that really, *qua* citizen, he too should rule and not merely be ruled—hence the notorious brittleness of oligarchic regimes, also stressed by Simonton. And the oligarchs, for their part, often did not truly believe that these people were really citizens at all—which is why Aristotle, in his ideal city, simply dispenses with the fiction. Oligarchies, in short, piggy-backed on democratic tenets even as they countered them; they operated within the conceptual horizon that democracy was establishing, without ever offering a genuine alternative.⁸⁹

The second development is what John Ma has influentially called the “Great Convergence”: the widespread adoption of democratic institutions across the Greek world by the second half of the fourth century (but arguably beginning much earlier).⁹⁰ By the time of Aristotle, this convergence had crowded out even the potential for alternative, non-democratic conceptualisations of citizenship.⁹¹ Democratic assumptions about what citizenship meant—that it entailed sharing in rule—had become so pervasive that they shaped the ideological landscape in which any theorist, including Aristotle himself, had to work. Non-democratic regimes and thinkers imagining non-democratic ideal polities found themselves ever more constrained by a hegemonic framework they could not escape. They had to work within the ill-fitting straitjacket of citizenship as formulated by democrats and for democrats. By regimes, that is, holding that socioeconomic resources and background should be irrelevant as criteria for citizenship, and that all citizens (should) possess equal *timē qua* citizens, with identical attendant *timai*, including rights (as powers) of access to judicial and political decision-making and to wield power as officials.

89 I also argue for oligarchy’s institutional and ideological “indeterminacy”, apart from the key underlying spite, hatred for the working classes, in Canevaro forthcoming (c).

90 See Ma 2018; 2024, 203–28 and *passim*.

91 And concrete examples of these were confined to the radial periphery of the category, their membership dependent on family resemblance with the democratic prototype, with no chance of rising to the status of “best example”, of prototype, themselves. See above, n. 87.