

# The Urban/Rural Divide in Athenian Political Thought

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**C**ontemporary analyses of Athenian democracy have focused on binaries such as mass/elite, free/slave, and male/female, overlooking the urban/rural divide. In this article, I argue that urban/rural was a central cleavage in the Athenian demos. Ancient thinkers including Thucydides, Aristophanes, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle paid close attention to urban/rural differences and their consequences during the fifth century. Plato and Aristotle in particular developed sophisticated institutions and strategies to mitigate urban/rural divisions. Attending to the Athenian urban/rural divide deepens our understanding of the demos and highlights the importance of attachments to place, home, and customary ways of life for democratic stability.


**T**he Spartan army faced little resistance when it marched into Attica in 431 BCE. Instead of fighting for their lands, the farmers of Athens gathered whatever valuables and food they could carry, abandoned their ancestral homes, and trudged to the city center. Pericles had persuaded the assembly not to face the invading Spartans in battle but to evacuate the countryside and shelter Athens's rural citizens inside the city's towering walls. The Spartans would ravage the countryside, but the city of Athens—and its maritime empire—would be safe. When they arrived in Athens, most rural refugees had nowhere to stay; Thucydides tells us that many squatted in temples or built unsanitary shanties anywhere they could (II.17).<sup>1</sup>

Any reader of Thucydides is struck by the power of his account of the evacuations and is touched by the deep distress rural Athenians felt when abandoning their ancestral homes for the city. Thucydides's vivid description has led some to suggest that he viewed the evacuation of Attica as a momentous political event and a pivotal episode in Athenian history (Foster 2010, 181). Yet political theorists have not fully explored the significance of this moment and its context—a period when political burdens fell squarely on rural people—for our understanding of Thucydides's narrative and Athenian democracy itself.

Because democratic theory has its roots in Athens, political theorists have looked to the contours of Athenian politics to explore the theoretical importance of various divisions in the demos. Foundational treatments of ancient political thought have generally focused on the rich/poor or mass/elite divisions in the demos (Ober 1989; Rancière

1999; Wolin 2016), whereas other important studies have explored gender relations (Loraux 1993; Pritchard 2014; Saxonhouse 1984) and the citizen/metic (Kasimis 2018) and freeman/slave (Ismard 2017) distinctions. Yet significantly less attention has been paid to the urban/rural divide in Athens despite its important role in many of the crises of Athenian democracy and the deep concern with which thinkers such as Thucydides, Aristophanes, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle treated it. Although there has been important historical work on rural life in Athens (Driskill 2013; Hanson 1998; Jones 2004; Ober 1989, 136–7; Strauss 1986, 59–60), political theorists have been slow to draw out the theoretical implications of the Athenian urban/rural divide for ancient political thought and democratic theory. Most scholarship on ancient democratic theory focuses on the politics of the city (*asty*) rather than on those living in the countryside (*chōra*), who constituted the majority of citizens (II.16.1).<sup>2</sup>

In this article, I argue that the urban/rural divide was a central fissure in Athenian democracy and an important concern of political thinkers during and after the Peloponnesian War. The urban/rural divide lurked beneath some of the most distinctive features of classical Athens, like assembly politics, naval imperialism, constitutional instability, and oligarchic coups. If we attend to the ways the urban/rural divide manifested in Athenian history, comedy, and philosophy, a different Athens emerges, one that contrasts with the stereotypical characterizations we find in canonical sources like Pericles's funeral oration or Socrates's descriptions of the assembly. This rural (*agroikos*) Athens was less dynamic, less commercial, less cosmopolitan, and less democratic than the impression we receive if we take the mostly urban (*asteios*) assembly to be representative of the Athenian demos. In fact, particularly in literary portrayals from Aristophanes, we find that rural Athenians saw their traditional way of life erode over the fifth century and often felt victimized, mocked, and unfairly treated by urbanites and by the political and economic forces they saw as fundamentally changing Athenian society.

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<sup>1</sup> Parenthetical citations refer to passages in the Mynott translation of *Thucydides: The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians* (2013). When indicated, other parenthetical citations refer to passages in Andocides (1960), Aristophanes (1923; 1998a; 1998b; 2003; 2007), Aristotle (1998; 2002), Herodotus (2009), Old Oligarch (1925), Plato (1997), and Xenophon (1925; 2001).

<sup>2</sup> The perspective of rural Athenians has emerged in specific contexts like Thucydides and Aristophanes scholarship, e.g., Forde (1989), Ludwig (2002; 2007).

I begin with a discussion of who counts as a “rural Athenian” and then offer a brief history of the challenges and changes they faced over the course of the fifth century, setting up a tension between agrarian Athenians and their imperial counterparts. Against the view that the Athenian demos was unified in the pursuit of naval empire, I argue that there was considerable uneasiness about the empire among rural citizens. Rural Athenians found themselves on the losing end of Athens’s transformation from a localist agrarian society in which they held an honored political, social, and military role into a centralized imperial democracy in which urbanites had coopted their traditional role. Contrasting the agrarian and imperial visions of Athens clarifies the ideals motivating pivotal events of the war and postwar political thinking.

Next, I analyze Thucydides’s account of the decline of Athenian attachment to rural Attica and the important role it played in the war, particularly in the rise of pleonexia, the Sicilian Expedition, and the coups of 411. Thucydides links pleonexia to Pericles’s intentional attenuation of the Athenians’ attachments to their lands, which made them less able to see the distinction between their own belongings and the belongings of others. This is borne out in the Sicilian debates, where Thucydides connects the decision to invade the faraway island of Sicily to a diminished attachment to the land of Attica. I also argue that the oligarchic coups of 411 were made possible by fluctuations in the composition of the participating demos in Athens resulting from the collision of urban and rural Athenians during the Deceleian War. The unique composition of the assembly in 411, which overrepresented rural citizens and underrepresented urbanites, provided an opportunity for oligarchs and hoplites to disempower the mostly urban *thētes*.

Finally, I discuss postwar political philosophers’ responses to the urban/rural divide and its challenges. Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle considered it an important fissure in the citizenry that needed to be carefully managed and developed strategies to mitigate urban/rural tensions in both ideal and nonideal settings. These thinkers stressed the importance of defending the countryside—the critical issue among rural Athenians during the Peloponnesian War—and emphasized the rural economy as a way to render overseas empire less necessary. They also explored the strict separation of rural people from urban spaces and designed institutions to homogenize the citizenry and erase the urban/rural divide entirely. I conclude by arguing that the urban/rural divide in Athens complicates our view of the demos and highlights the importance of attachments for the stability of democracy. Thinking with urban/rural categories can help us recognize important political challenges arising from attachments to place, home, and customary ways of life that are not captured by other analytical frames such as class, citizenship, or gender.

## Defining Rural Athenians

Who counts as a “rural” Athenian? Attempts to make a precise definition of rurality in the Athenian context

often break down. One attempt might consider geography, holding the walls of Athens, as Jones (2004, 8) does, to mark a “formidable social and cultural divide.” But this physical divide was not absolute, for there was small-scale farming inside the walls of Athens (Hanson 1998, 80n3) and there were extramural industries like stone-working, mining, fishing, logging, and charcoal-burning. A second attempt might refer to people who expressed agrarian identities, attitudes, and sympathies. Yet these emerged among urbanites like Aristophanes, who himself also owned property on the island of Aegina.<sup>3</sup> A third option might leverage the role of the traditional hoplite farmer-soldier or the *zeugitae* census class. But many farmers living outside the walls were too poor to afford their own armor, whereas others were much richer than the typical hoplite.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, urbanites like Socrates and metics also served as hoplites. On top of these difficulties, we are constantly confronted with the poverty of our sources from this period. Few touch on rural or agrarian topics, largely a product of the fact that almost all our extant written evidence comes from urbanites.

Yet despite these definitional difficulties, the urban/rural divide was undeniably a deep feature of Athenian politics as far back as Peisistratus’s policies to keep people from the countryside out of the city—and therefore out of politics (*Ath. Pol.* 16.3–5; Zatta 2010). Such policies indicate an important division between the Athenians in the *asty* and those in the *chōra*. Similarly, the works of Aristophanes illustrate a semantic pattern surrounding rural characters: a farmer; a traditionalist opposed to the corruption of the city; an agrarian against the unnatural importation of food; a peacenik eager to return to life on his farm; a hoplite eager to fight on land, not at sea; and even a rustic bumpkin—though these distinctions were flexible.<sup>5</sup>

Considering these historiographical difficulties, we should not demand a level of precision from our ancient sources that is difficult to attain even today (on the complexity of operationalizing rurality in empirical political science, see Nemerever and Rogers 2021). I suggest a flexible approach to the term rural. I take rural to generally refer to those whose primary residence was outside of the city walls and whose attitudes and identities exhibited a particularly agrarian character. When our sources are ambiguous about the identity of certain agents (like the precise urban/rural makeup of the hoplites in the coups of 411), we must leverage a judicious amount of inference to determine whether they were “rural” in either geography or consciousness. Therefore, when defining rural Athenians, we should

<sup>3</sup> Aristophanes was quite willing to mock rural Athenians, as seen in his buffoonish rural protagonists. See also fr. 706, where he speaks of the “slavish rusticity” of rural dialects. We need not attribute agrarian beliefs to Aristophanes himself as the final word on his political stance. For our purposes, it is enough to see him depict agrarian characters and reveal agrarian sympathies.

<sup>4</sup> The richest citizens often maintained residences in both the city and country (Ober 1989, 136n83).

<sup>5</sup> At times, rural identity seemed almost contradictory; the pacifistic Dikaeopolis and the bellicose Acharnian chorus seem to want opposite things (peace and war). Yet both want to return to their lands.

tolerate considerable overlap between the following categories: Athenians living outside the city walls, rural as an identity in tension with those living in the *asty*, hoplite as a social group, hoplite as a military function, *zeugitai* as a census class, farmer as an occupation, and agrarian as a normative outlook.

In focusing our attention on the urban/rural divide, I do not claim that it was the most fundamental or important divide in the Athenian demos, which had multiple cross-cutting cleavages of which urban/rural was only one. Indeed, there were many deliberate institutional efforts to overcome the urban/rural divide, like Cleisthenes's deme system, which incorporated people from every part of Attica into the political system as a way to mitigate geographic loyalties, and festivals like the *synoikia*.<sup>6</sup> For the most part, these institutions functioned as intended and did much to mitigate the urban/rural divide. Yet tensions remained, and this article attends to those tensions. Although, as Osborne (1985, 189) admits, they may have only emerged in "exceptional" circumstances, urban/rural tensions still had significant consequences for democracy.

## THE URBAN/RURAL DIVIDE IN ATHENS

In this section, I provide a history of the urban/rural divide in democratic Athens and argue that it lurked beneath some of the most important issues in Athenian politics in the classical period. Pericles's strategy of evacuating Attica led to a collision between urban and rural citizens and solidified amongst rural Athenians something resembling what Cramer (2016, 5–6), in a different context, calls "rural consciousness": a fierce attachment to place accompanied by a resentment of urbanites and urban spaces.

Many scholars have suggested that the Athenian demos was relatively unified in its pursuit of naval empire (e.g., Balot 2001, 142–45, 149; Finley 1985, 94–5; Ludwig 2002, 363–4). Such a view largely stems from Pericles's idealized depiction of Athens in his Funeral Oration, in which all citizens become one with Athens through love of her imperial power (II.43.1, see also VI.24.3). But the reality was far from the ideal; rural Athenians were often uneasy about imperialism, the result of Athens's transition from a localist agrarian society in which rural citizens held a privileged political, social, and military role to a centralized imperial democracy in which their traditional role was largely coopted by urbanites and sailors. This urban/rural divide was exacerbated by three trends that pushed Athens in an imperialist direction at the expense of the status of rural citizens: (a) the ascendance of a centralized democracy located around Athens's ports, (b) the increase in grain importation, and (c) the concomitant rise of the strategic importance of the Athenian navy.

The tension between Athenian agrarianism and maritime power can be traced back to the city's mythical

founding when Athena and Poseidon contended for the role of patron of Athens. Athena won the contest by gifting an olive tree to the city, but the tension between Athens as a land power and Athens as a sea power was never resolved. In predemocratic Athens, political power was most often directly tied to ownership and cultivation of the countryside. Land constituted the essential locus of families, *genē*, and *phratries*, which were often named after specific places or pieces of real estate, and the political loyalties of rural farmers were affixed to these local geographic associations (*Ath. Pol.* 13.4; Frost 2005, 163–8; Herodotus 1.59.3). Solon's class system distributed political power based on agricultural yields (Ober 1996, 58). But after Cleisthenes's reforms replaced the agro-centric politics of the Archaic period with a centralized democracy, political power traditionally rooted in control of the countryside was reconsolidated under the hegemony of the city centered on its ports. The agro-centrism of predemocratic politics and the centralized democratic empire represented two contradictory visions of Athens, putting traditional rural Athenians at odds with the new ethos of naval imperialism and setting the stage for urban/rural tensions to crystallize during the Peloponnesian War.

Cleisthenes's reforms were instrumental in establishing the borders of Athenian territory to include all of what we know as Attica, thereby making distant rural residents of Attica into official Athenian citizens. Politically incorporating Attica's very large territory and rural population, whose numbers exceeded the urban population (II.16.1), required a new way to integrate geographic and socioeconomic diversity into one democratic community (Anderson 2003; Vlassopoulos 2007, 36–7).<sup>7</sup> Through his artificial tribal organization and the incorporation of remote demes into the central government, Cleisthenes encouraged the acceptance of Athenian urban hegemony over a large rural population and territory, gradually supplanting the local identities that had dominated with communal ties mediated through the city of Athens (Anderson 2003, 5, 13–7, 21; Manville 1990, 157; Von Reden 1998). Yet although all of Attica had been *de jure* incorporated into democratic politics and many rural citizens participated in government, rural citizens were still politically underrepresented, particularly in the assembly; as Hansen writes, "The size of Attica was an insurmountable obstacle to having all citizens assembled regularly. . . . about a third of the citizens lived so far from the Pnyx that they were prevented from attending the *ekklesia* regularly" (1987, 9).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Some overseas colonies like Aegina had easier access to Athens than remote parts of Attica (Figueira 1991, 67).

<sup>8</sup> For a contrary view of rural participation in the assembly, a disputed matter, see Ober (1989, 136–7) and Strauss (1986, 59–60). Strauss argues that rural Athenians likely would have attended the assembly when important matters were up for debate (see also Ober 1996, 77). Yet during important assembly sessions, we can imagine that turnout from urbanites would have been higher as well. Given the Pnyx's limited capacity, it is unclear whether rural Athenians would have been equally represented during either

<sup>6</sup> See Osborne (1985, 183–9) and Strauss (1986, 59–63) for more sanguine views of town/country relations.



During the Persian Wars, the general Themistocles continued the gradual separation of political identity from local geographic attachments by threatening to move the polis from Attica to Italy (Herodotus 8.61–2; Taylor 2009, 24; Von Reden 1998, 171; see also Zatta 2011). Themistocles expanded the Athenian political imaginary by conceiving of a polis unbound by territory, enabling Pericles's later defensive strategy of sacrificing rural lands for the sake of the empire.<sup>9</sup> The construction of the long walls created a physical barrier between city and countryside, and Pericles's vision of imperial Athens located the polis in its male citizens and its empire, centered on the walled city—decidedly not in the rural countryside (I.143.3–4; Forde 1989, 27–8; Taylor 2009, 24). This perspective was dramatically at odds with the pious attachment rural Athenians felt for their ancestral fields, homes, shrines, and villages, which Thucydides says they considered to be their native polises (II.16.2; Foster 2010, 174–82) yet Pericles dismissed as “gardens” and “ornament[s]” (II.62.3).

Two additional interrelated trends further put rural Athenians at odds with imperialism: Athens became increasingly reliant on imported grain, and the Athenian military became increasingly reliant on its navy. These trends gradually unseated rural Athenians from their cherished role as defenders and food producers.<sup>10</sup> The unique demands of Greek agriculture led to the development of a novel form of warfare, the *phalanx*, in which farmer-soldiers, called hoplites, fought quick and decisive battles in rhythm with the agricultural calendar (Hanson 1989; 1998). The link between property, military service, and freedom formed the basis of a hoplite ideology that celebrated their status as free, independent, and self-sufficient food-producing citizens (Hanson 1996, 291; see also Ober 1996, 64–5).<sup>11</sup>

Imperial Athens was perhaps the one great exception to the rule that land warfare was determined by

agriculture (de Ste. Croix 1972, 46; Ober 1996, 70). Some have suggested that Attic farmers from the Solonian period onward steadily shifted from growing grains to other crops better suited to the rocky soil, such as olives and figs (de Ste. Croix 1972, 46; Tausend 1989). As a result, Athens became increasingly reliant on imported grain, which necessitated a proactive policy of naval imperialism to protect grain lifelines (de Ste. Croix 1972, 47; Finley 1985, 84–5; Moreno 2007, 323). One important consequence of grain importation was that Athenian military operations were less constrained by the agricultural schedule than those of cities that depended on domestic grain, disrupting the centrality of phalanx warfare and undermining the hoplite's ideological justification. The grain-importing Athenians were able to pursue innovative military tactics such as the nonengagement at the core of Pericles's defensive strategy (I.141.3). By contrast, the mere threat of crop devastation was enough to make other cities capitulate, as in the case of Acanthus (IV.88.1).

Athens's unique relationship to its land allowed it to devote itself to becoming the preeminent naval power in the Mediterranean, often preferring to project its power through naval raids rather than phalanx warfare. The poor, landless urbanites that mostly staffed the navy became essential to feeding and defending the polis, usurping the functions of the rural hoplites, who had increasingly become dependent for defense on those they saw as their social inferiors (see Old Oligarch I.2).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, after the Periclean evacuations, Ehrenberg (1962, 91) writes, “never again could the peasants argue that their work was indispensable.” There is also evidence that food importation and the imperialism it demanded were seen as profoundly changing Athens. In a fragment from Aristophanes's *Seasons*, an agrarian character mocks food importation as unnatural (because seasonal crops become available at any time of year) to underscore fundamental shifts in Athenian society: “You've changed their city from Athens into Egypt” (fr. 581; see also Old Oligarch II.6).

Rural Athenians posed a liability to Athenian imperial ambitions, their local attachments tempering their desire for empire (Foster 2010, 176). Pericles saw attachment to Attica as a strategic disadvantage (I.143.4–5). Farmers tried to force the entire polis to fight to protect their farms, jeopardizing the empire (II.20.3–4; see *Acharnians* 233). At other times, there was an impression that rural citizens curried favor with the Spartans to save their lands from destruction (Herodotus 9.73.3; Old Oligarch II.14; see *Acharnians* 185–200). Even if such occurrences were extremely rare, situations like these illustrate the disruptive effect the pursuit of empire had on rural citizens, and their prevalence in literature reflects their cultural salience. This is not to say that rural Athenians never benefitted from the empire; the Old Oligarch says that Athens abandoned Attica for greater goods (II.16; Strauss

mundane or important assemblies. Regardless, my overall argument does not hinge on this point.

<sup>9</sup> Forde (1989, 20–5) emphasizes the role of the Athenian evacuations during the Persian Wars in the formation of the unique character of Athenian imperialism. Although Thucydides notes that the Persian evacuations were in the background of Pericles's defensive strategy, he is clear that they had not led to a complete dissociation of Athenians from Attica; rural Athenians in particular were still deeply attached to their lands (II.16.1–2, II.21.2). The Persian evacuations also differed from the Periclean evacuations in one crucial respect: all Athenians, urban and rural, evacuated during the Persian invasion, making it a collective sacrifice, whereas during the Peloponnesian War, only rural Athenians had to sacrifice their lands.

<sup>10</sup> See De Romilly (1947, 69n2): “Le temps des hoplites et des cavaliers est ainsi révolu, comme celui des agriculteurs; et la réforme démocratique qui suit l'ostracisme de Cimon en 460 est, comme le remarque Glotz . . . ‘la conséquence logique, inéluctable, de ce fait essentiel: la transformation d'un état terrien, agricole . . . en un état maritime industriel et commerçant.’”

<sup>11</sup> Scholars are divided about the precise distribution of land in Attica (see Foxhall 1992). Yet recent scholarship suggests that rural Athenians of even modest means, albeit not the poorest, served as hoplites (Gallego and Guía 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Hoplites still provided essential military services as marines and expeditionary forces (Hanson 1996, 295; 1999, 363–5).

1986, 60). But the calculation was different for rural citizens. For them, there was a trade-off between securing the empire and securing their homes and traditional way of life—a trade-off that did not exist for urbanites (see *Knights* 671).

Urban/rural divisions also manifested in a culture war between rural agrarians and urbanites. In *Clouds* (423 BCE), Aristophanes represents the fraught relationship between rural Attica and urban Athens in the unhappy marriage of the rural protagonist Strepsiades and his urbanite wife (41–52; Jones 2004, 201). Similarly, the debate between Just Speech and Unjust Speech illustrates a contest between traditional hoplite values—the “education [that] nurtured the men who fought at Marathon” (985)—and the newfangled values of the city, which were accused of producing effeminate men with “pale complexion[s], small shoulders, narrow chest[s]” (1017).<sup>13</sup> As Strauss (1993, 146) argues, the intergenerational conflict in *Clouds* between old and new values mapped onto other tensions in Athenian society. One of these was urban versus rural. In *Clouds*, Socrates repeatedly makes Strepsiades’s rurality into a pejorative: “How rustic [*agroikos*] you are and poor at learning!” (646); “You’re crude [*agreios*] and a dullard” (655; Jones 2004, 202). Similar remarks are made by Socrates in the *Republic*, where “rustic” is almost always used negatively (e.g., 361e, 411a, 560d; Jones 2004, 249).

When we disabuse ourselves of the idea of a monolithic Athenian demos committed to imperialism, our picture of Athens becomes more nuanced. Rather than simply accepting the Corinthian characterization of the Athenians—that “they are born neither to enjoy any peace [*hēsychian*] themselves nor to allow it to others” (I.70.8)—we find that many Athenians longed for peace and scorned empire. The Periclean vision of abstract power projected through naval empire was not completely dominant, but it was antithetical to the agrarian tradition of Athenian politics, which located the polis in ancestral homes on the soil of Attica.

## PERICLES AND THE EVACUATION OF RURAL ATTICA

These powerful trends driving urban and rural Athenians apart—the relocation of political power to the city, the rise of grain importation and naval imperialism, and cultural conflict—might, under normal circumstances, have been successfully mitigated by Athenian institutions designed to ease the urban/rural divide. But Pericles’s strategy of sacrificing the land of Attica forced a collision between urban and rural citizens that exacerbated the divide. Pericles’s plan was to withdraw rural citizens behind the walls of Athens, allowing the Spartans to ravage the countryside while the city safely

imported grain through its fortified port. If the Athenians did not seek to expand their empire, Pericles argued, they could triumph by attacking enemy territory with their powerful navy and outlasting the Spartans (I.143–4). Nonengagement was a radical departure from the traditional “agonal” system of phalanx warfare (Ober 1996, 74–5). Greek farmers did not let other Greeks ravage their fields, which were considered inviolable (Hanson 1989, 4; Ober 1985, 34–5). Pericles’s plan would not have been possible without the decline in Athenian grain production, the rise in imports, and the supremacy of the naval ethos over traditional hoplite values.<sup>14</sup> His strategy depended on the sacrifice of rural homes and interests, causing rural citizens extreme grief, anxiety, and resentment about imperialism.

A rural citizen’s home (*oikos*) embodied his economic, religious, and political status, and the destruction of his rural farm epitomized his alienation from Athenian society. Beyond providing for farmers economically, the rural home was the locus of a farmer’s pious attachment to place, facilitating his devotion to his ancestors and the gods (II.16.1–2). The physical *oikos* also largely defined the political, social, and military roles of rural Athenians. Although urbanites probably used wealth as a proxy for the agricultural quotas of Solon’s class divisions, the political status of a rural citizen likely remained tied to the productive capacity of his physical landholdings. The destruction of a rural citizen’s home threatened his political status and self-conception as a valuable Athenian citizen. Indeed, destruction of someone’s home was sometimes used as punishment for particularly heinous crimes, likely seeking, according to Connor, “the extirpation of the individual and his immediate kin from the society” (1985, 86).

Ancient sources show that the evacuations of the countryside were psychologically devastating for the rural Athenians who, according to Thucydides, saw themselves as giving up “their way of life and leaving behind what each of them felt to be the equivalent of their native city” (II.16.1–2). Each time the Spartans invaded, rural citizens evacuated their ancestral homes and moved into shanty towns in the city as the enemy burned farms, homes, and shrines in the countryside (II.16.1–2, II.52.2; *Knights* 792–95). To these rural citizens, living in the city was foreign and strange. Urbanites often scorned and mocked them for their rustic language and shabby clothing (Ehrenberg 1962, 86–7; Jones 2004, 170–4). With no place to stay, Thucydides tells us, rural refugees even slept in temples filled with the corpses of plague victims (II.52.2–3).

This rural presence changed Athenian politics. The sudden influx of rural people caused a dramatic shift in the composition of the participating demos, for the first time including rural citizens at comparable rates to urbanites (see Cornford 1907, 15). Rural citizens had

<sup>13</sup> Aristophanes’s first play, *Banqueters* (427 BCE), expressed a similar theme. A rural landowner has two sons: Virtuous Boy, who receives a traditional education, and Bugged Boy, who abandons agrarian values for the sophistry taught to those like Alcibiades (fr. 205, 232).

<sup>14</sup> During the Sicilian Expedition, Syracuse also evacuated its countryside but was much more successful at protecting rural assets than the Athenians, especially as Athenian cavalry strength deteriorated after the first Spartan invasion and the plague (see Ober 1996, 79–83).

few means of earning money inside the walls beyond remuneration for political participation or military service as marines or rowers (*Ath. Pol.* 27.2–3). They also had less experience in government than their urban counterparts (Finley 1985, 52; Hansen 1987, 9; see also *Politics* 1319a30), as their dispersal over the countryside worked to neuter their collective capacity as a political force (Ludwig 2002, 362–3).<sup>15</sup>

Some have argued that the economic damage of the Spartan invasions was insignificant, as they only invaded for an average of thirty days at a time (Foxhall 1993, 141–2; Hanson 1998, 151–2). Others have argued that it was more significant (Thorne 2001). Regardless of economic impact, ancient sources indicate that the invasions left a deep psychological imprint on the Athenians (*II.16.1–2*; *Acharnians* 32–5, 233; Andocides 3.8; *Clouds* 5). These same scholars have argued that crop destruction was intended to inflict psychological or political, not economic, damage (Foxhall 1993, 142; Hanson 1998, 152, 179). The psychological and political toll of the Spartan invasions—not their economic impact—are decisive for my argument. Foxhall (1993) argues that crop devastation served a political purpose; the resulting pain would mostly be felt by the rural segment of the population, putting their interests directly at odds with their fellow citizens’ and the polis as a whole: “The risk of the Periclean strategy was that it depended on loyalty to the polis taking precedence over household and family loyalties. The failure of that strategy was not that it left Athens exposed to economic damage, but that it left Athens exposed to envy, suspicion, and social disunity. . . . The threat perceived by individual households to their own subsistence was the enemy’s most powerful weapon” (142–3). In this respect, the Spartan strategy was not unsuccessful, especially after the fortification of Deceleia.

Pericles’s evacuation of Attica marked the culmination of a crisis among rural Athenians, whose status in Athenian society, I have argued, had been steadily undermined in the pursuit of naval empire. Repeatedly dislocated from their homes, farms, and traditional cultural and religious practices, rural citizens could literally no longer find their home in Athenian society—“with people dying inside the city and their land ravaged outside it,” as Thucydides puts it (*II.54.2*). They were vulnerable on their ancestral farms but hated the city, traumatized by the evacuations and the devastating plague, which hit rural refugees particularly hard (*II.52.1–3*). Their distress was compounded by the Spartan fortification of Deceleia, which forced rural Athenians to live within the city walls all year round. The rural experience during the war was marked by a profound sense of loss and resentment accompanied by the desire to return to a bygone era of antebellum agrarianism.

Aristophanes’s comedies, particularly *Acharnians* (425 BCE), *Clouds* (423 BCE), and *Peace* (421 BCE), help us see how rural Athenians responded to the threats to their farms. Although Aristophanes was an urbanite, his wartime plays often focused on rural characters and thus provide more evidence about rural Athenians than perhaps any other source, portraying them as nostalgically lamenting the separation from their homes and desperate to restore their antebellum lifestyles. As interpreters like Strauss (1993, 154) and Ehrenberg (1962, 86) have recognized, Aristophanes’s humor depends on being topical and relevant to his audience, so his plays likely illustrate hopes and fears held by many rural citizens, albeit exaggerated for comedic effect. As Ehrenberg writes, “the poet has to keep close enough to real facts in order to be understood and to evoke the right kind of laughter” (86). So although evidence from Aristophanes should be approached with caution, it should not be dismissed out of hand.

At times, Aristophanes depicts rural citizens clamoring to fight the Spartans, like the elderly Acharnian chorus, who insist that “our hatred demands implacable war because of our lands” (*Acharnians* 233). At other times, Aristophanes depicts his rural protagonists longing for peace, like Dikaepolis (“I watch the countryside and yearn for peace, I hate the city and want to see my farm, my village,” *Acharnians* 32–35), Strepsiades (“Perish, then, O war, because among many other things, now I can’t even punish my servants,” *Clouds* 5), and Trygaeus (“the hour has come to throw away our troubles [*pragmatōn*] and our wars, and, ere another pestle [*hawkish leader*] rise to stop us, to pull out Peace, the joy of all mankind,” *Peace* 292–94, 500–15). Rural longing for a peaceful ideal of home also emerges in the surviving fragments of *Farmers* (ca. 424–22): “Peace deep in wealth and little team of oxen, would it were mine to have an end of the war, and delve and dress the vines” (fr. 111). One farmer is so desperate to return to his country life that he proposes donating a large sum to escape his duties in the city: “A: I want to farm! B: And who’s stopping you? A: You all are. So I’m contributing a thousand drachmas if you free me from my duties” (fr. 102).

Amidst these feelings of loss, the mood also turned to resentment directed at urbanites whom rural citizens saw as responsible for their suffering. In *Peace*, Aristophanes depicts the chorus of farmers complaining that they are treated unfairly by military officers, who privilege urbanites (*asteiōs*) (1185). Peace is achieved only after Hermes orders the Athenians to edge a little closer to the sea—perhaps causing those living by the coast in the Piraeus and city of Athens to fall in—until the “farmers pull alone” and rescue Peace (505–10). Along with *Peace*, the farmers rescue Harvest and Festival, suggesting a rural perception that urban imperialism also threatened traditional piety and agrarianism. Finally, *Clouds* ends with Strepsiades burning down Socrates’s schoolhouse (1480–1510), a symbolic instance of popular justice possibly embodying traditionalist anger at a newfangled culture undermining Athenian society (Forsdyke 2008, 28, 33n101; Connor

<sup>15</sup> This is not to say that rural citizens never participated in the assembly, see Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.7.6. For a good survey of the literature on rural participation, see Strauss (1986, 59–60, n97) and Ober (1989, 136–7).



1985, 88n29). Given the political context of *Clouds*, the burning of Socrates's schoolhouse may have had the additional meaning of revenge against urbanites. There is evidence suggesting that Strepsiades's attack was meant to have a particularly rural dimension; he attacks the burning schoolhouse with a mattock (*sminuē*, *Clouds* 1486, 1500), which Aristophanes explicitly identifies as a symbol of farmers at *Peace* 546.

## PLEONEXIA, SICILY, AND COUPS

Pericles's urban-centric defensive strategy deepened structural trends driving rural and urban Athenians apart, and Aristophanes portrays how these tensions manifested through the distress and resentment of his rural characters. But the divide between urban and rural Athenians did not merely result in hard feelings. Thucydides shows that the urban/rural divide had significant political consequences over the course of the war, particularly in the rise of Athenian imperialism, the Sicilian Expedition, and the coups of 411. We can find indications in Thucydides's narrative that each of these had deep roots in Athens's urban/rural divide.

Interpreters of Thucydides generally attribute imperial expansion (and the Sicilian Expedition in particular) to the material greed, eros, or pleonexia of the demos (Balot 2001; Forde 1989, 17; Kallet 2001, 45; Strauss 1964, 226; Wolin 2008, 246–8). Yet Thucydides is not silent about the factors that enflame or moderate pleonexia. If we keep the conflict between the Periclean ideal of imperial Athens and the agrarian ideal of Athens rooted in the land of Attica in mind, we see Thucydides repeatedly link imperialism and the Sicilian Expedition to the Athenians' attenuating attachment to the land of Attica. Attachment to place is not necessarily politicized along urban/rural lines, nor is it a uniquely rural phenomenon. However, in the context of Thucydides's narrative and Athenian politics during the war, attachment to the land of Attica was a highly politicized issue. For Pericles and the imperialists, Attica was a trifle (II.62.3)—there was “plenty of land both in the islands and on the mainland” (I.143.4)—whereas for a traditional agrarian Athenian, his *politeia patria* in the countryside was the heart of his political, social, and religious identity (II.16.2).

Several scholars have explored the link between Athenian imperialism and declining attachment to the land of Attica. Forde traces Athenian imperial daring to the evacuations during the Persian invasions, which he argues led to a diminution of Athenian piety (1989, 22–5). However, Forde speaks of “the Athenians” *in toto* losing their attachment to Attica; we must remember that this effect was not universal but was a partisan attitude held mostly by urbanites and resisted by rural citizens who remained deeply attached to Attica. Foster (2010) also argues that the Periclean imperial project depended on undermining rural Athenians' attachments to their ancestral lands. Just as Thucydides juxtaposes the ideal of Pericles's funeral oration with the bleak reality of the plague, Foster argues, he also juxtaposes Pericles's second speech urging the

abandonment of Attica with the reality of the distress of the evacuations of Attica (2010, 174; II.13–15). Thucydides not only dramatically describes the rural citizens' evacuation of their homes but also gives an excursus on the Athenians' relationship with Attica. He emphasizes that rural Athenians had a particularly close attachment to their land, having cultivated it longer than any other Greeks (II.15.1, c.f. I.2.5–6), and, in doing so, vindicates the farmers mourning the loss of their homes (Foster 2010, 181). The Periclean imperial project and the pleonexia that fueled it demanded the sacrifice of Athenian land to the Spartan invaders. Satisfying the demands of empire therefore required the attenuation of rural Athenians' attachment to Attica; they had to be convinced that it was preferable to potentially lose their homes for the sake of naval empire.<sup>16</sup> By creating an opposition between attachment to place and pleonexia and anchoring it in the difference between urban and rural attitudes toward Attica, Thucydides highlights the urban/rural divide as one of the most consequential cleavages of the war.

Thucydides connects pleonexia to the declining attachment to Attica in another famous episode: the Sicilian Expedition. Thucydides repeatedly emphasizes the role of homeland in the Athenian decision to invade Sicily, highlighting, in Taylor's words, “the Athenians' inability to distinguish between home and away” (2009, 140). Thucydides thereby subtly critiques the expedition as another consequence of the Periclean disregard for traditional attachments to Attica. Thucydides's account of the Sicilian Expedition, which he calls “the longest voyage from home [*oikeias*] ever attempted” (VI.31.6), is framed as a meditation on the importance of place.<sup>17</sup> He begins Book 6 with a catalog of all the different peoples who have called Sicily home, and his final words on the Athenian defeat are “few out of many returned home” (VII.87.6). The theme of “home” versus “faraway” also repeatedly emerges in the Sicilian debates. One major disagreement between Nicias and Alcibiades is over whether Athens's borders can or cannot be fixed (VI.13.1, 18.3)—which is to say, whether attachment to homeland is possible at all, for love of homeland cannot exist unless it can be distinguished from foreign land. Similarly, the two disagree about whether the Sicilians are attached to their own land, Nicias assuming that they are rooted in their homeland and Alcibiades asserting they are not (VI.13.1, 17.2–3). Perhaps most famously, Nicias calls the passion to sail for Sicily a “perverse craving for what is beyond reach [*dyserōtas . . . tōn apontōn*]” (VI.13.1) and acknowledges that “there is an aura of respect attaching to what is most distant” (VI.11.4). We need not take this *dyserōs* to be an infinite longing with no

<sup>16</sup> As Taylor (2009, 25) puts it, the Athenians had “both an innate acquisitiveness and a confusion . . . regarding what is theirs and what is not. This implies, in turn, both a stronger-than-normal connection to others' goods as well as a weaker-than-normal connection to their own.”

<sup>17</sup> Connor (1984) notes that Thucydides frames the Sicilian narrative with allusions to Odysseus's journey home (162n9).

definite object (see Nichols 2015, 125); it also makes sense to understand Thucydides as commenting on the importance of place for the stability of a political community, critiquing Pericles and further displaying his sympathy with rural Athenians. Had they not been dispossessed of their homes, many Athenians might have been unexcited by Alcibiades's incitement for gain (Ludwig 2002, 362).

Thucydides also links the Sicilian Expedition to Pericles's attenuation of attachment to place by remarking that young Athenians in 415 had a "yearning to see these far-off sights and spectacles" (VI.24.3). Although this passion might be attributed to the enthusiasms of youth, we can also learn something from the immediate chronology; the Sicilian debates took place 16 years after the first evacuations of Attica. Assuming Thucydides had men aged 20 to 30 in mind, they would have ranged from 4 to 14 years old at the time of the first evacuations of Attica. These young people, unlike any other generation, had been raised at a time when Athenian policy toward their homeland was nearly one of official disregard and when their homes in Attica were disparaged by the first man of Athens as "gardens" and "ornament[s]" (II.62.3, see also II.21.2). When Alcibiades argued that "a city which is accustomed to activity would be very quickly destroyed by a change to inactivity" (VI.18.7), we can imagine he is speaking to these young people in particular, who only knew a life of *kinēsis* divorced from the demands of attachment to homeland. To be clear, Thucydides does not explicitly say that rural Athenians were a potent political force in the debates of 415.<sup>18</sup> Still, the arguments he presents reveal his sympathies with the concerns of rural Athenians, and the Athens he depicts is one which appeared to have forgotten the importance of homeland and thus became lost.

## The Coups of 411

The urban/rural divide was also an important factor during the oligarchic coups of 411. I argue that the coups were largely the product of the fluctuating composition of the demos, which in 411 overrepresented rural citizens (hoplites in particular) and underrepresented urban *thētes*. Although our sources are not specific enough to claim that the coups were the direct result of urban/rural tensions, the particular contours of the urban/rural divide in 411 were instrumental in providing the conditions where such coups could take place, even if they were initially motivated by the ambition of a few conspirators.

Although Thucydides's description of it is much less vivid, the Spartan fortification of Deceleia in 413 was even more painful for rural Athenians than the invasions of the Archidamian War, for "now the enemy was in continuous occupation. . . . [The Athenians] were deprived of access to their entire countryside" (VII.27.3–5). The immediate political consequence of

this was that the number of rural citizens in the city was again much higher than usual—although this time, their confinement was not temporary but for the foreseeable future (indeed, until the end of the war). With farmers, the traditional backbone of the hoplite class, sheltering inside the city, Athens was inundated with discontented rural citizens.<sup>19</sup> But there was another important demographic shift in Athens at the time of the coups; the Athenian fleet, principally staffed by urban *thētes*, the traditional partisans of democracy, had been stationed at Samos. Hansen (1987, 11) and Finley (1985, 54) have argued that the unique demographic composition of the people in Athens was crucial for the coups, though they focus more on the underrepresentation of *thētes* at the assembly at Colonus than on the overrepresentation of hoplites due to the fortification of Deceleia.<sup>20</sup>

As the coups unfold, Thucydides links the various factions with corresponding attitudes towards Attica, reserving his praise only for the hoplite oligarchs, the faction with the closest ties to the land (VIII.97.2). After the assembly at Colonus, three principal factions formed—the democrats, the moderate hoplite oligarchs, and the radical oligarchs—and from these arose three "cities": a democracy on Samos, a hoplite stronghold in the Piraeus, and a radical oligarchy in the *asty* (Taylor 2009, 259). Given the Piraeus's reputation as a bastion of democracy (*Politics* 1303b10), one might expect it to be dominated by the democratic faction. But its role as the base of a hoplite oligarchy makes sense if we remember the large number of rural refugees that flooded in from the countryside, occupying the Piraeus and the area between the long walls.<sup>21</sup> Thucydides attributes a different relationship with the land of Attica to each group (see Taylor 2009, 190–5). For the democrats on Samos, the defining feature of Athens had nothing to do with the land of Attica; its essential element was the democracy, which could be refounded on Samos or anywhere else (VIII.76.7). The Athenian democrats on Samos accepted the Periclean vision that Athens could exist anywhere. On the other hand, the radical oligarchs adopted an Alcibiadean understanding of patriotism and were only attached to an Athens that benefited them (VI.92.4; Taylor 2009, 191, 201). Only the moderate hoplite oligarchs in the Piraeus accepted the more agrarian view that Athens was intrinsically connected to the land in Attica. For these oligarchic sympathizers, Taylor writes, "democracy was not essential to Athens. . . . an oligarchic city could be 'the city'" (2009, 190). By linking the

<sup>18</sup> On the link between the Sicilian Expedition and rural agrarianism, see Arrowsmith (1973, 142n13).

<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, we lack specific data on the proportion of hoplites who were rural or urban in residence and sympathies.

<sup>20</sup> See Harris (1990, 269–70) for an emphasis on hoplites. Hansen similarly links the democratizing reforms of Ephialtes to the fact that 4,000 hoplites had been sent to Messenia during that time (1987, 11). Some have speculated that the assembly location at Colonus, outside Athens's walls, was symbolic (of a change in regime) or strategic (to terrorize the *thētes* or dissuade citizens without their own armor from attending), but there is insufficient evidence to settle these arguments. See Taylor (2009, 216n41) for some of these debates.

<sup>21</sup> Andocides (1.45) states that there were hoplites, many being rural refugees, living in the Piraeus and between the long walls as early as 415, see also II.17.3.



different factions to different attitudes toward Attica, Thucydides highlights how conflicting notions of place and homeland shaped the political possibilities available to each faction.

Our sources are not specific enough to directly map urban and rural onto the democratic and oligarchic factions, and even basic facts about the coups are disputed.<sup>22</sup> Undoubtedly, the coups were a response to the political ascendancy of the urban *thētes* and the radical democracy. Shear (2011) describes how the Four Hundred and the Five Thousand both appealed to Athens's past to suggest they "were going back to the good old days . . . before the radical democracy" (58). And although we have circumstantial evidence about the agrarian sympathies of the hoplite class, there is no direct evidence to suggest that the coups were an instance of rural "golden age" revanchism against an urban government.<sup>23</sup> But we can be more certain about the demographic makeup of Athens in 411: flush with rural citizens and farmers, the backbone of the hoplites, and empty of its sailors, the traditional democratic partisans. The particular urban/rural composition of the participating citizenry in Athens in 411 left it vulnerable to the ambition of radical oligarchs who seized on the opportunity. Understanding this clarifies why, as Taylor (2009, 194) argues, it was so easy to overthrow the democracy. As we shall see, postwar theorists like Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle recognized the potential for *stasis* that the urban/rural divide presented and explored ways to manage it by carefully considering what kinds of people should be in the city center and why.

## THEORIZING THE URBAN/RURAL DIVIDE AFTER THE WAR

Recognizing the divisions between urban and rural Athenians during the Peloponnesian War years, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle developed strategies to manage interactions between urban and rural people. These theorists advanced three primary ways to handle the urban/rural divide: (1) segregation, through the exclusion of rural people from any business in the city, (2) the erasure of the urban/rural divide by making each citizen equally urban and rural, and (3) the employment of a preclusive frontier defense system to protect the countryside and thus avoid the issues that Athens faced during the war.

One approach taken by ancient theorists to the urban/rural divide was to embrace the cleavage and separate urban and rural people as much as possible. Like Pesistratus, who tried to keep rural citizens out of the city center (*Ath. Pol.* 16.3–5; Zatta 2010), Plato and Aristotle developed ways to keep rural people away

from the city. For Plato, this was mainly done through a strict division of labor (sustained by institutions like the Noble Lie), which meant the exclusion of farmers and other manual laborers (*banausoi*) from the urban precincts of the ruling class (see *Critias* 112b–d; *Rep.* 541a).<sup>24</sup> Rural people would not even visit the city for purposes of trade; farmers should not sell their own wares in the *agora* lest they "sit idly in the marketplace" (*Rep.* 371c). Farmers should be farmers "in the true sense of the word and . . . [devote] themselves to this single occupation" (*Critias* 111e). Aristotle also recognized that geography could be a significant source of *stasis* (1303b) and thought that farmers should be kept away from the public square unless summoned (1331a34–5). For him, the ideal citizen could not be a farmer "since leisure is needed both to develop virtue and to engage in political actions" (1328b40). In the ideal city, farmers would be slaves or foreigners, excluding them from citizenship entirely (1329a25, 1330a25).

Beyond exclusion from public affairs, these thinkers sought to keep rural people out of the city through administrative decentralization. Plato (*Laws* 763c, 848e–849a, 881c, 913d–14a) and Aristotle (1321b25–30) both created separate magistracies for the country, *agora*, and *asty*, with the effect that rural and urban areas would be administered separately, reducing opportunities for cross-contamination. This shows not only their belief that farmers, like other manual laborers, should be kept away from positions of power but also that they should stay in the countryside, among their own kind, precluding any potential confrontations between rural and urban citizens.

A second way ancient theorists approached the urban/rural divide was to try to erase it completely. Unlike Socrates in the *Republic*, the Athenian Stranger does not separate a class of propertyless guardians from the rest of the population. Instead, he develops a sophisticated property-distribution system to homogenize the population and make each citizen equally urban and rural. Each citizen will have two houses, one urban, one rural (745c–e), and the plots will be paired to produce an equal average: the plot closest to the city will be paired with the plot closest to the border, the second-closest to the city with the second-closest to the border, and so on. The overall effect is the homogenization of the citizenry into one that is equally urban and rural; land will be indivisible and inalienable to fix this arrangement permanently, and any violators will have their names carved in the temples to be shamed forever (741b–c).

Aristotle develops a similar dual-allotment property system for citizens—one plot on the border, another in the city—and provides a detailed line of reasoning: "This not only accords with justice and equality, but

<sup>22</sup> See Kagan (1987, 114n28, 203n46) on some debates surrounding the essential features of the constitution of the Five Thousand and on the difficulties in determining the motives of individuals leading the different factions.

<sup>23</sup> David (1995, 22) speculates that Theramenes courted hoplite farmers at Colonus with promises of peace.

<sup>24</sup> Philosopher-kings, it would seem, have little to learn from rural life. Socrates himself seems to have held such a view, at least: "landscapes [*ta . . . chōria*] and trees have nothing to teach me—only the people in the city [*en tō astei*] can do that" (*Phaedrus* 230e). Similarly, in the *Apology*, Socrates recounts speaking to many types of Athenians in search of knowledge—but not to farmers (22d).

ensures greater unanimity in the face of wars with neighbors. For whenever things are not this way, some citizens make light of feuds with bordering city-states, while others are overly and ignobly concerned about them" (1330a14–24). Aristotle likely has in mind the lessons from the Peloponnesian War. Rural citizens cannot be trusted to see beyond their attachments to their homes and can be set against urbanites, who have less to lose from land wars. The just and equal solution is to eliminate the urban/rural distinction entirely and give every citizen an equal stake in both. The dual-allotment systems formulated by Plato and Aristotle represent the ideal option for cities that allow private property, in which attachments to place and property can lead to factional loyalties along urban and rural lines.<sup>25</sup> Whereas Pericles sought to overcome the divide by sacrificing rural interests and agrarian ideals for urban and imperial ones, Plato and Aristotle sought to make each citizen equally urban and rural.

The third and most widely accepted approach to mitigating urban/rural tensions was a preclusive frontier defense system to protect the *chōra* from invasion and keep the sheltering of rural people behind city walls a last resort. Frontier defense defused tensions in several ways. First, it would protect the local rural economy, reducing the need for foreign grain importation and naval empire. Second, if the countryside was protected, rural citizens would not need to be confined in the city center for long periods, thus avoiding the collisions of urban and rural citizens like those in the Archidamean and Deceleian evacuations. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it would show rural citizens that the entire polis would fight to protect their homes and property, eliminating a significant source of *stasis*. This new defensive theory became popular among postwar theorists and Athenian political figures (Ober 1985, 69–86). Countryside defense was accompanied by a renewed emphasis on the rural economy; as Ober writes, the “new (or renewed) emphasis on rural resources . . . is of particular importance, since this interest marks a significant departure from the city-centered policies of Pericles” (1985, 19). The border-defense approach was also the most practicable for the nonideal world, as it could be implemented in existing polities.

Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle each advocated frontier defense, a major rejection of the Periclean strategy. In the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger develops a plan for the defense of the *chōra*; a rural force (*agronomoi*) would be tasked with preventing enemies from crossing the borders and harming people or property (760e–63b, 778e–79b; see also *Menexenus* 238b). Aristotle also saw countryside defense as crucial; the ideal city must be easy to defend, all parts of its territory must be easily accessible by troops, and *agronomoi* should be

established (1321b26–32, 1326b39–1327a6). Xenophon heavily stressed the rural economy and its protection, writing that the “*chōra* is by its nature capable of furnishing an ample revenue” (*Ways and Means* 1.1–2). In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon’s Socrates recommends the use of Attica’s mountainous borders and interior to harass invaders and “furnish the citizens with a great bulwark for the land” (3.5.25–27). Although frontier defense may seem banal to modern readers, it was a significant and innovative departure from prior Athenian military thinking, and the careful attention postwar theorists paid it reflects its importance.

All in all, postwar philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, held conflicted views of rural citizens. On the one hand, they admired their traditional values, especially compared with the urban rabble of sailors, whom they saw as dangerous and untrustworthy (see *Laws* 704b–05d). On the other hand, they still saw rural people as rustics and inferiors, excluding them from government and keeping them outside the city as much as possible. Ideally, as Plato’s and Aristotle’s land distribution schemes show us, the urban/rural distinction would not even exist among the citizenry. Yet short of the absolute embrace or erasure of the urban/rural divide, these thinkers rejected Pericles’s strategy of abandoning rural assets and recommended a refocus on the rural economy and its defense.

## CONCLUSION

By focusing on the experience of rural Athenians, we can gain new perspectives on Athenian history and its lessons for democratic politics. Reading along the urban/rural divide reveals the economic and political forces that intensified tensions between urban and rural citizens over the fifth century. Thucydides’s narrative explores the divide’s political consequences: the declining attachment to Attica, the rise of pleonexia, the Sicilian Expedition, and the demographic destabilization contributing to the coups of 411. Postwar philosophers recognized the challenges posed by the urban/rural divide and confronted them by imagining new ways to manage urban/rural relations. The novel institutions they developed to bind the polis together, such as Plato’s and Aristotle’s land-distribution schemes to make every citizen equally urban and rural, are strong evidence that urban/rural was considered an important fissure in classical Athens.

A further goal of this study has been to highlight the urban/rural divide as a promising analytical framework for political theorists. The urban/rural divide should be seen as a critically important political axis alongside, in Kasimis’s words, “the familiar axes of free/slave; citizen/foreigner; native/barbarian; mass/elite; [and] male/female” (2018, 12). Although the terms “urban” and “rural” are imprecise and change over time, the same is true about other categories of analysis like race, gender, and class. Like them, the urban/rural divide can cut across familiar cleavages in illuminating ways that offer a more comprehensive understanding of the demos. In the case of Athens, the differing perspectives, interests,

<sup>25</sup> Because Plato and Aristotle theorized that the urban/rural divide could be largely overcome by institutions (such as giving each citizen an urban and a rural plot of land), one might say that they saw the divide to be a structural, rather than essential, opposition, although they likely would not have used those terms.

and attitudes of urban and rural citizens cannot be reduced to their class status. Rather, the stresses that the urban/rural divide placed on Athenian democracy resulted from interactions between the geography of Attica; the concentration of important democratic institutions in the city center; the shifting political, economic, and military roles of urban and rural citizens; and the decline of agrarianism and attachment to the countryside. Similar intersections of politics, geography, economics, and culture continue to present distinct political challenges today that cannot be adequately recognized or theorized without urban/rural categories.

If we follow ancient authors as they think with the urban/rural divide, we find them confronting a specific set of problems arising from citizens' deep-seated attachments to place, home, and customary ways of life. These issues can be overlooked if we neglect to read with urban/rural categories in mind. Ancient authors recognized that place could become the basis of political conflict when policies (like Pericles's urban-centric defensive strategy) or exogenous social, political, or economic changes disproportionately burden people in particular areas. More importantly, these thinkers explored how differing local attachments could nurture contrasting ideals about what it means for a citizen to feel at "home"—both literally, through attachment to place, and figuratively, through a citizen's understanding of their customary way of life, their community, and their place in it. The political ramifications of the urban/rural divide largely result from differences in these attachments. Thucydides and Aristophanes in particular saw how the Periclean ideal of imperial Athens was incompatible with the agrarian ideal of Athens rooted in the land of Attica, setting up a cultural and political confrontation between urban and rural citizens during the war. Reading Athenian history along the urban/rural divide therefore complicates our view of the *demos*, not only by foregrounding rural citizens' role in Athenian politics, but also by highlighting a spatial dimension to what Monoson (2000, 6–7) calls the Athenian *politeia*: "the patterns of life and ideology that distinguish its civic culture." Membership in Athens, particularly for rural citizens, entailed the negotiation of competing attachments to rural peripheries and the urban center as the polis attempted to incorporate geographic diversity into a single democratic community.<sup>26</sup>

The urban/rural divide also has significant implications for democratic theory. Notwithstanding its important exclusions of women, slaves, and metics, Athenian democracy has long served as a model of a citizen-body bound together by democratic institutions enshrining the political equality of each citizen (Farrar 1988; Fishkin 2009; James [1956] 1992; Turner 1981). Recently,

theorists have closely investigated how Athenian institutions such as lotteries (Bouricius 2013), courts (Cammack Forthcoming), and the Council of 500 (Landauer 2021) embodied this political equality. This article complements those studies by considering how attachments to place, home, and customs can strain or sustain democratic institutions. Athenian democracy depended in part on attenuating citizens' local attachments and identities for the sake of a new poliswide civic identity based on political equality. For example, Cleisthenes sorted citizens into 10 artificial tribes, likely to weaken old loyalties to local phratries, tribes, and cults and to undermine the claims of genealogical prestige that often accompanied such local associations.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the myth of autochthony, which established a mythological brotherhood of equality and *eugeneia* among citizens, also asserted Attica's territorial unity by stressing the Athenians' common origins from the entire land of Attica. By "posit[ing] an original unity of the polis" (Loraux 1993, 39–40) and maintaining that Attica had always been a single, unified place, rather than a collection of different locales, the myth of autochthony undermined claims of ancestral descent from any particular area and challenged rural traditions of local autochthony (Connor 1994, 38; Herodotus 9.73). Still, the persistence of regional and urban/rural tensions suggests that Cleisthenes's artificial tribes, Pericles's place-effacing rhetoric, and autochthony's territorial uniformity were not enough to completely supplant local identities and attachments, particularly among citizens in the countryside.<sup>28</sup>

Athens therefore provides a powerful example of how citizens' connections to place, home, and customs can come into conflict with their commitment to democratic self-rule. If citizens feel forced to choose between preserving democracy or preserving their sense of home and way of life, many may choose the latter. For the hoplite oligarchs in 411, the land of Attica—not the democracy—was Athens's essential feature; Athens would still be Athens without its democracy (Taylor 2009, 190). In our present moment, political theorists are especially attuned to threats to democratic stability and longevity. To help recognize these threats and to better understand the relative worth citizens assign to democracy more generally, theorists should closely attend to attachments to place, home, and customs. They should also investigate the sociological conditions in which citizens feel compelled to value those attachments above democracy.

<sup>26</sup> As Connor writes, "the identity that residents of Attika felt as Athenian citizens was only one of the loyalties and ties that operated on them" (1994, 40). Efforts to spatially unify Athens were institutional, through Cleisthenes's tribal system; rhetorical, as in Pericles's speeches (e.g., I.143.4–5, II.62.3); and religious, through festivals and processions throughout the countryside (see Von Reden 1998, 170–8).

<sup>27</sup> On the connection between local phratries their ancestral lands, see Frost (2005, 162–3) and Tyrrell and Brown (1991, 134–5). Although the precise rationale behind Cleisthenes's reforms remains disputed, many scholars agree that they sought to transcend local and regional loyalties. For a summary (and interrogation) of this view, see Anderson (2003, 39).

<sup>28</sup> Athenian attachments to their physical lands push back against the conventional notion that the people, not the land, constituted Athens. As Zatta (2011) points out, the construction of Athens as consisting primarily in the people and not the place was "ideological work" mobilized during moments of crisis and "not a unanimously shared opinion" (343).



Recent scholars have investigated the forces driving urban and rural Americans apart and proposed strategies to heal divisions between them (Cramer 2016, 224; Hendrickson, Muro, and Galston 2018, 19; Hochschild 2016; Rodden 2019; Wuthnow 2018). Athens provides us with a historical example of a democracy that took steps to mitigate the divide's social and political consequences. Cleisthenes's artificial tribes mixed citizens from all over Attica in ways that did much to foster cooperation and loyalty between urban and rural citizens, although, as I have argued, they did not fully eliminate urban/rural divisions. After the war, Athens implemented specific reforms to mend its urban/rural divide, such as electing a general specifically responsible for defending the countryside (Ober 1985, 89–100). These solutions were tailored for the Athenian context, yet we can learn from their attempts to create and mend ties between urban and rural citizens. Although tensions between urban and rural people today may seem irreversibly entrenched, the Athenian experience helps us recognize the challenges presented by urban/rural conflict and reminds us that we are not helpless in the face of our own divisions.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

## ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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