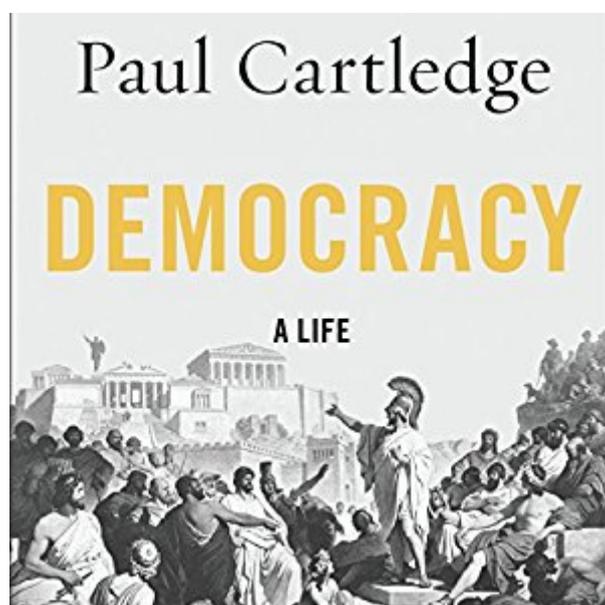


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# Democracy: A Life



## Synopsis

Ancient Greece first coined the concept of democracy, yet almost every major ancient Greek thinker - from Plato and Aristotle onward - was ambivalent toward or even hostile to democracy in any form. The explanation for this is quite simple: The elite perceived majority power as tantamount to a dictatorship of the proletariat. In ancient Greece, there can be traced not only the rudiments of modern democratic society but the entire Western tradition of antidemocratic thought. In *Democracy*, Paul Cartledge provides a detailed history of this ancient political system. In addition, by drawing out the salient differences between ancient and modern forms of democracy, he enables a richer understanding of both. Cartledge contends that there is no one "ancient Greek democracy" as pure and simple as is often believed. *Democracy* surveys the emergence and development of Greek politics, the invention of political theory, and - intimately connected to the latter - the birth of democracy, first at Athens c. 500 BCE and then at its greatest flourishing in the Greek world 150 years later. Cartledge then traces the decline of genuinely democratic Greek institutions at the hands of the Macedonians and - subsequently and decisively - the Romans. Throughout, he sheds light on the variety of democratic practices in the classical world as well as on their similarities to and dissimilarities from modern democratic forms, from the American and French revolutions to contemporary political thought. Authoritative and accessible, Cartledge's book will be regarded as the best account of ancient democracy and its long afterlife for many years to come.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Occasionally a book can be edifying, but some element of it leaves the reader feeling a little

disappointed and prevents a five star rating (or leaves one thinking, "What could have been"?). Such is the case with Paul Cartledge's 'Democracy: A Life' published by Oxford University Press. First, the overwhelming positives: The book renders a vivid picture of the nature of "democracy" in some of the "citizen-states" (see p. 15) of Ancient Hellenistic Greece, although it primarily focuses upon the Athenians because the evidentiary record for Athens is the deepest - particularly for the years 350-322 BCE (p. 105). "Democracy" it turns out is a remarkably plastic label, in fact so protean that it may serve as only a vague description of a political system in operation in Ancient Greece (or today, for that matter). Political systems in Ancient Greece varied as both internal and external forces buffeted the "citizen-states." As the author points out, the Athenians experienced four distinct "democratic" regimes (p. 185) between the fading years of Archaic Greece (c. 500 BCE) and Macedonian domination (c. 330 BCE). The "democratic" regimes varied by who was considered a citizen and what responsibilities they could exercise (voting, jury duty, officeholding, etc.). 'Democracy: A Life' is at its best when focused upon this complicated history. The political system a "citizen-state" adopted was influenced by internal forces (who could control power) and external forces such as shifting alliances between "citizen-states," as well as threats from Persia or Macedonia.

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