Aristotle and the *politeia* of the Carthaginians

Aristóteles y la *politeia* de los cartagineses

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Abstract

One aspect of Book 2 of Aristotle's *Politics* that has drawn the most attention among scholars is his discussion of the *politeia* of Carthage, a non-Greek political community. Bearing in mind this unconventional decision, my paper will firstly focus on the reasons that led Aristotle to include this regime by adopting the conceptual category of *politeia*: this, in fact, allows him to analyze political phenomena that meet a series of prerequisites and are not exclusively related with the Greek world. Secondly, I will concentrate on the criteria used by the philosopher to determine whether or not the Carthaginians' political order actually worked, showing that these criteria come mainly from the 'empirical' Books (4-6) of *Politics*.

Keywords: Aristotle's *Politics* Book 2, Carthage, *politeia*, non-Greeks, best regime (*ariste politeia*), Aristotle's *Politeiai*.

Resumen

Uno de los elementos del libro 2 de la *Política* de Aristóteles que más ha llamado la atención de los estudiosos de la obra ha sido el análisis de la *politeia* de Cartago, una comunidad política no griega. Teniendo en cuenta esta decisión aristotélica poco convencional, mi contribución se centrará en

primer lugar sobre las razones que llevan al filósofo a incluir este régimen gracias al uso de la categoría conceptual de *politeia*: esa categoría, en efecto, le permite analizar los fenómenos políticos que presentan una serie de prerrequisitos, aunque no pertenezcan al mundo griego. En la segunda parte del artículo presentaré los criterios empleados por Aristóteles al fin de establecer si el régimen político cartaginiense funciona, mostrando que estos criterios provienen en su mayoría de los libros 'empíricos' (4-6) de la *Política*.

Palabras-clave: libro II de la *Política* de Aristóteles, Cartago, *politeia*, bárbaros, régimen político mejor (*ariste politeia*), *Politeiai* aristotélicas.

One aspect of Book 2 of Aristotle's *Politics* (hereinafter *Pol.*) that has drawn the most attention among commentators[2] and which was recently brought up in two articles[3] aimed at defending the philosopher from accusations (raised by some scholars) that he was a proto-racist, inclined to identify non-Greeks as natural slaves, is his discussion of the political regime (*politeia*) of the North African city of Carthage. In this treatment, which takes up the third and final chapter of the section devoted to looking at the *politeiai* "in use in some of the cities that are said to be well managed" (trans. Lord[4]), not only does Aristotle compare the political organization of the Carthaginians with that of Sparta and Crete, which had long been held up as positive paradigms in Greek political thought, but he does this while engaged in studying the best political regime (*ariste politeia*) and the possibility of viewing it as somehow having been realized in historical experience (*Pol.* 2.11).

Bearing this 'unconventional' decision by Aristotle in mind, my contribution will focus on the reasons that led him to include a non-Greek political order in his discussion by applying the conceptual category of the *politeia*: this, in fact, allowed him to study political phenomena that met a series of prerequisites that had nothing to do with the fact of belonging or not belonging to the Greek world. The second part of my paper will concentrate on the criteria Aristotle used to determine whether or not the Carthaginians' political order actually worked. These criteria come mainly from what are known as the 'empirical' Books (4-6) of *Pol.* Finally, I will briefly discuss the importance of Aristotle's testimony for our knowledge of Carthaginian institutions in the second half of the fourth century BCE.

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[2] Newman 1887, II: 401-408; Schütrumpf 1991, II: 345; Simpson 1998: 112 and 123-124; Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 359ff.; Lockwood 2015: 69-70 and 75-78; Zizza 2021: 62-65.

[3] Lockwood 2020; Id. 2021. See also Dietze-Mager 2018: 24f.

[4] Translation by Lord 2013, from which all the passages of the *Pol.* mentioned in this essay will be taken, unless otherwise specified.

1. The *politeia* as a conceptual criterion used to interpret the Carthaginian regime

Before beginning to discuss how the conceptual category of the *politeia* affects Aristotle's interpretation of the Carthaginian political regime, we need to look at several facts which will help give a background for Aristotle's interest in this non-Greek city.

In the first place, a text like *Pol.*, whose aim was to provide generalized teaching for politicians and legislators, necessarily had to include information not only about the Greek world but about other peoples. This information might be of an institutional nature but it also might be connected with usages and customs that affected how a community was organized (politically): the aim was to obtain an overview (*synoran*) that would allow action or legislation through a knowledge of causes. In fact, as Aristotle states in *Pol.* 2.5, 1264a 1-5 in the domain of politics almost everything had already been discovered over the course of time[5] and these discoveries, as he repeats in *Pol.* 7.10, 1329a 40-b 35[6] were made by Greeks and non-Greeks: the division of the inhabitants of a city into classes is attested in both Egypt and Crete, but in Egypt it was much older and the practice of common messes which played a vital role in strengthening social cohesion among members of the *polis*, especially in view of military action, was first introduced by the king-lawmaker Italus in southern Italy. Furthermore, in *Rhetoric* 1.4, 1360a 30-37, which deals with legislation (a vital topic for decision makers and deliberative orators) Aristotle argues: "But it is useful, with a view to legislative acts, for someone considering the matter not only to understand what regime is advantageous on the basis of past events, but also to know the regimes present among other people (τὰς [πολιτείας] παρὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις) and what sort of regimes harmonize with what sorts of peoples. It is clear as a result that, for legislation, accounts of traveling the earth are useful (αἱ τῆς γῆς περίοδοι) – for in these it is possible to grasp the laws of nations (τῶν ἐθνῶν νόμους) – and for instance of political advice, the inquiries of those who write about human actions is useful" (trans. Bartlett). And he concludes (perhaps intended as a stab against Isocrates) that the application of such knowledge is the task of politics and not of rhetoric because the function of the politician "counsellor" is not the same as that of the rhetorician[7]. His use of data taken from travel accounts is clear, for example in *Pol.* 2.3, 1262a 18-21, where he criticizes Plato's proposal of having women and children in common and compares this with the custom (more functional) of certain inhabitants of Libya. But many other cases like this could be cited

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[5] Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 201.
[6] Lockwood 2020: 3-4 and 17-19. See also Weil 1960: 306-308.
[7] Poddighe 2020: 18-19.

in this work[8]. In the final part of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.10, 1181b 21-23, Aristotle insists on the importance of investigating the topic of the *politeia* in order to bring to completion the philosophy of human things and he continues: "first, then, if any part of what has been said by those before us is plausible, let us try to go through it. Then, in the light of the political systems we have collected (ἐκ τῶν συνηγμένων πολιτειῶν)[9], let us try to consider what sorts of things preserve and destroy cities and each type of political system, and what causes some cities to be well run, and others badly run" (trans. Crisp 2004). In short, when studying questions related to the *politeia* Aristotle also considers it worthwhile to examine the laws, institutions, usages and customs of other peoples, including, obviously, those of the Carthaginians.

The last cited passage explicitly mentions the collection of 158 *politeiai* which Aristotle and his school had created (or were in the process of creating). Aristotle declares that this material, which includes not only institutions and laws but all the components that go into forming the identity of a political community[10], will be used in *Pol.*, as a set of models for a general enquiry into the political regime (*politeia*) and its stability by using an inductive method. As Dietze-Mager has recently argued[11]: while it is likely that reports about usages and customs of non-Greek peoples (*ethne* as Thracians, Carians, Tyrrhenians, Romans) were not included among the *Politeiai* but in the Νόμιμα βαρβαρικά, it is nonetheless true that the former comprised, according to ancient testimony, not only those of the *poleis* but also of the *ethne* that inhabited the territory of north-western Greece and the Peloponnesus. This fact shows that Aristotle was certainly interested in some federal political formations present in the Greek world. All these components (constitutions of cities and *ethne*, usages and customs of non-Greek peoples) are considered worthy of being included in what Lockwood calls the "storehouse of institutional arrangements"[12] which Aristotle drew on to provide the most comprehensive possible picture of political enquiry.

Finally, we must also remember that in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, the wealthy and powerful city of Carthage appears to have enjoyed a generally positive reputation in the Greek sources[13] which gradually began to wane after the clash with Rome. One fact which bears this out is an earlier mention of the Carthaginian political regime as being well designed and its comparison

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[8] Weil 1960: 211-224; Zizza-Biondi 2020: 240-242 and Zizza 2021: 66-68.

[9] Bertelli 2012: 49-68 and Polito in this volume.

[10] See Polito in this volume.

[11] Dietze-Mager 2018: 24.

[12] Lockwood 2020: 19.

[13] The only exception is to be identified in the propaganda of the tyrant of Syracuse Gelon who defeated the Carthaginians in the battle of Himera (480 BCE), which is said to have taken place on the same day as the battle of Salamis: thus, an association was created between Gelon-Greeks and Carthaginians-Persians. See Barceló 1994: 1-14; Quinn 2019: 674-677.

with Sparta[14]. This reference is found in the oration *Nicocles*, dated around 368 BCE by Isocrates, who along with Plato was the object of attacks by Aristotle in the political domain, and who through the voice of the eponymous king of Cyprus (Isoc. 3.22 and 24 *passim*) affirms: "Monarchies not only excel in ordinary, everyday matters but they also have acquired every advantage in war. […] Furthermore, the Carthaginians and the Spartans, who governed best of all[15] are oligarchies at home but became kingships when they go out to war" (trans. Lee Too 2000). The rhetorician describes the regime of Carthage, along with that of Sparta[16], as being the best among those existing and defines it as a monarchy in circumstances of war and an oligarchy in peacetime. As we shall see below, this latter opinion was also partly shared by Aristotle, while the military aspect pointed out by Isocrates is almost entirely absent from the discussion in *Pol.* 2.11.

Considering these three aspects I have highlighted above which show a certain degree of openness on the part of Aristotle towards the institutions and customs of other peoples and to some extent the existence in the Greek world of a favourable view of Carthage, a manufacturing city that had succeeded in establishing a thriving commercial empire in the western Mediterranean, I will now concentrate on how, by using the general category of *politeia*, we can account for the inclusion of Carthage's political regime in a discussion of the *ariste politeia*.

The *Pol.* contains several definitions of the concept of *politeia*, one of the most comprehensive being in 4.1, 1289a 15-17 where Aristotle states that it is "an arrangement in cities connected with the offices, establishing the manner in which they have been distributed, what the authoritative element of the regime is, and what the end of the community is in each case". Out of this definition there arise a number of elements: 1. the *politeia* is linked to the *polis*, in fact, it is its τάξις; 2. in order to classify a *politeia* or to speak of a *politeia* one needs to consider how offices are distributed and the part of community that effectively exercises power, the *politeuma*; 3. the *politeia*'s τέλος needs to be considered, in other words the end the *politeia* pursues because it is this end that allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures adopted and to suggest suitable changes on the part of the legislator.

Now, in Aristotle's account in *Pol.* 2.11 of the Carthaginians' political regime all these elements are clearly present, in other words, Aristotle has

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[14] Bertelli 1977: 66.

[15] The codices all contain τοὺς ἄριστα τῶν Ἑλλήνων πολιτευομένους. The editors who adhere to the transcribed text attribute τῶν Ἑλλήνων only to the Spartans, others accept the conjecture τῶν ἄλλων proposed by Benseler and Blass, with the phrase referring both to the Spartans and the Carthaginians.

[16] Cf. Weil 1960: 230f. for whom the passage of Isocrates does not represent a significant precedent for the pairing of Carthage-Sparta: in fact, the Carthaginians would appear to have been cited by an association of ideas, given that just before (§ 23) the text mentions Dionysus I of Syracuse (Isoc. 6.44-45).

organized the information available to him about Carthage by applying a set
of criteria that allowed him to define their political order as a '*politeia*' just
as he had done for the Greek *poleis* and to compare this with the other two
systems mentioned earlier in this section, Sparta and Crete[17]. In fact in his
comparison of the Carthaginian *politeia* with that of Sparta – Crete quickly
disappears from the analysis – we can observe: 1. a mention of the main ἀρχαί:
office of the one Hundred and Four, kings, senate (*gerousia*), committees of
five, generals (*strategoi*), judicial boards (probably composed of the other
offices enumerated); 2. information about how these are appointed, that is to
say, by election based (at least theoretically) on merit alone (ἀριστίνδην), with
the problem (which I shall discuss below) of the same persons accumulating
various ἀρχαί; 3 the (implicit) importance of *kyrion* in the *politeia*, that is to
say, of the wealthy (who may also be distinguished by merit); 4. the political
regime's end which the legislator initially envisaged as merit but which then
became merit and wealth and finally only wealth[18].

   Aristotle's *interpretatio Graeca*[19] which he performs applying the
constitutive criteria of the *politeia* allows him to include non-Greek Carthage in
Book 2 of the *Pol.* It also shows that even if he had not written a *Constitution of
the Carthaginians*, he had gathered information on how their political system
functioned and that he deemed it worthy of his attention because as Newman
points out: "[t]he Carthaginian State was not a declining State when Aristotle
wrote, like the Lacedemonians and Cretans States, but was perhaps in its prime
or approaching it"[20] – in addition to the fact that this wealthy non-Greek city
was designed (at least as originally intended by the legislator) to reward the
excellence of its best persons (*beltistoi*) by assigning them public offices.

   Carthage does not only appear in *Pol.* 2.11, but is also mentioned, though
only very briefly, in other Books of the work[21]. In the order they have come
down to us over the centuries, Aristotle still cites Carthage, along with Sparta in
Pol. 3.1, 1275b 8-12, as an example of a *politeia* in which cases are adjudicated
by officials (and not by popular juries as in democracies), who divide these
cases among themselves; a treaty between the Carthaginians and the Etruscans
is mentioned in *Pol.* 3.9, 1280a 36 as an example of a tie based on commercial

exchange and mutual utility which has nothing to do with the definition of the *polis* and the citizen which Aristotle is trying to delineate. In the 'empirical' Books Carthage is mentioned in *Pol.* 4.7, 1293b 14-18, as an example of the second type of aristocracy, different from the best: "[w]herever, therefore, the regime looks both to wealth (πλοῦτον) and to virtue (ἀρετήν) as well as the people (δῆμον), as in Carthage, is aristocratic"; it is also distinguished from Sparta whose political regime, equally aristocratic, represents a different type of μίξις, which takes only two concerns into account, virtue and the people. In *Pol.* 5.7, 1307a 2-5 Aristotle in discussing the causes why aristocracies change, cites as an example of a *metabole* resulting from "an inordinate use of force deriving from the condition possessed"[22], the failed coup attempt by the Carthaginian general Hanno which probably took place in 344 BCE[23] and is mentioned immediately after another unsuccessful coup by the Spartan king Pausanias. Carthage is again mentioned in Book 5 in another two passages in Chapter 12 where the discussion deals first with tyranny and its stability and then with the criticism of 'constitutional' *metabolai* developed by Plato in Book 8 of *The Republic*[24]: it is interesting that Carthage is mentioned here, still alongside Sparta, first as an example of *metabole* from tyranny into aristocracy (εἰς ἀριστοκρατίαν, ὥσπερ ἡ Χαριλάου ἐν Λακεδαίμονι, καὶ ἐν Καρχήδονι[25], 1316a 33-34), which Plato does not consider and yet is one of the possibilities that an analysis of the historical data would allow, and a few lines later, as a case of a "democratic" regime (ἐν Καρχήδονι δὲ δημοκρατουμένῃ) in which "office-holders engage in money-making and have not yet changed its constitution" (trans. Keyt 1999). In 6.5, 1320b 4-7 Aristotle discusses the measures that can preserve a democracy and calls attention to the importance of not allowing the people to become impoverished, an approach that will be advantageous to rich and poor alike: this is precisely what Carthage did where "they are constantly sending out some of the people to the subject cities and making them well off", acquiring the "friendship" (φίλον) of the *demos*[26]. In the Punic city this measure was probably adopted by the wealthy in power who saw it as a way of protecting themselves from any potential rebellions the poor might unleash[27]. The final mention of the Carthaginians is in *Pol.* 7.4, 1324b 9-15 where they appear along with other non-Greek *ethne* (Scythians, Persians, Thracians and Celts) notable for their great honour of military power and are

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[22] De Luna-Zizza-Curnis 2016: 388.

[23] De Luna-Zizza-Curnis 2016: 393. This example, according to Weil 1960: 252-253, shows that Aristotle, at the time of composing this section of *Pol.* had obtained more information on the historical development of the Carthaginian political regime compared to what was available to him in 2.11.

[24] On this debate see De Luna-Zizza-Curnis 2016: 530ff.; Poddighe 2018 and Knoll in this volume.

[25] De Luna-Zizza-Curnis 2016: 541.

[26] On the importance of φιλία for the political stability and preservation of a *politeia* see Irrera in this volume.

[27] De Luna-Zizza-Curnis 2016: 603-604.

cited as an example of a people who stimulate men to military valour with *ad hoc* laws: "for example at Carthage, so it is asserted, they receive armlets to adorn themselves for each campaign they go on". With the exception of this final reference, where it is obvious the opposition between Sparta and Crete, Greek cities whose education and laws were aimed at stimulating military virtue, and several warlike non-Greek peoples (including Carthage), all the other passages mentioned above which appear uninterruptedly in Books 2-6 reveal a certain degree of attention by Aristotle for the Carthaginian political regime and his inclination to classify it according to a model appropriate for any Greek *polis*. If his classification of Carthage as a mixed aristocracy combining within it people, virtue and wealth (and which perhaps originated as a result of a *metabole* from an earlier tyranny)[28] cannot always be easily reconciled with his designation of the Punic city as a "democracy" where office holders enrich themselves while not aspiring to any political change[29] or as a political regime in which the citizens in power obtain the friendship of the poorest by allowing some of them to acquire wealth and thereby avert any threat of *stasis* and constitutional *metabole*[30], it is nonetheless clear that Aristotle is holding up this non-Greek political regime to his public as one of the many real models from which to draw very useful political suggestions.

2. Mixed aristocracy or oligarchy? Strengths and weaknesses of the Carthaginian regime

After arranging the data known about the Carthaginian political order in accordance with the most comprehensive definition of the *politeia* in Book 4, Aristotle can easily use this information in his discussion of the *politika* and on the best political regime, and, in fact, consider it as functioning better than the two systems discussed earlier, those of Sparta and Crete. He now must examine what strengths and weaknesses it presents and in relation to what parameters.

The detailed analysis is developed in *Pol.* 2.11 and follows two lines. Initially (1272b 26-1273a 2) the main reference point is the *politeia* of Sparta. In effect, Aristotle first acknowledges the superiority of many aspects of the Carthaginian political regime over generic 'others' and its similarity with Sparta. Subsequently he widens his perspective and draws a clear distinction between the *politeiai* of Sparta, Crete and Carthage, who form a group apart[31] – element which suggests a comparative study, already carried out, on the

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[28] Schütrumpf-Gehrke 1996: 609; Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 362.

[29] Cf. Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 371 and Poddighe 2018: 21-24.

[30] Cf. Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 372.

[31] On the various proposals regarding why these three may be grouped together cf. Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 361.

'constitutions'[32] – as opposed to the others. Having laid down these premises, Aristotle concentrates on those aspects worthy of praise while offering the triple proof of the fact that the Carthaginian political regime is "well-organized" (συντεταγμένη, 1272b 30): "the people abide by the constitutional system, and no faction even worth mentioning has developed and no tyrant"[33] (trans. Saunders). In Aristotle's opinion Carthage possesses a stable regime in which the *demos*, which is not the *kyrion*, remains calm and 'faithful' to the political system because, as Aristotle later points out, it views its own interests as being in some way taken care of.

At this point Aristotle begins a quick review of several aspects of Carthage's *politeia* which resemble (παραπλήσια) the Spartan system but which also appear to be superior to it: the common messes of the *hetaireiai* correspond to the Spartan *phiditia*[34]; the one Hundred and Four are the equivalent of the ephors – probably in the sense of their function, that is, the control they exercised over the other offices[35] – but their superiority consists of the fact that they are chosen on the basis of merit (ἀριστίνδην) and not just from any citizens (ἐκ τῶν τυχόντων); the king and the council of elders are also analogous (ἀνάλογον) to their Spartan counterparts, but even here the choice of their kings who are elected based on merit represents an advantage for Carthage – in fact, kings are identified within families who have distinguished themselves for merit and, from among members of these families and not on the basis of primogeniture[36]. As is obvious the Punic city stands out against Sparta for an important aspect, the criterion of merit[37] which determines the election of two of the three ἀρχαί hitherto mentioned (the one Hundred and Four and the king, while no mention is made of the *gerousia*).

Having completed this quick comparison between a number of institutions in Carthage and Sparta – which some interpreters believe was merely a way of 'justifying' to a Greek public his inclusion of this 'barbarian' *politeia*[38] –, Aristotle begins a criticism of the Carthaginian 'constitution' (1273a 2ff.), based mainly on indications of where it 'deviated' from the premises of the pre-selected political order.

First of all, Aristotle proceeds by declaring that the flawed aspects of the Carthaginian regime are censurable insofar as they are "deviations" (διὰ τὰς παρεκβάσεις, 1273a 3) and are also common to the other two constitutions –

[32] Perhaps the συνηγμέναι πολιτείαι of *NE* 10.10. Cf. Saunders 1995: 162.
[33] For possible contradictions of these affirmations with what is stated in *Pol.* 5.7, 1307a 2-5 and 5.12, 1316a 34, cf. Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 361.
[34] Cf. Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 362-363.
[35] Newman 1887, II: 405-406.
[36] A different opinion is found in Susemihl-Hicks 1894: 308 who refer to 1272b 38-41 on the election of the members of the *gerousia*.
[37] Cf. Hermosa 2013: 8-10.
[38] Simpson 1998: 112.

Sparta and Crete – discussed earlier. It is likely that here Aristotle is referring
to "deviations" from the best regime[39], represented perhaps by the choice of an
end – military virtue with a view to dominating others – which is not the one
the *ariste politeia* ought to be aiming for. This latter point disappears almost
immediately as a censurable criterion and gives way to a lengthy discussion
of the defects of the system relative to the ὑπόθεσις of the order chosen by the
legislator. In fact, according to Aristotle, Carthage is a mixed regime which was
born from the union of aristocracy and *politeia*, in which certain components of
the mixture tend towards the direction of extremes, democracy on the one hand
and oligarchy on the other.

Before proceeding to examine Aristotle's criticism we need to focus
on two aspects. Firstly, the appearance at 1273a 3 of the term παρέκβασις,
"deviation" (which is also repeated at 1273a 21, παρεκβαίνει, and 31,
παρέκβασιν), attested for the first time in *Pol*.[40]. This concept which represents
a novelty for Aristotle[41] and which he never clearly "defines"[42], is also used
in other passages of the work: in 3.7, 1279a 28-b 10, for example, the three
correct constitutions (monarchy, aristocracy and *politeia*), defined by the fact
that one, few or many govern for the common interest are contrasted with the
three deviated constitutions (tyranny, oligarchy and democracy) in which one,
few or many exercise power for their own benefit. Aristotle's assertion in 4.8,
1293b 22-27 is highly significant:

> It remains for us to speak of what is termed polity as well as of tyranny. We
> have arranged it thus, although polity is not a deviation, nor are those sort of
> aristocracies just spoken of, because in truth all fall short of the most correct
> regime, and because [usually] enumerated with them are those which are
> themselves deviations from them, as we have said in our initial discourses.

As Accattino has rightly pointed out[43], here Aristotle is postulating
two degrees of παρέκβασις: the first in which all regimes differing from
aristocracy understood as *ariste politeia* are 'deviated' since they do not
consider virtue as the sole criterion for access to citizenship, and the second
which is constituted by the regimes that deviate from the aristocracies

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[39] It should be briefly mentioned that in *Pol.* 2.9, at the beginning of the section (chapters 9-11)
devoted to real political regimes that are held in high repute, Aristotle has laid out the two forms of
enquiry that will be followed (1269a 31-34): "One: is there anything in the legislation that is been
enacted that is good, or bad, as compared with the best system (πρὸς τὴν ἀρίστην … τάξιν)? The other:
is there anything in it that is contrary to the assumption and character (πρὸς τὴν ὑπόθεσιν καὶ τὸν
τρόπον) of the constitution intended?" (trans. Saunders). Here the allusion is to the first form, *contra*
Weil 1960: 248; Bertelli 1977: 71 and n. 21; Schütrumpf 1991, II: 351-352; Tricot 1962: 154, n. 2.
[40] For the use of the term in *EE* 7.9, 1241b 27-29 and *NE* 8.12, 1160a 31-b 21, cf. Pezzoli-Curnis
2012: 369-370.
[41] The concept is absent in Plato, cf. Weil 1960: 249-250; Schütrumpf 1991, II: 352.
[42] Cf. *Pol.* 3.1, 1275b 1-3; 3.6, 1279a 20.
[43] Cf. Accattino 1986: 75-76.

discussed in 4.7 and the polity itself, understood as a mixture of democracy and oligarchy (1293b 33-34). These two degrees are already applied in *Pol.* 2.11 where first Aristotle cites the vaguely defined deviations from the *ariste politeia* common to the political regimes of Sparta, Crete and Carthage while later he concentrates on the tendencies and deviations of the Carthaginian regime with respect to the ὑπόθεσις of aristocracy and *politeia* (themselves 'deviations' from the best model).

The second point worth discussing is the fact that here the Carthaginian regime is classified as a μίξις of two types of constitutions, aristocracy and *politeia*[44]. Clearly the first term does not designate pure aristocracy but refers to those regimes, mentioned for example in Book 4, in which, along with virtue (which is their fundamental and characteristic element) other factors come into play (cf. 4.7, 1293b 7-21 and 4.11, 1295a 33-34). And it is no coincidence that precisely at 4.7, 1293b 14-16, Carthage appears in the list of 'other' aristocracies. The *politeia*, on the other hand, as Aristotle explains at 2.6, 1265b 26-28 when he criticizes the *polis* outlined in Plato's *Laws* is a composite of democracy and oligarchy in which the features of the two components are mixed in such a way that neither element prevails over the other[45]. Nevertheless, his critical examination of the Carthaginian constitution reveals that this μίξις of freedom, virtue and wealth does not function well enough. And this is clear, firstly from the considerations Aristotle introduces on the competencies of the assembly and magistrates, on the way they are elected and on the length of their terms, which find their basis in Aristotle's statements in 4.14-16 and 6.1ff. [46].

In particular, it is a deviation towards democracy (1273a 6-13), to allow the people, gathered together in the assembly (which they can attend by virtue of their free birth) to participate in determining the city's policy: the people, in fact, have authority to decide a question, if the king and senate are not in agreement; moreover, with regard to those proposals on which the king and senate are in agreement but for which they may submit a request for confirmation, the people have the right to hear the decisions and approve them, but they can also reject them and whoever wishes may express a contrary opinion (1273a 11-12). Aristotle criticizes this latter possibility which does not exist in Sparta and Crete and which, given the absence of more detailed information, may be applied to deliberations in any legislative domain because it implicitly ends up giving too much power to persons who were not chosen on the basis of merit but who only take part by virtue of their freedom, as is the practice in democracies.

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[44] For a different interpretation of the conjunction καί in the phrase τῆς ἀριστοκρατίας καὶ τῆς πολιτείας cf. Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 371.

[45] Cf. 4.8, 1293b 33-34 and 4.9.

[46] As correctly pointed out by Schütrumpf 1991, II: 353-354, though he does not state that *Pol.* 2.11 and the 'empirical' Books were written at the same time.

Deviations towards oligarchy (1273a 13-17) – which take up by far the most space from this point on until the end of the Chapter (with an interlude devoted to the "aristocratic" aspects, 1273a 17-20) – take the form of concentration of power in the hands of the committees of five, also known as the pentarchies, whose members co-opt themselves, elect the most important office, that is, the one Hundred [and Four][47] and remain in office longer than the others: enjoying supreme power in many important questions, they already have authority before they take office and after they have left it[48]. This latter aspect is in open contradiction with the principle of rotating offices which functions in a context in which citizens are equal and similar[49], and with the principle of limited terms of office, especially characteristic of democracies[50], but also very useful, as Aristotle states in *Pol.* 5.8, 1308a 13-19, in protecting aristocratic and oligarchic regimes where there are many who can access the ἀρχαί, so that these constitutions do not transform into a rule of the powerful (*dynasteiai*).

But inside the Carthaginian political order there also appear aristocratic features: offices are, in fact, not compensated, nor drawn by lot but chosen by election[51] and free and there is no legal specialization, by virtue of which, as in Sparta, certain legal matters are entrusted to certain offices and others to others offices. These two aspects, listed elsewhere as 'non-democratic'[52] and hence compatible both with aristocracy and oligarchy, are considered by Aristotle to be 'aristocratic' because their presence does not determine a greater oligarchic deviation of the political system[53].

In the last section of the Chapter (1273a 21-b 23) Aristotle insists on further aspects of the Carthaginian *politeia* that reveal its gradual departure from aristocracy founded on virtue and merit and which point to a clear deviation to oligarchy.

The first and most serious element which Aristotle focuses on (1273a 21-b 7) – because it is the result of an error by the legislator in the choice of means leading to a desired end – consists in the introduction of a second criterion, that

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[47] Cf. 4.15, 1300b 1-2: "it is oligarchic when some select from some by election".

[48] On the possible meaning of this latter assertion cf. Moscati 1972: 663.

[49] Cf. for example 3.6, 1279a 8-10.

[50] Cf. for example 6.2, 1317b 24-25.

[51] This observation suggests that the rule also applied to members of the *gerousia*.

[52] *Pol.* 6.2, 1317b 35-38: pay for judges, magistrates and participants of the assembly as a characteristic feature of democracy; 2.12, 1274a 8-9: concession by Pericles of the μισθός to jury members; 4.6, 1293a 6: pay to the poor in radical democracy to allow them to participate in politics; 4.9, 1294a 39-40: μισθός for participation in the tribunals as a defining feature of a democratic regime; 4.9, 1294a 7-8: appointments to offices drawn by lots as typical of the democratic system; 4.9, 1294b 31-33: Sparta is an oligarchy because office holders are elected and not drawn by lot; 6.2, 1317b 20-21 and 1318a 2-3: appointments to offices drawn by lots as typical of the democratic system. Cf. Newman 1887, II: 366; Aubonnet 1960: 169, n. 2; Schütrumpf 1991, II: 355-356; Simpson 1998: 125.

[53] Saunders 1995: 164.

of wealth[54], for access to offices: in fact, the Carthaginians have adopted the view, shared by others[55], that a poor person cannot perform well in an office and have leisure and they have therefore limited election to persons who are both virtuous and wealthy (οὐ γὰρ μόνον ἀριστίνδην ἀλλὰ καὶ πλουτίνδην οἴονται δεῖν αἱρεῖσθαι τοὺς ἄρχοντας, 1273a 23-24[56]). In particular, Aristotle observes that it is this very union of two criteria, wealth (oligarchy) and virtue (aristocracy) that allows the Carthaginian political system to be classified as a third sort (τάξις τρίτη) between pure oligarchy and pure aristocracy and it plays a part in the appointment of offices and especially the most important ones, kings and generals, the latter not previously mentioned and linked to the military sphere. Here Aristotle does not contest the idea that leisure is necessary for access to offices as well as a certain measure of wealth[57] but the way in which the Carthaginian legislator determined – or rather – failed to determine these requirements. The legislator grasped the importance of the question, which is one of the aspects that need to be dealt with at the beginning, but he solved the problem by excluding the virtuous poor who meet the criterion of the ἀρετή but not that of σχολή. And therein lies his error because he should have introduced such measures that would have allowed all those who are virtuous (οἱ βέλτιστοι) to have leisure time and to do nothing disgraceful not only when they are in office but as private individuals[58]. And yet, Aristotle continues, while for the sake of leisure one should look to the need for wealth, it is wrong that the greatest offices, that of king and general, can be bought. This practice has, in fact, two serious consequences, both in opposition to the general political orientation of aristocracy: on the one hand that wealth should be more honoured than virtue[59], and on the other, that the city should become greedy. It is, in fact, inevitable that if those in power honour wealth more than virtue – because wealth is the fundamental factor that allows them to be elected to office (especially the highest), then others will do the same, and a city in which this situation arises cannot be said to have a firmly aristocratic constitution. In addition, the central importance of wealth in the Carthaginian political regime has the effect that offices obtained at personal expense are not exercised for the common good but in order to obtain profit: for if a poor but virtuous person (hence someone excluded from holding office) is tempted to profit, this will be even more true for another ordinary individual (such as those who acquire magistracies in Carthage), especially if he has spent his own money. And, as

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[54] See Lockwood 2020: 12-15.

[55] Cf. for example 4.8, 1293b 36-42.

[56] See also *AP* 3.1 and 6 and Rhodes 1993: 97-98, where the combination of the two criteria functions for the first Athenian constitution.

[57] Cf. Simpson 1998: 125-126.

[58] Cf. with regard to what Aristotle established in *Pol.* 7.9, 1328b 39-1329a 2 and 1329a 17-26 on the characteristics of the citizen of the *ariste politeia*.

[59] Cf. Poddighe 2018: 21-24.

Aristotle remarks at 3.6, 1279a 13-16, when those holding office "because of the benefits to be derived from common things and from office, […] wish to rule continuously", private interest will prevail over the common good and correct political systems degenerate; furthermore, he makes the point in 5.8, 1308b 31-33, when discussing the remedies needed in order to avert *metabolai*, "a very great thing in every regime is to have the laws and the management of the rest arranged in such a way that it is impossible to profit (κερδαίνειν) from the offices". Clearly in Carthage the legislator did not act in this way and the result of his error is the greed of the city as a whole[60]. Aristotle concludes from this that offices ought to be entrusted to those best capable of ruling (1273b 5), that is to say, those who are distinguished by their virtue, regardless of their wealth – and that the Carthaginian legislator should have at least ensured that respectable persons have leisure while they are in office rather than entirely excluding those who are poor without intervening with any provision.

Before going on to the last oligarchic deviation, which confirms the definitive transformation of Carthage's political regime into an oligarchy, we should look at how the verb σχολάζειν and the noun σχολή are used in the passage just commented on (1273a 21-b 7). Here Aristotle uses the terms with a very precise socio-economic meaning referring to the condition of an individual endowed with a certain degree of wealth who is free to devote himself to active politics because he is not forced to support himself by his own labour[61], a meaning that is used with some frequency in the 'empirical' Books "in relation to the sociological categorization of groups/classes within the *polis* and the constitutions that correspond to the respective domination of each class"[62], and which already appeared in 2.9, 1269a 34-36[63], but where the reference term was the *ariste politeia* and not, as in the case of Carthage, the ὑπόθεσις of the regime.

Returning to Aristotle's criticism, a further deviation towards oligarchy (1273b 8-17) and a custom harmful for the running of the city is the simultaneous accumulation of several offices in the hands of one individual[64], a practice that was held in high regard in Carthage. As Aristotle states at 4.15, 1299a 34-b 4 and 6.8, 1321b 8-10, this custom (unless the community is very small) is unsuitable for two reasons: on the one hand, it is not appropriate for the life of the *polis* because it contradicts the principle according to which a man can best and most expeditiously perform only a single task at a time – the same person cannot be expected to make shoes and play the flute –, on the other hand, it is not democratic because it does not make offices accessible to the greatest number

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[60] Cf. Schütrumpf 1991, II: 358.
[61] Cf. Bertelli 1977: 68, 72 and 1984: 115-121.
[62] Bertelli 1984: 115.
[63] Pezzoli-Curnis 2012: 309-310.
[64] On the possible consequences of this practice cf. 5.10, 1310b 22-23.

of persons. In order to demonstrate the validity of his reasoning Aristotle now takes an example where many individuals participate in the same activity: in military and maritime matters, the fact of commanding and being commanded is shared by everyone insofar as everyone obeys a superior and commands a subordinate.

Now that the oligarchic nature of the constitution was clear, Aristotle observes that the Carthaginians in power had found a way of avoiding social conflict with the people by allowing them to enrich themselves – some of the poor are sent out to the subject cities to accumulate wealth[65] –, but while this device functioned it was not the product of the legislator but a work of chance (1273b 21). And let us add to this that, on the basis of what was said at 5.8, 1308a 9-10, allowing the people to enrich themselves makes it possible to safeguard aristocracies and oligarchies which in themselves are not solid but where the powerholders (τοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς) treat well those excluded from power. Clearly, even if the measure works, the fact that it is the result of chance and not of specific laws aimed at ensuring the tranquillity of the people means that the political regime will be spared conflict between rich and poor only as long as there are no unexpected rebellions[66].

All the strengths (few) and weaknesses (many) pointed out in 2.11 which Aristotle returns to in other passages of *Pol.* and especially in the 'empirical' Books (4-6) show that also the Carthaginian political regime, despite it being better than the Spartan system for certain aspects, insufficiently adapted its means to the ὑπόθεσις of this *politeia*.

3. Aristotle's testimony of Carthage

Before concluding, one final aspect that is worth mentioning is the importance of the historical reports contained in *Pol.* 2.11 for our knowledge (however scanty and unclear) of Carthaginian institutions in the second half of the fourth century BCE.

Obviously, there are limits to the extent we can rely on the historical *realia* in *Pol.* Aristotle in fact uses the information gathered in order to provide examples that are intended to clarify theoretical concepts[67], or as in the specific cases of Sparta, Crete and Carthage, he selects and then examines the features of these regimes according to the criteria of the *ariste politeia* or, for the North African city to determine whether its institutions conform to the ὑπόθεσις of the

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[65] For a different interpretation of the text cf. Whittaker 1978: 76.

[66] For Saunders 1995: 166 Aristotle's criticism has to do with the fact that a city whose only way of avoiding conflict is by expelling part of the citizenry is not a real political community.

[67] On Aristotle's use of history see Moggi 2013; Bertelli 2014; Poddighe 2020 and Zizza in this volume.

chosen *politeia*. But even with these limits, this chapter of Aristotle's represents the earliest discussion of Carthaginian institutions and, as Jahn has rightly pointed out[68], the only ancient source that does not describe that city's political regime from the perspective of an enemy. As stated above, it is likely that, given Carthage's rising political, military and commercial power, Aristotle wished to examine the city's current institutions and, in some way, foresee its potential future developments[69]. And this perhaps explains why, unlike in Sparta and Crete, where the origins of earlier failings and present decline are explained by an initial error on the part of the legislator, whose effects were aggravated with the passage of centuries – hence the coexistence of a synchronic and diachronic approach in Chapters 9 and 10 – Carthage's political order had no past and was judged solely on its present condition.

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[68] Cf. Jahn 2004: 180.
[69] Cf. also Lockwood 2020: 11.

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