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"OSTRACISM", THE PEOPLE'S WAY OF PROTECTING DEMOCRACY FROM TYRANTS IN ANCIENT ATHENS

"OSTRACISM", ANTİK ATİNA'DA HALKIN DEMOKRASİYİ TİRANLARDAN KORUMA YÖNTEMİ

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Abstract

In ancient Athens, where democracy was born, during the reign of Cleisthenes, between 487 and 416 BC, a kind of exile system called ostracism was introduced to protect democratic rule. This practice was actually a reflex of the Athenians, who were reacting to the arbitrary and oppressive regimes of the Tyrants, to protect the democratic government. Athenians wrote the names of rulers, who they feared would turn into tyrants and destroy democracy by force, on pieces of pottery called ostrakon, which served as ballot papers. As a result of the voting carried out in this way, the person whose name was written the most was exiled outside Athens for ten years. The status of the exiled person did not change. His property was also not confiscated. The person who was sent out of Athens with ostracism was returning to Athens after ten years of exile, continuing his life with his previous title and advantages.

Although ostracism was seen as the insurance of democracy and the guarantee of the system when it was first implemented, it later moved away from its real purpose. It is also seen that some Athenian rulers, who wanted to increase their power, used ostracism as a weapon by influencing the views of the people to weaken or eliminate their rivals. Hemistocles, Kimon, and Alcibiades were also among the famous rulers of Athens exiled by the practice of ostracism. Ostracism, which first started with the exile of Hipparchus from Athens for 10 years, was finally applied to Hyperbolos in 417 BC, and then this practice disappeared into history.

Keywords: Athenian democracy, democracy, ostracism, exile

Öz

Demokrasinin doğduğu antik Atina'da, Kleisthenes döneminde, MÖ 487-416 arasında, demokrasi rejiminin korunması için, ostracism adı verilen bir tür sürgün sistemi uygulanmaya başlanmıştı. Bu uygulama tiranların keyfi ve baskıcı rejimlerine tepki gösteren Atinalıların demokratik yönetime sahip çıkma refleksiydi aslında. Atinalılar tirana dönüşmesinden ve güç kullanarak, zorla demokrasiyi ortadan kaldırmasından endişe duyduğu yöneticilerin isimlerini ostrakon adı verilen, oy pusulası işlevi gören çanak çömlek parçalarına yazıyorlardı. Bu şekilde gerçekleştirilen oylamanın sonucunda en çok ismi yazılan kişi on yıl süreliğine Atina dışına sürgüne gönderiyordu. Sürgüne yollanan kişinin statüsü değişmiyordu. Mal varlığına da el konmuyordu. Ostracism ile Atina dışına gönderilen kişi, on yıllık sürgünün ardından Atina'ya geri dönüyor, önceki unvan ve avantajlarıyla yaşamına devam ediyordu.

Ostracism ilk uygulanmaya başlandığında demokrasinin sigortası, sistemin garantisi gibi görülse de sonradan gerçek amacından uzaklaşmıştır. Gücünü arttırmak isteyen bazı Atinalı yöneticilerin rakiplerini zayıflatmak ya da ortadan kaldırmak için, halkın görüşlerini etkileyerek, ostracismi adeta bir silah gibi kullandığı da görülmüştür. Atinalı yöneticilerden Hemistokles, Kimon ve Alkibiades gibi isimler Atina'nın ostracism uygulamasıyla sürgüne gönderilmiş ünlü yöneticilerindendir. İlk olarak Hipparchus'un 10 yıllığına Atina dışına sürgün edilmesiyle başlayan ostracism son olarak MÖ 417 yılında Hyperbolos için uygulanmış ve sonra bu uygulama tarihe karışmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Atina demokrasisi, demokrasi, ostracism, sürgün

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Introduction

Democracy emerged from the combination of the words “demos” meaning “people” and “kratos” meaning “power” (Ober, 2007). Presumably from 2000 to 700 BC, most Greek city-states were ruled by monarchs. At first, the Greek kings were elected by the people, but over time, the kings began to hand over their thrones to their children, and rather to the eldest son, after their death. It is possible to say that the road to Athenian democracy began with the abolition of the monarchy around 700 BC. In fact, from the seventh century onwards, the Athenians showed their opposition to the monarchy with their reactions and they united to resist (Mitchell, 2019).

The monarchy was replaced by the aristocracy, and the political power was given to an assembly formed by nine archons whose positions and terms were limited. The archon called "Basileus" was responsible for worship and religious rituals, resolving cases on religious matters. "Polemarch", also known as the war archon, was analyzing the legal cases between non-citizens while managing the army. The most effective archon, known as "eponymous", oversaw the parliamentary and public affairs, and was responsible for non-religious legal cases. Six other judicial officers, called "Thesmothetai", were added to these three archons, and the nine-person archon administration was formed. These nine archons were also elected annually among candidates close to aristocratic families known as "Eupatrids" (Pomeroy et al, 2020).

Social Structure in Ancient Athens

The social structure of Ancient Greece consisted of different classes. The highest ranking among these classes were the privileged class of aristocrats called "Aristoi". The aristocrats consisted of powerful families and clans that were possessing both economic and political power. There was also a second poorer class called "Perikoi" or "dusty feet", which consisted of men with very poor fertile lands far from the city. As the city's population grew, and the legacies were divided among siblings, this secondary class began to grow. Besides these two classes, there was another third class called "Nouveau riche" which engaged in production and trade. Aristoi was trying to protect his political privileges and powers only by allowing landowners to rise (Cartwright, 2013).

As the people of the city became stronger with the development of the city-states, disagreements began between the rich and noble classes and the people. The middle and lower classes of the people were not happy with the interpretation and enforcement of laws or rules governing social life according to customs and traditions. The privilege of having the last word and making the final decision in every matter belonged to the families formed by the nobles. The existing rules and system were based on the noble class's decisions and were only protecting themselves.

Eupatrids ruled Athens as they wished for almost four hundred years after the overthrow of the royal government. At the end of this long period of domination, it was observed that the public wanted to change the administration. The general discontent that emerged in 598 BC showed that a revolution was coming soon (Coulanges, 2012). Late in the seventh century, Athens also witnessed a tyranny clash. Cylon, an aristocratic winner of the Athenian Olympic games, whose father-in-law was the tyrant of the nearby Megara, Theagenes, attempted to become a tyrant by capturing Athens (Raaflaub, Ober, & Wallace, 2008). According to Grant, this coup attempt on Cylon was not an attempt inspired by democratic ideals. Rather, it was the result of sharp conflicts between the heads of the Eupatrid clans (Grant, 2012). The coup attempt failed, and Cylon was executed. The form of

government has not changed and quarrels between the elite groups continued (Hanssen& Fleck, 2011).

In archaic Athens, the quarrels between the elite clans and the conflicts between the nobles began to threaten the peace and security of the city. As instability increased, Athens' competitiveness with other city-states also decreased. The Athenian elites thought that if Athens, as in some other city-states, had written laws, this administrative confusion and chaos could be prevented. Appointed by the aristocrats for this purpose in the late 7th century BC, Draco created Athens' first written form of law. Although Draco's laws were successful in maintaining public order until the 4th century BC, Athens failed to provide the desired stability. Economic differences between classes have become more pronounced and deepened, and the threat of violence has not diminished (Carugati, Hadfield & Weingast, 2015). While Draco's laws were partially successful, they were not enough to stop the fighting in Athens. By the year 600, the small landowners were at risk of becoming the slaves of the large landowners, who were already in a position of political and religious authority, but also increased their economic power to the extreme. To get rid of this situation, the wisest of Athens called Solon, whom they believed in his honesty and impartiality (Adamidis, 2017). Solon prepared the Solon Constitution, the oldest constitution of the Ancient Greek era, bearing his name. The Solon Constitution was prepared to eliminate the negative effects of the Drakon Laws. During his rule, Solon's political and economic reforms aimed at justice and paved the way for subsequent social reforms. All debts were cleared and the lands taken from them were redistributed to the peasants.

Athens and Democracy

In 594 BC, Solon drafted a constitution called timocracy, based on the idea of a type of gradual oligarchy. Accordingly, the rulers would be determined by the amount of product they produced annually, not the birthrights of the aristocracy. In other words, classes would be reshaped according to the rate of production, not familial elements. According to this criterion, namely the amount of urea produced, Athens was divided into classes such as pentakosiomedinoi, ippeis, and zeugitai. In addition to these three classes, there was another class called Thetes, which produced the least. "Compared to the other three classes, the members of Thetes, which were the poorest, could not be elected to public office even though they could vote (Zouboulakis, 2014). According to this social template prepared by Solon, the most important political posts were again reserved for the upper class, but for the lower classes, participation in parliament was also possible (Arblaster, 1999). It was a great disappointment for the aristocrats that Solon, whom they appointed to protect their sovereignty, ended the forced slavery of the peasants due to their debts, erased their debts, and limited the amount of land that could be owned. Although the people were relatively more comfortable economically, they were not satisfied because they did not receive most of the social rights and security they expected. Putting the regime on the basis of wealth was in the interest of the tradesmen and the bourgeoisie, who were starting to get stronger economically, and they tried to turn this advantage against the aristocrats into political rights.

Athens needed a protector to protect her against her enemies. In 560 BC, Peisistratus, a relative of Solon, took advantage of this expectation and established a mercenary army with the wealth he obtained from the gold and silver mines, captured Athens and declared his leadership. Peisistratus, who ruled Athens for 10 years until his death in 527 BC, legitimized his persecution while preserving Solon's system. However, he manipulated the law by getting his relatives elected Archon (Pomeroy et al., 2020). Pesistratus continued to cooperate with the aristocrats, but on the other hand, he reconciled opposition groups and prevented the unrest in society. Although the powers of the nobles were not taken away, their former

privileges and absolute dominance disappeared. Athens has become a city where everyone is bound by common pride and loyalty. (Worthington, 1981). The economy was at the center of Pesistratus' policies. Like Solon, he followed a trade-oriented policy, especially agriculture. He loaned money to the poor and gave them land to cultivate. Especially with the importance of construction work, the poor began to find work more easily and the population of Athens increased. People whose situation improved became more interested in politics (Pomeroy et al., 2020). After Peisistratos, his sons Hippias and Hipparchus took over the administration. Aristocrat opposition also systematically increased during the two brothers' reign, resulting in the murder of Hipparchos in 514 BC. Later, Hippias was overthrown by the Spartans in 510 BC with the support of the exiled Athenians led by the Alkmoinoid family (Lyttkens, 2010).

Democracy arose in Athens, one of the ancient Greek city-states, called "polis" in word, concept, and practice. The belief in a management approach where there will be no external influence in administrative and legal terms and the right to vote will not depend on property has been effective in the emergence of democracy (Ober 2003). Athenians differ in their views on when democracy emerged. While some attribute the concept to the legendary king Theseus, the majority argue that Solon played a leading role in democracy (Sinclair 1991). Greek democracy emphasizes the direct participation of ordinary people in common self-government. With this feature, it is naturally different from modern forms of democracy (Ober, 2008).

Yes, maybe there was a democracy in Athens, but it is unlikely to be a true liberal democracy. Although the Athenians gave importance to the rights of the majority, they did not show the same sensitivity to individual rights. In ancient Athens, the people were in power politically and there were no institutions or constitutions to limit their rights. Therefore, laws could be repealed or declared invalid by the majority. There was no self-control and balance mechanism in Athenian democracy (Hatzis, 2016).

Between 650-550 BC, the dominance of tyrants was at the forefront in the ancient Greek administrations. These were people who seized power through violence against the existing laws and laws (Anıl, 2006). At the beginning of the seventh century, that is, after the aristocrats began to lose power, tyrants took over the government from time to time in Greek history. The word tyrant, which corresponds to the word dictator we use today, meant the man who single-handedly obtained power in the state and held the administration contrary to the existing laws (Andrews, 1956). The strengthening of the Athenian navy as a result of the wars, and the city's dominance of Aegean and Mediterranean trade in every sense enabled Athens to become much more prosperous and secure. As a result, democratic institutions and ideas in Athens had the opportunity to develop and spread in society. In addition to these, Athens, competing with monarchic and militarist Sparta, started to protect its democratic institutions more faithfully and felt the need to protect its regime (Anıl, 2006).

Protecting Democracy from Tyrants

There was a practice called Ostracism in ancient Athenian democracy to impede influential people and rulers who could pose a potential threat to the institution of democracy by exile. Ostracism was introduced during the reign of Cleisthenes, in the 4th century BC, as a guarantee of Athenian democracy. Due to this exile, people who threatened the harmony and peaceful functioning of politics and were worried about their tyranny had to leave Athens for ten years, with the Athenians voting by writing their names on sherds called ostraca (Maier et al., 2010). In ancient Greece, the word ostraca was used to refer to turtles and seashells. Indeed, the English word oyster comes from the same etymological root. In addition, the word ostraca was used to describe the broken pottery buried under the ground in those years and is used in the same sense today. A piece of pottery with an inscription is

called an ostracon. Another thing that turns a broken piece of pottery into an ostracon is that the inscription on it was written after the pot was broken (Maltomini, 2014). Although ostracism was identified with Athens, it was not limited to Athens. Ostracism was practiced in other Greek city-states such as Dargos, Megara, Miletus, Ephesus, and Syracuse. The practice in Syracuse was called petalismos because the names were written on olive leaves, not on broken pottery (Aktan, 2021).

Ostracism was part of Cleisthenes' far-reaching reforms to preserve ancient Greek democracy. However, before Cleisthenes, there was a practice of exile against tyrants in Athens. A similar exile took place during the Solon period. But the exiles during the Solonian period were different from the ostracism of Kleishenes. In Solon's system, this decision was made not by the popular assembly (ekklesia), but by the aristocratic council (Areopagus). In addition, the citizenship and property rights of the person who was exiled were taken away (Raubitschek, 1951). Kleishenes' ostracism was different from other classical exiles. The person who was found dangerous for the regime and exiled would be able to return after 10 years, when he completed his sentence, and when he returned, he would be able to get his rights back. With this, it is also aimed to transform the exiled person into a harmonious citizen (Kosmin, 2015).

Ostracism which emerged as a result of distrust and suspicion towards the cruel politicians in Athens (Aristotle, 1891), can be evaluated as a result of the principle and practice of isonomia, which means that everyone is equal according to the laws, which Solon laid the foundations and reinforced with the reforms of Cleisthenes.It is also important in this context that the application of ostrokismos has the opportunity to be applied after the phenomenon of ısonomia, which was strengthened by Cleisthenes (Gouschin, 2019). It is also important in this context that the Ostrokismos application has the opportunity to be applied after the Isonomia phenomenon strengthened by Kleisthenes (Gouschin, 2019). Although later used for different and personal purposes, the main purpose of the exile of ostrocism was to prevent the entire nation from falling into slavery under tyranny, which was seen as the greatest inequality in the eyes of the Greeks (Şenel, 1970). The aim here was to protect the city and democracy from extreme polarization and internal strife, rather than accusing anyone of any political crime. On the other hand, the political exile imposed by ostracism was different from other exile punishments as it did not include loss of status and property (Malkopoulou, 2017). The people's court was not a political institution, but publicly set up against richer, freer, stronger, and more colorful individualism (Friedell, 1999).

Athens was a society in which citizens had the right and tradition to punish and disenfranchise those found guilty by voting in assemblies or public courts. However, since ostracism did not have a punitive feature, exclusion was outside this scope. Today, the names of almost all of the leading politicians of the period can be found on the ostraca, which are exhibited in museums and kept in archives. For example, an ostracon found during archaeological excavations, on which the name of Themistokles is written, perhaps it is possible to deduce a whole philosophy of history. Popular opinion argues that ostracism is an anti-aristocratic and patriotic attitude. (Freeman, 2003). Aristocrats who were thought to be related to the Persians in 480's were expelled from the country in this way. The person thus exiled had to leave Athens within ten days and could not return for 10 years. However, he was able to preserve his citizenship and property during his exile, returned to Athens after his sentence was over, and continued his life without being subjected to any bad sanction or punishment. It was a kind of precaution rather than punishment. The honor of the person who was temporarily exiled for ten years was not tarnished (Karamanoğlu, 2007).

Criticism of Ostracism

The application of Ostracism, where the people of Athens could decide to exile a citizen through a democratic vote, was also an indicator of the institutionalization of Cleisthenes' power. The compulsion of deportation of a citizen under the name of democracy has caused occasional distress for the leaders of Athens democracy, as well as criticism of democracy. The close relationship between political power and post-exile political power, as well as the need to handle the power cycle between aristocrats in politics, explained why ostracism, which allowed the people to peacefully interfere with the conflicts and friction between aristocrats, was the basis of Cleisthenes' political reforms (Forsdyke, 2000).

Ostracism was subject to a different process than assemble meetings where ordinary legislation was discussed. At a meeting set in late December or early February each year, the chairman of the assembly would invite members, and the public, to a meeting where they would indicate whether they would like to make an ostracism decision. No name was specified in the call. The participants expressed whether they wanted to practice ostracism by raising their hands. While the participation was about 3000 people in the 5th century BC, this number went up to 6000 especially after the participants started to receive salaries for the sessions. If the decision of the majority was for the ostracism institution to enter the circuit for someone, voting would take place shortly after. Everyone wrote someone's name that he wanted to be exiled on a potsherd. Votes are counted, and the person who took at least 6000 people's votes would be banished for ten years by the votes of the general majority rather than the average majority. Every year, only one person could be banished as a result of ostracism (Tridimas, 2016). In another approach, ostracism is considered an effective weapon of the democratic regime, which acts collectively in the public and limits the effects of the members of the leading families of the society on public life.

About 12,000 ostraka have been found in the excavations carried out to date, in the Athenian agora and the excavations in Kerameikos (Aktan, 2021). According to Androtion, the first person who was exiled as a result of ostracism in the historical process is considered to be Hipparchus, a relative of Pisistratus. Concerned that Hipparchus would establish his tyranny by using his popularity as a military commander and that his followers would support him, the people activated ostracism, removed him from Athens, and started the practice of exile known as Ostracism (Raubitschek, 1951). The exclusion was used against many important figures in Athenian politics after Hipparchus. Leading figures of Athenian politics such as Aristides, Themistocles, Cimon, Alcibiades, and Thucydides were also exiled by the practice of Ostracism. Even some very important figures such as Pericles were targeted but not exiled. The ancient writer Plutarch says that Ostracism last occurred in 416 BC. When Alcibiades and Nicias realized that they were going to be exiled from Athens, they stated that they were against it and they tried to direct the votes of the citizens to write the name of their rival Hyperbolus, which caused the people to become completely alienated from this practice (Gannon, 2020). Ostracism fell out of use after Hyperbolus' exile. Indeed, there is no evidence that ostracism was used after 417 BC and the Peloponnesian War. Because, on this date, democrats and oligarchs had left the old conflicts behind and recalled those who were exiled from both sides, and declared a general amnesty. It was agreed not to file a lawsuit, and the search for the responsible for the previous events was abandoned (Şenel, 1970).

Although ostracism aimed to protect democracy from the danger of tyranny, on the other hand, it served the goals of the rulers to further increase their power by sending their opponents into exile (Aktan, 2021). For a while, ostracism, which was applied only to those who were thought to be related to former tyrants, later gained a general character and its scope of application expanded. The fact that ostracism is a political punishment, and there is no

evidence to justify the accusations, and the need to prove the accusations, has left the politicians face to face with a possible victimization. Ostracism could therefore easily turn into a useful tool for purging political rivals (Kutlu, 2019). There was no need to prove the accusation or claim that caused the exile of ostracism. This sometimes caused people to be exiled without being able to defend themselves even though they were innocent. An example of this is Pericles' use of ostracism in the mid-fifth century to maintain his dominance and get rid of his rivals (Doenges, 1996). Pericles' father, Xanthippus, was one of the Athenians who went into exile as a result of ostracism. Since he was a child in those years, there is no information about a part of his youth years because he lived in exile with his father and family (Azoulay, 2014). According to information based on Aristotle, the first person to be sentenced to ostracism despite not being guilty was Pericles' father Xanthippos in 488 BC. The main reason for the exile of Aristeides was the fact that he gained the enmity of his political rival Themistocles (Aktan, 2021). On the other hand, some interesting coincidental events have also been experienced in ostracism practices. For example, Themistocles himself, who was primarily responsible for the exile of Aristeides, was exiled from Athens around 470 BC, ostracized for collaborating with the Persians. However, Themistocles, although he was an important politician and general, who made the number of ships in the Athenian navy almost double and contributed to the state in this regard; he could not escape from exile (Kundakçı, 2018)

Finally, the practice of ostracism has been the subject of discussion on many platforms. A popular scholarly trend associates obstracism with aristocratic politics and elite rivalry. Exclusion became a tool for elite politicians to get rid of their rivals and for the police to prevent divisions over politics (Barbato, 2021).In other words, the experiences have shown that ostracism, which was used to protect democracy, became a victim of populism over time and was used to protect the personal interests of some.

Conclusion

Ostracism is a method invented in Ancient Athens, where democracy first emerged, to protect the system from those who intend to abolish democracy. In other words, ostracism is a self-defense of democracy against tyrants by the people themselves. From this perspective, it can be considered an expression of the people's belief in democracy and their desire to protect their government.

Here the following question should be asked. Does it protect democracy to send a single person into exile for 10 years for fear that he will become overpowered and tyrannical and change the current form of government? This is a subject of debate. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the objectionable person returning to Athens after 10 years of exile, as there is no financial sanction or any deprivation of rights, will not serve his dreaded purpose. Or, if the person wants to change the system, can't he do it while he is in exile by supporting other power centers? So is exiling a single person from Athens for 10 years a sufficient measure to preserve democracy? Or is it a palliative practice?

On the other hand, although in theory it is seen as a sincere effort of the people in terms of protecting democracy, in practice, ostracism has had to serve the personal interests of certain people while being implemented. There were exiles of ostracism, not only for the protection of democracy but also for the personal political protection of some.

Democracy comes from the Greek words demos meaning people and kratos meaning sovereignty.In a democracy, which is described as the sovereignty of the people, the structure of the people, namely the voters, their educational status, and socio-cultural structures are very important in terms of the form and use of sovereignty. As Plato also criticizes, demos,

that is, if the people are unconscious, democracy is always diverted from its purpose and abused by someone.

We see that voters are manipulated many times in the practice of ostracism. Political opponents did not hesitate to use ostracism to eliminate each other. In other words, in some cases, it is not democracy that is protected, but someone's political future. The public, on the other hand, has been deceived by populist attitudes.

In conclusion, ostracism is a naive but inadequate effort for the self-defense of democracy. However, it is possible to protect and strengthen democracy in real terms by raising awareness and educating the voters, and by ensuring that the system continues with laws, not personal decisions.

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