

# THE POLITICAL CAUSES OF THE DIALOGUE ORIGIN IN ATHENS IN THE 6<sup>th</sup> CENTURY BC

Vasyl Matskiv

Odesa I. I. Mechnikov National University

**Abstract.** The article analyzes the development of the social structure of Athens from the Mycenaean Age to the end of the 6th century BC. The main purpose of the article is to examine the main stages and principles of this development. The findings of the research illustrate that the emergence of the dialogue as a social phenomenon, and partly as a genre, became possible after Cleisthenes' reforms on the ground of principle of isonomia (equal distribution of political power).

**Keywords:** dialogue, isonomia, hierarchy, arithmetical equality, Athens.

**INTRODUCTION.** Extant ancient sources testify to the absence of the term *διάλογος* more than a century after Cleisthenes' reforms. We firstly discovered its use in the writings of Plato from the 4th century BC (Jazdzewska, 2014). However, the absence of the term does not mean the absence of the phenomenon that it generalizes. That is why today it is not surprising for us to hear that before Plato the *dialogues* were written by Epicharmus of Kos or Aleximemos, and the way of Socrates' philosophizing was dialogical. In any case, the emergence of the dialogue as a social phenomenon and partly as a genre of literature had occurred long before the term itself appeared. The main purpose of this work is to open the process of forming this term and to show the way from the vertical *λόγος* to *διάλογος*, which went through dynamic changes in the social structure of ancient Athens. This is the way out of a strictly regulated hierarchical system to the interaction of people with each other. It is a collaborative solution to practical and theoretical problems, based on the principle of *ισονομία* (equality).

**RESULTS.** There is very limited evidence about Athens from the Mycenaean Age, but archaeology testifies that there was previously a *palace* on the site of the classic Acropolis (Суриков, 2017: 85). Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the social order of Athens was the same as that of other cities of this period as Mycenae, Tiryns or Pylos. The marked cities were then settlements of the *palace culture*. Thus, the palace was headed by a king – *wanax* or *anax*. He was a divine person who held in his possession the religious, political, military, economic and

administrative function of government [Вернах, 1988: 42]. *Wanax* was constructing a multilevel apparatus of officials through which he delegated these functions. Each position was strictly regulated by the steps of the hierarchy from a king to a slave. This situation created a state of *permanent inequality*.

After the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization, the power of the king was constantly diminishing. At the same time the position of the military aristocracy was becoming stronger. The aristocracy had a monopoly on the possession of land, which gave it an economic opportunity to buy weapon and control the implementation of the law fully (the right of the nobility). Under such circumstances, the *unarmed* masses had no political rights, falling into debt or even slavery to the *armed* nobility. According to Plutarch, “the inequality between the poor and the rich... had reached its highest point...” (Плутарх, 1994: 100). The nobles were allowed practically everything. Regulated inequality in the Mycenaean period changed to *unregulated inequality*. The completeness of one social class rights and the absence of the others rights did not facilitate the emergence of the dialogue as a social phenomenon.

This situation was the reason for many rebellions and open long-term confrontation between the poor and the rich. Only the political genius Solon could temporarily stop the confrontation. He stated that he had wished to establish equality among citizens. But Solon had a specific understanding of equality, which was linked to the principle εὐνομία (balance of power). This principle is based on the notion of *proportional equality* (Lambardini, 2014: 395-396). It meant the extension of some political rights to the poor, but the main public posts reserved for the aristocrats. The poorest were not allowed to serve in the army (Плутарх, 1994: 103). Power and law remained in the possession of the nobility. But Solon's personality and some of his laws helped to shift the confrontation to the *agora*. He had abolished the possibility of slavery because of debts, which completely changed the attitude of the two classes and the position of the individual in society. Freedom as the highest value of man opened the way to the principle of *isonomia*, which contributed to liberation from the previous hierarchy.

After Solon's governance the confrontation continued but by that time the masses of people had already strengthened their political aspirations. They

relentlessly demanded greater political rights. Political equality became a dream or an ideal. Cleisthenes made that ideal a principle of his reforms at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. It was *isonomia*. *Isonomia* is a term that meant a new political structure and a requirement for the full political equality of citizens (Vlastos, 1953: 355-356). It was a requirement of such a society that would be built not on a hierarchy, but on arithmetic equality (Lambardini, 2014: 413). Thus, the main requirement illustrated that the aristocracy had to lose the monopoly of power. Cleisthenes put this principle at the forefront of his reforms to restructure the social order of the polis. He destroyed the old territorial division, which was built on the family (aristocracy) principle and created new territorial units based on the geographical principle. The essence of this action was to mix the poor and the rich, the commoner and the aristocrats and to allow everyone to the power (Аристотель, 1937: 32). For the first time in the history of the Greek polis the citizens of all classes were admitted to the government.

**CONCLUSIONS.** Thus, in our opinion, excellent political preconditions for a gradual transition from vertical *λόγος* to horizontal *διάλογος* were created in Athens of that time. The state of hierarchical subordination changed to collaborative solution of problems on the agora. This paved the way for the establishment of the dialogue as a social phenomenon, a collective search for truth. This phenomenon was fundamental to the development of polis and democracy. And we can assume that it influenced the emergence of the dialogue as a genre of ancient literature.

## REFERENCES

- Aristotel'. (1937). *Afinskaya politiya [Constitution of the Athenians]*. Moskva: Sotsëkgiz.
- Vernan, Z.-P. (1988). *Proiskhozhdenie drevnegrecheskoy mysli [The Origins of Greek Thought]*. Moskva: Progress.
- Plutarkh. (1994). *Sravnitel'nye zhizneopisaniya v 2 tomakh [Plutarch's Lives in two volumes]*. Moskva: Nauka.
- Surikov, I. (2017) «*Molchat grobnitsy?*» *Arkheologiya antichnoy Gretsii [«Silent tombs?» Archaeology of ancient Greece]*. – Moskva: Izd. dom YaSK.
- Jazdzewska, K. (2014) From *Dialogos* to Dialogue: The Use of the Term from Plato to the Second Century CE. *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*. 54, 17–36.
- Lambardini, J. (2013). «*Isonomia*» and the public sphere in democratic Athens. *History of Political Thought*, 34 (3), 393-420.
- Vlastos, G. (1953). *Isonomia*. *The American Journal of Philology*, 74 (4), 337-366.