

Early State and Ancient Democracy

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THE PROBLEM SETTING

- There are some scholars who regard **Athens**, some other **Greek poleis** and **the Roman Republic** not as states, but as **stateless societies** (communities), which represent a specific type of evolutionary alternative to the state.
- **I strongly disagree with this statement.**



THE PROBLEM SETTING

- The major question of the paper is why Athens and the Roman Republic **should be treated as early states, but not as a specific type of stateless societies?**



THE PROBLEM SETTING

- It gives a good opportunity to point out the major characteristics of the early state, the differences between early and mature state, and peculiarities of different types of early states.



THE PROBLEM SETTING

To understand which type of polities were Athens and the Roman Republic we must make differences:

- between early state and early state analogues;
- between different types of early states;
- between early states and developed and mature ones.



Evolutional Stages of Statehood

- **MATURE STATES**

- **DEVELOPED STATES**

- **EARLY STATES**



EARLY STATES

- are insufficiently centralized states of the ancient and medieval periods;
- they politically organize societies with underdeveloped administrative-political and social structures.

DEVELOPED STATES

- are the centralized states of the Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Early Modern period;
- they organize politically societies with distinct estate-class stratification.

MATURE STATES

- are the states of the industrial epoch;
- nation-states with developed constitutional and civil law.



Definition of the Early State

- The **early state** is a category denoting a specific form of political organization of a sufficiently large and complex craft-agrarian society that controls its external policy and, partly, social order.
- This polity
 - possesses sovereignty;
 - is capable of forcing the population to fulfil its demands, change important relationships and introduce new ones, and redistribute resources;
 - is not built (basically, or mainly) on kinship principles.



DISPROOFS OF THE IDEA
OF THE STATELESS NATURE OF
POLEIS AND CIVITAS



The main arguments in favour of the idea that poleis and civitas were stateless societies

1. Power was not alienated from the citizens.
2. No special coercive apparatus was available in the polis and civitas.
3. There were no government and professional administrators in polis. The branch of the executive power was very small-numbered in civitas.
4. The economic burden fell directly upon the rich rather than poor citizens.
5. The ability to use force is more or less equally distributed among the armed population. The coercion was applied only sporadically.



- **Statement 1:** Power was not alienated from the citizens.
- **Disproof:**
 - In early state power is always separated from the population, but in different ways;
 - In monarchic states **power is monopolized in favor of** a certain clan, a person, a family in the given territory;
 - In democratic states there is **an inherent alienation of anonymous power**, i.e. special institute of legitimate power in the form of **a post** with a certain balance of rights and duties.



The alienation of power from the population

MONARCHIC STATES

- permanent alienation;
- in favour of a certain clan, a person, or a family;
- power is inseparably linked with the power holder.

DEMOCRATIC STATES

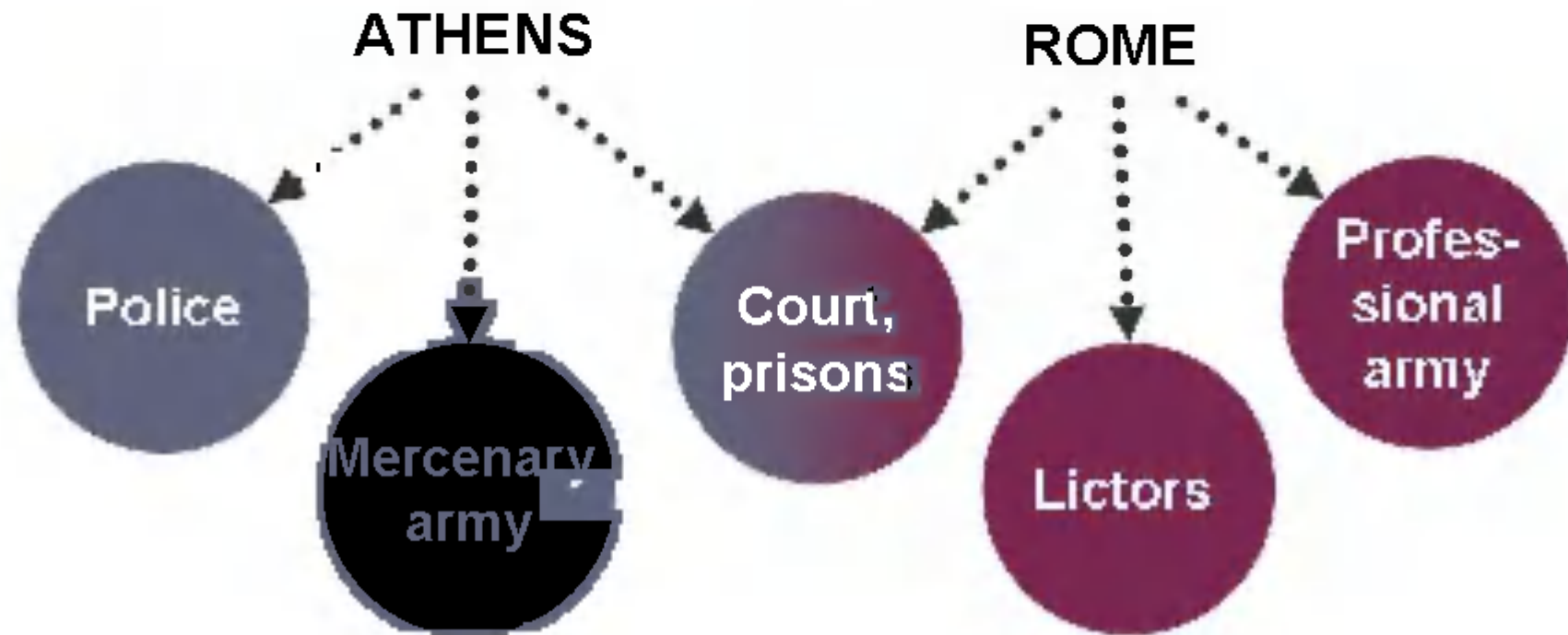
- temporary alienation;
- power in its pure form;
- power is not linked with the power holder.



- **Statement 2:** No special coercive apparatus was available in the polis and civitas.
- **Disproof:** The coercive apparatus did exist: lictors, police, mercenary army, etc. In particular, it was represented by the body of court.



Coercive Apparatus

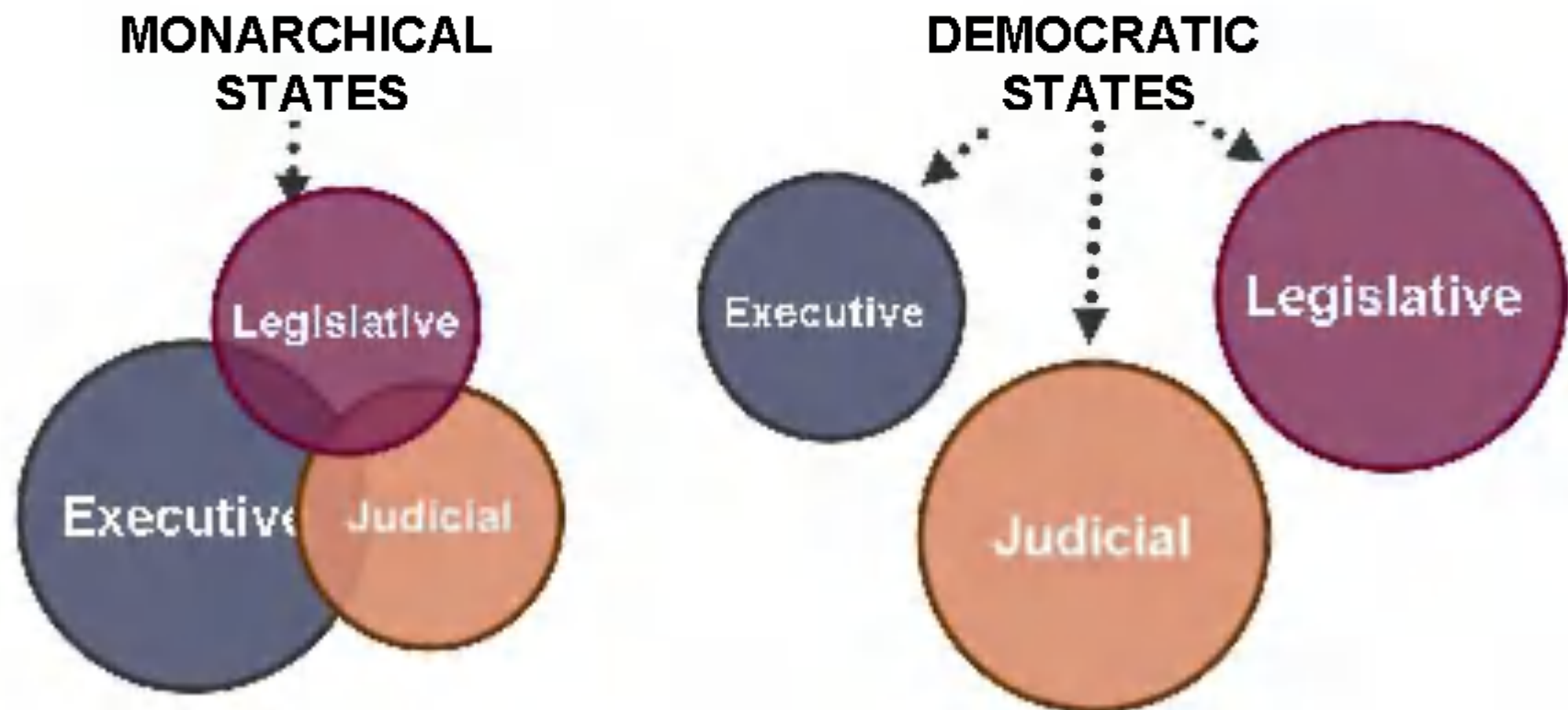




- **Statement 3:** There were no government and professional administrators in poleis. The branch of the executive power was very small-numbered in civitas.
- **Disproof:** The state apparatus was available both in the polis and the civitas, though it was of a specific type. The rather weakly developed branch of the executive power is compensated for by the developed legislative and judicial branches of power, whereas in many early states the legislative and judicial branches were weak or not separated from the executive one.

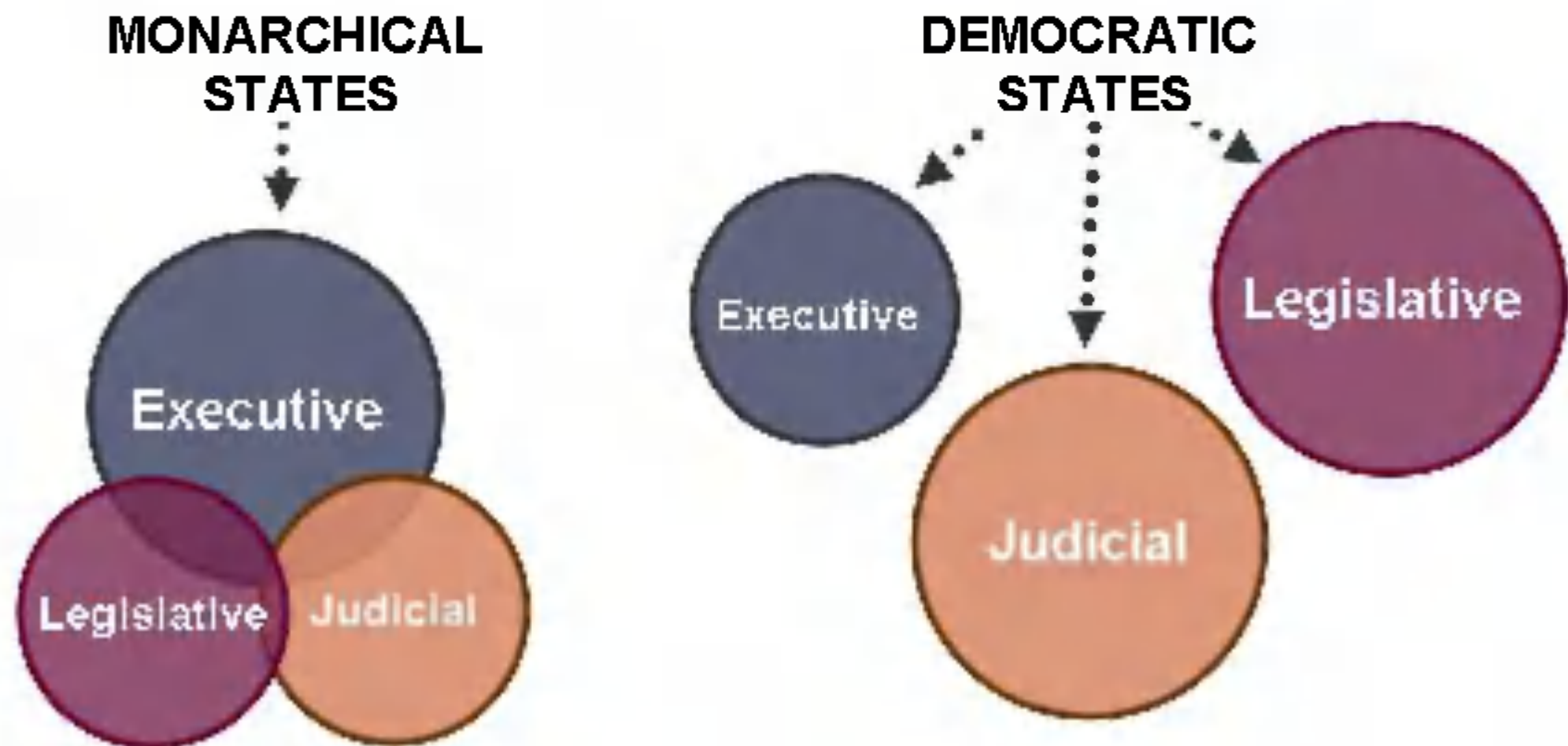


Branches of power in monarchical and democratic early states





Branches of power in monarchical and democratic early states





- **Statement 4:** The economic burden fell directly upon the rich rather than poor citizens.
- **Disproof:** The fact that in Athens the economic obligations were borne basically by the rich people, cannot be a serious argument against the presence of the state there. Otherwise, we should deny the presence of the state in many modern countries where the rich citizens pay basic taxes directly or indirectly.



- In many early states taxes on population were irregular or did not make the main source of state income. There were instead trade duties, litigation fee, tribute from subdued or depended, war plunder, monopolies on salt etc., gains from of monarch lands, slave or forced labor etc.



Important sources of income

ATHENS

- *liturgies*;
- allied contributions;
- private silver mines.

ROME

- payment for public lands;
- incomes from the subjugated tributary lands;
- tax farming.



- **Statement 5:** the ability to use force is more or less equally distributed among the armed population.
- **Disproof:** The monopoly of legitimate application of physical coercion is missing not only in many early states, but also in the developed and even mature ones. The more typical was concentration of lawful application of force in state hands.



- The more important is not that the citizens had weapons and quite often arrested the accused or criminals to deliver them to the court, but that the body that pronounced judgment on the guilt or innocence, *i.e.* the court, as well as the execution of death penalty verdicts, both were in hands of the state.



SUMMARY

- Thus, one should regard polis and the Roman Republic as early states, but the ones of specific – the democratic and non-bureaucratic – type which was hardly widespread in the ancient and medieval world.



CONCLUSION

- The early state is always an *incomplete* state. In every such polity there were some aspects missing which later appeared in the developed state. Thus, in every case a set of features and attributes (as well as an absence of any of them) may be peculiar or even unique.



Thank you for attention!