**Cicero (1st century BC)**

***The Republic* 1.44-55**

‘And as for the absolute power of the Athenian people—not to seek other examples of popular government—when it changed into the fury and licence of a mob . . .

(…)

‘And indeed they claim that this free popular government ought not to be entirely rejected on account of the excesses of an unbridled mob, for, according to them, when a sovereign people is pervaded by a spirit of harmony and tests every measure by the standard of their own safety and liberty, no form of government is less subject to change or more stable.

(…)

‘[But] that equality of legal rights of which free peoples are so fond cannot be maintained (for the people themselves, though free and unrestrained, give very many special powers to many individuals, and create great distinctions among men and the honours granted to them), and what is called equality is really most inequitable. For when equal honour is given to the highest and the lowest—for men of both types must exist in every nation—then this very “fairness” is most unfair; but this cannot happen in states ruled by their best citizens.

(…)

‘If I were compelled to approve one single unmixed form, [I might choose] the kingship . . . the name of king seems like that of father to us, since the king provides for the citizens as if they were his own children, and is more eager to protect them than. . . to be sustained by the care of one man who is the most virtuous and most eminent. But here are the aristocrats, with the claim that they can do this more effectively, and that there will be more wisdom in the counsels of several than in those of one man, and an equal amount of fairness and scrupulousness. And here also are the people, shouting with a loud voice that they are willing to obey neither one nor a few, that nothing is sweeter than liberty even to wild beasts, and that all who are slaves, whether to a king or to an aristocracy, are deprived of liberty. Thus kings attract us by our affection for them, aristocracies by their wisdom, and popular governments by their freedom, so that in comparing them it is difficult to say which one prefers.’

**Cicero (1st century BC)**

***For Flaccus* 16-17**

O for the admirable customs and principles which we received from our ancestors, if we could but keep them! but somehow or other they have slipped through our fingers. For our ancestors, those wise and upright men, would not permit the public assembly to have any authority to make laws; they chose that whatever the common people decided, or whatever the burgesses wished to enact should be ordered or forbidden, after the assembly was adjourned, and after all the parts had been properly arranged, by the different ranks, classes, and ages, distributed in their tribes and centuries, after having listened to the advocates of the proposal on which the vote was to be taken, and after the proposal itself had been for many days before the people, and had had its merits inquired into.

But all the republics of the Greeks are governed by the rashness of the assembly while sitting. Therefore, to say no more of this Greece, which has long since been overthrown and crushed through the folly of its own counsels; that ancient country, which once flourished with riches, and rower, and glory, fell owing to that one evil, the immoderate liberty and licentiousness of the popular assemblies. When inexperienced men, ignorant and uninstructed in any description of business whatever, took their seats in the theatre, then they undertook inexpedient wars; then they appointed seditious men to the government of the republic; then they banished from the city the citizens who had deserved best of the state.

But if these things were constantly taking place at Athens, when that was the first city, not only in Greece, but in almost all the world, what moderation do you suppose there was in the assemblies in Phrygia and Mysia? It is usually men of those nations who throw our own assemblies into confusion; what do you suppose is the case when they are by themselves? Athenagoras, that celebrated man of Cyme, was beaten with rods, because, at a time of famine, he had ventured to export corn. An assembly was summoned at the request of Laelius. Athenagoras came forward, and, being a Greek among Greeks, he said a good deal, not about his fault, but in the way of complaining of his punishment. They voted by holding up their hands. A decree was passed. Is this evidence? (…) I brought witnesses from Sicily in pursuance of the public resolution of the island. But the evidence that I brought was the evidence not of an excited assembly, but of a senate on its oath.

**Cornelius Nepos (2nd century AD)**

***Life of Alcibiades* 4**

Of this crime he was accused by his enemies in a public assembly of the people. But the time for him to set out to the war was drawing near; and he considering this, and being aware of the habit of his countrymen, requested that, if they wished anything to be done concerning him, an examination should rather be held upon him while he was present, than that he should be accused in his absence of a crime against which there was a strong public feeling.But his enemies resolved to continue quiet for the present, because they were aware that no hurt could then be done him, and to wait for the time when he should have gone abroad, that they might thus attack him while he was absent. They accordingly did so; for after they supposed that he had reached Sicily, they impeached him, during his absence, of having profaned the sacred rites. In consequence of this affair, a messenger, to desire him to return home to plead his case, being despatched into Sicily to him by the government, at a time when he had great hopes of managing his province successfully, he yet did not refuse to obey, but went on board a trireme which had been sent to convey him. Arriving in this vessel at Thurii in Italy, and reflecting much with himself on the ungovernable license of his countrymen, and their violent feelings towards the aristocracy, and deeming it most advantageous to avoid the impending storm, he secretly withdrew from his guards, and went from thence first to Elis, and afterwards to Thebes. But when he heard that he was condemned to death, his property having been confiscated, and as had been usual, that the priests called Eumolpidae had been obliged by the people to curse him, and that a copy of the curse, engraved on a stone pillar, had been set up in a public place, in order that the memory of it might be better attested, he fled to Sparta. There, as he was accustomed to declare, he carried on a war, not against his country, but against his enemies, because the same persons were enemies to their own city; for though they knew that he could be of the greatest service to the republic, they had expelled him from it, and consulted their own animosity more than the common advantage.

***Life of Timotheus* 3**

On this charge they were impeached. The people, violent, suspicious, fickle, and unfavourable to them, recalled them home; and they were brought to trial for treason. On this charge Timotheus was found guilty, and his fine was fixed at a hundred talents; when, compelled by the hatred of an ungrateful people, he sought refuge at Chalcis.

**Plutarch (2nd century AD)**

***Life of Pericles* 9.1-3, 15.2-4**

Thucydides describes the administration of Pericles as rather aristocratic,— ‘in name a democracy, but in fact a government by the first citizen.’ But many others say that it was his fault that the people first fell into allotments of public lands, festival-grants, and distributions of fees for public services, thereby falling into bad habits, and becoming luxurious and wanton under the influence of his public measures, instead of frugal and self-sufficing. Let us therefore examine in detail the reason for this change in him.

In the beginning, as has been said, pitted as he was against the reputation of Cimon, he tried to ingratiate himself with the people. And since he was the inferior in wealth and property, by means of which Cimon would win over the poor,—furnishing a dinner every day to any Athenian who wanted it, bestowing raiment on the elderly men, and removing the fences from his estates that whosoever wished might pluck the fruit,—Pericles, outdone in popular arts of this sort, had recourse to the distribution of the people's own wealth. (…) And soon, what with festival-grants and jurors' wages and other fees and largesses, he bribed the multitude by the wholesale, and used them in opposition to the Council of the Areiopagus.

(…)

But then he was no longer the same man as before, nor alike submissive to the people and ready to yield and give in to the desires of the multitude as a steersman to the breezes. No, rather, forsaking his former lax and sometimes rather effeminate management of the people, as it were a flowery and soft melody, he struck the high and clear note of an aristocratic and kingly statesmanship, and employing it for the best interests of all in a direct and undeviating fashion, he led the people, for the most part willingly, by his persuasions and instructions. And yet there were times when they were sorely vexed with him, and then he tightened the reins and forced them into the way of their advantage with a master's hand, for all the world like a wise physician, who treats a complicated disease of long standing occasionally with harmless indulgences to please his patient, and occasionally, too, with caustics and bitter drugs which work salvation. For whereas all sorts of distempers, as was to be expected, were rife in a rabble which possessed such vast empire, he alone was so endowed by nature that he could manage each one of these cases suitably, and more than anything else he used the people's hopes and fears, like rudders, so to speak, giving timely check to their arrogance, and allaying and comforting their despair.

**Polybius (2nd century BC)**

***Histories* 6.43-44**

The great power of Thebes notoriously took its rise, attained its zenith, and fell to the ground with the lives of Epaminondas and Pelopidas. We must therefore conclude that it was not its constitution, but its men, that caused the high fortune which it then enjoyed.

A somewhat similar remark applies to the Athenian constitution also. For though it perhaps had more frequent interludes of excellence, yet its highest perfection was attained during the brilliant career of Themistocles; and having reached that point it quickly declined, owing to its essential instability. For the Athenian demus is always in the position of a ship without a commander. In such a ship, if fear of the enemy, or the occurrence of a storm induce the crew to be of one mind and to obey the helmsman, everything goes well; but if they recover from this fear, and begin to treat their officers with contempt, and to quarrel with each other because they are no longer all of one mind—one party wishing to continue the voyage, and the other urging the steersman to bring the ship to anchor; some letting out the sheets, and others hauling them in, and ordering the sails to be furled—their discord and quarrels make a sorry show to onlookers; and the position of affairs is full of risk to those on board engaged on the same voyage: and the result has often been that, after escaping the dangers of the widest seas, and the most violent storms, they wreck their ship in harbour and close to shore. And this is what has often happened to the Athenian constitution. For, after repelling, on various occasions, the greatest and most formidable dangers by the valour of its people and their leaders, there have been times when, in periods of secure tranquillity, it has gratuitously and recklessly encountered disaster. Therefore I need say no more about either it, or the Theban constitution: in both of which a mob manages everything on its own unfettered impulse—a mob in the one city distinguished for headlong outbursts of fiery temper, in the other trained in long habits of violence and ferocity.

**Valerius Maximus (1st century AD)**

***On Ingrates* (*Memorable Doings and Sayings* 5.3)**

The Athenians would have done Miltiades a kindness if they had sent him into exile immediately after the defeat of three hundred thousand Persians at Marathon and not forced him to die in prison and fetters. Surely, though, they thought such cruelty to one who had deserved so much from them went far enough in all conscience? Not so: they did not allow his body, after he had been forced to die in this fashion, to be given up for burial until his son Cimon surrendered himself to be bound in the same fetters. The son of a famous commander, himself to become the most famous commander of his time, could boast that this was all he inherited from his father, chains and prison.

Aristides too, who set the standard of justice for all Greece, also an outstanding example of abstinence, was ordered to leave his country. Fortunate Athens, that after his exile could find a good man or a citizen to love her after banishing one in whose company Probity herself went abroad!

Themistocles is the most celebrated representative of those who found their country ungrateful. Having made her safe, famous, powerful, leader of Greece, he experienced from her such hostility that he must needs flee to the undeserved compassion of Xerxes, whom a little earlier he had ruined.

Phocion was well equipped with clemency and liberality, which two gifts are judged the most effective generators of human affection: the Athenians all but put him on the rack. Certainly after his death he found no piece of Attic earth to be thrown upon his body. They ordered him cast out of those boundaries within which he had lived as the best of citizens.

What is wanting then that we should judge it public insanity to punish by general consent the greatest of merits like the worst of offences, and to repay benefactions with injuries? That should seem intolerable anywhere, but particularly in Athens, in which city prosecution of ingrates was legalized – and rightly so, since whoever neglects to make equal return to a benefactor abolishes the interplay of giving and receiving benefits without which life would be hardly liveable. How severe a censure then do they deserve who, having most fair laws but most unfair natures, have preferred to follow their characters rather than their statutes!