

Alexander Buychik

**History of Society and Democracy:
Before New Epoch**

Book 1

Beginnings of Democracy in Early Civilizations

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Beginnings of Democracy in Early Civilizations

Anisiia Tomanek OSVČ

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In the first book, having common name “History of Society and Democracy: Before New Epoch”, it is paid special attention to the origin and formation of political and republican democracy in ancient civilizations, especially in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, and up to the 18th century when democracy acquired a new shape.

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A short analysis of the conditions of early civilizations’ society in Sumer, Babylon, Assyria, ancient states of Egypt, India, China and another East. Many people think that a democratic basis was born in Ancient Greece. However, researching of early civilizations showed that we are able to find beginnings of democracy in the societies of earlier states.

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INTRODUCTION.

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY...

1. Evolution of the term

Democracy is the most complex and polysemantic type of political regime in the forms of implementation. Debates have not ceased about the meaning of the term “democracy” for seven centuries, since 1260, when the word was first used in the translation of Aristotelian “Politics”¹.

The term “democracy” has become the most common in political science since antiquity when it originated and denoted “power of the people”². However, the mass use of the term did not leave behind it a certain unambiguous content. Until now, political science has not developed generally accepted ideas allowing us to formulate a clear definition of democracy. Various authors focus attention on the individual components of democracy, for example, the power of the majority, its limitation and control over it, the fundamental rights of citizens, the legal and social statehood, finally, the separation of powers, general elections, transparency, the competition of different opinions and positions, pluralism, equality, participation.

Accordingly, democracy is interpreted in several ways:

- 1) expansive as a social system based on the voluntariness of all forms of life of the individual;
- 2) more narrowly, as a form of state in which all citizens have equal rights to power (as opposed to a monarchy where power belongs to

¹ Politics is a work in 8 books of political philosophy by Aristotle. The title of the Politics literally means “the things concerning the polis”.

² The term originated from the Greek words “demos”, i.e., “people”, and “kratos”, i.e., “power”.

- one person or aristocracy, and management is carried out by a group of persons); it is an ancient tradition of the interpretation of democracy, originating from Herodotus (the 5th century BC);
- 3) democracy is understood as an ideal model of social order, as a certain worldview based on the values of freedom, equality, human rights; individuals, groups professing these values, form a movement for their implementation; in this sense, the term “democracy” is interpreted as a social movement, as a type of political orientation, embodied in the programs of certain parties.

The evolution of the meaning of the term “democracy” took place simultaneously with the development of human society. Initially, since its inception, democracy had been seen as the direct rule of citizens as opposed to the rule of the monarch or aristocrats. However, democracy was recognized as “the worst form” of the rule already in antiquity. For the low level of culture of the citizens of the Greek polis states allowed the rulers to manipulate such a “people’s power” so that the regimes of democracy were short-lived and passed into ochlocracy³; and those, in turn, gave rise to tyranny. Looking at this, Aristotle did not make distinctions between democracy and ochlocracy and opposed to the first form. This assessment of democracy affected its future: democracy was perceived negatively and was forced out of political use.

The next stage in the development of democracy was republicanism in the medieval cities of Northern Italy (the 11-15th centuries). In Florence, Genoa, Venice, Bologna, Padua and several other cities, there was a structure resembling the form that existed in the Roman Republic. The members of the aristocratic families were initially allowed to participate in the work of the authorities of the polis states only. However, over time, the citizens, who stood at the lowest levels of the socio-economic hierarchy, have achieved the right to participate in the management.

³ Ochlocracy is the form of the power of the crowd.

Moreover, unlike Rome and Athens, the status of a citizen was associated with the possession of property there.

A middle class consisting of merchants, artisans, bankers, was generated in the cities of Northern Italy. It was not only numerous but also well organized in guilds, partnerships, church fraternities. The institutional structure of the people's power was based on the power of the City Council, a Podestà⁴ elected for a year and accountable to the Council, as well as the Assembly of Citizens. The development of republicanism caused the flourishing of economic and cultural life in Northern Italy. However, unfortunately for democracy, in the second half of the 14th century, republics in some major cities began gradually to retreat under the onslaught of the eternal enemies of democracy: corruption, oligarchy, wars, territorial expansion, and usurpation of power by authoritarian rulers.

In parallel with the development of republicanism in Northern Italy were the processes of formation of the system of people's representation in Northern Europe including the Northeastern part, i.e., Northern Rus. For example, the development of democratic forms of government took place in the Novgorod Republic of 12-14th centuries, and then the Pskov Republic of the 15th century. In 930, in Iceland, there was a prototype of the world's first national Parliament, the so-called Althing, which remained a source of lawmaking for more than three centuries. Edward the First (1272-1307), under pressure from the nobility and townspeople, legalized Parliament in England. It grew out of sporadic assemblies of nobiliary class. In the 15th century, in Sweden, the tradition of popular participation in meetings gave birth to the forerunner of the modern Parliament: the king began regularly to gather representatives of various classes of Swedish society – aristocracy, clergy, burghers, commoners.

⁴ Podestà was the name given to certain high officials in many Italian cities beginning in the later Middle Ages.

The development of the urban middle class, which concentrated considerable economic resources, facilitated the formation of representative assemblies in the Netherlands and Flanders. The rulers, who were constantly in dire need of money, were not able to ignore this social stratum, and they had to convene meetings of urban representatives and the main classes of society to enlist its support.

A new stage in the development of the concept of democracy started from the French revolution when democracy began to be considered as a direction of public thought, which forms the objectives of the social and political movement that rejected the monarchy and elitism. The formation of the concept of democracy was associated with the need to justify the new nature of relations between rulers and citizens, caused by the emergence of civil society institutions, as well as the requirements of autonomy and social equality of individuals.

However, the negative attitude to democracy was not overcome even in the 18th century. It is because the ideal model of democracy as a daily and direct participation in the governance of all citizens in large political entities, such as national states, is almost impossible. The original meaning of democracy adapting to the new needs of life was transformed. The culture of a particular society, political and historical traditions, and democratic experience influenced the process of transformation. Thus, the original meaning of democracy as a people's power differed from the variety of practical forms of its implementation significantly. It brought confusion to the understanding of this term.

Differences in the interpretation of democracy, as well as differences in the mechanisms of its implementation in specific societies, due to the lack of unity of methodological principles of its analysis. In the first case, from the point of view of the normative approach, an ideal model of democratic governance corresponding to the mentality of the population, its ideas of fair governance are formed. However, real conditions adapt to the ideal model of democratic governance to the demands of practice. In the second case, from the standpoint of

empirical descriptive approach, democracy turns out to be a set of principles, procedures and political structures that found their effectiveness in the implementation of social and individual needs and goals.

Thus, different theories of democracy either proceed from the priority of the principle of duty or appeal to practice in the formation of the system of government.

2. Democracy and Modernity

We cannot talk about the formation of modern democracy about historical period up to the 19th century. The birthplace of the new democracy, according to most political scientists, became the United States, in which more than half of the adult male population received the right to participate in presidential and parliamentary elections for the first time in the 1820s. It was that moment when the global process of transition to democracy, which has now engulfed the entire planet, began.

What is the difference between modern and classical democracy? Primarily, it is a form of government operating on the scale of large national states, but not urban states, i.e., polis, or cities as republics. It is a representative system, but not direct self-government of citizens' community. Citizens delegate their sovereignty to their elected representatives, who are strictly accountable to voters. At the same time, citizens can directly participate in political decision making by participating in national and local referendums.

Modern democracy is becoming inclusive, i.e., inclusive but not exclusive as it was before. Passive and active suffrage is accessible almost to the entire adult population and it is not subject to a property qualification. The principles of political and legal equality are becoming widespread.

Democracy in developed industrial states is constitutional. Democratic governments strictly operate within the framework of a legal law that protects human rights, minority rights, sets certain limits (not prescriptions) for the free activities of citizens, interest groups, organizations, political parties, and deters the government from any encroachment on the freedom of citizens and associations.

The forms of modern democracy depend on the form of government, electoral and party systems. Depending on the form of government, there are presidential, parliamentary, presidential-parliamentary and parliamentary-presidential democratic systems. Depending on the type of electoral system, there are majoritarian democracies and democracies with a proportional voting system. Depending on the type of party system, there are multi-party, bipartisan and coalition-majoritarian democracies.

Thus, different combinations of these forms influence the effectiveness and stability of democracy. For example, combinations of presidential or parliamentary rule with a majority electoral system and bipartisanship are the most viable. The combination of a presidential form of government with a proportional electoral system and a multiparty system is the least stable.

In the first series of 7 books, having the common name “History of Society and Democracy: Before New Epoch”, it will be paid special attention to the origin and formation of political and republican democracy in ancient civilizations, especially in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, and up to the 18th century when democracy acquired a new shape, which has been preserved until present days and became the basis of a modern democratic society.

CHAPTER 1.

SUMERIAN SPACE

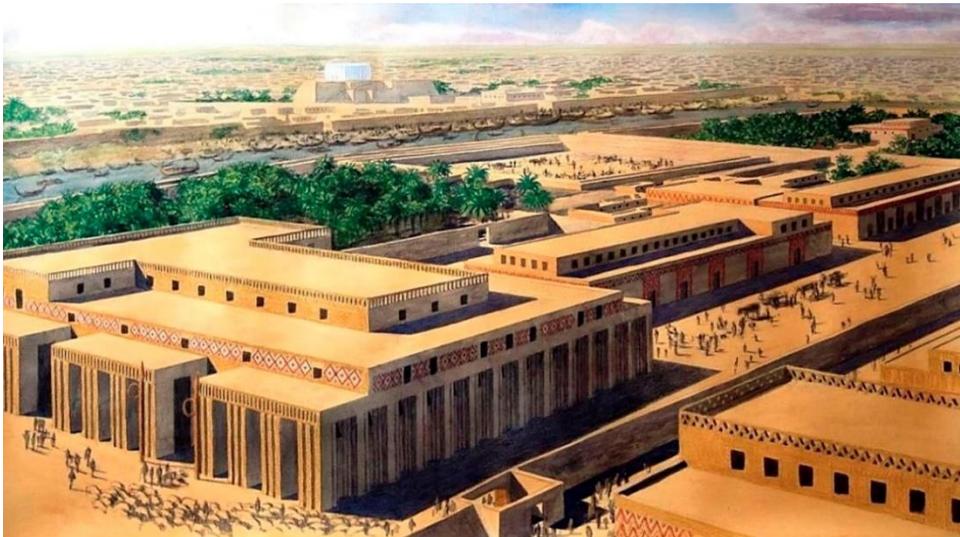
The existence of the Sumerian Kingdom throughout its history represented the development, rising and falling of the city-states. At the end of the 3rd millennium BC, the scribes of the temple of Ur made the first chronological table named “Royal List”. According to the research of scientists and chronological tables, reliable history of Sumer began since the middle of the 3rd millennium BC when the reformer Uruinimgina was the ruler of Lagash. In the 24th century BC, the ruler of one of the cities of Lugalzagesi made the first attempt of unification of Sumer. He geographically conquered almost all the cities of the region, but politically limited himself to the adoption of the title of “lugal⁵ of all cities”.

However, a hundred years later, the civilization of Sumer ended its way replaced by the Kingdom of Akkad. Young Sargon who belonged to the tribe of nomadic Semites lived in the North of Sumer, began the conquest of Sumer combining political intrigue with decisive military action successfully. The Kingdom of Akkad and Sumer, created him, marked the beginning of Assyria and Babylon in the future.

Initially, the economy of the Sumerians was planned. Temple employees engaged it. The chief priest of the city – ensi – performed all the duties of the political and economic ruler of the city-state. The priests controlled the entire economy and defined the details of agricultural and construction works. The church kept communal working tools, which were daily issued together with draft animals.

⁵ The Sumerian term for “king, ruler”. It was one of several Sumerian titles that a ruler of a city-state could bear (alongside “ensi”).

Already at this early stage of the development of society, we can trace the relationship between officials and peasants-communists. Groups of 8-10 people, led by an experienced overseer, worked in the areas of the temple fields. People received an equivalent portion of food, drink and clothing for the work and harvest. The calendar of agricultural works attributed to workers to work during the day and protect the fields from thieves and animals at night. As a result, it was necessary to harvest no less than prescribed by the temple. Otherwise, the peasants, who were guilty of the shortage, received less food and clothing and worked off debts.



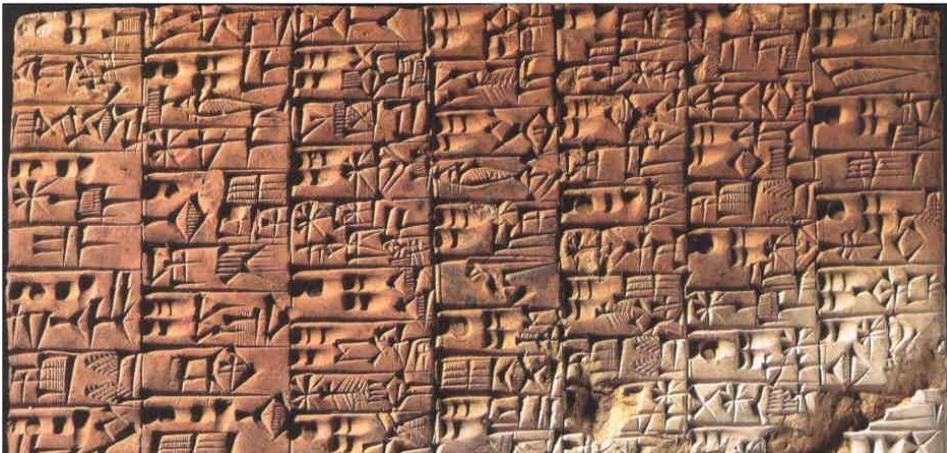
The image of the ancient Sumerian city of Uruk

5-6 millennia before the present day, officials had come to the rationality of rationing of the labour force. To some extent, it reflected the social ideas of a competent approach to the contribution of each profession to the economic well-being of the community, town or land. We can give an example of the daily ration of engars, i.e., simple farmers. The senior of the group received 1.25 litres of grain, gardener – 1 litre, unskilled assistant – less than 0.5 litres. Also, depending on the qualification of an

employee, the temple could provide him with a small area of the field to use personally. Those, who did not have such land, could rent the land for a third of the harvest from it. So two processes, that became the basis for the formation of social relations of all subsequent civilizations and societies, began gradually to occur:

- 1) stratification of the population into more affluent citizens and less affluent rural residents;
- 2) separation of the stratum of wealthy farmers and priests, who were the basis of the administrative apparatus of the city or state, from the urban population.

We have to consider the family as a unit of society to make a competent picture of the social situation of the population of any state. The foundations of relations between members of society are laid at the micro-level. If you look at the extant laws of the rulers of Sumer state, many of them were devoted to the family.



Sumerian writing in tables

In the patriarchal family, the man had one wife, but he was able to acquire concubines who did not have equal rights with the legal wife. Sons kept the house and had to take care of the posthumous veneration

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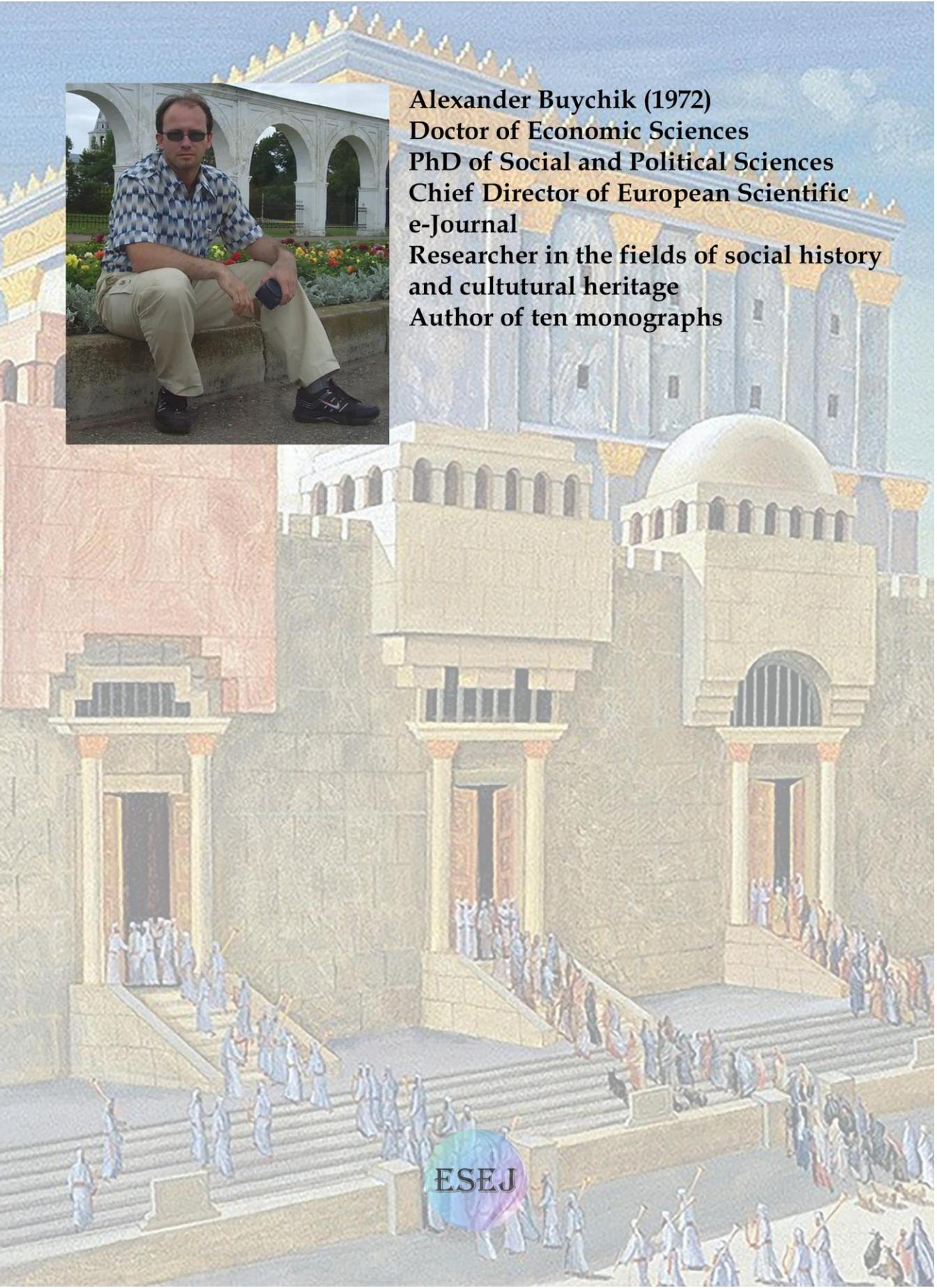
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexander Buychik (born in 1972), Doctor of economic sciences, PhD of social and political sciences, is a specialist in the field of social, political, and cultural development of society, the author of ten monographs and tens articles, the creator of two sciences – Klironomy (Preservation of Cultural Heritage) and Psychological Cultural Science.

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