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Tyranny: new contexts

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[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review]

Tyranny: New Contexts is the product of a conference panel at the Seventh Celtic Classics Conference in Bordeaux in September 2012. The editor has collected eight articles by international scholars about notions of 'tyranny' in the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman worlds with a particular emphasis on the interactions and reciprocal relationship between the 'tyrant' and the *demos*. In some ways, the present volume may be conceived of as a sequel to the 2006 collection entitled *Ancient Tyranny*, which originated from a conference on forms of autocratic rule held at Cardiff in 2003 and was also edited by Sian Lewis.[1] *Tyranny: New Contexts*, just like Lewis' 2006 volume, delivers on its aims and more than achieves its title's promise of "new contexts" by offering a forward-thinking and excellent addition to tyranny scholarship.

The collection is divided into three sections of which the first focuses on tyranny and the *polis*. Revisiting the analytical model of ontological history, Anderson's paper reminds us that assuming classical Athenians perceived themselves and the world around them in precisely the same way as we do today, simply because of the shared use of the word 'democracy,' can create misconceptions as to how Athenians actually viewed their role and participation in ancient *demokratia*.[2] Anderson contrasts the Athenian *politeia*, "an exercise in corporate self-preservation," with modern, social scientific models of self-government as "an idealistic exercise in political egalitarianism" (p. 30). While scholarship has tended to treat *tyrannis* "tyranny" as a threat to *demokratia*'s institutions, Anderson argues that the Athenians speak of tyranny in terms of the

demos' social ontology. That is to say, classical sources describe the establishment of a tyranny as a *katalusis*, "a complete dissolution, decomposition, or disintegration" of the *demos* (p. 15). In sum, for Athenians *tyrannis* represented more than just an assault on their institutions; it comprised an event with cataclysmic consequences – the utter annihilation of Athens' corporate self.

In the next chapter, McGlew proposes that the classical reception of the sixth-century tyrannicides, Harmodius and Aristogiton, provided the core values of citizenship equality in democratic Athens. His study brings together a wealth of material – Attic vase painting and sculpture, particularly the Kritios and Nesiotes group, *skolia* and other literary works, such as Old Comedy and the Attic orators – to show how the underlying message of these varied representations and reinterpretations of the famous pair emphasizes their shared purpose and cohesive action. The consistent depiction of the tyrannicides in this way invited "an imaginary space of a tyrannicide network" (p. 41). And, whether a casual observer of the statue group or performer of the songs glorifying Harmodius' and Aristogiton's deeds, each and every Athenian was 'equal' in the sense that all were encouraged to join in and all were capable, just as Harmodius and Aristogiton, of defending the democracy.

Leaving classical Athens, Lewis' stimulating contribution explores points of contact between tyrants and the assembly at Syracuse. Although conventional ideas about the unconstitutionality and unaccountable nature of tyrannical rule usually presume that a tyrant risked losing his power by allowing popular mechanisms of government to convene, Lewis shows that tyrants, in fact, relied upon the assembly as a means of regular interaction with the *demos*. By applying the Weberian model of plebiscitary politics, first utilized by D. Hammer to analyze archaic tyrants,[3] to Syracusan politics, Lewis offers two exceptionally interesting case studies contrasting the success enjoyed by the tyrant Dionysius I (405–368/7 BCE) in the assembly to the failures of the putative liberator of Syracusan tyranny, Dion (357–354 BCE). The chapter reveals what insights historians stand to gain about the day-to-day workings of political life under the rule of a tyrant by using alternative models of interpretation.

Part II of the collection is dedicated to Stewart's piece on tragedy and tyranny. In it he presents a reappraisal of the evidence for Euripides' visits to the Macedonian court and the possible plays commissioned by Archelaus at the time of the tragedian's stay. Stewart proposes two sojourns in Macedonia for the Athenian

playwright rather than the traditional one. He also reinterprets the evidence for the fragmentary plays, *Archelaus*, *Temenus*, and *Temenidae*, in order to tease out how these tragedies substantiated Archelaus' claim to the Argead throne, which in some circles was critiqued or even contested. In this way, Stewart establishes Euripides within a much broader tradition of royal patronage for poets by rulers, kings and tyrants alike, and he sees tragedy as one of several powerful tools used for self-promotion by various kinds of rulers and imperial powers (Athens especially).

The final four chapters make up Part III of the volume and treat tyranny in the Hellenistic kingdoms and early Roman world. Part III reflects some of the most exciting and cutting-edge work in recent scholarly treatments of tyranny, as the contributions move beyond traditional paradigms that regard tyranny as a political option limited to the archaic age or as a phenomenon isolated in later periods to the margins of the Greek world. This section opens with de Oliveira Gomes taking up the long-vexing problem of the titles used by Hellenistic "kings" (*basileis*). De Oliveira Gomes undertakes a philological study of the designations applied to sole rulers during the Classical period and identifies trends in the linguistic arrangements and formulae used for expressing rule of both 'traditional' royalty (i.e., *basileia*) and tyranny. She then shows how Hellenistic monarchs drew on this rich tradition to establish a working repertoire of titulature, which was consistently deployed for the next two centuries. Above all, this chapter evinces the importance of the past in the formulation of cultural representations of monarchic power in the Hellenistic world.

Lester-Pearson presents a case study of tyranny during the time of Alexander the Great and the Diadochi by investigating the Clearchids of Heraclea on the Black Sea. He convincingly argues that Heraclea, despite its location on what has sometimes been viewed as the Greek periphery, was a notable player in the politics of the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods by tracking the relations between the Diadochi and the later Clearchids, particularly Dionysius (337/6–306/5 BCE). The Clearchids deployed what Lester-Pearson describes as "a personal approach to political problem solving" (p. 142). Interpersonal strategies include marriage alliances with prominent generals and Hellenistic kings, such as Antipater and Lysimachus, and donations of military aid, provisions, and other diplomatic benefactions. Accordingly, the Clearchid dynasty showcases the practical approach to tyrannical regimes by Hellenistic kings. That said, Lester-Pearson also cautions readers

against assuming that Hellenistic rulers adopted a blanket policy of supporting tyrants; rather, his thesis emphasizes the benefits gained by Hellenistic kings from working cooperatively with tyrants.

In the next contribution, Dumitru evocatively asks what made a "Hellenistic tyrant of the Near East a tyrant" (p. 190). Using the one-hundred-fifty-year history of the Seleucids as a test case, Dumitru sketches five broad categories of Hellenistic tyrant operative in the territories of Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and the southern portion of Asia Minor, which made up the Seleucid realm. What emerges from this typology is an appreciation of the multiple guises that tyrannies took in the Hellenistic East. One textual finding shared between Dumitru's and de Oliveira Gomes' chapters is that tyrants typically ruled over a *polis*, while *basileis* are usually associated with rule over a people or larger territory (see table p. 190–191).

In the volume's final chapter, Antela-Bernárdez considers some potential tyrants during a run of turbulent years in early first-century Athens, leading up to Sulla's sack of the city in 87/86 BCE. He notes parallels between the economic, social, and political instabilities of the first century BCE with those of archaic Athens, when tyrants, such as the Pisistratids, also exerted political influence over the city. But precisely who is styled as a tyrant and who is not Antela-Bernárdez astutely recognizes is a matter of the positionality of the source describing the political figure in question, especially in terms of an author's pro- or anti-Roman stance during this period. To showcase this subjectivity, he contrasts Medeios, who dominated Athenian politics at the turn of the century by serving as eponymous archon on an unprecedented three occasions, with Athenion, a slightly later populist figure who served as Hoplite General. Both figures display strong resemblances to tyrants of Athens' earlier history (indeed to tyrants more generally), but, as Antela-Bernárdez points out, the extant sources apply the tag *tyrannos* only to the latter and not the former.

All in all, *Tyranny: New Contexts* is a thoughtful and well-edited volume. The papers collected here reflect the most recent trends in scholarly thinking about tyranny, to which it should be said that a large debt of gratitude is owed to the pioneering work of Sian Lewis herself.[4] The contributions demonstrate the enduring presence of tyranny as a concept useful both to think with and to deploy in practice, spanning the fifth through the first centuries BCE, and ranging from Athens to Macedonian, from Syracuse to the Hellenistic Near East. Like many volumes originating in conference

proceedings the individual chapters do not engage in much explicit dialogue with one another, even when clear intersections exist, as in Anderson's and McGlew's discussions of citizenship or de Oliveira Gomes' and Dumitru's connection between the tyrant and the *polis*. At the same time, given the time span and geographical reach of the volume, that weakness does not detract from the value and strengths of each chapter or from the volume as a whole. *Tyranny: New Contexts* will have wide-ranging appeal to many, student or specialist, interested in ancient history or Greek political culture.

Authors and Titles

Introduction, Sian Lewis

Part I: Tyranny and the Polis

Greg Anderson, Tyranny and Social Ontology in Classical Athens

James McGlew, The Tyrannicide Citizen in Fifth-Century BCE Athens

Sian Lewis, Classical Tyrants and the Assembly

Part II: The Image of the Tyrant

Edmund Stewart, Tragedy and Tyranny: Euripides, Archelaus of Macedon, and Popular Patronage

Part III: Tyranny in the Hellenistic Kingdoms

Claudia de Oliveira Gomes, Le nom du maître

Miles Lester-Pearson, Tyranny under Alexander the Great and the Diadochi: The Clearchids of Heraclea Pontica

Adrian Dumitru, The Tyrants of the Hellenistic East

Borja Antela-Bernárdez, The Last Tyrants of Athens

Notes

[1] Lewis, S. ed., 2006. *Ancient Tyranny*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.

[2] Anderson, G. 2015. "Retrieving the Lost Worlds of the Past: The

Case for the Ontological Turn." *American Historical Review* 120: 787–810; 2018. *The Realness of Things Past: Ancient Greece and Ontological History*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[3] Hammer, D. 2005. "Plebiscitary Politics in Archaic Greece." *Historia* 54: 107–131. I use a similar framework for analyzing demagogue tyrants in my 2016 dissertation (Boyd, M.J. "Fashioning Tyrants: Patterns of Tyranny and the Historian's Role in Tyrant-Making." Ph.D. Diss., Florida State University).

[4] See, for example, Lewis, S. 2000. "The Tyrant's Myth." In *Sicily from Aeneas to Augustus*, edited by C. Smith and J. Serrati, 97–108. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; 2004; "Καὶ σαφῶς τύραννος ἦν: Xenophon's Account of Euphron of Sicyon." *JHS* 124: 65–74; 2009; and *Greek Tyranny*. Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press.