

# **Haberdashers' Aske's School**

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### **KINGSHIP VS. TYRANNY: A REAL OR IMAGINED DICHOTOMY?**

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### **KINGSHIP VS. TYRANNY: A REAL OR IMAGINED DICHOTOMY?**

#### **Abstract**

Modern English draws a distinction between kingship and tyranny. The former denotes a type of rule deemed to be legitimate, the latter an illegitimate and violent autocracy. Those distinctions have been felt in the English language since at least Shakespeare's time and have their foundations in the political treatises of the fourth-century B.C. Greek philosopher, Aristotle. This paper delves into Greek literature pre-Aristotle and argues that, until the philosophical schools of the fourth century B.C. the terms king (in Greek, *basileus*) and tyrant (Greek, *tyrannos*) were semantically interchangeable and overlapping. The distinction becomes important in the development of political language from Aristotle onward, but as a distinction, was artificially engineered. In origin, there was no distinction between the two terms. Greeks of the Classical period looked with disdain upon monarchical systems of government, particularly that of Persia, and saw any form of autocracy as antithetical to the flourishing of a free society. Until the fourth century B.C., kingship and tyranny were thus synonymous.

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Modern parlance recognises a linguistic variance between 'king' and 'tyrant'. When using the adjectives kingly or regal, we tend to imply a positive value judgment about the type of ruler or leader to whom the description is being applied; conversely, when using the label tyrannical, we say something negative and derogatory. This semantic distinction goes back at least as far as the sixteenth century and, in an important sense, back to Classical antiquity, which invented the idea of 'king' as good ruler and 'tyrant' as evil. In early modern Europe, the Protestant Reformation developed the definition of 'king' as a legitimate monarch who drew his authority from God, whereas a tyrant was more like a usurper, who ruled without divine approval. That distinction has not, of course, been embraced or held universally. In 1649, the Rump Parliament sentenced Charles The First on the charge that his reign had been tyrannical, to which the King retorted: 'I would know by what power I am called hither. I would know by what authority, I mean lawful authority.' Where, if not in the King, does lawful authority reside? Historically, lawful rule has been understood differently. The Reformation doctrine

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of Divine Right asserted that all earthly authority was derived from the will of heaven, and that a king was a lawful ruler inasmuch as God had decreed his reign. Modern democratic theories, in contrast, tend to speak of lawful authority as proceeding directly from the will of the people, though, as the recent Brexit debacle has shown, the issue whether democratically elected rulers should be beholden to the outcome of a referendum, and how the authority of such a mandate is to be understood and applied, is open to widespread interpretation and dispute. Those who have accused the Prime Minister in recent months of behaving ‘tyrannically’ do so on the premise that to suspend Parliamentary authority is to behave without democratic mandate and, thus, as a tyrant.

Perhaps the best example in English literature of how the distinction between kingship and tyranny plays out occurs in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, produced in the early years of the reign of James The First, in which King Duncan of Scotland is presented as the archetypal ruler, just, mild and temperate, embodying all the bonds of love which tie a king to his people. In Act I, Scene 2, on hearing of the treachery of the Thane of Cawdor, Duncan proclaims:

No more that thane of Cawdor shall deceive  
Our bosom interest: go pronounce his present death,  
And with his former title greet Macbeth! (lines 63-5).

As Malcolm later remonstrates (Act IV, Scene 3, lines 92-6):

But I have none: the king-becoming graces  
As justice, verity, temperance, stableness,  
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,  
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,  
I have no relish of them...

The rule of the upstart Macbeth, by contrast, is blood-drenched, calculated, murderous, self-interested, and tyrannical. Shakespeare understood kingship as characterised by the exercise of justice, to be distinguished from the brute imposition of tyrannical rule. In more recent years, comparative studies have been carried out of the similarities between *Macbeth* and Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, where psychological parallels have been drawn between Lady Macbeth and Queen Clytemnestra, the scheming wife of Agamemnon who, in conspiracy with her lover Aegisthus, orchestrates a plot to assassinate the lawful ruler of Mycenae and usurp power.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, the Enlightenment spoke of a distinction between kingly authority and tyrannical rule. Perhaps the best example from seventeenth-century England is the magisterial treatise of Thomas Hobbes entitled *Leviathan*, written during the English Civil War (1642-1649), which saw legitimacy in an absolute ruler who reigned in accordance with the rule of law. Hobbes was familiar with the trials and horrors of a society where hierarchical authority had vanished and where civil unrest accompanied the breakdown of political order.<sup>2</sup> In 1661, Charles The Second was restored to the throne, but from that point the idea of a constitutional

<sup>1</sup> See, most recently, A. Bierl, ‘Klytimestra Tyrannos: Fear and Tyranny in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* (with a Brief Comparison with *Macbeth*)’, in *Comparative Drama* 51/4, 2017, pp. 528–563.

<sup>2</sup> My understanding of this complex period of history is heavily indebted to Christopher Hill’s study, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, Maurice Temple Smith Ltd., 1973.

monarchy began to emerge according to which monarchical power had, in some sense, to be curtailed by the authority of Parliament.

But how real is the alleged distinction between ‘king’ and ‘tyrant’? Put to an American Revolutionary over a hundred years later, the question might have been met with reproof, even though upon repudiating the authority of the English King and Parliament, the newly liberated ex-colonies toyed with the idea of proclaiming George Washington the new ‘King George’, an accolade which the first President of the United States sensibly eschewed. The modern nations of France and the United States are expressly anti-monarchical in their political doctrines, and though both nations exhibit a psychological fascination with nations which have not shaken off the historical vestiges of monarchy, the most obvious example being Great Britain, embedded in their self-belief is the understanding that a monarch or sole ruler is the antithesis of freedom, democracy, and human rights. It has been pointed out many times that nations which do away with monarchs often end up with a *de facto* monarchy, even if not in name. Oliver Cromwell by the time of his death in 1658 was assuming all the trappings of a king, and, a century later, Robespierre in France established a regime which was just as tyrannical, if not worse, than the one which he replaced. Moving ahead a century and a half, Stalin established himself in all but name as the new Czar of Russia, and the autocracies of dictators in other parts of the world where monarchy has been thrown off by violent revolution have, if not taken the regal title, all the same effected a similar self-arrogation of power as the regimes which they displaced. Even if kingly terminology is expressly repudiated, as at Rome with the First Settlement under the Emperor Augustus in 28 or 27 B.C., tyrannical rulership can often be more deadly if allowed to operate undefined, without the titles of king or ruler or dictator as constitutional anchorage.

Where and when did the distinction between king and tyrant arise? In European literary heritage, it can be traced as far back as the most famous Greek philosopher, political theorist, scientist, literary critic, and polymath, Aristotle, the pupil of Plato and tutor to the young Macedonian prince Alexander III, later to be Alexander the Great, who came from a remote corner of northern Greece called Stagira and set up a new school at Athens known as the Lyceum. Writing in the second half of fourth century B.C., at a time when the power of his adoptive city Athens was being cowed by the rising power of Macedon, Aristotle in an eight-volume treatise, entitled *Politics*, surveyed the typologies of government which he knew in his own day throughout Greece, and had this to say of the difference between king and tyrant:

παρεκβάσεις δὲ τῶν εἰρημένων τυραννὶς μὲν βασιλείας, ὀλιγαρχία δὲ ἀριστοκρατίας, δημοκρατία δὲ πολιτείας. ἡ μὲν γὰρ τυραννὶς ἐστὶ μοναρχία πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον τὸ τοῦ μοναρχοῦντος, ἡ δ’ ὀλιγαρχία πρὸς τὸ τῶν εὐπόρων, ἡ δὲ δημοκρατία πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον τὸ τῶν ἀπόρων· πρὸς δὲ τὸ τῷ κοινῷ λυσιτελοῦν οὐδεμία αὐτῶν.

Deviations from the constitutions mentioned are tyranny corresponding to kingship, oligarchy to aristocracy, and democracy to constitutional government; for tyranny is monarchy ruling in the interest of the monarch, oligarchy government in the interest of the rich, democracy government in the interest of the poor, and none of these forms governs with regard to the profit of the community [Arist. *Pol.* III. 1279<sup>b</sup>5-10].

Elsewhere, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle wrote:

πολιτείας δ' ἐστὶν εἶδη τρία, ἴσαι δὲ καὶ παρεκβάσεις, οἷον φθοραὶ τούτων. εἰσὶ δ' αἱ μὲν πολιτεῖαι βασιλεία τε καὶ ἀριστοκρατία, τρίτη δὲ ἀπὸ τιμημάτων, ἣν τιμοκρατικὴν λέγειν οἰκεῖον φαίνεται, πολιτείαν δ' αὐτὴν εἰώθασιν οἱ πλεῖστοι καλεῖν. τούτων δὲ βελτίστη μὲν ἡ βασιλεία, χειρίστη δ' ἡ τιμοκρατία. παρέκβασις δὲ βασιλείας μὲν τυραννίς: ἄμφω γὰρ μοναρχίαι, διαφέρουσι δὲ πλεῖστον: ὁ μὲν γὰρ τύραννος τὸ αὐτῷ συμφέρον σκοπεῖ, ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς τὸ τῶν ἀρχομένων. οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ βασιλεὺς ὁ μὴ αὐτάρκης καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ὑπερέχων: ὁ δὲ τοιοῦτος οὐδενὸς προσδεῖται: τὰ ὠφέλιμα οὖν αὐτῷ μὲν οὐκ ἂν σκοποίη, τοῖς δ' ἀρχομένοις: ὁ γὰρ μὴ τοιοῦτος κληρωτὸς ἂν τις εἴη βασιλεὺς. ἡ δὲ τυραννίς ἐξ ἐναντίας ταύτη: τὸ γὰρ ἑαυτῷ ἀγαθὸν διώκει. καὶ φανερώτερον ἐπὶ ταύτης ὅτι χειρίστη: κάκιστον δὲ τὸ ἐναντίον τῷ βελτίστῳ.

Now there are three forms of constitution, and an equal number of perversions or corruptions of those forms. The constitutions are Kingship, Aristocracy, and thirdly, a constitution based on a property classification, which it seems appropriate to describe as timocratic, although most people are accustomed to speak of it merely as a constitutional government or *politeia*. The best of these constitutions is Kingship, and the worst Timocracy. The perversion of Kingship is Tyranny. Both are monarchies, but there is a very wide difference between them: a tyrant studies his own advantage, a king that of his subjects. For a monarch is not a king if he does not possess independent resources and is not better supplied with goods of every kind than his subjects; but a ruler so situated lacks nothing, and therefore will not study his own interests but those of his subjects. (A king who is not independent of his subjects will be merely a sort of titular king.) Tyranny is the exact opposite in this respect, for the tyrant pursues his own good. The inferiority of Tyranny among the perversions is more evident than that of Timocracy among the constitutions, for the opposite of the best must be the worst. [Arist. *Nic. Eth.* 1160<sup>a</sup>-1160<sup>b</sup>].

In both passages, Aristotle situates each typology of government within a triad wherein each of the three best-known forms of government in Greece, democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy, is subdivided into beneficial and perverse components. The three good elements within each pairing are kingship, aristocracy, and polity or timocracy, the three evil are tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy. In the *Politics*, Aristotle likens the very worst type of unrestrained democracy to tyranny in that its ruling body, the *demos* or people, behaves exactly like an arbitrary tyrant, without reference to laws (Arist. *Pol.* 1319<sup>a</sup>39-1319<sup>b</sup>1). How far these semantic distinctions are to be taken is debatable. Modern scholarship has often seen Aristotle as writing in a tradition which was hostile to the extreme democracy of fourth-century Athens,<sup>3</sup> but that view runs up against the fact that Athens was a democracy under the rule of law, and it is remarkable how seldom Aristotle mentions Athens in his most important political treatise.<sup>4</sup> Be that as it may, it is indisputable that Aristotle regards tyranny as something malign and perverse and makes a point of contrasting it with kingship (*basileia*) which, on his specification, is lawful monarchy.

Conventionally, Classical scholars and historians have taken Aristotle's words at face value and on Aristotelian foundations have constructed grand theoretical explanations of how Greeks differentiated good rulers (*viz.* kings) from

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, J. Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Criticism of Popular Rule*. Princeton and Oxford: 1998, pp. 290-351; Ober, 'Aristotle's Political Sociology: Class, Status, and Order in the Politics' in Carnes Lord and David O'Connor (eds.), *Essays on the Foundation of Aristotelian Political Science* Berkeley, 1991; Recently, the claim that Aristotle advocated a type of 'hoplite democracy' which was democracy in name only has been advanced by A.W. Lintott, *Aristotle's Political Philosophy in its Historical Context. A New Translation and Commentary on Politics Books 5 and 6*. London, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> For a critical response to the commentary of Lintott (n. 3), see the remarks of D. Cammack, 'Aristotle, Athens, and Beyond', *The Classical Review* 69.1 (2019). Against an Athenocentric reading of the *Politics* in general, see E. W. Robinson, *Democracy Beyond Athens*. Cambridge, 2011, pp. 220-22.

bad ones (*viz.* tyrants).<sup>5</sup> But in recent years, that approach has increasingly fallen into disfavour. In an influential revisionist essay, Greg Anderson challenged the idea that so rigid a distinction could be maintained on the strength of sources that predate Aristotle, and more recently still, Lynette Mitchell has argued for a more fluid interpretation of the semantic overlap in Greek between *basileia*, meaning kingship, and *tyrannis*, meaning tyranny.<sup>6</sup> As recent scholarship has pointed out, one of the insurmountable difficulties we face with Aristotle's classifications is that of the thousand or so city states we can reliably document from antiquity, only a handful are known to have possessed monarchical systems of any reliable description. Aristotle himself admitted that there were few examples of monarchy left in Greece to which he could point, and so the question arises whether we can trust the definitions of monarchy which he set out in the *Politics*. Like most political theorists, Aristotle needed to define his critical terminology in special ways to clarify the distinctions and contrasts he was seeking to draw. Whilst it would be rash to claim that he was writing in a theoretical vacuum, uninfluenced by earlier usage, it would equally be mistaken to assume that his choice and application of relevant terminology was shared by all Greek authors, or that he did not frame language with special meanings and nuances which made sense within his own philosophical system, but which lacked the same moral and evaluative resonances elsewhere.

Though Greece of Aristotle's day conspicuously lacked kingly rulers, there were some important exceptions. The historical anomaly was Sparta, which retained from earliest times the unparalleled institution of the double kingship, where two royal houses, the Agiads and Eurypontids, held power simultaneously. This extraordinary and unique political system survived the rise of democracy at Sparta in the archaic period, after which time the powers of the Spartan kingship were politically checked by the existence of five elected officials known as Ephors, a council of elders called the Gerousia, and an assembly of Spartiate citizens which exercised its will in a referendum-style democracy. Perhaps the earliest known example of a system by checks and balances, as early as the seventh century B.C. the authority of the rulers had to acknowledge the will of the people, as is clear from the Great Rhetra, a maxim quoted variously in literary sources dating from a later period, but preserved best by Plutarch:

Φοίβου ἀκούσαντες Πυθωνόθεν οἴκαδ' ἔνεικαν  
μαντείας τε θεοῦ καὶ τελέεντ' ἔπεα:  
ἄρχειν μὲν βουλῆς θεοτιμήτους βασιλῆας,  
οἷσι μέλει Σπάρτας ἡμερόεσσα πόλις,  
πρεσβύτας τε γέροντας, ἔπειτα δὲ δημότας  
ἄνδρας, εὐθείαις ῥήτραις ἀνταπαμειβομένους.

Phoebus Apollo's mandate was which they brought from Pytho,  
Voicing the will of the god, nor were his words unfulfilled:  
Sway in the council and honours divine belong to the kings (*basileis*)

<sup>5</sup> In the nineteenth century, this theoretical distinction was explored in W.K.A. Drumann's seminal treatise, *De Tyrannis Graecorum*, re-published 2012, Nabu Press, but the most important twentieth-century exponent of the theory that a tyrant was a usurper was A. Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants*, Oxford, 1954, who read the statements of Aristotle back into earlier sources where the distinction is not clearly felt.

<sup>6</sup> G. Anderson, 'Before Tyrannoi Were Tyrants: Rethinking a Chapter of Early Greek History,' *Classical Antiquity* 24 (2005), pp. 173-222; L. Mitchell, *The Heroic Rulers of Archaic and Classical Greece*. London, 2013.



Under whose care has been set Sparta's city of charm;  
 Second to them are the Elders, and next come the men of the people  
 Duly confirming by vote straight decrees. [Plut. *Lyc.* 6.4].

The precise workings of the Spartan constitution are known from a treatise attributed falsely to Xenophon, which survives only in fragments, known in Greek as the *Lakedaimonion Politeia*, or *Constitution of the Spartans*, whose tone is oligarchic in leaning, and the tenor of which is thought to be historically unreliable. Writing two centuries after Aristotle at a time when the Greek world was being eclipsed by Rome, the historian Polybius compared the Spartan to the Roman constitution as exemplifying the mixed constitution, which synthesised the three basic elements of democracy, oligarchy and kingship.<sup>7</sup> In the case of Sparta, whilst the dual kingship indubitably exercised great authority even into Classical times, this is nevertheless an example of what might in modernity be termed a constitutional monarchy, viz. a type of kingship which was not absolute, but where other bodies stood as a counterweight to the royal prerogative.

Elsewhere in Greece of the fourth century B.C., historians are hard-pressed to find any living example of what Aristotle meant by kingship, or *basileia*. One possible exception is the somewhat less anomalous Molossian Federation of northwest Greece. According to tradition, the Molossians had an ancestral *basileia* which they traced back to Pyrrhus the son of Achilles, and which later brought in laws from outside, especially Athens.<sup>8</sup> The sources are insufficient to determine what kind of power the kings wielded, but coinage from the early fourth century indicates that nationhood, rather than the king, was paramount in the ideology of the federation over which he ruled.<sup>9</sup> Inscriptions from the 360s also suggest that alongside the king there were other constitutional officials, including a president (*prostates*), secretary (*grammateus*), and various public officials (*damiourgoi*).<sup>10</sup> We have no secure evidence of an assembly in existence to which the king addressed himself, though there may have been a representative body or council of the people.<sup>11</sup> According to Plutarch, every year the king of the Molossians would swear that he would rule in accordance with the laws (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 5.5). Aristotle

<sup>7</sup> For modern treatments, see K. von Fritz, *The Theory of the Mixed Constitution in Antiquity*. New York, 1954; G.J.D. Aalders, *Die Theorie der gemischten Verfassung im Altertum*. Amsterdam, 1968; W. Nippel, *Mischverfassungstheorie und Verfassungsrealität in Antike und früher Neuzeit*. Stuttgart, 1980; R.G. Mulgan, *Aristotle's Political Theory*. Oxford, 1987, pp. 53-77 and 199; B. Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal: Community, Justice and Conflict in Aristotelian Thought*. Berkeley and London, 1993; pp. 209-39; R. Balot, 'The « Mixed » Regime in Aristotle's *Politics*', in T. Lockwood and S. Samuras, (eds.), *Aristotle's Politics: A Political Guide*. Cambridge, 2015; S. Samuras, 'Aristotle and the Question of Citizenship', in Lockwood and Samuras, 2015, pp. 77-85; Lintott (n.3), pp. 41-52.

<sup>8</sup> Thuc. 1.136.2; 2.80.6; Just. 17.3; Plut. *Pyrrh.* 1.4; I Malkin, 'Greek Ambiguities: Between "Ancient Hellas" and "Barbarian Epirus"', in Malkin, I., (ed.) *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity. Center for Hellenic Studies Colloquia*, 5. Harvard, 2001; J. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture*. Chicago and London 2002, pp. 165-6; L. Mitchell, 'Born to Rule? The Argead Royal Succession,' in Heckel, W., Wheatley, P., Tritle, L (eds.), *Alexander's Empire: Formulation to Decay*. Claremont: Regina 2007, pp. 205-6.

<sup>9</sup> N. G.L. Hammond, *Epirus*. Oxford, 1967, pp. 541-4, 549.

<sup>10</sup> P. Cabanes, 'Institutions politiques et développement urbain (VIe-IIIe siècles avant J.-C.): Reflexions historique à partir de l'Épire', in C. Antonetti (ed.), *Lo spazio ionico e le comunità della Grecia nord-occidentale: Territorio, società istituzioni*. Pisa, 2010, p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> J.K. Davies, 'A Wholly Non-Aristotelian Universe: The Molossians as Ethnos, State and Monarchy,' in Brock, R. and Hodkinson, S. (eds.), *Alternatives to Athens. Varieties of Political Organization and Community in Ancient Greece*. Oxford, p. 254.

himself mentions the Molossian kingship in connection with moderation and lawfulness (Arist. *Pol.* 1313<sup>a</sup>18-24). In order to be a *basileus*, it was essential to renounce arbitrary rule and govern in keeping with a legal and constitutional prerogative. At one level, this appears to confirm the description of Aristotle of what a king was in theory, but even the Molossian kingship presents difficulties when mapped on to Aristotelian prescriptions, because here it looks as if the office of *basileus* was counterbalanced by other democratically appointed officials, and it is far from clear that the *basileus* himself, however we might wish to understand that in English, was not a democratic office, as indeed was the office of *basileus* at Athens, which was ceremonial only.

The best candidate for a contemporary kingship with which Aristotle would have been directly familiar was the Macedonian monarchy, which in the second half of the fourth century B.C. rose to a position of hegemony in the Greek peninsula and, under Alexander the Great, spread its power into Asia Minor and across the Levant and into the interior of Asia to defeat the Persian Empire. Significantly, there is no secure evidence that Philip II ever took on the title of *basileus*, or ‘king’, and much has been made of the propagandist initiatives of his son, Alexander the Great, in co-opting the title. Alexander styled himself ‘king’ in part to usurp the claims of Darius III to lordship over Asia, in part to present his rule along Homeric and heroic lines. In contrast, Eugene Borza has suggested that the rule of Philip II was less that of a ‘king’ and more that of a military fiefdom in which the whole of the clan, not one man, held sway.<sup>12</sup> Even if, as Borza maintains, Philip of Macedon did not use the title, inscriptions from the second half of the fourth century indicate that in the minds of Greeks he was a *basileus*,<sup>13</sup> and coinage dating from the later reign of his son Alexander, as well as inscriptions, illustrate that once Macedon had acquired pre-eminence over Greece and the former empire of Persia, its ruler was not averse to the title of king.<sup>14</sup> The case of Macedon is important because it shows that the Macedonian rulers were more than just chieftains or warlords but exercised a wide range of political, administrative, economic, judicial, and even religious functions which were essential to the running of a well-ordered and well-organised society. In addition to a standing army, we know from a passing comment in Thucydides (2.100.2) that even in the fifth century Macedon enjoyed a network of roads and fortifications, and Xenophon clarifies (*Hell.* 5.2.13) that the administrative seat of government by the fourth century was Pella. In addition, we have evidence of taxation and court jurisdiction which fell under the control of the king.<sup>15</sup> Philip

<sup>12</sup> E.N. Borza, *In the Shadow of Olympus. The Emergence of Macedon*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990; Borza, *Before Alexander: Constructing Ancient Macedonia*. Claremont: Regina, 1999. For a different interpretation, see P. Carlier, *La royauté en Grèce avant Alexandre*. Strassbourg, 1984.

<sup>13</sup> *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 40. 542

<sup>14</sup> *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 36. 626; Borza (n. 12), *Before Alexander*, pp. 11-15; N.G.L. Hammond, *The Macedonian State: The Origins, Institutions and History*. Oxford, 1989, p. 199.

<sup>15</sup> M.V. Hatzipoulos, *Macedonian Institutions under the Kings*. 2 vols. Athens, 1996; Z. Archibald, ‘Space, Hierarchy, and Community in Archaic and Classical Macedonia, Thessaly, and Thrace’, in Brock, R. and Hodkinson, S. (eds.), *Alternatives to Athens. Varieties of Political Organization and Community in Ancient Greece*. Oxford, 2000, p. 229; S. Kremyadi, ‘Coinage and Finance’, in Lane Fox, R.J. (ed.) *Brill’s Companion to Ancient Macedon. Studies in the Archaeology and History of Macedon, 650 BC-300 AD*. Leiden, 2011, pp. 159-69; R.J. Lane Fox, ‘Philip’s and Alexander’s Macedon’, in Lane Fox (above), pp. 375-6.



officiated in state sacrifices and adjudicated over territorial disputes.<sup>16</sup> Mitchell writes: ‘It is the fact that the Macedonian rulers had a range of civic, political and religious responsibilities to legitimize their position –although their success in war also had a significant bearing on their authority, and their desire for war seems to have a ritualized aspect –which lifts them beyond mere warlords. This was not just rule “by the strength of the arm”, but an organized attempt to engage. in the processes of legitimate and consensual rule’.<sup>17</sup>

It is superficially tempting to assert that Aristotle, the court tutor to Alexander the Great himself, modelled his view of *basileia* on the Macedonian example, but that would be to assume that Philip assumed the title of *basileus*, a claim which cannot be established on the evidence as it stands. The problem is just that we do not know with certainty how Philip referred to himself constitutionally, and there is every possibility that the title of ‘king’ was not applied to the rulers of Macedon until the time of Alexander, when the young upstart began to rival the claims of the Persian King himself. According to the historian Thucydides, writing a century earlier, kingship as a political institution belonged to the remote past, and even by the fifth century B.C., though Sparta might be treated as exceptional, there were no kings left (1.13):

Δυνατωτέρας δὲ γιγνομένης τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ τῶν χρημάτων τὴν κτῆσιν ἔτι μᾶλλον ἢ πρότερον ποιουμένης τὰ πολλὰ τυραννίδες ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι καθίσταντο, τῶν προσόδων μειζόνων γιγνομένων πρότερον δὲ ἦσαν ἐπὶ ῥητοῖς γέρασι πατρικαὶ βασιλεῖαι), ναυτικά τε ἐξηρτύετο ἡ Ἑλλάς, καὶ τῆς θαλάσσης μᾶλλον ἀντείχοντο.

As Greece grew more powerful and put its mind to the acquisition of money still more than before, for the most part tyrannies were established in the cities, as revenues grew greater (for previously there were ancestral *basileiai* with stated prerogatives), and Greece started to construct navies, and they held a greater preference for the sea.

Though often rendered ‘kingship’, the meaning of *basileia* is widely contested. Robert Drews, for example, argued against the existence in early Greece of royalty in any sense understood from comparison with medieval kingship, and argued instead for a prehistoric society run by aristocratic clans and families.<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, Oswyn Murray objected to the rendition of *patrikai basileiai* as ‘ancestral kingships’ and viewed the *basileus* as the head of a noble family.<sup>19</sup> Anthropological approaches as to how primitive rulership is to be properly understood have varied. Walter Donlan saw the *basileis* in Homer less as ‘kings’ than as chieftains or warlords in a society which he argued was modelled down kinship lines, and likewise Bjørn Qviller argued that, in contrast with later typologies of rulership, *basileia* as a political concept in early Greece was rule by brute force which, because of abbreviated life expectancy, fizzled out of existence as monetary wealth became more widely available.<sup>20</sup> Others have rejected the model of temporary chiefdoms and shown preference for more permanent political structures, even if

<sup>16</sup> P. Briant, *Antigone le Borgne. Les débuts de sa carrière et les problèmes de l'assemblée macédonienne*. Paris. 1973, p. 326; Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institutions* 1.pp. 422, 2.pp. 23-4.

<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, *Heroic Rulers*, p. 32.

<sup>18</sup> R. Drews, *Basileus. The Evidence for Kingship in Geometric Greece*. Yale, 1983.

<sup>19</sup> O. Murray, *Early Greece*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, 1983, pp. 37-62.

<sup>20</sup> W. Donlan, ‘Reciprocities in Homer’, *Classical Weekly* 75 (1981-2), pp. 137-75 1981-2; B. Qviller, ‘The Dynamics of Homeric Society’, *Symbolae Osloenses* 56 (1981), pp. 109-55.

they have not gone as far as calling *basileis* ‘kings’.<sup>21</sup> Others still have entertained the comparison between the *basileis* of early Greece and the kings of post-Carolingian Europe and drawn attention to its hereditary nature, as well as to the symbols of royal prerogative which it adopted, such as the sceptre.<sup>22</sup> Other paradigms suggest that with the rise of the Greek polis, it was impossible for institutional *basileia* to persist, and so the *patrikai basileiai* gave way to the city state which, as a permanent and stable political reality, displaced makeshift rulership.<sup>23</sup>

Thucydides understands the distinction between *basileus* and *tyrannos* in terms of the proportion of authority which each wielded, with *basileis* enjoying more limited and harnessed powers, whereas tyrants came to power on the back of money and wealth.<sup>24</sup> Recent scholarship has been disposed to doubt Thucydides’ nuanced definitions on the grounds that many of the so-called ‘kings’ in the archaic period and even before became very wealthy and were not shy to use wealth as a means to bolster their authority, and at the same time many so-called ‘tyrants’ exercised ancestral rule and did so in the interests of the people they ruled.<sup>25</sup> Be that as it may, the vital issue is what these terms meant in ordinary parlance, and whether the distinction is purely theoretical, as has recently been alleged.<sup>26</sup> It is undeniably true that, in practice, the differences were often blurred. In post-Mycenaean society, ruling houses in the small Early Iron Age communities could have seated more than one family and in one case may have seated up to two hundred members. The case of Nichoria in Messenia with its political and economic instability makes the idea that all Greek communities postdating the collapse of the Mycenaean world had solitary rulers who claimed uninterrupted lineage over generations *prima facie* unlikely.<sup>27</sup> Yet archaeology also shows that these Early Iron Age societies were artistically and economically vibrant and that their rulers sought to justify their power by connecting themselves with the warriors of the mythical past.<sup>28</sup> Mythical

<sup>21</sup> R.L. Carneiro, ‘The Chieftdom: Precursor of the State’, in Jones, G.D. and Kautz, R.R. (eds.), *The Transition to Statehood in the New World*. Cambridge, 1981; T. Earle, ‘The Evolution of Chieftdoms’, in Earle, T. (ed.), *Chieftdoms: Power, Economy and Ideology*. Cambridge, 1991; J. Whitley, *Style and Society in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge, 1991, pp. 184-6; W.G. Thalmann, *The Swineherd and the Bow. Representations of Class in the Odyssey*. New York, 1998; J. Hall, *A History of the Archaic Greek World. ca. 1200-479 BC*. Oxford, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Carlier, *Royauté*; H. van Wees, *Status Warriors, War, Violence and Society in Homer and History*. Amsterdam, 1992, pp. 32-6, 281-94; J.R. Lenz, *Kings and the Ideology of Kingship in Early Greece (c. 1200-700 BC): Epic, Archaeology and History*. Diss. Columbia University 1993, p. 10

<sup>23</sup> W.G. Runciman, ‘The Origins of States: The Case of Archaic Greece’, *CSSH* 24 (1982), pp. 351-77.

<sup>24</sup> Modern scholarship on the decline of ‘kingship’ in Greece has been heavily influenced by Thucydides. Perhaps the clearest influence can be traced in the work of Carlier, *Royauté*, who understands the decline of ‘kingship’ to go hand in hand with the rise of the polis.

<sup>25</sup> For a recent attempt to tear down the distinction between ‘kingship’ and ‘tyranny’ on the grounds that it belongs to the theoretical language of democratic states like Athens, see Mitchell, *Heroic Rulers*, pp. 34-48 and 153-63.

<sup>26</sup> A. Mazarakis Ainan, *From Rulers’ Dwellings to Temples: Architecture, Religion and Society in Early Iron Age Greece (1100-700 BC)*. Jonsered, 1997, pp. 79-80; N. Kennell and N. Luraghi, ‘Laconia and Messenia’, in Raaflaub, K.A. and van Wees, H. (eds.), *A Companion to Archaic Greece*. Chichester and Malden, 2009, pp. 239-54.

<sup>27</sup> For similar observations about the short duration of political communities in Early Iron Age Euboea, see J.P. Crielaard, ‘Basileis at Sea: Elites and External Contacts in the Euboean Gulf Region from the end of the Bronze to the Beginning of the Iron Age’, in Deger-Jalkotzy, D. and Lemnos, I.S. (eds.), *Ancient Greece: From Mycenaean Palaces to the Age of Homer*. Edinburgh 2006.

<sup>28</sup> S. Deger-Jalkotzy 1991; ‘Diskontinuität und Kontinuität: Aspekte politischer und sozialer Organisation in mykenischer Zeit und in der Welt der homerischen Epen’, in Musti, A., Sacconi, A.,

scenes on vases dating from the period show that the elites actively sought to link themselves to an heroic narrative dating back to the late Mycenaean age.<sup>29</sup> The famous Toumba at Lefkandi has often been likened to an heroön, which scholars have argued was used by the local rulers in the tenth and ninth centuries to legitimise their rule by reference to a notion of shared ancestry.<sup>30</sup> A similar picture emerges from Eretria.<sup>31</sup> Catherine Morgan concludes that while ancestry in most cases was fictional, it continued to function in an important symbolic way for the rulers of the Early Iron Age civilisations.<sup>32</sup> Thus, whether or not Thucydides was strictly right to apply the epithet *patrikai* to the kingships of the distant past which he partitions, what is clear is that even if genealogical claims were fictitious, they were nevertheless important ideologically and symbolically.

It is also true that tyrants could equally lay claim to heroic ancestry, the most notorious case being Peisistratus of Athens who symbolically purified the island of Delos as a token lip service to his Ionian heritage.<sup>33</sup> As Brian Lavelle points out, the myth of Peisistratus' descent from the Neleids of Pylos may have been manipulated to bolster claims to legitimacy through the likeness to kings Codrus and Melanthus who defeated Xanthus of Thebes in a war against Athens, and through the convenient historical parallel which this created with the recent war which Peisistratus had won against Megara.<sup>34</sup> If so, the hard-and-fast distinction between kingship, which was hereditary, and tyranny, which was not, comes into question. Further, the idea that tyrants were supported by wealth whereas kings fell back purely on an ancestral claim is made doubtful by indications across a wide range of evidence, that wealth and power were intimately linked from a very early stage. The Homeric rulers were certainly not averse to using lavish displays of wealth to show off their positions, such as Alcinous (*Od.* 7.81-102). The evidence of archaeology again indicates that regal houses from the Early Iron Age were often lavishly decorated and monumentally constructed.<sup>35</sup> On the Shield of Achilles the *basileus* has the task of managing the harvest, which suggests a close connection between the office of king and the economic management of the city or community (*Il.* 18.550-60). There is additional archaeological support for the view derived from

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Rochetti, L., Rocchi, M., Scafa, E., Sportiello, Giannotta, L. (eds.), *La transizione dal miceneo all'alto arcaismo. Dal palazzo alla città*. Rome; Crielaard, 'Basileis', pp. 282-4; B. Eder (2006). 'The world of Telemachus: Western Greece 1200-700 BC', in Deger-Jalkotzy, D. and Lemnos, I.S. (eds.), 2006; Deger-Lalkotzy, 'Late Mycenaean Warrior Tombs', in Deger-Jalkotzy, D. and Lemnos, I.S. (eds.), 2006; J. Maran, 'Coming to Terms with the Past: Ideology and Power in Late Helladic IIIC', in Deger-Jalkotzy, D. and Lemnos, I.S. (eds.), 2006; J.C. Wright, 'The Formation of the Mycenaean Palace', in Deger-Jalkotzy, D. and Lemnos, I.S. (eds.), 2006; R. Osborne, *Greece in the Making 1200-478 BC*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, 2009, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> J.M. Hurwitt, *The Art and Culture of Early Greece, 1100-480 BC*. Ithaca and London, 1985, pp. 123-4

<sup>30</sup> C.M. Antonaccio, *An Archaeology of Ancestors. Tomb Cult and Hero Cult in Early Greece*. Maryland and London, 1995, pp. 240-1; C. Morgan, 'The Early Iron Age', in Raaflaub, K.A. and van Wees, H. (eds.), *A Companion to Archaic Greece*. Chichester and Malden, 2009, pp. 46-63.

<sup>31</sup> C. Bérard, 'Le sceptre du prince,' *Museum Helveticum* 29 (1972), pp. 219-27, 'Récupérer la mort du prince: héroïsation et formation de la cité', in Gnoli, G. and Vernant, J.-P. (eds), *La Mort, les morts dans la sociétés anciennes*. Cambridge and Paris, 1983; F. de Polignac, *Cults, Territory and the Origin of the Greek City-State* (trans. Lloyd, J.). Chicago, 1995, pp. 129-43.

<sup>32</sup> Morgan, 'The Early Iron Age,' pp. 48-52.

<sup>33</sup> Hdt. 1.64.1-2; Thuc. 3.104.1-2; cf. Hom. *Hymn to Delian Apollo*, 146-64

<sup>34</sup> B. Lavelle, *Fame, Money and Power: The Rise of Peisistratos and 'Democratic' Tyranny at Athens*. Ann Arbor. 2005, pp. 17-29. For the claim to descent from the Neleids, see Hdt. 5.65.3.

<sup>35</sup> Mazarakis Ainian at n. 26.

*Odyssey* VII of the palace of Alcinous of the ruler's house in the Early Iron Age being used for communal feasting.<sup>36</sup>

The vanishing of these large ruling houses from the eighth century is often linked to the disappearance of institutional kingship in Greece, but more recently Mitchell has put forward the case that what shifted between the Early Iron Age and the early archaic period was not how much wealth rulers had at their disposal, but how they chose to display it, with an emerging emphasis being placed on the public display of wealth rather than on its use for private ostentation.<sup>37</sup> This would certainly explain the fashion for austerity among tyrants such as Periander of Corinth, Gelon of Syracuse, and Pittacus of Mytilene.<sup>38</sup> But is this enough to collapse the distinction? Crucially, the link between tyranny and wealth does not begin with Thucydides but had been established as a trope by the time Thucydides was writing. The first use of the word 'tyrant' in Greek literature appears in a fragment of the lyric poet Archilochus, who claims to despise the wealth of Gyges and repudiate tyranny.<sup>39</sup> Modern scholarship has rightly seen in this evidence for the connection in the popular imagination between tyranny and wealth.<sup>40</sup> Of course, Archilochus was speaking proverbially, but what is so significant from the fragment is that, from its first attestation, tyranny is demonstrably associated with something lavish, despotic and foreign. It cannot be claimed, therefore, that the link between tyranny and wealth was dreamt up by Thucydides at the end of the fifth century. From a philological angle, it is crucial to recognise that wealth and tyranny were bedfellows from the point that the latter entered Greek vocabulary. Ostentation, luxury, decadence and despotism were at the heart of what Greeks had always understood by tyranny, where those pejorative insinuations are felt across literature. The fact that more enlightened tyrants, like Peisistratus, took to using wealth for public rather than private display should not lessen this stereotype. No doubt he, Cypselus of Corinth and Gelon of Syracuse were each familiar with the advice of Bacchylides to rulers to use their wealth responsibly (Bacchyl. fr. 3).<sup>41</sup> But that tyrants and wealth were intimately connected in popular consciousness cannot be denied or argued against.

What is to be made of this connection? In a provocative re-evaluation of rulership in Greece, Mitchell argues that the semantic distinction between 'king' and 'tyrant' originated in the late fifth and fourth centuries and should not be understood rigidly as the defining properties of rulership – display of athletic and military prowess, political counsel, ancestral bonds and familial ties – are in evidence both among those who have gone down in history as *basileis* and among those labelled *tyrannoi*.<sup>42</sup> Even if true in practice, we run up against the fact that Greek had different terms for different types of ruler, and even if the conceptual boundaries between them were not firmly delineated until the time of Aristotle in the second half of the fourth century, the visible existence of a variety of

<sup>36</sup> Mazarakis Ainian, *Ruler Dwellings*, pp. 270-6.

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, *Heroic Rulers*, p. 54.

<sup>38</sup> Ar. fr. 611.20 Rose; Diod. 11.38.2-3; Arist. *Pol.* 1274b18-23; Diog. Laert. 1.76, 79

<sup>39</sup> Archilochus fr. 19 West.

<sup>40</sup> Thus, Andrewes, *Greek Tyrants*, pp. 21-3; R. Osborne, *Greek History*. London and New York, 2004, pp. 59-60; L. Kallet, 'Demos Tyrannos: Wealth, Power and Economic Patronage,' in Morgan, K. (ed.), *Popular Tyranny: Sovereignty and its Discontents in Ancient Greece*. Austin. 2003; R. Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind*, Cambridge. 2004, pp. 118 and 159.

<sup>41</sup> For Cypselus' benefactions to Corinth, see Salmon 1984, 196. For Gelon's dedication of a golden tripod at Delphi from the spoils of war with the Carthaginians, see Diod. 11.26.7.

<sup>42</sup> Mitchell, *Heroic Rulers*, pp. 57-151.



terminology for rulership from an early date may indeed indicate a range of meanings and nuances which long predate the political philosophers of the Classical period. But the fact that Greek has a plurality of words to denote rulership should not exclude synonymity, and not infrequently are the terms *basileus* and *tyrannos* used interchangeably. Scholars debate to what extent the Homeric poems can be used as historical evidence for early Greek society.<sup>43</sup> We have already had occasion to note the depiction of the *basileus* on the Shield of Achilles. Some have based their view that a *basileus* was no more than a nobleman on the famous scene in *Odyssey* Book 8, where Odysseus meets the twelve *basileis* of Phaeacia, Alcinous being the thirteenth (*Od.* 8.390-1).<sup>44</sup> Equally, it seems that on Ithaca there were many *basileis* beside Odysseus. It is entirely possible that in Homeric usage the term did, as Murray suggests, mean something like ‘aristocrat’ and nothing more, but there can be little doubt that a *basileus*, whether a sole ruler or one of a group, family or faction, was someone in a position of considerable power and influence. Whatever Homer meant by the term *basileus*, the word *tyrannos* does not appear in Homer but was a later accretion.

In the lyric age, by contrast, there is a growing awareness of the dangers which rule of one man can bring, and even if the word *tyrannos* is not always used, the poets of that age were au fait with a common political thread, the nature of tyrannical rule and the deleterious effects which despotic government wrought if not tempered by the rule of law. The moralising poem of Pindar warning Hieron of Syracuse not to commit the proverbial errors of Phaleris of Acragas, who burned his political opponents alive in a hollow brazen bull, shows that the reality of one-man rule was omnipresent towards the end of the archaic age and that its hazards were well known (*Pind. Pyth.* 1.96-7). Later in the fifth century, the tragedians were also preoccupied with monarchical government, and it has been argued that the figure of the sole ruler in Greek tragedy was postured as the antithesis to an orderly political community run according to legal principle. In the imagination of the Greeks, one-man rule was something evil, dangerous and almost apolitical. Even if a ruler did not receive the designation of *tyrannos*, it was widely understood that rulers who ruled selfishly, despotically, and without reference to the will of their subjects were behaving in ways which, according to an emerging, if unwritten, political code, had become synonymous with monarchy and was therefore anathematised as being contrary to the principles of a well-ordered society which understood the force of the law. Of course, Peisistratus and others might consciously have resisted those traps, but that is only because those paradigms were already there in the archaic age, and rulers who were successful and passed power to successors needed to resist being cast in a tyrannical light.

The question that follows is whether like ideas were held about ‘kingship’ and whether, as Mitchell and other scholars have argued, the terms only started to mean something different in the vocabulary of the fourth century, whereas previously they had been interchangeable. Often, the tragedians referred to monarchical government without clarifying the terms by which it was to be described. An example is the dream of Atossa, Queen of Persia, who envisaged two sisters in different garb, one Persian, the other Doric. In the dream the king yoked each of the two women to a chariot, whereupon one rode along obediently, the other

<sup>43</sup> K. Raaflaub, ‘A Historian’s Headache: How to Read “Homeric Society”’, in Fisher, N. and van Wees, H. (eds.), *Archaic Greece: New Evidence and Approaches*, 1998; P. Cartledge, *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice*. Cambridge 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Murray *Early Greece*, p. 38



struggled to break free and eventually dashed the chariot in two (Aesch. *Pers.* 176-99). The purpose of the story is to show how uneasily Greeks sat with the idea of monarchy: the Persian garb, luxuriant and decadent, becomes a symbol of how Greeks perceived the East, as tyrannical, puffed up, and subservient to an autocratic master. But it is not the case that the tragedians unequivocally saw monarchy as something necessarily evil. Rulers had the choice to govern in accordance with the laws and in the interests of those they ruled, or else to behave in a tyrannical and autocratic fashion. In her reproach to King Creon, Antigone accuses him of becoming a tyrant because he does and says whatever he likes and even starts to personify the city (Soph. *Ant.* 500-7):

τί δῆτα μέλλεις; ὥς ἐμοὶ τῶν σῶν λόγων  
ἀρεστὸν οὐδὲν μηδ' ἀρεσθείη ποτέ:  
οὕτω δὲ καὶ σοὶ τᾶμ' ἀφανδάνοντ' ἔφυ.  
καίτοι πόθεν κλέος γ' ἂν εὐκλεέστερον  
κατέσχον ἢ τὸν αὐτάδελφον ἐν τάφῳ  
τιθεῖσα; τούτοις τοῦτο πᾶσιν ἀνδάνειν  
λέγοιτ' ἂν, εἰ μὴ γλῶσσαν ἐγκλήῃσι φόβος.  
ἀλλ' ἢ τυραννὶς πολλὰ τ' ἄλλ' εὐδαιμονεῖ  
κᾶζεσθιν αὐτῇ δρᾶν λέγειν θ' ἂ βούλεται.

Why then do you wait? In none of your maxims  
Is there anything that pleases me—and may there never be!  
Similarly, to you as well my views must be displeasing.  
And yet, how could I have won a nobler glory than by giving burial  
To my own brother? All here would admit that they approve,  
If fear did not grip their tongues.  
But tyranny, blest with so much else, has the power  
To do and say whatever it pleases.

This is an explicit tract against unbridled autocracy. The hateful nature of tyranny is also visible throughout the plays of Euripides, especially in the *Phoenician Women* and the *Suppliants*. In the latter, Theseus is made to say that there is nothing more hateful to a city than a tyrant (Eur. *Suppl.* 429), but earlier claims that he has given sovereignty to the *demos* (352-3). The word used is *monarchia*, which might appear to be an oxymoron, but which on closer reading comports the notion of constitutional, lawful government as distinct from lawless, arbitrary tyranny: καὶ γὰρ κατέστησ' αὐτὸν ἐξ μοναρχίαν/ ἐλευθερώσας τήνδ' ἰσόψηφον πόλιν ('for I established it [viz. the demos] in a position of sole-rule/ having liberated this city equal in vote).

Of course, not all rulers in tragedy are wicked. King Pelasgus, in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, regularly addresses the assembly.<sup>45</sup> He is a good ruler ruling in keeping with legal prerogative. Although Oedipus brings the city of Thebes low, the moral question is whether he was morally culpable given that none of his crimes were done with foreknowledge. Oedipus importantly is a good but flawed ruler, different in nature from King Creon in *Antigone*, and from a semantic angle it is significant that the play to which Latin editions refer as *Oedipus Rex* (or 'Oedipus the King'), is titled in Greek *Oidipous Tyrannos* (or 'Oedipus the Tyrant'). It has also been pointed out that democratic states were not the only ones where tragedies were performed. Aeschylus wrote for the court of Hieron of Syracuse, and Euripides

<sup>45</sup> Thus, Duncan 2012, 149-51.

wrote plays for the royal house at Macedon.<sup>46</sup> Tragedy is not the only evidence for how Greeks thought about absolute monarchy. The comedies of Aristophanes are rich in allusions to monarchy and its excesses, especially in the way the King of Persia is viewed. The Great King is a despot, oozes in riches, dines lavishly, and anoints himself with fragrant ointments.<sup>47</sup> The image of the oriental despot was typeset by the time of Aristophanes in the fifth century B.C., who drew on stereotypes that went back to Archilochus two centuries earlier. The fact that a foreign king, a hereditary ruler whose rule was established over generations, could be caricatured in this way indicates a basic and fundamental preconception which Greeks of the period had about monarchical rule. To the democratic mindset, one-man rule was foreign, un-Greek, unlawful, extravagant, and contrary to the principles of a civilised society. Neither the comic poets nor the tragedians made fine distinctions between ‘kings’ on the one hand and ‘tyrants’ on the other. Much more important for them was the contrast between a free democratic society, where no king or ruler existed, and an unfree society ruled over by an arbitrary monarch. Though Zeus is referenced in *Birds* by Aristophanes as a *basileus*, or king, the comic point is just that Zeus himself had in legend been a usurper, having overthrown the Titans who preceded him to establish his rule on Mount Olympus. Zeus, indeed, is no better than the loathsome Pisthetairus who seeks to upend him, and who in various places is described specifically as a *tyrannos* (467-506, 1708).

There are other places in Greek literature preceding Aristotle where the terms king and tyrant are applied quite interchangeably. Herodotus describes Alexander I of Macedon as a *basileus* (9.44.1) but describes the style of Macedonian government *tyrannis* (8.137.1). There has been wide-ranging discussion among modern interpreters whether Herodotus’ view of monarchy was unequivocally negative. Arther Ferrill argued for a broadly negative view,<sup>48</sup> but in a fresh analysis of the problem, Stephen Fitzsimons has recently put forward the case that the matter for Herodotus is not whether monarchy on the Persian model is categorically evil, but the variant styles of government which each of the four successive kings of Persia, Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius and Xerxes, exhibit, with the first being described as πατήρ, the second δεσπότης, the third κάπηλος, and the last as consultative leader.<sup>49</sup> If so, it would be fair to say that the view of absolute rule in Herodotus is not completely fixed, but wrong to suggest that it was either ambivalent or insensitive to a range of different nuances of rulership. If Herodotus used the concepts of kingship and tyranny interchangeably to describe Macedonian rule, this need not imply that the two were interchangeable without some variance of connotation. When describing Alexander I as a ‘king’, he does so in a specific context, because as general of his army he takes on the role of leadership and indeed appears to occupy a constitutional position, as he is presented as στρατηγός τε ἐὼν καὶ βασιλεὺς Μακεδόνων (‘both general and king of the Macedonians). By contrast, when Herodotus describes Alexander earlier in Book VIII as a tyrant, he does so because he presents him as a usurper and overthrower. The inference may indeed be that the terms ‘king’ and ‘tyrant’ meant roughly the same in the fifth century because they could be applied to the same figure, but it is also true that each could

<sup>46</sup> Boscher 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Ar. *Ach.* 62, 68-76, 85-6, 88-9, 102; *Wealth* 170; *Birds* 486-7; *Knights* 1330-2.

<sup>48</sup> A. Ferrill, ‘Herodotus on Tyranny’, *Historia* 27 (1978), pp. 385-98.

<sup>49</sup> S. Fitzsimons, *The Leadership Styles of the Persian Kings in Herodotus’ Histories*. Manchester, 2017.

be applied with a subtle difference if the sense in which monarchical rule was characterised varied.<sup>50</sup>

The subtleties of nuance which start to become apparent in the fifth century B.C. become much more self-evident in the century which follows. In the philosophical schools of the fourth century B.C., the distinction between ‘king’ and ‘tyrant’ becomes firmly and clearly pronounced. In his famous discussion in *Republic* of how different forms of government evolve (8.545c-569c), Plato contrasts the kingly man, who is supreme in justice, and happiness (if this is the meaning of *eudaimonia*), with the tyrannical man who is the counterpoint to all those things. Similarly, Aristotle draws a distinction between two types of monarchical rule, kingship and tyranny, by the criterion of the rule of law, the former being lawful and in keeping with the will of the ruled, the latter being lawless and arbitrary (Arist. *Pol.* 1279b4-7, 16-17). Even Aristotle is not overly dogmatic in the way he applies the distinction, and, perhaps with the tyranny of Peisistratus in mind, is prepared to admit that some tyrannies are ‘kinglike’ in nature. It is a nice question whether, in fact, Peisistratus when ruler ever described himself as a tyrant. As Brian Lavelle argues persuasively, the largely negative tradition we have of Peisistratus as tyrant is almost certainly a later reaction to the rule at a time when Athens re-asserted herself as a democracy, but there is evidence that he commanded support of the people and was even voted a bodyguard, one of the criteria upon which Aristotle later differentiated kings from tyrants (Hdt. 1.59.5, 60.5).<sup>51</sup> Because of the lack the evidence, we cannot assert with confidence that the term ‘tyrant’ was a later appellation which democratic Athenians foisted upon the historical figure of Peisistratus as a means of discrediting his rule and endorsing the democratic system which replaced it. Nevertheless, in the literary tradition of the fifth century a clear differentiation was made between the style of rule which Peisistratus inaugurated and the disgraced tyranny of his sons who succeeded him. In a semantic sense, he was still viewed and described as a tyrant, even if the rule was mild, and though he claimed hereditary succession.

Mogens Hansen has argued that rulers and the polis did not combine well.<sup>52</sup> This is certainly true of the Classical period when, as Aristotle noted, there were very few *basileis* left in Greece. But this is less true of the earlier period, when, as Archilochus commemorated in another of his poems, it was possible to conquer a city, rule it (*anasse*), and hold the tyranny (*tyranniê*) (fr. 23 West). The sense of tyranny here is like what we read in other places, that is, rule that is established by some extra-legal or extra-constitutional means, even if, as was the case at Athens under Peisistratus, the tyrant once he had established his power ruled in keeping with the established laws. The question here, of course, is what is meant by a polis, and on this, modern scholars are once again divided. According to some the definition of a *basileus* in early Greece was whether a leading figure controlled a communal sanctuary.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, it has been said that a polis does not become a polis until it acquired a patron god, at which point the *basileis* vanished

<sup>50</sup> I cannot agree with Mitchell, *Heroic Rulers*, p. 9, who calls Herodotus ‘ambivalent about *basileis* and *tyrannoi*’. The fact that he can use both in reference to Alexander I of Macedon implies not that there was no distinction, but that monarchical rule could be described both positively and pejoratively, depending on context.

<sup>51</sup> B. M. Lavelle, *The Sorrow and the Pity. A Prolegomenon to a History of Athens under the Peisistratids, c.560-510 BC*. Historia Einzelschriften 80 (1993), Stuttgart.

<sup>52</sup> M.H. Hansen, *Polis. An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State*. Oxford, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> A. Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece; The Age of Experiment*. London. 1980, pp. 33-4, 58-64; C. Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles*. Cambridge, 1990, pp. 73-9.

as a phenomenon.<sup>54</sup> Yet analogy with the East shows that rulers often built shrines and sanctuaries in the cities over which they ruled, such as Demonax of Mantinea (Hdt. 4.161.3), Gelon of Syracuse (Diod. 5.2.3), and his successor Hieron (Hdt. 7.153-4; Pind. *Ol.* 6.94-5).<sup>55</sup> Control of state religion was a major feature of kingship at Sparta and Macedon.<sup>56</sup> Hansen's claim is open to further objection. From the first appearance of the word *basileus* in Homer and Hesiod, it is clear that the function of the *basileus* was to maintain order and a lawful environment,<sup>57</sup> and in later sources, including the lyric poets, the tragedians, and the orators, the link between ruling, justice, and *eunomia* is regularly in evidence.<sup>58</sup> Some scholars have argued that when justice was guaranteed by force, we are no longer dealing with *basileia* in the sense understood by the poets, but with tyranny.<sup>59</sup> But this is to posit a distinction which does not come into full force until the philosophical schools of the fourth century B.C. The significance of *euboulia*, the ability to give and receive good advice, in kingship is defining as far as the Homeric worldview is concerned.<sup>60</sup> Yet it is also true that Hesiod railed against the 'gift-devouring kings' (*Works and Days* 248-64), and this was intended as a warning kings to rule in accordance with an unwritten code of what it meant to be a *basileus* in the archaic world.

It is perhaps in the historical context of lawful kingship that we need to understand the emergence of democracy and the rule of law. It has been maintained in the past that popular sovereignty and the rule of law were antithetical ideas which were never properly resolved in the democratic societies which displaced the tyrannies of the archaic age. More recently, however, Edward Harris has demonstrated that these two concepts were not antithetical but mutually reinforcing, and furthermore, that democracy was functionally impossible without the rule of law.<sup>61</sup> The question is how a sense of the law in absence of a king or ruler emerged in the late archaic period. The radical departure which the great lawgivers of the archaic age made from the Homeric understanding of *eunomia* was to find ways of guaranteeing the rule of law without the titular authority of a *basileus* to defend or uphold it. The most famous example is Solon of Athens, who expressly renounces rulership in the city which he sets straight, but gives Athens *thesmoi*, or written laws, by which the principle of *eunomia* can reign (Sol. fr. 4 West). It has been pointed out that the development of a sense of legal abstraction without a physical sovereign being present to guarantee the rule of law goes hand in hand with the emergence of a belief in natural law, particularly in the philosophy of Heraclitus

<sup>54</sup> J.N. Coldstream, *Geometric Greece, 900-700 BC*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London and New York, 2003, pp. 317-27; A. Snodgrass, *Archaeology and the Emergence of Greece*. Edinburgh 2006, p. 212; R. Osborne, *Greece in the Making 1200-478 BC*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, 2009, pp. 83-4.

<sup>55</sup> M.J. Boda and J. Novotny, *From the Foundations to the Crenellations. Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible*. Münster, 2010; M.R. Thatcher, *A Variable Tapestry: Identity and Politics in Greek Sicily and Southern Italy*. Diss. Brown University, 2011; R. Parker, *On Greek Religion*. Ithaca and London 2011, p. 48.

<sup>56</sup> P. Briant *Antigone le Borgne. Les débuts de sa carrière et les problèmes de l'assemblée macédonienne*. Paris, 1973, pp. 326-7.

<sup>57</sup> Hom. *Il.* 2.205-6; 9.98-9; Hes. *Works and Days* 169, 238-47, 256-85, 668.

<sup>58</sup> Pind. *Pyth.* 1.86; Eur. *Electr.* 876-8; Isoc. *Nic.* 18.

<sup>59</sup> J.F. McGlew, *Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge, 1993, pp. 52-86; E. Irwin, *Solon and Early Greek Poetry. The Politics of Exhortation*. Cambridge. 2005, pp. 221-30.

<sup>60</sup> M. Schofield, 'Euboulia in the *Iliad*', *Classical Quarterly* 36 (1986), pp. 6-31, *contra* M.I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London, 1977, pp. 113-18.

<sup>61</sup> E.M. Harris, *The Rule of Law in Action in Democratic Athens*. Oxford, 2013.

(DK 22, 114).<sup>62</sup> This is in evidence both in the Orphic tradition (fr. 247 Bernabé) and in Pindar (fr. 169). It is crucial that we understand the significance of these shifts correctly. Rather than viewing monarchical rule as antithetical to the rule of law, as some have done, the point of this development was that the idea of the rule of law, which had been there from earliest times, was taken forward, and that a new understanding of how the law could be applied and regulated without the intervening hand of a monarch or sovereign became available from the sixth century and beyond. This might of course provide an insight into why writing developed in Greece and why, contrary to the views of some, the role of written mediums was crucial to the evolution of the democratic habit. Once written laws were in place, the need for an adjudicating ruler, or wise man, to decide the outcome of territorial or other disputes which arose among dwellers of the community vanished and the regularity of legal principle, guaranteed by written laws (*thesmoi*), entrenched itself.

The distinction between a ruler who accepted that there was a law above himself to which he himself was also subject, and one who did not, is much in evidence from the time of Herodotus onwards, and there is no reason to think that Herodotus was not indebted to an earlier train of thought which knew this distinction perfectly well. Cambyses of Persia was a tyrant because he invented laws to please himself (Hdt. 3.31.1-5, 80.2-5). Elsewhere, we learn that Pheidon of Argos began his reign as a *basileus* but degenerated into a tyrant once he lost sight of the idea that his role as ruler was to rule the community fairly and justly.<sup>63</sup> The need to respect the law as a sovereign entity above the head of the king was grasped by Agesilaus of Sparta and, a little later, by Alexander the Great himself. It is true that, once we get into the Hellenistic period, the phenomenon of ruler deification took hold, a tendency whose origins can be traced to the pronouncement of Alexander as the son of a god by the oracle of Ammon at Siwa in Egypt, but this was not without its dangers.<sup>64</sup> In earlier times, by contrast, the idea that rulers derived their authority from some divine source was not tantamount to a claim to divinity, but rather a recognition that, as ruler, the king needed to discharge his authority in line with a higher sense of right (*themis*) (Hom. *Od.* 19.109-14; Hes. *Theog.* 85-6). The recognition that there was a legal principle which transcended the figure of the king even in the Homeric worldview indicates that the idea of rule of law, though integral to democracy, did not begin with democracy but long predated it, and was very much part of a world where the majority of communities, cities and settlements throughout Greece were governed by a monarchical figure.

Of course, the link between divinity and righteousness was not so firmly established in the ancient worldview as it later became with the emergence of Christianity as the dominant religion in Europe in late antiquity and on into the Middle Ages. Zeus not infrequently was represented as a tyrannical figure who attained his power over the heavens and the earth by means of what was effectively a usurpation (Hes. *Theog.* 881-5). In the *Iliad* we see that Zeus is often arbitrary in his judgments which do not always or necessarily adhere to what is morally right (*Il.* 8.68-72; 16.657-8; 24.257). Nevertheless, the fact that Zeus is not morally

<sup>62</sup> G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge, 1983, pp. 181-212; L. Bertelli, 'Hecataeus: From Genealogy to Historiography', Luraghi, N. (ed.), *The Historian's Craft in the Age of Herodotus*. Oxford, 2001.

<sup>63</sup> Hdt. 6.127.3; Arist. *Pol.* 1310<sup>b</sup>23-27; J. Hall, *A History of the Archaic Greek World, ca. 1200-479 BC*. Oxford 2007, pp. 145-54.

<sup>64</sup> B. Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of the Heroes*. Oxford, 2005, p. 195; R. K. Balot, *Greek Political Thought*. Malden, Oxford and Carlton, 2006, pp. 269-76.



perfect and can sometimes act in ways which are morally objectionable is the surest sign that, even as early as Homer and Hesiod, Greeks had begun to detach the idea of power from right. To say that Zeus can act unjustly is not a 'might is right' argument, as the character of Thrasymachus in Book II of Plato's *Republic* was made to claim. Rather, it is an implicit recognition that right and might are not one and the same, and that even the most supreme of all rulers, Zeus himself, was not above every moral principle. If this is the case, then even in heaven it was possible for rulership to go astray, which means that, even on Olympus, there is a recognised sense that above the authority of the gods there is a principle of right which does not necessarily emanate from the deities who enforce it or who fail to do so. This detachment of the gods from authorship of righteousness and justice should not be taken to mean that, in the worldview of Homer and Hesiod, there was no such thing as justice. Rather, it shows that from the first beginnings of Greek literature it came to be understood that the word of the ruler, *qua* ruler, was not necessarily right or just, and that earthly or even heavenly rule needed to defer to an authority above itself. As Gabriel Herman has shown, this basic idea persisted even into the Hellenistic age when earthly rulers had begun to claim an almost divine status.<sup>65</sup>

The Greek world did not draw the distinctions which are so familiar to us between kings and tyrants. When Aristotle in the second half of the fourth century differentiated the two, he did so for theoretical purposes which fit the prescriptions of his own philosophical categories. Before Aristotle, the terms for rulership are used interchangeably. So, are we right to draw the distinction in our own parlance? Language evolves, and the senses in which terminology is applied develops with the evolution of language. No one would use 'king' and 'tyrant' in quite the synonymous way in which the words were used in Greek. Yet it is also of vital importance to understand why and how the terminology evolved, and why we use the different terminology we do. The language, literature, poetry, philosophy and drama of the ancient world remains the bedrock of our modern culture, and it is impossible to understand how the modern world has developed its own semantic registers without comprehending the world from which it came.

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<sup>65</sup> G. Herman, 'The court society of the Hellenistic age' in Cartledge, P., Garnsey, P. and Gruen, E. (eds), *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History and Historiography*. California, 1997.