

POLITICAL THINKING ON KINGSHIP IN DEMOCRATIC ATHENS

Democratic Athens seems to have been the first place in the Greek world where there developed systematically a positive theorising of kingship. Initially this might seem surprising, since the Athenians had a strong tradition of rejecting one-man-rule, and from at least the early fifth century the heroisation of the tyrannicides had formed the corner-stone of Athenian political thinking.¹ Indeed, from an early date the Athenian political imaginary was populated by monarchs; however, as well as wicked tyrants, there were also good and even ideal kings. While in the fifth century in particular the idea of the tyrant became a vehicle for thinking about and expressing the isonomic values of equality and freedom, at the end of the fifth century and into the fourth century the rule of the good king, and even the *tyrannos*, could also be a metaphor for the rule of the *demos*. It was in the fourth century, on the other hand, when the language of democracy was itself being contested at least by the intellectual elite, that a positive theorisation of kingship crystallised, and the language of positive kingship and the representations of the ideal king engaged in a deep and subversive, but

¹ This paper and the paper by Peter Rhodes published at pp. 000-0 were written as a complementary pair for the conference ‘One-Man Rule in the Ancient Greek and Roman World’ held at the Higher School of Economics, Perm, Russia, in August 2016. I would like to thank Peter Rhodes, Valerij Goušchin, and the Higher School of Economics for inviting me to take part in the conference where this paper was first delivered, and also all the participants at the conference for helpful comments and conversations. I would also like to thank both the members of the Bristol Department of Classics and Ancient History, and the members of the Glasgow Classical Association, where versions of this paper was given subsequently, for invaluable comment and advice.

ultimately redemptive, way with the language of tyranny. As a result, Athens, as the city where the *demos* ruled as tyrant, could also be presented as the city which allowed politically able leaders to use their abilities and greatness, so as to allow democratic Athens, in turn, to become the pre-eminent city in the Greek world. The study of kingship among the political thinkers of the fifth and fourth century has not received much scholarly attention until recent years, and particularly not the striking fact that it was democratic Athens, or at least writers directing themselves to an Athenian democratic audience, that produced a positive theorising of kingship. The aim of this [essay/article](#), then, is not only to show how the political language around kingship became a way of forming definitions of what democracy was and was not, but also (more significantly), among some fourth-century intellectuals, of shaping new ideas about what it could be.

This article will have three main parts: first of all, it will look at the early development of a democratic thinking, which it will be argued grew out of the experiences of the Persian Wars, and which emphasised the opposition between isonomic constitutions and tyranny. In the second part it will consider how, alongside the development of the discourse of tyranny, there also emerged a way of projecting good and ideal kings into the ancient history of democratic Athens and even representing the Athenian *demos* itself in terms of the 'good king' so that positive kingship as well as negative kingship became integral to the Athenian political biography. In the third and final section we will turn to how and why it was important for some Athenian democratic thinkers of the fourth century that there was a positive theorisation of kingship in order to deal with practical politics and create a space for leadership, and so to theorise the basis for a stable democratic regime, which reshaped the political discourse on kingship so that the Athenian *demos* might itself be a tyrant in the city, but the best men ordered the city's affairs.

1. Democracy and Tyranny

From at least the seventh century, the Athenians had shown themselves resistant to monarchy as a political form. In the mid seventh century, the Athenians put up a united, if not particularly concerted, resistance to the attempt by Cylon to seize power (Thuc. 1.126.7–8). In the early sixth century, Solon may have passed an anti-‘tyranny’ law (*Ath. Pol.* 8.4; cf. Plut. *Sol.* 19.4, both with Rhodes, *Comm.* 156), and in his poetry he both rejected the rule of a tyrant (frs. 32, 33, 34 West) and made an association between monarchy (though *monarchos* not *tyrannos*) and the slavery of the *demos* (fr. 9).² In Athens more widely elite resistance to other members of the elite seizing power was also demonstrated when a certain Damasias was elected archon but then held onto office until he was forcibly ejected two years and two months later (*Ath. Pol.* 13.2), and in 508/7 the power of the *demos* was demonstrated in the rejection of the attempt by the Spartan Cleomenes to install Isagoras as tyrant in Athens (Hdt. 5.70, 72, 74.1; cf. *Ath. Pol.* 20.1–3 with Rhodes, *Comm.* 242-7).³

² R. Brock, ‘Figurative Slavery in Greek Thought’ in A. Serghidou (ed.), *Peur de l’esclave – Peur de l’esclavage en Méditerranée/ Fear of slaves Fear of enslavement in the ancient Mediterranean* (XXIX^e colloque du GIREA, Rethymnon, 4–7 novembre 2004) (Franche-Comté: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2007), 217-24, at 210; id. *Greek Political Imagery from Homer to Aristotle* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 92.

³ See J. Ober, *The Athenian Revolution. Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 32-52.

However it was after the Persian attack at Marathon that the theoretical opposition between the relatively new Cleisthenic constitution and tyranny was articulated, whether or not this regime had yet acquired the name *demokratia*.⁴ Solon had made the contrast between the condition of being a slave and that of being free (fr. 36.7);⁵ nevertheless it was probably in the 480s, in the wake of Marathon and the attempted restoration of the Pisistratid Hippias (Hdt. 6.102, 107, 109.3), that the abstracted opposition of the Athenians' regime to tyranny was cemented.⁶ Ostracism, which ostensibly was aimed at preventing any one individual seizing control, though it might not be effective against a man with sufficient supporters (*Ath. Pol.* 22.3),⁷ was put into effect (if not established) for the first time in 488/7, two years after Marathon, and this first ostracism also had an extra anti-tyrannical dimension since it was Hipparchus son of Charmus, an associate of the Pisistratids (possibly a grandson of Hippias), who was the first to be ostracised (*Ath. Pol.* 22.4). It is also possible (and perhaps even likely) that it was at this point that the popular story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the so-called

⁴ On balance it seems unlikely that the term *demokratia* was the name given to Cleisthenes' regime. The move towards a regime in which the *dēmos* held clear sovereignty was gradual but continuous: in 487, for example, sortition for the archonship was introduced, diminishing the role of the archons.

⁵ Brock suggests that the link between the rule of the Persian King and slavery probably originated in the archaic period: *Greek Political Imagery*, p. 107.

⁶ The Athenians had already rejected Cleomenes' attempt to install Isagoras as ruler: Hdt. 5.70, 72, 74.1; cf. *Ath. Pol.* 20.1–3 with Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 242–7.

⁷ On the disagreement between *Ath. Pol.* 22.1 and Androtion *FGrH* 324 F6 concerning the establishment of the ostracism law, see Rhodes, *Commentary*, pp. 267–76.

‘tyrannicides’, as being responsible for the expulsion of the Pisistratids and establishment of *isonomia* (probably ‘order based on equality’: cf. the Harmodius song, Athenaeus 15.695a–b), became current, and the original statue group of the tyrannicides, and the cult of the tyrannicides (cf. *Ath. Pol* 58.1), may also belong to this post-Marathon period.⁸ Thus the regime of Cleisthenes, which Raaflaub and others call isonomic rather than democratic,⁹ came to be defined by its opposition to ‘tyranny’, whether of the Persian King or the rule of one man. In Aeschylus’ *Persians*, produced in 472, for which the young Pericles was *choregos* (*IG ii*² 2318.9–11), when Atossa asks who is the ‘shepherd’ (*poimanōr*)¹⁰ and who ‘lords it over’ (*epidespozei*) the Athenian army, the messenger replies: ‘They are called the slaves of no one nor the subject of any man’ (241–2). Later in the play the Chorus, rejoicing in Xerxes’ defeat, declare (584–96):

No longer now are those living in the Asian land
to live under Persian rule,
no longer are they to pay tribute

⁸ On the origins of the tyrannicides’ cult see J. L. Shear, ‘Religion and the Polis: The Cult of the Tyrannicides at Athens’, *Kernos*, 25 (2012), pp. 27–55, V. Azoulay, *Les Tyrannicides d’Athènes: Vie et mort de deux statues* (Paris: Seuil, 2014), pp. 43–8.

⁹ K. A. Raaflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 94.

¹⁰ The image of the ‘shepherd of the people’ has Greek antecedents, especially in the *Iliad* (e.g. *poimena laon*: *Il.* 1.263, 2.243; *poimeni laōn*: *Il.* 2.85, 105), though not again till Aeschylus; Aeschylus may be archaising and ‘Persianising’ (the king as shepherd is a common motif in the near east). See Brock, *Greek Political Imagery*, pp. 43–52.

by royal decree,
nor throwing themselves on the ground
will they be ruled. For the kingly power is destroyed.

No longer will the tongues of men
be under guard. For the people
have been released to talk freely (*eleuthera*),
since the yoke of strength has been removed.

Washed with blood in respect of its soil,

The sea-washed island of Ajax holds the remains of the Persians.

The King of the Persians, it is implied, is an enslaver who prevents his subjects speaking and acting freely, and provides a clear contrast with the Athenian regime.

In fact, the focus on tyranny as opposed to the Athenian regime was useful for highlighting what were to become key democratic values: especially freedom, equality and accountability.¹¹ In Herodotus' constitutional debate (which was probably written in the 430s or 420s and directed at least partially at an Athenian audience) the rule of the *mounarchos*, exemplified by the Persian Cambyses who discovered a law that he could invent his own

¹¹ These political values had pre-dated the articulation of democracy at Athens, but became assimilated into and appropriated by democratic discourse during the fifth century: K. A. Raaflaub, 'Equalities and Inequalities in Athenian Democracy', in J. Ober & C. Hedrick (eds.), *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 153.

laws (Hdt. 3.31), was unaccountable (*aneuthynos*); even the best man, out of envy, the Persian Otanes says, would not be able to resist succumbing to the temptation to subvert the customary laws (*nomaia patria*), rape women, and kill men without trial (Hdt. 3.80.1–5). The *mounarchos* is contrasted with the rule of the *plethos*, which ‘has the name that is the most beautiful of all, *isonomia*’; the *mounarchos* has none of the things which the rule of the *plethos* can achieve: accountability, magistracies appointed by lot, and all matters referred to the assembly (3.80.6). Elsewhere, Herodotus comments on the strength of the Athenians once they had rid themselves of tyrants (5.78):

For it is clear that not in one thing alone but in all respects equality of speech (*isegoria*) is a great thing. For while the Athenians were ruled by tyrants they were no better at the arts of war than their neighbours. But once they had got rid of the tyrants they were by far the first. For it is clear that when [the Athenians] were subdued they were lazy like those working for a master, but when they were free (*eleutherothenton*) each man was keen to work in his own interests.

By the second half of the fifth century, tyranny had become ideologically entrenched not only as the opposite but also as the threat to democracy:¹² proclamations and prayers were said in the assembly and the *boule* against tyrants (Ar. *Thesm.* 338-9),¹³ as well as a

¹² See, e.g., K. A. Raaflaub, ‘Stick and Glue: The Function of Tyranny in Fifth-Century Athenian Democracy’, in K. A. Morgan (ed.), *Popular Tyranny: Sovereignty and Its Discontents in Ancient Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press., 2003), 59–93.

¹³ See C. F. L. Austin & S. D. Olson, *Aristophanes, Thesmophoriazusae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 160.

pronouncement at the Dionysia of a reward for anyone who killed a tyrant (Ar. *Av.* 1072–4),¹⁴ in 410/09 the decree of Demophantus was passed against anyone who might overthrow democracy, install himself as tyrant, or support a tyrant (Andoc. 1.96–8), assistance against possible tyrants or oligarchy was probably written into the alliance between the Athenians, Arcadians, Achaeans, Eleians and Phleiasians in 362 (*IG* ii² 112 = RO 41; cf. *SEG* xxix 90; *IG* ii² 116), and in 337/6 a further law was passed against anyone who might rise up against the *demos* for a tyranny or join in setting up a tyranny (RO 79 = *IG* ii³ 320, perhaps partly repeated from earlier laws), although – ironically perhaps – this inscription goes on to attack Areopagites who might take advantage of any attempt to overthrow the democracy to enhance their own position. As we have seen the original purpose of ostracism was to remove politicians who were thought to be too powerful (although in reality it often became a mechanism for playing out political rivalries),¹⁵ and importantly for our purposes prominent politicians could be charged with tyrannical behaviour: Thucydides says that the Athenians were afraid of Alcibiades because of his lifestyle and thought he was aiming at tyranny (6.15.4). Pericles was accused of Zeus-like behaviour and of being a tyrant (Ar. *Ach.* 530–1; Cratinus fr. 258 KA; Com. Adesp. fr. 703 KA),¹⁶ and, although Thucydides calls this regime under Pericles’ management not tyranny but the rule of the first man (*prōtos anēr*: 2.65.9), yet he also says it was rule of the first man in fact but democracy in name, suggesting

¹⁴ N. Dunbar, *Aristophanes, Birds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 581 (for the proclamation on the first day of the Dionysia), pp. 583–4 (for the decree honouring would-be tyrant-slayers).

¹⁵ See S. Forsdyke, *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy: The Politics of Expulsion in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 165–77.

¹⁶ Cf. Rhodes, ‘Tyranny in Greece in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.’.

the – perhaps exciting – dangers that might lurk therein.¹⁷ Tyranny hints at excess but also at power: fear of Alcibiades, for example, was balanced by his allure (cf. Thuc. 6.16.2).¹⁸

2. Democracy and *Basileia*

However, even within the early phases of Athenian political thinking, the rule of one man was not totally rejected, and not all images of monarchs were negative. Pisistratus, for example, seems to have had popular support, especially in his final period of rule, even though the Pisistratids as a dynasty were finally rejected after Marathon.¹⁹ In Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, which dates to the 470s or 460s,²⁰ Pelasgus, the king of Argos (*archēgetēs*, *anax*:

¹⁷ See L. Mitchell, 'Thucydides and the Monarch in Democracy', *Polis* 25:1 (2008), pp. 1-30; cf. C. Attack, 'How to be a Good King in Athens – Manipulating Monarchy in the Democratic Political Imaginary', *Rosetta* 12 (2012), pp. 1-19.

¹⁸ See L. Mitchell, *The Heroic Rulers of Archaic and Classical Greece* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 47.

¹⁹ E.g. B. M. Lavelle, *Fame, Money and Power: The Rise of Peisistratos and Democratic 'Tyranny' at Athens* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

²⁰ The debate over the date of the play is still not settled. Many think that *POxy* xx 2256 (published in 1952) makes a date after 467, or specifically 464/3, certain, while others still maintain that on stylistic grounds it must be earlier than this. For example S. Scullion ('Tragic Dates', *CQ* 52 (2002), pp. 87–101) claims that stylistically 'a date of c. 475 would suit it very well'.

251, 252, cf. 259), is a positive monarch who pointedly defers to the *demos*, explicitly rejecting his ability to rule alone.²¹ The Danaid suppliants say to Pelasgus (370–5; cf. 424–5):

You are the *polis*, and you are the face of the people;
as *prytanis*, not being subject to judgement,
you control the altar, the hearth of the land,
with your single-voting nod;
with your sceptre alone, on your throne,
you bring to pass every needful thing.

Nevertheless, Pelasgus insists that, even though he rules, he does not want to act without the permission of the *demos* since he is accountable to them (365–9, 397–401), and it is the Argive assembly which makes the decision by show of hands (605–8, 621–2, 942–4; cf. 604, *demou kratousa cheir*).

The mythical kings of Athens could also be deployed to support Athenian political values, if not explicitly always democratic ones. Theseus, for example, who had become established as an Athenian hero, and grew in importance at the end of the sixth century, perhaps could be associated with the early political movement surrounding Cleisthenes' reforms, or may even have been sponsored by the Alcmaeonids as a symbol of Cleisthenes' victory, though some have seen Theseus as a Pisistratid hero, or as associated with neither of

²¹ Attack explores the role of mythical kings in Greek tragedy, although she sees Pelasgus as a weak king rather than as an ideal one: 'How to be a Good King in Athens', pp. 6–9.

these political figures but simply as a hero who had significance for all Athenians.²² Cimon, whose politics were probably not extreme (though not necessarily anti-Cleisthenic),²³ was able to exploit the importance of Theseus for his own political ends, interpreting an oracle (given to the Athenians in 476/5) to bring from Scyros the bones of Theseus (Plut. *Thes.* 36; *Cim.* 8; Paus. 1.17.6), and building a shrine to house them (Paus. 1.17.2–3).²⁴ Further, the Stoa Poikile, which may have been commissioned by Cimon's brother-in-law,²⁵ showed paintings of Theseus fighting the Amazons and Miltiades, his father, at Marathon with

²² H. J. Walker makes the case against Theseus' association with either Pisistratus or Cleisthenes, but argues instead that he should be seen as an *Athenian* hero in contrast to the Spartan Heracles at a time when Athens saw herself in competition with Sparta: 'The Early Development of the Theseus Myth', *RM*² 138 (1995), pp. 1–33; cf. S. Mills, *Theseus, Tragedy, and the Athenian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 26, 36.

²³ Cimon married Isodice, an Alcmaeonid (Plut. *Cim.* 4.10, 16.1) about 480: J. K. Davies, *A.P.F.*, 305.

²⁴ On the decoration of the Theseum as promoting Athens' / Cimon's military agenda against Persia: D. Castriota, *Myth, Ethos and Actuality: Official Art in Fifth-Century B.C. Athens* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), pp. 33–63.

²⁵ According to Diogenes Laertius (7.5) and Plutarch (*Cim.* 4.6), the Stoa Poikile had originally been called the Peisianactum after Peisianax, who was responsible for its construction and may also have been a brother-in-law of Cimon: see J. M. Camp, *The Athenian Agora: Excavations in the Heart of Classical Athens* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1986), 66–72; cf. Castriota, *Myth, Ethos and Actuality*, p. 76 and p. 259 n. 84; and for Peisianax as a brother of Cimon's wife Isodice, J.K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families, 600-300 B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 376–8.

Theseus hovering over the battlefield (Paus. 1.15.2–3).²⁶ Cimon's promotion of Theseus may have been intended to counter the anti-Alcmaeonid propaganda generated in the 480s and 470s, or (as is commonly supposed) as part of his rivalry with Themistocles over relations with Sparta,²⁷ or to promote his position in the Delian League as a military leader in the war against the Persians (or all of these things). Theseus' importance, however, did not decline with Cimon's changing political fortunes. By 462/1 both Themistocles and Cimon had been ostracised (Plut. *Cim.* 15.3–17.3, *Per.* 9.5);²⁸ nevertheless it seems there was a continued interest in Theseus as an Athenian figure,²⁹ if not an explicitly democratic one until after the 450s, when the metopes depicting Theseus' deeds on the Hephaesteum overlooking the agora explicitly connected Theseus with the tyrannicides, and vase painting makes the connection even more plain.³⁰

²⁶ Cimon's promotion of Theseus was possibly aimed at countering Themistocles' master-minding of Salamis (see A. J. Podlecki, 'Cimon, Skyros and "Theseus' Bones"', *JHS* 91 (1971), pp. 141–3).

²⁷ His rivalry with Themistocles: P. J. Rhodes, *C.A.H.* v². pp. 63–7.

²⁸ See Rhodes, *Commentary*, pp. 319–20 for uncertainty about the date of Themistocles' flight from Athens, despite *Ath. Pol.* 25.

²⁹ See P. J. Rhodes, 'Theseus the Democrat', *Miscellanea Anthropologica et Sociologica* 15:3 (2014), pp. 105–6.

³⁰ See D. Castriota, 'Democracy and Art in Late Sixth- and Fifth-Century Athens', in I. Morris, K. A. Raaflaub and D. Castriota (eds.), *Democracy 2500? Questions and Challenges* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall / Hunt, 1998), p. 211.

Indeed, even at the end of the fifth century, despite the strength of the discourse of tyranny, the Athenian *demos* itself could be associated with positive images of rulership. In Aristophanes' *Knights*, for example, the rejuvenated Demos is acclaimed as the *monarchos* of Greece (1330) and the *basileus* of the Greeks (1333). In *Wasps* the power of jurors is compared to that of a king (546–9, cf. 619–20). In Euripides' *Suppliants* of the 420s Theseus now becomes the founder of democracy, perhaps already hinted at on the Hephaesteum:³¹ although in the play he himself is called *anax* (113, 253, 255, 626), he says he does not rule Athens, but says to the Theban herald (rather ironically) that he has established the *demos* as a *monarchia*, making free (*eleutherōsas*) this 'equal-voting' city (352–3, cf. 406–7). It is the condition of sovereignty which brings freedom.³² In fact, it is only a few lines later in *Suppliants* that Theseus rejects the rule of one man, here explicitly the rule of a tyrant, from which Theseus differentiates himself, because when the tyrant holds all law for himself (429–441):

There is no longer equality.

Where the laws (*nomoi*) have been written down, both the weak

and the wealthy have justice equally,

and it is possible for the weaker to tell off

the fortunate, whenever he is abused.

And the lesser man has victory over the great when justice is on his side.

³¹ The elaboration of Theseus as founder must have come with the Attidographers of the fourth century: Rhodes, 'Theseus the Democrat', 110–5; cf. C. Attack, 'The Discourse of Kingship in Classical Athenian Thought', *Histos* 8 (2014), pp. 330–63.

³² See Raaflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom*, pp. 227–8.

This is freedom [when it is declared]: ‘Who desires to bring some good plan for the city to the assembly?’

Whoever desires to do this is famous; he who does not want to

is silent. What is more equal (*isaiteron*) for the city than this?

Democracy brings freedom to the citizen body when the *dēmos* is sovereign. Nevertheless, although this is not spelled out in the *Suppliants*, this condition for freedom must also have implications for when the Athenian *dēmos* ruled others.³³ In the fifth century (and certainly by the time *Suppliants* was produced) the Athenian *dēmos* had acquired an empire, which at some level was modelled on the Persian empire,³⁴ and Athens was itself represented as a ‘tyrant’ city (Ar. *Eq.* 1111–4; Thuc. 1.124.3, 2.63.2, 3.37.2), which some have seen as an empowering image for Athens the imperial city, although others are less certain.³⁵

³³ Aristotle’s principle was that equality and ruling could be squared if citizens ruled and were ruled in turn: e.g., *Pol.* 1.1255b16–20, 1259b4–6, 3.1279a8–13.

³⁴ Cf. K. A. Raaflaub, ‘Learning From the Enemy: Athenian and Persian “Instruments of Empire”’, in J. Ma, N. Papazarkadas, & R. Parker (eds.), *Interpreting the Athenian Empire* (London: Duckworth, 2009), pp. 89–124.

³⁵ Three essays in Kathryn Morgan’s edited volume, *Popular Tyranny: Sovereignty and its Discontents* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009 - **should read 2003**), give the range of views. L. Kallet, ‘*Dēmos Tyrannos*: Wealth, Power and Economic Patronage’ (pp. 117–53) and J. Henderson, ‘Demos, Demagogue, Tyrant in Attic Old Comedy’ (pp. 155–79) see the metaphor as empowering, while Raaflaub, ‘Stick and Glue’ (n. 12 above), is sceptical.

Morgan has argued the contrast between ‘good kings’ and ‘bad kings’ goes back to Homer and Hesiod,³⁶ and Haubold has shown how the *Iliad* in particular critiques the role of leaders in relation to the people (*laoi*) in epic, especially in the leaders’ role as ‘shepherd of the people’.³⁷ By the second half of the fifth century ideas about the good king who ruled under law and the tyrant who did not were well formed, and had purchase not just in Athens, but across the Greek world. As early as 470, Pindar could praise the Deinomenid Hieron in Sicily for founding Aetna ‘with freedom’ under law (*Pyth.* 1.61–3), but also in the same ode warned of the universal hatred that attended the memory of Phalaris (95–8). On the one hand Morgan suggests that the ruler of Acragas had already become an archetypal tyrant,³⁸ while, on the other, as Morgan shows, there was also a critical element in this presentation by the use of examples. Although Hieron might be used as an example of a good king, the example of Phalaris, in particular, hints at bad kingship as an opposite of the good king to heighten the risks in kingship, and perhaps also undermine the positive value of Hieron’s kingship itself.

What is significant, however, is that images of monarchy in Athens had shifting significations. The Alcmaeonids may have adopted the positive image of Theseus to support the Cleisthenic regime, which Cimon then also adopted to emphasise his family's importance at Marathon and a more conservative understanding of Cleisthenic politics. However, in the

³⁶ K. A. Morgan, *Pindar and the Construction of Syracusan Monarchy in the Fifth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 14–15.

³⁷ J. Haubold, *Homer’s People: Epic Poetry and Social Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³⁸ Morgan thinks the negative mythology surrounding Phalaris may have been elaborated during the rule of Theron: *Pindar and the Construction of Syracusan Monarchy*, pp. 119–21.

wake of Marathon, the opponents of Cimon and the Alcmaeonids also used monarchic imagery to down-play the role of the Alcmaeonids, and to support a more radical understanding of the Cleisthenic constitution, which could be defined as anti-tyrannical and ‘equal’, and emphasised the explicit importance of the sovereignty of the *demos* (as opposed to that of a king, even a good king who supported the regime).

During the period of radical democracy, when at an ideological level the threat of tyranny appeared to be everywhere, but in fact betrayed a concern about Athenian aristocratic leadership and its potentialities, the rule of one man was a powerful way to talk about sovereignty both within the city and of the city itself. It was a way of talking about power, of articulating political vulnerability, and expressing a need for alertness to danger, though not necessarily in a particularly focused way; in fact the ideological importance of tyranny undermined the democracy’s need for leadership, laying political leaders open to the charge of subversion and tyranny, while at the same time, paradoxically, providing the model for strong leadership (so that the possibility of a tyrannical leader was feared, but also desired).³⁹

Another consequence, however, was that the value terms used to describe democracy, which themselves had originally been borrowed from non-democratic contexts,⁴⁰ came at the end of the fifth century to be questioned, just as democracy itself in its most radical form also came under scrutiny, which opened the way for new theoretical models and possibilities. It was in this context that a positive theorisation of kingship was to develop in order to

³⁹ Compare Mark Griffith on the advantages of tragic settings for both elite and demos in ‘Brilliant Dynasts: Power and Politics in the *Oresteia*’, *CLAnt.* 14 (1995), pp. 62–129 at pp. 124–5.

⁴⁰ See n. 14, above.

repurpose the terms of democracy, and to create a different kind of vision of what democracy could be.

3. The Theorising of a Positive Form of Kingship

By the end of the fifth century, despite the intensity of the symbolism surrounding the re-establishment of democracy in 410/09,⁴¹ significant doubts had started to arise at least among the intellectual elite, but probably also more widely in the wake of the Sicilian disaster, about the efficacy of Athenian democracy, and searching questions were being asked not only about the alternatives, but also about how democracy itself might be rethought to produce a more

⁴¹ Julia Shear and Peter Wilson both emphasise that both the decree of Demophantus and the decree awarding honours to Phrynichus' assassin both took place at the Dionysia of 410/09, the first Dionysia after the restoration of the democracy, and for them both belong to a refoundation of democracy in 410 after the oligarchic coup of 411 in terms which emphasise the tyrannicides (J. L. Shear, 'The Oath of Demophantos and the Politics of Athenian Identity', in A. H. Sommerstein & J. Fletcher (eds.), *Horkos: The Oath in Greek Society* (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2007), pp. 148–60; P. Wilson, 'Tragic Honours and Democracy: Neglected Evidence for the Politics of the Athenian Dionysia', *CQ* 59 (2009), pp. 8–29. However, both overstate their case. The claim that Phrynichus is treated as a 'tyrant' in Thucydides seems to be drawn from a misreading of Osborne ('Changing the Discourse', in *Popular Tyranny*, pp. 251–72 = his *Athens and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 267–88).

satisfactory constitutional framework.⁴² While the decree of Demophantus and the awarding of honours to Thrasybulus of Calydon in 410/09 (*IG i*³ 102) emphasised the importance of the anti-tyrannical nature of democracy at a popular level, the simple opposition between tyranny and democracy was no longer adequate for some intellectuals who were seeking a new way of understanding democracy, and were willing to bring positive kingship constructively and purposefully into democratic thinking.⁴³

Apart from epinician poetry, which as we have seen was prepared to describe good kingship, it is in the constitutional debate of Herodotus that we find a systematic attempt to theorise a positive form of kingship. There is not space here to consider all the issues surrounding the constitutional debate itself, but, as well as trying to theorise democracy through its opposite as we have seen, it does also present a positive description of kingship. Darius, who persuades four of the seven conspirators, argues that both oligarchy and democracy would inevitably degenerate into monarchy, because factionalism and corruption can only be resolved by one man, some champion of the *demos*, *tis prostates tou demou*,⁴⁴ who puts an end to such things; the *demos* admires such a man, Darius claims, and he becomes a *mounarchos* (Hdt. 3.82.2–4). Even if the three constitutions were the best of their kinds, the best democracy, the best oligarchy, and the best *mounarchos*, monarchy would be the best: ‘for nothing could seem better than the best man (*aristos*)’ (3.82.2). Darius’

⁴² See Osborne, ‘Changing the Discourse’; cf. K. A. Raafaub, ‘Contemporary Perceptions of Democracy in Fifth-Century Athens’, *C&M* 40 (1989), pp. 33–70.

⁴³ Cf. C. Attack, *The Discourse of Kingship in Classical Greece* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

⁴⁴ Connor thinks this title was coined in the last quarter of the fifth century: *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 110–15.

crowning argument is that rule by one man, as exemplified through Cyrus the Great, who represented the ancestral constitution, the *patrioi nomoi*, brought freedom (*eleutheriē*) to the Persians (3.82.5). Herodotus' debate begins by presenting the case for bad kingship, for which the exemplary figure is Cambyses, and ends with Cyrus as the exemplary positive king. However, Darius does not spell out the qualities of the good king, except that he brings freedom, which in the context of Herodotus, and especially in his elaboration of the rule of Cyrus, meant freedom from being ruled by others (which then allowed the possibility of rule over others).⁴⁵

However, in order to explore the ways in which abstract ideas about good kingship came to be developed we need to digress momentarily to consider another significant shift and controversy among political thinkers, which regarded the nature of equality. As we have seen Euripides' Theseus had said that where there was no tyrant and law was common to all and anyone who wishes can speak in the assembly: 'What is more fair (*isaiteron*) for the city than this?' (*Supp.* 441.) However, by the end of the fifth century, the very nature of equality in democracy was being discussed (Thuc. 6.39.1: 'some say democracy is neither intelligent nor equal [*ison*]', and rather pointedly Thucydides has Pericles say in the Funeral Oration, under the headline that democracy is rule *in the interests* of the many rather than the few,

⁴⁵ In Herodotus Cyrus is reassured that no Persian would plot against him because Cyrus found the Persians as slaves, but made them free, and instead of being ruled by others, that they now ruled over all: 1.210.2, cf. 3.82.5. On Herodotus' Cyrus as a vehicle for exploring political freedom, see E. Baragwanath, *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 192-202; L. Mitchell, 'Herodotus' Cyrus and Political Freedom', in A. Ansari (ed.), *Perceptions of Iran: History, Myths and Nationalism from Medieval Persia to the Islamic Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), pp. 111-31, 244-7.

that on the one hand democracy gives equality for all before the law in private disputes, but on the other, as regards excellence (*axiosis*), as each man excels in something, preferment in public life depends the more not on rotation (*ouk apo merous*) but on *aretē*. As regards poverty, he who has any good things to do for the city will not be kept back by the obscurity of his status (*axiomatos aphaneiai*).
(2.37.1)⁴⁶

Pericles' equality for all in terms of law looks very much like the kind of equality Theseus had suggested. However, while Pericles explicitly rejects sortition as the basis for office-holding, Euripides' Theseus says that in his 'free' Athens,

the *demos* rules by annual succession in rotation (*en merei*),

not giving the wealthy most but even the poor having an equal share (*ison*).

(*Supp.* 406-8)

For Euripides' Theseus the poor and the wealthy should be treated in the same way. Thucydides' Pericles, on the other hand, shifts the ground a little. For him the question is not so much one of wealth (or lack of it) as ability, since in his democracy office-holding depended on merit and rejecting the levelling forces of rotation. Here Thucydides' Pericles is apparently anticipating the discussion of the doctrine of the two kinds of equality, one which distributed equality to everyone indiscriminately ('arithmetic'), and one which gave each man

⁴⁶ For the translation of μή ἐς ὀλίγους ἀλλ' ἐς πλείονας and οὐκ ἀπὸ μέρους, see P. J. Rhodes, *Thucydides, History, II* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988), pp. 219–20; J. S. Rusten, *Thucydides, Peloponnesian War, Book II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 144–6; S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991–2008), Vol 1, pp. 298–301.

his due, a doctrine not fully articulated until the fourth century (e.g. Isoc. 7.21–2; Pl. *Resp.* 8.558c, *Leg.* 6.757bc; Arist. *Pol.* 5.1301b29–32), but one to which we will return; it was this second kind of hierarchical and meritocratic understanding of equality which provided the kind of context in which someone like Pericles could himself rise to great influence.⁴⁷

At the end of the fifth century, the idea that the best, or at least the strongest, should rise to the top and rule the weak was becoming widely circulated and discussed in intellectual circles around the Greek world. For example, Democritus (in the 420s) says that ‘It is fitting that the strong should rule’ (Democr. 68A267 DK), Thucydides’ Melians say that it is true for gods and men that is a necessary law of nature that wherever they are the strong they do rule (5.105.2), and Gorgias, in his defence of Helen of Troy, argues that it was impossible to prevent the Trojan Wars:

For it is not natural for the stronger to be hindered by the weaker, but for the weaker to be ruled and guided by the stronger, and for the stronger to lead and the weaker to follow. A god is stronger than a man in terms of force (*bia*), intellect (*sophia*), and other things. So if the responsibility must be attributed to fortune and the god, Helen must be absolved of infamy. (*Helen* 6).

It is this Homeric principle that the best person should rule (cf. Hom. *Il.* 12.310–21) that informs fourth-century kingship theory. Xenophon, for example, uses Agamemnon as the exemplary king who became ‘majestic’ (*geraros*) when he learned the art of generalship, and, as ‘shepherd of the people’, cared for the people and made them happy (*Mem.* 3.1.4, 2.1-4).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ It is also significant that Thucydides articulated merit in terms of the Homeric *aretē*, excellence/virtue, which included physical as well as intellectual excellences.

⁴⁸ For discussion of these passages, see Haubold, *Homer’s People*, pp. 20-22.

Plato throughout his dialogues, plays with ideas about the acquisition of *aretē* by individuals through education for creating the best society (e.g., *Resp.* 6.492a), and that it is the wisest who should rule, though ultimately he is pessimistic about his Philosopher–King.⁴⁹ Aristotle, too, who proposes that if there is one person of incomparable virtue then this person must rule (since the alternative would be like men ruling Zeus), finally concludes in his discussion of the *pambasileia*:

It is preferable for law to rule than any one citizen, and according to the same reasoning, even if it would be better for certain men to rule, these men must be appointed as guardians of the law and servants of the law... Law provides rulers with an education fit for purpose, and then sets them to judge and manage the rest with a mindset which is most just. Further, it permits them to correct whatever seems, in their experience, to be better than the established laws. However, in bidding law to rule it seems one is bidding god and reason to rule alone, in bidding a man to rule, one is adding also a wild beast, for both desire is of such kind, and also passion corrupts rulers, even the best men. Thus law is reason without desire (*Pol.* 3.1287a8–32 [quotation 18–23_[L1]] with 1284a3–22, 1284b25–34, 1286a18–20, 33–5).⁵⁰

Isocrates and Xenophon, on the other hand, writing what have recently been termed

⁴⁹ See W. D. Desmond, *Philosopher–Kings of Antiquity* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 19–43; cf. M. Schofield, *Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 37.

⁵⁰ W.R. Newell, ‘Superlative Virtue: The Problem of Monarchy in Aristotle’s *Politics*’, in C. Lord & D. O’Connor (eds.), *Essays on the Foundation of Aristotelian Political Science* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 191–211.

‘monocratological texts’,⁵¹ were more positive and optimistic about rulers and their place in the political landscape, and developed some theoretical boundaries around kingship, which owe debts to Plato and earlier thinkers as well. While both Plato and Aristotle decided that law must rule, Xenophon and Isocrates were willing to imagine the rule of one man under law as a metaphor for ruling at Athens. In the first place, both recognised that there could be a legitimate role for rulers in cities. In a treatise for Nicocles, the son of Evagoras of Salamis, probably written in the second half of the 370s, Isocrates says that there are three functions for kings (*hoi basileuontes*): to relieve a city in distress, to maintain its prosperity, and to make it great from small (2.9, cf. 15–16, 21–3, 3.32, 41). Likewise, Xenophon, in his pseudo-historical *Cyropaedia* about Cyrus the Great, possibly written in the 350s, says the role of a ruler is like that of a father, who not only makes sure that his family has sufficient for its livelihood, but also looks to its interests and ensures the training and education of all those who manage his household (*Cyr.* 1.4.2, 4, 1.6.7–8; cf. *Oec.* 7.3–10.13).

In fact, both Xenophon and Isocrates (as indeed Plato) had recognised the importance of education, especially in the acquisition of *aretē*, which they understood in physical as well as intellectual terms. Isocrates says that this is the purpose of his treatises, to bring rulers (and in this case particularly Nicocles) towards a life of *aretē* to help both those who rule and those who are ruled (2.8, 12; cf. 3.10, 9.79–81, 5.1–5), and the most worthy *aretai* are *sophrosyne* and *dikaiosyne* (3.29, cf. 1.6–7, 15, 40). For Xenophon also the art of ruling can be taught (cf. *Oec.* 13.4–12). The kind of education Cyrus undertakes, as do the other

⁵¹ M. Haake, ‘Writing to a Ruler, Speaking to a Ruler, Negotiating the Figure of the Ruler: Thoughts on “Monocratological” Texts and their Contexts in Greco-Roman Antiquity’, in R. Forster & N. Yavari (eds.), *Global Medieval: Mirrors for Princes Reconsidered* (Boston: Harvard University Press for Ilex Foundation, 2015), pp. 58–82.

Persians, is not only in hunting and war, but also in other virtues, in particular justice, moderation and intelligence — *dikaiosyne*, *sophrosyne* and *phronesis* (1.2.6–9, 3.16–17, 6.21–2).

Cyrus' idealised constitution is a meritocracy where the best people are given the highest rewards, and the lazy and wicked must be weeded out (*Cyr.* 2.2.22–5). Cyrus rejects completely the notion that all should have the same rewards (*Cyr.* 2.2.18–21, 2.3.4; cf. 5–16), and transforms his army from the Persian model based on an elite of equals, the *isotimoi*, and a 'common' mercenary contingent, into one based on 'nobility', which is defined by the pursuit of excellence irrespective of social class or nationality (*Cyr.* 2.2.26), so that even Pheraulas, a *demotes* man, anticipates with alacrity the 'demotic contest' with the elite (*Cyr.* 2.3.15).⁵² Excellence is achieved through constant training and practice (e.g., *Cyr.* 8.1.39), and never sliding into complacency despite success (*Cyr.* 7.5.75–6; cf. *Mem.* 3.5.13), an excellence that can only be obtained by rivalry and pushing at limits (*Cyr.* 1.4.5, 2.1.22), and that is not limited by class or wealth but only by opportunity (*Cyr.* 2.1.11–18).

On the other hand, rulers must justify and legitimise their rule by having more *aretē* than their subjects. Isocrates warns Nicocles that he must train to be more intelligent (*phronimoteros*) than others (2.10, 14), and openly acknowledges that there must be distinctions and hierarchies in society. In fact, he argues that justice resides in making distinctions, and that people should be rewarded according to their deserts (3.14). This of course brings us back to the two forms of equality, and Isocrates claims that this is the strength of a monarchy, that it can deliver the second, distributive, kind of equality most

⁵² See L. Mitchell, 'Admiring Others: Persians and Xenophon', in A. Fitzpatrick-McKinley (ed.), *Assessing Biblical and Classical Sources for the Reconstruction of Persian Influence, History and Culture* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), pp. 183–91.

efficiently so that justice is achieved: ‘Monarchies distribute most to the best, and second most to the next after him, and third and fourth most to the rest according to the same principle’ (3.15). Isocrates’ Theseus in his *Helen*, while he wanted his subjects to compete with each other for *aretē* on equal terms, knew he would stand out from them, and in fact when he made the *demos* sovereign (*kyrios*), they did think it right that he should rule alone, ‘since they thought his *monarchia* was more trustworthy and more fair (*koinoteran*) than their *dēmokratia*’ (10.35–6).

Willing obedience was the central pillar of Cyrus’ success and security as a ruler (Cyr. 1.1.3; cf. *Oec.* 21.12),⁵³ which was also justified through his superiority to everyone else (cf. Cyr. 3.1.20; *Mem.* 3.3.9). Cambyzes, Cyrus’ father in the *Cyropaedia*, advises Cyrus his son that it is not the giving of rewards and punishments that produces willing obedience and the love of one’s subjects but being ‘wiser’ (*phronimoteron* — in the sense of having greater learning: 1.6.23) than anyone else, and being better able to endure hardship (1.6.20–5; cf. *Ages.* 4.3, 10.2). Cambyzes says: ‘If people think others are better than themselves, they will generally obey them willingly without compulsion’ (Cyr. 1.6.22–6, 3.1.20, cf. 4.1.19, 22–4, 2.11).⁵⁴ Cyrus is so successful at acquiring willing obedience that it is claimed he is a ‘king by nature’ and that those he leads have a ‘terrible passion’ (*deinos erōs*) to be ruled by him no less than bees wish to obey the leader of the hive (Cyr. 5.1.24–5). In the *Oeconomicus*

⁵³ On willing obedience in Xenophon, see V. Gray, *Xenophon’s Mirror of Princes: Reading the Reflections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). [For a sceptical view of Cyrus in the Cyropaedia: P. Carlier, L’idée de monarchie imperiale dans la Cyropédie de Xénophon, Ktema 3 \(1978\), pp. 133-63.](#)

⁵⁴ Xenophon tells us elsewhere (in reference to Cyrus the Younger) that it is the proof of a ruler’s excellence, his *aretē*, when his subjects obey him willingly (*Oec.* 4.19).

Xenophon's Ischomachus tells Socrates that even the best men will not have learned the art of ruling unless they have something of a *basilikos* nature (cf. *Oec.* 13.5), that is the greatest excellence to the point of divinity — which means that people will stir themselves at the sight of him — and that the ability to win willing obedience is more than mortal but a divine thing (*Oec.* 21.11–12).⁵⁵ The Cyrus of the *Cyropaedia* ‘thought that he could particularly inspire [his subjects] towards what was beautiful and good, since he was their ruler, if he tried to show himself before those he ruled as the most adorned of all in *aretē*’ (*Cyr.* 8.1.21). We are different from slaves (Cyrus says to his friends) in that slaves serve their masters unwillingly, but for us, if indeed we think we are free (*eleutheroi*), it is necessary to do everything willingly which we think it is worthwhile to do (*Cyr.* 8.1.4).

In order to avoid charges of absolute tyranny,⁵⁶ the ruler also had to rule lawfully in order to secure the goodwill (*eunoia*) of his subjects (cf. *Isoc. Ep.* 7.4–6, 7), and Xenophon

⁵⁵ See also B. Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of the Heroes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 176–8, who observes there was in Greek thought a ‘sliding scale’ between men and gods, and men could become gods through an abundance of *aretē* (cf. *Arist. Eth. Nic.* 7.1145A18–25).

⁵⁶ Xenophon distinguishes clearly between the rule of the *basileus* and the rule of a *tyrannos*; cf. *Mem.* 4.6.12: ‘*Basileia* and *tyrannis* [Socrates] considered both to be forms of rule, but thought they were different from each other. For he considered *basileia* the rule of cities where men were ruled willingly and according to law, but *tyrannis* rule of the unwilling and not according to law, but where the ruler did what he wished.’ Nevertheless, Xenophon is able to imagine benevolent tyranny, such as Simonides recommends to Hieron in the eponymous treatise. Isocrates distinguishes between *tyrannoi* and *basileis* in a rather different way: he seems generally to regard *tyrannis* as rule when the ruler has supplanted the previous

and Isocrates make plain the importance of rule under law. Isocrates in *To Nicocles* tells the king that he must be ‘a discoverer of the best things’: to seek laws and to make judgements that are just, advantageous and consistent with each other, since the opinion of the king must be like well-made law (2.17–18). In the *Helen*, on the other hand, Theseus, the paradeigmatic democratic monarch, says he managed the city lawfully (*nomimos*) and well, and thus received the good will (*eunoia*) of the citizens so that he did not need a bodyguard (10.36–7).⁵⁷ While Xenophon’s Cyrus understands that society must be regulated and that both written and unwritten law have their place,⁵⁸ he also emphasises obedience to one’s superiors (rather than acquiescence in the common will), and believes that a good ruler is ‘seeing law’, since he not only gives orders but punishes wrongdoers (*Cyr.* 8.1.22). Likewise, Xenophon’s Agesilaus, who Xenophon says had *arete* in his soul (*Ages.* 3.1), chose to rule and be ruled according to law (*Ages.* 2.16). It is the role of a leader, Xenophon says, to show his followers how to implement the law until they realise that good and honourable men (that is, those who

regime, and *basileia* as hereditary. he recognises Philip’s ancestral *basileia* (5.108), he warns the Macedonian to rule over the Macedonians *basilikos* rather than *tyrannikos* (5.154).

⁵⁷ On citizens and law as bodyguard, note also Arist. *Pol.* 3.1285a24–9, 5.1311a7–8; compare Arist. *Rhet.* 1.1357b30–6 (all those who are aiming at tyranny ask for a bodyguard); Xen. *Hier.* 5.3 (a tyrant makes *xenoi* more formidable than citizens and uses them as a bodyguard).

⁵⁸ The non-repayment of favours was an actionable offence when Cyrus was a child in Persia (*Cyr.* 1.2.7; compare also *Mem.* 4.4.24–5), and Cyrus receives a beating from his teachers because in a trial case put before him at school he decides in favour of commonsense rather than written law (*Cyr.* 1.3.16–17).

obey law) are the happiest, and that the wicked and most infamous are the most miserable (*Cyr.* 3.3.53).

The picture of the good ruler in both Isocrates and Xenophon is consistent, and suggests a wider conversation, at least to some degree consensual, among intellectual circles. The good ruler supports hierarchy, rewards and promotes those who contribute most whatever their backgrounds, but justifies his own position by having more virtues than anyone else, especially greater justice, moderation and intelligence. He rules lawfully and reasonably, looks after his subjects, and is particularly attentive to the *plethos*, and therefore has the goodwill and willing obedience of his subjects who in return provide affection and support for his position.

Does this then mean that either Xenophon or Isocrates supported monarchy? Did they want to replace democracy at Athens with a moderate monarchy? Even though that did happen at the end of the fourth century with the appointment by the Macedonian Cassander of Demetrius of Phalerum (Diod. Sic. 18.74.3), it is unlikely that either Xenophon or Isocrates was anticipating this move, or that they were anticipating Alexander and the Hellenistic kings,⁵⁹ although from antiquity it has been thought that Alexander was inspired by Xenophon (Eunap. *V.S.* 453).⁶⁰ It has also been suggested recently that the interest in kingship found in Athenian historiography and political thinkers in the fifth and fourth centuries, and especially the fourth, was because some Athenian intellectuals, and Isocrates in particular, had become aware that the Athenians had to find a way to deal with, and talk to,

⁵⁹ Cf. C. Mossé, *Alexander: Destiny and Myth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 124–39.

⁶⁰ However, note K. McGroarty, ‘Did Alexander the Great Read Xenophon?’, *Hermathena* 181 (2006), pp. 105–24.

regimes ruled by monarchs.⁶¹ It is certainly the case that the Athenians' need to deal with the monarchs of states like Macedon, Epirus and Syracuse became more acute in the fourth century, although as David Braund has shown the Athenian democracy had already had to develop diplomatic means to deal with monarchical regimes from the fifth century.⁶² The fourth century was also a time of 'great men' (such as Philip, Jason of Pherae and Dionysius of Syracuse), and some Athenian political thinkers had a practical interest in what they saw as improving through education the practices of real-life monarchs and leaders: Plato is said to have visited the royal court of Syracuse for that purpose,⁶³ and Isocrates defends the fact that he wrote treatises for Nicocles, the ruler of Salamis, in order to persuade him to change the nature of his rule according to Isocrates' prescription (4.67–72).⁶⁴ It is certainly the case that

⁶¹ D. Unruh, 'Talking to Tyrants: Citizens and Monarchs in Classical Greek Thought', PhD Diss. (Cambridge, 2015).

⁶² D. Braund, 'Friends and Foes: Monarchs and Monarchy in Fifth-Century Athenian Democracy', in R. Brock & S. Hodkinson (eds.), *Alternatives to Athens: Varieties of Political Organization and Community in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 103–18.

⁶³ M. Schofield, 'Plato and Practical Politics', in C. Rowe & M. Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 298–302.

⁶⁴ One might also note the letter to Alexander (*Ep.* 5) where Isocrates enjoins Alexander to keep up the study of rhetoric. Matthias Haake has argued against a didactic function for the Hellenistic *Peri basileias*: 'Writing down the king: The communicative function of the treatises *On Kingship* in the Hellenistic period', in N. Luraghi (ed.), *The Splendors and*

real-life rulers living within what had become a ‘discourse of tyranny’ had at least to think about how they wanted to present their rule to a wider political audience. Although Diodorus says (probably wrongly) that Dionysius openly declared himself as tyrant (13.96.2), the Sicilian ruler was careful to present himself as constitutional in official documents, entitling himself *archon* of Sicily (RO 10, 33, 34, Athenian documents which presumably reflect his preference). Furthermore, not only did he write poetry in which he said that tyranny was the mother of injustice (fr. 4 *TrGF*), but also he named three of his daughters Arete, Dicaeosyne and Sophrosyne (Plut. *De Alex. Fort.* 5.338C, *Dion* 6.1), which was self-consciously buying into fourth-century political theorising on the virtues that a ruler should espouse,⁶⁵ and attempting to present his rule both to a domestic and wider audience in politically correct terms.

Indeed, these political idealisations were panhellenic, and came out of a broad discussion among the panhellenic intellectual community about the proper nature of constitutions, and the role of kingship within them. It is significant that the first reference to the tripartite division of constitutions is in the Boeotian Pindar’s *Second Pythian* (86–8), which probably dates to 477/6, was written for Hieron of Syracuse, and refers to the rule of a *tyrannis* (here not pejorative), the wise (*hoi sophoi*), and the rowdy army (*labros stratos*). In fact, Athens was also not the only place (or even necessarily the first place) where the

Miseries of Ruling Alone: Encounters with Monarchy from Archaic Greece to the Hellenistic Mediterranean (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2013), pp. 165–206.

⁶⁵ L. J. Sanders, *Dionysius I of Syracuse and Greek Tyranny* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 2.

popular assembly held sovereign power,⁶⁶ although it may have been the first to call this kind of constitution a *dēmokratia*. In 466, when the Deinomenid dynasty collapsed, the Syracusans established a ‘democracy’ and founded (in celebration of the downfall of ‘the tyrant’) a cult of Zeus Eleutherios (Diod. Sic. 11.72). Though in many ways (despite Thucydides’ claim that they were of the same kind: 7.55.2) Syracusan democracy was of a different sort from that at Athens, yet, significantly, it used similar anti-tyrannical strategies to Athens to define its constitutional form at around the same time.⁶⁷ There certainly seems to have been a general and wide-ranging discussion about what kind of constitution might be ‘the best’, which continued into the fourth century. Aristotle says that Hippodamus of Miletus, who designed Thurii in the 440s, as a city-planner was the first of the non-political class to try to define what made ‘the best’ constitution (*Pol.* 2.1267b22–1268a14),⁶⁸ and the ideal constitution, of course, became a preoccupation of fourth-century political thinkers, such as Plato, Xenophon and Aristotle.

Nevertheless, at the heart of democratic Athens lay a paradox that some Athenian thinkers, and particularly Isocrates and Xenophon (despite his many years of exile) seem to have wanted to address, at least for their own theoretical purposes. Despite the fact that at Athens Demos ruled, as elsewhere practical politics required that there were political leaders

⁶⁶ See E.W. Robinson, *The First Democracies: Early Popular Government Outside Athens* (Historia Einzelschriften 57, 1997).

⁶⁷ The actual nature of the Syracusan constitution is unclear. It seems to have been based on aristocratic factions (Diod. Sic. 11.72.3); the lot for magistracies was introduced in 412 (13.34.6), and *petalismos*, a form of ostracism, in the 450s (11.86.4–87.1). See N. K. Rutter, ‘Syracusan Democracy: Most Like the Athenian?’, in *Alternatives to Athens*, pp. 137–51.

⁶⁸ The Old Oligarch also belongs to this tradition of treatises on the ‘best constitution’.

who guided the assembly, such as Pericles, Alcibiades, Cleon and Nicias, Demosthenes and Aeschines (to name a few). The importance of such leaders was recognised, and perhaps by the end of the fifth century lists of political leaders were being drawn up.⁶⁹ The *Athenaion Politeia*, in the late fourth century, for example, understands Athenian politics in terms of a competition between class-based opposites: the champions of the *demos* against the champions of the ‘notables’ or the ‘wealthy’ (e.g. *Ath. Pol.* 28). However, as we have seen, there was a risk associated with putting one’s head above the parapet, which could incur the charge of aiming at tyranny. For Plato, in his negatively progressing regimes which started with the Philosopher-King, as the final step in the decline of regimes the champion of the *demos* would finally become the tyrant (*Rep.* 8.565c, 565e–566a).

Both Isocrates and Xenophon are interested in the role of these leaders, and in finding a way in theoretical terms to accommodate strong leadership within a constitution where the *dēmos* was still pre-eminent. Xenophon, as has often been recognised, is interested in leadership in general terms, and believes that ruling a state can be compared to managing a household or commanding an army, and that the skills learned in one field can be transferred to another (e.g., *Cyr.* 1.6.7–9, 8.1.1, *Oec.* 21.2–12, *Mem.* 3.2–4; cf. Isoc. 2.19; note also Plato, *Protagoras* 319A). Isocrates, too, homes in on the figure of the leader, and in the *Antidosis* lists those Athenians whom he thinks to be the best statesmen (who he also thinks are those who have paid most attention to speech-craft), starting from Solon, whom he says was the first *prostates tou dēmou* (15.231–6). Isocrates also discusses, and defends, the Athenian

⁶⁹ See Rhodes, *Commentary*, pp. 345–6.

general, and Isocrates' friend, Timotheus,⁷⁰ who Isocrates thought was the greatest general of his time (4.106).

In fact, it seems that Isocrates and Xenophon, despite their wider interests in leadership across the Greek world, probably also had a specifically Athenian audience in mind.⁷¹ In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon has Socrates talk to the young Pericles son of Pericles about the poor state of the city (3.5). Pericles worries about the levels of disobedience and degeneracy. He asks, when will the citizens adopt the Spartans' respect for their elders,

who beginning with their fathers are contemptuous of their elders, or when will they train their bodies likewise, who do not care at all about good health but laugh at those who do care? When will they be obedient to their leaders, who glory in contempt for their leaders, or when will they be in harmony with each other, who instead of working together for what is advantageous are more spiteful to each other and envious of each other than the rest of mankind... (3.5.16)

Socrates replies that it is because the Athenians have lost the lessons of their ancestors, and have lost discipline. The reason why the city as a whole has lost its way, Socrates says, is that they have stopped trying to achieve the ancient *aretē*, and the desire to be pre-eminent in *arete*, as their forebears had been, both mythical descendants and those who took part in the Persian Wars, who far excelled all other men of their time. The Athenians can recover their

⁷⁰ See J. Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens. Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 268–77.

⁷¹ Cf. Walter Eder, 'Monarchie und Demokratie im 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr. Die Rolle of des Fürstenspiegels in der Athenischen Demokratie', in W. Eder (ed.), *Die athenische Demokratie im 4 Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1995), pp. 153–73.

old *arete*, Socrates says, by imitating those with pre-eminent *aretē*, and for this reason it is important for the generals too, like Pericles himself, to train and to acquire the skills necessary for a good general. Likewise, Isocrates praises the constitution of Solon and Cleisthenes, which he says recognised the two kinds of equality, and, differentiating between the *chrestoi* and the *ponēroi*, selected the best and most competent for the tasks to be done (7.21–2). While the *demos* was *tyrannos* (here used powerfully, but not meant pejoratively), ‘how could one find a democracy more stable and just than this [Isocrates says], which appointed the most able for the management of affairs but made the *demos* sovereign over these very men’ (7.26–7)? It is not just the removal of tyranny which brings Athens strength, as Herodotus had claimed, but the capturing of tyranny for democratic purposes, and the management of kingly virtues for democratic ends, which could make Athens the pre-eminent city. On these terms, the positive theory of kingship, by recasting for itself both the traditionally positive and negative language of democracy, was able to repurpose it in order to create not so much a model for kings, but an idea of how the best and most stable form of democracy could be achieved.

4. Conclusion

So ‘kingship’, whether rule by good or bad kings, *basileis* or *tyrannoi*, was an important idea to think with in Athenian political discussion. The constitution of the Athenians was said to have originated in kings, whose term of office was said originally to be for life, then for ten years (*Ath. Pol.* 3.1–2; cf. *Epit. Heracl.* 1; Thuc. 1.13.1). The historicity of early kingship at Athens is difficult to determine, although Athens, as other Greek cities, probably did have rulers in the Early Iron Age. The Athenians also seem to have imagined that the transition

from kings to magistrates was relatively peaceable, and by the fourth century they could even imagine that the beginnings of the regime of which they were so proud had been founded by their mythical king Theseus.

Nevertheless, the Athenians throughout the archaic period remained ambivalent about kingship. They seem to have accepted the rule of Pisistratus, and even looked back on his rule positively, but in the end they rejected the rule of the dynasty and popularly remembered the end of Pisistratid rule as brought about by the ‘Tyrannicides’, Harmodius and Aristogeiton. It was probably the successful defeat of Pisistratid Hippias and the Persians at Marathon which crystallised the opposition between the Athenian regime and a negative form of kingship, and over the next thirty years there was an increasing interest in values which at some point were called *democratic*, which emphasised freedom, equality and accountability — all of which could be articulated through their tyrannical opposites in enslavement, inequality and lack of accountability through law, and especially written law.

However, as well as the negative stereotype of the ruler, there remained strong ideas about good kingship. This had its roots in Homeric epic, and was based on descriptions of rulers who had the most *aretē*, whether this was seen as the most physical strength, or the ability to implement just decisions (so that they were lawful), the greatest intelligence and most moderate judgement. In part, this discourse of positive kingship grew up around the need to rehabilitate the idea of the leader, particularly in practical politics. The fourth century was a time of ‘great men’ who at least often wanted themselves on some level to be viewed as lawful, and holding power legitimately (Jason of Pherae, for example, was elected *tagos* of the Thessalian federation even if he achieved that position through the persuasive efforts of his mercenary army: Xen. *Hell.* 6.1.5, 18).

Also, by the end of the fifth century some people were saying that democracy based on an arithmetic equality was neither intelligent nor fair (cf. Thuc. 6.39.1). Although

Athenian democracy required leaders, it also had difficulties with leaders with brilliance, who therefore risked the charge of aiming at tyranny; Thucydides has Alcibiades suggest that the city cannot reasonably demand both brilliance (*lamprotes*) and equality (Thuc. 6.16). Fourth-century political thinkers then tried to find a constitutional way to accommodate the brilliant leader and democratic principles. Plato and Aristotle were finally pessimistic, but Isocrates and Xenophon tried to open up a way for democracy to find a place for leaders of great merit, even if the democracy they were suggesting was less like the democracy of Herodotus, especially in the constitutional debate, and more like that of Thucydides' Funeral Oration. And by doing that they also found a way for Athens itself to move away from being the tyrant city towards realising her potential, with the *demos* as *tyrannos* within the city, as the greatest city in the Greek world, which could understand and cope with, and provide a theoretical framework for, the great merit not only of individuals within the city, but also of the city itself.