

HOW TYRANTS AND DYNASTS DIE: THE SEMANTICS OF POLITICAL ASSASSINATION IN FOURTH-CENTURY GREECE*

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On November 22, 1963 John F. Kennedy was shot and killed in Dallas, Texas. Within minutes the news of the charismatic president's violent death spread around the globe and caused deep mourning, anger, and despondency. Like most assassinations, this killing had no real impact on policy¹, and yet, rarely before had a political murder such tremendous repercussions on a world-wide public. By now around 2000 books have tried to reveal the circumstances of the president's death, still deemed mysterious by many, and countless conspiracy theories have sprouted and contributed to the Kennedy myth².

By contrast, assassinations of the Ancient World are under-researched. The Encyclopedia of Assassinations lists only five victims for Greece, only two of them belonging to Ancient Greece: Alcibiades and Ephialtes³. More specifically, historical works on assassinations that also take into consideration examples from the Classical World normally focus on the plot of Harmodius and Aristogeiton against the Athenian tyrant Hipparchus (514BC)⁴ and the killing of Caesar (44BC)⁵. A closer look at the sources, however, makes it clear that political assassination was an intrinsic part of ancient pol-

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¹ A. DEMANDT (ed.), *Das Attentat in der Geschichte*, Köln - Weimer - Wien 1996, 456.

² Helpful for basic orientation are: K. KRAKAU, "John F. Kennedy. 22. November 1963", in: DEMANDT, *Das Attentat* 409-430; J. VON UTHMANN, "Die magische Kugel: John F. Kennedy", in: ID., *Attentat. Mord mit gutem Gewissen. Von Julius Cäsar bis Jitzbak Rabin*, Berlin 1996, 150-157; C. SIFAKIS, *Encyclopedia of Assassinations. Revised Edition*, New York 2001, 111-116.

³ SIFAKIS, *Encyclopedia* 240 mentions beside Alcibiades and Ephialtes George I, king of Greece, Gregory Lambrakis, and Richard S. Welch.

⁴ H. SCHLANGE-SCHÖNINGEN, "Harmodios und Aristogeiton, die Tyrannenmörder von 514 v. Chr.", in: DEMANDT, *Das Attentat* 15-37; M. BERTI, *Fra tirannide e democrazia. Ipparco figlio di Cosmo e il destino dei Pisistratidi ad Atene*, Alessandria 2004.

⁵ W. DAHLHEIM, "Die Iden des März 44 v. Chr.", in: DEMANDT, *Das Attentat* 39-59; J. VON UTHMANN, "Gajus Julius Cäsar", in: ID., *Attentat* 15-22. The volume edited by DEMANDT even brings another ancient assassination to the limelight: A. DEMANDT, "Darius und der 'falsche' Smerdis 522 v. Chr.", in: DEMANDT, *Das Attentat* 1-14.

icy-making, deeply rooted in the cultural, mental, and political structures of the time⁶. This article concentrates on those political assassinations perpetrated in the Greek world between 404BC and 336BC. The material is immense. Therefore, I will here try to shed light only on specific aspects that tell us more about differences within the vast expanse of the Greek world and allow us to come to a heuristic typology of assassinations in fourth-century Greece.

Defining “assassination” in contrast to political murder in general is not an easy undertaking. For English speakers the term “assassination” implies the planned and sudden killing of high-ranking individuals, whom we often know by name. Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th edition, provides us with two definitions for “to assassinate”: “1. to injure or destroy unexpectedly and treacherously. 2. to murder (a usu. prominent person) by sudden or secret attack often for political reasons”⁷.

If we apply such a broad category, the sample cases become too numerous to be studied in depth. In my opinion, further specifications must be made. Only a narrower definition will provide a more manageable corpus that allows the historian to discern specific features. An assassination is direct, not mediated via mock trials and executions. In these latter cases, we should rather speak of judicial murders⁸. Also excluded from this narrow definition are deaths inflicted in pitched battles and warlike actions⁹ and the

⁶ W. PLAT, *Attentate. Eine Sozialgeschichte des politischen Mordes*, Düsseldorf - Wien 1982, 347-353 criticizes older works on assassinations (P. LIMAN, *Der politische Mord im Wandel der Geschichte. Eine hist.-psycholog. Studie*, Berlin 1912; H. LANGEMANN, *Das Attentat*, Hamburg 1956; H. WILDE, *Politische Morde unserer Zeit*, Frankfurt 1966; CHR. ZENTNER, “...den Dolch im Gewande.” *Politischer Mord durch zwei Jahrtausende*, München 1968; W. LAQUEUR, *Zeugnisse politischer Gewalt*, Kronberg/Ts 1978) for neglecting the political, cultural, and historical circumstances of assassinations and contenting themselves with enumerating cases taken from world history that have nothing to do with each other. As correct as he is, as odd is his approach: like his predecessors he offers case studies from five centuries without exploring in depth one single historical epoch. Plat could have added to his critique A. NOBEL, *Mord in der Politik*, Hamburg - Berlin 1931.

⁷ MERRIAM WEBSTER’S *Collegiate Dictionary*, Springfield/MA 112003, 73.

⁸ Famous fourth-century Greek examples (not mentioned in this article) include: Sparta 397 (Xen., *Hell.* 3,3,5-11), Thebes 382 (Xen., *Hell.* 5,2,25-36; Corn. Nep., *Pelop.* 1,4; Plut., *Ages.* 23,3-7; Plut., *Pelop.* 5,3; Diod. 15,20,1-2; Plut., *Pelop.* 6), 364 (Plut., *Pelop.* 25,15; Diod. 15,79,3ff.; Orchomenos: Diod. 5f.; Dem. 20,109; cf. Paus. 9,15,3), 338 (Iust. 9,4,6ff.), Argos 370 (Diod. 15,57,3-15,58), Tegea 370 (Xen., *Ages.* 2,23; Xen., *Hell.* 6,5,6-12), Sicyon 366 (Xen., *Hell.* 7,1,46; Diod. 15,70,3), Delphi 356 (Diod. 16,24,3), Eretria (= Hestiaia) 342/1 (Dem. 9,62).

⁹ Famous fourth-century Greek examples (not mentioned in this article) include: Siphnos 393 (Isocr. 19,19), Rhodes 391-387 (Xen., *Hell.* 4,8,20ff.; Diod. 14,97,1ff.), Paros 373/2 (cf. S. ACCAME, *La lega ateniese del sec. IV a. C.*, Rome 1941, 229ff.; H.-J. GEHRKE, *Stasis. Untersuchungen zu den inneren Kriegen in den griechischen Staaten des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.*, München 1985, 126), Tegea 370 (Xen., *Hell.* 6,5,6-12; Xen., *Ages.* 2,23), Megara 370 (Diod. 15,40,4), Sicyon 370 (Diod. 15,40,4; Xen., *Hell.* 7,1,44; cf. Diod. 15,70,3), Ceos 363/2 (Iulis) (Isoc. 5,53; Diod. 15,79,1; IG II² 111 = Syll.³ 173 =

numerous mass slaughters in the Greek world¹⁰, because the victims lacked the prominence that makes a killing an assassination¹¹. In the Greek world assassinations frequently happened in the context of *staseis*, but not necessarily. Like modern assassinations, Greek political murders were either pro- or anti-establishment violence¹².

Alexander Demandt does not fail to see the dramatic components inherent in assassinations: “Jedes Attentat verläuft dramatisch und endet tragisch. Es erfüllt die aristotelischen Forderungen an den Stoff eines guten Dramas: Einheit des Ortes, der Zeit und der Handlung”¹³. If assassinations show some analogies to drama, it is also possible to understand them as “social dramas” in the sense of Victor Turner. According to him, all social conflicts show four distinct phases: a *breach* of rules, laws, taboos or rituals leads to a *crisis*. Some authorities try to resolve the conflict through some form of *redress*. The outcome is either *reintegration* or the *recognition of an irreparable schism*. The *redressive* phase is characterized by a multitude of possibilities, e.g. political, legal-judicial or ritual processes¹⁴. If we apply

M. TOD, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions II: From 403 to 323 B.C.*, Oxford 1948, 142 = P. RHODES - R. OSBORNE (ed.), *Greek Historical Inscriptions 404-323BC*, Oxford 2003, 39 = H. BENGTSON, *Die Staatsverträge des Altertums II. Die Verträge der griechisch-römischen Welt von 700 bis 338 v. Chr.*, München 21975, 289), Pydna 357/6 (Dem. 1,5 with schol. 20,63; Diod. 16,8,3).

¹⁰ They deserve their own study. The best known Greek examples (not mentioned in this article) are: Miletus 405 (Diod. 13,104,5f.; Plut., *Lys.* 8,1-3; 19,3; Polyain. 1,45,1) and many other cities with hundreds of murders that occurred shortly before the end of the Peloponnesian War (Plut., *Lys.* 19,3). Then there is Heracleia Trachinia 399 (Diod. 14,38,4f.; Polyain. 2,21), 394 (Diod. 14,82,6f.), Cyllene 398 (Xen., *Hell.* 3,2,27-29), Corinth 394 (Diod. 14,86), 392 (Xen., *Hell.* 4,4,2-4,4,9; 5,1,34-36; Diod. 14,86,1), 370 (Diod. 15,40,3), 365/4 (Plut., *Timol.* 4,5-8; *mor.* 808a; Diod. 14,46,4; 16,65; Corn. Nep., *Timol.* 1; FGH 566 F 116; FGH 115 F 334; FGH 70 F 221), 351/0 (Diod. 16,45,3), Rhodes 391-387 (Xen., *Hell.* 4,8,20ff.), Mantinea 385 (Xen., *Hell.* 5,2,6), the so-called *skytalismos* in Argos 370/69 (Diod. 15,57,3-15,58), Phigaleia 370 (Diod. 15,40,2), Phleius 370 (Diod. 15,40,5), and Tegea 370 (Xen., *Hell.* 6,5,6-12; Xen., *Ages.* 2,23). Alexander of Pherai killed Scotussa's and Meliboea's, both Thessalian cities, male populations in full assembly 367/6 (Plut., *Pelop.* 29,4; Paus. 6,5,2f. (371/70); Diod. 15,75,1). Furthermore, Elis 365/4, 343 (Dem. 19,260; 294; Paus. 4,28,4; 5,4,9; Diod. 16,63,4f.; cf. Dem. 9,27; 18,295), Heracleia Pontike 364 (Iust. 16,4,4ff.; Polyain. 2,30; Ain. tact. 12,5; Diod. 15,81,5), Thebes 364 (Orchomenos: Diod. 15,79,5), Corcyra 361 (Ain. tact. 11,13ff.; Diod. 15,95,3), and Phocis 353 (Diod. 16,33,3). In 347/6 500 Phocians were burnt to death in a temple by Theban hands (Diod. 16,58,4-6; Paus. 10,35,3); Eretria (= Hestiaia) 342 (Dem. 9,66). In 397BC, the troops of Dionysus I slaughtered masses of Carthaginians including their wives and children at Motye, Sicily (Diod. 14,53). It goes without saying that the cases mentioned in notes, 8, 9, and 10 sometimes overlap. The lists are partly based on GEHRKE, *Stasis* 234-236.

¹¹ Cf. A. DEMANDT, “Das Attentat als Ereignis”, in: DEMANDT, *Das Attentat* 449-462, 449-452.

¹² Concerning this differentiation cf. SIFAKIS, *Encyclopedia* IXf.

¹³ DEMANDT, “Attentat als Ereignis” 461.

¹⁴ TURNER explained this model in many publications. Especially useful, since illustrated by a graph, is V. TURNER, “Are there Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?” in: R. SCHECHNER - W. APPEL (ed.), *By Means of Performance. Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual*, Cambridge 1990, 8-18 (graph on p. 10).

Turner's model to the scenario of an assassination, several points stand out at first glance and help sharpen our questions. If we understand an assassination as the peak, the ultimate crisis of a social drama, it means that the perpetrators were not able or willing to resolve a certain kind of breach by other, more peaceful, political means. This is not to say that the Greeks had no methods of conflict resolution at their disposal¹⁵, but the sheer number of apex-assassinations in the Greek world suggests that such killings belonged to the accepted repertoire of pursuing politics. Interestingly enough, Turner is less interested in the reasons for social conflict than in its resolution and aftermath, i.e. the so-called *redressive process* and *reintegration/recognition of irreparable schism*. In accordance with Turner's work, this article will neither examine the assassins' motives nor the political or social reasons for the respective assassinations, but direct its focus on the following questions: what happened in the wake of an assassination? What were the consequences for the perpetrators and the general public? What kind of impact had the deed on the political life of the community? Were the plotters successful in achieving their original aims? How was the memory of the formerly prominent person preserved? What does this tell us about the community? All these questions follow from Turner's terms *reintegration* or *recognition of irreparable schism* as the possible consequences of a *redressive phase*. *Reintegration* versus *recognition of irreparable schism* determines whether or not the murder is legitimate in the eyes of the contemporaries. A successful reintegration therefore suggests that the murder was deemed legitimate. In case an irreparable schism occurred, the legitimacy of a political killing was vigorously contested. Beyond treating questions regarding the redressive process, this study seeks to demonstrate that the *kosmos* of the constitutional hoplite *polis* was characterized by a culture of public display, where violent acts could reveal their symbolic meanings before the eyes of their beholders, i.e. the citizens, whereas this aspect of publicity seems to have been of minor importance to tyrannies, such as Sicily, Thesaly, and monarchic regimes like Macedonia. There, assassinations were normally not committed in public, but behind palace walls. Public tyrannicide in hoplite *poleis* and hidden dynastic murder in tyrannies and monarchies show distinct features and convey specific cultural semantics. With these questions I seek to leave behind the history of events and embark on the exploration of the cultural history of political assassinations, which has yet to really begin.

Let us go now on a tour across the Greek world, picking out the most

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. A. DÖSSEL, *Die Beilegung innerstaatlicher Konflikte in den griechischen Poleis vom 5.-3. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, Frankfurt/M. - Berlin - Bern - Bruxelles - New York - Oxford - Wien 2003.

blatant examples of assassinations¹⁶. In each case, I will first sketch the events in all appropriate brevity before offering a short systematic analysis under the categories sketched out above. A conclusion will summarize the results. I differentiate between two structurally distinct parts of the Greek world: first, constitutional hoplite *poleis*; second, traditional tyrannies (Sicily, Thessaly) and monarchies (Macedonia). It will become clear that the respective cultural semantics of political assassination is embedded in these governmental structures.

1. *The Hoplite Poleis*

1.1. *Thebes*¹⁷

After the Spartan Phoebidas had taken over the Cadmeia in 382BC with the help of his Theban, pro-Spartan friends, some democrats, the most famous of whom was Ismenias, were executed in the wake of show trials. Others, like Androcleidas, Pherenicus, and Pelopidas, went into exile and fled to Athens¹⁸, where they were planning the return to their hometown by attempting to overthrow Spartan rule. But the 300 refugees were not even safe in Athens. Androcleidas was assassinated in Athens, presumably by Theban agents¹⁹. In 379/8 the time was ripe for revenge. Archias and Philippus were polemarchs in Thebes, backed by the Spartan garrison holding the citadel. Their oligarchic friends were Leontidas, who had invited Phoebidas to take control of the Cadmeia, and Hypates. In Athens, Pelopidas, Melon, and seven or twelve (the sources are contradictory) other exiled friends, were plotting to oust the oligarchs from power in Thebes. They hoped to overpower their enemies when they were drunk during the festival of Aphrodite. Pelopidas, Melon and their men approached the city disguised as hunters and peasants. Pherenicus waited outside the city with his men, on guard in

¹⁶ Cf. the list of assassinations in the appendix.

¹⁷ Xen., *Hell.* 5,4,1-12; Plut., *Pelop.* 5-13; Plut., *Ages.* 24,1-2; Plut., *De genio Socratis* 596; Corn. Nep., *Pelop.* 2-3; Diod. 15,25-27. Cf. W. JUDEICH, "Athen und Theben vom Königsfrieden bis zur Schlacht bei Leuktra", *RbM* 76, 1927, 171-197; AL. SCHÄFER, *Die Berichte Xenophons, Plutarchs und Diodors über die Besetzung und Befreiung Thebens (382, 379 v. Chr.)*, Diss. München 1930; S. ACCAME, "L'attentato di Pelopida contro i polemarchi", *RivFil* 64, 1936, 337-355; D. RICE, "Xenophon, Diodorus and the Year 379/378BC. Reconstruction and Reappraisal", *YaleClassSt* 24, 1975, 95-130; GEHRKE, *Stasis* 177-180; K. TRAMPEDACH, "Hierosylia. Gewalt in Heiligtümern", in: G. FISCHER - S. MORAW (ed.), *Die andere Seite der Klassik. Gewalt im 5. und 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, Stuttgart 2005, 143-165, 161 Nr. 16.

¹⁸ Xen., *Hell.* 5,2,25-36; Corn. Nep., *Pelop.* 1,4; Plut., *Ages.* 23,3-7; Plut., *Pelop.* 5,3; Diod. 15,20,1-2.

¹⁹ GEHRKE, *Stasis* 175-177.

case things got out of control and the assassins had to withdraw and flee from the city. Other plotters gained access to the city through their friends inside, i.e. Phillidas and Charon. Phillidas was secretary of the polemarchs at that time, but he sympathized with the democratic conspirators. Charon offered his house to the plotters – their number increased to 48 due to democrats joining them from within the town – and together they prepared the coup. The conspirators now formed two groups: Charon and Melon should try to slay the polemarchs at their party; Pelopidas and Damocleidas were supposed to kill Leontidas and Hypates in their private homes. Plutarch offers the most detailed report, which excels at creating literary suspense. Two times the victims were warned, two times the coup was at the brink of failure, but both times, the polemarchs did not heed the warnings. They got drunk and waited for some married women to show up at the party and entertain them. This was the conspirators' chance: disguised as women they entered the party hall, revealed who they were and dispatched Archias and Philippus immediately. The other group met fierce fighting: Leontidas put up resistance in his house and killed one of the intruders, but Pelopidas prevailed and stabbed Leontidas in his bed chamber. Hypates escaped to his neighbors, but he was slain there by Damocleidas. The democrats who had waited outside now entered the city. They opened workshops and stores and armed a large part of the pro-democratic citizenry. The next morning, Pelopidas summoned an assembly and explained the situation. The democratic-minded Thebans united, celebrated the assassins as heroes and benefactors and started to attack the Spartans on the Cadmeia. The beleaguered knew that things would only get worse, because an army from Athens would arrive in support of the Thebans. Help from Sparta would arrive at some point, but they did not hope to hold out that long. They achieved a conditional surrender and gave up the Cadmeia. Not only did the Spartan occupying forces march out, but so too the Theban oligarchs who had fled to the citadel during the democratic overthrow. The Theban democrats hated them so much that they slaughtered most of them including their wives and children.

Due to strategic reasons the assassinations themselves were not perpetrated in public. The victims were overwhelmed partying or sleeping in their houses. In the face of a 1500 men strong Spartan garrison on the citadel and oligarchic-minded citizens in town, this strategy seemed safest. The successful assassination had long-term consequences. The assassins were revered as heroes. Pelopidas became the most eminent man in Thebes besides Epaminondas. Sticking to Turner's terminology, the redressive phase was short, but painful. Many Theban oligarchs were killed with their families. In this way, Theban unity was re-established on the basis of violence. Thus,

reintegration was brutally achieved in the domestic realm, whereas the schism with Sparta became irreparable through the coup d'état. The deed could be regarded as liberation from foreign rule and was thus totally legitimate in the eyes of anti-Spartan, i.e. pro-democratic Thebans, but as a consequence, Spartan grip on Boeotia became even harsher. Wherever they could, the Spartans introduced *dunasteiai*, small oligarchies in the cities of Boeotia. Civil strife was unavoidable. The antagonism between Thebes and Sparta finally led to the battle of Leuctra, where Sparta lost its predominance forever in 371BC.

1.2. *Sicyon*²⁰

The battle of Leuctra had immense repercussions throughout the Greek world. In Sicyon, democratic-minded citizens tried to overthrow the government, but failed and lost their lives in 370²¹. Sicyon remained oligarchic and loyal to Sparta. In 369, however, the Thebans attacked the city and tried to install a democratic constitution like everywhere else in their sphere of influence. Euphron, originally pro-Spartan, changed sides and promised to render the city democratic. In 367 he introduced democracy with the help of Arcadian and Argive troops and put himself at the head of the new regime. Immediately, he eliminated political opponents with his mercenaries. His rule more and more resembled a tyranny²². This aroused considerable opposition among the Sicyonians. *Stasis* ensued. In order to get some help from outside, Euphron traveled to Thebes and was about to curry favor with Theban officials, when he was slain by his enemies on the *acropolis* in plain view of the city magistrates (366/5).

The killers were immediately sued by Theban officials. The deed committed in open public was deemed especially outrageous²³. What is valuable about this case is that Xenophon has preserved the speech of defense of one of the assassins in a stylistically reworked form²⁴. According to the speaker two motives fully justified the act: Euphron was a traitor (*prodotes*) and tyrant, who had deserved his due punishment. The skillful orator even

²⁰ Xen., *Hell.* 7,1,44-46; 7,3,4-5; Diod. 15,70,3. Cf. P. MELONI, "La tirannide di Eufrone I in Sicione", *RivFil* 29, 1951, 10-33; J. MANDEL, "Zur Geschichte des coup d'Etat von Euphron I. in Sikyon", *Euphrosyne* N.S. 8, 1977, 93-107; A. GRIFFIN, *Sikyon*, Oxford 1982, 24; 68f.; 70-74; 148; GEHRKE, *Stasis* 147-149.

²¹ Diod. 15,40,4.

²² S. LEWIS, "Kai saphos tyrannos en: Xenophon's account of Euphron of Sicyon", *JHS* 124, 2004, 65-74 reveals why Xenophon writes in such detail about Euphron, depicting him as a tyrant, and why Xenophon's definition of "tyranny" is so broad.

²³ Xen., *Hell.* 7,3,6.

²⁴ Xen., *Hell.* 7,3,7-11.

makes use of Thebe's recent past and claims that this killing was as justified as the recent murder of Archias and Hypates. Two salient features stand out that characterize assassinations in constitutional hoplite *poleis*: first, the main motive and justification is to prevent tyranny; second the deed is in many cases carried out in open public. The Thebans take offence at that, but comparisons to other cases reveal that this kind of public killing seems to have been an almost routine pattern for defining tyrannicide. This almost standardized kind of public murder is full of symbolic messages. The perpetrators show their courage and boldness. The victim is represented as powerless, defenseless and weak, thus deserving to be slaughtered by stronger men. The publicity of such a killing resembles executions or religious sacrifices. The bloody deed is necessary to purge the city of an imminent evil, i.e. tyranny. Killing somebody in plain view of an audience greatly enhances the dramatic effect and underscores the success and effectiveness of the city's saviors. Military bravery won on a battlefield must be on display, and therefore it requires onlookers. Killing somebody behind closed doors is far less valiant and does not support the assassins' claim to military prowess. Unfortunately, one does not hear much about the redressive phase in this case. The Thebans were convinced by the speech and released the assassins. At home, however, they might have had more difficulties judging from the Sicyonians' treatment of Euphron's corpse. Contrary to what the murderers had hoped, the citizens honored Euphron as having embodied democracy. They revered him even as *heros ktistes* and solemnly buried him in Sicyon's *agora*²⁵. The Thebans even entered into an alliance with Euphron's son. It is possible that the assassins isolated themselves by their deed and thus caused an irreparable schism between themselves and their hometown. The killers believed in the legitimacy of their actions, for they probably regarded themselves as tyrant slayers, having killed their victim in plain view of an audience in the tradition of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Their fellow-citizens disagreed. Euphron's ability to make people believe that he embraced democracy took away from the murderers their main justification for slaying him, his alleged standing for tyranny. Thus, in the eyes of Sicyon's citizens the assassination was unjustified and therefore illegitimate.

1.3. *Heracleia Pontike*²⁶

Clearchus of Heracleia was the first tyrant to meet his premature death due

²⁵ A. LINTOTT, *Violence, Civil Strife, and Revolution in the Classical City, 750-330BC*, London 1982, 233f.; GEHRKE, *Stasis* 148f.

²⁶ Cf. H. APEL, *Die Tyrannis von Heraklea*, Diss. Halle 1910; P. FRANKE, "Zur Tyrannis des Klearchos und Satyros in Heraklea am Pontos", *AA* 1966, 130-139; GEHRKE, *Stasis* 72.

to his alleged cruelty²⁷. He was called upon to mediate between rival parties in the city and was appointed *aisymnetos* in 365. Soon afterwards, he allegedly developed traits of a tyrant and ultimately went so far as to demand godlike honors²⁸. The two leading conspirators – there were fifty altogether – Chion and Leonidas, were intellectuals, upper-class youths and, like their victim, students of Plato. They decided to free their hometown from the tyrant²⁹. In 353 they struck him down in public, while he was performing a sacrifice³⁰.

In this case tyrannicide implied even the violation of a holy place and rite, a blatant *hierosylia*³¹. The action seems to have been of limited effect, for the tyranny persisted: Timotheus, son of Clearchus, finally became tyrant of Heracleia Pontike (345-337). The assassination was unsuccessful in the end, because the “tyrant” seems to have been quite popular. Like Euphron, Clearchus did not correspond to the paradigm of the cruel tyrant. Otherwise, his son’s accession would be inexplicable. The killers’ deed, although performed according to the semantic rules of tyrannicide, i.e. in public, lacked legitimacy in the eyes of many citizens.

1.4. Corinth³²

The next case makes it abundantly clear that in constitutional hoplite *poleis* the legitimacy of an assassination hinged upon the question whether or not the slain ruler was perceived as a tyrant who had transgressed the unwritten code of behavior that a sole ruler had to follow. Although Corinth seems to have been a kind of democracy, “dominated by the pro-Spartan aristocrats”³³, the cavalry commander Timophanes³⁴ commanding 400 mercenaries came to power in 365. He did not say *expressis verbis* that he sought tyranny³⁵, but he definitely behaved that way. Worst of all, he had many eminent citizens executed without trial so as to crush any sort of op-

²⁷ H.G. SCHMIDT-LILIENBERG, *Die Lehre vom Tyrannenmord. Ein Kapitel aus der Rechtsphilosophie*, Aalen 1964 (orig. Tübingen 1901), 5; F. FORD, *Der Politische Mord. Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (engl. *Political Murder. From Tyrannicide to Terrorism*, Cambridge/MA 1985), 1990, 61f.

²⁸ FORD, *Der politische Mord* 61f.; GEHRKE, *Stasis* 71f.

²⁹ LINTOTT, *Violence* 268 with background information.

³⁰ Memnon, FGH IIIB 434, F1,1,4; 3-4; Suda, s.v. Klearchos; Diod. 15,81,5; 16,35,3; Iust. 16,4,17-5,18.

³¹ TRAMPEDACH, “Hierosylia” 162 Nr. 19.

³² Cf. S. ACCAME, *Ricerche intorno alla Guerra corinzia*, Napoli 1951; D. KAGAN, “Corinthian Politics and the Revolution of 392BC”, *Historia* 11, 1962, 447-457; C. HAMILTON, “The Politics of Revolution in Corinth, 395-386 BC”, *Historia* 21, 1972, 21-37; GEHRKE, *Stasis* 87f.

³³ LINTOTT, *Violence* 227.

³⁴ Corn. Nep., *Timol.* 1; Plut., *Timol.* 4-5; 7; *mor.* 808a; Diod. 16,65,3-9; Aristot., *Pol.* 1306a 23; Timaios FGH 566 F 116; Theop. FGH 115 F 334; Ephoros FGH 70 F 221.

³⁵ According to Plut., *Timol.* 4,4,5 he did.

position. To what extent the killing of citizens without trial was deemed illegitimate is well attested by the reports about the Thirty Tyrants at Athens. Plutarch speaks about Timophanes' mistakes³⁶, which the Loeb translation renders as "transgressions". Timoleon tried to talk his brother Timophanes out of his tyrannical behavior, but without success. According to most sources, Timoleon overcame his brotherly love and had Timophanes killed in the *agora* in the interest of the city.

The assassination was carried out in public according to the standard pattern of tyrannicide in hoplite *poleis*. Only Cornelius Nepos mentions possible personal motives on the part of Timoleon, like jealousy. Most ancient authors agree that Timoleon did not kill his brother with his own hands, but had some of his friends do the job so as to avoid pollution. Only Diodorus claims that Timoleon committed the deed himself. What makes this case exemplary is the wealth of information about its ambivalent aftermath. Instantly people sharply disagreed in the *agora*. Some hailed Timoleon as a tyrant slayer and hero; others accused him of fratricide. According to Diodorus, he was put to trial in front of the senate (*gerusia*), where Timoleon's friends and enemies debated the pros and cons of the assassination. At this moment, the ambassadors from Syracuse arrived and asked for the general. The Corinthians let him go, but on the condition that "if he ruled the Syracusans fairly, they adjudged him a tyrant slayer, but if too ambitiously, a murderer of his brother"³⁷. On this point Diodorus' and Plutarch's accounts differ considerably. According to Plutarch, Timoleon fell into dependency after the assassination – his own mother had cursed him – and wandered the lands for 20 years (a kind of self-imposed exile like in the case of Oedipus). Only then did Corinth entrust him with the command to go to Sicily³⁸. In front of the *demos*, who appointed Timoleon general, Telecleides admonished him to prove his worth. If Timoleon ruled the Syracusans with fairness and modesty, he would be regarded as a tyrant slayer, if not as a killer of his brother³⁹. The dilemma of definition could not be expressed more concisely⁴⁰. The Corinthians understood that tyrannicide was murder

³⁶ Plut., *Timol.* 4,4,5.

³⁷ Diod. 16,65,9. By linking the assassination to Timoleon's mission to Syracuse, Diodorus moves the event to 346.

³⁸ On Timoleon's activities on Sicily cf. B. SMARCZYK, *Timoleon und die Neugründung von Syrakus*, Göttingen 2003.

³⁹ Plut., *Timol.* 7,7,2.

⁴⁰ FORD, *Der politische Mord* 70: "Was das Attentat, einschließlich der besonderen Kategorie des Tyrannenmordes, zu einer so sensiblen Frage machte, war die nicht zu leugnende Tatsache, dass das Schwert des Mörders in beide Richtungen traf. Der Tyrann, der den Tod verdiente, hatte sich selbst zu einer 'gesetzlosen Person' gestempelt, die durch ihre eigene Grausamkeit und Arroganz ausserhalb der Gesellschaft stand. Aber das galt auch für den Attentäter, *es sei denn*, er konnte jenen eng definierten

too, and it had the potential to harm the city by causing civil strife. In no other case, as far as we know, was the question of legitimacy versus illegitimacy more vigorously discussed by contemporaries obviously aware of the intricacies of tyrannicide⁴¹.

1.5. *Rhodes*⁴²

The next example demonstrates the role a foreign power could play in the overthrow of an oligarchic regime. On Rhodes the three towns of Ialysos, Lindos, and Kamiros united in a *synoikismos* and called the new *polis* Rhodos (408/7). At that time, Rhodes was an ally of Sparta. In 396 the Athenian general Conon made the *polis* defect from Sparta and conclude an alliance with Persia. Obviously both factions in town, the aristocrats as well as the democrats, had agreed to this change in their foreign policy. To the chagrin of the democratically-minded citizens, this new orientation had no effect on the domestic constitution, which was still an oligarchy dominated by the family of the Diagoreians, who came from Ialysos. When Conon was present with his fleet (summer of 395), the democrats saw their chance. Together with the Athenians, they worked out a sophisticated plot⁴³. Conon would parade his ships off the coast again and again so as to get the Rhodians used to the Athenian military presence. One day, however, Conon was to set sail to Caunos so as not to be present when the democratic overthrow took place. He had his officers instructed to place some troops at strategic points, i.e. the harbor and near the *agora*. Now it was up to the conspirators. They gathered in the market-place. Dorimachus, their leader, mounted the

Grund geltend machen, der den echten Tyrannenmord rechtfertigte [...]”.

⁴¹ SCHMIDT-LILIENBERG, *Lehre vom Tyrannenmord* 5-19 summarizes Plato's and Aristotle's stance on this subject-matter. H. FRIEDEL, *Der Tyrannenmord in Gesetzgebung und Volksmeinung der Griechen*, 1937, 50-56 shows that tyrannicide was seen as problematic from the fifth century on. The book gives an overview of the fight against tyrants in Athens, Asia Minor, the Greek mainland and during early Hellenism. Cf. O. JASZI - J. LEWIS, *Against the Tyrants. The Tradition and Theory of Tyrannicide*, Glencoe/Ill. 1957. More recent is F. FORD, “Die Geburt der Theorie über den Tyrannenmord”, in: ID., *Der politische Mord* 64-71. P. BARCELÓ, *Basileia, Monarchia, Tyrannis. Untersuchungen zu Entwicklung und Beurteilung von Alleinberrschaft im vorhellenistischen Griechenland*, Stuttgart 1993, 187-196; 201-202 elucidates the antagonism between *tyrannis* and *isonomia*. L. DE LIBERO, *Die archaische Tyrannis*, Stuttgart 1996, 409-411 mentions the way archaic tyrants were ousted from power.

⁴² R. SEAGER, “Thrasylbulus, Conon, and Athenian Imperialism, 396-386BC”, *JHS* 87, 1967, 95-115; R. BERTHOLD, “Fourth Century Rhodes”, *Historia* 29, 1980, 32-49; GEHRKE, *Stasis* 136-139.

⁴³ Hell. Oxy. 18 is our only source for this event. On this episode cf. I. BRUCE, “The Democratic Revolution at Rhodes”, *CQ* 55, 1961, 166-170; P. FUNKE, “Stasis und politischer Umsturz in Rhodos zu Beginn des IV. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.”, in: W. ECK - H. GALSTERER - H. WOLFF (ed.), *Studien zur antiken Sozialgeschichte. Festschrift Friedrich Vittinghoff*, Köln - Wien 1980, 59-70; H. WESTLAKE, “Conon and Rhodes”, *GRBS* 24, 1983, 333-344; GEHRKE, *Stasis* 136f.

large stone from which the herald normally announced the news and exhorted the citizens to strike a blow against the tyrants. On this signal his friends burst into the assembly of the *archons*, slaughtered the Diagoreians, i.e. the members of the leading family, and eleven other citizens. After the deed, the assassins convened a meeting of the Rhodian people, abolished oligarchy, and introduced democracy. By that time Conon was back with his troops. In this situation, any resistance would have been senseless. Some citizens were sent into exile.

This overthrow was not to last forever. In 391, the pro-Lacedaimonians prevailed again and butchered masses of citizens⁴⁴. After that the democrats took over again. Until the peace of Antalcidas in 387, the city was torn apart by constant civil strife⁴⁵. Dorimachus' motto "against the tyrants" found echo in the way the coup was carried out, i.e. in public according to the rules of tyrannicide. The magistrates were killed at their daily routine, doing business in their workplace. The assassins were keen to stylize their action as tyrannicide and derive legitimacy from that. The fact that they achieved their aim only for a short time shows that their definition of the deed was not shared by everybody. The assassination was regarded as illegitimate and therefore was condemned by the oligarchic faction. A short-lived reintegration of the whole citizenship was only possible through the pressure exerted by Athens, the hegemonial power at that time. The constant civil strife on Rhodes rather suggests an irreparable schism between the two opposing groups. We neither know anything about Dorimachus' and his friends' fate nor whether or not the memory of the Diagoreians was preserved.

Let us now turn to traditional tyrannies, e.g. Sicily and Thessaly.

2. *Traditional Tyrannies*

2.1. *Sicily*⁴⁶

2.1.1. Tyranny was firmly established at Syracuse when Dionysius I fell seriously ill in 367. The intrigues at court are fascinating to study. Concerning Dionysius' death, full clarity will never be achieved, but one thing is cer-

⁴⁴ Xen., *Hell.* 4,8,20ff.; Diod. 14,97.

⁴⁵ GEHRKE, *Stasis* 137-139. FUNKE, "Stasis", suggests that the antagonism between oligarchy and democracy is not enough to explain this period of considerable unrest. Tensions within the Rhodian elites, especially after the *synoikismos*, where the leading families of three previous towns were now vying for power and influence in one city, might have contributed as well to this situation of constant *stasis* and foreign intervention.

⁴⁶ Recent contributions on Dionysius I and II in: N. BONACASA - L. BRACCESI - E. DE MIRO (ed.), *La Sicilia dei due Dionisi. Atti della settimana di studio Agrigento, 24 - 28 febbraio 1999*, Rome 2002.

tain: there was rivalry between Dionysius II, the oldest son of the tyrant, and the experienced and cunning courtier Dion, who was very close to Dionysius I, not least because of his kinship ties with the tyrant. Dions's sister, Aristomache, was married to Dionysius I and had borne him four children, two sons, and two daughters. Dion married one of them, his niece Arete, after her husband, Thearides, another son of Dionysius I by a different woman, had died. Thus, Dion became Dionysius I's son-in-law after being his brother-in-law. When Dionysius I's death seemed imminent, Dion wanted to confer with the dying tyrant to secure his nephews' share in power, the nephews also being Dionysius' own children. As they were not yet of age, Dion was acting in his own interest. Dionysius II heard of Dion's deliberations and knew how to foil them. Plutarch's and Cornelius Nepos' accounts differ on one crucial point⁴⁷, the involvement of Dionysius II in the old tyrant's death. According to Plutarch, the physicians wanted to curry favor with the obvious, legitimate heir, and gave a sleeping potion to the sick man upon his own request. But this was not a normal dosage, for Dionysius I did not wake up again. Plutarch's version directs the blame away from Dionysius II and treats the tyrant's death as a medical accident. Nepos' version, however, casts doubt on this story. According to him, the young Dionysius wanted to prevent a conversation between his father and Dion. So he forced the doctors to give his father the sleeping drug. We cannot tell for sure, if Dionysius II intended the death of his father, but the fact that the old tyrant died without giving a statement on whom he wished to succeed him, clearly worked in favor of Dionysius II. He acceded to the throne and reigned with interruptions from 367 to 344.

Dionysius I's death seems to be representative of tyrannical or monarchic regimes. He was probably killed because of dynastic schemes by his own family, which had no interest in stylizing the killing as a heroic tyrannicide. Since the people of Syracuse had no influence whatsoever on the succession, the murder did not have to take place in public. On the contrary, if some of their own family members murdered tyrants and monarchs, they died within their palaces most of the times. The people then were confronted with a *fait accompli*. The public assassination of Philipp II is an exception that confirms the rule, and we will have to come back to it. Due to the Sicilian tyrant's apparently peaceful death, reintegration of the opposing parties was no problem at all. Nobody could claim that Dionysius II had slain his father. Because of his seniority, Dionysius II was immediately accepted as the new ruler. Dion gave in, but continued to play an influential role at court. If Dionysius II really plotted against his father, he succeeded.

⁴⁷ Corn. Nep., *Dion* 1,2,4-5; Plut., *Dion* 6,1-3.

This is not to say that public performances of punishment and death played no role in tyrannies. After conquering Rhegion in 387, Dionysius I seized Phyton, the Rhegians' general, and his son, and staged public executions. Dionysius had Phyton's son drowned and tortured the father in public. Interestingly enough, he had the general led around the city like a scapegoat, and then executed him under terrible torments. Thus, Dionysius made his superior power visible to his audience by publicly crushing his enemy's body⁴⁸. But this was not a political assassination, but rather a kind of judicial murder after a military conquest.

2.1.2. Dion, student and admirer of Plato, remained a powerful figure in Sicily. His attempts, however, to put Plato's ideas into practice and to found a philosopher's state, failed. He periodically fought against Dionysius II and became quite popular with the *demos*. The fact that Dion was elected *strategos autokrator*, behaved in a more and more tyrannical way, and was supported by oligarchs, finally roused the democrats' suspicion. Their leader was Heraclides, the admiral of the fleet. Dion and Heraclides had already vied for power for quite some time, when Dion decided to crush the democratic opposition, abolish the fleet – the hotbed of democracy – and have Heraclides killed. Dion's blatant tyrant-like behavior was now clearly visible to all. In 354 Callippus (Nepos calls him Callicrates), one of Dion's friends from Athens, and his brother Philostratus planned a sophisticated plot⁴⁹. Callippus told Dion that he would spy out his opponents and hand them over to him. So Callippus gathered conspirators with the full consent of the unknowing tyrant. Aristomache and Arete saw the catastrophe coming and warned their brother and husband. It was too late. Callippus hired mercenaries from Zakynthos to kill Dion. They entered the palace unarmed and were thus admitted to Dion's bedchamber by his bodyguards. As soon as they were in the room, they overpowered Dion and demanded a sword. The guards outside could hear the tumult, but did not come to their master's rescue. A neighbor finally handed a sword through the window so that the mercenaries could slaughter the defenseless victim. Aristomache and Arete were thrown into prison.

Of the aftermath of the assassination there is no doubt. The legitimacy of the deed was so hotly contested that an irreparable schism resulted between the opposing groups. Right after the deed, several innocent people were killed, because some people supposed that they were the culprits. People who had thought critically about Dion now changed their minds and revered

⁴⁸ Diod. 14,112.

⁴⁹ Corn. Nep., *Dion* 8-10; Plut., *Dion* 54-58; Diod. 16,31,7. Cf. LINTOTT, *Violence* 212; FORD, *Der politische Mord* 59f.

him as their savior from the tyranny of Dionysius II. He was honored with a public funeral and buried in the middle of the city of Syracuse. A monument was even dedicated in his memory. For all these reasons, it comes as no surprise that Callippus was in power only for a short period of time. He lost several battles and also Syracuse. Since no city in Sicily would host him, he occupied Rhegium, but was executed when he could not support his mercenaries any more. According to legend, he was killed with the same sword that had been used against Dion. When Aristomache and Arete were released from prison, Hicetas, a former friend of Dion's, took care of them. Dion's enemies, however, persuaded him to put them on a ship and to instruct the sailors to kill them and the little boy that Arete had borne in prison. Plutarch relates, not without satisfaction, that Hicetas also found due punishment. Timoleon later seized and executed him, and the Syracusans killed his two daughters to take revenge for what he had done to Dion's family.

Why were the conspirators so unsuccessful? The cowardly plot carried out by mercenaries within the palace aroused pity for the victim rather than support for the conspirators. Callippus failed because he did not come across as a tyrant slayer. He did not strike the blow himself, but sent in hired thugs. This murder, hidden behind the palace's walls, did not correspond to the pattern of tyrannicide, but rather had the odium of a dynastic plot. Since Callippus had no right to rule whatsoever, this murder, looking so like a dynastic quarrel, was doomed to failure from the beginning. Had Callippus killed Dion in the open, i.e. on the *agora*, things might have evolved differently. Then he could have portrayed himself as courageous citizen, liberating the city from a tyrant. He could have stylized his deed as being in the interest of the city, himself being the selfless benefactor and savior of the city. In other words: Callippus chose the wrong form of assassination and violated the semantics of tyrannicide. Citizens kill tyrants in public for the city's sake, family members kill monarchs in their beds for dynastic reasons.

2.2. *Thessaly*⁵⁰

The tribal state of Thessaly was characterized by two salient features during the 4th century: (1) its agricultural and aristocratic structure and (2) the conflict between the Thessalian League, the so-called *koinon*, and the tyrants of Pherai. The Aleuadaei of Larisa represented the Thessalian League. The tyrants of Pherai strove for supremacy in Thessaly beyond constitutional boundaries⁵¹. Jason of Pherai held the official title of *tagos*, when

⁵⁰ H. WESTLAKE, *Thessaly in the Fourth Century BC*, London 1935.

⁵¹ GEHRKE, *Stasis* 189-194.

he was killed by seven conspirators on the occasion of the Pythian games in 370⁵². As he held court, the assassins approached his seat pretending to be quarreling and seeking his aid. When they were near enough, they struck him down. His bodyguards killed two of them, but the rest escaped on horseback⁵³. As the deed was carried out in plain view, we can assume that the perpetrators had tyrannicide in mind. And indeed, Xenophon tells us that the Greeks were afraid of Jason's tyranny: "This fact, indeed, made it plain that the Greeks had conceived a very great fear lest Jason should become tyrant"⁵⁴. According to Diodorus, this version goes back to Ephorus. Other historians, so says Diodorus, suspected his brother Polydorus of committing the crime⁵⁵. Xenophon alludes to another motive as well: the Delphians were afraid Jason would lay hands on the sacred treasures⁵⁶. Be that as it may, both brothers, Polydorus and Polyphron, succeeded to the throne. Shortly afterwards, on their way to Larisa, Polyphron seems to have killed his brother Polydorus in his sleep⁵⁷. Polyphron too, however, enjoyed his position as *tagus* for only a short time. After consolidating his rule by killing Polydamas, who had cooperated with Jason, and eight eminent citizens in Pharsalos⁵⁸, he too was assassinated in 369. The assassin was his own nephew, Alexander, who became the new *tagus*⁵⁹. Alexander pretended to have sought revenge for Polydorus and to have liberated Pherai and Thessaly from a tyrant. But the way he behaved – his rule was a harsher tyranny than that of his predecessors – made it abundantly clear that Alexander acted for dynastic reasons only, i.e. to win the throne. When his reign became more and more intolerable, his own wife, Thebe, incited her brothers Lycophron, Tisiphorus (Tisiphonus in Plutarch), and Pytholaus to kill him in his bed (358). She not only planned the plot, but also exhorted her brothers, when they hesitated at the last moment. The way Xenophon characterizes her reminds one of Lady MacBeth⁶⁰, for she hid her brothers in the palace for a whole day, removed Alexander's sword, and left the candle light burning after her husband had returned home drunken and had fallen asleep. She then called in the brothers and held the door firmly closed while they killed him⁶¹. The motives of the murderers were manifold. According

⁵² FORD, *Der politischer Mord* 61.

⁵³ Xen., *Hell.* 6,4,30-32.

⁵⁴ Xen., *Hell.* 6,4,32.

⁵⁵ Diod. 15,60,5-6.

⁵⁶ TRAMPEDACH, "Hierosylia" 159 Nr. 9.

⁵⁷ Xen., *Hell.* 6,4,33.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 6,4,34.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 6,4,34.

⁶⁰ Xen., *Hell.* 6,4,35-37. Cf. Cic., *De off.* 2,7,25; Val. Max. 9,13, ext. 3.

⁶¹ Plut., *Pelop.* 35 offers a slightly different version.

to Plutarch, Thebe was afraid of her husband's well-documented cruelty. Xenophon's mention of a youngster whom Alexander had thrown into prison and killed with his own hands, after Thebe had asked for his release, is in line with Alexander's brutality. She cajoled her brothers into the deed by claiming that Alexander was preparing an attempt on their lives. Whether this was true, we cannot tell, but Xenophon also mentions a more personal reason, one having political and dynastic dimensions. When Thebe did not become pregnant, Alexander thought of marrying Jason's widow who was then at Thebes. It is safe to assume that the perpetrators set forth many motives to justify the murder, but in its actual performance it was a typical killing for dynastic reasons.

What about the consequences? According to Plutarch, the Pheraeans mutilated Alexander's corpse by trampling on it. Although the feat was carried out within the palace, the assassins were briefly celebrated as tyrant slayers. This is at least what Diodorus tells us⁶², reflecting how they wanted to be seen. Soon, however, they turned out to be tyrants themselves. So the true reason for Alexander's murder was not virtuous seeking glory or liberation from tyranny, but rather a crude, simple grab for power, as it was typical of dynastic courts. The people of Pherai were not involved in measures of reintegrating the killers or coming to an irreparable schism with them. The murderers continued their business as usual at court so that any kind of reintegration was not even necessary. The killing of a dynast for purely dynastic reasons only concerned the limited world of the court and did not have any far reaching implications. The people did not decide on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of such an assassination.

3. *Monarchy: Macedonia*

Even more than in Thessaly, political murder seems to have been the order of the day in Macedonia. Killings for dynastic reasons at court were so frequent that they were an integral part of policy-making in this tribal society. They were so normal that the perpetrators did not even try to style their deeds tyrannicides, except for the assassination of Philipp II⁶³. This is neither the place to trace the period of instability in Macedonia from 399 to 359, nor the problems of the succession to the throne 399-393⁶⁴. Nevertheless, one of the most scrupulous women in the royal house needs to be men-

⁶² Diod. 16,14,1.

⁶³ On Philipp II cf. J.-N. CORVISIER, *Philippe II de Macédoine*, Paris 2002 (with older literature).

⁶⁴ N. HAMMOND - G. GRIFFITH, *A History of Macedonia. Vol. II. 550-336 BC*, Oxford 1979, 167-172.

tioned. Eurydice was married to Amyntas III in 390, and with him she had three sons: Alexander II, Perdikkas III, and Philipp II. She may have been involved in the murder of Alexander⁶⁵. The greed for power compelled the royals to kill even their own family. In order to accede to the throne, Philipp II had no qualms whatsoever about removing his half-brother Archelaus in 359. Since dynastic assassination was a structural feature of the Macedonian monarchy, the sources are so laconic and vague that generally we cannot know exact circumstances.

One exception, however, is the famous assassination of Philipp II in 336⁶⁶, shortly before his planned campaign to Asia Minor. In its implications this assassination can be compared to the death of Caesar, for it paved the way for Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire and much of the known world. The circumstances of this assassination will be mysterious forever, but one thing seems to be certain. Alexander and his mother Olympias had sufficient motives to kill their father and husband, and they greatly benefited from his death. Their direct involvement cannot be proven, but seems highly likely. Pausanias, one of Philipp's royal bodyguards, committed the deed in public, i.e. in the theater during a wedding procession. Pausanias had been abused by Attalus and had not received redress or compensation at Philipp's hands. In the end, however, Pausanias only seems to have been a front man, for Plutarch tells us that both Olympias and Alexander had talked him into the murder⁶⁷. The assassin met his death while trying to escape. Alexander and Olympias immediately purged their surroundings of enemies and rivals under the pretext of avenging Philipp⁶⁸. Justin, our most detailed source, plausibly suggests that Olympias and Alexander were directly involved in the plot⁶⁹.

Unlike so many murders at the Macedonian court, Philipp's killing took place in public according to the rules of tyrannicide in a constitutional hoplite *polis*. Whoever prepared this plot had an intimate understanding of the symbolic language of Greek assassinations. Getting rid of Philipp was not only a dynastic issue in the eyes of the conspirators. Not only were the court and the inner circles of the royal house to be concerned, but the message of this death was to address a wider audience, i.e. the Macedonian peo-

⁶⁵ Justin is sensational in also assigning to her the death of Perdikkas III, who actually died in battle. Cf. HAMMOND - GRIFFITH, *Macedonia* 182-184.

⁶⁶ Diod. 16,93-95; 17,2,1; Corn. Nep., *On Kings* 2,1; most detailed Iust. 9,6-7.

⁶⁷ Plut., *Alex.* 10,4. Cf. FORD, *Der politische Mord* 63.

⁶⁸ For Philipp's and Alexander's dealing with political opponents cf. G. SQUILLACE, *Basileis e tyrannoi. Filippo II e Alessandro Magno tra opposizione e consenso*, Soveria Mannelli 2004.

⁶⁹ Iust. 9,6-7.

ple. The choreographic staging was perfect. Philipp died helplessly in the theater in front of an audience. A member of his own bodyguard betrayed him; the others were not able to defend him. Philipp had failed in many ways. He was unable or unwilling to give redress to the abused Pausanias. He had offended Olympias and Alexander by taking a younger wife. In spite of the reconciliation between Philipp on the one hand and Olympias and Alexander on the other, Philipp had sought to curb Alexander's burning ambitions by sending him into exile for a while. In the eyes of Alexander and his mother these transgressions were those of a typical tyrant. His death should depict Philipp as a tyrant and convey this message to the people of Macedon. So Philipp had to die according to the unwritten code of tyrannicide, i.e. in plain view of an audience. He was not supposed to die the ignoble dynastic death, i.e. in his chamber, slain in his sleep by relatives. Since he was a dynamic ruler and highly successful warlord, he had deserved better than dying in bed. Such a dynastic murder would have emotionally disengaged the common people. But in this case, more than normal dynastic questions were at stake. The organizers of the plot wanted to engage the people of Macedon emotionally, wanted them to be witnesses of the old king's exit from and the new king's entrance onto the stage. The theater was deliberately chosen as an ideal setting for the deed. Whatever was Alexander's role and that of his mother, it was not open to public display, for patricide would have greatly complicated Alexander's succession, if suspected, or, if, in fact true. The king's dramatic death in the theater and Alexander's quick reaction of taking over power and punishing those obviously guilty convinced everyone of three crucial facts: first, a *tyrant* had been slain, who obviously lacked good fortune and the gods' support; second, his son had avenged him; and third, this son was fully entitled to seek his glory on the battlefield. Was it not obvious now that the unjust tyrant's death removed every obstacle for the next king, who was full of youthful vigor? The stereotypical pattern of tyrannicide got across a multi-faceted message to the audience, a message that culminated in the allegedly justified and sensible replacement of Philipp by Alexander. And so Alexander was the uncontested new ruler from the beginning.

One question remains: Why did Alexander eliminate the tyrant slayer and many potential opponents? Did his taking vengeance not undermine the legitimacy of the tyrannicide? Being the son of Philipp II Alexander could not leave the assassination unavenged. Although stylized as a tyrant through the specific way of assassination, Philipp's memory was to be preserved in order to legitimize Alexander's rule. Only from the father could legitimate rule be transferred to his son. Therefore, the son had to avenge his

father, the assassin had to die on the spot. And yet, the ambivalence remains. An explanation might be found in the performance of the deed itself. It is the public staging of this killing as tyrannicide that concealed the fact that in reality the plotters mainly acted out of personal spite and dynastic deliberations. The careful staging was supposed to deceive, i.e. to make people overlook the underlying truth that this assassination was a dynastic murder in the guise of tyrannicide.

From this perspective, it seems more than unlikely that this was an individual's plan and deed. Alexander's position as legitimate heir enabled the quick reintegration of the opposing parties, not least, because he quickly removed all potential opponents. Due to the circumspect choreography and staging of this assassination and its direct aftermath, the reintegration and coherence among Macedonian elites and people were so strong that Alexander's departure for Asia could be undertaken without risk.

4. *Special Case: Athens*

Against the backdrop of the Greek world, Athens seems to be an exception⁷⁰. For the fourth century down to 322 only eight killings are attested, most of them being of private nature⁷¹. Although the number of cases reported is in no way representative of the number of actual killings that may have occurred, the rarity of homicide cases in our sources is significant given the fact that we know so much more about Athens than any other Greek city state. The assassination of Alcibiades in 404 was commissioned by the Thirty, but the deed was carried out in Phrygia by non-Athenians. The death of Theramenes in 404, brought about by Kritias and the Thirty Tyrants, was a judicial murder rather than a real assassination. After being dragged away from the altar where he had sought refuge, he was forced to drink hemlock⁷². The murder of Nicodemus of Aphidna may have had a

⁷⁰ FORD, *Der politische Mord* 48-54 realizes that Athens seems to have been highly pacified without asking for the reasons why.

⁷¹ G. HERMAN, "How Violent was Athenian Society?" in: D. LEWIS - R. OSBORNE - S. HORNBLOWER (ed.), *Ritual, Finance, Politics: Athenian Democratic Accounts Presented to David Lewis*, Oxford - New York 1994, 99-117, 101 provides a list of 15 reported manslaughters between 507 and 322 BC, one of them (Nr. 12) was a faked homicide. Herman forgot the killing of Nicodemus of Aphidna (cf. appendix Nr. 2). In contrast to Herman, D. COHEN, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens*, Cambridge 1995 interprets the crime rate at Athens totally differently. In his opinion, Athenian society was a feuding society, the courts just being means for feuding, not settling disputes for good. This claim has not remained uncontested: cf. G. HERMAN, "Review of D. Cohen, *Law, Violence and Community in Classical Athens*, Cambridge 1995", *Gnomon* 70, 1998, 605-615.

⁷² Xen., *Hell.* 2,3,15-2,3,56; Diod. 14,4,5-14,5,4; cf. Lys. 12,96.

political component⁷³. It was committed by Aristarchus⁷⁴, but Demosthenes' enemies did not get tired of claiming that he too was involved.

This is not the place to explore Athens' relative peacefulness and stability during the fourth century. The courts, the magistrates, among them the Eleven, the Areopagus, and the cultural practice of gossiping⁷⁵ were not efficient enough to keep the large city of Athens under control. Other means, hidden to the modern eye, must have played a crucial role in preventing, regulating and overcoming conflicts. It seems to me that the ritualization of violence played an important role in filling these administrative gaps and making Athens governable⁷⁶. What matters here is the striking difference between Athens' ability to resolve political conflicts relatively peacefully after the amnesty of 404/3 and the readiness of other Greek *poleis* and states to resort to violence quickly and without qualms.

In conclusion, I hope it has become clear that political assassinations in the Greek world were not senseless deeds. They were a meaningful social practice that followed certain cultural rules and depended on political and strategic circumstances. Basically, they fell into two categories, each of them conveying a specific symbolic message.

1. In the constitutional hoplite *polis*, assassination was justified to get rid of a tyrant or prevent tyranny. A culturally complex semantic system defined what a tyrannicide must look like to be accepted as one. A perpetrator must have the courage to face the tyrant in public and strike him down in front of eyewitnesses, whose task was to adjudicate the deed. Only this public display could help lend legitimacy to the deed. This condition had a socially stabilizing function, because would-be perpetrators will have thought twice before committing such an assassination. Many compelling reasons must have accumulated to entice someone to go ahead and kill the ruler of a city. In a way, this high moral and psychological threshold protected the members of the elite to some extent. In hoplite *poleis* the citizenry wanted to be involved in the process of defining the legitimacy of an assassination. In general, the killing of a tyrant was regarded as legitimate, although the problem of tyrannicide was already clearly seen. If the assassin failed to portray the dead convincingly as a

⁷³ Cf. D. MACDOWELL, *Demosthenes. Against Meidias (Oration 21)*, ed. with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary, Oxford 1990, 9; 325-344.

⁷⁴ Dem. 21,104-122 and scholia; Aisch. 2,148; 166; Dein. 1,30-31; 47; Idomeneus, FGH 338 F 12, ap. Athen. 592-3.

⁷⁵ Cf. V. HUNTER, *Policing Athens. Social Control in the Attic Lawsuits, 420-320 BC*, Princeton/NJ 1994, 96-119.

⁷⁶ This question shall find treatment elsewhere.

tyrant and to stylize himself a tyrant slayer, his deed lacked legitimacy and he ran into serious trouble.

2. In established tyrannies and monarchies the common people had no say in the process of defining a political murder as legitimate or illegitimate. The question of legitimacy vs. illegitimacy itself was even irrelevant to the power-mongers at court. Monarchic rulers were surrounded by their bodyguards most of the times so that they were harder to kill. Plots were necessary to overwhelm them in their private chambers. The killing of a monarch was solely the court's business, for it had little or no impact on society as a whole. Typically, a dynastic murder carried out in a chamber had little symbolic meaning. The deed, therefore, could take place behind palace walls and closed doors. In most cases, family members killed a powerful relative, not necessarily because he was a tyrant doing harm to society, but for dynastic reasons only.

These two scenarios are ideal paradigms. Exceptions confirm the rule. According to strategic circumstances and the assassins' plans and wishes, the two fundamental categories could be mixed and transformed so as to convey subtle and complex symbolic messages to an audience.

Appendix:

List of Political Assassinations in the Greek World (404BC - 336BC)

This list is based on a narrow definition of assassination (cf. above). Only victims known by name are considered (cf. exception # 25). Judicial murders, killings in the wake of wars and warlike actions, and mass slaughters are excluded (cf. above the footnotes 8, 9, and 10). The cases listed below are mainly attested in the literary sources. A thorough analysis of all inscriptions and historical fragments could not be undertaken in the context of preparing this article.

Athens

1. 404: Alcibiades killed in Phrygia on the order of Pharnabazus, who acted on Spartan initiative. The Spartans were enticed into the assassination by Kritias and the Thirty Tyrants of Athens (Iust. 5,8,10; Diod. 14,11; Plut., *Alc.* 38,3-39; Corn. Nep., *Alc.* 10,1-6).
2. 354: Nicodemus of Aphidna killed by Aristarchus (Dem. 21,104-122 and scholia; Aisch. 1,172; 2,148; 2,166; Dein. 1,30-31; 1,47; FGH 338 F 12, ap. Athen. 592-593).

Macedonia

3. 400: Archelaus killed by Craterus/Crateas/Crataeus/Crateuas (Diod. 14,37,5; Plut., *Mor.* 768f.; Ail. var. 8,9).
4. 400: Orestes killed by his guardian Aëropus (Diod. 14,37,6-7), uncertain.
5. 392: Amyntas II (the Little) killed by Derdas (Arist., *Pol.* 1311 b 3f.; Diod. 14,89,2).
6. 368/7: Alexander II killed (maybe) by his brother-in-law Ptolemy of Alorus, son of Amyntas, and his mother Eurydice (Diod. 15,71,1; Plut., *Pelop.* 27; Iust. 7,4,7-7,5,8 (sensational); Marsyas in Athenaeus, *Deip.* 14,629d; FGH 135 F 6).
7. 365: Ptolemy of Alorus killed by his brother-in-law Perdiccas (Diod. 15,77,5; 16,2,4).
8. 359: Archelaus killed by his half-brother, Philipp II (Iust. 7,4,5; 8,3,10; FGH 115 F 29).
9. 336: Philipp II killed by Pausanias (Plut., *Alex.* 10,4; Corn. Nep., *On Kings* 2,1; Iust. 9,6-7; Diod. 16,93-95; 17,2,1).

Sicily

10. 404: Nicoteles the Corinthian killed by the Spartan commander Aristus (Diod. 14,10,3).
11. 367: Dionysius I “killed” by Dionysius II (Corn. Nep., *Dion* 2,4-5; Plut., *Dion* 6,1-3; Diod. 15,73,5).
12. 354: Heraclides killed by Dion (Corn. Nep., *Dion* 6,5-7,1; Plut., *Dion* 53,5-6; Plat., *Epist.* 7; 8).
13. 354: Dion killed by Callippus, the Athenian (Corn. Nep.: Callicrates), and his brother Philostratus (Corn. Nep., *Dion* 8,1-9,6; Plut., *Dion* 54-58; Diod. 16,31,7; Plat., *Epist.* 7; 8).

Thebes

14. 382-379: Androcleidas killed in Athens by Theban agents (Plut., *Pelop.* 6,2).
15. 379/8: Archias and Philippus killed by Charon and Melon. Hypates and Leontidas killed by Pelopidas and Damocleidas (Xen., *Hell.* 5,4,1-12; 19; Plut., *Pelop.* 5-13; Plut., *Ages.* 24,1-2; Plut., *De genio Socratis* 596; Plut., *Mor.* 575-578; 594c ff.; 597b; 597d-f; 619d; 1099a; e; Corn. Nep., *Pelop.* 2-3; Diod. 15,20,2; 15,25-27; Dem. 59,99).

Thessaly

16. 370: Jason, tyrant of Pherai, killed by seven assassins or his brother Polydorus (Xen., *Hell.* 6,4,30-32; Diod. 15,60,5-6).

17. 370: Polydamas and eight eminent citizens of Pharsalos killed by Polyphron (Xen., *Hell.* 6,1,2ff.; 6,4,34).
18. 369: Polydorus killed by his brother Polyphron (Xen., *Hell.* 6,4,33f.; Diod. 15,60,5).
19. 368: Polyphron killed by his nephew Alexander (Xen., *Hell.* 6,4,33ff.; Plut., *Pelop.* 29).
20. 358: Alexander of Pherae killed by his wife, Thebe, and her brothers Lycophron and Tisiphorus (Diod. 16,14,1; Xen., *Hell.* 6,4,35ff.; Plut., *Pelop.* 35; Cic., *De off.* 2,7,25; Val. Max. 9,13, ext. 3).

Other

21. 395: Diagoreians killed by Dorimachus and his friends on Rhodes (Hell. Oxy. 18).
22. 366: Lycomedes of Mantinea killed by Arcadian exiles (Xen., *Hell.* 7,4,2f.).
23. 366: Euphron of Sicyon killed on Theban *acropolis* by Sicyonians (Xen., *Hell.* 7,3,4-6; 7-11).
24. 365/4: Timophanes killed by his brother Timoleon at Corinth (Plut., *Tim.* 3,4ff.; 4,1-8; *praec. ger. reip.* 808a; Diod. 14,46,4; 16,65; Corn. Nep., *Timol.* 1; Aristot., *Pol.* 5,5,1306a 20ff. (= 5,5,9); FGH 566 F 116; FGH 115 F 334; FGH 70 F 221).
25. 363/2: Athenian *proxenos* killed by a certain Antipatrus during defection of Iulis on Ceos from Athens (IG II² 111 = Syll.³ 173 = TOD, *GHI* II 142 = RHODES - OSBORNE, *GHI* 39 = BENGTON, *Staatsverträge* II 289; Isoc. 5,53; Diod. 15,79,1; DÖSSEL, *Beilegung* 147-158).
26. 353/2: Clearchus of Heracleia Pontike killed by Chion and Leonidas, students of Plato's (FGH 434 F 1).