

RATIONAL ACTORS? HIPPIAS AND ARISTOGEITON

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ABSTRACT. This paper seeks to address the extent to which ancient historical actors might be seen to have exhibited what might be described as rational motives. In particular, it examines a number of strategic interactions employed by the Athenian tyrant Hippias in his interactions of Aristogeiton, the protagonist of an unsuccessful *coup d'état*. A secondary objective of this paper is to explore Hippias' reactionary policies following his brother's assassination, namely, whether Hippias' choice of external allies, in the face of possible exile, were irrational as suggested by some ancient authors.

KEYWORDS: Aristogeiton, Hippias, Peisistratid tyranny, Rational Choice.

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to address the extent to which ancient historical actors might be seen to have exhibited what might be described as rational motives. In particular, it examines a number of strategic interactions employed by the Athenian tyrant Hippias in his interactions of Aristogeiton, the protagonist of an unsuccessful *coup d'état*. A secondary objective of this paper is to explore Hippias' reactionary policies following his brother's assassination, namely, whether Hippias' choice of external allies, in the face of possible exile, were irrational as suggested by some ancient authors. In the case of the first objective, I focus exclusively on Aristogeiton's strategy of whether or not to name Hippias' allies as his fellow-conspirators in the aborted *coup d'état* of 514 BC.

My main argument is that Hippias' downfall, and hence the fall of tyranny in ancient Athens, was not due to any incompetence or irrationality on Hippias' part as some ancient scholars have suggested. Instead, his overthrow in 510 BC appears to have resulted, among other things, from a domino-type series of events that began when his younger brother, Hipparchus, became involved in a love-triangle involving a younger man by the name Harmodius and his older lov-

er, Aristogeiton. In particular, Hippias found himself operating under high levels of uncertainty following the assassination of his brother at the hands of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Hippias' ensuing choice of strategies – following Aristogeiton's confession under torture that his conspirators were Hippias' own allies and friends – could have only yielded negative payoffs.

The first part of this paper describes the so-called *expected utility theory*. The second part outlines the historical and political background of the rise of the Peisistratid family, including Hippias' rule. The third part describes the affair between Harmodius and Aristogeiton and their abortive *coup d'état*. The fourth part examines the strategic interaction between Hippias and Aristogeiton from the perspective of rational choice. While the fifth and last part discusses the actions of Hippias and the resulting and aftermath following Aristogeiton's confession during his torture in the hands of Hippias.

2. *The Rise of the Peisistratid Tyranny*

Hippias was the oldest son of Pisistratus. Following the death of his father (ca. 527/8 BC) he became the ruler of Athens. In turn, Pisistratus, the son of Hippocrates, was an Athenian aristocrat who became a tyrant after taking advantage of Athenian socio-political instability in the sixth century. At the risk of misunderstanding it should be pointed out that the word 'tyrant' (*tyrannos*) was a Lydian word meaning 'King'. To be exact, the word was simply associated with oriental wealth and/or a one-man rule, and did not carry any negative connotations (Sealey 1976, 38-9). Nonetheless, the development of tyranny became a recurring phenomenon in archaic Hellenic city-states (Austin 2009). Also noteworthy is the fact that the Greek term *tyrannos* was generally used to describe a usurper. Namely, someone who seized power by force rather than gain it by legal means, such as inheriting a kingship, winning an election, or building a network in the ruling class. Tyrants were not necessarily arbitrary or cruel rulers; some were of the sort we now call "strongmen". Tyrants were especially common in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, when the governance of the Greek polis was still a work in progress, and the progress entailed a lot of conflict.

The tyrant was often from the upper class, but not an insider to the aristocratic establishment – perhaps someone from a less distinguished family or a shirt-tail relation of one of the greater houses. Tyrants were likely to be wealthy, above the needs of earning a living day to day and able to use their wealth and free time to win friends and supporters, intrigue in public affairs, and mount coups.

This was certainly the case with Pisistratus whose initial rise to political power was strenuous; he only succeeded in his third attempt. His first attempt was

foiled by another Athenian aristocrat, Megacles of the Alcmaeonidae *genos* or family/clan. (The term *genos* is not without contestation but it could be described as a family unit with a common linear ancestor, as well as a line of future descendants [Ober 1989, 56-57]; and it involves, among other things, “acknowledgment of reciprocal obligation of help, defence, and redress of injuries” [Grote 1884 as cited in Jones 1999, 242]).

A politically ambitious Pisistratus formed a political alliance with Megacles by marrying Megacles’ daughter. At that point Megacles assisted Pisistratus in his bid for political power. Among other machinations, the two men devised a plan to parade an unusually tall, beautiful woman as the goddess Athena and proclaim that Pisistratus had her support (Hdt. 1.60.4).¹ Leaving aside the question of whether the Athenians were fooled or simply engaging in a collective ritual expressing civic unity (Connor 1987; Forsdyke 2005), the fact remains that their plan worked – Pisistratus was reinstated.

However, as the marriage failed so did the political alliance.² Soon afterwards Pisistratus was forced into exile and fled to the city-state of Eretria. Following deliberations with his sons he pursued the political strategy articulated by his oldest son, Hippias (Hdt. 1.61.3). That strategy entailed seeking aid from other city-states in the form of previously uncollected debts or donations in terms of money and warriors. Following 10 years of preparation, the Peisistratid family marched successfully into Athens (Hdt. 1.61.1-1.64.1). Shortly after they cemented their political hold by taking hostages the sons of their political opponents and by exiling Meg-

¹ Original passage: “There was in the Paeonian deme (local division) a woman called Phya, three fingers short of six feet, four inches in height, and otherwise, too, well-formed. This woman they [Megacles and Pisistratus] equipped in full armor and put in a chariot, giving her all the paraphernalia to make the most impressive spectacle, and so drove into the city; heralds ran before them, and when they came into town proclaimed as they were instructed: “Athenians, give a hearty welcome to Pisistratus, whom Athena herself honors above all men and is bringing back to her own acropolis.” So the heralds went about proclaiming this; and immediately the report spread in the demes that Athena was bringing Pisistratus back, and the townsfolk, believing that the woman was the goddess herself, worshipped this human creature and welcomed Pisistratus” (Hdt. 1.60.4).

² Herodotus writes that one potential reason that this marriage failed was because Pisistratus already had young sons and did not wish to have any other children with his new wife because her family was under a curse (for the killing of another aristocrat who had also sought to become an Athenian tyrant). As such, Pisistratus had “wrongful intercourse” (*ou kata nomon*) with his newly-wed wife (Hdt 1.61). According to Herodotus, “At first the woman hid the matter” but “afterwards she told her mother” and the mother told her husband” who became enraged and broke the political alliance (*ibid*).

acles and the Alcmaeonidae family from Athens. Pisistratus remained in power for nineteen years until his death (*Ath. Pol.* 17.1).³

During that time, Pisistratus was regarded as a benevolent tyrant because he “gave the multitude no trouble during his rule, but always worked for peace and safeguarded tranquillity; so that men were often to be heard saying that the tyranny of Peisistratus was the Golden Age of Cronos...” (*Ath. Pol.* 16.7). Josiah Ober is of the mind that Pisistratus’ inclusion in Aristotle’s⁴ list of democratic champions stems from his interpretation of “Athenian political history as the product of an ongoing struggle between the mass of citizens and the elite” (1998, 354).

In that struggle, Herodotus tells us that Pisistratus instituted many reforms that favoured the lower classes. This included lowering their taxes; using surplus money to combat Athenian urban poverty; free loans for peasants; and gifting the land of exiled nobles to peasants (thereby ensuring the peasants’ loyalty while simultaneously weakening the strength of his political opponents) (Hdt 1.64). Indeed, it was during Pisistratus’ regime that the success of agrarianism accelerated in Athens (Ober 2000).

In addition, Pisistratus retained Solon’s constitution, greatly beautified Athens by building temples and other public buildings, and established various religious festivals including the Dionysian festival where Athenian drama first made its appearance. An indirect consequence of Pisistratus’ policies was the fostering of a “closer ideological identification” of the citizenry as a whole with the Athenian state that led for the first time to a “civilian self-consciousness of the Athenian demos” (Ober 1998, 66-67). Pisistratus and his sons made sure that the highest offices were given to family members and friends leading Herodotus (1.56) and Thucydides (6.54) to argue that during the Peisistratid regime family interests and state policies went hand in hand. As a result of the above-mentioned populist policies, Pisistratus’ son, Hippias, inherited a staple political situation.

While some scholars such as (Ehrenberg 1973, 88) have argued that Hippias “was a lesser man than his father”, I would argue that we should not underestimate Hippias’ political capabilities. For example, starting with his involvement in the Eretria council (Hdt. 1.62) and nineteen years by the side of his father in Athens (*Ath. Pol.* 17.2), Hippias had 29 years of accumulated political experience. To be sure, Hippias was described as “statesmanlike and wise by nature” (*Ath. Pol.* 18.1). This characterization however stands in sharp contrast to Hippias’ younger

³ It should be noted that Aristotle was thought to be the author of *Athenaion Politeia* (Constitution of the Athenians). This is no longer the case with modern scholarship. As such, and to avoid confusion all references to this text will be simply as ‘*Athenaion Politeia*’.

⁴ Please note footnote three.

brother, Hipparchus, who was described as someone who was “fond of amusement and love-making” (ibid).

3. *The Love Triangle: Harmodius, Aristogeiton and Hipparchus*

According to Thucydides the strife began when Hippias’ younger brother, Hipparchus, came to desire a young, beautiful Athenian aristocrat by the name of Harmodius who was “in the flower of his youth” (6.53-4). Hipparchus’ infatuation with Harmodius is of importance to our discussion because it was this ill-fated affair that unleashed a chain of events that led to Aristogeiton’s death and, shortly thereafter, to the indirect downfall of Hippias.

According to various accounts Hipparchus tried to seduce Harmodius but Harmodius was already loved by another man, Aristogeiton. Adhering to the ideal of *paidika* (young love), Harmodius ignored the obvious benefits that would have ensued from taking the tyrant’s brother as a lover and remained faithful to Aristogeiton despite a second seduction attempt by Hippias’ brother. (For those unfamiliar with the nature of ancient Hellenic male homosexual relationships, in its ideal form it was an erotic, mentoring, intergenerational relationship between a man called the *erastēs* (lover) and a worthy adolescent youth called the *eromenos* (beloved) [Dover, 1997; Skinner 2013]).

Upon being told of Hipparchus’ seduction attempts and “being very much in love” with Harmodius, Aristogeiton was greatly upset (Thuc. 6.54). He became fearful that Hipparchus would use force to take Harmodius and begun “as much as his condition would permit” a plot to overthrow the tyranny (ibid). Despite his ability to use force on Harmodius, Hipparchus refrained. Instead, he sought revenge by public insulting Harmodius’ young sister by excluding her from a religious procession on the grounds that she was not worthy (ibid).

The nature of Hipparchus’ insult to Harmodius has been interpreted by contemporary scholars in two ways. The first interpretation holds that the insult was meant to imply that Harmodius’ family was not ‘Athenian’ or ‘prestigious’ enough. The second interpretation holds that the insult was of a sexual nature; the sister was not a virgin. While both insults were grave, the second insult demanded retribution, usually by the brother of the dishonoured girl (Holt 2000; Lavelle 1986). Hence, it would appear that it was a combination of Harmodius’ wounded pride and Aristogeiton’s persistent fear of losing his young lover that drove the pair to overthrow the Peisistratids and not any political considerations.⁵

⁵ Please note that Thucydides claims that Hipparchus was the person involved in the love triangle. However, *Athenaion Politeia* claims that it was Hegesistratos, a paternal

Thucydides writes that other than the two lovers there were not many other conspirators in the plot for security reasons. Harmodius and Aristogeiton plotted to overthrow Hippias at the festival of Panathenaea. The *coup d'état* went horribly wrong when Harmodius and Aristogeiton saw a fellow-conspirator talking in a friendly manner to Hippias. They mistakenly assumed that their fellow-conspirator was betraying them. At that point they became frightened and fled away from Hippias seeking instead Hipparchus and upon seeing him, “immediately fell upon him without a thought of their safety” (Thuc. 6.56-7). Harmodius was immediately killed while Aristogeiton escaped only to be arrested soon afterwards. This led Thucydides to conclude that Harmodius and Aristogeiton’s conspiracy failed as a result of “reckless action” resulting from a “momentary failure of nerve” (ibid).

Thucydides claims that Harmodius and Aristogeiton mistakenly assumed that there would be a spontaneous uprising. Namely, they believed that bystanders, upon seeing “even a few people ready to take the risk” would join in on the spur of the moment in order to regain their liberty (ibid). Leaving aside the claim that citizens were not allowed carrying arms at the Panathenaic Festival (*Ath. Pol.* 19.5),⁶ was this assumption realistic or based on unfounded hope? If there was a general feeling of discontent amongst the general population with Hippias’ rule one could argue that their assumption was valid. However, evidence suggests otherwise. To begin, there was: 1) Hippias’ popularity (partly inherited from his father); 2) his show of public piety via the observance of all proper religious sacrifices; 3) respect for past laws, and 4) his low taxation rates which were only a twentieth of one’s income (Sealey 1976). In addition, Thucydides claims that Hippias “never made it difficult for anyone to approach him” (6.57). If true, this type of behavior is not indicative of a political leader afraid or suspicious of his subjects. Perhaps Harmodius and Aristogeiton’s *coup d'état* was an ill-prepared plan by a pair of lovers whose rational judgment was clouded by their emotions as Thucydides claims (6.59).

4. Hippias and Aristogeiton

Herodotus writes that following the assassination of his brother Hipparchus, Hippias became irrational, even “unstable” (1.58). It is telling that both Herodotus

half-brother of Hippias and Hipparchus. According to the same source, upon failing to possess Harmodius, Hegesistratos proceeded to insult him by calling him “effeminate” (*Ath. Pol.* 17. 3). That being said, this discrepancy does not effect the outcome of our analysis – the fact remains that one of Hippias’ brothers insulted Harmodius.

⁶ The custom of carrying arms at this religious festival was established at a later day under democracy (*Ath. Pol.* 19.5).

and Thucydides argue that Hippias “overreacted” to the abortive plot that his troops managed to easily suppress.

Hippias’ overreaction manifested itself in two policies. First, he adapted suppression tactics in the form of political prosecutions. Second, he struck an alliance with the tyrant of Lampsacus in Asia Minor (Hdt. 1.59; Thuc. 6.55). In respect to the second point, it is suggested that while Hippias was persecuting his opponents he also began to look for a possible place of refuge in the case of a revolution. Marrying his only daughter, Archedice, to the son of the tyrant Hippocles who ruled Lampsacus ensured such a refuge. The fact that Hippocles was said to have great influence with the Persian King Darius was even of a greater appeal (6.59).

Turning our attention to the argument that Hippias became irrational, I would argue that a more nuanced interpretation is needed. For instance, is it possible that Hippias’ actions were an *optimal response* to the behaviour of the other political actors under circumstances of *incomplete information* and *uncertainty*. In defense of my argument I begin by addressing the first position, namely, that Hippias undertook excessive political prosecutions. This, I would argue, is not the case when one considers the following two points:

- A) The family origins of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, and
- B) Aristogeiton’s confessions under torture

On point A, both Harmodius and Aristogeiton were members of the Gephyraei *genos* (family). This meant that the entire Gephyraei family was now suspect in the eyes of Hippias. Worse, the Gephyraei family had migrated to Athens from the city-state of Eretria and had kept close relations with their place of origin (Hdt 5.57.1). The Peisistratid *genos* also had strong ties to Eretria – their place of exile during Peisistratus’ second exile – but their ties were weaker. Put differently, the city of Eretria was no longer a friendly territory for Hippias’ family (Sealy 1976).

On point B, Aristogeiton’s confessions under torture, the evidence is vague but intriguing. It would appear that Aristogeiton was engaging in a strategic ‘confession game’ with Hippias. For example, we know that Hippias begun torturing Aristogeiton for the names of the plot conspirators. Assuming that Aristogeiton wanted to take revenge his optimal response would have been to name Hippias’ allies as his fellow conspirators *regardless* of their involvement.

Aristogeiton also had the option of not naming anyone. However, this does not appear as viable option. To explain, Aristogeiton was no doubt aware that he could be held imprisoned. As a matter of fact, we know that Hippias had kept Aristogeiton alive and under torture for considerable time. By not confessing Aristogeiton was gaining nothing but pain.

Back to our analysis, Aristogeiton had two strategies:

- 1) To name non-Hippias allies as his fellow conspirators
- 2) To name Hippias' allies as his fellow conspirators

Hippias also had two strategies:

- 3) To believe Aristogeiton
- 4) Not to believe Aristogeiton

Aristogeiton's highest payoff is whereby he names as his fellow-conspirators Hippias' allies, and Hippias believes him thereby killing his own political allies. Aristogeiton's least payoff is whereby he names as his conspirators people who are not allies of Hippias with Hippias believing him. Hippias' highest payoff is whereby Aristogeiton does not name his [Hippias] allies as conspirators and he [Hippias] believes him. Hippias worst-case payoff would be whereby Aristogeiton names Hippias' allies as the conspirators and Hippias believes him.

In the case where Aristogeiton names Hippias' allies as his fellow conspirators but Hippias does not believe him leads to a stalemate. Interestingly enough *Athenaion Politeia* provides us with evidence that a 'confession game' was possibly played out between Aristogeiton and Hippias. He writes:

According to the account of people of popular (*dēmotikoi*) tendencies Aristogeiton accused the tyrant's friends for the purpose of making his captors commit an impiety and weaken away themselves at the same time by making away with men who were innocent and their own friends... (18. 5-6).

The following could be argued from the perspective of a prudent and logical perspective. If his allies were indeed innocent, by killing them Hippias fatally weakened his regime (recall that the Peisistratids gave the highest posts to family members and friends).

But what if Hippias' allies were really guilty? Surely, one might argue, Hippias 'benefited' by getting rid of traitorous allies. I would argue in the negative. Overall, Hippias was faced with a Pyrrhic victory. By killing his allies (i) he still weakened his regime by killing the people holding high posts, (ii) the sheer act of killing fellow Athenians, no doubt, diminished his popularity, and (iii) with the protagonists of the revolution dead (e.g., Harmodius and Aristogeiton) the surviving conspirators would have aborted any future revolutionary plans.

The reader might raise an additional objection at this stage. Namely, if Hippias' friends were 'real conspirators' would Aristogeiton not be reluctant in revealing their names in the hopes of a second *coup d'état*? In response I would argue that given the fact that Aristogeiton was operating under conditions of *uncertainty* (there were no guaranties that the conspirators would undertake a second *coup d'état*) his optimum strategy was to name Hippias' allies as his fellow-conspirators.

We know that Hippias' rule became increasingly cruel and hard to bear – no doubt as a result of Aristogeiton's confessions. The same cruelty and paranoia weakened his regime and left him vulnerable to his political opponents – fellow Athenian aristocrats (especially Cleisthenes, son of Megacles) who eventually forced him into exile.

Returning to Aristogeiton, was he lying or saying the truth when he accused Hippias' friends of conspiracy? Any answer would have to be aporetic. A more educated question would be to ask whether Aristogeiton was capable of engaging in a 'confession game' with Hippias. According to the following passage, he was.

Finally, as do what he [Aristogeiton] would he was unable to die, he offered to give information against many more, and induced Hippias to give him his right hand as a pledge of good faith, and when he [Hippias] grasped it he [Aristogeiton] taunted him with giving his hand to his brother's murderer, and so enraged Hippias that in his anger he could not control himself but drew his dagger and made away with him (*Ath. Pol.* 18. 6).

Leaving aside the observation that Aristogeiton appears to have commanded greater self-control than Hippias, the above testifies to the notion that Aristogeiton had the incentive and capability to engage in a 'confession game' with Hippias.

5. *The Aftermath*

In 510 BC Hippias was driven away from Athens. His overthrow, however, was not the result of any 'popular uprising' (as Harmodius and Aristogeiton had hoped), but the result of the Spartan King Cleomenes I. The Spartans intervened in the domestic affairs of Athens under the urging of the Delphic Oracle (Lintott 2014). When it turned out that the Delphic Oracle had been 'compromised' by Athenian opponents of Hippias (e.g., the Alcmaeonids) the Spartans were furious (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, on a pragmatic level the Spartans "realized that the position of the Peisistratidai was becoming untenable after the assassination of Hipparchus and the guerilla warfare of the Alkmeonidai" (Lintott 2014, 85).

At the time of Hippias, the Alcmaeonid family was headed by Cleisthenes, the son of Megacles (i.e., Pisistratus' old nemesis) who eventually replaced Hippias at the political leader of Athens. Not without significance, Herodotus would go on and attribute to Cleisthenes the disposal of the Peisistratid tyranny while at the same time downplaying the role of Harmodious and Aristogeiton. He writes,

...it was by their devising [Alcmaeonid family] that the sons of Pisistratus were deposed from their despotism (*turannēuontas*). Thus in my judgment it was they who freed Athens much more than did Harmodius and Aristogeiton; for these did but enrage the rest of Pisistratus' kin by killing Hipparchus, and did nought to end the rule of the rest of them; but the Alcmeonid did most plainly set their country free (*Htd.* 6.123).

Herodotus' commentary paves the way for us to turn our attention to Cleisthenes' actions from the perspective of *rational choice*. To begin, Cleisthenes stemmed to gain considerable political benefits by advocating the view that Harmodius and Aristogeiton were 'tyrant-killers.' Their idealization as 'tyrant-killers' was helpful in casting the Peisistratids in a negative light. This was crucial in the early stages of Cleisthenes' reign because of: (1) The high probability that Hippias would reattempt to regain Athens (much the same way his father, Peisistratus had done under the advice of Hippias); and (2) The loss of Spartan allies due to the debacle of the Delphic Oracle, combined with the loss of another strategic partnership with Isagoras, a fellow Athenian aristocrat (Cartledge 1993). In regard to the first point, we know that Hippias did indeed invade Athens in 480 BC with the help of the Persians, his new-found allies. In regard to the second point, after the loss of Isagoras and his Spartan allies, Cleisthenes needed the help of the Athenian 'demos'.

It is unclear to what extent Cleisthenes played an active role in encouraging the myth of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. We know that bronze statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton were commissioned in Athens (Lucian, *De Parasito*, 48). We also know that those statues were commissioned during Cleisthenes' rule (Munn 2000). Considering the fact that prior to this time only mythological figures were afforded statues, this was a great honour (Taylor 1991). Moreover, the fact that these statues were enacted in the Athenian Agora, the locus of political life, this makes them the first Athenian "political monuments" (Hölscher 2008, 300). Interestingly enough when Hippias briefly overtook Athens (accompanied by the Persians) the statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton were removed and taken to Susa, Persia. While in all likelihood these were looted as war trophies by the Persians, there is a small possibility that they were removed by Hippias?

Apart from the statues, we know that Harmodius and Aristogeiton were buried in a public tomb at the Ceramicus – another unusual, high honour (Pausanias 1.29.15). Furthermore, the Athenians began conducting yearly memorials in the form of sacrifices on their tombs (ibid). Drinking songs were also composed and sung in their honour during symposia, to the point where one's exclusion from them was a sign of non-friendship in 425 BC (ibid). Additionally, according to the orator Hypereides (2.3) it became illegal to sing songs which disparaged the pair in any manner (Pownall 2013, 342). Last but not least, laws were enacted providing for the welfare of Harmodius and Aristogeiton's descendants. For example, Aristogeiton's poor, unmarried granddaughter was given an estate for a dowry and was married to a well-born Athenian citizen (Plut. *Arist.* 27.4). The above has led to the observation that the Athenian state "went to considerable lengths not

just to perpetuate the memory of Harmodius and Aristogeiton but also to stipulated exactly how they should be remembered” (Anderson 2003, 202).

Some authors suggest that the ‘myth’ of Harmodius and Aristogeiton became at some point the *foci* of an ideological battle between two political systems. In that battle Cleisthenes won in real and ideological terms (Ober 1998). After the fall of Hippias, Cleisthenes and the Alcmaeonid, were labelled as *misoturannoí* (tyrant-haters) (Hdt. 5.124). (This, despite the fact that Cleisthenes’ maternal grandfather was the tyrant of Sicyon, another Greek city-state).

Cleisthenes cemented his political hold by enacting a series of democratic reforms that greatly favoured the majority of non-aristocratic citizens to the detriment of the (minority) elites. Apart from being Cleisthenes’ ‘gift’ to the non-aristocratic Athenians, the same reforms doomed any political hopes the Peisistratids might have had for the future.

While not directly related to our topic, something more should be said about the apotheosis of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. As already mentioned, later-day popular tradition depicted Harmodius and Aristogeiton as altruistic democrat-lovers seeking to overthrow an undemocratic regime (Taylor 1991). This did not sit to well with Thucydides who saw the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton as an example of faulty historical knowledge by his fellow Athenians insofar as they were “no better than other people at producing accurate information about their own dictators and the facts of their own history” (*Thuc.* 6. 54). Some authors have countered that while Harmodius and Aristogeiton unwittingly and undeservingly became the founding cult-heroes of Athenian democracy this was not without good reason (Taylor 1991, 25). To be exact, as Athens became democratic the Athenians had to invent new “symbolic heroes” to celebrate this new political phase (*ibid.*). In this interpretation, traditional Athenian heroes the likes of King Theseus could no longer serve as adequate images to embody the ideals of the new political order where all Athenian (male) citizens were equal (*ibid.*). Alternative, and equally plausible, arguments suggest that the Alcmaeonid were associated at different times with both the Persians and the Spartans (Thomas 1989, 247; Pownall 2013, 340) and hence were ill-suited as democratic heroes.

Does that mean that Thucydides failed to recognize that the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton was a deliberate misconstruction by later democratic actors? Not really according to Ober (1998, 54) who claims that by undervaluing Harmodius and Aristogeiton’s myth Thucydides was undermining the foundation myth of democracy and depriving popular rule of one part of its “usable part”. Another, more generous interpretation, holds that while Thucydides “admired the Pisistratids for preserving Athenian traditions” he found tyranny unaccepta-

ble because tyranny occurs “when traditional law is abrogated” (Woodruff 1993, xxvi n. 11).

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