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Power and Opposition in the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean World

edited by Mait Kõiv and Vladimir Sazonov

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Introduction

Mait KÕIV, Vladimir SAZONOV

Power building and maintenance of power, both inside political communities and between them, has been a central issue in human society, and understanding this is crucial for comprehending the functioning of any socio-political or regional unit. Concentration of power in to the hands of a ruling elite can produce statehood, which can be conceptualised as a product of gradual accumulation and monopolisation of physical (i.e. predominantly military), economic, social and ideological power by the rulers.[1] Comparable processes can lead to the formation of large centrally controlled political units – hegemonical systems where a dominating polity, often but not universally ruled by a narrow elite, has established its control over a large surrounding area.

The question would be how this accumulation and monopolisation of power was attained and maintained, i.e. by which means did the rulers achieve legitimation and assure the compliance of the population. As the actual power-holders usually form a tiny minority, we must ask what made the others comply, often perhaps at the expense of their own interests and welfare. What means did the power-holders (leaders, rulers, monarchs) have for building up, enhancing, and maintaining their position and identity? Why and on what conditions were the people loyal to them, either the other members of elite, or the commoners constituting the majority of population? And why did the rulers sometimes fail in assuring compliance? What were the chances for successful opposition? And under what conditions did this lead to changes in social or political structure instead of simply replacing one ruler or ruling group by another? These problems involve social framework and political institutions, the relations between centre and periphery, and moral code and power ideology closely tied to religion.[2]

Power can be attained and maintained differently, and rulers can use different strategies. States have been described as ‘states of mind’, meaning an establishment of ideologies viewing the rulers as the guarantors of earthly law and order and communicating with the gods for ensuring the continuity of the cosmos. The rulers can present themselves as caretakers of their subjects, and promote an ideology regarding their power as the divinely set norm.[3] But they must also be able to use force for assuring compliance, and for all these

[1] MANN 1986, 22-27; DONLAN 1997.

[2] See e.g., HRŮŠA 2015.

[3] YOFFEE 2005; TRIGGER 2003; CLAESSEN–SKALNIK 1978.

purposes they need an adequately funded power base: a control of resources enabling to reward the loyal subjects and to maintain physical force.[4] Scholars have variably emphasised the significance of a military factor and the control of strategical resources for power building,[5] the role of the privileged access to prestigious goods for creating symbolic capital,[6] the formative role of ideologies,[7] including royal ideology,[8] the importance of collective action for assuring the compliance of the subjects, and the significance of market-based economies for enhancing human cooperation.[9] An interplay of these factors allows the development of different kinds of socio-political organisation and strategies of power building, including the agrarian / 'archaic' / agro-literate states on the one hand and city-states on the other,[10] and both monarchic and collective governments.[11]

The solutions to these problems, discussed in the articles in the present volume, are bound to have been different in the variety of the early states and societies developing in the Near East and Mediterranean region. The collection is based on the papers given during the international conference 'Power and (Op)position in the Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean World' **1–3 June 2018 in Tartu,** approaching power relations in the communities from almost the whole of this area in Antiquity: from the Early Bronze Age Mesopotamia (III millennium BC) to Greece and Sicily during the Classical period (5.–4. centuries BC).

The collection begins with three articles discussing the cases of regional power building in the Bronze Age Near East. **Walter Sommerfeld** proposes a meticulous analysis of the demographic evidence for the Early Dynastic and Sargonid Mesopotamia to specify the impact of the Akkadian rulers' power building strategies on the ethnic situation and political structure of the region. The next two contributions are dedicated to the Egyptian hegemony and its impacts in the Levant during the late Bronze Age. **Giulia Tucci** discusses the character of the Egyptian domination, focusing on the use of religion for confirming the foreign reign and reconciling the locals with it. **Andres Nõmmik** analyses the evidence for the military, political and economic aspects of Egyptian power in the region and discusses the ways the strategies of domination could have enhanced the crisis during the following collapse.

The next three articles are dedicated to the ways of confirming and contesting power by Hittite kings and their opponents. **Vladimir Shelestin** proposes a case study of possible

[4] HAAS 1982, 172-182; EARLE 2002, 60-64; SCHRAKAMP 2017.

[5] CARNEIRO 1970; 1981.

[6] RENFREW 1972; EARLE 2002.

[7] CLAESSEN–OOSTEN 1996; TRIGGER 2003; YOFFEE 2005.

[8] MITCHELL–MELVILLE 2013; SAHLINS–GRAEBER 2017; SELZ 1998; PONGRATZ-LEISTEN 2015; PONGRATZ-LEISTEN 2019; POSTGATE 1995.

[9] BLANTON–FARGHER 2008; 2016.

[10] MORRIS 1997; TRIGGER 2003.

[11] FLAIG 2013; GLASSMAN 2017.

justification of opposition against Ḫattušili I by manipulating a mythological text. **Vladimir Sazonov and Mait Kõiv** describe the different ways of justifying the usurpations of royal power, and dealing with their consequences, used by the kings Telepinu, Šuppiluliuma I, and Ḫattušili III. **Siim Mõttus** analyses the principles of royal succession in the Hittite New Kingdom, pointing out the very limited impact that the proclamation of Telepinu ostensibly regulating this actually had in practice.

The collection continues with discussion concerning the uses and perception of monarchic power among the Greeks during the Archaic and Classical periods. **Lynette Mitchell** explores the necessity for charismatic power of the Greek monarchs. She focuses on, mainly, the imagological strategies of the Deinomenid rulers in Sicily and explains the variable success of the successively reigning brothers Gelon and Hieron in their use of power politics. **Luca Macale** discusses the descriptions of Eastern kingship by the Classical Greek historians, demonstrating how the remoteness and inapproachability ascribed to these kings was perceived as both their strength and weakness. If Mitchell and Macale pay attention above all to the image of sole rule then the two following articles focus rather on the material resources at the rulers' disposal. **Priit-Hendrik Kaldma** shows how increasing scarcity of resources led to the growing taxation and oppression by the Athenian tyrant Hippias, contributing to the fall of his power. **Mait Kõiv** compares the power politics of the Kypselid tyrants in Archaic Corinth to the monarchies of the small Iron Age Levantine states, and views the rulers' difficulties in resource control in the relatively egalitarian Greek poleis as a principal reason for the instability and eventual failure of monarchy in Archaic Greece.

The volume terminates with two articles dedicated to power politics in the republican governed poleis in Classical Greece. **Eleni Tzovla**, discussing the cynical use of rhetoric of justice by the Athenians for subjugating smaller states, as described in the 'Melian dialogue' in the History of Thukydides, shows how the historian presented this as the highpoint of the Athenian imperialistic attitude, foreshadowing the subsequent disaster. The last article by **Salvatore Tufano** analyses in detail the different ancient accounts concerning the charges brought against the Theban leaders Epameinondas and Pelopidas in connection to their Peloponnesian campaigns, comparing this to the 'show trials' from recent history, and shows how the merits of the leaders allowed them to counter the accusations with relative success.

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