

Guardianship and Regnal Politics

Discussion of the Papers
of K. Buraselis and A. Mardirossian

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ABSTRACT

Compared here are two distinct cases of dynastic guardianship, from Argead and Hellenistic Macedonia and from ancient and early medieval Armenia. The Armenian institution of dayekut'iwn nurtured the foundling princes of extinguished clans, effectively reproducing an equilibrium of power between kings and nobles. The Macedonian practice of appointing a royal epitropos structured succession, taking on added significance after 200 B.C.E. Alternative Macedonian models of kingship also cast guardianship as a metaphor for non-charismatic monarchy.

Presented here are two views of guardianship as a dynastic strategy deployed by the ancient Armenian and Macedonian monarchies at distinctly different stages of development. The juxtaposition of the Armenian and Macedonian cases highlights divergent trajectories in state formation among monarchies participating in what we call the Hellenistic world, which sat poised between the Roman Mediterranean and ancient Iran. The clans, or princely houses (*išxan* or *naxarar*), of Arsacid Armenia used guardianship to strengthen themselves against the depredations of a centralizing monarchy, demonstrating a form of elite solidarity that Philip II of Macedon successfully dissolved in his domain. In Philip II's late Argead kingdom, Macedonian (and likely Thracian nobles) were rallying around a Pan-Macedonian identity, seated comfortably on sympotic couches around the banqueting halls of the palaces of Pella.¹ By contrast, the ancient Armenian centralizing monarchy never pulled off such a feat, and the clans survived into the medieval Abbasid period.

For the Armenian institution of *dayekut'iwn*, we possess a rich, etiological tale in the Buzandara epic. Two generals of the Mamikonean clan, Artawazad and Vasak, at the behest of King Aršak II (350-368), obliterate the clans of Rštuni and Arcruni. Yet, the generals ensure the survival of their own clans, and so it seems, of their entire social stratum, by rescuing a sole fledgling dynast from each of the extinguished clans and incorporating them into their own houses. Interestingly enough, King Aršak II, who ordered the massacre, had once been the ward of his Mamikonean generals Artawazad and Vasak! The clans of Rštuni and Arcruni are preserved by the same guardianship that binds the ever-powerful Mamikoneans to the Arsacid royal house. It is an awkward embrace, but the centrifugal effects of the *dayekut'iwn* guardianship are patent. By whatever strategies they employed, the noble houses of ancient Armenia seem to have been resilient in the face of centralizing power.

The interference of outside Roman, Byzantine, and Persian interests must have strengthened their position, but so did the centripetal tendencies of the *dayekut'iwn* guardianship. The institution guarded the rights of the legally incapacitated all too well. Far more than seems to have been the case in Macedonian contexts, the future legal capacity of the ward was respected. As long as the heir survived, the guardian could not alienate the canton (*gawar*) from the control of its ancestral «owners». The consolidation of territory was impeded, and many clans held out. It seems that Justinian, too, was still trying to break their power, at least this is how Nicholas Adontz, in the classic history of Armenia in that period, understood Justinian's edict "Concerning the Or-

¹ Strabo echoes the discontents of Macedonian ethnogenesis: οἱ μὲν ἐκόντες οἱ δ' ἄκοντες, μέρη καθέσταντο...Ὀρέσται δὲ καὶ Πελαγόνες καὶ Ἑλιμιῶται Μακεδόνων (9.5.11).

der of Inheritance among the Armenians”, which has been seen to strengthen female rights of inheritance in an effort to fragment these great households.²

Both papers depict the translation of an institution of private law into the royal sphere. What exactly was borrowed and from where? And whatever was borrowed, how was it transformed in its new environment? If we take the example of Classical Macedonia, all the cases adduced down to the death of Alexander the Great, can we actually speak of a formal institution of *epitropeia*? Fine-grained institutional analysis of royal politics in Argead Macedonia is notoriously difficult, and Buraselis judiciously leaves aside the vexing question of the «constitutionality» of Macedonian kingship, but to press the sources further, in whose eyes were royals like Aeropos and the future Philip II *epitropoi*? Are our sources leading us into anachronism or guilty of inappropriately importing a *terminus technicus* from Athenian law? It seems significant that neither Perdikkas nor Krateros, the guardians of Alexander’s would-be heirs, is ever called an *epitropos*. Indeed, little of the spirit of Athenian *epitropeia* is preserved in these cases. We replace this pervasive suspicion of the guardian who would usurp the rights of his ward with guardianship as a stepping stone to legitimate kingship. Multiple paths to legitimate kingship existed in Macedonia, and competent guardianship counted as one of them. Might it be that in some royal contexts, *epitropeia* should be understood as a kind of metaphor according to which figures of the court and royal family modeled their behavior, and according to which a person on the street made sense of it all?

Despite the hazards of entering into the traditions surrounding the death of Alexander the Great, the review of his case is salutary, the failed attempt to institute a collective guardianship, since the model of Alexander, on so many levels, permeates later performance of Hellenistic kingship. Indeed, collective guardianship later reemerges as a response to the challenge of maintaining continuity through succession, both in administering complex bureaucracies and navigating high-stakes foreign relations, without a mature king. The problem, full-blown, is on display in Polybius’ account of the succession crisis of Ptolemy V Epiphanes. Why does collective guardianship come to the fore from ca. 200 BCE, both in the Ptolemaic and Seleukid kingdoms? Should we see here, at last, the classical Athenian model entering Hellenistic royal culture, reaching the court of Alexandria along with other fourth-century Athenian institutions? Or rather, is this a reaction to the complexities of dynastic succession in heterogeneous, confederative kingdoms? That the machinery of governance in Ptolemaic Egypt required a different kind of operator than that of Argead Macedonia is evident in the minting activity of a guardian like

² ADONTZ 1970, 142-154.

Sosibios II – Alorites, by contrast, had not coined. It need not be either/or. But in a royal context, behind the figure of various guardians may lie different interests, different bases of power. One recalls here that in the case of Alexander’s death, Perdikkas is backed by the Companion Cavalry, Krateros, by the infantry. In the case of Ptolemy V, it is noteworthy that the soldier-turned-*epitropos* Tlepolemos survives the role of guardian and returns to his home in Lycia where, we assume, he still had a constituency.

Finally, Buraselis makes a series of fascinating connections, whereby he places guardianship at the center of the normative ideal of Hellenistic kingship. He does this by leading us through two different definitions of *basileia* (kingdom or kingship) in the 10th-century Byzantine lexicon the Suda, focusing on the Suda’s second entry for this term, which is almost universally ignored in scholarly discussions of Hellenistic kingship – with no apparent philological justification. By the first definition, the monarch staked his right to rule on achievements and ability in war and diplomacy – the so-called personal monarchy; by the second, Buraselis suggests, the king is likened to the guardian of his kingdom. The kingdom is conceived of as public property, the people as the ward. One could call this non-charismatic monarchy. Here, the king is the slave steward of his master’s – that is, his subjects’ – property, in the conceit of the story of Aelian about the philosophically minded king Antigonos Gonatas.

Another reading of the Suda might find a strong conceptual distinction between the king’s property and public property. “Since kingship entails the possession of *ta koina* [“the commons” or common funds], but the public’s property does not belong to the monarchy, it follows that one must detest as the excesses of a tyrant royal interventions made with force and arrogance, but one must honor like a solemn duty requests for contributions made persuasively and humanely” (ὅτι ἡ βασιλεία κτήμα τῶν κοινῶν, ἀλλ’ οὐ τὰ δημόσια τῆς βασιλείας κτήματα. διὸ τὰς ἐξ ἀνάγκης καὶ μεθ’ ὕβρεως εἰσπράξεις ὥσπερ τυραννικὰς ἀκολασίας μισεῖν δεῖ, τὰς δὲ σὺν λόγῳ καὶ φιλανθρωπία τῶν εἰσφορῶν ἀπαιτήσεις ὥσπερ κηδεμονίαν τιμᾶν). The role of the guardian in the text seems to be assumed by the public, which solemnly answers the king’s call like an obligation of *kêdemonia*.

The existence of a category of public property beyond both the king’s property and his guardianship appears to have been neatly inscribed, for example, on the roof tiles recovered in the excavations of the Macedonian capital Pella.³ While certain roof tiles were marked “of Pella” (ΠΕΛΛΗΣ), others were tagged “of the king” (ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΟΣ), implying a clear distinction in property rights that clashes with any an all-encompassing notion of royal guardianship.

³ AKAMATIS 2011, 402.

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