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## The Assassination of Archelaus and the Significance of the Macedonian Royal Hunt

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**ABSTRACT** Aristotle is the best extant source for the death of Archelaus during a Royal Hunt. He clearly indicates that Archelaus was murdered by Crataeas who, along with two co-conspirators, Hellanocrates of Larissa and Decamnichus, were incited to their plot by perceived injustices at the hand of the king. This article argues that in lieu of a widely agreed upon constitution in Argead Macedonia, a king's legitimacy was based largely (if not solely) on the perception that he was the font of justice, and by his appearance in sacred rituals—one of which was the royal hunt—which religiously validated his right to rule. Thus, this murder was carefully timed by the conspirators to reject the legitimacy of Archelaus for not dispensing “correct” justice in their respective cases. As always personal animosities get roiled into politics in Argead Macedonia.

**KEYWORDS** Archelaus, Crataeas, Hellanocrates, Decamnichus, Royal Hunt, Justice, Euripides.

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I have argued elsewhere in several articles (and will not repeat here) my understanding that the Argead kings were not elected by any constitutional body and that they were not formally limited by any group, however constituted<sup>1</sup>. This is a position which by no means is universally accepted among Macedonian scholars, but it should be noted that I have a lot of company in regard to Macedonian political customs<sup>2</sup>. Regardless, my position has been that although in a sense the Argead kings —being living Heroes and enveloped in the charisma of their family— were absolute in theory, no Argead king lived in “theory”<sup>3</sup>. No absolute ruler rules for long without the support of willing subjects, so that while the power inherent in the Argead family was thought to have descended from above, no king held his power without meeting the expectations of his subjects from below when it came to issues of custom, perhaps best understood for my current purpose as traditional law. The greatest brake to Argead autocracy (at least before the reign of Philip II) were the *Hetairoi*, upon whom the king relied for the extension of his rule domestically and for the defense of the realm against outsiders<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Especially in GREENWALT 2010, 151-163; 2011, 148-156.

<sup>2</sup> See *supra* (note 1) for articles in which I provide lists for works that can be seen as arguing the “non-constitutionalist” case. Among scholars currently arguing this position, see Carney 2015, 2f.

<sup>3</sup> See *supra* (note 1), and GREENWALT 2015.

<sup>4</sup> The political leverage of the *Hetairoi* was considerably lessened by the Illyrian defeat of Perdiccas III and the massacre of 4,000 of his men. Certainly a large number of those who died were *Hetairoi*. It is nowhere attested, but when Philip reconstituted the class, he certainly did so with men personally loyal to the quickly effective king. Philip simply did not have to deal with the entrenched status of Companion families as did all of his royal predecessors. I would not argue that the new *Hetairoi* were necessarily

The “law” which supported Argead rule was anchored in its meeting the traditional expectations of his subjects—period. There was no openly articulated constitutional framework to fortify the rights of either the monarch or his subjects. There were no established offices other than King, and that position was so undefined in daily life that he did not even have a title: a king went simply by his personal name (with patronymic, if necessary). He was, in essence, the head of the national household, where neither titles nor term limits applied. His closest political adjuncts possessed neither titles nor terms of office: they were simply his *Hetairoi*—his “Companions”, whether established by birth or royal whim. They extended his reach (for no matter how small the state, no man can be everywhere at once), and they therefore reaped appropriate influence, status and wealth.

But, if there were no rules legalistically laid out and published for any interested party to examine: realistically, upon what did the kingship hang in the temporal world? God given kingship, is one thing<sup>5</sup>, but how was the power of the Argead dynasty made manifest to those under its authority? I argue here that Argead authority was made manifest through the distribution of *right* justice (largely interpreted by the subject population) and through religious rituals (a subset of right justice), whose duty it was the king’s to perform. In short, Argead kingship was made most readily manifest through the roles a monarch embraced in sacred and legal times and spaces. This issue is a big one and I will not attempt to handle it *in toto* here, but I do want to begin chipping away at the issue by examining a royal hunt which ended in the death of a king who was perceived by his murderers as having acted unjustly—that is, the assassination of Archelaus (reigned ca. 413-399).

We have two sources which attest to Archelaus’ homicide: Aristotle and Diodorus. Let us first consider the death of Archelaus as laid out by Aristotle, the earlier of our sources. Amid a review of political assassinations Aristotle includes that of Archelaus:

“And many risings have also occurred because of shameful personal indignities committed by certain monarchs. One instance is the attack of Crataeas on Archelaus; for he was always resentful of the association, so that even a smaller excuse became sufficient, or perhaps it was because he did not give him the hand of one of his daughters after agreeing to do so, but gave the elder to the king of Elimea when hard pressed in a war against Sirras and Arrabaeus, and the younger to his son Amyntas, thinking that then Amyntas would be less likely to quarrel with his son by Cleopatra; but at all events Crataeas’s estrangement was primarily caused by resentment because of the love affair. And Hellanocrates of Larisa also joined in the attack for the same reason; for because while enjoying his favours Archelaus would not restore him to his home although he had promised to do so, he thought that the motive of the familiarity that had taken place had been insolence and not passionate desire” (*Pol.* 5.8.11-12. Translation by RACKHAM 1944).

“Also Decamnichus took a leading part in the attack upon Archelaus, being the first to stir on the attackers; and the cause of his anger was that he had handed him

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“yes” men, but they would not have had the same established positions as their predecessors, and, Philip’s uncanny series of successes, dragging victory out of the mouth of defeat time and again, certainly would have muted any opposition from that quarter.

<sup>5</sup> See *supra* (note 3), and GREENWALT 1986; 1994; 1997.

over to Euripides the poet to flog, Euripides being angry because he had made a remark about his breath smelling (*Pol.* 5.8.13. Translation by Rackham 1944)<sup>6</sup>.

There is a lot to unpack in this testimony, and (fortunately?) most of its background is lost, but before returning to Aristotle, let us look at Diodorus (14.37.6), where it is recorded that: “King Archelaus was unintentionally struck while hunting by Craterus, whom he loved, and met his end, after a reign of seven years”<sup>7</sup>. Leaving aside the minor points that Diodorus here miscalculated the length of Archelaus’ reign and his variant on the chief of assassins name, his testimony must be discarded in favor of Aristotle’s not primarily because Aristotle wrote only about 75 years after Archelaus’ murder while Diodorus wrote over 300 years after the event (although that is significant), but more importantly because Aristotle had been close to the Argead court for over three decades before he penned his brief account, and because he was very well informed about Argead affairs both contemporarily and historically<sup>8</sup>. In contrast to Aristotle’s detailed knowledge of Argead history, Diodorus’ account betrays little inside information or interest in unearthing any. The source behind Diodorus appears apologetic and thin: the kind of thing one might associate with a press release issued by someone who wanted Archelaus’ death to be swept under the rug so that that source might go about quickly with dealing with (and probably attempting to take advantage of) its aftermath. In short, Diodorus’ information seems to stem from self-promoting and intentionally misleading propaganda.

So, I accept without qualification that Archelaus was murdered in the context of a hunt, and the primary assassin was a companion (*hetairos*) who had once been a lover of the victim, but who had suffered a falling out with the king. Crataeas, however, seems not to have been the only sexual tool of Archelaus. So too was Hellanocrates of Larisa, who seemed to have surrendered to Archelaus physically in return for the king’s help in being reinstated to his home. Given the long association between Argeads and the Aleuads of Larisa, it would have been natural for a young man in a least some trouble at home to flee to the court of the Argead king, *i.e.* that of Archelaus, for sanctuary. It

<sup>6</sup> SCULLION 2003 has argued that Euripides’ death in Macedon while a guest of Archelaus is a fiction because Aristophanes did not mention in his play, the *Frogs*, that Euripides in was an ex-pat at the time of his death. His argument is mostly an attack on the tradition of bogus ancient biographies and does not distinguish a credible historical source from those who did not care a whit about facts. His dismissal of Aristotle as a credible source (396) makes no mention of Aristotle’s long connection with the Argead house, or his interest in its history. I (with HATZOPOULOS 2011, 59 n. 62) find this an astonishing argument perhaps fueled by extreme hero-worship of a modern kind. The agon between Aeschines and Euripides portrayed by Aristophanes is a brilliant bit of theater, but surely Aeschines’ victory over his opponent was less the result of his superior artistic message than the fact that he fought at Marathon, and exalted that experience on his grave marker. Scullion’s noting that Aristophanes’ mentions Agathon’s flight to Macedonia, but not Euripides is immaterial. Agathon (despite his theatrical victory, glorified in Plato’s *Symposium*) simply was not of the stature of Euripides as a playwright. Agathon could be good for gags, but Euripides, whose lasting legacy ensconced him as one of Athens three great writers of tragedy? Still, who Aristophanes and his audience have as the savior of the city, a man (who happened to be a great playwright) who fought for it at a climactic moment in its history, or one who cut and ran when the city faced doom? Aristophanes’ audience would have thought the notion of Euripides saving the city rather ironic. Perhaps Aristophanes even sympathized with Euripides’ despair, but Euripides as the savior of Athens? Ludicrous to Athenians at the end of the Peloponnesian War! Hence, the dark humor of the poetic agon. I have no doubt that Aristophanes admired the genius of Euripides enough not to overtly mention his flight. Aristotle is a credible source for Macedonian affairs. There is no reason to doubt his historical veracity. There is reason to believe that Aristophanes’ silence was not a reflection of historical fact.

<sup>7</sup> Translated by OLDFATHER 1977-1978.

<sup>8</sup> See GREENWALT 2010, 155-156.

seems that Archelaus found Hellanocrates attractive enough to hold close (certainly physically and probably politically for a time to keep his options open), and that Hellanocrates was willing to submit to Archelaus' sexual advances for political leverage. It also seems that Archelaus was in no hurry to intervene on behalf of Hellanocrates, with the result that Hellanocrates began to glean that he was being unduly manipulated in an inappropriate way (certainly being screwed physically and almost certainly politically).

A third aggrieved young courtier, Decamnichus, seems to have been deeply offended by Archelaus as a result of his treatment at the hands of Euripides. This great playwright had fled to Macedonia near the end of the Peloponnesian War, where among other tragedies he penned the *Bacchae*. It seems that both the physical safety and the prevailing ethos of the Macedonian court appealed to Euripides<sup>9</sup>, although by the time of his northern epiphany he was an old man. Apparently, he also demonstrated at least one of the possible symptoms of physical decay, that is, halitosis. Old men are old, but sexual desires appear not to have been doused in Euripides' case. It appears that a sexual advance by Euripides led to a complaint by Decamnichus, whose comments upon Euripides' lack of oral hygiene insulted the great poet to the point where Archelaus allowed the hallowed author to educate the youth for his poor manners and undoubted disregard for genius by a flogging. This lashing was not appreciated and deemed unjust.

Wow, what a court. But let us return to the case of the companion whom Aristotle identifies as the chief assassin: Crataeas (Craterus in Diodorus<sup>10</sup>). We do not know anything about this Crataeas beyond the fact that he seems to have struck Archelaus during a hunt as he was in the process of "targeting" the prey. Aristotle's addition of two other conspirators belies the fact that Crataeas' aim was faulty. Crataeas seems to have been a native Macedonian, because Aristotle carefully distinguishes Hellanocrates as being of foreign extraction. As such, Crataeas apparently caught the eye of the king and was the scion of a prominent family, for how else can we explain his expectation that Crataeas was originally betrothed (or at least, he thought so) to marry a daughter of Archelaus? Clearly, Crataeas expected that Archelaus' sexual interest in his person would accelerate the advancement of his own career to the point where he was willing to submit to the king's advances (even though Aristotle implies that he never embraced the king with the same fervor as the king embraced him). Crataeas' growing pique, however, seems to have reached its maximum after he was informed that his "promised" bride would not be forthcoming because Archelaus eventually found his intended to be a more useful pawn in the winning over of the friendship of the upper Macedonian canton of Elimeia when he was being hard pressed by Sirras and Arrabaeus (almost certainly from Lynceus, another upper Macedonian realm which in the time of Archelaus was not under the sovereignty of the Argeads<sup>11</sup>) in a dispute about which we otherwise know nothing. (These details reinforce a faith in Aristotle's testimony.) Despite his natal prominence and his sexual submission, more pressing matters for Archelaus

<sup>9</sup> One can only imagine a despair over Athens' impending defeat in the Peloponnesian War along with the destruction of its "Camelot" induced Euripides to abandon the city of his birth for the escape Archelaus proffered.

<sup>10</sup> Diodorus' confusion about this name is easily understood. The name Craterus was well known in Macedonia. The most famous of that name was a very dear friend of Alexander the Great, who, amongst his other accomplishments, saved Alexander's life during a hunt. Diodorus' mention of "Craterus" as the lover and accidental murderer of Archelaus, perversely reinforces the account of Aristotle in the sense that we can be sure that Archelaus died during a hunt.

<sup>11</sup> Upper Macedonia was certainly an area of interest to the Argeads, but was not fully under Argead control until the reign of Philip II. See GREENWALT 2011.

dictated a political re-calculation (that is, if Archelaus ever intended to make Crataeas a son-in-law)<sup>12</sup>. Reality stung, Crataeas became convinced that he had been ill-used, and a craving for justice became paramount.

Perhaps because there was no distinction in Macedonia between the Argeads' public and private personae, issues of sex, politics and "justice" were intertwined when it came to the royal family. Although I do not want to pursue in depth the historical episode involving Philip II, Pausanias (I), Pausanias (II), and Attalus—which, of course, ended with Philip's murder as he was shouldering royal duties in a very public place—one need only recall it to know that the conclusion which begins this paragraph is duly noted in our extant sources (D.S. 16.93.4-16; 94.3-4; Aris. *Pol.* 5.8.10; Just. 9.7.9-11).. Clearly, the lesson to be learned from this more famous episode is that issues of sexual misuse became issues of festering injustice when the king did not step in to honor the wishes of the offended (Pausanias II) with some sort of punishment for a manifest offender (Attalus, on behalf of Pausanias I). At least in Pausanias II's case, the king was not the most egregious offender, but it did not spare him from the assassin's dagger, largely because Pausanias II came to realize and was humiliated by the fact that his past sexual submission to Philip, counted little when balanced against the political and military importance of Attalus. In our present case, Archelaus was the primary offender in the minds of two of the three conspirators who plotted his murder, both of whom begrudged what they came to deem as their sexual abuse, although the plot which cost Archelaus his life was only spawned when other injustices were made manifest (*i.e.* the renegeing of a promise of a politically advantageous marriage, and the failure to take action to see an exile returned home.) Throw the treatment of Decamnichus by Euripides into the pot and you have a very deadly stew.

So, why was the setting for the assassination a hunt? Well, it should be admitted that opportunity must be taken into account. We have no idea how the Archelaus was normally protected against violence. Since the Argeads were frequently exposed to physical threats—all one has to do is conjure up the drunken proximity of "trusted" royal friends during the ubiquitous royal symposia—there must have been some guard. Of course, the Pages had yet to be introduced to the Argead court, but when Philip II created that assembly of youths (which at least Alexander III used to protect his person<sup>13</sup>) he did so more for their political indoctrination and education, while additionally using them as hostages for the fathers' good behavior, than for protection. Maybe Crataeas, Hellanocrates, and Decamnichus were not of the status to be invited to royal symposia, but it is hard to fathom, given Archelaus' intimacy with the first and second of this trio, why one or the other could not have stricken the king down in a private, and one supposes, unguarded moment.

It seems far more likely that opportunity alone did not dictate the choice of venues in the assassinations of Philip and Archelaus. In the case of the former, Pausanias II

<sup>12</sup> An interesting aside: the younger of Archelaus' daughter appears also to have been denied to Crataeas, because in Archelaus' thinking, he could bolster the support of his son, Amyntas (Amyntas II in the Argead king list? Probably. Amyntas III? Almost certainly not.), when it came to Archelaus' preferred successor, the son of his wife Cleopatra (this son, unnamed by Aristotle, was probably Orestes, the short lived king who followed Archelaus). We know nothing of Archelaus' marriages and we also have no evidence for marriage involving full siblings in Argead Macedonia. I would imagine that this younger daughter and the Amyntas in Aristotle were half-siblings. The polygamy noted from later in Argead history seems implied here. See GREENWALT 1989; CARNEY 2000; and OGDEN 1999, among others. Regardless of Archelaus' hope that he could strengthen the chances that Orestes would live long enough to rule, the young Orestes' murder and the Argead civil wars of the 390s are proof of his lack of success.

<sup>13</sup> Not always judiciously: Arr. *An.* 4.13.2; Curt. 8.7.2-3; Plu. *Alex.* 53-55.

made a statement before a domestic and international audience that Philip II ruled unjustly because no punishment for Attalus' atrocity had been imposed by the king upon his prominent *hetairos* (and general currently in Anatolia preparing for Philip's would-be invasion of Asia). Even though Pausanias II seems to have wanted credit for the murder of Philip since the king had disregarded a king's primal responsibility for the dispensing of justice, he nevertheless had an escape plan which was foiled primarily because of an inconvenient stumble (although it is difficult to see how Pausanias II could have long escaped the revenge of Philip's avengers)<sup>14</sup>. Likewise, Crataeas seems to have wanted to cut down Archelaus as the king was engaged in an essential royal ritual, while simultaneously hoping that he might escape retribution through the excuse: "oops, sorry, I missed my target." Aristotle's account of the plot betrays any such naïve hope, perhaps imbedded in the belief that Crataeas' family was simply too important to have Crataeas' story believed. Maybe that family was that important—six years of civil war followed Archelaus' demise<sup>15</sup>. Torture, however, (probably) imposed (look to the example of Philotas<sup>16</sup>) quickly suggested that more nefarious motives were afoot. But again, why choose a hunt? If, as I and others are suggesting, the royal hunt was an institution in Argead Macedonia from at least the beginning of the fifth century, then one can easily discern for the hunt meant in Macedonia as elsewhere<sup>17</sup>. A. I. Molina Marín reminds me that Heracles Cynagidas was an extremely important god for the Macedonians. Of course all deities in the Greek world had diverse portfolios, and among those for this Heracles one aspect was significant in the freeing of slaves, but for our purposes, this Heracles was a god of hunting, well documented throughout Macedonia<sup>18</sup>. Here the king, with his *hetairoi*, was acting out his role as the protector of his kingdom against all the physical and metaphysical threats which threatened the very existence of his realm and its inhabitants. Here, the king was the strong and victorious epitome of proper order, prosperity, and protection. Here, the king was the avatar of justice itself. Where better to undo an unjust king? Hence I argue that the royal hunt was one of those institutions which ratified an Argead king's legitimacy among his subjects, and that a violation of royal hunting protocol was an overt (and recognized as such) challenge to a monarch's legitimate rule. This is an argument which I will strengthen elsewhere with an examination of the "Pages" conspiracy against Alexander the Great.

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<sup>14</sup> The primary sources for Philip's death are D.S. 16.91.4-94.4 and Just. 9.7.9.

<sup>15</sup> BORZA 1992, 171-179.

<sup>16</sup> Arr. An. 3.26.1-4; D.S. 17.79-80; Curt. 6.7-7.2; Plu. Alex. 48-49.

<sup>17</sup> GREENWALT 1992; 2015. Also, FRANKS 2012, esp. 36-52.

<sup>18</sup> For references, see HAMMOND – Griffith 1979, 155 with n. 4, 165; Polyae. 32,14.; HATZOPOULOS 1994, 24, 102-111; GRAEKOS 2011, 78; FRANKS 2012, 20.

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