MONARCHY ("Monarchy")

Classical scholars and historians of antiquity usually take for granted that the concept of 'monarchy' (μοναρχία), like that of 'tyranny' (τυραννίς), was part of Greek political vocabulary from very early on. 70 years ago, this theory was forcefully propounded by Albert Debrunner, who hypothesised that μοναρχία was the original classical Greek constitutional term, on which the others, e.g. 'oligarchy' (ὀλιγαρχία) and 'democracy' (δημοκρατία), were subsequently modelled. A less well-known theory by Gerhard Aalders states, on the contrary, that the term for people's rule, δημοκρατία, originated before μοναρχία and other similar terms. This paper re-examines the question of the origins of classical Greek constitutional terms by weighing these two alternative hypotheses against each other. Part I of the present investigation recapitulates Debrunner's theory and presents the arguments in its favour. Part II introduces the main arguments against it, with special attention paid to the occurrences of μοναρχία and μόναρχος ('monarch') in archaic Greek sources. Finally, Part III draws out the consequences of this critique and explicates three alternative hypotheses of how μοναρχία and other classical Greek constitutional terms may have developed.

Keywords: Origins of monarchy, Origins of democracy, Early Greek political thought, Development of Classical Greek constitutional terms, Early history of political ideas, History of ancient Greek democracy, Conceptual History, Ancient Greek Monarchy

I

Regarding the question of the origins in ancient Greece of compound constitutional terms such as μοναρχία ('monarchy'), ὀλιγαρχία ('oligarchy') and δημοκρατία ('democracy') – where the first part refers to the subject and the second part to the object of government – two opposed explanatory models have been proposed. According to the first of these, δημοκρατία was first terminologically determined, before similarly contrived compound constitutional terms, e.g. μοναρχία and ὀλιγαρχία, were formulated. This theory was first propounded by Gerhard Aalders (1968), who never really argued for it, however, but simply presented his thesis as the most viable alternative. As Aalders reasoned, the terms for one man’s rule and rule of few were probably coined by the adversaries of people’s rule some time after the establishment of democracy had first taken place. (Aalders 1968, 9). 1

1. "…die Begriffe ἀριστοκρατία, ὀλιγαρχία und μοναρχία sind wohl nicht älter als das 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr. Sie sind wahrscheinlich geprägt worden in den politischen Kämpfen um die Verfassung, vielleicht eben im Kampfe mit der Demokratie von deren Gegnern geformt worden." The question of when and where the breakthrough of democracy first took place in the Greek cultural sphere is debated. At the moment of writing, the dominant scholarly view holds that full-scale direct democracy emerged originally at Athens in 508 BC as a consequence of the reforms ascribed to Cleisthenes (Cartledge 2009, 57-62). However, an alternative viewpoint underlines the importance of the elite-disempowering reforms of 462 BCE
According to the alternative view, which is the one usually presumed by scholars, the other classical Greek constitutional terms were developed following an earlier model provided by μοναρχία.

The latter hypothesis was set forth by Albert Debrunner (1947), and it is collaborated by the fact that μοναρχία – unlike δημοκρατία and ὀλιγαρχία – seems to occur in archaic Greek texts. More specifically, μοναρχία is attested in a fragment ascribed to Alcaeus (POxy 1789/Lobel & Page A 6/Loeb 6), and a century later in a fragment attributed to Alcmaeon of Croton (B4 DK).

Following Debrunner, scholars usually take for granted that μοναρχία – like τυραννίς (‘tyranny’) and βασιλεία (‘kingship’) – were part of Greek political terminology from very early on – and that all three stood for the concept of sovereign political rule already in the Greek archaic age (See e.g. Barceló 1993, 90 and Lewis 2009, 2). It could be argued, however, (although thus far it has not) that a mere two occurrences of μοναρχία in archaic sources in fact makes it likely that the term has been interpolated on both texts – most likely, then, in place of an original τυραννίς, since the latter is most commonly used to convey the notion of sovereignty in archaic and early classical sources (see e.g. Archil. fr. 19; Sol. fr. 32; Simon. Fr. 71 (West) and Pind. Πύθ. 2.87; Aesch. Πρωτ. 10). Now, if the possibility of interpolation in connection with one or two of the archaic occurrences of μοναρχία were admitted, it would become considerably more difficult to argue for the anteriority of the Greek concept of ‘monarchy’ over and against ‘democracy’ and ‘oligarchy’. This would also have consequences with regard to how we understand the original meaning of μοναρχία, as well as the beginnings of classical Greek constitutional thinking and theorising more generally – as will become clear by the end of this paper.

Nevertheless, Debrunner (whose influential idea that ‘monarchy’ came first has never really been questioned) also produced an elaborate philological proof for his theory, which indeed is persuasive (albeit possibly false, as will be seen). In his argument, Debrunner proceeded from the assumption that it is impossible to place δημοκρατία in a normal word formation type (Wortbildungstypus). Such a pattern would presuppose the prior existence of a basic word, *δημοκρατίς (“democrat”), from which the abstract noun δημοκρατία could have been derived. However, *δημοκρατίς is not attested in ancient Greek texts, and therefore the genealogy of the Greek word for people’s rule cannot be understood in analogy with how abstract nouns ending in –ία were usually formed. In the case of γεωμετρία (‘geometry’) (Hdt. 2.109), for instance, it seems clear that the abstract noun has been derived from the basic word γεωμετρής (‘geometer’) (Plat. Θη. 143b) (although the former is attested earlier); but not so with δημοκρατία, due to

ascribed to Ephialtes for the effectuation of direct democracy at Athens (Rihll 1995, 296-297). As an alternative to both of these views, Eric Robinson has placed the earliest realization of people’s rule at Argos in the 490’s BCE. (Robinson 2011, 196-197).
the lack of a concrete noun relating to it. The fact that in ancient Greek there
are other abstract compound terms ending in –κρατία with concrete nouns
ending in -κρατής connected to them, cannot offer a model for understanding
how δημοκρατία developed either. Words of this kind all originated later
than δημοκρατία, and in most cases the original term was actually the abstract
noun. Thus, for instance, ἀριστοκράτης (‘aristocrat’) on the one hand (Asp. in
EN182.8.), and τιμοκράτης (‘person in favour of a rule according to honour’) on the other hand (ibid.), have clearly been derived from the much earlier
ἀριστοκρατία (‘aristocracy’) (Thuc. 3.82) and τιμοκρατία (‘rule according to
honour’) (Plat. Rep. 545b) respectively. (Debrunner 1947, 11-15).

Based on the above, Debrunner concluded that since a normal word
formation type cannot be stipulated for δημοκρατία, an entirely different
model must be sought for how the term may first have been formed.
According to Debrunner, the likeliest model is to be found in another
constitutional term. What is more, since the historical context in which
δημοκρατία was formed, was marked by the transition from elite rule to
people’s rule, Debrunner thought the most suitable candidate was the name
given to the form of rule which in the actual historical reality had just been
replaced: ὀλιγαρχία. (Debrunner 1947, 15). Debrunner’s presumption is
collaborated by δημοκρατία and ὀλιγαρχία being contemporary terms; both
of them have their earliest attestations in Herodotus (6.43; 3.82). 2 Another
consideration supporting Debrunner’s theory in this regard, is that just like
δημοκρατία, ὀλιγαρχία is lacking a basic word ending in –ης as an
antecedent: the term ὀλιγάρχης (‘oligarch’) (Dion. Hal. 11.43) is a much later
derivate.

Of course, if indeed δημοκρατία was modelled on ὀλιγαρχία, one may
still wonder why people’s rule was not termed δημαρχία (‘people’s
governance’) instead. However, this avoidance may be explained by
δημαρχία already being in use as a term for the office of δήμαρχος (‘people’s
governor’) – the latter which is attested in inscriptions at Athens as early as
423 BCE (IG 12, p. 347). Moreover, a composite word involving a component
derived from the verb ἀρχεῖν (‘to rule’) seems to presuppose subjects being
ruled over as is the case in both ὀλιγαρχία and μοναρχία. However, δημοκρατία refers specifically to a form of rule where the (politically
empowered) people rule themselves – as Debrunner rightly pointed out.
(Debrunner 1947, 18).

Debrunner did not stop here, however, but added that since the political
history of Ancient Greece (in some parts at least) had actually proceeded
according to the sequence monarchy-oligarchy-democracy, a corresponding

2. Although prefigurations of δημοκρατία is encountered already in the earliest tragedies. See e.g. δήμου κρατοῦσα χείρ (“the ruling hand of the people”), at Aesch. Supp. 604.
succession on the level of conceptual history is to be presumed as well. In other words, Debrunner thought that both ὀλιγαρχία and δημοκρατία had been modelled on an original μοναρχία. (Debrunner 1947, 16). Speaking in favour of the latter assumption is the already mentioned alleged attestations of μοναρχία in archaic Greek sources (in Alcaeus and Alcmaeon). Moreover, even if it were admitted that these occurrences may be interpolations, a factor favouring the theory that μοναρχία as the original classical Greek constitutional term would still remain. This is the fact that μοναρχία, unlike ὀλιγαρχία and δημοκρατία, has a clearly recognizable basic word connecting to it – i.e., the concrete noun, from which the abstract constitutional noun could have been derived: μόναρχος.

II

In order to evaluate the viability of Debrunner’s theory over and against its alternative, we may thus begin by over-viewing the attestations of μόναρχος in archaic Greek sources. The term μόναρχος has two early occurrences, one each in the elegies ascribed to Theognis and Solon respectively.3 In the Solonian fragment, the “demos because of ignorance” (δῆμος αἴδριῃ) is depicted as falling into the slavery of the μόναρχος (ἐς δὲ μονάρχου δήμος αἴδρη δουλοσύνην ἐπεσεν) (Sol. 9.3 (West)).4 In the Theognidean passage, on the other hand, μόναρχος is put on a par with ‘civil strife’ (στάσις) and ‘kindred murder’ (ἔμφυλος φόνος), as things that the city-state should never delight in (Theognid. 52). However, in extant archaic Greek sources, these are in fact the only two occurrences of the term in question, and the possibility certainly remains that at least the former is an interpolation. Indeed, in the original text of the fragments of Solon, the much more common βασιλεύς (‘king’ or ‘chieftain’) or τύραννος (‘tyrant’) may well have been used.

3. Another possible occurrence may be detected in a papyrus fragment ascribed to Alcaeus. Extant here is ἡρχον, which could perhaps stand for the last part of a name such as ἰππαρχος in the accusative case, or could possibly even refer to an office-holder with a title constructed on the model of τριήραρχος or δήμαρχος, but could certainly also have been the accusative form of μόναρχος. Too little has been preserved of the papyrus, however, to determine any name, word or meaning contained in it with certainty. (See Alc. POxy 2304).

4. δῆμος αἴδριῃ without iota subscript would imply that the masses are inherently ignorant. With the subscript, the word is marked as a dative, which in this case must be understood as causative: the masses thought of as having been mislead, not the masses as characteristically easy to mislead.
This possibility is borne out by a survey of the extant verses of Solon and Theognis. Here, no further attestations of μόναρχος are encountered, while clear-cut examples of political vocabulary derived from βασιλεύς and τύραννος may be detected in at least six elegiac verses ascribed to these authors. Beginning with Theognis, verse 823 has the accusative form of τύραννος in μήτε τιν’ αὐξε τύραννον ἐπ’ ἐλπίς, κέρδεσιν εἰκόν ("Do not raise the tyrant giving into hopes for gain"). Further, at Theognid. 1181, the reference is to the tyrant who devours the people (δημοφάγος τύραννος) and in the verses 1203-1206 the story is on how utterly unworthy of mourning the occasion of the death of a τύραννος would be. At 743, again, Zeus is addressed with the vocative ἄθανάτων βασιλεύ ("king of the immortals"), implying that the writer knew of a θανατόν ναρχος ("king of immortals"), who was not himself immortal. Turning to Solon, we may note here a similar preference for vocabulary derived from τύραννος when the reference is to the notion of one man’s rule. Thus in fr. 33 (West), an aorist participle of the verb τυραννεύω ("to act as a tyrant") is employed to point out that Solon had been a tyrant for no more than one day (τυραννεύοντος Ἀθηναίων, μούνον ἡμέρην μίαν). In fr. 32, on the other hand, the genitive forms of τυραννος and βία ("force") function as possessive attributes to an object of the verb καθήπτω ("fasten") in the aorist middle voice. Here, a similar reluctance on part of Solon to assume the role of a tyrant is then given expression to: τυραννικός δὲ καὶ βίος αμελία ὧν καθηψάμην ("I did not fasten myself to the unmitigated things of tyranny and force").

Based on the above survey, and especially taking into account the Solonian preference for words derived from τύραννος when referring to sole rulers, I would suggest that μονάρχος in Sol. 9.3 (West) should be replaced with τυράννος. The genitive of τύραννος fits the meter as well as μονάρχος, but, as was shown above, the former aligns better with the political vocabulary in Solon’s other preserved elegies, and with other archaic elegiac poetry as well. Thus the metrically apt Theognidean μονάρχος (the Ionic Greek form of μόναρχος) should perhaps be counted as the earliest occurrence in Greek of a compound political term, where the first part refers to the subject and the second part to the object of governance. However, here, too, caution must be taken.

If we admit that the occurrence in Theognid. 52 is the earliest, it would then be impossible to put any more accurate date on μόναρχος, since the assumption must be that the terminology in every single of the elegies ascribed to Theognis has been altered in the century-long oral transmission of his poems. Thus, even if we knew for a fact that the original version of Theognidea 39-52 was composed in Megara and not later than the 630’s B.C., as Martin West proposed (1974, 68), it would still be the case that the lines of the poem can be applied to a variety of political situations (Nagy 1983, 90-91). In the process of this application over centuries of ancient Greek political history,
it may well be that the verses that in our editions now incorporate μόναρχος,
were updated to mirror major changes in constitutional concepts. This
possibility is supported, too, by the survey of the extant poems in the
Theognidean corpus presented above. Here, as we saw, there are no more
occurrences of μόναρχος or μόναρχος, while devaluation of the rule of the
τύραννος finds expression in three passages and one passage presumes the
existence of a mortal βασιλεύς.

Nevertheless, the possibility certainly remains that the text at this point is
not corrupt, and that in ancient Greek political vocabulary, μόναρχος, as one
term in use to denote elite rule leaning towards the social dominance of one
man, may be traced as far back as the 7th century BCE. However, because of
the reasons stated above – i.e., basically, because βασιλεύς and τύραννος and
their various derivations were widely in use during the Greek archaic age,
whereas μόναρχος seems at least not to have been at all common – the latter
alternative appears less likely. In fact, it seems conceivable that μοναρχία and
μόναρχος were not even part of Greek political terminology, before the turn
to direct democracy first gave the impetus to the juxtaposing of different
alternative orders as variant principles of social rule in their own right.

This possibility is borne out by the earliest evidence of a text opposing the
principle of sole rule (μοναρχία) and “equal distribution” or “like order”
(ἰσονομία) to be found in a fragment (B4 DK) ascribed to the pre-Socratic
thinker Alcmaeon from Croton (ca. 500 BCE):

τῆς μὲν ύγειας εἶναι συνεκτικὴν τὴν ἰσονομίαν τῶν δυνάμεων, ὕγροῦ, ἄρρητοῦ,
ψυχροῦ, θερμοῦ, πυκνοῦ, γλυκοῦ καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν, τὴν δ᾽ ἐν αὐτοῖς μοναρχίαν
νόσου ποιητικὴν φθοροποιῶν γὰρ ἐκατέρῳ μοναρχίαν.5

Suitable for keeping health in place is equal distribution of powers, of moisture,
dryness, cold, heat, bitter, sweet and the rest, whereas monarchy among them is
the maker of decease: monarchy of any of these is the cause of destruction.

Here, the juxtaposing of μοναρχία and ἰσονομία takes place in a context
dealing with questions of health and illness. More specifically, the medical
states and the natural order depicted in the passage intertwine. If there are
any political undertones to be noted in the clash of principles depicted, this
cosmically naturalizing way of thinking at least makes it impossible to
conceive of these variant orders as principles for social rule in their own right.6

5. Interestingly, the latest Loeb-edition considers most of this fragment to be a
paraphrase, but maintains both μοναρχία and ἰσονομία as the concepts belonging to
the paraphrased original. See Alc. Cro. D 30 (Most & Laks).

6. This is actually the only time ἰσονομία is used in a medical context in extant
Greek literature, which led Charlotte Triebel-Shubert to the conclusion that the way
the term is juxtaposed against μοναρχία, must in fact be taken to reflect a “generally
In truth, the possibility of juxtaposing alternative main principles of rule specifically with regard to the social order seems to have presupposed a realized radical alternative to the prevailing rule (or at least we have no evidence of such a theory before the democratic breakthrough took place in ancient Greece). When Alcmaeon was writing, this turnover may not yet have materialized anywhere in the Greek world. After the transition to full-scale direct democracy had been completed, however, a political theory juxtaposing distinct social ordering principles soon emerged. The earliest evidence of a theory of this kind is encountered in Book III in Herodotus, and here the three classical Greek constitutional variants – democracy, oligarchy and monarchy – are first also opposed (Hdt. 3.80-82).

III

To sum up the discussion thus far, it seems difficult to ascertain that the ancient Greek terms for ‘monarch’, μόναρχος, and ‘monarchy’, μοναρχία, are older than the 5th century BCE. As seen, there are indeed only very few occurrences of these words in pre-classical sources, and most or all of these apparent attestation may have been interpolated on an original form of τύραννος or τυρανίς. The consequence of this is that the major assumption in favour of Debrunner’s theory – the postulation of μοναρχία as the archaic Greek forerunner on which all subsequent classical Greek constitutional terms were modelled – may be doubted.

In truth, it seems possible that Aalders was right in this regard, and that compound constitutional terms of the kind, where the first part refers to the subject and the second part to the object of government, originated first in 5th-century BCE Greece – as a direct result of the democratic breakthrough.” (Triebel-Schubert 1984, 328). It remains unclear, however, why the exceptionality of the use of ἴσομοιρία in a medical setting would rule out the possibility of a specific medically naturalizing use in the Alcmaeonean fragment. In truth, the ensuing preference among later Greek medical writers for non-political terms, such as ἴσομοιρία ‘equal share’, to express similar contents, may be considered an indication of the fact that the kind of political theorising dealing specifically with constitutional matters was launched first at a later date. For the later preference of ἴσομοιρία with regard to similar contents as those found in the Alcmaeonian fragment, see e.g. Galen, De temp. 1.534 (Kühn): ἄλλ’ ἡ τῆς τῶν τεττάρων κράσεων ἴσομοιρία τῆς εὐκρασίας αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς ὑγείας, αἰτία. (“Whereas the equability of the four temperaments is the cause of both its mildness and of its health”).

7. It should be noted, too, that βασιλεία, which is often used as a synonym to μοναρχία in classical Greek texts, has its earliest occurrence in in Herodotus (1.11), and may thus have been modelled on μοναρχία – although the concrete noun
may well have been when the hitherto always (in one form or another) prevailing principle of elite rule had been replaced by realized rule of the people, that constitutional alternatives first began to be conceived of in terms referring principally to the ruling subject(s) – and as applying mainly to the human sphere (Meier 1983, 428). In fact, before the classical democracies were established, Greek constitutional terminology seems largely to have been dominated by concepts relating to a broadly conceived, socially and cosmically instantiated, ideal order. The terms used to express this socio-cosmological ideal were often conceived of as divinities in their own right, then, like Solon’s εὐνομία ‘good order’, or its later derivate: ἱσονομία.9 ‘like

βασιλεύς is a much earlier term which existed already in Mycenaean Greece. This is another pointer to the possibility that ‘monarchy’ as a constitutional term did not really exist before the Greek classical age.

8. The first occurrence of εὐνομία is in Homer. See Hom. Od. 17.487. The noun and adjective forms probably derive from the verbal stem -νεμ- (to distribute or to assign) and not from νόμος, as the latter is not attested in Homer. In its intimate connection with (godly sanctioned) good order and tending to laws (written or unwritten), εὐνομία finds it first use in Solon. See esp. Sol. fr. 4 (26-38) (West). H. J. Erasmus wrote the definitive article on εὐνομία, wherein he concluded the following: “In Homer the verbal significance of the word is still prominent and it means something like ‘right distribution’ or ‘right apportionment’. In Solon [...]the derivation from the verbal stem is maintained, but after the passing of his laws and the establishment of ‘right distribution’ at Athens by the intervention of law, the word probably acquired the meaning of ‘right distribution by law’. In Herodotus the verbal significance of the word recedes into the background and the condition of good order resulting from ‘right distribution’ becomes more prominent. When Herodotus and Thucydides use the term in reference to Sparta, they use it in the sense of ‘good order by law’”. (Erasmus 1960, 63). The use of εὐνομία as an ultimate legitimizing horizon for the maintaining and rectifying of the social order is most evident in Solon fr. 4, (West). For the latter development of εὐνομία into a party-concept used by oligarchic cliques, see Simonton 2017, 71.

9. The earliest extant evidence of ἱσονομία as an adjective is found in the drinking song in honour of “the tyrannicides” Harmodius and Aristogeiton ("Scolia anonyma" 13 (Diehl). As for the noun-form of ἱσονομία, here a traditional “constitutional” model of “good order” (εὐνομία), is adjusted with a criterion of (some notion of) equality, thus establishing a link between equality and justice. This may be taken as a terminological indication of “a new type of participation by the demos in the functioning of institutions” and of a more widespread conception of “equality before the law”. (Meier 1990, 66-68; 1999, 119-120). Gregory Vlastos argued against Arnold Wycombe Gomme’s assumption that ἱσονομία could refer to any kind of “constitutional regime” in contrast to “irresponsible tyranny”, and for the close association of the term with democratic and approximately democratic constitutional forms. Vlastos based his argument in Herodotus’ use of ἱσονομία which seems to confirm its “unique reference to democracy”. (Gomme 1949, 125: Vlastos 1964, 2-6) However, an alternative explanation was put forward by Charlotte Triebel-
order’ or ‘equal distribution’. Therefore, it is actually anachronistic to speak of a constitutional terminology in connection with these pre-classical Greek notions of order.

The question that remains, however, is in which sequence the classical Greek constitutional terms originated. Could it be that Aalders was right in this regard, too, and that δημοκρατία was in fact coined first? Given the state of extant evidence, this is a question that cannot be conclusively settled. Three alternative explanatory models seem equally viable. The first one is the one originally defended by Debrunner, the third one is Aalders’, while the second one (possibly because of its strangeness, from a modern point of view) has never been proposed before:

1. The apparent attestation of μόναρχος and μοναρχία in political contexts in archaic Greek sources are authentic. This would mean that the respective notions of one man’s rule and sole ruler could have been expressed by means of these terms as early as the 9th-7th centuries BCE. After the emergence of direct democracies, these kinds of ruling-subject-oriented compound constitutional terms could then naturally have been extended to the new form of social rule (democracy), as well as to its contender-regimes (e.g. oligarchy). There are two main problems with this theory, originally proposed by Debrunner, however. The first is the above-discussed scarcity of occurrences of μόναρχος and μοναρχία in archaic sources. The second is that if μοναρχία really had been terminologically determined, then it would be expected that similar compound constitutional terms expressing alternative social orders had emerged as well. There are, however, no attestations of other compound constitutional terms of this kind in the archaic Greek sources.

Schubert, according to which we may distinguish between two layers in the history of the concept – one pre-democratic and one democratic. In the first phase, the contrast could then still be conceived of as being that between a general “representation of equilibrium” (Gleichgewichtsvorstellung) and a likewise general “idea of lordship” (Herrschaftsvorstellung), while the “democratic concept of isonomy” (demokratische Isonomie-Begriff) would presuppose a genuine mixture (echte Vermischung) realized through specific democratizing reforms (Triebel-Schubert 1984, 49).

10. Of course the classical Greek constitutional terms could be deified as well, which happened for instance with δημοκρατία after the restoration of democracy at Athens in 403 BCE. See IG II2 1496:131-132; 140-141. Unlike their archaic predecessors, the classical constitutional terms could, however, also be conceptualised in terms almost completely freed from divine legitimations. See Linderborg 2019.

11. Thus ισονομία, for instance, became politicized first in the Greek classical age, when it began to be used as a watchword for the new democratic order. See Vlastos 1964, 8.
2. The term μοναρχία was earlier than μόναρχος, and the former was originally used as a cosmically naturalizing principle referring to broadly conceived social, medical and cosmological states – as in the Alcmaeonian fragment discussed above. This theory is collaborated by the fact that μοναρχία, but not μόναρχος, is attested also in the earliest preserved tragedies from the Greek classical age (see Aesch. Theb. 883). The examples discussed above of ἀριστοκρατία preceding ἀριστοκράτης and τιμοκρατία being earlier than τιμοκράτης, also show that ancient Greek constitutional terms were not necessarily coined from an antecedent concrete noun, but the opposite sequence was possible as well. If this theory is correct, then μοναρχία may have begun to be used expressly as a constitutional term shortly after the democratic breakthrough, and other similar terms, e.g. ὀλιγαρχία and δημοκρατία, may then actually have been modelled on the former – just as Debrunner presumed.

3. The term δημοκρατία was first historically manifested and terminologically determined, before similarly contrived compound constitutional terms, e.g. μοναρχία and ὀλιγαρχία, were conceived. The term δημοκρατία could then have been modelled on the (possibly) previously existing δημαρχία, but semantically modified with the ending –κρατία (‘power’), so that the central characteristic of the new order – people’s rule rather than people being ruled – was captured. The ending –αρχία could then have been reapplied when coining the terms for the main alternative regimes (μοναρχία and ὀλιγαρχία) – since here the semantic element of people being ruled was again present. Were it admitted that all pre-classical attestations of μοναρχία and μόναρχος in political contexts may be interpolations, this theory of the origins of the classical Greek constitutional terms – originally defended by Aalders – could be possible as well.12

As mentioned, all three of the above hypotheses (1-3) are possible, and the state of our present evidence does not permit us to settle conclusively for any of them. All the same, this paper has argued (ex silentio) against the first hypothesis – which theory is also tantamount to the still prevailing common scholarly assumption; holding that the notion of ‘monarchy’, along with that of ‘tyranny’, goes back to the Greek archaic age. However, based on the

12. A fourth possible theory, that ὀλιγαρχία came first and the other terms were modelled on it, seems to be weakened by the consideration that the use of μοναρχία and δημοκρατία as constitutional terms is prefigured already in the earliest tragedies (Aesch. Theb. 883; Aesch. Supp. 604), whereas ὀλιγαρχία occurs first in Herodotus (3.82).
findings of this investigation, it seems at least as likely that μοναρχία as a political concept originated first after the establishment of the first democracies. This would entail that an explanatory model positing the co-originating of the terms δημοκρατία, μοναρχία and ὀλιγαρχία would be strengthened as well. What seems considerably more difficult to determine, however, is which one of three classical Greek constitutional terms came first.

References


3. 1-35.

