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NATURAL BORN KILLERS?
ARCHELAUS AND THE STRUGGLE(S) FOR SUCCESSION IN 5TH CENTURY MACEDONIA

Abstract. – The philosopher Plato claims that the Macedonian king Archelaus was the illegitimate son of Perdiccas II and a slave, and that he allegedly killed all the legitimate heirs to the throne and seized royal power in Macedonia by force. Although this story was well known in ancient times, modern scholars question it, either in whole or in part; nevertheless, all attempts to prove that it is unfounded are based on assumptions and inferences from circumstantial arguments. The reassessment of our sources, as well as a comparison with appropriate examples concerning the succession of royal power in Macedon, shows that even if the details of Polus' speech are extremely doubtful, its essence – the killing of Alcetas, Alexander and little Aeropus – may be accepted as a historical fact. At the same time, the context of the killings is probably not an invention of Plato, but comes from the propaganda *mythoi* that were a feature of the dynastic struggles between the Argeadae. What remains unclear is whether this propaganda dates from the time when Archelaus was still fighting for the throne, or whether it emerged later, in the troubled decade after his death and the murder of his son, which ended his lineage.

Key words. – Archelaus, Alcetas, Plato, succession, throne, Macedonia.

Plato tells us that Archelaus – an illegitimate son of Perdiccas II and a slave of Alcetas, Perdiccas' brother – killed all the legitimate heirs to the throne and seized royal power in Macedonia by force.[1] His alleged victims were Alcetas, Alcetas' son Alexander, supposedly a peer of Archelaus, and an unnamed seven-year-old son of Perdiccas II. The

[1] This paper is based on the article by V. Sarakinski in *Annuaire de la Faculté de Philosophie* 73, 2020, 149-156, which provides an overview and initial scrutiny of the events discussed here; for this occasion, the text has been expanded and thoroughly revised, adding new aspects and an extended analysis of events and sources.

story of Archelaus killing his uncle, cousin, and younger half-brother in order to become king was well known in ancient times, but it is disputed by modern scholars, with some of them denying it partially, and others completely. In any case, all attempts to prove that the story is unfounded are based on assumptions and a conjecture of circumstantial arguments; especially in recent times, there are neither new arguments nor new proposals to reconstruct the events – rather, previous scholarship is either automatically cited or the question is simply not mentioned. While it is admittedly difficult to argue against impressions and hunches on a question that many believe to have been settled, we think it deserves to be given another look.

1. Questions at hand

Before we get into the problem itself, we need to consider some open questions relevant to our topic that might help us interpret the text.

1.1. The inscription

All discussions about the succession and the state of the Macedonian court in the last decades of the 4th century[2] begin with the famous IG I³ 89 – an inscription recording the agreement between Athens and Perdiccas II, which ends with a rather long list of signatories on the Macedonian side:

> (12) ...ες Μ̣ακε̣δ[όνο]ν· Περδ̣ίκκας [Ἀλεχσάνδρο], Ἀλκέτες Ἀλεχσάνδρο, Ἀρχέλας Π̣[ερδίκκο (23) | (6) Μενέ̣λαος Ἀλεχσά̣[νδρ]ο, Ἀγέλαος Ἀ[λκέτο, ...]υρος Ἀλκέτο, Βυργῖνος Κράστονο[ς] (29) | (6)]ο, Ἄγερρος Φιλίππ[ο], Ε̣ὐρύλοχος Βο[(6), Ἀλέ]χσανδρος Πανταπόνο, Νεοπτόλε̣[μος, (28)], etc.

According to a number of researchers, the signatories from the Macedonian side are listed either according to the hierarchy within the kingdom at that time, or according to the line of succession, which in a way confirms the story of Polus, the contents of which we will discuss in a moment. This is certainly a reasonable assumption, even a likely one, but it still requires great caution in using the inscription. The date of the treaty has been debated ad nauseam without agreement;[3] at the same time, we do not even know how old Archelaus was at the time, a matter not unrelated to his standing among the signatories.

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[2] All dates are B.C.

[3] On the problems related to the inscription – the dating, the significance of the order of the signatories, etc., *v.* Meiggs 1972, 428-430; Hammond [& Griffith] 1979, 134-136; Hatzopoulos 1986, 283-286; Hammond 1989, 73; Greenwalt 1989, 24; Borza 1990, 161f., 295; Whitehorne 1994, 25f.; Psoma 2012, 74-76.

In fact, in the context of the succession to the throne, the whole order seems confusing, if not outright botched up. Not only does Archelaus precede the sons of Alcetas, but, more interestingly, he precedes his own brother, if his name occupied the gap in line 60.[4] This is important in the context of the assumption that Archelaus was in a secondary position due to the principle of porphyrogeniture, which may have been practiced in Macedonia. Perhaps the most peculiar aspect of the list is that the sons (?) of Perdiccas precede Menelaus, the son of Alexander I and brother of Perdiccas and Alcetas. As a result, Ogden's claim that "constitutionalism lurks" behind these assumptions and reconstructions, that is, that the order of the signatories should not be taken to reflect the order of succession, takes on added significance.[5]

The answer to the question of the order of succession may be found in the middle part of the inscription (l. 35-45), which seems to have been generally overlooked by scholars who have focused on the signatories:

[….....31…..… Περδίκκα]ν̣ καὶ τὸς βασιλέας τὸς [μ]ε̣τὰ Περδ̣[ίκκο …....…28…....]
[…....….34.....… ἐπὶ τοῖ]ς ἴσοις καὶ τοῖς ὁμ[οίο]ις. ὀμνυ̣[…….....…33……....….]
[…....….39…….…]υ̣ιδο καὶ ἐπαρᾶσθα̣ι [μὲν] τ̣[σῖ] μὲ ἐμ[μένοντι …....25 …...]
[…..….40…….....…]α̣ι Περδίκκαν κ[α]ὶ τὸ[ς παῖδ]ας τὸ[ς Περδίκκο …....…23…....]
[…….....….40……..…..….]α̣ν κατὰ τὸ δίκαιον ἐ[πὶ βασ]ιλει […....…32..…....…]
[...31.... οὐ στρατε]υ̣σόμεθα ἐπὶ πόλιν οὐδεμ[ία]ν *h*οῦν Π[ερδίκκας κρατεῖ ...17...]
[…....…..38…….… τ]ὰς δὲ χσυνθέκα[ς ἐμ]π̣εδόσο πρὸς Πε[ρδίκκαν …..24…..]
[…...30…… *h*ὰς χσυνέθ]εντο Ἀθεναῖοι ἀδ[όλ]ος ποιοῦντι Πε[ρδίκκαι …...25…..]
[…….……40…….……]ο̣ Περδίκκαν οὔτ̣ε [α]ὐτὸν οὔτε τὸς […..…31……..…]
[…….……40…….…] πρὸς *h*ὸς τὸν *h*όρκο̣ν {*h*ον} ὄ̣[μο]σα ν οὐ̣ […....30……]
[..39.. τ]ὸς αὐτὸς θ<ε>ός. ταῦτα δὲ ἀναγραφσ̣ά̣[το *h*ο γραμματεὺς *h*ο τε̃ς βολε̃ς ..6.]

This part probably refers to the general provisions of the agreement and the oath taken by both parties. What is interesting is the mention of Περδίκκαν κ[α]ὶ τὸ[ς παῖδ]ας τὸ[ς Περδίκκο.[6] If our suggestion

[4] Hammond [& Griffith] 1979, 134-136. Errington 1990, 267 n.3, rightly points out that Hammond's restoration is highly subjective. In fact, several different additions have been offered, depending on how different scholars date the inscription, with most variants not assuming a son of Perdiccas at all *v.* Ogden 1999, 31f. n.29. Of course, given the length of the gap, any guess is hypothetical.; however, *v.* n. 6.

[5] Ogden 1999, 31f. n. 29.

[6] The mention of Perdiccas' children seems to be a decisive argument in favor of Hammond's proposed restoration, at least as far as the presence of another son besides Archelaus is concerned. The narrowest circle of the Argeadae ends with one of Alcetas' sons, followed by Byrginus, the son of Craston. Consequently, on the basis of the expression 'children of Perdiccas' in the central part of the inscription, we must assume that the second son is also mentioned among the signatories, the only place for such an addition being the gap in the 60th line. However, the 40th line is also fragmentary, so we cannot be completely sure of this solution either.

for the content of this section of the inscription is correct,[7] then the mention of Perdiccas along with his sons makes sense only in the context of emphasizing his children as the future heirs upon whom the obligations and benefits of the treaty would fall.[8] In that case, regardless of the principle by which the signatories are listed at the end of the inscription, the order in which they are listed does not reflect the order of the heirs.

As we can see from this brief discussion, the fragmentary nature of the inscription, as well as the fact that we cannot date it more precisely, significantly reduces its value in discussing the succession, i.e., the position of Archelaus. If our admittedly hypothetical reinterpretation is accepted, then the story of Polus must be discarded, at least with respect to Archelaus' status and motives. But even if we do stick with the conventional interpretation and accept that the order of the signatories does reflect the order of succession, Plato's version must be modified again. Regardless of Archelaus' origin and current status, his patronymic testifies that he was recognized as a legitimate son of Perdiccas. Perhaps more importantly, it places him ahead of the sons of Alcetas, who, according to Polus' version, should have preceded him in the line of succession. As far as the position of Alcetas is concerned, we will come back to this question later in the text.

1.2. The 'regency' of Iolaus

Adding to the confusion is the case of Iolaus,[9] who most modern scholars believe was installed as regent in Aegae during Perdiccas' Potidaean campaign in 432.[10] According to Borza, the fact that Perdiccas did not appoint Alcetas, but rather the once-mentioned and otherwise unknown Iolaus, shows that Alcetas cannot be next in line to the throne, or at least that things are doubtful. Various opinions have been offered as to the identity of this Iolaus – perhaps an ancestor of the famous Antipater,[11] or even a member of the Argeadae.[12] Both opinions are based on his name itself – Antipater was the son of an Iolaus, and one

[7] This is important because it rules out the possibility of some kind of honor being bestowed – such as the *proxenia* awarded to Archelaus and his children in 407 (*OR* 188) – which could theoretically pass to them regardless of whether they were heirs or not.

[8] In the same way, in the Treaty of Corinth, the Greeks pledged themselves not to wage war against Philip and his descendants: οὐδὲ τ]ὴν βασιλείαν [τ]ὴν Φ[ιλίππου καὶ τῶν ἐκγόν]ων καταλύσω *RO* 76, ll.11-12. *cf.* Psoma 2012, 75.

[9] 1.62: ἀπέστη γὰρ εὐθὺς πάλιν τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ ξυνεμάχει τοῖς Ποτειδεάταις, Ἰόλαον ἀνθ' αὑτοῦ καταστήσας ἄρχοντα.

[10] *e.g.* Hammond [& Griffith] 1979, 123; Borza 1990, 161f.; Psoma 2015, 17; Müller 2017a, 86, 146f.

[11] Heckel 2016, 33.

[12] Gomme 1945, 219; Hammond 1989, 23; Müller 2017a, 147. Psoma 2015, 17, goes the furthest, suggesting that Iolaus may be another son of Alexander I.

of his sons bore the same name; in contrast, given the prominent role of the mythical Iolaus as a friend and fellow fighter of Heracles, the appearance of the name among the Argeadae may not come as too much of a surprise. Needless to say, this kind of reasoning does not seem to be very convincing. Incidentally, the idea that Iolaus was part of the Argeadae is based on another, more interesting and arguably more compelling argument – that it was common practice in Macedonia for the ruler to appoint his deputy from within the ruling family.[13]

However, this brings us to the crux of the matter – was there a regency at all? It seems that this piece of information deserves more attention than modern scholars have given it, not least because it would not be logical for Perdiccas to appoint a regent in Aegae in order to go and fight at Potidaea – less than 100 miles away and close to Anthemus, which was allegedly under Macedonian influence as early as the times of Amyntas I.[14] For the sake of comparison, Potidaea was much closer than Ennea Hodoi, which Alexander I had reached half a century earlier without the aid of any stand-ins. Gomme sees nothing peculiar in this episode, pays no particular attention to it, and simply, as Hornblower puts it, "accuses Thucydides of inconsequentiality".[15] However, the phrase Ἰόλαον ἀνθ' αὑτοῦ καταστήσας ἄρχοντα may refer to something completely different. In his commentary, Hornblower accepts a subtle solution from Jowett's translation: "having appointed Iolaus to take his place with the expedition", which would mean that the entire sentence refers to the command of the troops at Potidaea, and that it was Iolaus who was actually sent to Potidaea as a general. Then, what follows in the next paragraph becomes perfectly clear: [...] τὴν παρὰ Περδίκκου διακοσίαν ἵππον ἐν Ὀλύνθῳ μένειν, namely, 200 Macedonian cavalrymen who had been sent by Perdiccas (παρὰ Περδίκκου), and not led by him personally.[16] Accordingly, the entire episode with Iolaus, including his origin and supposed importance and posi-

[13] Hammond 1989, 23; Müller 2017a, 147.

[14] Hdt. 5.94: "Ἱππίῃ δὲ ἐνθεῦτεν ἀπελαυνομένῳ ἐδίδου μὲν Ἀμύντης ὁ Μακεδόνων βασιλεὺς Ἀνθεμοῦντα, ἐδίδοσαν δὲ Θεσσαλοὶ Ἰωλκόν"; nevertheless, *cf.* Gomme 1945, 216 on Strepsa and Anthemus. For a detailed account of this episode, and Anthemus in general, v. Xydopoulos 2012. *cf.* Hornblower 2013, 269.

[15] Hornblower 1991, 105.

[16] *loc. cit.* This interpretation is accepted by Rhodes 2014, 228, and implicitly by Zahrnt 2006, 592. In fact, Hornblower's proposal is anticipated, without further explanation, by Cole 1974, 63; and Hoffman 1975, 371. The solution is rejected by Müller 2017a, 146, on the grounds that a Macedonian ruler was expected to personally lead the army, and it was through military exploits that he legitimized his authority; this was especially important in this particular case, as his brother Philip personally led the contingent that had fought on the side of Athens. This seems plausible in theory, but given the volatile situation and the numerous challenges and pressures Perdiccas faced, it is equally logical to assume that he considered it far more important to remain in Aegae and personally control the core of the state rather than lead a relatively small contingent of 200 horsemen.

tion in Aegae, is irrelevant to our discussion and can be safely disregarded.

1.3. Euripides' play

The last piece of evidence we need to discuss briefly is the play *Archelaus*, written by Euripides during his stay in Macedonia. The work has not survived, but its content can be roughly reconstructed from the fragments and testimonies: exiled by his brothers, Archelaus, son of Temenus, joins a ruler named Cisseus and helps him in his fight against his neighbors. After the victory, Cisseus, unwilling to fulfill his promise, plans to kill Archelaus, who manages to outwit him and strikes the fatal blow first. He then flees to Macedonia, where, guided by a goat and a prophecy from Apollo, he founds the city of Aegae.[17]

As we can see, the tragedy has certain similarities with Herodotus' version of the origin of the dynasty,[18] but there are also some notable differences. Unlike Herodotus' version, which displays the obvious characteristics of an oral tradition, the play is, as one would expect, adapted and contains all the elements that are characteristic of the tragic genre.[19] Apart from the structural differences, which are of no interest to us in this case, the most important difference is, of course, that in Euripides Archelaus appears as the founder of the dynasty instead of Perdiccas:

Δαναὸς ὸ πεντήκοντα θυγατέρων πατὴρ
Νείλου λιπὼν κάλλιστον †ἐκ γαίας† ὕδωρ,
[ὃς ἐκ μελαμβρότοιο πληροῦται ῥοὰς
Αἰθιοπίδος γῆς, ἡνίκ' ἂν τακῆι χιὼν
†τεθριππεὺοντος† ἡλίου κατ' αἰθὲρα.]
ἐλθὼν ἐς Ἄργος ὤικισ' Ἰνάχου πόλιν·
Πελασγιώτας δ' ὠνομασμένους τὸ πρὶν
Δαναοὺς καλεῖσθαι νόμον ἔθηκ' ἀν' Ἑλλάδα.[20]
..... οὐκ ἔψαυσε· Λυνκὲως.....

[17] Hyg. *Fab.* 219: Archelaus Temeni filius exsul a fratribus eiectus in Macedoniam ad regem Cisseum uenit, qui cum a finitimis oppugnaretur Archelao regnum et filiam in coniugium dare pollicetur si se ab hoste tutatus esset Archelaus, quia ab Hercule esset oriundus, nam Temenus Herculis filius fuit. qui hostes uno proelio fugauit et ab rege pollicita petit. ille ab amicis dissuasus fidem fraudauit eumque per dolum interficere uoluit. itaque foueam iussit fieri et multos carbones eo ingeri et incendi et super uirgulta tenuia poni, quo cum Archelaus uenisset ut decideret. hoc regis seruus Archelao patefecit; qui re cognita dicit se cum rege colloqui uelle secreto; arbitris semotis Archelaus regem arreptum in foueam coniecit atque ita eum perdidit. inde profugit ex responso Apollinis in Macedoniam capra duce, oppidumque ex nomine caprae Aegeas constituit. ab hoc Alexander Magnus oriundus esse dicitur. *cf.* Harder 1985, 170-176; Gibert 2004, 330-333.

[18] Hdt. 8.137-138.

[19] Harder 1985, 133-135. *cf.* Müller 2016, 98f.

[20] fr. 228.

”Α[β]ας ἐγένετο· τοῦ δὲ δίπτυχον γένο[ς·
Προῖτος μανε[ι1σῶν θυγατὲρων τρισσῷν πατήρ,
ὅς τ’ εγκατῆγεν χαλκέωι νυμφεύματ[ι
Δανάην ... θεις . ... Ἀκρίσιός ποτε.
Δανάης δὲ Περσεὺς ἐγένετ’ ἐκ χρυσορρῦτων
σταγόνων, ὃς ἐλθὼν Γοργόνος καρατόμος
Αἰθίοπ’ ἔγημεν Ἀνδρομέδαν τὴν Κηφέως,
ἣ τριπτύχους ἐγείνατ· ἐκ Περσέως κόρους·
Ἀλκαῖον ἠδὲ Σθένελον, ὅς γ’ Ἄργους πόλιν
ἔ[σ]χεν Μυκήνας, πατέρα δ’ Ἀλκμήνης τρίτον
Ἠλεκτρύωνα· Ζ[ε]ὺς δ’ ἐς Ἀλκμήνης λέχος
πε[σ]ὼν τὸ κλειν[ὸ]ν Ἡρακλέους σπείρει δέμας.
Ὕλλος δὲ τοῦδ[ε], Τήμενος δ’ Ὕλλου πατρὸς.
ὃς Ἄργος ὤικησ’ Ἡρακλὲους γεγὼς ἄπο.
ἀπαιδίαι δὲ χρώμενος πατὴρ ἐμὸς
Τήμενος ἐς ἀγνῆς ἦλθε Δωδώνης πτύχας
τέκνων ἔρωτι· τῆς δ’ ὁμωνύμου Διὸς
πρόπολ[ο]ς Διώνης εἶπε Τημένωι τάδε·
Ὦ παῖ πεφυκὼς ἐκ γονῶν Ἡρακλέους,
Ζεὺς σ[οι] δίδωσι παῖδ’, ἐγὼ μαντεύομαι.
ὃν Ἀρχ[έλ]αον χρὴ καλεῖν ..... α[.].[.].[[21]

Although genealogies are a common part of Euripides’ prologues, this one is not only the longest,[22] but also spans the most generations.[23] At the same time, contrary to the usual order Heracles – Hyllus – Cleodaeus – (Aristomachus)[24] – Temenus, Euripides skips two generations. Although we find such abridgments in some of his other works,[25] it is significant that in this case, intentionally or not,[26] Archelaus comes much closer to Heracles, being his great-grandson. If we add to this the motive that his birth was allegedly a gift from Zeus and prophesied by Dione, it becomes clear that the author has tried to give his main character an (overly) glowing pedigree, as if to compensate for his problematic origin and the way his patron came to power. This is exactly how some scholars understand the purpose of the tragedy, that is – the invention of the genealogy of a new ruler.[27] Others, more cautious, accept the propaganda value of the tragedy, but place it in

[21] fr. 228a.

[22] Matthiessen 2002, 257.

[23] To compare, the genealogy in *Archelaus* spans 11 generations, while the next longest, in *Orestes*, spans only five; Gibert 2004, 350.

[24] In some versions, Aristomachus is left out.

[25] *v.* Harder 1985, 201.

[26] Harder (*loc. cit.*) suggests that Euripides may have “dropped” the two generations because they seemed less interesting.

[27] *e.g.* Duncan 2011, 79; Moloney 2014, 239f. *cf.* Matthiessen 2002, 257; Roisman 2010, 157.

the context of the struggles between Archelaus and his political opposition.[28] There are others, however, who believe that it was a piece of propaganda aimed at the Greeks, exalting and confirming the Argive origin of the Temenids at a time when relations between Archelaus and Athens were particularly close.[29] Of course, these propositions are not mutually exclusive, nor do they contradict what we learn from Euripides' biography: ἐκεῖθεν δὲ εἰς Μακεδονίαν παρὰ Ἀρχέλαον γενόμενος (*sc.* Euripides) διέτριψε καί χαριζόμενος αὐτῶι δρᾶμα ὁμωνύμως ἔγραψε.[30]

We shall not be discussing the validity of the other opinions here, but we will briefly address the first one. It is evident that the tragedy had some effect, as it clearly influenced the next intervention in the royal genealogy, namely the insertion of Caranus.[31] However, several details make us cautious about such a solution. First, as Archelaus would have realized, tragedy was not a particularly suitable medium for spreading official propaganda in Macedonia.[32] Second, as far as we can tell from the sources, Archelaus does not even seem to have attempted to impose the new genealogy as 'official' (whatever that meant in the context of Macedonian kingship).[33] Perhaps most importantly, the tragedy should be dated to 408/7,[34] when Archelaus' victory in the dynastic struggle was a thing of the past and his accession to the throne a *fait accompli*. In other words, after ruling for five or six years, he had nothing to gain by revisiting the question of his origin, legitimacy, and how he came to the throne. Therefore, whatever the

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[28] *e.g.* Greenwalt 1994, 129; Müller 2017b, 191. *cf.* Sarakinski & Panovski 2023, 100, 106.

[29] *e.g.* Harder 1985, 129-131; Borza 1990, 172f. *cf.* Hammond [& Griffith] 1979, 138.

[30] *test.* 1 (Harder).

[31] *Cf.* Harder 1985, 133-137, who still leaves open the question of whether the myth of Caranus appeared before, or after Archelaus, as some historians believe. Without engaging in discussion, we accept the view that the appearance of the new genealogy that begins with Caranus should be placed in the period of dynastic struggles after the death of Archelaus, if not later; *v.* Greenwalt 1985; *cf.* Sarakinski & Panovski 2023, 103f., 107f.

[32] Correctly noted by Greenwalt 1994, 129.

[33] It is tempting in this context to refer to Thucydides 2.100.2, who apparently follows Herodotus' version. But since we cannot determine more precisely when the "Peloponnesian War" was written, and whether Thucydides even had time to revise it completely, following Herodotus' version cannot be taken as a serious argument that he was not also aware of the version according to which Archelaus is the progenitor of the Temenids. On the other hand, a very serious argument against our position is the identification of the taenia-wearing youth on the coins of Archelaus with his mythical namesake. However, while some accept this identification (e.g. Borza 1990, 173; Greenwalt 1994, 129f.), Westermark 1989, 303, prefers to identify the figure as Apollo, especially since (though less frequently) a laurel wreath appears instead of a taenia on some specimens; *cf.* Draganov 2000, 71.

[34] Harder 1985, 125f.

propaganda function of the tragedy, if any, there is no direct and unequivocal evidence that compels us to connect it with Plato's story, or more specifically, with the way Archelaus came to power.

1.4. The system of inheritance

Before we finally focus on what Plato tells us, we must briefly address another important question – what were the rules, and how did the system of inheritance work under the Argeadae? This question is really just one aspect of the long and hotly debated problem of the nature and organization of the Macedonian state. Fortunately, and to our great relief, on this occasion there is no need to deal with this delicate subject, to which too many pages have already been devoted.[35] However, we must always be aware that 'inheritance models' are usually derived from authors' understanding and attitudes about the nature of the state, and probably for that very reason we could characterize most of the proposed solutions as formalistic models, regardless of whether the proposed solution is primogeniture, porphyrogeniture, election of the Macedonian Assembly, decision of the current ruler, agreement between the ruler and the aristocrats, and so on.[36]

As with almost all other problems and questions concerning the Argeadae, our sources are few, often fragmentary, and contradictory, so that none of the proposed solutions can be observed in more than one or two examples; moreover, if we exclude the Antigonidae, we must accept that "the data set is not statistically large enough, or consistent over a long enough period of time, to provide a clear answer".[37] Perhaps most importantly, the chaos, confusion, and often open conflict and bloodshed that accompanied virtually every example of succession that we have from Perdiccas II to Philip II (even Alexander III), argues against accepting a single model that was operative throughout the history of the Argeadae.[38] Regardless of whether we agree that virtually every transition of power has been a 'scramble for power',[39] the impression we get from the examples we know is that even if there were certain criteria or *nomoi* in the selection of a new ruler,[40] they were more often ignored and breached than observed.[41] It

[35] On the history of the problem and the main theories, *v.* Borza 1990, 231-252; Id. 1999, 44-48; King 2010; Hatzopoulos 2020, 88-121.

[36] *e.g.* Hatzopoulos 1986; Id. 1996, 276-279; Errington 1978, 99-103; Hammond [& Griffith] 1979, 150ff.; Anson 1985, 305-308, 312; Psoma 2012.

[37] Howe 2018, 10.

[38] Greenwalt 1989, 21, 30f.

[39] Mitchell 2007, 74.

[40] Such is the belief of Anson 2009, 278f.

[41] Howe 2018, 10. It seems that the only necessary criterion for any claimant is 'to be a member of the Temenid clan' (Greenwalt 1989, 35). In this sense, Carney 1995, 368-376, suggests that power in Macedonia was more likely to have belonged to the Argead

is precisely for this reason that in recent decades there has been a tendency to emphasize the partly informal but essential factors in the selection of a new ruler – the immediate situation in the state, the role of women of the royal household, especially the mothers of potential kings, personal family and friendship ties, and, of course, the ability to gather and mobilize support among Macedonian champions, but also from outside.[42] As expected, this climate of constant power struggles was particularly conducive to the generation of various propaganda *mythoi* – partly to glorify one's own origin and importance, partly to discredit potential rivals.[43]

2. The Problem

Let us now take a look at what Plato is telling us:

> ᾧ γε προσῆκε μὲν τῆς ἀρχῆς οὐδὲν ἦν νῦν ἔχει, ὄντι ἐκ γυναικὸς ἣ ἦν δούλη Ἀλκέτου τοῦ Περδίκκου ἀδελφοῦ, καὶ κατὰ μὲν τὸ δίκαιον δοῦλος ἦν Ἀλκέτου, καὶ εἰ ἐβούλετο τὰ δίκαια ποιεῖν, ἐδούλευεν ἂν Ἀλκέτῃ καὶ ἦν εὐδαίμων κατὰ τὸν σὸν λόγον. νῦν δὲ θαυμασίως ὡς ἄθλιος γέγονεν, ἐπεὶ τὰ μέγιστα ἠδίκηκεν· ὅς γε πρῶτον μὲν τοῦτον αὐτὸν τὸν δεσπότην καὶ θεῖον μεταπεμψάμενος ὡς ἀποδώσων τὴν ἀρχὴν ἣν Περδίκκας αὐτὸν ἀφείλετο, ξενίσας καὶ καταμεθύσας αὐτόν τε καὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ Ἀλέξανδρον, ἀνεψιὸν αὐτοῦ, σχεδὸν ἡλικιώτην, ἐμβαλὼν εἰς ἅμαξαν, νύκτωρ ἐξαγαγὼν ἀπέσφαξέν τε καὶ ἠφάνισεν ἀμφοτέρους. καὶ ταῦτα ἀδικήσας ἔλαθεν ἑαυτὸν ἀθλιώτατος γενόμενος καὶ οὐ μετεμέλησεν αὐτῷ, ἀλλ' ὀλίγον ὕστερον τὸν ἀδελφόν, τὸν γνήσιον τοῦ Περδίκκου υἱόν, παῖδα ὡς ἑπτέτη, οὗ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐγίγνετο κατὰ τὸ δίκαιον, οὐκ ἐβουλήθη εὐδαίμων γενέσθαι δικαίως ἐκθρέψας καὶ ἀποδοὺς τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐκείνῳ, ἀλλ' εἰς φρέαρ ἐμβαλὼν καὶ ἀποπνίξας πρὸς τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ Κλεοπάτραν χῆνα ἔφη διώκοντα ἐμπεσεῖν καὶ ἀποθανεῖν.[44]

It is clear that the speech has the characteristics of a personal invective, of the kind that we usually see in speeches of a political and judicial nature. In fact, Socrates himself, after pointing out that he is not at all convinced and does not agree,[45] makes an ironic remark to Polus: Ὦ μακάριε, ῥητορικῶς γάρ με ἐπιχειρεῖς ἐλέγχειν, ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν τοῖς δικαστηρίοις ἡγούμενοι ἐλέγχειν.[46] In fact, the speech is not particularly

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clan, channeled through a leader whose selection depended on immediate circumstances. *cf.* Borza 1999, 11-15.

[42] Various aspects of this conclusion have been addressed by several authors, *inter alios*, Greenwalt 1989; Carney 2000, ch.1; Mitchell 2007; Müller 2016, 37-40.

[43] Howe 2018, 11f.

[44] Pl. *Gorg.* 471a-c.

[45] 471d: καὶ μὴν οὐδέν γέ σοι τούτων ὁμολογῶ ὧν σὺ φῄς.

[46] 471e.

skillfully constructed and has several weaknesses and contradictions in its logic,[47] which, to a certain extent, should not come as a surprise. Like most of the interlocutors in Plato's dialogues, Polus is intellectually inferior to Socrates – another thing to keep in mind. The speech does not come from Socrates, but from one of his conversational partners, and so it is practically destined to be refuted. This does not mean, however, that we should reject the entire speech out of hand; as Greenwalt so wittily concludes, "the presentation is too baroque to have been entirely fabricated".[48]

For this reason, let us try to analyze it in a little more detail. As we can see, the 'accusation' of Polus boils down to three key points:

1. as the son of a slave woman, Archelaus was subordinate to his uncle Alcetas;

2. he lured Alcetas and his son Alexander and killed them;

3. he killed his younger brother, to whom the throne rightfully belonged.

2.1. A son of a slave woman?

We learn from Aelianus that the mother of Archelaus was called Simiche.[49] Ogden concludes that "Simiche is a typical name for a slavewoman – all too typical, perhaps";[50] unfortunately, we know nothing more about her. Carney suggests that she belonged to the Macedonian elite, and that the marriage was probably arranged relatively early in the reign of Perdiccas II, in an attempt to stabilize the kingdom and establish a political base.[51] All of this is logical, but regrettably unprovable – which may not be that significant in the end, as the attack is ultimately on Archelaus and his legitimacy. But as we have seen, IG I^3 89 reflects the position of Archelaus quite clearly and without ambiguity: a legitimate son of Perdiccas, who is at the very top of the political hierarchy of the state, so that any further discussion of this matter is superfluous.

It is interesting that we find similar allegations against Arrhidaeus, the later Philip III, or rather against his mother Philinne.[52] However, such a choice by Philip II would certainly be contrary to his usual approach, since all his marriages had a political aspect. In this sense, if Philip II wanted to cement his ties with Larissa, it is much more likely

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[47] *v.* Müller 2016, 165-169.

[48] Greenwalt 1989, 23.

[49] Ael. *VH*. 12.43.

[50] Ogden 1999, 8.

[51] Carney 2000, 17.

[52] Plut. *Alex.* 77.5 γυναικὸς ἀδόξου καὶ κοινῆς; Just. 9.8.2 saltatrix, 13.2.11 scortum; Athen. 578a ὀρχηστρίς.

that the new wife came from the local aristocracy, if not directly from the house of the Aleuadae, than that she was of humble origin.[53]

We can interpret in a similar way the conflict between Perseus and Demetrius, which culminated in the murder of the younger brother in 180.[54] As an echo of this struggle, we can perceive the attacks against Perseus and his mother – that she was of humble origin, or that she was not Philip's lawful wife but a concubine,[55] or that Perseus was implanted and was not his son at all.[56] What all these versions have in common is an emphasis on the superior lineage of Demetrius, as opposed to the questionable lineage of Perseus. In this case, things are more complicated, first because no source definitively tells us who Perseus' mother was, and second because we have no knowledge at all about Demetrius' mother. However, we can point out several things that clearly show that this is once again the usual propaganda, but this time it is coated with a layer of pro-Roman tradition. First, Philip V obviously had no doubts about Perseus' origins – not only did he appoint him nominal commander of part of the army during the Second Macedonian War, despite him being only 13 years old,[57] but less than two decades later he founded a city called Perseis, apparently in his honor.[58] Second, although we cannot be absolutely certain, it is accepted in scholarship that his mother was Polycrateia, the widow(?) of Aratus the Younger. If this is the case, then although she was not really part of the elite circle from which the Antigonids usually took their wives, her origins were not as lowly as the sources suggest, and she may well have come from the ranks of Argive aristocracy.[59] Finally, we can add to these examples that of Eurydice, who was clearly the target of merciless attacks and enemy propaganda – her origin, her infidelity to Amyntas III, her role in the murder of her own son, etc. – which probably came from the group gathered around Gygaea and her sons.[60]

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[53] Ogden 1999, 25f.; Carney 2000, 61f.

[54] The episode is confusing and colored by pro-Roman propaganda, making it difficult to sort out what exactly happened and why. The main literature on the subject is listed in Пановски 2011; Dreyer 2013.

[55] The sources are unclear as to whether or not Philip ever actually married her, but it seems likely that he did. *Cf.* Liv. 27.31.8: uni etiam principi Achaeorum Arato adempta uxor nomine Polycratia ac spe regiarum nuptiarum in Macedoniam asportata fuerat. It is interesting that this sentence gives the impression of hostile propaganda not only against Philip V, but also against Polycrateia, who, attracted by a royal marriage, left her husband, and in this aspect resembles a part of the propaganda against Eurydice, the mother of Philip II. Whether the events really happened this way, and whether Aratus was still alive, is another question; *v.* n. 60.

[56] Polyb. 23.7.5-6; Diod. 29.25; Liv. 39.53.2-3, 40.9.2, 41.23.10; Plut. *Aem.* 8.7, *Arat.* 54.3; Ael. *VH*. 12.43.

[57] Liv. 31.28.5, 33.3.

[58] *v.* Cohen 1996, 99.

[59] Ogden 1999, 183-186; Carney 2000, 193f; Briscoe 2008, 399f.

[60] *v.* Howe 2018, 12-19.

The case of Archelaus fits perfectly into this matrix of hostile propaganda and attacks in the fight for the throne, especially in the context of amphimetric clashes between half-brothers, and it is precisely in this context that it should be interpreted.[61] It is interesting to note that although the initial impression is that the origin of the pretender and his mother was very important in these struggles – which is why we see such accusations so often – both Archelaus, the three sons of Eurydice, and Perseus eventually succeeded to the throne. Obviously, however important this element was, other factors prevailed in the final tally.

2.2. The murders of Alcetas and Alexander

The description and details of how Archelaus got rid of Alcetas and Alexander are extremely dubious[62] and should probably be discarded. However, the murder itself does not seem implausible and should be placed in the context of the struggles for the throne after the death of Perdiccas. Unfortunately, we know too little about Alcetas to be certain of the basis of his claim to the throne.[63]

It was the combination of Plato's description and the information in Thucydides that led scholars to believe for a long time that Alexander I effectively divided the kingdom so that although Perdiccas II was king, his brothers Philip and Alcetas were given separate *arkhai* to rule.[64] Aside from the fact that such a division would be unprecedented in the history of the Argeadae, the sources are not as consistent as it might seem at first glance.[65] Thucydides does mention an *arkhe* of Philip,[66] but he does not mention what it was based on, i.e. how he

[61] What remains unclear is why Simiche is Alcetas' slave. According to Hammond [& Griffith] 1979, 154f., Simiche was originally the wife of Alcetas, being then taken by Perdiccas. This solution is neither convincing, nor can it be supported by any other source. On the other hand, Ogden 1999, 8, believes that she is described in this way simply to emphasize that Alcetas was the legitimate ruler, and that she, therefore, belonged to him. This, too, seems to us to be an overly free interpretation of a relatively clear and simple text. Perhaps in this case we should assume an authorial intervention for the sake of the dialogue, since the addition of this detail adds to Archelaus' crime: among other things, he took the life of his former master when he essentially owed him his loyalty *cf.* Müller 2016, 167. Of course, like the rest of the assumptions, this, too, is unprovable, so the question must be left open.

[62] Müller 2016, 168; especially since it resembles in many ways the famous episode when Alexander I lured the Persian envoys with drink and women, then killed them and covered up the crime, Hdt. 5.18-21.

[63] The whole matter is further complicated by the fact that we do not know the age of Alexander I's sons, nor whether he had one or more wives, i.e. whether they were full brothers or half brothers; *v.* Hammond 1989, 71f.; Ogden 1999, 5-7; Müller 2017a, 86-98.

[64] *e.g.* Cole 1974, 55-57; Borza 1990, 134f.

[65] For a detailed analysis of the whole problem, see Müller 2017a, 103-115, whose conclusions we generally follow.

[66] Thuc. 2.100.3.

acquired this position, nor how long he held it.[67] It appears that Plato also speaks of the same thing, since he states that Alcetas was also deprived of his *arkhe*. However, it would seem too much to ask for legal and formal precision from an apparently biased and antagonistic speech in a philosophical writing. More importantly, Plato/Polus uses the same term in the context of the young son of Perdiccas II, and this can only refer to the entire kingdom. As we can see, *arkhe* as a complex *terminus technicus* in Thucydides for the position of Philip[68] is not to be equated with the generic *arkhe* in Plato, which obviously refers to kingship; and as soon as the bond between the authority of Philip and that of Alcetas is broken, the theory of the delegation of special *arkhai* by Alexander I fails at once.[69]

How Philip managed to achieve his position in Amphaxitis remains unclear, but this does not affect us too much, as the position of Alcetas is of greater importance. If we accept the previous conclusion, then Plato implies that Alcetas claimed royal power that he had already lost or was prevented from obtaining. A scholion is even more specific: ὃν (*sc.* Ἀλκέταν) ἐκβαλὼν ὁ Περδίκκας εἶχε τὴν βασιλείαν.[70] So Alcetas either ruled at one point but was overthrown, or else he was prevented from ruling Macedonia and was exiled. Since we have no coins bearing his name, the second possibility certainly seems more likely. This opens up the possibility of a relatively straightforward reconstruction that reconciles the literary sources: after the death of Alexander I, Perdiccas succeeded in gaining the throne at the expense of Alcetas who was exiled; and after his death, Archelaus called his uncle

[67] Müller 2017a, 108.

[68] Müller 2017a, 107-110, drawing primarily on Thucydides 2.95.2-3 and Diodorus 12.50.4, 6, speculates that Philip also ultimately aspired to kingship. This is doubtful – not only do these passages refer to practically the end of his career, but they rather reveal the ambitions of his 'allies', Athens and Sitalces. For a contrasting interpretation, see v. Badian 1993; Саракински 2016. But even if we accept that Philip reached for the whole kingdom, this still does not tell us how, when and why he managed to establish himself in Amphaxitis. Accordingly, it seems better, at least for the moment, to treat Philip's *arkhe* as separate from that of Alcetas, referred to by Plato.

[69] Hammond [& Griffith] 1979, 115; Id. 1989, 71, is another who doubts the theory of the division of territories since Alexander I, but his argument is untenable. Namely, on the basis of the information in Curtius 6.11.26 that Alexander met a violent end, he points out that his death was obviously unexpected, so that he had no opportunity to devise such a system for his sons. This is not very convincing, since Alexander could have devised and applied the system during his reign, after his sons had grown up. Worse, he assumes that the division of powers and territories was actually a decision of the Assembly in an attempt to appease the feuding brothers, and when Alcetas and Philip proved disloyal, that the same Assembly deprived them of their positions. Such a far-fetched construction not only lacks any support in the sources, but also raises the question of why, if the Assembly could react so forcefully during a dynastic crisis, did it not do so on numerous other occasions when the state was facing the same problem.

[70] *Schol. Arist*. 4.120.2 Dindorf iii, p.450. Although the source is later in date, it appears to be well informed, as it goes on to give the name of Archelaus' brother.

back with false promises, only to lure him in and kill him.[71] Unfortunately, this assumption is unacceptable, as IG I³ 89 clearly testifies to Alcetas' prominent position at the Macedonian court.[72] If we are to 'save' these few precious passages dealing with this obscure period, we must somehow reconcile them. Therefore, based on Plato and the scholia, we must assume the following course of events. Although Alcetas had, or at least claimed to have, a right to the throne, it was denied him by Perdiccas, who exiled him and took over the state. Given IG I³ 89, the brothers apparently reconciled at some point – in the 420s at the latest, and since Thucydides has nothing to say about Alcetas as he slowly turns his attention to Macedonia, we could place this reconciliation in the previous decade, if not earlier. We do not know where Alcetas was and what he was doing, but it is logical to assume that, like Philip, he controlled some territory from which he defied Perdiccas. If he was a mere refugee, then there is no explanation why Perdiccas, in the course of the reconciliation, would have given him such a prominent position at the court, which could have posed a potential danger to his own successors. If this is true, then the order of the signatories of IG I³ 89 becomes clearer; not by right of succession, but by reputation and influence – a position Alcetas secured for himself in his reconciliation with Perdiccas.[73]

If this was the situation at the Macedonian court at the time of Perdiccas II's death, then we can assume that Alcetas, or rather, given his age, his son Alexander, was once again asserting his claims to royal authority, that is, contesting the succession of Archelaus, which is why he was able to outwit and eliminate them.

2.3. The murder of Aeropus

Finally, we will briefly address the murder of his younger half-brother, who, according to the scholiast, was likely named Aeropus.[74]

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[71] *cf.* Ogden 1999, 6, who assumes exactly this sequence of events.

[72] Ogden 1999, 7, does not seem too troubled by this and assumes a temporary reconciliation. This is not impossible, but if Perdiccas was facing a new challenge from Alcetas in the 430s or 420s depending on when we date the inscription, then Thucydides would have certainly mentioned it.

[73] *cf.* Greenwalt 1989, 24.

[74] τοῦτον δὲ ἐπικεκλῆσθαί φησιν Ἀλκέταν ἢ Μέρωπον. Since Meropus is not a name found in the dynasty, the form is usually amended to Aeropus. According to Hammond [& Griffith] 1979, 135f., the author's uncertainty about the name is due to the fact that Perdiccas had two sons by Cleopatra, so he was not sure which one had been killed. This is not very convincing – if one son was a threat to Archelaus, why not the other? Moreover, neither Plato nor the scholiast suggest that there was another son of Perdiccas and Cleopatra. Ogden 1999, 8, suggests that Alcetas is listed by mistake, possibly influenced by the murder of the uncle, i.e. that the son's name was Aeropus. This solution is not very convincing either, but it seems more acceptable, since it seems unlikely that Perdiccas

While the details are again questionable,[75] the killing itself is not problematic and fits nicely into the examples of conflict between amphimetric brothers.[76] As we can see, the issue of Archelaus' questionable lineage and status – specifically, the right of Perdiccas' young son to inherit the throne – remains a dominant theme.[77] As for the origin, we have already established that, thanks to IG I³ 89, any further discussion is pointless, and such rumors should be placed in the context of the propaganda battles between the various contenders. Moreover, given that the rules of succession in Macedonia were at best ill-defined, and the process itself chaotic and often bloody, the claim that the kingdom rightfully belonged to the child is somewhat debatable.

But it was precisely this 'fluidity' in the succession that made the younger half-brother, or rather his mother and the faction behind her, a potential threat to Archelaus. Unfortunately, we know absolutely nothing about Cleopatra's background.[78] However, the fact that Archelaus apparently felt threatened enough to eliminate the young son of Perdiccas II, while not daring to do the same to his mother, shows that she came from a family of sufficient power and influence. If so, her arrival at the court of Perdiccas II must have upset the existing balance and become a source of restlessness and uncertainty for Archelaus, especially after the birth of his half-brother.[79] In other words, the situation is very similar to the last days of Philip II, when his marriage to Cleopatra strained his relationships with Olympias and Alexander to the breaking point. Given the similarities between the two cases, it is

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would give one of his children the same name as his brother, with whom he disputed the throne.

[75] Whitehorne, 1994, 18; Müller 2016, 168. Müller 2017a, 117f., goes one step further and doubts the historicity of the killing of Aeropus, assuming that he is identical to the future *epitropos* of Orestes and then ruler Aeropus II. In a setting where we know too little about the events in Macedonia, almost no reconstruction can be rejected with certainty; in this case, however, the proposal seems less than convincing. First, Aeropus is a common name among the Argeadae, so a coincidence in the names is not unlikely. Second, both Plato and the scholiast insist that Archelaus killed the boy early in his reign. This is important because the scholiast, unlike Plato, also mentions the boy's name, which suggests that he is following another source, not just the speech of Polus. Thirdly, the invention of a murder that apparently did not take place makes no sense and has no propaganda value, and forces us to assume that it is a fabrication by Plato himself, which we obviously know not to be the case, thanks to the scholiast. Therefore, we maintain that Aeropus the son of Perdiccas and Aeropus II are two different people.

[76] Ogden 1999, 8.

[77] *cf.* Schol. Arist. 4.120.2: οὗτος *sc.* Ἀρχέλαος δὲ νόθος ὢν ἀπέκτεινε τὸν ἀδελφὸν γνήσιον ὄντα, ᾧ ἡ βασιλεία ὠφείλετο, καὶ οὕτως αὐτὸς ἐβασίλευσεν.

[78] Whitehorne 1994, 26-29 suggests that she belonged to the royal house of the Lynkestae, a daughter or sister of Arabaeus, the old enemy of Perdiccas II, while Carney 2000, 22 believes that she came from the Macedonian aristocracy, if not from the Argeadae themselves.

[79] Whitehorne, 1994, 20f.

not surprising that the outcome was similar, with the difference that Olympias eliminated both mother and daughter, and Alexander – her guardian Attalus. The fact that Archelaus had to content himself with killing his younger brother probably testifies to the relative weakness of his position, at least at the beginning of the reign, and perhaps supports the view that his wife Cleopatra, mentioned by Aristotle,[80] is identical with the last wife of Perdiccas II.[81] But this question is beyond the scope of this paper.

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To sum up, even if the details of Polus' speech are extremely doubtful, its essence – the killing of Alcetas, Alexander and little Aeropus – may be accepted as a historical fact. That Archelaus' succession was problematic and that he managed to ascend the throne through bloodshed is not at all surprising: such was the fortune of almost all Argead rulers. Unfortunately, due to the lack of sources, we are unable to say anything more with certainty. At the same time, we have seen that the context, that is, the reasons for the murders, are probably not an invention of Plato, but are part of the propaganda *mythoi* that were a feature of the dynastic struggles between the Argeadae. What remains unclear is whether this propaganda (or propagandas?) dates back to the time when Archelaus was still fighting for the throne, or whether it emerged later, in the troubled decade after his death and the murder of his son, which ended his lineage.

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[80] *Pol*. 1311[b].

[81] *e.g.* Hatzopoulos 1986, 283; Whitehorne 1994, 28f.; Ogden 1999, 10f.; Carney 2000, 21-23. Hammond [& Griffith] 1979, 169 is sceptical, while Müller 2017a, 118 adopts an agnostic stance.

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