Illusions of Democracy in the Hellenistic World

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Political Illusions

One of the most extraordinary ceremonies in western democracies is the Royal address given by the Queen in the House of Lords, at the State opening of Parliament. The Imperial State Crown, the Sword of State, and the Cap of Maintenance are transported to Westminster by coach ahead of the Queen as symbols of royal power. The royal procession, following a route prescribed as much by tradition as the route in a Roman triumph, brings the Queen from Buckingham Palace, down The Mall and along Whitehall to the House of Lords. As the Queen passes under the Royal Arch of the Victoria Tower, the Union Flag is lowered and the Royal Standard is raised. The Queen in her parliamentary dress enters the chamber of the House of Lords, sword and cap being carried before her. While the Queen is processing, the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod is dispatched to the House of Commons where he bangs three times on the door with his ebony staff. As a reminder that Members of the Parliament fought hard to gain independence from the Crown, the door is slammed in his face before he is allowed in to summon them to the Lords, as no monarch is allowed to enter the Commons. The Members of the Parliament traditionally dawdle and are boisterous in protest that the House of the Lords still is the senior chamber. After the Lords are seated and the Members of the Parliament are stood in position at the bar of the Lords, the Lord Chancellor hands the Queen her speech. Although written by the government, setting out its aims for the forthcoming Parliamentary session, the Royal Address creates the illusion that it expresses the monarch's wishes, who refers throughout to “my government”; adding, however, the phrase “other measures will be laid before you,” thus giving the government flexibility to introduce other legislation if necessary. In this ceremony, the monarch is dressed in a particular attire—one is tempted to use the word “costume”; all the details are staged; the ceremony is overloaded with symbols; everyone involved—the yeomen, the Members of the Parliament, the Lords, and the Queen play a part; the effect, to a certain extent, is the maintenance of the illusion that the United Kingdom is ruled by a sovereign monarch.

In our everyday life and in public life we continually encounter situations of artificial and staged behavior. We are also surrounded by illusions, whether we recognize them or not,
whether they are consciously staged or transmitted as fundamental assumptions. Some of them are harmless—for instance creating the illusion of a successful performance by applauding after a bad lecture; others have more serious consequences—for instance the illusion of free will which dominates our system of justice, or the illusion that parliamentary democracies always guarantee the full and unlimited expression of the will of the people. Hardly any society can function without elements of staged behavior or illusion.

Illusions and elements of theatrical behavior are particularly prominent in public life and in the behavior of statesmen, especially in our times, when the mass media provide almost unlimited possibilities (see §8 below). We recognize them for instance in the gestures and body language of candidates in elections, or in the artificial tone in parliamentary debates. I briefly mention only a striking convergence in the behavior of modern statesmen: the demonstration of health, vigor, and youthfulness. All American presidents after Jimmy Carter have included jogging in their public image (figure 1); they were soon imitated by statesmen in the Old Continent.

Figure 1: A statesman’s mask: the healthy and vigorous president

Vladimir Putin misses no opportunity to demonstrate his skills in martial arts, his predecessor presented himself dancing (or rather jumping up and down) despite his severe heart problems,1 and an image of Andreas Papandreou swimming at a Cretan beach aimed to persuade the electorate that the “iron premier” (siderenios) had recovered from his health problems. The eighty-year-old President Perón in Argentina dyed his hair, and until a German court ruled to prohibit discussions on whether the then German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder dyed his, this subject had provoked some debate.2 A few years ago, readers of a French newspaper had no reason to doubt the credibility of a report that some extra weight had been

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removed from President Sarkozy’s waist with the help of Photoshop—until they noticed that the report appeared on April Fools’ Day.

Illusion is defined as the ability of appearances to deceive the mind and senses. The result of illusion is the belief of an individual or a group that something exists although it does not—or it really exists in a different form—or the belief that something has taken place, although it has not—or it has not taken place in the way they think it has. According to this definition, statesmen who adopt such forms of behavior attempt to create illusions.

An illusion with more serious consequences is the impression that democracy—roughly defined as the free and equal right of every citizen to participate in a system of government, primarily practiced by electing representatives of the people by the people—is only limited or abolished by violations of the constitution or violent interventions of extraconstitutional organs (e.g. the army), and not by social and economic forces, such as wealth and indiscernible economic interests (e.g. in the U.S.), the control of mass media (e.g. in Berlusconi’s Italy), local systems of patronage that allow parliamentary seats to pass from one generation to the next within a family (e.g. in Greece), and murky interconnections between economic interests, the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary power, and those who control the mass media.

That the rule of the people in a democracy can be an illusion is an observation made for the first time by Thucydides in connection with the Athenian democracy. In his appraisal of Pericles’ leadership, Thucydides (2.65) designated Periclean Athens as only nominally a democracy (logoi men dēmokratia); in reality it was the rule (arkhē) of one man. This remark needs to be seen in its context. Pericles’ rule was based on charisma; it was primarily imposed by means of his personality. Admittedly, social position, inherited wealth, and education had helped him establish his leadership, but without his political skills neither the social position nor the wealth of his family would have had the same impact. Thucydides observed a discrepancy between the principles of a radical democracy and reality, which originated in disparity with regard to personal skills and political insight. Today, but also in the moderate democracies of the Hellenistic period that will be the subject of this presentation, the discrepancies between the ideal and the reality of democracy have their roots in anything but the merits of individuals.

What makes Thucydides’ observation particularly interesting is the fact that it retrospectively refers to the period in which Athens had developed the most advanced
democratic institutions. The Athenian democracy introduced mechanisms that undeniably safeguarded the participation of the people: regular meetings of the assembly; the accountability of the magistrates; appointment to important positions by lot; limits on office iteration; people’s courts; remuneration for public service. It has often and rightly been pointed out that this triumph of democracy in Athens had its limits: only a small segment of the inhabitants of Athens had citizenship; the female members of citizen families had limited participation in public life (essentially as priestesses and in other cultic functions); foreign residents had many rights but were rarely awarded citizenship; and the economy relied very much on slave labor. Nostalgic aristocrats resented the rule of the people (dēmos), and the allies of Athens often perceived the interventions of the Athenians in their own affairs (political institutions, coinage and standards, administration of justice, payment of tribute, foreign policy, defense) as a tyranny, against which some of them revolted. But despite these deficiencies, the Athenian political reforms of the mid-fifth century BCE not only influenced the political organization of other Greek communities, but they also created standards against which democratic constitutions, in general, are still being judged. Despite its own decline, the Athenian democracy also influenced the diffusion of democratic institutions in the rest of the Greek world.

In this presentation I shall first give a brief overview of the diffusion, acceptance, and main features of democracy in the Hellenistic period (§2), and explain the main factors that undermined the sovereignty of the people: external interventions by kings (§3) and the inherited power of an elite of wealthy and politically influential families (§4). I argue that the visibility and continual commemoration of benefactions and service in magistracies was an important medium exploited by the members of the elite in order to make their political power acceptable, ensure that their descendants continued the family tradition of political leadership, and establish an oligarchic regime without abolishing the democratic institutions (§§5–6). The awarding of honorific titles (e.g. “the son of the polis”) created the illusion that the community was a big family, and expressed the expectation that the members of the elite would treat their polis with the same affectionate care that loving sons treat their mothers. Theatrical behavior of kings and statesmen displayed affability and closeness to the people

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3 See Ober 2009, with earlier bibliography.
(§7). Taking into consideration the Hellenistic paradigm of theatricality, one can critically study the theatrical behavior of both the modern elite (as observed by Panajotis Kondylis) and statesmen who attempt to create a deceptive image of themselves by exploiting the possibilities of the mass media (§8).

The Expandable Meaning of Dēmokratia: Hellenistic Democracies and Their Limits

It was once believed that the defeat of an alliance of Greek cities under the leadership of Athens and Thebes at Chaironeia in 338 BCE meant the end of the Greek city-states and with it the end of democracy. Until the mid-twentieth century many histories of ancient Greece ended with that year. The following period—the Hellenistic period—was primarily treated as the history of kings and their wars. Although the curriculum of many American and European universities still continues this tradition, research in ancient history has established that the Hellenistic world is a world of poleis striving for autonomy as much as it is a world of monarchies.4 It is not possible to estimate the number of Hellenistic poleis. In the approximately 250 years from Alexander the Great (336–323 BCE) to the last revolts of Greek cities against the Romans during the Mithridatic Wars (c. 88 BCE) many new poleis were created and dozens were destroyed or lost their autonomy. At times, their number may have approached 800. In addition to the poleis in “old Greece” and the old colonies of Magna Graecia, the Aegean coast of Asia Minor, the Black Sea, and Cyrenaica, new poleis with institutions of the Greek type were founded by Hellenistic kings for their Greek military settlers in Asia Minor and the Near East. In Crete alone, more than fifty independent poleis existed at the beginning of the Hellenistic period—most of them had disappeared by its end.5

The institutions of most of the small cities are not known, and for this reason generalizations should be avoided. Also, the institutions changed in the course of the Hellenistic period, especially after the mid-second century BCE, under the influence of internal

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5 For an inventory of poleis in the archaic and classical periods see Hansen and Nielsen 2004. For the new foundations see Cohen 1995 and 2006. For Crete see Chaniotis 1996:12.
social developments and in part under Roman pressure. Many city-states had oligarchic constitutions—usually noticeable in the fact that only a small group of citizens had the right to occupy political offices or to become members of the council (boulē), which prepared all proposals that were presented to the assembly (probouleusis). Despite this limitation, one can safely claim that in the Hellenistic period democratic institutions experienced their greatest dissemination in Greek history.

Admittedly, the democratic institutions in the Hellenistic period are more comparable to those of the moderate Athenian democracy of Demosthenes’ times than to the radical Athenian democracy of the fifth century BCE. Still, in this period the foundation of the people’s sovereignty, the popular assembly (ekklēsia), regularly met in hundreds of city-states to elect annual magistrates, to approve of all proposals of the council and the magistrates, to honor local and foreign benefactors, to grant citizenship to foreigners, to confirm treaties, and to exercise control over the magistrates. Foreign envoys appeared in front of the assembly to present their case. Statesmen had to use persuasion strategies in order to get the people on their side. Inscriptions containing the decrees (psēphismata) approved by the assembly occasionally record the number of votes in favor of and against the proposal. Citizens had the right to address the council and request that it should draft a decree. Proposals of the council (probouleumata) could be amended after considering the discussions in the assembly. In this respect, moderate democracy is the most widespread constitutional form in the Hellenistic period.

In some cities democracy was regarded as an ideal that was worth fighting for. Commemorative anniversaries for the abolishment of tyrannical or oligarchic regimes are

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6 See e.g. Hamon 2005 on the increased political power of the council (boulē) in the second and first centuries BCE. General overview: Dmitriev 2005.


10 E.g. SEG XLV 1500 (Alabanda, first century BCE); Gauthier 2005:85–89.
known in several cities, as are also honors for the defenders of democracy. As a decree from Klazomenai or Erythrai reports (third century BCE), the supporters of an oligarchic regime had removed the sword from a statue of a tyrannicide, “believing that his posture was against them.” After the collapse of this regime the city decreed that the statue should be restored in its earlier form. Measures were also taken to keep the bronze statue clean from stain and to crown it on the first day of each month and during all festivals. In Athens, democracy’s birthplace, the personification of the Dēmos, the sovereign people, was worshipped as a god, and a procession in honor of the personification of Dēmokratia took place every year, attended by the ephes.14

By the Hellenistic period the word dēmokratia, for a long time hated by the proponents of oligarchy and aristocracy, was widely acceptable. But it was also used to describe constitutions with clearly oligarchic or aristocratic features. A treaty between Rhodes and the Cretan city of Hierapytna (c. 201 BCE) contains for instance the following clause:15

If anyone attacks the city or territory of the Rhodians or subverts their laws, revenues, or their established democracy (damokratian), the Hierapytnians shall assist the Rhodians with all possible strength.... If anyone deprives the

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12 Engelmann and Merkelbach 1973:no. 503: ἐπειδὴ οἱ ἐν τῇ ὀλιγαρχίᾳ τῆς Φιλίτου τοῦ ἀποκτεινόντος τὸν ἀνδριάντος τοῦ ἀνδριάντος έξείλον τὸ ξίφος, νομίζοντες καθόλου τὴν στάσιν καθ᾿ αὐτῶν εἶναι,... ἔγγονυ τὸ ἔργον διαστολὴν ποιησάμενους μετὰ τοῦ ἀρχιτέκτονος, καθ᾿ ὅτι συντελεσθήσεται ὡς πρότερον εἶχεν... ὡς ὅπως δὲ καθαρὸς ιὸν ἔσται ὁ ἀνδριάς καὶ στεφανωθήσεται ἀεὶ ταῖς νομηνίαις καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις ἑορταῖς, ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τοὺς ἀγορανόμους.
14 SEG XXIX 116, line 18.
15 Bengtson 1969:581: εἰ τίς κα ἐπὶ πόλιν ἢ χώραν στρατεύεται τὰν Ἱεραπυτνῖος... ἢ εἰ τίς κα τὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ δικαίου γινομένας πθόδους ἢ τὰν καθεστακυῖαν δαμοκρατίαν καταλύη, βοαθεῖν Ἱεραπυτνῖος... εἰ δὲ τίς κα τὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ δικαίου γινομένας πθόδους ἢ τὰν καθεστακυῖαν δαμοκρατίαν παρὰ Ἱεραπυτνῖος καταλύη καὶ συμμαχίαν μεταπέμπωνται Ἱεραπυτνῖοι, ἀποστελλόντων Ἱοί Ῥοδίοι...
Hierapytnians of their lawful revenues from the sea, or subverts the established democracy of the Hierapytnians, and the Hierapytnians ask for auxiliary force, the Rhodians shall send two triremes to the Hierapytnians.

Neither Hierapynta nor any other Cretan city had a democratic constitution. As for Rhodes, Strabo (first century BCE) comments:

The Rhodians care for the δῆμος, although they do not live under a democracy. They wish nonetheless to keep the mass of the poor in good condition. And so the common people are provided with food, and the wealthy support those in need according to an old tradition. They have liturgies for the provision of food, with the result both that the poor receive sustenance and the city has no lack of available manpower, particularly as regards the fleet.

We notice that Strabo’s comments do not refer to the constitution (elections, power of the assembly, membership in the council, etc.), but only to wealth. In the mid-second century BCE, the greatest Hellenistic historian, Polybius, in his famous description of the Achaean League, characterized its constitution as a democracy:

Nowhere will you find a better constitution and more genuine ideal of equality, freedom of speech, and in a word a true democracy than among the Achaean.

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16 Chaniotis 1996:15 (with further bibliography).
And yet, in the Achaean League a small minority of wealthy landowners, who formed the league’s cavalry, monopolized political power.\(^{19}\)

Although the word *dēmokratia* should not always be taken literally, as these passages show, it is true that in the Hellenistic period it had acquired a positive, albeit expandable, meaning. This is quite comparable with the expandable meanings of “democracy” in the modern world: no other artificially created word has had so great a dissemination (before the introduction of the Internet) as the word “democracy”—a term created some time in the fifth century BCE to describe the new Athenian institutions. But probably also no other political term has been subject to so many controversies, manipulations, inappropriate usages, and modifications. Innumerable attributes can be attached to the word *democracy* to modify its meaning—for instance in modern Greek attributes such as ἀμέση, βασιλευομένη, κοινοβουλευτική, λαϊκή, προεδρευομένη, προεδρική, and so on. The “People’s Democracies” have little to do with the “parliamentary democracies,” but the word *democracy* is used in both cases. If we take a close look at Polybius’ statement (above), we notice that the historian qualifies democracy: the praise of “true democracy” (*dēmokratias alēthinēs*) presupposes the existence of “false democracies.” The reference to the genuine ideal of democracy in the Achaean League is an implicit criticism on pretentiousness as regards the ideal of democracy elsewhere. This suggests that a very vague concept of *dēmokratia* was idealized, and at the same time the concrete institutional meaning of *dēmokratia* varied from city to city and from time to time. In the late third or early second century BCE, Magnesia on the Maeander arbitrated in one of the numerous Cretan wars, requesting one of the leading powers, Gortyn, to let the Cretans live in democracy.\(^{20}\) When the Magnesians referred to *dēmokratia* in this context, they did not apply a technical term; they did not recommend a specific constitutional form or reform. They were using a catchphrase that admitted multiple interpretations. What they meant by *dēmokratia* was not necessarily what the Gortynians understood by the same word. Similarly, when Alexander the Great ordered the Chians to establish a democracy, he acted not as a proponent of a political ideal, but as a monarch who took a decision which best suited the interests of his

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\(^{19}\) Aymard 1938.

campaign. Alexander made sure that the laws of the Chians were approved personally by him, not by their popular assembly.\textsuperscript{21}

A discrepancy between ideal and reality is inherent in democracy, as it probably is in any constitution. The great diffusion of democratic institutions combined with the vague and expandable use of the term “democracy”/\textit{dēmokratia} make the Hellenistic period an interesting case study for the factors that increase this discrepancy between ideal and reality. Despite the ubiquity of democratic institutions, or some kind of democratic institutions, in the Hellenistic cities, democracy was often only an illusion.

The illusion of democracy, which I shall treat in this contribution, is of an entirely different character than the one noticed by Thucydides (see §1 above). It was not generated by the disparity between the charisma of one individual and the inferior political skills of the large majority of the citizens. It was generated by political and social processes. I should stress, again, that the following examples do not support any generalizations: the political institutions of hundreds of communities of citizens and their development over a period of almost three centuries are extremely complex phenomena that need to be seen in very concrete historical contexts. The following remarks, therefore, only apply to the specific cases that I discuss here. They are based on a few selected sources that show the mechanisms through which main principles of democracy—the people’s sovereignty and the possession of equal political rights by all citizens, regardless of property or birth—were undermined; they also reveal the means that were used to maintain the illusion of the rule of the people. I do hope that they can stimulate thoughts concerning the dangers for democracy in classical antiquity and beyond.

Before I discuss a few selected sources, I shall briefly summarize the main factors that limited democracy in the Hellenistic cities. First, the rule of the people was undermined by the direct or indirect control which Hellenistic monarchies\textsuperscript{22} and later Rome exercised on Greek poleis. Secondly, we can observe a discrepancy between the image of democracy and the reality

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\textsuperscript{21} Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum\textsuperscript{3} 283.

\textsuperscript{22} The Antigonid kingdom of Macedonia; the Seleucid Empire that controlled most of Asia Minor and the Near East; the Ptolemaic kingdom, which had possessions in the Aegean and the coast of Asia Minor; and Pergamon.}
of rule by a small number of wealthy men. Within this elite, wealth and social networks were inherited, and with them the claim to political leadership. In the Hellenistic period the political power of a small number of families resembled the rule of an aristocracy—without, however, reaching the level of institutionalized aristocratic rule. The transformation into a genuine hereditary aristocracy only occurred at the end of this period and characterizes the imperial period.\textsuperscript{23}

**The Castration of Sovereignty by Kings**

The limitation of democracy by monarchical power was straightforward. By appointing “overseers” (epistatai, epi tēs poleōs) or tyrants, establishing garrisons, offering support to political friends, and communicating their wishes through letters, Hellenistic kings exercised close control of the cities in the areas under their influence. Nevertheless an effort was made to save face and to retain the illusion of democracy and sovereignty.\textsuperscript{24}

The correspondence between King Philip V, ruler of the Antigonid kingdom of Macedonia, and the nominally sovereign city of Larisa in Thessaly (217–215 BCE) is very instructive in this respect.\textsuperscript{25} The Lariseans had sent an embassy to Philip explaining that their city had suffered population loss because of the wars. Responding to their embassy, Philip explained:\textsuperscript{26}

> Until I think of others who are deserving of your citizenship, for the present I rule that you must pass a decree to grant citizenship to the Thessalians or the other Greeks who are resident in your city. For when this is done and all keep together because of the favors received, I am sure that many other benefits will result for me and the city, and the land will be more fully cultivated.


\textsuperscript{25} Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum\textsuperscript{3} 543, Bagnall and Derow 2004:no. 32.

\textsuperscript{26} Lines 5–7: έως άν οὖν έτέρους έπινοήσωμεν άξιός τού παρ’ ύμιν πολιτεύματος, ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος κρίνω ψηφίσασθαι ύμᾶς, ὅπως τοῖς κατοικούσιν παρ’ ύμιν Θεσσαλῶν ἢ τῶν ἄλλων Ἕλληνων δοθῆι ἢ πολιτεία etc.
Philip could not do more than request that the Lariseans vote the necessary measures. The grant of citizenship, in other words the acceptance of new full-rights members into the polis community, was a decision that only the sovereign community could take, through vote in the people’s assembly. No matter how great the king’s real power, he could never, under any circumstances, award to anyone citizenship in any polis of his realm. What he could do was to ask the community to take this decision following the constitutional procedure of a vote in the assembly. And, of course, he could make clear what his will was. Philip did this by using the very strong verb *krinō* (‘to rule’, ‘to pass a judgment’); but he combined his ruling with arguments (“I am sure that many other benefits will result for me and the city”), in order to allow the Lariseans to pass the decree not as the result of his ruling but as the result of persuasion, thus saving face. We know that Philip was a master of theatrical behavior, who often wore the mask of the affable ruler, the friend of the people. The historian Polybius reports that when a few years later (209 BCE) Philip visited Argos “he laid aside his diadem and purple robe, wishing to produce the impression that he was on a level with others, a lenient individual, and a man of the people.” Philip used his dress as a costume in which he could play a role and evoke a deceiving image; similarly, he also used the words to mask a command as advice. The two verbs in the expression *krinō psēphisasthai humas* (“my judgment is that you shall vote …”) contradict one another: a decree of the popular assembly in a sovereign community can never be the result of the ruling of a king. This phrase very characteristically shows the discrepancy between the nominal sovereignty of Larisa and the true power of the king.

Philip’s recommendation was too strong to be ignored. The inscription reports that “the city has voted to act in these matters as the king wrote in his letter.” However, the story did not end there. When the king’s attention was distracted by the first Macedonian war against Rome, the Lariseans recanted, cancelled the decree that had been forced upon them, and deprived the new citizens of citizenship. We learn this from Philip’s second letter:

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27 Polybius 10.26.1–2: Φίλιππος ὁ βασιλεὺς Μακεδόνων μετὰ τὸ ἐκτελέσαι τὸν τῶν Νεμέων ἀγώνα αὕτης εἰς Ἀργος ἐπανῆλθε καὶ τὸ μὲν διάδημα καὶ τὴν πορφύρα ἀπέθετο, βουλόμενος αὐτὸν ἵππον τοῖς πολλοῖς καὶ πρᾶον τινα καὶ δημοτικὸν ὑπογράφειν. ὡς δὲ τὴν ἐσθῆτα δημοτικωτέραν περιετίθετο, τοσούτῳ τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἑλάμβανε μεῖζῳ καὶ μοναρχικωτέραν.
I hear that those who were granted citizenship in accordance with the letter I sent to you and your decree, and whose names were inscribed on the stele, have been erased. If this has happened, those who have advised you have ignored the interests of your city and my ruling.

This time Philip explained in more detail the advantages of this measure, and made clear what the city should do. Again, he could not award citizenship himself; he could not pass a decree, but he could dictate its content:

And yet I even now exhort you to approach the matter with impartiality, and to restore to their citizen rights those chosen by the citizens.

He then asks the Lariseans to put off any decision on persons who were regarded as not deserving citizenship, and concludes:

But warn in advance those who intend to lodge accusations against them, that they may not be seen to be acting in this way for partisan reasons.

This second time the city complied. In this case the negotiations between a sovereign city and a king are recorded in a document which presents the king’s view (quoting his letter) and the official response of the city (the decree passed by the assembly). What was the contemporary perception of such external limitations on the free expression of the assembly’s will?

A narrative by an anonymous Hellenistic historian of Athens, which has indirectly survived in Plutarch’s life of Phokion, gives us an impression of how a contemporary intellectual perceived such royal interventions. The narrative describes how the Athenian general Phokion was put on trial because of his opposition to the Macedonian king Philip Arrhidaios (Alexander’s brother and successor) in 318 BCE. Plutarch’s Hellenistic source, probably an eyewitness, describes the scene:\(^{28}\)

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\(^{28}\) Plutarch *Phokion* 34: καὶ προσῆν τὸ σχῆμα τῇ κομιδῇ λυπηρόν, ἔφ’ ἀμάξας κομιζομένων αὐτῶν διὰ τοῦ Κεραμεικοῦ πρὸς τὸ θέατρον ἐκεῖ γὰρ αὐτοὺς προσαγαγὼν ὁ Κλεῖτος συνείχεν, ἀρχι ὁ δὲ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἐπιλήφθωσαν οἱ ἄρχοντες, οὐ δούλον, οὐ ξένον, οὐκ ἄτιμον ἀποκρίναντες, ἀλλὰ πᾶσι καὶ πᾶσαις ἀναπεπταμένοιν τὸ βῆμα καὶ τὸ θέατρον παρασχόντες, ἐπεὶ δὲ ἦ τε ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀνεγνώσθη, λέγοντος αὐτῶ μὲν ἐγνώσθαι προδότας γεγονέναι τοὺς
Their transportation [of Phokion and his associates] presented a sad spectacle, as they were brought from Kerameikos to the theatre. After they had been brought there Kleitos [a supporter of the king] put them under arrest, until the magistrates called the assembly, allowing everyone access to the podium and the theatre, not preventing anyone from attending, neither slaves nor citizens who had lost their citizenship. Then the letter of the king was read out, in which he said that as for his part, he regarded (ἐγνώσθαι) these men as traitors, but since the Athenians are free and autonomous, they have the right to pass their own judgment. After that, Kleitos presented the men. Then some covered their heads and others looked down shedding tears. Someone found the courage to stand up and say that since the king had entrusted such an important decision to the people, it was proper that the slaves and the foreigners leave.

As all historical narratives, this one is based on selection and composition. What the contemporary historian intended to show with his narrative is that the popular assembly, the most important expression of Athenian democracy and the people’s sovereignty, had become a show, a spectacle, a theatrical performance. In order to show that this alleged expression of the will of the people was no more than an illusion, the historian evokes in a subtle way the image of a spectacle. He does this by mentioning details that at first sight seem insignificant. Why did he decide for instance to describe the route followed by the arrested men: “they were brought from Kerameikos to the theatre”? For his readers, familiar with the topography of Athens, the significance of this route was clear. The prisoners were brought from Dipylon, the northwest gate of Athens at Kerameikos, to the theatre of Dionysos, on the south slope of the Acropolis; in other words they followed the processional route of the great Panathenaia, one of the greatest Athenian spectacles. The historian also chose to mention that this assembly took place in the theatre—not in the Pnyx, where the assembly usually met. Again, the mention of the venue, which would have been dispensable, serves a purpose: it shows that the assembly...
that took place in the theater was a parody of an assembly; not an expression but a show of
democracy. This assembly did not consist of the citizens alone, but also of the usual audience
of the theatre: men and women, citizens and foreigners, free and slaves. During this spectacle,
the letter of the king was read, in which he recognized the right of the Athenians to pass their
free judgment, but only after he had informed them about his own judgment. In the theater—
the usual venue of spectacle, illusion, and deception—the illusion of democracy and freedom
was maintained. In the historian’s narrative the assembly functions like a theatrical mask, to
conceal the bitter reality of the loss of sovereignty.

Such externally imposed limitations of sovereignty and democracy were to a certain extent
acceptable, because monarchs not only adopted theatrical behavior in order to save face, but
they also offered the cities protection and benefactions. Thus the relation between kings and
cities was based on reciprocity.\(^\text{29}\) Its most characteristic expression was the cities’ offering of
godlike honors to those kings who had served their interests.\(^\text{30}\) We shall observe the same
interplay between reciprocity and theatrical behavior in connection with the power of the
elite in Greek poleis.

\textbf{“Local Heroes”: The Power of the Elite}

The concentration of power in a circle of a few families, whose claim on it was based on
wealth, blood, or both, is more relevant for the history of democracy than royal interventions.
Prosopographical studies—that is the study of individuals and their families—in cities from
which we have substantial data (e.g. Athens, Rhodes, and Kos) show that certain individuals
occupied offices repeatedly; political life was increasingly the prerogative of wealthy
individuals, who undertook liturgies (obligatory contribution by wealthy people to state
expenses for specific tasks), proposed decrees in the assembly, occupied offices, won the favor
of the people with benefactions, took initiatives, bought priesthoods, and made sure that their
descendants inherited not only their wealth but also their political influence. Similar
phenomena—local political “dynasties”—are known in modern democracies as well, not only


\(^{30}\) Habicht 1970; Price 1984, 23–53; Ma 2002; Chaniotis 2007b.
in contemporary Greece, where a seat in the parliament often passes from one generation of a family to the next.

In principle, inherited wealth also implies inherited status. But an elevated status in itself does not necessarily mean that the scions of elite families automatically inherit their parents’ or ancestors’ political role. This does not happen automatically, and it does not happen in all societies. It needs to be encouraged and facilitated. Precisely this was the case in Hellenistic cities. The inheritance of political position was directly encouraged by the members of the elite, and indirectly implemented through the honors offered to benefactors by their grateful cities and through the exemplum of fathers and forefathers.

We may observe the heredity of political power even in Athens, the city with the longest democratic tradition. As is true for most forms of specialized knowledge, in antiquity political experience and military expertise—the latter was very important in a period of continual wars—were also best transmitted within the family or within the circle of friends. The family of the Athenian statesman Eurykleides, who together with his brother Mikion dominated Athenian political life in the second half of the third century, is a good case in point.\(^3\) An honorary decree for Eurykleides epitomizes what a Hellenistic city expected from an efficient and dedicated leader; it also makes clear that none of this could be achieved without enormous wealth. Only part of the text is preserved, but the content of this eulogy is more or less clear:\(^2\) as a treasurer of the military treasury Eurykleides spent a lot of his private money while serving in this office. He organized contests during festivals, spending the enormous amount of seven talents.\(^3\) “When the land was lying fallow and unsown because of the wars,” he procured the necessary money for cultivation. “He restored freedom to the city together with his brother Mikion” by procuring the necessary money for the withdrawal of the Macedonian garrison from Piraeus. “He fortified the harbors and repaired the walls of the city and of Piraeus, together with his brother Mikion.” He concluded alliances with other Greek cities. He made sure that loans were repaid to Athens. He proposed new laws. He organized spectacles to


\(^{32}\) IG II\(^2\) 834.

\(^{33}\) 43,000 drachmas. This roughly corresponds to the annual income of 120 mercenary soldiers (cf. note 41).
honor the gods and introduced an athletic competition of armed men in order to commemorate the restoration of freedom. Finally, he excelled in his building activities. From another inscription we know that he had also served as general.\textsuperscript{34} Eurykleides’ political and military activity may be extreme in duration, intensity, and breadth, but on a smaller scale one finds men like Eurykleides in almost every Hellenistic city with a substantial epigraphic record (see below on Diokles of Kos).

Interestingly, the honorary decree for Eurykleides also reveals how he introduced his son to political life.\textsuperscript{35} After having served as treasurer of military funds (\textit{tamias stratīōtikon}) for a year and unable to occupy this office for a second time, “he performed this office (\textit{tēn ton strat[īōtikon tamieian? die]xegagēn}) through his son” (\textit{dia tou huiou}). He thus involved his son in his political activities. He applied this method for a second time with regard to the liturgy of \textit{agōnothesia}, that is the financial responsibility for the organization of a contest: “he provided again his son for this charge” (\textit{kai palin ton huion dous [eis tauten] tēn epimeleian}). Eurykleides’ son Mikion, who learned his duties under the guidance of his father, is known to have served later as \textit{agōnothetēs} (responsible for the organization of contests) and member of a commission for the purchase of grain; he also donated money.\textsuperscript{36} Many members of this illustrious family are known as winners of equestrian competitions, and these victories gave them additional prominence.\textsuperscript{37} I repeat that generalizations are not permissible. We cannot determine the frequency of similar phenomena, but Eurykleides was certainly not an isolated case. Helikon, commander of the guard in Priene, was assisted by his son during his term in this office (late third century BCE),\textsuperscript{38} thus introducing the next generation of his family to political life.

An example of another political leader who combined family traditions, wealth, and personal skills is provided by a certain Diokles, one of the most powerful men in Kos in the late third century BCE. Already his father Leodamas had served as \textit{monarkhos} (the highest

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} IG II\textsuperscript{2} 1705.
\item \textsuperscript{35} IG II\textsuperscript{2} 834 lines 1-6.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Habicht 1982:179-182.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Habicht 2006.
\item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{Inschriften von Priene} 19.
\end{itemize}
Diokles’ career is described in an honorary decree of his district (Halasarna, c. 200 BCE), which reveals a man of great political talent but also significant inherited power:

Diokles, son of Leodamas, acting in accordance with the virtue which has been handed down to him by his ancestors, has continually shown every zeal and care for the district of the Halasarnitai. During the wars he aimed to secure the fort and those who inhabit the territory, showing the best consideration and taking upon himself every danger for its sake. For during the Cretan War, when it was announced that the site was threatened, he arrived with many men, and making inspections together with those who had been assigned to guard (the fort) he asked the inhabitants to come together to the fort and to join its defense, until it occurred that the enemies abandoned their plan to attack. In the present war, as the enemies were often threatening (the fort), when many naval and land forces were gathered in Astypalaia, he brought weapons and catapult missiles in order to keep the fort safe....

The decree goes on to describe how Diokles showed initiative, leadership, and tactical thinking. A second decree of Halasarna in his honor describes similar achievements during the Cretan war: he took care of the construction of fortifications, procured the necessary funds, arranged for guards and their wages, and gave loans whenever necessary. Diokles is also known as the man who proposed a public subscription (epidosis, see below) to improve the defense of Kos. With the sum of 7,000 drachmas, he was also the largest sponsor.

Wealth was the necessary condition for all this. The significant words in the first decree—words that reveal the mentality of the citizens in this city and in such critical situations—are: “he acted in accordance with the virtue which has been handed down to him by his ancestors.” In a society which not only acknowledged the natural inheritance of wealth, but also believed

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39 SEG XLVIII 1104; emphasis mine.

40 Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum 3 569.

41 In this period one drachma is the daily honorarium of a mercenary soldier. It is hard to determine the equivalent in contemporary sums of money, but it is safe to assume that 7,000 drachmas corresponds to at least 250,000 euros (probably more).
in the inheritance of virtue and in the obligation of descendants to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors in their conduct in public life, a society which primarily expected members of the elite to take initiatives, the citizens could not be equal.

We may observe the interplay of exemplum and expectation, benefaction and claim on power, in the honorary decree for a certain Harpalos, a prominent citizen of Beroia in the late Hellenistic period (late second/early first century BCE).\(^4\) Only part of the text is preserved and can be translated: Harpalos, we are told,

\[\textbf{renewed the glory inherited by his forefathers,} \text{ even though their glory was smaller (than what they deserved) due to the hard times in which they lived, and he zealously tried not to be left behind with regard to virtue. As soon as he reached the age of citizenship he did not stay behind the older men in making requests or serving as an ambassador for the fatherland; and remembering that his grandfathers had served as generals and having in mind the expenses which they had undertaken and what they had constructed for the adornment and the protection of the city, he courageously accepted the greatest priesthood which involves the largest expenses [emphasis mine].}\]

Harpalos felt the obligation to follow the ancestral exemplum. His forefathers could serve their community as generals, but a young man living under the Roman rule did not have the opportunity to show his courage in war; so Harpalos showed his courage by accepting the challenge of a costly office. As in many honorary decrees of this period, in this text it is stressed that Harpalos inherited his participation in public life from his ancestors. The decree of his grateful fellow citizens enabled Harpalos to pass this heritage on to the next generation. The decree that honored Harpalos was to be read every year during the elections. Before the citizens elected new magistrates, they were reminded what Harpalos and his ancestors had done for them.

There was only a very small step from inherited status, inherited wealth, inherited leadership, and inherited gratitude to the institutionalization of a class of privileged citizens. From the late Hellenistic period (first century) onwards, prominent citizens are characterized

\(^4\) \textit{I. Beroia 2 = SEG XLVII 891, lines 5–17.}
as the “first citizens,” the “first class,” or the “leading families”\(^4\). An honorary decree of Plarasa/Aphrodisias for one of the political leaders and benefactors of the community during the wars of the Late Republic (first century BCE) is very eloquent with regard to the institutionalized heredity of social position\(^4\). The text begins with praise of the man’s ancestors:

… Since Hermogenes Theodotos, son of Hephaistion, one of the first and most illustrious citizens, a man who has as his ancestors men among the greatest and among those who built together the community and have lived in virtue, love of glory, many promises (of benefactions), and the fairest deeds for the fatherland; a man who has been himself good and virtuous, a lover of the fatherland, a constructor, a benefactor of the polis, and a savior; a man who has shown benevolence and prudence/moderation in his conduct towards the entire people and towards each one of the citizens; a man who has always shown the

\(^{43}\) Quass 1993:51–56.

\(^{44}\) Chaniotis 2004:no. 1: ἐπεὶ Ἑρμογένης Ἡφαιστίωνος Θ̣εόδοτος, τῶν πρώτων καὶ ἐνδοξοτάτων πολειτῶν, προγόνων ὑπάρχων τῶν μεγίστων καὶ συνεκτικῶτων τὸν δήμον καὶ ἐν ἀρετῇ καὶ φιλοδοξίᾳ καὶ ἐπανγελίᾳ πλείσταις καὶ τοῖς καλλίστοις ἔργοις πρὸς τὴν πατρίδα βε-βι-ωκότων, καὶ αὐτὸς γεγονὼς ἀνήρ καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόπατρις καὶ κτίστης καὶ εὐεργέτης τῆς πόλεως καὶ σωτὴρ καὶ εὐνόως καὶ σωφρόνως ἀνεστραμένος πρὸς τὸν σύνπαντα δήμον καὶ τοὺς καθένα τῶν πολειτῶν καὶ πρὸς θεοὺς εὐσεβεστάτα διακείμενος καὶ πρὸς τὴν [π]ατρίδα, φιλοδοξότατος κοσμήμας αὐτὴν ἐπανγελίας καλλίστας καὶ ἀναπαύσας, εἰς πολλὰς δὲ πρεσβείας καὶ ἀνανκαιώσεως [πρ]οχειρισθεὶς καὶ εἰς ἀγώνας κατὰ τὸ κάλλιστον ἐτέλεσεν [π]άντα, τὰς τὸν ἀρχαὶ πάσας ἐπιδεξάμενος καὶ χιροτονηθεὶς πλευνάκις ἐπισήμως ἀνεστράφη δικαίως καὶ καθαρῶς, παρὰ τὸς ξύλου προσφέρεις καὶ τοὺς ἱγουμένους πλείστην γνῶσιν καὶ σύσταις σχῶν εὐνεργήσας καὶ διὰ τῶν μεγίστα τὴν πόλιν· αἱρεθεὶς δὲ καὶ στεφανηφόρος ἐτέλεσεν καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν λειτουργίαν [ι]εροπρεπῶς καὶ κοσμίως· ἐφ’ ὀς πάσιν ἀποδεξάμενος αὐτὸν ὁ δήμος ἀπέδωκεν αὐτῷ τὰς καταξίας χάριτας· τὰ δὲ νῦν μετήλλαξαν τὸν βίον, καθήκει δὲ ἐπισήμων καὶ τὴν ἐκκομιδὴν γενέσθαι αὐτοῦ· δεδόχθαι τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ ἐπεμνήσθαι αὐτὸν καὶ μετηλλαχθῆναι καὶ στεφανωθῆναι ὑπὸ τῆς βουλῆς καὶ τοῦ δήμου στεφάνωι ἀριστήωι ἀπὸ χρυσῶν ἐκατόν.
utmost reverence towards the gods and the fatherland; who has adorned the fatherland most generously by (the execution of) the most noble promises and with dedications; who has been elected to many and most crucial embassies and contests and has accomplished everything in the best possible way; a man who having accepted all the magistracies and having been elected in an outstanding way many times has shown a just and clean conduct; a man who has established relationships and has received appreciation (recommendation) by the authorities and the officials (governors?) becoming a great benefactor of the polis through these as well; who having been elected as a stephanēphoros has fulfilled this liturgy as well in the manner appropriate to a religious office and in decency; whom the people has acknowledged for all these (services) rewarding him with appropriate acts of gratitude; (since) he has now passed away and it is the proper thing to conduct his funeral as well in an outstanding manner, let the council and the people resolve that he is to be praised also after his death and that he is to be crowned by the council and the demos with the crown of merit, at an expense of one hundred golden coins.

This aristocracy, to which Hermogenes and other “first citizens” belonged, owed its existence to a great extent to the critical situations caused by the continual wars. Not unlike kings, the members of the elite to which he belonged had established their position with their services as military leaders, peacemakers, and benefactors (see also §5 below on Kallikrates of Aphrodisias); not unlike kings, they exploited their personal achievements in order to set themselves apart from the rest of their community. The differences between royal and nonroyal images were not fundamental, but of degree.

What is also interesting in this text is the fact that two fundamentally different concepts are confused: arkhē, the office which an individual occupied on the basis of election; and leitour gia, the financial responsibility for a public task (e.g. contests, festivals, the gymnasium, etc.), which was undertaken exclusively by wealthy citizens, and only on the basis of their property. By stating that Hermogenes “was elected as a stephanēphoros and fulfilled this liturgy” (my emphasis), the author of this text reveals that by that time the office of the stephanēphoros could be understood as a liturgy exactly because it was exclusively occupied by wealthy citizens. This text shows the transition from the actual but not institutionalized rule
of the wealthy citizens to the institutionalized monopolization of power by a hereditary elite of wealthy families. This new political regime characterizes the following period—the imperial period. Despite this transition, even in the imperial period, which I cannot treat here, nominally the people remained sovereign—in fact the citizens were occasionally in a position to express dissatisfaction.\textsuperscript{45}

Another example of this de facto transformation of moderate democracies to aristocracies is provided by Apollodoros of Berenike (early first century BCE).\textsuperscript{46} When King Ptolemy (IX?) died (80 BCE) and the lack of a central authority had encouraged bandits to attack the city and to terrorize the countryside, Apollodoros was appointed as commander of the young men “and taking upon himself every danger he established the greatest peace.” The city had been without a fortification wall and had already twice been the victim of pirates. In this critical situation, the citizens entrusted him with full authority over the city and the countryside, a unique position which he held with such prudence that his fellow citizens praised him for safeguarding concord in the city and demonstrating just judgment. These are kingly qualities: peace and security, unlimited authority, justice, and good judgment. The individual who demonstrated them filled a gap left by the absence of a king; in many a small city, such a “local hero” might have resembled a king.

Exactly as the decrees for Diokles of Kos, Harpalos of Beroia, and Hermogenes of Aphrodisias, the honorary decree for Apollodoros of Berenike begins with a reference to the fact that he belonged to a family with a tradition in public service. Such references to the forefathers are stereotypical in honorary decrees; they reflect the fact that men not only inherited their father’s property and legal and social status, but also their moral obligations and their ambitions.

\textbf{The Visibility of Service for the Community}

One of the most effective media for strengthening the power of the elite and making it acceptable was the visibility of its services and benefactions. Although recent research has

\textsuperscript{45} For this development in Aphrodisias see Chaniotis 2005b.

\textsuperscript{46} SEG XXVII 1540.
shown that the public finances of the Greek cities were quite advanced,\textsuperscript{47} public funds never sufficed to cover all public needs. For this reason the Greek poleis always needed the financial assistance of their citizens, in addition to taking loans. The financial contributions imposed on the citizens (taxes, liturgies undertaken by the wealthy citizens, extraordinary contributions called eisphorai, and leitourgiai) are irrelevant for our subject; but the voluntary contributions are not, since they were an ideal way for the wealthy citizens to display their willingness to spend (part of) their private property for the community—a willingness which was, however, combined with the expectation that the community would accept their political leadership.

Not unlike the nature of the relation between kings and poleis, the relation between the elite who monopolized power and the mass of the citizens who accepted this monopoly was based on reciprocity. We have already seen (§2 above) that Strabo attributed to such a reciprocal relation the success of the Rhodians: the wealthy were willing to spend for the community, and the poor citizens were willing to accept their rule (Strabo 14.2.5 [C 652/653]):

The Rhodians ... wish to keep the mass of the poor in good condition. And so the common people are provided with food and the wealthy support those in need according to an old tradition. They have liturgies for the provision of food, with the result both that the poor receive sustenance and the city has no lack of available manpower, particularly as regards the fleet.

Primarily, two types of voluntary contributions enhanced the political power of the elite: the entirely voluntary donations or endowments (doreai) and the donations for a particular purpose defined by the popular assembly (“subscriptions,” epidoseis). Here, I shall focus on the latter.

In Greek antiquity there is no such thing as the noble spender who wants to retain his anonymity. Financial contributions for the city were visible, transparent, and above all loud. At the beginning of the Hellenistic period Theophrastos describes the behavior of the stingy man.\textsuperscript{48} When he notices that a public subscription (epidosis) is on the agenda of the popular assembly, he leaves the assembly unnoticed, hoping that that no one will observe that he had


\textsuperscript{48} Theophrastos Characters 22.
offered no money. Indeed, as we know from many sources, the whole procedure of giving was a public performance that was closely observed. The descriptions of *epidoseis* in classical Athens in Plutarch’s *Lives*\(^49\) show the public nature of the offering, the loud demands on certain citizens, and the loud response of the people. For instance, it is said that Alcibiades once heard a lot of noise and asked what was going on. When he was told that an *epidosis* was taking place, he came forward and made a donation under the applause of the people. It is also reported that the Athenian statesman and general Phokion (mid-fourth century BCE) was asked repeatedly and with loud cries to participate in an *epidosis*, but to no avail (*κληθὲὶς πολλὰκις, οὔκ ἐπαύοντο κεκραγότες καὶ καταβοῶντες*).

The behavior of a wealthy man was scrutinized by the other citizens, even in a city as large as Athens. In his speech *On the Crown*, Demosthenes criticizes Aeschines for not having participated in an *epidosis*.\(^50\) In another speech (*Against Meidias*) he attacks his opponent using similar arguments:\(^51\) although Meidias was present in the assembly, he did not contribute to an *epidosis*. But when the news came that Athenian troops were besieged at Tamynai and the authorities considered sending the rest of the cavalry, Meidias, a coward, attended the next assembly and made a money contribution in order to avoid taking part in the war. As Demosthenes ironically remarks, even before the chairmen had taken their seats, Meidias was already raising his hand to give money. Also Isaios gives us a nice example, when he attacks an opponent in a lawsuit:\(^52\) he had promised to give only 300 drachmas, less than a foreigner, and only after the danger had increased. But then, to make things worse, he neglected to pay what he had promised (*ἐπέδωκεν, οὐκ εἰσήνεγκεν*), and his name was inscribed in a list in front of the statues of the eponymous heroes, under the heading “these men have voluntarily promised to give money to the demos for the rescue of the city and did not pay the amount.”

It was precisely because these contributions were made publicly, in the popular assembly, with all the citizens inspecting the behavior of the prominent citizens, that the *epidoseis* could serve as a sort of “social capital” of the elite. In Athens the *epidosis* during the Chremonidean

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\(^{50}\) Demosthenes 18.312 = Migeotte 1992:no. 7.


\(^{52}\) Isaios 5.37–38.
War (267–261 BCE) was limited to the amount of 50–200 drachmas, probably in order to avoid certain wealthy individuals’ exploiting the size of their donation in order to acquire political influence. What in the early third century appeared as a danger—the influence of persons because of wealth and donations—had become a reality by the end of the Hellenistic period. The competitive and performative character of contributions and donations becomes clear when we study the lists with the names of the contributors. By recording different amounts, the lists of contributors were public monuments of inequality. It also becomes clear that these contributions could have a substantial impact on public life.

Let us see an epidosis in Rhodes concerning the reconstruction of towers. The text begins with the phrase: “These persons promised to contribute to the fortification of the city, wishing to jointly safeguard the security of the demos.” This heading is followed by a single name: “Hegesandros son of Mikion promised to construct a tower.” Instead of donating a specific amount, Hegesandros promised to cover the entire expense for the construction of a tower. It has been estimated that a tower could cost between 5,000 and 20,000 drachmas. Then some space was left uninscribed, and the names of the remaining contributors are listed under a separate heading (“These individuals promised to give money for the construction of towers”). In this way, the name of Hegesandros was clearly highlighted. We know that he was one of the most influential citizens of Lindos. Ten years earlier he had held the office of the priest of Poseidon Hippios.

Similarly, other lists highlight the contributions of certain individuals. In an epidosis list from Kolophon (late fourth century BCE) we find first the names of nine members of a committee of ten who had proposed the decree for the subscription; together they gave 9,600 drachmas, that is more than 1,000 each. The tenth member of the committee, a certain Leophantos, who could (or wanted to) give only 370 drachmas, is named at the end. Then the text continues listing groups of men who gave various amounts—the higher amounts first, the lower next, exactly as in the list of sponsors of the Metropolitan Opera. In a list from Kalymna, the beginning is not preserved, but at the end a single man is highlighted: Dikaiarchos, son of

55 Migeotte 1992:no. 69.
Epistratos. He had given the highest amount (50 drachmas) and was also *stephanēphoros*, the highest magistrate of the city.\(^{56}\)

The visibility of donations is also clearly referred to in a Koan decree concerning an *epidosis* for the defense of the city.\(^{57}\) The decree explains:

In order that it becomes visible that the citizens take care of the common security in every difficult situation, may the following decree be adopted: Those citizens, illegitimate children, foreign inhabitants, and foreigners who come forward may make a promise. The names of those who make a promise should be announced immediately in the popular assembly. The people shall take a decision through open vote concerning the size of the donation and accept it, if it approves it.

Then the Koan decree makes provisions for inscribing the names of those who made a promise and those whose offer was not accepted.

Substantial contributions to an *epidosis* usually overlap not only with wealth but also with political influence. In Kos, the man who proposed the *epidosis* (Diokles) was also the greatest sponsor, paying 7,000 drachmas, and one of the most powerful men in his city (see §5 above). Christian Habicht, who studied the *epidosis* lists in Athens, observed that they consist of members of the wealthy and politically active families in Athens,\(^{58}\) among them Eurykleides of Kephisia and his brother Mikion, whom we have already met as the most influential Athenians of the late third century BCE. Members of this family continued to occupy a prominent position in the public life of Athens for seven generations! Among the contributors one finds seven *arkhontes* (the highest magistrates), eleven members of families that undertook liturgies, and many members of the class of the *hippeis* (the wealthiest Athenians, who served in the cavalry).

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\(^{56}\) Migeotte 1992:no. 53.


“All Animals Are Equal but Some Animals Are More Equal Than Others”: The Commemoration of the Elite and the Inheritance of Status

We have already seen a few examples of honorary decrees. As they were inscribed in public places, often on the base of the statue of the honored individual, they commemorated the contributions of members of the elite for generations. The commemoration was also achieved with other measures. For instance the decree in honor of Harpalos (§5 above) was to be read every year before the elections of new magistrates, reminding the voters what Harpalos and his ancestors had done for their city. The descendants of benefactors and political leaders made sure that these services were not forgotten, since they also profited from such a commemoration (see below).

_Epidosis_ lists fulfilled a commemorative function. They were read aloud, and more importantly they were part of the political discourse—we have seen for instance that they were used by Demosthenes in his speeches against Aischines and Meidias. They were social capital for the members of the elite. The participation of the elite in the _epidoseis_ was in part the result of social pressure. But once they had donated money, their contributions placed them above their fellow citizens and established personal prestige, on which political power could be based. In the course of the Hellenistic period this power often became hereditary.

The honors bestowed upon the members of the elite were of great symbolic value, ensuring respect towards their leadership, their election to offices, and the acceptance of their proposals in the council and the assembly. Their statues decorated the public places as eternal memorials of their services and as point of reference for their descendants. Often the benefactors themselves—or members of their families—covered the expenses as a further expression of their munificence, but also because of the ideological value of honorary statues. The crown awarded to benefactors, and often proclaimed year after year, was another means of commemorating individual achievement. Finally two other honors, the seat of honor in theatrical performances and athletic contests and the free meal in the seat of the magistrates,

59 See for example Raeck 1995.
60 Gauthier 2000.
symbolically placed the honored individuals above the “normal” citizens, and put them on the same level as the elected political leaders of the community.\(^{62}\) Thus the communities factually accepted the existence of a group of individuals who had an elevated position in exchange for their services to the community.

Sometimes, the honors bestowed upon a prominent citizen were inherited by his descendants. For instance, after the liberation of Athens from a Macedonian garrison established by Demetrios the Besieger (287 BCE), the Athenians decreed to honor the comic poet and statesman Philippides, a prominent defender of democracy and political opponent of the friends of Demetrios. He was to receive for all time free meals in the prutaneion (the seat of the executive committee of the council) and a seat of honor in all the contests organized. Thus he was assimilated into the political leadership of the city. These honors were also given to the eldest of his descendants.\(^{63}\) Such measures perpetuated the prominent position of the benefactor’s family.

A last example epitomizes the observations made above as regards wealth, political leadership, heredity of status, and commemoration of services. Two inscriptions from Aphrodisias, unfortunately both of them fragmentary, narrate the achievements of Kallikrates, a member of the elite in the late first century BCE.\(^{64}\) He preserved the common interest during the most stressful crises; he served in the highest offices, including those of the stephanēphoros, the director of the gymnasion (gymnasiarkhos), the priest of Hekate, and the overseer of the market in a very difficult situation—during a serious famine. During the wars he held offices that were not subject to account; he represented his city as an ambassador to the authorities in Rome; he was a great warrior, killing sixty enemies in battles; and he posted bail on many occasions on behalf of many people.

To be sure, many of his services required personal skills, especially his achievements in battles and in embassies. But equally important for Kallikrates’ leading position was his wealth. His wealth gave him the leisure to dedicate himself to political life and the opportunity to increase his popularity by giving bail to poorer fellow citizens. His public offices gave him


\(^{63}\) IG II\(^{2}\) 657, lines 64–66.

\(^{64}\) Reynolds 1982:nos. 28 and 29.
prominence; his service as director of the gymnasium allowed him to exercise his influence on the young men. His extraordinary position is shown by the fact that he occupied military offices not subject to account (ἀρχαὶ ἀνυπεύθυνοι), in direct violation of a main principle of democracy: accountability.

The honors awarded to Kallikrates show how elevated his own personal position was. He was given the extraordinary honor of burial in the gymnasium, where his grave was visited by the young men of Aphrodisias for generations. During all festivals he was given an honorary portion of the meat of sacrificial animals. And alone among all Aphrodisians he had the permission to wear the crowns they had bestowed on him whenever he wished. All this made his elevated position visible and permanent. Further inscriptions show that the commemoration of this position was significant for his family, which retained a prominent public position. More than a century later one of his descendants, a certain Kallikrates, son of Molossos, who served as priest of Mes Askainos and Hermes Agoraios and repaired the dedications made by his ancestors and the statues set up in their honor, including the honors for this Kallikrates.65

**Maintaining the Illusion of Democracy through Theatrical Behavior: Hellenistic Paradigms**

The discrepancy between the ideal of the rule and sovereignty of the people, the reality of royal interventions—which undermined sovereignty—and the monopolization of power by a hereditary elite—which undermined the function even of moderate democracies—did not escape the attention of contemporary scholars. Polybius commented for instance on the efforts of Philip V to conceal his autocratic rule under the mask of “the people’s king” (see §3 above); Strabo commented on the absence of democracy in Rhodes, which was accepted by the people because of the financial services of the aristocracy (§2); and the traveler Herakleides commented on the discrepancy between the omnipresence of spectacles in Athens and the poverty of its population:66

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65 Reynolds 1982:nos. 29 and 32.
66 Herakleides *Account of the Cities in Greece* 1-2 (Pfister): ἑορταὶ παντοδαπαί· φιλοσόφων παντοδαπῶν ψυχῆς ἀπάται καὶ ἀνάπαυσις· σχολάι πολλάί, θέαι συνεχεῖς. Τὰ γινόμενα ἐκ τῆς γῆς πάντα ἀτίμητα καὶ πρώτα τῇ γεύσει, μικρῷ δὲ σπανιώτερα. ... ἔστι δὲ ταῖς μὲν θέαις ἡ πόλις...
... festivals of all sorts; intellectual enjoyment and recreation through all sorts of philosophers; many opportunities for leisure; spectacles without interruption....

Because of the spectacles and entertainments in the city, the common people have no experience of hunger, as they are made to forget about food.

As I have already explained, these discrepancies were acceptable up to a point, as long as a reciprocal, albeit asymmetrical, relationship could be established between kings and poleis and between the elite and the mass of the citizens. The benefactions of both kings and members of the elite served precisely this purpose. Honorary titles awarded to the members of the elite, often by acclamation, attributed their elevated position to their services and thus were indirectly justified. We have already seen a fine collection of such titles in the case of Hermogenes (§5 above): lover of the fatherland, constructor, benefactor, savior (philopatris, ktistēs, euergetēs, sōtēr). Even his nickname, Theodotos ‘the gift of god’, displayed gratitude—whether genuinely felt or theatrically displayed is another question. While these titles highlighted an individual’s contribution and placed him above the rest of the citizens, another set of honorary titles, very common in the imperial period, created the illusion that the whole community was just a big family, thus making inequality less visible and assimilating the position of the members of the elite with that of the father (cf. the modern Greek political acclamation “you are our father,” eisai o pateras mas). We can see this mentality for instance in the funeral of Herodes Atticus, the wealthiest Athenian of his time and a great benefactor.

The burial which was being performed by his freedmen in Marathon was interrupted by the Athenian ephebes, who marched from Athens to Marathon, seized the body with their own hands and brought it back to Athens, mourning together, and honoring with commoners the gifts of the father.

Pfister 1951 dates this work to the late third century BCE; Arenz 2005 prefers an earlier date (c. 270-260 BCE), but his arguments are not conclusive.

Benefactions by the elite: Gauthier 1985.

Philostratos Lives of the Sophists 15.20: ἀποθανόντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Μαραθῶνι καὶ ἐπισκήψαντος τοῖς ἀπελευθέροις ἐκεῖ θάπτειν Ἀθηναίοι ταῖς τῶν ἐφήβων χερσίν ἁρπάσαντες ἐς ἄστυ ἣνεγκαν προαπαντώντες τῷ λέχει πᾶσα ἡλικία δακρύοις ἀμα καὶ ἀνευφημοῦντες, ὅσα παῖδες χρηστοῦ πατρὸς χρηεύσαντες....
hands, brought it back to Athens in procession, and buried it there, near the stadium which Herodes had donated. Philostratos reports that all the Athenians attended the funeral, lamenting the death of their benefactor “like children who have lost a good father” (*hosa paides khrēstou patros khereusantes*). Expressing their relation to Herodes Atticus in this manner, the Athenians also proclaimed their dependence on their benefactor and their acceptance of his “paternal” authority. Similarly, the scions of the elite families were awarded by the popular assembly the honorific title “the son of the polis” (*huios poleos*). This, again, expressed the illusion that the community was a big family, and at the same time voiced the expectation that the young members of the elite would take care of the polis as good sons take care of their mothers.⁶⁹

Theatrical behavior was another medium which was extensively applied in the Hellenistic period to support the rule of the elite.⁷⁰ By “theatricality” I mean the effort of individuals or groups to construct an image of themselves which is at least in part deceptive, either because it is in contrast to reality or because it exaggerates or partly distorts reality. I understand it, furthermore, to mean the effort to gain control over the emotions and the thoughts of others, in order to provoke specific reactions, such as sorrow, pity, anger, fear, admiration, or respect. To achieve these two aims, that is to construct an illusion and to control the emotions and thoughts of others, a variety of verbal and nonverbal means of communication may be employed: a carefully composed text; a particular costume; images and mechanical devices; the selection of the place and time where the “performance” takes place; and the control of the voice, body language, and facial expressions.⁷¹

Theatrical behavior is quite common in social and public life. At the beginning of the Hellenistic period, Theophrastos, an attentive observer of the behavior of men in public spaces, described the behavior of the supporter of oligarchy: “He goes out at midday and struts

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⁶⁹ Collection of the relevant sources: Canali De Rossi 2007.

⁷⁰ For a more detailed discussion of various aspects of theatrical behavior in the Hellenistic world see Chaniotis 1997 and 2009.

⁷¹ For the concept of theatricality, especially in connection with public and social life, see Burns 1972; cf. Postlewait and Davies 2003, Chaniotis 2009.
about dressed in his cloak, with his hair trimmed and his nails carefully pared.” 

We notice here the importance of timing: going out in the morning is what the lower classes do. We also notice the attention paid to the costume. In his characterization of the man of petty ambition, Theophrastos comments on appearance and posture: “After parading with the cavalry, he gives his slave the rest of the equipment to take home, then throws back his cloak and strolls through the marketplace in his spurs. In the popular assembly he steps forward wearing a smart white cloak. He has his hair cut often, his teeth are white.”

In the Hellenistic period historians and intellectuals showed for the first time a great interest in observing and describing theatricality in public life. Interestingly, Cavafy, who has a better feeling for the Hellenistic world and its culture than many modern historians, has perceived theatricality as one of the predominant features of this period and has dedicated several of his poems to theatrical behavior. For instance in his “Philhellene” (composed in 1912), he presents an anonymous Oriental king, giving instructions to the engraver of his portrait on coins to construct the appropriate image:

See that the engraving is artistic.
The expression serious and stately.
The crown had better be rather narrow;
I do not like those broad Parthian ones.
The inscription, as usual, in Greek;
not exaggerated, not pompous.

Theatrical behavior was employed by both kings and statesmen in order to make to make their elevated position acceptable and to create the illusion that they were not distant from the ordinary citizens. I have already mentioned the example of Philip V in Argos (see §3

72 Theophrastos Characters 26.4: καὶ τὸ μέσον δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας έξιῶν τὸ ἰμάτιον μεμελημένως ἀναβεβλημένος καὶ μέσην κουράν κεκαρμένος καὶ ἀκριβῶς ἀπωνυχισμένος.

73 Theophrastos Characters 21.8: καὶ πομπεύσας δὲ μετὰ τῶν ήπειρων... ἀναβαλόμενος δὲ θοιμάτιον ἐν τοῖς μύωψι κατὰ τὴν ἀγορᾶν περιπατεῖν; 21.11: παρεσκευασμένος λαμπρὸν ἰμάτιον; 21.12: πλειστάκις δὲ ἀποκείρασθαι καὶ τοὺς ὀδόντας λευκοὺς εἶχειν. καὶ τὰ ἰμάτια δὲ χρηστὰ μεταβάλλεσθαι.
above). Of Agathokles, the Sicilian ruler of the late fourth century, it is said that in his drinking parties he used to put off the pomp of kingship and show himself more humble than the ordinary citizens:74

Being by nature also a buffoon and a mimic, not even in the meetings of the assembly did he abstain from jeering at those who were present and from portraying certain of them, so that the common people would often break out in laughter.

Antiochos IV is said to have joined common people in their revels by playing musical instruments.75 At the end of the great festival he had organized in Daphne (166 BCE), the king danced naked and acted with the clowns.76 One cannot help but compare this behavior with that of Chavez, Berlusconi—or in Greece the Prefect of Thessalonike Psomiadis.

Figure 2: The statesman in the role of the humble, ordinary citizen

Theatrical behavior is recommended to kings by the author of a treatise on kingship (Peri basileias). This treatise, attributed to a certain Diotogenes and composed in the second century CE, reflects Hellenistic ideas concerning monarchic rule.77 The author recommends to the

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74 Diodoros 20.63.1-2: ἀπετίθετο δʹ ἐν τοῖς πότωις τὸ τῆς τυραννίδος ἀξίωμα καὶ τῶν τυχόντων ἰδιωτῶν ταπεινότερον ἐαυτὸν ἀπεδείκνυε ... ύπάρχων δὲ καὶ φύσει γελωτοποιὸς καὶ μίμος οὐδʹ ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ἀπείχετο τοῦ σκώπτειν τοὺς καθημένους καί τινας αὐτῶν εἰκάζειν, ὥστε τὸ πλῆθος πολλάκις εἰς γέλωτα ἔκτρέπεσθαι, καθάπερ τινὰ τῶν ἡθολόγων ἢ θαυματοποιῶν θεωροῦντας.

75 Polybius 26.1.4 (= Athenaios X, 439a); cf. Diodoros 29.32.

76 Athenaios V 195f: ἀναπηδήσας γυμνὸς ὕρχειτο καὶ ὑπεκρίνετο μετὰ τῶν γελωτοποιῶν.

77 Wallace-Hadrill 1982:34.
monarch to “set himself apart from human failings” and to astonish onlookers by his staged appearance and studied pose:78

The monarch should set himself apart from the human failings and approach the gods, not through arrogance, but through magnanimity and through the greatness of his virtue, surrounding himself with so much trust and authority with his appearance, his thought, his reason, the morality of his soul, the deeds, the movement, and the posture of the body, so that those who watch him shall be overwhelmed and shall be adorned with shame and wisdom and the feeling of trust.

This passage regards the king as an actor, who performs on earth the part played by the gods in heaven: “… And above all one should remember that kingship is the imitation of the gods.”79 The author associates moral and intellectual abilities with staged behavior, appearance, and the movement of the body. In another passage, he stresses again the importance of appearance:80

78 Stobaeus 4.7.62:268, lines 2–12 (Hense): χωρίζοντα μὲν ἑαυτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων παθέων, συνεγγίζοντα δὲ τοῖς θεοῖς, οὐ δι᾽ ὑπεραφανίαν, ἀλλὰ διὰ μεγαλοφροσύναν καὶ μέγεθος ἀρετᾶς ἀνυπέρβλατον, τοιαύταν αὐτῷ ἐπιπρέπην καὶ προστασίαν ἀμφιβαλλόμενον καὶ κατα δῗς καὶ κατὰ λογισμὸς καὶ κατὰ ἔνθυμημα καὶ κατὰ ἄθος τᾶς ψυχᾶς καὶ κατὰς πράξιας καὶ κατὰς κίνασιν καὶ κατὰ γένος τοῦ σώματος, ὥστε τῶς ποταυγασμένους αὐτὸν κατακοσμαθῆς καταπεπλαγής αἰδοῖ καὶ σωφροσύνῃ τε καὶ διαθέσει τε περὶ τὰ ἐπιπρέπη αὐτῷ ἐπιπρέπης καὶ προστασίαν ἀμφιβαλλόμενον κατα παταπλαγίμενος αἰδοῖ καὶ σωφροσύνα τε <καὶ> διαθέσει τε τὰ περὶ τὰ ἐπιπρέπη αὐτῷ ἐπιπρέπης καὶ προστασίαν ἀμφιβαλλόμενον καταπεπλαγής αἰδοῖ καὶ σωφροσύνα τε (cf. 42, 17–43, 9 (Delatte, who plausibly reads ἐπιπρέπης).


80 Stobaeus 4.7.62:266, 23–267, 16 (Hense): ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ τοῖς ἀγορευομένοις δεῖ καὶ θέσιας καὶ ἔξιας ἐπιπρεπείς ἐπιταδεύειν τὸν ἀγαθὸν βασιλέα, πολιτικῶς αὐτὸν πλάσσοντα καὶ πραγματειωδὲς, ὡς μήτε τραχὺς φαίνεται τοῖς πλάσσει μήτε εὐκαταφρόνητος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀδύς καὶ ἀμφιστραφῆς· ταῦτα δὲ τούτων, αὕτη πράτην μὲν σεμινὸς ἦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἰδέων καὶ ἐκ τῶ ἀκόουσαι καὶ ἐκ τῶ ἕξιος ἐπιφαίνεσθαι τὰς ἀρχὰς, δεύτερον δὲ χρητός καὶ ἐκ τὰς ἐντεύξιος καὶ ἐκ τὰς ποτιβλήσιος καὶ ἐκ τὰς εὐεργεσίας, τρίτον δὲ δεινός καὶ ἐκ τὰς μισοποναρίας καὶ ἐκ τὰς
As regards public addresses the good king needs to take care of the suitable position and appearance, forming a political and serious image of himself, so that he appears to the multitude neither harsh nor contemptible, but sweet and considerate. He shall achieve this if he is, first, majestic to watch and to listen to and seems worthy of his rule; secondly, if he is kind in conversation and in appearance and in benefactions; thirdly, if he is fearsome in his honesty and in punishing and in swiftness and, generally, in the experience and practice of kingship. Majesty, being an imitation of the gods, will make it possible that he will be marveled at and honored by the people; kindness will make the people be favorably disposed towards him and love him; and finally severity will terrify his enemies and make him invincible, but to his friends it will make him magnanimous and confident.

Consequently, a very crucial issue in the public appearance and the public image of a Hellenistic king was not to disturb the balance between affability, necessary for his popularity, and remoteness, necessary for the respect of his leadership. When the balance was disturbed, with too much affability or too great a distance, the king was criticized and his behavior was regarded as ridiculous or an expression of madness. King Antiochos IV, Polybius tells us, used to hang around with simple people, attending their celebrations, and dressing up to play different parts.

κολάσιος καὶ ἐκ τὰς ἐπιταχύσιος καὶ ὀλὺς ἐκ τὰς ἐμπειρίας καὶ τριβὰς τὰς περὶ τὸ βασιλεύειν. ἀ μὲν σεμνότας θεόμιμον ὑπάρχουσα πράγμα δύναται θαυμαζόμενον καὶ τιμώμενον αὐτὸν παρέχεσθαι τοῖς πλάθεσιν, ἀ δὲ χρηστότας φιλεύμενον καὶ ἀγαπαζόμενον, ἀ ὕπονοικός φοβερὸν μὲν καὶ ἀνίκατον ποτὶ πολεμίως, μεγαλόψυχον δὲ καὶ κραταλέον ποτὶ φίλως....

81 Polybius 26.1.3–5 (cf. Athenaios X 439): ἔπειται καὶ μετὰ δημοτῶν ἐπὶταχυςα πρᾶγμα δύναται θαυμαζόμενον καὶ τιμώμενον αὐτὸν παρέχεσθαι τοῖς πλάθεσιν, ἀ δὲ χρηστότας φιλεύμενον καὶ ἀγαπαζόμενον, ἀ δὲ δεινότας φοβερὸν μὲν καὶ ἀνίκατον ποτὶ πολεμίως, μεγαλόψυχον δὲ καὶ κραταλέον ποτὶ φίλως....

82 Polybius 26.1: πολλάκις δὲ καὶ τὴν βασιλικὴν ἀποθέμενος ἐσθήτα τῆβεναν ἀναλαβὼν περιήμε κατὰ τὴν ἀγορὰν ἀρχιφυσιάξων καὶ τοὺς μὲν δεξιούμενος, τοὺς δὲ καὶ περιπτύσσων παρεκάλει γένεινα αὐτῷ τὴν ψήφον, ποτὲ ἀνὴρ ἀγορανόμοις γένειται, ποτὲ δὲ καὶ ὃς δήμαρχος.
Many times he used to take off the royal garment and to wear a toga, going around in the agora, participating in the elections and asking the people for their vote, embracing some and begging others, in order to be elected as overseer of the market (agoranomos) or tribune (dēmarkhos).

With this behavior the king attempted to create the illusion of popular rule, but ultimately his behavior was interpreted not as affability and respect of popular rule, but as madness.

Similarly, statesmen in Greek poleis employed theatrical behavior in their communication with the mass of citizens. Based on the account of a Sicilian historian, Plutarch narrates how meetings of the popular assembly were staged in the theater of Syracuse, when the city was still governed by a democracy but was under the political leadership of Timoleon (Timoleon 38.2–3):

Moreover, the proceedings in their assemblies afforded a noble spectacle, since, while they decided other matters by themselves, for the more important deliberations they summoned him [Timoleon]. Then he would proceed to the theatre carried through the market place on a mule-car; and when the vehicle in which he sat was brought in, the people would greet him with one voice and call him by name, and he, after returning their greetings and allowing some time for their felicitations and praises, would then listen carefully to the matter under debate and pronounce an opinion. And when his opinion had been adopted, his retainers would conduct his car back again through the theater, and the citizens, after sending him on his way with shouts of applause, would proceed at once to transact the rest of the public business by themselves.

Such carefully staged performances elevated a single individual above the rest of the citizens. In the case of Timoleon his elevated status was admittedly based on achievement and political talents (comparable to that of Pericles in Athens). But this passage can give us an impression of how members of the elite may also have staged their appearance in the assembly.

Once on the tribune of the assembly, the political leaders had to rely on complex performances in delivery and acting in order to receive its enthusiastic approval for the proposals (probouleumata) that had been negotiated among the members of the elite in the
council. Unfortunately, information about Hellenistic rhetoric is very limited, and we have to
reconstruct the performance of the political leaders indirectly from a variety of testimonia.

Delivery had always been very important in political oratory, and the relevant handbooks
paid great attention to the control of the voice and body language, recommending the use of
postures and gestures appropriate for various occasions: for example leaning towards the
audience when giving advice (figure 3).

Figure 3: Rhetorica ad Herennium 3.15.26: Sin erit in demonstratione sermo, paululum corpus a
cervicibus demittemus (“for the explicative conversational tone, we shall incline the body
forward a little from the shoulders”). Kostas Karamanlis in the Greek parliament
(February 8, 2008).

Unfortunately, the Hellenistic handbooks do not survive, but the treatise Rhetorica ad
Herennium and the works of Cicero and Quintilian (Institutio Oratoria) give us an impression of
the common practices in delivery. The repeated references to Greek orators and the use of
Greek terms show that the rhetorical habits that they discuss apply, at least in part, to Greece
as well. Taking lessons from actors, the treatise says, political orators should learn how to
control the emotions of their audiences with the proper use of body language.

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84 http://www.nd.gr/ (accessed on Feb. 9, 2008).
85 Rhetorica ad Herennium 3.15.26–27: nam si erit sermo cum dignitate, stantis in vestigio, levi dexterae
motu, loqui oportebit, hilaritate, tristitia, mediocritate vultus ad sermonis sententias adcommodata. Sin
erit in demonstratione sermo, paululum corpus a cervicibus demittemus; nam est hoc datum ut quam
proxime tum vultum admoveamus ad auditores si quam rem docere eos et vehementer instigare
velimus.... Sin contentio fiet per distributionem, porrectione perceleri brachii, inambulatione, pedis
dexteri rara supplausione, acri et defixo aspectu uti oportet.
For the dignified conversational tone, the speaker must stay in position when he speaks, lightly moving his right hand, his countenance expressing an emotion corresponding to the sentiments of the subject—gaiety or sadness or an emotion intermediate. For the explicative conversational tone, we shall incline the body forward a little from the shoulders, since it is natural to bring the face as close as possible to our hearers when we wish to prove a point and arouse them vigorously.... For the sustained tone of debate, we shall use a quick gesture of the arm, a mobile countenance, a keen glance. For the broken tone of debate, one must extend the arm very quickly, walk up and down, occasionally stamp the right foot, and adopt a keen and fixed look.... For the pathetic tone of amplification, one ought to slap one’s thigh or beat one’s head, and sometimes to use a calm and uniform gesticulation and a sad and disturbed expression.

Interestingly, we find here a convergence with the body language of modern statesmen (figures 4–6), to whose theatrical behavior I shall return later (§8). When the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* observes that “good delivery ensures that what the orator is saying seems to come from his heart,” the emphasis is on appearances (*videatur*), on the creation of an illusion.

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86 *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.15.27: *hoc tamen scire oportet, pronuntiationem bonam id proficere, ut res ex animo agi videatur.*
Figure 4: Rhetorica ad Herennium 3.15.27: Pronuntiationem bonam id proficere, ut res ex animo agi videatur ("good delivery ensures that what the orator is saying seems to come from his heart").

Figure 5: International Herald Tribune, January 12/13, 2008: "I need your help' Clinton said, tapping on her heart with a closed hand."

Figure 6. Quintilianus Institutio oratoria 11.3.13: nam etiam complodere manus scaenicum est [pectus caedere] ("but to beat the breast with the clenched fist is theatrical").

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87 http://bp2.blogger.com/_sW65ilskOC8/RvLEObiZFPI/AAAAAAAAGVY/OXqnuNCWcRc/s1600-h/GeorgeBushRoyalPose.jpg.

In Hellenistic times political oratory had developed into a carefully staged dramatic performance, through which the statesman controlled the emotions of the assembly. Two examples demonstrate this. The first example is an honorary decree of Olbia for the benefactor Protogenes, an extremely wealthy man of this city on the Black Sea. The long decree is based on a speech delivered in the assembly. The aim of the anonymous orator was to show that Protogenes deserved extraordinary honors. In order to justify this and to elevate Protogenes to the status of a savior, the orator continually recreates the terror felt by the Olbians in the past, and the rescue provided by Protogenes. For reasons of space I have only selected a short passage:

The largest part of the city along the river was not fortified, and (neither was) the whole of the part along the harbor and the part along the former fish market as far as the (sanctuary?) of the hero Sosias. Deserters were reporting that the Galatians and the Skiroi had formed an alliance, that a large force had been collected and would be coming during the winter, and in addition that the Thisarnatai, Scythians, and Saudaratai were anxious to seize the fort, as they themselves were equally terrified of the cruelty of the Galatians. Because of this many were in despair and prepared to abandon the city. In addition many other losses had been suffered in the countryside, in that all the slaves and the half-

89 IosPE I² 32 (c. 200 BCE).

Greeks who live in the plain along the river bank had been lost to us, no fewer than 1,500 in number, who had fought on our side in the city in the previous war, and also many of the foreigners and not a few of the citizens had left.

We notice the orator’s interest in details: He describes the exact length of the unfortified perimeter of the city; he gives the number of the deserters in the countryside (1,500); he lists all the barbarian tribes who were about to attack the city. The anonymous orator chose to give all these details, because they serve the vivid description of the past experience of fear and despair. The long list of foreign names (Galatai, Skiroi, Thisarnatai, Skythai, Saudaratai) brings to mind the greatness of the danger and the strangeness of the enemy, who stands outside the border of civilized world. The list of the unfortified sections of the city underscores its vulnerability. The next passage describes a scene in the assembly.91

Because of this the people met in an assembly in deep despair, as they saw before them the danger that lay ahead and the terrors in store, and called on all who were able-bodied to help and not allow their native city, after it had been preserved for many years, to fall into the hands of the enemy.

I draw attention here not only to the emotional framing of the scene (the fear expressed by the verb diēgōniakōs), but also the repeated references to the senses, to voices and images: the people saw the danger (δεινὰ πρὸ όφθαλμῶν ποιούμενος), they called out (παρεκάλει, ἥξιοι). This is the moment of total despair, the moment in which a city, whose very name (Olbia ‘the blessed one’) raises the expectation of prosperity and bliss, is faced with extinction. Exactly in this moment, a reversal occurs:92

91 B LL 21–27: ὃν ἐνεκεν συνελθὼν ὁ δήμος διηγωνιακῶς καὶ τὸν κίνδυνον τὸ μέλλοντα καὶ τὰ δεινὰ πρὸ όφθαλμών ποιούμενος παρεκάλει πάντας τοὺς ἵσχύοντας βοηθῆσαι καὶ μὴ περιγείν τὴν ἐκ πολλῶν τετηρημένην πατρίδα ὑποχείριον γενομένην τοῖς πολέμοις.

92 B LL 27–31: οὐδενὸς δ᾿ ἐπιδιδόντος ἐαυτὸν οὔτ᾿ εἰς ἅπαντα οὔτ᾿ εἰς μέρη ὃν ἥξιοι ὁ δήμος, ἐπαγγείλατο αὐτὸς κατασκευᾶν ἀμφότερα τὰ τείχη καὶ προθήσειμ πᾶσαν τὴν εἰς αὐτὰ δαπάνην etc.
When no one would volunteer for all or part of the demands of the people, he promised he would himself build both the walls and would advance the whole cost of the construction....

Exactly as the demos in the assembly had vividly depicted the future disaster (δεινὰ πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν ποιούμενος), in another assembly our anonymous orator vividly describes the past calamities. After this dramatic description had reminded the people how much they relied on Protogenes, any honor for him could be justified.

In my second example, the Hellenistic historian Poseidonios describes how Athenion, an Athenian statesman and supporter of King Mithridates VI, in 88 BCE manipulated the emotions of the assembly in order to win its support for the king. The passage begins with a description of Athenion’s arrival in Athens. With the selection of the appropriate vocabulary and images, Poseidonios creates a stage full of theatrical connotations, thus characterizing Athenion’s

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94 Poseidonios Histories fragment 247 (Theiler) (Athenaios V, 212 b-e): ἔπεμψαν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνακομιδὴν αὐτοῦ ναῦς μακρὰς καὶ φορεῖον ἀργυρόπουν. ἀλλ’ εἰσῄειν ἤδη, καὶ σχεδὸν τὸ πλείστον μέρος τῆς πόλεως ἐπὶ τὴν ἐκδοχὴν αὐτοῦ εξέκχυτο· συνέτρεχον δὲ πολλοὶ καὶ ἄλλοι θεταὶ τὸ παράδοξον τῆς τύχης θαυμάζοντες, εἰ ὁ παρέγγραφος Ἀθηνίων εἰς Ἀθήνας ἐπ’ ἀργυρόποδος κατακομίζεται φορείου καὶ πορφυρῶν στρωμάτων... συνέτρεχον οὖν πρὸς τὴν θέαν τάυτην ἄνδρες, γυναῖκες, παῖδες τὰ κάλλιστα προσδοκῶντες παρὰ Μιθριδάτου... ἀπήντησαν δ’ αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον τεχνῖται, τὸν ἄγγελον τοῦ νέου Διονύσου, καλοῦντες ἐπὶ τὴν κοινὴν ἑστίαν καὶ τὰς περὶ ταύτην εὐχὰς τε καὶ σπονᾶς. ... ἀφ’ ἦς (sc. οἰκίας) ἔξηι διαβόλοι λαμπρὰν ἐπισύρων καὶ περικείμενος δακτύλιον χρυσίου ἐγγεγλυμμένην ἔχοντα τὴν Μιθριδάτου εἰκόνα ... ἐν δὲ τῷ τεμένει τὸν τεχνιτῶν θυσίας τε ἐπετελοῦντο ἐπὶ τῇ Ἀθηνίωνος παρουσίᾳ καὶ μετὰ κήρυκος προαναφωνήσεως σπονδαῖ. ... ἀναβὰς ὅπως ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα... στὰς ἐπὶ τούτου καὶ περιβλέψας κυκληδὸν τὸ πλῆθος, ἔπειτ’ ἀναβλέψας «ἀνδρές Ἀθηναῖοι» ἔφη τὰ πράγματα μὲν μὲ βιάζεται καὶ τὸ τῆς πατρίδος συμφέρον ἀπαγγέλλειν ἢ ἀδίδα, τὸ δὲ μέγεθος τῶν μελλόντων λέγεσθαι διὰ τὸ παράδοξον τῆς περιστάσεως ἐμποδίζει μὲ». ἀθρόως δ’ ἐπιβοησάντων αὐτῷ τῶν περιστάσεως θαρρεῖν καὶ λέγειν, «λέγω τοίνυν» ἔφη «τὰ μηδέποτε ἐλπισθέντα...»: μικρὸν δ’ ἐπισχὼν ἐπὶ τούτως καὶ ἐάσιας τοὺς πολλοὺς συλλαλῆσαι περὶ τῶν παραδόξων προηγούμενων τρίφας τε τὸ μέτωπον «τί οὖν» εἶπε «συμβουλεύω;».
speech as a spectacle and a performance in acting, through which Athenion controlled the emotions of the Athenian assembly.

For his return they dispatched warships and a chair with silver legs. He had barely arrived, and the largest part of the population was already out in the streets to receive him. Many other spectators (θεαταί) also came together, wondering at the strange reversal of fortune, that Athenion, who had acquired citizenship with fraud, was now being brought to Athens on a chair with silver legs and on a purple mattress... So men, women, and children were running to this spectacle (θέαν), expecting the best from Mithridates....

With the words theatai and thea, Poseidonios turns Athenion’s arrival into a spectacle. By distinguishing between spectators and statesman, he also indirectly shows the relegation of the Athenians to spectators of political life. Athenion enters the agora from the seat of the theater artists (another allusion to the theater) wearing a costume which is described in great detail.

He came out from this house dragging a glamorous cloak and wearing a golden ring with the portrait of Mithridates engraved on it. Many servants walked in front and behind him.

If one could recognize Mithridates’ portrait on his ring, it is probably because Athenion was stretching his hand in such a way that everyone could see it. He was not properly wearing, but dragging his cloak (episuron), which was obviously too large for him. We observe that Poseidonios includes in his narrative details that liken Athenion to an actor and his behavior to a performance. Arriving in the agora, Athenion ascends the tribune and delivers his speech. Here, the historian focuses on the description of body language, gestures, and pauses, and on the artful exploitation by Athenion of unexpected elements (paradoxon) while interacting with the audience.

He ascended the podium ... he stood on it looking around at the crowd, and then raising his head he said “Athenians, the affairs and the interests of the city urge me to say what I know, but the magnitude of the things that are to be said prevents me from saying them, because of the unexpected nature of the
events.” And when all who stood around urged him by shouting to have courage and talk, he said “I will tell you, what you had never hoped for.” Then he paused for a while after this, giving the crowd the opportunity to talk about the unexpected announcements. Then he scratched his forehead and said, “What is then the advice that I give you?”

Athenion’s body language—looking around, raising the head, scratching the forehead—corresponds to the body language of contemporary comedians. With his whole attire and staged behavior Athenion tried to create the illusion of dignity and competence; his rhetorical delivery with its clear theatrical overtones aimed to manipulate the emotions of the audience, to move from anxiety to hope, and thus convince the Athenians to support the king.

Admittedly, we cannot tell how accurate the historian’s description of this particular scene is, but on the basis of many parallels we can at least be certain that it was inspired by contemporary practices. Athenion was not a representative of the elite, but a man of humble origins imitating the theatricality of kings and members of the elite. While Athenion tried to elevate himself through theatricality—and ultimately presented himself as a caricature of a man of elevated status—the kings and the members of the elite tried to present themselves as humble individuals and lovers of the people. We have already see examples of royal behavior. To study the analogous behavior of members of the elite we have to turn not to texts but to images. The so-called Mantelstatuen (statues of citizens wrapped in a cloak) offer a characteristic example of how the members of the elite constructed their image (figure 7).

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95 For a more detailed analysis see Chaniotis 2009.

They represent the men who had been honored by the popular assembly with decrees such as the ones I have previously discussed. They show them in orderly draped cloaks, avoiding luxury—exactly the opposite of Athenion’s extravagant robe. Also very different from Athenion’s gesticulation is their body language, evoking self-control and reservation. Even when the arms are freed from the cloaks’ drapery and are projected forward to indicate energy and strain, they avoid the passionate gesticulation of the demagogues and underline self-control, a virtue of the educated man of the elite (figures 8–9).

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97 Zanker 1995:267 (figure 5).

98 See also Wörrle 1995.
Contemporary portraits encapsulate in their facial expressions the vigor and the strenuousness with which these members of the elite carry out toilsome civic duties, not as an exercise of power but as a service to the people (figure 10). They represent the members of the elite with the mask of the virtuous citizen, in the proper dress and with facial expressions indicating exhaustion after the demanding efforts for public welfare.

Figure 10: Left: The statesman genuinely concerned for the people. Head of a portrait statue of unknown provenance (c. 150 BCE), now in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California (inv. no. 91.AA.14). Right: Tony Blair’s photo accompanying an article, in which he speaks about his passion for science (official site of the Prime Minister, November 2007).

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100 http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20091207125248/number10.gov.uk/page12045.
This brings to mind the advice given by Quintilian to orators: They should demonstrate their exhaustion, by letting their dress fall in careless disorder and their toga slip loose, by streaming with sweat, and showing signs of fatigue, thus signaling that they had spared no strength for the interest of their clients. Although the images of the self-controlled and committed citizens differ from Athenion’s appearance, they are comparable with Athenion’s theatricality because they also embody artificial and staged behavior. I can not help but quote an account of George Bush’s congressional campaign in Houston in the 1960s:

> Over and over again, on every television screen in Houston George Bush was seen with his coat slung over his shoulders; his sleeves rolled up; walking the streets of his district; grinning, gripping, letting the voter know he cared. About what was never made clear.

Public life in the Hellenistic cities with their moderate democracies was dominated by “protagonists”: kings, wealthy benefactors, and other representatives of the urban elite. Given the assembly’s established constitutional status in the cities, the Hellenistic statesmen had to rely on delicate skills of performance in order to manipulate the masses in the assembly and to preserve the fiction of the rule of the people. The kings’ role in the fragile balance of power between monarchic aspirations and the pretensions of urban populations (in Greek poleis and in capitals) was quite similar. The kings had to construct an image of supremacy that would legitimate their rule, and at the same time respect the fiction of civic autonomy.

**Theatricality in Public Life: Modern Parallels**

The structural features of mass democracies belong to the subjects to which the Greek philosopher Panajotis Kondylis has dedicated penetrating observations: consumption, division of labor, social mobility, and populism. Among other things, Kondylis drew attention to a discrepancy inherent in the mass democracies of our times: the discrepancy between the principle of equality and the factual rule of the elite. In mass democracies, the potential of

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101 Quintilianus *Institutio oratoria* 11.3.147.
102 Burns 1972:34.
equality is more important and the feeling of equality stronger than the reality of equality. This asymmetry between reality and expectation can also be observed in the manner in which the elite presents itself to the “ordinary person” (*kleiner Mann*): Populism needs to continually satisfy psychological needs as well, creating substitutes for equality where practically no equality exists. Such a substitute is provided for instance by the advanced abolishment of the borders between the private and the public, so that the “ordinary people,” but also the “mature citizen,” can be persuaded on the basis of what is told him by the mass media that this or that member of this or that elite generally behaves in a “human” manner and is, generally, “one of us.” The inherent populism of mass democracy makes it a principal duty of the members of the elite to display on every occasion how close they are to the ordinary people.

In order to demonstrate such developments, Kondylis studied the relation between sincerity (*Aufrichtigkeit*), a traditional bourgeois virtue, and authenticity, that is the ability of an individual to act and speak without taking into consideration conventions or habits. According to Kondylis “authenticity” has become a play (*Schauspiel*):

For this reason authenticity often is only the mask, which is worn in a very old play—a mask which in contrast to the bourgeois mask is not a construct of education and practice but in many respects the changing product of unpredictable improvisation.

Although Kondylis did not use the term “theatricality,” the mode of behavior he described is theatrical behavior. The roots of such theatrical behavior should be seen in the asymmetry between ideal (or expectation) and reality. This makes the elite present themselves to the...
“ordinary people” wearing the mask of authenticity, and so ultimately undermining all authenticity.

One can apply Kondylis’s observations to another aspect of mass democracy: the relation between statesman and voter established through the use of mass media. It is a commonplace that the invasion of the TV and other mass media in public life has had an enormous impact on political discourse. The TV set, and more recently the computer and the iPod screen, have become the most important loci for the exchange of political arguments and the circulation of political ideas. Unavoidably, political behavior is modified in order to suit the conditions and the advantages of TV screen and cyberspace. And as the TV screen is associated with entertainment and spectacle, political behavior also adopts features of entertainment and spectacle. This phenomenon was already observed by Plutarch (or his source) in connection with popular assemblies that took place in theaters:

> When those who have come together gaze upon statues and paintings, or proscenia of theaters, or extravagantly decorated roofs of council halls during the assembly, they become foolish, vain, and empty-headed.

The statesman enters the house of every citizen, but this seemingly direct communication between the politician and the citizen is only an illusion; this communication is one-sided, turning the citizens into passive audiences. Contemporary parliamentary debates and orations are shaped by the fact that their protagonists know that they are being watched, or will be watched, by audiences. Consequently, often the primary addressee of an oration is not directly the parliamentarian with whom a member of the parliament is engaged in a dialogue, but the spectator—indeed a spectator who will watch the parliamentary debate under the same conditions under which he watches other spectacles. Political debates in the parliament, speeches in electoral campaigns, and political interviews are staged in order to best exploit the possibilities offered by the media. The statesman knows that what will reach the citizen will not be a complex and differentiated political argument, but a “sound bite”—a short phrase, an

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108 Plutarch *Lycurgus* 6: φλυαρώδεις ἀπεργαζόμεναι καὶ χαύνους φρονήματι κενῷ τὰς διανοίας τῶν συμπορευομένων ὅταν εἰς ἁγάλματα καὶ γραφὰς ἢ προσκήνια θεάτρων ἢ στέγας βουλευτηρίων ἡσκημένας περιττῶς ἐκκλησιάζοντες ἀποβλέπωσι.
ironic comment, an impressive gesture, a facial expression, an image of only a few seconds, which can be isolated from the context, highlighted, and repeated again and again. An element of entertainment is expected by those who turn their TV set on, and it is indeed generously offered by those who know that they will appear on TV. All this enhances the theatrical behavior of statesmen, a few examples of which are presented below.

Figure 11: Left: the image of the winner: Kostas Karamanlis on September 16, 2007. Right: An anonymous Hellenistic king; the structure of the figure ultimately leads our gaze to the point of his spear. Despite his leisurely and calm posture, the king is supported by a weapon, which he will use if necessary.¹⁰⁹

A photo taken on the night of the Greek elections of 2007 is a characteristic example (figure 11). It was selected from among thousands of photos made that night for the Web site of Nea Demokratia, because it best presents the image of a successful statesman: a man who controls his emotions and allows only a moderate smile to express his joy at a narrow and unexpected victory; a man who inspires devotion—clearly expressed in the way his wife, standing on a lower level, looks upon him; a man who is more devoted to his (invisible) people, to whom his eyes are fixed, than to his private life and his wife; a man who knows how to get what he wants—we notice the possessive way in which he holds his wife. A virtual diagonal line divides the image into two halves, making our gaze move from the wife’s eyes up to the prime minister’s head and finally to the upper right corner and to the photo’s ultimate message: to the sign of victory—a success that results from moderation, harmony, and devotion. The image

¹⁰⁹ Pollitt 1986:72–73.
evokes peace and tranquility—in direct contrast to the passionate and loud campaign period. This photo was not staged; but if Kostas Karamanlis or his PR managers were to stage a photo, this is most likely how it would look.

![Image](image-url)

Figure 12: The harmonious couple. Photo from the Web site of the William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum.  

Harmony and devotion is the image promoted by the official Web site of the William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum (figure 12). In this case the image is staged and theatrical. Two individuals, mature but still young, gaze devotedly into each other’s eyes. If they can do this after all their prehistory, which is known to everyone, it is because they know how to set priorities—family values (or their careers), because they know how to control their emotions, because they know how to manage a crisis and can show tolerance and indulgence.

In ancient drama, actors did not have faces. They wore masks appropriate for a character or a role: the parasite, the courtesan, the stingy old man, the cunning slave. In the modern drama of public life, statesmen certainly have individual features and individual facial expressions, but as their public activities resemble the performance of a part in a staged play, their public images also resemble ancient theatrical masks, and one has the impression that the individuals become interchangeable. One such public mask—a theme with endless variations—is that of the statesman in the company of young people (figure 13): innocent infants, smart-looking children, young boys and girls full of hope—preferably multicultural. What we see is not Bill Clinton and Gordon Brown as individuals, but two actors playing the part of the statesman interested in education. You can have this image in variations, seated or standing, with one child or many. Do not ask these statesmen about details concerning education in their countries. Their audiences are willing to believe that they know the big picture and applaud them for playing this part successfully.

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Depending on the part, the mask can change from the Tony Blair’s “Olympic smile” to the expression of concern and serious consideration (figure 14).

In the Hellenistic period, elements of theatricality and illusion did not remain unnoticed, at least by the intellectuals, as we can judge from the critical remarks of contemporary authors. In modern times, a poem of Cavafy’s best captures this Hellenistic mood: his “Alexandrian Kings” of 1912.

The Alexandrians are gathered together
to see Cleopatra’s children,
Caesarion and his brothers,
Alexander and Ptolemy, whom they lead forth
for the first time to the Stadium,
there to proclaim them kings,
amid the brilliant procession of soldiers.
...
The Alexandrians surely perceived
that all these were theatrical words.
But the day was warm and poetic,
the sky a lucid azure blue,
the Alexandria Stadium
a triumphant achievement of art,
the superb splendor of the courtiers,
Caesarion all grace and beauty
(Cleopatra’s son, blood of the Lagidae)
and so the Alexandrians rushed to the ceremony,
and they grew enthusiastic, and they cheered
in Greek and in Egyptian and some in Hebrew,
enchanted by the gorgeous spectacle—
knowing full well the worth of these,
what hollow words these kingships were.

The Alexandrians knew full well. What about citizens in contemporary democracies?

References


