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Santo Mazzarino's Cultural *Koiné* of Asia Minor and Its "Limits": New Perspectives on Old Greek Miracles*

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Abstract

The article assesses the legacy of Santo Mazzarino's Fra Oriente e Occidente *with respect to the author's views on the emergence of the Greek* polis *against broader phenomena of cultural interaction between Greece and ancient Near Eastern civilizations. It argues that, eighty years after the publication of Mazzarino's otherwise pioneering work, modern scholarship has not yet overcome the prejudice, central in Mazzarino's thought, whereby Greek political culture constitutes the most important exception to the numerous cultural experiences that the Greeks shared with their eastern neighbors. Yet, the article also posits that a way to solve this prejudice can be found in Mazzarino's work itself, namely among the author's formulations of the concept of cultural* koiné.

Keywords

Santo Mazzarino, Greece and the Near East, Greek miracle, polis*, tyranny,* koiné

1. Reading Mazzarino Today: Unresolved Tensions

Almost eighty years have passed since its publication, but the present time seems most appropriate for a new reflection on Santo Mazzarino's *Fra Oriente e Occidente*.[1] I shall begin by briefly looking at current debates on the status of Classical Studies as a discipline. Over the last couple of decades, Classical scholars have been

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[1] The book was published by La Nuova Italia, Florence, in 1947 (Mazzarino [1947]). In the present paper, all citations and quotations follow the page numbering of the edition published by Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, in 2007 (Mazzarino [2007]).

calling for greater inclusivity in the discipline and for an expansion of its research and teaching horizons. The concept of the "Classics" is being revised: the canon of Greek and Latin authors sometimes expands to Akkadian epic poetry, while the study of Greek and Roman history — which, somewhat forcibly, alone constitutes the discipline called "Ancient History" — is often accompanied by a need for wider perspectives that emphasize the relations between those civilizations and neighboring ones in the Mediterranean basin and beyond.[2]

Those who have read *Fra Oriente e Occidente* will find this debate quite familiar.[3] In the introductory chapter of the volume, Mazzarino addresses with irritation the tendency of some scholars to deny *a priori* any connections between the Greek world and the Near East:

> [O]gni aprioristica "insistenza" su arbitrari pregiudizi classicistici, e ogni denegazione dei rapporti fra Grecia e Oriente, si deve considerar ingiustificata e (se anche presentata sotto il manto di una scientifica "prudenza") ostinatamente "imprudente."[4]
>
> Any aprioristic "insistence" on arbitrary classicist prejudices, and any denial of the connections between Greece and the Near East, must be considered unjustified and (even if presented under the mantle of scientific "caution") stubbornly "incautious."

On the other hand — Mazzarino argues — the Classicists' skepticism towards postulating Near Eastern influences on the Greek world proves to be methodologically sound as long as it does not end up being sheer

[2] Cf. Horden and Purcell (2000) 9–15; Raaflaub (2000) 51–52, 60; Bagnall (2005) 342–43; Vlassopoulos (2007) esp. 101–122; Haubold (2011); Broodbank (2013) 25; Adler (2020); López-Ruiz (2021) 4–9; López-Ruiz (2022); Murray (2024) 12–27, 353–54; Scheidel (2025). See further Mac Sweeney (2023) and Quinn (2024) for these questions within the debate on what constitutes "Western Civilization." A controversial, notoriously flawed attempt to deconstruct the myth of "Classical Civilization" was carried out by M. Bernal in his *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (3 vols. 1987–2006); see Lefkowitz and Rogers (1996) for reactions.

[3] Some fifty years ago, Arnaldo Momigliano also pointed out the limits of European education, sphere of knowledge, and system of values, intrinsically conditioned by the legacy of Hellenism; see Momigliano (1975a) 11–12 and Momigliano (1975b); further comments in Santini (2021) 287. For Momigliano's reaction to Mazzarino's work, see below, note 36.

[4] Mazzarino (2007) 26.

skepticism but leads to in-depth analyses that aim to establish motivations, contexts, and consequences of said influences — in other words, historical explanations.[5]

Mazzarino's effort to interpret cross-cultural interactions on the historical level manifests itself into his adoption of the concept of cultural *koiné*. Mazzarino identifies at least four areas of cultural *koiné*, corresponding to zones of peripheral "Greekness" where Greeks came into contact with non-Greek civilizations. One can distinguish among the different zones of *koiné* by their respective remoteness from the Greek mainland, the complexity of the societies in which they have their roots, and the antiquity of those roots. The most remote and least complex *koiné* zones are those of Ukraine, Cyrenaica, Spain, and Gaul. Then comes the Italic cultural *koiné*, where the "Greekness" of Sicily and Magna Graecia came into contact with Latins, Etruscans, Oscans, and Umbrians, and from which Rome emerged. Finally, the cultural *koiné* of Asia Minor — which encapsulates relations between Ionians, Phrygians, Lydians, Lycians, and Carians — stands out as it is rooted in interactions that occurred during the Bronze Age between civilizations by then already characterized by a high degree of social and political complexity.[6]

The cultural *koiné* of Asia Minor is the prime location for studying relations between East and West and for understanding the nature of "Greekness" itself. Asia Minor is where the "soul" of the Greeks manifested more evidently than anywhere else. According to Mazzarino, the *koiné* of Asia Minor witnessed the "miracle" of Ionian culture, the most distinctive culture of the archaic Greek world, which expressed, in its *poleis*, the fundamental traits of Greek collective life.[7] Therefore, it appears that the "intimate collaboration" between Greeks and non-Greeks within the *koiné* of Asia Minor coincides with the Greeks standing out for the peculiarity of their political culture.[8]

This tension, unresolved in Mazzarino's work, seems to me particularly worthy of reflection.[9] Almost eighty years later, the question is

[5] Mazzarino (2007) 25–26; cf. also 5–18 for his history of scholarship. The question translates into an opposition between "universal history" and "national histories." See also Ampolo (1997) 5–12, 42–57, 85, 88–93, 113–27.

[6] Mazzarino (2007) 21–22; for the argument about the deep roots of the *koiné* of Asia Minor, see *ibid.* 31–39. For Mazzarino's concept of *koiné*, cf. Corsaro (2003) 28–32 and Mazza (2023), Chapters 1, 5, and 6.

[7] Mazzarino (2007) 20–22, 26–27.

[8] Mazzarino (2007) 23 ("intima collaborazione").

[9] On Mazzarino's unresolved tension, see the remarks of Giarrizzo (2003) and especially Corsaro (2003); cf. also Mazza (1991) 328, more generally on certain aspects

still timely: the most recent studies on early Greek political development, the widespread "Mediterraneanist" approach to the Classical world, and today's drives to broadening the horizons of Classical Studies have largely failed to tackle the tacit assumption whereby Greek political culture is intrinsically different from the political culture of neighboring Eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern societies — certainly incommensurable with it, if not implicitly superior to it. Despite a growing interest in various kinds of cultural interaction between Greece and its eastern neighbors, research on this subject is still underdeveloped. This is an elephant in the room that urgently demands our attention.

Starting from the tension that features in Mazzarino's seminal work, this contribution aims to outline new directions for future research on this problem.

2. The Limits of *Koiné*

Mazzarino himself is aware of the tension he posits and tries to define its causes. This endeavor translates into an attempt to identify the "limits" of the concept of *koiné*.

In Mazzarino's treatment, the "limits" of the *koiné* of Asia Minor are of a political nature, specifically institutional and constitutional. They are represented by the presence, in the Ionian world, of the "typical Greek experience," the *polis*, which was absent in the Phrygian, Lydian, and neighboring worlds sharing that common cultural experience.[10] In Mazzarino's view, any aspect of cultural-political *koiné* has its own evolutions, nuances, and limits: the "constitutional travail" that gave birth to the *polis*, according to a metaphor frequently employed by the author, corresponds to a moment when the effects of the cultural *koiné* of Asia Minor on the development of the Greek world proved to be of "the least importance."[11] In the experience of the *polis* — Mazzarino writes — one sees the "leap" from the "barbarian" world of Asia Minor to the Ionian one.[12]

Thus, the *polis* stands outside the common cultural experience of Greeks and non-Greeks in Asia Minor. However, upon closer examination, Mazzarino fails to provide historically convincing explanations for this limit of the cultural *koiné* of Asia Minor — a limit which rather

of Mazzarino's work: "… le sue audacie filosofiche, i suoi ragionamenti sottili, certe prospettive innovatrici si risolvono nella conferma della tradizione."

[10] Mazzarino (2007) 26.

[11] Mazzarino (2007) 30 ("il minimo di importanza").

[12] Mazzarino (2007) 26–27 ("il 'salto' dal mondo micrasiatico 'barbaro' allo ionico").

appears to be a preconception. In the pages dedicated to the origins of the *polis*, in chapter five of the book,[13] Mazzarino firmly argues for the incommensurability of the Greek political experience with other political experiences, foremost among them that of Lydia, co-protagonist with Ionia of the *koiné* of Asia Minor:

> Di fronte alla *polis* in quanto organismo costituzionale, si è fermato l'influsso della Lidia. Dal punto di vista costituzionale, nulla i vassalli potevano insegnare ai cittadini; nulla i Lidii potevano dire agli Ioni. Né la crisi che noi indichiamo generalmente come fenomeno "tirannico," né, tanto meno, un qualche impulso verso ordinamenti democratici. La *polis* è un organismo ellenico, ed ellenico soltanto: *tutta* la sua storia, *tutta* la sua evoluzione si commisura solamente con la storia culturale e sociale dei Greci.[14]
>
> Faced with the *polis* as a constitutional organism, Lydian influence stopped. From a constitutional point of view, the vassals could teach nothing to the citizens; the Lydians had nothing to say to the Ionians. Neither the crisis we generally refer to as the "tyrannical" phenomenon nor, much less, any impetus towards democratic arrangements. The *polis* is a Hellenic organism, and Hellenic only: its *entire* history, its *entire* evolution is coextensive only with the cultural and social history of the Greeks.

This stance, which can undoubtedly be described as aprioristic, betrays an essentialist vision of the notion of *polis* and is in open conflict with the need for an "anticlassicist" approach which Mazzarino had expressed in the introduction (see above, § 1). The essentialism informing Mazzarino's vision of the *polis* is even more evident a few lines later:

> [È] probabile che il problema dell'"origine della *polis*" si risolva su un piano sociologico piuttosto che su un piano propriamente storico: la *polis* non ha origine precisa da questo o quel fenomeno contingente — ma piuttosto trae caratteristiche e aspetti propri da un'esigenza generica dell'anima greca. Di un tale fenomeno non si dà origine; esso *è*; …[15]
>
> [It is] probable that the problem of the "origin of the *polis*" be resolved on a sociological rather than on a properly historical level: the *polis* does not have a precise origin from this or that contingent phenomenon

[13] Mazzarino (2007) 199–208.

[14] Mazzarino (2007) 199–200 (original emphasis).

[15] Mazzarino (2007) 200 (original emphasis).

> — rather, it draws its own characteristics and aspects from a general need of the Greek soul. Such a phenomenon has no origin; it *is*; …

In short, the *polis* is an ahistorical product of a "general need of the Greek soul." No other city-state culture contemporaneous with the Greek one — such as the Phoenician, Philistine, or Neo-Hittite city-state culture[16] — can be considered a source of influence for the Greek one. Although Mazzarino identifies common denominators explaining the spread of this type of political organization, such as the dissolution of great empires, migrations of peoples, and the resulting tendency towards "civic atomism,"[17] the constitutional essence of the Greek *polis* remains irreducible to other experiences:

> [L]e forme costituzionali proprie della grecità sono creazione dello *spirito* greco; questo è il più semplice, ma anche l'unico modo d'intenderne la genesi …[18]

> The constitutional forms peculiar to Greekness are creations of the Greek *spirit*; this is the simplest, but also the only way to understand their genesis …

One might ask where the essence of this "spirit" of the Greek people lies. For Mazzarino, it resides in an "isonomic need" arising from the crisis of the aristocratic state.[19] The formulation of this concept is influenced by a scheme, ultimately of Aristotelian origin, that interprets the constitutional evolution of the Greek state as a transition from kingship to aristocracy to democracy — a scheme now largely surpassed and not worth delving into further,[20] except to note that for Mazzarino the final stage of the evolutionary process is not necessarily represented by democracy but rather by "isonomy" (*isonomia*) itself, which can also occur in an oligarchic context (the so-called "isonomic oligarchy," *oligarchia isonomos*). The transfer of power to collegial institutions ensuring equal laws for all is the culmination of the process.[21]

[16] For the notion of "city-state culture" in a comparative perspective, see Hansen (2000a), Hansen (2000b), Hansen (2002). Cf. now Osborne (2021) for the Neo-Hittite (or Syro-Anatolian) world.

[17] Mazzarino (2007) 203–204 ("atomismo cittadino").

[18] Mazzarino (2007) 205 (original emphasis).

[19] Mazzarino (2007) 205–216 ("esigenza isonomica," *passim*).

[20] See e.g., for kingship, Drews (1983), Luraghi (2013a), and Luraghi (2013b); for aristocracy, Duplouy (2006) 11–35, esp. 12–16, and van Wees and Fisher (2015).

[21] Mazzarino (2007) 215–16.

Where does this "isonomic need" come from? It arises from the need to curb the *habrosyne*, the ostentation of luxury which characterized archaic aristocracies, and its deleterious effects on the state's life, particularly the oppression of the "free of inferior condition," the *kakoi*.[22] However, the aristocracy itself first moved in this direction through the institution of tyrannies. For Mazzarino, tyranny is a crucial moment in the evolution of the Greek state towards isonomy, but it is also a source of embarrassment due to the difficulty of determining its origins and its relations with Near Eastern autocracies, especially Lydian autocracy. The fundamental issue on which Mazzarino's discussion hinges is the theory of the Lydian origin of tyranny.[23] It is worth dwelling on the treatment of tyranny because it is here that Mazzarino most strongly appeals to the "limits" of the cultural *koiné* of Asia Minor:

> Ci si dirà: com'è lecito porre da una parte un problema ionico in termini di *koiné* culturale micrasiatica, e viceversa porre in discussione, d'altra parte, quell'origine lidia della tirannide, la quale, anzi, dovrebbe, se mai, postularsi proprio da chi insiste su una *koiné* culturale micrasiatica? Alla quale obiezione va risposto, in genere, che, come già si accennava, ogni fenomeno di *koiné* culturale presuppone varie "sfumature," e ha limiti ed aspetti vari; e che, in ogni modo, l'evoluzione costituzionale in un momento "creativo" (come è questo in cui si trapassa dallo stato aristocratico greco alla *polis*) è un processo caratteristico, e come tale va studiata.[24]
>
> One might say: how is it legitimate, on the one hand, to pose an Ionian problem in terms of a cultural *koiné* of Asia Minor, and on the other hand, to question the Lydian origin of tyranny, which, if anything, should indeed be postulated by those who insist on a cultural *koiné* of Asia Minor? To this objection, it must be answered, generally, that, as already hinted, every phenomenon of cultural *koiné* presupposes various "nuances" and has several limits and aspects; and that, in any case, constitutional evolution in a "creative" moment (such as this, in which the Greek aristocratic state transitions to the *polis*) is a distinctive process, and it must be studied as such.

[22] Mazzarino (2007) 215 ("liberi di condizione inferiore"). For Mazzarino, *habrosyne* and its social and political consequences define the Archaic Age as a historical period; see further below, § 4, and cf. Kurke (1991) and Murray (2024) 224–25.

[23] The theme of tyranny is addressed at different points in the book; see Mazzarino (2007) 29–30, 185–96, 216–25, 230–37.

[24] Mazzarino (2007) 30.

The obstinate denial of any influence from Asia Minor or more generally from the Near East in the "constitutional travail" that led from the crisis of the aristocratic state to isonomy underlies Mazzarino's categorical refusal to look for the origins of tyranny in Asia Minor, and specifically in Lydia — despite his belief that the term *tyrannos* belonged to the "Asiatic" linguistic heritage.[25] Mazzarino's demonstration that tyranny cannot have Lydian origins is fundamentally based on three arguments: several tyrants of Asia Minor were enemies of the Lydians; the aristocratic families of *lydizontes* documented in the *poleis* of Asia Minor did not aim to establish tyrannies; in Asia Minor, especially in Ionia, tyranny opposed the conservatism of aristocratic families and limited their *habrosyne*, which was indeed based on their relations with Lydia within the framework of the cultural *koiné* of Asia Minor.[26] It is hardly necessary to emphasize that none of those arguments is compelling, as Mazzarino seems to confuse the issue of the origins of tyranny as a political phenomenon or form of government with the issue, irrelevant in this specific case, of the relations of the tyrants of Asia Minor with the Lydian ruling class or with Lydianizing aristocracies in Greek *poleis*.[27] More interesting for our purposes are the consequences of the reasoning: tyranny is a constitutive part of the evolutionary process of the *polis* — a process, let us reiterate, exclusively Greek — because, by opposing aristocratic *habrosyne*, it effectively pursues the same objectives as isonomy. However, it manifests itself as the non-ethical and violent moment in the establishment of isonomy, which finds its ethical and non-violent counterpart in the figure of the lawgiver.[28]

Excluding any possibility of influence in the political-constitutional domain, in the remaining chapters Mazzarino addresses the routes of the "generic cultural influence"[29] of the Near East on archaic Greece, identified in a maritime route dominated by the relations among Phoenicians, Cretans, and mainland Greeks,[30] and in a land route centered on Ionia

[25] Mazzarino (2007) 195–96, 367 note 572. For the linguistic background of the term *tyrannos* see further below, § 5.

[26] Mazzarino (2007) 185–93.

[27] That Mazzarino's reasoning is flawed does not mean that its opposite is true, that is, that tyranny originates from Lydia; for the problem of the origins of tyranny see now Santini (2024), esp. 42–44 for the Lydian question.

[28] Mazzarino (2007) 215.

[29] Mazzarino (2007) 247 ("generico influsso culturale").

[30] Mazzarino (2007) 245–70 (chapter six, "Commerci fenici e colonie greche"). See further Bonnet in this volume.

and more widely Asia Minor.[31] In this framework, what were initially defined as the "limits" of the cultural *koiné* of Asia Minor become the "limits" of any relationship between the Greek world and the Near East: East–West relations — the relations between the Greek "West" with any kind of "East" — are reduced to a "generic cultural influence" to which the political sphere remained immune. Precisely in the political sphere, by contrast, Greek identity expressed itself in peculiar forms:

> Dinanzi all'elaborazione di un'originale esperienza costituzionale si è fermato l'influsso dell'Oriente: presente agli inizi di questa esperienza, connesso con l'intensificarsi della vita commerciale ed economica, quell'influsso si arresta dinanzi al peculiare travaglio per cui la *polis* passò dalle forme costituzionali aristocratiche all'isonomia ed infine agli ordinamenti democratici. L'evoluzione costituzionale dello stato lidio nulla poté insegnare all'evoluzione costituzionale delle *poleis* greche, anche delle ioniche; a maggior ragione, nulla poté insegnare ad esse l'evoluzione degli altri stati orientali — anche degli stati-città: ci poté essere […] un parallelismo iniziale, ma nulla di più.[32]
>
> Before the elaboration of an original constitutional experience, Near Eastern influence stopped: present at the beginning of this experience, connected with the intensification of commercial and economic life, that influence stops before the peculiar travail through which the *polis* transitioned from aristocratic constitutional forms to isonomy and finally to democratic arrangements. The constitutional evolution of the Lydian state could teach nothing to the constitutional evolution of the Greek *poleis*, not even the Ionian ones; a fortiori, the evolution of other Near Eastern states — even state-cities — could teach nothing to them: there could be […] an initial parallelism, but nothing more.

At the end of the book, Mazzarino concludes that the constitutional evolution proper of the Greek *poleis* is precisely where "Western Civilization" was born and manifested itself for the first time:

[31] Mazzarino (2007) 271–92 (chapter seven, "L'altra via fra Oriente e Occidente"). For the land route, cf. also Birmingham (1961); Burkert (1998); van Dongen (2013); Liverani (2021a) 364, 370. For the importance of land routes in a Mediterranean context more generally, cf. Horden and Purcell (2000) 130–33, 151.

[32] Mazzarino (2007) 247. For the difference established by Mazzarino between (Greek) "city-states" ("città-stato") and (Near Eastern) "state-cities" ("stati-città") — driven by an unwillingness to apply the category of city-state, normally used for the Greek *polis*, to city-states that were not *poleis* — see Liverani (2021a) 375.

> Il travaglio costituzionale ci è apparso, dunque, opera di tutti i Greci; ed è un travaglio gelosamente, diremmo, greco, senza nessun "emprunt" lidio o comunque straniero. In esso l'anima dell'Occidente si è, la prima volta, rivelata. Partendo da condizioni economiche e sociali analoghe a quelle delle città-stato orientali, i Greci hanno tuttavia "scoperto" qualcosa che gli Orientali non sospettavano: l'esigenza isonomica. Questa fu la nascita dell'Occidente.[33]
>
> The constitutional travail has thus appeared to us as the work of all the Greeks; and it is a travail that is, as it were, jealously Greek, without any Lydian or otherwise foreign "borrowing." In it, the soul of the West has, for the first time, revealed itself. Starting from economic and social conditions similar to those of the Oriental city-states, the Greeks, however, "discovered" something that the Orientals did not suspect: the isonomic need. This was the birth of the West.

Mazzarino reached these conclusions eighty years ago.[34] And yet, although the problem of the relations between East and West has been approached anew from many different angles and much work has been done to deconstruct the myth of "Western Civilization,"[35] today the view that the Greek political experience is incommensurable with the political experiences of other ancient Mediterranean or Near Eastern societies still holds sway — and this is especially true for the Classicists' side of things.[36]

[33] Mazzarino (2007) 296.

[34] In *Fra Oriente e Occidente*, what ultimately seems to distinguish the achievements of the Greeks as opposed to those of Near Eastern societies is the "rational" nature of the "Greek soul" as opposed to the "spiritual" nature of Near Eastern thought. This stance is most evident in the parallel drawn by Mazzarino between rational *historiē* and Greek political life; see Mazzarino (2007) 287–92; 295–97. In later works, Mazzarino came to more nuanced formulations and the initial dichotomy between "rational" and "spiritual" forms of thought is blurred. On this question, see now Corsaro (2003) 42–44; cf. also Liverani (2021a) 374, 376–77.

[35] See above, note 2, and further below, § 3.

[36] In a vitriolic review of *Fra Oriente e Occidente* which appeared one year after the publication of Mazzarino's book, Arnaldo Momigliano quite paradoxically claimed that the problem of East–West relations no longer deserved treatment ("L'unica cosa da fare intorno al problema 'Oriente e Occidente' è di non parlarne più"), while expressing skepticism on the putative originality of the Greeks in terms of political institutions ("Vorrei essere meno reciso sulla originalità dei Greci in materia di istituzioni politiche"). See Momigliano (1948), now republished in Mazzarino (2007) 394–403 (quotes from 399 and 400 respectively).

3. Current Approaches: Limits and New Directions

Let us briefly go back to my starting point. If we look at the directions in which the attempt to broaden the horizon of Classical Studies has moved in recent decades, we will easily notice that — with some exceptions on which I will focus in a moment — the political problem has remained at the margins of the debate on the relations between Greece and the Near East or on the "Mediterranean" dimension of the Greek world. Influential works such as *The Corrupting Sea* by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell[37] and *The Making of the Middle Sea* by Cyprian Broodbank[38] have brought to the forefront structural factors that unite the varied and multifaceted world of the ancient Mediterranean.[39] Although their subject matter is the entire Mediterranean basin in a *longue durée* dimension, these works have significantly contributed, too, to reorienting the investigation towards phenomena of connectivity within various sectors of the Mediterranean, on a regional or supra-regional level and over shorter, discrete periods of time.[40] On the one hand, questions posed on a pan-Mediterranean scale can retain their heuristic potential when they are simultaneously posed on a smaller scale *within* the Mediterranean; in fact, research on Mediterranean antiquity could benefit even more from a multiscalar approach that does not dilute regionalities into a Mediterranean uniformity, but takes into account multiple levels of integration.[41] On the other hand, it has been recognized that Mediterranean integration is not an absolute constant, but rather the result of a process that unfolded for millennia and reached a peak around the eighth century BCE, with periods of intensification and abatement and with different regions within the Basin following different timings and tempoes.[42] Another

[37] Horden and Purcell (2000).

[38] Broodbank (2013).

[39] For reactions and responses, cf. Harris (2005a) and Horden and Purcell (2020). For the influence of Braudel's vision of the Mediterranean in modern historiography, see Murray (2024) 341–55. For a Mediterranean reading of Mazzarino's work, see Aymard and Galasso (2004) 9–10; cf. Aymard (2004); Galasso (2004).

[40] Cf. e.g. van de Mieroop (2005); Hodos (2020); Arrington (2021); Osborne and Hall (2022). As has been pointed out, however, attention should be paid so that the label "Mediterranean studies" does not just become "a politically correct alternative to Classics;" see Broodbank (2013) 25 (quote); cf. Harris (2005b) 2, 16 ("let our answers not be too Greek"); Herzfeld (2005) 49; Bagnall (2005) 342; Horden and Purcell (2020) 8.

[41] See e.g. Dietler (2022) 233–36; Riva and Grau Mira (2022); cf. also Harris (2005b) 7.

[42] A process called "Mediterraneanization"; see Morris (2003) and Broodbank (2013) esp. 15–53, 506–12, 600–605. On the importance of historical change in

important corollary of the "Mediterraneanist" approach has been the dissolution of the conceptual barrier that opposes "East" and "West," simultaneously challenged by the debate on the "Orient," "Orientalism," "Orientalizing," and similar concepts.[43] In short, in the "Mediterraneanist" approach, East and West belong to a broader "Mediterranean" perspective worthy of a unified analysis.[44]

However, the political element remains largely absent from this type of investigation, both on a pan-Mediterranean scale and on a smaller scale. For Horden and Purcell, the unity of the Mediterranean, or rather the Basin's structural characteristic of being a "continuum of discontinuities,"[45] ultimately lies in its ecological conformation. In the framework they outlined, there is no room for the analysis of shared structural factors of a political-institutional order.[46] In Broodbank's treatment, states and institutions feature as the protagonists of major historical events that triggered dynamics of rise and abatement, acceleration or

accounts of Mediterranean history, see also Shaw (2001) 426–27 and Harris (2005b) 8–10, 24–25, 37–38.

[43] See e.g. Riva and Vella (2006); Gunter (2013); Fales (2021); Liverani (2021a); Liverani (2021b); Arrington (2022). The debate goes back to Said (1978). For this debate in the context of Mediterranean studies, cf. Broodbank (2013) 23, 53, 500–502, 518, 604; Hodos (2020) 1–34; López-Ruiz (2021) 1–89; López-Ruiz (2022); for the traditional East–West orientation of Mediterranean studies, cf. Bowersock (2005). Still, some authors have warned that "Mediterraneanism" may run the risk of becoming just an avatar of "Orientalism;" see Harris (2005b) 2, 38; Herzfeld (2005) 48, 51.

[44] Cf. Purcell (1990) and Horden and Purcell (2000) 9–25, though in the end the Near East plays little role in the book, as has been pointed out by Shaw (2001) 420. It plays a more extensive role in the integrated histories of Broodbank (2013) and Quinn (2024). For the "Mediterranean" dimension of different parts of the Near East and moments of Near Eastern history, cf. also van de Mieroop (2005); Haubold (2012); and Bagnall (2005) for Egypt. This question should be contextualized within the debate on the "boundaries" of the Mediterranean; see esp. Shaw (2001) 423–24; Morris (2003) 45; Galasso (2004) 34; Harris (2005b) 4–5, 11–12; Broodbank (2013) 25, 54–60; Murray (2024) 354. For a reaction to early criticism, cf. Purcell (2003) (= Horden and Purcell [2020] 42–60).

[45] Horden and Purcell (2000) 53.

[46] Horden and Purcell (2000) 2, 20–25. A partial exception is their treatment of the typologies of "town" and "city," but even in this case the political-human aspect of settlement is set to the background as different typologies of settlements are conceptualized from an ecological point of view ("microecologies"); see Horden and Purcell (2000) 90–122, with the comments by Shaw (2001) 444–45 and Harris (2005b) 29–34. Cf. already Purcell (1990) esp. 49–54.

deceleration, in Mediterranean connectivity.[47] Yet, those who made interconnectedness possible were traders rather than political actors.[48] Similarly, the numerous studies that in recent years have revisited the problem of the relations between East and West — whether from a "Mediterraneanist" perspective or in a more traditional sense, up to the very recent volume *The Connected Iron Age* edited by Jonathan Hall and James Osborne[49] — have done so from a literary and linguistic perspective,[50] from the point of view of trade and material culture,[51] population movements and ethnogenesis (too often uncritically associated),[52] religion,[53] and other aspects of culture and society more broadly,[54] while little attention has been paid to the role played by political thought, practice, and institutions in the formation of shared cultural experiences.[55]

As I mentioned, there are some exceptions. The first case to be mentioned is that of the so-called "international system" of the Late Bronze Age, best documented by the Amarna letters and diplomatic

[47] See, for example, the role of Assyria's imperial interests in triggering Mediterranean-wide connectivity: Broodbank (2013) 491, cf. also Purcell (1990) 38–44. For different views on this question, see e.g. Frankenstein (1979); Sherratt and Sherratt (1993); Aubet (1993) 78, 90–96; López-Ruiz (2021).

[48] Not differently from Horden and Purcell (see above, note 46), for Broodbank the essential traits of the "Mediterranean polity" are not of a political nature but concern the relation of the "state" with the environment: polities of a "Mediterranean" type encompass an ecologically diverse territory; see Broodbank (2013) 604. For some criticism to the absolute prominence of the trader or seafarer as the main representative of economic activity in the Mediterranean, see already Purcell (1990) 53–54; Horden and Purcell (2000) 30.

[49] Hall and Osborne (2022).

[50] See e.g. López-Ruiz (2010); Louden (2011); Haubold (2013); Metcalf (2015); Bachvarova (2016); Bianconi (2021); Myerston (2023); Metcalf (2025). This and the following lists are not exhaustive but purely indicative.

[51] See e.g. Gunter (2009); van Dommelen and Knapp (2010); Aruz et al. (2014); Aruz and Seymour (2016); Knapp and Demesticha (2017); Martin (2017); Hodos (2020); Arrington (2021); and several contributions in Hall and Osborne (2022).

[52] See e.g. Yasur-Landau (2010); Fischer and Bürge (2017); Driessen (2018); Demetriou (2023).

[53] See e.g. Metcalf (2015); Nissinen (2017); Blakely and Collins (2019); Rutherford (2020); Kelly and Metcalf (2021); Ulanowski (2021).

[54] See e.g. Collins et al. (2008); Rollinger et al. (2010); Rollinger and Schnegg (2014); Rollinger (2017); von Bredow (2017); Halpern and Sacks (2017); D.M. Lewis (2017); D.M. Lewis (2018); Stevens (2019); Payne et al. (2021).

[55] Absence of political factors from the narrative has been a point of criticism to the Mediterraneanist approach since its inception; see e.g. Morris (2003) 51; Harris (2005b) 6–7, 36–37.

correspondence from other archives. It is widely recognized that in the 14th and 13th centuries the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East were largely part of an integrated system characterized by shared political ideologies and practices as well as modes of political organization and a hierarchical structure of society attested across multiple regions in analogous forms.[56] Yet, while no scholar would question the participation in this system of the regional polities traditionally considered to be part of the Near East (Ḫatti, Egypt, Mitanni, Assyria, Babylonia, Elam), the degree of participation of the Greek world — that is, of the Mycenaean palatial states — is a matter of debate. Leaving aside the question of economic integration or cultural interaction more generally,[57] what is at stake here is whether the political culture of Mycenaean Greece can be considered part of the shared political culture of the "international system" more broadly. Answers to this question range widely, primarily due to the scarcity of evidence from Mycenaean Greece compared to the other regions of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East — the absence of royal inscriptions, royal iconography, and the elusiveness of Mycenaean political institutions in local records hinder comparison.[58] While some scholars emphasize their incommensurability with the political infrastructures of their eastern neighbors,[59] the inclusion of the Mycenaean polities in the "international system" depends on the weight and significance one is willing to attach to the so-called "Ahhiyawa documents," a group of Hittite texts attesting to a political entity called "Ahhiyawa," identified by most scholars with (some part of) the Mycenaean world. These texts show that Ahhiyawa often proved to be a challenge for the Hittites, but the latter occasionally entertained diplomatic relations with it on a peer-to-peer basis.[60] However, that this should suggest that Mycenaean Greece had the same form of political organization as the Hittite empire, as some have argued, seems to be far-

[56] See e.g. Liverani (1990); Cohen and Westbrook (2000); van de Mieroop (2005). Peer-polity interaction has been invoked as an explanatory model for this system.

[57] For economic integration, see e.g. Mountjoy (1998); Sherratt (2001); Murray (2017). For cultural interaction, see e.g. Bachvarova (2016); Rutherford (2020).

[58] See e.g. Blakolmer (2019); Dickinson (2019a); Shelmerdine (2024). For a detailed documentary overview of the socio-political organization of the Late Bronze Age Aegean, see Carlier (1984) 40–116.

[59] Cf. e.g. Sherratt (2001); Knodell (2021) 100–115.

[60] For overviews of the Ahhiyawa question, see Fischer (2010); Gander (2015); Bryce (2018); Weeden (2018); Dickinson (2019b); Blackwell (2021), all with further literature. The "Ahhiyawa texts" have been collected in Beckman et al. (2011). Linguistic arguments for the identification of "Ahhiyawa" with some notion of "Achaea" have been advanced by Finkelberg (1988); the identification is rejected, for example, by Ünal (1991); Steiner (2007); Schürr (2020); Egetmeyer (2022).

fetched.[61] In my opinion, the problem should rather be set on the structural level, and the question to be asked is whether ideologies, practices of power, and principles of legitimacy in Mycenaean Greece betray any typological analogies to their Near Eastern counterparts — differences in scale and in forms of political organization notwithstanding. In other words, the focus should be on inner structures that underlie outer manifestations, and our challenge as historians is to develop a method to access them.

The case of Mycenaean Greece's integration in the Late Bronze Age "international system" may seem not to be of immediate relevance to students of the world of the *polis*, given the hiatus — "collapse," "crisis," or whatever we may want to call it — that separates the latter from the former. However, there is now growing awareness that the emergence of the *polis* is a process that needs to be investigated in a long-term dimension, which includes the transformations that affected the Greek world after the collapse of the palaces, with all continuities and discontinuities involved.[62] Mazzarino himself shows an attention to the long-term dimension of historical processes when he emphasizes that the *koiné* of Asia Minor had its ultimate roots in the interactions between Ahhiyawa and the Hittites[63] — even though, as we have seen, the conclusions he reaches as to the political sphere draw a firm line between the world of the Greek *polis* and everything else, whether contemporary or not.[64] When it comes more specifically to the Iron Age and to what is considered the "archaic" period of Greek history — that is, the formative period of the *polis* and Mazzarino's main focus — voices that advocate for a joint analysis of political development in Greece and the Near East have directed their investigation to figures of power, forms of political organization, political institutions, and political ideas. Interestingly enough, those voices come more often from the field of Near Eastern Studies than from Classical Studies.

For example, in a seminal study which was published posthumously in 1983, Franco Pintore offered the first coherent historical explanation

[61] This theory, already advanced a few decades ago, has received new attention in more recent years: see Kelder (2008); Kelder (2010); Kelder (2013); Kelder (2018); Eder and Jung (2015); Kelder and Waal (2019); Waal (2019). For earlier criticism, see Carlier (1984) 132–34; Dickinson (2006) 26–35.

[62] See e.g. Dickinson (2006); Crielaard (2011); Davies (2018); Eder and Lemos (2020); Whitley (2020); Knodell (2021); and lastly Ma (2024) 21–24, 26–68 (cf. esp. 28–29).

[63] Cf. Mazzarino (2007) 21–22, 31–39, 203–204. Note that Mazzarino locates Ahhiyawa in Asia Minor and not on the mainland; see *ibid.* 36, 314 note 49.

[64] Cf. the comments of Liverani (2021a) 373.

for the existence of forms of monarchic, though not traditionally royal, power in the southern Levant, Anatolia, and Greece in the first half of the first millennium BCE.[65] These forms of power are identifiable in the figures of the Philistine *seren*, the Neo-Hittite *tarwannis*, and the Greek tyrant. The Neo-Hittite *tarwannis*[66] — the "just" leader beloved by the gods who seizes power but not necessarily institutional authority — is characterized, in Pintore's words, as "the cousin of the Greek tyrant,"[67] in a historical framework where it was not an institution but a political concept that passed from the Neo-Hittite world to the Greek one. This framework has recently been revisited by Maurizio Giangiulio with a focus on Cypselus of Corinth.[68] As Giangiulio argues, the legitimizing rhetoric of Neo-Hittite rulers, primarily centered on the notion of justice but also on divine election and force, must have found actual resonance among political actors who, like Cypselus, sought new bases of power in the Greek world.

Remaining within the realm of political agents, Lorenzo d'Alfonso has suggested that a similar historical development characterized the figures of the Hittite *tabariyalli-* and the Aegean *basileus* in the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age — low-ranking figures in the socio-political hierarchies of the second millennium BCE who then rose to positions of command at the dawn of the first millennium.[69] More generally, in considering forms of political organization, Mario Liverani has proposed to interpret the reorganization of communities in the Levant, Anatolia, and the Aegean world in the aftermath of the Late Bronze Age crisis according to the political typologies of "ethnic state" and "city-state," both present in each of the three areas due to parallel developments.[70] Besides some points that I consider debatable, such as the rigidity of the distinction between "ethnic state" and "city-state,"[71] the

[65] Pintore (1983); cf. also Pintore (1979).

[66] See further below, § 5, for more details on this question.

[67] Pintore (1983) 306.

[68] Giangiulio (2020).

[69] See d'Alfonso (2023); cf. also Gerçek and d'Alfonso (2022).

[70] Liverani (2002). This categorization has been further developed in subsequent studies; see e.g. Liverani (2003) 37–87 and *passim*; Liverani (2011) 539–65; Liverani (2021b) 119–30. For further comments, see d'Alfonso (2023), with a special focus on the notion of "canton state," also introduced by Liverani to classify political entities in Early Iron Age south-central Anatolia.

[71] One major issue of these typologies is that they run the risk of reproducing old, superseded dichotomies, such as that between "tribal" and "urban" for the Levant, or that between *polis* and *ethnos* in the Greek world. For a critical approach to these dichotomies in the Levant, see e.g. Porter (2004); Porter (2010); Benz (2016) 11–14, 17–46, 111–25, 278–302; for the Greek world, see e.g. Roussel (1976); Morgan (2003).

attempt to frame these three areas of the Eastern Mediterranean along lines of parallel historical-political development remains important.

There is one case on which I would like to focus more in the present context as it — perhaps unconsciously — shows echoes of Mazzarino's arguments. Following a proposal initially formulated by Klaus Seybold and Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg to explain analogies in the social criticism of Amos and Hesiod,[72] the late Kurt Raaflaub posited the existence of a *koiné* of political thought that united various Eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern societies in the early first millennium BCE.[73] This concept of *koiné* has been formulated by means of a cross-cultural comparison of ideas of political significance, especially that of justice: by identifying similarities in the ideas of justice in Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Hebrew, and early Greek thought, Raaflaub notes that during a certain period of time, those societies were aligned on parallel patterns of political thought.[74] However, the rise of the *polis*, with its representative institutions and decision-making mechanisms entrusted to collectives of citizens, marks the moment when the Greek world made a leap forward compared to the other societies participating in the initial *koiné*. As Raaflaub writes in his essay *The "Great Leap" in Early Greek Politics and Political Thought*:

> My comparative research has forced me to emphasize Greek particularism. […] [T]he main result of my investigation remains firm and clear:

For the use and abuse of the concept of ethnicity in these contexts, cf. e.g. London (1989); Skjeggestad (1992); Finkelstein (1996); Hall (1997); McInerney (2001).

[72] Seybold and von Ungern-Sternberg (1993), featuring in the edited volume Raaflaub (1993). Cf. also Seybold and von Ungern-Sternberg (2007), on Josiah and Solon, esp. 150–51.

[73] The problem was widely discussed by a number of scholars in Raaflaub (1993), even though the specific concept of an *ostmediterrane Koine des 8. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* features only in the contribution by Seybold and von Ungern-Sternberg (see previous note, esp. 233–36); cf. Raaflaub's own comments in the final *Diskussionen* (Raaflaub [1993] 425–26). (The concept of *altvorderasiatische Kulturkoine* employed by Haas [1993] 135–36 in the same volume refers to the cuneiform literary culture of the Bronze Age Near East and is not relevant to the present discussion.) Raaflaub himself has further explored the concept in later contributions; see e.g. Raaflaub (2000); Raaflaub (2007a); Raaflaub (2009); Raaflaub (2013); Raaflaub (2018). The concept is also employed in the same sense by Horst (2019); Horst (2020b); Oswald (2020).

[74] See esp. Raaflaub (2018), republished in German as Raaflaub (2020); cf. also Raaflaub (2000); Raaflaub (2013). Comparison of other ideas yields, in Raaflaub's view, less promising results; see the works cited in the previous note. For further comparative work on ideas of justice in the ancient world, cf. Irani and Silver (1995); de Boer (2023).

> nobody in the whole wide world of early Iron Age antiquity [...] except the Greeks entrusted the responsibility for enacting normative communal laws to a collective of citizens [...] that met in public assembly and determined in open debate what the law of the town was to be. This is a remarkable turning point or point of origin in world history, the "needle's eye" from which western traditions of politics and political thought developed.[75]

Although Raaflaub does not cite Mazzarino in his contributions, one cannot help but observe an analogy with the conclusions of *Fra Oriente e Occidente*, especially considering how Raaflaub's "great leap" echoes Mazzarino's "leap" from the "barbarian" world to the "Ionian" one[76] — which, against the broader context of the cultural *koiné* of Asia Minor, is precisely identified in the peculiarity of the *polis* experience. Moreover, Raaflaub employs the concept of cultural *koiné* — of which Mazzarino was so fond — experimenting with it on the political level — unlike Mazzarino. However, Raaflaub's *koiné* is, so to speak, a static one: it is given as a fact, but we see neither its formative processes nor the relations between the cultures that participate in it. The comparative method which lies behind its formulation does not inquire into the individual processes that led to the forms of thought and practice whose similarity is acknowledged, nor does it allow us to establish whether those processes themselves can be understood in terms of *koiné*. At best, the dynamic aspect is limited to interactions that happen before the *koiné*, elsewhere defined as a "a pool of ideas and knowledge that emerged from intense interaction among various cultures in the eastern Mediterranean."[77] The advantage of this formulation is that it proposes a model alternative to the quest for individual Near Eastern influences on Greek thought, which risks reducing the problem to a *Quellenforschung* — however sophisticated it may be.[78] Yet, no *koiné* of historical processes is envisioned here — only

[75] Raaflaub (2018) 45–46. For a similar conclusion, cf. Arnason (2013). These conclusions essentially confirm the fundamental thesis of Meier (1980), with correctives informed by subsequent debates on the Axial Age, for which see Eisenstadt (1986) and Arnason et al. (2005).

[76] Mazzarino (2007) 26–27 (see above, § 2 and note 12).

[77] Raaflaub (2009) 38, cf. 47.

[78] As a matter of fact, most of Raaflaub's work on this topic is presented as an attempt to assess Near Eastern influences on Greek political thought; see esp. the programmatic essay Raaflaub (2000). However, Raaflaub himself recognizes the advantages of the *koiné* model over the search for influences; cf. *ibid.* 64 and esp. Raaflaub (2018). On the relation between the two approaches, see also Seybold and von Ungern-Sternberg (2007) 150–51: "Im Rahmen der ostmediterranen *Koiné* sind aber kulturelle und politische *Einflüsse* natürlich nie und nirgends einfach

of their ultimate consequences. All in all, this method results in identifying entities that are only partially commensurable, and from this perspective, Raaflaub's conclusion about the "great leap" of the Greek world, which in some way reproduces Mazzarino's, seems rather obvious and predictable.

I should immediately clarify that the intention here is not to deny elements of originality in the Greek political experience by forcibly reducing it to an indistinct copy of Near Eastern political experiences.[79] It is, however, possible to address the question of the existence of a political-institutional *koiné* from a different, more "historical" perspective. The contribution by Raaflaub that I have just discussed takes its cue from an article by Mario Liverani entitled *Nelle pieghe del despotismo: organismi rappresentativi nell'antico Oriente*, published in *Studi Storici* in 1993.[80] In that article, by surveying documentary traces of the existence of representative and collegial institutions in the Near East between the second and first millennia BCE, Liverani argues, with particular reference to the period between 750 and 550 BCE, that the political debates on representation and collegiality that took place in the emerging Greek *polis* must not have been so different from the debates — largely lost but inferable thanks to traces they left in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere — that animated the contemporary communities of the Syro-Anatolian and Phoenician-Palestinian regions. However, it was the Assyrian imperial conquest, followed by the Babylonian and Persian ones depending on the area, that suppressed those debates in the Levant and prevented more concrete institutional developments from unfolding:

> [N]el periodo tra il 750 e il 550, le condizioni di partenza della Grecia e di quelle zone che ho definito l'Occidente del Vicino Oriente potevano essere abbastanza simili sul piano politico e sul piano culturale. Poi il diverso esito dell'impatto imperiale ne determinò la sorte diversa, coi centri orientali stroncati dalla conquista imperiale (perdita dell' autonomia, deportazioni, deculturazione, colonizzazione, crollo verticale economico e demografico) e quelli greci decollati verso le loro realizzazioni culturali e filosofiche. Infine la perdita (quasi totale) delle formulazioni politiche orientali le ha rese storicamente irrilevanti,

auszuschließen" (my emphasis), though in this case the "influence" takes place after the *koiné*. An attempt to explain the *koiné* by Phoenician mediation can be found in Seybold and von Ungern-Sternberg (1993) 233–36.

[79] Cf. Vlassopoulos (2007) 122.

[80] Liverani (1993).

> mentre quelle greche si trasmettevano e andavano a costituire in prosieguo di tempo l'asse portante del dibattito istituzionale che e giunto sino a noi.[81]

> [D]uring the period between 750 and 550, the starting conditions of Greece and those zones that I have called the West of the Near East could have been quite similar on both the political and cultural levels. Then the different outcome of the imperial impact determined their different fates, with the eastern centers crushed by the imperial conquest (loss of autonomy, deportations, deculturation, colonization, vertical economic and demographic collapse) and the Greek centers taking off towards their cultural and philosophical achievements. Finally, the (almost total) loss of Near Eastern political formulations rendered them historically irrelevant, while the Greek ones were transmitted and subsequently became the main axis of the institutional debate that has reached us.

Liverani has recently come back to this question precisely within the context of a reflection on *Fra Oriente e Occidente*, published under the title *Orienti e Occidenti* in *Studi Storici* in 2021.[82] The most significant issue raised by Liverani in this contribution seems to me to be precisely that of the devaluation — Mazzarino's, but not solely his — of the ancient Near Eastern city as a venue of political action and debate, even in a collective or collegial form.[83] On the contrary, although monarchy prevails in the Near East as a form of government, the existence of — I quote — "that residual city, a true civic community, with its general assembly, its elders, its fixed-term officers," often forgotten by the "Occidentalists," remains evident, showing "abundant traces of collegial institutions and political debate."[84] The valorization of these traces aims to make the Near East commensurable, or at least more commensurable,

[81] Liverani (1993) 32–33.

[82] Liverani (2021a).

[83] Liverani (2021a) 373–77; cf. Liverani (2021b) 61–71.

[84] Full passage in Liverani (2021a) 375: "Oggi anzi diremmo più esplicitamente che la città orientale, e in buona misura anche quella levantina, era centrata [...] sui due poli pubblici del tempio e del palazzo reale [...] ferma restando peraltro quella città residuale, vera e propria comunità civica, con la sua assemblea generale, coi suoi anziani, coi suoi magistrati a termine, che gli studiosi 'occidentalisti' tendono spesso a dimenticare." A few lines later, commenting on the alleged lack of political debate in the ancient Near East, Liverani notes that "abbondanti tracce di istituzioni collegiali e di dibattito politico sono state a più riprese individuate e valorizzate." See further below, with literature at note 86.

with the Greek world. Commenting on the conclusions of *Fra Oriente e Occidente*, Liverani writes:

> In ultima analisi, l'apporto greco consiste nel dispiegamento della "libera personalità," che è "nuova e irriducibile alla orientale." Sarà pur vero; ma se la Grecia viene storicizzata, datando in maniera piuttosto precisa questo dispiegamento, le sue fasi preparatorie, il suo contesto politico, le sue conseguenze istituzionali, perché non provare a storicizzare anche l'Oriente? Perché mantenerlo (quando si arriva al dunque del giudizio finale) come un'entità immutabile e compatta? Purtroppo ancora oggi, mezzo secolo dopo il volume del Mazzarino, […] siamo ancora in grave ritardo, e il pregiudizio che traspare dalla conclusione del Mazzarino è ancora diffuso.[85]

> Ultimately, the Greek contribution consists in the unfolding of the "free personality," which is "new and irreducible to the Eastern." This may be true; but if Greece is historicized, dating with a certain precision this unfolding, its preparatory phases, its political context, its institutional consequences, why not attempt to historicize the Near East as well? Why maintain it (when it comes to the final judgment) as an immutable and compact entity? Unfortunately, even today, half a century after Mazzarino's volume, […] we are still severely behind, and the prejudice that emerges from Mazzarino's conclusions is still widespread.

In the last few decades, several scholars have emphasized aspects of collegiality and political debate in the civic institutions of the ancient Near East, while others have pointed out how these find parallels in *polis* institutions.[86] This is a huge step forward towards the solution of the prejudice that opposes East and West and their political experiences. Nevertheless, the approach that envisages "historicizing" the Near East alongside the Greek world might not yield the desired results if the two processes of "historicization" remain separate — that is, if they are not accompanied by a "historicization" of Greece *and* the Near East (or relevant areas thereof) as part of a *single and coherent* historical system.

[85] Liverani (2021a) 376–77.

[86] See Liverani (2021a) 375 note 36 for an extensive bibliography. See further Seri (2005); Vlassopoulos (2007) 101–122; Kõiv (2011); van de Mieroop (2013); Momrak (2013); Momrak (2014); Benz (2016); Raaflaub (2018); Horst (2019); Woolmer (2023); Quinn (2024) 33–35, 143–45; the volume Horst (2020a); and various papers in Wilhelm (2012), esp. in the sections "Collective Governance and the Role of the Palace in the Bronze Age Middle Euphrates and Beyond," and "The Public and the State." Cf. also the comparative project on city-state cultures directed by M.H. Hansen (cited further below in the text and notes).

In other words, while studying the historical development of forms of political thought and practice that feature both in Greece and in the Near East increases their commensurability, an additional effort is needed to interpret on the historical level any common processes that produced said similar, parallel, or shared forms of political thought and practice. Such an effort requires us formulating a heuristic tool that allows us to locate those processes in a coherent historical framework, defined by co-ordinates of space and time.

This problem was seen, too, by Kostas Vlassopoulos in *Unthinking the Greek Polis*, published in 2007.[87] Here, Vlassopoulos advocates for a "connected history" that views Greek history "within the changing history of the Eastern Mediterranean." Yet, lamenting that, by the time he was writing, "[t]he lack of research and methodological tools" made a similar endeavor "impossible," the author went on the avenue opened by comparative studies on popular participation in the ancient Near East.[88] The same avenue is indicated by John Ma's recent, comprehensive history of the *polis*,[89] which programmatically tries to avoid offering an image of the *polis* as a "miracle." The existence of forms of popular government in ancient Near Eastern history is briefly mentioned at the end of the volume in the context of a call for a global-scale comparative history of the city-state on the model of the enterprise directed by Mogens Herman Hansen between the late 1990s and the early 2000s.[90]

In response to calls for widening comparative research even further, I wonder whether we should rather start looking closer. That is to say, instead of taking the *polis* as a self-contained entity[91] that participates in taxonomical comparisons with similar entities found in different geographical contexts and time periods, let us try to conceptualize its early development as a part of a broader, though coherent, historical framework. Comparative work, whether on a contained scale or on a global horizon, is certainly beneficial in that it helps us relativize our objects of research and decenter our perspectives. However, this also poses the risk of losing the historical dimension of our object of research — which in some cases paves the way to confusion. Some studies that strive to make the Near East more commensurable to the Greek world,

[87] Vlassopoulos (2007).

[88] Vlassopoulos (2007) 101–122 (quotes from 101–102).

[89] Ma (2024).

[90] See esp. Hansen (2000b) and Hansen (2002); the specificity of the Greek *polis* is outlined in the volume Hansen (2006). Cf. Ma (2024) 543–46, esp. 545 for the ancient Near East.

[91] Cf. Ma's "postulate of the unitary existence of *the* Greek city-state, in the singular and the absolute"; Ma (2024) 410, original emphasis.

for example, show an excessive emphasis on the alleged "democratic" nature of collective political action, public gatherings, and critique to rulers in certain Near Eastern societies[92] — as if the comparison between Greece and the Near East could hold water only if we found "democratic" features in the latter. Unless we want to subsume any form of power sharing and collegiality under the label of "democracy," in these cases the concept of democracy is too loosely employed and proves to be misleading: even in the Greek world itself, power sharing, collegiality, participation, and dissent do not *per se* suggest democracy; not even *isonomia* is necessarily equivalent to democracy, as Mazzarino appropriately noted (see above, § 2).[93] Such confusion is partially due to an implicit overlap between defining characteristics of the Greek *polis* — first and foremost political participation and power sharing — and the concept of democracy, likely catalyzed by a long-standing Athenocentric bias.[94]

[92] See Jacobsen (1943); Jacobsen (1957); Evans (1958); more recently Horst (2019) esp. 239–40, 249–50; and Horst (2020b), with an attempt to legitimize the comparison between Greece and the Near East under the lens of *Agonale Demokratie*, which obscures the distinction between monarchy and democracy as institutional arrangements (see esp. xiv–xvi, xix). Similar claims advanced by political scientists — that is, by scholars who do not specialize in the ancient world — are summarized in Momrak (2013) 37–41, with references. Other scholars formulate the problem in more balanced ways; see the following note.

[93] Cf. Brock and Hodkinson (2000), esp. 14; Vlassopoulos (2007) 117–22, esp. 122; Raaflaub (2007b); Raaflaub and Wallace (2007); Raaflaub (2018); Haubold (2020) esp. 38, 41, 43, 51; and, for the Near Eastern side, Fleming (2004) esp. 235–41; Momrak (2013); van de Mieroop (2013) esp. 285–87; van de Mieroop (2020) esp. 6–8. The "sliding scale of popular participation" proposed by Momrak (2013) is a useful analytical tool, as long as one does not turn it into an assessment of the "degree of democracy" of the polities involved. For power sharing and collective decision-making in democratic and non-democratic constitutions alike, see now Esu (2024).

[94] See e.g. titles like *The Greek Polis and the Invention of Democracy* (Arnason et al. [2013]), mostly focused on Athens, or *Der Alte Orient und die Entstehung der Athenischen Demokratie* (Horst [2020a]). A corrective to Athenocentrism is sought by Robinson (1997) and Robinson (2011) with an attempt to identify democracies outside Athens in the archaic and classical periods respectively. However, the definition of "democracy" adopted in both volumes has been criticized for being too loose; see resp. Hölkeskamp (2000) esp. 493, and Canevaro (2014) esp. 426. In his recent study, Ma (2024) posits a generalized tendency of the *polis* towards forms of democracy starting from the sixth century BCE (121–27, 139), notwithstanding the political experimentation of earlier periods (*ibid.* 18, 21–24) and in spite of several elements that counterbalance the democratic ideal throughout the entire history of the *polis* (*ibid.* 480–538). Acknowledging the existence of forms of popular government in the ancient Near East, Ma concludes that "[t]he history of the *polis* represents a discovery (and consolidation) of democracy, not *the* discovery of democracy" (*ibid.* 544, original emphasis). What "democracy" means in all these contexts can be a matter of debate.

Yet, democracy is just one of the manifold outcomes of political experimentation that took place in the Greek world and were characterized by the traits listed above.[95] We do not need to find democracy in the ancient Near East at all costs to solve the prejudice about its incommensurability with the Greek world — on both sides, there is much else that deserves our attention.[96]

All this is to say that the solution to the prejudice regarding the peculiarity of the Greek political experience cannot be given solely on a comparative level, nor can it be limited to the issue — however examined on the level of historical processes — of the existence of representative or collegial institutions in the Greek world as well as in the Mesopotamian, Anatolian, Levantine worlds, and so forth. The valorization of the existence of such political experiences in the Greek world and in various parts of the Near East in different periods of time certainly makes Greece and the Near East more commensurable with each other, but it does not help determining whether the Greeks walked alone on the path that led to their alleged political "miracle," or whether on that path they were accompanied by peoples and communities who, like them, found themselves facing the same kind of problems in the same historical circumstances.

A possible way out from the impasse is traced in the conclusions drawn by Liverani in *Nelle pieghe del despotismo*: "[D]uring the period between 750 and 550, the starting conditions of Greece and those areas I have defined as the West of the Near East could have been quite similar on both the political and cultural levels."[97] Here we see an attempt to make the Greek world commensurable — on the historical and not purely comparative level — with those areas of the Near East that shared with the Greek world historically definable "starting conditions," and which, like the Greek world, found themselves during that period on the periphery of great empires. In his recent volume *Oriente Occidente*, Liverani renews his proposal to interpret the areas in question — the

[95] See above, note 93, for more balanced positions on this question.

[96] For a comparative investigation of structural similarities in social issues and legal responses, irrespective of forms of government, see D.M. Lewis (2017), with reference to archaic Attica and Israel. Also interesting is the attempt to investigate the notion of citizenship beyond the Classical world; see e.g. the volume Filonik et al. (2023), even though most chapters, including the theoretical ones, focus on the Graeco-Roman world. Concepts of freedom, traditionally ascribed to the Classical world or more generally to "Western Civilization," have also been identified in ancient Near Eastern societies; see von Dassow (2018) and von Dassow (2011), but cf. Raaflaub (2009) 50–51. On both questions, see also Vlassopoulos (2007) 101–122.

[97] Liverani (1993) 32 (full passage quoted above).

Aegean, Anatolia, and the Levant — as a single, coherent macro-area, which he calls "the Levant" in a broad sense.[98] Although Liverani's analysis largely focuses on the Levant proper and concentrates on the end of the parallel political experiences — that is, the turning point of imperial expansion[99] — I believe that the question to be asked is similar. Yet, unlike Liverani, I believe the issue should be considered for a much longer period, starting from the ashes of the Late Bronze Age political systems. These, in my view, constitute the "starting conditions" from which the analysis should begin, and the question to be posed is whether we can identify lines of parallel or shared historical-political development across those areas of the Eastern Mediterranean where the Late Bronze Age collapse exhibited its most enduring consequences — the Aegean, Anatolia, and the Levant.[100]

4. Back to Mazzarino: *Koiné* Reconsidered

We arrived at this point starting from the need to overcome the "limits" of Mazzarino's *koiné*, that is, Mazzarino's — and not only Mazzarino's — prejudice regarding the peculiarity of the Greek political experience compared to that of contemporary Eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern societies. The way out appears to be the formulation of a dynamic *koiné*, historically situated in space and in time, which encompasses the political element without preconceptions and focuses on historical processes rather than on their final products only. To use Mazzarino's metaphor, a *koiné* that considers the "constitutional travail" of the Greek world and all other societies involved, their debates on the organization of newly formed or reconstituted communities, and their experimentation with new and diverse solutions. Now, in our attempt to "overcome" Mazzarino's approach, it is intriguing to note how Mazzarino himself indicates at least two ways to formulate scenarios of dynamic *koiné* that

[98] Liverani (2021b) 100–218, esp. 100–118, 131–32.

[99] Cf. also Liverani (2021b) 56–60, 140–60.

[100] For an overview of the Late Bronze Age collapse and its outcomes, see e.g. Cline (2014); Knapp and Manning (2016); Cline (2024). More specifically for the Levant, see e.g. Liverani (1987), Fischer and Bürge (2017), and Maeir et al. (2019); for the Aegean, see Murray (2017) and Middleton (2020); for Anatolia, see de Martino and Devecchi (2020) and d'Alfonso (2024), all with further literature. The recent volume Masetti-Rouault et al. (2024) collects several contributions focusing on Anatolia, Assyria, and the Levant.

include the political sphere and at the same time overcome both obsolete diffusionist perspectives and purely comparative approaches.[101]

The first is found in a work that developed concurrently with *Fra Oriente e Occidente*, forming, as has been said, a diptych that looks at the entire archaic Mediterranean.[102] I am referring to *Dalla monarchia allo stato repubblicano*.[103] The subject of this book — published in 1945, two years before *Fra Oriente e Occidente* — is the history of Roman magistracy, or the process, defined by Mazzarino as the "Roman miracle," that led from the "irresponsible" — that is, unaccountable — king or leader to the "responsible" — that is, accountable — magistrate.[104] Put in other words, from the concentration of power in a single individual to its collegial management. The key to understanding this process lies, according to Mazzarino, in the existence of an Italic cultural *koiné*, in which "proto-Latin" experiences merged with those of other peoples of ancient Italy, Greeks included, to form "a culture that was neither Etruscan nor Latin nor Umbrian-Oscan nor Greek, but only and above all 'Italic'" — as he puts it.[105] The crucial point of the argument is the emergence, in the second half of the sixth century BCE in various centers of ancient Italy such as Velletri, Chiusi, or Perugia, of systems of power management that were no longer monarchic but collegial, or at least tending toward collegiality even within a conception of power that was still partially personal. From this analysis, Mazzarino concludes that the problem of power management was felt as "a common problem in cities of common culture."[106] We are thus facing a "travail," a political debate entirely "Italic" to which the constitutional evolution of Rome cannot be considered foreign.[107]

[101] It should be noted that the concept of *koiné* has also been employed to describe shared patterns of material culture, religion, or literature: for material culture, see e.g. Lemos (1998); Gadolou and Handberg (2017); D'Agata (2022); for religion, see López-Ruiz (2023); for literature, see Ziemann (2019). As some of these works show, the use of this concept is not uncontroversial, and this is especially true for material culture studies. It is not among the goals of the present paper to delve into this debate, but rather to discuss the applicability of the concept of *koiné* — and of *which* particular notion thereof — in the sphere of political development.

[102] See Fraschetti *apud* Mazzarino (2001) ix–x.

[103] Mazzarino (1945). In the present paper, all citations and quotations follow the page numbering of the edition published by Rizzoli (Milan) in 2001 (Mazzarino [2001]).

[104] Mazzarino (2001) 9–18, esp. 11.

[105] Mazzarino (2001) 37 ("una cultura che non fu etrusca né latina né umbro-osca né greca, ma solo e soprattutto 'italica'").

[106] Mazzarino (2001) 75 ("un problema comune in città di comune cultura").

[107] Mazzarino (2001) 76, 83–84, 90, 102, 123. On the question of Rome's participation in an Etruscan-Latin-Italic *koiné*, see also Ampolo (1986), esp. 451–62 for the

The definition of cultural *koiné* adopted in *Dalla monarchia allo stato repubblicano* is very similar to that which Mazzarino's readers would find a couple of years later in *Fra Oriente e Occidente*. Unlike *Fra Oriente e Occidente*, however, in *Dalla monarchia allo stato repubblicano* the concept of *koiné* operates not only from a broadly cultural perspective but also and above all from a political one. The political-institutional "limits" of the concept of *koiné* that inform *Fra Oriente e Occidente* are absent in *Dalla monarchia allo stato repubblicano*. Indeed, Mazzarino makes it clear from the Preface that the purpose of the work is precisely to demonstrate that in the Italic area the application of the concept of *koiné* cannot be limited to the cultural sphere. Explaining his use of the term "Italici," Mazzarino points out that the term

> abbraccia tutti i popoli dell'Italia antica, in quanto partecipi a quella *koiné* culturale "italica" che in questo libro si vuol mostrare attiva e operante nella formazione del diritto pubblico, come nell'evoluzione religiosa e culturale in genere appare ormai [...] certamente operante e decisiva.[108]

> encompasses all the peoples of ancient Italy, as participants in that "Italic" cultural *koiné* that in this book is intended to be shown as active and operative in the formation of public law, as it certainly appears now [...] active and decisive in religious and cultural evolution in general.

On the other hand, the "limits" of this *koiné* — if one can speak of "limits" at all — reside more in a methodological caveat. A historically valid application of the concept of *koiné*, Mazzarino warns, is possible only if one refrains from seeking identical forms of thought and political institutions across the cultures involved, but instead looks at the analogy of processes, the parallel direction of constitutional developments, and the shared "travail" towards the resolution of common problems:

> Vive, negli istituti della *koiné* italica, iniziale e fondamentale somiglianza; non assoluta e morta identità. Analoghe le forme dello sviluppo costituzionale — ma non identiche, che sarebbe tutt'altra cosa e concezione antistorica.[109]

political problem; Ampolo (1987); Ampolo (2009); Ampolo (2018), all with further literature.

[108] Mazzarino (2001) 6–7.

[109] Mazzarino (2001) 108.

> Within the institutions of the Italic *koiné*, there exists an initial and fundamental similarity; not an absolute and dead identity. The forms of constitutional development are analogous — but not identical, which would be something entirely different and an ahistorical conception.

And again:

> Il passaggio dalla monarchia alla magistratura collegiale ha dunque varie sfumature nei vari centri della *koiné* culturale italica: eppure è, nel processo generale, alcunché di affine e di similare, qualcosa che lascia sentire un comune travaglio e un interesse culturale comune.[110]
>
> The transition from monarchy to collegial magistracy thus has various nuances in the different centers of the Italic cultural *koiné*: yet it is, in the general process, something akin and similar, something that lets one sense a common travail and a shared cultural interest.

Here we encounter a dynamic *koiné* immersed in historical processes, which distinguishes itself not only from the corresponding concept of the *koiné* of Asia Minor by incorporating the political dimension, but also from the more recent concept of *koiné* developed by Kurt Raaflaub, which is also political but static and somehow ahistorical. In *Dalla monarchia allo stato repubblicano*, this approach is presented as an antidote to the romantic idea of the "Roman miracle," based on the centrality of Rome in the evolution of public law.[111] But while the concept of a "Roman miracle" is downscaled, the Hellenocentric prejudice of the "Greek miracle" also makes its appearance in Mazzarino's interpretation of archaic Roman history:

> La Grecia scoprì l'uomo; il mondo italico e romano scoprì ad esso forme caratteristiche di organizzazione. Ma, senza la Grecia, queste prime forme italiche di organizzazione sarebbero, nei loro inizi, inconcepibili.[112]
>
> Greece discovered man; the Italic and Roman world discovered characteristic forms of organization for him. But, without Greece, these early Italic forms of organization would be, in their beginnings, inconceivable.

[110] Mazzarino (2001) 119.

[111] Mazzarino (2001) 5, 11.

[112] Mazzarino (2001) 139. For the relation between Greek and Roman "miracles" in Mazzarino's work, see Tessitore (2003) 37.

Paradoxically, however, it is precisely Mazzarino's explanation of the "Greek miracle" that offers, between the lines, a second way to formulate a dynamic *koiné* of political processes. We are again in the fifth chapter of *Fra Oriente e Occidente*, in the section dedicated to the question of the evolution of the *polis*, and more precisely to the debate on the priority of Ionia or of the mainland.[113] Asking whether the concepts of *isonomia* and tyranny originated in Ionia and then spread to the mainland or vice versa, Mazzarino excludes the Ionian origin, although this conclusion once again betrays his desire to remove any suspicion that tyranny, and the constitutional evolution it triggered, could have any ties with Lydia.[114] Therefore — Mazzarino continues — the experience of the crisis of the aristocracies that gave rise to tyrannies and thus to the need for *isonomia* must be reconsidered outside of Ionia, particularly in the context of that love for luxury that emerged out of trade relations between the Phoenicians and the Greek mainland, which happened to be more intense than those between the Phoenicians and the communities of Asia Minor.[115] Can we say, therefore, that the crisis of the aristocracies began on the mainland and on the islands and later spread to Ionia? This formulation, in Mazzarino's view, is not fully satisfactory either.[116] The reason is that, in the sixth century BCE, the cultural concept of "Ionia" was not limited to the region called Ionia in Asia Minor: instead, Ionia was a unity that extended from Attica to Euboea to Ionia in the strict sense.[117] Now, if we set aside the evident awkwardness of this argument, it is nonetheless interesting to focus on the conclusion to which Mazzarino is led by this reasoning:

> In queste condizioni ambientali, sarebbe imprudente dire che p. es. Atene è modello a Chio, così come è assurdo affermare il contrario. […] Il 7° secolo […] aveva creato quei presupposti economici e culturali che, parallelamente svolgendosi, davano paralleli fenomeni costituzionali.[118]

> In these circumstances, it would be hazardous to say, for example, that Athens is a model for Chios, just as it is absurd to affirm the opposite. […] The 7th century […] had created those economic and cultural

[113] Mazzarino (2007) 216–34.
[114] Mazzarino (2007) 216–25.
[115] Mazzarino (2007) 217, 226–27.
[116] Mazzarino (2007) 227.
[117] Mazzarino (2007) 227.
[118] Mazzarino (2007) 228.

> premises which, developing in parallel, gave rise to parallel constitutional phenomena.

The implications of this statement are extremely significant. It is not just a rejection of the diffusionist paradigm but a framing of the problem of the existence of "parallel constitutional phenomena" — albeit confined to Greek or, more precisely, Ionian culture — in the same terms in which the dynamic cultural (and political-institutional) *koiné* of the Italic area was framed in *Dalla monarchia allo stato repubblicano*. While it makes no sense to ask whether the motherland preceded and influenced Ionia in the process of constitutional evolution, the existence of "parallel constitutional phenomena" is explained by the existence of common starting conditions, or "economic and cultural premises" that developed "in parallel." And this discourse concerns not only Ionia in the broad sense but the entire Greek world, since an aristocracy attracted by luxury characterizes the entire Greek world throughout the sixth century BCE:

> Tutta la grecità ha un suo problema da risolvere: conciliare la *habrosyne* con la creazione di uno stato secondo il diritto; evitare che la *habrosyne* aristocratica si configuri come riduzione dei liberi meno abbienti in istato di servitù [...] La distinzione fra Greci e Greci è nella soluzione del problema. Ed ogni stato dà la "sua" soluzione.[119]

> The entire Greek world faces a common problem: reconciling *habrosyne* with the creation of a state governed by law; preventing aristocratic *habrosyne* from resulting in the subjugation of the free poor into a state of servitude [...] The difference among Greeks and Greeks lies in the solution to this problem. And each state provides "its own" solution.

Again: just as in the Italic cultural *koiné*, where Latins, Etruscans, Oscans, and Umbrians faced the same "constitutional travail" that led them — at different paces and with varying solutions — from monarchic institutions to collegial institutions, so all the communities that were part of the Greek world confronted the problem of aristocratic *habrosyne* and formulated different solutions at different times.

Although confined to a sort of "Hellenic cultural *koiné*," the path followed by Mazzarino here, just as in the case of the Italic *koiné*, adheres to the same principle as the main path for formulating a politico-cultural *koiné* of the Eastern Mediterranean in the Iron Age: on the historical

[119] Mazzarino (2007) 229.

level, it is possible to overcome the Hellenocentric prejudice, as well as diffusionist and comparative approaches, by looking at the political-institutional "travail" — with all its nuances, speeds, and variations — of those societies that found themselves to share the same starting conditions. By putting center stage the "travail" of the communities involved, this notion of *koiné* recognizes their individual agency and thus departs from models where emphasis on external inputs risks relegating individual agency to the background. At the same time, this model postulates that shared starting conditions constitute a common structural background that, producing a "travail" that unfolds along similar yet different lines, also fosters exchange and facilitates receptivity. Thus, this model of dynamic *koiné* operates on two levels — the structural one and that of interconnections — both observed in a historical, processual dimension.

In the next, and final, section, I shall discuss some practical implications of this model.

5. *Koiné* to the Test: The Case of Tyranny

I would like to devote the concluding section of this paper to exploring some potentialities of the model outlined here within the historical context of the Eastern Mediterranean during the Iron Age. I will briefly examine the case of tyranny, so central to Mazzarino's argument for the existence of "limits" to the *koiné* of Asia Minor, but in fact one of the most evident examples of the contrary.[120]

As already recognized by Franco Pintore and now confirmed by a more recent study by Craig Melchert, the term *tyrannos* reached Greece from the Neo-Hittite world: it is a loan from Luwian *tarwanni-*, an adjective or, when substantivized, an epithet meaning "the just, righteous one," unattested in the Bronze Age but widespread throughout the chronological span covered by the Iron Age Hieroglyphic Luwian documentation.[121] The term does not identify any institutional position

[120] The Anatolian background of the concept of tyranny has been treated in greater detail in Santini (2024).

[121] See Pintore (1983); Melchert (2019); and lastly Santini (2024). Following a recent discovery by E. Rieken, presented at the 3rd workshop *The Gods of Anatolia and Their Names* (Santiago de Compostela, 21–23 May 2025) and to be published in the relevant proceedings for the *Barcino. Monographica Orientalia* series, the reading *tarrawanni-* adopted in Melchert *loc. cit.* and Santini *loc. cit.* is now superseded in favor of the (older) reading *tarwanni-*. Accordingly, Greek *tyrannos* is derived from the base form *tarwanni-* via the syncopated form *tarunni-* (syncope of /a/ in the syllable *-wan-* yielding *-un-*; reflected in the spelling *tara/i/u-na* attested in ARSUZ 1,

but rather expresses a personal quality and describes a wide variety of individuals occupying different roles and positions within society: from kings to other high-ranking political actors, to individuals who proclaim themselves "servants" of rulers, as well as scribes, wives of rulers, and other members of the middle and upper classes without any evident connection to the political sphere. Alongside the adjective-epithet *tarwanni-*, there is also a homophonic abstract noun meaning "justice, righteousness," and employed equally widely.[122]

Given the characteristics of the Luwian term, when addressing the origins of tyranny one must ask how a term of such meaning and diverse usage came to Greece specifically to denote the autocrats of archaic *poleis*. Although the phenomenon of tyranny is attested only from the mid-seventh century BCE onwards,[123] the answer to this question should be sought precisely in the political experimentation that characterizes the Eastern Mediterranean during the formative period of the Iron Age, following the crisis of the palatial systems. In this context, the Greek and Neo-Hittite worlds — as well as the Southern Levant, which I cannot delve into here for reasons of space[124] — developed parallel forms of political thought, arising from a common need to find a solution to the problem of political legitimation that accompanied the emergence of new political actors. The world of the Iron Age is an unstable one where traditional criteria such as the hereditariness of the office, a royal ancestry, or divine election were not always sufficient — or simply not available — to guarantee full legitimacy to new political actors.[125] As new leaders were closer to the people than their Late Bronze Age counterparts,[126] there arose a need for criteria of legitimacy being more widely shared between the rulers and the ruled, whereby those in power were expected to meet generalized expectations. It is in this context that a new rhetoric of justice and righteousness spread out, both in the Neo-Hittite world and in the

§ 2) and further vowel metathesis giving *turann-*. My thanks to C. Melchert for pointing this development out to me and to E. Rieken for sharing her material.

[122] For a full list of attestations with references, see Santini (2024) 4–7.

[123] The earliest attestations are in poems of Archilochus, resp. frgs. 19 and 23 W.

[124] See e.g. Liverani (1971); Cazelles (1973); Pintore (1983); Seybold and von Ungern-Sternberg (1993). For further social and legal implications, see Seybold and von Ungern-Sternberg (2007); Raaflaub (2007a); and esp. D.M. Lewis (2017).

[125] For continuities and transformations in the criteria of political legitimation in the Late Bronze Age-Iron Age transition, see Liverani (1971); Liverani (1987); Pintore (1979); Pintore (1983); Masetti-Rouault (2004); d'Alfonso (2023); d'Alfonso and Lovejoy (2023).

[126] Cf. Pintore (1979); Raaflaub (1988); Haubold (2000); Masetti-Rouault (2004).

Greek world, at various levels of society and not only within the ruling class.[127]

In the Neo-Hittite world, rulers share the epithet *tarwanni-*, "just, righteous," with their "servants" but also with their subjects:[128] being "just, righteous" constitutes a shared expectation for holding a legitimate role in society. Save a couple of exceptions,[129] generally the term does not point to the judicial sphere, that is, to the administration of justice, but identifies a *moral* quality of the individual. As such, it may encompass several nuances ranging among "justice, righteousness, uprightness, loyalty, fairness, honesty, equity, integrity," and so on.[130] Nevertheless, when discussing the social and political significance of the term, it is a pointless exercise to try to establish what specific nuance may be implied from time to time. What matters emically is the consistency of the terminology employed by a wide variety of social agents: whether kings, scribes, rulers' servants, or commoners, the universally recognizable flag of their moral integrity is consistently the concept of *tarwanni-*, and it is precisely its quality of being universally recognizable that makes this term a powerful tool of socio-political legitimation.[131] The quality of being *tarwanni-* ultimately guarantees success in the political arena: the justice or righteousness of rulers ensures them the benevolence of the gods, which in turn ensures the fertility of the region, the prosperity of the state, and the well-being of the subjects — as clearly implied, for example, in king Kiyakiya's inscription from Aksaray:

> [… Tar]hunza prospered the NISA(?), and m[uch] came down from the sky, and much came up from the earth. In those years for one sheep 30 measures? of barley stood?, 20 measures of oil? […]ed, […] measures? of wine stood?. Because of my justice (*amiyadi tarwannadi*) I was dear to Tarhunza and to all the gods here, and great kings (and) kings all admired? this city. And who gives this position to me? Tarhunza gave it

[127] Cf. Santini (2024) 4–20, with ample literature.

[128] For sources and discussion, see now Santini (2024) 5–6, 19.

[129] Discussed in Santini (2024) 7–10.

[130] Cf. Pintore (1979); Melchert (2019) 342–43.

[131] This is why I think it is preferable to translate *tarwanni-*, whether the adjective/epithet or the abstract noun, with the same English word in all circumstances, be it "just, justice," or "righteous, righteousness." These two options seem to me to be more appropriate as they can encompass a wider array of nuances. Another option may be to leave the concept untranslated throughout and to gloss it according to what aspect of its usage one wishes to point out, whether any specific semantic nuances or its socio-political significance or else.

> to no one, but to me he gave it, Kiyakiya the just king (*tarwanni hantawatti*)…[132]

A similar cause-and-effect chain operates in the world of Homer and Hesiod, although, in contrast to the Neo-Hittite world, here more emphasis is placed on the judicial element, that is, on the administration of justice and on the straightness or crookedness of judgments. A well-known passage from the *Odyssey* (19.107–114), spoken by Odysseus himself, testifies to how the well-being of the people is tied to the justice of a god-fearing *basileus*:

> Lady, no one of the mortals on endless earth could question you: for your fame reaches the vast heaven, as that of a blameless *basileus*, who, fearing the gods (*θεουδήϛ*) and ruling over many and valiant men, upholds justice (*εὐδικίαϛ ἀνέχῃσι*); and the black earth produces wheat and barley, the trees are laden with fruit, the flocks give birth continually, and the sea gives fish because of his good leadership (*ἐξ εὐηγεσίηϛ*), and the people prosper under him.[133]

An equally well-known passage of Hesiod's *Works and Days* (225–51) similarly shows how the justice or injustice of individuals, especially rulers or political leaders, were believed to affect the entire community in opposite ways: "Those who give straight judgments (*δίκαϛ … ἰθείαϛ*) to strangers and native fellows and who do not deviate from what is just (*μή τι παρεκβαίνουσι δικαίου*), for them the city blossoms and the people flourish in it" (225–27), while "for those who care of evil insolence (*ὕβριϛ … κακή*) and wicked deeds (*σχέτλια ἔργα*), for them far-seeing Zeus son of Cronus ordains a punishment. Often even a whole city suffers from an evil man, who sins and devises reckless things (*ἀτάσθαλα*)" (238–41). An admonition to community leaders — *basileis* — clarifies that the consequences of justice and injustice laid out in the previous lines define the expectations against which their activity as leaders is checked: "You, *basileis*, consider this punishment yourselves: for, being close among mortals, the immortals mark out those who wear out one another with crooked judgments (*ὅσοι σκολιῇσι δίκῃσιν ἀλλήλουϛ τρίβουσι*) without minding the vengeance of the gods" (248–51).[134] Here it is important to remark that while the judicial element is explicitly emphasized and

[132] AKSARAY §§ 1–9, tr. slightly modified from Hawkins (2024) 264–65; see also Hawkins (2000) 475–77 and Melchert (2019) 341–42.

[133] My translation. On this passage, cf. Haubold (2000) 27, 102, 118–19.

[134] My translations.

basileis are warned against giving crooked judgments, the moral element is also encompassed in the concept of justice laid out in the passage: the various calamities — including famine, pestilence, infertility, ruin, and shipwrecks — experienced by the people as a consequence of "evil insolence," "wicked deeds," and "reckless things" (242–47) represent a reversal of the well-being and prosperity experienced by the people when their leaders "give straight judgments" and "do not deviate from what is just" (228–38).[135] The judicial and moral aspects of the concept of justice are therefore intrinsically related.[136]

In these passages we see in the negative what Neo-Hittite sources only show in the positive: in the Greek world, a discourse on justice is accompanied, by way of contrast, by a parallel discourse on injustice, which — due to the nature of the Hieroglyphic Luwian evidence, mostly consisting of inscriptions with celebratory purposes — we do not see in the Neo-Hittite world. However, the strong analogy of contexts and images allows us to assume that even in the Neo-Hittite world, if the justice of rulers ensured well-being and prosperity, their injustice was seen by way of contrast as the cause of malaise and ruin. Furthermore, just as in the Neo-Hittite world justice is a central value not only in the public discourse of rulers but also in the public or private discourse of the ruled, so too in the Greek world it is configured as a shared value and an object of expectation: the Homeric and Hesiodic poems testify to the existence of a political debate on good governance and the characteristics of a good ruler, called upon to ensure the well-being of the people; such a debate included a critical reflection on rulers when expectations were not met.[137] Once again, given the nature of the evidence, in the Neo-Hittite world we only see the "positive" side of the coin, but it would be illogical to think that such a critical debate on expectations of the rulers' justice as an essential element of good governance was absent in that society.

Thus, the Greek and Neo-Hittite worlds developed a parallel discourse on justice as the foundation of political legitimacy, notwithstanding the different aspects of the concept — whether the moral or the judicial one or both — that were emphasized in each society from time to time. In the Greek world, this discourse assumed further importance during the period of the archaic tyrannies: in a number of cases, archaic

[135] Cf. also *Il.* 16.384–93; Hes. *Erg.* 35–39, 219–24, 263–64; Hes. *Theog.* 81–93. For the moral aspects of justice in early Greece, see the literature cited below, note 138.

[136] The same can be said, to some extent, for the Neo-Hittite world, too; cf. Santini (2024) 7–11, with references.

[137] Cf. Raaflaub (1988); Seybold and von Ungern-Sternberg (1993) 219–24; Hammer (1998); Haubold (2000); Raaflaub and Wallace (2007) 24–43; Ma (2024) 57–61.

Greek communities were willing to grant special powers to individuals who presented themselves, among other things, as champions of justice, with the aim of resolving crises and internal conflicts and "straightening" injustice, often understood in moralizing terms such as insolence (*hybris*), wickedness, or greed.[138] However, while in the Neo-Hittite world this discourse revolved around the concept of *tarwanni-*, the source of the Greek term *tyrannos*, the Greek world does not appear to have been familiar with this concept while developing its initial reflections — testified to by Homer and Hesiod — on justice in political action, even though these reflections were analogous to those developed in the Neo-Hittite world of the *tarwanninzi*. In what context and through what modalities, then, did the transmission of the concept of *tarwanni-* to Greece occur?

The reception of this concept among the Greeks was, so to speak, selective: the concept of *tyrannos* neither captures the semantics of *tarwanni-* nor expresses its rhetorical function within the discourse on justice. What *tyrannos* does capture, however, is the political significance of *tarwanni-* as a means to flag the legitimacy of power positions regardless of their institutional make-up, thus including ones that are weakly institutionalized or that have an ambiguous relationship with pre- or co-existing institutions. Several political actors who define themselves as *tarwanni-* occupy positions of power in unconventional ways, either because they exercise royal powers without filling the relevant office, as in the case of the Country Lords of Karkamiš; or because they claim top-ranking positions without holding any precise institutional office, but by attributing new meanings to generic appellatives, as in the case of Saruwanni, "Lord" of Nahidiya. Others, such as Tarhunazza, "servant" of Warpalawa of Tuwana, share the quality of justice with the holder of royal authority, which allows them to present themselves — like the king! — as legitimate absolute lords, albeit at the local level.[139]

Similarly, Greek tyrants appear to take up ruling positions either in the absence of well-defined institutions, reviving titles suitable to the occasion, as in the case of Cypselus "*basileus* of illustrious Corinth";[140] or

[138] See e.g. McGlew (1993) 52–86; Wallace (2009); Luraghi (2015); Ma (2024) 141–43. For the various aspects subsumed under the concept of (in)justice in early Greece, see e.g. Nagy (1985); Nagy (1995); Raaflaub (2013); Stein-Hölkeskamp (2018) 133–37; Canevaro (2022) 382–85. For the social, other than moral, relevance of *hybris*, see now Canevaro (2024), esp. 27–30, 33 for *hybris* and justice in Hesiod (cf. above).

[139] For a detailed discussion of these examples, see Santini (2024) 20–29, with references.

[140] Hdt. 5.92ϵ.2. On Cypselus see further Giangiulio (2020), with previous bibliography.

within existing constitutional frameworks to which they do not bring substantial alterations. As has been widely noted, there are indeed several examples of tyrannies, from that of the Orthagorids to that of the Pisistratids or that of Pittacus in Mytilene, which did not modify existing constitutions in archaic *poleis* but coexisted with them.[141] However, this coexistence places the tyrant in an ambiguous relationship with the institutions: even where the tyrant does not formally alter the existing constitutional arrangement, it is precisely his absolute power that represents the main alteration.

Beyond the semantic sphere of justice, it is the structural characteristics inherent both to the power of *tarwanninzi* and to that of early Greek autocrats that explain how and why the concept of *tarwanni-* gave rise to that of *tyrannos*. The latter emerged from what the concept of *tarwanni-* signified politically within a *koiné* of political thought and practice rooted in the Iron Age: the same starting conditions, namely the crisis of the palatial systems and of associated notions of legitimacy, confronted the Greek and Neo-Hittite worlds with the same political problem of reorganizing communities around credible institutions and forms of power. From these starting conditions, both worlds developed a new rhetoric of justice as the basis for legitimizing political action — each according to its own needs and in its own forms and timing, yet on a common ground that facilitated the circulation and reception of ideas, debates, and new concepts. It is on this shared ground, where a *koiné* of political thought based on ideas of justice and righteousness had long been operative, that the concept of *tarwanni-* found fertile soil to spread into the Greek world and there give rise to a new political concept, that of *tyrannos*.

Although ideas of justice and righteousness constitute the common substratum within which to contextualize the spread of the concept of *tarwanni-* to the Greek world, the reception of this concept is, however, inseparable — to borrow Mazzarino's famous metaphor — from the "constitutional travail" of the emerging *poleis*. It did not occur when the Greeks started formulating, in their own terms, their own discourse on justice, but rather when the Greek world began to establish new institutions, at the moment when political debates on good governance were starting to take an institutional form — a process that had already been underway in the Neo-Hittite world for some time. Once again: *tyrannos* does not capture the semantics of the Neo-Hittite concept of

[141] See Anderson (2005) 198–201; Kõiv (2021) 147–48; S. Lewis (2021). For the low degree of institutionalization of tyrannies, cf. Luraghi (2013a) 138; Dreher (2017) 179–85.

tarwanni-, but rather its suitability to describe supreme power holders irrespective of institutional constraints, and more specifically to define para-institutional forms of power, whether they were newly created or informally insinuated themselves into pre-existing institutions.

Rather than a conclusion, these reflections on the case of tyranny aim to be a starting point for a comprehensive reevaluation of the historical and dynamic concept of *koiné* from a political perspective. I hope to have demonstrated that the Iron Age is the period at which we should look to begin this re-evaluation.

6. To Be Continued

I would like to conclude these reflections by recalling the words with which Mazzarino closed the Preface to *Fra Oriente e Occidente*. They reveal his awareness of the complexity of the investigation he had undertaken and the risks he faced in undertaking it. At the same time, however, Mazzarino emphasized the need for that investigation, and I believe that his words remain valid today for us, who have the responsibility to continue it:

> Io so bene che un'indagine di questo genere, per la varietà dei problemi che implica, non sempre può esser considerata definitiva: e l'archeologo e il grecista e l'assiriologo e il biblicista avranno, per proprio conto, da dire su singole questioni la loro parola. Ma un'impostazione "storica" mi pareva oggi necessaria, già per la stessa esigenza di sintesi che essa implica: con questa fiducia ho iniziato, con essa termino il mio lavoro.[142]

> I am well aware that an investigation of this kind, due to the variety of problems it implies, cannot always be considered definitive: the archaeologist, the Hellenist, the Assyriologist, and the biblical scholar will each have their own say on individual issues. But a "historical" approach seemed necessary to me today, if only for the need for synthesis it implies: with this confidence I began, and with it I conclude my work.

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[142] Mazzarino (2007) 4–5.

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