

Henning Börm (ed.), *Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity*,  
(*Studies in Ancient Monarchies* 3), Franz Steiner Verlag,  
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In every era, the institution of the monarchy and the associated ideology, as well as social reactions to this form of political system, have been the subject both of panegyric eulogies and of fierce criticism. The latter is the leitmotif of the articles in this volume, put together on the initiative of Henning Börm. This scholar, associated with the University of Konstanz, is known mostly for his studies of the history of Iran under Sassanid rule. In recent years his research has also had an important focus on the question of the role of monarchy in the Iranian world. And it was these interests that gave rise to his initiative to publish a set of studies devoted to the topic of manifestations in the ancient world of hostile or unfriendly attitudes towards the institution of monarchy (or rather, more broadly, the monocratic style of rule), as well as the social and ideological foundations of these positions.

The book titled *Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity* contains a total of 13 texts. Although most of them (10) were written by German researchers (the other three authors are from Austria, Israel and the USA), they are all published in English, which certainly helps with finding a wider audience. In chronological terms, the articles occupy a broad timeframe, from the history of pharaonic Egypt to the times of Justinian. The various historical eras are not represented equally, however.

The volume is opened by an article which forms its introduction, written by Börm (*Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 9–24). The rest of the chapters are in chronological order. J.F. Quack (*‘As he disregarded the law, he was replaced during his own lifetime’: On Criticism of Egyptian Rulers in the So-Called Demotic Chronicle*, pp. 25–43) analyses the antimonarchical message contained in the Demotic Chronicle. Only one copy is known of this text, recorded in the third century BCE. According to the author, the original was written at the time of pharaoh Nectanebo II, and the criticism of his predecessors that it presents was supposed to legitimise his own rule, gained by means of usurpation (pp. 38–39). Questions of the views of the monarchy in Iran in the time of the Achaemenids are discussed by Josef Wiesehöfer (*‘Rulers by the Grace of God’, ‘Liar Kings’, and ‘Oriental Despots’: (Anti-)Monarchic Discourse in Achaemenid Iran*, pp. 45–65). Wiesehöfer presents various perspectives and appraisals known from the sources not concerning monarchy as such, but rather various Persian monarchs. He is interested not only in the judgments present in Persian sources, but in Greek ones too. The next three articles concern the question of tyranny in Greece in the archaic and classic era and the Hellenistic monarchy (N. Luraghi, *Anatomy of the Monster: The Discourse of Tyranny in Ancient Greece*, pp. 67–84; H.-U. Wiemer,

*Hero, God or Tyrant? Alexander the Great in the Early Hellenistic Period*, pp. 85–112; S. Diefenbach, *Demetrius Poliorcetes and Athens: Ruler Cult and Antimonarchic Narratives in Plutarch's Life of Demetrius*, pp. 113–151). Although these problems have been the subject of research for a long time, the analyses and interpretations which their authors present contain many interesting observations and comments. Issues concerning monarchical power, its acceptance and criticism and equivalent aspects in Rome during the Republic and early Empire are analysed in as many as four articles (F. Russo, *Roman Discourses against the Monarchy in the 3rd and 2nd Century BCE: The Evidence of Fabius Pictor and Ennius*, pp. 153–180; A.-C. Harders, *Consort or Despot? How to Deal with a Queen at the End of the Roman Republic and the Beginning of the Principate*, pp. 181–214; U. Gotter, *Penelope's Web, or: How to Become a Bad Emperor Post Mortem*, pp. 215–233; M.L. Dészpa, *Idleness. Monarchic and Antimonarchic Discourses and the Construction of Roman Imperial Order*, pp. 235–247). Two further articles tackle the question of the antimonarchical criticism present in the works of historians of the Late Antique period, who focus on the *Historia Augusta*, a collection of biographies of emperors from Hadrian to Numerian whose authorship and date of origin have been the subject of discussion for well over a century. Matthias Haake ('*In Search of Good Emperors. Emperors, Caesars, and Usurpers in the Mirror of Antimonarchic Patterns in the Historia Augusta – some Considerations*', pp. 269–303) analyses the information contained in this work and concerning so-called good emperors, seeking to establish the author's position towards the institution of monarchy. The most important conclusion to be made from his analysis is the work's generally antimonarchical overtones. Yet the author's ideological position does not reflect that of the whole society, but rather just one section of it: the aristocracy connected to Rome. His criticism of the monarchy expresses this social group's longing for its long-lost political position and the associated prestige (cf. pp. 291–294). Henning Börm (*Procopius, his Predecessors, and the Genesis of the Anecdota. Antimonarchic Discourse in Late Antique Historiography*, pp. 305–346), meanwhile, considers the sources of the antimonarchical character of Procopius' work *Anecdota*. He argues that there is no justification for the assumption that it is an expression of Procopius' personal beliefs, rather reflecting the complex situation of the times in which it was written and evidence of the haste with which this took place. Meron M. Piotrkowski's article *Josephus on Hasmonean Kingship. The Example of Aristobulus I and Alexander Jannaeus* (pp. 249–267), discussing Josephus' appraisal of certain rulers of Judea from the Hasmonean dynasty, is worthy of separate mention. According to the author, the harsh verdict on the rule of the sons of John Hyrcanus is closely related to Aristobulus' adoption of a royal title. This decision infringed the traditional rules of Jewish theocracy, based on the rules dictated by Yahweh, abidance by which was overseen by priests. Introduction of monarchy not only violated them, but it also meant that the kings ruling Judaea became tyrants. According to Josephus, it was Aristobulus I and Alexander Jannaeus' breaking of the rules of theocracy that led to the loss of Judaea's independence.

The great variety in the issues analysed and interpreted in the texts in this book concerning manifestations of antimonarchical attitudes in the ancient world will be of interest to scholars of various periods of it, and especially to specialists on the history of Greece and Rome. Reading these texts also leads to an irresistible reflection suggested

by the various authors' conclusions. The negative or critical appraisal of the monocratic style of rule so frequently expressed in various periods of history is usually subjective. Although these judgments are articulated by authors whose names we know, they do not necessarily reflect their own views. In general they are exponents of the opinions of a specific social group to which they themselves belong. This group very often tends to be one that had held power in the past and lost it to monarchs or tyrants, and had difficulties in coming to terms with this fact.

Edward Dąbrowa (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)