

BOOK REVIEW

The Tyrant-Slayers of Ancient Athens: A Tale of Two Statues. By VINCENT AZOULAY. Translated by Janet Lloyd. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xx + 276. Hardcover, \$35.00. ISBN 978-0-19-066356-8.

In this volume translated from the French by Janet Lloyd, Vincent Azoulay, professor of ancient Greek history at Paris-Est Mare-la-Vallée University, offers us “a veritable biography of the effigies of Harmodius and Aristogeiton,” figures which “gain from being regarded as like living organisms that pass through various states” (5). We remember the pair of lovers for their botched assassination attempt in 514 BC upon the tyrant Pisistratus’s elder son Hippias during which Hippias’s brother, Hipparchus was killed instead, and they too perished. Seen as heroic tyrannicides, they were memorialized by the sculptor Antenor with statues that were placed in the Agora near the Leocoreion, a shrine to the daughters of King Leos who had given their lives for Athens.

Through a variety of sources (sculpture, pottery, coinage and literary texts including an examination of the history of the Harmodius-song), the author deftly traces the vagaries of the ‘life’ of these statues from Antenor’s originals, those that Critius and Nesiotes made to replace them in 476/77 after the originals were taken by Xerxes to Susa, and the subsequent and remarkable placement of both pairs in the Agora (effected by Alexander, Seleucus I or Antiochus) to which Pausanias attests. The author examines an idea expressed in Andocides that the “Athenians solemnly swore to consider any assassin of a man aspiring to tyranny as ‘pure in the sight of gods and divinities’ . . . because he had killed ‘an enemy of the Athenians’” (19) and sets out to explain how an apparent act of pollution turned into a subject for veneration, how two murderers emerged as hero-protectors, and how they became symbols, albeit ambiguous at times, of “liberationist daring-do” (xiv) to use Paul Cartledge’s phrase in the politics, religion and culture inside and outside Athens over a period of many centuries.

The result is, as Josh Ober avers on the dust-jacket, “a wonderfully readable and deeply learned book.” But the author might have been wise to stop with chapter 8, (“Model Notables: The Tyrannicides in the Hellenistic Period”), and re-

served the examination of the statues' more recent influence in Chapter 9, ("Forever Young: The Uses of the Statuary Group's Belated Rebirth in the West"), for a separate monograph or extended article. For here his command is not so magisterial, and indeed at one point wrong. Azoulay states that Harmodius and Aristogiton "are conspicuously absent from *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, written by John Milton just after the execution of Charles I of England, in defence [sic] of the people's right to execute a guilty sovereign" (164) and that "[o]nly in the many anti-monarchist lampoons produced in French reformist circles in the wake of Saint Barthélemy disaster of 1572 did Harmodius and Aristogiton find a discreet place" (164-5). While the specific statement about Milton's *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649) is true, it is not true in respect to Milton's overall oeuvre, for Harmodius and Aristogiton appear in the Latin prose work that first won Milton fame, the *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Prima* (1651) in which he defended the English Parliamentarians against the charge of regicide after they beheaded Charles I at the end of January, 1649. At one point in chapter V (Columbia UP, 1932, vol. 7: 339) of this brilliant work, one which was burned in Paris and Toulouse and in England during the Restoration, Milton wrote: "speras 'exituros esse alios Harmodios et Thrasylulos qui, nostrorum caede, tyranni manibus parentent.' At tu citius animum despondebis & vitam te dignam, omnibus bonis execrandus, ante suspensio finieris quam Harmodios Harmodiorum sanguine litantes tyranno videas" (You hope that some Harmodius and Thrasylulus are going to spring up, who by the slaughter of our men, avenge the spirits of the tyrant. But you, who should be cursed by all good people, will more quickly lose heart, and end a life suited to you by hanging before you see Harmodius appeasing the tyrant with the blood of Harmodius). This was Milton's response to a passage from the *Defensio Regia Pro Carolo I* (1649), a 720 page treatise charging the English with murder written by the French scholar Claude Saumaise (1588-1653) and published with money from Charles II. Saumaise was the leading classical scholar of his day, and he brought his learning to the task. There on page 252 of 1649 edition he wrote: "exituros esse aliquos Harmodios, & Thrasylulos, qui caede quadraginta horum tyrannorum infandum crimen expient sanguine impio & sanctis manibus optimi Regis parentent" ("Other Harmodiuses and Thrasyluluses are going to arise who by the slaughter of 40 of these tyrants expiate a shocking crime with unholy blood and appease the sacred spirits of an excellent king.")

This mistake, however, lends support to the Azoulay's observation that the statues were not only "a formidable device to sparking discussion, now laudatory,

now sarcastic, but never conciliatory” (92), but also supplies strong evidence that their legacy and lore merit further study¹.

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¹ Examples of some works using of Harmodius and Aristogiton in their texts include *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744), a long didactic poem by the English poet Mark Akenside (1721-1770), *Le Grand schisme d'Occident* (1902) by Louis-Joseph Salembier (1849-1913), French Catholic priest and church historian and the tragedy *Harmodius* (1870) by Victor de Laprade (1812-1883), French poet and essayist.