

Jose M. GONZALEZ

Ho basilikos logos: Hesiod and Isokrates on Tyranny

The *Nikokles* of Isokrates, a speech put in the mouth of the fourth-century Cyprian king, opens with a famous passage in praise of the civilizing power of *logos*. Nevertheless, this famous "hymn" (as Jaeger 1944, 89 calls it) has usually been discussed in isolation (often for its relation to various myths about the origin of civilization) and without regard to its rhetorical function within the discourse as a whole. Thus, in his *Isokrates* (Berlin 1983) 249 Christoph Eucken considers the proem "surprising", adding that "[it] seems completely independent from the theme of the main part of the speech." In his *Studien zur dritten Rede des Isokrates* (Freiburg 1946) 32-43, perhaps under the influence of *Antidosis* 253-257, where Isokrates reintroduces his praise to *logos* with "just as I already said earlier," Josef Frey in turn analyzes the hymn as a transparent presentation of Isokrates' own views, as if he, and not Nikokles, were the speaker. (Similarly in Jaeger 1944, 88-91.)

But does this hymn really display Isokrates' failure to sustain the conceit that Nikokles is the speaker? In this paper I answer "no" to this question, arguing instead that what others have thought an obtrusive aside in the king's defense of his legitimacy is, in fact, a rhetorically effective programmatic opening that depends for its force on the reader's recognition of its intertextual and thematically cognate relationship with *Theogony* 80-96. In this well-known passage, Hesiod describes the *diotrephês basileus* — the beneficent ruler and guarantor of the welfare of his *laoi*, Zeus' own gift to the archaic polis. Isokrates' allusion does not depend on specific verbal echoes, but rather on the centrality of *speech* to the exercise of the king's rule. So strong and even unexpected is Hesiod's union of *king* and *speech* (*basileus* and *aidos* share in their dependence on the Muses), that king Nikokles' exaltation of *logos* — and the correlative centrality he thus grants to it — becomes *ipso facto* a reference, subtle but meaningful, to the Hesiodic *basileus*, who is owed reverence *theos hôs* 91, and derives his legitimacy from Zeus himself (*ek de Dios basilêes* 96).

But why this appeal to Hesiod? A partial answer lies in the bias of the intellectual discourse on *tyrannis*, *basileia*, and *monarchia* present in Isokrates' milieu. Indeed, despite the sophists' defense of tyranny as the natural outcome of the power relations between the strong and the weak, the consensus of the time in Athenian political and philosophical discourse had rejected *tyrannis* as evil and judged the *bios tyrannikos* undesirable. Drawing the portrait of an ideal ruler, whose profile the Cyprian tyrant claims for himself as the grounds for the legitimacy of his *monarchia*, the *Nikokles* represents an attempt to redefine this *communis opinio*.

This paper shows that the opening focus on *logos* is a vital element of this portrait, one whose legitimizing rhetorical force is paramount in Isokrates' design, and that only an intertextual reading — with emphasis on its Hesiodic "ancestry" and contextual associations — opens the way to a correct understanding of its significance and its programmatic value for the speech as a whole. In particular, I argue that Nikokles (as depicted by Isokrates) adopts a calculated strategy of self-presentation that appropriates

Hesiod as a cultural icon and the prestige that attached to his didactic poetry. This strategy hinges on Nikokles' association with the heaven-nourished *basileus*, who in honor and uprightness sustains the claims of *Dikê*, eliciting his subjects' reverence by a fair and gentle administration of justice exercised with divinely inspired words of persuasion.

Furthermore, I show that this cunning Isokratean anachronism, linking the *archaic basileus* and his *epê* with the *fourth-century* Nikokles and his praise of *logos*, is not an isolated instance of the ends to which the classical reception of Hesiod was put, but is paralleled by the philosophical reuse of other Hesiodic motifs (such as "The Myth of the Ages") by the sophists and Plato, and is in keeping with the centrality of Homer and Hesiod to the classical educational canon.