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Murder, Pollution and Expiation in the Kylonian Conspiracy and the Dipolieia

Accounts of the Kylonian conspiracy vary, but the underlying narrative remains the same: Kylon was an Olympic victor who seized the Acropolis with supporters in a bid for tyranny. It failed, and his men were slaughtered in the sacred precinct where they had taken refuge as suppliants. In most versions, the conspirators were being led to the Prytaneion to stand trial when they were killed at the altars of the *semnai theai*, although some traditions imply that some were killed on the Acropolis itself (Thuc. 1.126). In Plutarch (*Solon* 12) and [Aristotle] (*AthPol* 1), Kylon's murderers were tried and condemned, and the Alkmaionidai were sent into exile.

Harris-Cline (1999) has recently shown that the conspirators would have exited the Acropolis from the Northeastern postern gate on their way to the Prytaneion. Remarkably, this route is paralleled in Athenian festivals only by the Dipolieia (or Bouphonia). In the Dipolieia, the ox which eats grain from the altar of Zeus Polieus is killed by a priest, who then flees the city. After a sacrifice and communal meal, the participants process to the Prytaneion, where a trial is held, in which the sacrificial knife is found guilty and cast into the sea (Paus. 1.28.10, Porph. *Abst.* 2.29-30). The cult *aition* explains the origins of blood sacrifice and court trials, and with them a change in the cosmic and social orders (Aratus 131-2, Paus. 1.28.10).

The Dipolieia and the Kylonian conspiracy share several typological features. Both begin with acts of impiety on the Acropolis: Kylon and his men seize the Acropolis during a festival to Zeus, and are said to have plundered Athena's treasury (S Ar. *Eq.* 445); in the Dipolieia, the only festival of Zeus on the Acropolis, a bull eats from the Zeus's altar. The responses to these impieties are both acts of violence in the sacred precinct: Athenian officials kill the conspirators, and a religious official kills the bull at the altar. In both cases, a trial ensues at the Prytaneion, and the judgment involves expulsion from the city. These homologies highlight a number of salient features of both stories, such as the *pars pro toto* assignment of guilt for a crime committed by the entire community, and the threat of the city's destruction averted by court trial at the Prytaneion.

I suggest that these correspondences are so strong that they cannot be entirely coincidental. We may therefore ask how they came to be so closely related: in particular, was the influence uni-directional or are there signs of reciprocal influence? I will argue that details indicate that the ritual and the narrative exerted reciprocal influence on each other. As Rosalind Thomas (1989) suggests, the story of Kylon was probably reproduced in the traditions of the shrines where the sacrilege occurred; it is by understanding the relationship between history and ritual that we move closer to contextualizing both.