



Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece

By James F. McGlew

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Resistance to the tyrant was an essential stage in the development of the Greek city-state. In this richly insightful book, James F. McGlew examines the significance of changes in the Greek political vocabulary that came about as a result of the history of ancient tyrants. Surveying a vast range of historical and literary sources, McGlew looks closely at discourse concerning Greek tyranny as well as at the nature of the tyrants' power and the constraints on power implicit in that discourse. Archaic tyrants, he shows, characteristically represented themselves as agents of justice. Taking their self-representation not as an ideological veil concealing the nature of tyranny but as its conceptual definition, he attempts to show that, although the language of reform gave tyrants unprecedented political freedom, it also marked their powers as temporary. Tyranny took shape, McGlew maintains, through discursive complicity between the tyrant and his subjects, who presumably accepted his self-definition but also learned from him the language and methods of resistance. The tyrant's subjects learned to resist him as they learned to obey him, but when they rejected him they did so in such a way as to preserve for themselves the distinctive political freedoms that he enjoyed. Providing a new framework for understanding ancient tyranny, this book will be read with great interest by classicists, political scientists, and ancient and modern historians alike.

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Review

"This new and fascinating approach, unlike but very complementary to traditional studies . . . focuses upon how the Greeks experienced contemporary autocrats and their reactions to that experience."?J. M. Balcer, Ohio State University, Religious Studies Review

"Why were tyrants included among the Seven Sages' By what paradoxical twist of history did Peisistratos, Athenian tyrant extraordinaire, not only lay the foundations of democratic Periclean Athens (drama included), but also leave the memory of his reign?despite philosophical and political rant against tyranny in all its aspects?as a Golden Age? These are among the fundamental questions that McGlew sets out to solve. . . Brilliant and groundbreaking. . . Compulsively readable."?Choice

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