

# The Last Tyrants of Athens

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## THE LAST TYRANTS OF ATHENS<sup>1</sup>

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The first decades of the first century BC were one of the most eventful and notable periods in the history of ancient Athens. From the prosperity gained as a result of loyalty to Rome until the shocking siege and sack of the city by Sulla in 87/86, Athens experienced what may be called a Bronze Age, after the Golden Age of Pericles' times and the Silver under Lycurgus of Butadae. The reasons for the city's rise under Roman protection after the destruction of Corinth in 147 BC are well known; in contrast, the causes of the fall are full of unresolved questions. Athenian decline in the early first century BC needs to be analyzed in order to understand the role played by certain individuals in the events which drove Athens to suffer Sulla's wrath, and near-destruction. Economic crisis, impoverishment and elite conflict led to the rise of individual rulers, the last tyrants of Athens.<sup>2</sup>

### MEDEIOS, THE LEGAL TYRANT

Medeios III, son of Medeios of the Piraeus,<sup>3</sup> is perhaps the most enigmatic and controversial character in the history of ancient Athens. An aristocrat, descendant of

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Sian Lewis for her patience and kind support in managing both the conference and this publication. Also, much useful bibliography and discussion was provided by César Sierra during editing. This paper is dedicated to my son Max and my daughter Frida, with love.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, IX, 1, 20 mentions the tyrants (plural) that Mithridates VI Eupator put in charge of Athens. Niese 1887; Lewis 2009, p. 117 assigns the 'honour' of being the last Greek tyrant to Hieron II of Syracuse. Nevertheless, tyranny remained in Greece at least until the fall of Athens after the Sullan siege of 87/86 BC, as I try to show in the following pages.

<sup>3</sup> Kirchner 1901-1903, n° 10098.

one of the main Athenian families, Medeios stands out among his fellow citizens of all ages for being the only Athenian to have held the office of Eponymous Archon four times in his life (101/100, 91/90, 90/89, 89/88),<sup>4</sup> three of them consecutively. He is the only case we know of an Athenian who held the main archonship so often, and there is no record of any other Archon having held this position three times sequentially. The context in which his political activity took place and the consequences of his government make Medeios the leading figure of his times.

We must first consider Medeios as a prominent member of the Athenian traditional aristocracy. Descendant of Lycurgus of Butadae,<sup>5</sup> Medeios' family held some important hereditary priesthoods of Athens.<sup>6</sup> He was also a leading politician, and in 101/100 BC he was Eponymous Archon. During his period in office, he had to manage events such as the slave revolt in Attica in 100 BC.<sup>7</sup> Our sources say little about this event,<sup>8</sup> but it seems clear that the number of rebel slaves was very high (*μυριοί*), and the revolt lasted until at least 97 BC.<sup>9</sup> During the uprising the slaves devastated the Athenian countryside, seriously affecting the Athenian economy. Medeios probably had a main role in crushing the slave mutiny.<sup>10</sup>

During the 90s, Medeios also held a surprising continuity of public offices,<sup>11</sup> such as the directorship of the public bank at Delos<sup>12</sup> (100/99), *στρατεγὸς ἐπὶ τὰ ὄπλα* in Athens (99/98),<sup>13</sup> and further offices in both Athens and Delos.<sup>14</sup> Medeios' links with Delian affairs surely show his importance as a distinguished personality in the Delian

<sup>4</sup> *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1713, 9-11.

<sup>5</sup> Pseudo-Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*, 843b.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Schiller 2006, p. 267-268, p. 271, n. 42; Davies 1971, p. 349: "in the present case it can hardly be accidental that the two branches of the genos held the chief Athenian priesthoods of the two deities concerned in the famous dispute *περὶ τῆς χώρας*". Also, Hauvette-Besnault 1879, p. 491; Tracy 1979, p. 227.

<sup>7</sup> Tracy 1979, p. 233-234 has dated this slave revolt in the year 100.

<sup>8</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, VI, 272 f.

<sup>9</sup> Tracy 1979, p. 233 has stressed that the consequences of the economic crisis caused by the slave revolt were still substantial in 98/97.

<sup>10</sup> Verdejo Manchado, Antela-Bernárdez 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Tracy 1982, p. 159-164; Osborne 1984; Geagan 1983; Karila-Cohen 2007, p. 376-377.

<sup>12</sup> *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 2336, 185.

<sup>13</sup> On this office, cf. Geagan 1967, p. 18-31; Geagan 1997, p. 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Roussel 1916, p. 112; Badian 1976, p. 106; Mackendrick 1969, p. 55.

commercial and economic activities.<sup>15</sup> Finally, in 91 he once again became Eponymous Archon. This is was irregular, but more irregular is the continuity of Medeios' rule as Archon, three continuous archonships until 88. Nevertheless, in 88/87 Medeios laid down his office, and we know nothing more of him. In his absence the Eponymous Archonship remained vacant: the Archon List records an *ἀναρχία* for this year.<sup>16</sup>

As Tracy has stressed, the slave revolt of 101/100 resulted not only in a temporary impoverishment caused by the looting of the slaves during the crisis, lasting probably until 98/97, but also in a long term debt<sup>17</sup> involving most of the Athenians. In a critical speech of 88/87, Athenion of Athens talks about the problem of the debts and explains Mithridates' promise to cancel them,<sup>18</sup> so we can consider that the consequences of the economic crisis of the early 90s were still affecting Athenian families in 88/87, when Athenion arrived in Athens.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, MacKendrick proposed that the power of Medeios and his circle derived from their financial capacity as creditors to the majority of the impoverished Athenians.<sup>20</sup>

In his speech Athenion also made the Roman Senate responsible for this situation. We have little evidence for this. Nevertheless, from epigraphic evidence we know of the links between Medeios and the pro-Roman faction in Athens.<sup>21</sup> Most probably the Roman Senate was favorable to continuity in the power of Medeios and his pro-Roman circle, representing the traditional aristocratic group that controlled Delian business as allies of Rome.<sup>22</sup>

Was Medeios a tyrant? The ancient sources do not consider him so. Nevertheless, Medeios' continuous rule over Athens, although it was achieved through a legal magistracy, as Eponymous Archon, seems very suspicious. We can consider him as the type of tyrant described by Aristotle in *Politics*, a magistrate elected to a high office who

<sup>15</sup> Roussel 1908, p. 350, n° 401.

<sup>16</sup> Tracy 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Tracy 1979, p. 207.

<sup>18</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, V, 212a. Likewise, Glew 1977, p. 255. On the economies of Mithridates in this time, cf. de Callataÿ 1997, p. 288; Santangelo 2007, p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Mattingly 1971, p. 86 has suggested that the situation of *anarchia* could be caused by an economic crisis.

<sup>20</sup> Mackendrick 1969, p. 60-61 propose that the power of Medeios and his circle was a result of their financial authority, as creditors of the main part of the Athenian population. *Contra*, Davies 1973, p. 229.

<sup>21</sup> Following Byrne's interpretation of *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1054*: Byrne 1995, p. 59. Cf also Antela-Bernárdez 2009a.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Rubinson 1993, p. 20-22.

misuses it in order to rule by himself.<sup>23</sup> Thus his unchecked seizure of power seems to be beyond legality. But Medeios can be also considered a tyrant for other reasons. When Athenion criticizes the preceding government (*i. e.* that of Medeios), he mentions an unfortunate religious situation: some Athenian temples, says Athenion, are closed. What we can infer from this is that perhaps Athenion considered Athens, at his arrival, to be in a situation of *loimos*, the religious Greek concept for corruption. As R. Parker has demonstrated, civil strife was usually linked in Greek thought to *loimos*.<sup>24</sup> In this way, the repeated archonships of Medeios coincided with a break in the succession of tribes in the cycles of the priesthood.<sup>25</sup> The death of Medeios, at the same time Eponymous Archon and priest of Poseidon Erechtheus, probably had consequences for the natural religious practice of Athens as a state. Since a bad ruler, or even an illegal ruler, could produce religious corruption for the community,<sup>26</sup> Medeios could be seen as responsible for this *loimos*, and consequently as a tyrant.

#### ATHENION, THE POPULIST

After his three illegal eponymous archonships, Medeios seems to vanish. Nothing more is known about him. Probably as a result of his absence, Athens experienced a vacuum of power. At the end of the sailing season, we hear about the arrival in the city of Athenion, a peculiar and intriguing historical character.

The sources related to Athenion of Athens are few: while most writers about this period of ancient Athens mention someone called Aristion, only Posidonius gives a complex reference<sup>27</sup> recorded by Athenaeus of Naucratis in his *Deipnosophists*.<sup>28</sup> In this account, Athenion is described as an Athenian ambassador sent to Mithridates VI Eupator, and a *philos* of the king. Peripatetic philosopher, and

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, V, 10, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Parker 1983, p. 257.

<sup>25</sup> Dinsmoor 1931, p. 281.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Homer, *Odyssey*, XIX, 109-114; Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 225-247. Cf. Parker 1983, p. 265.

<sup>27</sup> Fr. 253 Edelstein-Kidd.

<sup>28</sup> On the discussion involving Athenion and Aristion, see McGing 1986, p. 120-124; Ferrary 1988, p. 441-444; Bugh 1992; Kidd 2004, p. 59-60; Mastrocinque 1999, p. 77-78 collects the most recent bibliography on the topic.

a bastard illegally inscribed as citizen according to Posidonius,<sup>29</sup> Athenion represents for Athenaeus the best example of the corruption of wise men and philosophers when they become rulers.<sup>30</sup> Once in Athens Athenion addressed a harsh speech to his fellow citizens in the assembly (from the Bema, used by the Roman consuls to address the Athenians). There he summarized the situation in Athens at his arrival: ἀναρχία, the absence of an eponymous archon, for which Athenion made the Roman Senate responsible, and an institutional deterioration (closed *gymnasia*, theatres without assemblies, voiceless courts). As a result of his discourse, the Athenians elected him Hoplite General (στρατηγὸς ἐπὶ τὰ ὄπλα)<sup>31</sup>.

With this new authority, Athenion posted sentinels on the gates of the city and sent hoplites to patrol the country, ordering them to pursue the citizens who fled illegally from the city and those who conspired from within the city with the exiles against his rule, essentially decreeing a curfew for Athens. Athenion also deprived some wealthy Athenians of their properties, and others were condemned to death. According to Posidonius, he frequently convoked meetings of the Athenian assembly and in this way became a tyrant. Finally, a shortage of food in Athens forced Athenion to ration the wheat and barley. Perhaps as a consequence, after confiscating the estates of both citizens and strangers, Athenion ordered his political associate Apellicon of Teos, also himself a Peripatetic, to seize the treasures of the temple of Apollo at Delos. However, this mission was a failure,<sup>32</sup> and we hear no more of Athenion or Apellicon.<sup>33</sup>

In the light of this account, it is hardly surprising that Athenion could be considered by the ancient authors as effectively, a tyrant. To begin with, he acted, according to Posidonius, for his own profit. In this sense, Athenion came to power with the support of the mob. He also opposed his rule to the wealthy, “sober-minded” Athenian citizens, as the confiscation of their properties seems to show. His populist attitude appears again in the idea of the frequency of meetings of the assembly, where the people, and not the aristocrats, could give support to his policies. Apart from this popular support, Athenion had some kind of military backing, as we can infer from the

<sup>29</sup> Bringmann 1997 p. 156-157. Likewise, on bastardy in the Ancient World, see Mac Dowell 1976; Rhodes 1978; Carlier 1992. Also, Hodot 1992.

<sup>30</sup> Momigliano 1971, p. 33 considers the portrait of Athenion by Posidonius as the most hostile of all Antiquity.

<sup>31</sup> On this position, see Sarikakis 1951; Ferguson 1909; Geagan 1967, p. 18-31.

<sup>32</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, V, 215a.

<sup>33</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, V, 211e-215b.

references to patrols, hoplites, and even to a group of *cataphracts* (κατάφρακτικοί).<sup>34</sup> But above all, Athenion can be considered a tyrant by the ancient audience since he ruled as a subordinate of a king, as philosopher and *philos*,<sup>35</sup> and therefore, as a real tyrant, in the best Hellenistic tradition, in charge of a city subject to the royal decisions of the dynast Mithridates VI Eupator.

This usual portrait of Athenion, however, clearly from a pro-Roman authorship, must be reviewed in the light of the evidence, since an analysis of all the information we can collect about Athenion offers us a very different picture of Athens under Athenion's rule.

If we contrast what we know from Athenaeus about Athenion's activities and the powers of the Hoplite General, we find definite similarities. Athenaeus says that Athenion was elected as Hoplite General in the theatre, and we know that this is one of the places where Athenians elected Hoplite Generals.<sup>36</sup> The powers attested for the Hoplite General also fit well with what we know about Athenion's activities as a ruler. As we know, the office of the Hoplite General had existed in Athens since at least the Classical period.<sup>37</sup> From the third century BC onwards, the power of this office was increasing, and it was held by many prominent political personalities of Athens.<sup>38</sup> Philostratus records that both the Archonship and the Hoplite Generalship were the main magistracies of Athenian politics.<sup>39</sup> From the first century onwards, the Hoplite General was in charge of the defence of the frontiers and the direction of the ephebes during military service, also controlling public order and the security forces of the city. His responsibilities could also have included the management of the corn supply and the supervision of markets and shipping both in Athens and in the Piraeus.<sup>40</sup>

If we consider Athenion's activities in the light of the powers of the Hoplite General, there were few significant differences between them. The use of patrols

<sup>34</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, V, 214A. See also the discussion in Bugh 1992, p. 114-119.

<sup>35</sup> Smith 1993.

<sup>36</sup> Geagan 1997, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution*, 61, 1. Likewise, cf. Rhodes 1981, p. 678-679. Also, Wheeler 1991, p. 147-152.

<sup>38</sup> Oliver 2007, p. 163. *IG II<sup>2</sup> 2336* is a reliable source for the importance of the Hoplite Generals, with the names of the Generals following that of the Eponymous Archons. See Geagan 1967, p. 10; Tracy 1979, p. 215.

<sup>39</sup> Philostratus, *Lives of Philosophers*, II, 20, 103.

<sup>40</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia*, 736d; *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1039*; *IG II<sup>2</sup> 3500*; Geagan 1967, p. 23-27.

(perhaps of epebes<sup>41</sup>), hoplites or military forces were some of the Hoplite General's responsibilities. Similarly it was the Hoplite General who controlled, or even rationed, food in case of shortage, since he controlled the markets and managed the corn supply, and hence Athenion was acting within his own office when he rationed the wheat and barley among the Athenians. Since Delos was under Athenian control, the corn reserves and the Delian markets<sup>42</sup> were probably also managed by the Athenian Hoplite General, and so, although unusual, the actions taken by Athenion in order to resolve the shortage had nothing illegal about them, including the mission against Delos.<sup>43</sup> Yet he was still accused of tyranny.

As far as we know, until Medeios' disappearance, Athenian rulers had tried to adopt a policy of careful accommodation with the Romans and Italians, especially with *negotiatores* and merchants in connection with the trading interests on Delos.<sup>44</sup> After the crisis of the end of the second century, Athenian prosperity declined, and many Athenians were impoverished by debt. Athenion's rule gained the support of those poor Athenian citizens.

Posidonius stresses the fact that Athenion frequently summoned meetings of the assembly. In fact it is possible that Athenion embarked on a programme of political reform during his short rule. An Athenian inscription<sup>45</sup> records an attempt to change the Athenian constitution, in order to establish a new political system, strongly democratic in form, with a clear influence from Peripatetic political theory.<sup>46</sup> This constitutional proposal can be dated during the reign of Athenion. Aristotle's political science was primarily a practical science, addressed not only to philosophers but especially to men engaged in politics.<sup>47</sup> Athenion fits perfectly into this Aristotelian view of political

<sup>41</sup> Although we know from Athenion's speech before the assembly that something had gone wrong with the epebes, since the *gymnasia* seem to be closed. On this question, see Verdejo Machado, Antela 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Nicolet 1980, p. 97 mentions the great reserves of grain collected in Delos, as the law of 58 BC seems to show.

<sup>43</sup> Baslez 1982, p. 52 and n. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Tracy 1982, p. 179. However, as Tracy remarks at p. 179-180, "nearly every Athenian shared to some extent in the prosperity created by the port of Delos and concurred to some degree with a policy of cooperation, if not outright accommodation [with Rome]".

<sup>45</sup> *Agora*, I, 2351.

<sup>46</sup> Oliver 1980; Antela-Bernárdez 2009b with full bibliography.

<sup>47</sup> Lord 1978, p. 337.

activity, as director of a political project based on Aristotelian principles,<sup>48</sup> namely the creation of the radical democracy suggested in the inscription. With Peripatetic theory in mind, the final aim of Athenion's political project seems to have been the installation of a new democratic constitution, within which the Athenian people could be the active agents of the Athenian government.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, this political project would have been the first step in a broad plan, by which the Peripatetics, with Athenion at their head (and surely with Mithridatic support) expected to resolve the social, economic and cultural problems Athens suffered at the time, in order to recover the city's former glorious position.

It is likely that the principal problem faced by Athenion in his attempt to restore democracy and prosperity in Athens was the opposition of the wealthy class of Athenian traditional aristocrats, and also the merchants linked with the Delian market, those who during the nineties were creditors of a significant number of the Athenian population. The fact that his rule was supported by the people made him, in the eyes of the aristocratic audiences, both Greek and Roman, a *demagogue*. His democratic activity did not assist Roman judgement of his rule, since democracy was treated in Roman political thinking as something to be avoided. In J.-L. Ferrary's words, Greek democracy

n'était pas non plus un adversaire qu'on dût réduire dans un combat idéologique, mais le désordre qu'elle leur paraissait favoriser les inquiétait, et le maintien de leur hégémonie s'accommodait mieux de l'évolution de leurs sujets vers un ordre politique plus proche de celui des nouveaux maîtres du monde.<sup>50</sup>

As a consequence, Athenion was perceived by the Romans and philo-Romans as an agitator, and ultimately as a dangerous enemy, since he was not considered to be ruling in his own interest but as a Mithridatic agent, although the evidence already shown seems to indicate that Athenion had his own political objectives. Being ineluctably linked with Mithridates, Athenion was subject to some topical clichés and prejudices (stranger, illegal citizen, false philosopher, despot or tyrant). In this sense, Athenion

<sup>48</sup> Santangelo 2007, p. 64 stresses the opposition between Athenion's will to exercise restraint and good sense, as a pupil of Aristotle. This was another feature of Posidonius' critical portrait and shows his desire, as a Stoic, to attack the other Athenian philosophical schools.

<sup>49</sup> We must keep in mind the statement, although very distant in time, made by Ioannes Lydus in the sixth century AD about Domitian, considering innovations as proper of tyrants: see Escribano Paño 1993, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> Ferrary 1987-1989, p. 206.

fits well in the tradition of the Greek tyrant as a defender of the impoverished against the *aristoi* and the rich, with populist (and popular) policies of the distribution of land and cancellation of debts<sup>51</sup> and grievous actions of impiety,<sup>52</sup> as the plan for sacking the Delian temples of Apollo seems to show. Thus, Athenion actually appears in what we can call a ‘typical’ time for tyranny, that of early first-century BC Athens, marked by social instability (a regular factor in the appearance of tyrannies since the Archaic age),<sup>53</sup> the opposition of a popular ruler against the aristocracy,<sup>54</sup> and the elimination of the *best* citizens.<sup>55</sup> To sum up, he can be presented as a traditional “demagogue”, a *new man* who obtained the support of the *demos* in order to oppose the wealthy citizens and then tried to serve his own best interests.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, we should not forget that Athenion had other supporters apart from the Athenian people. We know, for example, of Apellicon, a friend in philosophy and in government, who was a rich merchant. Furthermore Posidonius says that when Athenion came to Athens, he was accommodated in the house of Dies, similarly a merchant.<sup>57</sup> So, comparing Medeios and Athenion, we find that while the first was the visible head of a traditional, pro-Roman Athenian aristocracy with strong links with the Delian markets, the latter obtained the support of a new untraditional aristocracy, perhaps pro-Mithridates, and surely related to the business in Delos. This is a point we must consider carefully, for it indicates some kind of struggle between two elite groups who were trying to obtain control of the Athenian government, which meant also the authority to manage wealthy Delos.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, at least during the short rule of Athenion, we cannot really talk of complete political discontinuity, because prosopographic studies show that some magistrates in Athenion’s government had also been members of Medeios’ government in the past.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Mossé 1969, p. IV.

<sup>52</sup> Impiety as a main characteristic of tyrants: Dunkle 1967, p. 160.

<sup>53</sup> Mossé 1969, p. 2; Andrewes 1956, p. 147.

<sup>54</sup> Andrewes 1956, p. 23.

<sup>55</sup> Escribano Paño 1993, p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> The topical concept of the demagogue as tyrant from the Archaic age had continuity in the Greek tradition from the fourth century, as is shown in the works of the classical philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, and beyond, remaining the usual significance of the concept down to Athenion’s time. See Mossé 1969, p. 88, p. 134.

<sup>57</sup> Dow 1942.

<sup>58</sup> Some of these questions are analyzed in Verdejo-Manchado, Antela-Bernárdez 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Badian 1976, p. 112.

ARISTIÓN, THE *REAL* TYRANT

After the failure of Apellicon's naval campaign to seize the treasures of Delos, we hear nothing more about him or his colleague Athenion. Nevertheless, the importance of Delos and Athens as strategic ports for the Pontic offensive against Rome drove Mithridates to send his commander Archelaus with a naval force to lay siege to and gain control of first Delos, and then Athens. Archelaus then placed an Athenian, Aristion, the Epicurean philosopher,<sup>60</sup> in charge of the city with a garrison of 2 000 Mithridatic soldiers. With their help Aristion killed the pro-Roman Athenians, made himself the tyrant of the city and aligned Athens definitively on the Pontic side for the war against Rome.<sup>61</sup>

According to this account, Aristion of Athens fits perfectly into the Greek concept of the tyrant. First, he became ruler not by law or election, but by force, thanks to the Mithridatic army under Archelaus' command. Second, his rule gained the support of the people in opposition to the wealthy *aristoi*, the 'sober-minded' Athenians.<sup>62</sup> And third, he was an impious ruler, guilty of *hybris* against the Gods, for he refused to light the sacred lamp of the Athenian Erechtheion.<sup>63</sup> On this construction, his rule over Athens drove the city to the siege of Sulla,<sup>64</sup> the Roman sack,<sup>65</sup> the loss of autonomy, and even near-destruction.<sup>66</sup> In this way, Aristion appears as an uncontrolled character driven by rage, killing, celebrating lavish banquets during the famine caused by the Sullan siege,<sup>67</sup> and even taking refuge in the Acropolis, as the first would-be tyrant of Athens, Cylon, did in 632 BC.<sup>68</sup> According to this portrait he is thus the worst a tyrant can be, the more so because he was not in fact the true ruler, but subject to a

<sup>60</sup> The links between the historical characters of Athenion (Peripatetic) and Aristion (Epicurean) and the facts that drove Athens to the Sullan sack seem to be a result of the account of Posidonius, who attacks these schools as a way to glorify his own, the Stoics. On the question of the role played by the philosophical schools in the context of Mithridatic Athens, see Ferrary 1988, p. 435-486.

<sup>61</sup> Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists*, V, 214a-d mentions these 'sober-minded' citizens as the detractors of Athenion's rule.

<sup>63</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, 12, 3; *Numa*, 9, 5-6. See Palagia 1984.

<sup>64</sup> Hoff 1997; Antela-Bernárdez 2009c.

<sup>65</sup> A review of the military campaign of the Athenian siege can be found in Antela-Bernárdez 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, 14, 6; Strabo, *Geography*, IX, 1, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, 13, 2-3.

<sup>68</sup> Herodotus, V, 71; Thucydides, I, 126; Plutarch, *Solon*, 12, 1.

greater power, that of the King who employs him to direct the city's affairs. Thus we can consider Aristion, so similar in many ways to Athenion, as a typical Hellenistic tyrant: philosopher, *philos* of a King and impious ruler by force of a free city with the support of the people and against the will of the city's aristocrats. Of course, these elements justified the Roman action against the tyrant, not only as a way to recover control of Athens and Greece, but also as guarantors of the freedom of the Greeks against the Kings. Certainly, the ideological cocktail of freedom, kings and tyrants would not have been well received by Roman public opinion, in view of traditional Roman hostility towards monarchy, personal power and, of course, popular government.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that our mainly pro-Roman sources<sup>69</sup> try to explain the tyranny of Aristion as uniquely personal, we know that he ruled with the help of other Athenians.<sup>70</sup> Once the city fell into Sulla's hands and he finally captured Aristion and his staff, we know that Aristion was executed, but he was the only one who paid with his life for Athens' betrayal. The rest of Aristion's colleagues in the rule, as it seems, retained their lives. Nevertheless, it seems difficult to accept that these colleagues can have been, as the accounts perhaps imply, members of the *demos* or representatives of the mob. Aristion was almost certainly a member of the Athenian wealthy class, and as during the government of Athenion, his staff were probably also wealthy Athenians, *i. e.* "sober-minded" citizens. We can thus doubt that in reality Aristion's government was supported by the people, as Athenion also claimed. What we see, ultimately, is simply a conflict among aristocrats, a struggle for power between two types of wealthy Athenians, those who traditionally ruled the city under the patronage of Rome, like Medeios' circle, and those who, once Medeios' circle began to seem weak, tried to gain the control of the city using either legal means or military force, under the patronage of king Mithridates, the new savior of the Hellenic world.

In conclusion, we can consider that after the conflict among these interest groups, the final victory belonged to Sulla, who chose who lived and who died and almost drove his troops to the total destruction of once-glorious Athens. Sulla, the ultimate tyrant, was able to impose himself thanks to his possession of military force. In order to gain booty, rewards and military experience, he commanded a very successful campaign against Mithridates before returning to Rome to fight his own comrades and forcibly proclaim himself the real and legal ruler of Rome. In the game of tyranny, you win or you die. Unfortunately, during the game, other people too may suffer and die.

<sup>69</sup> And also anti-Athenian accounts: Ballesteros Pastor 2005, p. 389.

<sup>70</sup> Plutarch, *Sulla*, 23, 2.

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### Abbreviations

*Agora* = A.G. Woodhead, *The Athenian Agora XVI. The Decrees*, Princeton, 1997.

*IG* = *Inscriptiones Graecae*, Berlin.

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