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# A Note on *μόναρχος* at Solon 9 West (12 Gentili-Prato)

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## Abstract

This investigation explores the term *μόναρχος* as it appears in Solon 9 (West) (Gentili-Prato 9). Alongside the use of *μούναρχος* in Theognis 52, this Solonian fragment stands as the only surviving instance in archaic Greek literature of the concept of ‘monarch.’ By analyzing the manuscript witnesses, particularly the evidence provided by Diodorus Siculus’ *Bibliotheca Historica*, and comparing other Solonian passages that feature terms for sovereign rulers, I contend that the term *μονάρχου* in Solon is likely an interpolation, replacing an original *τυράννου*.

Keywords: Solon, Diodorus Siculus, *μόναρχος*, Archaic Greek Constitutional Terms, Origins of Monarchy, Textual Criticism

## Introduction

The term *μόναρχος*, meaning ‘monarch,’ appears in two early instances — once in the elegies attributed to Theognis and once in Solon.<sup>1</sup> The Theognian passage presents *μούναρχοι* alongside ‘civil strife’ (*στάσις*) and ‘kindred murder’ (*ἔμφυλος φόνος*) as a result of ‘private gain dear to the bad’ (*κακοῖσι φίλ’ ἀνδράσι [...] κέρδεα*).<sup>2</sup> Conversely, in the Solonian passage, the ‘demos beset by ignorance’ (*δῆμος ἀϊδρίη*) is depicted as descending into the slavery of the *μόναρχος*:

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<sup>1</sup> Another possible occurrence is found in a papyrus fragment attributed to Alcaeus. Here, we have the fragment *]αρχον* (P.Oxy. 2304 (Lobel)), which may represent the latter part of a name such as *Ἰππαρχος* in the accusative case, or it might refer to an office-holder with a title modeled after *τριήραρχος* or *δήμαρχος*. It could also, in principle, represent the accusative of *μόναρχος*. However, too little of the papyrus has been preserved to confidently determine any name, word, or meaning contained within it.

<sup>2</sup> Theognis 49-52: *‘Τῶν γὰρ στάσιές τε καὶ ἔμφυλοι φόνοι ἀνδρῶν μούναρχοι δε’* (‘from these follow strife, internal murders of men, as well as monarchs’). All translations of Greek texts are my own.

ἀνδρῶν ἐκ μεγάλων πόλις ὀλλυται, ἐς δὲ μονάρχου / δῆμος αἰδρίη δουλοσύνην  
ἔπασεν.<sup>3</sup>

The city will be destroyed by great men; through ignorance, the people fall into the slavery of a monarch.

In surviving archaic Greek sources, the Theognian and Solonian lines mentioned above represent the only occurrences of the concrete noun *μόναρχος*. Additionally, there is a very limited number of pre-classical attestations of the abstract noun *μοναρχία*, meaning 'monarchy.' *Μοναρχία* is found in a pair of fragments attributed to Alcaeus (POxy 1789 (Lobel)/A6 (Lobel-Page)) and 6.27 (Voigt), and a century later in a fragment ascribed to Alcmaeon of Croton (B4 (Diels-Kranz)).<sup>4</sup> The goal of this paper is to demonstrate that in the Solonian instance, *μονάρχου* is an interpolation for the original *τυράννου*. If the reading *τυράννου* in this context can be discredited, it would have implications for the prevailing understanding that *μόναρχος* and *μοναρχία*, as constitutional terms, can be traced back to the Greek archaic period.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, the reading *τυράννου* can be found in one of the three sources we possess for the above lines attributed to Solon. The extant sources for the Solonian verse include Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 9.20.2 and 19.1.4, as well as Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae Philosophorum* 1.50. Notably, *τυράννου* appears in Book XIX of Diodorus, while the same lines in Diogenes Laertius, as well as in Book IX of Diodorus, are rendered with *μονάρχου*. However, the variant *τυράννου* is consistently found in all primary manuscripts quoting the Solonian content in Diodorus, while in Diogenes, similarly, the reading *μονάρχου* prevails.

## The Manuscripts

Beginning with the rendering of the Solonian lines in Book IX of Diodorus' work, the passage in question has been preserved solely in the *Byzantine Excerpta de sententiis*. That, in turn, is preserved in a single Vatican palimpsest, *Vaticanus Graecus* 73, dating from the tenth or eleventh century. As for Book XIX of the *Bibliotheca*, there are two principal manuscripts from which others derive: *Parisinus*

<sup>3</sup> Sol. 9.3–4 (West) (12.3–4 (Gentili-Prato)).

<sup>4</sup> We also have *μόναρχ[ι]* in another fragment ascribed to Alcaeus (P.Oxy. 2734 (Lobel)).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Linderborg 2018: 102–104.

*Graecus* 1665 from the eleventh century, and *Laurentianus* 70.12 from the fifteenth century. Both of these manuscripts attest to the reading *τυράννου*, leaving no room for alternative interpretations of the term in this context within Diodorus.

Turning to Diogenes' *Vitae*, the key manuscripts are the *Neopolitanus Bourbonicus III B* 29 from the twelfth century, the *Parisinus Graecus* 1759 from the thirteenth century, and the *Laurentianus* 69.13, also from the thirteenth century. Here, conversely, all major manuscripts support the reading *μονάρχου*. A sole exception is found in *Vaticanus Graecus* 96 from the twelfth century, which also contains Byzantine excerpts. This manuscript renders the Solonian lines with the accusative *μόναρχον*. However, this variant should be dismissed as ungrammatical, as in the clause in question, *μονάρχου/τυράννου* clearly functions as a possessive attribute of the accusative object *δουλοσύνην*, rather than serving as an object itself.

It appears, then, that our three witnesses leave us at an impasse, with the Solonian lines interpreted either as referring to a 'monarch' or a 'tyrant'. Nonetheless, two out of the three extant sources favor the former interpretation over the latter. Consequently, editors have consistently preferred Diogenes' reading, relegating the variant offered by Diodorus to the *apparatus criticus*.<sup>6</sup> However, it can be argued that when composing the original version of his poem, Solon was indeed referring to the concept of a tyrant rather than that of a monarch. This possibility is supported by an examination of the rest of Solon's surviving poetry.

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<sup>6</sup> In a similar vein, modern commentators generally agree that Solon was indeed referring to a monarch in this context. Christoph Mülke (2002: 209) has argued that Solon's choice of *μόναρχος*, rather than the more common *τύραννος*, may reflect his disagreement with either a genuine or hypothetical promotional use of the term; in this case, the later negative connotations of *μόναρχος* might have originated with Solon himself. In contrast, Maria Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010: 316) suggests that Solon's use of *μόναρχος* may be associated with an earlier exemplary model of absolute rule provided by the Cypselids of Corinth — although *μόναρχος* is only documented in connection with Cypselian tyranny in later classical Greek sources (Hdt. 5.92β.2). In inscriptions, *μόναρχος* begins to appear only in the 4th-3rd century BCE as an eponymous magistrate (IG XII,4 1:72, 33) and as a personal name (CID 2:122, 10).

## Solonian Evidence

Here, no additional instances of *μόναρχος* are attested in any of our surviving manuscript witnesses. In fact, when referring to sole rulers, the remaining Solonian verses show a clear preference for vocabulary derived from *τύραννος*. Thus, in fr. 33.6 (West) (29a.6 (Gentili-Prato)), an aorist participle of the verb *τυραννεύω* is employed to indicate that Solon had been a tyrant for no more than a day (*τυραννεύσας Ἀθηνέων μοῦνον ἡμέρην μίαν*). In fr. 32.2–3 (West) (29.2–3 (Gentili-Prato)), on the other hand, the genitive forms of *τυραννίς* and *βία* serve as genitive objects of the verb *καθάπτω* in the aorist middle voice. Here, Solon's reluctance to assume the role of a tyrant is expressed: *τυραννίδος δὲ καὶ βίης ἀμειλίχου οὐ κατηψάμην* — 'I did not lay hold of tyranny and relentless force.'

The above analysis indeed supports the proposal that *μονάρχου* in Sol. 9 (West) should be replaced with *τύραννου*. The genitive of *τύραννος* fits the elegiac meter just as well as *μονάρχου*, but the former aligns more closely with the political vocabulary found in Solon's other preserved poetry. Additional support for this view can be gathered from a broader examination of our sources, particularly the work of Diodorus Siculus, where both variants (*μονάρχου* and *τυράννου*) are encountered. The question we shall pose on Diodorus, then, is which of his readings is the correct one?

## The *Bibliotheca*

First and foremost, a work of this magnitude — likely around six times the length of Herodotus' *Histories* — would have been written over several decades. Based on documentation regarding the processes of other Graeco-Roman writers engaged in similar endeavors (for example, Pliny the Elder), this creative process likely consisted of two main phases, referred to by Catherine Rubincam as the compilation and composition stages. Rubincam's two-part division challenges earlier interpretations of Diodorus' work as merely that of a copyist; in her view, the compilation phase also involved arranging the source material of the *Bibliotheca* into an intermediate document or commentary, which then served as the foundation for the actual writing.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rubincam 2018: 30–33.

As a result, it appears probable that this transitional record (assuming such a document existed) contained an original Diodorean version of the Solonian lines, which were later cited in slightly different forms in the final literary work. How, then, can we explain that one of these two references included *μονάρχου*, while the other referred to *τυράννου*?

This question is directly addressed by examining how other duplicate passages within the *Bibliotheca* were composed. Rubincam's contribution lies in demonstrating that, when these passages are compared, it becomes clear that Diodorus was not merely copying from his intermediate document; rather, he was significantly rewriting its content for each section of his book.<sup>8</sup> That Diodorus applied this same method in quoting Solon is evident when we consider the distinct ways in which the poem is introduced each time.

Thus, at 9.20.2, the presentation of the Solonian lines begins with the phrase *‘λέγεται δὲ Σόλων καὶ προειπεῖν τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις τὴν ἐσομένην τυραννίδα δι’ ἐλεγείων’* (‘it is said that Solon also foretold the impending tyranny to the Athenians through elegies’). In contrast, at 19.1.4, the introduction states *‘τῆς γὰρ Σόλωνος φωνῆς ὥσπερ χρησμοῦ πινος ἐμνημόνευον, ἐν οἷς περὶ τῆς Πεισιστράτου τυραννίδος προλέγων ἔθηκε τόδε τὸ ἐλεγεῖον’* (‘they recalled the voice of Solon as akin to a prophecy, when he composed this elegy while foretelling Pisistratus’ tyranny’). It is worth noting that in the latter version, Diodorus has included a completely new clause: *‘τῆς γὰρ Σόλωνος [...] ἐμνημόνευον’*. This has clearly been added to the narrative to restore the Solonian lines within a Classical Athenian context. Furthermore, while the other elements of each preface are quite similar and likely derived from the same source (certainly via an intermediary document), there are still significant differences regarding the specific word choices made in each case. For instance, the future participle *ἐσομένην* appears only in the former variant, while the finite aorist *ἔθηκε* is found solely in the latter.

Indeed, considering the considerable creative freedom displayed, it is hardly surprising that Diodorus substituted *μονάρχου* in one of his renderings of Solon's lines with *τυράννου* in the other, especially as both terms fit the meter. This variation is further clarified by observing that Diodorus seems to have employed the terms for

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<sup>8</sup> Rubincam 2018: 26–29.

monarchy/monarch and tyranny/tyrant nearly synonymously. For example, in the lead-up to his quotation of Solon in Book XIX (1.2), Diodorus explains how challenging it is for those living in wealth (τοῖς ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ μένουσιν) to refrain from monarchy (δυσχερὲς ἀποσχέσθαι μοναρχίας), while in Book IX (20.1), he presents Solon as addressing the assembly about the necessity ‘to overthrow the tyrant’ (καταλύειν τὸν τύραννον).

These considerations indicate that the dual attestations of the Solonian lines in Diodorus indeed place us in a sort of stalemate. It remains impossible to definitively determine whether Diodorus wrote *μονάρχου* or *τυράννου* in the relevant section of the intermediate document he used for the final composition of his work, let alone ascertain which form was present in the original source that his transitional record was based upon. Consequently, Diodorus’ testimony cannot be effectively employed to resolve the debate on which term to adopt in Sol. 9 (West). However, it is crucial to recognize that this impasse leaves open the possibility that the correct term may, in fact, be *τυράννου*.

The arguments above suggest that we cannot simply juxtapose the Diodorean attestation of *μονάρχου* against that of *τυράννου*, conclude that they cancel each other out, and thus proceed to favor Diogenes’ reading, though this has been the approach taken by editors and commentators up to this point. Instead, we should consider the evidence from Diodorus as offering a significant alternative to the *μονάρχου* found in Diogenes. As we have noted, this variant reading — specifically, *τυράννου*, which is consistently attested in all manuscripts of Diodorus Book XIX — may indeed represent the correct interpretation of the Solonian lines.

## Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has argued that the sole Byzantine attestation of *μονάρχου* concerning Diodorus’ rendering of Solon’s poem does not provide sufficient grounds to favor this reading. Rather, it has been posited that the textual evidence from the *Bibliotheca Historica*, along with an examination of the context in which the work was created, strongly supports the reading of *τυράννου*. Additionally, further evidence for this reading has been drawn from an examination of the remaining segments of Solon’s preserved poetry, which include other instances of vocabulary derived from

τύραννος, but none from μόναρχος. Consequently, this investigation proposes an emendation that, if accepted, would mean that the Solonian lines we have examined here should henceforth be rendered according to Diodorus Book XIX, as follows:

ἀνδρῶν ἐκ μεγάλων πόλις ὅλλυται, εἰς δὲ τυράννου / δῆμος αἰδρίῃ δουλοσύνην  
ἔπεσεν.<sup>9</sup>

The city will be destroyed by great men; through ignorance the people fall into the slavery of a tyrant.

Finally, one might ask why this alternative reading is significant, given that editions of the Solonian text already include *τυράννου* in the critical apparatus. Why could it not simply remain in the footnotes? In this context, it is important to remember that the Solonian usage of *μόναρχος* represents one of only two occurrences of this term in pre-classical Greek sources. The possibility of interpolation, therefore, has implications for the broader question of the chronology and emergence of Classical Greek constitutional terms, a topic I explore in greater detail elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Diod. 19.1.4 (Bizière).

<sup>10</sup> Linderborg 2025.



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