Introduction

A deciding factor for the survival of a democratic regime in an ancient Greek polis was the capability of its supporters to defeat their domestic opponents in an armed confrontation. If they had that capability, pro-democrats (the dēmos) would have the power (kratos) to impose their will. The polis would thus be governed by a dēmokratia. If pro-democrats did not have such capability, however, anti-democrats would take control of the polis and impose their will. The polis then would be governed by either an oligarchy or a tyranny.¹

Whether or not the pro-democrats of a given polis could defeat their domestic opponents depended largely on the number of men who would mobilize on the pro-democrats’ behalf. It is true that, on average, anti-democrats likely had important advantages, such as greater financial resources, superior weaponry and training, important interpersonal connections, and more free time to plot and to plan. Thus one pro-democrat did not necessarily “pack the same punch” as one anti-democrat. Nevertheless, the deciding factor in an armed confrontation almost certainly would come down to numbers: the pro-democrats’ chances for victory increasing in more or less direct proportion to the extent of their numerical superiority over their anti-democrat opponents.

¹ My factional and power-based understanding of the meaning of ancient Greek dēmokratia is based on two points. First, kratos connotes bodily strength and thus physical domination (see LSJ s.v. κράτος). Thucydides, for example, wrote (8.70.1–2) that the Four Hundred ruled kata kratos: they had citizens executed, imprisoned, and banished. Second, in addition to referring to the whole citizenry, dēmos refers more specifically to the subset of the population that believed that the very poorest citizen should have equal political standing with the very richest citizen. Thus dēmokratia was a regime type wherein those who believed that the very poorest citizens should have equal political standing with the very richest are able to physically impose their will on the polis. In support of this conception, note the “Old Oligarchs” direct statement (1.9) about nondemocratic regimes: if “the good” (hoi chrēstoi) controlled the city, “the dēmos would swiftly fall into slavery.” Many of the incidents explored in this book also provide support. On the meaning of ancient Greek dēmokratia, see Ober (2006).
This logic is simple, but it could be quite challenging for pro-democrats to mobilize in response to a well-organized coup. The most crucial explanatory dynamic is straightforward: an individual pro-democrat who publicly defended his regime with insufficient support from his fellow pro-democrats would almost certainly be killed. In the event of a coup, therefore, individual pro-democrats likely would give no clear public indication of their actual political preference and would wait for a large number of people to join the fight before they thought it safe enough to join. As a result, an insufficient number of pro-democrats would fight in defense of their democracy and the anti-democratic regime would retain power. The pro-democrats would thus have had what I call a “revolutionary coordination problem.”

Despite the apparent difficulty involved in mobilizing in defense of a given democracy, democratic regimes flourished in the ancient Greek world during the Classical and early Hellenistic periods. Data culled from Hansen and Nielsen’s Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis supports two crucial points. First, with respect to those cites for which the Inventory provides information on regime type, the percentage of cities that experienced a democracy, however briefly, increased over time: 8 percent (6 out of 76 cities) experienced democracy at some point during the second half of the sixth century; 18 percent (16 out of 89) did so in the first half of the fifth century; 40 percent (51 out of 126) did in the second half of the fifth century; 46 percent (54 out of 117) did in the first half of the fourth century; and 46 percent (52 out of 112 cities) did at some point in the second half of the fourth century. Second, the number of geographic regions that contained at least one polis that experienced democracy increased over time: during the second half of the sixth century, there is evidence for democratically governed poleis in five (out of thirty-nine) regions; during the first half of the fifth century the number rises to twelve; in the second half of the fifth century it is twenty-one regions; for the first half of the fourth century it is also twenty-one; and the number of regions rises to twenty-four in the second half of the fourth century. The data, admittedly, are noisy and often problematic. But the trend is clear: the ancient Greek world became increasingly more densely democratic during the Classical and early Hellenistic periods.

In light of the preceding comments, it appears reasonable to suspect that democratic regimes flourished in the ancient Greek world in large part because their supporters developed methods or mechanisms to mobilize en masse in response to coup d’états—to solve the revolutionary coordination problem. That is, admittedly, a simple conclusion. But there would seem to be only three principal objections. And each may be countered.

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2 Note that both Megara and Herakleia (Pontica) experienced democracy in the first half the sixth century. For democracy outside of Athens, see Robinson (1997 and 2011).

3 See the appendix for a presentation of the data and an explanation of the method.
The first objection is that most democratic regimes survived, in large part, because they did not have motivated domestic opposition. That there were anti-democrats in most cities is obvious—there can be very little doubt about it. But it does not necessarily follow that the anti-democrats in the various cities were sufficiently motivated to overthrow democracies. They might have concluded, for example, that the democratic status quo—despite its injustice (in their minds)—was tolerable. Or perhaps they had been effectively socialized by pro-democracy ideology. They might actually think that democratic governance advances their interests.

This "lack of credible domestic opposition" theory is not particularly persuasive. First, stasis was a common problem for most poleis from the Archaic through the early Hellenistic periods. Hansen and Nielsen's Inventory (index 19), for example, records 279 instances of stasis in 122 different poleis. And, as Hansen and Nielsen note (p. 125), those numbers—impressive as they are—do not capture the full extent of the phenomenon. It is thus reasonable to conclude that most regimes, be they democratic, oligarchic, or tyrannical, had motivated domestic opposition. Second, literary passages clearly suggest that, generally speaking, oligarchs in most cities were eager to overthrow the governing democracy. The fifth-century author known as the Old Oligarch, for example, wrote (1.5) that "everywhere on earth the best element (to beltiston) is opposed to democracy." And according to Aristotle (Pol. 1310a8–12) the oligarchs in some poleis swore, "I will be hostile to the dēmos and will plan whatever evil I can against them."

The second objection is that most democratic regimes survived, in large part, because they were propped up by an external power or powers. The logic of this objection is quite simple: (1) if anti-democrats staged a coup, they would be challenged militarily by the outside power that supported the dēmos; (2) the combined forces from the outside power and the dēmos would likely defeat the anti-democrats in an armed confrontation; (3) the anti-democrats would thus choose not to stage a coup in the first place.

This "external power theory" is intelligible, but its significance should not be overstated. Even the Athenians, a people most willing and able to prop up

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4 The general presence of anti-democratic forces in democratically governed poleis is certainly implied by Aristotle (Pol. 1304b19–1305a36; 1309a15–1310a35). And it is tendenitiously asserted by Demosthenes (10.4).

5 Note, for example, Aristotle’s suggestion (Pol. 1310a5–8) that, in a democracy, political leaders should “pretend to be speaking on behalf of men that are well-to-do.”


7 Note too the description—provided by a scholion to Aischines, Against Timarchos (DK 88A13)—of the relief on Kritias’s tombstone: personified Oligarchia setting fire to personified Dēmokratia. (Kritias was the leader of the so-called Thirty Tyrants who ruthlessly dominated Athens for several months after the Peloponnesian War.)
democracies, were by no means consistent in their interventions: the afore-
mentioned Old Oligarch, for example, wrote (3.11) that, in the fifth century,
they supported the upper classes in many cities; and we know that they even
supported "tyrants" in the fourth century. It would, in fact, stand to reason
that, in general, an external power would prop up a given democracy only if
it concluded that that democracy's domestic supporters would soon be able
to maintain control of the polis by themselves. One might appeal here to the
difficulties recently encountered by the United States in its attempt to prop
up democracies in Iraq and Afghanistan. For the survival of a given democ-
acy, internal factors are primary and external factors, although important,
are generally secondary.

The third objection is that pro-democrats would have “naturally” over-
come difficulties of mobilization in defense of their democracy. The best
basis for that objection is that most Greek poleis were rather small. And if the
citizen population of a given polis was small enough, each citizen might gain
knowledge of both the nature and intensity of each of his fellow citizens’ po-
itical preferences simply from everyday interpersonal interactions. If he
knew from such interactions that a majority of them are willing to fight to
defend the democracy and that everybody knows that, he likely would as-
sume greater risk in defending the democracy too: he would not wait for a
large number of other individuals to act before he does because he would
trust that a sufficient number of individuals would follow him.

This “natural solution” theory is reasonable, but its applicability should
not be overstated. Malcolm Gladwell has suggested that members of a com-
munity larger than about 150 active members cannot rely on interpersonal
relationships to solve problems that affect the community as a whole. Most
poleis (even small ones), however, had several times that number of citi-
zens. And mobilizing in response to a coup attempt is particularly danger-
ous: a person would not act unless he was fully confident that his fellow citi-
zens would risk their lives in defense of the democracy too. One might thus
conclude that something “artificial” (i.e., the use of some technology) would
have to be created to instill and maintain that trust.

Since the preceding three objections do not fully persuade, it remains rea-
sonable to suspect that democratic regimes persisted in the ancient Greek
world in large part because their supporters devised means to mobilize en

8 Meiggs (1972: 54–55) notes that the Athenians did not always insist that their allies be
democratically governed. Individual autocrats in Karia appear in the tribute lists: Meiggs cites ATL
i. 297 f (Κάρες ὧν Τύμνες ἄρχει). For this question, see now Brock (2009) and Robinson (2011:
188–200). The Athenians supported several tyrants in Eretria during the fourth century. See chap-
ter 2.
9 Gladwell (2000: chap. 5). Josiah Ober (2008: 84–90) addresses this issue and cites the im-
portant literature (including Gladwell).
10 A so-called Normalpolis (Ruschenbusch 1985) had a few hundred to several thousand citi-
zens and a territory of less than 100 square kilometers.
masse in response to a coup attempt. Some democratic regimes, it is true, might not have had motivated domestic opponents. Some might have been completely propped up by external powers. And the supporters of some democratic regimes might have been able to solve their coordination problems naturally. But, in general, the survival of a given democracy ultimately came down to the capability of domestic supporters to act in its defense. A fundamental question for historians of ancient Greek democracy thus should be, how did pro-democrats in the various democratically governed poleis ensure that they could mobilize in the event of a coup?

This book examines one peculiar, but apparently quite popular, means by which pro-democrats in ancient Greece facilitated large-scale mobilization in defense of their democracy: the promulgation of tyrant-killing legislation—the promulgation, that is, of laws and decrees that explicitly encouraged individuals to “kill a tyrant.”

The Athenians promulgated the earliest known tyrant-killing law—called the decree of Demophantos—in June 410, immediately after the democracy, which had been overthrown in the coup of the Four Hundred, had been re-established.\footnote{There are no known tyrant-killing laws that were promulgated prior to the decree of Demophantos (for a full discussion of which, see chapter 1). The Athenians, as noted immediately below in the introduction, promulgated an anti-tyranny law sometime in the Archaic period (\textit{Ath. Pol.} 16.10). But it did not explicitly call for the killing of a tyrant (and, in any case, it was an Athenian law). Also antecedent to the decree of Demophantos is the well-known decree from mid-fifth-century Miletos (\textit{ML} 43): it records the banishment of certain named individuals and explicitly incentivizes individuals to kill them. But that decree does not mention “tyrants,” and the incentives were for the assassination of named individuals, not of potential future revolutionaries.} That decree required all Athenians to swear an oath both to kill “whoever overthrows the democracy at Athens (δεῖ ἂν καταλέσῃ τὴν δημοκρατίαν τὴν Αθήνησι) or holds any office while the democracy is overthrown” and to reward anybody who kills such a man. In crafting the language of that oath, however, Demophantos included language found in an old Athenian anti-tyranny law (\textit{Ath. Pol.} 16.10)\footnote{The law reads, ἕαν τινες τυραννεῖν ἐπαναστᾷ ἢ τὸν τύραννον συγκαταστήσῃ and to treat “just like Harmodios and Aristogeiton” (καθάπερ Ἁρμόδιόν τε καὶ Ἀριστογείτονα) anyone who might die attempting to kill a tyrant.} and made specific reference to Harmodios and Aristogeiton, Athens’s two famous tyrannicides. Thus, in addition to a general pledge to kill participants of an anti-democratic coup and to reward anyone who kills such a man, all Athenians pledged both to kill “anyone who aims to rule tyrannically or helps to set up the tyrant” (ἐὰν τις τυραννεῖν ἐπαναστᾷ ἢ τὸν τύραννον συγκαταστήσῃ) and to treat “just like Harmodios and Aristogeiton” (καθάπερ Ἁρμόδιόν τε καὶ Ἀριστογείτονα) anyone who might die attempting to kill a tyrant.\footnote{Harmodios and Aristogeiton killed Hipparchos, the brother of the tyrant Hippias, in 514. See the “Oath of Demophantos” section in chapter 1.}
Three tyrant-killing laws, promulgated in three different cities, were almost certainly modeled off of the decree of Demophantos. The Eretrians ratified the earliest such law in 341, immediately after the Athenians overthrew a pro-Macedonian “tyranny” in that city and reestablished a democratic regime. The Athenians themselves passed another tyrant-killing law, called the law of Eukrates, in the spring of 336, nearly two years after Philip II defeated the Athenian-led coalition at the epoch-making battle of Chaironeia. And the third law comes from Ilion and dates to circa 280. It was likely promulgated shortly after Seleukos I defeated Lysimachos at the Battle of Kouroupe-dion and consequently assumed control of much of Asia Minor.

Each of these laws contains the generic language similar to that found in the decree of Demophantos: a reward is publicly offered to “whoever kills a tyrant” (ὅς ἃν ἀποκτείνηι τὸν τύραννον) and the primary concern articulated is the “overthrow of the democracy” (καταλύειν τὴν δημοκρατίαν).14

Inscribed tyrant-killing documents from two additional cities must be considered together with the aforementioned laws. From Eresos we have a dossier of inscribed texts concerning a trial, ordered by Alexander the Great, of two men who ruled Eresos as “tyrants” in 333. Significantly, the Eresians executed those tyrants and did so in accordance to their “law against tyrants” (ὁ νόμος ὁ κατὰ τῶν τυράννων). We do not have that law. But we know that they had one. And the dossier allows us to assess the significance of its application for the survival of the Eresian democracy. The second city is Erythrai, from which we have an inscribed decree of the dēmos, dating to the early Hellenistic period, that ordered the repairing and frequent crowning of their statue “of Philites the tyrant killer” (Φιλίτου τοῦ ἀποκτείναντος τὸν τύραννον); during an earlier oligarchy, the oligarchs had desecrated it. The document from Erythrai is not a law, but it publicly encourages tyrannicide and thus contains the defining element of an inscribed tyrant-killing law.15

The aforementioned tyrant-killing laws and decrees were thus promulgated in three distinct periods, each of which was important in the history of ancient Greek democracy. The first period, to which belongs the decree of Demophantos, is late-fifth-century Athens, when the viability of the democratic regime that governed that most important polis was severely threatened. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the viability of Greek democracy in the post–Peloponnesian War period was largely dependent on the viability of Athens’ democracy.16

The law from Eretria and Athens’ law of

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14 A full discussion of the Eretrian, Athenian (Eukrates), and Ilian law is found, respectively, in chapters 2, 3, and 6.
15 A full discussion of the texts from Eresos and Erythrai is found, respectively, in chapters 4 and 5.
16 The combination of several factors supports that assertion. First, Sparta—the sole hegemonic power in the Greek world immediately after the Peloponnesian War—sought to establish an oligarchic order in Hellas. See, for example, Diod. Sic. 14.10, 14.13. Second, the Athenian dunamei—
Eukrates, on the other hand, date to the end of the so-called Classical period, when the Athenians and their allies combated the attempts by Philip of Macedon and his supporters to subvert democratic regimes on the Greek mainland. And the final three texts—the dossier from Eresos, the “Philites stele” from Erythrai, and the Ilia tyrant-killing law—date to the early Hellenistic period, when, quite remarkably, Alexander and several of his successors encouraged the democratization of the Greek poleis in the eastern Aegean and western Asia Minor. There is reason to conclude that tyrant-killing legislation was much more popular than the six aforementioned texts might suggest. As we will see in chapter 4, Alexander the Great heavily promoted anti-tyranny and tyrannicide ideology during his conquest of western Asia Minor: he ordered the citizens of various cities to punish the leaders of their pro-Persian faction, whom he specifically referred to as “tyrants”; he issued an anti-tyranny proclamation to the Greek cities in 331, after the battle of Gaugamela; he publicly announced his intention to return to Athens the original statues of Harmodios and Aristogeiton that had been stolen by Xerxes’s forces in 479. And, as we will see in the conclusion to chapter 6, there is (often very fragmentary, to be sure) epigraphic evidence from several Asia Minor cities for anti-tyranny or tyrant-killing promulgations that date to the first several decades after Alexander’s conquest. Important examples come from Kalymna, Ephesos, Mylasa, Priene, Olbia, and (perhaps) Nisyros. Thus, when one also takes into consideration the inscriptions from Eresos, Erythrai, and Ilion, there is reason to suspect that the use of tyrant-killing legislation was particularly widespread in western Asia Minor during the earlier years of the Hellenistic period.

Another reason to conclude that tyrant-killing legislation was much more popular than it might originally appear is the fact that the literary sources indicate that tyrant killing was praised throughout the Greek world. Another large polis would have championed democracy, being a model and defender: Syracuse was governed by the “tyrant” Dionysos I (ruled 406–367), and Argos was not a very influential polis at this time. Fourth, democracy had been discredited: Athens, the paradigmatic example of democratic government, (foolishly) invaded Sicily with tragic results, lost the war with oligarchic Sparta, and suffered through a brutal stasis. It is reasonable to suppose, then, that it would take some time before a sufficient number of individuals in a given polis could convince their (non-thetic) citizens to adopt that form of politeia.

17 See the conclusion to chapter 4.
18 I am unaware of any overt criticism or problematizing of tyrant killing in ancient Greece on general, theoretical grounds. Aeschylus’s Oresteia, however, appears to come close: Orestes is clearly depicted as a tyrant killer (e.g., Cho. 973), yet he must stand trial and is barely acquitted (Eum. 752–753), and the furies, who drove Orestes to become a tyrant killer (i.e., to take the law into his own hands, as it were) are escorted beneath the earth (Eum. 1007, 1023) and largely ren-
thors as different as Aristotle (Pol. 1267a15–16), Xenophon (Hier. 4.5, cf. 6.11), Isokrates (8.143), and Polybios (2.56.15) state that general fact.\textsuperscript{19} And there are several particular cases that support such generalities. Xenophon, for example, wrote (Hell. 6.4.32) that the assassins of Jason of Pherai were honored in cities specifically because he was a potential tyrant. And the same author wrote (Hell. 7.3.10) that, in trial, one of the men involved in the successful conspiracy to kill Euphron, the tyrant of Sikyon, said that he could expect to receive praise for his act of tyrannicide. In addition, the people of Sikyon erected a statue of Aratos (Plut. Arat. 14), the famous opponent of tyrants, and, after he died, performed sacrifices annually on the day that he deposed the tyrant Nikokles (Plut. Arat. 53). The Achaeans dedicated in Delphi a statue of Philopoiomen that depicted him in the act of killing the tyrant Machanidas (Plut. Phil. 10.8; cf. Syll.\textsuperscript{3} 625).\textsuperscript{20} And the people of Syracuse buried Timoleon in their agora at public expense and held annual musical and athletic games “because he overthrew the tyrants” (Plut. Tim. 39).\textsuperscript{21}

Scholars have published important work on each of the known tyrant-killing laws and decrees. The work by epigraphers is particularly helpful. Simply put, as a result of their efforts, historians can both read what is on the extant portions of the stones and be reasonably confident about what was written on the lost portions. Epigraphic work on the dossier from Eresos and the laws from Ilion and Eretria is particularly impressive. Progress also has been made on the historical front. Many of the most important dates have been established, a task much more difficult than it might seem. And analyses of the documents’ historical contexts have provided a fine initial orientation for further, more extensive inquiries.

der inoperable in the future. It is possible that the recent and no doubt politically motivated assassination of Ephialtes convinced Aeschylus that unreflective praise of tyrant killing could actually harm the community. In addition, there are examples of certain individuals finding fault with specific anti-tyranny acts. For example, Aratos, a prominent leader of the Achaean League during the second half of the third century, was apparently tried in absentia before the Mantineians and fined for plotting to depose Aristippos, the tyrant of Argos (Plut. Arat. 25). And according to Plutarch (Tim. 5), some men in Korinth—those who “could not bear to live in a democracy”—were outraged by the assassination of Timophanes, the tyrant of Korinth.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} Aristotle: “accordingly high honors are awarded to one who kills a tyrant”; Xenophon: “cities heap honors on one who kills a tyrant”; Isokrates: “those who kill [tyrants] receive the highest rewards from their fellow citizens”; Polybios: “the killer of a traitor or tyrant everywhere receives honors and the front seat at festivals.”

\textsuperscript{20} Plutarch writes (Phil. 21.5) that, after he died, the citizens of many cities erected statues of Philopoiomen and gave him honors.

\textsuperscript{21} Another interesting indication of the widespread praise for tyrannicide: the people of Messana reportedly brought their children to a theater to witness the torture and execution of their tyrant Hippo (Plut. Tim. 34). One should also note that Aeneas Tacticus (10.16–17) apparently advised the public announcing of rewards that would be given to a tyrant killer. This can be taken as an indication of the popularity of tyrant-killing legislation. On the passage in Aeneas Tacticus, see Whitehead (1990: 125) and the note on pp. 58–59 of the Loeb edition.
As solid as the existing scholarship on tyrant-killing legislation is, it is still incomplete. For example, there is no comprehensive work that studies all of the relevant texts: most studies focus on a particular text, citing the others as parallels. The only attempt to study all tyrant-killing documents in a single monograph was published by Friedel in 1937. But two important inscriptions have been discovered since then (the Eretrian law and the law of Eukrates). And Friedel’s analysis of the other texts is rather brief. Much more fundamentally, scholars have not yet explained how the promulgation of a tyrant-killing law might actually have helped pro-democrats defend their regime against a coup d’état in practice—the obvious purpose of such legislation. Such an explanation is essential, of course, simply to understand the nature of this peculiar type of legislation. And that understanding might, in turn, provide important insights into both the nature of ancient Greek democracy and the basis of its persistence within the larger Greek world.

As already noted, this book’s overarching thesis is that pro-democrats promulgated tyrant-killing legislation in order to facilitate large-scale mobilization in response to an organized coup d’état. That is, it helped individuals work as a group and take advantage of their numerical superiority. I will fully explain the means by which the promulgation of such legislation achieved that end in chapter 1, when we examine the historical and sociopolitical context within which tyrant-killing law was invented in late-fifth-century Athens. But it will be helpful to anticipate the discussion here.

The promulgation of tyrant-killing law facilitated large-scale pro-democracy mobilization by accomplishing two complementary tasks. The first task was to widely publicize the pro-democrats’ commitment to defend their democratic regime in the event of a coup d’état. That demonstration of commitment would convince moderately risk-averse individuals that, should they defend the democracy, a sufficient number of individuals would follow them. Those moderately risk-averse individuals would thus require fewer people to act in defense of the democracy before they do. Such commitments, however, since they concern actions that are so dangerous, almost certainly would not be fully credible to everybody. But an individual who, before the promulgation of the law, would have required roughly 35 percent of the population to act in defense of the democracy before they thought it safe enough to act, might now—that is, after its promulgation—require only 30 percent of the population to act before he acts. And an individual who would have required 30 percent of the population to act before he did might now require only 25 percent of the population to act first. Again, the reason is that they believe that others will follow them.

The second task was to widely publicize the rewards that would be given to an exceptionally brave individual who struck the first blow in defense of the democracy—to the individual, that is, who “killed a tyrant.” Before the promulgation of the law, such an individual might have waited for “one per-
son” to defend the democracy before he thought it safe enough to do so. But, after the law’s ratification, he would conclude that the positive, selective incentives made it worth the risk to go first: like the moderately risk-averse individuals, he would believe that a sufficient number of people will follow him. And should such an individual “kill a tyrant,” another individual who, after the promulgation of the tyrant-killing law, was waiting for only “one person” to act before he did, would join in the defense of the democracy. And then someone who was waiting for “two people” to act would act, and so on. The first person’s act of “tyrannicide” would thus have initiated a pro-democratic revolutionary bandwagon; the pro-democrats would overwhelm their opponents.

The promulgation of tyrant-killing legislation thus, in theory, gave the pro-democrats a credible “second strike” capability. Anti-democrats might still conclude that they could stage a well-coordinated coup, perhaps killing prominent pro-democrats and quickly seizing control of the public space. But those anti-democrats also would have to factor into their calculus of decision the likelihood that pro-democrats, nonetheless, would be able to mobilize in defense of their democracy pursuant to a public act of tyrannicide. If the pro-democrats were able to mobilize (i.e., if the act of tyrannicide initiated a revolutionary bandwagon), the resulting conflict would be between two unequally sized factions: minority anti-democrats and majority democrats. And since anti-democrats would likely lose that battle, they might choose not to defect in the first place. The result of such a successful “unilateral deterrence” scenario would be a stable democracy.23

Each of the following six chapters presents a historical and sociopolitical analysis of one tyrant-killing enactment. As would be expected, the chapters exhibit a great deal of variety. The text of the decree of Demophantos and its context, for example, are quite different from the remarkably long law from Hellenistic Ilion. There are, however, three elements that are common to them all.

One common element is the identification of the “tyrannical” threat. It perhaps goes without saying, but pro-democrats promulgated tyrant-killing legislation because they believed that anti-democrats might stage a coup. But why did they feel threatened? Or, perhaps better, what, in particular, were they afraid of? The quantity and quality of evidence available to answer such questions vary from case to case. But, in each instance, it is important to consider both internal and external factors.

22 That the number of potential pro-democrats (i.e., the poor) in a given city was greater than the potential number of anti-democrats (i.e., the rich) is asserted and discussed by Aristotle (Pol. 1279b11–1280a6).
Another common element is an explanation of how the promulgation of the law or decree would have addressed the tyrannical threat. Generally speaking, the answer is the same for them all: namely, by facilitating large-scale mobilization in the event of a coup. (And, again, the means by which that end was accomplished is fully described in chapter 1.) But each of the texts is different from the others. Thus the task is to explain how the unique elements or provisions contributed to the workings of the law as a whole. To put it in the form of a question, how would the various unique elements of the law—and thus the law as a whole—alter the behavior of individuals to the advantage of the democratic regime?

A final common element is an assessment of the law or decree’s effectiveness. The operative question here is straightforward: Did the promulgation of the law or decree help the pro-democrats maintain control of their polis? That is, no doubt, a difficult question to answer: discerning cause is problematic in general, and there are no sources that assert that a particular tyrant-killing law or decree “worked.” But, unless one concludes that the promulgation of tyrant-killing legislation could never contribute to the defense of a democracy, it is worthwhile looking at the evidence in order to determine what sort of circumstantial case can be made.

And, finally, a few minor matters. All three letter dates are BCE. Except when noted otherwise, translations of Greek authors are from the most recent volume of the Loeb Classical Library. And with respect to the English spelling of Greek words, I have not been doctrinaire, but the spelling of any particular word is consistent throughout the book.