



Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece

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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