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Erythrae (Antiquity), Basilidai

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Erythrae (Antiquity), Basilidai

Summary :

The Basilidai were an oligarchic Ionian genos, which ruled in Erythrae sometime during the Archaic period. According to ancient sources, they were overthrown by the people, despite their sound administration.

DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH

Archaic period

MAIN ROLE

Oligarchic Ionian genos

1. Aristotle on Basilidai

According to Aristotle,¹ the oligarchic rule of the Basilidai (“τῆς τῶν Βασιλιδῶν ὀλιγαρχίας”) was overthrown by a resentful «demos» governed by a minority, despite their sound administration. This happened “in ancient times” (“ἐν τοῖς ἀρχαίοις χρόνοις”) sometime in the Archaic period. This unique mention of Basilidai in [Erythrae](#) is probably an excerpt of the vast Aristotelian political and historical theory which states that each Archaic polis has experienced successively monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, tyranny and, finally, democracy. In this case, one might suppose that Aristotle presented Erythrae as having passed directly from oligarchy to democracy.

2. Recent research

Toepffer and Carlier asserted that the Basilidai were members of a royal Ionian genos equivalent to the Codridai.² There is, however, no written testimony about that. With regard to this hypothesis, it is worth considering the following facts. Erythrae was founded by [Cnopus](#), an illegitimate son of Codrus.³ According to Hippias of Erythrae, quoted by Athenaeus,⁴ Cnopus was toppled in a sedition instigated by Ortyges and his hetairoi. Cnopus' brother killed the tyrants and liberated the city with the aid of its inhabitants.⁵ However, monarchy was not established in Erythrae, not to mention that there is no evidence for any descendant of Cnopus. Carlier himself correctly reminds us that no royal magistracy is known in classical Erythrae. We do not even know when and how the oligarchy of the Basilidai began, and no association between Cnopus and Basilidai or between the latter and a monarchy is attested.

3. The name of the genos

According to Aristotle, Basilidai formed an oligarchic government and despite their name, he does not allude to a royal lineage or to the exercise of royal rule. In fact, regarding the way words ending in -idai are usually constructed, "Basilidai" has probably nothing to do with the word basileus; on the contrary, there must have existed an ancestor named Basilos or more probably Basile at the head of the lineage. Indeed, we can convincingly connect the Basilidai in Erythrae with the Basile to whom a temenos in Athens was dedicated together with Codrus, father of Cnopus, and Neleus. This sanctuary is documented in an inscription of 418/7 BC and in Platon's *Charmides*.⁶ Thus, instead of equating them with some unattested descendants of Cnopus, I suggest that Basilidai in Erythrae have in fact some link with this Basile, like Neleidai in [Miletus](#) were associated with the name of Neleus.

1. Arist. *Pol* 5. 6,5, 1305b, 18-22.

2. *RE* 3.1 (1897) cols. 96-97, s.v. Basilidai (J. Toepffer). Carlier P., *La royauté en Grèce avant Alexandre* (Strasbourg 1984) p. 444-445.



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3. Str. 14. 633.
4. Hippias. Erythr. *FgrHist* 421 F1. Ath., *Deipnosophistai* 6. 74-75. 258 f-259 f.
5. Drews R., *Basileus. The Evidence for Kingship in Geometric Greece* (New Haven 1893) p. 15.
6. IG I³ 84. Pl. *Chrm.* 153 a.

Bibliography :

	Carlier P. , <i>La royauté en Grèce avant Alexandre</i> , Strasbourg 1984
	Drews R. , <i>Basileus. The Evidence for Kingship in Geometric Greece</i> , New Haven 1893
	Toepffer J. , "Basilidai", <i>RE III.1</i> , 1897, 96-97

Glossary :

	tyrant, the
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The initial meaning of the term was the leading archon of a noble origin. Later on he was the usurper of rightful power and the one who was ruling in an absolute way, aiming ostensibly to the welfare of his people.

SOURCES

Aristotle, *Politics*, 5. 6-5, 1305b, 18-22

Strabo, *Geography*, 14.633

Athenaios, *Deipnosophistai*, 6. 74-75. 258 f-259 f.