



THE MEANING OF *ACOSMIA* IN ARISTOTLE, *POLITICS* II, 1272b1-16

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Recibido: 16.05.2018 - Aceptado: 30.07.2018

RESUMEN

La palabra griega *acosmia*, en oposición a *cosmos*, se refiere al desorden y a la mala conducta a nivel físico, moral o social. En *Política* de Aristóteles II, 1272b1-16, la palabra *acosmia* es usada en la descripción de las instituciones cretenses. En este contexto particular, se han dado interpretaciones contrapuestas para el término *acosmia*, en la medida en que *Cosmos* es también un título de magistrado en Creta. Examinaré aquí las cuestiones filológicas y filosóficas planteadas por este uso puntual de “*acosmia*”.

Palabras clave: *Acosmia*, *anarchia*, vacío de poder, desorden, *Cosmi*.

ABSTRACT

The Greek word *acosmia*, in opposition to *cosmos*, refers to disorder and bad behavior, on a physical, moral or social level. In the *Politics* of Aristotle II, 1272b1-16, the word *acosmia* is used in the description of Cretan institutions. In this particular context, conflicting interpretations have been given of the term *acosmia*, as *cosmos* is also a title of magistrate in Crete. I will examine here the philological and philosophical issues raised by this particular use of “*acosmia*”.

Keywords: *Acosmia*, *anarchia*, power-vacuum, disorder, *Cosmi*.

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INTRODUCTION

Book II of Aristotle's *Politics* is devoted to the critical examination of constitutions considered as the best ones. After having examined the constitution of Sparta in Chapter IX, Aristotle presents the Cretan constitution in Chapter X. He correlates and compares the institutions of the two regimes. Thus he equates the ephors in Sparta and the *Cosmi* in Crete. However, Aristotle estimates that the institution of the *Cosmi* is inferior to the one of the ephors. Indeed, as he indicates, all citizens in Sparta are eligible to this office. Therefore, the people participate in supreme power and wish to maintain the constitution² whereas in Crete only a few families have a right to lay claim to the office of *Cosmi*, so the people are excluded from power. All the more since the Elders³ forming the Council (βουλή) are chosen only among those who have been *Cosmi*.⁴ The oligarchic nature of this institution makes the office extremely unstable.⁵ The explanatory passage that follows raises important philological problems. I was led to examine it while studying the phenomenon of *anarchia* (ἀναρχία, *anarchy*)⁶ in its institutional meaning, that is, the vacancy of the office of *archon*, which is attested in Athens and Thasos.⁷ Indeed, Aristotle uses the term *a-cosmia* (ἀκοσμία⁸) that may refer, on the model of *an-archia* (ἀν-αρχία), to the vacancy of the office of *Cosmos*.⁹

13. Ἦν δὲ ποιῶνται τῆς ἀμαρτίας ταύτης ἰατρείαν, ἄτοπος καὶ οὐ πολιτικὴ ἀλλὰ δυναστευτικὴ· πολλάκις γὰρ ἐκβάλλουσι συστάντες τινὲς τοὺς κόσμους ἢ τῶν συναρχόντων αὐτῶν ἢ τῶν ἰδιωτῶν·

² Aristotle, *Politics*, II 10, 1272a31-33, cf. II 9 21, 1270b20.

³ Aristotle, *Politics*, II 10, 1272a35-39.

⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, II 10, 1272a33-35.

⁵ On the magistracy of *Cosmi*, cf. Willetts 1955, 1967; Perlman 1992, 2002; Link 1994, 2003; Gehrke 1997; Ruzé 1997; Papakonstantinou 2002; Guizzi 2005; Chaniotis 2005.

⁶ My PhD dissertation completed in Paris IV Sorbonne University deals with anarchy in Ancient Greece from Archaic to Hellenistic period ("L'anarchie en Grèce ancienne").

⁷ Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution*, XIII, 1-2, Xenophon, *Hellenics*, II, 3, 1-2, Pouilloux 1954, p.263-268.

⁸ LSJ: "disorder, extravagance, excess, disorderliness, absence of *kosmos*, chaos, abeyance of *kosmoi*".

⁹ This particular meaning, nowhere else attested, has been generally adopted from the 19th century onwards but rarely specifically commented: Bernays 1872, p.115 ("die Suspension der Kosmenbehörde"), Newman 1887 ("an abeyance of the magistracy of the *Cosmi*"), Aubonnet 1960 ("la suspension de cette magistrature"), Tricot 1962 ("la vacance de la charge de *cosme*"), Pellegrin 1990 ("la suspension de la magistrature des *cosmes*"), Curnis & Pezzoli 2012 ("la sospensione della carica dei *cosmi*").

ἔξεστι δὲ καὶ μεταξύ τοῖς κόσμοις ἀπειπεῖν τὴν ἀρχήν· ταῦτα δὴ πάντα βέλτιον γίνεσθαι κατὰ νόμον ἢ κατ' ἀνθρώπων βούλησιν· οὐ γὰρ ἀσφαλῆς ὁ κανὼν. 14. Πάντων δὲ φαυλότατον τὸ τῆς ἀκοσμίας τῶν δυνατῶν, ἣν καθιστᾶσι πολλάκις ὅταν μὴ δίκας βούλωνται δοῦναι. ἢ καὶ δῆλον ὡς ἔχει τι πολιτείας ἢ τάξις, ἀλλ' οὐ πολιτεία ἐστὶν ἀλλὰ δυναστεία μᾶλλον. Εἰώθασι δὲ διαλαμβάνοντες τὸν δῆμον καὶ τοὺς φίλους μοναρχίαν ποιεῖν καὶ στασιάζειν καὶ μάχεσθαι πρὸς ἀλλήλους· 15. καίτοι τί διαφέρει τὸ τοιοῦτον ἢ διατίνος χρόνου μηκέτι πόλιν εἶναι τὴν τοιαύτην, ἀλλὰ λύεσθαι τὴν πολιτικὴν κοινωνίαν ; ἔστι δ' ἐπικίνδυνος οὕτως ἔχουσα πόλις, τῶν βουλομένων ἐπιτίθεσθαι καὶ δυναμένων.

Aristotle, *Politics*, II, 1272b1-16¹⁰

To begin with, I will present the various kinds of interruptions in the office tenure described first by Aristotle. Then I will examine the use of the term *acosmia* through referring in particular to the interpretations of the passage in Medieval and Renaissance translations and commentaries of Aristotle's *Politics*. Finally, I will conclude with the consequences of *acosmia* on the Cretan regime through replacing this passage within the overall perspective of Aristotle's work.

1. THE SUSPENSION OF THE OFFICE OF *COSMI*

The access to the office of *Cosmi* and consequently to the Council of Elders is restricted to a few prominent and ancient families thus concentrating a very great power in their hands. This very selective method of appointment is problematical. Aristotle regards it as an *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία, “error, mistake, defect”) and presents the surprising solutions – referred to as *iatreia* (ιατρεία, “remedy”) – that the Cretans adopt:

“Ἦν δὲ ποιοῦνται τῆς ἁμαρτίας ταύτης ἰατρείαν, ἄτοπος καὶ οὐ πολιτικὴ ἀλλὰ δυναστευτικὴ·

The remedy they give to this error is strange; it is not political but dynastic.

The “remedy” consists in the suspension of the power of the *Cosmi* in two forms: expulsion and resignation.

¹⁰ Aubonnet 1960. I give a personal translation of the text under examination throughout the article.

a. The first solution: expulsion

πολλάκις γὰρ ἐκβάλλουσι συστάντες τινὲς τοὺς κόσμους ἢ τῶν συναρχόντων αὐτῶν ἢ τῶν ἰδιωτῶν·

Indeed, often some of their colleagues themselves or some private individuals form a coalition and expel the *Cosmi*.

A conspiracy forces the *Cosmi* out of power. It is fomented by *Cosmi* in charge or private citizens who remove *Cosmi* from office by force, leaving, as it seems, the city without any *Cosmi*. This phenomenon could be the consequence of conflicts between prominent families who share the office and/or with the families which are excluded from it. A parallel can be established with a passage in Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution*, XIII, 1-2. Soon after the reforms of Solon, the eponymous archon Damasias is expelled by force after two years and two months in office (ἐξηλάθη βίᾳ τῆς ἀρχῆς).¹¹ The lot of the other archons is not indicated.

b. The second solution: resignation

ἔξεστι δὲ καὶ μεταξύ τοῖς κόσμοις ἀπειπεῖν τὴν ἀρχήν·

But it is also possible for the *Cosmi* to quit their office in the meantime.

In this case, the *Cosmi* abandon themselves their office during the term (ἀπειπεῖν τὴν ἀρχήν). The coordinating conjunction *de* (δέ) that can have a contrasting function and the adverb *metaxu* (μεταξύ) ("but in the meantime") suggest that *Cosmi* under pressure prefer to desist themselves before being chased away.

One may ask if resignation could be also a way for *Cosmi* to escape prosecution, payment of fine or accountability at the end of term. Nevertheless, it is not, in my opinion, Aristotle's perspective, because he emphasizes in particular the incorruptibility of these magistrates (1272a40). According to W. L. Newman,¹² resignation before the completion of the mandated term of office was not usually authorized in Greece. There are indeed only rare examples and it is difficult to determine if it was a forced dismissal or a voluntary resignation.

¹¹ Mathieu & Haussoullier 1985.

¹² Newman 1887, 357.

c. Aristotle's commentary

ταῦτα δὴ πάντα βέλτιον γίνεσθαι κατὰ νόμον ἢ κατ' ἀνθρώπων βούλησιν· οὐ γὰρ ἀσφαλῆς ὁ κανὼν.

Certainly, all this would better happen according to law than men's opinion. Indeed the rule is unsafe.

Both cases mentioned previously (ταῦτα δὴ πάντα) are, according to Aristotle, arbitrary (κατ' ἀνθρώπων βούλησιν) as opposed to law (κατὰ νόμον). Law is something sure and permanent whereas men's goodwill is uncertain and changeable. The principle (ὁ κανὼν) which consists in following men's opinion cannot be a law (a νόμος).

The commentary resumes to confirm it, after a factual illustration, the idea expressed in the introductory sentence that presented this remedy as *atopos* (ἄτοπος, "out of place, strange, extraordinary"), and *dynasteutikē* (δυναστευτική, "dynastic, tyrannical"), that is pertaining to the goodwill of the powerful and not relying on legality (οὐ πολιτική). Indeed, the departure of the *Cosmi* is not legally regulated and depends upon the goodwill of some individuals. Moreover, according to Aristotle, the office of magistrate is an obligation for those who deserve it: in his analysis of the Spartan regime, he indicates that the most deserving citizen must hold office, whether he wants it or not.¹³

Thus expulsion by force and voluntary resignation appear to be two remedies, which are not constitutional, to the excessively oligarchic method of appointment, by preventing the same individuals to keep a power too great for too long. But Aristotle doesn't stop there and presents a third phenomenon: the *acosmia*.

2. ACOSMIA : PHILOLOGICAL, TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION ISSUES

Πάντων δὲ φαυλότατον τὸ τῆς ἀκοσμίας τῶν δυνατῶν, ἣν καθιστᾶσι πολλάκις ὅταν μὴ δίκας βούλωνται δοῦναι.

The worst of all is the *acosmia* of the powerful that they establish often when they do not want to suffer punishment.

This is the text adopted by the majority of editors today¹⁴ but three main versions of this sentence have been transmitted in manuscripts related to

¹³ Aristotle, *Politics*, II, 1271a11-12: δεῖ γὰρ καὶ βουλόμενον καὶ μὴ βουλόμενον ἄρχειν τὸν ἄξιον τῆς ἀρχῆς. Cf. Plato, *Republic*, I, 347c, VII, 519c.

¹⁴ Bekker 1831, Newman 1887, Ross 1957, Aubonnet 1960, Dreizehnter 1970, Curnis & Pezzoli 2012.

variations on the term *tōn dūnatōn* (τῶν δυνατῶν) and its position, after *tēs acosmias* (τῆς ἀκοσμίας) or at the end of the sentence after *dounai* (δοῦναι).¹⁵

ABCDE, mg of P: Πάντων δὲ φαυλότατον τὸ τῆς ἀκοσμίας τῶν δυνατῶν ἦν καθιστᾶσι πολλάκις ὅταν μὴ δίκας βούλωνται δοῦναι.

MPS: Πάντων δὲ φαυλότατον τὸ τῆς ἀκοσμίας ἦν καθιστᾶσι πολλάκις ὅταν μὴ δίκας βούλωνται δοῦναι τῶν δυναστῶν.¹⁶

H: Πάντων δὲ φαυλότατον τὸ τῆς ἀκοσμίας ἦν καθιστᾶσι πολλάκις ὅταν μὴ δίκας βούλωνται δοῦναι τῶν δικαστῶν.

What is the meaning of *acosmia*? Is it another remedy or does Aristotle rephrase what he said previously? Why does he qualify this process as the worst? To give an answer to these questions, I studied the uses of the word *acosmia* in Greek literary sources and I traced the history of the interpretations of this passage through translations and commentaries made since the rediscovery of the *Politics* in the 13th century until the 17th century.¹⁷

a. *Acosmia as “disorder” or “misbehavior”*

On the one hand, *acosmia* has been understood as “disorder” or “misbehavior”. This interpretation prevailed from the 16th to the 19th century.

¹⁵ Two families of medieval manuscripts have been identified by editors, transmitting a text that was already presenting several variants since Antiquity. One family (Susemihl's Π²) contains various manuscripts among which the 14th century ms A (ca 1360/80) copied in Constantinople is probably the oldest (with 13th-15th (?) century ms B and 15th century mss C, D and E). The other family (Susemihl's Π¹) contains 3 Italian manuscripts (the older P (ca 1460/80) and the twin 15th century mss M and S). The ms H stands apart: it seems to show a state of the tradition preceding the division between the 2 main families which was relatively late. Cf. Dreizehnter 1962 and 1970, Besso & Curnis 2011, 3-55. NB: ms A Dreizehnter/Curnis = Q Aubonnet = P² Susemihl ; ms B Dreizehnter/Curnis = R Aubonnet = P³ Susemihl.

¹⁶ This word order is adopted by Susemihl 1894 and Goold 1932 with an emendation by Coray (οἱ ἄν instead of ὅταν): πάντων δὲ φαυλότατον τὸ τῆς ἀκοσμίας, ἦν καθιστᾶσι πολλάκις οἱ ἄν μὴ δίκας βούλωνται δοῦναι τῶν δυνατῶν. On favor of δυνατοί against δυνάσται, cf. Newman 1887, *ad loc.* The 13th century Latin translations of W. of Moerbeke (cf. *infra*) present the same word order as Π¹. Two translations attributed to W. of Moerbeke remain, one incomplete (Book I – II, 1273a30) dated 1260-1264 (G.i.) and a second one complete (G.). Following Besso & Curnis 2011, 36-37, G. and G.i. are correlated respectively to Π¹ and Π² at a moment when the differences between the two families were not as much marked as attested by manuscripts.

¹⁷ On the earliest translations of Aristotle's *Politics* and their role in Medieval and Renaissance thought, cf. Schmitt 1992, Lanza 2013, Schütrumpf 2014.

Jacques Le Fèvre d'Étaples, 1506	<i>Quia omnium deterrima turbatio : ipsorum potentum ab Cosmatus dignitate depositio...</i> ¹⁸
Joachim Périon, 1542	<i>Omnium autem vitiorum, nullum neque foedius neque deterius ea confusione...</i> ¹⁹
J. G. Sepúlveda, 1548	<i>Sed vincit omnem pravitatem ea rerum perturbatio...</i> ²⁰
Pietro Vettori, 1552	<i>Pessimum autem omnium est perturbatio reipublicae... perturbationem & confusionem omnium rerum...</i> ²¹
Denis Lambin, 1567	<i>Omnium aut remedium pessimum est magistratus huius amplissimi vacuitas totiusque reipublicae status perturbatio...</i> ²²
Louis Le Roy, 1568	<i>Mais le plus grand mal qui y soit, est le desordre...</i> ²³
J. Camerarius, 1581	<i>licentiam potentium</i> ²⁴
Antonio Montecatini, 1594	Translation: <i>Omnium vero pessimum illud est, quod ad perturbationem potentum attinet... Commentary: Peccatum omnium... deterrimum, est illa rerum civitatis, statusque reipublicae conturbatio, ac confusio [...] turbae illae potentum [...] perturbatio totius civitatis, statusque reipublicae [...] rerum civitatis, statusque reipublicae perturbationem. Vertere etiam possem immodestiam, ac petulantiam potentum, ex qua turbae nascuntur. Perturbationem autem potentum intellige, ab potentibus creatam, ut declarant verba sequentia [...] turbas movent...</i> ²⁵
Pierre de La Ramée, 1601	<i>Ex omnibus autem peccatis nullum deterius, neque foedius est ea reipub. perturbatione, quae à locupletibus & potentibus cum iudicia disturbant, excitatur.</i> ²⁶

¹⁸ *In hoc libro contenta: Politicorum [Aristotelis] libri octo; commentarii [Jacobi Fabri Stapulensis in eosdem]; Economicorum duo; Commentarii [Fabri]; Hecatonomia septem; Economiarum publicarum unus; Explanaciones Leonardi [Aretini] in Oeconomica duo, Parisiis, ex officina Simonis Colinaei, 1543.*

¹⁹ Aristotelis, *De republica, qui Politicorum dicuntur libri VIII, Joachimo Perionio Benedictino Cormoeriaceno interprete, editio tertia, Parisiis, ex typ. Thom. Richardi, 1557.*

²⁰ Aristotelis Stagiritae, *De Republica lib. VIII. Interprete et enarratore Jo. Genesisio Sepulveda Cordubensi, quibus iam adiecti sunt Kyriaci Strozae de Repub. lib. duo: videlicet, nonus et decimus, graece conscripti, nunc ab eodem Stroza latinitate donati. Coloniae Agrippinae, in officina Bireckmannica sumptibus Arnoldi Mylij, 1601.*

²¹ Petri Victorii, *Commentarii in VIII. Libros Aristotelis, De Optimo statu civitatis, Florentiae, in officina Iuntarum, Bernadi Filiorum, 1576.*

²² Aristotelis, *Politicorum libri octo ex Dion. Lambini et P. Victorii interpretationib. Puriss. Graecolatini, Theod. Zuingeri argumentis atque scholiis, tabulis quinetiam in tres priores libros illustrati: Victorii commentariis perpetuis declarati, Basileae, Eusebii Episcopii opera ac impensa, 1582.*

²³ *Les Politiques d'Aristote, traduites de Grec en François, par Loys Le Roy dit Regius, 22 décembre 1575, Michel de Vascosan.*

²⁴ Camerarius Joachim, *Politicorum et oeconomicorum Aristotelis: interpretationes et explicationes accuratae, Francofurti, apud Andrea Wechelium [1581].*

²⁵ Aristotelis, *Politicorum, hoc est civilium librorum, secundus, ab Antonio Montecatino in latinam linguam conversus, et partitionibus, resolutionibus, scholiis illustratus, Ferrariae, apud Benedictum Mammarellum, 1594.*

²⁶ Aristotelis, *Politica, a Petro Ramo Regio Professore latina facta, et Dialecticis rerum summis breviter exposita & illustrata. Cum indice rerum & verborum memorabilium locupletis, Francofurti, typis Weckelianis, apud Claudium Marnium, 1601.*

Hubert Von Giffen, 1608	<i>Omnium vero vitiosissima est potentum petulantia... potentiorum impotentia & petulantia...</i> ²⁷
Heinsius, 1621	<i>Omnium vero vitiosissima est potentum petulantia... licentia potentum... omnia miscere ibi solent ac confundere...</i> ²⁸
Conringius, 1656	<i>Pessimum autem omnium est perturbatio reipublicae...</i> ²⁹

Firstly, *acosmia* is translated with the notions of “disorder, confusion”, expressed in Latin with the words *confusio*, *perturbatio*, *conturbatio* and *turbae*. This notion is introduced in the commentary of Jacques Le Fèvre at the beginning of the 16th century with the term *turbatio*. It is then found constantly in Joachim Périon, Sepulveda, Vettori, Lambin, Louis Le Roy, Montecatini, Pierre de la Ramée, Heinsius and Conringius. One should note that the complement in the genitive of *perturbatio* or *confusio* is not the powerful but the entire state (*reipublicae*, *status reipublicae*) or the public affairs in general (*rerum*, *rerum civitatis*, *omnium rerum*), terms that are not in Aristotle’s original text.

Secondly, the term *acosmia* is understood with the notions of “licentiousness, intemperance, impudence, insolence, excess”, expressed by the Latin words *licentia*, *immodestia*, *petulantia* and *impotentia*, so many terms that designate moral vices of the powerful. This interpretation appears in the commentary of Joachim Camerarius at the end of the 16th century with the term *licentia*. It is taken up in Montecatini, Hubert von Giffen and Heinsius. In this interpretation, the complement in the genitive is *potentum*: it relates indeed to the misconduct of the powerful.

This interpretation is not opposing the first one, since the vices of the powerful are perceived as the cause of disorder in the *respublica*. It appears clearly in Montecatini’s commentary which reconciles the two interpretations: *immodestiam ac petulantiam potentum, ex qua turbae nascuntur*, “the excess and the insolence of the powerful that give birth to troubles”.

On the whole, these translations and commentaries are clearly moralizing. The phrase *pantōn de phaulotaton* (πάντων δὲ φαυλότατον) is most often understood, not as the worst of remedies referring to the term employed previously (Denis Lambin: *omnium remediorum pessimum*), but

²⁷ Oberti Giphanii, *Commentarii in Politicorum opus Aristotelis, post sat bene longam suppressionem, jam, boni publici gratia, primum in lucem editi*, Francofurti, impensis Lazari Zetzneri, 1608.

²⁸ Aristotelis, *Politicorum, Libri VIII, com perpetua Danielis Heinsii in omnes libros paraphrasi accedit accuratus rerum index*, Lugduni Batavorum, ex officina Elzeviriana, 1621.

²⁹ Aristotelis, *Politicorum libri superstites, editio nova cura Hermanni Conringii cum ejusdem Introductione & Emendationibus*, Helmestadii, Typis & sumptibus Henningi Mulieri, Academiae Typographi, 1656.

as the worst of all vices and all sins (*omnium vitiorum, peccatum omnium*). Sometimes the superlative *phaulotaton* is translated directly by *vitiosissima*.

How can we explain this choice of translation? The first explanation rests on the reference to ancient texts which are then rediscovered. In his commentary, Pietro Vettori supports his interpretation by referring to Aeschines' use of the term in *Against Ctesiphon*: the *acosmia* of the powerful must be understood as the misbehavior of orators disparaged by Aeschines. Their *acosmia* is characterized by their lack of *ratio* and *modestia*. The second explanation rests on the reference to their own time orienting their reading. Antonio Montecatini, for instance, explains the disorder of the powerful as one of the three ways that exist, in reference to his own time, to escape justice, the two others being trickery and corruption.

Is this interpretation actually corroborated by the uses of the term *acosmia* in Aristotle's time? The term *acosmia* formed with the negative prefix ἀ- and κόσμος can be defined above all in contrast to this last term that denotes "good order", in a material or moral sense (good behavior, discipline, propriety, decency, modesty).³⁰ A definition is given by Gorgias in the *captatio benevolentiae* of his *Encomium of Helen*:

Κόσμος πόλει μὲν εὐανδρία, σώματι δὲ κάλλος, ψυχῇ δὲ σοφία,
πράγματι δὲ ἀρετή, λόγῳ δὲ ἀλήθεια· τὰ δὲ ἐναντία τούτων
ἀκοσμία.

The right order for a city is being well-manned; for a body, beauty; for a soul, wisdom; for a deed, virtue; and for a speech, truth; the opposites of these are disorder.

Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, 1.1-3³¹

Correlatively, the concept of *acosmia* has a wide extension. It includes a broad range of moral defects. The examination of the term's occurrences³² shows two main uses in Aristotle's time. On the one hand, it designates, in a philosophical and cosmological use, the material disorder of elements, chaos as opposed to the harmonious order of elements in the universe.³³ On the other hand, it designates often, in the private or social sphere, with a moral

³⁰ Cf. Chantraine 1968, 570-571.

³¹ DK 82[76] B 11 (II, 288, 2-4).

³² The corpus under examination includes the 25 occurrences given by the TLG from the origins to the 1st century BC and the numerous occurrences in Plutarch's work (17 occurrences).

³³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 508a4, *Symposium*, 188b4 ; Plutarch, *Life of Dion*, 10, 2, *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, 1014b6, *De defectu oraculorum*, 430e5, *Quaestiones conviviales*, 646a1, *De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet*, 926e3.

dimension, the behavior of someone who doesn't stay in his place, who doesn't respect moral values and social rules, who is immoderate, excessive, outrageous, inordinate...³⁴ This is the meaning within which *acosmia* could be understood in our passage. Besides this unique occurrence of the substantive *acosmia* in Aristotle's work,³⁵ the verb *acosmō* (ἀκοσμέω-ῶ) is used in the *Athenian Constitution*, III 6, to designate the troublemakers, those who disrupt public order because of their disrespectful and bad behavior (τοὺς ἀκοσμοῦντας).³⁶ Later on, in Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Plutarch, the term designates often the disorder of a crowd (assembly, spectators or army) combining the material and moral dimensions, in a political and military context.³⁷

What are the limits of this interpretation? First, the syntactic structure doesn't allow a satisfactory translation (*acosmia* is constructed as direct object of *kathistasi* (καθιστάσι), "the misbehavior that they established"). What's more, the context leads to consider another meaning, the one of abeyance of *Cosmi*, which was the common understanding in Medieval time.

b. *Acosmia as vacancy of the office of Cosmi*

William of Moerbeke, ca 1260	Q.i.: <i>Omnium autem pessimum quod akomie, quam constituunt frequenter, cum non causas velint dare potentum / Q. : Omnium autem pessimum id quod Acosmiae quam constituunt frequenter, cum non sententias velint dare potentum.</i> ³⁸
Albertus Magnus, ca 1275	<i>Omnium autem pessimum Acosmiae, ab ἀ quod est sine, et κοσμία, quod est violenta cessatio Cosmorum quando scilicet cogebantur cedere [...] quando Cosmi, qui iudices sunt, nolunt dare sententias pro potentibus, et tunc conspirantes dejiciunt eos [...] <i>acosmia</i>, id est, cessatio potentatus Cosmorum...</i> ³⁹

³⁴ Sophocles quoted by Plutarch, *Conjugalia praecepta*, 26, 141e5; Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, v.317; Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, 169, 9 and 189, 8, *Against Ctesiphon*, 4, 7; Plutarch, *Life of Sertorius*, 26, 9, *Life of Antony*, 11, 4, *Consolatio ad uxorem*, 609e2; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, VII, 23, 3 and XVI, 4, 3; cf. also Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 54, 16, 3.

³⁵ I am not taking into account here the late treatises attributed to Aristotle.

³⁶ The participle is often used as noun to designate people disrespectful of moral or social order in the private or public sphere, cf. Plato, *Laws*, 764b6, 784d7, 785a2.

³⁷ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, I, 85, 1, VI, 34, 3, VI, 65, 3, VI, 66, 2, VII, 35, 4, VIII, 15, 2, IX, 53, 4, X, 41, 1, XX, 12, 3, *De Isocrate* 8, 7 and 9, 55; Plutarch, *Life of Cicero*, 13,4, *Life of Crassus*, 24, 4 and 27,7, *Life of Otho*, 13, 5, *Life of Galba*, 15, 3, *Life of Cato the Younger*, 63, 1, *Life of Coriolanus*, 18, 5.

³⁸ Aristoteles Latinus, *XXIX I Politica (libri I-II.11) Translatio prior imperfecta interprete Guillelmo de Moerbeka*, edidit Petrus Michaud-Quantin, Bruges-Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1961. Aristotelis, *Politicorum libri octo, cum vetusta translatione Guilelmi de Moerbeka. Recensuit Franciscus Susemihl. Accedunt variae lectiones Oeconomicorum*, Lipsiae, in aedibus Teubneri, 1872.

³⁹ B. Alberti Magni, ratisbonensis episcopi, ordinis praedicatorum, *Opera omnia, ex editione lugdunensi religiose castigata, cura ac labore Augusti Borgnet, Volume octavum*,

Thomas Aquinas, ca 1272	<i>cessatio principatus Cosmorum : interdicebant enim ad tempus omnino talem principatum : hoc autem dicit esse pessimum, quia non solum erat contra personas, sed contra totum officium vel principatum ex quo proveniebat multa utilitas civitati. de vacatione Cosmorum...</i> ⁴⁰
Nicole Oresme, ca 1372	<i>Et de toutes les ordenances que il ont ce est la tres plus malvese que celle que il appellent akosme, ce est a dire estre sans kosme. Et est cessacion du fait et de la juridiction que avoient ceulz qui sunt diz kosmoys. Et establissent tele chose quant il ne veullent pas que l'en donne sentences contre aucuns puissans hommes.</i> ⁴¹
Leonardo Bruni d'Arezzo, 1436-1438 ⁴²	<i>potentum depositio...potentium ab cosmatu depositio : quae saepe concitant, cum non sententias dare volunt</i>
Jacques Le Fèvre d'Étapes, 1506-1511 ⁴³	<i>Quia omnium deterrima turbatio : ipsorum potentum ab Cosmatus dignitate depositio...</i>

In the first Latin translation, in the 13th century, W. of Moerbeke, who translates word by word, transliterates the Greek term without clarifying its meaning. However from the first commentaries, the term was understood as referring to the vacancy of the office. The Greek word *acosmia* is explained by the Latin words *cessatio* and *vacatio*, in Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas and Nicole Oresme. In the new Latin translation by Leonardo Bruni in the 15th century, *acosmia* is translated into the term *depositio*, taken up by Jacques Le Fèvre.

The text commented by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas and translated by Nicole Oresme in French, is the Latin translation by W. of Moerbeke. The latter places the term *potentum* at the end of the sentence. Nevertheless, the powerful are understood as the subject of *constituunt*: the powerful cause the departure of the *Cosmi* when the latter don't want to

Politicorum Lib. VIII, Commentarii in octo libros politicorum Aristotelis, Parisiis, Apud Ludovicum Vivès, 1891.

⁴⁰ S. Thomae Aquinatis, *In libros Politicorum Aristotelis expositio*, cura et studio P. F. Raymundi M. Spiazzi, Taurini, Marietti, Romae, 1951. *Politica Leonardo Aretino interprete, cum commentariis Thomae de Aquino et conclusionibus Ludovici Valentiae*, Silber Eucharius imp., 1492. *Tomus quintus D. Thomae Aquinatis doctoris angelici, complectens expositionem, in decem libros Ethicorum, et in octo libros Politicorum Aristotelis*, 1570.

⁴¹ Oresme, *Le livre de politiques d'Aristote*, Paris, chez Antoine Vérard, 1489. *Maistre Nicole Oresme, Le Livre de politiques d'Aristote*, published from the text of the Avranches Manuscript 223, with a critical Introduction and Notes by Albert Douglas Menut, *TAPhS*, 60, 6, 1970. *Oresme's Livre de Politiques and the France of Charles V*, Susan M. Babbitt, *TAPhS*, 75, 1, 1985 (Chapter II « Oresme and the commentary tradition of the Politics », p.14-31).

⁴² Aristoteles Stagiritae, *Libri moralem totam philosophiam complectentes, tertium volumen*, Venetiis apud Iuntas, 1550.

⁴³ *In hoc libro contenta: Politicorum [Aristotelis] libri octo; commentarii [Jacobi Fabri Stapulensis in eosdem]; Economicorum duo; Commentarii [Fabri]; Hecatonomia septem; Economiarum publicarum unus; Explanationes Leonardi [Aretini] in Oeconomica duo*, Parisiis, ex officina Simonis Colinaei, 1543.

deliver judgments on their behalf. Nicole Oresme's commentary remains unspecified with the pronouns "ils" and "on": "they establish *acosmia* when they do not want judgments to be pronounced against the powerful".

From the translation of Leonardo Bruni onwards, *potentum* appears as the complement in the genitive of *acosmia*. Leonardo Bruni translates *potentium ab cosmatu depositio quae saepe concitant cum non sententias dare volunt* ("the deposition of the powerful from the office of *Cosmi* that they often cause when they do not want to issue judgments"). In this translation, the powerful are equated with the *Cosmi* and the meaning is ambiguous, leaning towards deposition (*depositio*) or resignation (*quae saepe concitant*).

However, this sense is progressively eclipsed by the one of disorder during the 16th century. It is only in the 19th century that it is reintroduced in Gottlob Schneider's edition of 1809. The latter establish a parallel between *acosmia* and *anarchia*. This interpretation is then adopted by translators up to our time.

What is this interpretation by the first commentators and translators based on? On the one hand, it relies on the morphological analysis and the immediate context in which *cosmos* (κόσμος) designates the magistrate. Thus, Albertus Magnus analyses the term : *ab á quod est sine, et κοσμία, quod est violenta cessatio Cosmorum*. This analysis is resumed in the next century in the French translation by Nicole Oresme (*akosme, ce est a dire estre sans kosme*). On the other hand, it is based upon the general meaning of the passage. The abeyance of the power of the *Cosmi* is explained by the formation of a coalition (*conspirantes*), the violent action of the powerful who forcibly evict the *Cosmi* (*dejiciunt*) and prevent them from holding office (*interdicebant, cogebantur cedere*), in accordance with the above. Indeed, as Aristotle enumerates different kinds of abeyance (the clause is coordinated by *de* (δέ) and the superlative *phaulotaton* (φαυλότατον) draws an axiological comparison with the previous cases), it seems preferable to understand *acosmia* on the model of *anarchia* with the institutional sense of office vacancy.

This use can be set alongside Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* XIII, 1, aforementioned. The Athenians didn't appoint an Archon twice. The phenomenon is described first with the clause *ou katestēsan archonta* (οὐ κατέστησαν ἄρχοντα, "they didn't appoint an Archon", 1.2), and then with the clause *anarchian epoiēsan* (ἀναρχίαν ἐποίησαν, "they made an *anarchia*", 1.3). These phrases find an echo with *tēs akosmias hēn kathistasi* (τῆς ἀκοσμίας ἣν καθιστᾶσι) in our passage.

It should be understood that the powerful, the noble Cretans who want to evade justice, establish *acosmia*, that is to say, suspend the office either by preventing the *Cosmi* from holding their office or by not proceeding to

their appointment, with the result that there is no office holder to fulfill its functions and the dispensation of justice is suspended.⁴⁴

From then on, what is the difference between *acosmia* and the two cases aforementioned? In my opinion, the three cases have as a consequence the abeyance of *Cosmi* and so the possibility to escape prosecution. But, as suggested by Thomas Aquinas, *non solum erat contra personas, sed contra totum officium, ex quo proveniebat multa utilitas civitati*, “it was not only against individuals, but against all the magistracy, which was highly beneficial to the political community”. In the third case, the very institution of the office of *Cosmi* is threatened. A part of the constitution is abolished giving free rein to arbitrariness and individual will. This distinctive feature is, in my opinion, the reason why Aristotle characterizes this third case as the worst and presents it as the proof that the Cretan constitution is not in its essence political but dynastic. Therefore, it is now necessary to consider the consequences of *acosmia* on the political regime.

3. THE CONSEQUENCES OF ACOSMIA

a. *The first consequence: the transformation of the regime's nature into a δυναστεία*

ἢ καὶ δῆλον ὡς ἔχει τι πολιτείας ἢ τάξις, ἀλλ'οὐ πολιτεία ἐστὶν ἀλλὰ δυναστεία μᾶλλον.

That shows also that the organization has something of a constitution but is not a constitution but rather a dynastic government.

The term *taxis* (τάξις) is used by Aristotle in the *Politics* to designate the organization of the different components of the city, but especially the organization of the *politeia* (πολιτεία)⁴⁵ itself, that is to say, the partition of citizens and the distribution of power.⁴⁶ It determines the *politeia*⁴⁷ and defines it as a democracy, an oligarchy or a monarchy...⁴⁸ This order is inseparable from law (*nomos*, νόμος), insofar as an organization is a law, a

⁴⁴ Schütrumpf's translation, “die Amtsgewalt der Kosmoi außer Kraft setzen” (Schütrumpf 1991, 42) may imply that the *Cosmi* are deprived of their power but stay in place, which is, in my view, not the case.

⁴⁵ On Aristotle's concept of *politeia*, cf. Schütrumpf 1991, p.342, Hansen 2013.

⁴⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a38, 1264b31; 1268a15; 1269a10; 1271b41; 1272a4; 1272b31; 1281b39; 1289a1; 1296a40; 1297b28; 1307b18; 1309b33; 1316b32; 1318b36; 1325a3; 1329b33; 1333b7.

⁴⁷ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1274b38, 1278b9, 1289a15, 1290a8, 1324a24, 1309b33, 1272b31.

⁴⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1265b26, 1273a21, 1273a27, 1294b21, 1298b5.

law is an organization and a good organization goes along with good laws,⁴⁹ knowing that laws must be established according to the kind of *politeia*.⁵⁰

The Cretan practice described by Aristotle is characterized from the beginning as *dunasteutikē* (δυναστευτική, I.1) and allows at the end to define the regime's nature as a *dunasteia* (δυναστεία, I.6),⁵¹ that is, the fourth and extreme form of oligarchy in Aristotle's classification, corresponding to the extreme form of democracy and the extreme form of monarchy, i.e. tyranny.⁵² Its distinctive feature is that power is concentrated into the hands of a minority of citizens whose great power is based on wealth and friendship relations, inherited and exercised independently of laws.⁵³ In several passages, Aristotle explains how a *dunasteia* is formed.⁵⁴ Two specific explanations tally with our passage. A *dunasteia* appears notably either when a small group of persons holds too much power⁵⁵ or when constitutional provisions are progressively repealed and a few individuals then govern arbitrarily.⁵⁶ Aristotle also indicates that this extreme form of oligarchy, whose causes of troubles and seditions are so numerous, is the most unstable and the most difficult to preserve (cf. below the third consequence).⁵⁷

According to Aristotle, the extreme forms of government, which are tyrannical regimes of private rule, lose their constitutional value⁵⁸ because power isn't based on law anymore but on the arbitrary will of the rulers (ὅπου γὰρ μὴ νόμοι ἄρχουσιν οὐκ ἔστι πολιτεία, "indeed where law has no authority, there is no constitution at all", IV 1292a32).⁵⁹ To avoid arbitrary power and personal domination, it is necessary that law rules, defining the distribution and exercise of power and being the condition of a true *politeia*. Extreme forms of regime lead to the dissolution of legally established powers and thereby defined and limited.⁶⁰ As a comparison, extreme democracy, which appears when the Assembly holds a despotic power, leads to the ruin of all offices (ὥστε καταλύονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἀρχαί, IV, 1292a 29-30), including not

⁴⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1287a18, 1326a30, 1269a32.

⁵⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1289a13-20.

⁵¹ Chantraine 1968, 301: this word family refers to a violent, arbitrary and unconstrained power. On the use of *δυναστεία* and *δυνατοί*, cf. Tricot 1962, p.150, Caire 2016, 55-57, 152-153.

⁵² Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1298a32.

⁵³ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, IV, 5, 1292b10, IV, 6, 1293a31.

⁵⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, V, 3, 1302b18, 1303a13, V, 8, 1308b8, V, 6, 1306a24, V, 7, 1307b18, V, 8, 1308a18.

⁵⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, V, 3, 1302b18, V 6 1306a15.

⁵⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, V, 7, 1307b18.

⁵⁷ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, VI, 6, 1320b31.

⁵⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, IV, 8, 1293b27-29.

⁵⁹ Cf. Newman 1887, 358-359, Schütrumpf 1991, 342, Curnis & Pezzoli 2012, 356.

⁶⁰ Cf. Curnis & Pezzoli 2012, 356 speaking about "il venir meno dei poteri legittimi, ovvero la legge e l'istituzione del cosmato".

only the power of magistrates but also the power of the Council and the power of laws.

In the Cretan regime, power is excessively concentrated in the hands of a few, being accountable to no one and following their goodwill rather than obeying the law. The officials legally appointed are very often deprived of their power and the office itself is often abolished by the powerful who then govern as masters. These practices are usual (εἰώθασι, πολλάκις repeated twice). They are therefore constitutive and characteristic of this regime and transform its nature.

The word *dunatōn* (δυνατῶν) echoes *dunasteia* (δυναστεία) and the odd phrasing *to tēs akosmias tōn dunatōn hēn kathistasi* (τὸ τῆς ἀκοσμίας τῶν δυνατῶν ἦν καθιστᾶσι) is as much striking as it expresses all the paradox of this constitution that is not one, where the powerful by “establishing” *acosmia*, prevent the lawful exercise of power by the *Cosmi* and thereby abolish the *politeia*.

b. The second consequence: the advent of μοναρχία and στάσις

Εἰώθασι δὲ διαλαμβάνοντες τὸν δῆμον καὶ τοὺς φίλους μοναρχίαν ποιεῖν καὶ στασιάζειν καὶ μάχεσθαι πρὸς ἀλλήλους.

It is their custom, by dividing the people and their friends, to establish a monarchy, to form factions and to fight the ones against the others.

Once the lawful government is abolished, the powerful divide the city and fight against each other. Here occurs another philological problem: the word *monarchia* (μοναρχία) of the manuscripts is sometimes replaced by the word *anarchia* (anarchy), as anarchy seems more compatible with the notions of division and civil war⁶¹. In my opinion, it is preferable to keep the text of the manuscripts.

⁶¹ This correction attributed to J. Bernays has been adopted by Susemihl 1894, Immisch 1909, Goold 1932, Ross 1957, Tricot 1962, Laurenti 1966, Pellegrin 1990, Robledo 2000. In favor of *anarchia* cf. Schütrumpf 1991, p.343: the establishing of a *monarchia* is contradictory with the idea that the *politeia* is abolished, moreover Aristotle doesn't usually use the verb *poien* to denote the establishing of a constitution. One may consider that Aristotle is not so much referring to *monarchia* as a constitution but to single-man powers and the “arbitrary despotism of the powerful families” (cf. Barker 1961 (“set up...as many monarchies”), Aubonnet 1960 (“susciter comme des monarchies”), Simpson 1998, p.123, Curnis & Pezzoli 2012, p.357), cf. Plato's *dunasteia* in *Laws*, III, 680b. Nevertheless Aristotle does not use a comparative term and “monarchy” is in the singular.

Besides the parallel established by Newman with the narrative of Herodotus about the advent of Peisistratos' tyranny in a situation of *stasis*,⁶² the Aristotelian context appears to be close, by its wording and idea, to the elegies of Theognis of Megara (6th century BC). At the beginning of book I, v.39-42 and 51-52,⁶³ Theognis expresses the fear, in a situation of *stasis*, of the advent of a tyrant, to straighten the situation (ἄνδρα εὐθυνητῆρα, v.39-40). The unfair and bad practices of the leaders (ἡγεμόνες, v.41) could ruin the city by engendering divisions into factions (στάσιές), murders among one's people (ἔμφυλοι φόνοι ἀνδρῶν), and monarchical powers (μύναρχοί).

When there is no more lawful established government, that is in a situation of *anarchia* or here of *acosmia*, it is the advent of a monarchical, authoritarian and arbitrary power that is feared. We can draw a parallel with Aeschylus in *The Eumenides* and his warnings against the double danger of *anarchia* and despotism when the laws are not obeyed,⁶⁴ or with Plato and his description of the transformation of democracy – presented as a regime of *anarchia*⁶⁵ – into tyranny in the *Republic*, VIII-IX.

c. *The last consequence of this practice: the dissolution of the political community*

καίτοι τί διαφέρει τὸ τοιοῦτον ἢ διὰ τινος χρόνου μηκέτι πόλιν εἶναι τὴν τοιαύτην, ἀλλὰ λύεσθαι τὴν πολιτικὴν κοινωνίαν; ἔστι δ' ἐπικίνδυνος οὕτως ἔχουσα πόλις, τῶν βουλομένων ἐπιτίθεσθαι καὶ δυναμένων.

However, how such a situation differs from the fact that for some time such a city doesn't exist anymore and the political community is dissolved? A city that stands in this way is in danger, because those who want to attack it also have the power to do it.

⁶² Newman 1887, p.359. One should note also that Aristotle establishes a close link between *dunasteia* and *monarchia*: when the powerful concentrate excessive power, fortune or friends, appears a *dunasteia* close to *monarchia* (IV, 1293a30-34) or even a *monarchia* (V, 1302b18). One can understand as well in a figurative way that the powerful impose their will as a monarch in the same way as the people in the extreme form of democracy govern as a monarch imposing its will without submitting to the law (IV 4 1292a11-17: ὁ δ' οὖν τοιοῦτος δῆμος, ἄτε μόναρχος ὢν, ζητεῖ μοναρχεῖν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἄρχεσθαι ὑπὸ νόμου, καὶ γίνεται δεσποτικός, *such a people, as being monarch, seeks to exercise monarchic rule through not being ruled by law and he becomes despotic*). In both cases, the law is abolished and the power becomes despotic; nevertheless in the case of the *dunasteia* it is more difficult to conceive a unity in comparison to the *demos* governing with one voice through decrees.

⁶³ Carrière 1975.

⁶⁴ Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, v.525-527, v.696-697.

⁶⁵ Plato, *Republic*, VIII, 558c3-7, 560d3-561a4, 562c9-562e5.

According to Aristotle, these periods, characterized by the *acosmia*, the tyrannical action of the powerful and the civil strife, equate with the annihilation of the city (μηκέτι πόλιν εἶναι) and the dissolution of the political community (λύεσθαι τὴν πολιτικὴν κοινωσίαν). Beyond the ruling class, it is the whole city as a political community that is destroyed. The city deprived of its *politeia* loses the bulwark of laws and magistrates ensuring their implementation⁶⁶ and becomes thereby extremely vulnerable, *dunamenōn* (δυναμένων) echoing in its turn *dunasteia* and *tōn dumatōn* (τῶν δυνατῶν) to designate the almighty power of brute, arbitrary and authoritarian force. Division and civil strife challenge the very idea of *koinōnia* (κοινωνία) uniting the citizens of the same city.

This consequence appears all the more worrying and serious as Aristotle defines from the beginning of his work the city or the political community⁶⁷ as the highest natural community aiming the supreme good.⁶⁸ It allows not only to “live” but to “live in a good way”,⁶⁹ that is to say, to achieve happiness,⁷⁰ by fulfilling one’s nature of “political animal”.⁷¹ Moreover, the function of the citizen that defines its virtue is to ensure the safety of the community, that is to say, of the *politeia*,⁷² and not to attack and annihilate it. Therefore a man who acts in such a way acts against his own nature.

CONCLUSION

Thus, after close examination, it seems to me that the meaning that should be given to *acosmia* in this passage by Aristotle is the one of “vacancy of the office of *Cosmi*”. However, the fact remains that, due to the word’s usual meaning, the notions of misbehavior, impropriety, licentiousness and disorder remain present in the spirit of the reader and enrich the reading of the passage at a second level. The threshold is soon crossed between the institutional meaning of “abeyance of *Cosmi*” and “disorder” or “disorderly conduct”, all the more as the *Cosmos* is precisely in charge of *cosmein* (κοσμεῖν), that is “to put in order”. The parallel with the word *anarchia* supports this reading on two different levels. Indeed its meaning oscillates in classical Greek sources between absence of government and disorder resulting from the absence of government, state of lawlessness.

Cretan *acosmia* is comparable to *anarchia* in the *Athenian Constitution*: both happen in a situation of division and fight for power between the

⁶⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, IV, 1289a18-20.

⁶⁷ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, II, 1, 1260b40.

⁶⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 1, 1252a1-7.

⁶⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 2, 1252b27-30.

⁷⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, VII, 8, 1328a35-1328b2.

⁷¹ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 2, 1253a1-5.

⁷² Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, III, 3, 1276b27-31.

powerful in an oligarchic regime. The main difference is that *anarchia* in Athens happens in an exceptional situation of crisis, whereas in Crete *acosmia* has become according to Aristotle an usual practice of the powerful so as to escape retribution, to dominate personally and to act according to their goodwill. Consequently, it corrupts the nature of the regime and leads ultimately to the dissolution of the political community and the temporary destruction of the city.

The text variants transmitted by the manuscripts may be a testimony of the difficulties of interpretation already raised by this passage in ancient time, in particular due to the uncommon use of the word *acosmia* in this sense. One can wonder whether this use was forged by Aristotle on the model of *anarchia* or whether the word was used in the Cretan cities that had *Cosmi* as magistrates, use for which, as far as I know, no trace remains.

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