

BOTTLES AND BATTLES

*The Rise and Fall of the Dionysian Mode of Cultural Production.
A Study in Political Anthropology and Institutions in Greece and Western
Europe.*

Bjørn Qviller.

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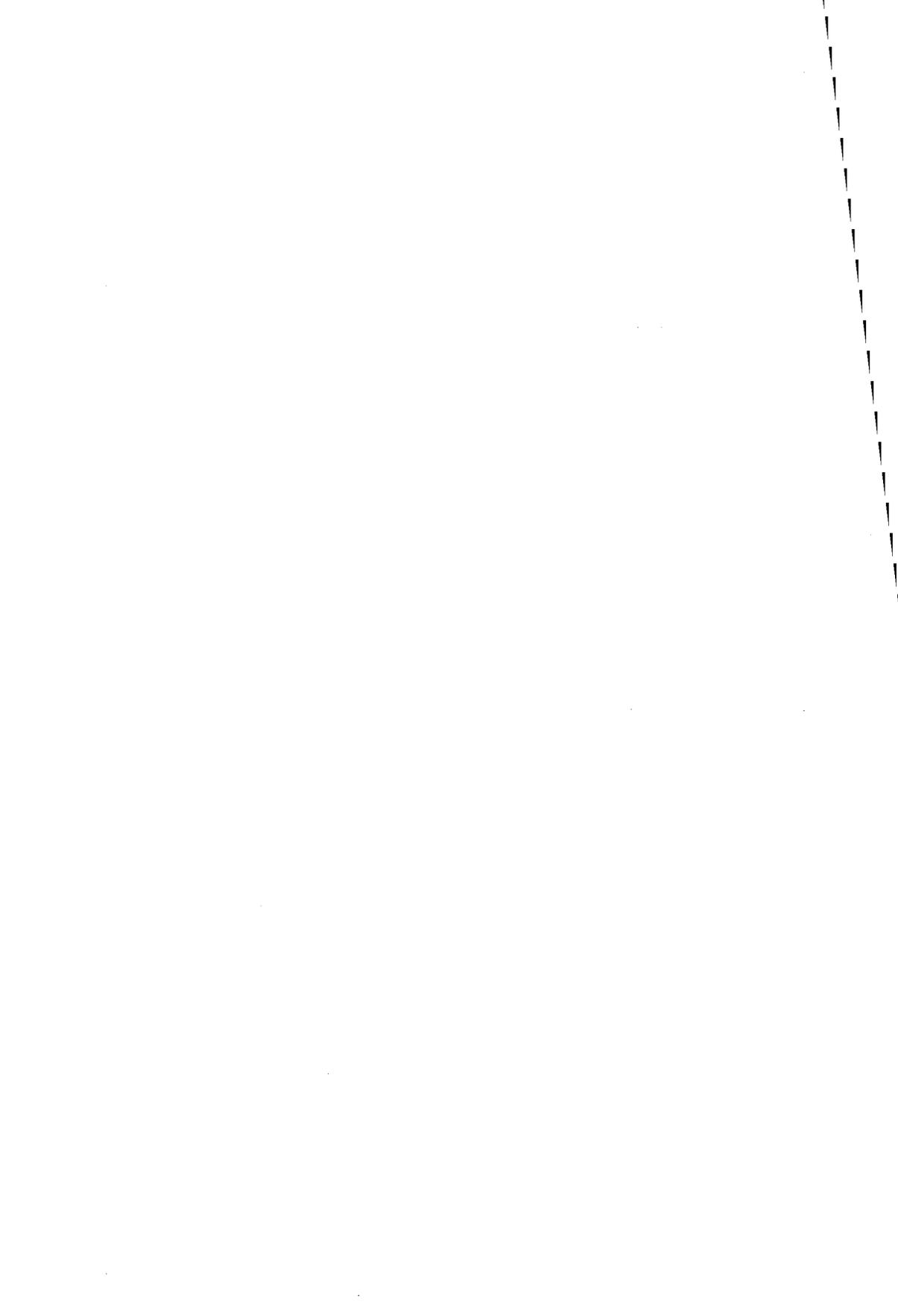
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To Atle and Wanda



Preface

This book outlines the tortuous history of a certain strand of socio-political thought and organization in Western civilization. The focus is on the way in which a view of men as sharing a common substance was replaced over 1500–2000 years with a view of men as independent and evil entities in isolation. The omnipresence of human wickedness could only be restrained by strong and repressive institutions. The book correlates the transition with the emergence of complex forms of political organization, ranging from chieftainship to bureaucratic centralization, tracing the interplay between civilizational anthropology and the legitimation of the state. The early view of men as social beings is found everywhere in the Old World. The ideology of the new socio-political order emerging in the Late Middle Ages in Western Europe has as its intellectual core the atomism of Democritus and Epicurus fused with the Manichæan anthropology of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin. I thank the professors Pamela Price, Ian Morris and Andrew Sherratt for assistance and comments. Kjersti Selnes gave valuable assistance. A special word of thanks to Bjørn Thommessen for a longlasting cooperation. He is co-author on the chapter on Machiavelli. The Norwegian Research Council through a grant made the publication of the book possible.

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B. Q.

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List of abbreviations

Classical Greek texts are referred by the same system as is used in the *Greek-English Lexicon* by Liddell and Scott. 9th Ed. 1940.

EHD = English historical documents. 1. Ed. David C. Douglas. 2.nd ed. Lond. 1979.

Gtl. = Law of the Gulathing. English translation in: *The Earliest Norwegian laws : being the Gulathing law and the Frostathing law* . Transl. from the Old Norwegian by Lawrence M. Larson. N.Y. 1935.

Heimskr. = *Heimskringla, or The lives of the Norse kings / by Snorre Sturlason.* Ed. with notes by Erling Monsen and transl. into English with the assistance of A.H. Smith. N.Y.1990.

DCD = Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*.

Migne. *PL.* = [Patrologia Latina] *Patrologiæ cursus completus : sive bibliotheca universalis, integra, uniformis, commoda, oeconomica omnium ss. patrum, doctorum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum ... / accurante J.-P. Migne.* Paris, 1844-1891.

Luther, *WA* = [Weimarausgabe] D. Martin Luthers Werke. - Kritische Gesamtausg. Weimar 1883- .

Introduction

Ruth Benedict, the famous anthropologist, once introduced the concepts “Apollonian” and “Dionysian” in her classification of types of culture. Marshall Sahlins discovered an “Aphrodisian mode of production” in Hawaii as a consequence of the social and economic aspects of sexual relations in Hawaiian society. The reason why I propose yet another mode of production is that fermented drinks were an important part of the identity of the peoples comprised by this inquiry. The Greeks used metaphors from drinking when they speculated about *cosmos*. Social life was in many pre-modern societies organized around and modeled on the drinking party that is the subject of the first part of the book. The “hero” of this book is the formal or informal gatherings of friends in which drinking plays a part. The attitudes towards friendship and various institutions that are manifestations of commensality exhibit great variations from antiquity till today. Whereas the ancient peoples took a positive attitude towards the symposia, the attitude of modern public opinion towards drinking is extremely negative. Friendship was publicly recognized as an important institution in early society, modern society considers friendship a private relationship that should not be allowed to play a political role. One may use this difference to illustrate the evolution of aspects of European civilization and political culture during the last 3000 years.

The chapters on the ancient symposia in this book deal mainly with evidence for political drinking from Archaic and Classical Greece. Their purpose is to construct a pattern of Greek symposia that have political importance. This pattern is a point of departure for an exposition of some sympotic features of evolutionary interest. That is because I am most familiar with the Greek material, but I have not attempted to write a full history of the Greek symposia. The reader is for this purpose referred to the rich book by Pauline Schmitt Pantel (1992), which is written in the functionalist tradition of French historical sociology. Neither have I intended to scrutinize in great detail the changing nature of Greek conviviality as such. My reason for dealing with the symposium is that one often comes across statements that the Greeks were unique in creating a *political* culture. With some qualifications

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this is correct. In order to examine such theories I have presented comparative evidence on this institution, taken mainly from Ancient Ireland and early Germanic societies. This is done in order to bring out the special features of some of the Greek symposia, which take on mainly political functions. I anticipate some of my conclusions by mentioning that it came as a surprise to me to find that everywhere in Early Europe the symposium is a basic institution.

My main intention in writing the book was to take an evolutionary view of intermediate collectivities in Europe to see what significance they had to political history in different periods. The second intention with this book is to deal with symposia that transcend the function of only providing the participants with a good social atmosphere. This means that Hellenistic and Roman symposia as a rule are left out of consideration. The historical narrative is taken up again in Late Antiquity as the symposia clashed with Augustinian Christianity. In the Early Middle Ages the guild or fraternity appears as a successor to the symposia. The revival of Augustinian theology culminating in the Reformation was utterly hostile to the guilds and so was the ideology of the modern state in Europe, Protestant and Catholic. The reason for this hostility is that the state changes its character. Until the Late Middle Ages the State had mainly ritual functions, whereas the modern state under the influence of Augustinian theology develops an emphasis on containment of sin, administration and payment of taxes. This means that the penal code is radically expanded, officially to prevent wicked actions, but also to provide the state with more income through the imposition of exorbitant fines. In case the victim of state justice was not able to pay, he was submitted to penal labor. As the authority of the state grew, friendship was to an increasing degree seen as an institution that was incompatible with the new political society. In this type of state the space left for intermediate collectivities promoting friendship was narrowed down to nothing.

Within ancient political practice and ancient moral philosophy four important functions are allocated to the symposia and commensality: One consists in the promotion of friendship, being an instrument for political and social integration. Another function is moral education. A third function is to provide the participants with a common substance that symbolically converts allies and friends into relatives in a ritual. Kinship in Greece and early Germanic states was narrowly defined. A kinship base would prove to be insufficient as a political platform. The symposium was a remedy for this insufficiency. The perhaps most manifest function of the symposium is to be a forum for the making of decisions. Aristotle writes in *Politics*: "As to common meals, all agree that this is a an institution advantageous to possess [...]. Common meals must include all citizens" (1330 a). They are considered of such an importance that he proposes to divide the land in a city-state into two parts, one subject to private possession, the other, the public one, to defray the cost of the common meals and the cult. This model is not utopian. Aristotle says that a similar system exists in Crete (1272 a).

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Aristotle is also concerned with another form expenditure, namely outlays to demonstrate one's honor and excellence. In a long catalogue of potentially honorable actions he mentions votive offerings, buildings and sacrifices, provisions for a chorus, the maintenance of a warship and even "entertaining the whole city at a banquet" (*EN* 1122 b). Political life thus appears as stimulus to production.

According to Plato, the purpose of the feast is to preserve the existing friendliness among its participants and to see it strengthened as a result of a party (*Lg.* 640). He continues by saying that the time we spend with friends over the wine is a considerable contribution to education (641). No one will dispute that in the symposia we have a means to test each other unrivalled in speed, reliability and low costs. It is the most useful aid to the art of statesmanship (650). No modern textbook in political science makes similar statements. The disappearance of the symposium as well as other cultural phenomena as topics for political theory is dealt with in the second main section of the book. In order to place the symposium in an historical perspective and contrast it with Renaissance political theory I have gone into the theories of Machiavelli and Hobbes in some detail. Whereas the first part of the book deals with the symposium and the state, the second part deals with the effects of theological discussions in the Late Middle Ages on political ideas with special reference to the role of symposia. Christian guilds are presented as an adaption of symposia to the dominant religion. The book is necessarily lopsided as the second part to a large extent deals with the political anthropology of Machiavelli and Hobbes. The reason for this is that the dominant political ideas from the Late Middle Ages onwards had a corrosive effect on the symposia. The reason why these two parts are not published in separate volumes is that in the first place I did not feel competent to continue a detailed study of symposia after the High Middle Ages, such a study would probably have been an even better contrast to the modern political theorists. Secondly, that I felt it worthwhile to illuminate the new features that entered the scene with the "Modern Project", to see what replaces the institutions of commensality and the symposia. As representatives of the new ways of political thinking I picked Machiavelli and Hobbes, as they are still regarded as sources of inspiration in both political science and historiography. As the symposia and other forms of commensality are only mentioned in a negative way by the new political theorists I feel convinced that the new system of political thinking is indicative of a new way of looking at human relations. Whereas the symposium established an implicit social contract, Hobbes's name is connected with an explicit contract theory of the state. The Modern Project has no use for symposia.

The reason for writing this book derived from a fact that is given little attention in the sources and in modern historiography. It appears obvious the networks growing out of a sympotic society produced social relations with special qualities. The Athenian democracy developed maritime loans, a form

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of credit which until then seems to be unique in the ancient world, as well a relatively sophisticated banking system. The creation of such institutions was made possible by the mutual trust that grew out of the sympotic relationships.

Later on, in the republican city-states in Medieval and Late Medieval Italy something similar happened again. The North Italian city-states were dominated by religious and economic guilds. They generated social relations dominated by trust that produced a moral climate in which economic credit expanded to an previously unknown degree. In contrast to the Athenian democracy, these guilds shaped an economic culture that still is important. The present North Italian industry and cooperatives modeled themselves on medieval organizational patterns when modern industry came to Italy in the 1850's.