

Pardons, Autarchy, Test

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 13 Jul 1998

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adam louis stephanides — 13 Jul 1998, 16:53

On Sun, 12 Jul 1998 mantis wrote:

A thousand pardons! I was confused.

The confusion was partly my fault; I should have been more explicit.

Your initial post of 9 Jul is entirely focused on how Valeria couldn't be regent and how Severian has abdicated. There is no positive model asserted, just a negation of the existing model.

My initial post asserted no positive model because, aside from believing that Severian abdicated, my reconstruction of events was the same as yours and raster's. And in my second post I didn't realize how I'd been misunderstood. Hopefully everything is now clear.

Having said this, I now feel obliged to again rush in where angels fear to tread. I have doubts--nothing more--both about whether it is really impossible for Valeria to be a legitimate Autarch, and about whether unmanning is the invariable penalty for failing the Test.

First Valeria's putative Autarchy. You and raster both say Valeria can't be Autarch, but for different reasons.

The funny thing is: you are as adamantly opposed to the apparently flippant use of the term "regent" as I am about the flippant use of the term "autarch" (divorcing title from Multiversal Mandate; hence "pseudo-autarch," since Valeria cannot be genuine autarch)!...

The autarchy was created/recognized by Yesod.

What you are saying, in essence, is that the Commonwealth is not fully sovereign, since the choice of its legitimate ruler does not lie entirely in its own hands. The alternative view, which I lean towards, is that the Commonwealth is fully sovereign, and that whoever is recognized by the "political nation" (in practice, the army) as Autarch is fully the Autarch, whether the Hierogrammates like it or not.

As far as I can tell, you base your view upon the facts that the Autarchy was created about the same time as Urth was condemned by the Hierogrammates (the end of Typhon's reign), that the old Autarch is said to be the Hierodules' puppet, and that both Severian and the old Autarch rely on the Hierodules for advice, and presumably for weaponry. I don't deny any of these points. I accept that the Hierogrammates undoubtedly played a major role in the establishment of the Autarchy, and that in the politics of the Commonwealth, the Hierodules are the Autarch's allies. The Autarch may even be de facto dependent upon the Hierodules' support; I take this to be the implication of the claim that he is the Hierodules' puppet, although I can't locate that claim in the text (although this would imply that they must be continuing to help Valeria, regardless of whether they think she's legitimate). But I don't see this as being incompatible with the de jure independence of the Commonwealth, in the sense I spoke of earlier.

There are a few points on my side, although I none of them are conclusive. There is the term

Autarch itself, which if taken literally implies that there are no external restraints on the Autarch's rule, either on or off Urth. There is the fact that neither the old Autarch or Malrubius are shown as mentioning any "pact" such as you describe in *_Citadel_*, although I grant that they were both pressed for time. Finally, Famulimus tells Severian "'We would not rob your race of your own rule'" (III, ch. 34). If Famulimus is not lying, this implies to me that the Commonwealth is indeed fully sovereign, although again this isn't definitive.

raster argued that, as long as Severian was still alive or if he'd been lost at sea, nobody could be a legitimate Autarch. It's not clear to me whether this is because a legitimate Autarch must eat his predecessor's brains, or simply that a legitimate Autarch must be chosen by his predecessor. If the former, it would seem that the Autarchy runs a grave risk of being permanently lost, either through the Autarch being captured by the enemy, or killed in battle or by assassination with the designated successor unable to arrive in time. (We don't know this hasn't happened; Severian is unsure whether his predecessors' memories stretch back to Ymar (Urth, ch. 41).

The latter is less of a problem, but it's still hard to see a political system surviving a thousand years with no provision to cover the contingency of a sovereign becoming insane, senile, or simply neglecting to name a successor until it's too late. My thinking here is also influenced by the analogy with the Byzantine Empire, which Wolfe has explicitly stated the Commonwealth was based on. Byzantine history provides numerous instances when the throne was not passed in an orderly fashion from one Emperor to his designated successor; in fact, it's notorious for it. Of course, Byzantine Emperors did not eat their predecessors' brains, either, so the analogy is inexact. Again I'm not claiming it's definitive, just suggestive.

Now to the Test:

The prize of success is the New Sun. The penalty for failure is a loss of ability to procreate

This is what Severian was told, but is it true? Appian was unmanned, but Severian later learns that this was done specifically so that Severian would succeed to the throne. This would not seem to apply to Ymar, so was he unmanned? I don't recall it ever being stated that he was, and, as mentioned above, Severian himself doesn't seem to remember. For that matter, had Severian failed the Test, would the Hierogrammates have gone through with the punishment? It would seem pointless, especially if Severian is correct that he is Urth's last chance.

A couple other questions about the Test while we're on the subject. We know Appian's Test was a put-up job. Was the same true of Ymar's? My guess would be yes. Also, was the refusal of all the Autarchs between Ymar and Appian to take the Test in part due to advice from the Hierodules? It seems suspicious that the test is taken by the minimum number of Autarchs "necessary": Ymar, the first Autarch, to set the precedent and to establish in the minds of the populace that an Autarch will eventually bring the New Sun; and Appian, so that Severian will remember Appian's Test (though why it's important for Severian to believe his Test will be what Appian's seemed to be is something else I'm not clear on).

(If you can find additional pointers towards "abdication of autarchs taking the Test"

So far all I have are Severian's statements that he "was" Autarch, and his references to reclaiming the Throne. I agree that the latter group of references are not definitive.

and/or "success at the Test means you lose the throne which you've already abdicated anyway," I'd be most interested in seeing them.)

This was an idea that came to me as I was writing my post, and I now think it's wrong. I had temporarily forgotten Severian's thoughts at the start of ch. 34, where he thinks the New Sun will come but not in his lifetime, and talks about reclaiming the throne. In the light of this, it seems clear that when Severian had said he would not return as Autarch if he succeeded, he had been thinking that if he succeeded, then Ushas would arrive as soon as he returned to Urth and there would be no more need for Autarchs. And when he spoke of being "permitted to reclaim the Phoenix Throne" he must have meant permitted by fate, or something of the sort.

--Adam