“The court of an Antigonid king presents no aspects of interest, and need not detain us.” So Tarn. Thus a Macedonian king of the Hellenistic period, like any Hellenistic king (or indeed any king), had guards in attendance (Antigonos Doson is meant to have presented himself before the people without bodyguards during an episode of unrest, as a special gesture of appeal); seeing him, like seeing any king, was controlled—by staff-wielding ushers, *rhabdouchoi*, who debarred a powerful high officer, Apelles, from seeing Philip V; the king had a retinue, a court, courtiers (*hoi peri ten aulen* in Polybios).

These institutions are indeed attested for all Hellenistic monarchies; however, this does not mean that they are devoid of interest. The operations of the court are central to the understanding of any Hellenistic monarchy, and indeed any political system based on the exercise of personal power. Court history has emerged as a subject in its own right. It studies the court from different angles: as the environment of interaction (the “court” of courtiers and king); as the workings of the apparatus of decision-making and governmentality (the “Court” of royal council, high officials, household military units, and so on); as the site of power display and

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2 Justin 28.3.11.

3 Polybios 5.26.10.

“stateliness,” so that events at court are representations and embodiments of this power. These issues have recently attracted sustained attention for the ancient world, for instance in the case of the Achaimenids, Alexander, or the Roman emperor. For the Antigonids, this sort of history can be documented especially through narrative literary sources (such as Polybios’ gripping, though often unreliable, account, preserved whole for the early years of Philip V, then in fragments and through Livy). These sources provide test-cases of life at court, showing all three aspects of court history in action.

One such detailed test-case is provided by the incident involving Apelles. When Apelles was debarred from seeing Philip V, this marked his loss of access, and social capital at court. Apelles’ march up to the king’s quarters, accompanied by officers and troops, on the assumption of immediate admission to see the king as was Apelles’ habit, demonstrated his status at court; his spectacular (“tragic,” in Polybios’ expression) entrance and reception by the elite of the Macedonian troops, and his progress up to the royal quarters, were in fact stage-managed, as a demonstration of power, by the commanders of various elite units, who also constituted a faction. Apelles’ rebuff was immediately followed by the hangers-on deserting him, Apelles’ solitary retreat to his own residence, and his exclusion from the inner circle of intimacy with the king. The incident (the beginning of the downfall of the faction) gives Polybios the occasion of a comparison of courtiers with pieces on a boardgame. The incident also shows the importance of the Court as a system which directly creates decisions and governmental actions—at stake behind the dark stories of conspiracy lie not just conflicts of personality, but probably broader issues of state policy about the choices to be made in the circumstances of the Social War. The conflict is made particularly delicate by the position of


7 R. M. Errington, “Philip V, Aratus, and the ‘Conspiracy of Apelles’,” *Historia* 16 (1967),