

# Archaeology and Anthropology

## ATHENS BEFORE 480BC: THE EMERGENCE OF A WEALTHY CIVIL SOCIETY

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This presentation will first sketch a major but hidden current historical problem, and then set out a possible route of reaching an answer to it. The problem, presented by literary sources that are scanty and, in many ways unreliable, is that of modelling the transformation of pre-classical Athens in the 6th century BCE from being a society labouring under serious social tensions to one that was wealthy and powerful enough to resist Persian invasion in the 490s and 480s and then to aim for primacy in the Aegean and in Greece. The route towards the answer is indirect. It has five components. One, to be described briefly, is archaeological, comprising the various excavations of the city and its surroundings, and especially that of the Acropolis of Athens in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The focus here will be on the mass of destroyed buildings and monuments and other debris that was cleared away after the Persian sack of the Acropolis in 480-479 BC in order to start afresh. The second component is largely art-historical. Again briefly, this will report two of the great collective scholarly achievements that used the mass as prime material evidence, first the establishment of a reliable chronology of Archaic-period sculpture in stone and bronze, and secondly the creation of a reliable system of classifying and dating many thousands of fragments of painted ceramic vessels that Athenian potters and vase-painters had created in the 6th and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC: both achievements being effectively complete by the 1950s. A third component is partly art-historical, partly epigraphical. This was

the creation of a reliable catalogue in 1949 for all the inscribed dedicatory monuments of the 7<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries that had been set up on the Acropolis, together with the scrupulous re-edition of all the relevant inscriptions in 1994. That re-edition in turn has allowed a fourth essential component to appear. Athens before 480 BC was unique in Greece for the extent to which its inhabitants, women as well as men, made their own and others' names known in public: on the dedicatory inscriptions, on gravestones, on painted ceramics, and on the 'votes' for ostracism that began in 487. Scattered and hard to find for years, all those names and many more from all periods of Athenian history have now been gathered together in the 21 volumes (1994-2012) of a biographical dictionary: and a parallel publication in active progress is listing attestations of personal names from all other regions of the Greek world. Finally, a fifth component, now in active preparation, will be a catalogue of early Athenian coinage that will give us a newly updated estimate of its bulk. These components – historical, archaeological, art-historical, epigraphic, onomastic, and numismatic -- can now be put together to create a far more detailed human, social, and economic portrait of Athenian society before 480 BC than has ever been possible until now. In particular, it will show how wealth gradually accrued far more widely than within the handful of seigneurial families known from the literary sources.

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