ATTIC INSCRIPTIONS: EDUCATION

TEACHERS' NOTES ON A-LEVEL CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

D. Democracy and the Athenians (H408/34)

While the evidence of inscriptions contributes greatly to the modern understanding of the workings Athenian democracy in the classical period, it says relatively little about some areas specified for study in the OCR A-level specifications: what we know about Solon, Cleisthenes, the development of democratic institutions in the fifth century BC, democratic ideals and critiques of democracy, for instance, is largely derived from our literary sources.

However, Athenian inscriptions are deeply relevant to study of ancient democracy: a list of inscriptions relevant to particular aspects can be found in section 6 of Attic Inscriptions Online Papers no 10. In order to get a full picture of the way that democracy worked in the classical period, we have to move beyond the fifth century and draw upon inscriptions of the fourth century and the Hellenistic period: thus, understanding the workings of fifth-century democracy can be an exercise in extrapolation. The attention of learners should be pointed to the fact that, strictly speaking, some of these inscriptions fall outside the prescribed period of the component. Students should always be encouraged to acknowledge the time period from which the evidence came from and what it can tell us in relation to the question posed.

One way of introducing students to ancient democracy and in particular the role of inscriptions in understanding democratic phenomena might be by reference to the account of a 'constitutional debate' told by the fifth-century BC Greek historian Herodotus (book 3 chapters 80-83). In this part of his work, Herodotus tells a story about a debate that he says went on in Persia (a monarchy, or kingship) in 522 BC between three conspirators about the best form of government for Persia to take. We cannot know whether the conspirators really made these arguments or whether the debate really took place (Herodotus appears sometimes re-tell stories that he heard from others). However, it is reasonable to suggest that the arguments put forward may have reflected debates and ideas that were current among Greeks when Herodotus was writing in the late fifth century BC.

Of the three conspirators, Otanes advocated a form of government featuring the 'rule of the many (*to plethos*)' which he described as *isonomia* ('equality before the law'); meanwhile Megabyzus suggested oligarchy (rule of the few); and Darius (who presently became the King of the Persians) made a case for *monarchia* (monarchy or kingship). It is perhaps significant that the term *demokratia* (democracy) does not appear in the debate. Herodotus uses this word elsewhere (at 4.137 and 6.43) and so it is plausible to think that his non-use of it in the debate of 522 BC betrays his own awareness that it was not current in that era. Nevertheless, Otanes' arguments for *isonomia* (equality before the law) highlighted three themes that are often associated with democratic governance: (a) **democratic accountability**; (b) **decision-making**

processes; (c) **appointment of officials by lot**. To these themes we may add a fourth that is extensively illustrated by inscriptions: (d) **citizenship**.

(a) **Democratic accountability**

Otanes argued that a benefit of a system featuring the 'rule of the many' was that office-holders were answerable (*hypeuthynos*) for their activities. 'Accountability' is a democratic concept that modern indirect democracies share with ancient Athenian direct democracy. In the UK system Ministers (including the Prime Minister!) are accountable to Parliament, and Members of Parliament accountable to their electors.

In democratic Athens, officials held office for a single year at a time. At the end of their office, they were subject to an examination of their conduct, known as *euthyna*. This scrutinised both their handling of public accounts and offered an opportunity for others to raise objections about their conduct. Inscriptional evidence of the first half of the fifth century BC demonstrates that this type of practice developed early on in the history of democracy: the ordinances of the deme Skambonidai, 475-450 BC (*AIUK* 4.1 (British Museum. Cult Regulations) no. 3: see above, **slide 25**, its context explained in more detail in the notes on Class Civ A-level Athenian Religion). This is an important early document of the history of accountability at Athens in that it lays obligations on the demarch and other officials of the deme in terms of accountability with respect both to expenditure on religious observance and a 'handing-over' of deme property 'in the presence of the auditor'. It does so, however, in a way that does not emphasise, as later deme inscriptions do, the democratic nature of the decision processes (on which, see below). For example, the heading states that the provisions were not 'decided by the demesmen', but are described instead as 'ordinances of the Skambonidai': the latter form of words has no implications at all that the decision-making process was democratic. This is interesting because the inscription might illustrate something that was believed by contemporaries about the Athenian democracy: that accountability of officials developed very early on in the history of democracy (perhaps even at the time of Solon, as Aristotle in his *Politics* (2.1274a15-18) believed) and possibly before the emergence of collective decision-making (on which see below, (b)). This is all discussed in more detail in Lambert's commentary in *AIUK* 4.1. Moreover, another inscription, a decree of the Attic deme Halai Aixonides of 368/7 BC (*IG* II^2 1174), demonstrates very vividly how the culture and processes of accountability continued to penetrate into the Attic demes in the fourth century BC: demarchs and treasurers of the deme were instructed to submit their accounts of receipts and expenses monthly and to deposit them into a box.

The notion of accountability surfaces in the context of honorific awards granted to office-holders: a frequent provision in Athenian decrees was that honours could not be awarded before an official in question has rendered their accounts (in other words, passed their *euthyna*). A good exercise on this topic in general would be to get students to search AIO for the word 'accounts' and to analyse the pages of references that it produces. This is a good way to get a sense of the different aspects of this concept.

There is another sense of 'accountability' into which inscriptions offer us a significant perspective: some historians, such as Charles Hedrick (*Hesperia*, 2000), have

explored the possibility that there is a link between the notion of accountability and the publication-on-stone of decrees of the Athenian assembly, emphasising the idea that the Athenians published their public documents 'so that all might know'. Other historians (such as Stephen Lambert) have advocated a different approach to this subject, emphasising that the Athenians selectively published decrees on stone, especially those with an honorific intent (e.g. the honours for King Euagoras of Salamis in Cyprus in 394/3 BC: **slide 28**) or which were relevant to the management of the Athenian empire (e.g. the Kleinias decree on tribute of 425/4 or later: **see below, slide 32**). Accordingly, the publication of decrees on stone was something intended to increase the value of an honorific award, aimed at managing collection of the tribute, or was even aimed at a divine audience. But at the same time we cannot rule out the possibility that there was an interest in accountability: leaving on a stone record the details of the person responsible for the proposing the decree, or even setting out detailed regulations so that they would be followed in the future.

Decrees were not the only kind of state document inscribed by the Athenians. During the Peloponnesian War, the Athenian state treasury under the administration of the *Hellenotamiai* ('Treasurers of the Greeks') started to receive payments (perhaps in the form of loans) from the treasuries of the goddess Athena in order to support the war effort. The records of these payments were made on stone and set up on the Athenian acropolis (e.g. the account of 415/14, which mentions monies supporting Athenian military activity in Melos and Sicily: **slide 29**), and some of them even took note of the interest accrued on loans. These inscriptions may be viewed as accounting-records or as records of the accountability of the magistrates who handled these sums of money: it was in the interest of these annually-appointed magistrates to create a public record of the money they had handled so as to avoid accusations of corruption. Such documents may have been cited at the *euthyna* (rendering of accounts) of magistrates at the end of a term of office. A similar principle may have applied when in 409/8 BC the Athenians re-started work on the Erechtheion on the acropolis (**slide 30**) and they ordered the managers of the project to survey the site and to write down an inscription giving precise details of the work that was remaining to be undertaken on the building.

At the same time, the fact that such documents were set up on the acropolis, a complex of shrines to the gods, reminds us that they may have been written up with an audience of the deities in mind: almost as if the Athenians were letting Athena know how much money had been loaned from her treasury to the state coffers of the Athenians. This may have been the case also with the Athenian habit of writing up on stone inscriptions documents relating to the payment of tribute: the Athenian Tribute Lists, of which a fragment is preserved at the British Museum, were stone slabs set up on the acropolis listing the 1/60th of tribute which was dedicated to the goddess Athena (**slide 31**).

(b) **The decision-making processes of the democratic Athenians**

Otanes stated that a feature of the 'rule of the many' was that 'all proposals were referred the collective' (*bouleumata de panta es to koinon anapherei*). This encapsulates what in modern terms we refer to as 'direct democracy'. It was very important in the ancient practice of democracy that the collective, i.e. the Assembly

(the *ekklesia*, often referred to in Athens as the people or *demos*), took all important decisions, and that the body that formulated proposals, i.e. the Council (*boule*), referred them all to the Assembly. Accordingly, decrees that took shape in the Council were referred to as 'probouleumatic'. One way to probe and illustrate this point in the context of *AIUK* is to invite students to study relevant sections of Stephen Lambert's *Attic Inscriptions in UK Collections* 4.2 (*British Museum: Decrees*: see **slide 32**), pages 7-8, and to search the pdf for 'Council' and 'prytany'. The key sections are sect. 2.2 'Council and Assembly' and sect. 2.7 'Content of decrees and developing Athenian policy agenda'. Important phenomena relating to decision-making are illustrated in:

(a) *AIUK* 4.2 no. 2, the 'Regulations for Erythrai', imposing a democratic council on Erythrai: see **slide 33**;
(b) *AIUK* 4.2 no. 8 'Honours for a man from Argos', an interesting case of a decree apparently passed by Council independently of Assembly: see **slide 34**;
(c) *AIUK* 4.2 no. 15 'Decrees honouring the prytany of Ptolemais': although this is a decree of the Hellenistic period, the AIUK commentary on this text gives a full account of the history and significance of the prytany decree in relation to the important democratic principle enunciated by Otanes at Hdt 3.80: see **slide 35**.

When the Athenians wrote down a decree on stone, it would include in its heading details about its enactment. The Kleinias decree (**slide 36**), for instance, says that it was enacted by the Athenian council and people, and that it was proposed by a person called Kleinias. No single inscription in a UK collection fully illustrates the decree-making process of the Athenians, which involved contributions from individuals, the council, and deliberation at the assembly. A short explanation can be found of the decree-making process in Stephen Lambert's *Attic Inscriptions in UK Collections* 4.2 (*British Museum: Decrees*: see **slide 32**), pages 7-8.

In the proxeny decree for Straton of Sidon (see above, **Slides 37, 38**), an amendment suggests that the main decree had been 'non-probouleumatic,' i.e. formulated in the Assembly, rather than being based on the Council's proposal. This shows that the decree was the subject of active debate in the Assembly rather than just being sent by the council for ratification. And the decision to write down the rider on stone suggests that an inscription reflected not only the content of the decree but offered also an account of how the Athenians reached a decision at the assembly.

(c) **Appointment of Officials by Lot**

Otanes' words on popular rule mention that officials were chosen by lottery (sortition). Appointment of officials by lot may seem to those in a western European democracy an odd way of appointing individuals to positions of responsibility, though interestingly juries are in the UK chosen by random selection. In Athens it was deployed to select jurors from a pool of volunteer adult citizen males; it was used also to select office-holders with the exception of a few offices with great responsibility (the generals, or *strategoi*, and offices with financial responsibility were selected by election). As Lambert and Blok have shown, sortition is a form of selection that was used in the archaic period for the appointment of priests within religious cults. Accordingly, it is likely that it was a process that enhanced the authority of the appointed official by demonstrating that the selection of individual(s) had been approved or overseen by a

deity or other supernatural power. Moreover, it was a form of selection that did not favour those who showed talent or ability or who possessed socio-economic privilege, and so in its civic Athenian setting may have had democratic implications.

Slides 39-45 outline the process used to select officials from pools of volunteers using a *kleroterion* (allotment machine) and *pinakion* (name-tag) and suggest a *pinakion*-making activity. **Slide 41** represents an Athenian *pinakion* now in the Manchester Museum. Some Athenian allotment machines which survive bear inscriptions: see *IG* II^3 4, 106, with Lambert's discussion, of which there is an image on the website of the Athenian Agora. Their use to select panels of jurors in the classical era of democracy is attested from literary sources (brief allusion at Aristophanes, *Assemblywomen* 681; description of the process at Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians*, 63-66). *Kleroteria* consist of *stelai* bearing columns of slots into which *pinakia* bearing the names of the candidates were inserted. To the left of the slots there ran a tube into which black and white cubes or balls were inserted. If a white ball issued from the bottom of the tube a candidate or row of candidates was selected, if a black ball they were not selected.

(d) **Citizenship**. As is well known, in 451 BC the Athenians enacted a law proposed by Pericles that said that only those with two parents who were Athenians (this is the usual interpretation of the *ex duoin astoin*, literally, 'from two city-parents') would be granted the privileges of citizenship. Robin Osborne suggests (in his article in *Past and Present*, 1997) that 'the law's insistence that citizens have Athenian mothers led to men advertising both their mothers and their wives in the only place where the public display of a respectable woman was acceptable: in the cemetery.' This may account for the depiction of harmonious family relations in Athenian funerary monuments of the classical period.

Slide 46 is a funerary stele for Melisto and Epigenes, c. 350 BC (*AIUK* 5 (Lyme Park) no. 2). This funerary monument (*stele*) for a husband and wife named Melisto and Epigenes was obtained by Thomas Legh in Athens in 1811-1812 and set in its present location above the fireplace of the library of Lyme Park in the context of the refurbishment of the House carried out under Legh's direction from 1814. The stele depicts a seated Melisto shaking hands with Epigenes, expressing the strong bond between them. This gesture, known as *dexiosis*, is common on Athenian funerary monuments, as is the similarly intimate gesture of unveiling (*anakalypsis*) which Melisto is making towards her husband. The figure in the background, probably representing an (unnamed) domestic slave, holds Melisto's jewellery box. Overall the monument seems designed to project an impression of affluence. The inscription names Epigenes' father and his deme (Eleusis, one of the villages of ancient Attica, in the NW of Athenian territory), and also Melisto's father and his deme (Oion). This information confirms the citizen status of the couple. We know from speeches delivered in court that monuments like this could be cited as evidence in cases of disputed inheritance.

Another of the most striking classical inscriptions of the classical period is that from Mount Stewart in Co. Down, though in this case the absence of demotic means that the citizen identity of the individuals cannot be demonstrated.

Slide 47. Mount Stewart Stele, ca. 400-350 BC. *AIUK* 13 (*Mount Stewart, County Down*), no. 1. Its inscription is lost at the left-hand side, reading ‘ -sios. Kleno. Phaino. Neophron. Onomantos’.

The only ancient Athenian inscription in Northern Ireland, it is known to have been in the London home of the Marquesses of Londonderry in the first half of the twentieth century, but the circumstances of its acquisition by the family are unknown.

This funerary monument commemorates five individuals. The character of the scene is typical of Classical Attic funerary monuments (late-5th to late-4th centuries BC), though it is unusual for as many as five figures to be depicted. The inscription labels the figures and appears upon the moulding running above their heads.

The figures form a group consisting perhaps of three generations of the same family. The seated male (-sios) and the standing female (Phaino, father and daughter?) are shaking hands (*dexiosis*), as are the older (Neophron) and younger (Onomantos) standing males (father and son?). This gesture signifying intimacy is common on Attic funerary monuments, though it is rare to find it depicted twice in the same scene. Onomantos is naked, a conventional indicator of youth and athletic virility. Although they are standing back-to-back the fact that the feet of Phaino and Neophron are touching suggests that they are husband and wife. A smaller female figure (Kleno, sister of the standing youth?) is carved in shallower relief than the other figures, and has a small bird perched on her raised left hand, another common, and poignant, motif on this type of monument, also usually associated with youth.

An attractive (but uncertain) restoration of the name of the seated man is [Ai]sios, a distinctive name borne by a known member of a propertied family connected with that of the orator Demosthenes. Aisios was the brother of Aphobos, Demosthenes' guardian, who allegedly mismanaged his property.

Attic funerary monuments had a specific function in terms of projecting claims to status in relation to inheritance of citizenship and property rights. It is tempting to speculate that the composition of our monument was intended to convey a specific message in this context, namely that Phaino was the sole heir (*epikleros*) of the oikos of -sios, who, lacking male offspring, may have betrothed his daughter to Neophron with a view to securing the passage of his property to his grandson, Onomantos. Perhaps Onomantos later died prematurely, which meant that the oikos passed to Kleno (perhaps the daughter of Phaino and Neophron) as the next *epikleros*: this would account for the addition of her figure in the space between -sios and Phaino. Such an emphasis on inheritance would seem appropriate for a family who may been involved in litigation about the property and inheritance of the father of the orator Demosthenes in the 360s.

The *tenon* (tongue) of the lower part of the object suggests that the relief may originally have been inserted in a base which may itself have been decorated and inscribed, e.g. with an epigram. The monument would probably originally have been one of a series of monuments in a family funerary enclosure (*peribolos*). The high quality of the relief suggests an affluent family. The stele can be dated by the style of its sculpture and lettering to ca. 400-350 BC.

Also of interest to this element of the specifications is the depiction of women in Athenian inscriptions: **examples of these are collected in the *Attic Inscriptions: Education* resources for GCSE Classical Civilisation**.

Questions to consider: can we say anything about the aspirations of this family from the way that it commemorated its members? Why would they have invested money in depicting this scene? Is it relevant to the theme of inheritance? Consider the representation of gender here and the balance in prominence between the male and female individuals.