

**ATTIC INSCRIPTIONS: EDUCATION**  
**TEACHERS' NOTES ON GCSE ANCIENT HISTORY**  
**(OCR J 198; for first assessment 2019)**

In this resource we discuss a number of inscriptions which are relevant to the **Depth Study on Athens in the Age of Pericles, 462–429 BC**. They are pertinent to the following topics: the workings of Athenian democracy, Pericles' foreign policy (including Delian League), cultural and religious life in the age of Pericles; Women (especially questions of citizenship; role and position of women in daily life and marriage).

This selection aims to address a wide range of aspects of the GCSE curriculum, covering culture, religion and military affairs. We try to draw upon inscriptions that derive chronologically from the 'Periclean' period of Athenian history. Other inscriptions that deal with Athenian foreign policy in the fifth century can be found in our [resources for A-level Ancient History](#); inscriptions relevant to the **role and position of women** and **Athenian democracy** can be found in our [resources for GCSE Classical Civilisation](#).

**Slide 3. Decree about Erythrai, c. 454-50 BC. British Museum 1816,0610.346**  
**([AIUK 4.2 \(British Museum Decrees\) no. 2](#))**

This inscription records a decree of the Athenian assembly concerning provisions for a member-state of the Delian League. It arranges for an Athenian garrison to be imposed upon the large and wealthy Ionian city of Erythrai, which is likely to have joined the Delian League shortly after its foundation in 478 BC. We cannot be sure of the exact date and context of this particular intervention, but it is placed in the final years of the 450s BC. It is one of a number of inscriptions in which the Athenian assembly is recorded as interfering in affairs of the city of Erythrai: [another inscribed Athenian decree, now lost, accounts for Athenian intervention after a revolt or civil upheaval and made provision for the establishment of a democratic council at Erythrai](#). The BM inscription may suggest upheaval of a similar nature and attests certainly to Athenian intervention in the 450s.

*Relevant to: Pericles' foreign policy (including the Delian League).*

*Question: how might we interpret Athenian intervention in allied city-states like Erythrai? Was it undertaken in support of the original principles of the Delian League or was it an infringement of independence?*

**Slide 4: Fragment of an Athenian Tribute List, 448/7 BC. British Museum 1863,0516.1 (IG I<sup>3</sup> 264).**

*Relevant to: Pericles' foreign policy (including the Delian League)*

During the period of the Delian League, confederacy members would pay a pre-determined amount of tribute to the Athenians. The sums of money were received by the Athenian officials known as the *Hellenotamiai* (Treasurers of the Greeks). One-sixtieth of the money was handed over to the treasury of the deity Athena. This one-sixtieth was recorded on stone inscriptions set up probably on the Acropolis. These lists, therefore, act essentially as accounts of offerings made to Athena and probably had as much sacred as accounting value. They are known as the Athenian Tribute Lists; however, given that they record only the portion of the tribute dedicated to Athena, this is in fact a misnomer.

The BM fragment pertains to the year 448/7 BC and records contributions by four communities to the Delian League. It is part of the 'first stone' (*lapis primus*), which at 3.8 m. high was among the most massive of Athenian inscriptions, covered the years 454/3 to 440/39 and was inscribed on four sides. Composed of 184 fragments, some aspects of the current reconstruction and that of the 73 fragments of the 'second stone' (439/8-432/1) have been questioned.

The high quality of the marble, with crystalline mica, is evident and may reflect significant financial investment in setting up these documents. However, the view of Miles (*Hesperia* 80, 2011, 657-75) is that the size of the stones reflects the possibility that they were blocks re-used from building projects, such as the Older Parthenon.

The names of the communities appear on other fragments not at the British Museum. In this fragment we can see only the Athenian acrophonic numbers that listed one-sixtieth sums received by Athena's treasury (see a separate set of [AIE slides for KS 3](#) explaining the acrophonic numerical system). The association of this fragment with another piece still in Greece has enabled scholars to associate the sums with particular groups. Note that 6 obols make up one drachma and 6000 drachmai make up one Talent. In order to calculate the total amount of tribute annually paid by these states each year, one has to multiply the amounts by 60 (see above). So in this case, we would expect that:

- the Chersonesioi have paid  $60 \times 300 = 1800$  drachmai = **3 Talents** per annum;
- the Pyrnioi and Neapolis each have paid  $60 \times 16 = 960$  drachmai **and**  $60 \times 4 = 240$  obols, making of **1000 drachmai**;
- the Kyllantioi have paid  $60 \times 200$  drachmai = **1200 drachmai = 2 Talents** per annum.

It seems that the ancient Athenians would have calculated the amount of tribute to be paid on the basis of the resources of the individual communities (sometimes changing the amounts to reflect other forms of imposition). So we might be able to get a sense on the relative resources and population size of the communities listed here.

Athenian tribute-paying allies were classified into five regional groups: Hellespontine, Ionian, Carian, Thracian and the Islands. Of the communities paying here, the Pyrnioi, the Chersonesioi and Kallyntioi belonged to the Carian district; the city of Neapolis belonged to the Hellespontine district.

The fragment is now in store at the BM.

*Questions for discussion: Why would Athenians write down the amount of tribute being dedicated to Athena? Think about the amount coming in (note that an artisan's wage was 1 drachma a day in this period): would this have transformed Athens' finances?*

**Slide 5. Sacrificial Calendar, 470-50 BC. [AIUK 4.1 \(Cult Provisions\) no. 2](#)**

*Relevant to: cultural and religious life of Periclean Athens.*

Ancient Athenians (and other Greeks) wrote down on stone slabs 'calendars' of sacrifices and religious celebrations offered to deities and heroes. This is one example from Athens: two others are held at the British Museum (see [Attic Inscriptions in UK Collections 4.1 \(Cult Provisions\) nos 1, 2 and 3](#) with [video](#)). Like many other examples of its type, the text lacks sufficient historical references for us to be able to date it precisely. But the shapes of the letters and the forms of spelling point to a date between about 470 and 450 BC.

The decision to write these details down on stone may reflect an ambition to formalise practice or it may reflect actual reform of practices. In the inscription we read of the type of sacrifices that would be offered to the different heroes and deities. The Plynteria was an important festival celebrated in the month of Thargelion every year during which the statue of Athena *Polias* was stripped of its robes so they could be washed. The offering to Hermes at lines 29-33 perhaps represented a kind of end-of-year party by youthful gymnasium users who supplied their own animal(s) for sacrifice and roasting on spits (*obeloi*).

The Athenian calendar of months was designed in origin primarily to regulate religious observance, and calendrical specifications feature prominently in inscriptions providing for religious rituals, including this one. The year started notionally or actually at the first new moon after the summer solstice. Months, all of which were named for religious festivals, had either 30 or 29 days. The sequence of the months was: Hekatombaion, Metageitnion, Boedromion, Pyanopsion, Maimakterion, Posideon, Gamelion, Anthesterion, Elaphebolion, Mounichion, Thargelion, Skirophorion.

Now in store at the British Museum. There is a video about this inscription and two other cult regulations at the British Museum on the [Youtube channel](#).

*Question: what do sacrificial calendars show us about ancient Athenian religion? Why would they write them down on stone?*

**Slide 6. Athenians renew their treaty with the Rhegians, 433/2 BC. British Museum 1816,0610.206 ([AIUK 4.2 \(British Museum Decrees\) no. 4](#))**

*Relevant to: Pericles' foreign policy (including the Delian League).*

This is an inscription which reveals how long-standing Athenian interests were in the West. Rhegion was a Greek city on the western side of the toe of Italy, opposite Sicily. It features for the first time in the literary evidence in connection with Athens in 427 BC, during the early stages of the Peloponnesian War. In that year Leontinoi, a Greek city in Sicily a little north of Syracuse, together with its allies, including Rhegion, asked Athens to intervene in a conflict between them and Syracuse and its local allies, who were aligned with Sparta. According to Thucydides 3.86, among Athens' reasons for

accepting the appeal of Leontinoi and her allies were a desire to interfere with the Peloponnesian supply of grain from this region, and to assess the potential for bringing Sicily under Athenian control, thus foreshadowing Athens' major expedition to Sicily in 415 BC, which was to end in disaster. In 427 BC Leontinoi and her allies appealed to Athens 'in accordance with an old alliance'. It seems that our inscription, was, or at least reflected, that 'old' alliance, or components of it.

The first 8 lines of this inscription – which consist of the heading and prescript which contain the details about the Athenian institutions of the decree – are inscribed over an erased portion of the stone. This seems to be because they renewed and updated a previous version of the treaty. So we learn that the alliance had been renewed in 433/2 BC: perhaps the original dated back to the 440s. Rather than inscribe the treaties afresh on that occasion, the old prescripts were replaced with new ones, dating to the time of the renewal, the same day for both inscriptions. Though the renewals of 433/2 are not mentioned by Thucydides or any other literary source, the timing suggests that they may have been connected with Athens' alliance that year with Corcyra, one of the contributory causes of the Peloponnesian War.

The first 8 lines give us insight into the process: it seems that, during the archonship of Apseudes (433/2 BC) envoys have come from Rhegion to request or discuss a renewal of the treaty. We can presume that he would have visited the Athenian Council where a proposal would have been formulated and then sent to the assembly. This appears to have been to renew the old alliance, which had originally been proposed by a certain Kallias. The Athenians swore an oath to be faithful allies of the Rhegians.

We don't know where the inscription was originally set up, but it is likely that it would have been set up on the Athenian acropolis, like many other treaties. The heading 'Gods' underlines the fact that the treaty was addressed to an audience both of humans and deities.

The inscription is kept in Gallery 78 (Classical Inscriptions) of the British Museum, but that is a room currently open only by appointment.

*Questions to consider: what does this tell us about Athenian relations and ambitions with the west in the Periclean period? Was the Sicilian Expedition of 415 as much of a sudden enterprise as Thucydides presents it in book 6?*

### **Slide 7. Erechtheion Accounts, 409/8 BC. British Museum 1785,0527.1 (IG I<sup>3</sup> 474)**

*Relevant to: cultural and religious life in the age of Pericles (including building project)*

This inscription is later than the Periclean period but it reflects building activity that had been initiated during the Periclean period. The Erechtheion is among the most famous buildings on the Athenian Acropolis: it was a temple which came to house the statue of Athena of the City and was the home to other cults, including those of Poseidon and Hephaistos. It is particularly well-known for its Caryatid porch. It is generally thought that the planning and construction of the Erechtheion began before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 431 BC. Work on it appears to have been abandoned during the Peloponnesian War, perhaps at the point when the Spartans occupied Dekeleia in 413 BC.

At a time when their financial resources and military confidence were reviving, the Athenians decided to renew work on the Erechtheion in 409/8 BC, beginning with a review of the current state of the building. This inscription, part of which has been in the British Museum since 1785, records in great detail the care that the Athenians took to assess the current state of the construction work and the organisation of the work that was to be carried out. It shows that the Athenians thought in detail about measurements and even the types of materials (e.g. the mention of 'Eleusinian' stone on a non-BM fragment) that would be used to complete the work. The interpretation of some architectural elements named here, e.g. the *maschaliaia*, is debated: the word may be linked to the Greek word for 'armpit', *maschale*, and so it may refer to a corner-stone.

It seems likely that the Athenians wrote these details down on stone as part of their system of accountability and so that the details would remain on public display as the work was undertaken and so that contractors could not claim for work that had already been completed.

The BM part of this stone tells us mostly about architectural details. But other parts of this inscription (fragments which are still in Greece) describe also the men who worked on the building: both Athenian citizens and non-Athenian residents of the city (metics) appear to have worked alongside one another as sculptors. Slaves play a role too, as masons or carpenters. The role of *architekton* (foreman) was taken by a citizen. The inscription also gives us information about the day-wage of 1 drachma paid to the architect, sawyers and labourers. Others were paid lower rates perhaps because they had worked less than a full day for a particular job.

The stone is on display in G19 of the British Museum.

*Questions for discussion: why was constructing sacred buildings so important to the Athenians? Why did they pay so much attention to minute detail? What does this say to us about Athenian inscribing habits and their relationship to democracy?*

### **Slide 8. Decree about temple building, 450-403 BC ([AIUK 4.2 \(British Museum. Decrees\) no. 6](#))**

*Relevant to: cultural and religious life in the age of Pericles*

In the fifth century BC, the Athenians passed decrees in their democratic assembly concerning a range of matters: legislative changes, declarations of war, alliances, adjustments to the tribute and also decrees about the physical development of the city. Sometimes they decided to write them up on stone slabs, often putting these on the Acropolis. Some of them survive until today.

Frustratingly, this decree of the late fifth century is very fragmentary. But enough of it remains for us to be able to decipher that it refers to an Athenian decree of the second half of the fifth century concerning building-work (line 11). It is not clear which building it relates to: possible candidates include the temple of Athena Nike, the Hephaisteion

and the Erechtheion. There are two mentions of the *architekton* (more like a modern foreman rather than designer) on the inscription: can you identify them? Look out for the letters APXITE[KTON].

The stone is on display in G19 of the British Museum.

*Question to consider: How legible are Athenian inscribed decrees? Who might have read them?*

### **Slide 9. Poem for the Athenians who fell at the Battle of Potidaia in 432 BC: BM 1816,0610.348**

Relevant to: *Pericles' foreign policy*

This inscription was written up to commemorate the Athenians who died fighting for the Athenians at Potidaia (in Chalkidike, Northern Greece) in 432 BC.

In 432 BC, just before the Peloponnesian War broke out, the Athenians were involved in hostilities at Potidaia (Thuc. 1.56-65) after that city, a tribute-paying member of the Delian League, revolted from Athens with the help of the Corinthians. Both Socrates and Alcibiades are known to have served at Potidaia (Plato, *Symposion* 219-20). Their intervention in that part of the Greek world was one of the 'causes of complaint' that the Peloponnesians raised in the run-up to the outbreak of war in 431 (Thuc. 1.66, 118, 139).

It is likely that this inscription was the base for a bigger monument. Thucydides says that the Athenians won an easy victory but that 150 Athenians died in the battle, including the general Kallias (Thuc. 1.63). Their names could have fitted on a single stone slab set upon this base (originally ca. 1.34 m long).

The inscription consists of 12 lines of verse which was made up of three four-line epigrams. The behaviour of the Potidaians, some of whom fled the battle, is contrasted with the honourable fate of the dead, who receive glory (*arete*) and brought good fame (*eukleia*) to their homeland (*patris*). The epigram of three elegiac poems is of high quality and remarkable both for its reflection of civic attitudes about the war dead and for the references to the separation of body and soul at death: *either* (the air) takes the souls of the dead whereas the earth takes their bodies.

The translated text here refers to the Athenians as 'the people of Erechtheus'. However this should be treated with caution: this part of the stone is broken away and the words have been restored by modern scholars. Nevertheless, the Athenians did sometimes refer to themselves in this way, referring to Erechtheus, one of their mythical kings, often thought to be the founder of their city.

*Topics of discussion: the significance of verse as a way of commemorating a group of soldiers. Significance of Potidaia in the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.*

**Slide 10. Funerary stele for Melisto and Epigenes, c. 350 BC ([AIUK 5 \(Lyme Park\) no. 2](#))**

*Relevant to: role and position of women; democracy*

This funerary monument (*stèle*) 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, in north-west Attica), 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.

While this inscription dates to a period after the Periclean period of GCSE study, it is important as it is reminiscent of the ideas about citizenship asserted in that the Citizenship Law of Pericles of 451/0 BC: this law stated that citizenship could be inherited only by those who could prove that they were the offspring of two citizen (*astoi*) parents. In the inscription, the deme names of both the male and female individuals proves that they were both citizens.

*Question to consider: what does an object like this suggest about the status of women in classical Athens?*