# Archives in Classical Athens: Some Observations

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Through their different interests and approaches, the three papers of this session have presented an overview of the main questions in the current scholarly debate on archives and archival practices in classical Greece. To some extent, we can be reproached for only focusing on Athens – archives and *corpora* of archival documents are also known from other cities of mainland Greece (notably Argos, where a recently discovered "archive" comprising 134 bronze tablets dated to the early fourth century is still unpublished)[1] and colonial areas such as Sicily and Magna Graecia[2] – but this Athenocentric bias will be partially compensated by the contributions of Laura Boffo and Kaja Harter. Athens nonetheless remains unique in that – differently from other *poleis* – the role and organization of archives can be placed, and contextualized, within the larger frame of the institutional and administrative system.

As it must have become apparent, compared to students of Ancient Mesopotamia Greek historians are placed in a more disadvantaged position for archi-

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1    *SEG* 54,427. Cf. Kritzas 2003-2004 and 2006.

2    On the lead tablets from Kamarina (*SEG* 42,846) see Cordano 1992; Dubois 2008, 103-14 (no. 46). For the archive of the Olympieion in Locri cf. Costabile 1992 (for a recent review of the questions posed by the tablets and of the newest bibliography cf. Costabile 2007, 251-307 [*SEG* 57,935]).

val documents were normally written on perishable materials (whitewashed wooden boards, waxed tablets, papyrus) and are consequently now lost. The few exceptions are represented by records on lead or bronze, such as the "archive of the Athenian cavalry", a group of over 600 lead tablets dumped in the area of the agora, which, according to the terminology employed by papyrologists (namely by Lucia Criscuolo in her paper), should however be technically defined a "dossier", since they were discarded and did not all belong to the same period (nor they were all found in the same place)[3]. The existence of archival documents must therefore be largely inferred from the literary sources, as shown by Christophe Pébarthe and Edward Harris, or be traced back from references to other documents not meant for display on stone, from headings, formulae or variations in formulaic language (or contents) in inscriptions, as discussed by Shimon Epstein in his paper, sometimes even from the way the text was laid out on the stone (for instance when the text is organized in columns, presumably after a papyrus model, as it frequently happens in archaic and classical legal texts from Crete)[4].

The difficulties students of Greek archives must overcome are aptly symbolised by the image we have chosen for the cover of this book. It is a reconstruction of the Metroon – the archive of the Athenian Council and Assembly located in the agora – in Hellenistic times[5]. It is frequently assumed, on the basis of a passage in Aristotle's *Constitution of the Athenians* (47,5), that this is what the public archive in the Metroon looked like also in the fourth century. Needless to say, Aristotle's passage has been subject to different interpretations and, as a result, the proposed reconstructions of the "archive" vary accordingly[6]. As is well known, archives are not archeologically traceable and the site of an ancient archive can normally be identified only when a concentration of seals is found[7]. There is, however, also a more subtle reason accounting for the "immaterial" substance of ancient Greek archives, and this is the lack of a centralised repository of documents which is a recurring feature in the way *polis* administration was organized. *Archeion*, the Greek word from which our modern term "archive" is derived, until the Hellenistic period indicated the office of a magistrate, *arche*, where, no doubt, records were kept, but did not primarily identify the building as *the* place where documents were publicly stored. In other words, in a Greek city each public official had his own archive and, as a principle, there were as many public archives as officials. The Metroon in Athens, where the records of the Council and the Assembly were stored, was to some extent the central archive

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3   Kroll 1977. Cf. Pébarthe 2006, 237-8.

4   Del Corso 2003, 32-5; Faraguna 2011, 14.

5   Valavanis 2002, 246-7 (figs. 10-11).

6   Sickinger 1999, 148 and 246 n. 50; Valavanis 2002, 249; Coqueugniot 2007; Papazarkadas 2011, 73-4.

7   Invernizzi 1996; Valavanis 2002, 236-44.

but this is true only in so far as the Council and the Assembly transacted the most important business for the community. Records which were outside the competence of these democratic bodies were preserved elsewhere[8].

Christophe Pébarthe's paper is significantly built on this assumption. On the one hand, at a theoretical level, he has explored, and stressed, the wider implications of the study of archives and administrative procedures as a heuristic tool for our understanding of the Greek *polis* as, simultaneously, a "state" and a "society", or, to use more concrete language, an original construction where «sans une bureaucratie professionnelle, les Athéniens sont parvenus à construire des institutions durables et complexes, permettant l'exercice d'une réelle autorité sur l'ensemble du territoire». On the other hand, in the second part of his paper, he has shown how, even in a community like Athens where citizenship was conceived as participatory and exclusive, citizen registers, since the archaic age and well before the establishment of democracy, were not centralised but, instead, were kept locally in the almost 140 administrative units, the demes (or villages), into which the Attic territory was divided. Full citizenship rights were acquired only after the new member of the community had been socially and ritually introduced by his father to the phratry and deme, the hereditary subgroups he was to belong to for the whole of his life[9]. The *lexiarchika grammateia*, the registers kept by the local magistrates, thus became the repository of the official information, both on personal and economic status, the *polis* needed for political, military and taxation purposes. When the army was to be mobilised, taxes and liturgies had to be assigned or the assembly pay had to be distributed, the local registers provided the hard data necessary to compile lists and carry out such operations at a *polis* level. The functioning of the administrative system and the ability to pool together human and material resources in other words hinged on the interaction between centre and periphery and on the circulation of the relevant information[10].

While Christophe Pébarthe has provided us with the broad picture, Shimon Epstein's paper has offered us a valuable insight into the question of the relationship between the inscribed text of a document, what we can today read on the stone, and the original records kept on file by the magistrate, on the basis of which the inscription was prepared. He has focused on the Attic building accounts pertaining to the Parthenon, the Erechtheion and construction work in the sanctuary of Eleusis, spanning from the Periclean age (the Parthenon was built over fifteen years between 447/6 and 433/2 BC) to the 30s and 20s of the fourth century. The striking feature of these accounts is that they greatly differ in the

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8   Faraguna 2005, esp. 72-3.

9   Whitehead 1986, 97-104; Lambert 1993, 161-89; Robertson 2000.

10   On this point see also my forthcoming article *Citizen Registers in Archaic Greece: The Evidence Reconsidered*.

amount and the quality of the information they provide. How are such differences to be accounted for? In order to offer some general background, it must be remembered that Athens was a democracy and that democratic procedures also governed the building process. On the basis of other relevant contemporary evidence, it must be surmised that the building of the Parthenon was first decided by the citizens' Assembly, and following this act the written technical specifications (*syngraphai*) were commissioned to an architect and then approved again by the Council and Assembly[11]. Once construction started, a special board of magistrates, the *epistatai*, was annually appointed to oversee the development of the project, manage all the financial aspects and contract out the execution of each architectural element[12]. At the end of their term of office, the *epistatai* had to render the accounts of the *euthynai*. It is interesting to note that the administrative process I have described is perfectly reflected by the Erechtheion accounts, where we first encounter a reference to the decree of the *demos* authorizing resumption of construction, and then we find 1) a survey of the already existing architectural elements; 2) the specifications for the works to be continued; 3) lists of the individual pieces and of the workers to whom their execution was assigned, organized by prytanies (*IG* I³ 474-479). The same organization is also to be found, more than a century later, in the inscription concerning repair works to the city walls (*IG* II² 463), where, again, we have the enabling decree of the Assembly (ll. 1-34), the *syngraphai* (ll. 35-118) and finally a list of the sections of the walls and of the contractors the work had been assigned to (ll. 120-130)[13].

As suggested by Shimon Epstein, this was the kind of documentation which we may expect was presented by the magistrates in charge on the occasion of their *euthynai*. Seen in this light, the Parthenon accounts indeed pose a problem, as they are very much unlike the other documents we have. In order to explain their different organization, I would like to add another possibile dimension to those explored by Epstein, in other words the religious dimension. The accounts of the Parthenon were inscribed on a single imposing stele, according to the reconstruction of W. Dinsmoor 1,60 meters tall, 1,80 wide and 0,20 thick, six years being inscribed on one face, seven on the reverse and two on the sides. It was clearly a monument resembling the *lapis primus* and *lapis secundus* of the Athenian tribute lists[14] and this makes it very likely that it was conceived as an *anathema*, a dedication to Athena. It is striking that the building accounts we have both for the fifth and for the fourth century are mostly connected to construction for religious purposes. We do not have accounts for the Periclean Odeon or for the Long

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11   Carusi 2006.

12   Marginesu 2010.

13   Faraguna 2010, 134-5.

14   On these monuments cf., most recently, Miles 2011. For their original location see Monaco 2008.

Walls. The objective in publishing the Parthenon accounts on a large monument was to show the goddess that her moneys were managed in a correct and pious manner. Given this objective, details were to some extent not necessary. As Epstein underlines, «the Parthenon inscriptions as we have them are hardly a convenient tool for democratic accountability».

Records on perishable materials nonetheless there must have been and my guess is that they were not very different from what we get in the Erechtheion accounts. The board of *epistatai* significantly not only appointed a secretary (*grammateus*) who changed every year but also a *syngrammateus*, a co-secretary named Antikles who held this position continuously until 437/6 and was then "promoted" to the role of secretary until the project was completed. The presence of a permanent co-secretary shows that the amount of paperwork to handle must have been not negligible. In the fourth century magistates overseeing public building also had judicial competence and could impose fines as well as preside over the court when legal cases resulting from breach of contract ended up in a trial (Aesch. 3,14: οἱ δὲ τῶν ἔργων ἐπιστάται πάντες ἡγεμονίᾳ χρῶνται δικαστήριου)[15]. It can therefore be reasonably assumed that the *epistatai* needed to keep detailed records of their activity.

A fundamental issue that remains open to doubt however concerns how permanent such records were. The *epistatai* of the Parthenon were an *ad hoc* board specifically elected to oversee the construction of the temple and they finished their work when the project was completed. They must have had an office on the acropolis while building was in progress but what happened after that? We must assume that only accounts in a shortened form were preserved and the more detailed records were either discarded or privately kept. We have something similar in the fifth-century accounts of the deme of Rhamnous, where for each year we have records concerning the moneys belonging to Nemesis given out on loan and those in the hands of the *hieropoioi* (*IG* I³ 248). These are obviously only the annual grand totals but, as shown by *IG* I³ 247bis, a lead plaque recording the movements of money between the *epistatai* and the *hieropoioi*, more detailed records concerning each individual transaction must have existed. The tablet was found in a cistern and had obviously been discarded when it ceased to be of use[16].

The same question indirectly arises also from Edward Harris' paper on the *enklema*, the "plaint", and its function in Athenian legal procedure. Harris has convincingly shown that the written plaint submitted by the accuser when he initiated legal procedure to a remarkable extent contributed to ensuring procedural fairness and, more generally, to the good functioning of the judicial system. It recorded the information that the magistrate who received the charge needed to determine that the case was εἰσαγώγιμος, i.e. could be lawfully accepted and

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15    Marginesu 2010, 72-8.
16    Petrakos 1999, II, no. 181. Cf. also Petrakos 1984, 188-95.

had been brought before the correct jurisdiction. G. Thür had already stressed the importance of the plaint for defining the legal issue about which the popular judges would decide[17]. Harris shows that the charges against the defendant had to follow the language of the statute under which the action was brought. This ensured that the court would only decide whether the defendant had violated a specific law and that the judges would uphold their oath to vote "according to the laws". Harris' argument is important because he has not only investigated the function of the plaint in private and public charges, *dikai* and *graphai*, but also systematically extended the analysis to include other procedures such as *eisangelia*, *phasis* and *paragraphe*. As a result, we now have a much better knowledge of the elements the indictment consisted of and we know that it could be a rather elaborate document that had to be framed according to the terms of the law and specified in a detailed manner the acts through which the defendant had violated the law.

More to the point for the topic of this volume, Harris has also shown that records of trials could be used *after* the case had been judged both as evidence in subsequent litigation and as a source of information for further administrative (mainly financial) documents, especially those presented by magistrates when they rendered their accounts (and then inscribed on stone)[18]. I agree with him that Arist. *Pol.* 1321b34-37 should be taken seriously and that κρίσεις δικαστηρίων, together with αἱ γραφαὶ τῶν δικῶν, were as a rule preserved in Greek *poleis*[19]. What remains perhaps more controversial is where they were kept after the trial was over. Personally, I do not believe that *all* indictments were stored in the Metroon. For the reasons I stated before, I think it is more likely that only the plaints within the jurisdiction of the Council and the Assembly were kept there. The other indictments must have been stored in the archive of the magistrate who was responsible for the case[20]. The rich epigraphic evidence adduced by Harris also seems to confirm this conclusion. Again, however, the main question remains, for how long? Harris has mentioned two interesting passages in Demosthenes' *Against Zenothemis* (32,27) and *Against Nausimachus and Xenopeithes* (38,14-16), where a legal argument is developed on the basis of the information provided by the indictment in a related earlier case. The second passage is particularly important as it appears that fourteen years had elapsed between the two trials (38,6). I could add another passage from Demosthenes' *Against Aristogeiton*: in this speech Aristogeiton is described as an evil person and is attacked, among

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17  Thür 2007.

18  Cf. also Sickinger 2007, 204-6.

19  This has however been recently denied by Gagarin 2008, 195, according to whom, apart from some exceptions, «verdicts in general were not officially recorded»; cf. also Gagarin 2009, 86.

20  Faraguna 2006; cf. 2009, esp. 68-9.

other things, for having sold his sister by the same mother "as is stated in the indictment of the action which was brought against him on these grounds by his brother" (25,55)[21]. The indictment is then read to the judges. The impression is again that a long time had elapsed between the trials. Where did these documents come from? Were they retrieved from a public archive or did they come from some private, family archive? Previously, I had suggested that they must have come from the magistrate's *archeion*. It is therefore rewarding to note that at the end of his thorough and enlightening examination of the evidence Edward Harris has reached the same conclusion.

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21   On the speech, if genuine, see MacDowell 2009, 298-312.

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