

Greek History ca. 750–479 BC: Documents

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HT 2024, Weeks 1–4
Monday 11:00am
Examination Schools

NB: Lectures will not be recorded.

Prospectus

In this short series of lectures, we will learn how to approach and use a particular class of documents for the study of archaic Greek history, that is, inscriptions. These lectures primarily feed into the papers in “Greek History ca. 750–479 BC” (Greats) and “Greek History ca. 650–479 BC” (AMH Prelims), but everyone taking any other paper on the early Mediterranean world or the archaic Greek world is especially encouraged to attend.

After an introduction outlining what an inscription is, how we can classify inscriptions, what tools we have to study them, and what aspects of the ancient world they can illuminate, we will proceed to analyzing a selection of case studies taken from the Epigraphic Dossier available on Canvas (please download it in advance and have it always at hand!). For each piece, attention will be paid to materiality, text, and historical significance. More specifically, topics covered in the four lectures include the following:

Lecture 1

Introduction to Greek epigraphy. The first half of the first lecture will be devoted to a short, general introduction to epigraphy and to some of the most important issues in archaic epigraphy more specifically. We will discuss typologies of inscriptions (public, private, sacred); writing mediums; the origins of the alphabet and the development of local scripts in archaic Greece; the later evolution of the Greek alphabet; scripts, style, and chronology; writing directions; epigraphic layouts; interpunction and word division; tools for the study of inscriptions. Examples discussed in this section may or may not come from the Epigraphic Dossier.

Private inscriptions and dedications. In the second half of the first lecture, we will discuss exemplary inscriptions of a private character as well as a couple of dedications: the famous Nestor’s cup with its metrical inscription and the metrical inscription on the Dipylon vase; the dedication of Nikandra on a *kore* from Delos; the funerary inscription of Menekrates, dedicated by the people of Corcyra.

Lecture 2

The *Polis* Speaks: Laws, Decrees, and Institutions. In this lecture, we will examine three texts that illuminate the political life of a *polis* and the organization of its civic institutions: the so-called “constitutional law,” but perhaps more properly a decree, of Dreros, Crete; the decree of the Cretan community of the Dataleis for the appointment of the scribe Spensithios; and the so-called “constitutional law” of Chios.

Lecture 3

Communities Expand: Settlement, Colonization, Interactions. The texts we will examine in this lecture cast light on various kinds of arrangements that Greek communities made in the process of settling new land, sending a colony overseas, and interacting with neighboring communities. The case studies we will look at are a Lokrian law concerning the apportioning of land in a newly settled territory (the so-called “Bronze Pappadakis”); the oath of the founders of Cyrene, preserved in a later decree of the city; and a treaty between the Achaean colony of Sybaris in Magna Graecia and the local community of the Serdaioi.

Lecture 4

Aspects of Social and Economic History: Mercenaries and Traders in the Archaic Mediterranean. We will conclude our series of lectures with a selection of texts that illuminate some aspects of the social and economic history of the archaic Mediterranean world. More specifically, we will encounter the social profiles of mercenaries and traders. Texts included in this lecture are the graffiti engraved by Greek mercenaries on a colossus of Ramses II at Abu Simbel; the dedication of the returning mercenary Pedon; a dedication by the famous trader Sostratos of Aegina; and two documents on lead respectively from Berezan and Phanagoreia on the Black Sea, concerning transactions and other business as well as the sale of a slave.