

Athenian Grave Monuments and Social Class

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THE LARGE CORPUS of Attic tombstones commemorating citizens is an extremely valuable source for the study of Athenian demography. The sepulchral inscriptions, which span the period *ca* 400 B.C. to *ca* A.D. 250, record the names of 4,519 Athenians: 2,905 men, 1,472 women, 142 of unknown sex.¹ For males we learn the name, the demotic, and often the patronymic of the individual commemorated on the stone; and a comparison of the recorded demotic with the provenance of the grave monument may give valuable information about population movements within Attica. In a study of population in town and country A. W. Gomme adduced as his principal evidence a count of Attic tombstones of the fourth and third centuries B.C.² In a recent re-examination and updating of Gomme's material, A. Damsgaard-Madsen has corroborated his conclusion that the tombstones testify to a

¹ At the Copenhagen University Institute of Classics a group consisting of the five authors has built up a data base of Athenians recorded on private funerary monuments in this period. The inventory comprises all the sepulchral inscriptions published in *IG II*² (1940) 5228–7861 (plus 110 of those recorded in the subsequent sections, 7862–13085) with later addenda in *AM* 67 (1942) 77–229 (Peek and Stamiris); W. Peek, *Attische Grabinschriften II* (Berlin 1957); D. W. Bradeen, *The Athenian Agora XVII. Inscriptions. The Funerary Monuments* (Princeton 1974); *SEG XII–XXXV* (1955–85); M. J. Osborne, "Attic Epitaphs. A Supplement," *Anc Soc* 19 (1988) 5–60. On the basis of this inventory the Copenhagen group intends to publish a number of studies in Athenian demography. The present study is composed by Thomas Heine Nielsen in collaboration with the other members of the group.

² A. W. Gomme, *The Population of Athens in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.* (Oxford 1933) 44f.

considerable migration from the countryside into Athens.³ Now, both Gomme and Damsgaard-Madsen presuppose without discussing the problem that during this period tombstones with sepulchral inscriptions were erected by Athenian citizens irrespective of their wealth and social status. The prevailing orthodoxy, however, seems to be that the corpus of sepulchral inscriptions is biased towards wealth: only affluent citizens had grave monuments, and consequently the sepulchral inscriptions reflect the demography of the upper class only. Most recently the orthodoxy has been restated by John Davies, Robin Osborne, David Whitehead, and Robert Garland.⁴

The purpose of this study is to question this orthodoxy and to suggest that even poor citizens could easily afford a grave monument inscribed with their name, that many of the preserved sepulchral inscriptions must in fact commemorate ordinary citizens of little distinction and slender means, and that wealthy citizens—though perhaps represented in more than their due proportion—probably count for a fairly small fraction of the funeral monuments we have. We must not forget that the grave cult was an important aspect of Greek religion. In Pl. *Euthyd.* 302C it is taken for granted that every Athenian citizen had ancestral tombs, and Socrates' statement in conversation with Euthydemus is corroborated by what we know about the *dokimasia* of incoming officials: at the examination all candidates for the nine archonships (and probably for other offices as well) were asked whether they had family tombs and where they were (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 55.3). Since any Athenian citizen was eligible for office, the inference is that all could point out their ancestral tombs. Now, the tombs were clustered in *nekropoleis* or lined along the roads outside the urban settlements. Many of the simpler undecorated monuments, e.g. the *columellae* and small insignificant stone slabs, are so much alike that the only way of distinguishing one from the other is to have the name(s) inscribed, and the presumption is that most of the simple

³ "Attic Funeral Inscriptions. Their Use as Historical Sources and Some Preliminary Results," in *Studies in Ancient History and Numismatics Presented to Rudi Thomsen* (Århus 1988) 55–68.

⁴ J. Davies, "Cultural, Social and Economic Features of the Hellenistic World," *CAH* VII.1 (1984) 267 (only foreigners are mentioned); R. Osborne, *Demos, The Discovery of Classical Attika* (Cambridge 1985) 130; D. Whitehead, *The Demes of Attica 508/7–ca. 250 B.C.* (Princeton 1986) 354; R. Garland, *The Piraeus* (London 1987) 66 (foreigners only).

grave monuments that survive in great numbers were erected by ordinary citizens.⁵

We have restricted this investigation to the fourth century B.C. for the following reasons. (a) Very few sepulchral inscriptions with demotics recorded antedate the archonship of Eukleides in 403/2.⁶ (b) Demetrius of Phaleron's ban on expensive grave monuments makes it difficult to detect a social stratification of the grave monuments of the period after 317. (c) Further identification of several of the citizens recorded in fourth-century sepulchral inscriptions is made possible by the abundance of literary sources and inscriptions of other kinds. For the third century, on the other hand, the complete lack of literary sources combined with the dearth of epigraphical evidence in general reduces our chance of further identifying the citizens recorded on the grave monuments. (d) The opinion that grave monuments are biased towards wealth is always stated of fourth-century Athens.

First we note that the close connection between wealth and grave monuments is usually asserted *a priori* without any discussion of the problem. Apart from Davies' list of sources for the costs of burials (*cf. infra*) the only evidence adduced tends to be a reference to Demetrius of Phaleron's sumptuary law banning grave monuments and sculptured tomb stones (Cic. *Leg.* 2.25.63=Dem. Phal. fr.135 Wehrli). Many historians seem to infer that before the law was passed, grave monuments were invariably a demonstration of wealth and social position.⁷ But Demetrius' law was aimed at expensive funerals, not at burial rites and grave monuments as such. His legislation had the effect of curtailing expensive *periboloi* and grave monuments decorated with elaborate reliefs.⁸ Simple stelae and small columns inscribed with one or more names were set up in great numbers both before and after Demetrius' law, and there is

⁵ Cf. S. Humphreys, "Family Tombs and Tomb Cults in Ancient Athens. Tradition or Traditionalism?" *JHS* 100 (1980) 123: "By the fourth century everyone had ancestral tombs just as everyone had an altar of Zeus Herkeios."

⁶ *IG I²* includes only a dozen private funerary monuments recording Athenians with demotics.

⁷ J. Sundwall, for example, took a funerary inscription to be sufficient evidence that the man commemorated belonged to the "wealthy": *Epigraphische Beiträge zur sozial-politischen Geschichte Athens im Zeitalter des Demosthenes* (=Klio Beih. 4 [Leipzig 1906]) e.g. 3 (Nikeratos, Presbychares).

⁸ Cf. R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (London 1985) 107 and "A Catalogue of the Attic Peribolos Tombs," *BSA* 77 (1982 [hereafter 'Garland']) 127.

no reason to believe that these monuments were all erected by wealthy citizens. It is in any case unlikely that the price of a grave stele prevented the commemoration of an ordinary citizen.

We have no direct information about the price of a grave monument, but Davies gives a most valuable collection of passages stating the price of a burial:

30 *dr.* for two burials (*Hesperia*, 10 (1941), 14, no. 1, lines 25–30: 367/6), though this might be merely the balance outstanding; at least 300 *dr.* (Lys. xxxi.21: c. 400); 1,000 *dr.* (Dem. xl.52: c. 358); 1,000 *dr.* ([Plato], *Ep.* 13.361e); 2,500 *dr.* or 5,000 *dr.* (Lys. xxxii.21: in 409); over 2 *tal.* (Dem. xlv.79: by 349), suspect in that it was in Apollodoros' interest to arouse prejudice against Phormion by exaggerating. All of Komon's bank balance was used to defray his funeral expenses ([Dem.] xlviii.12).⁹

In the literary sources the purpose of stating the costs is invariably to emphasize how expensive the burial was. The only epigraphical source cited by Davies gives a much lower price: 30 *dr.* for two burials, *i.e.* 15 *dr.* per burial. That the amount listed is "the balance outstanding" is guesswork, and this single piece of evidence is undoubtedly a much better source than the literary texts for the costs of an ordinary burial. Furthermore, only a fraction of the expense of a funeral was spent on the grave monument itself. The price of a stone was a few obols,¹⁰ and the cost of having one or two names carved on the stone cannot have amounted to more than a drachma or so.¹¹ Even a standard relief of poor artistic quality could be obtained for a reasonable price.¹² The total cost of a simple grave monument with a short sepulchral inscription must have been much less than 20 *dr.* and probably not much more than *ca* 10 *dr.* if decorated with a small standard relief. Now, we know that a dis-

⁹ J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families* (Oxford 1971 [hereafter 'APF']) xix n.3.

¹⁰ *E.g.* IG II² 1672.52; 1673.2, 5f. *Cf.* also A. Burford, *The Greek Temple Builders at Epidaurus* (Liverpool 1969) 173ff.

¹¹ *Cf.* Burford (*supra* n.10) 196f.

¹² Most Attic decrees include a formula that records the price of the stele in question. In the fourth century the ordinary price was either 20 or 30 *dr.* *Pace* Drerup (*NJbb* 153 [1896] 230, 251), this price seems to include the costs of the relief (if the stele was decorated), as will be argued by Dr Carol Lawrence in her forthcoming study of Attic documentary reliefs.

ablement pension of two obols per day was paid out to (invalid) citizens who owned less than 300 dr. (*Ath. Pol.* 49.4). The inference is that even a citizen who drew disablement pension could afford a simple stele with a short inscription if he cared about being remembered in this way.

How many of the preserved grave monuments are sufficiently plain and inexpensive that ordinary citizens could afford them? A survey of the material shows that the majority of the monuments are of the inexpensive kind. As against 76 *aedicula* and 356 other monuments decorated with reliefs, there are 588 undecorated stelae and 71 *columellae*.¹³ A prosopographical study of the citizens commemorated in sepulchral inscriptions, however, indicates that there is no clear connection between the wealth of a citizen and the magnificence of his gravestone. Thirteen monuments commemorate citizens who from other sources are known to have performed liturgies.¹⁴ One is a *columella* (*IG II*² 5810), and four are simple stelae without any decoration (5432–33, 7240; *Hesperia* 15 [1946] 180 no. 28). There is no *aediculum* and only one of the monuments is decorated with a relief (*IG II*² 7636). If one's grave monument was an indication of wealth and social status, we should expect the known examples of grave monuments erected by members of the liturgical class to have been much more impressive and expensive than they are. There is, however, a further aspect to take into account. The grave monuments commemorating members of the liturgical class may have been set up in a *peribolos*, in which case the monument as a whole indicates wealth even if some of the in-

¹³ The statistics are from the Copenhagen data base (*supra* n.1).

¹⁴ Aristandros Lykinou Oinaios (*IG II*² 6969, *APF* 47); Deixenos Kydikleous Oinaios (*IG* 6970, *APF* 98); Dikaiogenes Menexenou Kydathenaieus (*IG* 6569, *APF* 145); Diopethes Diophantou Myrrhinousios (*Hesperia* 15 [1946] 180 no. 28, *APF* 166); Euthykrates Euthykleous Lamptreus (*IG* 6667, *APF* 193); Hieronymos Hieronos Acharneus (*IG* 5810, *APF* 243); Kallippos Philonos Aixoneus (*IG* 5432+5433, *APF* 275); Kephisodoros Eschationos Phegaieus (*IG* 7636, *APF* 291); Mnesarchides Mnesarchou Halaieus (*IG* 5501, *APF* 392); Nikon Timotheou Kephalthen (*IG* 6370, *APF* 413); Poseidippos Kirrhioi Prasieus (*IG* 7286, *APF* 469); Prokles Protokleous Plotheieus (*IG* 7240, *APF* 470); Cheimeus Kikonos Lakiades (*IG* 6635, *APF* 574). Furthermore, the following are recorded by Davies as possible identifications: Exekestides Aristodemou Kothokides (*IG* 6474, *APF* 176); Epikrates Kephisieus (*IG* 6444, *APF* 181); Nikostratos Nikeratou Halaieus (*IG* 5509, *APF* 410); Lysimachides Lysimachou Acharneus (*IG* 5813, *APF* 358); Philokrates Phrynichou Acharneus (*IG* 5847, *APF* 542).

scribed stelae set up within the *peribolos* were plain and undecorated.¹⁵ It is a major problem that the study of *periboloi* is fairly recent and that most of the preserved sepulchral inscriptions were recovered and published in *IG II* and again in *IG II²* without any indication of whether or not they may have belonged to a *peribolos*.¹⁶ The whole problem is best treated in Garland's impressive catalogue, from which it is apparent that far from all funeral grave monuments came from *periboloi*. Even in Rhamnous, where recent excavations have revealed more *periboloi* than in any other place in Attica, there are single graves along the sacred road between the larger *periboloi*.¹⁷

We conclude that an ordinary grave monument was so cheap that any Athenian could afford it, and proceed to the next question: whether ordinary citizens availed themselves of the possibility of erecting a grave monument or left it to the rich as a kind of status symbol. We have pursued two questions that shed some light on the problem: (1) What is the proportion of grave monuments set up by citizens who are known from other sources as wealthy? (2) Is there any evidence of grave monuments set up by people who were poor and/or of low status?

In *APF* Davies lists 13 (perhaps 18) fourth-century *leitourgountes* whose names are also recorded on funeral monuments. The number of male Athenian citizens recorded in sepulchral inscriptions during the same period is 1,330.¹⁸ Thus a crude calculation

¹⁵ A simple *columella* (*IG II²* 11817) is connected with *Peribolos* A1, cf. Garland 136; another *columella* (5813) and four small *cippi* are connected with *Peribolos* A4, cf. Garland 138.

¹⁶ Cf. Garland 125.

¹⁷ Cf. Osborne (*supra* n.4) 141.

¹⁸ If the 1,330 males reflect the age distribution of the Athenian population, more than 40% of the inscriptions most commemorate boys who died before they came of age. Several considerations, however, indicate that almost all the 1,330 male citizens were adults. (1) Of the 2,110 citizens commemorated in the fourth-century sepulchral inscriptions some 625 are recorded on tombstones decorated with reliefs. Children are not infrequently found among the persons represented, especially when the composition is a family group. The child is often a slave boy or girl, but sometimes undoubtedly a member of the family. In only ten cases, however, is a representation of a child to be matched with a name inscribed on the stone. In three cases the name of the child is recorded without patronymic and demotic. In three more cases we find the name of a girl with her father's name added in the genitive case. There are four attestations only of a boy recorded with

suggests that only 1% of the Athenians commemorated in sepulchral inscriptions belonged to the liturgical class. Since at any time the liturgical class numbered some 1,200 out of some 30,000 adult male citizens,¹⁹ *ca* 4%, the corpus of grave monuments seems to have a bias towards poverty and not towards wealth. That would be an astonishing conclusion, and a refined calculation does in fact give a different result.

In the fourth century the number of adult male citizens living in Attica seems to have been about 30,000. Adopting a life expectancy at birth of *ca* 25 years and an annual growth rate of *ca* 0.5% we infer that the number of eighteen-year-old Athenians inscribed annually in the *lexiarchikon grammateion* of their deme must have totalled *ca* 1,000 (3.3% of 30,000).²⁰ Thus across the fourth century the number of names of citizens entered on the *lexiarchika grammateia* must have amounted to about 100,000. During the period *ca* 420–320²¹ the members of the liturgical class must have totalled about 4,000.²² What is the proportion of each group actually attested in our sources? Sepulchral inscriptions covering the fourth century provide us with the names of some 1,300 adult male citizens, *ca*

patronymic and demotic, although he must have died before he came of age and could be inscribed in his deme. (2) *SEG* XXIII 161 commemorates eleven members of one family over six generations. If all the deceased members of the family had had their names inscribed on the stone irrespective of age, we should expect five of the eleven to commemorate children. A prosopographical study of the family shows, however, that at least ten and probably all eleven persons were adults when they died and had their names inscribed on the stele. The conclusion is that a man's name in the nominative case with patronymic and demotic added almost invariably commemorates a full citizen. This problem will be pursued further in a forthcoming article by Torben Vestergaard and the other members of the group.

¹⁹ 1,200 *leitourgountes*: Dem. 14.16; Isoc. 15.145; Harp. *s.v.* *chilioi diakosioi*. Cf. *APF* xxix: 30,000 adult male citizens living in Attica, cf. Hansen, *Demography and Democracy* (Herning 1985) 65–69 and *passim*.

²⁰ Hansen (*supra* n.19) 11ff.

²¹ Of the *leitourgountes* we have selected those attested between *ca* 420 and 320, because (most of) the *leitourgountes* of the period 420–400 must have died in the fourth century, whereas (most of) the *leitourgountes* of the two decades 320–300 must have died in the third century, *i.e.*, outside the period selected for our study.

²² If we apply the same calculation as in the case of all citizens, the annual replacement of *leitourgountes* must have been *ca* 3.3% of 1,200 x 100 (years) = 3,960, or in round numbers 4,000.

1.3% of the total 100,000. But of the members of the liturgical class some 650 are attested in our sources, *ca* 1/6 of the total 4,000.²³

Now, for the sake of argument, let us assume that the Athenians known from sepulchral inscriptions represent a cross section of the citizen population and that the corpus of grave monuments has no bias towards wealth. Let us further suppose that we had perfect sources. What are the consequences? Sepulchral inscriptions commemorating all 100,000 Athenians would have provided us with the names of all *ca* 4,000 members of the liturgical class. The preserved names, however, represent only about 1.3% of all Athenians. Consequently we should expect—if we knew the names of all the 4,000 *leitourgountes*—to find the names of *ca* 53 *leitourgountes* in the corpus of sepulchral inscriptions. But we know, in fact, the names of only 1/6 of all *leitourgountes*, so among the 1,300 citizens known from sepulchral inscriptions we should expect to find the names of nine *leitourgountes*. But we do have at least 13 *leitourgountes* attested among the Athenians commemorated in sepulchral inscriptions. Thus, there may be a slight bias towards wealth in the material we have but, given the very rough character of the calculation, it is not strong enough to be statistically significant. We conclude that the prosopographical evidence is perfectly compatible with the view that the tombstones commemorated a cross section of the population. Even if we assumed an error of 100% in our calculation (*i.e.*, *leitourgountes* are represented not 1.5 but 3 times as often as expected demographically), the vast majority of the preserved tombstones must still have been erected by citizens belonging to the middle class or the common people. Thus, there is no reason to assume a bias toward wealth. To say that “grave stelae, however mean, are indicative of wealth and pretensions” is misleading,²⁴ at least insofar as wealth is concerned, and in what follows we shall argue that it is also misleading in so far as social “pretension” is concerned.

A funeral monument inscribed with one's name was not a prerogative of citizens. In *IG II*² the *Tituli sepulcrales civium*

²³ *APF* xxvii. The period *ca* 422–322 corresponds to Davies' generations F (433–401, the later part only, *i.e.* some 50 persons from 71), G (400–367, 154 persons), H (367–334, 334 persons) and the first part of I (180 persons from 260). The total is 718 persons, but there is an overlap of 71 between generations F, G, H, and I. Thus the total is 647 individuals, or in round numbers 650.

²⁴ Osborne (*supra* n.4) 130.

Atheniensium (nos. 5228–7861) are followed by a short section of *Tituli sepulcrales ἰσοτελῶν*, then by two extensive collections of *Tituli sepulcrales peregrinorum* (nos. 7882–10530) and *Tituli sepulcrales hominum originis incertae* (nos. 10531–13085). If, again, we concentrate on the fourth century, no fewer than 650 metics are recorded of whom 40% are women, all with ethnics instead of demotics as an indication of their status as foreigners.²⁵ The section *Tituli sepulcrales hominum originis incertae* comprises all the inscriptions which bring neither a demotic nor an ethnic. Presumably, many of these monuments commemorate children of citizens who died before they came of age and were inscribed in their deme.²⁶ But several hundred of the inscriptions subsumed under the heading *originis incertae* were undoubtedly slaves. The status of these persons can be ascertained in various ways. Names such as Daos, Getas, Manes, Thrax, *etc.* reveal that the honoree was either a slave,²⁷ or a former slave who had been manumitted and registered as a metic. Next, the epithet χρηστός and the greeting χαῖρε are never used for citizens, very rarely for metics, and the occurrence of either term is a strong indication that the inscription commemorates a slave.²⁸

Inspection of the fourth-century monuments on which the terms χρηστός or χαῖρε occur seems to corroborate the assumption that they were set up by persons of low status and slender means. There are no *aedicula*, and only one *lekythos*. Almost all the inscriptions are cut on simple stelae without any relief or other forms of elaborate decoration.²⁹

The conclusion is that grave monuments were set up by citizens, metics, and slaves. Wealthy citizens may have been represented in greater proportion to their number, but it would indeed be strange if grave monuments commemorated wealthy citizens, metics, and

²⁵ Cf. D. Whitehead, *The Ideology of the Athenian Metic* (Cambridge 1985) 33f.

²⁶ The number of representatives of children to be matched with inscribed names is much higher in this section of the *Corpus* than it is in the section *Tituli sepulcrales civium Atheniensium*.

²⁷ Cf. O. Masson, "Les noms des esclaves dans la Grèce antique," in *Actes du colloque 1971 sur l'esclavage* (Paris 1973) 9–23.

²⁸ Cf. Peek (*supra* n.1) 16 no. 29.

²⁹ Pace Garland's note (132): "It was quite acceptable to bury domestic slaves within a family enclosure." Or rather: even if slaves were buried inside the *peribolos*, they did not have their names recorded on the grave monuments.

slaves, but normally not ordinary citizens of modest means. Thus, the numerous funeral inscriptions erected by metics and slaves disprove the assumption that grave stelae, however mean, are indicative of wealth and pretension. The sepulchral inscriptions may well represent a cross section of the Athenian citizen population and are valuable sources for the demography of the Athenian population as such, not just for the demography of the upper class.

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