

The Ideology and Organization of the Metroon in Democratic Athens

The first archive in the Classical world, the Metroon, was established in Athens at the end of the fifth century BCE and it has presented numerous difficulties in interpretation. Its ideological *raison d'être* and the intricacies of its bureaucratic operations have been unable to be excised from modern conceptualizations of nationalistic archives and from their supportive administrative structures. The plurality of media on which or in which the written contents were placed, such as bronze or stone stelai, ostraka, clay tablets, and sealed amphoras, have made attempts to reconstruct an organizational scheme for this archive particularly difficult.

The proper framework for understanding the ideological role and the organizational scheme for the Metroon begins with the political and historical context from which it originated. The Metroon's ideological function as a central location for record storage is a radical manifestation of the democratic mentality of accountability. Publication, storage, and retrieval of records allowed for public scrutiny of an individual's or the Boule's transactions over an indefinite period of time. The Metroon, I will argue, received its organizational structure by following the historical precedent established by the publication of the Athenian treasury inventories. From the end of the fifth century BCE to the mid-fourth century BCE, the contents of each of the treasuries on the Athenian acropolis were inscribed annually for public scrutiny. An analysis of these lists reveals that objects fashioned from the same media and which served a similar function were grouped together and, within each of these groups, objects were organized according to the content inscribed on the objects themselves. The treasury lists of the Hekatompedon, for example, present all of its dedicatory wreaths together, but they are chronologically organized according to the year in which they were deposited in the treasury itself. The Metroon, therefore, is a product of its historical and political environment where

democratic ideology allows for access to records for scrutiny and where its organizational framework relies upon precedent that embraced medium, function, and written content.

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