

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

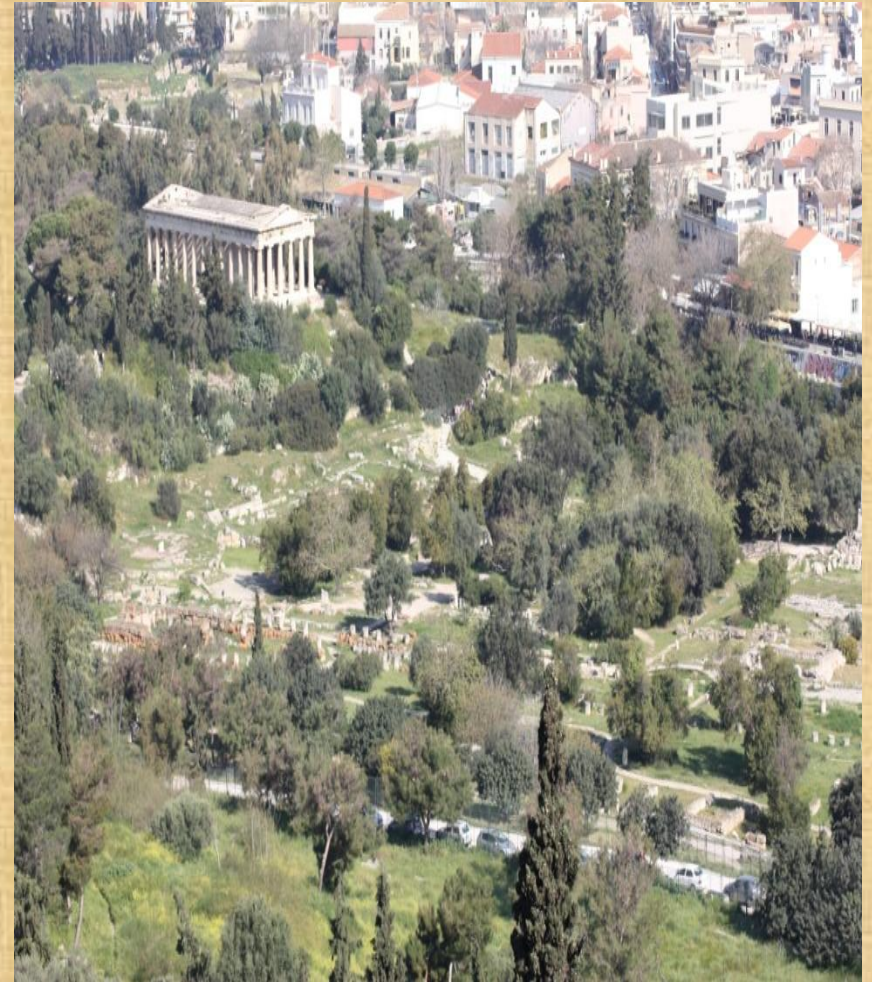
Lecture 27 – Trade, Markets and Food-supply
Athens

CLCS4007

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The Agora

- ❑ Open space located in the centre of Athens.
- ❑ Key centre of politics, commerce, law and religion.
- ❑ Stoa, long colonnaded buildings – used for public business. Possibly used for commerce?



Markets in Athens

- ▣ Likely to have temporary wooden stalls – areas essentially bazaars.
- ▣ Not necessarily any strict planning or layout.

“[Sausage-Seller] - Just tell me how a sausage-seller can become a great man.

[Demosthenes] - That is precisely why you will be great, because you are a sad rascal without shame, no better than a common market crook.” –
Aristophanes *Knights* lines 179-81.

Goods in the Market

“Midwinter here means gherkins and grapes and such
things mind you,
And violets and the like for sale though dust blows fit to
blind you,
While thrushes and olives, honey and pears, are sold at the
self-same stall
With beestings, haggises, pilewort, crickets and kidlets
small,
And there figs and myrtles in basketfuls even in snowy
weather,
And pumpkin-seed and turnip-seed are both put in
together.
Aye, none of ‘em knows in these days what time of year
they’ve got to.”

- Aristophanes *Seasons* fr. 569. 1-7.

Athenian Coinage

- ▣ Athenian silver coinage - 98% pure - compare Sterling silver, 92.5%
- ▣ Guaranteed purity and weight – indicated by the *type* (emblems) stamped on the coin – meant that lumps of this precious metal could be unit counted, instead of weighed and tested as required by bullion or plate
- ▣ 1 talent = 6000 drachmas.
- ▣ 1 mina = 100 drachmas.
- ▣ 1 drachma = 6 obols.
- ▣ 2-3 obols = a day's pay in 5th C BC law-courts.



Erechtheum - Workers Pay

**TABLE 7
RATES OF PAY**

Architects	Salary, 36-37 dr./prytany	1 dr./day
Carpenters	General work: making struts, laying rafters, truing edges Making coffer lids Planing roof pieces Making frames	1 dr./day 2 dr./lid 1½ ob./piece 20 dr./frame
Joiners	Work by the day Gluing cymatia	5 ob./day 2 dr./opening
Laborers	General work: laying tiles, removing scaffolding, using block and tackle	1 dr./day
Masons	Laying Eleusinian block Laying Pentelic backers, 5½ cubic feet Laying Aeginetan backers, 12 cubic feet Finishing stones Shaping center gable block, 24 cubic feet Channelling columns, 20 feet high, 24 flutes	5 dr./tetrapody 2 dr. 4 ob./block 2 dr. 5 ob./block 3½ dr./tetrapody 40 dr./block
Modellers in wax	Models of acanthus & rosette	350 dr./column 8 dr./model
Painters	Painting wooden ceiling Encaustic painting	4 dr./coffer lid 5 ob./foot
Sawyers	Sawing timber Sawing timber (same account)	1 dr./day 1 ob./4 foot cut
Sculptors	Frieze figure (adult) , 26½ inches max. ht.	60 dr./figure
Under-secretary	Salary, 30 dr. — 30 dr. 5 ob./prytany	5 ob./day
Woodcarvers	Ceiling rosettes	14 dr./rosette

Table from Randall, Jr. (1953)

Prices in Athens

- C. mid-late fifth century BC one *medimnos* (c. 52 dry litres = c. 40 kg) of wheat cost three drachmas? – likely to be subject to fair degree of fluctuation.
- “... for [grain retailers] they were bound, in selling, to add no more than an obol to the price... But in fact they were selling at a profit of a drachma several times in the same day, as though they were buying by the medimnus at a time.” – *Lysias Against the Corn Dealers* 22.8,12.

Trading Standards

Agora

- *Dokimastes* – scrutinizer - a public slave who checked coins for purity.
- Market overseers checked measures against official standards - Penalty: 10 x value for fraud/cheating.

Piraeus

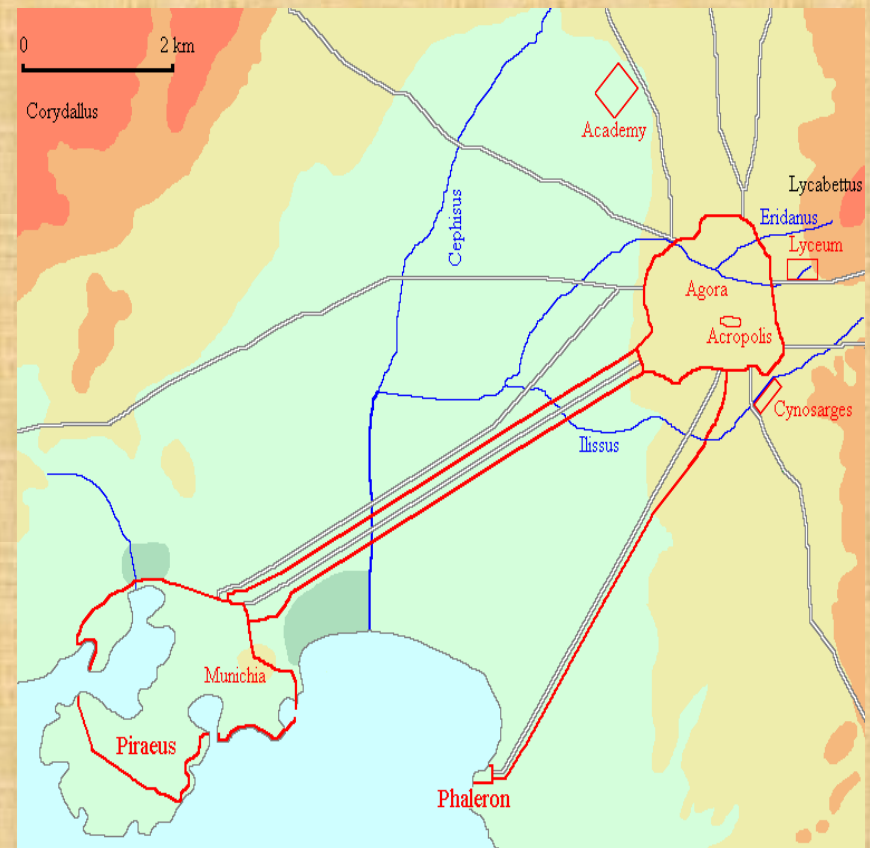
- 5 *agoranomoi* – ensured merchandise was pure and unadulterated.
- 5 *metronomoi* - ensured honest weights and measures were used.
- 5 (later 15) *sitophulakes* - ensured no fraud in sales of grain -
Millers sold flour at price proportional to grain price -
Bakers sold loaves of specified weight at prices proportional to grain price.

Piraeus and Trade

The Piraeus

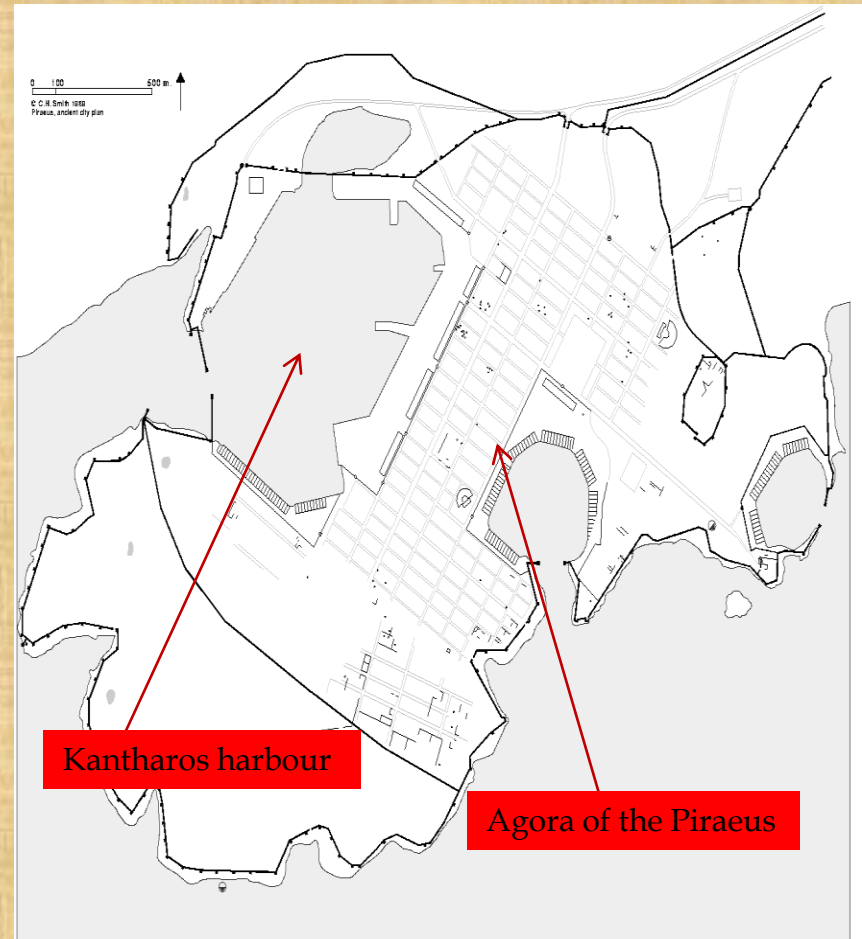
- ▣ The Piraeus is the harbour area of Athens.
- ▣ c. 7 km from the harbour to the acropolis.
- ▣ There were three distinct harbours
 - Zea - triremes
 - Mounichia - triremes
 - Kantharos – commercial.

City walls in red



Merchant Harbour

- ❑ Piraeus was laid out on a grid plan, designed by Hippodamos of Miletos.
- ❑ Many metics lived here – foreign cult objects found.
- ❑ Banks and warehouses.
- ❑ Merchant ships moored at quays and wharfs; they were not pulled out of the water like warships.



Some goods for sale in classical Athens

Antiphanes *fr.* 236 lists local specialities as:

- ▣ Elis – cooks.
- ▣ Argos – cooking-pots.
- ▣ Phlius – wine.
- ▣ Corinth – rugs.
- ▣ Sicyon – fish.
- ▣ Aigina – flute-players.
- ▣ Sicily – cheese.
- ▣ Athens – perfume.
- ▣ Boiotia – eels.



Transport



Reconstruction of ancient merchantman



Amphorae (sing. Amphora)

Sailing season

- ▣ The sailing season was roughly March – November; storms are frequent December – February.
- ▣ Most military and civil shipping avoided sailing in winter.
- ▣ Some sailed despite the risks, by necessity or desire.
- ▣ Local shipping tramped round the coasts.
- ▣ Wrecks prove that direct crossings were made too, e.g. from North Africa.

International Commerce

- ▣ Taxes were levied on exports as well as imports:
 - Rate normally 2.5% where and when we have figures
 - Foreigners were subject to additional taxes – equality of taxation with citizens was an honour sometimes bestowed on foreign benefactors.

- ▣ Special maritime courts were established in 4th C BC to deal speedily with cases involving foreign traders:
 - Foreigners needed local patron to act for them in court.
Proxenos = citizen of state in which he lives who acts on behalf of citizens of another state (*cf.* our ambassadors).

Attitudes to Traders

- ▣ The international trader (*emporos*) was regarded as
 - a necessary evil to enable acquisition of things not obtainable locally and by self e.g. salt, metals, slaves.
 - a lifeline when the harvest was bad.
 - an untrustworthy person – shifty, physically and in character.
- ▣ The local trader (*kapelos*) was regarded as
 - a sort of parasite who made nothing and just bought and sold what other people made and moved.

Grain Imports

Importance of Imports

- ▣ Imports of food important for non-land owners, e.g. metics, artisans.
- ▣ Local surpluses can be limited and variable.
- ▣ Athenian soil generally better suited to barley.
- ▣ Consumption and enjoyment of goods not produced in Athens.
- ▣ Frequent concern over “profiteering” and manipulation of the grain price by traders.

Grain Regions

- ▣ Major sources of grain for Athens are Thrace and the Black Sea region.
- ▣ Also Sicily, Egypt, Magna Graecia.
- ▣ Athenian diplomacy and imperialism, frequently direct to ensuring safety of grain supply.
- ▣ Byzantium important.



Scale of Importation

“Now from the Bosphorus there come to Athens about four hundred thousand *medimnoi*; the figures can be checked by the books of the grain commissioners.” – **Demosthenes *Against Leptines* 20.32.**

- ▣ 400,000 *medimnoi* = just short of 21 million ml.
- ▣ Estimates of minimum calorie requirements:
 - 5-8 *medimnoi* consumed per person per year?
- ▣ Food for 50,000 – 80,000?

Grain Shortages

- ❑ Variable Mediterranean climate means poor harvest not infrequent.
- ❑ Attica's agricultural capacity sufficient to feed perhaps c. 150,000 – 200,000?
- ❑ Population estimates c.150,000 – 250,000?
- ❑ **Problems:** debate over population numbers - sufficient dietary requirements – agricultural capacity (amount of cultivatable land 17-50%?) – variable yield (13-25 *medimnoi* per hectare).

Legislation

“Of the products of the soil, he [Solon] allowed oil only to be sold abroad...” – **Plutarch *Solon* 24.1.**

“...I lent the money for a voyage to Pontus and back to Athens. For you know, men of the jury, how severe the law is, if any Athenian transports corn to any other port than the port of Athens, or lends money for use in any market save that of Athens; you know what penalties there are in such cases, and how severe and to be dreaded they are.” – **Demosthenes *Against Lacritus* 35.50.**

“There are ten Superintendents of the Market, elected by lot, whose duty is to superintend the Market, and to compel merchants to bring up into the city two-thirds of the corn which is brought by sea to the Corn Market.” – **Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 51.4.**

Athenian Grain-Tax Law

“In the archonship of Sokratides [374/3 BC]... Agyrrhios moved: In order that there may be grain for the people (*demos*) in the public domain, sell the 8 % tax (*dodekate*) (which originates) in Lemnos, Imbros, and Skyros, and the 2% tax (*pentekoste*) in terms of grain... Let the Assembly (*demos*) elect ten men from all the Athenians in the meeting (*ekklesia*) at which they elect the generals (*strategoi*), who are to take care of the grain. After these men have seen to the weighing out of the grain in accordance with the written instructions, let them sell it in the marketplace (*agora*) at whatever time seems best to the Assembly (*demos*), but it is not permitted to put the sale of the grain to a vote before the month of Anthesterion (January/February). Let the Assembly (*demos*) set the price at which the elected men must sell the wheat and barley. Let the buyers (*priamenoι*) of the 8 % tax (*dodekate*) transport the grain (to the *Aiakeion*) before the month of Maimakterion (October/November.” – **SEG XXXVI 146.**

Grain Distribution

“Moreover, in accordance with Aristides’ proposal, the Athenians furnished an abundant food supply for the masses: from the income accruing from tribute, taxes and the allies more than 20,000 were kept provisioned. For there were 6,000 jurors, 1,600 archers, 1,200 cavalrymen, 500 Council members, 500 guards of the docks, and 50 guards in the city. In terms of magistrates, there were about 700 at home, and about 700 abroad. Added to these, when the Athenians went to war later on, were 2,500 hoplites, 20 patrol vessels, and other ships conveying the tribute, with 2,000 crewmembers elected by lot. Over and above this there were the Prytaneum [town hall], the orphans, and prison guards, for all these were supported by state funds.” – *Aristotle Athenian Constitution* 24.3.

“My father left me nothing, and I have only ceased supporting my mother on her death two years ago; while currently I have no children to take care of me. I possess a trade that can give me but slight assistance: I already find difficulty in carrying it on myself, and as yet I am unable to procure someone to relieve me of the work. I have no other income besides this dole, and if you deprive me of it I might be in danger of finding myself in the most grievous plight.”

– *Lysias On the Refusal of a Pension* 24.6.

Useful Reading

- ▣ Bissa, E. M. A. (2009) *Governmental Intervention in Foreign Trade in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Leiden: Brill).
- ▣ Thompson, H. A., and Wycherly (1972) *The Agora of Athens: The History, Shape and Use of an Ancient City Centre* (Princeton: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens).
- ▣ Stroud, R. S. (1998) 'The Athenian Grain-Tax Law of 374/3 B.C.', *Hesperia Supplements* 29.
- ▣ Randall, Jr. R. H. (1953) 'The Erechtheum Workmen', *American Journal of Archaeology* 57 (3): 199-210.