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G. Anderson, *The Athenian Experiment: Building an Imagined Political Community in Ancient Attica, 508-490 BC*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003. Pp. xvii, 310; pls. 16. ISBN 0-472-11320-8. \$60.00.

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Greg Anderson demonstrates well that sixth-century Athens lacked any significant military capacity, making it vulnerable to invasion and a minor player in Greek affairs, and was afflicted with limited and ineffectual public institutions.¹ Thus public life largely consisted of unfettered rivalries between leaders of a handful of elite clans, who competed for preeminence through conspicuous consumption, private alliances, the leading of private military ventures, and the securing of magistracies and religious roles for themselves and their fellow clansmen. This could be a high-stakes contest that sometimes resulted in one or another leader and his clan forced out of the city by their rivals, with public life eventually breaking down into the long tyranny of Peisistratos and his sons. If we fast-forward to 490 BCE, Anderson reminds us how everything had changed. At the battle of Marathon Athens deployed an army of 9000 citizen hoplites, far larger than that of any other city-state (including Sparta), and, with this unexpected victory over the Persians, confirmed its status as a dominant power in the Greek world. Moreover, the decision to go to war, like others concerning foreign affairs and an ever-increasing range of public activities, was taken in the new popular *boule* ('council') and *ekklesia* ('assembly'). Although political proposals, in 490, were still made by elite Athenians as part of their efforts to be first among their peers, it was now the *demos* ('people') ultimately deciding which proposal the city should pursue. This popular adjudication reduced the traditional instability engendered by elite competitiveness, with the people themselves now reserving the right to expel prominent members of the elite through the new institution of ostracism.

This picture of the transformation of late archaic Athens has been drawn before and probably represents the consensus of those scholars currently working in the period.

Things start to get interesting, though, when Anderson considers why archaic Athens was so weak and when exactly this transformation took place. The novel argument of his book is that Athens of the sixth century was far from properly integrated with its surrounding region: the effectiveness of city-based institutions and leaders fell well short of the borders of Attike; no mechanism existed to register the free male residents of the region as citizens of Athens or to involve them in its political and military affairs, and they had no sense of being part of a collectivity covering all of Attike. Additionally non-elite Athenians played no part politically or otherwise in the public life of the archaic city. Anderson rejects the standard view that the involvement of non-elite Athenians in politics and warfare and the integration of Athens and its region were gradual, long-term processes involving reforming leaders such as Solon and Peisistratos. Instead he believes they were achieved only as part of the tribal and political reforms of Kleisthenes in 508/7. Even then, Anderson maintains, for non-elite Athenians a sense of shared Athenian identity and of being part of the *demos* took much longer to develop, resulting as it did from the mixing of citizens in tribal activities, their experience of new political institutions, and the cultural programme of Kleisthenes and his successors (22, 40, 81, 83, 119, 124-5, 197, 216).

Few others have argued that Athens was so lacking in basic state organization and political processes until the end of the sixth century.² Building on the work of Kurt Raaflaub, Anderson also critiques the recent, influential interpretation of Josh Ober that the impetus for the post-508/7 reforms came not from Kleisthenes but from the *demos* itself (9, 51-2, 76-83, 220 n.9).³ Instead Anderson maintains (81): '... the new order was not the spontaneous creation of a popular revolutionary fervor, however much the support of nonelite citizens might have been crucial to its success. Rather, it should be seen as a massive, ingenious, and artfully self-conscious exercise in social engineering -- the product, in short, of a vision from above, not below.' While privileging Kleisthenes as the creator of the institutions that would be responsible for the military might and full democracy of classical Athens, Anderson acknowledges and explores how the Athenians quickly forgot what he did, preferring to see the mythical king Theseus as the one who unified Attike and founded -- along with Solon -- the democracy.

There are several reasons why this book will become essential reading for ancient historians and research students. Firstly, the book is timely. It is one of only three monographs on Kleisthenes to appear in more than three decades.⁴ And since Anderson studies in some detail the century or more before 508/7 and extends his analysis down to 490, his book is even rarer: a monograph-length discussion of archaic Athens.⁵ Secondly, Anderson's engagement with relevant evidence, publications and ongoing scholarly controversies is extraordinarily thorough. Thus there are 78 pages of endnotes and bibliography compared with only 217 of text. Finally, Anderson's employment and negotiation of what is challenging evidence is very good. He intelligently draws on

material culture to balance out limited literary sources, which are frequently contradictory and far from contemporary with the events they describe. Anderson also shows great touch in his evaluation of solitary ancient references or well-established scholarly interpretations, usually weighing each against both the entirety of evidence and its probability in light of what else is known of archaic practices. Thus he often shows ancient sources to be of little evidentiary value and hoary old arguments to be shibboleths.

Now for a look at the book's chapters.

Part 1 of this book (chapters 1-2) considers the new institutions and practices Kleisthenes introduced and how they represented a clean break from the past. In chapter 1 'From City-State to Region-State' (13-42) Anderson overturns the scholarly orthodoxy that Athens and Attike were politically and legally unified in the sixth century. In so doing he effectively refutes the commonly expressed view -- based on two classical sources (*Ath. Pol.* 13.3-4; Herodotos 1.59) -- that the contending elite leaders of this period drew support from different parts of Attike (31-2). Chapter 1 closes with a useful discussion of how the reforms of Kleisthenes finally unified Athens and Attike by co-opting the demes into political and military administration, grouping these villages and suburbs from three different regions of Attike into ten tribes, and using the latter as the basic subdivisions of a new popular council and city-based army (34-42). In chapter 2 'In Search of Popular Government' (43-84) Anderson shows that the Athenian *demos* was not involved in the political life of the city before the reforms of Kleisthenes. Here Anderson provides new arguments for seeing the popular Council of Four Hundred, supposedly created by Solon (*Ath. Pol.* 8.4; Plutarch *Solon* 19.1-2), as no more than a self-serving invention of the Athenian oligarchs of 411 (57-76) and marshals the evidence showing how non-elite Athenians became active in politics only in 508/7 (52-7, 76-83).

Part 2 (chapters 3-4) explores the impact of the reforms on the city's political and religious centres. Chapter 3 'The Agora: Showcase for a New Regime' (87-103) argues that the transformation of the *agora*, after 508/7, constitutes important evidence for how contemporaries sought to represent the recent reforms. In particular, the re-use of structures set up by the Peisistratids and the conservative, traditional design of the square's new political buildings suggest to Anderson that '... Cleisthenes and his associates consciously refrained from presenting their experiment at face value. Rather, they chose to emphasize its reassuring continuities, real or imagined, with Athenian political tradition' (103). In chapter 4 'The Acropolis: New Departures among Old Certainties' (104-19) Anderson draws the same inference from the lesser impact of the Kleisthenic reforms on the Akropolis. Notwithstanding the first appearance of public inscriptions and dedications (112; cf. 157-8), the traditional features of the Old Athena Temple, which Anderson dates to 500 (110, 247 n.17), and the continuities in the private use of the Akropolis for religious purposes suggest that 'the new order' claimed a

'reassuring conformity to the traditions of Athenian government' (115).

Part 3 (chapters 5-9) analyzes how mythology, hero cult, religious festivals and the celebration of recent events were used to constitute, represent and legitimize the reforms. In chapter 5 'Tribes, Heroes and the 'Reunification' of Attica' (123-46) Anderson reminds us how Kleisthenes obscured the novelty of his tribal reforms by giving each tribe as its eponymous figurehead an established demi-god with pre-existing myths and cult (123-34). He goes on to develop systematically the well-known (but never especially convincing) case that the myth of the unification of Attike by Theseus was invented by Kleisthenes (134-46).⁶ In chapter 6 'The New Order at War' (147-57) Anderson rehearses the important finding -- made most recently by Henk Singor -- that the Athenians did not have a city-controlled hoplite army until the tribal reforms of Kleisthenes gave them the first-ever mechanisms of mass mobilization (149-50, 259 nn.9-12).⁷ Therefore it was only after 508/7 that they had 'a way to exploit the manpower potential of their region to the full' (150).⁸ Using the monuments linked with the first victories of this new army (Herodotos 5.74-7; *Palatine Anthology* 12.26), Anderson shows how the new popular government simply appropriated the ways the aristocrats of sixth-century Athens had represented their own valiant deeds (151-7).

In Chapter 7 'The Festival of All of the Athenians' (158-77) Anderson argues that tribally-organized 'warrior' contests' were deliberately added to the Great Panathenaia, between 508/7 and 490, in order to flaunt the new military power of Athens and its ultimate source -- the tribal and political reforms of Kleisthenes. This, unfortunately, is one of the book's weaker arguments, since the dating of these new contests to the early fifth century, their signification as strongly martial, and the organization of each team event by tribes are far from certain.⁹

In Chapter 8 'Ritual Ties between Center and Periphery' (178-96) Anderson maintains that Kleisthenes and his associates also used the festivals of the Great Dionysia, Eleusinian Mysteries and Brauronia to undergird the political integration of Athens and Attike. Here Anderson successfully strengthens the suggestion of Robert Connor that the Great Dionysia was actually founded as part of the Kleisthenic reforms in the last years of the sixth century (178-84) and makes a sound and original case for down-dating the Brauronia from the Peisistratid tyranny to just after 508/7 (194-6; cf. 22).¹⁰ Turning to the Eleusinian Mysteries (185-94), Anderson argues that the massive renovation of the sanctuaries at Athens and Eleusis just after 508/7 (186-7, 274 nn.26-7), meant 'the festival now visibly underscored the new order's efforts to affirm the political integrity of the region and build a sense of collective mission among its citizens' (192). However Anderson still acknowledges the earlier parallel building at both sanctuaries in the second quarter of the sixth century (186-7), even if he does not see this as proof of any burgeoning regional self-identity. Rather it was the product of the 'yearning' of the two

gene controlling the priesthoods of the Mysteries 'for Panhellenic recognition' (190-1). Anderson's reading of this mid-sixth-century evidence will be received as too narrow by most currently researching archaic Athens (see below).

In chapter 9 'Change and Memory' (197-211; cf. 44-52) Anderson ends with a bang by assaulting the scholarly orthodoxy that the so-called Tyrannicides, Harmodios and Aristogeiton, were honoured as the promoters of democracy. Drawing together the threads of argument from earlier chapters, Anderson explains that his book shows how Kleisthenes and his associates misrepresented what they had done 'as no more than the restoration of an older, ancestral order that had been suspended or dismantled by the Peisistratid 'tyrants' (205), because they did not want their reforms to be viewed as revolutionary. Therefore, the Tyrannicides were represented as the restorers of an older order and hence were 'a device created by leaders to help deflect attention from the novelty of the recent innovations' (206). The inventiveness and iconoclasm of this chapter will give ancient historians much food for thought. For this reviewer one problem immediately springs to mind: even if all of the book's arguments are accepted, it does not succeed in proving that Kleisthenes and his associates engaged in the misrepresentation this chapter claims. Certainly Anderson's book puts beyond doubt that the reformers of 508/7 and the new democracy sought to maintain a sense of continuity and to associate themselves with pre-existing traditions. It can also be said that these dispositions most probably contributed to the popular forgetting of Kleisthenes and his reforms and the emergence of Solon and Theseus, by the last decades of the fifth century, as the founders of the democracy. But to argue that Kleisthenes and his colleagues deliberately misrepresented their reforms as the restoration of an ancestral order is an inference which clearly goes beyond the evidence Anderson marshals.

In sum, this book refutes the predominant 'gradualist approach' to the history of archaic Athens (213), which interprets the institutional integration of Athens and Attike and non-elite citizens into political life as long-term processes, taking most of the sixth century. Instead Anderson establishes firmly that this double integration was achieved extremely quickly, at the end of the century, as part of the Kleisthenic reforms. As such the book makes a major contribution to scholarship on ancient Athens. However, for this reviewer Anderson pushes his revisionism too far in arguing that Attic residents only formed a common sense of identity as Athenians and the *demos* as a result of these reforms and the related cultural programme (22, 40, 81, 83, 119, 124-5, 197, 216).

The weakness of this interpretation of Kleisthenes as an institutional *and* cultural unifier of Attike is that it relies on a narrow reading of developments that are better (and more often) understood as examples of a burgeoning Athenian 'nationalism' decades before 508/7.¹¹ A good example is how Anderson explains the introduction, from the second quarter of the sixth century, of religious buildings and cult acts for Athena, such as the monumental ramp up to the Akropolis, the Bluebeard Temple, the Sanctuary for

Athena Nike, and the contests and procession for the new festival of the Great Panathenaia. For Anderson these are examples of the self-promoting projects Athenian leaders used in their struggles for preeminence locally and across Greece (70-1, 90-1, 106-8, 163-4, 166-7; cf. 138-9, 190-1). But this reading overlooks the significant ways the festivals of archaic Greece crystallized, developed and broadcast communal identity and civic ideology. In particular François de Polignac shows that solidarity between dispersed residents of a particular territory and different social classes was first formed and articulated in the shared worship of a community-protecting deity.¹² Therefore, these projects for Athena can also be interpreted as attempts by local aristocrats to style themselves as the benefactors of the worshippers of Athena across Attike. Thus they were competing with each other through 'nationalist' gestures which helped to articulate and reinforce an emerging regional identity.

Inadvertently the book also establishes that non-elite residents of sixth-century Attike shared this regional self-identity and saw themselves as the *demos* decades before the reforms of Kleisthenes. Anderson himself details 'the crucial part' of non-elite citizens in 508/7 (79) and how, within only a few years, they were asserting their new right to take the community's decisions on foreign affairs and public administration and committing themselves to regular military campaigns (52-7, 76-83, 147-57). Such political and military activism presupposes that they already had political aspirations and communal identities as Athenians and the people. Since the latter would have taken years -- if not decades -- to take shape, they could not have been, as Anderson repeatedly suggests, the products of the institutions, practices and cultural programme of Kleisthenes and his associates.

Details of this book undercut one of its main theses, that Kleisthenes was responsible for creating the communal identities and political aspirations of the Athenians. Instead the great innovation of Kleisthenes and his associates was not to invent the Athenian imaginary but rather to turn it into a concrete reality: he took pre-existing communal identities and gave them form as city-based institutions and practices. In turn, these new realities underwrote the regional and political self-identities of the Athenians, which had to become stronger than older local and class self-perceptions if the new style of politics and warfare were to last. That this book provides detailed evidence for this contrary interpretation bears witness to the scholarly rigor and honesty of its author and its status as an important study of archaic Athens.

Notes:

[1.](#) For their helpful comments on an earlier version of this review I would like to thank Ben Brown, Josh Ober, Guy Olding and Greg Stanton. I have also benefitted from the

author's answers to my various inquiries.

2. One other to do so is Frank Frost; see, for example, F.J. Frost 1976, 'Tribal Politics and the Civic State', *AJAH* 1, 66-75; 1981, 'Politics in Early Athens', in G.S. Shrimpton and D.J. McCargar (eds.), *Classical Contributions: Essays in Honour of M.F. McGregor*, 33-9, New York; 1984, 'The Athenian Military before Cleisthenes', *Historia* 33, 283-94; 1994, 'Aspects of Early Athenian Citizenship', in A.L. Boegehold and A.C. Scafuro (eds.), *Athenian Identity and Civic Ideology* 45-56, Baltimore and London.
3. J. Ober 1993, 'The Athenian Revolution of 508/7 BCE', in C. Dougherty and L. Kurke (eds.), *Cultural Poetics in Ancient Greece*, 215-32, Cambridge; re-published in J. Ober 1996, *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory*, 18-31, Princeton. The critique by Raaflaub occasions a published debate between the two; see K.A. Raaflaub 1998, 'Power in the Hands of the People: Foundations of Athenian Democracy', in I. Morris and K.A. Raaflaub (eds.), *Democracy 2500?: Questions and Challenges*, 31-66, Dubuque; J. Ober 1998, 'Revolution Matters: Democracy as Demotic Action (A Response to Kurt A. Raaflaub)', in Morris and Raaflaub 1998, 67-85; and K.A. Raaflaub 1998, 'The Thetes and Democracy (A Response to Josiah Ober)', in Morris and Raaflaub 1998, 87-103.
4. The others are Peter Siewert 1982, *Die Trittyen Attikas und die Heeresreform des Kleisthenes*, *Vestigia* 33, and M. Rausch 1999, *Isonomia in Athen: Veränderungen des öffentlichen Lebens vom Sturz der Tyrannis bis zur zweiten Perserabwehr*, Frankfurt.
5. In this respect the only book with which it compares is P.B. Manville 1990, *The Origins of Citizenship in Ancient Athens*, Princeton.
6. For this case, see E. Kearns 1989, *The Heroes of Attica*, *BICS supplement* 57, 117-8. Kearns comments (1989, 117): 'The theory that Theseus as we know him is in a sense the creation of the supporters of Cleisthenes is too well known to need elaboration.'
7. H.W. Singor 2000, 'The Military Side of the Peisistratean Tyranny', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg (ed.), *Peisistratos and the Tyranny: A Reappraisal of the Evidence*, 107-29, Amsterdam. This critical but too often overlooked finding was first made by H. van Effenterre 1976, 'Clisthène et les mesures de mobilisation', *REG* 89, 1-17. Note also Frost 1984.
8. A possible criticism of this otherwise impressive chapter is that in writing of the tribes turning 'all citizens' into soldiers (150, 153) Anderson overestimates the ambit of the Kleisthenic tribes and the extent of their non-elite participation. The navy and the lightly-armed corps of fifth-century Athens were not organized along tribal lines and sub-hoplite citizens did not participate in tribal or tribally-organized activities. See D. Pritchard 2000, 'Tribal Participation and Solidarity in Fifth-Century Athens: A Summary', *AH* 30, 104-18; 2003, 'Athletics, Education and Participation in Classical Athens', in D.J. Phillips and D. Pritchard (eds.), *Sport and Festival in the Ancient Greek World*, 293-349, 328-30; 2004 (in press), 'Kleisthenes, Participation, and the Dithyrambic Contests of Late Archaic and Classical Athens', *Phoenix* 58.
9. The uncertainty surrounding the dating of these events is partially recognized by Anderson (168, 268 n.27). His description of these events as "warrior" contests' is based

on the prize list of a Great Panathenaia of about 370 (166), where they are listed under the title 'prizes for the warriors' (IG 2.2 2311.58). This surely is not sound evidence for their signification more than a century earlier. Convincing critiques of the popular claim that the pyrrhic dance of this festival was organized; see, for example, J.K. Davies 1967, 'Demosthenes on Liturgies: A Note', *JHS* 87, 33-40; and P. Ceccarelli 2004, 'Dancing the *Pyrrhiche* in Athens', in P. Murray and P. Wilson (eds.), *Music and the Muses: The Culture of 'Mousike' in the Classical Athenian City*, 91-118, 93-9, Oxford.

[10.](#) W.R. Connor 1989, 'City Dionysia and Athenian Democracy', *C & M* 40, 7-32; re-published at W.R. Connor et al. 1990 (eds.), *Aspects of Athenian Democracy*, 7-32, Copenhagen.

[11.](#) For a fuller discussion of the cultural antecedents for the Kleisthenic reforms and the role played by non-elite citizens in 508/7 and in the subsequent defence and development of the democracy, see D. Pritchard 2005 (in press), 'Kleisthenes and Athenian Democracy: Vision from Above or Below?', *Polis* 22.1.

[12.](#) F. de Polignac 1995, *Cults, Territory and the Origins of the Greek City-State*, translated by J. Lloyd with a foreword by Claude Mossé, especially 78-82, Chicago and London. For a similar argument about the Great Panathenaia being an integral part of the 'public life' of sixth-century Athens, see D.J. Phillips 2003, 'Athenian Political History: A Panathenaic Perspective', in Phillips and Pritchard 2003, 197-232, 204-6, table 1.

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