



Financing the Athenian Fleet

Vincent Gabrielsen

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To meet the enormous expenses of maintaining its powerful navy, democratic Athens gave wealthy citizens responsibility for financing and commanding the fleet. Known as trierarchs -- literally, ship commanders -- they bore the expenses of maintaining and repairing the ships, as well as recruiting and provisioning their crews. The trierarchy grew into a powerful social institution that was indispensable to Athens and primarily responsible for the city's naval prowess in the classical period. Financing the Athenian Fleet is the first full-length study of the financial, logistical, and social organization of the Athenian navy. Using a rich variety of sources, particularly the enormous body of inscriptions that served as naval records, Vincent Gabrielsen examines the development and function of the Athenian trierarchy and revises our understanding of the social, political, and ideological mechanisms of which that institution was a part. Exploring the workings, ships, and gear of Athens' navy, Gabrielsen explains how a huge, costly, and highly effective operation was run thanks to the voluntary service and contributions of the wealthy trierarchs. He concludes with a discussion of the broader implications of the relationship between Athens' democracy and its wealthiest citizens. "This is a marvelous book: an original, well-researched, and compelling treatment of the financial organization of the Athenian navy, from which Gabrielsen expands our understanding of the functioning of Athens' democratic government. In particular, he addresses the topic of how democracy induced its richer members not to hide their money but to spend it on behalf of Athens. Gabrielsen has mastered a rich body of unusual -- and fundamental -- material which he presents with clarity and intelligence. This book is a major contribution to Athenian social history." -- Robert Wallace, Northwestern University.

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