

507-450 B.C.- The 57 years which gave birth to Democracy

By Antonis Mystriotis

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The purpose of this book is twofold. Its first objective is to present a method of historical analysis which is particularly useful when the available data are fragmented and chronologically misplaced. We call this method Exhaustive Analysis of Data. In this approach, any theoretical analysis or scenario has to take into account all available data without exceptions. However, contrary to Physical Sciences, where this methodology is also applied, reproducible experiments cannot be used to distinguish true data. Therefore the validity of the reported facts has to be determined by different means. In the present work, only information coming from eyewitnesses or archeological findings was considered as valid data. On the contrary, comments or interpretations of events given by ancient historians were not considered credible, even if the authors were chronologically close to the facts. Apparent discrepancies or contradictions coming from sources contemporary to the events were carefully examined as data since they most probably represent unfiltered raw data written down by the ancient historians following the narration of eyewitnesses. In many such cases, discrepancies can be resolved without discarding valuable data.

The second objective of this book is to present the historical period 507-450 BC, which corresponds to the growth phase of democratic Athens in a compact but detailed and integrated fashion. The aim was to reveal the forces which led to the transformation of Athens from a city-state to an empire in just fifty seven years while its constitution evolved towards pure, direct Democracy, where all decisions were taken in the Assembly by all citizens. The studied period includes a part (almost thirty years) of what is known as Pentecontaetia (479-433 BC), which is a poorly documented and obscure period of the Athenian history of the 5th century BC. The integrated approach of the present book, which links the events of 479-450 BC to the political situation in Athens during the previous twenty years (499-480 BC), views this period under a new perspective.

Through this book several innovations have been introduced in the historical analysis of the studied period, 507-450 BC. The most important ones are summarized as follows:

- 1) The presence of two parties or factions representing the Athenian populace is recognized. These two parties had conflicting interests and were competing for power.

- 2) The 2nd Persian War is analyzed on the basis of the Decree of Troezen rather than of Herodotus' Histories. It is shown that most discrepancies between these two sources can be resolved.
- 3) The Areopagus Council which held the power during the decade following the battle of Salamis is shown to be a government of national unity, rather than a conservative institution.

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