

The Organization of the Athenian Assembly: A Reply

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IN SEVERAL articles and in a recent monograph,¹ I have argued against the view that, during the *ekklesiai*, the Athenians were seated in tribal groups. I have also argued against the view that they gathered together in political groups; and my position has been that the Athenians attending a session of the *ekklesia* were seated at random and as they pleased. In "Voting in Tribal Groups in the Athenian Assembly," *GRBS* 28 (1987) 51–92, G. R. Stanton and P. J. Bicknell have reopened the question and argued that, in the assembly place on the Pnyx, the Athenians were organized not only in tribes, as often maintained in this century, but also in *trittyes*, as some scholars believed in the nineteenth century, a view recently revived by P. Siewert in his seminal study of the Attic *trittyes*.²

I am much impressed by Stanton and Bicknell's valuable contribution to the discussion of the evidence, but I am not persuaded. A full treatment of the problem will be published in *The Athenian Ecclesia II: A Collection of Articles 1983–88*. But I would like to offer a short rejoinder in the periodical in which most of the discussion has been conducted. Like Stanton and Bicknell I will treat Pnyx I, II, and III separately and open my rejoinder with a discussion of the evidence for the first period of the assembly place on the Pnyx.

Pnyx I

According to Stanton and Bicknell the auditorium of Pnyx I was constructed by Cleisthenes and fitted out with thirty *trittys* markers, each indicating a sector in which members of the *trittys* in question were seated during sessions of the *ekklesia*. In support of their view Stanton and Bicknell adduce four fifth-century *trittys* markers of marble: *IG* I² 883 (ca 450?) found west of the Areopagus, [Κερ]αμέου

¹ M. H. Hansen, "How Did the Athenian *Ecclesia* Vote?" in *The Athenian Ecclesia* (Copenhagen 1983) 115f; "Two Notes on the Pnyx," *GRBS* 26 (1985) 247–50; *The Athenian Assembly in the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford 1987) 39–41, 127.

² Cf. e.g. C. Schäfer, *AM* 5 (1880) 87; P. Siewert, *Die Trittyen Attikas und die Heeresreform des Kleisthenes* (Munich 1982) 10–13.

[τρ]ιττός; *IG I² 884* (*ante med. s. V*) found on the Pnyx, Λακιαδῶν τριττός; *SEG X 370* (*ca 420?*) found in the Agora, τριτ[ύς] Σφετ[ρίον]; and *SEG XXI 109* (*ca 450*) found in the Agora, [Σκ]α[μ]βο[νιδῶ]ν τριττός. Stanton and Bicknell (52–55) follow Siewert³ in believing that these four marble *horoi* belong together and were used as *trittys* markers in the auditorium of Pnyx I. I have the following objections:

(a) The four *horoi* belong in the period *ca 460–420*. I find it inconceivable that the thirty *trittys* markers erected on the Pnyx *ca 500* in consequence of Cleisthenes' reforms were damaged so rapidly that, after less than two generations, several had to be replaced—so many in fact that the four we have preserved are all replacements of the period 460–420. For comparison I note that of the three preserved boundary stones set up in the Agora during the same period (*ca 500*), two were found *in situ* and must have served their purpose for almost a millennium without having been replaced.⁴

(b) Further, the four marble *horoi* “display differences of stone, letter height and form, and disposition of text on the stone.”⁵ Following Camp and Binder I prefer the view that the four *horoi* belong to four different series. Thus the only *trittys* marker to be connected indisputably with the Pnyx is *IG I² 884*, inscribed Λακιαδῶν τριττός.

(c) The stele *IG I² 884* was found by Pittakis, and in his first report he wrote: Ἡῶρον αὐτὴν τὸ 1846 Ἰανουαρίου 18 οὐ μακρὰν τοῦ βήματος τῆς πυκνός.⁶ A few years later Rangabé republished the stone and stated: “trouvé, d’après M. Pittaki, dans un trou creusé dans le roche horizontal du Pnyx.”⁷ He believed, as do now Stanton and Bicknell, that the *trittys* marker once indicated the place where the citizens of Lakiadai were seated during the sessions of the *ekklesia*: “Je crois devoir le considerer aussi comme une borne, indiquant la place que les Laciades occupaient dans les assemblées populaires.” Thus, he probably took the stele to have been found in the auditorium in front of the *bema*. In a subsequent publication, however, Pittakis objected, *inter alia*, to Rangabé’s interpretation of where the stone was found: Ὁ Κ. Ραγκαβῆς λαμβάνεται τοιοῦτους λόγους δὲν εἶπον· ὁ δὲ ἔγραψα εἶναι τοῦτο. “. . . Ἡῶρον αὐτὴν τὸ 1846 Ἰανουαρίου 18 οὐ μακρὰν τοῦ βήματος τῆς Πυκνός.”⁸ Pittakis’ objection, if it can be trusted, indicates that he found the stone, not in the auditorium itself, as Rangabé

³ Siewert (*supra* n.2) 11f.

⁴ Cf. H. A. Thompson and R. E. Wycherly, *The Athenian Agora XIV The Agora of Athens* (Princeton 1972) 117–19.

⁵ Report on the four *horoi* by J. Camp and J. Binder quoted in Hansen, “Two Notes” (*supra* n.1) 248f n.23.

⁶ *ArchEph* (1853) 773 no. 1289.

⁷ A. R. Rangabé, *Antiquités helléniques* II (Athens 1855) 586 no. 890.

⁸ *ArchEph* (1856) 1357 no. 2700.

seems to assume, but probably in the area above the scarps of Pnyx III. To sum up, I find it impossible to decide whether the stele was found some meters to the north of the *bema* in the auditorium, or some meters to the south of the *bema* above the scarps. Thus, I agree with E. Meyer, who concludes: “Es ist also recht unsicher, ob der Stein zum alten Volksversammlungsplatz gehört.”⁹

(d) Let us suppose with Stanton and Bicknell that the seating floor of Pnyx I was covered with thirty *trittys* markers, each indicating the gathering point for the members of a *trittys*. The auditorium could hold only 6,000 citizens. What happened if, occasionally, some 7,000 or 8,000 citizens turned up? The supernumeraries undoubtedly took their places on the undressed rock east, south, and west of the auditorium;¹⁰ but since the *trittys* markers cannot have indicated subdivisions of the hillside outside the auditorium, the organization into *trittyes* must have broken down whenever more than 6,000 citizens attended a session.

(e) Stanton and Bicknell assume that the marble *trittys* markers set up in Pnyx I indicated gathering points, not boundaries (68), whereas the *trittys* markers of poros stone,¹¹ which—according to Stanton and Bicknell—served the same purpose in the assembly place in the Piraeus, clearly indicated boundary lines between the areas reserved for the individual tribes and *trittyes* (61f with *Fig. 3*). I find it disquieting to have one kind of organization used in Pnyx I but a different kind used in the contemporary assembly place in the Piraeus and again in Pnyx III.

(f) In addition to the epigraphical evidence we have one literary source that Stanton and Bicknell take to bear on the problem how the Athenians were seated and voted in the fifth-century assembly place, Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.9. During the trial of the Arginousae generals, Calixenus proposed and carried a decree that the assembly pass sentence on the eight generals collectively and that the vote be taken by ballot and according to tribes:

διαψηφίσασθαι Ἀθηναίους ἅπαντας κατὰ φυλάς· θεῖναι δὲ εἰς τὴν φυλὴν ἐκάστην δύο ὑδρίας· ἐφ’ ἐκάστη δὲ τῇ φυλῇ κήρυκα κηρύττειν, ὅτω δοκοῦσιν ἀδικεῖν οἱ στρατηγοὶ οὐκ ἀνελόμενοι τοὺς νικήσαντας ἐν τῇ ναυμαχίᾳ εἰς τὴν προτέραν ψηφίσασθαι, ὅτω δὲ μή, εἰς τὴν ὑστέραν.¹²

⁹ E. Meyer, *RE* 21 (1951) 1115 s.v. “Pnyx.”

¹⁰ M. H. Hansen, “The Construction of Pnyx II and the Introduction of Assembly Pay,” *ClMed* 37 (1986) 91; cf. H. A. Thompson, “The Pnyx in Models,” *Hesperia* Suppl. 19 (1982) 135: “The natural contours of the hillside would have permitted many citizens to sit or stand outside the dressed seating floor.”

¹¹ Listed and described by Siewert (*supra* n.2) 12 with n.57.

¹² For a description of the trial of the generals cf. Hansen, *The Sovereignty of the*

Stanton and Bicknell cite Callixenus' *proboulema* in support of their view that "the assembly always sat in tribal groups" (71), but in my opinion the passage does not support this view. First, the other evidence we have for *psephophoria* in the assembly (relating to the fourth century) shows that the ballot took place *outside* the assembly place and before the citizens took their seats in the auditorium.¹³ In the trial of the generals the vote took place *after* the *ekklesia* and, probably, *outside* the auditorium. Thus, the voting procedure described in Callixenus' decree offers no information about how the vote is to be taken *during* the session. Second, Callixenus' minute description of how the vote is to be taken shows that the ballot he prescribes is exceptional and not standard procedure. Third, other sources (*e.g.* Dem. 19.31) confirm that the *ekklesia*, when transformed into a law court, regularly voted by show of hands and not by ballot. From these three observations I infer that Callixenus' decree prescribed an exceptional form of ballot imitating the voting procedure used in an *ostrakophoria* and in the *dikasteria*; and since the vote was to be taken after the session, and probably outside the assembly place, the passage does not elucidate the problem how the citizens were organized in the auditorium.

Pnyx II

No archaeological or epigraphical evidence sheds light on how the audience was seated in the auditorium of Pnyx II, but several texts give valuable information. The principal literary sources are (a) Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*; (b) a passage in Aeschines' speech *On the Embassy* (2.64–68); and (c) a passage in the Demosthenic speech *Against Neaira* (59.43).

(a) In the *Ecclesiazusae* Aristophanes describes how the women implement their scheme to sit packed together around the *bema*. The play has always been adduced in support of the view that the Athenians sat in the auditorium where they wanted and not according to tribes. Bicknell, however, advances an alternative interpretation. During the period of Pnyx II the members of the inland demes sat at the very front across the auditorium from east to west, subdivided into ten *trittys* groups (82f). Next, he argues that the disguised women pose as members of the inland demes (to be seated in the front of the auditorium: 84), and concludes that Aristophanes' play supports the

People's Court in Athens (Odense 1974) cat. no. 3, and *Eisangelia* (Odense 1975) cat. no. 66.

¹³ Dem. 59.89f; *cf.* Hansen, *The Athenian Ecclesia* (*supra* n.1) 13.

assumption that, in Pnyx II, the audience was organized into thirty *trittyes* with the ten inland *trittyes* in the front and the ten city *trittyes* in the back of the auditorium (82f).

Bicknell's interpretation is ingenious but unconvincing. Aristophanes emphasizes that the women are in a hurry (84–87, 282ff) and that they intend to oust the men from the city (302, τὸς ἐξ ἄστειος ἤκοντας). If inland dwellers invariably sat in the front of the auditorium and city dwellers in the back, the women cannot oust the men from the city, and they do not have to hasten. They have the lead on the men from the countryside and, as long as they arrive before them, they can have the front seats to themselves and, in any case, they will not have to mingle with the men from the city. Furthermore, the conversation between Chremes and Blepyrus at 372–477 disproves the assumption that the women posed as members of the inland demes. When Chremes reports the audience's response to Praxagora's speech he says: εἶτ' ἐθορύβησαν κἀνέκραγον ὡς εὔ λέγοι, τὸ σκυτοτομικὸν πλῆθος, οἱ δ' ἐκ τῶν ἀγρῶν ἀνεβορβόρυξαν (431–33). Obviously the front part of the auditorium was filled, not with citizens pale as city dwellers, but with pale city dwellers whom Chremes opposes to the citizens from the countryside. If we accept Bicknell and Stanton's reconstruction of how the Athenians were seated in Pnyx II, Chremes would have wondered himself, and Blepyrus would have asked him, "but how can it be that city dwellers were seated in front of the auditorium?" Thus, we are back at the traditional interpretation: Aristophanes' play strongly supports the view that the citizens were seated at random where they pleased, and not organized into tribes or *trittyes*.

(b) Bicknell and Stanton may, of course, revise their interpretation of Aristophanes and claim that the women all posed as members of the city demes and that the fifth-century organization of the auditorium was upheld in the fourth century, but then they will have difficulties in explaining the conversation between Demosthenes and Amyntor, reported at Aeschin. 2.64–68. I grant Stanton and Bicknell (81f) that a conversation between Amyntor of Erchia (inland *trittys* of Aigeis II) and Demosthenes of Paiania (inland *trittys* of Pandionis III, regularly seated near the scarps) is possible *if the organization of the trittyes had been reversed* so that, in the auditorium of Pnyx II, the inland *trittyes* were placed near the *bema* whereas the city *trittyes* were relegated to the back along the retaining wall. But the italicized provision is crucial, and the explanation for it offered by Stanton and Bicknell is rather weak: they believe that the whole reconstruction of the Pnyx was carried out by the Thirty in 404, moving the city dwellers to the

back of the auditorium in order to reduce their influence on the debate and give more weight to the peasants living in the countryside (82f). Following Moysey,¹⁴ I still hold that the Thirty may well have started the rebuilding as reported by Plutarch, perhaps as a pretext for closing the Pnyx; I refuse to believe, however, that the elaborate building up of the auditorium of Pnyx II is the work of the oligarchs. The new closed auditorium is, in my opinion, to be connected with the introduction of assembly pay and accordingly belongs in the years around 400.¹⁵

(c) A further argument against having the inland *trittyes* close to the *bema* may be found in the Demosthenic speech *Against Neaira*, where we are told that Stephanus of Eroiadai was regularly to be found near the *bema* shouting at the speakers (Dem. 59.43). Now, Eroiadai is the name of two different demes: one belonged to Hippothontis (VIII) and the other to Antiochis (X). Eroiadai (VIII) was probably located in the city district,¹⁶ whereas the location of Eroiadai (X) is unknown.¹⁷ In a prytany inscription of 334/3, however, Eroiadai is recorded in the third column with Alopeke.¹⁸ If we follow Traill in taking Eroiadai (X) to belong in the city *trittys*,¹⁹ the inference is that Stephanus, though he belonged to the city *trittys* of either Hippothontis or Antiochis, nevertheless preferred to take his seat in Pnyx II near the *bema*, and not near the back. If the allocation of Eroiadai (VIII) and (X) is correct, Stanton and Bicknell's theory is disproved once and for all. But we must not forget that prytany inscriptions may not be reliable guides for assigning demes to *trittyes*, and that the relation between geographical *trittyes* and bouleutic *trittyes* is a moot point.

Pnyx III

In any discussion of the auditorium of Pnyx III two crucial problems must be addressed: (a) how are we to explain the six stele beddings running parallel to the scarps at a distance of *ca* 10.5 meters? and (b) how are we to interpret the law of 346/5 on *ἡ προεδρεύουσα φυλή?*

(a) On Stanton and Bicknell's interpretation of the stele beddings (60f with *Fig. 3*) the seating floor reserved for each of the five tribes in the

¹⁴ R. A. Moysey, "The Thirty and the Pnyx," *AJA* 85 (1981) 31–37.

¹⁵ Hansen (*supra* n.10) 93–98.

¹⁶ J. S. Traill, *Demos and Trittys* (Toronto 1986) 137; Siewert (*supra* n.2) 171f.

¹⁷ Traill (*supra* n.16) 139. There is some evidence (tombstones) that Eroiadai (X) was located inland at Charvati (Peuka) near Pallene.

¹⁸ *Agora* XV 44.67 (334/3).

¹⁹ Cf. Traill, "Diakris, the Inland Trittys of Leontis," *Hesperia* 47 (1978) 104.

western part of the auditorium of Pnyx III is: VI Oineis, 260 m.²; VII Kekropis, 360; VIII Hippothontis, 465; IX Aiantis, 435; and X Antiochis, 270. I find the disparity of seating facilities given to the various tribes suspicious, especially if a sector of no less than 435 m.² was assigned to the smallest of all tribes, *viz.*, Aiantis, whereas the members of the medium-sized tribe Antiochis has to squeeze together in a sector of no more than 270.²⁰ On this reconstruction, the huge auditorium could accommodate no more than *ca* 675 citizens belonging to Antiochis, but some 1,100 belonging to Aiantis. With a normal attendance of *ca* 6,000 citizens, the presumption is that the sector assigned to Antiochis was simply too small, whereas the citizens of Aiantis probably never filled the sector assigned to their tribe.

(b) In the law of 346/5 on the presiding tribe (Aeschin. 1.33f, 3.4; Dem. 25.90) Stanton and Bicknell suggest taking *προεδρεύουσα* in a metaphorical sense: “being in charge of the meeting and keeping order” (64). But at 1.34 Aeschines refers to the law as *ὁ περὶ τῆς προεδρίας τῶν φυλῶν νόμος*. The noun *προεδρία* is almost always used in a literal sense,²¹ and at Aeschines 1.34 it is explicitly stated that the law concerns what goes on around the platform (*καθ’ ἐκάστην ἐκκλησίαν ἀποκληροῦν φυλὴν ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα, ἥτις προεδρεύσει*). Thus, the presiding tribe must have been seated in the front part of the auditorium around the *bema*, and we know that the presiding tribe was selected by lot before a session of the *ekklesia* was opened.²² The system by which all members of one tribe had to take turns sitting in front around the *bema* is, in my opinion, irreconcilable with the view that the citizens were organized into thirty well-defined *trittys*-groups spread out over the auditorium with an open area in front.

Summing up, I find that the evidence presented by Stanton and Bicknell is insufficient to prove that the Athenians attending an *ekklesia* were seated and voted in *trittys* groups. Regarding Pnyx I, we cannot be certain that *IG I² 884* was found in the auditorium of the Pnyx; and Xenophon *Hell.* 1.7.9 was an extraordinary measure prescribing that a ballot be taken by tribes (not *trittyes*) after the *ekklesia*. Regarding Pnyx II, Aristophanes’ description of the women’s coup in *Ecclesiazusae* strongly supports the view that the citizens could sit as

²⁰ On the relative size of the tribes *cf.* J. Traill, *The Political Organization of Attica* (=Hesperia Suppl. 14 [1975]) 32 with n.20.

²¹ Hdt. 6.57; Ar. *Ach.* 42, *Eq.* 575, 702–04; Xen. *Vect.* 3.3; Pl. *Leg.* 881B, 946B; Arist. *Rh.* 1361a35; Dem. 18.91; Aeschin. 2.80, 110; 3.76, 154; Dinarchus 2.13; *cf.* the literal *προεδρία* at competitions commonly granted in honorific decrees. *προεδρία* appears in a metaphorical sense only at Arist. *Pol.* 1292a9, 1309a29.

²² Hansen, *The Athenian Ecclesia* (*supra* n.1) 41.

they pleased in the auditorium; the conversation between Demosthenes and Amyntor (Aeschin. 2.64–68) is inconclusive; whereas Stephanus of Eroiadai's position near the *bema* upsets Stanton and Bicknell's reconstruction, if we follow Traill in taking both Eroiadai VIII and X to belong to the urban *trittys* of (respectively) Hippothontis and Antiochis. Regarding Pnyx III, the subdivisions of the auditorium suggested in their *Fig. 3* (61) are, in my opinion, odd and do not fit what we know about the relative size of the tribes. Finally, the law on the presiding tribe (Aeschin. 1.33f) is to be taken literally and not metaphorically; and a system of rotation in which all members of one tribe were gathered around the *bema* is irreconcilable with an organization of the audience into thirty fixed *trittys* sectors.

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