

## The funerary *periboloi*: a source for the social history of classical Athens

The broad spread of family tombs, the so called funerary *periboloi*, is a phenomenon peculiar to Classical Attica. Without any doubt the numbers allow us to talk of a mass phenomenon. Significantly it began in the second half of the Vth century and lasted until the end of the following century. It thus coincides - and not by chance in my opinion - with the golden age of Athenian democracy.

In the family tombs, the *politēs* displayed, within the microcosm of his *oikos*, the correct functioning of the basic mechanisms on which the *polis* was founded. Indeed hierarchy, differences in role depending on the age and sex, interfamilial solidarity are the informing principles of the iconography of *semata*, tomb arrangement and grave-good selection, but also of inscriptions. Together these elements form a symbolic code that was shared by the community as a whole. Showing as clearly as possible the acceptance of this collective code is crucial.

The investigation of the activities of family tomb owners indicated that they formed a heterogeneous group which, while it sometimes included political leaders of the community, mainly provided the lower nodes of the administration, the members of that complex organization of temporarily appointed magistrates and officials who concretely guaranteed the survival of the *polis*.

Through a multidisciplinary approach, based on a detailed analysis of archaeological contexts and a systematic prosopographical investigation, we try to come up with a social identikit of the individuals who commissioned the *periboloi*.

Despite their diversity in wealth and social status, their absolute ideological homogeneity and their sharing of values, aspirations and behavioral models possible entitle us to regard them as a “bourgeoisie” ante *litteram*.