



Art and Society in Transition: The Radical Redistribution of Power and Wealth in Periclean Athens

W. Phillip Strand

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In the mid fifth century B.C., the people of Athens raised perhaps the greatest buildings of the ancient world. The temple construction program was a significant part of an overall cultural policy put forward by the democratic leader of Athens: Pericles. By 449 B.C. the Athenians controlled an Aegean empire and it was then that the building program was initiated--such a juxtaposition was anything but mere coincidence. The Periclean beautification project served to address both foreign and domestic problems facing the Athenians on the one hand, and Pericles on the other. Athens needed to portray an "image of power" that matched the reality of her power. Pericles, on the domestic level, wanted to strengthen the radical Athenian democracy and, at the same time, weaken the influence of the entrenched wealthy elite. The present study seeks to understand how the Periclean building program uniquely answered these two related problems.

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