

The monuments of the city of Athens have become increasingly familiar to students of Greek history and archaeology. In the city of Athens itself the twin foci of memorialisation in the archaic period, the Athenian Acropolis and the Ceramicus cemetery, were immediately after the Persian Wars initially supplanted by the Athenian Agora before first the Acropolis and then the Ceramicus reasserted themselves so that fourth-century memorialization variously occurred in all three locations. This pattern of change can be largely explained in political terms, with the invention of the Agora (and its immediate environs) as a focus of memory closely linked to insistence on the responsibility of the people as a whole (and not that of either individuals or the gods).

The monuments and patterns of memorialization in the Attic demes, by contrast, have been largely ignored. There are some very good reasons for this. We cannot reconstruct the monuments of any deme agora, and mostly have little idea where the deme agora was. Nor can we locate on the ground even those deme sanctuaries of which we know from literary and epigraphic sources. However, gaps in our evidence – and we are equally ignorant of large parts of the city of Athens – do not prevent us from forming a broad picture of the variety of ways in which monuments were disposed in different demes and the different sets of memories that were invoked by those different dispositions.

This paper looks in detail at two demes, Thorikos and Rhamnous, using evidence from other Attic demes to suggest that the same elements were often also in play elsewhere. The two demes share certain qualities. Both were sizeable communities, with adjacent forts, theatres, and substantial late fifth-century investment in religious building. For both we are relatively well provided with archaeological evidence concerning the deme centre and with epigraphic evidence for various activities going on in the deme, and for both the evidence extends from the sixth to the fourth century.

The deme of Thorikos clusters round the hill of Velatouri, away from immediate contact with the coast, which is where the fort is situated. The settlement is in immediate contact with bronze age tombs, a theatre and cemetery, and industrial activities. But there is little sign that the cemetery was at all dominant in the space of the town. Commemoration of the dead seems to have been modest. By comparison, as both surviving buildings and the late fifth-century sacred calendar make clear, cult activity was extensive, and cults of local heroes and heroines bulked peculiarly large.

The deme of Rhamnous lay close to the fort and the sea, but habitation areas seem to have been separate from spaces for the dead and for the gods. The theatre was within the fort, the sanctuary inland, linked by a major processional route. Along this route lay monumental tombs. The dead interposed themselves between the people of Rhamnous and their gods, and the gods themselves were cults of pan-Athenian importance. Although the absence of a sacred calendar means that we have inevitably lost much detail of the cult life of the city, and although we know of a local healing hero, the monuments that stake out the space of the deme stress the power and wealth of Rhamnousian families rather than a landscape inhabited by parochial supernatural powers.

The variety of landscapes of memorialisation experienced by Athenians growing up in their demes was no trivial matter: it directly shaped the ways in which citizens construed what was central to the life of the city as a whole.