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Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece

Kurt A. Raaflaub, Josiah Ober, Robert Wallace

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This book presents a state-of-the-art debate about the origins of Athenian democracy by five eminent scholars. The result is a stimulating, critical exploration and interpretation of the extant evidence on this intriguing and important topic. The authors address such questions as: Why was democracy first realized in ancient Greece? Was democracy “invented” or did it evolve over a long period of time? What were the conditions for democracy, the social and political foundations that made this development possible? And what factors turned the possibility of democracy into necessity and reality? The authors first examine the conditions in early Greek society that encouraged equality and “people’s power.” They then scrutinize, in their social and political contexts, three crucial points in the evolution of democracy: the reforms connected with the names of Solon, Cleisthenes, and Ephialtes in the early and late sixth and mid-fifth century. Finally, an ancient historian and a political scientist review the arguments presented in the previous chapters and add their own perspectives, asking what lessons we can draw today from the ancient democratic experience. Designed for a general readership as well as students and scholars, the book intends to provoke discussion by presenting side by side the evidence and arguments that support various explanations of the origins of democracy, thus enabling readers to join in the debate and draw their own conclusions.

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