

Introduction

In this volume, I offer a new view of the role of the decree as an institution within the framework of Athenian democratic political activity and its legacy. Focusing upon decrees of the Athenian *demos* of the period 403/2–322/1, the perspectives offered in this volume are informed primarily by the literary evidence collected in Volume 1, but also by epigraphic material and literary engagement with documents and decrees of a wider chronological context, particularly those associated with the fifth century.

What makes this volume distinctive is its attempt to contemplate the role of the decree as an institution which, by offering both a rhetorically authoritative resource for narratives of the history of the Athenian *demos* (Chapter 1 below) and a legitimate route for the political self-promotion of individual citizens (Chapter 2 below), came to play an important role in shaping Athenian politics. I seek to determine how awareness and interpretations of decrees circulated among contemporary Athenians in the fourth century, considering the role of epigraphical publication in that process (Chapter 3 below). I assess ideas about, and the reality of, the dissemination of knowledge of decrees among non-Athenians (Chapter 4 below); I also explore their representation in classical literature, seeking to explain how the subject of decrees came to attain a rhetorical presence and a significance to the wider image and legacy of the Athenians (Chapter 5 below).

Over the course of this volume I build upon a number of different modern scholarly developments which deserve mention here: first, scholarly works on Athenian democracy, which have gone some way to placing decrees and activity related to them within the broader frameworks of political institutions and social dynamics;¹ second, the work of those who have emphasised the technical aspects of decrees, the significance of their epigraphical publication, and their literary circulation;² third, those who have produced close studies of

1 For interpretations of Athenian democratic activity based upon an analysis of the city's institutions (including decree-making institutions), see Rhodes 1972; Hansen 1987, 1999; Lambert 2018: 171–226; on the social dynamics of Athenian politics, see Finley 1966; Ober 1989, 2008.

2 For institutions and Athenian decrees: Hansen 1987: 108–118; Rhodes 1972: 52–87; Schoemann 1819: 129–47; Biagi 1785; for technical aspects of decrees: Rhodes with Lewis 1997; Canevaro 2013; on the significance of their epigraphical publication: Hedrick 1999, 2000; Sickinger 2009; Lambert 2011a (= 2018: 71–92) and 2018: 47–68; on the literary circulation of decrees: Haake 2013.

particular types of decree.³ Particular mention must be made of the work of Stephen Lambert, which has opened up a great variety of historical perspectives on inscribed Athenian laws and decrees (see especially Lambert 2018); several of the avenues of analysis Lambert has opened up are pursued here, in particular those which concern the significance of epigraphical publication and the association between decree-making and political influence. To the angles developed by such approaches, I add those developed in sociological theory, New Institutional analysis, and memory studies.

An account of the premises upon which this study of Athenian decrees in literature is based can be found in the Introduction to Volume 1, and the Inventory of Decrees. References to ‘D’ and ‘DP’ in the current volume refer to the entries in the Inventory. In the current Introduction, I outline succinctly the approaches offered in this volume to the analysis of the ancient evidence for decrees.

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In Greece, the decree, as a means by which communities made decisions, and initiated the process of implementing them, emerged towards the end of the archaic period out of the political tendency of the Greek city-states to draw together their male adult citizens to discuss proposals put forward by members of their community and to make enactments as shared decisions.⁴ Some classical Greek city-states entitled an unusually high – for a premodern (or indeed a modern) society – proportion of male citizens to a role in politics. Yet comparable decision-making processes are known in other, non-Greek, city-state organisations which featured forms of direct democracy.⁵ For instance, the seventeenth-century *rada* (assembly) of the Zaporozhian Cossacks was a decree-making body which voted by acclamation on matters such as the division of income, plunder, mercenary remuneration, hunting and questions of

3 Four works which have successfully placed the discussion of particular types of honorific grant in their wider context are: Osborne 1981–3 (citizenship decrees); Ma 2013 (honorific statues); Mack 2015 (proxeny awards); Lambert 2011a (= 2018: 71–92; honorific decrees).

4 For inscribed enactments of archaic Greek city-states, see Koerner 1993; Van Effenterre and Ruzé 1994–5. On decision-making at the Homeric proto-assembly, see Hom. *Il.* 1.1–305, 2.1–182; *Od.* 2.1–159 with Hammer 2002 and Raaflaub 2004.

5 For discussion of rule by councils and assemblies ‘in which decisions were made by vote after a debate’ as a characteristic of the city-state across history, see Hansen 2000: 612 with note 81, pointing to examples of republican forms of political organisation among city-state organisations of the Etruscans, Latins, Italians, Swiss, Dutch, Mzâb, Swahili, Ibadan of the Yoruba, and Banda-Neira of the Malay. For decision-making in the assemblies of Balinese village society, see Hobart 1975: 87–91.

war or peace.⁶ In this and the ancient Greek context, decrees were formulated and enacted by groups of men who shared privileged status at an assembly or a smaller council. In the ancient Greek world, the passing of decrees allowed communities to regulate internal matters related to areas such as cult practice and civic organisation, but also enabled them to co-ordinate transactions with other communities (through exchange, honorific transactions, diplomacy and warfare). They were, therefore, important for social co-ordination and co-ordination of interaction with other communities. Yet, as we shall see, the Athenian system of enactment, in which individual initiative played a big part, also meant that the proposal of decrees offered a significant route of political self-promotion.

Decrees appeared in democratic Athens before the fifth century and it is likely that they were made by the assembly even in the pre-Cleisthenic era;⁷ the oldest extant Athenian inscription which makes reference to an enactment of the people is *IG I³ 1* of perhaps the late sixth century, a slab of marble on which is inscribed a decree concerning Salamis.⁸ Extant epigraphical evidence suggests that the publication of inscribed decrees by the Athenians accelerated over the second half of the fifth century and reached a peak in the second half of the fourth century.⁹ This aspect of the epigraphical habit is a clear demonstration

6 On Cossack decision-making, see Longworth 1969: 36–7. For the re-establishment of the *rada* both at the beginning and again at the end of the twentieth century, see O'Rourke 2007: 200–201, 282; caution is necessary about the modern claims about their heritage, given that such developments were at least partially inspired by Cossack ideals of freedom and equality which were, according to O'Rourke 2007: 62, 'the stuff of popular dreams'. On the *veche* (town-meeting) and other 'free institutions' among the city-states of Kievian and Novgorodian Russia of the Middle Ages, Cossack communities and military democracies of South Russia, see Timasheff 2010.

7 For an account (perhaps anachronistic) of a decree (a proposal attributed to a certain Aristion) granting a bodyguard to Pisistratos before his first seizure of power in 561/0, see [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 14.1. Herodotus (1.59.4) tells a story about Pisistratos persuading the Athenian *demos* to grant him a bodyguard, but without explaining it as a decree. For another occasion when a fourth-century source describes an incident known from Herodotus' work as a decree, see Chapter 5.2.1 below. Fourth-century sources make frequent reference to decrees of the Persian War era, but these are often thought to be spurious: see Develin 1989: 56, 59, 64, 66; Habicht 1961; cf. discussion below, Chapters 1.5.3 and 5.4.1 with note 113 below.

8 *IG I³ 1* line 1 contains the earliest epigraphically attested occurrence of the enactment formulae 'ἔδοξε τῷ δήμῳ' ('it was resolved by the people'). For the earliest known use of the term *psephisma*, see Chapter 1.1 note 4 below.

9 For a quantitative survey of the publication of Athenian decrees, see Hedrick 1999; for the relationship between imperial administration and the publication of decrees, see Schuller 1974. For figures of fifth- and fourth-century Athenian decrees on stone, see Table 1, pp. 12–13 below.

of the importance of the decree to the ancient Athenians,¹⁰ who displayed their financial and physical investment in decrees by setting them up in public places (often at locations with monumental and/or religious significance), and adorned some of them with sculptured reliefs.¹¹ Such forms of publication are a clear demonstration of the importance of the decree to ancient Athenian culture.

In Athens, the enactment of decrees was generally regarded as indicative of the democratic will of the people, a theme that will be explored in Chapters 1 and 2;¹² more precisely, however, decrees demonstrated the authority of the institutions that enacted them.¹³ Indeed, while decrees were prevalent in other Greek democracies,¹⁴ they were the tool of decision-making also in those Greek city-state communities, such as Delphi, which possessed more narrowly restricted institutional bodies or were not conspicuously democratic;¹⁵ decree-making, therefore, was not the exclusive preserve of democratic regimes. Moreover, associated as they were in Athens with individual proposers,¹⁶ decrees were subject also to appropriation by political actors in a number of different ways. By the 330s, Demosthenes was able to make claims about his contribution to the salvation of the Athenian city-state on the basis of accounts of decrees that he proposed; in the same period, decrees are attested as the subject and focus of political competition (see Chapter 2.3 below). It is clear, therefore, that in the second half of the fourth century decree-proposing had become a signifi-

- 10 Rhodes with Lewis (1997) collects the evidence for the enactment of decrees of city-state communities from across the Greek world, drawing predominantly upon epigraphical evidence. The epigraphical publication of Athenian decrees will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3 below.
- 11 Places of publication: Hölkeskamp 2000; Liddel 2003; Moroo 2016; Lambert 2018: 19–46; see discussion in Chapter 3.3 below. On document reliefs: Lawton 1995; Hagemajer Allen 2003; Moreno 2007: 260–9; Blanshard 2004b, 2007; Deene 2016; Mack 2018. On the history of the *stèle* as a documentary form, see Meyer 2013 and Davies 2005.
- 12 On the relationship between democracy and decree-publishing see Hedrick 1999, 2000 and now Sickinger 2009.
- 13 However, on the limits to the sovereignty of decrees of the Athenian *demos*, see Chapter 1.3 below.
- 14 Decrees elsewhere in the Greek world: Rhodes with Lewis 1997: *passim*; democracies outside Athens: Robinson 1997 and 2011; Grieb 2009; Carlsson 2010.
- 15 Rhodes with Lewis 1997: 126–40. For decrees of (what might be, given that the awards were made by the council alone) oligarchic Erythrai, see RO 56 and SEG XXXI 969; for a decree of oligarchic Miletos, see OR 123 = ML 43. For voting and electoral manipulation at assemblies in oligarchies, emphasising their deployment in supporting regimes, see Simonton 2017: 121–33.
- 16 The earliest epigraphically attested Attic decree to mention a proposer is IG I³ 8 of c. 460–50: “Ἀντίβιο[ς εἶπεν· τὰ μὲν ἄλλα καθάπερ] Καλλίμαχος” (lines 3–4: ‘Antibio[s] proposed: other things just a[s] Kallimachos (proposed)’): according to this restoration, Kallimachos is revealed as the original proposer, with Antibios the author of a rider. For the attribution of a sixth-century decree to a certain Aristion, see note 7 above.

cant political activity which offered a route (but not the only route) to political prominence.¹⁷ This theme will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2 below.

The interpretations of decrees, their political connotations and the literary representations of them explored over the course of this volume – particularly in Chapters 1 and 2 below – draw extensively upon ancient sources but are informed more broadly by critical perspectives. The approach taken draws upon three related interpretations of human behaviour and aspiration which have been developed in sociological studies. The first is that of symbolic capital, articulated by Pierre Bourdieu in his 1979 *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*). This notion emphasises the preponderance among human individuals of aspiration for ‘name, renown, prestige, honour, glory, and authority’.¹⁸ The desire for symbolic capital is said to be ‘inculcated in the earliest years of life and reinforced by all subsequent experience’.¹⁹ Its demonstration and display equates to the expression of symbolic power.²⁰ That similar aspirations are espoused by individuals in ancient Greek culture has been extensively demonstrated in modern scholarship;²¹ indeed, the widespread public display of symbolic capital in honorific and commemorative contexts (both inscribed and funerary) is well documented.²² This approach is resonant with the appearance of decrees in political and forensic oratory: in Chapter 2 below I underline the fact that decrees are deployed in political arguments not only for purposes of persuasion but as a demonstration of personal knowledge and political achievement; politicians were able to capitalise on them by deploying accounts, both at the assembly and the lawcourt, of decrees and success in enacting them. In other words, knowledge of decrees could be deployed in the manufacture of political capital. But as will become clear (see Chapter 1 below), this is not the whole picture: decrees were held up not only as records of decisions that were supposed to bolster the profile of particular individuals, but they also could be described in ways which were aimed at communicating a sense of solidarity and shared interests among the people; this is relevant to Bourdieu’s notion – related to, but distinct from, that of symbolic capital – of social capital.²³ Bourdieu’s sociological methodologies,

17 The view that political institutions can provide a focus for political competition and struggle has been established in the field of political institutionalism: see Blyth 2002.

18 Bourdieu 2010: 249. For an exposition of the idea of symbolic capital, see Bourdieu 1977: 171–83.

19 Bourdieu 1977: 182.

20 On the idea of symbolic power, see Bourdieu 1991: 163–70.

21 Cf. Cohen 1991; Herman 2006.

22 Veyne 1976; Gauthier 1985; Whitehead 1983, 1993; Loraux 1986; Tsagalis 2008: 135–213.

23 Social capital: Bourdieu 1998: 70–1.

therefore, form a good basis for articulating the deployment of knowledge and familiarity with decrees as tools related to expressions of individual aspiration and visions of shared ideals.²⁴ However, another set of theories is helpful in elucidating the significance of thinking about decrees as dynamic institutions – through which human aspirations were framed and managed – in their own right: those which fall under the banner of New Institutionalism.

The term ‘New Institutionalism’ is used to refer to a broad set of analytical approaches which focus upon the role of institutions in theoretical, comparative and specific political analyses.²⁵ As defined by North, ‘institutions are the rules of the game in society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction.’²⁶ Put another way, institutions consist of ‘the formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and economy.’²⁷ They can consist of formal constraints (rules) or informal constraints (conventions, codes of behaviour).²⁸ It is widely accepted that the notion of the ‘institution’ can be helpfully applied to thought not only about ‘institutional agencies’ (in ancient Athens, assemblies, councils, lawcourts, boards of magistrates), to ‘institutional arrangements’ (such as concepts of ownership, property, marriage, the *oikos*, or law-making) but also to ‘institutional things’ (a contract, the *agora*, the decrees of the council and assembly).²⁹ Of particular

24 Bourdieu’s development of such methodologies in the late twentieth century was articulated in a way that is relevant to the interpretation of ancient Greek history; see now, for its re-articulation as a theory of value, Graeber (2001). Earlier pioneers of the idea of symbolic capital include Mauss and Veblen: see Veblen (2006) and Mauss (2006). One early sense of the value of social capital was raised by de Tocqueville, who observed the value of participation for democratic cohesion. See Volume 1, Part 2, Chapter 3 of his 1835 *Democracy in America*: de Tocqueville 2003: 269–87.

25 On New Institutionalism, see March and Olsen 1984, 1989. For an introduction to the revival of the study of institutions in politics, see Thelen and Steinmo 1992: 2; March and Olsen 1989; Lowndes and Roberts 2013.

26 North 1990: 1.

27 Thelen and Steinmo 1992: 2.

28 North 1990: 4. On informal constraints, see North 1990: 36–45; on formal constraints, see North 1990: 46–54.

29 For this perspective, see MacCormack 2007: 34–7. North 1990: 5 defines such agencies not as institutions but rather as ‘organizations’.

For the application of a range of New Institutional theories to ancient Greek history, see, for instance, Weingast 2002; Canevaro 2011; Harris 2013a: 12–14; Simonton 2017: 65 with note 295; Blok 2017: 46, 145–6, 199–200. New Institutional economic thought has also been introduced to the study of ancient Greek economics: see Frier and Kehoe 2007 (emphasising the role of rational self-interest); Ober 2015: 5. With characteristic incision, Davies (2015: 241) writes: ‘the jury is still out on the adequacy of New Institutional Economics’.

relevance is the Historical Institutional approach,³⁰ which is concerned with assessing the significance of institutionalised rules, practices and procedures in steering political habits (path dependence)³¹ over time and emphasising their role in political activity and political change (see Chapter 2 below); it considers also the ways in which accounts of political activity aspire towards demonstrating legitimacy of political decisions (see Chapter 1 below). This volume's underlying position, that the decree can coherently be given centre-stage in an analysis of political activity, takes a view of the decree as an institutional arrangement in its own right.³² The view that institutions are shaped not only by authoritative rules but are founded upon accepted practices and narratives is also very important.³³ The Athenians certainly possessed formal rules when it came to the making and challenging of decrees (see Chapter 1.2.1 below) and such activities were treated also as standard operating practices; yet the liveliness and breadth of narratives about past decrees in political oratory (Chapters 1 and 2) and other genres (Chapter 5 below) is striking. Such an approach, furthermore, places emphasis upon analysis of political actors' compliance with, and deployment of, these institutions rather than speculations about the personalities of human individuals:³⁴ this is highly appropriate when analysing a dataset in which a small number of famous men dominate the record but which also indicates the breadth of political participation (see Chapter 2 below).³⁵

Finally, New Institutionalism emphasises the importance of strong political institutions in ensuring stability:³⁶ there was some debate in fourth-century

30 On Historical Institutionalism as one of seven forms of institutionalist analysis, see Peters 2005: 71–86 and 2008: 2–5; cf. Steinmo, Thelen and Longstreth 1992; Sanders 2006: 39–55.

31 On the 'path dependence' perspective, which says that forms of institution established at a prior stage in history have a significant impact on the behaviour of rational actors in the future, see North 1990: 93–8; March and Olsen 1984, 1989: 49–51; Thelen and Steinmo 1992.

32 An alternative view might be to consider decrees as a kind of 'transaction', that is a unit of the wider institution of Athenian democracy; this would be to follow the model developed in Avner Greif's study of the ways in which fledgling medieval economic institutions (such as merchants' guilds and traders' coalitions) influenced modes of economic and commercial behaviour. Greif defines a transaction as the basic unit of institutional analysis (Greif 2006: 29), and as an action taken when an entity (whether that be a commodity, social attitude, emotion, option or piece of information) is transferred from one individual to another (Greif 2006: 45–6).

33 Lowndes and Roberts 2013: 46–76.

34 Sanders 2006, concluding: 'Historical institutionalists, then, will not be distracted by wishful thinking about different personalities occupying executive power. If HI teaches us anything, it is that the place to look for answers to big questions about class, power, war, and reform is in institutions, not personalities, and over the longer landscapes of history, not the here and now.'

35 Demost, Appendix 1 and Lambert 2018: 65–7.

36 Huntington 2006: 91–2.

Athens about the extent to which the decree-system was an effective way of meeting day-to-day challenges,³⁷ and individual decrees were open to challenge and dispute through indictment by the *graphe paranomon* process. Regardless, political leaders and the *demos* carried on with the decree-making system throughout good times and bad during and beyond the fourth century:³⁸ we might presume that there was no public conception of any plausible alternative way of making decisions democratically;³⁹ this consensus is what underlay the continuity and to a certain degree the strength and constancy of the decree as a decision-making institution. As we will see, there were rules to the systems within which decrees operated (see Chapter 1.2.1 below), but this volume's emphasis on the use of decrees places emphasis on practice (especially Chapters 1 and 2) and narratives about Athenian decrees (Chapters 3, 4 and 5 below).⁴⁰

There is one further critical perspective that has influenced the approach taken to decrees in this volume, particularly that which underscores its assessment of the dissemination of their ideas (Chapters 3 and 4). This is the perspective of memory studies and in particular the notion of collective (or 'social') memory as a significant historical factor in political and human interaction.

37 Mader 2006; cf. Chapter 1.2.2 below.

38 For a survey of fourth-century decree-making in relation to geopolitical developments, see Chapter 1.4 below. The decree-making system is epigraphically well attested at Athens throughout the Hellenistic period: see Hedrick 1999; Byrne 2004; *nomothesia* is not, however, attested to have continued in the same way, though the classical distinction between laws and decrees appears to have persisted: see Canevaro 2011. The example of Philon's *graphe paranomon* against Sophokles in 306 suggests that the process continued after 322/1: see Diogenes Laertius 5.38.

39 Decrees may have been enacted even under the non-democratic regimes of late fifth-century Athens by more limited boards or groups of voters. For decrees of the regime 5,000 of 411/10 at Athens, see Develin 1989: 164–5. The honorific decree OR 173 may be one of the regime of Four Hundred; for another example, see [Plu.] *X Or.* 833e–f. Despite the fact that the Thirty were chosen purposefully to frame new laws and a constitution (*Xen. Hell.* 2.3.11) it proves hard to isolate any particular examples within the narrative accounts of their activity (*Xen. Hell.* 2.3–4; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 35–7). At *Ath. Pol.* 37.1–2 it is said that the Thirty ordered its *boule* to pass a number of laws. Kritias' speech at the Council condemning Theramenes refers to decisions made by the Thirty, but calls them 'new laws' and it is far from clear that he was referring to decrees (*Xen. Hell.* 2.3.51). The closest we come to evidence for a decree made by enfranchised citizens under the Thirty is the death sentence against men captured at Eleusis, which was passed by the vote of the hoplites and cavalry who were 'on the list' at an extraordinary meeting at the Odeion attended also by armed Spartan soldiers (*Xen. Hell.* 2.4.9–10); on Kritias' manipulation of this occasion see Simonton 2017: 128–9. Oinobios' decree to recall Thucydides (*Paus.* 1.23.9) is often associated with the period of the Thirty in 404/3: see Develin 1989: 186. Kritias' decree casting Phrynichos' body out of the city must, however, be placed before the time of the Thirty: Lycurg. 1.113–14. On the abolition of democracy through the decree of the assembly in 411, see Chapter 1 note 101 below and Chapter 5.2.2 below.

40 Practice: Bourdieu 1977.

It is an approach which places emphasis on the potential fluidity of memories of the past especially those which are sustained among collective groups and enunciated in different forms by individuals. Two recent works in Greek history have been instrumental in demonstrating the potential of memory studies to the wider interpretation of Greek history.⁴¹ The approach established by Shear in her *Polis and Revolution* places an emphasis on the view that a society's memory 'might be regarded as an aggregate collection of its members' many, often competing, memories.⁴² Collective memory, for Shear, finds one expression in the setting up of monuments and public documents in commemoration of particular events and processes; yet it is viewers' interaction with such monuments and their reperformance of these memories which is what, according to Shear, perpetuates shared memory.⁴³ The creation of these memories underpinned the Athenian reconstruction of a unified *polis* in the aftermath of the oligarchic interventions in 411/10 and 404/3; as I shall argue (Chapter 1.5 below), memories of decrees played an important role in the construction of ideas about the harmonious *demos* of the reconciliation of 403/2. Steinbock's 2013 book, moreover, has also underlined the importance of collective memory both in public discourse and social cohesion;⁴⁴ for Steinbock, while there existed a 'monolithic group mind',⁴⁵ individual Athenians were at the same time free to tweak and adapt versions of the past that suited the case they were making. The presentation of decrees (both Athenian and non-Athenian) is relevant to this picture: Steinbock shows how Athenian discourse played up contradictory Theban decrees at different points in the fourth century. Accordingly, an Athenian wishing to encourage hostility to the Thebans would emphasise the Theban proposal to destroy Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War (Din. 1.25); those who in the 330s wished to encourage rapprochement would emphasise a Theban decree which had assisted the Athenian democrats (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.19–20).⁴⁶

Engagement with memory studies highlights the rhetorical significance of claims made about decrees, in particular in the Athenian courts. This is

41 Note also the seminal studies of Wolpert (2002), Gehrke (2001) and Bommas (2011); see also the contributions in Marincola, Llewellyn-Jones and MacIver (eds.) 2012; for a detailed discussion of approaches to memory studies, see Assman 1995; Olick 2007, Shear 2011: 6–12 and Steinbock 2013: 7–17.

42 Shear 2011: 7 citing Young 1993: xi.

43 Shear 2011: 11–14; for further explication of dynamism in the treatment of inscribed public documents, see Low forthcoming.

44 Steinbock 2013; cf. Shear 2014: 506–8.

45 Steinbock 2013: 13.

46 Steinbock 2013: 211–79, 280–340.

particularly pertinent in the case of accounts of Persian War era decrees which circulated in the late fourth century. These included the decree of Themistocles and that against the traitor Arthmios: the former is represented by an inscribed version which is generally agreed to be partially fabricated in terms of its historical details;⁴⁷ the latter by a series of stories about it which circulated in the oratorical evidence.⁴⁸ But the role of social memory is relevant also to the deployment of roughly contemporary fourth-century decrees; as we shall see in Chapter 3 below, social memory was probably more important in terms of the profile of decrees than inscribed or archival versions of them. But when it came to the deployment of contemporary material, orators were apparently more careful to ground their claims in truth than they were in the discussion of fifth-century material: both public awareness of events and the development of an archive from 403/2 meant that, even while orators did not base their claims about a decree closely on scrutiny of the archive, its accessibility meant that their claims could be checked by others.⁴⁹ Decrees, therefore, were not merely empty vessels that could be put to use for any political purpose or manipulated in any way possible: their content went some way in structuring the possibilities of their deployment.

It is to the subject of the significance of the decree to political dynamics that I turn in Chapters 1 and 2 below, where I assess the extent to which decree-making and decree-citing might be viewed as social and political practices in their own right and analyse the ways in which those familiar with decrees drew on them in the pursuit of political activity. A guiding principle of this book is the view that the writing of the political history of the decree includes, but should consist of much more than, an account of mechanics and rules; accordingly, I emphasise the role both of decree-making and decree-recalling as a social practice and its significance in oratorical persuasion. Chapter 1 below develops some of the themes initiated in this Introduction, setting out the institutional factors that gave the decrees a negotiable status and exploring their use to make claims about collective achievements and shared values of the *demos*. In Chapter 2 below, I explore the role of the decree in the construction of arguments, the creation of individual political legacies, and assess the depth of knowledge that was deployed in the courts by self-interested politicians. Both chapters demonstrate that Attic orators presumed that their audiences would

47 Meiggs and Lewis 1988: 48–52.

48 Meiggs 1972. See also Chapter 5.4.1 below.

49 Olick 2007: 7, 37–54 emphasises that the development and exercise of shared memory was a negotiation between different political challenges and cultural claims, but one constrained by awareness of past events.