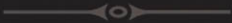


ANCIENT LITERACIES

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THE CULTURE OF READING
IN GREECE AND ROME



EDITED BY
WILLIAM A. JOHNSON
HOLT N. PARKER

Ancient Literacies

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and Rome

EDITED BY

William A. Johnson and Holt N. Parker

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William A. Johnson
Holt N. Parker

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Abbreviations

ATL:	Meritt, B.D., H. D. Wade-Gery, and M. L. McGregor. 1939–1953. <i>The Athenian Tribute Lists</i> . Princeton.
CIL:	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> . 1863–. Berlin.
FPL-Blänsdorf:	Blänsdorf, Jürgen. 1995. <i>Fragmenta poetarum Latinorum epicorum et lyricorum praeter Ennium et Lucilium</i> . 3rd ed. Leipzig.
IG:	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> . 1873–. Berlin.
ILLRP:	Degrassi, A. 1957–1963. <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae</i> . Florence.
IvE:	<i>Inscripfen von Ephesos</i> . 1979–1981. <i>Inscripfen griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien</i> 11–17. Bonn.
LIMC:	<i>Lexicon Iconographum Mythologiae Classicae</i> . 1981. Zurich.
LTUR:	Steinby, Eva Margarita. 1993–2000. <i>Lexicon topographi- cum urbis Romae</i> . Rome.
OCD:	Hornblower, Simon, and Antony Spawforth, eds. 2003. <i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> . 3rd ed. Oxford.
ORF:	Malcovati, E. 1955. <i>Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta</i> . 2nd ed. Turin.
PIR ² :	<i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani</i> . 1933. 2nd ed. Berlin and Leipzig.
RIB:	Collingwood, R. G., and R. P. Wright. 1995. <i>The Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i> . 2nd ed. Gloucester- shire.
SEG:	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i> . 1923. Leiden.
TLL:	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i> . 1900–1990. Leipzig.

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Ancient Literacies

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Introduction

William A. Johnson

A previous generation of scholars made ancient Greece a point of central focus in arguments concerning literacy. In these earlier accounts (one thinks in particular of Jack Goody, Eric Havelock, and Walter Ong), literacy was isolated as a primary agent of change in the “Greek revolution”—what Brian Street has dubbed the “autonomous model”—in which the introduction of an alphabetic writing system, in and of itself, is said to bring about various consequences for society and culture.¹ Such determinist accounts are now generally discredited, both at large and among most classicists.² Yet little has arisen to take its place. Classicists have only slowly begun to take advantage of the important advances in the way that literacy is viewed in other disciplines (including in particular cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics, and socio-anthropology).³ The most widely referenced general book remains William Harris’ *Ancient Literacy* (1989), a thoughtful, immensely learned, and important book, which, however, focuses narrowly on the question of what percentage of people in antiquity might have been able to read and write.⁴

The moment seems right, therefore, to try to formulate more interesting, productive ways of talking about the conception and construction of “literacies” in the ancient world—literacy not in the sense of whether 10 percent or 30 percent of people in the ancient world could read or write, but in the sense of text-oriented events embedded in particular sociocultural contexts.⁵ The volume in your hands was constructed as a

1. Goody 1963, 1977; Havelock 1963, 1986; Ong 1982; Street 1984.

2. See summary and critique in Street 1984, 44–65; Thomas 1992, 15–28; Olson 1994, 1–20, 36–44; Johnson 2003, 10–13.

3. For overviews of the tendencies, see in this volume Thomas (chapter 2: for Classics) and Olson (chapter 15: for a broader view), and the bibliographical essay by Werner (chapter 14).

4. Harris 1989; reactions collected in Humphrey 1991.

5. UNESCO has defined *literacy* in terms of the illiterate: someone “who cannot with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life” (quoted in Harris 1989, 3). But sociological researchers have proposed definitions with a much broader cast to the net: for example, Shirley Heath (1982, 50) speaks of “literacy events” as “occasions

forum in which selected leading scholars were challenged to rethink from the ground up how students of classical antiquity might best approach the question of literacy, and how that investigation might materially intersect with changes in the way that literacy is now viewed in other disciplines. The result is intentionally pluralistic: theoretical reflections, practical demonstrations, and combinations of the two share equal space in the effort to chart a new course. Readers will come away, therefore, with food for thought of many types: new ways of thinking about specific elements of literacy in antiquity, such as the nature of personal libraries, or the place and function of bookshops in antiquity; new constructivist questions, such as what constitutes reading communities and how they fashion themselves; new takes on the public sphere, such as how literacy intersects with commercialism, or with the use of public spaces, or with the construction of civic identity; new essentialist questions, such as what “book” and “reading” signify in antiquity, why literate cultures develop, or why literate cultures matter.

SITUATING LITERACIES

Rosalind Thomas's opening essay (“Writing, Reading, Public and Private ‘Literacies’: Functional Literacy and Democratic Literacy in Greece”) serves as an introduction and overview of the inquiry. Her essay takes as its starting point the observation that we need to speak of a multitude of “literacies” that play out in different ways in different contexts. She focuses on the ways that different uses of reading and writing are embedded in specific institutions in classical Athens, such as the distinct uses of literacy in banking and other commercial activities, the use of names and lists in citizenship activities, and the particular needs and uses of reading and writing among Athenian officials. Her aim is to tease out specific literacy practices that can be associated with separate social, economic, and political groups.

Along somewhat similar lines, Greg Woolf in his essay (“Literacy or Literacies in Rome?”) focuses on inscribed objects under the Roman empire, and what they tell us about the uses of literacy in specific social and commercial contexts; but also what such uses say more generally

in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies”; Brian Street (1988, 61) of “literacy practices,” referring thereby to “both behaviour and conceptualisations related to the use of reading and/or writing”; and R. D. Grillo (1989, 15) of “communicative practices,” in which he includes “the social activities through which language or communication is produced,” “the way in which these activities are embedded in institutions, settings or domains which in turn are implicated in other, wider, social, economic, political and cultural processes,” and “the ideologies, which may be linguistic or other, which guide processes of communicative production.” These are summarized and discussed further in Street 1993, 12–13; Johnson 2000.

about the “joined-up” relationship between private uses of writing and literacy practices as they are developed by the state.

Barbara Burrell (“Reading, Hearing, and Looking at Ephesos”) examines more literally the situating of inscribed writing in its context, as she explores the complex relationship between inscriptions and public space in the great plaza in Ephesus known, in particular, for the Library of Celsus. Texts, architecture, and décor of public buildings are considered in tight, reflective relationship to one another; and she charts as well an evolving readers’ response over time as new dedications and new structures are added to the plaza such that it ultimately becomes a hallmark of the intersection of Hellenic and Roman culture.

Simon Goldhill’s essay (“The Anecdote: Exploring the Boundaries between Oral and Literate Performance in the Second Sophistic”), by contrast, focuses on literary culture. He explores the sudden popularity of “anecdote” in the Second Sophistic and how that speaks to the ways that literate practices can be situated in oral performance in distinct social settings. The anecdote as a written form is seen as emblematic of the literary culture of the time, a characteristic packaging of material that is best understood in relation to actual oral practices among the literary elite. As an originally oral form that can be written down, and once written down memorized and recirculated orally, the anecdote becomes a normative means whereby a bookish, highly educated elite compete in the symposium and other contexts.

Thomas Habinek (“Situating Literacy at Rome”), looking at the Roman evidence, also emphasizes the interdependence of oral and literate as he tries to situate writing in what he sees as the predominate oral culture at Rome. In a broad-ranging essay, he looks at writing (1) diachronically, sketching an account of the early use of writing for assertion of status and Roman identity; (2) synchronically, describing what is at stake socially in the mastery of literate practices; and (3) ontologically, examining the “embodied” character of writing, whereby writing is seen not as a representation of speech but as something material, and thus with its own opportunities but also its own strictures and constraints.

BOOKS AND TEXTS

The three essays that follow focus on working out the relation between book and text, a longstanding and productive area of inquiry in Classics. Florence Dupont (“The Corrupted Boy and the Crowned Poet or The Material Reality and the Symbolic Status of the Literary Book at Rome”) explores in nuanced fashion the nature of the symbolic status and function of the bookroll. Her interest lies in the tension between the fragile physical book and the ways in which the text—the “fictive utterance” for which the book acts as vehicle—can escape that fragility. For Dupont, the literary book by Alexandrian times is in concept no more

than a container, a copy of something composed in the past; and this conceit is one that Catullus and the Augustan poets use to advantage, as they strive to establish themselves among the ones who are *qui primus*, the “first” to create the foundational, “consecrated” text that is preserved so as to be imitated and commented on, thus sealing their status as canonical authors, worthy of the Greeks.

Joe Farrell (“The Impermanent Text in Catullus and Other Roman Poets”) is likewise interested in the emphasis in the Roman poets on the fragility of the physical bookroll. For Farrell, too, this emphasis entails a paradox, but of a different sort. He wishes, rather, to focus on the curious way in which the poets, even while recognizing material texts as the vehicle for gaining a wide and lasting audience, repeatedly express anxieties over the corruptibility and “impermanence” of the physical text. The image of the bookroll is linked, in Catullus and others, with the ceremonial presentation copy, and thereby, he argues, attracts association with anxieties over public reception of the work and the alienation of the work from the poet’s control; for these reasons, the image of the bookroll is inherently ambivalent, and the increasing emphasis on “song” and “singer” in the Augustan poets a fitting, if also strictly anachronistic, turn.

Holt N. Parker’s essay (“Books and Reading Latin Poetry”) also focuses on the image of the book and its reception, but from a different strategic angle. This essay is written as a challenge to the sometimes careless comfort with which Romanists speak of “orality” and “performance” when speaking of classical Latin poetry. Although acknowledging the importance of recitations, entertainments at dinner parties, and use of professional lectors, Parker advocates a return to the *communis opinio* of an earlier era, namely, that such communal activities were preparatory or complementary to “the unmarked case of private reading.” In a wide-ranging analysis, he questions the notion that Augustan Rome was an “oral society” in any meaningful sense, and underscores the poets’ own statements about their expectations for a readership divorced from performance, and extending in time and space.

INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Several essays examine the social institutions or communities in which literate practices may be said to be “embedded.” George Houston (“Papyrological Evidence for Book Collections and Libraries in the Roman Empire”) surveys the papyrological evidence for personal libraries and book collections under the empire. Along the way he has much of interest to say about the activity of book collecting and the people who did this collecting. General conclusions emerge, however tentatively, about the nature of book collecting and use over time: there seems a distinct tendency toward collections garnered together mostly in a limited

time period, with specific goals (such as accumulation of philosophical texts), followed then by use, with only occasional augmentation or maintenance, over a succession of generations.

In similar fashion, Peter White (“Bookshops in the Literary Culture of Rome”) surveys what we know of ancient bookshops and booksellers in Rome. Again, investigation of details leads to discovery. As an institution, bookshops had a commercial identity that differentiated them from other small shops, because they were concentrated in a small sector of the city, had distinctive conventions of sale, and fostered special types of literate sociability. The modes of engagement with texts are themselves of interest, because they privilege the use of a book as a commodity—there is value, for example, in being able to size up a book for its antiquity or authorship, without attention to substantive content. But the central role of niche players, such as *grammatici*, in bookshop society is yet more striking, a demonstration of how “hyper-literacy converted into social performance” facilitated social movement and allowed non-elite to gain entry to the highest literary circles in Rome, moving thereby into positions of considerable social authority.

Kristina Milnor (“Literary Literacy in Roman Pompeii: The Case of Vergil’s *Aeneid*”) looks at the placement and function of literary texts written as graffiti on the walls of Pompeii. Taking Vergil as a sample set, she explores “literary literacy” for the variety of ways it speaks to the interests and attitudes of the ancient writers and readers. Her theoretical stance is explicitly localizing, avoiding universal explanations in favor of a focus on the unique character of each text in its context, as she tries to tease out, in particular, the writers’ view of the relationship between Vergil’s text and their own act of inscribing. The specific interpretations lend themselves nonetheless to a general conclusion: the use of canonical literary texts seems to open the door to a special kind of discourse, by which the Vergilian tags function less as a cultural product and more as a means of cultural production (“less facts than acts and . . . aware of themselves as such”).

William Johnson (“Constructing Elite Reading Communities in the High Empire”) similarly insists on a focus on particulars and specific contexts as a means to work towards more general conclusions. Taking Gellius’s *Attic Nights* as an illustrative example, he presents a methodology for exposing the sociology of certain types of reading events in the *Nights*, including both reading in groups and reading alone, as he explores the “nuts and bolts” of how a specific reading community makes use of texts. This then leads to conclusions about the ideological components of reading events. At basis, his theoretical angle is constructivist, that is, he sees the ancient literary text as a vehicle by which the ancient writer (in this case Gellius) and the ancient community (“Gellius’s world,” in his terms) not only construct “best practice” ways for using texts but also construct defined significances for different types of reading events.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY AND EPILOGUE

Shirley Werner's bibliographical essay and index ("Literacy Studies in Classics: The Last Twenty Years") give a convenient, quick overview of the last generation of literacy studies in Classics, followed by a topical index and the bibliography itself. Defining the boundaries of "literacy studies" can be at times a task more pragmatic than theoretical; the omission of books and articles on orality in the Homeric epics, for example, will surprise no one who pauses to think through the consequences. Chronological limits are arbitrary, but rooted in the conviction that William Harris's work (1989) marked a turning point in literacy studies in Classics. Harris's bibliography is extensive, even though it does not claim to be comprehensive, and we thus agreed to take the last year of Harris's active collecting, 1987, as an approximate boundary in Werner's bibliographical assemblage.

By way of coda to the collection, David Olson offers an essay ("Why Literacy Matters, Then and Now") with both a review of the last couple of generations of work in literacy as it impinges on Classics, and his own take on the relationship between the objectification of written text and linguistic features of quotation. Building on ideas developed in his earlier work, Olson sees writing as neither equivalent to speaking nor utterly divorced from speaking. Specifically, he sees written text to share with quoted expressions (whether written or spoken) the characteristic that the understanding of illocutionary force—how the utterance is intended to be taken—is something that needs to be added in order for the expression to be understood. The distance between expression and understanding leads, in the case of written texts, to a range of reading competencies, and Olson isolates the fully competent reader as one who is not only "critical" (grasping the author's attitude) but "reflective" (understanding both the author's attitude and the reader's own perception of that attitude). This trained ability to separate the attitude of an utterance from the propositional content has important cognitive consequences, since one can then use language to reflect on language in "pure thought" fashion; and this then helps account for why writing is so important in the development of modern thought and the growth of literate traditions.

As we try to step back from this sampling for the larger view, the first thing to notice is what is not there. No one in this group is speaking of, or in terms of, gross estimations of the literate population. Harris (1989) seems to have marked a turning point in that, however one evaluates his conclusions, he seems to have put paid to that line of inquiry. Similarly, there is an interesting, perhaps surprising, lack of emphasis on the long-central set of scholarly debates on the importance of "orality" and "performance" for ancient literacy;⁶ and in any case the

6. Perhaps because study of orality and performance has become a subdiscipline itself, rather than a point of distinction in literacy studies.

nature of the questions raised along these lines (see Goldhill, Habinek, Parker) are a far remove from the likes of Eric Havelock and Walter Ong.

What we find instead is an intense interest in particulars. In what may be taken as a *leitmotiv* of our current generation of scholarship, local variation is found to trump generalizing tendencies. Where generalities are put forward, these tend to be tentative, with deep alertness to the probability of real, essential exceptions among individual examples. Even an overarching cognitive theory (Olson) is grounded in recognition of different types of readers, of real exceptions, that is, to the working theoretical principle. It is this urgent attention to local variation that led us to take over the plural of Thomas's essay, *Ancient Literacies*, for the title of this book.

There are other striking tendencies, again consistent with some dominant themes of our scholarly era. Texts, reading, and writing are seldom considered in and of themselves. Books are taken as symbolic materialities, having strong social valuation. Reading and writing are events, to be analyzed in broad and deep context, carrying social and cultural valuation, embedded in particular institutions or communities. Several themes repeat themselves, with variation, time and again: the sociology of literacy; the importance of deep contextualization; the necessity to see literacy as an integrative aspect within a larger sociocultural whole. It is this strong set of themes that conditioned our subtitle to this volume, *The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome*.

As said at the outset, this volume speaks, intentionally, with disparate voices. And yet within the whole one can, I think, sense a strong movement away from earlier work in ancient literacy, work in our view gone stagnant, toward a rich field of new inquiries that frame books, readers, and reading more clearly and interestingly within study of the culture that produced them.

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Part I

SITUATING LITERACIES

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Writing, Reading, Public and Private “Literacies”

Functional Literacy and Democratic Literacy in Greece

Rosalind Thomas

In 1997 a UNESCO conference was convened to help reformulate policy on illiteracy in the modern world. The final statement on the “Making of a Literate Society” stressed that “current research and practice has shown that in order to bring about cultural and social transformation, literacy must be seen as an activity embedded in social and cultural practice”;¹ that literacy is not something that is simply “delivered” but something to be employed, and employed in diverse ways for activities which are meaningful in some way for individuals and communities; some campaigns failed because they were “carried out without proper regard to the language, knowledge and learning needs of the individuals and communities involved.”²

For literacy to take root in a society, it has to have meaning, it needs to have obvious and valuable uses, to be “relevant” or empowering in some way; and it needs to be in a language that is actually used by the people learning to read. Both conference and volume embraced the idea of “multi-literacies,” an awkward neologism but one that attempts to underline the fact that reading and writing tend to be learned and given meaning in a particular social, political, and cultural context. They tend to be learned and used in quite specific tasks, not necessarily transferred by their users across these boundaries. Some modern literacy campaigns had tended to assume that “literacy” meant Western literacy and literate habits in a Western language, though literacy in other languages for often quite different contexts and functions might exist (half-hidden to outside observers) alongside Western literacy. A multitude of literacies needs to be recognized alongside the ideals and habits of standard Western literacy and the potential

1. Olson and Torrance 2001, xii, taken from the draft policy statement.

2. Olson and Torrance 2001, xiii, also from the policy statement. Note esp. ch. 9 in that volume on Pulaar literacy in a Senegalese community.

advantages that that can bring. There is thus a fascinating tension between the obvious fact that writing makes certain activities possible or easier, and that different potentials are seized upon by different communities. In some, writing means bureaucracy, control, and oppression by the state, in others an enabling skill that frees an individual's creative potential.

This is the direction of research at the moment. Rather than see "literacy" as an independent, separable skill, researchers as well as teachers in the field tend to wish to see it more as an embedded activity—or to see a tension between the social context and the potentialities of writing. All this makes it both more interesting and more difficult to discern the social positioning of different kinds of literacies and their relation to individual empowerment or to power of any kind, such as community or bureaucratic empowerment.

The situation in the Greek world contributes to and enhances this more complex picture of "literacies" rather than literacy. Moreover, the insights of researchers able to study living societies can suggest further questions and potential interpretations, and therefore enrich the way we approach the Greek written evidence: this Greek evidence is often fragmentary and by definition it obscures the unwritten side of life, privileging the written. It might be tempting to look for a general, overall picture of Greek literacy and literate habits. Yet it is misleading to talk simply in these terms, or to talk of percentages of "literate," for that presupposes a certain definition of literacy, one that irons out variety and complexity. The percentages of "literate" in modern Britain changes depending on whether you define literacy as being able to read three words on a page, an Inland Revenue form, or a work of literature (we see ancient equivalents of these below). It thus seems more useful to talk of the uses writing is put to, and of different types of literacy. Pressing the insights of modern research into twentieth-century literate practices, some of it in turn influenced by research into the ancient world, I therefore wish to try further to isolate and define some specific literacies or subgenres of literacies from the Greek evidence. In particular, can we isolate for the Greek world at least some separate social, economic, or political groups with different practices, habits, and assumptions about writing? As part of this aim, this paper will discuss (a) various types of written text and the form of literacy they presuppose; (b) closely related, different levels of literacy and uses of literacy, and in the process, (c) consider the relation between social advancement and type of literacy. It will seek constantly to bear in mind the possibility of change in both—too much is said, still, about literacy in the ancient world as if evidence for one period tells us about the situation a hundred years later or earlier.³

3. Sickinger 1999, for instance, is puzzlingly unwilling to acknowledge the possibility and extent of change over the period of Athenian democratic politics. Pébarthe 2006 is important, appearing too late for full discussion here, but he also occasionally underplays large gaps of time and the likelihood of development over time.

I hope that this will circumvent the all-or-nothing approach to ancient literacy that sometimes occurs, and suggest a profitable way of thinking about the different forms of literacies around in a society where—as almost all would agree—various social, cultural, or political groups approached writing with differing purposes and attitudes. This is a rather different approach from William Harris’s use of the term “craftsman’s literacy” to denote the literacy of a skilled craftsman in early modern Europe.⁴ It also attempts to be more specific than the vague all-embracing term functional literacy (see below) often used to denote literacy of a mundane kind.

First, two preliminary points: further discoveries both of informal and formal epigraphic writing mean that new and often surprising texts are bound to appear, and our discussion must be provisional. We may think, for instance, of the recent discovery of an extraordinary “archive” at Argos: in a small sanctuary annex a series of stone “chests” were found, of which four still contained “an estimated 120 to 150 inscribed bronze plaques,” dating to second half of the fifth or early fourth century B.C. They seem to record sums of money either borrowed from, or deposited with, the goddess Athena by institutions or groups in the polis—the temple effectively performing the role of central bank.⁵ Or the new laws and lead curse tablets appearing in Greek-speaking Sicily, the small but steady appearance of lead letters.⁶ Second, it is an obvious point but one that needs constantly to be borne in mind, that our evidence for writing inevitably privileges the literate: written texts have some chance of preservation, and activities, hopes, prayers, rituals, that were not committed to writing disappear from sight. It is the combination both of written and of nonwritten activity that tells us about the place of writing in the totality of ancient experience.

As with most other practices in the Greek world, city-states had local specialisms in their use of writing. Even with the selective preservation of evidence, we can discern, for instance, that Camarina’s inhabitants went in for extensive use of lead tablets for curses, as did those of Selinous.⁷ Lead survives, it is true, yet even so, a local augmentation of this use of lead is

4. See W. Harris 1989, 8: “By craftsman’s literacy, I mean not the literacy of an individual craftsman but the condition in which the majority, or a near-majority, of skilled craftsmen are literate, while women and unskilled laborers and peasants are mainly not, this being the situation which prevailed in most of the educationally more advanced regions of Europe and north America from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century”; cf. also p. 61.

5. See *JHS Archaeological Reports* 2003–4, pp. 19–20: texts being published by Prof. Kritsas.

6. Curses from Camarina and Selinous: Dubois 1989 *IGDS*, nos. 29–40 and pp. 124ff. Laws from Himera: Brugnone 1997; and from Selinous: Jameson, Jordan, Kotansky 1993. Note also the Mappa di Soletto: *Daily Telegraph* Nov. 18, 2005.

7. Selinous curses: mid-sixth century to end of fifth century, Dubois 1989 *IGDS* nos. 29–40; Camarina curses: c. 450 or later 5th century—and Dubois 1989 *IGDS* pp. 124ff. Contracts in lead seem to appear later.

visible in Athens, where curse tablets were adapted for the peculiar local need against opponents in the democracy's law courts. Athens produced inscriptions in stone on a grand scale, dwarfing other classical cities: to a large extent this must be linked to her democratic constitution, yet even so other democracies were not so extravagant in stone—Syracuse (were their decrees on bronze?), or Argos, which had a form of democracy in the fifth century, or Taras, which has left no public inscriptions at all.

We will look more closely at Athens, whose rich evidence allows us to discern a range of literate habits. What types of literacies, what different social contexts or political habits of literacy can we discern? Cribiore, for instance, has recently emphasized the importance of "signature literacy" in Greco-Roman Egypt.⁸ What about Athens? And how are different literacies linked to the various social or political aspirations of her citizens?

Here "functional literacy" rears its head, and it will be a recurrent element in this paper. Yet the very term *functional literacy* seems increasingly inadequate. Though it is a term that we all (myself included) take refuge in to mean in a vague way "enough literacy to get by," that evades the question what exactly *is* enough literacy to get by, in what circumstances and for whom? Whether someone's literacy is adequate (functional) depends on the surrounding needs and uses of writing. In a modern Western society functional literacy—enough literacy to function adequately—requires a large range of skills and increasingly a basic computer literacy of the kind necessary (for instance) to access information, or to initiate applications. What is the line between just being able to manage, and being able to manipulate writing and written skills so well that someone can prosper? In ancient Athens, the line at which someone is seriously disadvantaged by poor writing skills can be drawn very low, but that does not mean that he was on an educational and political level with the elite. The educated elite, who overlapped considerably with the political leaders, had advanced literacy and cultural attainments that included *mousike*, music, literary knowledge, and literary composition. We therefore need to examine evidence for differing literacy skills alongside the surrounding social or political demands for writing.

We will concentrate on aspects of financially related literacy and democratic literacy, omitting more literary kinds of literacy, not least the increasing use of writing for composing speeches in the late fifth and fourth centuries. Starting with banking literacy, we will look at minimal citizen literacy ("name literacy") in Athens' early democracy; then the case of the merchant and the possibility of commercial literacy or list literacy; and finally return to the question of types of citizen literacies in Athens, considering both list literacy, this time in public inscriptions, and the literacy of the official. Some of these overlap, but I hope that this

8. Cribiore 2001. Pébarthe 2006 prefers to stress the extensive *use* of writing (in Athens), esp. ch. 2, minimizing social and professional distinctions.

makes possible a nuanced and flexible picture of several overlapping literacies, and illustrates the point that to examine “functional literacy” we need an ever-shifting, sliding scale of literate attainments.

BANKING

I start with banking because interesting evidence implies that banks in Athens of the fourth century (at least) had peculiar habits in their exploitation of the written word. At least this type of writing use needed explaining to the big democratic audience listening to [Demosthenes] 49, *Against Timotheus*, in such a way as to imply that it was quite unfamiliar to most Athenians. Probably dating to 362 B.C., the action was undertaken in order to recover money lent to the prominent politician Timotheus by Pasion, the famous slave-turned-banker and father of Apollodorus, the writer of the speech. Initially we are told that when Timotheus was in danger of a death sentence, Pasion lent him a large sum without security (οὐτε . . . ἐπ’ ἐνεχύρω) and without witnesses—for him to repay when he wished (49.2). Other large payments followed. But when Timotheus was back and in the political limelight again, he refused to pay unless forced by law, and Apollodorus needs in the speech to go through the list of moneys lent and the dates: “Let no one wonder that I know accurately,” he continues. “For bankers are accustomed to write out memoranda (ὑπομνήματα γράφεσθαι) of the money they lend, and for what, and the payments a borrower makes (καὶ ὧν ἅν τις τιθῇται), in order that his receipts and his payments should be known for the accounts (logismos)” (49.5).

Apollodorus continues with a blow-by-blow account of dates of payment, names of the men who receive the money, the very precise sums passed over, and the reasons for the loan. Much revolves around these details. At chapter 43, Timotheus challenged him before the arbitrator to bring *ta grammata* from the bank, and demanded copies, sending someone to the bank to examine the records and make copies. At chapter 59f. we return again to the peculiar methods of the banks, carefully explained to the audience—which turn out to be simply that the debt is noted at the precise time money is paid out.

There are remarks elsewhere about banking practice—special pleading perhaps—such as the accusation made in Isocrates that Pasion reneged on the agreement with his Black Sea client to keep his money in Athens secret (Isocrates XVII, esp. 7–10, 19–20).⁹ Alongside these fascinating

9. There is less here on the workings of the bank: Isoc. XVII 7 for agreement; 7–10 speaker in cahoots with banker to pretend he has no money in the bank; 19–20, further (written) agreement to keep things under wraps. Cf. also [Dem] LII, for example, 4, 6, 24, 27. Pébarthe 2006, 103–9 approaches this from a rather different angle.

hints that banks might be enjoined to keep matters hidden as well as keeping records, we are dealing with a species of literate practices, a kind of literate environment, which is special to the bank and this realm of professional activity. It is not unique, for in other areas people made lists, probably agreements. But the whole amounts to a genre of literacy, and it needs explaining to the audience. The jury is subject to a barrage of other rhetorical arguments about court practice and life in general that are not presented in the speeches as unfamiliar. But banking literacy is presented as operating under special conventions, a subgenre of literacy, a fact we may obscure by talking simply of “functional literacy” or “literacy” in general.

THE CITIZEN: NAME LITERACY

Let us take a step back to a precise category of citizen: what kind of writing needs did a citizen have who was not politically prominent but went to the Assembly, even the jury-courts? Was there a democratic minimum in the mid-fifth century (ostracism?) and perhaps a different minimum in the restored democracy of the fourth century?

Ostracism was the only time a citizen had to write to perform his basic democratic functions in the fifth century: a name on a sherd to vote someone into exile. Much discussed of course, it seems to assume every citizen could write a name (as Vanderpool [1973] believed). The mass of ostraka found in the Agora, and then the further 8,500 found in the Kerameikos, dating to the 470s, offer unusually rich direct evidence for such writing citizens. Attention focuses on the mass of 190 ostraka conveniently found together naming Themistokles and written out neatly in fourteen identifiable hands.¹⁰ Were they prepared for convenience or vote-rigging, for wavering voters who might be swayed by having a prepared vote thrust into their hands, or simply for illiterates? We do not really know, but the anecdote about Aristides and the illiterate voter (Plut. *Aristides* 7.7–8) shows that the Greeks were well aware of the possibility—and the irony—of an illiterate having to get someone, even the man he hated, to help write the name. Further careful research on joining ostraka shows several ostraka from the same pot written out in the same hand both against the same politician, and against different politicians: as Brenne points out from the Kerameikos ostraka, the implication is that they were prepared in advance, probably by a “scribe,” but not necessarily as part of a concerted effort against the one candidate.¹¹ Other ostraka with the name painted before firing imply preprepared names. Phillips has also recently canvassed the idea, building on a suggestion of Vanderpool’s, that more scribal hands are visible in the ostraka, especially when the pottery is of a

10. Broneer 1938.

11. See Brenne 1994, esp. 16–20 on the Kerameikos ostraka.

high grade.¹² But again, are these simply helpful scribes? There is still considerable ambiguity, but the evidence seems to be growing that many more sherds were preprepared, for whatever reason, to be given ready-made to the voters. (These ambiguities are perhaps reminiscent of the recent phenomenon of the mass e-mail protest.)

The varying quality and especially poor quality of many sherds is in itself revealing, a point Phillips has emphasized. Though scratching on pottery is not that easy, it is clear that some writers found the process far harder than others, though the material was the same for all. The published ostraka do show dramatic variation in the quality and confidence of handwriting, spelling, omitted letters, badly formed or back-to-front letters. Of the examples in Phillips’ article, figures 11 and 12, which read *ΚΛΕΟΦΩΝ* (with omega omitted) are such examples, and figure 1 (*Τεισανδρος Ισαγορο*) has writing that is wavering boustrophedon but with the sigmas the wrong way round. Mabel Lang’s edition of the Agora ostraka (1990) gives many more examples in which essential vowels or consonants are missing.¹³ The following are some examples, all from *Ostraka*, written with lowercase letters in the modern convention, without the missing letters added in:

Ostraka no. 89 (Lang 1990, fig. 4): *Βουταλιανα* *ho marthonios* *Βυταλιονα*—with *Βυταλιονα* crossed out and alpha missing in “marathonios.” (See figure 2.1.)

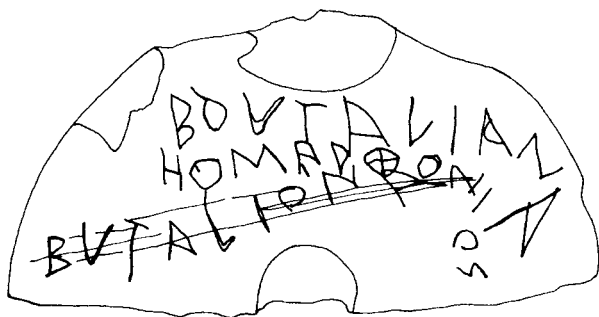


Figure 2.1 Athenian Agora XXV, *Ostraka*, no. 89.

no.1061 (Lang 1990, fig. 27): *Χσνθιπος Αριφρονος* (for *Χσ{α}νθιπος Αριφρονος*). Note omitted alpha; also single pi and rho.

no.1097 (Lang 1990, fig. 29): *Ματισηνς ηιφοχρατος*—with four-bar sigma the wrong way round.¹⁴ (See figure 2.2.)

12. Phillips 1990.

13. Lang 1990: omitted letters listed pp. 16–17. Note also Lang 1982 on writing and spelling.

14. For an alternative reading of the first word, see Lang’s edition, ad loc.

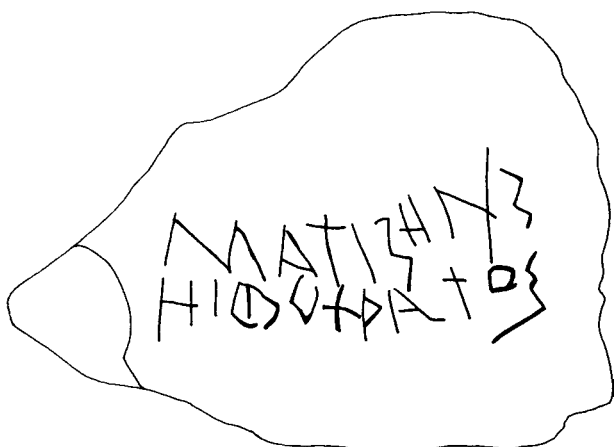


Figure 2.2 Athenian Agora XXV, *Ostraka*, no.1097.

no.768 (Lang 1990, fig. 23): *Θμισθοε Φρεαριος*—an attempt at *Θεμισθοκλες Φρεαριος*. Spindly, uncertain writing. (See figure 2.3.)



Figure 2.3 Athenian Agora XXV, *Ostraka*, no.768.

no.762 (Lang 1990, fig. 23): *Θεμισθοκλες Φρεαριος*—written retrograde, but the sigmas still face forward; iota missing in Themistokles' name. Far less impressive on the sherd than the modern text implies. (See figure 2.4.)

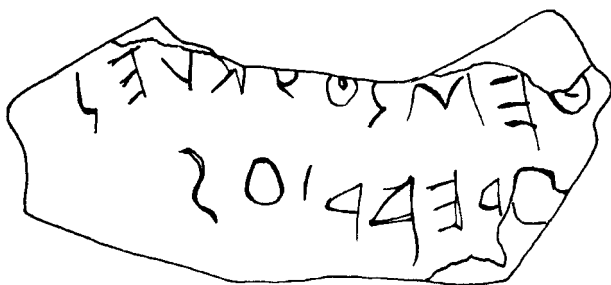


Figure 2.4 Athenian Agora XXV, *Ostraka*, no.762.

no.198 (Lang 1990, fig. 9): *ἡπποκρατ[] Ἀλμεονιδος*. K omitted in Alkmeonidos. The sherd reads from left to right, then upside down as the sherd is turned around. The sigma at the end of the patronymic and the form (*alkmeonidos*) is wrong (writer thinking of Alkmeonos?).¹⁵ (See figure 2.5.)

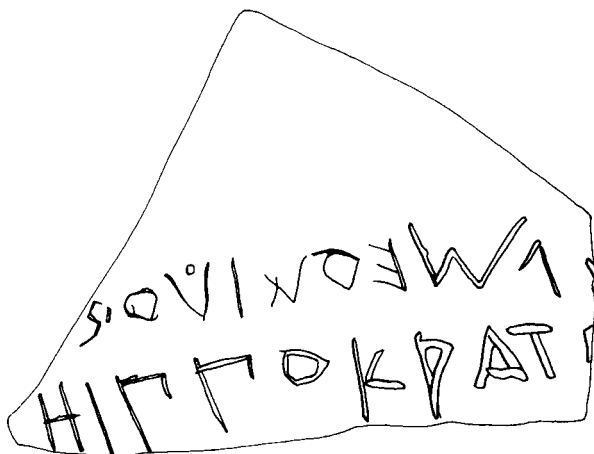


Figure 2.5 Athenian Agora XXV, *Ostraka*, no.198.

By contrast, no. 1065 (Lang 1990, fig. 27), the much quoted couplet against Xanthippos (“This ostrakon says Xanthippos son of Aripheon does most wrong of the accursed leaders”) is an elegiac couplet, and the small, neat handwriting is that of a confident writer well used to forming letters and constructing written texts. (See figure 2.6.)

These extreme examples seem to be attempts by men quite unaccustomed to writing the simplest message, and the fact that the grammar is occasionally awry—some give the patronymic in the nominative, not the

15. See Lang 1990, no. 198 for discussion.

correct genitive¹⁶—suggests the same. In a period such as this in which a standard orthography is not developed, let alone taught comprehensively, we might partly be seeing individuals' representations of what they

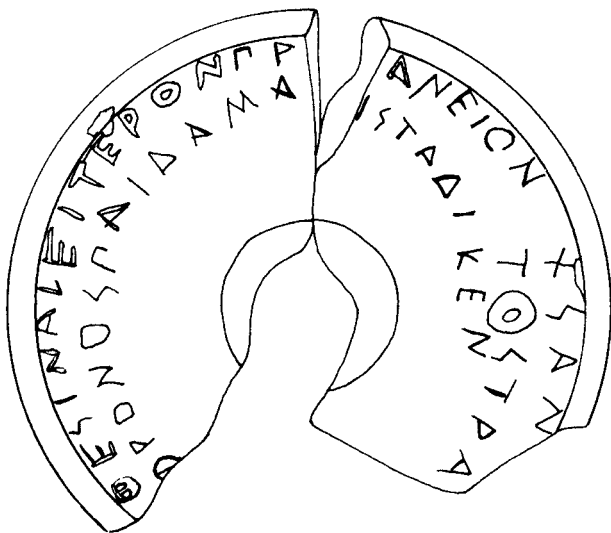


Figure 2.6 Athenian Agora XXV, *Ostraka*, no.1065.

thought they heard. As Lang and Threatte have investigated, quite a few of the “misspellings” or deviations may be indications of actual pronunciation.¹⁷ But many must simply be labeled “graphic error,” to use the polite term of Threatte, and he points out that it is in general in the private texts, as opposed to the big public inscriptions, that one finds the greatest variety of spelling. A further fascinating suggestion about missing letters has been made by Wachter, who examined more fully the possible patterns in missing letters as a way of analyzing when a lapse is a mistake or reflects pronunciation.¹⁸ He finds that the omitted vowel after a particular consonant is very often the vowel occurring after that consonant in the Greek name for the consonant (e.g., ε is often omitted after *theta*), thus a form of “abbreviated writing” and a common “semi-mistake” generated by the fact of learning the alphabet from the letter names (thus *theta* is thought to equal the sound *th* + *e*). This helps explain the omission of ε in Themistokles’ name, yet the other examples cited above do not fit this pattern—numbers 89, 1061, 1097, 768, and 762 are

16. Lang 1990, 17 has found 15 cases of this. See further Lang 1990 for lists of omitted syllables, extra letters and so forth, and below for Wachter 1991.

17. Threatte 1980, 395–407—“graphic error” at p. 398; Lang 1982, 1990.

18. Wachter 1991 (who was unable to use the Agora publication).

still simply wrong. In other words, we find carelessness and semi-literacy, revealing, one may imagine, real unfamiliarity with letters.

The political implications are interesting: quite a few of those exercising their democratic rights found writing hard and unfamiliar in the early fifth century, when most of these ostraka originate (480s and 470s). They can barely write. Unlike the modern damaged ballot papers, this does not seem to matter. We are dealing with the early days of democracy, it is true, so perhaps this is not surprising, but we may remember that those who cast their sherd in an ostracism were, by definition, the active citizens. This probably changed as the democracy gathered steam and more and more documents were produced. But at the basic level of participation by listening to Assembly debates, even listening in the jury-courts, this very poor, basic acquaintance with writing was adequate. The juror needed to recognize his name on his *pinakion*, when these are introduced in the fourth century (perhaps the first and most basic type of reading, joyfully practiced, to judge from children today!). “Functional literacy,” then, in the sense of enough literacy to function in the democratic process, could have been extremely basic in the 480s, even 460s.

But in a way, that is not the point, or only half the point. The Sausage-seller in the *Knights* is jokingly declared appropriate as *prostates tou demou* because he has no education (*mousike*) except his letters and those barely at all; it would be still better if he had none (*Knights* 188–93). Ostracism only indicates a bare minimum, and that not fully attained. Someone who could barely read or write would have to listen to others reading out proposed laws—not debarred completely, that is absolutely true, but less able to use his initiative in certain areas as the democracy developed in the late fifth and fourth centuries: less able, for instance, to check lists of suspect Athenians as more lists were put up on the Acropolis (we return to lists below), unable to read details on mortgage stones without taking someone along, unable to draft a proposal without help. Gossip, oral communication, heralds, and announcements were all essential; much could and was conveyed by these methods, but the “slow writer,” to use the term of Roman Egypt, could hardly be equal to a member of the educated elite in their ability to master every aspect of the political system, especially as the elite could probably manipulate written texts with relative ease as well as compose eloquent speeches. The poor writers of the 480s and 470s ostraka will have become increasingly left behind as the democracy developed its more complex use of decrees and written record (and indeed the elite will have had to differentiate itself as this low-level literacy became more common). By the 380s, say, one hundred years later, there were simply more written records around, and the illiterate therefore probably excluded from more.

As for the juror in the fourth century, a member of a central element of the democracy, his identity as juror was now established in writing with the *pinakia*, small plaques of bronze with the juror’s name and a letter or symbol, many of which have been found in the Agora. There were also

coin-shaped bronze tokens.¹⁹ The fourth-century juror thus had his written badge, as it were. The courts were an environment in which written texts were used—written testimonies, laws, and decrees were read out—but it seems unlikely that jurors were required to read anything themselves as part of their duties. Two amusing remarks occur in fourth-century speeches. In Apollodorus' *Against Makartetos*, [Dem] 43.18, the speaker goes into the family relationships of Hagnias' family necessary for this complex inheritance case of the mid-fourth century. He says he was intending to write the genealogy out on a board, but those farther away would be at a disadvantage, therefore word of mouth would be fairer, and he proceeds with the spoken word. This is both tantalizing and suspicious, the only hint, so far as I know, that a written text might be set up in the courts to be read: Apollodorus leaves out some significant items of genealogy, and given the complexity of this case, he may have benefited from a certain lack of clarity! The balance between rhetoric and fact here is unclear. He can flatter the jurors while advancing his own case.

In the second, dating to 330, Aeschines reminisces with nostalgia about jurors of the old days of the restored democracy (III, *Against Ctesiphon* 192): they often told the clerk, he claims, to read the laws and the motion again (as appropriate for cases of illegal proposals). Nowadays, though, he continues, jurors treat the clerk reading τὸ παράνομον (statement of illegality) as if they were hearing an incantation of something of no concern to them (ὥσπερ ἐπωδὴν ἢ ἀλλότριόν τι πρᾶγμα) and thinking of something quite different. Even here jurors in the present and idealized past are envisaged as listening carefully or listening carelessly (cf. Cleon, in Thuc. III 38), and careful attention to a written text is manifested by asking the clerk—in this idealizing picture—to read out the text again.

Athenian jurors, then, could function as jurors with only the most basic literacy skills, for example, recognition of names. Some would have a more complex level of literacy, some less. By the late fifth and early fourth centuries, they were partaking of a democratic system with valued written law, produced numerous inscriptions for public display, and they heard the written texts read aloud.²⁰ one would expect from this that some of these other written practices would become more embedded for more of the active citizen body than they had been in the 480s. At the very least they were partaking, if aurally, in the manifestations of a political system that included these written texts. As the Agora graffiti seem to confirm (*Athenian Agora* vol. XXI), this would mean that more citizens were reading and writing in relatively simple ways. The “democratic minimum” for an Athenian citizen in courts or assembly, however, could have remained the ability to read or write little more than names.

19. See Boegehold 1995; also Boegehold 1960.

20. This seems to become more common as the fourth century progresses: see Thomas 1989, ch. 1, esp. 60ff., 83ff.

COMMERCIAL LITERACY? THE CASE OF THE MERCHANT

"Commercial literacy" is another case in point. It is increasingly tempting to suspect a subgenre of writing use and written techniques that can best be called commercial literacy. Because the Greeks had adapted the alphabet from the Phoenicians who were traversing, settling, and trading across the Mediterranean, we would expect the current uses of writing—which included some form of commercial use—to be adopted along with the alphabet itself. Even more telling are the lead letters increasingly coming to light from the Black Sea settlements and Southern France, and dating considerably later to c. 500 and after. They indicate a sphere of commercial activity and writing that hitherto had to be deduced from the archaeological and literary evidence, for traders did not seem to leave direct written evidence themselves. Wilson has examined this growing body of evidence to argue that some traders at least were literate enough to write letters, and perhaps even write contracts, in the late archaic period.²¹ Van Berchem has used fascinating Near Eastern evidence to supplement the Greek and press the possibility that written contracts were adopted by Greeks from the Phoenicians, and by implication even earlier than our explicit evidence.²²

Lead letters are rather hard to date, and much still remains obscure. The Berezan lead letter is dated to c. 500 B.C., as is the Emporion letter.²³ Moreover, it is clear that the letters belong to a world of traders, buyers, and sellers, on the edge of the Greek world, but unclear that this is a specifically commercial literacy. Most of these letters seem to be crisis letters, letters about circumstances and problems arising within a group engaged in various commercial activities, and there is much about seizure of goods or people. The Berezan letter was sent by Achillodorus to his son to say that he has been seized and so have the goods he was carrying; the Olbia letter is about seizure of goods.²⁴ But we may compare the fourth-century Attic letter from a slave in dire circumstances in a foundry—the letter recently published by Jordan, with the convincing argument that it is from a slave (but written *by* a slave too?) by Edward Harris.²⁵ A crisis letter is not uniquely commercial, clearly, and we should also note that the creation of a continuous prose letter with a degree of narration is more complicated than the banker's list. Yet the surroundings and circumstances of their activities may have made written messages between traders rather necessary—the long distances and times to cross them, suspicion of intermediaries, perhaps even language barriers that might distort messages. Antiphon in *Herodes*, V 53, gives a "persuasive definition" of the written message as opposed to

21. Wilson 1997–8.

22. Van Berchem 1991.

23. Bravo 1974 for the publication of the Berezan letter; for the Emporion letter, Sanmartí and Santiago 1987 and 1988.

24. See Wilson 1997–8, 38.

25. E. Harris 2004.

the messenger: written messages, he says, are used only when it is necessary to conceal the message from the bearer, or else for a very long message. This is an attempt at special pleading, but it must have sounded plausible. In crisis and suspicious circumstances, the letter's ability to cross distances and time, and transcend messengers, would be very handy.

One letter contains peremptory instructions from a business man or maritime trader: the Emporion letter, found in Northeast Spain (see note 23 above), has an impatient tone of command surrounding the transactions and its contents. It is tempting to see this as a particular subgenre of writing for commercial activity—the written instructions from one person to another.

We may also wonder about the use of writing for receipts, loans, or contracts, all of which need to be carefully distinguished from a letter that is simply from a trader. The seven Corcyrean lead tablets of the early fifth century possibly record maritime loans.²⁶ A puzzling lead tablet mentioning guarantors, conflict, and the attempted sale of an ox was found in Sicilian Gela (c. 480–450 B.C.).²⁷ And as van Berchem and Wilson argue, we have evidence of a surprisingly sophisticated use of writing, the written contract, in one of these lead documents, the Pech-Maho tablet (so far this is the only lead document that can probably count as a contract, though see below). The Pech-Maho tablet is particularly revealing, because it involves an agreement between people of different origins, as is clear from the names.²⁸ Witnesses are invoked, a guarantee (*ἐγγυητήριον*) and an *arrabon*, a form of pledge that is handed over at a named location.

“So-and-so (*perhaps* Kyprios) bought a boat [from the] Emporitans. He also bought [three (?) more] (*i.e., from elsewhere*). He passed over to me a half share at the price of 2 1/2 *hektai* (each). I paid 2 1/2 *hektai* in cash and two days later personally gave a guarantee (*ἐγγυητήριον*). The former (*i.e., the money*) he received on the river. The pledge (*arrabon*) I handed over where the boats are moored. Witness(es): Basigerros and Bleruas and Golo.biur and Sedegon; these (were) witnesses when I handed over the pledge. But when I paid the money, the 2 1/2 *hektai*, .auaras, Nalb. .n.” (Chadwick's 1990 translation of revised text)

It is very tempting to wonder if the written contract developed early among traders on the edges (both geographical and ideological) of the Greek world precisely because of the mobility of the trader, the fluidity of business, the absence of a secure and permanent base, and of security in land; and above all, the need to make agreements with strangers Greek and

26. See Calligas 1971, Wilson 1997–8.

27. Dubois, IGDS no.134, for text and commentary; LSAG, 2nd ed., Gela, Q (p. 461): note the past tenses.

28. For the Pech-Maho tablet: Lejeune and Pouilloux 1988; revised text and slightly different interpretation of contents, Chadwick 1990. Cf. also Rodríguez Somolinos 1996.

non-Greek. Writing might seem to offer an extra, unchangeable proof of agreement in which witnesses might be thought not totally trustworthy.²⁹

But even in the Pech-Maho document it is not writing alone that gives the contract its security. There are three forms of guarantee mentioned, including witnesses: apparently every attempt is made to buttress and secure the transaction. It is also interesting that the “contract,” if that is what it really is, is couched in the form of a narrative of past actions, unlike later Greek contracts. This is fascinating because it implies that the conventions and technicalities of what a transaction entailed might have developed slowly and in quite different form in different places.³⁰ The important aim was for trust and security to be established: the written word was molded to that aim in whatever form seemed appropriate.

If we compare the Athenian situation, the written contract between individuals appears relatively late in our evidence, first in a speech delivered in 390 B.C. No one would imagine that this was therefore the first example for the Athenians, and Millett has pointed out that because oratory provides us with our main evidence for contracts in Athens, we are therefore confined to speeches of the late fifth and fourth centuries.³¹ It may be that the written contract for private individuals was at least known in the fifth century, as Millett and Stroud suggest, but it seems too easy to assume that fully formed written contracts were ubiquitous throughout the fifth century and everywhere in an “all-or-nothing” model. These practices will develop: the Pech-Maho tablet is couched in narrative form; Athens itself continued to use the very primitive *horoi* as mortgage stones. Besides, trust in writing cannot be simply assumed to override trust in witnesses. As Antiphon puts it in his first speech, a dying man anxious to name his murderer will call witnesses from his friends and relatives and tell them who the murderer was; failing that he will write and use slaves as witnesses (I 28–30). Writing might be called upon when personal trust was lacking.

We may also need to consider more emphatically a distinction between contracts made between private individuals acting independently in far corners of the Mediterranean, and contracts made between an Athenian citizen and the polis in which legal safeguards and procedures were available.³² A contract’s usefulness depends on the degree of trust and the nature of the guarantees or penalties. It is possible that in Athens the state led the way in the use of written agreements—for instance, in tax leases—and Athenian officials were sufficiently confident of the machinery of the polis and had faith in its power of redress. It is difficult at the moment to reach further certainty: it would be unwise to posit a universal system.

29. Wilson 1997–8 esp. good on this, esp. pp. 48ff.: following Millett 1991, written contract developed first in Athens in banking.

30. We may tentatively wonder if it is even a contract in the usual later sense or some hybrid.

31. Millett 1991, 259–60 n. 27; Stroud 1998, 46–7. See now Pébarthe 2006, 94–103.

32. Pace Stroud 1998 and van Berchem 1991.

A further element in the Pech-Maho tablet suggests an even greater distance between its world and that of Athens. The *arrabon* in the document, the object of pledge, is a Semitic loanword, and we may naturally guess that this form of pledge was learned from the Phoenicians along with the word. This suggests that areas with extensive Greek-Phoenician interaction might well have developed the business contract in a form quite different from that visible in later Athenian evidence (Greeks in certain places may have been more open than others to the Near Eastern form of contract).³³ It may be unwise to class the Pech-Maho document simply and straightforwardly with the Athenian documents as “written contracts,” ignoring the differing compulsions and habits of thought. As Stroud emphasized in discussing the Athenian Grain-Tax law, Athenian contracts used the future indicative (and imperative);³⁴ the Pech-Maho document gives an account of a series of guarantees in the past tense. It may well be, with more evidence, that the earliest “written contracts” turn out to be more like written accounts of pledges and witnessing already made.

Be that as it may, we can see then that from the point of view of functionality, the trader had more use of literacy as written contracts became more normal, more acceptable; and these letters indicate more command of continuous writing than do simple lists. As in late Ptolemaic Egypt, even a “slow writer” might be at an advantage compared to the illiterate, but *only if* his habits and business could be progressed by making written records or contracts. Signatures, after all, were not yet required in classical Greece.

LIST LITERACY: “FUNCTIONAL LITERACY” AND THE COMMERCIAL LIST

Similarly with the list. Who used lists of sums of money, lists of articles, goods, lists of people? We should surely expect that by the late fifth century commercial habits of literacy—buying, selling, counting receipts—may have begun to make use of the list, and more so in the next century.³⁵ It is extremely difficult at present to suggest periods or stages of development, but the ostrakon list from Athens of the mid fourth century, found in the Kerameikos, may be used as a possible example of what I mean (see figure 2.7).³⁶

33. Van Berchem is rather vague on this (his main thesis is that the Greeks learned to use written contracts from the Phoenicians).

34. Stroud 1998, 45–6.

35. Goody 1977 argued that the list was a quintessentially literate creation; this seems exaggerated because the earliest Greek poetry has great liking for lists, albeit in continuous verse.

36. Johnston 1985 for *ed. pr.*