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8. ATHENS

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8.1 Traditional Education

Typically the later fifth-century comedy *Clouds* by Aristophanes is taken as evidence that the young of classical Athens had abandoned the *palaistra* (‘wrestling school’) and *gymnasion* (‘athletics field’) for the ‘new education’ of the sophists (961-1054). Certainly these intellectuals offered classes in disciplines which ranged from astronomy and cosmology to, for example, *hoplomakhia* or weapons training (e.g. Ar. *Nub.* 359-360; Pl. *Phd.* 108d-113c). The most popular of their classes were in public speaking (Joyal, McDougall and Yardley 2009: 59-87). However, a wide range of surviving literature, including a close reading of this comedy of Aristophanes, suggests otherwise: although the later fifth century witnessed a big expansion in what young Athenians could study, physical education manifestly remained a major discipline of the education of *paides* or boys (e.g. Aeschin. 1.10; Ar. *Ran.* 727-730; Pl. *La.* 184e). This branch of what Aristophanes calls the *arkhaia paideia* or old education (*Nub.* 961) was taught by the *paidotribēs* or athletics teacher (e.g. Ar. *Nub.* 973; *Eq.* 490-492, 1238-1239; Pl. *La.* 184e). His lessons were not one-on-one but for groups of students (e.g. Isoc. 15.183-5; Pritchard 2013: 49-50). It is an historical irony that while the sophists argued for the superiority of what they taught over the *arkhaia paideia*, they were the first to describe this traditional education systematically (Pritchard 2013: 47, 108-109).

Athletics teachers are most frequently represented in classical texts or on red-figure pots giving lessons in the ‘heavy’ events of Greek athletics: wrestling, boxing and the *pankration* (e.g. Ar. *Eq.* 490-492, 1238-1239; Beck 1975). This comes as no surprise, as each of these events was technically demanding and many athletics teachers owned their own wrestling schools, while some, when they were young, had been famous Panhellenic victors in these events. But the so-called track and field events required athletes to be no less proficient in ‘the moves devised competition’ (Isoc. 15.183). Thus on pots and in literature we also find athletics teachers training groups in these non-contact sports. In his *Statesmen* Plato, for example, outlines how there are in Athens ‘very many’ supervised ‘training sessions for groups’ where instructions and *ponoi* (‘toils’) take place not just for wrestling but also ‘for the sake of competition in the foot race or some other event’ (294d-294e). Red-figure pots often show a *paidotribēs* supervising not only running and javelin-throwing but also discus-throwing and the long jump (Beck 1975; Nicholson 2005: 245 n. 25, 246 n. 38). These lessons of a *paidotribēs* were the only opportunity for Athenian boys and young men to learn and to practise the events of local and Panhellenic games (Pritchard 2013: 46-53).

Gumnastikē or physical education was one of the three disciplines of traditional male education in classical Athens. The other widely agreed disciplines were *mousikē* or music and *grammata* or letters (e.g. Pl. *Alc. I* 118d; *Prt.* 312b, 325e, 326c), to which were occasionally added lessons in singing and dancing dithyrambs (e.g. Aeschin. 1.9-11; Ar. *Ran.* 727-730; Pl. *Leg.* 654a-654b, 672c; Pritchard 2004). The discipline of music was the preserve of a *kitharistēs* or *kithara* teacher, who taught students how to play the *kithara*, which was a bit like a lyre, and to sing poems (e.g. Ar. *Nub.* 962-72; Pl. *Prt.* 326a-b), while that of letters was overseen by a *grammatistēs* or letter teacher. He instructed students in literacy and probably also numeracy and made them memorise and recite passages of Homer and other epic poets (e.g. Pl. *Prt.* 325e-326a).

As classes in each of these three main disciplines were taken concurrently, students travelled from one *didaskaleion* or school room to another throughout the day (e.g. Ar. *Nub.* 963-964), probably spending only a few hours at each (Beck 1964: 81-3; Golden 1990: 62-3). This schooling of boys was a predominantly private affair in classical Athens (e.g. Arist. *Pol.* 1337a22-1337a 33; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.2). Admittedly laws were passed to regulate school hours, class sizes and the minimum age of pupils (Aeschin. 1.9-11). But the democracy did not license teachers, determine the curricula for their lessons nor subsidise their wages. Thus it was fathers who decided what disciplines their boys should study, who the good teachers were and how long they should be at school.

For the classical Athenians the solitary goal of education was not the teaching of practical skills but the forming of boys into *agathoi andres* or virtuous men (e.g. Eur. *Supp.* 911-917; Pl. *Prt.* 325d-325e; *Meno* 94b). Precise ways in which each of the traditional education's disciplines contributed to this moral end are postulated by Protagoras in the Platonic dialogue bearing his name (325a-326c). The physical education of the *paidotribēs*, he suggests, guarantees that a lack of fitness will not cause a young man to be the coward on the battlefield (326b-326c). Protagoras isolates the source of moral education which is provided by the lessons in *mousikē* not in the content of lyric poetry but in the practising of scales and rhythms on the *kithara* (326a-326b). Yet Protagoras believes that Athenian boys received the lion's share of their instruction in morality sitting in the classes of the *grammatistēs* (325e-326a):

When the boys understand their letters and are on the point of comprehending the written word, the teachers set before them on the benches poems of good poets to read, and they are compelled to learn by rote these works, which contain many admonitions and numerous descriptions, eulogies and commendations of virtuous men of long ago, so that the boy out of a sense of jealousy imitates them and yearns to be this sort of man himself.

A wide range of authors agreed that the learning of Homer and other epic poets by heart served as instruction for boys in morality (e.g. Aeschin. 3.135; Ar. *Ran.* 1038-9; Xen. *Sym.* 3.5-6). Aristophanes for one made the educational content of

Homer's poetry its warrior heroes, when he had the dead Aeschylus claim in *Frogs* (1040-1042): 'In imitation of him my purpose was to represent in poetry the many excellences (*pollas aretas*) of Patrocluses, lion-hearted Teucers in order to induce the citizen to become a rival of these men whenever he heard the trumpet of war.' Clearly the classical Athenians believed that the learning of epic poetry by heart was the chief means of instructing boys in morality. Within traditional education this poetry was encountered and studied only in the lessons of a *grammatistēs*.

8.2 Participation

Before considering participation in this traditional education we must first clarify the nature of social classes in classical Athens. Sometimes the Athenians divided themselves up on the basis of military roles, income-bands, occupations or places of residence (Vartsos 1978). But the distinction which they used much more often than others and which demarcated the most important social cleavage was between *hoi plousioi* ('the wealthy') and *hoi penētes* ('the poor'). The wealthy led lives of *skholē* or leisure and so did not have to work for a living (e.g. Ar. *Plut.* 281; *Vesp.* 552-557; Men. *Dys.* 293-295). It also enabled them to pursue pastimes which were simply too expensive and time-consuming for the poor (Pritchard 2013: 3-6). Thus groups of wealthy friends regularly came together for a *sumposion* or drinking party (e.g. Ar. *Vesp.* 1216-17, 1219-22, 1250; Murray 1990: 149-50). This class's members stood out for their wearing of distinctive clothes, their undertaking of public services such as sponsorships of a chorus or warship, and their paying of the *eisphora* or emergency tax on property for war (e.g. Ar. *Eq.* 923-6; *Ran.* 1062-5; Dem. 4.7; 10.37; 27.66; Lys. 22.13). Politicians too were drawn from their ranks (Pritchard 2013: 5-6). They numbered around 5 percent of the whole body of Athenians (Pritchard 2010: 13 n. 66). The Athenians classified the rest of the citizen-body, ranging from the truly destitute to those sitting just below the elite, as the poor (Pritchard 2013: 7-9). What the members of this social class had in common was a lack of *skholē* and hence a need to work for a living (e.g. Ar. *Pax.* 632; *Vesp.* 611; *Plut.* 281; Lys. 24.16).

The classical Athenians understood that a family's resources dictated the number of disciplines a *pais* ('boy') could take up and the length of his schooling. This inequality of educational opportunity is again expressed clearly by the Platonic Protagoras, who explains that the three disciplines of traditional education 'are done by the most able, and those who are best able are the wealthiest (*hoi plousiōtatoi*). Their sons begin regularly attending the schools of teachers at the earliest stage of their youth and stop doing so at the latest point' (Pl. *Prt.* 326c; cf. *Ap.* 23c). In the same vein Xenophon acknowledged how education depended on money (*Cyn.* 2.1); Aristophanes made out that education beyond the three disciplines of the 'old education' was the preserve of *kaloi te k'agathoi*, that is, wealthy gentlemen (*Nub.* 101, 797-8); and Pseudo-Xenophon maintained that poverty causes poor Athenians to be ignorant and uneducated (1.5; cf. Ar. *Vesp.* 1174-5, 1183).

An obvious way in which wealth impacted on education was that a family had to have enough cash to cover the fees of three teachers, which together could be expensive (Beck 1964: 130; Golden 2008: 36). To be educated in letters, music and athletics a boy also needed to be free of other day-time obligations, as he would be attending classes in two or more disciplines each day (e.g. Isae. 9.28). Critically such *skholē* was only guaranteed for the boys of wealthy families: most poor citizens could not afford enough household slaves, as Aristotle explains (*Pol.* 1323a5-1323a), and so needed their children to help with the running of farms or businesses (Golden 1990: 34-6). The negative impact of such child labour on the education of poor boys was fully appreciated by contemporaries (e.g. Isoc. 14.48; Xen. *Cyr.* 8.3.37-9).

In his discussion of how young Athenians were kept under control in the era of Solon and Cleisthenes, for example, Isocrates assumed that some of them took up employment instead of education (7.43-5). Their forebears, he writes, ‘used to turn to farming and commerce those with inferior resources’, but ‘compelled those in possession of sufficient funds to while time away with horsemanship, athletic exercises, hunting and philosophy’ (7.45). Admittedly this pamphlet is notorious for the historical fabrications which Isocrates used to try to convince the Athenians that a restriction of their democracy would be no more than a return to the beneficial regime of their ancestors. But the dichotomy which it drew between the different educational opportunities of those with and without wealth was not due to this conservative political agenda, because similar distinctions were made by authors who wrote for audiences of poor Athenians. Lysias, for example, noted how a wealthy boy went to the city to be educated, while poverty forced another to be a shepherd (20.11-12). And Demosthenes contrasted the full education which he enjoyed as wealthy boy with the impoverished childhood of Aeschines, who had to work in his father’s letter school where he performed menial tasks which were otherwise done by slaves (18.256-67).

8.3 Athletics and Music

Some ancient historians argue that poor Athenians participated in athletic *agōnes* or games. Harry Pleket for one has long argued that while the wealthy originally monopolised Greek athletics, from the early fifth century athletes of hoplite status increasingly entered athletic contests (e.g. Pleket 1992). By contrast, David Young suggests there were always good numbers of poor athletes before and after the early fifth century (1984: 107-63). Nick Fisher maintains that involvement of poor Athenians in local athletic games even reached down to Athenians of sub-hoplite status (Fisher 2011). The extent of athletic participation which these ancient historians advocate presupposes that large numbers of non-elite families sent boys to the regular lessons of the *paidotribēs*; for his lessons alone provided the training which athletic competitors required (see section 8.1 above).

Yet this education of poor boys in this discipline was very far from likely (Golden 2008: 23-31; Kyle 2007: 87-88, 205-216; Pritchard 2013: 34-83). The limited means of poor families and their reliance on child labour would have made it

difficult to send their sons to lessons in letters *and* athletics. Nor is it likely that they would have had their boys give up the moral lessons of the *grammatistēs* in favour of athletics. The classical Athenians believed that an athlete could only win or even perform creditably at games, if he had devoted a lot of his time to such training (e.g. Aeschin.3.179-180; Ar. *Ran.* 1093-1094; Isoc. 16.32-3; Pl. *Leg.* 807c). Those of the city's boys and young men who lacked access to the lessons of a *paidotribēs* would have performed poorly in such *agōnes* and hence would have been greatly disheartened about entering a race or bout in the first place. What literary evidence we have confirms this picture: schooling in *gumnastikē* and *mousikē* and participation in athletic *agōnes* were predominant or possibly even exclusive preserves of the wealthy in classical Athens.

This limited direct experience of athletics and music among poor Athenians is reflected clearly in a scene of Aristophanes' *Wasps* where Bdelycleon struggles to teach his father, Philocleon, how to be a wealthy symposiast (1122-1264). The humour of this scene depends on the unexpected difference in the social classes of father and son: as a poor citizen Philocleon is naturally wary of the wealthy and their exclusive pursuits, such as the *sumposion* or drinking party, and is ill equipped to assimilate the lessons of his wealthy son. Bdelycleon initially finds it very difficult to persuade his father to exchange his *embades* ('felt slippers') and *tribōn* ('coarse cloak'), which are the standard attire of poor citizens (Ar. *Vesp* 33, 115-117; *Plut.* 842-3; Isaeus 5.11), for imported shoes and gown and to ape 'the walk of the wealthy' (1122-1173).

Next Bdelycleon asks his father whether he knows any 'posh stories' suitable for relating to 'well educated and clever men' (1174-1175). He quickly learns that Philocleon does not and so suggests that he speak perhaps of an embassy in which he may have participated (1183-1187). However, as only wealthy citizens with their overseas guest friends could be ambassadors (e.g. *Ach.* 607-11; *Av.* 1570-1; *Dem.* 19.237-8), the best Philocleon can do is to bring up his service as a rower on an expedition to Paros (Ar. *Vesp* 1188-9). Instead of this Bdelycleon encourages him to talk about a famous sportsman (1190-1194): 'you need to say, for example, that although he was grey and old, Ephoudion continued to fight well in the *pankration* with his very strong sides, hands and flank and his very fine torso (*thōrak' ariston*)'. Philocleon interrupts his son here (1194-5): 'Stop! Stop! You're speaking nonsense. How could he fight in the *pankration* wearing a suit of armour (*thōrak' ekhōn*)?' Philocleon's confusing of the two established meanings of *thōrax* reveals his unfamiliarity with 'jock talk' and suggests that he spent no time as a boy with a *paidotribēs* or as a competitor at games (Golden 1998: 160).

Undeterred Bdelycleon tells his father he will have to relate 'a very manly exploit of his youth' (1197-1199), and, in response to Philocleon's inability to do even this (1200-1201), suggests he talk about 'how once you chased a wild boar or a hare, or you ran a torch race, after you have worked out your most dashing youthful exploit' (1202-1205). His father's experience of such things again seems unlikely. Hunting was clearly an exclusive pursuit of the wealthy (e.g. *Men. Dys.* 39-44), while joining a tribal team of torch-racers – before the reform of the *ephēbeia* in 335 –

would have been possible for only a small minority of Athenian youths (Pritchard 2013: 76-80, 214-216). Thus it is a surprise to find Philocleon relating what seems an anecdote about athletics before, that is, we realise that he is talking about something quite different (1205-1207): ‘Well I certainly know my most impetuous and youthful deed of early years: while still a boy, the runner Phayllus I overtook (*heilon*), pursuing (*diōkōn*) him for slander, by two votes.’ The joke here rests on two more double entendres: *aireō* (aorist form, *heilon*) and *diōkō* are commonly used in discussions of sporting *and* legal contests. Therefore, while Philocleon, at first, seems to be recalling a race against a famous Olympic victor of a previous generation, Phayllus of Croton (cf. Ar. *Ach.* 214; Paus. 10.9.2), his last three words dash this impression: this addict of the jury courts has been reminiscing about a legal prosecution all along. His lack of athletic nous is revealed again when, the demonstrations of his son notwithstanding, he botches reclining on a symposium couch *gumnastikōs* or athletically (1208-1213).

Aspects of this scene’s treatment of athletics and music occur in other classical texts. In the famous *parabasis* of *Frogs*, for example, Aristophanes links athletics, music and political leadership with the wealthy (727-730), while wrestling schools for Euripides belong to the ‘well born man’ (*El.* 528). Alternatively Athenian authors group athletics with other activities, such as hunting and philosophy, which were clear preserves of wealthy Athenians (e.g. Isoc. 7.45).

8.4 Letters

Poor families did not send their boys to the classes of an athletics teacher or a music teacher. But it has long been argued that they most certainly did send them to the classes of a *grammatistēs* (e.g. Beck 1964: 79-80, 83, 94, 111; Golden 1990: 63-4). This discipline – it is argued – would have been ‘more strictly useful’ for the poor’s participation in politics and business (Beck 1964: 83). However, as the role of writing in the Athenian democracy has become extremely controversial, this assessment of this discipline’s usefulness is no longer secure. This means that working out which Athenian boys went to the lessons in *grammata* requires us to reconsider the case for widespread literacy in classical Athens.

One argument in support of it is that this skill was a basic requirement for participation in politics. In this vein an older handbook on Greek education suggests that the institution of ostracism ‘presupposes the widespread knowledge of writing among the citizen body and therefore the existence of schools for its introduction’ (Beck 1964: 77). This argument has several problems. Firstly, although the capacity to scratch out the name of another person shows some writing capacity, it does not demonstrate the highly developed ability to read and write confidently. Secondly, Athenians who lacked even a limited skill in writing could still take part in these institutional expulsions; for they could always ask an educated fellow to incise a potsherd for them (e.g. Plut. *Arist.* 7.5-6). David Phillips, finally, has shown how literate Athenian craftsmen produced for each ostracism batches of pottery-sherds

which were inscribed with the names of potential candidates for expulsion, providing another source of *ostraka* for functionally illiterate citizens (Phillip 1990: 134-7).

Others have posed the requirement of literacy for politics in more general terms. Josh Ober suggests (1989: 158): ‘In order to function as a citizen, and certainly in order to carry out the responsibilities of many of the magistracies, the Athenian citizen needed a basic command of letters.’ Politicians, certainly, were expected to have a confident grasp of public finances, which depended on their close scrutiny of the public accounts of financial boards (e.g. Arist. *Rhet.* 1.4.7-1.4.8; Xen. *Mem.* 3.6.5-3.6.6). As boys and young men they would have honed their public speaking by studying with the sophists (see section 8.1 above). Instruction in this discipline covered the commonplaces of forensic and deliberative oratory and more controversially anti-logical argumentation, which helped a speaker to argue either side of a case with equal force (e.g. Pl. *Euthd.* 275d-277c). In these lessons students were required to copy model speeches and parts of handbooks on oratory (Ford 2001). To do so they needed to be able to read and to write confidently. Thus wealthy parents, who were eager for their sons to be famous leaders one day, would have made sure that their sons were well schooled by a *grammatistēs*.

Poor Athenians would have perceived literacy as useful for taking part in politics. For example, a hoplite or naval petty officer would have found it more convenient to search himself for his name on a public list of conscripts than to rely on another’s literacy. And a magistrate would have been a lot more relaxed during his public audit if he was able to consult his accounts without the help of a *hupogrammateus* or undersecretary. Yet this skill was simply not a requirement for participation in politics (Thomas 1989: 61-4; 1992: 3). Jurors, councillors and assemblygoers did not have to be literate. The *agōnes* or debates of the law-courts, the council and the assembly were conducted orally, with documents and testimonies relevant to them read out by secretaries (e.g. [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 54.5). In addition the decisions of the council and assembly, along with the instructions of magistrates, were made known through public announcements (e.g. 62.2). The Athenians, finally, made it possible for those who were functionally literate to be magistrates by providing every board of them with a secretary or *hupogrammateus* (e.g. Dem. 18.261; 19.200, 249; Antiph. 6.49; Lys. 30.29). Thus the operation of the Athenian democracy did not depend on any way on widespread literacy.

Proponents of widespread literacy have also presented some ancient passages which supposedly show how most citizens could read and write (e.g. Beck 1964: 83; Golden 1990: 64; Thomas 1992: 155). The first of these two passages allowing such an interpretation comes from the *Laws* of Plato (689d). In this dialogue the Athenian speaker argues that only those harmonising their emotions and reasoning ability will be judged wise in his ideal city, ‘even if, as the saying goes, they know neither letters nor how to swim (*mēte grammata mēte nein epistōntai*)’. This aphorism is usually interpreted as evidence that the Athenians thought a lack of literacy was very strange. A similar conclusion is drawn from the opening scene of *Knights* by Aristophanes where the Sausage Seller, objecting to the unlikely prediction of his leadership of the city, explains (188-189): ‘my good fellow I do not even know music, except letters

(*oude mousikēn epistamai plēn grammatōn*), and these I actually do very badly'. This character, of course, is not an average Athenian but a criminally inclined and underemployed individual from a deprived background (296-7, 1242, 1397-1401). Thus it is argued that if such marginal individual can read and write, the majority of Athenians who were certainly much better off must have been able to do so as well.

A problem with this argument is its assumption that the phrase *epistasthai grammata* ('to know one's letters') refers to nothing less than the capacity to read and to write confidently. This assumption pays too scant regard to the fact that different levels of literacy exist, ranging from the ability to sign one's own name and the sounding out of words syllable by syllable to the highly developed skills of reading and writing without conscious effort (Thomas 1992: 8-9). In addition two other passages by Plato and Aristophanes suggest that 'to know one's letters' must be placed much lower down this scale of literary than the advocates of widespread literacy assume. We have already noted what Plato's Protagoras says about how a *grammatistēs* gets his students to read (325e-326a): '...when the pupils understand letters (*grammata mathōsi*) and are on the point of comprehending the written word (*sunēsein ta gegrammena*), just as when they are about to understand the spoken word, the teachers set before them on the benches poems of good poets to read (*anagignōskein*)...' What is striking here is the distinction drawn between learning and understanding the alphabet (*manthanein grammata*) and the act of reading itself (*sunienai ta gegrammena, anagignōskein*). As *manthanein* is semantically very close to *epistasthai*, the phrase *epistasthai grammata* most probably refers – as the phrase *manthanein grammata* certainly does – to a pre-reading familiarity with the alphabet.

This new interpretation of 'to know one's letters' is backed up by a fuller consideration of the educational attainment of Aristophanes' Sausage Seller. Towards the end of *Knights* an exchange between him and Paphlagon makes plain his complete lack of schooling (1235-1238):

Paphlagon: When you were a boy the establishment of which teacher (*eis tinos didaskalou*) did you attend?

Sausage Seller: I was trained with knuckles in the swine-singeing yards.

Paphlagon: At the school of the athletics teacher (*en paidotribou*) what wrestling technique did you learn?

Sausage-seller: How to swear falsely and to steal while saying the opposite.

As the generic term *didaskalos* can describe a music teacher just as easily as a letter teacher (e.g. Pl. *Prt.* 325d, 326c), these witty responses of the Sausage Seller suggest that he lacked schooling not just in athletics but also in *mousikē* and *grammata* (Joyal, McDougall and Yardley 2009: 52-3). It would have been hard for any Athenian – not to mention an impoverished seller of small goods – to have acquired any competency in reading and writing without formal schooling (Kleijwegt 1991: 78). Thus the Sausage Seller's earlier claim about knowing letters (188-189) denotes not an ability to read and write but a pre-reading knowledge of the alphabet. In view of what the phrase *epistasthai grammata* means ancient historians have been

mistaken to use these two passages as evidence for widespread literacy in classical Athens.

It is archaeology which provides the evidence that literacy was not confined to wealthy Athenians. Small finds from the American excavations of the Athenian *agora* or civic centre as well as finely painted Attic pottery suggest that many poor residents were reasonably literate. This presupposes that the classrooms of the letter teacher also included good numbers of poor boys. The *agora*-excavators have unearthed and inventoried over 3000 sherds of pottery with incised or painted texts, ranging in date from the early archaic period to the eighth century of our era. More than 800 of these pieces whose preserved texts are long enough to determine their original functions were catalogued by Mabel Lang.

The largest group in Lang's catalogue are ownership-marks for pots (1976: 23-51). Admittedly 60 per cent of these marks do not demonstrate any significant level of literacy: they are no more than an abbreviated name or a complete name in the nominative case. Nonetheless 20 per cent of them have names in the genitive or dative cases, while more than 6 per cent consist of short sentences. Classical-period examples of the latter consist of the verb *eimi* ('I am/belong to') plus the owner's name in the genitive case, to which is often added the adverb *dikaiōs* or rightly (e.g. nos. F 131-2, 139, 154). These simple sentences and names in oblique cases demonstrate a level of writing skill that is higher than a simple knowledge of the alphabet or an ability to write one's own name. The large number of these marks may point to a widespread capacity to write a personal name. But the archaeological context of nearly every piece is too ambiguous or not sufficiently documented to determine the social backgrounds of those incising these pots. Consequently on the basis of ownership marks it is not possible to say in which sections of the Attic population this skill in writing existed.

Yet enough is known of the archaeological context of two pots with ownership-marks to show that the ability to write one's own name existed among the city's craftsmen. A black-glaze base of a cup from the second quarter of the fifth century which has the name Simon in the genitive case most probably came from the workshop and home of a cobbler (no. F 86). Similarly a black-glaze drinking cup of the fourth century, which was found in the house of a family of marble workers, was incised with the name Menon (no. F 164; Pritchard 1999: 14-21).

The functions of several other types of marks in Lang's catalogue also point to the socio-economic identity of those who made them. The largest group providing this information are the records of capacity, weight, date and contents which were originally inscribed onto ceramic containers (Lang 1976: 55-81). Of these it is the capacity marks which exemplify most clearly the variations possible in this class of commercial notations. Among capacity indications of the classical period the simplest consists of tally marks alone (e.g. nos. Ha 3-4). More sophisticated texts display the first letter of the name of a standard measure followed by tally marks or numerals (e.g. nos. Ha 5-7, Ha 9-12). The most complex of capacity notations have complete words. For example, one black-glaze olphe of the fifth century has *mētrio*, which is a misspelling of the name of a middle-sized measure, while a jug predictably bears

the name *khos* (nos. Ha 1, 8). Other types of commercial notations also have full words and phrases. For example, two amphorae record dates by means of the preposition *epi* and the name of a late fourth-century eponymous archon in the genitive case (nos. Hc 1-2), while a fifth-century wine amphora bears the painted label *okhos*, meaning ordinary wine (no. Hd 1). Several other pieces classified by Lang as numerical notations are of a commercial nature as well (21-3). Most notable among the classical-period objects is a tag recording the batch size of some ceramic product, which gives the word *keramos* and numerals (no. E5).

Other archaeological evidence confirms that a good number of Athenian craftsmen were similarly literate. In the so-called house of Mikion and Menon a bone stylus which bears the inscription *ho Mikion epoiese* ('Mikion made [me]') was found on a fifth-century floor (inv. no. BI 818; Pritchard 1999: 17). Whether this tool was made by a marble worker living and working in this house or a different craftsman, this inscription points to a reasonably high level of literacy. Certainly some painters of Attic pots possessed no more than a pre-reading knowledge of the alphabet, because they could only include gibberish words and phrases in their paintings. But others were literate enough to paint in the names of characters in mythological scenes or an inscription next to an image of a handsome boy describing him as beautiful (Vickers and Gill 1994: 163-4). Other pots reveal a higher level of skill in writing on the part of their painters. Around 1 percent of surviving pots have inscriptions recording that a certain craftsman painted (*egrapsen*) the scene and that another manufactured (*epoiesen*) the actual pot (100, 154-71). More impressive still are the book-scrolls in paintings of the classes of a letter teacher on pots, on which sometimes appear actual lines of epic poetry (Immerwahr 1964; 1973).

As wealthy Athenians avoided any direct contact with the world of business, these inscribed or painted objects could only have been the work of poor craftsmen and retailers. Consequently these pieces prove that literacy existed far below Athens's wealthy. Indeed the obvious utility of these skills for business would have been a powerful motivation for poor businessmen to send their sons to the classes of a *grammatistēs* (Arist. *Pol.* 1338a15-1338a19).

Archaeology indeed confirms that many poor citizens had quite high levels of literacy and hence must have as boys attended the classes of a *grammatistēs*. On closer inspection it appears that attending such classes was not prohibitively expensive nor something which stopped *paidēs* from helping out with the farms or the businesses of their families. The school fees which letter teachers charged were most probably very low. Third-century inscriptions from Miletus and Teos indicate that they received between 1 and 2 drachmas per day (*SEG* 43.381; *SIG* I³ 577; cf. Dem. 19.249), which was no more than the wage of a skilled labourer. What figures we have for class-sizes suggest that classes were normally large, consisting of several dozen or more students (e.g. Hdt. 6.27; Paus. 6.9.6). In these circumstances school fees were far from prohibitive (cf. Theophr. *Char.* 30.14). Moreover, as classes in each discipline of traditional education lasted no more than a few hours (see 8.1 above), poor boys who only attended the classes of a *grammatistēs* had plenty of time out of school when they could help to secure the livelihood of their families.

It is striking that the complex poetry of Homer was introduced to Athenian boys very early in the course of their studies at the letter school. We have seen that the Platonic Protagoras describes that pupils received copies of epic poetry to read and to memorise when they had just mastered the alphabet and were about to begin reading. Nevertheless they were initially using copies of Homer simply as a mnemonic aid and hence required only 'phonetic' literacy, which is the ability to decode texts syllable by syllable and to pronounce them orally (Thomas 1992: 9, 92). Letter-school students seem not to have been made to complete the time consuming tasks of learning to read and write confidently before being introduced to Homeric poetry. Consequently even a pupil whose family's difficult economic circumstances prevented him from completing his studies with a *grammatistēs* would have been assured of encountering passages of Homer during his student days.

This certainty of learning by heart stories of the heroes would have been another major motivation for Athenian fathers to send their sons to the classes of a *grammatistēs*. Indeed for those humble Athenians who were not in the world of business it might have been the only motivation. The solitary goal of education in the literature of classical Athens was the moral improvement of young males, while the chief means to achieve this was universally understood to be the memorisation and recall of epic poetry (see 8.1 above). Consequently their certain and extended introduction of boys to the poetry of Homer made the letter school appear to poor fathers the surest and easiest of ways to guarantee the rectitude of their sons. We can say with some certainty that the classes of the letter teachers did contain good numbers of Athenian boys from poor backgrounds.

8.5 References

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