

Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens, Rosalind Thomas. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture, vol. 18. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. xiii + 321 pp. Appendix; Bibliography.

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The purpose of Thomas's very interesting book is to explore two preconceptions widely accepted by scholars interested in orality: (1) that literacy is always more prestigious than orality and, as a corollary, in writing about the past, literary sources are to be valued above oral; and (2) that literacy and orality function completely independently of each other; that is, that literate societies can be distinguished from oral "with clear-cut characteristics attributed to each" (1-2).¹ In her introduction (1-14), Thomas makes clear her approach and the breadth of the scholarly work on which she is drawing, as she discusses classicists' almost complete avoidance of the research done on oral societies by anthropologists. She recognizes that to know how to apply anthropologists' contributions to the study of ancient Greece, where fieldwork is no longer possible, is difficult, but she argues that it can be done.² She suggests that anthropology shows us that "the most important factor in oral tradition is the way the tradition is passed on" (6), then describes her search through Greek authors for "texts which either directly represent oral tradition or which represent its transmission" (7). For her, there are three areas to be investigated—the types of oral tradition, such as those that remember a family's service to the city or its genealogy; the groups who do the transmitting, such as a prominent Athenian family like the Alcmaeonids, or even the Athenian city-state itself; and the means of transmission—oral, literate, or a mixture.³ Also important is the motive, which can vary from the desire for prestige to a need for self-defense, for passing on such a tradition.

Thomas's focus is upon classical Athens of the 5th and 4th centuries BC. Her choice reflects, in part, her belief that evidence from the city disproves both of the scholarly assumptions mentioned above and, in part, the nature of the evidence available, which makes her choice of focus, to use her term, "inevitabl[e]" (7). She argues that scholars studying literacy in ancient Athens have let certain biases restrict their work: they may be interested in literacy only "as a means of access to Greek literature" (19) or they may see in literacy the impetus for democracy (22, 30), and thus be misled about the role of literacy in Athenian culture, as she understands it.

Equally important to her discussion of orality are her beliefs that both oral and written ways of accomplishing tasks co-existed in Athens, and that Athenian attitudes toward oral tradition and written documents changed only gradually from the 5th to the 4th centuries, as Athenians came to feel that oral tradition by itself was no longer sufficient for

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Timothy W. Boyd for his work in helping me to prepare this review.

² Thomas expresses many disagreements with Jack Goody's work, particularly with his "autonomous model" of literacy (Brian Street's term), throughout her introduction and section 1.1.

³ Important for oral transmission is its form, whether it is, for example, "passed on in poetic or other fixed form" (6).

their needs. She points to the legal and commercial worlds, specifically to pleas, evidence, and contracts, to illustrate the co-existence of oral and literate ways and the eventual replacement (sometimes only partial) of the oral by the literate (41-43). In her discussion, she suggests that an intermediate stage in this transition may be seen in the iconic value given to texts by orators (49-51). In her survey of the 4th century BC, she singles out Aeschines of the orators and the *Athenaion Politeia* as examples of sources that reveal themselves to be more “document-minded” than their contemporaries and forebears.

Her material is presented in five complex, densely argued chapters, an epilogue, and an appendix on lists in early Greece. In the first chapter, she discusses her approach and defines important terms. The second and third chapters together are devoted to family tradition and genealogy. In the second, she concentrates on family traditions because she believes them to be oral, without almost any contamination from writing, and studies three cases, the family of Aristocrates, the family of Andocides, and the Alcmaeonids. In these three, she finds evidence for the transformation of family tradition in response to Athenian civic development and polis tradition. The subtitle of the third chapter, “Genealogy and family tradition: the intrusion of writing,” reflects Thomas’s belief that writing is not “simply a neutral skill or technology” (24), and she argues in this chapter that writing and the interests of Athenian democracy both affected the genealogies of prominent families. She illustrates her thesis with a long look at the Philaid genealogy.

In her final two chapters, Thomas broadens her perspective to examine the tradition of the Athenian city-state. The epitaphios (the public funeral oration) and polis traditions are the subjects of chapter 4. Thomas argues that the epitaphios shaped most Athenians’ views of their past, creating for them a past that ignored much of the city’s history (e.g., defeats in battle and changes in the civic government), focused on Athens’ legendary beginnings, and praised the demos with aristocratic language and imagery, often omitting even the names of its leaders. In this respect, she suggests that family and polis traditions diverge: families retain memories of ancestors’ deeds for Athens, while civic traditions deny the importance of both the individual and ancestry. Chapter 5 studies the many oral traditions about the end of the Peisistratid tyranny in Athens in order to compare family, polis, popular, and official versions of acts that remained prominent in Athenian minds for at least two centuries. Thomas disagrees with Jacoby’s division of these traditions into two, the “Alcmaeonid” as given by Herodotus and the “official,” and argues that the traditions were much more complex, much more intertwined than that.

It is important at the outset to understand just how Thomas sees literacy. She criticizes earlier studies that define literacy too broadly or assume that its meaning is self-evident (18-19) and devotes her first chapter to a discussion of the issues she believes are involved.⁴ She suggests that we have asked the wrong questions about literacy and that “we should consider the place of literacy in Athens rather than its extent” (15):

⁴ For F. D. Harvey, in his article “Literacy in the Athenian Democracy,” a definition of literacy may be inherent in his opening question: “how may Athenians in the fifth and fourth centuries BC could read and write?” (*Revue des études grecques*, 79 [1966]:585). Terrence A. Boring’s definition of literacy in his study of Sparta seems perhaps too broad: “the ability of an individual to make any use of writing as a tool for the satisfaction of normal social, business, or political requirements, however great or small” (*Literacy in Ancient Sparta*, Mnemosyne, suppl. 54 [Leiden: Brill, 1979], p. 1). Thomas praises Cartledge’s term “functional literacy” in his discussion of Spartan ephors (“Literacy in the Spartan Oligarchy,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 98 [1978]:25-37), although her citation should be to his p. 30 (19).

Literacy is not a single uniform skill with only one significant level of competence, and... its use is far from predictable. Common sense tells us that there is little value in considering literacy by itself as an almost theoretical possession, if we do not also consider how it is used....

It is also recognized that much of Athenian life was primarily oral where we might expect the use of writing. So we must extend discussion of literacy to the 'mixture' and interaction of literate and oral processes. Once we recognize such a mixture, and even regard it as normal, then we may see the evidence used for the "literacy debate" in a rather different light. (15-16)

Such a very flexible view thus allows Thomas a greater freedom than that of earlier writers to explore Athenians' attitudes to and uses of writing, as well as to document any changes.

One of the book's major strengths is the evidence—often fresh—that Thomas brings to her subject. She draws first on the speeches in the Athenian assembly and law courts, including the public funeral speech. She begins with this evidence not only, she suggests, because speeches offer a version of Athenian history based on the city's oral tradition,⁵ but also because they sometimes provide the family history of the speaker and are thus a source of family tradition, much of it potentially orally received. Conversely, Thomas also argues that studying oratory "tells us how written documents were regarded in practice" (61). Her second source is comedy, which, she believes, "expressed popular tradition" (7), but, curiously, she does not make much use of this material.⁶ Because of her emphasis on oral material contained within the written speech of rhetoric and the stylized conversation of comedy, it is only after these two types of evidence that Thomas suggests that we can turn to the historians. She explains this ordering of her sources by arguing that, although such historians as Herodotus and Thucydides used oral tradition, they so

⁵ Thomas provides evidence for her belief in chapter 4, "Official Tradition? Polis Tradition and the Epitaphios."

⁶ Thomas cites the emphasis on Marathon and the *Μαραθωνομάχαι* in Aristophanic comedies. She argues that for Athenians, Marathon came to represent the whole of the Persian Wars, the Athenians quickly forgot that they were not alone against the Persians at Marathon (221), and that "the battle both reflected legendary heroism and began the *aretē* of the historical period" (225-26). She also suggests on the basis of *Lysistrata* that 5th-century Athenians remembered Sparta's role in the expulsion of the Peisistratidae but that Athenian patriotism was troubled by this memory (245-47). Very early in her discussion of the meaning of literacy, she points to what she believes are distorted interpretations of Aristophanes made by previous scholars (19-20).

Harvey (1966) makes greater use of Aristophanes in his discussion of Athenian literacy, depending on the comic poet chiefly when there is evidence from no other source. Thus he cites Aristophanes as evidence, for example, for public notices in Athens concerning forthcoming trials, military summonses, assembly meetings, and the agenda of the Boule (601). Aristophanes also provides evidence of the keeping of personal accounts (611-13), casual notetaking (616-17), the knowledge of uneducated people (618-19), and the education of women (621).

G. E. M. de Ste Croix's reservations about the use of comedy, especially Aristophanes, as the basis for historical reconstruction are particularly relevant in this context (*The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972]:231-37). He argues that comic poets should be the last source of evidence in historical reconstructions and offers five principles for using them. His first states: "the only safe course is to *look at the other evidence first*, and, if we have reliable sources, to make sure we *interpret the comic poet in the light of the remaining evidence* [italics de Ste Croix's], instead of going to work the other way round, as people so often do" (232).

rearranged and combined it with what they learned from other sources, that such contamination has made it more difficult to isolate and understand the oral material which their histories may embody. She illustrates this rearrangement in her detailed analysis of Herodotus' and Thucydides' sources for the Alcmaeonid family (chapter 5, *passim*).

The Attic orators have been neglected by other treatments of orality in Greece,⁷ but Thomas shows clearly how invaluable a source for orality and writing they are, as she makes them reveal Athenian attitudes towards not only orality and literacy but also the Athenian past. In her use of them, she illustrates how the orators assume the oral transmission of written documents (62). As well, she demonstrates how they exploit the "family defence" in their speeches before juries or assemblies, making a plea for sympathy through their ancestry or ancestors' service to the city. This family defense, she argues, reveals what an Athenian may know about his family's past (99); perhaps it may also reveal something about the level of historical and genealogical knowledge of the jury or assembly that might be expected by the speaker.

The epitaphios most frequently recalls the Persian Wars, epitomized for Athens by Marathon, and Thomas believes that this tradition of the epitaphios may have begun soon after the Persians were defeated, perhaps as a response to that victory (207).⁸ In other speeches, she points out, Athenian orators emphasize repeatedly four main events: the end of the Peisistratidae, the Persian Wars, the Athenian empire, and the fall of the 30 tyrants (198).⁹ We may be surprised that Athenians do not recall ancestors who held civic offices, such as the archonship, and stress military accomplishments instead, but this may reflect the importance of an ancestor's death in battle and also allow an orator to evoke the glory due a

⁷ Harvey's article is an exception and puts the orators to many different uses. He cites their random references to Athenian public secretaries (597), governmental policies (598), business practices (606-15), wills (617), or the literacy of women and slaves (622-23). He also makes much of Ps.-Dem. 43 (*Macart.*) .18 (596-97).

⁸ In the epitaphios, four events from Athens' legendary past reappear time and again—the defeat of the Amazons, the expulsion of Eumolpus from Attica, the expulsion of Eurystheus, and the permission given to the Argives to bury their dead (207).

⁹ There is a noteworthy lack of reference in the public sphere to Athenian participation in the Trojan War; the only exceptions are the comparison of the Persian or Peloponnesian Wars to the Trojan, to the detriment of the latter, and the use of the Trojan War in historical arguments, as when Solon argued for Athenian possession of Salamis on the basis of two lines in the Homeric catalogue of ships (*Iliad* 2.557-58). Many believed that Solon interpolated the verses for this purpose (Plutarch, *Solon* 10). The third honorific inscription that the Athenians allowed Cimon, the commander of the Delian League forces, to place on a herm after his victory over the Persians at Eion in northeastern Greece in 476 BC may testify to Athenian touchiness on their participation in the Trojan War: the verses describe Menestheus, the Athenian leader at Troy, as a superb leader and then assert "οὐτῶς οὐδὲν ἀεικὲς Ἀθηναίοισι καλεῖσθαι / κοσμηταῖς πολέμου τ' ἀμφὶ καὶ ἡγορέης"—thus there is no shameful reputation to the Athenian leaders in war and in bravery (Plutarch, *Cimon* 7; compare Aeschines 3.183-85). See the discussion, with bibliography, of this passage in R. E. Wycherley, *The Athenian Agora III: Literary and Epigraphical Testimonia* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1957):103-5, 107.

Perhaps for Athenians, Theseus and his exploits partially filled the gap of the Trojan War. See, for example, Theseus' appearance at Marathon, as if he were an old war comrade called back to the colors (Plutarch, *Theseus* 35). See also Thomas 201-6, 211-12, 221.

Homeric hero (117).

This equation of a recent ancestor and a Homeric hero standing at the very beginning of a family's lineage is characteristic, according to Thomas, of traditional Greek genealogical thinking. A family was not interested in being able—as we might with our meticulous family trees—to trace its descent, generation by generation, from the god or hero with whom its line began, but simply in making the connection with that legendary figure clear. Speakers often show themselves in such passages able to recall only a very few generations in their family, often back only to their grandparents, then leaving a wide gap to a legendary ancestor early in the family's past.

It is here that Thomas suggests we may be able to see the Athenian democracy having an effect on the kind of story that becomes family tradition: the legendary hero may be omitted if the speaker can claim a relative who opposed the Peisistratidae or brought down either of the two oligarchies Athens suffered during the Peloponnesian War. As the fourth century progressed and the distance from these events grew, speakers have an increasing difficulty in identifying just how they are related to their anti-tyrant, anti-oligarchical ancestors and understanding precisely what these ancestors did, but they produce them as evidence, often conflating events in the two oligarchies (e.g., 135, 138), turning defeats inflicted by the tyrants into victories (139-41), or obscuring the relationship between their ancestors and the tyrants, as happened in both the Philaid and Alcmaeonid traditions (169). Thomas even argues that “the rule of the Thirty actually produced changes in most traditions about the end of the Peisistratid tyranny” (144, 252-54).

What is difficult to judge in such developments is how much a part conscious manipulation of family traditions plays and how much is due to oral transmission. Thomas discusses the “telescoping” of events that commonly occurs when information is passed on orally and not in any fixed form. When writing is used for genealogies, Thomas argues convincingly that it does not merely record what it finds in the oral traditions, but that it transforms it. Written records attempt to coordinate and synchronize stories whose contradictions may never before have been noticed in their oral shape; writing may also attempt to fill in the gap between a family's legendary and its democratic heroes. Thus, the writing of genealogies can be seen as the earliest study of Greek chronology, but the accuracy of any of the chronology or even of names is questionable, as Thomas shows: where memory may shorten genealogy, writing seems often to elongate it, to make contemporary generations or figures, such as brothers or cousins, into successive generations, such as fathers and sons (ch. 3 *passim*).¹⁰

For Thomas, Aeschines shows the transition towards a new way to use documents and she singles him out, saying that he “alone of our extant orators exploits the past decrees fully for chronology” (69). She also finds in him the attitude that the records themselves, rather than the city's memory, are the guardians and preservers of the past. Aeschines depends on this argument in the beginning of his speech against Timarchus, for instance.¹¹ He distinguishes between democracy and other forms of government on the basis of laws:

¹⁰ The Athenians may have inadvertently added to this uncertainty about ancestry in their naming customs, when they followed a tradition of calling grandsons after grandfathers (125).

¹¹ Thomas does not cite this example, but discusses others (70).

εὖ δ' ἴστε, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ὅτι τὰ μὲν τῶν δημοκρατουμένων σώματα καὶ τὴν πολιτείαν οἱ νόμοι σφύζουσι, τὰ δὲ τῶν τυράννων καὶ ὀλιγαρχικῶν ἀπιστία καὶ ἡ μετὰ τῶν ὅπλων φρουρά.

You know well, Athenians, that the laws guard the citizen body and constitution in a democracy, but that in a tyranny and an oligarchy, it is distrust and armed guards which do the guarding. (1.5)

Aeschines then makes a parallel argument, that the citizens should regard themselves as protectors of the laws handed down to them by their lawgivers: “καὶ τούτους τοὺς νόμους ἀναγράψαντες ὑμῖν παρακατέθεντο, καὶ ὑμᾶς αὐτῶν ἐπέστησαν φύλακας”—and having inscribed these laws, they passed them down to you, and established you as their guardians (1.7). As Thomas observes (71), Aeschines’ sophistication in the use of documents is noted by at least one enemy, Demosthenes, who seizes upon this practice as a weapon to use against him: for Demosthenes, Aeschines is “κατάρατε καὶ γραμματοκύφων”—accursed and one who pores over records (18.209) —and a ὑπογραμματεὺς—undersecretary (19.249).

Thomas also argues that the author of the *Athenaion Politeia* (Aristotle, perhaps)¹² makes greater use of written sources than previous writers. This dependence on written materials, both documents and poetry, she suggests, may be “expressive of the increasing interest in documents and documentation” (91). Aristotle’s dependence on written sources, one might add, could also reflect an increasing ease of access to documents as well as an increasing willingness to grant such documents authority. As Thomas herself discusses, the establishment of the Metroon in the Athenian Agora as a repository of documents only occurs at the very end of the 5th century BC and it seems to have taken some time for Athenians to realize its potential value for them, but once Aeschines showed the way, many others (orators, at least) eagerly followed (38-40, 52, 68-83).

In Aeschines and the *Athenaion Politeia*, then, Thomas detects a change in the Athenian attitude toward documents, but argues that even during the 4th century, “Athens was only partially document-minded, familiar with oral methods of proof and record” (93). Nonetheless, for her, there is a sense in the rhetoric and histories of the late 4th century “that oral traditions alone might no longer be adequate” (93). She points, for instance, to the increase in the citation of documents (both genuine and forged) by other orators (see 86). Curiously, however, she makes little of the collection of Athenian inscriptions by Craterus (*FGrH* 342). She mentions him only once, describing his ψηφισμάτων συναγωγή as “a new and unusual idea” (90).¹³

¹² Thomas, perhaps for the sake of simplicity, does not question or comment on the controversy of Aristotle’s authorship of the *Athenaion Politeia*. P. J. Rhodes considers the evidence about authorship of this work and concludes: “On the evidence which we have, Aristotle could have written this work himself, but I do not believe he did” (*A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981]:63). For convenience, however, I shall refer to the author as Aristotle.

¹³ If the fragments of Craterus that survive are at all indicative, he does not seem to have been much used by later writers, with the possible exception of Plutarch in his biographies of Athenians. Plutarch discusses the conflicting evidence for Aristides’ final days, then remarks: “τούτων δ’ οὐδὲν ἔγγραφον ὁ Κρατερός τεκμήριον παρέσχηκεν, οὔτε δίκην οὔτε ψήφισμα, καίπερ εἰωθῶς ἐπιεικῶς γράφειν τὰ τοιαῦτα καὶ παρατίθεσθαι τοὺς ἱστοροῦντας.”—on the other hand Craterus provides

But is Athens unique or anomalous in its attitude toward orality and in its increasing dependence on writing?¹⁴ Although Thomas is right to say that the overwhelming majority of evidence on the subject is devoted to Athens, one wonders whether something might be said about other Greek city-states. What were the Spartan, Theban, or Corinthian attitudes toward documents?¹⁵ For most states, including Thebes and Corinth, there seems little hope of recovering any sense of this, but for Sparta a few tentative observations might be made. Indeed, Thomas cites Cartledge's article in her bibliography ("Literacy in the Spartan Oligarchy," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 98 [1978]:25-370), but does not mention a monograph on the subject, by Terrence A. Boring (*Literacy in Ancient Sparta*).¹⁶

The evidence for orality and literacy in 5th-4th century Sparta¹⁷ must be assembled from a variety of sources, often offhand remarks made by someone in the course of talking about something else.¹⁸ The essential passages are to be found in Isocrates' *Panathenaicus*

no evidence of these things that I have written, neither a decree of the court nor a public bill, although he customarily writes such things and quotes his authorities (*Aristides* 26). He also remarks that a copy of the Peace of Callias was included in "ἐν δὲ τοῖς ψηφίσμασιν ἃ συνήγαγε Κρατερός"—the collection of Athenian decrees made by Craterus (*Cimon* 13).

¹⁴ Thomas herself suggests it is somewhat surprising that Athens does not develop a public archive until the end of the 5th century BC, some one hundred years following Clisthenes and two centuries since Solon. She notes the creation of ἀναγραφεῖς in 410 to examine the city's laws as perhaps relevant (40) and also suggests that creating a document, preserving it, and then later making reference to it are not all the same skill, that writing can be used without subsequently organizing what has been written (37-39, 71-73).

¹⁵ Plutarch does mention "τὸ γραμματοφυλάκιον"—the public record office—in Plataea in his description of the festival created to honor the Greek victory over Persia there: the chief magistrate of Plataea is to carry an urn from there in the procession (*Aristides* 21). See also note 24 below.

¹⁶ See L. H. Jeffery's very helpful review in *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 101 (1981):190-92.

¹⁷ By the time of Plutarch, Sparta was a very different place, complete with a γραμματοφυλακεῖον, probably near the agora, and an official known as the γραμματοφύλαξ. Plutarch remarks that he has seen bits of old Spartan poetry ([τὰ Λακωνικὰ ποιήματα] ὧν ἔτι καθ' ἡμᾶς ἔνια διεσώζετο—some bits of Laconian poetry have been preserved even down to our age) (*Lycurgus* 21.3) and looked in the Spartan archives (ἡμεῖς δὲ εὔρομεν ἐν ταῖς Λακωνικαῖς ἀναγραφαῖς—we have found in the Laconian records) (*Agessilaus* 19.6). On these matters, see Paul Cartledge and Antony Spawforth, *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta: A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Routledge, 1989), esp. 127, 147, 217.

¹⁸ Anecdotal evidence is particularly hard to judge, as these two stories from the Peloponnesian War may illustrate. Thucydides describes Nicias' reasons for writing a letter from Sicily to request help rather than to depend on a messenger to convey the desperate situation of the Athenian forces:

Ἦνικίας φοβούμενος δὲ μὴ οἱ πεμπόμενοι ἢ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ λέγειν ἀδυνασίαν ἢ καὶ μνήμης ἔλλιπείς γιγνόμενοι ἢ τῷ ὄχλῳ πρὸς χάριν τι λέγοντες οὐ τὰ ὄντα ἀπαγγέλλωσιν, ἔγραψεν ἐπιστολὴν, νομίζων οὕτως ἂν μάλιστα τὴν αὐτοῦ

209, the *Dissoi Logoi* 90 F2 10 (DK), Plutarch's biographies of Athenian and Spartan figures and various passages from the *Moralia*, Socrates in the *Hippias Maior* (285e-286f), and Aristotle in the *Politics* (1270b28-1272a36). A pair of anecdotes from Plutarch, while perhaps not completely believable, reveal for us ancient attitudes toward writing and its power. In his life of Lycurgus, Plutarch describes the Spartan lawgiver's attitudes toward written laws:

Νόμους δὲ γεγραμμένους ὁ Λυκοῦργος οὐκ ἔθηκεν, ἀλλὰ μία τῶν καλουμένων ῥητρῶν ἐστὶν αὕτη. τὰ μὲν γὰρ κυριώτατα καὶ μέγιστα πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν πόλεως καὶ ἀρετῆν, ἐν τοῖς ἥθεσιν ὤφειτο καὶ ταῖς ἀγωγαῖς τῶν πολιτῶν ἐγκατεστοιχειωμένα, μένειν ἀκίνητα καὶ βέβαια, ἔχοντα τὴν προαίρεσιν δεσμὸν ἰσχυρότερον τῆς ἀνάγκης, ἣν ἡ παιδεία ἐμποιεῖ τοῖς νέοις, νομοθέτου διάθεσιν ἀπεργαζομένη περὶ ἕκαστον αὐτῶν . . . τὸ γὰρ ὅλον καὶ πᾶν τῆς νομοθεσίας ἔργον εἰς τὴν παιδείαν ἀνήψε.

Μία μὲν οὖν τῶν ῥητρῶν ἦν, ὥσπερ εἴρηται, μὴ χρῆσθαι νόμοις ἐγγράφοις.

Lycurgus did not set down written laws—this is one of the prohibitions of the so-called *rhētras*. For he believed that the most powerful and greatest force for the happiness and good of the city would remain imbedded in the characters and in the training of the citizens. These forces would stay unchanging and fixed, possessing their purpose as a bond rather stronger than necessity, which education produces in the young and would complete the arrangement of the lawgiver for each of them.... He attached the whole of his work of lawgiving to education.

One of the *rhētras*, as has been stated, forbade the use of written laws. (*Lycurgus* 13.1-3)

Lycurgus did not believe that the written law had any power to affect a citizen's behavior, but seems to have believed that education of that citizen was the key to controlling him.¹⁹ Lycurgus wanted his laws to remain in force in Sparta forever, without any change, and so tricked the Spartans into swearing an oath that they would not change the constitution until

γνώμην μηδὲν ἐν τῷ ἀγγέλῳ ἀφανισθεῖσαν μαθόντας τοὺς Ἀθηναίους βουλεύσασθαι περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας.

Nicias feared that the messengers would not report the facts, either because of their inability to speak or from loss of memory or because of their desire to please the crowd, so he wrote a letter. He thought that thus the Athenians would learn his opinion which would not be suppressed in the message and would debate the truth (7.8.2)

Ironically, Nicias fails to get what he hoped by writing. As Gomme observes in his discussion of Thucydides 7.8, the context suggests that the writing of a letter by a general was not commonplace, but there are other, later examples.

We might compare this with the story told of the downfall of the Spartan leader Gylippus, who stole a certain amount from each of the bags of silver that he was entrusted to deliver to Sparta; what he didn't know was that Lysander had included a note in each bag giving the value of the contents. Gylippus had to leave Sparta disgraced (Plutarch, *Lysander* 16). Was Lysander very cunning in his inclusion of the note or was Gylippus merely an unthinking thief (or illiterate and thereby vulnerable to such a trap)?

¹⁹ There is an unresolvable contradiction in this passage from Plutarch on education in Sparta.

he had returned, then committed suicide at Delphi (*Lycurgus* 29.1-3, 31.1-5).

Compare the Athenian Solon's attitude to written laws and their survival. A foreign visitor, Anacharsis, comes to see Solon while he is reforming the laws and has this reaction:

[Ἄναχαρσιν] καταγελάει τῆς πραγματείας τοῦ Σόλωνος, οἰομένου γράμμασιν ἐφέξειν τὰς ἀδικίας καὶ πλεονεξίας τῶν πολιτῶν, ἃ μὴδὲν τῶν ἀραχνίων διαφέρειν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκεῖνα τοὺς μὲν ἀσθενεῖς καὶ λεπτοὺς τῶν ἀλισκομένων καθέξειν, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν δυνατῶν καὶ πλουσίων διαρραγήσεσθαι. τὸν δὲ Σόλωνα φασὶ πρὸς ταῦτ' εἰπεῖν, ὅτι καὶ συνθήκας ἄνθρωποι φυλάττουσιν ἅς οὐδετέρῳ λυσιτελέες ἐστί παραβαίνειν τῶν θεμένων, καὶ τοὺς νόμους αὐτὸς οὕτως ἀρμόζεται τοῖς πολίταις, ὥστε πᾶσι τοῦ παρανομεῖν βέλτιον ἐπιδείξει τὸ δικαιοπραγεῖν. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ὡς Ἄναχαρσις εἵκαζεν ἀπέβη μᾶλλον ἢ κατ' ἐλπίδα τοῦ Σόλωνος.

[Anacharsis] laughed at Solon's efforts, that Solon believed he could stop the wrongdoings and greed of citizens with written laws, which didn't differ from spider's webs—they could hold the weak and insignificant men who were caught, but the powerful and wealthy would slip through. Solon is said to have replied to this that men honor agreements which neither side profits by violating; and that he was tailoring the laws to the citizens so that it would seem better to obey them rather than violate them. But these things went as Anacharsis suggested rather than according to Solon's hopes. (*Solon* 5.3.1-6.4)

In the preserved stories, at least, there is no mention of education in Solon's reforms, in great contrast to its place in Lycurgan Sparta. As well, before he departed for a 10-year absence from his city in order to give the laws a chance to work, Solon took this precaution²⁰:

Ἰσχὺν δὲ τοῖς νόμοις πᾶσιν εἰς ἑκατὸν ἐνιαυτοὺς ἔδωκε, καὶ κατεγράφησαν εἰς ξυλίνους ἄξονας ἐν πλασίοις, περιέχουσι στρεφομένους, ὧν ἔτι καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐν Πρυτανείῳ λείψανα μικρὰ διεσώζετο....

He gave force to all of these laws for 100 years and they inscribed them on wooden tablets [...], of which even down into our generation a few remnants have been preserved in the Prytaneion. (*Solon* 25.1.1)

Solon's laws, at least those regarding the archonship, do not last even the ten years of his absence from Athens.²¹ Given this almost immediate abrogation of some of Solon's legislation, we may see as ironic the physical survival of many of his laws, long after they had fallen out of use—Plutarch, for instance, in the passage cited above noted the survival

²⁰ Rhodes argues that Athenians agreed to abide by Solon's laws for only ten years (136). On whitened boards, see Rhodes 1981:555, 594.

²¹ We learn from the *Athenian Politeia* (13.1) that stasis over the archonship in the fifth year of his absence resulted in no one being elected and that later, Damasias, after having been elected archon, stayed in office for fourteen months beyond the end of his term.

of Solon's laws even into the 2nd century AD.²²

Although Thomas does not discuss Spartan orality and literacy, she does make some very suggestive remarks about the relationship between the forms of government and the nature of memory. She argues that the Athenian democracy promoted interest in recent ancestors, those who might have fought at Marathon or opposed the 30 tyrants (154, 157); can we find any evidence to suggest that Sparta's Lycurgan constitution, much older than the Athenian democracy (if we can believe our sources), had a different effect upon the memories of its citizens? She mentions that Hippias of Elis commented on the Spartan love of genealogies of men and heroes, as well as the foundation of cities (Plato, *Hippias Maior* 285d), implying, perhaps, that Spartans were uninterested in their more recent past (174).

As I hope to have shown, Thomas's book covers a wide range of topics, uses a very broad assortment of evidence to illustrate her arguments, and prompts rereading many familiar texts. Unfortunately, the lack of an *Index locorum* makes it impossible to track texts down in her work. The shape of her presentation sometimes means that concentrated, in-depth discussion of sources, such as the *Athenaion Politeia*, must be omitted, and I believe that such texts could be put to many more uses. For example, the sources that Aristotle draws on in the *Athenaion Politeia* as he describes both the history of the government of Athens and its present form may tell us something about the use of documents in producing such works; but we may also begin to understand from it the roles that both orality and literacy played in the Athenian government as we study Aristotle's description.

On the first point, we might begin by cataloguing the sources that Aristotle cites, but does not quote: although he only once names a predecessor in his research into Athenian ways,²³ from his language and treatment of incidents we can infer that Aristotle draws on Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Androtion. He occasionally refers to unnamed sources who conflict (3.3, 17.2) and once is scornful on the grounds of chronology of the opinion about Solon's regard for Peisistratus (17.2). He does name Solon as a source, perhaps because of his importance to the Athenian constitution rather than because of his writing, and also quotes or cites Solon's poetry ten times, in addition to other references to Solon's laws.

This might lead us to wonder, in turn, how Aristotle knows Solon's laws and poems, whether they were part of the oral tradition of Athens over two centuries after Solon had lived or whether Aristotle was completely dependent on written sources.²⁴ As

²² For a convenient collection of all the ancient testimonia to the display of Solon's laws in the Athenian Agora and even a statue of Solon himself (in front of the Stoa Poikile), see R. E. Wycherley, *The Athenian Agora III: Literary and Epigraphical Testimonia* (note 9 above).

²³ “ὡς μὲν Ἡρόδοτος φησιν” (14.4)—as Herodotus says. See Rhodes' commentary on the sources of the *Athenaion Politeia*, 15-30.

²⁴ See Rhodes for a discussion of Aristotle's sources. He notes that our other major surviving source for Solon's poems, Plutarch, uses many of the same lines as the *Athenaion Politeia*, but that the two treatments do not overlap completely, leading Rhodes to suggest that Aristotle “found the quotations from the poems in his source” and that Plutarch probably used both Aristotle and Aristotle's source (118).

Thomas remarks, there is evidence for the survival and even display of Solon's laws, long after they had been superceded, perhaps because of their power as historic relics (77 and n. 198).²⁵ In his *Athenaion Politeia*, Aristotle refers to the laws being inscribed and on display in the Stoa Basileios (7.1; see 47.1), quotes from a Solonian law that he describes as no longer being in force (8.3), and discusses possible explanations for the complex language of some of Solon's laws (9.2).

Aristotle seems to rely more heavily on other sources of evidence than the historians. He records public opinion—stories about politicians, sayings, even drinking songs. He tells the anecdote of Peisistratus' visit to the man farming near Mt. Hymettus, introducing it with “φασι”—they say (16.6).²⁶ In his discussion about pay for jury duty, Aristotle recounts the story told of the advice given to Pericles by Damonides: ἐπεὶ τοῖς ἰδίοις ἤττατο, διδόναι τοῖς πολλοῖς τὰ αὐτῶν—since he was restricted in his own resources, he should give the people what was theirs (27.4). As part of his treatment of the end of the Peisistratidae, Aristotle quotes from two drinking songs about two failed attempts to remove the tyrants from Athens (19.3, 20.5)²⁷

He quotes only one inscription, a private dedication from the Acropolis of a statue of the giver and a horse (7.4), in his discussion of Solon's property qualifications for citizens, but he does refer to other public inscriptions, as can be seen in his remark about the recording of the name of the secretaries of the prytany:

καὶ γὰρ ἐν ταῖς στήλαις πρὸς ταῖς συμμαχίαις καὶ προξενίαις καὶ πολιτείας
οὗτος [γραμματεὺς] ἀναγράφεται

and on the stelai for treaties and proxenies and public business this [office of secretary] is

Rhodes does not explore the possibility that Aristotle knew the poems from an oral source, except obliquely, in his discussion of *Athenaion Politeia* 5.3. He does assert, however, that “a man working in Athens in the fourth century should have known the poems,” but provides no evidence (124; see also 24).

Aristotle is not the earliest witness still surviving to Solon's poetry as well as his laws: Herodotus not only records the story of Solon's visit to Croesus and its aftermath, but refers to a poem in which Solon praises a ruler of Cyprus (...τὸν Σόλων ὁ Ἀθηναῖος ἀπικόμενος ἐς Κύπρον ἐν ἔπεσι αἴνεσε τυράννων μάλιστα—Solon the Athenian after he came to Cyprus praised him among tyrants very highly in his poems [5.113.2]).

Solon is also quoted or referred to in the orators, as Thomas notes (51, 87). He describes Solon with the anthropological term “culture hero,” which aptly characterizes his role in Athens (280, n. 129).

²⁵ See Rhodes 1981:131-34 for a full discussion of the evidence. He notes that a list of the works from the Aristotelian school includes a 5-book study of Solon's αἴχνη" (25).

Plutarch, in his life of Solon, cites one of his laws according to its placement on the block—“ὁ δὲ τρισκαίδέκατος ἄξων τοῦ Σόλωνος τὸν ὄγδοον ἔχει τῶν νόμων”—Solon's thirteenth table contains his eighth law (19.3). See Thomas 74.

²⁶ In tone and style, this might be compared to the story about Aristides the Just who writes his own name on an ostrakon to help an illiterate Athenian, but thereby contributes to his own ostracism (Plutarch, *Aristides* 7)—is there a subgenre, possibly oral, of such revealing stories about great men?

²⁷ As with Solon's poems, Rhodes suggests that these two songs were both so well known that Aristotle may not have used a written source but produced them from his own memory, but does not offer any supporting evidence (235, 248).

inscribed (54.3)

From other comments such as this, we can infer that many of the public inscriptions in Athens were lists—of those who didn't pay their public debts (48.1), of houses and farms claimed as public property (52.1), of those qualified for the cavalry (49.2), and of those called up for military duty (53.7).²⁸ There seems to have been some sort of citizen roll as well, perhaps kept in the demes, where the registration of new citizens occurred.²⁹ One list that was to be published, but that appeared only belatedly, after much pressure and alteration, was of the so-called 300, a list that should have been put out by the 30 Tyrants (36.2).

Aristotle's presentation of public life in Athens provides us with evidence for both oral and literate ways of doing business. In his description of the work of various public boards, especially the *poletae*, and other public officials, many of whom are assigned secretaries to assist them, and in his description of the lawcourts and assemblies, we see that writing and documents did play a role in Athenian government. At the same time, we understand that orality still functioned: candidates were questioned for office, probably orally, but possibly in writing (7.4)³⁰ The legislative process depended on both writing and orality; although notices of meetings and bills to be discussed were posted, at the same time, they were presented orally in the assembly and there was a secretary whose sole function was to read documents aloud (54.5).³¹

Thomas has had to pass by some topics that I hope she will tackle in her future work, given the care and creativity that she has shown in this. One such topic is education, both formal and informal, in Athens and Sparta. In this book, Thomas argues, primarily on the basis of the orators, that "oral tradition in a wider sense provided most Greeks with a knowledge of their history" (3) and singles out the funeral speech in this context: "the epitaphios presented the only opportunity for most Athenians to hear an account of Athenian history set out in roughly chronological sequence from its earliest times, and this could be crucial" (235). For her, orators transmit the traditional, accepted view of Athenian history, using references familiar to their audience that they suggest are known from their elders; orators might also make small changes in the tradition that they pass on (200-1).

The assumptions in these statements, I believe, need to be examined in depth.

²⁸ Lists seem to have been particularly associated with the board in Athens known as the *πωληταί*—vendors (*AP* 47.2, 52.1). On the *πωληταί* and the recording of debts, see Thomas 53-55. Once a debt was paid, no record of it was kept, perhaps indicating that, in business, written memory was only important until a transaction was completed.

²⁹ See 13.5, 42.1, 53.4 with Rhodes' commentary *ad loc.* and 493-95.

³⁰ Rhodes seems to assume oral questioning in his commentary: "the question was presumably asked when men submitted their names as candidates" (145).

³¹ Thomas makes a similar observation in her discussion of this passage (64). Rhodes suggests that the secretary read the documents aloud because there was no easy way to supply multiple copies of them (604). To have a secretary read documents aloud may also have been faster and more efficient. In the 4th century, it was also a secretary's job to read texts of tragedy aloud from a copy stored by the city to those actors who would perform the play (48-49).

Thomas assumes that the audiences for speeches included all Athenians, but does not provide us with any evidence. For the epitaphios, at least that given by Pericles, Thucydides' description does support her belief: he states that everyone who wants to be in the procession, both citizens and foreigners, can, and that the female relatives of the dead are allowed to grieve at the tomb (ξυνεκφέρει δὲ ὁ βουλόμενος καὶ ἀστῶν καὶ ξένων, καὶ γυναῖκες πάρεισιν αἱ προσήκουσαι ἐπὶ τὸν τάφον ὀλοφυρόμεναι [2.34.4]). It is important to know what the audiences at speeches in the law courts or the assembly might have consisted of.³² We might also wonder that an orator doesn't attempt to make a new version seem familiar by suggesting that his audience has already heard it from its elders. Perhaps it is important to distinguish between education and acculturation when we look at passages from the orators, such as Aeschines 3.246 discussed by Thomas (63).³³ I do not think that we can take these lines for what they seem to say on first glance, but must put them into context and remember that Aeschines is arguing cases before a court of law. Thomas couples this interpretation of the orators with frequent references to Plato's emphasis on oral education and his suspicion of the written word (20-21, 32-33, 101). Though Plato is not arguing a case before the Athenian jury, surely he is no less determined to make his point than is Aeschines and is thus equally dangerous as a piece of evidence.

A second topic to be explored is numeracy: is there any evidence that some Greeks were numerate but not literate or that some were both illiterate and innumerate?³⁴ We know that Greeks had ways of recording whole numbers as early as the Mycenaean era and that later Greeks developed two different ways to record numbers. We also know that mathematics—geometry in particular—played a central role in Greek education, philosophy, astronomy, town planning, and architecture.³⁵

Finally, I would hope for a discussion about how Greeks calculated their ages. Young men in 5th- and 4th-century Athens certainly seem to have known when it was their turn to begin their ἐφηβεία, but how did they know? The *Athenian Politeia* describes the registration at the deme of the sons of Athenian citizens when they were eighteen (42.1)

³² See Plutarch, *Demosthenes* 5, where we are told of the young Demosthenes' eagerness to attend a trial to hear a speaker famed for his eloquence. It is only through the intervention of Demosthenes' tutor that he is allowed to enter and sit by the doors, where he would not be seen.

³³ See also S. Perlman, in an article cited by Thomas, who argues that we are to understand passages such as Aeschines 1.141 to mean that the education of Athenians comes from "listening by learning," not to teachers probably, but "to recitations and performances, which are thus the primary source of knowledge" ("Quotations from Poetry in Attic Orators of the 4th Century BC," *American Journal of Philology*, 85 [1964]:156).

³⁴ See Boring 1979:11-12, 41, for evidence on Spartan numeracy. He discusses the context and tone of Hippias' claim that Spartans could not even count (*Hippias Maior* 284-85).

³⁵ On mathematics in Greece, see O. A. W. Dilke, *Mathematics and Measurement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

There are also archaeological finds associated with mathematics which could be combined with literary evidence to understand the role that mathematics played in the Greek business world. See John McK. Camp, *The Athenian Agora* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986) for illustrations of artifacts such as water clocks. Mabel Lang discusses numbers marked on pots in their possible interpretations in "Numerical Notation on Greek Vases," *Hesperia*, 25 (1956):1-24.

and then explains the function of the monument to the eponymous heroes in not only military callups but also the assignment of lawsuits to *διαιτηταί*—arbitrators (53.4-7).³⁶ One wonders whether this was the only way to know one's age and whether Sparta, for instance, had a similar system.³⁷

Thomas's book is well worth reading and makes me eager for her to explore other issues. Her rephrasing of the question of literacy in Athens is an important step forward in our attempt to understand that world.³⁸

The Odyssey of Homer, translated by Allen Mandelbaum. With Twelve Engravings by Marialuisa de Romans. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990. 526 pp.

The 1991 Homeridae
University of Missouri-Columbia

The new verse translation of Homer's *Odyssey* by Allen Mandelbaum offers a very useful introduction to ancient Greek epic for those unfamiliar with the poem in the original language. Using a vehicle characterized by iambic pentameter, rhyme, and alliteration, Mandelbaum manages to achieve an effect parallel to that of Homer's original. Due to this metrical commitment and his emphasis on parataxis, he is (perhaps expectably) unable to render completely the formulaic structure of Homer's diction. As a result, he treats the oral traditional legacy of the *Odyssey* inconsistently, sometimes instilling problematic interpretations onto the Greek. Although his English *Odyssey* contains these and other inevitable discrepancies inherent in any translation, Mandelbaum does capture much of the feel of the Greek, both in style and interpretation; he and the University of California Press have, in short, presented an elegant and beautiful volume.

³⁶ On the complex system, involving not only the ten eponymous heroes of the monument but—seemingly—another forty-two, see Kurt von Fritz and Ernst Kapp, *Aristotle's Constitution of Athens and Related Texts* (New York: Hafner Press, 1950):191, n. 166. These additional heroes are very mysterious; were they some of the one hundred submitted to Delphi (*AP* 21.6)? See also Rhodes on 42.1, 53.4-7.

Aeschines notes that a certain Misgolas “τυγχάνει μὲν γὰρ ἡλικιώτης ὦν ἐμὸς καὶ συνέφηβος, καὶ ἔστιν ἡμῖν τοῦτι πέμπτον καὶ τετραρακοστὸν ἔτος”—happens to be the same age as I and was an epebe with me, and we're both in our 54th year (1.49).

³⁷ Xenophon observes, “πρῶτον μὲν τοίνυν οἱ ἔφοροι προκηρύττουσι τὰ ἔτη, εἰς ἃ δεῖ στρατεύεσθαι καὶ ἵππεῦσι καὶ ὀπλίταις, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τοῖς χειροτέχναις”—the ephors first announce the ages which are required to serve to the cavalry and hoplites, and then also to the craftsmen (*Politeia Lacedaemonion* 11.2)

³⁸ I have only a very few quibbles with the presentation of the material. Occasionally Thomas's sentence style becomes too complex and hard to untangle, so her points can seem more complicated than need be. Although she carefully cites her sources, it would make the reader's task easier if she would quote at least the most important among them; her wide range of sources virtually insures that the necessary texts will not be at the reader's hand for easy verification. My only other quibble concerns the presentation of the Greek: I do not understand why sometimes the Greek is transliterated and sometimes not.

Although modern English is by its nature unable to easily accommodate the Greek hexameter, Mandelbaum has preserved the oral-aural texture of the epic line by employing a loose iambic pentameter with a mixture of rhyme, alliteration, and assonance. By utilizing target-language poetic conventions, in other words, he imitates the regular pattern of the original epic meter. Book Nine, for example, the description of the blinding of Polyphemos successfully renders the flavor of the Greek by transmitting it through a dynamic concatenation of English language sound-patterning (p. 186, ix.387-96 Greek):

So did we twirl that hot
point in his eye; around the glowing wood,
blood flowed. And both his eyelids and his brow
were singed by fire as his eyeball burned;
his eye-root hissed. Even as, when a smith
plunges an ax or adze into cold water,
the metal hisses as he quenches it
to give that iron strength, so did that eye
hiss round the olive stake's sharp tip. His howl
was terrifying; all the rocks rang out.

ὥς τοῦ ἐν ὀφθαλμῷ πυριήκεα μοχλὸν ἐλόντες
δινέομεν, τὸν δ' αἶμα περίρρεε θερμὸν ἐόντα.
πάντα δέ οἱ βλέφαρ' ἀμφὶ καὶ ὀφρύας εὔσεν αὐτμῆ
γλήνης καιομένης· σφαραγεῦντο δέ οἱ πυρὶ ῥίζαι.
ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἀνὴρ χαλκεὺς πέλεκυν μέγαν ἤε σκέπαρνον
εἶν ὕδατι ψυχρῷ βάρπη μεγάλα ἰάχοντα
φαρμάσσω· τὸ γὰρ αὐτε σιδήρου γε κράτος ἐστίν·
ὥς τοῦ σίζ' ὀφθαλμὸς ἐλαϊνέω περὶ μοχλῷ.
σμερδαλέον δὲ μέγ' ὤμωξεν, περὶ δ' ἴαχε πέτρη,

This combination of assonance and alliteration coupled with enjambed lines recreates the rapid cadence of the Homeric hexameter, forcing the reader of English to move lightly and quickly from one line to the next in the same way as the reader or auditor of Greek.

Likewise, Mandelbaum employs end-rhyme to add emphasis to particular passages that would otherwise be lost in the translation from Greek to English. Such highlighting often occurs at the end of speeches, providing a rhetorical marker similar to those employed by Homer for various purposes. For example, Zeus concludes his address of the gods in Book One with an end-rhyme (p. 6, i.42-43 Greek):

Hermes had warned him as one warns a friend.
And yet Aegisthus' will could not be swayed.
Now, in one stroke, all that he owes is paid.

ὥς ἔφαθ' Ἑρμείας, ἀλλ' οὐ φρένας Αἰγίσθουο
πεῖθ' ἀγαθὰ φρονέων· νῦν δ' αἰθρόα πάντ' ἀπέτισε.

In this way, the translator effectively signals the end of Zeus's address rhetorically, thereby transmuting the distinctly Homeric rhetoric into elegantly parallel English. Although it could be argued that Mandelbaum makes too frequent use of poetic devices, he does successfully echo much of the poetic nature of the original Greek.

To maintain the poetic character of the original, Mandelbaum had also to consider the integral nature of the Greek line and its additive dynamics. In order to bring this effect

over into English verse, one must sacrifice fidelity to the Greek lexical units in favor of parataxis. At times this emphasis creates awkwardness within the English syntax, causing the translator to employ an elaborate system of dashes to establish relations between phrases and verses. In the first few lines of Book Two Mandelbaum's parataxis is particularly evident (p. 25, ii.1-7 Greek):

Firstlight: when Dawn's rose fingers touched the sky,
the dear son of Odysseus—quick to rise
and dress—soon set with his shoulder strap
and his sharp blade; to his feet—anointed, sleek—
he tied fine sandals. As he crossed the threshold,
he seemed a god. At once he told his heralds—
with voices clarion-clear—to call a council.
The long haired Ithacans were soon assembled.

Ἥμος δ' ἠριγένεια φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως,
ὄρνυτ' ἄρ' ἐξ εὐνήφιν Ὀδυσσεύος φίλος υἱός,
εἵματα ἐσσάμενος, περὶ δὲ ξίφος ὄξυ θέτ' ὤμων,
ποσσὶ δ' ὑπὸ λιπαροῖσιν ἐδήσατο καλὰ πέδιλα,
βῆ δ' ἴμεν ἐκ θαλάμοιο θεῶν ἐναλίγκιος ἄντην.
αἶψα δὲ κηρύκεσσι λιγυφθόγγοισι κέλευσε
κηρύσσειν ἀγορήνδε κάρη κομόωντας Ἀχαιοῦς.

Mandelbaum manipulates the Greek phrase (ποσσὶ δ' ὑπὸ λιπαροῖσιν) as “feet—
anointed, sleek—,” presumably to fit his target-language meter. Although he captures
Homer's frequent use of parataxis, Mandelbaum's awkward system of dashes, employed to
reflect the characteristic nature of Homer's verse, sometimes hinders the reader's
comprehension.

Though Mandelbaum reshapes the Greek line, he does remain faithful to some of the
formulaic phraseology of the original. However, because of the relative brevity and
distinctive texture of the iambic pentameter line, he is unable to wholly reproduce the highly
repetitious lines so common to Homer and therefore cannot completely capture the oral
traditional style of the poem. His consistent translation of “more poetic” lines like the “rosy-
fingered Dawn” verse (rendered as “As soon as Dawn's rose fingers touched the sky”) does
convey some feel for the original diction. However, many other formulaic phrases are
inconsistently translated or omitted, such as the exclusion of the common noun-epithet ἔπεα
πτερόεντα (“winged words”) in Book Nine, line 409. Although Mandelbaum admits to the
cancellation of several lines (see pp. 503-4), his rationale is not entirely convincing. Some
lines are omitted based on scholarly evidence; others are passed over merely because they
recur elsewhere in the epic. The reader should be aware that by silencing some of the oral
traditional qualities present in the original, Mandelbaum in effect makes the poem more of a
literary, textual composition.

Of particular difficulty is his translation of the beginning of Book One, where he
equates the return of Odysseus with a path of exile. Mandelbaum renders the first two
original Greek lines of Book One as follows:

Muse, tell me of the man of many wiles,
the man who wandered many paths of exile
after he sacked Troy's sacred citadel.

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε·

Here Mandelbaum translates ὃς μάλα πολλὰ, πλάγχθη as “the man who wandered many paths of exile,” possibly imposing a Vergilian figure on the Homeric epic or simply seeking an effective rhyme for the opening lines. On the contrary, πλάγχθη is more appropriately translated as “was tossed about” or the like. Even in its most oblique sense, this verb certainly never suggests Odysseus is in exile.

In contrast to his imposition of the theme of exile in the first book, Mandelbaum admirably captures the ambiguity of the ξείνος relationship throughout his translation. This concept is particularly troublesome in that there is no single word in English to express the traditional Greek word, which hovers between the English poles of “guest” and “stranger.” The concept underlying Homer’s invocation of ξείνος emphasizes the particular relationship between guest and host, a relationship according to which Penelope is obliged to feed and care for Odysseus, who in turn must reveal his identity and story. By attention to each individual situation in which the word ξείνος appears in the original, Mandelbaum attempts to preserve the complex, reverberative idea of guest-friendship. A good example of his method appears in Book Nineteen, where Penelope names Odysseus “stranger” until she has learned where he has come from and heard of his alleged relationship with the apparently lost Odysseus. After this formality has occurred, Mandelbaum has Penelope address Odysseus as “guest,” capturing the complexity of the ξείνος relationship. Furthermore, once Odysseus rejects Penelope’s hospitality, Mandelbaum again renders ξείνος as “stranger,” illustrating the singular inappropriateness of Odysseus’ refusal. Thus the translator is able to fully illustrate the complicated ritual of guest friendship through his varying but situation-specific translation of ξείνος throughout the book.

To balance the ledger, it should be observed that Mandelbaum also occasionally brings into his translation modern idioms or colloquialisms that often disturb the otherwise epic tenor of his *Odyssey*. A pointed example occurs in Book One, lines 133-34 where Mandelbaum translates the revels of the suitors (*orumagdôî deipnôî*) as “brouhaha.” Although this rendering captures the disruption of the suitors, the word seems inappropriate to the heroic tone of the epic. Another instance of this kind of break in tone appears in Book Nineteen, line 91, where Mandelbaum unnecessarily translates *kuon adees* as “arrogant slut,” an interpretation that few would find Homeric. Though relatively uncommon, such idiosyncrasies at times interject an unheroic flavor into the epic.

This translation of the *Odyssey* is not a substitute for the more literal works of Fitzgerald and especially Lattimore, but its poetic emphasis complements these traditional translations. Despite his inconsistencies, Mandelbaum does produce a compelling introduction to Greek epic, which is enhanced greatly by the masterful presentation of the volume. Each book is introduced with a brief outline of major scenes, a feature that should prove particularly helpful for the student or scholar interested in locating specific episodes. The text is also partnered with a series of engravings by Marialuisa de Romans that captures the magic and mystery of the epic. Supplementing Mandelbaum’s translation, her art work at the beginning of each chapter unifies the volume, reminding the reader of the harshness of Odysseus’ struggles to return and emphasizing the joy of his homecoming.