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978-0-521-12876-6 - Literacy and Democracy in Fifth-Century Athens

Anna Missiou

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FIFTH-CENTURY ATHENS

Who wrote the administrative documents of Athens? Was literacy extensive in ancient Attika? Were inscriptions, those on stone or pieces of pottery (ostraka), written, read and comprehended by common people? In this book Anna Missiou gives full consideration to these questions of crucial importance for understanding the quality of Athenian democracy and culture. She explores how the Kleisthenic reforms, advancing political equality in the large territory of Attika, provided new contexts and new subject matter for writing. It promoted the exchange of reliable information between the demes, the tribes and the urban centre on particular important issues, including the mobilization of the army and the political organization of the citizen body. Through a close analysis of the process through which Athenian politicians were ostracized and a fresh examination of the involvement of common citizens in the Council of Five Hundred, Missiou undermines the current orthodoxy that literacy was not widespread among Athenians. Literacy underwrote the effective functioning of Athenian democracy.

ANNA MISSIOU is Associate Professor of Ancient Greek History at the University of Crete. Her previous publications include *The Subversive Oratory of Andokides: Politics, Ideology and Decision-Making in Democratic Athens* (1992).

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*To the memory
of
M.I. Finley.*

*For my sons Thodoris and Dimitris Laddis.
For my grandchildren
Alexander and Zoe Laddis
Jake, Ben and Sia Laddis.*

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Preface

The polis of Athens attained the highest degree of popular participation in government that the world has ever known. Ordinary men made decisions on every important issue of public and foreign policy in the People's Assembly. But, as we do not have the voices of *hoi polloi* directly represented in our literary sources, modern scholars have not engaged with the question as to how these ordinary citizens in fact reacted to current events in the People's Assembly. Although the greatest number of Greek public inscriptions come from Athens, modern scholars concerned with literacy in fifth-century Athens have not faced questions such as the following: who wrote the various administrative documents? Was literacy important to the direct democracy of Athens? The answers that can be given to questions such as these may indeed indicate that ordinary people wrote, read and understood those inscriptions. Because of the apparent dearth of evidence, a whole group of actors has been left out of consideration.

The investigation of the relationship between democracy and literacy would gain from a close analysis of public decrees and ostraka, that is, potsherds used as votes for the expulsion of political leaders in the early decades of the fifth century. Although I would not claim to be a skilled epigraphist, I have found the experience of engaging with such texts to have been particularly challenging and rewarding. Athenian democracy emerged as the driving force behind the extensive literacy in Attika, since the production of both public inscriptions and ostraka involved citizens of all social classes.

Through the long years of the composition of the book I have sustained myself by the thought that it deals with an important subject in a relatively new way, but also by the encouragement of many friends and colleagues. Its present form would not have been accomplished

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Preface

if I had not had the continuing encouragement of Paul Cartledge, Peter Garnsey, David Keeble and Dorothy Thompson, who generously gave of their time to read preliminary drafts and various versions of the manuscript, and offered insightful criticism and helpful suggestions. Vassilis Anastasiadis, Efi Avdela, Chloe Balla, Kostas Burazelis, Michael Gagarin, Jacqueline Guiral-Hadziiossif, Nikos Hadjinicolaou, Aikaterini Liambi, Robin Osborne, Paula Perlman and Elza Yoka have read sections and chapters of this work as it has evolved over the years. Errors which remain are entirely my own. I have learned a lot from those with whom I disagree; here W.V. Harris is the name to mention, and I owe him a debt of gratitude. More recently, the anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press have provided thoughtful criticisms. Most of my research for this book was carried out before 2007. Inevitably, newer studies are not cited.

The completion of this work owes much to the Program in Hellenic Studies, Princeton University, and to the Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University, which offered me financial support and made accessible the resources and services of their libraries in 1996–7 and 2000, respectively. Likewise I am grateful to Angelos Chaniotis at the Department of Classics, New York University, to David Konstan and Kurt Raaflaub, Department of Classics, Brown University, and to Michael Arnush at the Classics Department, Skidmore College, who kindly provided favourable conditions for me to enjoy the facilities of their institutions during my sabbatical leaves in 1997, 2000 and 2005, respectively. The Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge gave me access to libraries with facilities adequate for the specialized requirements of my research. Above all, I wish to acknowledge the sustained support of my colleagues in the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Crete. Sabbatical leaves have enabled me to devote myself full-time to my research during three semesters (1997, 2000 and 2005). Not to be forgotten are the secretariat of the Department of History and Archaeology, and the members of staff of the Library, University of Crete, and of the American School of Classical Studies at the Agora, especially Ariadne Gazi, Kalli Karadaki and Jan Jordan, respectively. My colleague Dr Eleni Zymi has helped me with the burdensome task of assembling permissions to use photographs of ostraka. Dr Apostolos Sarris, Institute of Mediterranean

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Studies, added radiuses to the map of Attika that Professor John Traill generously offered. To all these institutions and individuals named above I offer my sincere thanks.

To Dr David Keeble and Dr Valerie Broadbend-Keeble I would like to extend my special thanks for facilitating my stays in Cambridge; their ample generosity in time and hospitality have given me the privilege of many summers spent in the intellectually stimulating environment of that city.

Last but not least, I wish to express my deep appreciation to my brother Yannis Missios and my sister Dionysia Missiou, who have assisted me in so many ways.

Rethymno, October 2008

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All Greek words are transcribed in italic type, in the lower case. Greek words and phrases appear often in transliterated form wherever possible spelled consistently throughout. Transcription of Greek letters: *ai* is written for alpha iota, *ei* for epsilon iota, *oi* for omicron iota, *k* for kappa and *kh* for chi; *ē* and *ō* are written thus for eta and omega; upsilon is written as *y* as an independent vowel and as *u* when it follows alpha, epsilon, eta or omicron. Proper names are not italicized. I have generally transliterated the ancient words and names of ancient persons directly from Greek into English: *agōn*, *euthynos*, *gymnasiarkhoi*, *khoregos*, Harpokration, Hippokrates, Megakles, Aiskhines, Aiskhylos.

Abbreviations of periodicals are according to *L'Année Philologique*, but notice *AM* for *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* (Athen.) and *BSA* for *Annual of the British School at Athens*.

As I did not wish to enter into the thorny problem of the authorship of the Aristotelian text *Athenaion Politeia*, I often use the abbreviation *Ath. Pol.* to denote both the author and his work.

Square brackets used in translations or quotations indicate that the transcription is my own, not that of the cited authority.

All references to ostraka from the Agora, Akropolis and Kerameikos adopt the enumeration given by the excavators (P for the Agora ostraka, A.O. for the Akropolis ostraka and O for the Kerameikos ostraka). In the case of the Agora and Akropolis ostraka, the P or A.O. number is followed by a parenthesis containing the enumeration given by Mabel Lang in her later edition (1990). Thus, when I first refer to an Akropolis ostrakon, Broneer's enumeration is followed by a parenthesis which contains the capital L (for Lang), the number given

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by Lang followed by one of the capitals A to O used by Broneer to designate the hands, e.g., A.O. 20 (L 1152 A), and whenever possible reference to Lang's illustration – drawing (fig.) or photo (pl.) – e.g., A.O. 7 (L 1308 K, pl. 11).

References to illustrations of this book are cited as Figure(s).

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With regard to inscriptions the work contains references to:

- IG I³ *Inscriptiones Graecae I. Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno anteriores*, 3rd edn. Fasc. 1, ed. D.M. Lewis; fasc. 2, ed. D.M. Lewis and L. Jeffery. Berlin, 1981 and 1994.
- IG II² *Inscriptiones Graecae II. Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno posteriores*, 2nd edn. Ed. —. Kirchner. 4 vols. Berlin, 1913–40.
- M–L *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* ed. R. Meiggs and D.M. Lewis. Revised edn. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.
- SEG *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*. Leiden: Gieben, 1923–.

The following abbreviations also appear in the book:

- FGrH *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. F. Jacoby, Leiden: Brill, 1923– (followed by author number and fragment number).
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by H.G. Liddell and R. Scott. Rev. and augmented by H.S. Jones. With Supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1977.
- OED *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd edn, prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.