Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome. Edited by WILLIAM A. JOHNSON and HOLT N. PARKER. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. xv + 430. Cloth, $74.00. ISBN 978–0–19–534015–0.

This volume was "constructed as a forum in which selected leading scholars were challenged to rethink from the ground up how students of classical antiquity might best approach the question of literacy" (p. 4). Spurred by a belief that work in the field of ancient literacy has stagnated, William A. Johnson writes in the introduction that the "deterministic accounts" of ancient literacy presented by Goody, Havelock and Ong have been generally discredited, while Harris' *Ancient Literacy* is narrowly focused on defining what percentage of people in antiquity could read and write. He thus offers this collection "to formulate more interesting, productive ways of talking about … text-oriented events embedded in particular sociocultural contexts" (p. 3). The essays analyze examples of literacy within social and cultural contexts. In addition to the introduction, there are five chapters under the theme "Situating Literacies," three under "Books and Texts," and four under "Institutions and Communities." A bibliographical essay and epilogue follow. Each chapter contains its own bibliography, and an *Index Locorum* and General Index are appended to the whole work.

The collection takes its name from the essay contributed by Rosalind Thomas, and though not positioning itself as a counterpart to her influential *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*, should help revive debate and inspire investigation into Roman, and perhaps Hellenistic, literacy. [[1]] All of them focus on the particular—that is, on the variations that affect the nature of literacy—and on the social and cultural context of literacy, and should inspire further study of the topic.

Rosalind Thomas' arguments for the existence of "multi-literacies" (p. 13) in the Greek world attempt to define sets of literary skills necessary to succeed in particular social, cultural or political settings. She describes five types of literacy: banking literacy, name literacy, commercial literacy, list literacy and the literacy of the official. In each case, she discusses the minimum skills necessary to take out a loan, for instance, or to serve as a juror, and shows how the skills needed for success in each arena changed over time.

In the next chapter, Greg Woolf argues that we should not envisage such a range of literacies in Rome. He points out two possible specialized literacies (understanding legal formulae and deciphering

amphorae labels), but concludes that Roman literacy was generalized, primarily because the literary practices of the state depended upon those of its private citizens.

Barbara Burrell focuses on the bilingual inscriptions and structures in the plaza south of the Hellenistic agora of Ephesus. By following the process by which each structure was "read" by the elite viewers who erected later structures in the plaza, she shows how the plaza became an intersection of Hellenistic and Roman culture.

Simon Goldhill focuses on the anecdote, which he distinguishes from quotation, chreia, paradoxography, admirabilia and exempla. He identifies Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*, Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and Plutarch's *Sympotic Questions* as anecdotal works, and concludes that the anecdote, which can be written or recited with ease, is where literacy and orality meet, and therefore reveals the interdependence of the two spheres.

Thomas Habinek's "Situating Literacy at Rome" begins with the assertion that literacy and orality are not mutually exclusive. Roman literacy must be "situated" in specific contexts at Rome, and Habinek explores how it changes through time and differs from literacy elsewhere, as well as how literary practices at Rome reveal the Roman understanding of literacy. He concludes that the spread of writing mirrored the growing need to assert one's status as a Roman, that writing derives its ability to assert status from the fact that literacy reveals a mastery of special speech, and that Romans' propensity "to intensify the constraints upon writing" in graphic word games reflects an understanding that the written word need not signify spoken language (p. 136).

In "The Corrupted Boy and the Crowned Poet," Florence Dupont examines why people read and wrote literary books at Rome. Although books preserve a "fictive utterance," the material reality of the *volumen* itself cannot be ignored. Dupont enlists Catullus, Horace and Ovid to define the book's "double destiny" (p. 153): it can live as a *puer delicatus*, given, sold and resold, growing ever more tarnished and sullied, or it can be preserved in a library and consecrate the status of the poet.

Joseph Farrell's "The Impermanent Text in Catullus and Other Roman Poets" is also concerned with the dual nature of the bookroll. Like Dupont, Farrell is interested in the paradoxical nature of this

fragile material object, which is also the instrument through which the authors' works might be preserved. He concludes that for an ancient poet, the material text was "a locus of anxiety," as revealed in the tendency to juxtapose the material text with immaterial song (p. 181).

In "Books and Reading in Latin Poetry," Holt Parker argues against the view that Romans experienced poetry primarily at recitations or other literary performances. Instead, books were often read silently, even in the presence of others, and performance played little role in the circulation of Roman poetry.

In "Papyrological Evidence for Book Collections and Libraries in the Roman Empire," George Houston analyzes papyri that have preserved the titles of books and identifies eight lists which he concludes are likely to be library inventories.

Peter White's "Bookshops in the Literary Culture of Rome" examines the evidence for bookshops within the larger literary culture of Rome. White discusses how bookshops, concentrated in the city center, represented the locus of bibliographic knowledge in Rome before the advent of the library and used the appearance of libraries to expand their stock. Competition between the bookstores and the presence of poor quality texts led to the need for specialists who could convince the customers of the reliability of the texts for sale. He argues that this role was filled by *grammatici* and concludes that a sort of social performance arose in bookstores, in which they could use their knowledge to enhance their public or social authority.

Kristina Milnor argues in "Literary Literacy in Roman Pompeii: The Case of Vergil's *Aeneid*" that the selection and placement of graffiti was often inspired in part by the context of other writing and painting on the wall, as well as by the quotation's status as part of the literary tradition.

William A. Johnson concentrates on how the reading community constructed in Gellius' *Attic Nights* uses texts, and on the encumbrances the community attaches to this use. The ways Gellius presents reading, Johnson argues, seek to create a reading community as ideal as the one portrayed in his work.

Part IV consists of Shirley Werner's thorough bibliographical essay "Literacy Studies in Classics: The Last Twenty Years." She also provides an index.

The epilogue is David R. Olson's "Why Literacy Matters, Then and Now." He advances the theory that writing is instrumental in distinguishing thought from belief, and conjectures that written texts exhibit the qualities of quoted expressions. Olson concludes that writing is instrumental in the development of modern thought and a literate tradition.

The strength of this collection is in the learning on display in the articles and the attention it pays to situating itself in the scholarly tradition. Readers without a solid background in literacy studies may have to review other major works on the topic to reap the full benefit of this volume. But specialists will find a great deal of food for thought there.

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[[1]] R. Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 1992).