A Collaborative Project on Aristotle's Constitution of Athens in a Greek History Course

History students who come to the study of classical Greece for the first time are in a difficult position. Their previous history courses have probably focused on methodology appropriate to the study of more modern eras; in our university, history students rarely have experience researching anything before the Early Modern period, with most large projects concentrated on America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even undergraduate classics students, who may have some familiarity with Greek or Latin, may find their first experience with researching ancient history quite challenging. In response to the obstacles encountered in teaching Greek history to Greekless undergraduates, mainly upper-division history majors, I developed a collaborative, focused project that uses Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia* as a means of introducing students to the methodology of research on classical history.

In this project, each student writes on a different topic, but all papers analyze the same text. Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia* has proved to be a useful text to introduce students to the problems of working with classical texts and topics. Most of it is known only from a single, incomplete papyrus (a medium with its own problems), which has a rather dramatic discovery story. Its authorship is in question (von Fritz and Kapp 1974: 4-5). Its date is uncertain (Keaney 1970). However, the text itself is relatively straightforward: a chronological narrative of the development of Athenian democracy from about the time of Draco through the author's time somewhere around the mid-fourth century BCE, with a shorter descriptive section on the functioning of the democracy at that time. The topic—the birth of the world's first democracy— is relevant to students' interests, and the author, should he in fact be Aristotle, is a Big Name. Finally, there exists another ancient text on the same topic, by pseudo-Xenophon or "Old Oligarch," giving some opportunity for comparison (Marr and Rhodes 2008).

After students are assigned or choose their topics, working groups are formed among students with similar topics. These working groups share bibliography and ideas through online discussion boards; they edit each other's papers via electronic "lockers," while meeting together in small groups during class about once a week. All students start off the project with a complete reading of the text and of a long article on its structure (Keaney 1963). As students discover new sources, decisions have to be made about how to cite those sources, both within the documents and in the general bibliography. Since the final product is supposed to have a seamless style across all the contributions, students learn the importance of following a standard style, both in writing and in editing.

The project develops specific skills: reading secondary literature on classical history (and not panicking if there is the occasional Greek quotation), citing ancient texts in an appropriate format, using classical reference materials, and reading a text closely, but with the skepticism necessary when working with a translation. In addition, the project introduces students to the nature of the transmission of ancient texts and the type of books available in the ancient world (Kenyon 1932); these topics, of course, are relevant to the study of any other classical text. The specific product of the research is a set of short papers (about five pages each) on the narrow issues of the *Athenaion Politeia*, all well-documented in a uniform scholarly format. Collectively, the papers might be said to form, not an original scholarly contribution, but an introduction to the text for the Greekless student of history, political science, or philosophy. The project has been presented as a panel at a student symposium.

This paper will present some practical lessons learned about choice of translations, development of a style sheet, and timing of interim deadlines. I will also analyze the problems remaining with the outcome and share some students' feedback on the project.

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