

Information collection and transmission in Classical Greece

KATHRYN PAYNE

The manner in which information was collected and transmitted in Classical Greece was a function of the change from a predominantly oral to a more literate culture. The earliest stages of this transition are seen in Homer. The epic poems attributed to him, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, collected, and passed on information about Mycenaean Greece, information derived from a tradition of oral literature. The poems were written down sometime between the 8th and 6th centuries B.C., and so later transmission was literary. Herodotus represents a period in Classical Greece when writing is well established, but the old oral culture is still strong. In his *Histories*, he indicates he used both oral reports and written sources such as archives. The *Histories* were composed in writing, but intended for public recitation. Theophrastus and Alexander the Great both lived in a period when writing was fully established and widespread oral culture was waning. Theophrastus used oral reports from informants, but also written sources. His works were written down and used for lecture notes. Alexander's information collection, due to its military nature, was predominantly oral, but the preferred form of transmission was written. Information collection and transmission in Classical Greece changed from Homer, who relied entirely on orally collected and transmitted information, to Theophrastus and Alexander the Great, who used oral sources, but were firmly committed to written information.

The twentieth century is often called the age of information. However, a period perhaps even more deserving of the label "information age" than this is that of Classical Greece.

The glory of Greece, her legacy to succeeding ages, is found in its truest sense in the information which was passed down through the ages. The geometry of Euclid is the basis for the beauty of the Parthenon and later buildings. The classification systems of Aristotle are the ancestors of every-

The author is Science Librarian, Ablah Library, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0068 USA