



## **Ancient Greek with Thrasymachus: A Web Site for Learning Ancient Greek**

**Alison Barker**  
St. Paul's School

### **ABSTRACT**

This project began as an attempt by two teachers of Ancient Greek to provide supplementary materials to accompany *Thrasymachus*, a first-year textbook for learning ancient Greek. While the text itself offers an excellent and appealing introduction to the language using a reading method, it has little explanation of grammar and insufficient exercises, particularly for students who have not studied Latin. Thus, the need for a supplement to the text, now on-line and evolving. The topics discussed in this article include: a brief history and description of the project (see [www.vroma.org/~abarker/thrascontents.html](http://www.vroma.org/~abarker/thrascontents.html)), the format of each chapter, a chronology for completion of materials for all 32 chapters in the text, and some ideas for further refinements to link students to on-line information to enhance their study of Ancient Greek.

### **KEYWORDS**

*Thrasymachus*, Reading Method, VRoma Project, Web-Based Supplement

### **HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION**

For some 15 years, this writer has enjoyed using the text *Thrasymachus* for teaching beginning ancient Greek at the high school level. Dr. Ann Thomas Wilkins, a long-time colleague and friend, found that the text was also eminently suitable for teaching ancient Greek to college students and used it in her classes when she taught this course at Duquesne University. The text introduces the grammar and vocabulary of Attic Greek entirely within the context of an engaging narrative which provides background in Greek myth and which draws students into the world of the gods and



heroes of the ancient Greeks. It is this element of context that seems to us to help students understand and recall the new points that they encounter as they gradually build their knowledge of the language. Students have, of course, a certain amount of memorizing to do, but all of the many forms of this highly inflected language they eventually learn thoroughly come to them first within a continuous, meaningful narrative, not as isolated bits of words in a table.

Wilkins and this writer saw a need for supplementary explanations and exercises when we realized that students now often come to the study of Greek without training in grammar and without having studied Latin, both of which the writers of *Thrasymachus* expected of their own students in Britain in the 1960s. Wilkins began to write some very simple, basic explanations of grammar and exercises for her students, following the order of presentation in *Thrasymachus*. We decided to work together to expand and refine these materials and to test them for clarity and usefulness in our classes at both the high school and college levels and with the idea that it might be appropriate to publish these materials as a supplement to *Thrasymachus* at some point in the future. The publisher of the original text informed us that the text could not be altered in any way, thereby eliminating any chance of integrating our materials into a new edition of the book itself. Supplementary materials using short quotations from the text were permitted, but our materials could not be published in book form because the market for them would be so limited. We thought we would have to turn back to the copy machine.

During this time, the writer's interest in using technology to enhance the teaching of Latin and Greek was growing. She had some ideas about what to do but no knowledge or skills for converting those ideas into useful, effective tools for students. The writer applied to the VRoma project, a consortium of college and high school Classicists dedicated to improving the teaching of Classics with on-line resources funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Taking part in a workshop in summer 1998 at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, she began to learn about web authoring, working with images, and creating audio files. She also began to share ideas about the effective use of on-line materials in Classics teaching. The writer eagerly attended a second workshop for more training in 1999. Thanks to the workshops provided by the VRoma project, it occurred to her that Web publication would be ideal for the supplement to *Thrasymachus*. She proposed this possibility to Wilkins who readily agreed that it should be explored. The writer began to consider some of the problems that would have to be solved. How would she be able to incorporate a Greek font that web browsers would display clearly? How could she make answer keys appear in pop-up windows?

The more the writer thought about how a Web-based supplement could make materials available to any student who had access to the Web that



could potentially reach beyond St. Paul's School, the more Web publishing made sense. The **VRoma** server provided the perfect, permanent home for a living document that could be changed and refined indefinitely as new ideas arose and as the writer's skills at Web authoring improved. In addition, this approach would not infringe upon copyright. Although the writer realized that she was launching a much bigger project than anything she had attempted thus far, she was eager for the day when she could assign some exercises on Greek grammar that would be attractive, appropriately didactic, and would make use of the computers in our Language Center rather than paper. She experimented with a basic design, with the size and appearance of images (largely from her own collection of photos), and finally found an adequate Greek font that users could easily download to their local computer. She was excited by the possibility of getting students involved in the development of the site and perhaps receiving some constructive criticism for improving it from Classics colleagues around the world.

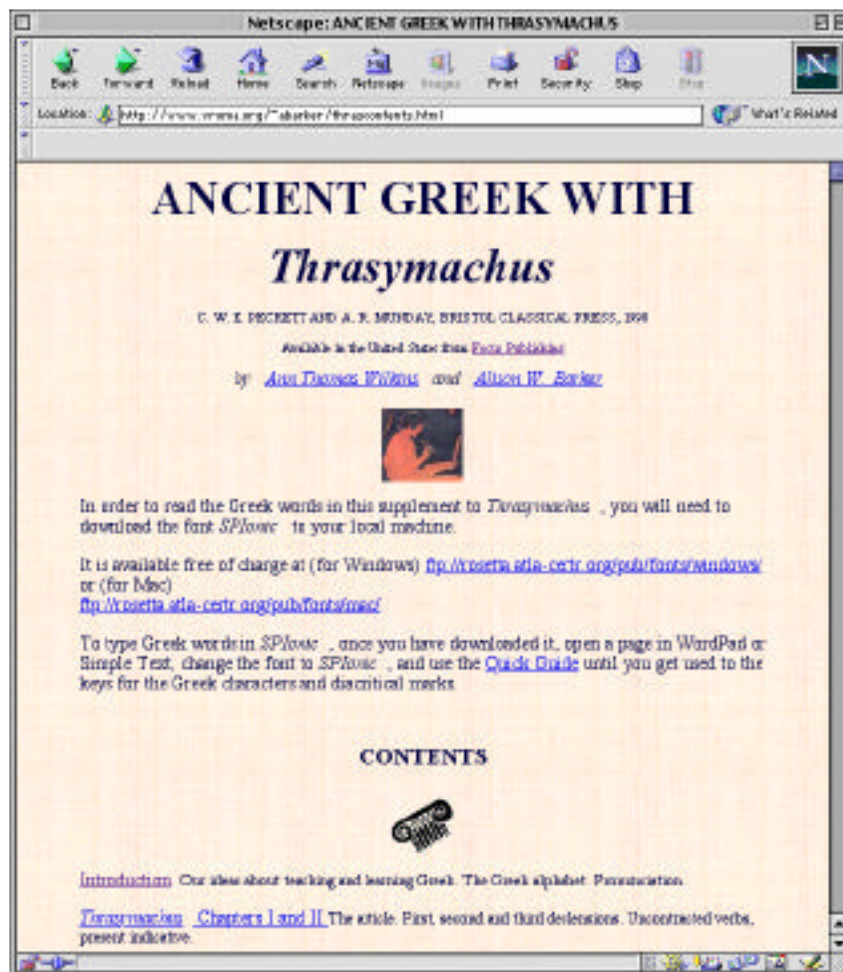
This web site, then, aims to provide supplementary explanations and exercises to help students make the most effective use of *Thrasymachus* for learning ancient Greek.<sup>1</sup> We suggest that the textbook itself be used as its authors intended, that is, with a teacher guiding students through the reading of each chapter and explaining and giving hints as necessary to make the Greek narrative intelligible. Currently, the on-line supplement allows students to review the main points of grammar, do exercises to help them solidify their understanding of these points, and explore links to other web sites relating to the content of each chapter. For each set of exercises, the writer has provided a link to an answer key which appears in a small pop-up window so that students can easily check their work, close the window, and move on to the next point. The on-line supplement works equally well for students who want to review basic ancient Greek on their own using *Thrasymachus*.

## FORMAT

For all of the web pages that accompany each chapter (or group of chapters) in *Thrasymachus*, the writer chose uniform design elements (such as a light papyrus background), which was intended to be simple, attractive, quick to load, and easy to read. For Greek language, students are instructed to download the SPIonic font to their computer. The SPIonic font is simpler to use and available for free on the Web. Students are also instructed on the first page to use **WordPad** or its equivalent for their exercises (see Figure 1).



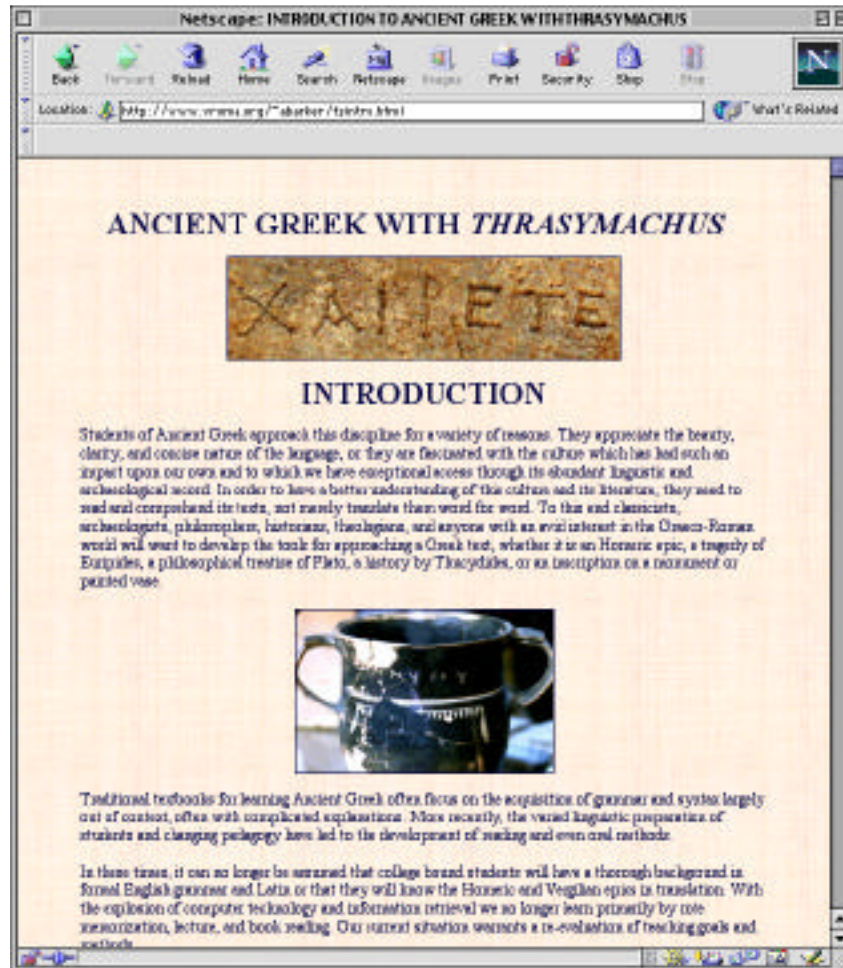
Figure 1  
Thrasymachus Home Page



The first page also lists the topics of each chapter for quick reference and provides links to the relevant web pages. The introduction presents our ideas about teaching and learning Greek and information for getting started with and practicing the alphabet. Relevant images and links are included on this page (see Figure 2).



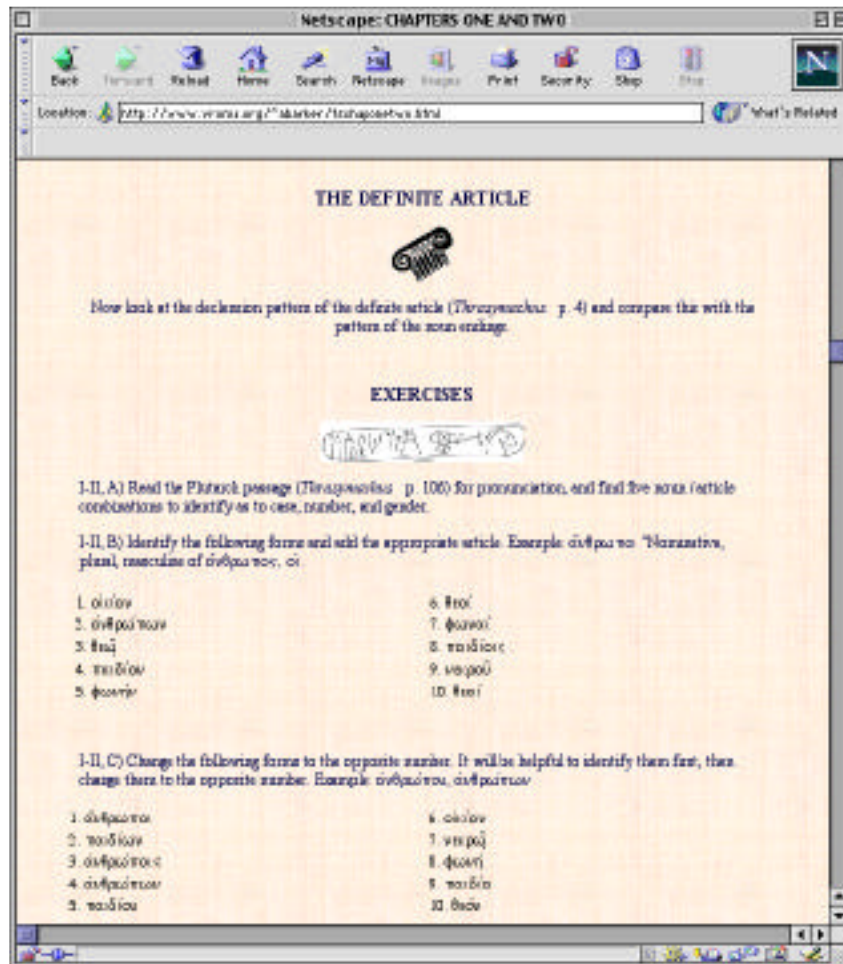
Figure 2  
Introduction



On individual pages, each chapter (or group of chapters) offers a straightforward explanation in simple language of the grammar introduced in *Thrasymachus* and exercises using simple vocabulary. Repeated images (such as a bit of Linear B for exercises) set off sections (see Figure 3).



Figure 3  
Section Demarcations





## CHRONOLOGY OF THE PROJECT

The first phase of “Ancient Greek with *Thrasymachus*,” begun in the fall of 1999, included transforming the supplementary materials for the first 22 chapters from Microsoft **Word** documents to HTML, deciding on design elements, organizing grammar information in tables, changing all of the Greek to the SPIonic font, putting in the diacritical marks, editing and supplying exercises as required, and checking errors. In the second phase, which is well underway at this point, the writer has created answer keys in pop-up windows for all of the exercises so that students can check their work and is adding other refinements to these chapters. The final phase, which she plans to complete by fall 2002, will consist of writing and editing materials to accompany the last 10 chapters of *Thrasymachus*.

## THOUGHTS ON REFINEMENTS AND POSSIBILITIES

The *Thrasymachus* supplement began as a series of paper documents, something akin to a preliminary version of a traditional workbook copied for students. It has taken on an entirely new life as an on-line tool for helping students learn ancient Greek. The first step focused on simply presenting the materials in an attractive, readable form, while subsequent steps have sought to make the materials more interactive such as having the reader actually complete and correct the exercises on line. In the future, users will find Greek sayings appropriate to each chapter (those little gems of Greek thought that no beginning Greek student should be without) with accompanying images and audio files, links to some of the countless resources available to students of Greek on the Web, audio files of Homeric Greek for the final chapters that include passages from the Odyssey, vocabulary practice and review. Other enhancements will surely suggest themselves, especially as students of beginning ancient Greek at St. Paul’s School become more involved in the creation of the site during the current academic year, research appropriate web sites for links, and generate ideas for improvements and new features.

Students’ responses to the initial phases of the web site have been positive. They report that reviewing grammar points in this format and doing on-line exercises in our Language Center have been helpful to their progress in Greek. A more formal assessment of the effectiveness of the site will take place at the end of this academic year at which point students’ progress in Greek will be measured in the usual way (written final examinations). Students will also have an opportunity to evaluate in writing their experience using “Ancient Greek with *Thrasymachus*.”

In addition to fulfilling its original purpose of reinforcing classroom learning, this Web-based supplement invites active participation on the



part of users. With the inclusion of carefully chosen links to sites related to the context of *Thrasy-machus*, it will serve to stimulate curiosity about Greek art, history, archaeology, as well as language and to connect students to additional resources. With input from users, the web site has the capacity to evolve and grow into an ever more useful learning supplement and to become a locus for an on-line community of students seeking to learn the language of the ancient Greeks.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> The gateway maintained by Marc Huys at the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium lists valuable links to a variety of web sites devoted to Ancient Greek (see [perswww.kuleuven.ac.be/~p3481184/greekg.htm](http://perswww.kuleuven.ac.be/~p3481184/greekg.htm)).

#### REFERENCE

Peckett, C. W. E., & Munday, A. R. (1970). *Thrasy-machus* (Rev. ed.). Shrewsbury, UK: Focus Press.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer wishes to express her gratitude to Dr. Ann Wilkins without whose cooperation and assistance she could not have developed the materials described in this article.

#### AUTHOR'S BIODATA

Alison W. Barker is a teacher of Latin and Greek at St. Paul's School in Concord, NH, where she holds the Cochran Mastership in Greek and is the director of the Classical Honors Program. She holds a BA in Greek from Wellesley College and an MA in Classical Studies from the University of Pennsylvania.

#### AUTHOR'S ADDRESS

Alison Barker  
St. Paul's School, Classics  
Concord, NH 03301  
Phone: 603/229-4739  
Fax: 603/229-4649  
E-mail: [abarker@sps.edu](mailto:abarker@sps.edu)  
WWW: [www.vroma.org/~abarker/index.html](http://www.vroma.org/~abarker/index.html)