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0521587360 - Literacy and Power in the Ancient World

Edited by Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf

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This collection attempts to set the study of literacy in the ancient world in the wider context of the debates among anthropologists over the impact of writing on society. Was writing a revolutionary innovation, prompting or participating in social change, or a fundamentally repressive and disciplinary technology? The book consists of a series of studies ranging over the whole of the Mediterranean world and much of northern Europe during a period of more than a millennium (c. 600 BC – AD 800). The areas examined include Pharaonic and Hellenistic Egypt, Persia and the Near East, Judaea, classical Greece, and the Roman and Byzantine empires. Each of the contributors investigates, in his or her particular area of expertise, the changing roles of writing in history, in particular the extent to which writing played an active role in historical change in antiquity. The book as a whole illustrates and explores the diversity of writing practices and their relations to the construction of power in ancient society, with an awareness of the competing claims of anthropological and historical disciplines.

Ancient and mediaeval historians, anthropologists and anyone interested in the power of the written word will find this book essential reading.

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