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978-0-521-80930-6 - Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece

Edited by Harvey Yunis

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Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece

From the sixth through the fourth centuries B.C.E., the landmark developments of Greek culture and the critical works of Greek thought and literature were accompanied by an explosive growth in the use of written texts. By the close of the classical period, a new culture of literacy and textuality had come into existence alongside the traditional practices of live oral discourse. New avenues for human activity and creativity arose in this period. The very creation of the “classical” and the perennial use of Greece by later European civilizations as a source of knowledge and inspiration would not have taken place without the textual innovations of the classical period. This book considers how writing, reading, and disseminating texts led to new ways of thinking and new forms of expression and behavior. The individual chapters cover a range of phenomena, including poetry, science, religion, philosophy, history, law, and learning.

Harvey Yunis is professor of classics at Rice University. He has been a Humboldt fellow and a fellow of the Center of Hellenic Studies in Washington, D.C. He is the author of *Demosthenes: On the Crown* and serves as the editor of *Rhetorica*.

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Preface



Behind this volume lies not one, but two, conferences. The first gathering took place at Rice University in Houston, Texas, in April 2000 under the title “Written Text and Transformations of Thought and Expression in Classical Greece.” The papers and discussions were lively and interesting so far beyond the norm that we were compelled to consider publication. Beyond revising the individual papers, we wanted a volume that would strike the reader as a seamless, integrated, multifaceted inquiry into the subject. To that end, an extensive series of collaborative steps was planned, culminating in a second gathering, also at Rice University, in November 2001. At the second gathering, no new papers were delivered; our efforts were devoted entirely to mutual criticism and to fashioning one book out of ten papers. For their hard work and devotion to the project, I am hugely indebted to my fellow participants. Anything worthwhile in the final product should be attributed ultimately to the critical and collaborative efforts of the group. In place of acknowledgments to the rest of the group placed at the end of each chapter, the contributors asked to record here their general acknowledgment of detailed criticism, advice, and comments received from the other participants.

The roster of those who contributed to this volume extends beyond the contributors. At the conference in April 2000, Dirk Obbink and Hilary Mackie also delivered papers, but it was not possible to publish

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them in this volume. That first conference was further enlivened by the presence and comments of Johan Schloemann, Christian Brockmann, and John Marincola, who were invited specifically to add to the discussions. The April 2000 conference was made possible by generous support from Rice University's School of Humanities and Center for the Study of Cultures. Colleen Morimoto, the center's assistant director, was invaluable in bringing things together smoothly.

Following the April 2000 conference, I received an enlightening and generous introduction to writing and ancient India at the hands of Johannes Bronkhorst, professor of Indology at the University of Lausanne. Professor Bronkhorst's explorations of writing and literacy in ancient India will see the light elsewhere. Beatrice Rehl welcomed the project for Cambridge University Press and shepherded it through the acquisition process. At a crucial moment, a conference grant from the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation made it possible for the participants to reconvene at Rice in November 2001; the participants and I express our gratitude to the foundation. The project continued to enjoy the support of Rice's Center for the Study of Cultures. Sandra Gilbert, the center's current assistant director, helped bring about a reunion as smooth as the initial gathering. Finally, a special word of gratitude, from both me and the contributors, to our fellow participant Dirk Obbink, for his criticism and suggestions at the November 2001 meeting. Though no chapter in the volume bears his name, he has left an imprint on the volume as a whole.

Harvey Yunis
Houston, Texas

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his modern reception, the representation of ritual in literature and art, the religious self-awareness of the Greeks, and the history of classical scholarship since 1800.

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