and one can hope that future translators will find these more neglected texts both interesting and worthy of their attention.

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## LITTERA SCRIPTA MANET

B. B. POWELL: *Writing and the Origins of Greek Literature*. Pp. xvi + 210, maps, ills. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Cased, £40, US$55. ISBN: 0-521-78206-6.

This is a forceful and wide-ranging book with a somewhat quirky patchwork structure, its different elements all intended to throw light on the relationship of writing to the earliest Greek literature. A series of short, punchy chapters lead up to a lightly revised version of Powell's long and informative *BMCR* (2000) review of M. L. West's *East Face of Helicon* (Oxford, 1997), whose presentation of evidence for an 'East Mediterranean koinē' P. considers highly persuasive. This is followed by accounts of theories of writing and of its contrasting manifestations in China, Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Near East. P. then returns to the question of the invention of the Greek alphabet, an area in which he has already made an important contribution with his *Homer and the Origins of the Greek Alphabet* (Cambridge 1991). Here he builds on and revises his earlier argument for a single 'adapter' of the Greek alphabet, concluding that the inventor 'is likely to have been a Semite, an inheritor of the tradition of West Semitic writing and its traditions of multiliteralism, who was also bilingual in Greek' (p. 114). A wide selection of pertinent images illustrate the book, and in the penultimate chapter P. concentrates on the way elements of Near Eastern art seem to have acted as a catalyst for the aoidic innovation and creation of myths. The advent of writing, however, and consequent preservation and dissemination of the text of Homer is connected to the discernible turn in seventh-century Greece towards the depiction of images drawn from Homeric myths.

In the first section, P. sets out to offer various perspectives on the relationship of the written word to the earliest literature in Greek. He revisits the oral/literate distinction with the aim of destabilizing any cosy assumptions about what such a distinction means. He is unconvinced by such usages as 'oral text' and 'oral literature', and reminds us that the conversion of a song into a text of any kind, whether written in alphabetic script or recorded (like Milman Parry's tapes of Yugoslav oral songs) on aluminium wire, is an unusual, laborious, and denaturing process. We only know Homer's epics as texts, whatever our theories or speculations about their oral composition. P. is a firm proponent of the Parry/Lord hypothesis, that the text of Homer was originally composed in performance and dictated by the poet to a literate amanuensis—something for which he provides fascinating parallels from Ugaritic practice. Writing as we understand it is 'a technology of explosive force', one unknown to the Homeric epic, as P. succinctly demonstrates, pointing out that 'there are no tape recorders mentioned in the songs of the guslar Avdo Mejedovich either'. Homer's ignorance of writing may be tellingly contrasted with its prominence in the Egyptian *Tale of Sinuhe* (*c.* 1800 B.C.E.) which revels in describing written exchanges.

If we are unclear about the meaning of orality, we are equally confused about the

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meaning of literacy—for example, about the cognitive advantages it is thought to bestow, or the implications it carries of cultural superiority. P. stresses that writing emerges to fulfil a social need: while Linear B fulfilled the bureaucratic needs of Mycenean palace society, we have little information about what literacy meant in the context of eighth-century Greek culture. When examining the way orality is linked to myth, he cites the definition of the latter as 'a traditional tale', but is quick to demolish the rider proposed by Walter Burkert—'with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance'—pointing to its limited application to 'the lightness and fun of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which more than any poem defines what we mean by "myth" ' (p. 19). He can be less fair, for instance in dismissing Rosalind Thomas's claim that poetry holds a central place in archaic Greece because its structures make it easier to remember ('Poetry does not preserve poetry!' he exclaims [p. 29], 'In the ancient world, only writing preserved poetry').

*Writing and the Origins of Greek Literature* raises important questions and makes sharp observations about the nature and origins of the earliest written texts, offering a range of thought-provoking insights drawn from an impressive engagement with different bodies of evidence. P.'s style is pithy and forthright, and his text refreshingly free of footnotes (references are given in brackets). His clarity and incisiveness help to dispel some of the confusions he deplores, but despite a concluding chapter in which he attempts to pull the threads together (his own image is that of a wigwam, with various poles meeting to support a single structure) the argument gives the impression of being disjointed and uneven. In this respect, however, the portmanteau effect may reflect the way that a topic of such complexity and indeterminacy, many angles of which are treated here with admirable breadth and lucidity, will be bound to resist tidy presentation and packaging.

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## OF GODS AND MEN

J. S. Clay: *Hesiod's Cosmos*. Pp. xii + 202. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Cased, £45, US$65. ISBN: 0-521-82392-7.

The critical aim of this book is to demonstrate 'how the two Hesiodic poems must be read together as two halves of an integrated whole, embracing both the divine and the human cosmos' (p. i). The *Theogony* and the *Works and Days* 'embrace both the beginning and end of the process of cosmic evolution' (pp. 1–2). Furthermore, C. asserts that the *Catalogue of Women*, 'whether Hesiodic or not', constitutes 'a suitable supplement to both compositions by offering a heroic perspective intermediate between the divine and the human, both chronologically and conceptually' (p. 166).

This complementarity, especially that of the *Theogony* and the *WD*, has been often observed by critics (see, for instance, the lucid description by Wismann[1]): interpreters differ primarily in assessing the consistency and the programmatic nature of this complementarity. By a critical gesture that is both bold and new, C. reads the poems

[1]Heinz Wismann in F. Blaise, P. Judet de la Combe, Ph. Rousseau (edd.), *Le métier du mythe* (Lille, 1996), p. 22.

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