

this book, and one cannot fail to be most favorably impressed by the care and intelligence S has brought to this work. He has produced a book that is highly serviceable, stimulating, and above all reliable.

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KEVIN ROBB, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece*, New York, Oxford University Press 1994, pp. x + 310. ISBN 0-19-505905-0.

In this study of the reintroduction of writing into Greek society [italicized prefix mine] and its immediate and eventual cultural impact, Kevin Robb discusses the 'when', 'where', 'how', and 'how we know', but has a different interpretation of the 'why' than that offered recently by Barry Powell, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet*, Cambridge 1991 (reviewed in *Minos* 25, 1990-1991, pp. 446-449) with whose central thesis—especially the cultural primacy of Homer and oral epic in the preliterate 'Dark Ages' and early literate archaic period—Robb is sympathetic. Both Powell and Robb rely closely—and correctly in my view—on the dates and nature of the earliest inscriptional evidence to date the adoption of alphabetic writing to approximately the mid-8th century B.C. and to hypothesize about why the alphabet was invented at this particular historical moment. Robb's response (p. 37 n. 11) to the theories of Semitic epigraphers like Naveh arguing for an earlier date for the creation of Greek alphabet is particularly apt: "No amount of argument from script comparisons, it seems to me, especially when based on isolated letters, can overcome a total silence in the inscriptional record". It seems that way to me, too. Script comparisons between isolated signs distorted for decades our views of the development of Linear B from Linear A (cf. T. G. Palaima, «The Development of the Mycenaean Writing System», in J.-P. Olivier and T. G. Palaima eds., *Texts, Tablets and Scribes*, Suplementos a *Minos* 10, 1988, pp. 269-342). Both Powell and Robb stress the orality of archaic Greek society and put forward early inscriptions like those on the Nestor Cup from Pithekoussai, the Dipylon oinochoe from Athens and the *xenos* oinochoe from Ithaca as evidence that the primary motive for the most distinctive innovation in adapting the Greek alphabet from the Phoenician (the introduction of signs for pure vowels) was to record hexameter verse. [Both follow I. J. Gelb in classifying pre-Greek Semitic scripts structurally as syllabaries, wherein each consonantal sign represents 'consonant plus any vowel' (cf. Robb, esp. pp. 265-266, 271, 284 n. 6)].

Thereafter Powell and Robb part company (cf. pp. 265-279 for Robb's own capsule critique of his own theory and its differences from Powell's). For Powell the alphabet was created by an 'adapter' specifically to put down in writing, and thereby preserve and transmit, the monumental texts of Homer. The early *symposiastic* inscriptions are for Powell an indication of the spread of these written texts among aristocratic elites, initially along Euboean trade routes. Robb, however, stresses that Greek society remained mainly oral and did not begin to have any significant *cultural/institutional* literacy until the fifth century B.C. For Robb (p. 252) then the earliest inscriptions written in hexameters "reflect widespread absorption of oral Homeric or epical verse through the preceding several hundred years of the so-called Dark Ages". Before the textualization of knowledge and the creation of institutionalized procedures of education dependent on literacy (e.g., text-based 'schools' like the Lyceum), "epical verse", as Robb calls it, was the chief mechanism of *paideia* or "enculturation". In the preliterate period and for several

centuries at least after the adoption of the alphabet, according to Robb, p. 23, "epical speech belonged to all the people, who heard it, understood it, cherished it, and even, when appropriate, could rise to the occasion and completely imitate it". They also used it in ways paralleled in other anthropologically documented oral cultures, as the principal means of inculcating culture and maintaining cultural norms. Oral sung poetry within the context of the male *sumposion* taught and reinforced modes of responsible ethical and moral and civic or pre-civic behavior and such practices as guest-friendship and hospitality. Many of the paideutic functions of oral verse were later performed by script (pp. 34-35). Alphabetic writing "intrudes" into such an environment. It gradually responds and, as do all technological advances, contributes to social changes that result in the institutional literacy of the late 5th and early 4th centuries. Quite simply then, in Robb's view, the conditions or motives for writing down Homer *in toto* did not exist in the 8th century B.C., while the very "economics of production" seem daunting —Robb (p. 256) guesses that ca. 300 feet of manufactured papyrus would have been necessary to record our *Iliad* and rhetorically ponders how many valuable sheep would have to have been slaughtered in order to yield the required number of *diphtherai*, if skins were to be used instead of papyri.

Robb (pp. 39-43 *et passim*) argues that oral epical verse would have been performed at *sumposia*, at receptions of guests as prescribed by the code of *xenia*, and on other prominent social occasions (weddings, funerals, temple dedications, public religious festivals, and so on). Epics like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, funeral praise songs for great men deceased, theogonic and other hymns, and festival recitations not only taught their audiences how to know the world and behave within it, but they also "embedded in the popular memory... favorite snatches or even sequences of verse". Epic poetry provided moral and ethical *paideia* and "transmitt[ed] what amounts to a way of life". Interpreted from this point of view, the *Odyssey* and parts of the *Iliad* become instructional texts on the proprieties of the practice of *xenia* and the role of the *sumposia* and of dancing and singing within the rituals of receiving the *xenos* and being a *xenos* (pp. 28-35, 49). On appropriate occasions individuals would have taken advantage of alphabetic writing and their environmentally conditioned knowledge of epic song to inscribe suitably allusive verse on *oinochoai*, cups, and even dedicatory objects (plaques, spits, statuettes) (pp. 55-59). There is abundant evidence for "craft literacy" during the period 700-450 B.C. among the potters, vase painters, stone masons and bronze workers who used their knowledge of script to make dedications "speak." I take for granted that Robb would not maintain that the *Odyssey* is *only* a paideutic text on how hosts and guests should behave, and that he would not deny aristocratic circles a major role in commissioning costly dedications and thereby supporting literate craftsmen, in practicing and refining the arts of the *sumposion*, and in providing, as do the courts of the *basileis* (e.g., Alcinous) in the *Odyssey*, the environment for production of grand epic. Robb's point, however, is to stress the "traditional and popular" nature of Homeric epic (p. 257), the consequent pervasive influence of orality and oral epic verse throughout society, and how these explain the late development in Greek culture of *institutional* literacy in such areas as law, education, and history.

Let me make clear that I find Robb's main thesis compelling and of keen interest, and not only to Homerists, students of writing *per se*, and the epichoric scripts crowd. Robb's discussion is far-ranging and more than adequate in technical areas, e.g., his linguistic and historical analysis of the creation/adaptation of the Greek alphabet (pp. 265-286) wherein he gallops from Denise Schmandt-Besserat's tokens through Falkenstein's Uruk down to McCarter's eighth-century Phoenician texts. It falls short in its overall treatment, I think, in the area and period of principal interest to the readers of *Minos*. Throughout Robb's discussion of the oral nature of Greek society, of the role of oral poetry and the social institutions and occasions through and at which oral poetry would have been performed,

and of the natural limitations orality would have imposed on the cultural applications of writing, he views historical Greek culture and epic verse as a completely post-Mycenaean creation. The passage quoted above which refers to the cultural influence of “epical verse through the preceding several hundred years of the so-called Dark Ages” is typical. There is one mention of *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, but that only to cite Wace’s opinion in the introduction to the first edition. It is telling that Robb (p. 3) dates Wace’s opinion to 1953 (*sic!!!*) despite the facts that *Docs*¹ was published in 1956 and Wace closes his foreword with a note stating: “This introduction was written in the winter of 1954-5 while I was a member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton”. Because of a peculiar technique of bibliographical reference —items are included in the bibliography only if reference is made to them in more than one chapter— there is no full reference to *Docs*¹ or *Docs*² in the footnotes or the closing bibliography. It would be picayune to dwell on this uncorrected blunder on the first page of the introduction, if it were not representative of sloppy proofreading, inaccurate references, and careless presentation of primary evidence throughout the text (more on this below).

“Wace 1953” also signals that Robb is woefully unaware of most Mycenological evidence, and discussions thereof, pertaining to even those topics that are central to his theses. This weakens his treatment of the historical evidence for writing and orality and distorts certain of his theories. Robb did not have available to him C. J. Ruijgh’s masterful «D’Homère aux origines proto-mycéniennes de la tradition épique», in Jan Paul Crielaard ed., *Homeric Questions*, Amsterdam, Gieben 1995, pp. 1-96, with its demonstration *inter alia* of the proto-Mycenaean origin of *Il.* 7.166 = 8.264 = 17.259. But «Le mycénien et Homère», in A. Morpurgo Davies and Y. Duhoux eds., *Linear B: A 1984 Survey*, Louvain-la-Neuve 1985, pp. 143-190, was out a full nine years before the publication date of *Literacy and Paideia*, and it covers some of the same ground. In more mainstream Classical journals, M. L. West has likewise argued for the existence of heroic poetry in the Second Millennium, cf. «Greek Poetry 2000-700 B.C.», *ClQu* N.S. 23, 1973, pp. 179-193, esp. pp. 187-188, for metrical, dialectal, comparative IE, and archaeological arguments that there is “nothing inherently unlikely in the idea that the Greeks had heroic poetry in the first half of the second millennium” and dactylic epic in ‘south’ Mycenaean in the second half of the Second Millennium. For reconstructed early Mycenaean verse, cf. «The Rise of the Greek Epic», *JHS* 108, 1988, pp. 151-172, esp. pp. 156-159. If we combine Ruijgh’s —and West’s— support (in Crielaard, pp. 85-88) of the antiquity of hexameter verse within the Aegean and its artificial —used in a non-pejorative sense— adjustment through time with the iconographical (cf. T. G. Palaima, «The Nature of the Mycenaean *Wanax*», in P. Rehak ed., *The Role of the Ruler in the Prehistoric Aegean*, *Aegaeum* 11, Liège 1995, pp. 132-133 with references) and archaeological evidence for the existence of just the sort of ceremonial and ritual receptions, complete with lyre players and banqueting, that Robb analyzes in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, it is difficult not to see as one major factor in the limited literacy of the Mycenaean period the very orality of which Robb makes much for the Dark Ages and the historical period. If Mycenaean palatial culture functioned satisfactorily through the use of such traditional oral mechanisms of acculturation as operated, according to Robb, in the Dark Ages and the archaic period, there would have been no need or even impulse to use Linear B writing to codify laws —or even to compile lists of precedents or ‘reformulated verdicts’ (cf. Robb, pp. 283-284 n. 5 in which context reference might have been made also to the Hittite law ‘codes’), record *oral* poetic verse, chronicle the histories of the rulers of palatial territories, and so on. Thus Robb’s views of orality and institutional literacy are applicable to the Bronze Age palatial culture of Mycenaean Greece and its restricted use of the Linear B script.

Failing to take the Mycenaean evidence into account would have been regrettable, but fair enough, if it had been left entirely out of account. There are, however, instances where Robb, without providing references to —and seemingly without relying on— any

Mycenological scholarship, seriously distorts the Mycenaean evidence. The editors at the Oxford University Press pronounced *imprimatur* after unsatisfactory proofreading. They and the outside readers upon whom they relied apparently failed to suggest or to require that Robb consult standard Mycenological reference works on matters about which he himself makes pronouncements. I discuss here two examples.

On page 44, Robb is discussing, as a preliminary to his treatment of the oldest Greek alphabetic inscriptions, how writing is used on personal possessions like pottery in order to note ownership. He states that this practice may even have been known to the Bronze Age Greeks: "They occasionally used their clumsy syllabic scripts, especially the undeciphered Linear A, to inscribe a few signs on stirrup jars and (perhaps) similar items, including at least one libation table". This is gibberish. It seems to imply that Linear A is one of the Bronze Age Greek scripts. It dismisses in the standard naive way Linear B as "clumsy" without any understanding of the subtleties of phonological perception that went into transforming Linear A into Linear B —including some of the very same linguistic insights that Robb (pp. 266-274 with notes) considers marvels in the inventor and invention of the Greek alphabet. Robb here fails to recognize the purpose of the personal and place names painted on Linear B stirrup jars —a mere five minutes glancing at Erik Hallager's definitive treatment in *AJA* 91, 1987, pp. 171-190, would indicate the tripartite formulaic complexity of the numerous inscriptions, that they relate to economic production, and that they have little to do with ownership. What Robb means by an inscription in one of the Greek Bronze Age scripts on "at least one libation table" is impossible to fathom. This muddle is not even graced with a reference. If it had been, it would have had to attain to some degree of accuracy and clarity.

Particularly pertinent here, because of Robb's own proper concern with the use of the Greek alphabet upon dedicatory objects, is his lack of any knowledge of the probable dedicatory and formulaic nature of Linear A libation table inscriptions: cf. Y. Duhoux, «Le linéaire A: problèmes de déchiffrement», in Duhoux *et al.* eds., *Problems in Decipherment*, BCILL 49, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1989, pp. 60-119. A reading of T. G. Palaima, «Comments on Mycenaean Literacy», in J. T. Killen, J. L. Melena, J.-P. Olivier eds., *Studies in Mycenaean and Classical Greek Presented to John Chadwick*, *Minos* 20-22, 1987, pp. 499-510, would have provided Robb with some simple understanding of the applications and limitations of script in the Mycenaean period. Since Robb opts for Cyprus as the likeliest place of origin for the Greek alphabet and also sees influence of the structure of the Cypriote Syllabic script upon the inventor of the alphabet, he might also profit from seeing how diversely and efficiently a syllabic script can be applied and how well it can compete with the Greek alphabet: T. G. Palaima, «The Advent of the Greek Alphabet on Cyprus: A Competition of Scripts», in C. Baurain *et al.* eds., *Phoinikeia Grammata*, *Collections d'Études Classiques* vol. 6, Namur 1991, pp. 449-471.

A lengthy discussion of the institution of *xenia* is central to Robb's arguments about oral *paideia*. One would have wished that either Robb himself or the editors or readers of the Oxford University Press might have grasped the wisdom of seeing whether there is any Mycenaean evidence for this word or institution. Instead Robb (p. 52) proposes that "[t]he protections of *xenia* may well not have been a concern of closely allied Mycenaean cities in the least" and that singers of epic verse transferred the institution back to "distant, epical ancestors", i.e., Mycenaean, "in order to secure present compliance to the custom [*sic*] ways". This is accompanied by a discussion (p. 71 n. 18) of Thucydides' *archaeologia* in which Robb "hazards", as far as I can reconstruct, that Thucydides deduces from conditions that prevailed during the post-Mycenaean period of the 11th and 10th centuries that the safeguards of the practice of *xenia* were lost during this period. Thucydides then retrojects the loss of the cultural supports for *xenia* into the time before the Trojan War, i.e., the Bronze Age. Following such convoluted speculation, we are to believe that epic singers of the Dark Ages took on the role of moral reformers and stressed

the theme of *xenia* in order to “reinforce its proprieties”. It is not my purpose here to disentangle any more than I have the snarls in this logical skein. But one can assert that such hypothesizing is undone by the clear textual evidence that the cultural practice of *xenia* was firmly imbedded in Mycenaean palatial society. To posit convincingly, to Mycenologists at least, that the custom of *xenia* was lost and then reinserted into the epic tradition by Dark Age singers would require: 1. arguing for nearly absolute social discontinuity at all levels between the collapse of the Mycenaean palatial period when *xenia* was practiced and the historical period when *xenia* was also practiced; 2. refuting the evidence for Bronze Age epic song, including not only Ruijgh’s dialectal/linguistic/verse-structural evidence, but also such evidence as is provided by onomastics and naming patterns in the Linear B and Homeric texts and in historical Greek inscriptions and texts. A Homerist should at least begin by looking up *ke-se-ne-wi-ja* / *ke-se-nu-wi-ja* and *ke-se-ni-wi-jo* in *Docs*² or F. Aura Jorro, *Diccionario Micénico* vol. 1, Madrid 1985, pp. 353-354.

Here follows a random selection of proofreading and other muddles:

- p. 10 “in the adoption [of] the five Greek vowels”.
- pp. 15, 16, 296 *Coranto* vs. *Coronto* in a journal citation of one of Robb’s own articles.
- pp. 46 and 69 Rüter and Pithekoussi (*sic*) vs. Ruter and Pithcussai (*sic*) in citation.
- p. 49 *pistōsanta* mistakenly for *pistōsanto* in transliterating Greek.
- p. 56 *en aulai* for *en aulai* in a discussion of metrical formulae.
- p. 70 n. 9 *Od.* XI.641-642 mistakenly for *Il.* XI.642-643.
- p. 71 n. 17 and throughout reference to G. Herman’s fundamental work on *xenia* as *Ritualiz[ed] Friendship and the Greek City* instead of *Ritualised*.
- p. 263 n.3 *Ptol[e]maic*
- p. 267 for Turkish *lisei* read *lise*
- p. 271 change $X^1X^1X^1X^1p^{X_2X}$ to $X^1X^1X^1X^1p^{X_2X}$
- p. 310 Nau[s]jicaa

More serious are mistakes such as the incorrect transliterations in providing an illustration of how unsuited the Semitic script with its non-representation of vowels would be for writing Greek (p. 271). Robb renders *dikaiō*, *dikasmos*, *dikasmios*, *dikaïō*, and *dikaiōs* as *dkz*, *dksms*, *dksms*, *dik*, *dik*. The erroneous non-vocalic representations even include vowels! Correct the last two to *dk* and *dks*. Elsewhere the discussions of how to reconstruct the *lacunae* and the verse patterns of fragmentary metrical inscriptions are hampered by imprecise and inconsistent use of dashes to indicate letters or syllables. It therefore took me—and I assume it will take a reader less familiar with epichoric scripts and epigraphy—a good deal of time to work out just how Robb was reconstructing the *xenos* oinochoe from Ithaca (p. 49) and the votive plaque from Aegina (pp. 55-56). Under serious omissions in the bibliography, I would put: S. Stoddart and J. Whitley, «The Social Context of Literacy in Archaic Greece and Etruria», *Antiquity* 62: 237, 1988, pp. 761-772.

Before closing let me say that, as inviting as it is to link the creation of the alphabet directly to the earliest hexametrical inscriptions that make allusions to epic verse and to stress the importance of vowels in being able to record Greek hexameter, both the Powell hypothesis and the Robb hypothesis must deal with the fact that vowels are primary conveyors of meaning in the Greek language in general. I.e., the words in the phrase ἀταλῶτατα παίζειι transcribed as $X^1X^1X^1X^1p^{X_2X}$ are intolerably ambiguous whether or not they are part of any poetical/metrical expression. One might consider the sequence $p^{X^1th^X}$ and reconstruct it variously as ἔπαθε or ἔπειθε or ἔπιθε or πείθει or πείθω or πείθη or πάθη or πάθω or ἐπίθου or πίθου or πίθου or $p^{X^1th^Xn^X}$ as πείθω or πιθών or ἔπιθου

ορ ἔπειθον ορ παθῶν ορ ἔπαθον ορ πείθειν ορ πιθεῖν ορ παθεῖν ορ πίθων ορ πόθεν ορ πίθων ορ πύθων ορ Πύθων ορ πόθων in order to get some sense of the importance of notation of vowels (a feature of both the Cypriote and the Linear B syllabaries, including separate signs for *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*) for writing Greek (these sample alternatives are not exhaustive). In fact NW Semitic has no words that begin with vowels. The introduction of pure vowel signs as a feature of an alphabet to write Greek would have been suggested, as it was to the inventors/adapters of the two syllabaries used for Greek, also by the preponderance of vowel-initial roots and forms in Greek of the 8th century. One need think no further than the alpha-privative and the epsilon augment to recognize a further pressing need for vowel representation in historical Greek. In Robb's own now-corrected illustration (cited above), without vowel signs it is impossible to distinguish between *dks* = δίκαιος and *dks* = ἄδικος.

As long as there are early prose inscriptions —and there are (cf. Stoddart and Whitley cited above and A. Johnston, «The Extent and Use of Literacy: The Archaeological Evidence», in R. Hägg ed., *The Greek Renaissance of the Eighth Century B.C.: Tradition and Innovation*, Stockholm 1983, pp. 63-68)— that simply mark ownership and the like, practical applications of script cannot be ruled out. Robb's objection that “[i]f rudimentary proprietary marking were the purpose for adopting the Phoenician script,... it would have been taken over ‘as is’, with vowel development later” ignores the importance of the vowels for representing the Greek language *per se* and also the existence of pure vowel signs in both syllabaries devised to write primarily non-poetic Greek. Robb (p. 274) proposes that the singer of epic verses and those accustomed to listening to epic song “heard the vowel sounds very precisely. A recording device, a script, that ignored them or created ambiguity and chaos in the written version of the verses by failing to specify them would therefore be totally inadequate for recording verse”. The Greek alphabet as created is a satisfactory mechanism for representing Greek. It is inadequate for representing the metrical patterns of verse precisely because it fails to designate the lengths of any of the five vowels, and uses *eta* and *omega* only in Ionic where the psilotic nature of the dialect frees up the sign that elsewhere marks aspiration. Is precise rendering of verse then really the compelling and original motive, whether to record at first grand works of oral epic (Powell) or epic-inspired phrases (Robb)?

Robb asserts in his conclusion (p. 253) that as the millennium approaches it becomes ever more likely that the “rediscovery of the oral dimension in Greek life in the Geometric and Archaic periods and its strong residual effects in the culture of the High Classical and Classical periods” and Milman Parry's role within this scholarly process will be considered “the greatest discovery of the twentieth century in classical scholarship”. I do not think that even Mycenologists who have lived and worked before and after the decipherment of Linear B in 1952 would dispute this claim. They would, I am sure, however, appreciate some use by Parryite Homerists of the evidence provided by Ventris's equally stunning intellectual feat and by the work of his equally imaginative and industrious intellectual heirs. They might even make so bold as to propose a final correction to Robb's text in the way of an editorial comment, rather than a proofreading supplement: “[one] of the greatest discover[ies]”.

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