Writing and Literacy in Early China examines a topic of international importance: the emergence and spread of literacy in ancient human society. Writing arose separately in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Mesoamerica, and China, and it is widely acknowledged that modern Chinese orthography preserves logographic principles shared by its most ancient forms three thousand years ago, being unique among all the known writing systems in the modern world. In the past three decades, the discovery of previously unknown texts dating to the third century BCE and earlier as well as older versions of transmitted texts has revolutionized the study of early Chinese writing.

The long-term continuity and stability of the Chinese written language allow for this detailed study of the role literacy played in early civilization. The widely informed and highly respected contributors to this volume inquire into modes of manuscript production, the purposes for which manuscripts were produced, and the ways in which they were actually used. In all these areas, the book carefully evaluates the current evidence and offers groundbreaking new interpretations. Writing and Literacy in Early China illuminates the nature of literacy for both scribes and readers.

Contents

Introduction: Writing as a Phenomenon of Literacy
Li Feng and David Prager Branner

Chapter 1. Getting “Right” with Heaven and the Origins of Writing in China
David W. Pankenier

Chapter 2. Literacy and the Emergence of Writing in China
William G. Boltz

Chapter 3. Phonology in the Chinese Script and Its Relationship to Early Chinese Literacy
David Prager Branner

Chapter 4. Literacy to the South and the East of Anyang in Shang China: Zhengzhou and Daxinzhuang
Ken-ichi Takashima

Chapter 5. The Evidence for Scribal Training at Anyang
Adam Smith

Chapter 6. Textual Identity and the Role of Literacy in the Transmission of Early Chinese Literature
Matthias L. Richter

Chapter 7. The Royal Audience and Its Reflections in Western Zhou Bronze Inscriptions
Lothar von Falkenhausen

Chapter 8. Literacy and the Social Contexts of Writing in the Western Zhou
Li Feng

Chapter 9. Education and the Way of the Former Kings
Constance A. Cook

Chapter 10. Soldiers, Scribes, and Women: Literacy among the Lower Orders in Early China
Robin D. S. Yates

Chapter 11. Craftsman’s Literacy: Uses of Writing among Male and Female Artisans in Qin and Han China
Anthony Barbieri-Low

Order from the University of Washington Press:
http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/