

Chapter VI Epic Poetry by David Gaunt, pp. 162-194

p. 171 Thanks to Milman Parry and A. B. Lord, we have a good knowledge of how, over a period of several centuries, the Odyssey and Iliad were probably performed; what we do not know is when and by whom they were first written down. Bards have no need of writing, and in fact the evidence from Jugoslavia suggests that the arrival of writing leads to the decline and eventual extinction of oral techniques. The poems themselves do not specifically refer to writing, . . . We know approximately when the Greek world again became literate, this time using its own version of the Phoenician alphabet. There is strong evidence for written codes of laws in the Greek states by the mid-seventh century B.C.;² and it would seem that, as writing became common, so the craft of the ῥαψῳδός, or bard, declined, until, perhaps at Athens under Pisistratus, it became necessary, if the poems were to be preserved, to institute a quite different type of performance, that given by rhapsodes.