

# Introduction

The contributions gathered together here follow on from a seminar organized within the framework of the network, 'Literate worlds' (CNRS, Paris, Programme 'Archives de la Création') in June 1998, centring on Jean Irigoïn's book (1997), *Tradition et critique des textes grecs* (Paris, Les Belles Lettres).

Collective study continued in a two-monthly seminar during the year 1998–9. An international symposium, organized under the auspices of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, with the involvement of the Commission nationale française for UNESCO and of the CNRS, has just examined more closely the related questions developed in these pages. This first symposium, entitled 'Du livre au texte [From the book to the text]', took place in Paris, 23–25 June 1999 (in the auditorium of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France at Tolbiac). It was dedicated to the history of the constitution of the great literary corpora, through work on library, philological and editorial disciplines, which fixed the letter and the meaning of the texts inherited from the tradition, from the clay tablets of Sumer to the computerized libraries of today. Libraries, in their diverse historical and cultural forms are viewed as guardians of the text, playing a decisive role in the fabric of readability.

A second symposium, entitled 'Les métamorphoses du lecteur [The metamorphoses of the reader]', took place at Alexandria, 27–30 November 1999, in the conference centre of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. It followed the evolution of literate practices connected with reading, the intellectual use of texts and the instrumental role of the library in the production of knowledge. Reading, translating, annotating, commenting, citing, memorizing, criticizing: these fundamental activities cross the history of literate cultures, from the papyri of Alexandria to the dynamic readings of today's hypertext, while reflecting the evolution of societies and of concepts of memory and of knowledge.

Christian Jacob