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Messy margins of Polis Religion

Kernos, 2010, 23, p 2 - 19



Jan Bremmer

***Manteis*, Magic, Mysteries and Mythography**

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Référence électronique

Jan Bremmer, « *Manteis*, Magic, Mysteries and Mythography », *Kernos* [En ligne], 23 | 2010, mis en ligne le 21 août 2012, consulté le 27 décembre 2012. URL : <http://kernos.revues.org/1559> ; DOI : 10.4000/kernos.1559

Éditeur : Centre International d'Etude de la religion grecque antique

<http://kernos.revues.org>

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Document accessible en ligne sur :

<http://kernos.revues.org/1559>

Document généré automatiquement le 27 décembre 2012. La pagination ne correspond pas à la pagination de l'édition papier.

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Jan Bremmer

Manteis, Magic, Mysteries and Mythography

Messy Margins of *Polis* Religion?

Pagination de l'édition papier : p. 13-35

- 1 With the passing away of Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood (1945-2007), my generation has lost its most personal voice and, perhaps, its most powerful intellect. Christiane had still much to offer and her death is an irreparable loss. I knew her for thirty years, and she always was a very loyal friend. I would never visit Oxford without having lunch with her and her husband Mike Inwood, often in Trinity College, and those occasions are some of my best memories. It is also fair to say that from my generation she was one of the most polemical scholars. One contradicted her at one's peril, as several of her publications all too clearly show.¹ That is why my contribution is delivered not without a certain feeling of ambivalence. Certainly, while she was still alive, it would have been very hard to disagree with her in print at length. Yet the memory of a great scholar is never served by hagiography, and it is in the spirit of the greatest admiration that I would like to ask some questions regarding Christiane's seminal and highly influential articles on the idea of *polis* religion.²
- 2 It is a sign of her persuasiveness that criticisms of Christiane's model have long been few and far between, and that a sustained critical analysis appeared only last year.³ In my contribution I will take a closer look at the more marginal aspects of *polis* religion. Although these have recently been admirably studied by Robert Parker and Esther Eidinow,⁴ it may still be possible to add a few more touches to their general picture, as the study of these marginal aspects remains dominated, to a certain extent, by old prejudices of previous generations of scholars, which in turn were sometimes fed by the prejudices or representations of ancient authors. I will concentrate on those areas of Greek, especially Athenian, religious life in which books and writing were particularly important, as the written word enabled people to take a more independent stance in *polis* religion. Subsequently, I will make observations on *manteis* (§ 1), magic (§ 2), mysteries and Orphism (§ 3) and mythography (§ 4), and then end with some final observations on the nature of *polis* religion (§ 5)

1. *Manteis*

- 3 Let us start with the Greek seers. It is clear that in the Archaic Age the oldest seers still operated without the use of writing or texts. In fact, the idea that oracles 'speak' and 'are spoken' lasted well into the fifth century. In a valuable study of Greek 'holy tales' and 'holy books',⁵ Albert Henrichs has recently stressed that oracles are 'intrinsically oral, that is to say they "speak" to the human recipient in their own voice by addressing an issue, as at *Birds* 962 f.: "There is an oracle (*chrêsmos*) of Bakis explicitly speaking about (*legôn*) Cloudcuckoland'.⁶ And indeed, as the late Olivier Masson has argued, Bakis actually means 'Speaker'.⁷ This oral character started to change from the late seventh century onwards when oracles and prophetic utterances were fixed into writing. Our oldest example is the so-called 'skin of Epimenides', apparently a parchment sheet with oracles of that great but elusive purifier.⁸ Epimenides' grave was in the official building of the Spartan ephors, who also regularly consulted an incubation oracle in Thalamae, a hamlet south-west of Sparta,⁹ whereas each of the two Spartan kings had two Pythioi, officials who could consult the Delphic oracle, the results of which they preserved in an archive for future consultation.¹⁰ We see here clearly the combination of seers, power and literacy in the area of the gods' messages.
- 4 Power over these messages must have been considered so important that the Pisistratids too kept oracles on the acropolis, and Pisistratus' son Hipparchus expelled the man who had been officially charged with collecting oracles, Onomacritus, when he was seized in the very act of falsifying

one of these oracles.¹¹ When in 510 B.C., the Spartan king Cleomenes ousted the Pisistratids, he took the oracles home in the process, to be stored, presumably, in the Spartan royal archives.¹² This close connection between oracles and the ruling powers is also suggested by Herodotus' story that the Spartan Dorieus was advised by the seer Antichares who cited an oracle of Laios (V, 43). It was apparently not considered strange that the Theban kings owned oracles and this, presumably, added to the authority of the oracular source. In fact, Pausanias (IX, 26, 3) mentions that Laios revealed to the Sphinx an oracle that was known only to the kings of Thebes. It fits this situation that many kings of archaic times were also known as seers, such as Anios of Delos¹³, Polyidos of Argos, who was the son of Koiranos, 'Ruler',¹⁴ Mounichos, Teneros and Phineus of Thrace.¹⁵ A similar combination of political authority and oracles prevailed in Rome where the Senate anxiously guarded the Sibylline oracles, which were even classified as 'hidden books', *libri reconditi*.¹⁶

- 5 Literacy, however, is a great democratiser. In the fifth century we find all kinds of oracle collections and collectors.¹⁷ Our earliest known example is probably Polemainetos, who bequeathed his books on divination to his friend Thrasyllus in the middle of the fifth century (Isocr., 19, 5-9), but Aristophanes repeatedly mentions the collections of Bakis and Musaeus, the latter an Athenian and the former a Boeotian.¹⁸ These oracles were probably used in debates in the assembly and thus liable to the approval of the audience,¹⁹ but that was only one place where they were quoted or chanted.²⁰ The books will also have been used in more private gatherings, as in Aristophanes' *Birds* (980-989), where they were not subject to public scrutiny. They were peddled by men and women,²¹ and 'Once we are alerted to their presence, we find them everywhere throughout our sources'.²² As Burkert well notes, these seers and diviners 'remained somewhat marginal to Polis religion, and could never even think of authoritarian organization of belief, of dogma to monopolize the creation of sense'.²³

2. Magic

- 6 A similar increasing visibility, even if not in the public sphere or the literary sources, is the case of magical spells and curses. In the last two decades the study of ancient magic has been a booming business.²⁴ Yet this study has remained mainly limited to the small crowd of aficionados of ancient magic and has hardly entered the study of *polis* or, for that matter, Greek religion: there is no discussion of magic in the handbooks of Nilsson and Burkert and neither is there an entry 'magic' in the indices of Christiane's books. Yet in some respects this is an excellent opportunity to compare *polis* religion with what Robert Parker calls 'unlicensed religion',²⁵ a term we will have to come back to.
- 7 Even if we limit our attention to magic today to the curse tablets, it is clear that these were part of all layers of Athenian society. The mention in these tablets of the politicians Lysurgus and Demosthenes, but also of Phocion (to note only the most famous ones)²⁶ suggests that the practice pervaded the whole of Athenian society, from top to bottom, aiming mainly at males, but sometimes also at females, although the latter were stigmatised as *laikastriai*, a Greek term to which the English translation 'tart' in Eidinow does not really do justice.²⁷ In passing we note that women were already the target of very early Selinuntine *defixiones* but without attracting such malice.²⁸ Once again, it is literacy that must have made a real change in this respect.
- 8 Our oldest curse tablets derive from Sicily and Magna Graecia, where they emerge in the sixth century,²⁹ whereas in Attica they arrive in the course of the later fifth century. Fritz Graf has suggested two possible explanations. First, the early Attic spells were written exclusively on perishable materials and only later on lead;³⁰ or, secondly, the *defixiones* originated in Sicily and Magna Graecia and were brought from there to Athens. It is true that Plato (*Leg.*, 933a) mentions waxen images attached to doors and spells deposited on crossroads, which in both cases would hardly have survived the ravages of time. Yet the time difference seems to speak unequivocally for the priority of Italy. Now the ancestor of the curse tablet probably derives from the Assyro-Babylonian world, as Graf has argued,³¹ and Near Eastern influence has also been claimed for the enumeration of the different body parts in anatomical curses.³² Given the Carthaginian rule of Western Sicily from the sixth century onwards and the occurrence

of the Carthaginian name Mago on an earlier fifth-century Selinuntine *defixio*,³³ Near Eastern influence on Sicily via Carthage seems impossible to overlook and very plausible.³⁴ Such an influence would also account better for the fact that Pythagorean or Orphic influence is not noticeable in the earliest curses.

9 Having looked at their origin, let us now turn to their connection with *polis* religion. If anywhere strict religious control was impossible, it was in the area of eschatology. The curse tablets therefore present an interesting case where we can compare *polis* religion with its possible opposite, admittedly a rather vague term to which I will come back at the end of this piece (§ 5). As we know, literature always makes certain choices determined by genre, audience or personal preference of the author. Thus we hardly find a single trace of Orphic and Pythagorean beliefs in Greek tragedy, and the statement of a character in Euripides' *Meleagros* (fr. 532 Kannicht) that 'after death every man is earth and shadow: nothing goes to nothing' might even suggest the absence of any belief in an afterlife. However, these words clearly demonstrate that we cannot simply extrapolate to general beliefs or collective representations from one literary or artistic medium, since, as we know from vase paintings and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the Athenians, like the other Greeks, believed in the usual afterlife suspects, such as Charon, Hades, Cerberus and Persephone. In fact, some of these figures must be pretty old: a dog already guards the road to the underworld in ancient Indian, Persian and Nordic mythology,³⁵ and a ferryman is part of the eschatology of many peoples.³⁶ Finally, Persephone's name has recently been etymologized as 'she who beats the ears of corn', an explanation that fits the activity of girls in many less developed areas and probably predates the first millennium.³⁷ The antiquity of these figures, then, well guarantees their presence in the Greek belief system, even if an element of doubt seems to have always been there and would continue to do so well into the Byzantine period.³⁸

10 Do we find the eschatological 'inherited conglomerate' of Charon, Hades, Cerberus and Persephone back on the Attic curse tablets of the Classical era or do we find different divine figures? Let us first note that we do not encounter Charon. This is not really surprising, but it also shows that it is not the normal underworld that we have here. This is also demonstrated by the scarce invocation of Hades who is mentioned only twice (*DTA* 102; *SGD* 44). Hades' name also hardly appears on Attic vase painting and may well have been felt too infernal to invoke.³⁹ The most popular deity by far is Hermes, who is mentioned with just his own name (8#), but also as Katochos (14#), 'he who holds down', Hermes Chthonios (8#), 'of the Earth', Eriounios (3#: unknown meaning), Dolios (2#), 'Cunning', and once as Lord Katochos (*DTA* 94) and as God Katochos (*DTA* 95), the last perhaps being examples of the soft Attic taboo on the pronunciation of names of underworld powers.⁴⁰ Interestingly, then, we find in these tablets not only the name of the god Hermes but also Hermes with various different epithets.

11 From these epithets only one can be found in Attica as a cult epithet outside the curse tablets: Hermes Chthonios. During the *Choes* the Athenians sacrificed to Hermes Chthonios but to none of the Olympian gods, according to Theopompus (*FGrH* 115 F 347ab). For the study of epithets this is a very interesting passage, as Hermes was of course one of the Olympian gods. We can see here that in particular circumstances the Greeks could completely isolate a god +epithet from the same god without epithet.⁴¹ From the other epithets, Katochos is clearly the most popular, because Hermes is often asked 'to bind' the objects of the curse (*DTA* 89, 100, 102, *DT* 50, etc.); Eriounios is an old epic epithet, which was no longer understandable but was probably chosen for its poetic effects,⁴² whereas Dolios indicates the trickiness which is hoped for to defeat the opponents. Unlike Katochos, Dolios does occur as an epithet of Hermes in tragedy and comedy, but in Attica it was not a cult epithet.⁴³

12 The prominence of Hermes is somewhat striking, as he hardly figures, for example, on Sicilian curse tablets. Yet Hermes was important on the funerary white lekythoi, which were the most popular Athenian grave gifts from the middle of the sixth to the end of the fifth century. Given that the lekythoi were placed on graves of recently deceased Athenians, the presence of Hermes as the great psychopomp, often in the company of Charon, is not surprising, but his role is

always limited to leading the deceased to Charon: he seems to be absent from the underworld proper.⁴⁴ In short, the prominence of Hermes is typical of the curse tablets.

13 Moreover, Hermes is several times invoked with Persephone,⁴⁵ who is the second popular divinity in the curse tablets. Her presence is hardly surprising and does not really add new aspects to her more public persona. In one case the form of her name, *Persephoneian* (*SGD* 42), suggests an (ultimate) origin in dactylic poetry, such as we also find in some curse tablets from Sicily and Boeotia.⁴⁶ In two other cases we find the form P(h)errephatta (*DT* 68-9), which is the normal Attic one in comedy, inscriptions and other non-tragic literature.⁴⁷ The strangest case surely is the mention of ‘She with Persephone’ (*DT* 68). Could this be a reference to Demeter? Whatever the answer, the mention shows that the cursers could personalize their curses and did not wholly depend on the ‘inherited conglomerate’. This is also clear from the frequent mention of Ge, who was not particularly honoured in ancient Greece, even though in Attica she received several cults, which, whatever their purpose, do not seem to have been connected to the underworld.⁴⁸

14 Other interesting examples are Tethys and Lethe. Tethys (*DT* 68) is the Greek transcription of Akkadian Tiamat, as Burkert has shown,⁴⁹ who appears first in the *Iliad* where we hear of ‘Okeanos, begetter of the gods, and mother Tethys’ (XIV, 201). The couple appears several times in Greek mythology: not only in Hesiod and Eumelus, but also on a well-known Attic dinos of Sophilos on the marriage of Peleus and Thetis (*SEG* 35, 37) and in a, presumably, Orphic *Theogony* quoted by Plato in his *Cratylus*: ‘The handsome river Okeanos was the first to marry, he who wedded his sister Tethys, the daughter of his mother’.⁵⁰ Eidinow quotes with assent Audollent who quoted Wunsch that she was conceived as ‘Mutter Erde – also chthonisch’,⁵¹ but there is no proof of that. It rather seems that she was chosen because of her strange name and hoary past.⁵² Another curious hapax is a relatively early text from the Kerameikos (ca. 375 BC) that mentions Lethe as a personal power (*SEG* 51, 328). It fits this unique content that Lethe was less popular among the Greeks than among the Romans and was more of a general underworld character than a fixed identity: it is not a river before Plato’s *Republic* (X, 621a-c).⁵³

15 Our final example is a third, possibly fourth-century, curse tablet from Attica (*DT* 72), which mentions a number of people, amongst whom are the intriguing figures Bakchis and Kittos, two Dionysiac names. It concludes with ‘(I bind) their hopes from both gods and heroes and all their business before Hermes the Binder and before Hekate and before Ge and before all the gods and the Mother of gods’. Is the appearance of Mother here ‘unique and aberrant’, as has recently been claimed?⁵⁴ I argue ‘unique’, certainly, but also ‘aberrant’? The Greeks, the Athenians included, had identified Gaia/Ge as the Mother of Gods from an early time onwards. We see this in the *Homeric Hymn to Gaia* (17) as well as in Solon (36, 4-5 West²) and Sophocles (fr. 269a, 51 Radt). It seems to me plausible that this quality of Ge has played a role here. Alternatively, she might have been adduced as a symbol of great antiquity like Tethys. A third possibility, however, is that the scribe or buyer of the tablet wanted to be absolutely certain and added the ‘Mother of Gods’ to ‘all the gods’ in order to be absolutely sure to have adduced the whole pantheon.

16 In any case, is the notion ‘aberrant’ justified in regards to these curse tablets? We have seen that the infernal divinities that we find in them do not all conform to the ‘inherited conglomerate’, but constitute a motley of divinities, some of whom we do not find in either cult or literature; other examples would be Hekate Chthonia (*DTA* 105-7) and the Praxidikai (*DTA* 109; *SGD* 14). Athenians could use formulaic enumerations of deities as provided by the professional selling them the tablet, or they could personalize their divinities. Is it not precisely in the area of magic that we would expect a pantheon different from the normal Olympian one?

3. Mysteries and Orphism

17 The underworld also played an important role in a phenomenon that cannot be neglected in a discussion of *polis* religion, the world of Orphism. But who was Orpheus, what did he write, what did he teach and who were his followers? The debate about these questions has already

- 18 raged for two centuries, and it will be helpful for our discussion to take a brief look at what the main handbooks of Greek religion from the twentieth century have said about these questions. In the summer of 1931 the aged Wilamowitz (1848-1931) worked feverishly on his last book, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, knowing that he would have little time left for completing this work that clearly was close to his heart.⁵⁵ On Orpheus and Orphism he was pretty sceptical. He admitted that there had been an Orphic *Theogony*, but, as he argued, this did not prove a ‘besondere Religion und erst recht keine Gemeinde’, an ‘orphische Seelenlehre soll erst einer nachweisen’ and the Gold Leaves certainly were not Orphic. On the other hand, there was vegetarianism, and *Winkelpriester* administered *teletai* with their books with magical formulas, but these were no more than ‘Schwindler’. Rather striking is his rejection of the idea that ‘Platons Hadesbilder und zugleich die Petrusapokalypse von Orpheus stammen’.⁵⁶ Although he does not mention any names here, it is clear that he aimed at Albrecht Dieterich’s *Nekyia*,⁵⁷ but his rejection must have also struck Eduard Norden, whose commentary on *Aeneid* VI had appeared in a third edition only a few years earlier, and which Wilamowitz had enthusiastically welcomed when it was first published in 1903.⁵⁸
- 19 Only a decade later, Martin Nilsson (1874-1967) turned Prussian scepticism fully on its head. His discussion of Orphism, which Wilamowitz had still called ‘das neue Wort’,⁵⁹ accepted most of what the latter had rejected – a sobering lesson for anybody engaged in the study of Orphism. Nilsson distinguished its heyday in the archaic age from its decline in the fifth and fourth centuries to ‘einer verachteten Sekte’, when it had fallen into the hands of ‘Bettelpriester’ and ‘Scharlatane’. Yet the ‘tiefer Blickende’, such as Pindar and Plato, were receptive to its ‘grosse Gedanken’. As elements of Orphism, Nilsson accepted a *Theogony*, of which he considered the anthropogonical part the most original and to be connected to the doctrine of reincarnation, vegetarianism, and books about Orpheus’ descent into the underworld, which pictured the penalties for the uninitiated; in his survey, he also mentioned Norden’s ‘scharfsinnigen Versuch’ to reconstruct these. Finally, but not uninterestingly, Nilsson wondered whether we should speak of Orphic-Dionysiac mysteries rather than Dionysiac mysteries.⁶⁰
- 20 After Nilsson’s twenty-page discussion, it is rather striking to see that Walter Burkert discusses Orphism in relatively few pages, and mostly in combination with Pythagoreanism, despite the recent appearance of the Derveni papyrus, the Gold Leaf of Hipponion and the bone plates from Olbia. He accepts metempsychosis, vegetarianism and a *Theogony*, a poem about Demeter’s arrival at Eleusis, and an Orphic *Katabasis*, which relates the blessings and punishments in the hereafter. So far, this is not a great step forward from Nilsson. However, in the light of our previous observations it is noteworthy that Burkert stresses the importance of books. As he notes: ‘the new form of transmission introduces a new form of authority, to which the individual, provided that he can read, has direct access without collective mediation. The emancipation of the individual and the appearance of books go together in religion as elsewhere’. Yet, in the end, he concludes: ‘Orphism, like other sects, probably appealed to the class of the small man most of all’.⁶¹
- 21 What did Christiane think of Orphism? In her work, there are a few references, both implicit and explicit, which give a pretty clear idea of her thoughts. In her seminal article she stated that ‘in a religion without a canonical body of belief, without revelation, without scriptural texts (outside certain marginal sects which did have sacred books but are irrelevant to our present discussion), without a professional anointed clergy claiming special knowledge or authority, without a church, it was the ordered community, the *polis*, which assumed the role played in Christianity by the Church – to use one misleading comparison (for all metaphors derived from Christianity are inevitably misleading) to counteract and destroy alternative, implicit models.’ The only exception she allowed for the mediation by *polis* religion of all religious discourse was, as she put it, ‘some sectarian discourse’.⁶²
- 22 In her last book, *Hylas*, she made a few more observations on Orphism. So she argued that ‘the “dying Dionysos” most dominantly inhabits sectarian, Orphic, beliefs; but these beliefs seem to have involved more than one strand, and also, and most importantly, they eventually

came to interact with, and ultimately “infiltrate”, exert influence on, polis cults’. After all, for Christiane, Orphism was ‘the broad multifarious current of sectarian teaching that was contained in Orphic books’.⁶³

23 Now the first thing that must strike any student of Orphism and of Christiane’s writings is her use of Christian language in these passages. Although she herself added the warning that all such metaphors are misleading, one may wonder to what extent her own Greek origin and socialisation at a time when virtually every Greek was at least nominally Greek-Orthodox have played a role in her observation that the *polis* assumed the role of the Church in Christianity. Surely, anybody raised in a Protestant church should know that, in this respect, there already is a big difference between Protestantism and Roman-Catholicism, and that Protestant theology might be influenced but certainly is not mediated by the Church.

24 More worrying, though, is her use of the expression ‘sectarian discourse’. Once again the underlying standard is Christianity with its established churches, such as Anglicanism in England, Lutheranism in Germany and Scandinavia or the various Orthodox churches in Eastern and Southern Europe. The distinction between church and sect was popularised at the beginning of the twentieth century by the great German sociologists of religion Max Weber (1864-1920) and Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), who had both been very impressed by the religious developments in America with its lively sects. However, the trouble with the expression ‘sectarian discourse’ is not only that it suggests the existence of a sect and a Church, but also that this discourse is of a somewhat less respectable or marginal character. Neither suggestion is justified, as we will see shortly.

25 Having looked at the various opinions about Orphism, let us now try to answer some of the questions I raised at the beginning of this paragraph. I will start with the following questions: 1) which Orphic books can we establish with some certainty for the fifth century and 2) which of those were composed in Attica? These questions are not that easy to answer, as there are a number of books among the Orphic writings that are closely connected to Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism. And indeed, the great scholars of the ancient underworld, Albrecht Dieterich (1866-1908) and Eduard Norden (1868-1941), used the term ‘Orphic-Pythagorean’.⁶⁴ Their inheritance is still clearly visible in Burkert’s close combination of Orpheus and Pythagoras, and there is no doubt that a strand in Orphic writing worked on Pythagorean themes. Martin West has well identified these, most of which carry very brief names: *Net*, *Robe*, *Crater*, *Lyre*, *Sphere*. There is very little left of these cosmological poems, and we can hardly say anything about their contents, let alone about their dates and places of origin.⁶⁵

26 It is different with some other poems. Pride of place must go to the Orphic *Theogony*. Unfortunately, neither its date nor place of origin is known. It is very likely that there was more than one, but the oldest example that allows us to have some idea of the Orphic theogony(ies?) is the Derveni papyrus. Its quotation of the Orphic poem, though, is incomplete due to the burning of the papyrus, but also to the fact that the author may have left out whole passages. Any reconstruction of its original content should, therefore, be handled very carefully.⁶⁶ Both the Ionian-epic character of the Orphic hexameters and the influence of Hittite material seem to point to Ionia as its original place of composition, but the sprinkling of Attic features in the text suggests a presence, even if temporary, of the author of the Derveni papyrus in Athens, regardless of his original origin.⁶⁷ There is, however, one other likely remnant of Attic Orphic theogonical poetry. In Athens Persephone’s name was written in inscriptions, comedy and other non-tragic literature as Pherephatta and its variations (§ 2), whereas P(h)ersephassa is the spelling in tragedy;⁶⁸ Timaeus already identified this spelling as the more poetical form in his Platonic lexicon.⁶⁹ Now Tatian (*Or.* 10.1 = *OF* 89 F) uses the form Phersephassa in an enumeration of divine metamorphoses, when saying that ‘Zeus became a serpent because of Phersephassa’. Consequently, this indicates an ultimate origin from an Attic, poetic and Orphic source. From this evidence, I conclude that Orphic theogonies were probably also composed in Attica in the fifth century.

27 Besides an Orphic *Theogony*, the second big poem must have been the Orphic *Katabasis*, whose existence was doubted by Wilamowitz, as we have seen. However, there can be little doubt that Norden was correct in his reconstruction of elements of the Orphic *Katabasis* on

the basis of *Aeneid* VI, as the appearance of the Bologna papyrus (*OF* 717) in 1954 with its picture of the underworld has only strengthened his position. Now in Greek and Latin poetry, Orpheus' descent into the underworld is always connected to his love for Eurydice.⁷⁰ In fact, at the beginning of the Orphic *Argonautica*, Orpheus himself tells us in the first person singular: 'I told you what I saw and perceived when I went down the dark road of Taenarum into Hades, trusting in our lyre,⁷¹ out of love for my wife'. Norden already noted the close correspondence with the line that opens the *katabasis* of Orpheus in Virgil's *Georgica*, *Taenarias etiam fauces, alta ostia Ditis, / ... ingressus* (IV, 467-469), and persuasively concluded that both lines go back to the *Descent of Orpheus*.⁷² As references to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice do not start before Euripides' *Alcestis* (357-362) of 438 BC, a red-figure loutrophoros from 440-430 BC, and the decorated reliefs of, probably, the altar of the Twelve Gods in the Athenian Agora, dating from about 410 BC, the poem about Orpheus' *katabasis* that was used by Virgil probably arrived in Athens around the middle of the fifth century BC, and its use by Aristophanes shows that it was well known in Athens.⁷³

28 On the other hand, the use of Orphic eschatological material by Pindar suggests that he already knew an earlier version of this poem or a different one. On the same topic, one could consider the *Descent into Hades* ascribed to Orpheus from Sicilian Camarina (*Sudas*.v.Ὀρφεύς= *OF* 708, 870, 1103). He seems to be a fictitious person, as Martin West has noted,⁷⁴ but the mention is remarkable. Surely, he owed his name to the fact that he also told his descent in the first person singular (above). As Camarina was a town with close ties to Athens,⁷⁵ influence from that quarter is not unthinkable.

29 A much less known text is the Orphic *Physica*, which must date to the second half of the fifth century. As Renaud Gagné has persuasively argued, this hexametric poem, in which the Tritopatores played a prominent role, combined theogonic and anthropogonic narratives with a theory of the soul and Presocratic physical doctrine. Unfortunately, the scarcity of fragments means that we cannot say anything more.⁷⁶

30 Our next texts are the Orphic *Hymns*, which are mentioned in the Derveni papyrus where column XXII says: 'And it is also said in the *Hymns*: Demeter, Rhea, Ge, Meter, Hestia, Deio' (11-12).⁷⁷ Dirk Obbink has argued that Philochoros, who quotes other Orphic poetry (*FGrH* 328 F 77 = *OF* 810), therefore must have known the Derveni text, since he also quotes this verse as being by Orpheus and as having stood 'in the *Hymns*' (*FGrH* 328 F 185). But this is not really necessary. If the text from which the quote was taken belonged to a collection of hymns, it may indeed have been known as the *Hymns*.⁷⁸ Obbink is on firmer ground when he argues that, originally, the line must have been written in Attic,⁷⁹ a suggestion supported by the many divine identifications, which point to Attic poetry of the last half of the fifth century.⁸⁰ Referring to Pausanias' mention of Orphic hymns in the rituals of the Attic Lykomids (IX, 30, 12 = *OF* 531), the family of Themistocles, Obbink plausibly suggests a connection between the *Hymns* and family mysteries. The Lykomids met in a club-house, and in this connection we may perhaps draw attention again to the famous beginning of the Orphic *Theogony*: 'Close the doors, you uninitiated' (*OF* 1) which suggests a performance indoors, as opposed to the performance of the great epics and Hesiodic poems at festivals. Another connection of Orpheus with a respectable Athenian family becomes visible in Euripides' *Hypsipyle* (ca. 411-408 BC), where Euneos, the ancestor of the Euneids, is instructed on the lyre by Orpheus (fr. 759a, 1619-1622 Kannicht); the play even seems to contain traces of an Orphic theogony (F 758a, 1103-1108 with Kannicht).⁸¹

31 Our last text is the Orphic hymn on Demeter's entry in Eleusis, which has been reconstructed in outline by Fritz Graf.⁸² This hymn celebrated the cultural achievements of Athens within the framework of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* but with some important alterations, such as the introduction of the swineherd Eubouleus. It probably also contained an *aition* of the Thesmophoria in order to facilitate the adoption of Eubouleus by Eleusis from his original *Heimat* on the Cycladic islands. This *aition* has been preserved by Clement of Alexandria and a scholiast on Lucian (*OF* 390). Its source was a Hellenistic Attic antiquarian, as appears both from the mention of the Attic Skirophoria and Arretophoria in Clement and the scholion

as well as from Clement calling Kore (the name in Lucian's scholion) Pherephatta, the Attic version of her name, as we have already seen above (§ 2). The date of the hymn seems to have been the third quarter of the fifth century, given its indebtedness to the cultural theories of Prodikos and the mention of Eubulos in the famous Athenian First Fruits decree of 422/1 BC, where he is combined with Theos and Thea (*IG*³ 78, 39).⁸³

32 Do we also have Orphic sects, as Nilsson, Burkert and Christiane suggest? There is simply not a trace of it and, in fact, it is very improbable. The Christian image of a sect conjures up small-minded, lower-class people, as does indeed Burkert's 'class of the small men'. Yet the visits of Orphic initiators to wealthy Athenians, as attested in Plato's *Republic* (364b-365a), preclude any acceptance of Burkert's surprising statement, as does the fact that well-to-do women seem to have constituted the great majority of recipients of the Gold Leaves. And indeed, in the most recent study of the social origin of the Gold Leaves Robert Parker rightly concludes that 'initiates tended to be relatively wealthy'.⁸⁴

33 Moreover, we nowhere hear of Orphic groups or congregations: it is too often forgotten that *Orphikoi* on the Olbian bone plates is not a secure reading and would be the first and only designation of the followers of Orpheus as 'Orphics'.⁸⁵ The itinerant, probably vegetarian, life style of the *orpheotelestai*, which is increasingly documented also by the wide geographical spread of the Gold Leaves, hardly favours the formation of sects. The earliest known *orpheotelestês*, Philippus, was still received by the Spartan king Leotychidas in the first decades of the fifth century (*OF* 653), and Christoph Riedweg has interestingly argued that Empedocles styled himself as a kind of *orpheotelestês*; Gábor Betegh has gone a step further by suggesting that 'the constellation of functions and abilities that make up the image of Empedocles finds its most immediate prefiguration in Orpheus'.⁸⁶ Empedocles is indeed one of the last of the wandering *Wundermänner* of the later Archaic era, a group which includes the likes of Epimenides, Abaris, Aristeas and, to some extent, Orpheus himself,⁸⁷ but, of course, adapted to his own day and age. The *orpheotelestai* (*OF* 653-664), I suggest, are further inheritors of this tradition. In the course of time, society moved on, and Plato and other philosophers started to look down on them. Yet there is no reason to see them as charlatans or *Schwindler*. Such judgments need better arguments than modern contempt for religious entrepreneurs: the history of religion has shown us how complicated the evaluation of religious practitioners often is.

34 It is clear, then, that books played an important role in the spread of Orphic thought,⁸⁸ but can we call these books 'sacred' as Christiane does? I doubt it. 'Holy books' in our sense of the word is a typically Jewish and Christian invention that has managed to infiltrate even Islam and modern Judaism, neither of whom traditionally knew a 'Holy Quran' or a 'Holy Torah'.⁸⁹ Moreover, an important quality of holy books is that their texts are fixed. This is of course not the case in Orphic literature, which was extremely fluid in its texts. We may even wonder whether we can actually call this literature 'religious books'.⁹⁰ What is the difference between the mid-sixth-century epic of Heracles' *katabasis* and that of Orpheus? Is the one literature, the other religion? Or the Orphic *Theogony*? Is that classed as religious, but Hesiod's one literary? Admittedly, Euripides' Theseus scolds Hippolytus' 'honouring the smoke of many writings', but that only shows him up as a bookish intellectual, just like Aristophanes associates the sophists with books.⁹¹ However this may be, it is clear that in fifth-century Athens Orphic books circulated and were composed, books that did not conform to the standard ideas of Athenian *polis* religion.

4. Mythography

35 Before I try to draw some conclusions let us conclude by looking very briefly at mythography. The choice of subject may be surprising in a discussion of *polis* religion. Yet it should be clear that Greek myths were important media for conveying information on gods, heroes and other supernatural beings that were worshipped by the Greeks. For many Greeks, their mental images of the gods must have been formed by the great poems of Homer and Hesiod, and it is not unexpected that according to Herodotus (II, 53) 'it was Homer and Hesiod who gave the gods their epithets, chose their honours and skills, and pointed out their forms'.

Starting at about 500 BC we see the rise of authors who collected Greek myths and began to systematize them. They were not, however, just putting the mythological house in order, so to speak, but also changing the tradition. Those rationalisations, such as Herodorus' replacement of the dragon that guarded the Golden Fleece with amazingly big snakes (*FGrH* 31 F 63bis = fr. **52A Fowler) or, more subtly, Pherecydes' probable omission of any theogony, are well known and need not occupy us here. Nevertheless, we must not fail to note that these rationalising changes also will have contributed to the secularisation of the inherited mythological tradition.⁹²

36 For us, the important question is on whose authority the mythographers introduced their versions and changes. I see at least two different strategies here. First we have the one employed by Acusilaus, who was, by all accounts, one of the oldest mythographers. He said, presumably in the proem of his *Genealogies*,⁹³ that he had found his history on bronze tablets, which his father had dug up in his house. The strategy of authentication by finding an old manuscript was well known in antiquity and also employed by Euhemerus.⁹⁴ Admittedly, one of the testimonia (T 7 Fowler, from the *Suda*) claims that Acusilaus' works were forged, and, on this basis, Jacoby (*ad FGrH* 2 T 1, 7) claimed there was a forgery in circulation in Imperial times. Yet there is no other evidence for the existence of this forgery, and the likeliest explanation of T 7 is a commentator's scepticism about the story of the tablets in Acusilaus himself.⁹⁵ In fact, the appeal to ancient tradition seems to have worked so well that some people included Acusilaus among the Seven Sages (*FGrH* 2 T 11ab = fr 11ab Fowler). This would hardly have happened if his work had just been an enumeration of genealogies. In any case, it is interesting to note that the authority in Acusilaus' case no longer is divine inspiration by one of the Muses but tradition in the form of the hoary past.

37 The second strategy is to boast one's own superiority. Let us listen to the 'chest-thumping' beginning of a competing author of *Genealogies*: 'Hecataeus the Milesian speaks (*mytheitai*) as follows: I write what I think to be true, for the tales of the Greeks, as they appear to me, are many and ridiculous' (*FGrH* 1 F 1 = fr. 1 Fowler). It is also typical of this 'argumentative context' of early Greek intellectuals to criticise the competition.⁹⁶ Thus Hellanicus (*FGrH* 4 T 18 = T 18 Fowler) criticised Acusilaus, who in turn had criticised Hesiod (*FGrH* 2 T 6 = T 6 Fowler).⁹⁷ In neither case is there any reference to the *polis*.⁹⁸

5. Final observations

38 Before I come, at last, to the subject of *polis* religion, let me first say a few words regarding religion in general. In her discussion of *polis* religion, Christiane offered an excellent definition of Greek religion, which, to the best of my knowledge, has not attracted any interest, either inside or outside the world of classics. It deserves to be better known. For Christiane, Greek religion is above all:

a way of articulating the world, of structuring chaos and making it intelligible; it is a model articulating a cosmic order guaranteed by a divine order which also (in complex ways) grounds human order, perceived to be incarnated above all in the properly ordered and pious *polis*, and providing certain rules and prescriptions of behaviour, especially towards the divine through cult, but also towards the human world.⁹⁹

39 If we leave out the sentence about the *polis*, which unduly limits Greek religion to the *polis* as if there was not also the sizeable world of the Greek *ethnê*,¹⁰⁰ we are left with a definition of religion in general, which clearly has been inspired by John Gould. He, in turn, was inspired by the perhaps most famous definition of religion at that time, which was developed by Clifford Geertz (1926-2006). Geertz defines religion in the following way:

A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.¹⁰¹

40 It is interesting to note that Christiane's definition also mentions the human and divine parts of the equation and their interaction in cult, whereas Geertz's definition remains rather vague

regarding these points, although in the exposition of his definition he becomes much more specific. This difference with Geertz shows the influence of another very influential modern definition of religion, which is, in the words of Melford Spiro, ‘an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated super-human beings’.¹⁰² Christiane, then, combined the most prominent functionalist and substantivist definitions.

41 Christiane was very much a Durkheimian. This is clear from the concluding, nearly rhapsodic, sentences of her seminal article: ‘The role of the *polis* in the articulation of Greek religion was matched by the role of religion in the articulation of the *polis*: religion provided the framework and the symbolic focus of the *polis*. Religion was the very centre of the Greek *polis*’. In fact, she confessed, if that is the word, herself to be a Durkheimian in a passage of her ‘*Reading*’ *Greek Death*, in which she stressed the necessity not to fall into the trap of reductionist tendencies.¹⁰³ And indeed, as appears from the words just quoted, she did not take the road, so often taken by neo-Durkheimians, of describing society as having a religious nature. Rather, she argued, for religion having a social nature or, in a more poetical formulation, the Greek *polis* as having a religious heart.¹⁰⁴ Now it is well known that Durkheim (1858-1917) came to religion relatively late and in his opus magum *Les Formes élémentaires* of 1912 he concentrated in particular on the relatively undifferentiated societies of the Australian Aborigines. Can we apply his thoughts to a really big and literate city as late classical Athens was?

42 Although the main lines of Christiane’s argument are convincing, even a non-reductionist Durkheimian approach has some disadvantages. By concentrating on civic religion, we get a more harmonious picture of religious life as a whole than was the case in reality. Moreover, the focus on and inspiration by Durkheimian thought perhaps lead to a certain overvaluation of public cultic practice above private activities and of religious performance above religious thinking and speculation. For the latter, the arrival of literacy was undoubtedly an important factor, even though religious thinking was certainly not limited to literate societies.¹⁰⁵ In both cited definitions of religion, we lack the aspect of power, as has been pointed out by Talal Asad in his famous critique of Geertz’s definition of religion.¹⁰⁶ Religion is a social phenomenon, and every social phenomenon has to deal with hierarchies and power, even if a religion lacks an established clergy, as was mainly the case in ancient Greece. Moreover, in the case of Christiane it is striking that she notes cult but does not mention anything about religious thought, belief or speculation.

43 It is these two aspects, religious thought and authority, that I would like to conclude with in light of my previous discussion. First, religion is more than cult. Regarding the Christian tradition one could fairly say that many books on its history concentrate on its big thinkers and theologians. It is only in recent times that research has started to concentrate more on everyday Christian life, a focus which, of course, is more difficult the more one retreats in time. In the study of Greek religion it is rather the reverse. Although the major handbooks do pay attention to the religious role of poets and philosophers, one never gets the feeling that this is seen as an important part of the history of Greek religion. It is probably symbolic that both Nilsson and Burkert treat them towards the ends of their handbooks, whereas Wilamowitz does not give them any special attention at all.¹⁰⁷

44 The concept of *polis* religion, however, cannot be used without also asking who exerted authority in this religion. Who actually had the power to shape and control that religion? In general, we can say that the *polis* community often exerts control. The case of Socrates is perhaps the most obvious example,¹⁰⁸ but we might also think of the banishment of Diagoras and the reports of attacks on other fifth-century intellectuals because of their atheism.¹⁰⁹ On a more positive note, the state calendar of festivals comes to mind. We know that circa 401 BC, for example, the secretary Nicomachus drew up a new calendar for public sacrifices, which seems to have omitted some of the older sacrifices. There can be little doubt that such matters were under the control of the *polis*, even though we do not have detailed information about the public scrutiny of his proposals.¹¹⁰

45 This, though, is only one side of *polis* religion. The other side is the shaping of new ideas or the testing of old ones, a side of religion that was always problematic from the perspective of

the Durkheimian approach with its stress on the hegemony of tradition and ritual.¹¹¹ Here we should distinguish between public performance and more private reading. The tragedies or the *Odes* of Pindar were performed in public, be it in front of larger or smaller audiences. Here too we could perhaps still speak of the control of the *polis* or, in less democratic ones, of its rulers. For example, Pindar may well have thought about what religiosity Theron favoured before he composed his *Second Olympian Ode*. Moreover, however far Euripides went, he will always have had in the back of his mind that the aim of his compositions was also to win, not to lose. This is different with books or oral poems. We do not know how the oldest Orphic poetry was spread over Greece, but the Derveni papyrus demonstrates that around 400 BC people could read this poetry and even study its commentaries.¹¹² Orphic poetry was clearly very influential in some areas of thought, especially those having to do with the afterlife (as is well illustrated by Pindar and Empedocles), an area hardly controlled by the *polis*. Its authority must have been the name of Orpheus. As the words of Herodotus about Homer and Hesiod (§ 4) demonstrated, poets could have an enormous influence. That is why in the earlier fifth century people started to spread new ideas under Orpheus' name. The loss of most of that poetry makes us forget that the prestige of Orpheus as poet was enormously high in the fifth century. According to a set of fifth-century historians, which include Pherecydes and Hellanicus, Homer was a descendent from Orpheus as was Hesiod.¹¹³ And when Plato enumerates the great poets of the past, he puts Orpheus first.¹¹⁴

But to what extent can we still call poetry under his name expressions of *polis* religion? This is hardly possible, I would argue, for poems like Orpheus' *Theogony* and *Katabasis*, which derived their authority from the name of their supposed poet, not from a particular *polis*. It is Orpheus' name too that should forbid us to call his poetry sectarian discourse. There is nothing in our fifth-century tradition that points into that direction. Orphic poetry was well-known in Athens in the fifth century, and accepted in the best circles of the Athenian population. Some of its figures (e.g. Eubouleus, Brimo) were even incorporated into the Eleusinian Mysteries.¹¹⁵ It is clear that in the fourth century Plato looked down on the Orphic initiators. Sure enough, compared to him they undoubtedly were second-rate theologians and had to really work for a living. Yet nothing in our sources (except Plato's contempt) warrants modern opinions of them as charlatans or swindlers. Orphic views (§3), mythography (§ 4) and sophistic theories (§ 3), such as those of Prodicus, all spread via books and there is no reason to call them expressions of *polis* religion.

Indeed, writing also enabled the spread of private oracles and *defixiones*. In the case of the former, Cimon, Nicias and Alcibiades all employed private seers, sometimes even a number of them.¹¹⁶ This use of private seers by leading politicians goes back at least to the beginning of the fifth century, since Aeschylus already mentions the 'seers of the house'.¹¹⁷ There is no reason to think that these seers or their more humble colleagues on the streets were controlled by the *polis* or were always concerned with expressing the views of the *polis*. The same must be true of the professionals that wrote and sold magical formulae. As noted before, Robert Parker discusses these under the title 'unlicensed religion', but that suggests that there was a dichotomy in the *polis* between licensed and unlicensed religion. This introduces a distinction that is modern and not warranted by Athenian evidence. In the end, we will have to accept that religion in urbanized Greece was indeed mainly *polis* religion, as has been presented to us in Robert Parker's wonderful books on Athenian religion. The margins of that religion, however, were perhaps much messier than Christiane liked to think.¹¹⁸

Notes

1 See, for example, C. SOURVINOU-INWOOD, 'Reading' *Greek Death to the End of the Classical Period*, Oxford, 1995, p. 413-44.

2 I quote her 'What is *Polis* Religion?' (1990) and 'Further Aspects of *Polis* Religion' (1988) from the reprints in R. BUXTON (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion*, Oxford, 2000, p. 13-37, 38-55.

3 J. KINDT, "Polis Religion – A critical Appreciation," *Kernos* 22 (2009), p. 9-34; note also M.H. HANSEN, *Polis: an introduction to the ancient Greek city-state*, Oxford, 2006, p. 119-122.

- 4 R. PARKER, *Polytheism and Society at Athens*, Oxford, 2005, p. 116-35; E. EIDINOW, *Oracles, Curses, & Risk Among the Ancient Greeks*, Oxford, 2007.
- 5 A. HENRICHs, "Hieroi Logoi and Hierai Bibloi: the (Un)written Margins of the Sacred in Ancient Greece," *HSCP* 101 (2003), p. 207-266 at 220.
- 6 Note the same expression in Ar., *Eq.*, 128.
- 7 *Suda*, s.v. *Bakis*; schol. Ar., *Pax*, 1071, cf. W. Burkert, "Apokalyptik im frühen Griechentum: Impulse und Transformationen," in D. Hellholm (ed.), *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean world and the Near East* Tübingen, 1983, p. 235-254 at 248-249; O. Masson, *Onomastica Graeca Selecta* III, Geneva, 2000, p. 207-208; add to his material L. Jonnes, *The Inscriptions of Heraclea Pontica*, Bonn, 1994, p. 128 (Bakides).
- 8 For Epimenides and his skin, see J.N. Bremmer, "The skins of Pherekydes and Epimenides," *Mnemosyne* 46 (1993), p. 234-36; for oracles on parchment sheets, note also Euripides, fr. 627 (ed. KANNICHT).
- 9 Plut., *Ag.*, 9; *Cle.*, 11, 3-6; *Agis and Cleomenes*, 28, 3; Cic., *Div.* I, 96; *IG* V 1, 1317; Tert., *An.*, 46; Jacoby on *FGrH* 596 F 46.
- 10 Hdt., VI, 57; Xen., *Resp. Lac.*, 15, 5; Cic., *Div.* I, 95; K. Ziegler, "Pythioi," *RE* 24 (1963), col. 550-552.
- 11 Hdt., VII, 6; H.A. SHAPIRO, "Oracle-mongers in Peisistratid Athens," *Kernos* 3 (1990), p. 335-345; J. DILLERY, "Chresmologues and Manteis: Independent Diviners and the Problem of Authority," in S.I. JOHNSTON, P. STRUCK (eds.), *Mantikê*, Leiden, 2005, p. 167-231.
- 12 Hdt., V, 90, 2. Oracles in state archives during the heyday of Athenian democracy: Dem., 21, 51-54; 43, 66.
- 13 Anios: *Cypria*, fr. 19 (ed. DAVIES) = 20 (ed. BERNABÉ); Pherecydes, *FGrH* 3 F 140 = fr. 140 (ed. FOWLER); *SEG* 32, 218; 41, 80 and 129; 44, 682; Ph. BRUNEAU, "Anios," in *LIMC* I.1 (1981), p. 793-794; A.D. TRENDALL, "The daughters of Anios," in E. BÖHR, W. MARTINI (eds.), *Studien zu Mythologie und Vasenmalerei*, Mainz, 1986, p. 165-168; M. HALM-TISSERANT, "De Délos à l'Apulie : les filles d'Anios et le peintre de Darius," *Ktema* 25 (2000), p. 133-142; N. HORSFALL on Verg., *Aen.* III, 80.
- 14 *Il.* V, 148 and schol. (king), XIII, 663-670 with R. JANKO *ad loc.*; Pind., *O.* 13, 74-75; Pherecydes, *FGrH* 3 F 115 = fr. 115 (ed. FOWLER); Soph., *Manteis* with RADT *ad loc.*; Paus., I, 43, 5; Apollod., III, 3, 1. Koiranos' etymology: A. HEUBECK, "Koiranos, korragos und Verwandtes," *Würzb. Jahrb. Altert.* NF 4 (1978), p. 91-98; E. KACZYŃSKA, "Greek (Hesychian) kóros 'Great Number of Men' and Related Words," *Emerita* 75 (2007), p. 273-278.
- 15 Mounichos: Ant. Lib., 14; L. PALEOCRASSA, 'Mounichos', in *LIMC* VI.1 (1992), p. 655-657. Teneros: Pindar, fr. 51d and 52g.13 (ed. MAEHLER); Strabo, IX, 2, 34; Paus., IX, 26, 1; schol. Pind., *P.* 11, 5 and Lycophron, 1211; I. RUTHERFORD, *Pindar's Paeans*, Oxford, 2001, p. 343f. Phineus: A. KISLINGER, *Phineus*, Diss. Vienna, 1940; L. KAHIL, "Phineus I," in *LIMC* VII.1 (1994), p. 387-391.
- 16 J. LINDERSKI, "The Libri Reconditi," *HSCP* 89 (1985), p. 207-234, reprinted in his *Roman Questions* I, Stuttgart, 1995, p. 496-523, 669 (addenda).
- 17 J. FONTENROSE, *The Delphic Oracle*, Berkeley *et al.*, 1978, p. 158-165; W.K. PRITCHETT, *The Greek State at War* III, Berkeley *et al.*, 1979, p. 320.
- 18 HENRICHs, *l.c.* (n. 5), p. 216-222; Musaeus T 64-71 (ed. BERNABÉ).
- 19 As persuasively argued by H. BOWDEN, "Oracles for Sale," in P. DEROW, R. PARKER (eds.), *Herodotus and His World*, Oxford, 2003, p. 256-274 at 270-274.
- 20 For the chanting of oracles see Soph., fr. 573 (ed. RADT); Eur., fr. 481, 16 (ed. KANNICHT); Eupolis, fr. 231 (ed. KASSEL-AUSTIN).
- 21 See most recently EIDINOW, *o.c.* (n. 4), p. 26-32; add, for female seers, M. FLOWER, *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, Berkeley *et al.*, 2008, p. 211-5, to be supplemented by J.N. BREMMER, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Leiden, 2008, p. 149-150.
- 22 EIDINOW, *o.c.* (n. 4), p. 27.
- 23 W. BURKERT, *Kleine Schriften* I, Göttingen, 2001, p. 24.
- 24 For an excellent survey see R. GORDON, F. MARCO SIMÓN, "Introduction," in *eidem* (eds.), *Magical Practice in the Latin West*, Leiden, 2010, p. 1-49; D. FRANKFURTER, H.S. VERSNEL (eds.), *The Brill Guide to the Study of Magic*, Leiden, 2010.
- 25 PARKER, *o.c.* (n. 4), p. 116-135.
- 26 C. HABICHT, "Attische Fluchtafeln aus der Zeit Alexanders des Grossen," *ICS* 18 (1993), p. 113-118, reprinted in his *Athen in hellenistischer Zeit* (Munich, 1994), p. 14-18; A. NISOLI, "Defixiones politiche e vittime illustri. Il caso della defixio di Focione," *Acme* 56 (2003), p. 271-286; F. MARCO SIMÓN, "Execrating the Roman Power: Three *Defixiones* from Emporiae (Ampurias)," in GORDON – MARCO SIMÓN, *o.c.* (n. 24), p. 399-423 at 413.
- 27 EIDINOW, *o.c.* (n. 4), p. 415 (translating *SGD* 48), cf. D. BAIN, "Six Greek Verbs of Sexual Congress," *CQ* 41 (1991), p. 51-77 at 74-77.

- 28 M. DEL AMOR LOPEZ JIMENO, *Las tabellae defixionis de la Sicilia griega*, Amsterdam, 1991, p. 223-4; add L. BETTARINI, *Corpus delle defixiones di Selinunte*, Alessandria, 2005, p. 1-7 (no. 1): Kleonnô.
- 29 See, with bibliography, A. WILLI, *Sikelismos. Sprache, Literatur und Gesellschaft im griechischen Sizilien (8.-5. Jh. V. Chr.)*, Basel, 2008, p. 317-321.
- 30 This suggestion is followed by G. BOHAK, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, Cambridge, 2008, p. 154.
- 31 F. GRAF, *Magic in the Ancient World*, Cambridge Mass. and London, 1997, p. 170-174. For an early forerunner see W.S. FOX, "Old Testament Parallels to *Tabellae Defixionum*," *Am. J. Semitic Languages* 30 (1913-14), p. 111-124.
- 32 H.S. VERSNEL, "An Essay on Anatomical Curses," in F. GRAF (ed.), *Ansichten griechischer Rituale. Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert*, Stuttgart/Leipzig, 1998, p. 217-267 at 256-259.
- 33 BETTARINI, *o.c.* (n. 28), no. 23.
- 34 Similarly WILLI, *o.c.* (n. 29), p. 317-318; less precise, H.S. VERSNEL, *Fluch und Gebet*, Berlin/New York, 2009, p. 27.
- 35 M.L. WEST, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, Oxford, 2007, p. 392.
- 36 L.V. GRINSELL, "The Ferryman and His Fee: A Study in Ethnology, Archaeology, and Tradition," *Folklore* 68 (1957), p. 257-269; B. LINCOLN, "The Ferryman of the Dead," *J. Indo-European Stud.* 8 (1980), p. 41-59.
- 37 R. WACHTER, review of *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos*, Bd 3, p. 1009-1678, in *Kratylos* 51 (2006), p. 136-144.
- 38 J.N. BREMMER, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife*, London/New York, 2002, p. 8; PARKER, *o.c.* (n. 4), p. 363-368.
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57 A. DIETERICH, *Nekyia*, Leipzig and Berlin, 1893, 1913².

58 E. NORDEN, *P. Vergilius Maro Aeneis VI*, Leipzig, 1903¹, 1927³. For his changing appreciation compare WILAMOWITZ’S letters of 11 June 1903 and 25 August 1926 in W.M. CALDER III, B. HUSS, “*Sed serviendum officio...*” *The Correspondence between Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Eduard Norden (1892-1931)*, Berlin, 1997, p. 18-21 and 235-236, respectively.

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65 OF 403-420, cf. M.L. WEST, *The Orphic Poems*, Oxford, 1983, p. 7-15.

66 BURKERT, *o.c.* (n. 49), p. 89-90; see also *id.*, *Kleine Schriften III: Mystica, Orphica, Pythagorica*, Göttingen, 2006, p. 95-111 (‘Die altorphische Theogonie nach dem Papyrus von Derveni’).

67 For the linguistic nature of the text, see T. Kouromenos et al., *The Derveni Papyrus*, Florence, 2006, p. 14.

68 Persephassa: Aesch., *Cho.*, 490; Eur., *Or.*, 964 (corrupt); *Phoen.*, 684; Archemachus, *FGrH* 424 F 6; A. HOLLMANN, “A Curse Tablet from the Circus at Antioch,” *ZPE* 145 (2003), p. 67-82, line 27. Persephassa: Aesch., fr. (dub.) 451s, 70 (ed. RADT); Soph., *Ant.*, 894; Eur., *Hel.*, 175.

69 Timaeus Soph. φ 1006b, 37-38 = Thomas Magister, *Ecl.* φ 378.

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71 NORDEN (*ad loc.*) compares *Aen.* VI, 120: *Threicia fretus cithara*; see also his *Kleine Schriften zum klassischen Altertum*, Berlin, 1966, p. 506-507.

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75 F. CORDANO, “Camarina città democratica?,” *PP* 59 (2004), p. 283-292; S. HORNBLLOWER, *Thucydides and Pindar*, Oxford, 2004, p. 190-192.

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- 110 PARKER, *o.c.* (n. 90), p. 218-20.
- 111 As noted also by H.S. Versnel, *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual*, Leiden, 1993, p. 9.

112 Also note the mention of Orphic books by Claudian, *Epith.*, 232-234 and *Carm. Min.*, 23, 11; 31, 25-33, to which DIETERICH, *o.c.* (n. 57), p. 159 calls attention, but which seems to have been overlooked by BERNABÉ in his splendid new edition of the Orphic fragments.

113 Pherecydes, *FGrH* 3 F 167 = fr. 167 (ed. Fowler) = *OF* 871; Hellanicus, *FGrH* 4 F 5 = *OF* 871 (Homer and Hesiod); Damastes, *FGrH* 5 F 11 = fr. 11b (ed. Fowler) = *OF* 871; Charax, *FGrH* 103 F 62 = *OF* 872.

114 Pl., *Apol.*, 41a (= *OF* 1076); *Ion*, 536b (= *OF* 973); note also Alexis, fr. 140 (ed. KASSEL-AUSTIN) (= *OF* 1018); Hecataeus, *FGrH* 264 F 25 (= *OF* 55).

115 See BREMMER, *o.c.* (n. 83).

116 Cimon: Plut., *Cimon*, 18. Alcibiades: Plut., *Nic.*, 4, 2; 13, 1; Flower, *o.c.* (n. 21), p. 177.

117 See Fraenkel on Aesch., *Ag.*, 409.

118 This is the slightly revised and annotated version of a keynote lecture at the Conference 'Perceptions of Polis-Religion: Inside/Outside. A Symposium in Memory of Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood', Reading, 6 July, 2008; I have kept its oral nature. The text has also profited from audiences in Montreal, Toronto and New York as well as from comments by Bob Fowler, Albert Henrichs and Vinciane Pirenne-Delforge. Suzanne Lye kindly corrected my English.

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

Jan Bremmer, « *Manteis, Magic, Mysteries and Mythography* », *Kernos* [En ligne], 23 | 2010, mis en ligne le 21 août 2012, consulté le 27 décembre 2012. URL : <http://kernos.revues.org/1559> ; DOI : 10.4000/kernos.1559

Référence papier

Jan Bremmer, « *Manteis, Magic, Mysteries and Mythography* », *Kernos*, 23 | 2010, 13-35.

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Droits d'auteur

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Résumés

Ces dernières décennies, il est devenu habituel de considérer que la *polis* de la période classique contrôlait la religion sous tous ces aspects. Ce n'est que récemment que ce point de vue a été mis en question. Même si les aspects plus marginaux de la religion de la *polis* ont déjà reçu l'attention nécessaire, leur étude reste marquée, dans une certaine mesure, par les préjugés des savants des générations antérieures, eux-mêmes nourris des préjugés et des représentations des auteurs anciens. Cet article se concentre sur les lieux de la vie religieuse grecque, et plus particulièrement athénienne, où des livres et de l'écrit étaient particulièrement importants, dans la mesure où l'écrit permet aux gens de prendre une position plus indépendante en regard de la religion de la *polis*. Mes observations concerneront les *manteis* (§ 1), la magie (§ 2), les mystères et l'Orphisme (§ 3), la mythographie (§ 4), en terminant par quelques considérations sur la nature de la religion de la *polis* (§ 5).

In recent decades it has become customary to assume that in the classical period the *polis* controlled religion in all its aspects. It is only recently that this view is being questioned.

Although the more marginal aspects of *polis* religion have already received the necessary attention, the study of these marginal aspects remains dominated, to a certain extent, by old prejudices of previous generations of scholars, which in turn were sometimes fed by the prejudices or representations of ancient authors. I will concentrate on those areas of Greek, especially Athenian, religious life in which books and writing were particularly important, as the written word enabled people to take a more independent stance in *polis* religion. Subsequently, I will make observations on *manteis* (§ 1), magic (§ 2), mysteries and Orphism (§ 3) and mythography (§ 4), and end with some remarks on the nature of *polis* religion (§ 5).