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# LITERACY AND THE ORIGINS AND LIMITATIONS OF GREEK ATHEISM[1]

## J. Bremmer

In *the* Archaic and Classical Ages Greek religion was the subject of a growing amount of reflection and criticism which resulted in rather outrageous statements about the nature of the Greek gods. We only have to think of Protagoras' well known

> "Concerning the gods I am unable to discover whether they exist or not, or what *they* are like in form; for there are many hindrances to knowledge, the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life" (tr. W.K.C. Guthrie)

to realise that in some circles religious thought had progressed almost beyond recognition since the time of Homer. This development did not, of course, leave the traditional myths untouched, and already in the fifth century we find the word μῦθος being used for tales which are untrue, as is apparent from Pindar's lines

> "There are many wonders, and it may be
> Embroidered tales (μῦθοι) overpass the true account
> And trick men's talk
> With their enrichment of lies"
>
> (Pindar *Ol.* 1.19, tr. C.M. Bowra)

How and why did this criticism develop? In a very interesting study the English social anthropologist Jack *Goody* has recently drawn attention to the consequences of literacy for modes of thought[2]. Drawing upon a wide range of source materials he has argued persuasively that the introduction of literacy gradually transforms people's mode of perception and encourages the growth of a critical outlook. Following Goody, we offer some observations on the rise of Greek religious criticism from this particular point of view. We will look first at the prominence of classificatory thought in the Archaic Age, the initial consequence of literacy, and then discuss *the* influence of literacy on *myth*, since the earliest attacks directed themselves against the traditions about the gods. We will then note the necessity of learning to criticize, and also look at other factors which can be singled out as contributing towards the Greek 'rise of reason'. Finally, we will try to answer a question which, curiously enough, never seems to be posed; why, after the growing criticism of the tra-

ditional body *of* myths, did *so* few Greeks take **the final** plunge and become practising atheists?

<center>1</center>

For the **Greeks** literacy started in the **first half** of the eighth **century when** *they* **developed** their own alphabet, **which** descended **from a Phoenician prototype to** be dated about *800* B.C. **This** does not **mean** *that* the **Greeks** had always been **illiterate. In Mycenean times** *they* employed **the** so-called Linear-B, **a** syllabic script the content **of which** was **predominantly Greek, It** was **a typical** product of a palace administration and **with** the fall of the Mycenean ruling *élite* the script inevitably **disappeared**[3]).

From the texts **we have** left **we can judge** that their content was remarkably **like** *the* great majority of the texts **of the Ancient** Near East. Unlike the Near East, however, **the** Linear-B tablets have **not** given **us a** Gilgamesh epic, and *they* **furnish** only list after list **of** different items. **The** following **is a fair example:**

<center>

three amphoras

fourteen cooking **bowls**

seventeen water **jars**

(uncertain number of lines lost)[4]

</center>

**The** Near Eastern scribes **did not** only make lists for practical purposes. **We** also find onomastic **lexica** and lexical lists **with** all kind of encyclopaedic knowledge, **appropriately** called *Listen-wissenschaft*[5]. With these lists man in **the Ancient Near** East moved **into** the realm **of** restricted literacy, restricted because the complicated character **of this script** prevented **widespread** proficiency in writing. Very **soon after** these particular lexical lists started, the scribes **began to systematise** them; *they* introduced order into their listings, just **as** the Egyptian scribes would arrange **some of** their lists in **a** certain hierarchy, starting with the gods and **ending** with the **contemptible** herdsman[6].

This process of **classifying** also **took** place **in** Modern **Africa when** writing was introduced and **is** evidently, **as** *Goody* **argues,** a **feature typical of** early writing. Somehow lists invite their scribes **to** re-order them, **to create a cosmos** out **of** the jumble *of* **entries.** The introduction **of** literacy therefore **promotes** classificatory thought, **in** itself a **forerunner** of methodical, critical thought[7].

Did the **same process occur** also in Archaic Greece? In other words, **do we, in precisely** the period **in which writing was** introduced, **find** also **a** prominence *of* classificatory thought? **I suggest** that **we can give an** affirmative answer **to** this question **by** paying attention **to** the place **of** genealogies **in** the literature of the period. Of **course,** genealogies are older **than** writing; they are **frequently found in** Homer **and** their social use has often been **commented** upon. Yet **when we look at** the literature **of** the Archaic **Age we cannot** but **be** struck **by** a *preoccupation* with the genealogy of the gods. The best known work **of this** nature **is** Hesiod's *Theogony,* **but a** theogony was also **composed** by Alcman (*Fr.* 5 Page); works with the **same** title have been recorded for **the miracle-worker** Epimenides and the **enigmatic but interesting** Pherecydes; and the tradition was continued **in** Akusilaos' *Genealogies.* Recently, the Derveni-papyrus has even given **us a** commentary **on a theogony of** 'Orpheus'. The early **philosophers,** it **is true,** were **not** *so* interested in the *gods* but **nevertheless concentrated on** 'genetic' aspects **of** *the* world. The **facts** are **too well-known to** need elaboration **at** this point.

**Why** then **was** early **Greece** *so* **preoccupied** with the genesis **of** both **gods and men, and not so** much **with** ontology **or** ethics? **In** fact **it is** not difficult to detect in **this preoccupation the** same **classificatory** bias **as we met** in **the** early **cultures of** the Neax East. **In** their **theo- and cosmogonies** the **Greeks** created order **out** of the chaos of their **mythological** traditions and **allocated** *to* gods **and** men their specific places. Once this order had been created they **could move on** – **as** *they* certainly **did.**

2

Literacy, then, enabled **the** Greeks **to** bring **about a more** refined **classification of** their knowledge[8]**. Before we look** into the **consequences** of this **development, we** shall **first** consider another, **no less** important **consequence** of literacy **for** myth. **In** an **oral c lture** myths are evidently transmitted orally. **This** has the obvious effect that there **can** exist **no** one sacrosanct version **of a** myth, since myths are not transmitted verbatim. Every time the myth **is** recited, **at** least part **of** it **is** recreated. **This** oral character has the advantageous **implication that** myths can **be** continually adapted to new **situations**[9]**.** *Goody* has recorded **a**

striking **example of** such an **adaptation** from *the* **state of** Gonya **in** Northern Ghana. When the Gonya **were** asked **to** explain the number (7) **of** their **divisional** kingdoms, *they* **told a** story about **an** invading chief with seven sons. **At** the **time** the British arrived **two of** the seven **kingdoms disappeared, and** when Goody recorded his version **of** the myth **in** 1956-7 the invading chief was the happy father of five sons! 10) **Similarly, in** *the* **first** half of the fifth **century** the Theseus **legend in** Athens — **at** that time **still a** city with restricted literacy — was adapted **in a number of** details **to** glorify *the* Athenian contribution against Persia 11).

The Attidographers changed the Theseus myth and other **ones virtually at will** in the fourth century — **a** time **of** full literacy — but **it is** nevertheless clear that once **myths** are written down, **one** particular, historically dated, version can **become 'frozen** and **will, given** time, gain weight **as** the authoritative version. This **process is** particularly **well** illustrated **by** the history *of* early Christianity where the 'orthodox' gospels **prevailed to** such **an** extent over *the* 'gnostic' ones that the **latter** accounts **would** have been irretrievably **lost,** were it not for the Nag **Hammadi discovery** 12).

The oral **transmission of** myths also prevents their **becoming too individually** coloured. Elements **which** are **not 'swallowed'** by the **audience** will **be** dropped **in** the next **performance** 13) In **this** way **oral transmission rules** out **any excessively individual**istic traits **such as we often** find in the mythographers **of** late Antiquity **such** *as* Dictys or Nonnos. **In** *the* case **of** written myths **correction** by an **audience** is much **less** immediately evident, Of course, for written myths **time** is a sifting factor: versions that are **rejected will** be copied either not at all or to a much more modest extent, Yet, with the work of an important author **there is** always **the** chance that it **will** be transmitted **in** its entirety out *of* **reverence** for its creator, **irrespective** of the appreciation of some individual parts **of** the work.

The **distinction we have** made at this point between myths **which** are orally **transmitted** and myths transmitted **in** writing **is of importance** for the analysis **of** classical myth, since the French anthropologist **Claude Lévi-Strauss** has argued that **we** should not study just one version of **a** myth but **all its** versions and per**mutations;** recently similar claims **have** been **advanced** regarding the study **of Greek** myth 14) . Yet, **we can** now realise **that** not **all** versions **of a** myth **are** equally valuable. This becomes **especially**

clear in the case of the Alexandrian poets. Their allusive art delighted in the ancient myths and rituals, to which *they* often gave their own colouring. In practice this means that late accounts of popular myths are more likely to have acquired individualistic stamps than earlier ones.

However, this does not mean that all late sources are late inventions: *posteriores non semper deteriores*. Travellers such as Pausanias and Strabo have rescued many an archaic myth, but, unfortunately, there are no definite rules to prove the early character of the evidence contained in such late sources, although *a* connection with a existing ritual is often a strong indication of the myth's antiquity. We always have to consider the inherent probability of the tradition, and in some cases a comparative approach can establish an *early* origin with near certainty, as in the case of Achilles' transvestism. Absolute certainty, however, is always difficult to reach in these cases.

<div align="center">3</div>

So far we have seen that literacy carries the power to 'freeze a myth or give it a very individialistic stamp. These possibilities are nevertheless negligible compared with another potential consequence, As Goody observes: "Once an utterance is put dawn in writing it can be inspected in much greater detail, in its parts as well as in its whole, backwards as well as forwards, out of context as well as in its setting; in other words, it can be subjected to a quite different type of scrutiny and critique than is possible with purely verbal communication[15]. However, when an author is not accustomed to weeding out' inconsistencies in his oral performance, although naturally striving to evade disturbing mistakes, he must get used to a more critical approach towards his work after it has been put down in writing. Such an attitude can only be acquired over a period of time and does not come naturally. We may therefore expect that *our* earliest literary texts will be less consistent and less concerned with unity than later ones,

These characteristics are indeed apparent in the earliest works, the poems of Homer and Hesiod. Although Homer already shows the influence of literacy, even 'unitarian' scholars have been able to point out many inconsistencies and contradictions in his text.

Hesiod's *Works and Days* is a collection, like similar ones from the scribal cultures of the Ancient Near East, of instructions and proverbial wisdom, which is not at all tightly organised. Consequently, all kinds of unifying principles have been proposed[16]. From a methodological point of view this *is* justified, as long as we realise that the modern preoccupation with unity and inconsistency can hardly have been shared to that extent by the poet himself.

The better organisation of a work is only one aspect of the implications of literacy. Much more important is the possibility which it creates for reflection on the traditional body of belief. Unfortunately, anthropological research has greatly neglected the occurrence of religious criticism in traditional societies. Yet, it seems clear that sustained criticism is widely absent, although sceptics do exist[17]. This is understandable since, besides the 'blocage mental' we will discuss in $ 5, in oral *so*-cieties the preconditions for the development *of* criticism are absent. Without the material means of preserving one's argument, it cannot be challenged, improved upon and developed. Moreover, we may doubt whether in a small face-to-face community there exists enough critical talent for a fertile dialogue, whereas literacy immediately widens the size of the audience.

Just as organising a literary work has *to* be learnt, *so* has religious criticism. And indeed we can observe a transition from the criticism of details to more general statements. Whereas Xenophanes attacked only the anthropomorphic representation of the gods, Protagoras could speculate on whether the gods existed at all. And whereas Xenophanes attacked only the legends of Titans and Giants as 'products of the imagination of earlier generations' (*Fr*. 1.22 Gentili/Prato), Diogenes of Apollonia (A *8)* contrasted speaking truly about the divine with speaking μυθικῶς.

4

Up to now I have followed *Goody* in ascribing to literacy an overriding influence on the growth of Greek religious criticism. Yet historical developments are rarely to be explained in a monocausal way. And the heavy stress *Goody* lays on literacy leaves the reader somewhat dissatisfied since the problem naturally arises as to why philosophy and logic did not originate in the

Ancient Near East, where literacy was *so* much older. **Goody's comparison** of the Near East **with modern** Africa also **leaves** something **to be** desired, **since** in modern Africa literacy came **in the** form of printing, **a mode of communication which** must have had **a** much swifter **impact by** virtue **of** the sheer volume **of** modern accessible **material, in** contrast with **the** much rarer **production in** earlier times, but **especially** since **the** printed material already contains modes **of** thought heavily influenced **by centuries** of literacy[18].

In Archaic Greece religious criticism **is** only **one aspect of a general** 'rise *of* reason'. Looking **upon** the problem **from** this angle **we shall** have to **look** for factors **which** promoted the rise of critical thinking and which were **particular** *to* **Greek** literacy and **to** the Archaic **Age.** Within the **scope** of **a single article it is impossible to** give **an** exhaustive **analysis,** but for **a first** exploration **a** number **of** factors may tentatively **be** identified[19].

The **introduction** of the alphabet and the **simplification of** the **letters** enabled more **people to** master writing and reading within **a** shorter time. **This meant** a kind **of democratization of** literacy **in contrast** with the restricted literacy **of** the scribal **cultures**[20].

Scholars **have** pointed **to the importance of the democratic** revolution of Cleisthenes and **the** fall **of** the tyrants in Sicily for the rise **of** reason **and the development of alternative** ways **of** thinking. **Curiously** enough **much** less **importance** has been attached **to** political **developments in** Ionia, **the** home **of** the **first philosophers.** But precisely **in** this **area, in** Chios, **we** find one **of** the oldest **testimonies for democratic** institutions[21]. and the traditions about στάσις in Miletus (Hdt. 5, *29)* indicate **that the** Chian **development** can hardly **have** been unique, **even** though its final outcome, **a** kind **of democracy,** may have been **so.** Besides, the Chian **development will have** been a topic **for** discussion **in** the neighbouring cities and islands[22]. **In** this **connection it** fits intriguingly **well** that the subject **of our** earliest Ionian poem, the *Iliad,* **is an aristocratic 'drop out',** a feature **which** regularly marks the breaking up **of the aristocratic** order[23].

The Archaic **Age witnessed lively commercial activities in many** parts **of** the Mediterranean. Cities **sent out their colonies,** and colonists **will** regularly **have returned with** news **of the outlandish customs** of their neighbours the **natives,** thus **widening** the **mental** horizon **of** the **Archaic** Greeks[24]

In one of his subtle **studies** the **German** sociologist and **philosopher** Georg Simmel **has argued** that the introduction **of** money greatly contributed **to a** more rational **way of** looking **at** society. Money enables man **to** make **quick** profits and **to move** more independently **outside** the **ruling aristocratic** circles. **In** this **way** it **promotes** social **mobility, an important** factor **in** the loosening **of** the traditional social order and, **consequently, in challenging traditional** thinking. Given this rationalising **effect of** money it can hardly **be** chance that **the first philosopher**, Thales, **is also** the first known **speculator**25).

**In a recent analysis** of the 'rise of reason' in the **earlier Middle Ages** the **role played by mathematics** has been **stressed**. Although *our* **sources** are rather **scarce for** the pre-Socratic thinkers **we** know that a number **of** them were **interested in** mathematics, **and** the analogy with the **Middle Ages suggests** that **this** factor **will** have **been of** influence **in** the Archaic Age **of Greece** too26).

**Finally,** *the* birth **of philosophy has** been explained **as** a product *of* **leisure of** the early Ionian society27). **The** argument, which **was** already advanced **by** Aristotle (*Metaph*. 981b 17 ff.), is too monocausal **to be** convincing, **since all** feudal orders **had** their **leisure-class** but **as good as** none had **philosophers** of **the stature of** the pre-Socratics. **Nevertheless** the affluence **of** Ionian society **will have been** important, since **it** enabled the thinker to **be** independent **of his audience in** expounding his **views, in** contrast **to** the poet, who had **to please his immediate audience**28).

**When we now** look back **at** the factors identified **we** note that a number **of** them – **the** breaking up **of the old** aristocratic **order, colonisation and growing** affluence – **must** already have been influencing **Greek** thought towards **a** more rational outlook before the actual birth **of philosophy. Consequently, we** suggest that **in** Archaic Greece literacy **was not so much** the 'first **cause' of** critical **thought,** but **most likely** intervened **in an already ongoing process to** accelerate **and to deepen** it29).

5

After **this** foray **in** the more general field **of the rise of** Greek reason, **we now** return **to** the problem of religious **criticism. One of** the **most puzzling** aspects *of* **this criticism is** the way

it **stops** just before the **brink.** After the **scepticism of** Protago-
ras one **would** have **expected to** find **atheism as** the next **logical**
step **to be** taken. **To be** sure, later **generations knew** *of* many
ἄθεοι **in** the fifth century, **such as** Anaxagoras, Diagoras and
Euripides, but modern **research** has shown that these **allegations**
cannot withstand proper critical **scrutiny,** and **really** notorious
atheists, **such as** Callicles, **only** appear **in literature** as **crea-**
tions **of their** authors, **not as** faithful reports **of historical**
**figures**[30]. However, it **can** hardly **be a** coincidence that **these**
'literary' **atheists** start **appearing at** the **end** of **the** fifth
century. The **rise of** criticism had made **it possible to imagine**
**the possible existence of such persons,** although **to practise**
atheism was **not** yet **a** 'life **option'. And** even though **a** Herculanean
papyrus **tells us** of the **sophist** Prodicus **of Keos** that **he**

> "maintains that the gods **of popular belief do not exist** and
> that they lack **knowledge,** but **that primitive** man, [out **of**
> admiration, deified] the **fruits** of the earth and **virtually**
> everything that contributed **to his subsistence ...**"[31]

**there is** nothing **in our** tradition that indicates that **he was**
known *as* **a practising atheist**[32].

Moreover, in **addition to** the virtual absence **of practised**
**atheism we** rarely find **the** realisation of religious **alternatives.**
**This** becomes **especially apparent in** the total **isolation in Greek**
society **of the** Pythagoreans, the **only** sect **which** succeeded **in**
founding **a community where an** alternative **view was** actualised.
**Similarly,** the epigraphical and papyrological evidence of Orphism,
the other sect with an **alternative way** of life, has been found
**only** at the **margins of Greek** society: Southern Italy **(the** main
**home of** the Pythagoreans!), Thessaly, Crete, Thessalonica and
Olbia[33]. The **question** therefore **naturally arises as** *to* why **more**
alternatives were not realised, and why, after the **rejection** of
**myths** and **scepticism about** *the* gods, **Greek** religion **did not** die
**a** peaceful death.

We **will approach** the problem **by way of a** détour. The absence
**of** atheism **is not** only **a** problem **in relation to Classical** Greece.
In 1942 the French historian **Louis Febvre** published **his** epoch-
making study **of** Rabelais, **in which** he noted *the* absence **of** atheism
**in** *the* **Middle** Ages. Febvre **explained this** absence **as a** kind of
'blocage mental'. **In** the **life of society and the** individual
Christianity was **of** overriding **importance. Its festivals con-**
stituted the **rythm of** the **year; important transitions in** the

life of *the* individual – such as birth, amrriage and death – were completely integrated into religious life, as were everyday activities, which were usually connected with different Saints. Even one's place of habitation was normally dominated by the church, whose bells would always remind the forgetful believer of its existence. To think Christianity away from society was simply impossible34).

Febvre concentrated his work on the life of an intellectual, but some fascinating recent investigations into the life of the common people have shown that agnostics and persons who doubted virtually everything that *the* priest said did actually exist. Yet, their corrections in a way only strengthen Febvre's point, since these sceptics were often marginal to the life *of* the community, such as shepherds and vagabonds. And even *those* sceptical about points of dogma nevertheless adhered to rituals such as baptism, maxriage and confession35).

A similar explanation is valid too for Archaic and Classical Greece. In the polis religion determined the course of the year by its festivals; the rites accompanying an individual's life from birth *to* death were closely connected with the gods of the polis; and temples dominated the space of the polis even more than churches dominated the landscape of Medieval Europe: we have to think only of the Parthenon in Athens. To think this all away would have meant a total revolution in customary life; naturally enough, the average Greek refused to let his life be confused or altered by modernists or sectarians.

This is not *to* say that *the* attacks *of* the sophists on the traditional beliefs had left the position of ritual unaltered. The nature of *our sources* prevent us to trace this development in detail, but the numerous decayed temples that are described by the travellers Pausanias and Strabo clearly demonstrate that in the end the changing attitude towards the gods had not left the place of ritual undisturbed.

It was the rise of literacy, as we have seen, that enabled the Greeks to formulate and develop the critique *of* their religious tradition. It would also be literacy that helped the early Christians to replace the traditional Greek religion with their new belief, and the still prominent position of the Bible in our own culture today is just one example of the enormous changes that the introduction of literacy exerted on the age-old beliefs of mankind.

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1. I would like to thank the following friends and colleagues for their comments on earlier versions: W. Burkert, R. Buxton who in addition corrected the English, F. Graf, A. Henrichs and Th. Korteweg. The notes have been kept down to the most recent literature; the well-known has not been annotated.

. J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge 1977).

. P.K. McCarter, *The Antiquity of the Creek Alphabet and the Early Phoenician Alphabet* (Missoula 1975), 126; A. Heubeck, *Schrift* (= *Archaeologia Homerica* III.X, Göttingen 1979), 75-87. McCarter's useful study was apparently overlooked by Heubeck.

4. M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenean Greek* (Cambridge 1973$^2$), 331.

5. A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften*, II (Munich 1953), 90-99.

6. G. Maspero, *Manuel d'hiérarchie égyptienne*, J. As. 11 (1888), 250-280.

7. Considered in this light it can hardly be chance that the scholastic movement followed closely upon the Gregorian reform, which greatly promoted literacy, see A. Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1978), 215 f.

8. For Greek literacy, see F.D. Harvey, *Literacy in the Athenian Democracy*, REG 79 (1966), 585-635; R. Weil, *Lire dans Thucydide*, in *Le monde grec. Hommages à Claire Préaux* (Brussels 1975), 162-168; E. Havelock, *The Preliteracy of the Greeks*, New Literary History 7 (1977), 369-391; E.G. Turner, *Athenian Books in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.*, (London 1978$^2$); O. Longo, *Scrivere in Tucidide*, in *Studi Anthos Ardizzoni* II (Rome 1978), 517-554; P.A. Cartledge, *Literacy in the Spartan Oligarchy*, JHS 98 (1978), 25-37; T.A. Boring, *Literacy in Ancient Sparta* (Leyden 1979); A. Bums, *Athenian Literacy in Fifth Century B.C.*, J. Hist. Ideas 42 (1981), 371-387.

9. See R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry* (Cambridge 1977), 52-87; J. Goody, *Mémoire et apprentisage dans les sociétés avec et sans écriture: la transmission Bagre*, L'Homme 17 (1977), 29-52.

10. J. Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge 1968), 33.

11. See, *e*.g., C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *Theseus as Son and Stepson* (London 1979), 48-58,

12. See, for a good introduction, E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York 1979).

13. See the perceptive observations by R. Jakobson and P. Bogatyrev, in R. Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, IV (The Hague/Paris 1966), 91-93.

14, L. Brisson, *Le mythe de Tirésias* (Leyden 1976), 7; M. Detienne, *Dionysos mis à mort* (Paris 1977), 23 ff.

15. Goody, *The Domestication*, 44.

16. M.L. West, *Hesiod: Works and Days* (Oxford 1978), 3-15 (Near Eastern parallels), 41-59 (unifying principles).

17. P. Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (New York 1957$^2$), 375-384.

18. This becomes especially clear in the effects of printing, a kind of intensified literacy, see the illuminating study of E.L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge Mass. 1979).

Since the following enumeration had already been written before I read G.E.R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience* (Cambridge 1979), I have left it unchanged, but it should be stressed that Lloyd is of the highest importance for our subject.

20. Cf. A.A. Havelock, *Origins of Western Literacy* (Toronto 1976); J.-P. Vernant, *Mythe et société en grèce ancienne* (Paris 1974), 95.

21. R. Meiggs and D. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions* (Oxford 1969), no. 8.

22. Following Gernet, Vernant, Vidal-Naquet and Detienne, Geoffrey Lloyd attaches great value to the discussions provoked by these developments and the argumentative procedures developed in the course of the debates surrounding the different political happenings. Yet, Lloyd, in my opinion, in this way undervalues the importance of literacy. public debates always imply a certain censorship of the audience and therefore do not lend themselves to the exposition of daring theories. It cannot be chance that the Greeks themselves especially connected the sophists with the book, a medium which is free of preceding censorship. For sophists and books, see R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, I (Oxford 1968), 17 f., 28 f.; J. Mansfeld, Mnem. IV 33 (1980), 94, n. 345.

23. K. von See (Ed.), *Europäische Heldendichtung* (Darmstadt 1978), 30 f.

24. Lloyd, *Magic*, 236-239.

25. G. Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes* (Leipzig 1907²), 357-386; see also J.-P. Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*, II (Paris 1981⁶), 117 f. Thales: Aristot. *Pol.* 1259a 6-18; Diog. Laert. 1.26.

26. Cf. Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages,* 203-210; W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge Mass. 1972), 415 ff.; Lloyd, *Magic*, 103-124.

27. W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, I (Cambridge 1962), 30 f.

28. Cf. B. Gentili, in *Storia e civiltà dei Greci*, II 3 (Milan 1979), 209-254.

29. The same conclusion, but along a different line of reasoning, is reached by O. Murray, *Early Greece* (Glasgow 1980), 99.

30. See the perceptive observations by A. Dihle, *Das Satyrspiel Sisyphos*, Hermes 105 (1977), 28-42. It is consistent with this view that the number of *asebeia*-processes was probably much lower than later tradition suggests, cf. K.J. Dover, *The Freedom of the Intellectual in Greek Society*, Talanta 7 (1975), 24-54.

31. *PHerc* 1428 fr. 19. This highly important fragment, which was omitted by Diels, has recently been rescued by A. Henrichs, HSCP 79 (1975), 107-123 and *The Atheism of Prodicus*, Cronache Erc. 6 (1976), 15-21. For Prodicus' thought and influence, see also Henrichs, *The Sophists and Hellenistic Religion: Prodicus as the Spiritual Father of the Isis Aretalogies*, in *Acta VII Congress FIEC* (forthcoming Budapest 1982/3).

32. Contra Henrichs, *The Atheism,* 18.

33. The marginal character of Orphism has been stressed by W. Burkert, *Neue Funde zur Orphik*, Informationen zum altsprachlichen Unterricht 2 (1980, 27-42), 40. We may compare the marginal character of Catharism: Montaillou!

34. L. Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle: la religion de Rabelais* (Paris 1962²).

35. Cf. K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth 1973²), 198-206; E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* (Paris 1976), 523-534; C. Ginzburg,

*Il formaggio e i vermi* (Turin 1976); G.E. Aylmer, *Unbelief in Seventeenth-Century England*, in D. Pennington and K. Thomas (eds.) , *Puritans and Revolutionaries* (Oxford 1978), 22-46. Thomas, *Religion*, 200 also notes that the sceptics were often aliens and strangers to the district, but he wrongly infers from this to the conclusion that therefore the number of sceptics must have been much higher.