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CHAPTER ONE

Thales, Father of Philosophy?

Before the Presocratics

“Presocratic” refers to a long phase of Greek thought that stretches over two centuries (the sixth and fifth BCE). This label, still in use, first appeared in a handbook of universal philosophy published toward the end of the eighteenth century, during a period of “reorganization of historical consciousness,” which “was also one of new periodization.”¹ And the demarcation has repeatedly been questioned over the past few decades, in the wake of a generalized anti-historicizing trend that has left its mark on the study of the ancient world.

Indeed, such a category as “Presocratics” may sound reductive in and of itself, since it groups under the same umbrella authors who differ greatly in intents, interests, and writing styles. Paradoxically, the main trait shared by these thinkers is that their works have come down to us as fragments, or through ancient testimonies or citations in the works of others. Other reasons to question the “Presocratic” categorization could easily be listed here, but first it will be more useful to reflect on the lasting fortune of the term.

Now, it is clear that the use of such a term identifies Socrates as the turning point at the end of a determined line of development within Greek thought. In this historiographical framework, the Athenian philosopher acts as the founder of ethical inquiry, thus marking a crucial break from a tradition that was mainly focused on the observation and analysis of the physical world. The ancient authors themselves have made vivid contributions to this picture. Socrates’s devoted pupil Xenophon, for instance, emphasizes his mentor’s lack of interest in the “nature of all things.” Conversely, he stresses his attention to the “human” condition and the elaboration of moral notions such as wisdom and courage (*Memorabilia* I, 1, 11–12, and 16). But Plato insists more than others on Socrates’s detachment from natural inquiry. In his *Apology* (19d),

¹ I am referring to Johann Augustus Eberhard’s *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie* (1788), as quoted by Laks (2001c, 293). See also Laks 2018 [2006], 19–20.

we see a Socrates on trial who is busy defending himself against the charge of having formulated dangerous cosmological doctrines. Again, in the still more dramatic setting of the *Phaedo* (96aff), Socrates devotes part of his final conversation with his disciples to explaining the reasons for his dissatisfaction with an inquiry into the natural world (*peri phuseōs historia*) like the one carried out by Anaxagoras, though he had initially been drawn to it. Moreover, throughout the first phase of Plato's production, the character Socrates elaborates countless variations on the problem of defining certain moral concepts.

In the first book of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle builds on this preexisting framework to trace a powerful outline of the philosophical tradition that preceded him. Here, too, the backdrop is dominated by natural inquiry until Socrates intervenes, isolating the field of ethics and investigating it with a specific method (the search for universals and definitions: *Metaphysics* I, 6, 987b 1; *Parts of Animals* I, 1, 642a 28). According to this view, Socrates represents a rupture between an earlier phase of philosophy, where an interest for nature prevails, and a later and more complete one, characterized by dialectic, starting with Plato's inquiry on the Forms (*Metaphysics* 1, 3, 983b 7; 1, 6, 987b 31). The sequence leading from the Presocratics to Socrates and then to Plato thus overlaps with a division of philosophy into physics, ethics, and dialectics. This combination will later be perfected (in particular by the Stoics) and make its way into the main text of Hellenistic historiography, Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers* (I, 14; II, 16; III, 56).

Plato's dialogues would have sufficed to present subsequent generations with the idea of Socrates as the *primus inventor* and discoverer of a new world—the one closest to man, to be sure, but never before glimpsed. And Cicero admirably condensed this depiction by describing Socrates as “the first one to call philosophy down from the sky and place it in cities and even into our homes” (*Tusculanae*, V, 4, 10). Yet it was thanks to Aristotle (though popularized by Diogenes Laertius)—and to the powerful organization of Aristotle's philosophical construction—that this shift of the philosophical gaze came to be embedded in a strong evolutionary framework that was destined to re-emerge in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany, where it would serve the periodization needs of philosophical historiography. In fact, the utility of the Presocratic category can be explained through this process of refunction- alizing Aristotle's outline, and Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1833) and Zeller's *Philosophie der Griechen* (1844ff) offer the most illustrious and emphatic arguments for this reading of Aristotle. And its fall from grace, after all, is relative.²

² See Beall (1993) for a brilliant study of the relationship between Hegel's *Lessons*, in their various editorial stages, and their Aristotelian source. On the relationship between Zeller's and Hegel's constructions, see Leszl 1989 and 2011. Brancacci 2002 acutely notes other reasons for the deserved success of the notion of “Presocratic.”

It is true that the definition of Socrates as the *after* of the Presocratic period has encountered a growing number of objections. Is it not the case, for instance, that signs of ethical and anthropological interests are already present before Socrates? Consider the concern for the vicissitudes of the soul that pervades the Orphic and Pythagorean traditions, as well as the writings of Heraclitus and Empedocles. Some of the authors that we call “Presocratics” are contemporary with Socrates (e.g., Democritus), and where should we place the Sophists?³ However, these are relatively simple questions, and in asking them we are still moving along a predefined path. In fact, the majority of scholars may continue to use the current terminology for the sake of practicality, while others circumvent the problem by talking about “Preplatonic” thinkers (thus leaving Socrates in splendid isolation). The *after* of the Presocratics seems to posit a preliminary problem of definition, with little bearing on the evaluation of specific authors and contexts. But can we say the same about their *before*?

Another familiar formulation describes Thales as the “father of philosophy.” It is worth remembering that this, too, stems from an image created in antiquity. Thales is the first thinker from whom we have been handed down insights on nature, hints of geometrical demonstrations, as well as astronomical and meteorological interests; the sources report his opinions on problems that would become topical, such as the causes of earthquakes and of overflows of the Nile. His activity can be traced in Miletus between the second half of the seventh century BCE and the first decades of the sixth (among other things, he reportedly predicted a famous eclipse in 585 BCE, but this information must be taken with a grain of salt). A port city on the coast of Ionia and a congested crossroads between East and West, Miletus at this time was particularly prosperous and lively, as shown by the numerous foundations of new colonies across the Mediterranean and along the coastlines of the Black Sea. It is not by chance that, in the sixth century, the city will be home to Anaximander and Anaximenes (who, together with Thales, form the renowned triad of “Ionian scientists”), as well as Hecataeus. The last authored the first geographical treatise in Greek (*Journey around the World*), as well as a mythographical writing (*Genealogies*) wherein mythical tales are subjected to a systematic and rationalistic critique in order to retrieve their historical core

³ Walther Kranz, in the *Vorrede* to his fifth edition of Diels’s *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (1934–37), observed that “Presocratic” should be used strictly to indicate those who preceded the “Socratics,” by analogy with the practice of calling “Postsocratics” only those who came after them (we’ll remember that Nestle’s influential 1923 work is titled *Nachsokratiker*). But Kranz’s main insight was that the *Vorsokratiker* featured many a contemporary of Socrates (some of whom even outlived him), and that the edition as a whole was nevertheless tied together by the panorama of thought outlined in it, which, while not strictly “Presocratic,” was certainly *not* Socratic, since those authors represented a line of thought that was influenced by neither Socrates nor Plato.

from beneath the contradictory elaborations of legend. The exchange with different cultures (from both the East and the colonies) on one hand, and the needs of maritime trade on the other, trigger the elaboration of new theories geared toward understanding atmospheric phenomena, exploring new territories, and reflecting on Greek traditional knowledge.

Starting from the Hellenistic period, Thales is reported as the author of several writings, including a poem titled *Nautical Astronomy*. However, it is more likely that he did not leave behind any written work: the earliest sources that mention his doctrines, such as Herodotus and Aristotle, depend on an oral tradition. It is no wonder, then, that his image was soon surrounded by an aura of legend, imbued with the allure of the archetype.⁴ In a famous digression in Plato's *Theaetetus* (164a–b), Thales is the name of the philosopher who, distracted while observing the stars, falls into a well, thus provoking the scorn of a Thracian servant girl—a memorable prefiguration, in the dramatic setting of the dialogue, of the tragic end that the city of Athens has in store for Socrates. This image will later enjoy widespread popularity as a metaphor for the failure of philosophical contemplation in the “life-world.”⁵ Conversely, Aristotle invokes Thales as grounds for rehabilitating the practical value of philosophy. He tells how, thanks to his knowledge in matters of astronomy, Thales was once able to predict an abundant olive harvest. He then bought all the oil mills in the region, only to sell them again when the right time came. He reportedly did this not so that he could make a sizable profit but in order to discredit those who, citing his humble lifestyle, had accused philosophy of being worthless (*Politics* 1, 11, 1259a 7–22). It is clear that for both Plato and Aristotle, Thales is “good to think with”; that is, he serves as an early figure upon whom to project that philosophical ideal of life that developed much later, between the Academy and the Peripatos.⁶ It must be noted, however, that both Plato's and Aristotle's accounts pivot around Thales's meteorological and astronomical knowledge: neither author, in other words, has any doubt that the “first philosopher” concentrated his scrutiny on the natural world.

It is again Aristotle who, in the first book of *Metaphysics*, interprets this interest in natural inquiry as a turning point marking a new epoch. According to him, Thales's role is as decisive as that of Socrates, and symmetrical to it. In

⁴On the figure and activity of Thales, see the extensive treatment by O'Grady 2002, rich in materials though weakened somewhat by the author's excessive confidence in the possibility of reconstructing “what Thales really said.” For a critical use of the sources on Thales, see instead Gemelli Marciano 2007b.

⁵For the meaning of this Platonic image, whose history is masterfully described by Blumenberg (1987), see also Butti de Lima 2002, 27ff.

⁶It was Jaeger (1928) who proposed this reconstruction of the manifold tradition of anecdotes, in which the most ancient thinkers (including the Seven Sages) are chosen as representatives of an ideal of life, whether it be contemplative, practical, or political. On Thales's “metamorphoses” in the ancient tradition, see also Mogoródi 2000.

fact, since Thales identified water as the principle of all things, he is seen as the “inaugurator” of the study of material causes that started the investigation of nature and, consequently, philosophy itself. In Aristotle’s view, philosophy then evolved into an understanding of *all* things (*Metaphysics* I, 3, 983b 20).⁷

This was another crucial move on the part of Aristotle. Admittedly, it was soon opposed by a tendency to trace the beginnings of philosophy to the East. Herodotus and Plato had already shown admiration for the lore accumulated by the Egyptians long before the Greeks appeared on the horizon. Plato knows something about Zoroaster (*Alcibiades* I, 122a), and Aristotle himself mentions with great interest the dualistic conceptions of Persian magi (*On Philosophy*, frag. 6 Ross; *Metaphysics* XIV, 1091b 10). But a number of other Greek authors, especially from the fourth century onward, assert the philosophical precedence of Persians, Chaldeans, Indian gymnosophists, and the Druids. Diogenes Laertius will vigorously argue against this position in the proem of his *Lives of the Philosophers*. According to an authoritative hypothesis, this work was written in an anti-Christian vein and its main purpose was to reclaim the Greek character of philosophy.⁸ The claim of a pre-Greek barbarian philosophy, resurrected within the framework of the new Christian one, will nevertheless prevail (thanks in particular to Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata*, from the beginning of the third century CE) and make its way through modern historiographical philosophy until Brucker—that is, until the detour caused at the turn of the nineteenth century by the aforementioned “rebirth” of Aristotle’s historiographical paradigm. Once again, a triangulation took place (Aristotle-Hegel-Zeller), sanctioning the removal of the East from the history of philosophy and reinstalling Thales in his pioneering position. As we know, this endeavor was rather successful: until very recently, the majority of school textbooks started off inevitably, and unproblematically, in Greece with Thales.

In recent years, however, even this schematization has met increasing criticism. Giorgio Colli’s *La sapienza greca* is representative of the situation in Italy. Inspired by the desire to rewrite Herman Diels’s classic edition of the fragments of the Presocratics—to this day the reference work for the studies in the field (in the edition revised by Walther Kranz)—Colli’s project originally called for eleven volumes, but after the author’s death it was left incomplete at the third tome (devoted to Heraclitus). Nevertheless, its overall design is fairly clear, thanks in particular to the fact that Colli’s musings on the subject had already been expressed elsewhere. The reasons behind the project’s structure are especially evident: while the first book treats religious lore predating Presocratic thought, the second features the Ionians, preceded (as in

⁷ See Frede 2004 for an attentive analysis of the complex strategy executed by Aristotle in the first book of *Metaphysics*.

⁸ See Momigliano 1986.

the Diels-Kranz edition) by the semimythical figures of Epimenides and Pherecydes. In this overtly Nietzschean endeavor, Colli proposed a global reorganization of the approach to ancient thought, pinpointing the source of philosophy or, better yet, the source of “wisdom”—as opposed to “knowledge,” intended as an expression of decadent rationalism, and initiated as such by Socrates and Plato—and identifying it with ecstatic experience, in a ritual context dominated by Apollo and Dionysus. This hypothesis was developed at the price of many a forced interpretation, but it should nevertheless (or perhaps for this very reason) be credited with bringing to the fore a central hermeneutical problem, namely, the inseparability of the issue of the *beginning* of philosophy and that of the *nature* of philosophy itself.⁹

In fact, the identification of a specific starting point of philosophy tends to be tied to a specific choice concerning its objects, modalities, and purposes. The more convinced we are that philosophical activity has to do with a positive curiosity about the outside world, the keener we will be to accept Aristotle’s portrayal of Thales. This is what happened, for instance, in those positivistic accounts of authors endowed with great historical acumen such as Burnet and Gomperz, for whom the history of early Greek thought became a history of acquisitions—possibly seen as anticipations of modern science. Conversely, we will be prone to opposing that same portrayal if we tend to identify philosophy with the wise men’s quest for the origins of being, as Colli unambiguously did—but he was not and is not the only one.

In my view, a problem like the one we are dealing with here requires more nuanced answers. But first I would like to reformulate it in terms that are just as clear-cut: we may ask ourselves whether philosophy was born as an autonomous exercise of critical reasoning bursting into an arena governed by religious and mythical wisdom, or whether this very wisdom was its deeper and more propelling source. Or rather, in other (Greek) words: does philosophy start as a *logos* that interrupts and unhinges the monopoly of *muthos*, or is philosophy itself a *muthos*?

The stakes are undoubtedly high, and the problem cannot be circumvented with some easy terminological sleight of hand, such as the one we adopt when we speak of “Preplatonic” thinkers in order to avoid the hurdle represented by Socrates. In this case, we have to venture into, and take soundings from, the background Thales might have drawn from for his beliefs on the cosmos and its origin. We cannot overlook the fact that an appreciation of water as a natural principle can already be traced to the earliest text of Greek literature, the Homeric epics, where the sea (*Okeanos*) is called “origin of the gods” and “of all things.” Represented as a river that encircles Earth (seen as a flat disk), Okeanos is the source of all waters, fresh or salty. Moreover, Hesiod, in his

⁹ Cf. Colli 1977, 1978, and 1980, with the various objections of Graf and Barnes 1979, Cambiano 1980, and Voelke 1985.

Theogony, points out that the union of Okeanos and Tethys—both born of Sky (*Ouranos*) and Earth (*Gaia*)—results in abundant aqueous offspring: three thousand Oceanids (who, scattered across the earth, keep watch over it and the depths of the sea) and as many river gods.¹⁰ But we can dig even deeper and go even further back in time, given the possibility that these representations are derived, in turn, from non-Greek beliefs. In fact, water plays the role of a cosmological principle in the great fluvial civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Numerous Egyptian texts speak of a primordial aqueous mass (referred to as Nun in the *Book of the Dead*, toward the end of the second millennium) from which the world emerged. Furthermore, the fertilizing power of the primordial principle was generally recognized in the annual flooding of the Nile. As for Mesopotamia, Apsû designates the realm of cosmic water in Sumerian and Akkadian mythology. The *Enuma Elish* (or *Enûma Eliš*), the most renowned Mesopotamian poem “of creation,” was written in Akkadian toward the end of the second millennium BCE (the title corresponds to the first two words of the text, meaning “when up high”). It postulates a primordial mingling of waters (Apsû, male, and Tiamat, female) that generates a series of sky and earth divinities that are Marduk’s forebears; in the present world, Apsû still appears, this time as the cosmic region under the earth.¹¹ Thales, who himself posited that the earth floats on water, may have been aware of some of these conceptions.

We are also informed of his travels to Egypt. It is true that the land of Egypt, admired and revered for its wisdom, was an almost mandatory travel destination for the first *sophoi* in the biographical tradition. After all, it was thanks to the merchants coming from Miletus, Chios, and Samos, under the auspices of Pharaoh Psammetichus I, that the port of Naucratis was founded (620 BCE) in order to facilitate the exchange between Egypt and Ionia. And we cannot rule out the possibility that curious seafarers may have traveled to Egypt or elsewhere together with Greek human and material resources, and that Thales may well have been among them.¹² At any rate, Miletus’s preeminent

¹⁰ See Homer, *Iliad*, 14, 201, 246, and 302; 18, 607; 21, 195; Hesiod, *Theogony*, 133 and 337–70. Herodotus (IV, 8) comments that the idea of an Okeanos encircling Earth is rather common among the Greeks, even though they do not provide a demonstration of it.

¹¹ The pioneering collection of essays by Frankfort, Frankfort, Wilson, Jacobsen, and Irwin 1946 remains an indispensable source of information on the Eastern and Middle Eastern roots of Greek cosmogonical knowledge. On Mesopotamian cosmology, see also Bottéro and Krämer 1989 and, more recently, an up-to-date assessment by Rochberg 2005. On the *Enuma Elish* in particular, see Maul 2015.

¹² Van Dongen 2007 stresses the importance of Naucratis in his prudent analysis of a vast group of archaeological and historical data pertaining to the relations between preclassical Greece and the Near East. It should be noted that, unlike Egypt, Mesopotamian cultures cannot be proved, with the documentation we possess, to have had a *direct* influence on preclassical Greece.

geographical position amid these commercial routes is likely to have promoted, across Middle Eastern as well as Mediterranean inlands, a familiarization with other cultures.

To conclude, the picture becomes rather complicated if we try to go back beyond Thales—in other words, if we ask ourselves whose “son” this controversial “father” of philosophy was—for this kind of question compels us to venture into the grueling territory of traditional wisdom and lore, preserved by myth. In particular, it forces us to explore the cosmogonic myths, whose ramifications will stretch out well beyond the phase of the Ionian cosmologies and whose roots are, after all, rather remote. So remote, in fact, that we must look for them *elsewhere*, be it in Egypt or in the Near East. When it comes to philosophy, the question of *when* is intertwined with that of *where*, and the exploration of the philosophical contents of myth undermines the very foundations of the paradigm of a Greek origin of philosophical reasoning.

Ex Oriente Lux?

When touching upon the problem of the cognitive status of myth in Greek thought, we cannot overlook the history of scholarship on the subject, which is one of the richest and presents some of the roughest terrain. So, before delving deeper into our argument, it will be worth exploring some of its pivotal moments.¹³ As we know, ancient thought had expressed a firm devaluation of the repertoire of classical mythology as a hodgepodge of fictions and errors, which made its way through to the eighteenth century and found the most fertile ground in the rationalism of the Enlightenment. However, in the pre-Romantic climate of the last decades of the eighteenth century, philosophers such as Herder and innovative classicists such as Heyne initiated a rehabilitation of the intellectual contents of myth that has carried on to the present day, with an alternation of leaps forward, pauses, and resistances. Another decisive step was taken during the second half of the following century by the philologist and historian of religions Hermann Usener, whose lesson has been reprised not only in the context of *Altertumswissenschaft*, by scholars such as Rhode or Diels but also—outside this context—by Warburg and Cassirer. From then on, the development of a history of religions that was keen on anthropological comparativism and, conversely, the attention to the modalities of symbolical expression has struck progressively harsher blows at the divide between myth and philosophy. Nor can we forget the role played by Nietzsche in the retrieval of myth’s power of truth and vitality, to be played against the rigidity and false optimism of scientific rationalism, symbolized in the eyes of the philosopher by Socrates. In this same critical perspective,

¹³ For a more detailed treatment of the episodes mentioned hereafter, see Bodei 1982, Sassi 1982a and 1986, Borsche 1985, and Most 1995.

Nietzsche was brought to the equally influential discovery of the peculiarity of Presocratic thought, whose primeval authenticity he highly praised.

Of course, there have also been opposite strategies, which were even partially successful in revamping the idea of a teleological development from mythical imagination to logical thinking. Consider for instance the fortune of Wilhelm Nestle's *Vom Mythos zum Logos* (1940), whose title served for a long time to label Greek culture as the one that, as early as the archaic period, made the neat and triumphant transition "from myth to reason."¹⁴ In general, however, the most careful scholars have proven less and less prone to speak in terms of a stark polarity between *muthos* and *logos*, and at the same time have gradually turned their attention to the relationships between East and West. Concurrently, the problem of the beginnings of philosophy had been brought to the fore, but—the milestone represented by the myth/reason opposition having been lost—it grew more complicated. We shall see how this happened by focusing on two exemplary cases.

During the first half of the last century, Francis MacDonald Cornford chose the very "beginning of knowledge" as his main object of reflection. Cornford was once called "an imaginative man with a rare ability to challenge the mind of his reader."¹⁵ Indeed, more than fifty years after the publication of *Principium Sapientiae* (and more than sixty years since the author's death), this book remains persuasive, the fruit of a perfect combination of intuition, clear argumentation, and effective writing.¹⁶ A shrewd and sensitive scholar, Cornford studied with the enthusiastic guidance of Jane Harrison, and his earlier works are heavily influenced by the anthropological approach to ancient culture (with a particular focus on ritual aspects and the manifestations of the primitive) that is a trademark of the group of the so-called Cambridge ritualists (among whom Gilbert Murray is usually listed, despite his being at Oxford). Harrison led the group for some years, but her influence did not prevent the intellectual autonomy of its members from emerging freely.¹⁷ In fact, after more than a decade of collaborative work, at the outbreak of World War I the members of the group parted ways and Cornford began increasingly to cultivate the philosophical penchant that always characterized him.¹⁸

¹⁴ Most 1999a has shown the noninnocence of Nestle's endeavor. In the first pages (and note the time and the place), the author declares that this intellectual maturation seems to be a prerogative of the "Aryan" people alone.

¹⁵ Vlastos 1955, 65.

¹⁶ See Cornford 1952, published posthumously (Cornford died in 1943, leaving an incomplete manuscript) and edited by William K. C. Guthrie.

¹⁷ Beard 2000 has shown that the idea of a proper "group" is largely the product of a later mythicizing process.

¹⁸ Perhaps for this reason Cornford appears rather seldom in the otherwise rich and often excellent literature on the ritualists; see Bonanate 1974, Ackerman 1991, Calder III

The problem of the beginning of philosophy had already attracted Cornford's attention. His 1907 monograph *Thucydides mythistoricus* offers a reading of Thucydides that reveals a tragic, at times Aeschylean vision of human nature, one that invites the reader to interpret the *History* as a full-fledged tragedy, the tragedy of Athens. While this thesis is still stimulating for Thucydides scholars,¹⁹ I am more interested in pointing out how it goes hand in hand with a more general reflection, well summarized in the following passage:

In every age the common interpretation of the world of things is controlled by some scheme of unchallenged and unsuspected presupposition; and the mind of any individual, however little he may think himself to be in sympathy with his contemporaries, is not an insulated compartment, but more like a pool in one continuous medium—the circumambient atmosphere of his place and time.²⁰

Thus, according to Cornford, the mind of the individual is unwittingly influenced by the tacit premises of the world he or she inhabits. Just as Dante could not guess that his design of redemption would appear unconvincing within an astronomical framework that was no longer geocentric, and Cornford—as he himself notes—would not be able to determine to what extent his vision of the world and that of his contemporaries was “colored” by Darwinian biology, so too the Greek historians, Thucydides included, cannot be fully understood without taking into account the products of contemporary poetry. Moreover, when studying any author (philosophers included), one must take into account that “mythological phase of thought,” that “background of glistening chaos” from which the Greek spirit emerged in seemingly beautiful harmony. This mythological background, however, is usually neglected in classical scholarship. In particular:

The history of philosophy is written as if Thales had suddenly dropped from the sky, and, as he bumped the earth, ejaculated, ‘Everything must be made of water!’²¹

In *From Religion to Philosophy*, a work published a few years later, Cornford combined the notion of collective representation (elaborated after Durkheim and Mauss) with the need to establish continuity between the mythical-religious tradition and the Presocratics. This allowed him to trace an anticipation of later element-based cosmological models to an ancient “to-

1991, and Schlesier 1994. And then there is that magnificent exercise in intellectual biography, Guthrie 1950.

¹⁹ It was reprinted by Vidal-Naquet (2000). See also Chambers 1991.

²⁰ Cornford 1907, viii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, x.

temic” tendency to classify things. Within this framework, the job of philosophy is presented as a mere clarification of themes that are already focused in the collective consciousness of a tribal society no longer satisfied by the ritual plane: even the concept of *phusis*, one of the core tenets of Presocratic thought, is connected by Cornford to the notion of *mana* of a tribal group (a connection that has been widely criticized).²²

In fact, Cornford later abandoned this research path, which was admittedly as fascinating as it was speculative. He similarly abandoned the reference to the Jungian theory of a collective unconscious, even though at some point he had used it to substantiate the notion of “implicit suppositions.”²³ He preferred to seek confirmation of his intuitions within his own field of inquiry. And there he was, at an inaugural lecture in 1931, reinstating his conviction that philosophical discourse is driven by “premises that are rarely or never expressed” (in that they are shared by all people of a particular culture and taken for granted) and arguing that the approach of ancient science to the problem of motion is oriented more by maxims that belong to a most ancient popular wisdom (such as “like acts on like”) than it is by the observation of nature.²⁴ Thus the ancient philosophers’ frames of thought, projected onto the background of a prephilosophical knowledge, fall under the rubric of dogmatism, one that precludes the discovery of the scientific laws of motion and change. The relationship between the Greek philosophical tradition and a pre-existing one, already glimpsed twenty years earlier, is exemplified here for the first time within a broader framework. But an even more comprehensive picture is presented in the last great book, whose title is a declaration of its central problem: *Principium Sapientiae*.

In the first part of the book, Cornford identifies and contrasts two dominating tendencies within the earliest phases of Greek philosophy: on one hand, the study of nature started by the Ionians, and on the other the configuration of a level of truth underlying the phenomena, advanced by philosophers such as Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Empedocles (and Plato, who in this respect followed in their footsteps), who chose to deliver their message using prophetic and inspired tones. It must be noted that Cornford combines his insistence on this precious “inspired” current with the intriguing statement that it is the continuation of ancient shamanic traditions. From this we first glimpse an idea of philosophy as religious wisdom, and it is not by chance that the title of the book is taken from a famous line in Proverbs: *Timor Domini principium sapientiae*. But let us leave aside the problem of what constitutes

²² See Cornford 1912, in particular chapters 1 and 2. Bréhier’s reaction (1913) is noteworthy for its mixture of serious attention and no less serious perplexities regarding Cornford’s approach.

²³ See Cornford 1921, 6 and passim.

²⁴ Cornford 1931, 12. Along the same lines, see Cornford 1934 and 1936.

wisdom in Presocratic thought,²⁵ and focus for a moment on the second part of the work, “Philosophical Cosmogony and Its Origins in Myth and Ritual.” It is evident at once that Cornford, whose argument does not appear to be new, is intent on diminishing the innovative character of the Ionian cosmologies:

If we give up the idea that philosophy or science is a motherless Athena, an entirely new discipline breaking in from nowhere upon a culture hitherto dominated by poetical and mystical theologians, we shall see that the process of rationalization had been at work for some considerable time before Thales was born.²⁶

In the following pages, Cornford tenaciously and coherently realizes his declared purpose: to examine the doctrines of the Ionians and separate the elements that derive from the observation of nature from those inherited from tradition.²⁷ In particular, he focuses on Anaximander, whose ideas appear to be more complex than those of Thales (and we have more information on them, in any case). He revisits them in the light of an array of images and problems that he believes were previously developed—though on a mythopoeic level—in the context of religious tradition. We shall come back to the details later, but it should be noted that for Anaximander the origin and formation of the cosmos take place by means of a differentiation from an original state, which he calls *apeiron* (that is, “unlimited,” with respect to both quantity and quality). This prompts Cornford to pinpoint a series of analogies (which are undeniable in and of themselves) between Anaximander’s ideas and a variety of cosmogonic tales, attested not only in Greek culture predating Anaximander himself but also in the ancient Near East, India, China, and the traditional cultures of Oceania. With insight, Cornford observes that, in all of these tales, creation is represented as an act of *separation* from an original state of *indifferentiation*.

Consider, to start with, the cosmogonic section in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (lines 116ff), the first phase of which consists in the separation of Sky and Earth. According to Cornford, this act of separation is again represented in the gory tale that unravels without interruption from the cosmogony. This is a reference to the famous episode of Kronos rebelling against his father, Ouranos (who, fearing the sons Gaia bore him, had pushed them all back inside their mother’s womb), and severing his genitals with a pruning hook made by Gaia herself, in a rage (lines 176ff; then, as we know, the story repeats itself: Kronos will devour his sons by Rhea, until Zeus, the youngest, dethrones him:

²⁵ This will be dealt with in detail in chapter 5.

²⁶ Cornford 1952, 188.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 187. The notion of collective unconscious is not brought into question here, but it could have been; we might suppose that it was absorbed by the more generic but still effective notion of “inheritance.”

lines 453ff). Cornford recognizes the Babylonian epic poem *Enuma Elish* as the direct precedent of this story. Here Marduk, the god of creation, kills Tiamat, primordial water divinity, “splits her in half like stockfish,” and builds the firmament out of the upper half. Similarly, Egyptian mythology contains the story of the separation of Earth (the god Geb floating on abyssal waters) and Sky (the goddess Nut) at the hands of Shu, the god of air. Analogously, at the beginning of Genesis, God moves along an indefinite aqueous mass before the creation of light, after which he divides it into waters above and below the firmament. Cornford also notes in a Maori tale, which is the most well known version among Polynesian creation myths, a mechanism of separation between Sky (Rangi) and Earth (Papa), the two entities from which gods, men, and things originate.

The comparative material collected by Cornford is impressive for the evidence it gathers and for its quality. It is also remarkable that soon after his death another text was added to this list of parallels, namely, the Hittite-Hurrian *Song of Kumarbi*, published in 1943. This text predates Hesiod’s *Theogony* by five hundred years and contains, like Hesiod’s poem, a story of violent usurpations that alludes to a sequence of cosmic disorder and order. Alau, the first god of the sky, is overthrown by Anu during the ninth year of his reign, and Anu is in turn overthrown and castrated by Kumarbi after the same amount of time. We may recall that Ouranos receives a similar treatment from Kronos; moreover, Kumarbi bites and swallows Anu’s genitalia, producing offspring. Among these is a storm god, who will dethrone Kumarbi just as Zeus did Kronos. The hypothesis that Hesiod’s *Theogony* contains an adaptation of this Babylonian myth, perhaps purged of the goriest details, has found strong confirmation in the aforementioned text, which provided proof of a Hittite mediation.²⁸ More generally, as we will note again later, after Cornford one cannot overlook how indebted Greek culture is to the East. Within this framework, however, Cornford comes to a conclusion regarding the Ionian cosmologies that is not easy to accept: they should be considered, under this new light, as the result of a trimming of the mythical repertoire, made poorer and poorer through a process of rationalization. According to Cornford, this process reached its most extreme phase with Anaximander but started long before him. This would explain why Anaximander’s cosmogony is anything but “a free construction of the intellect reasoning from direct observation of the existing world.”²⁹

But Cornford does not stop here; he dedicates a few pages to a close comparison between Hesiod’s *Theogony*, reinterpreted as a hymn to Zeus for gaining sovereignty over the other gods, and the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*, a hymn to the victory of Marduk over Tiamat, cosmic deity of disorder, and his

²⁸ See Dodds’s footnote to Cornford 1952, 249n1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

reestablishment of an order that is at once natural and political. The scholar is particularly interested in reminding us that the text of *Enuma Elish* was tied to a rather specific ceremony. In fact, it was normally recited (presumably from the end of the second millennium BCE) during the festival for the Babylonian New Year, in a context of a ritual celebrating the regularity of the seasons and, at the same time—in a kind of osmosis between natural and political order—a ritual of sovereignty: the creation myth must therefore be read, like any other myth, as the narrative version of a ritual. Cornford applies here a sort of axiom (even if a controversial one)³⁰ of the Cambridge ritualists, and goes on to add that even when myth is transposed onto a different cultural terrain and the link with ritual is lost, the original meaning of this link continues to be perceived “obscurely” and lingers on; but it does so at the expense of a process of rationalization that is mistaken for a reasoned reflection on nature, while it is nothing other than the purification of a cluster of inherited images.³¹ It is with Hesiod that the myth of Marduk is revived in a now prosaic form, one that is no longer authentically mythical and can barely be told apart from “early Greek systems which historians still innocently treat as purely rational constructions.”³² Ultimately, the general lines of this creation myth do not depend on the observation of natural phenomena (only a “lunatic under the influence of hashish” would, from the mere sight of the starry sky and the earth beneath his feet, elaborate the strange theory that they derive from a monstrous deity being torn in half!).³³ In fact, those lines have been traced in the context of extremely ancient rituals.

The primary factor is the thing *done*. It is also the proper starting point for inquiry. Instead of picturing a hypothetical horde of savages, at no particular time or place, sitting round a camp-fire and speculating on the origin of the world, we can take as our point of departure a set of rites which we know to have been performed in the cities of Mesopotamia at the date of the earliest records we possess. As we have remarked, the rites are already extremely elaborate; behind them must lie a very long prehistoric period of development through simpler phases of society, leading back into the palaeolithic and terminating, no one knows when or where, in something that might be called “primitive.”³⁴

In the field of ancient studies, Cornford’s comparatist perspective helped pave the way for an anticlassicist trend that has become mandatory: it is impossible to deny that Greek culture is greatly indebted to mythical thinking and

³⁰ According to Lambert (1968) (who should be read also for a detailed description of the ceremony), the link between mythology and ritual in Mesopotamia was actually the product of a later construction of the priests.

³¹ Cornford 1952, 225ff, in particular p. 238. See also Cornford 1941.

³² Cornford 1941, 100.

³³ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁴ Cornford 1952, 230.

to Eastern cultures when it comes to one of its most acclaimed achievements, namely, the area of rational thought. However, it is also undeniable that a biased inquiry that focuses on similarities rather than differences is more likely to miss the peculiar characteristics of one culture or the other. For what concerns the Greeks, we should ask ourselves how they *transformed* the materials coming from the East and articulated them into constellations of thought wherein the borrowed elements may have taken on a new meaning.

As a case in point, let us consider Marduk and the Zeus of Hesiod. Both gods are chosen as leaders of the other deities and as perpetrators of a cosmic order based on the distribution of the different areas of power among the gods. Beyond this similarity, there is indeed a significant difference to be noted: while none of the other gods is related to Marduk, the organization under Zeus follows the lines of his familial ties. Now, this familial structure serves to systematize the cosmic picture, and it also contributes to dramatize the ever-conflicted relationship between the power of Zeus and that of the other gods. At any rate, while Hesiod derived single elements from Eastern traditions, it is noteworthy that he adapted them into a coherent whole aimed at symbolizing Zeus's supremacy over the divine and human order, which established a narrative model that had a lasting influence on Greek culture.³⁵

Cornford's approach to the Ionian cosmologies lends itself a fortiori to the same objection. The scholar, as if obsessed with the need to push as far back as possible the infancy of philosophy, to the point of causing philosophy to "disappear" into myth (or even of causing both to disappear into ritual), traces Anaximander's system (reduced to the pattern of undifferentiation/nonseparation) to a nonspeculative, most ancient origin that is lost in the dawn of time. Thus his argument overshadows the real significance and innovation of Ionian thought, which started with the removal of divine personas: when it comes to the conflict of opposites such as hot and cold, dry and wet that is central in Ionian thought, Cornford prefers to emphasize the legacy of the mythical figures Gaia and Okeanos rather than stressing the elaboration of a notion of *nature* that pivots around the idea of an internal regularity independent of the intervention of supernatural forces. By doing this, he prevents himself from appreciating the starting phase of a reflection on the idea of natural *order* in the context of the Ionian cosmologies: an idea that was later appreciated by scholars who considered religious tradition as one of many factors to be evaluated against the political and social context of the Greek world.³⁶

Some of the best comparative studies on the problem of myth/philosophy still move along the lines of Cornford's work. As a matter of fact, the steadily

³⁵ See Allan 2006, 30–31.

³⁶ See at least Vlastos (1955), for a review of *Principium Sapientiae* showing all the reasons that sparked Vlastos's interest in this theme, and Vernant (1957), who takes a clear position regarding Cornford. The theme of cosmic order will be the core of chapter 2.

mounting evidence on the East has allowed us to discover a growing number of analogies with Presocratic cosmology, confirming that the problem of the Eastern background absolutely cannot be avoided.³⁷ Nonetheless, the evaluation of the relationship between documentary evidence and the features of archaic Greek thought does not yet seem to meet well-defined criteria, in the sense that the necessary acknowledgment of the debts to other cultures has been paired with a problematic—to say the least—assessment of the Greeks' own specific contribution to the beginning of philosophy. This is the case (the second, and last, that I have chosen to illustrate my argument) of a scholar of philosophy and ancient religion such as Walter Burkert.

Walter Burkert is still today, like Jean-Pierre Vernant is in a different field, a prominent representative of an anthropological approach to the ancient world. His work, like Vernant's, is dominated by an interest in the history of religions. However, while Vernant studied the most specific and innovative aspects of Greek culture and society, Burkert preferred to insist—in the wake of Konrad Lorenz—on the psychobiological constants of humankind. For him, then, anthropological comparativism was not just an antidote against the humanistic temptation to idealize the Greeks but also a paramount instrument for reading the Greek evidence, seen as a “mirror” of the deepest roots of culture (singular), reaching all the way through the Paleolithic period. While Vernant focused on the elements of discontinuity that characterize the origins of Greek thought, Burkert always shared with Cornford (to whom he significantly referred more than once) what we might dare to call an obsession with continuity.³⁸ There is, however, an important difference: according to Burkert, Greek philosophy has religious, mythic, and ritual roots, but he—unlike Cornford—does not explain myth exclusively in connection with religious ritual. Rather, myth itself becomes a locus of speculation from its very beginnings—except that these beginnings are not to be found in Greece.

Let us start with some methodological considerations in the introduction to a book where Burkert reconstructed the pronounced presence of foreign images, myths, and rituals on Greek soil, advancing the thesis that in the period between 750 and 650 BCE, Greek religion and literature were deeply influenced by Eastern models, in a way that also influenced the following developments:

The studies presented in this book may still run up against a final and perhaps insuperable line of defense, the tendency of modern cultural theories to approach culture as a system evolving through its own processes of internal economic and social dynamic, which reduces all out-

³⁷ Cf. Hölscher 1953, Schwabl 1962, and West 1971.

³⁸ A clear outline of Burkert's argument can be found in Schlesier (1994, 321–28). Vernant's theoretical premises have been studied in depth by Laks (1998 and 2008); some aspects of Vernant's arguments on the birth of Greek thought will be analyzed directly in chapter 3.

ward influences to negligible parameters. There is no denying the intellectual acumen and achievement of such theories. But they may still represent just one side of the coin. It is equally valid to see culture as a complex of communication with continuing opportunities for learning afresh, with conventional yet penetrable frontiers, in a world open to change and expansion. The impact of written as opposed to oral culture is perhaps the most dramatic example of transformation wrought from the outside, through borrowing. It may still be true that the mere fact of borrowing should only provide a starting point for closer interpretation, that the form of selection and adaptation, of reworking and refitting to a new system is revealing and interesting in each case. But the “creative transformation” by the Greeks, however important, should not obscure the sheer fact of borrowing: this would amount to yet another strategy of immunization designed to cloud what is foreign and disquieting.³⁹

Here Burkert tried to formulate a theoretical model for approaching Greek culture that aimed on one hand to preserve its internal autonomy, and on the other to project it onto a world interspersed with “penetrable frontiers”: this way, the process of “creative transformation” brought about by the Greeks⁴⁰ will not be underestimated, and at the same time their debts to other civilizations will not be obscured. So far so good, in principle. In reality, throughout the book the attention falls on the indebtedness of the archaic world to the Semitic East in the most disparate fields, from technology to medicine to mythology. This is not surprising, since Burkert was always more interested in exploring the background rather than in identifying the characterizing traits of the earliest phases of Greek thought. His reflection on this subject has nevertheless been a tormented one, and this is important in its own right.

Let us compare two other writings by Burkert composed within ten years of each other. In a 1987 work, devoted to the many parallels between Greek mythology (read: Hesiod) and Near Eastern mythologies (regarding which he mentioned Cornford’s pioneering contribution), the scholar backdated “the origin of Greek philosophy . . . to the Sumerians, the Babylonians and the Hittites, not to mention the Egyptians.”⁴¹ (Coincidentally, that same year Erik Hornung, an influential Egyptologist, claimed that “already the Egyptians set in motion the process of philosophy,” seeing the first formulation of questions on being, death, and the cosmos in Egyptian texts such as the *Book of What Is in the Underworld*.)⁴² Later, however (1996), in concluding a lecture on

³⁹ Burkert 1992, 7.

⁴⁰ As we know, this notion is an example of autorepresentation by the Greeks, the most famous attestation of which is found in *Epinomis*, 987d.

⁴¹ Burkert 1987, 21–23.

⁴² Hornung 1987, 125.

Greek and Eastern cosmogonies that he had opened, once again, with an appreciation of Cornford, Burkert revisited his position by identifying the distinctive trait of Greek philosophy with rational *argumentation*, which started with Parmenides. This meant granting the Ionian cosmologies the privilege of a close relationship with the mythical sphere, which he ascribed (together with Hittite, Babylonian, and Egyptian cosmologies) to the genre of the “just so story.” In all of these texts, he noted, the origin and the first events of the cosmos are presented in the form of an ordered story: it is this particular form that makes all of these stories myths.⁴³ This point is the result of a long journey of reflection, which deserves a great deal of attention: mythical discourse is qualified as such—and it differs from philosophical discourse—because of its imaginative and narrative *form*.

Cornford was loath to recognize that myth has an autonomous *speculative content*, because he still remained bound—beyond his intentions, no doubt—by a rationalistic stance. Burkert, on the other hand, having assimilated Usener’s and Cassirer’s message, did not hesitate to recognize myth’s power to organize and represent experience, which in some cases reaches high levels of abstraction: as he incisively wrote not so long ago, “there is *logos* in cosmogonic myth from the start.”⁴⁴ Hence the need to introduce a notion of *form* to separate the two: mythic *logos* is written in fictional form, philosophical *logos* in an argumentative one. This is an interesting reevaluation of the thesis, once championed by Burkert himself, that the beginning of philosophy should be sought in the mythical sphere. However, the identification of argumentative form as a distinctive criterion of philosophy does not seem to solve our problem, for it corresponds to an idea of philosophy as logical-deductive reasoning that appears reductive, not only on a general level of definition but especially if we consider the notable diversity of thought patterns in the Presocratic period. Let us limit ourselves to the case of Parmenides: if we focus on his role as “inventor” of logic, what should we make of the proem in which he tells us, in inspired tones, of the journey that led him to a goddess who revealed to him the truth about Being? A similar objection can be put forward against Jaap Mansfeld’s proposal to limit Thales’s founding role to the area of science, given that science *today* would not be a branch of philosophy; thus philosophy began rather with Heraclitus or Parmenides. This thesis, too, stemmed from a reductive definition of philosophy (intended in this case as epistemological and ontological speculation) brought about by a critical preconception that does not take into account the philosophical character of the Ionians’ inquiry on nature, which preceded Heraclitus and Parmenides.⁴⁵

Another limitation of the picture brought forth by Burkert (and developed along the same lines by Mansfeld) is that the Ionian cosmogonies, if set

⁴³ Burkert 1999a, 35ff, and Burkert 1999b.

⁴⁴ Burkert 1999b, 104.

⁴⁵ See Mansfeld 1984, and Leszl’s response (1985), with which I fully agree.

aside because uninteresting, are confined to a no-man's-land, with the other important consequence that, in this perspective, Parmenides or Heraclitus steps into the picture as an unexpected flower in the desert, similar—to use Cornford's words—to “a motherless Athena.” Instead, we need to go back to the Ionian cosmogonies if we want to outline a picture of the *beginning* of Greek philosophy that on one hand takes into account the complexity of all its components, and on the other preserves its continuity with the mythical background. To this end, it will not suffice to dissolve the classic pairing *mythos/logos* and reformulate it in terms of an opposition between mythical and philosophical *logos* differing only with regard to the presence of imagination and/or abstraction. We will need to combine this move with others: rather surprisingly, Aristotle will be the first to point us in this direction.

Back to Aristotle

Let us start by noting that the Greek term *muthos* is a typical “false friend,” in that it does not have the generally depreciative meaning of “false story,” endowed at best with symbolic meaning, that inevitably accompanies the word *myth* in modern Western languages. Rather, the majority of the many instances of *muthos* in Homer designate speech uttered in public, from a position of authority, by leaders in the assembly or heroes on the battlefield: it is the discourse of power, one that enforces obedience toward the prestige of the orator. Conversely, *logos* (in its few Homeric instances) tends to designate well-organized, but also potentially deceptive, discourse. After the Homeric Age, the respective frequency of the two terms gradually shifts, and so do their respective connotations. *Logos* gains more and more importance as the designation of speech that does not depend on tradition but only needs to be evaluated with respect to its internal organization, while *muthos*, on account of the fact that its significance stems from the prestige of the speaker, takes up the meaning of speech that cannot be verified. This causes *muthos* to indicate preferably (but not always) speech that lacks credibility in the context of argumentative strategies, particularly those of historians or philosophers who use *muthos* to refer to the positions of *others*, which they intend to discredit.

This semantic development would be too complex to deal with at length here.⁴⁶ But we must at least mention Thucydides, who, in the so-called *Archaiologia* of Book I, reconstructs the earliest phase of Greek history based on a tradition of earlier stories. In dealing with this tradition, the historian is concerned with separating the most-plausible facts from those elements that became patently fictional (*to muthōdes*: I, 21, 1) in the long run. Then we must dwell on Plato. As shown by Luc Brisson, *muthos* is for Plato any speech that aims at persuading and uses to this end more or less effective images instead

⁴⁶ I refer the reader to the illuminating treatments in Lloyd 1990 (1ff), Lincoln 1999 (8ff, 37ff), and Cozzo 2001 (25ff, 85ff).

of argumentative mechanisms designed to reach well-thought-out theoretical truths.⁴⁷ After all, Plato's judgment of myth is not always a negative one, and it varies from context to context based on ethical considerations. On one hand, the often "immoral" stories in the poetic tradition (first and foremost the episode of Ouranos and Kronos, which contains one of the goriest depictions of the world of the gods) should absolutely be banned from the educational horizon of the city of the *Republic*; on the other hand, Plato himself employs the patterns of mythical discourse (thus competing with the poets) in contexts where he would rather try to persuade than conquer rational certainties, on such topics as the essence of the soul or the origin of the universe, which cannot, by their own nature, be experienced. Myths are also contained—and articulated vividly and with grandeur—in the depictions of the afterlife outlined in the *Phaedo*, the *Gorgias*, and the last book of *Republic*, aimed at providing an effective picture of the vicissitudes of the soul after death, its transmigrations into bodies of superior or inferior nature, and the rewards or punishments awaiting the individual depending on his moral conduct.

Even the description of the creation of the cosmos by a divine demiurge, presented by Timaeus in the dialogue of the same name, is called *muthos* (but also, with an equivalent meaning, *logos*) and declared, if not indisputable, at least "plausible." From a different angle, on the other hand, the depreciative connotation of *muthos* may be brought to the fore again to qualify *other* cosmological speeches, considered incapable of dealing with a specific problem being discussed. In a well-known passage of *Sophist* (242b–243c) Plato outlines—through the words of the Eleatic Stranger—the history of those who discussed Being before him. Now, each and every one of these predecessors seems to want to "tell us a story, as if we were children." Someone said that Being is made of three entities, which are sometimes in conflict and sometimes mutually well disposed, to the point of marrying and bearing children (this is a possible allusion to Pherecydes's theogony, focused on *Chthoniē*, *Zas*, and *Chronos*). There have also been some who said that the entities are two (hot and cold, or dry and wet) and united them in marriage. The Eleatic school maintained the unity of Being, "thus forging their own personal myth," while still others argued that Being is one and many at the same time (the "Ionian Muses" of Heraclitus are stricter, Empedocles's Sicilian ones more lax). None of them, at any rate, was concerned with the intelligibility of their speech; on the contrary, "they could not care less about us, the mass they despise," and did not pause to clarify what is meant by "Being." Thus, Plato relegates all previous philosophical tradition on Being to the area of myth—even the reflection of the Eleatics—in order to better consolidate his dominion over the terrain of metaphysical inquiry. This is made possible precisely by the malleability that the notions of *muthos* and *logos* have for him, and by

⁴⁷ Cf. Brisson 1982, Murray 1999, and Morgan 2000.

their magmatic interplay: in the passage from *Sophist*, *muthos* is, after all, almost a kind of *logos*, characterized not so much by falsehood or by a lack of rationality as by inadequacy on methodological and dialectical levels.⁴⁸

We shall now ascertain that Aristotle's position regarding myth is just as flexible by dwelling precisely on that first book of *Metaphysics*, where Thales is presented as the first "of those before us who embarked upon the study of the things that are and philosophized about the truth" (I, 3, 983b 1–3). In this book, intended as an introduction to the problem of substance that runs through the treatise, Aristotle attempts a general outline of the preceding philosophical tradition, revised in the light of his own reflections on the four causes (material, efficient, formal, and final). As is well known, Aristotle presents the doctrines of his predecessors as anticipations—more and more complex, but inadvertent—of a theory that he believes he has finally brought to its full fruition. The markedly teleological perspective that determined the fortune of this framework in the historicist climate of the nineteenth century also marks the beginning of its disrepute, and it has only fallen lower over the course of the last century. However, it may be time to recuperate some of its elements. Granted, we will need to carefully analyze Aristotle's account, which is not intended as an objective historical reconstruction but as a retrospective construction serving to illustrate a personal theory.⁴⁹ Yet we can read between the lines and detect elements of internal tension indicating an attitude toward tradition that is anything but dogmatic or simplistic.

In reflecting upon the origin of the philosophical enterprise, Aristotle seems even more willing than Plato to grant cognitive significance to myth. He believes that men began to philosophize, that is, to seek knowledge, out of a feeling of ignorance brought about by their marveling at problems not immediately understandable, such as those arising from the origin of the cosmos and the astral phenomena. So the contents of myth are an expression of this marvel, and "he who loves myth is a philosopher, in a way" (*ho philomuthos philosophos pōs estin*: I, 2, 982b 18). Nor does Aristotle limit himself to making this basic statement, as demonstrated by the two references to Hesiod's *Theogony* that appear shortly afterward. The first reference occurs during the discussion of efficient cause, which thinkers like Empedocles and Anaxagoras realized indirectly, for both revealed the need to track down a principle of movement that is fundamental to the order and good of the cosmos: the former by introducing the forces of Love and Strife, the latter Nous. In doing so, they came close to glimpsing—albeit unwittingly and imprecisely—the role of finality in determining becoming (by focusing on the final cause, which

⁴⁸ See Adomenas (2006) for an illuminating reading of Platonic passages showing particular formal traits (primarily the mythic setting and a hermeneutical obscurity) that according to Plato characterize the philosophical discourse of the Presocratics.

⁴⁹ I have dealt elsewhere with this delicate problem (Sassi 1996).

includes a focus on the formal cause of things, Aristotle believes he made his most relevant contribution, thus completing the reflection on causality). Now, according to Aristotle, “one might suspect that Hesiod was the first to look for such a factor, he or anyone who posited love or desire as the origin of beings, such as Parmenides” (I, 4, 984b 23; followed by a quotation from Parmenides frag. 13, then the beginning of the cosmogonic passage in *Theogony*, lines 116ff, which is actually quoted in a slightly incorrect and rather abbreviated form: “First of all things was Chaos, then broad-breasted Earth, then Love, distinguished among the Immortals”).⁵⁰ Hesiod is mentioned again later as an eminent proponent of the idea that the earth is generated before all other elements: an idea, shared by the majority of men, which the philosophers disdain but which deserves to be considered for its antiquity and diffusion alone (I, 8, 989a 10).

This appreciation of the mythical knowledge underlying the poetical tradition is fairly frequent in Aristotle. Elsewhere, he formulates the hypothesis that all myths preserve the “remains” (often hidden under increasingly heavy structural layers) of a most ancient wisdom that was periodically lost in a catastrophe but later rediscovered (because the loss had been partial). An instance of these “ruins” of an “ancient philosophy” is represented by proverbs, which survived tremendous destructions of humanity thanks to their characteristic concision and sharpness (according to the lost dialogue *On Philosophy* [frag. 8 Ross]). In book XII of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle also recognizes that the men of very ancient times were able to grasp the divine nature of the stars. Such an intuition was later passed on “in mythical form” (*en muthou schemati*), after having been veiled with a representation of the gods in human or animal guise in order to persuade the population to follow the laws. But those who are able to “separate” these additions from the rest, after all, may also be able to “grasp” a still valid doctrinal core: indeed, Aristotle sees ancient divinization of the astral bodies (which he calls “first substances”) as a predecessor of his own concept of unmoved divine mover (XII, 8, 1074a 38–b 14).⁵¹

Thus myth, when the deformations it underwent over time have been properly pruned away, reveals the traces of most ancient philosophical truths. Moreover, as documented by the aforementioned Hesiodic references, Aristotle admits that the poetic medium is capable of hosting philosophical concepts. In other words, not even in Aristotle is the opposition between *logos*

⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, the pairing of Hesiod’s and Parmenides’s texts was already in Plato; in the *Symposium* (178a–b), Phaedrus cites them as “proof” of the antiquity of Eros. We should also consider the possibility that Parmenides, by calling Eros “first” of all gods, was trying to correct Hesiod, who placed Eros in a primordial triad with Chaos and Gaia; see below, 59n44.

⁵¹ For a thorough treatment of these themes and for further textual references, see Verdenius 1960, Verbeke 1961, Casertano 2007 (55ff), Johansen 1999, Palmer 2000 (in particular 192–203), and Cambiano 2002.

and *muthos* that stark: we might even say that already for him “there is *logos* in *muthos*,” were it not for the fact that his way of decoding mythical discourse follows a fully rationalistic pattern. But this is not the only surprising turn emerging from the Aristotelian text, considering the reading approach we have been proposing. If we now go back to the passage indicating that the beginning of philosophy can be discovered in Thales, and examine it more closely, we will find that, in order to separate the new terrain of knowledge from the mythical one, Aristotle has pulled off a rather complex feat, not only precociously applying the hermeneutical principle of the opposition between the abstract character of philosophical reasoning and the fictional character of myth but also understanding the need to combine this insight with further distinguishing criteria (I, 3, 983b 6–984a 2):

Most of those who first philosophized thought that the principles of all things were exclusively of the material kind. That of which all beings consist, from which they first come to be and into which they are destroyed in the end, persisting as an underlying substance but changing in its affections—this they call an element and principle of beings. . . . However, they do not all agree as to the number and kind of such a principle. Thales, the founder of this sort of philosophy, says that it [this principle] is water (therefore he also claimed that the earth rests on water), perhaps deriving this assumption from the observation that the nutriment of all things is moist, and that warmth itself comes from this and lives by it (and that from which they come to be is the principle of all things). He then derived this assumption from this consideration and also from the fact that the seeds of all things have a moist nature and water is the principle of the nature of moist things. There are in fact some people who think that those who first spoke about the gods in ancient times, living long before the present generation, had the same conception about nature. For they made Okeanos and Tethys the parents of becoming and water, which they called Styx, the oath of the gods. For what is most ancient is most honoured, and what is most honoured is an oath. Yet it is unclear whether what seems to be an ancient and venerable opinion was actually (formulated) about nature; what is certain is that Thales is said to have expressed himself precisely in this way about the first cause.⁵²

The first part of this passage clearly shows how Aristotle filters earlier philosophical accounts, selecting and recombining, based on personal coordinates,

⁵² The second part of this passage is quoted in its entirety in Laks and Most’s edition as a reconstruction (R32) of Thales’s argument, whereas in Diels and Kranz’s edition (11 A 12) it was cut after the reference to the divine oaths, thus obscuring the meticulousness of Aristotelian discourse.

the doctrinal elements gathered from tradition (which, in the case of Thales, is exclusively an oral tradition, and rather scant). Moreover, it is not impossible for the modern reader to extrapolate elements useful for historical reconstruction from a theoretical grid that is as powerful as it is legible.⁵³

In this case we see that Aristotle ascribes to “those who first philosophized” an interest in the “principle” (*archē*) of things, the idea that this is unique, and the tendency to recognize it in the material world (which is to say, in Aristotelian terms, in the “material cause”). But there is more: this principle, in line with the Aristotelian system, is something that exists beneath the qualitative variations of things. Now, the notion of a material substratum characterized by stability and permanence is an Aristotelian invention, and to project it onto the beginnings of natural philosophy would be patently anachronistic. Moreover, in this phase the term *archē* would not have been employed⁵⁴ to mean “basic principle”: in archaic Greek literature, the term appears with the meaning of “command” or temporal “beginning”; in the context of natural philosophy, it may have conveyed the idea of a principle—chosen based on various considerations about priority—from which all things originated. It is unlikely that Thales’s water was meant to establish a qualitative connection between all things and a principle intended as their unitary *essence*. It is more likely that he reflected on the *origin* of things, and water seemed suitable to explain, to some extent, a state of becoming.

We are pointed in this direction a few lines later by Aristotle himself, and it must be noted that the author, after mentioning Thales, does not refer to any lingering on his part about the requisites of material cause and prefers to ascribe his ideas to more concrete data. On one hand, the appreciation of water in Thales is connected with the idea that the earth is kept afloat by a cosmic aqueous mass; on the other hand, according to Aristotle, Thales derived his theory from the observation of the role played by moisture and heat in biological phenomena. Aristotle points out that “perhaps” (*isōs*) Thales started from this observation, and clarifies that he did not receive it from the existing tradition (as he did with the doctrine on the position of the earth):⁵⁵ this confirms that Aristotle is proceeding in his account in such a way as to enable the reader to formulate his personal opinion on the proposed hypoth-

⁵³ At least after Cherniss’s (1935) detailed analysis of the mechanisms of Aristotelian discourse.

⁵⁴ If it was indeed used; we are not sure it ever was, even by Anaximander. The interpretation of the meaning of *archē* proposed here, which has been made possible by Cherniss’s studies, prompts us to see the Milesians as the theorists of a “generative substance” (in the terms discussed by Graham [2006]) rather than as proponents of a rigorous material monism.

⁵⁵ Aristotle refers again elsewhere to the idea that the earth “lies on water” as an opinion that must certainly be ascribed to Thales, and discusses it closely (*On the Heavens*, II, 13, 294a 28, in 11 A 14 DK).

eses. And indeed it is plausible that Thales may have been led to choose water as the “vital” element for the whole sensible universe by an assessment of its role in the generation and growth of all living things, through a process of inference entirely justified in an era that lacked a clear distinction between biological and geological phenomena.⁵⁶

But Aristotle makes a further remark regarding Thales’s pivotal role. He mentions “some” who ascribe a speculation on nature even to the “men of very ancient times” who “first spoke about the gods,” indicating Okeanos and Tethys as “parents of generation,” or stating that the gods swear upon the water of the river Styx (which demonstrates the sacral aspect of this element). Aristotle is thinking here of a few Homeric passages that refer to Okeanos and Tethys as the “parents” of all the gods (*Iliad* 14, lines 201, 246, and 302) and to the Styx as “dread river of oath” (*Iliad* 2, line 755; 14, line 271, and 15, lines 37–38; a most ancient river, since Styx is the eldest daughter of Okeanos in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, lines 400 and 775–806). These texts are part of the evidence used by modern scholars who point out remnants of Eastern wisdom that may invite us to backdate the beginning of philosophy. Now Aristotle is telling us that even in antiquity there were one or more commentators convinced that it was possible, thanks to an allegorical reading, to extrapolate speculative elements from theogonic poetry. It is not important to identify Hippias and/or Plato, to whom Aristotle refers without naming names, as supporters of this position.⁵⁷ However, it is interesting to note that Aristotle knows and reflects on a reading method, elaborated by others, that was aimed at finding philosophical *doxai* in poetic texts by decoding their expressive structure: in other words, a method based on the assumption that the difference between *muthos* and *logos* is essentially a *formal* one.

In short, form matters. But from this shared observation Aristotle comes to conclusions different from Burkert’s. Regarding the representation of Okeanos and Tethys and the swearing on the river Styx, he states that it is “*not clear* whether this opinion, a somehow venerable and ancient one, happened to be made concerning nature.”⁵⁸ In other words, it may well be possible to glean a certain vision of nature beneath the fictional structure of the Homeric text,

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Hankinson 1998a, 11–12.

⁵⁷ The problem has given rise to rich and interesting scholarship; cf. Snell 1944, Classen 1965, Mansfeld 1983 and 1985, Patzer 1986, and Balaudé 2006.

⁵⁸ I support Mansfeld’s (1985) criticism of the standard translation of this passage, although I propose a partially different interpretation. I am also going to depart from a translation I proposed elsewhere (Sassi 2002, 69), and I do not think I have yet come to terms with the particular difficulty of this phrase. In any event, it confirms the striking *caution* underlying Aristotle’s account (see also Laks 2004). Moreover, there is no doubt that, in counteracting the mythical account, Aristotle is intent on emphasizing the “theoretical precision” of Thales’s explanation; Hussey also insists on this important point (2006, 7ff).

but the close hermeneutical work needed to reach this point indicates that the text was unclear from the start. Conversely, “it is said that Thales’s opinion concerning the first cause was precisely this.” “It is said,” because we have no direct information regarding Thales’s opinions; if this information is true, however, it reveals anything but a remote intuition covered by names of divine figures full of symbolical resonances. To paraphrase Aristotle, we might say that Thales called things “by their names” when he sought an explanation for them in water, the stuff of daily life. The *clarity* of Thales’s formulation presupposes new content: in gazing at nature without resorting to the divine, he did not act as a passive recipient of the picture of the world inherited from myth.

The other important criterion that guides Aristotle in the separation of poetical and philosophical knowledge is clarified and confirmed by a further passage in *Metaphysics* (III, 4, 1000a 9–20). In discussing a major *aporia* (do corruptible and incorruptible entities have the same principles?), Aristotle notes: “the followers of Hesiod and all theologians have only been concerned with what seemed plausible to them, and could not care less about us.”⁵⁹ In fact, they have said that the gods are the principles of things, but also told us that they are immortals thanks to the nectar and the ambrosia they eat. . . . But how can the gods be eternal, if they need nourishment? Nectar and ambrosia are nothing but “mythical devices” that need not be taken seriously, unlike the opinions of those who provide the “demonstration” and the “cause” of the things they say. If we now reformulate the problem of Thales in light of this argument, we might say that the poets who speak of Okeanos and Tethys feed us with unfounded stories, while Thales, with his observation of the power of moisture and heat, has (perhaps!) provided some proof for his statements.

Finally, I would like to propose giving more credit to Aristotle’s reasons for naming Thales the “father of philosophy”: the clarity of expression combined with a limitation of the role of the divine in nature, and the possible (though embryonic) application of an empirical procedure. These indications might prove fruitful for the modern scholar.

Knowledge Has Many Faces

One last remark should be made, however: the Presocratics were not interested only in nature. Aristotle, who chose to write a history of *physiologia* aimed at emphasizing the turning point represented by Socrates, ended up

⁵⁹ I have chosen a “strong” translation of the Greek verb *oligereō*—“to hold someone or something in low esteem”—in order to facilitate comparison with the passage in *Sophist* where Plato laments, with very similar wording, the argumentative negligence of earlier philosophers (see above, 20–21). For this connection see Frede 2004, in particular 30–33 and 43.

normalizing an intellectual landscape that had been far richer than the one emerging from the first book of *Metaphysics*. The figure of Thales himself is thrust into this picture, which showcases his interest in the physical world while sacrificing other aspects of his thought that were nevertheless present in the tradition known to Aristotle.

As already mentioned, Thales might also appear as the herald of a kind of socially useful practical wisdom, a role with which Aristotle seems to be familiar when he cites the episode of the olive mills in *Politics*. Thales was also constantly present in the various ancient lists of the Seven Sages and thus chosen—together with a series of personalities from the first decades of the sixth century—as a representative of an intellectual context where moral wisdom is intertwined with practical sense, political ability, and poetic talent, or at any rate with a good dose of verbal and gestural eloquence. In fact, according to some sources (Diogenes Laertius I, 22, who attributes the anecdote to Demetrius of Phaleron, a pupil of Aristotle and an important political figure), Thales was proclaimed “the first” *sophos* by the city of Athens in a decree dated to 582 BCE. These lists also include politicians such as Solon and Pittacus, a tyrant (Periander), and a seer (Epimenides). It would be pointless to look for single elements of truth behind the many anecdotes about this or that sage: as Bruno Snell has shown, the tradition of the Seven Sages is largely the product of a construction that began in the fifth century BCE.⁶⁰ This tradition nevertheless shows traces of an idea of wisdom aimed not so much at the acquisition of scientific notions as at a practical and moral reflection. Such an approach characterized Greek culture in the period between the seventh and the sixth centuries BCE, a phase that saw the toiled establishment of the institutions of the polis after a series of harsh economical and social conflicts perceived as a consequence of the crisis of aristocratic values. Solon, the least legendary among the Seven Sages, famously personifies this approach. Archon of Athens from 594 to 593 BCE, Solon is the author of a complex legislation aimed at saving the city from a political and moral crisis whose main cause he saw in the greed of the rich and their abuse of power at the expense of the poor. His reforms consistently aim at mediating social conflict and are inspired by an ideal of moderation memorably propagandized in his elegies.

The tradition of the Seven Sages was of course well known to Aristotle, and he probably centered on it, on at least one occasion, a picture of the beginnings and developments of knowledge intended as an alternative to the one he would provide in the first book of *Metaphysics* (which shows a different agenda, a higher level of elaboration and systematization, and was incomparably more successful). As documented by a long passage by Johannes

⁶⁰ Snell 1938.

Philoponus (frag. 8 Ross),⁶¹ the Aristotelian writing *On Philosophy* must have featured a description of the civilization of those who survived the Flood thanks to the subsequent discoveries of useful *technai*, the fine arts, the “civic virtues” that coexist—with the Seven Sages—with the invention of the laws and all that favors cohabitation in the polis, and finally on the emerging interest in the natural bodies (*phusikē theōria*) and in the knowledge of divine truths. The last are defined as the object of the highest form of *sophia*, but *all* the preceding phases are seen as manifestations of *sophia* (the term is used here in the polyvalent if unitary sense, typical in the archaic period, of a cognitive and practical ability in the context of a specific area of competence). As in the first book of *Metaphysics*, what we are dealing with here is a history of knowledge that is teleologically oriented: but here the exposition starts from the *technai* and the political wisdom of the Seven Sages, then moves to the theoretical sciences.⁶² This different choice may be explained with the specific contents of *On Philosophy*, where Aristotle investigates the intrinsic nature of philosophical activity by examining the different faces of *sophia* depending on the context. Thus the highest level of knowledge (represented, one might suppose, by Plato) would be connoted as such because it deals with ontologically supreme entities. Conversely, in *Metaphysics* Aristotle shows a specific interest for theoretical knowledge, the highest level of which is reached by fulfilling the understanding of the causal principles of reality.

That is why Thales attracts Aristotle’s attention within the framework of *Metaphysics* 1: not as one of the Seven Sages (although he was one of them), but for the contribution he made to natural science, in Aristotle’s estimation, that is, his intuition of the material cause; here, his contributions to technical and practical thought remain in the background. Later on in the same context (*Metaphysics* I, 6, which we have already mentioned) Socrates holds a parallel position, having launched a journey of reflection—ethics—that had never been explored before. His position is, however, also reduced due to the prominent role that Aristotle assigns to concept analysis in his discourse on virtue. In fact, however, Socrates’ teaching did make use of a few central aspects of the tradition of the Seven Sages: we must think not only of his sententious use of moral (especially Delphic) maxims, but also of his embracing not so much an exposition of theories as a *performance* of wisdom, which he realized in the practice of the dialogue and in his *exemplum*. This relationship between the Socratic experience and the earlier practice of moral dis-

⁶¹The hypothesis that the passage by Johannes Philoponus (*Introduction to Nichomachus’ Arithmetics*, I, 1) belonged to the writing *On Philosophy* is not universally acknowledged; in any case it is imbued with Aristotelian elements. Berti (1997, 263–66) provided some starting points for the reading I propose here.

⁶²It must be noted that Plato grants Solon the title of *philosophos*, which he then bequeathed to his heirs (*Charmides*, 154e–155a).

course, long overshadowed by the reception of the agenda of *Metaphysics*, is a remarkable phenomenon that has been rediscovered in recent scholarship.⁶³

In fact, the most characteristic feature of the intellectual landscape of the period preceding Plato is the very coexistence and intersection of a plurality of intellectual trends, which overlap and compete with respect to their methods, approaches, and areas of interest.⁶⁴ Rather soon, for instance, we encounter poets (Hesiod and perhaps Alcman, as we shall see) interested in cosmogonic and cosmological themes, or a writer of history like Hecataeus, whom we might compare, in light of his critical position against traditional stories, to Xenophanes (for whom, however, the appellation of philosopher may not be entirely appropriate).

On the other hand, nature is not the only field of philosophical interest in the sixth century BCE. In this regard we must again emphasize the role of the Seven Sages, and Solon in particular, whose reflections on the prerequisites of lawfulness and justice necessary for keeping a city together are rightly seen as the beginning of ethical and political thought; on the basis of this consideration, and rightly so, Solon has been instated as a thinker on par with the other Presocratics.⁶⁵ Conversely, the *phusiologi* often branch out into fields other than that of natural inquiry. Mathematics was one of these, probably since Thales, then with Pythagoras and his school; it is also possible that Zeno of Elea's arguments were directed toward the procedures of contemporary mathematicians. Moreover, medicine was a full-fledged field of inquiry that interested those who studied nature.⁶⁶ This observation is valid first and foremost for Alcmaeon of Croton but also for thinkers known mostly for their complex explanations of being and becoming, such as Parmenides, Empedocles, or Anaxagoras. It might seem striking, in particular, that we possess a sizable number of *doxai* from all these thinkers in the area of embryology, showing a range of explanations of the role played by either parent with regard to generation, sexual differentiation, and fetal development. The amount of information on this subject may have been determined by the preferences of the doxographers (which, we might further hypothesize, may have been determined in turn by the interest Aristotle focuses on more ancient explorations of this problem in *On the Generation of Animals*). However, this consideration does not completely diminish the value of the doxographical tradition, and we may take comfort from the fact that a source external to the line of philosophical doxography, the lexicographer Pollux, attributes the formulation

⁶³ See Martin 1993. Sharp 2006 has some interesting observations about the modalities of interpersonal communication in the relationship between Croesus and Solon as portrayed by Herodotus.

⁶⁴ See Cambiano 1997; Lloyd 2002c and 2005, 11–16.

⁶⁵ See Lewis 2006, 8.

⁶⁶ For this reason we might even suggest (with Frede [1986]) that the theoretical side of Greek medicine started among the philosophers.

of embryological doctrines even to the Sophist Antiphon (87 B 34–39 DK). In conclusion, there is no doubt that in the Presocratic period the terrain of embryology, far from being the sole prerogative of professional physicians, was open for discussion to anyone who chose it as his field of inquiry.

Other similar situations will gradually emerge from these pages. However, we have yet to mention a specific category of authors, namely, those who wrote treatises on their own *technē*.⁶⁷ By far the most famous among these is Polycleitus's *Canon*, devoted to the description of the rules applied in carving the well-known *Doryphorus*. Moreover, the centrality of the notion of symmetry in this writing (and in the sculptor's practice) has been linked to Pythagorean theories, which garnered Polycleitus a place among Diels's *Vorsokratiker* (number 40) and, as a direct consequence, a peculiar interest on the part of historians of ancient philosophy.⁶⁸ An analogous case is provided by the work of the architect Hippodamus of Miletus, who lived during the first half of the fifth century BCE and was known for the urban planning of the Piraeus and (perhaps) of Thurii, and remembered by Aristotle for his views on the best form of political organization, connected with the problem of an equal distribution of the civic body across the urban territory, as well as for the lavish robes he wore in layers even during the summer, as a rather obvious way of showing off an expertise that covered "the whole of nature" (*Politics*, II, 7, 1267b 22–1268b 25: this testimony is partially reprinted in 39 A 1 DK).⁶⁹

We may leave aside the fundamentally nominalistic problem of whether Polycleitus or Hippodamus may be welcomed or not among the Presocratic thinkers, accepting or refusing Diels's attempts at categorization. What I would like to stress—in the light of the significant number of "technicians" who reflect on their own activity (from cooking to nutrition, from wrestling to horse riding, from medicine to painting), sometimes with intents and outcomes of remarkable theoretical interest—is the pluralism of knowledge and styles of reasoning that characterize the intellectual enterprise of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. On the other hand, if after these necessary preliminary clarifications we try to outline a field of strictly philosophical knowledge, we shall not sacrifice the extraordinary complexity of this situation nor stiffen the elasticity of its internal articulations. It will be possible to populate this field with personalities that differ greatly in approach and sets of problems, thanks

⁶⁷ Festugière (1948, 32) provides a useful outline of the *Technai*, although in some cases his postulation of full-fledged treatises is a stretch and is not supported by the ancient sources. And to Festugière's list we must add the treatise of musical theory by Lasus of Hermione, Pindar's music teacher.

⁶⁸ Huffman 2002 is rightly skeptical concerning the link with Pythagoric doctrines. In any case, Polycleitus is described since the first phases of the doxographical tradition as an eminent figure of the *doctus*-artist (see Settis 1973).

⁶⁹ Hence the late characterization of Hippodamus as *meteōrologos* (Hesychius, in 39 A 3 DK).

(continued...)

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