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Text and Ritual: The Meaning of the Media for the History of Religion

I think that the changes in written characters in different periods of culture have always played a very important part in the revolutions in human knowledge as such, and particularly in the manifold changes in the opinions and concepts of religious questions.

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1. From Ritual Coherence to Textual Coherence

It has often been proposed that there might be a connection between the histories of religion and the media. As early as the eighteenth century, a link was perceived between monotheist religion and the invention of the alphabet, and the connection between Protestantism and the printing press is a long-standing commonplace. The present chapter aims to explore such issues with reference to the ancient world and to establish a link between the origins of the book-based religions and changes in the history of the media. In the process I make use of ideas that I developed at length in my book *Cultural Memory*, and shall only allude to here.[2]

In the relationship between text and ritual, the history of religion marks a turning point that amounts to a complete reversal. Where, previously, the text was embedded in the ritual and subordinated to it, now the text, in the shape of a body of canonic writings, becomes the pivotal factor, and ritual is left with only a framing and accompanying function. This turning point is a watershed, and separates two types of religion. We may differentiate these as cult religions and book-based religions. Cult religions are the primary phenomenon everywhere. They arise seamlessly from tribal religions, branch out into the complex and complicated polytheisms of the early high cultures, and can still be found in the Asiatic world down to the present day, frequently in a state of peaceful coexistence with religions that stand on a very different footing. Book-based religions, on the other hand, all arise from a radical rupture with tradition. We may follow Theo Sundermeier in characterizing religions at this stage as "secondary religions."[3] This concept includes all religions that do not trace their origins back to the mists of time, but claim to be the product of historical acts of revelation and creation. They include the three Western monotheisms, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as Buddhism, Jainism, and the Sikh religion. All secondary religions are book-based religions. They are founded on a canon of sacred writings, such as the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Bible, the Koran, the Jain canon, the Pali canon, and the Adi Granth.[4] The change of medium that formed our point of departure has its corollary in a structural change in the nature of religion. On the side of the secondary religions we find writing and transcendence, while on that of primary religion we find ritual and immanence.

This transformation is accompanied by a transformation of "cultural memory." In the cult religions, the "connective structures" that ensured the identical reproduction of the culture down through the generations were based primarily on the principle of ritual repetition. In the case of book-based religions, they are founded on the principle of interpreting the canonical texts. I would like to make three additional points in support of this assertion: first, with regard to the distinction between cultural and canonical texts; second, in relation to the "expanded context" and its institutionalization in the oral and written traditions; and third, with reference to the change that takes place in the question of who participates in the religion, a situation that changes drastically in the development from ritual to textual coherence.

By "cultural texts" we understand all sign complexes, that is, not just texts, but also dances, rites, symbols, and the rest, that possess a particular normative and formative authority in the establishment of meaning and identity.[5] Cultural texts lay claim to an authority that embraces society as a whole; they determine its identity and coherence. They structure the world of meaning in which society makes itself understood, and also the sense of unity, belonging, and individuality that can be handed down

through the generations, thus enabling a society to reproduce itself as a recognizable group.

Cultural texts change with the changing context of a changing present, and it is precisely the cultural texts that are subject to the most radical editorial modifications.[6] This is because it is they, above all, that are concerned to adapt themselves to a changed reality. It is they that must be continually added to and accommodated because they have to be transported from one generation to the next and because they keep finding themselves in a changing environment. Such *mouvance*, to use Paul Zumthor's term, is the fate of texts destined for repeated use; it is the form in which they are adapted for constant reuse, and the typical form of organization of the "stream of tradition" (in the sense used by Leo Oppenheim) in Mesopotamia and Egypt. The earliest and most widespread form of the cultivation of meaning consists in alterations to the text. Such alterations are forbidden wherever the literal word is sacrosanct and where neither "jot nor tittle" can be altered. That is the step that we call canonization.

As noted earlier, we owe the concept of an "expanded context" to Konrad Ehlich, who applies it to a communication situation in which, thanks to the existence of the appropriate cultural institutions, it is possible always to recall communications that have been stored. Therefore, the principal difference between the oral and written transmission of such communications or cultural texts does not lie in the medium and the technology of storage, but in the way the expanded context is institutionalized. The position with oral transmission is that the extended context calls for a far more radical shaping process than is required in developed written cultures, and it normally takes the form of ritual. As we have seen, festivals and rituals are the typical ways in which societies without writing institutionalize the expanded context of cultural texts. Ritual ensures that a communication will be recalled; it guarantees the communicative presence of the text and thus the ritual coherence of the culture. Despite the growing quantity of written matter, early written cultures are decisively based on such ritual coherence.

The possibility created by writing of storing linguistic utterances in their literal form, so that they could be reproduced subsequently without the need to learn them by heart, was a development that liberated people from the repetition compulsion of ritual coherence. What mattered now was understanding. This is the place where Hans-Georg Gadamer's

principle of "merging horizons" comes into its own. This principle represents the *unio mystica* of text and reader, a process of merging achieved in the realm of ritual coherence by ritual itself. The classical example is the "dream time" of the Australian Aborigines. With every new celebration mythical time comes into being yet again, and the clock of everyday, linear time is put back once more. In the realm of textual coherence, such mystical fusion can only be achieved with the aid of an elaborate art of interpretation. The hermeneutics of the merging horizon described by Gadamer is only valid in the framework of canonical texts, and then only for this exceptional case of the expanded context. Admittedly, it provides an outstanding description of this context. However, far more is called for simply than "intrinsic textual markers," to which Gadamer ascribes "eternal expressive power." What is needed is the entire apparatus of a culture of learning, exegesis, understanding, and internalization with all of its highly complex set of assumptions.

The transformation from ritual to textual coherence implies a change in the *structure of participation*. For textual coherence to exist, knowledge of the text has to be as widely disseminated as possible. Ideally, every member of society should be able to read the texts, and even learn them by heart, as well as having access to an interpreter from whom he or she can seek advice. In the case of ritual coherence, the opposite participation structure obtains, one based on the principle of secrecy. Cult religions are religions concerned with mysteries, just as book-based religions are religions of revelation. They are dominated by the pathos of proclamation and explanation; cult religions, in contrast, are dominated by the opposite pathos of keeping secrets, exclusivity, and esotericism. I shall discuss this in greater detail in Section 3. The increased participation of the entire nation made possible by the book-based religions implies that the sacred is constantly present and accessible. In the primary religions, the sacred was much more evident to the senses, in a variety of ways. In exchange, however, the sacred occasions when the holy made its appearance were spread much more abstemiously over the whole year. Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, drew attention to this important distinction between pagan cult religion and Jewish book-based religion in his polemic *Contra Apionem.*

Can any government (says he) be more holy than this? Or any religion better adapted to the nature of the Deity? Where in any place but in this, are the whole

People, by the special diligence of the Priests, to whom the care of public instruction is committed, accurately taught the principles of true piety? So that the body politic seems, as it were, one great *Assembly*, constantly kept together, for the celebration of some sacred *Mysteries*? For those things which the Gentiles keep up for a few days only, that is, during those solemnities they call MYSTERIES and INITIATIONS, we, with vast delight, and a plenitude of knowledge, which admits of no error, fully enjoy, and perpetually contemplate through the whole course of our lives. If you ask (continues he) the nature of those things, which in our sacred rites are enjoined and forbidden, I answer, they are simple and easily understood. The first instruction relates to the DEITY, and teaches that GOD CONTAINS ALL THINGS, and is a Being every way perfect and happy: that he is self-existent, and the SOLE CAUSE of all existence; the beginning, the middle and the end of all things, etc."[7]

2. Ritual and Immanence: The Changing Structure of the Sacred

The principle of ritual coherence is combined with the idea of the need to maintain the world. Ritual cultures or cult religions typically assume that the universe would suffer or even collapse if the rituals were not performed in an orderly manner. The ritual always serves to maintain an overall unity that is threatened by decay. The emphasis on textual coherence grows as this idea fades. For the Bible, this change is brought about by the emergence of a theology of creation and a theology of the will. The world does not owe its existence to rituals, but to the sustaining will and activity of a transcendent God. For the tradition of classical humanism, the Platonic theory of the world-soul (as formulated in the *Timaeus*) and the Aristotelian idea of the unmoved mover signify a comparable revolution in the relationship between man and the world. These philosophies likewise remove from man the burden of keeping the world going and represent the cosmos as an ordered, living totality that exists independently of man. This did not indeed have any further implications in the practices of the Greek cults, but it did for Greek culture which, unlike that of ancient Egypt, did not disappear along with the rituals, but survived in the texts.

The principle of ritual coherence and the need to maintain the world is connected further with the social type of the priest, much as the notion of text-interpretation implies the social types of the interpreter, the scholar, and the priest. The priest is separated from the community by strict rules

about purity; he becomes qualified by virtue of a ritual cleanliness that is achieved by means of washing, fasting, sexual abstinence, and other forms of what Max Weber terms "magical asceticism." Priestly competence is in the first instance a physical matter; the body is much more directly involved than in the case of book religions. With the institution of celibacy, this was given such decisive form in Roman Catholicism that even today we tend to talk more of priests than of parsons and pastors. In addition, of course, there is an emphasis on knowledge in the shape of ritual and liturgical competence. The priest has to know how, when and where specific actions are to be performed, and which words have to be spoken or chanted. The whole business of keeping the world going, with all its assumptions, can only succeed if a plethora of rules are followed all of which have to be known and mastered. Success or failure are proved through the direct interaction with nature, through the fact that the sun rises or sets, that it rains, that the seed blossoms, the cattle thrive, the army is victorious, the storm passes or the calm comes to an end, the pregnant woman gives birth or the invalid recovers, etc., etc. The sacred realm with which the priest is concerned and for whose sake he must purify himself exists within this world; it is attached to a particular location or is vividly present to the senses, and it is separated from the profane world of everyday by very high barriers. This contrasts starkly with the situation of the interpreter or preacher. The sacred realm with which the latter is concerned is radically separated from this world. Within this world it is present exclusively in written form. For this reason both in Judaism and Islam, writing is invested with ideas and regulations that have manifestly been imported from the world of ritual. Thus a Jew may not put a Bible on the floor, and a Muslim is forbidden to destroy any piece of writing in the Arabic script or language. He may not even take it to read in unsuitable places, even if it is only the newspaper. Christianity, and especially Protestantism, has done away with even this vestige of ritual. The interpreter or preacher becomes qualified for his office through his knowledge of the scriptures. He knows how to read them and to read them aloud, he knows them by heart and is able to use one passage to shed light on another. Above all, he knows how to make them relevant to particular situations in the present. Here, there is no direct interaction with nature. The success of his calling is measured by the degree to which his sermon is taken to heart, that is, by the translation from text to practical life.

The transition from cult religion to book religion is accompanied by a structural change in the nature of the sacred to which the Greek specialist Albrecht Dihle has drawn our attention on the basis of semasiological observations.[8] Greek and Latin distinguish between two concepts of the "holy" that exist in only one form in Hebrew as well as in modern languages. The first term, *hieros* in Greek, and *sacer* in Latin, designates "the holiness that exists objectively in many places in the world." The second term, *hosios* or *sanctus*, signifies "the qualification of a person or of circumstances that is necessary for dealing with the holy."[9] Primary or cultic religions are concerned with the holiness that exists visibly in the world (*hieros*). Priestly dealings with this holiness call for holiness in the sense of *hosios*. This signifies a condition that is segregated from the profane sphere. Secondary religions, on the other hand, abolish this distinction because holiness is no longer to be found anywhere in the world. The only thing that can still pass as *hieros* or *sanctus* is the holy scripture, *biblia sacra*.

The expulsion of the holy from the world, into a transcendental realm on the one hand, and into scripture on the other, leads to a fundamental redirection of attention. Previously, all eyes were focused on the phenomena of this world and the holiness that was manifest in them. Henceforth, attention is concentrated exclusively on scripture. Everything else is stigmatized as idolatry. The things of this world, images above all, are snares and pitfalls that distract attention from the scriptures. Man must free himself from any entanglement with them. The denigration of images and the visual in general is accompanied by a form of discourse that desensualizes religion and dismantles the theatricality of ritual. Moses Mendelssohn, incidentally, saw the danger here with particular clarity. "We are literal people," he complains, "our entire nature depends on letters."[10] Accordingly, he praises Judaism for prescribing so many rituals because they enable the aesthetic dimension of religion to be preserved even in the context of a book religion.

3. Ritual, Text, and Mystery

The principle of ritual coherence is based on the media that make the sacred visibly manifest in the world. These media include holy places, trees, sources, stones, grottos, groves, but also and above all, images, stat-

ues, symbols, and buildings such as temples, pyramids, and stupas. The priest has to adapt himself to these evidences of the sacred. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet," it says in Exodus 3:5, "for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Where the holy is present in corporeal and visible form, other laws obtain and to ignore them can be fatal. This holds good also for the sacred texts that are embedded in the rituals for the purpose of recitation or already in recitable form. They too make the holy present. To have them recited correctly in the right place, at the right time, and by the right speaker unleashes cosmic energies that keep the world in order. In late Egyptian civilization, these texts were brought together under the generic title "The Power of Rē," which means something like "solar energy." The Egyptian priest had to chew sodium and cleanse his mouth before reciting these texts. These utterances had to be protected from profanation just like the holy places, images, and symbols, and hedged around by all the rules of secrecy.

I would like to illustrate this with a number of examples from Egypt. Ancient Egypt can be regarded as the prototype of a religion based on mystery.[11] In a text from the Middle Kingdom, "The Admonitions of Ipuwer," we hear the following lament:

> Lo, the private chamber, its books are stolen,
> The secrets in it are laid bare.
> Lo, magic spells are divulged,
> Spells are made worthless through being repeated by people.[12]
> See, the secret of the land, its limits are unknown,
> If the residence is stripped, it will collapse in a moment.
>
> . . .
>
> See the serpent is taken from its hole,
> The secrets of Egypt's kings are bared.[13]

Thus great emphasis is placed on extreme confidentiality in ritual texts:

> You shall accomplish this without allowing any man to watch,
> Apart from your true confidant and a lector-priest.
> Let no other person watch and let no servant enter from without.
>
> . . .
>
> This script is truly secret.
> Profane persons may not watch
> At any place and any time.[14]

Or again: "Now when this is recited the place is to be completely secluded, not seen and not heard by anyone except the chief lector-priest and the *setem*-priest."[15] In the crypts of the temple of Hathor in Dendara, it is said that entrance is forbidden to foreigners in particular:

> The hidden place of the powerful in the sistra house
> If the destroyers invade Egypt.
> The Asiatics do not enter there,
> The Bedouins do not harm it,
> The profane do not walk around there.
> Whoever recites a spell against it,
> May the milk of Sekhmet be in his body.[16]
>
> . . .
>
> The place whose secret is hidden
> Against the day that the Asiatics invade the fortress.
> The Phoenicians do not approach it,
> The Aegeans do not enter,
> The lizards do not crawl around there.
> A magician does not perform his rites.
> Its gates are not opened to those without authority.[17]

A ritual book from the Late Period with the title *The End of Work* is described as follows:

On this day (1 Achat 20), the book entitled *The End of Work* is examined. This is a secret book that foils magic, that formulates the incantations, establishes the incantations and keeps the whole universe in check.

It contains life and death. Do not make it known, since whoever makes it known will die a sudden death and will be murdered on the spot. Keep away from it, for it contains life and death.

It is (only) the scribe of the administration of the house of life who recites it.[18]

The ritual takes place in the house of life, of which it is said:

> It shall be very, very hidden.
> No one shall know it, no one see it
> Apart from the sundial that gazes on its secret.
>
> . . .
>
> The officiating priests . . . shall enter silently, their bodies veiled,
> So that they shall be protected against a sudden death.
> The Asiatic may not enter, he may not see anything.[19]

The priest who is able with his words to release cosmic energies intervenes in the cosmos in a supportive way, but he may also intervene menacingly if the situation calls for it and a crisis has to be averted. Thus he may threaten to halt the bark of the sun in its tracks if a particular patient is not instantly cured. This is discussed by Porphyry, the Neoplatonic thinker, in his letter to the Egyptian priest Anebo, known to us from the response written by Iamblichus. Porphyry is scandalized by the idea that the priest could have an effect on the cosmos simply through the act of recitation. "For the reciter threatens to shatter the heavens, to make public the mysteries of Isis, to reveal what is hidden in the abyss (of the universe), to bring the bark to a standstill, to cast the limbs of Osiris before Typhon and other things of this sort."[20] Such texts do in fact exist in large numbers. It would be hard to reproduce more precisely Egyptian notions of the power of cultic language. Porphyry has in mind threats of the kind that occur frequently in Egyptian books of spells,[21] but it also gives a much broader sense of the performative power of cultic language in general. The sacred texts are able to generate such effects—effects that are also to be feared if they are profaned, if they fall into the wrong hands and their mysteries are revealed. The "power of Re" is, as we have said, the generic name for such "sacred texts" that have to be protected and kept secret because they contain cosmic knowledge. The ritual incantation of this knowledge keeps the world going because it joins in the cosmic work of the journey of the sun. In Egypt, a sacred text was thought to be a linguistic repository of the holy and was subject to the same restrictions and regulations with regard to access as the cult image. The recitation of a sacred text produced the same corporeal and visible realization, the "making present" of the "godly," as the holy image. This literature was secret because it formed part of the cult mysteries of objects that had to be protected from profane defilement and from being deprived of their power by the external world. Whatever had been desecrated was no longer able to make the godly present and real.

4. The Foreign-Language Dimension of Sacred Texts

In his reply to Porphyry's accusing the priest of blasphemy, Iamblichus too turns out to be extremely well informed. For he writes that the

priest or magician does not utter such threats in his own interest and by his own responsibility, but that he moves onto the same plane as the gods, assumes the identity of a god, and only resorts to such extreme measures while acting in this role, and not in his own person.[22] Nor did he desire to create havoc; on the contrary, his intention was to ward it off. These threats were intended apotropaically, to ward off evil demons. The magician speaks to the gods as a god, and in the last analysis it is their cause he is defending, since they too want to prevent evil demons from gaining the upper hand. This brilliantly encapsulates the principle of cultic language. Elsewhere, however, Iamblichus discusses this principle even more explicitly.

I am thinking here of the famous chapter in which Iamblichus responds to the question Porphyry had posed about the meaning of meaningless formulas or names.[23] *Ti gar bouletai ta onomata asema?* What is the purpose of invocations without meaning? What are being referred to are the so-called *onomata barbara* or magic words that are to be found, above all, in the Greco-Egyptian magic papyri. These formulas, Iamblichus replied, are not actually meaningless; they only seem so to us because we have forgotten their meaning. They are not meaningless to the gods to whom they are addressed. What we find here is a divine language that we have forgotten but which the gods still understand. Even if it has become estranged from us, when we speak it, it is still able to raise us to the level of the gods. Thus Iamblichus conceives of the language of the Egyptian cults in a mystical sense: it is less concerned with the impact of speech on the hearer than on the speaker. By speaking the divine language, he himself becomes a god, even though, or rather because, he does not understand it. This mystical interpretation of cultic language is of course a misunderstanding. Nevertheless, Iamblichus correctly understands the divine character of cultic speech, which the priest recites not in his own identity but in the role of a god.

Iamblichus's theory of a mystical language of the gods is so interesting, for all its misunderstanding, that I would like briefly to summarize it here. According to Iamblichus, we harbor in our souls mystical and mysterious images of the gods. This internal iconography is activated when we utter the foreign-language formulas, helping us to raise our souls to the gods and thus to approach them as closely as we can. The very fact that we do not understand these formulas is what makes them seem sublime. Pre-

cisely because we do not understand them our uttering them brings about our inner transformation. It is their foreignness and their foreign-language nature that helps us to transcend our own nature.

Iamblichus's mystical account of the effect of the speech on the speaker is precisely the principle that underlies the Egyptian cult. It consists in the ability to encounter the gods not as man but as a god, to communicate with them on the same plane. This presupposes that in his commerce with the gods the priest makes use of the language of the gods, and not that of man. For its part, the language of Egyptian cult recitation is often obscure, but for quite different reasons. We are not concerned here with foreign-language formulas or senseless abracadabras. The cultic recitations are couched in a divine language, not in the sense of a foreign language, but as divine language mediated by masks and roles. This speech has a transformative power, a power not concerned, or less concerned, with transforming the speaker than with transforming the listener.

What is crucial is that the priest encounters the gods not as a man, but in the role of a god. Iamblichus rightly insists "that the workings of the gods are not achieved by two different parties confronting one another (man and god), but that this kind of divine activity is brought about in agreement, unity and consent" (4.3).[24] "The theurgist issues his commands to the cosmic forces by virtue of the power of the secret symbols, no longer as a man and no longer as exercising power over a merely human soul, but as if he now belonged in the ranks of the gods. These commands are more powerful than those available to him by virtue of his own actual nature" (6.6).[25] The fundamental idea of the ritual practices of the ancient Egyptians could not be formulated with greater clarity. This "theurgical" principle applies to action and in particular to language that cannot be separated from action. The recitation accompanying the actions contains the transformative, transfiguring power. This explains why the priest is always on hand with his scroll. He administers the linguistic side of action, the recitation that becomes divine speech in the mouth of the priest at the moment of the cultic act. When the priest speaks, one god speaks to another, and the words unfold their transformative, performative, and "presentificatory" power.

By its meaning and nature, therefore, sacred recitation is divine speech, stored in the medium of writing and realized in the context of cul-

tic role play. The priest does not speak in his own person; he does not encounter a divine image as a human being. Instead he slips into a role in the context of a combined divine and worldly "constellation." Cultic language is language of the gods,[26] a language that also treats script as belonging to the gods. The Egyptian word for hieroglyph means roughly "God's words." The failure to distinguish between script and language in the expression *mdt ntr*, "God's words," for hieroglyphic script, is symptomatic of the close link between script and cult in the Egyptian mind and remained decisive for modern theories about hieroglyphs. Giordano Bruno's understanding of hieroglyphs evidently was inspired by Iamblichus:

The . . . "sacred letters" used among the Egyptians were called hieroglyphs which instead of individual signs [*designanda*] were specific images taken from the things of nature, or their parts. By using such writings and voices (*voces*), the Egyptians used to capture with marvellous skill the language of the gods. Afterwards, when letters of the kind which we now use with another kind of industry were invented by Theuth or some other, this brought about a great rift both in memory and in the divine and magical sciences.[27]

Admittedly, the turning point did not come, as Bruno believed, with the invention of the alphabet, but with the shift of emphasis from sound to meaning in the definition of sacred texts, from expression to content, from ritual performance to the need to heed the texts as a guide to living, and from cultic theatricality to hermeneutics. This turning point is the subject of the correspondence between Porphyry and Iamblichus, in which the older man is already reasoning on this side of the threshold, while the younger man persists in the older view.

5. Mysteries of Reading and Intellectual Rituals

It was Bernhard Lang who coined the concept of "intellectual ritual."[28] Following up Robert Ranulph Marett's claim that "primitive religions are danced rather than thought," he draws attention to a fundamental change that leads from rites that are danced to rites in which "only the word still dances," while the participants devote themselves to reciting and interpreting, listening to the word and taking it to heart. His thesis is that this change first took place in early Judaism, during the Babylonian exile.

From these origins, it spread throughout the entire ancient world, together with a prehistory in the rejection by the prophets of orgiastic cults and sacramental magic, and a long posthistory in the religion of what Lorenzer termed the "bookkeepers."[29] Lang has the same change in mind here as we have described in terms of the concepts cult religion / book religion, primary/secondary religion, and ritual/textual coherence. Lang, too, places the invention of paganism and idolatry in the same context. Moses' anger at the sight of the orgiastic dance round the Golden Calf captures this polarity with the succinctness of a primal scene. The scriptures in his hands (the tablets with the Ten Commandments) and the scene before his very eyes prove to be incompatible. *This* script and *this* cult form an irreconcilable antithesis.

The Egypt of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods provides us with a late illustration of the primary, cult-oriented religious experience and of a culture given coherence by ritual. The cult here produced more and more writing, so that it ended up with a whole library of sacred writings in and around itself. Even so, the library remained subordinate to the cult, and the shift from a cult religion to a book religion did not take place. Clement of Alexandria describes not just the structure and composition of such a library, but also the mode of its cultic integration in the shape of a procession that we might describe as the typical Egyptian form of an "intellectual ritual." In Chapter 3 I gave a detailed account of Clement's description. It consists of the solemn procession of five priests or representatives of five different categories of priest: singers, astrologers, scribes, stole-keepers, and prophets (high priests). A particular group of books is assigned to each of these priests or priestly orders, whose task is to learn them by heart and master them perfectly. This gives rise to a canon of books whose internal arrangement and hierarchical structure reflects precisely the hierarchy of the priests in the temple. Thus the procession of the priests makes visible the hierarchic ordering of the canon of sacred books. In total, the books to be mastered by the priests or priestly orders amount to thirty-six—the number of the decan stars, that is, the totality of time. In addition, there are a further six medical books to be mastered by the image bearers, the *pastophoroi*, which brings the total up to forty-two, the number of Egyptian provinces and at the same time, the number of the limbs of Osiris's body that had been torn in pieces and scattered throughout

the provinces. This latter, then, is the totality of space. The procession of priests demonstrates in impressive fashion the interconnections between ritual, script, and memory that characterize the Egyptian cult. The books must be learned by heart; they are not meant for reading, but as the foundations of a specialized priestly memory. The entire canon, which is staged and activated by means of a procession, in its turn provides the foundation for the ritual process of sustaining the world.

6. Writing and Revelation

In Judaism the relationship between writing and cult is turned on its head. The scriptures, ceasing to act as something that precedes or follows a cultic act, are the heart of the matter. The cultic act is reduced to something that comes after the scriptures, in the form of communal readings, memory, internalization, and interpretation. This amounts to a complete reversal. The scriptures do not give permanence to the ritual, they replace it. It is one of the most remarkable coincidences of history that the Temple of the Jews was destroyed at the very moment when the internal development of the religion had rendered it superfluous and undermined the meaning of the rituals. This was when Titus destroyed the Temple in A.D. 70. The Jesus movement was just one of a number of Jewish (and Greek) trends that sought to do away with the fundamental idea of the cult, namely blood sacrifice and ritual killing, and replace it with a process of sublimation, moralization, and internalization. If Titus had not destroyed the Temple they would have had to close it—or else Judaism would never have come into being, and Christianity and Islam along with it. The Temple had in a sense outlived its usefulness, since the cult had long since found its death in the scriptures.

There is much to be said in favor of the idea that Jewish monotheism, the principle of revelation, and, arising from it, the constantly increasing loathing of traditional cult forms, were born from the spirit of writing, or at least were bound up with the medium of writing in a profound way, very much in the spirit of Moses Mendelssohn, who more than two centuries ago postulated a link between media revolutions and religious transformations. The step to a transcendental religion was a step out of the

world—we are tempted to speak of an emigration, an exodus—into the world of writing.[30] Ultimately, the canonized scriptures replace art, public life, and the world. The world is itself declared to be an object of idolatry and is thus discredited. The reverence now being paid to the Creator must not be allowed to become ensnared in His creation. God's radical positioning outside the world goes hand in hand with the radically scriptural nature of His revelation.

With this we touch upon a link between writing and transcendence that Friedrich Kittler has summed up with inimitable succinctness. "Without cultural techniques, . . . no one would know that there is anything apart from what there is. The sky would just be sky, the earth earth and so-called human beings would simply be men and women. But the revelation of the sacred leads to knowledge or (to put it more precisely) to artificial intelligence."[31] Kittler establishes a link between the "artificiality" of writing, in which the sacred becomes revealed, and the principle of the asemanticity of the texts that we discussed in connection with Iamblichus. Kittler, too, is thinking of the *onomata asema* of the Greco-Egyptian magic texts.[32] Admittedly, the very distinctions I am concerned to draw become confused here. The sacred texts of which Iamblichus speaks are quite different from the Bible and the Koran texts which Kittler has in mind, and the boundary that separates these worlds is the question of meaning. In Iamblichus, meaning plays no role at all because the texts are not supposed to be understood by men, but by gods, and the less meaningful they appear to men the more divine they are. In the Bible and the Koran, in contrast, meaning plays the central role. This explains why there are no commentaries on the Egyptian "transfigurations" and "demonstrations of solar power," while a vast, even limitless tradition of commentary exists about the Bible and the Koran. This is why we have priests and cultic communities on the one side and teachers (rabbis, mullahs) and learning communities on the other. The Bible and the Koran did not grow out of cultic formulas, but out of laws and narratives. The norms that govern them have their ultimate roots not in theurgy, but in morality and law. They form the basis for human conduct, not cult practices. It is in this context that we must view the writing that opposed the cult and led to its overthrow.

Nevertheless, I would like to express my agreement with Kittler on the point of the writing-based "artificiality" of revelation. Without the

techniques of writing and hermeneutics it would be impossible to conceive of what the eighteenth century called "positive religion" and thought of as something artificial, in contrast to natural religion. There is no natural evidence in favor of prophetic monotheism, which, as St. Paul says, walks by faith not by sight. Faith is based on writing, on the attested covenant and the law. Cults are based on the act, the performance, on sight. Writing leads to a de-ritualization and de-theatricalization of religion.

7

Officium Memoriae: Ritual as the Medium of Thought

1. Cosmology and Religion: The Case of Akhenaten

Around the middle of the fourteenth century B.C., King Amenhotep IV of Egypt, who later called himself Akhenaten, did away with Egypt's traditional polytheistic religion and replaced it with the cult of a single god, the sun. This is the first occurrence of the foundation of a religion that we hear of in the archives of human history. Akhenaten appears as the first in a line that continues in Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed. However, when we look at the texts in which this new theology has come down to us, we feel tempted to place the king in a completely different context, namely that of Ionian nature philosophy. For in reality our concern here is not the revelation of a new truth which leads men to conduct their lives according to a new set of rules, but a new cosmology, a theory of origins and fundamental principles, or "archai," as the Greeks would have called them, on which the world is based. Akhenaten made the discovery that the sun creates light and heat through its rays, and that without this there would be no life on earth. Hence, so much depends on the sun that even traditional religion acknowledges the sun god as the creator and supreme god. But over and above that, through its motion the sun also creates time, so that—and this seems to have been the king's crucial discovery—absolutely everything that appears by the light of day and that unfolds in time seems to be explicable as the work of the sun. These ideas are familiar to us from the Ionian nature philosophers, who, howev-

Notes

PREFACE

1. H.-G. Gadamer, "Wahrheit und Methode," in *Gesammelte Werke* (Stuttgart, 1975), vol. 1, p. 478.

2. K. Ehlich, "Text und sprachliches Handeln: Die Entstehung von Texten aus dem Bedürfnis nach Überlieferung," in A. Assmann, J. Assmann, and C. Hardmeier, eds., *Schrift und Gedächtnis* (Munich, 1983), pp. 24–43.

3. A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich, 1999).

INTRODUCTION

1. M. Halbwachs, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, 1925 (repr. 1975); *La Mémoire collective* (published posthumously by J. Alexandre) (Paris, 1985). On Halbwachs, see V. Karady, in M. Halbwachs, *Classes sociales et morphologie* (Paris, 1972), pp. 9–22. See also Chapter 5.

2. In this context we can ignore a third type, motor memory, the type that is involved in walking, swimming, cycling, and so on.

3. On the general question of memory distortions, see D. L. Schacter, ed., *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997). On confabulation, see M. Moscovitch, "Confabulation," in ibid., pp. 226–51.

4. See P. Gourvitch, "The Memory Thief," *New Yorker*, June 14, 1999, pp. 48–68. I am grateful to Aleida Assmann for drawing my attention to this article.

5. F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 39 ff.

6. Part 1, in A. Assmann and U. Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit, Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart, 1999), pp. 19–147, esp. pp. 41–49.

7. R. Koselleck, "Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden," in O. Marquard and K. H. Stierle, eds., *Identität* (Munich, 1979), pp. 255–76.

8. On this point, see D. Krochmalnik, "Amalek: Gedenken und Vernichtung in der jüdischen Tradition," in H. Loewy and B. Moltmann, eds., *Erlebnis—*

Gedächtnis—Sinn: Authentische und konstruierte Erinnerung (Frankfurt am Main and New York, 1996), pp. 121–36.

9. A. Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition: Kulturelle Strategien der Dauer* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna, 1999), p. 64.

10. This refers in particular to the critique directed by H. Cancik and H. Mohr at the "extension of the metaphorical use of memory to 'society' and 'culture,'" in "Erinnerung/Gedächtnis," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* (Stuttgart, 1990), vol. 2, pp. 299–323.

11. Cited according to E. Otto, *Das Deuteronomium* (Berlin, 1999), p. 82, in the translation into German by S. Maul, both of whom I would like to thank for their assistance on this and many other questions. [All translations from secondary texts are by the translator of the current volume unless otherwise stated. All text in square brackets is the translator's interpolation.—Trans.]

12. C. Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris, 1962), p. 309. See C. Lévi-Strauss, *Strukturale Anthropologie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1960), p. 39.

13. W. Müller, "Die Nonhongschinga und die strukturale Anthropologie," in H. P. Duerr, ed., *Sehnsucht nach dem Ursprung: Zu Mircea Eliade* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), pp. 264–82, esp. p. 270.

14. Ibid., p. 274.

15. M. Granet, *Das chinesische Denken* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985), p. 67; see also ibid., pp. 69 ff. Quoted in G. Dux, *Die Zeit in der Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), p. 225.

16. J. Piaget, *Die Entwicklung des Erkennens* (Stuttgart, 1975), vol. 2, p. 77; quoted in Dux, *Die Zeit in der Geschichte*, p. 224.

17. H. Beinlich, *Die "Osirisreliquien": Zum Motiv der Körperzergliederung in der altägyptischen Religion* (Wiesbaden, 1984).

18. Bible quotations are from the Revised Version.—Trans.

19. The Hebrew text does not speak of writing ("shall be upon thy heart"), but it does in Jeremiah 31:33 ["and in their heart I will write it"—Trans.].

20. "Conversational Remembering"; see the discussion from a psychological viewpoint in D. Middleton and D. Edwards, eds., *Collective Remembering* (London, 1990), pp. 23–45. The contribution of J. Shotter in the same volume is also of importance for the role of speaking in the construction of a shared memory. See pp. 120–38.

21. The fulfillment of this injunction is described in Joshua 8:30–35.

22. Originally, all three festivals were harvest festivals (Matsah: barley harvest; Shavuot: wheat harvest, alternatively, at the end of the grain harvest; Sukkot: fruit harvest). It is assumed that it was only with the loss of the land in the Diaspora that the close tie between the feast dates and the agrarian cycle was broken and the festivals were converted into festivals of remembrance. I am concerned here to show the role played by memory even in the founding texts.

23. On the Matsah festival as Zikharon, festival of remembrance, see Exodus 12:14; Leviticus 23:24. See the literature given in Cancik and Mohr, "Erinnerung/Gedächtnis," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* (Stuttgart, 1990), vol. 2, notes 73–77.

24. In the post-biblical era Shavuot has acquired the additional meaning of a feast to commemorate the revelation on Mount Sinai and the "giving of the Torah." See M. Dienemann, "Schavuot," in F. Thieberger, *Jüdisches Fest und jüdischer Brauch* (1937; reprint, 1967; Königstein im Taunus, 1979), 280–87. See C. Hardmeier, "Die Erinnerung an die Knechtschaft in Ägypten," in F. Crüsemann, C. Hardmeier, and R. Kessler, eds., *Was ist der Mensch . . . ? Beiträge zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments* (Munich, 1992), pp. 133–52.

25. "And Moses wrote this law . . . and commanded" that it be read out in a regular cycle before all Israel, every seven years during the Feast of Tabernacles; 31:9–13. This chimes with the customary arrangement in Hittite treaties of reading the text out at regular intervals. See V. Korosec, *Hethitische Staatsverträge: Ein Beitrag zu ihrer juristischen Wertung* (Leipzig, 1931), pp. 101 ff. Ezra reads the law out to the people day after day during Sukkot, from the first day to the last (Neh. 8:1–18). See also the ruling at the end of the "Testament" of the Hittite King Hatusilis I (sixteenth century B.C.): " . . . and this tablet should always be read out every month (to the successor to the throne); in this way you will always remember my words and my wisdom." (Laroche, "Catalogue des textes hittites," no. 6, in Cancik and Mohr, *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, p. 314.)

26. The book of Deuteronomy closes with a great song that recapitulates the warning against the terrible consequences of disloyalty and forgetfulness in a condensed poetic form. This song is supposed to remain alive in the oral tradition of the people and so constantly remind it of its commitments.

27. The obligation to adhere strictly to the law is expressed in the frequently reiterated demand "not to add unto the word . . . neither shall ye diminish from it" (4:2; 12:32). On "canonic formulas" and their various forms, see J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, 1992), pp. 103–7.

28. See A. and J. Assmann, eds., *Kanon und Zensur* (Munich, 1987). On the origins of the Hebrew canon and the significance of the Book of Deuteronomy as a kind of crystallized nucleus of the biblical process of canonization, see the contribution in this volume by F. Crüsemann. See also F. Crüsemann, *Die Tora: Theologie und Sozialgeschichte des alttestamentlichen Gesetzes* (Munich, 1992), esp. pp. 310–23. For the wider importance of the principle of "canon," see the contributions by C. Colpe and A. and J. Assmann.

29. *Ve-'atem tihju-li mamlechet kohanim vegoj kadosh*; Exodus 19:6.

30. On this point, see G. Braulik, "Das Deuteronomium und die Gedächtniskultur Israels: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zur Verwendung von

lamed," in G. Braulik, W. Gross, and S. McEvenue, eds., *Biblische Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel* (Fs. N. Lohfink SJ) (Freiburg, 1993), pp. 9–31; following on from N. Lohfink, "Der Glaube und die nächste Generation: Das Gottesvolk der Bibel als Lerngemeinschaft," in N. Lohfink, *Das Jüdische am Christentum* (Freiburg, 1987), pp. 144–66; and J. Assmann, "Religion als Erinnerung: Das Deuteronomium als Paradigma kultureller Mnemotechnik," in *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, pp. 212–28. A similar point could be made, according to H. J. Gehrke, about the laws in ancient Crete, which, according to a note in Aelian, were learned by heart together with melodies. The subject matter of what was to be learned consisted in the first place of the laws, and after that came hymns to the gods and, finally, songs of praise in honor of worthy forbears. The double meaning of the Greek word *nomos,* "law" and "song" (hence *noimen* for musical notation), derives from this memory technique.

31. A. Oz, "Israelis und Araber: Der Heilungsprozess," in *Trialog der Kulturen im Zeitalter der Globalisierung, Sinclair House Gespräche,* 11th dialogue (December 5–8, 1998), Herbert-Quandt-Stiftung (Bad Homburg von der Höhe), pp. 82–89, quotation, p. 83.

32. The speech was published in M. Walser, *Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998). The subsequent debate was documented in F. Schirrmacher, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), and analyzed in G. Wiegel and J. Klotz, eds., *Geistige Brandstiftung? Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte* (Cologne, 1999); J. Rohloff, *Ich bin das Volk,* vol. 21 (Hamburg, 1999). See also A. Assmann and U. Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit, Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart, 1999), pp. 53–96.

33. A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich, 1999), pp. 130–45.

34. Ibid., p. 136.

35. Y. H. Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven, Conn., 1991).

36. J. Derrida, *Mal d'archive* (Paris, 1995).

37. R. J. Bernstein, *Freud and the Legacy of Moses* (Cambridge, 1998).

38. J. W. von Goethe, *Werke* (Hamburger Ausgabe, 1952), ed. Erich Trunz, vol. 2, *West-östlicher Divan, Rendsch Nameh: Buch des Unmuts* (Munich, 1998), p. 49. [*Poems of the West and the East,* trans. J. Whaley (Bern and New York, 1998), p. 189.]

39. G. Jonker, *The Topography of Remembrance: The Dead, Tradition, and Collective Memory in Mesopotamia* (Leiden, 1995).

40. M. Halbwachs, *La Topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre Sainte* (Paris, 1941).

41. On this point, see J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis,* chap. 7.

CHAPTER 1: INVISIBLE RELIGION AND CULTURAL MEMORY

1. On the concept of "tradition," see A. Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition: Kulturelle Strategien der Dauer* (Cologne, Vienna, and Weimar, 1999).

2. T. Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion* (New York and London, 1967).

3. A. Assmann and D. Harth, eds., *Mnemosyne: Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991). See also J. Assmann and T. Hölscher, eds., *Kultur und Gedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988); A. and J. Assmann, "Schrift, Tradition, Kultur," in W. Raible, ed., *Zwischen Festtag und Alltag* (Tübingen, 1988), pp. 25–50; J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, 1992), and now especially, A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Funktionen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich, 1999).

4. Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion,* p. 41.

5. On this point, see J. Assmann, *Ma'at: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten* (Munich, 1995).

6. J. Assmann, *Der König als Sonnenpriester: Ein kosmographischer Begleittext zur kultischen Sonnenhymnik in thebanischen Tempeln und Gräbern* (Abh. des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts VII, Glückstadt, 1970); *Sonnenhymnen in Thebanischen Gräbern* (Mainz, 1983), pp. 48 ff.; *Ma'at,* pp. 205–12; M. C. Betrò, *I testi solari del portale di Pascerientaisu* (Pisa, 1989).

7. See also J. Assmann, *Ägypten: Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 11–14.

8. P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth, U.K., 1967), p. 49.

9. On the distinction between primary and secondary religions, see T. Sundermeier, "Religion, Religionen," in K. Müller and T. Sundermeier, eds., *Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe* (Berlin, 1987), pp. 411–23; J. Assmann, *Ma'at,* pp. 279–83.

10. Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion,* p. 43.

11. Ibid., p. 45.

12. See *The Social Construction of Reality,* pp. 77 ff.

13. Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion,* p. 45.

14. For one example among many, see M. Mauss, *Essai sur le don,* German translation, *Die Gabe* (Frankfurt am Main, 1968); M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London, 1972); C. Lévi-Strauss, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris, 1947).

15. On this concept, see Chapter 5.

16. On the basis of the narrative character of formative texts, particularly in their early and original forms, one is tempted to juxtapose them to the other principle of Jewish text-interpretation, the Aggadah that is concerned with storytelling.

29. On the typology of the "canonic formula," see J. Assmann, "Fiktion als Differenz," in *Poetica* 21 (1989): 239–60, and esp. 242–45; J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, 1992), pp. 103 ff.

30. M. Fishbane, "Varia Deuteronomica," in *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972): 349–52.

CHAPTER 6: TEXT AND RITUAL

1. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, in *Schriften über Religion und Aufklärung*, ed. M. Thom (Berlin, 1989), pp. 422 ff.

2. J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, 1992). See also my essay "Schrift und Kult," in M. Fassler and W. Halbach, eds., *Geschichte der Medien* (Munich, 1998), pp. 55–81. It has not been possible to avoid some textual overlap with this last article.

3. T. Sundermeier, "Religion, Religionen," in K. Müller and T. Sundermeier, eds., *Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe* (Berlin, 1987), pp. 411–23.

4. See C. Colpe, "Sakralisierung von Texten und Filiation von Kanons," in A. Assmann and J. Assmann, eds., *Kanon und Zensur* (Munich, 1987), pp. 80–92.

5. On the concept of the "cultural text," see A. Poltermann, ed., *Literaturkanon—Medienereignis—kultureller Text: Formen interkultureller Kommunikation und Übersetzung* (Berlin, 1995).

6. On this question, see Chapter 5, Section 3b.

7. Quoted from W. Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated on the Principles of a Religious Deist, from the Omission of the Doctrine of a Future State of Reward and Punishment in the Jewish Dispensation* (London, 1738–41), vol. 1, pp. 192–93. Warburton emphasizes the terminology of the mysteries through his use of italics and capitals.

8. A. Dihle, the article "Heilig" (Holy), in E. Dassmann et al., eds., *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt* (Stuttgart, 1988), vol. 14, pp. 1–63.

9. A. Dihle, "Buch und Kult," unpublished MS. I am very grateful to A. Dihle for allowing me to consult this text.

10. Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, p. 422.

11. On this point, see J. Assmann, "Ägyptische Geheimnisse: Arcanum und Mysterium in der ägyptischen Religion," in A. Assmann and J. Assmann, eds., *Schleier und Schwelle*, vol. 2, *Geheimnis und Offenbarung* (Munich, 1998), pp. 15–41.

12. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1, *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, Calif., 1975), p. 155.

13. Ibid., p. 156.

14. Das Todtenbuch, chapter 148 (Papyrus of Nu), LL, 19 ff.

15. M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 3, *The Late Period* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980), p. 120.

16. After R. Givéon, *Les Bédouins Shosu des documents égyptiens* (Leiden, 1971), pp. 168 ff.

17. Ibid., pp. 170 ff.

18. Papyrus Salt, 825, V.10–VI.3, ed. P. Derchain, *Le Papyrus Salt 825: Rituel pour la conservation de la vie en Egypte* (Brussels, 1965), vol. 1, p. 139, 2,7*.

19. Papyrus Salt, 825, VII.1, VII.5.

20. Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, VI.5.

21. S. Sauneron, in *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Egyptologie* 8 (1951): 11–21.

22. Iamblichus, *Über die Geheimlehren*, trans. Theodor Hopfner (Leipzig, 1922), 6.6.

23. Ibid., 7.4.

24. Ibid., pp. 121 ff.

25. Ibid., pp. 159 ff.

26. On this point, see the apposite observations of H. te Velde, "Some Remarks on the Mysterious Language of the Baboons," in J. H. Kamstra, ed., *Funerary Symbols and Religion* (Kampen, 1988), pp. 129–136, esp. pp. 134 ff.

27. Giordano Bruno, *De magia*, quoted from F. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago, 1964), p. 263.

28. B. Lang, ed., *Das tanzende Wort: Intellektuelle Rituale im Religionsvergleich* (Munich, 1984). See also Lang, *Heiliges Spiel: Eine Geschichte des christlichen Gottesdiensts* (Munich, 1998), pp. 161–71.

29. A. Lorenzer, *Das Konzil der Buchhalter: Die Zerstörung der Sinnlichkeit. Eine Religionskritik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984).

30. On this question, see especially, M. Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997).

31. F. Kittler, "Die Heilige Schrift," in D. Kamper and C. Wulf, eds., *Das Heilige: Seine Spur in der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), pp. 154–62, quoted on p. 154.

32. Ibid., p. 159. Kittler believes that the procedure of *onomata asema* goes back as far as the Egyptian texts of the late Ramessid period (around 1150 B.C.), and refers in this context to F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1925), pp. 52 ff., which is itself based on E. Meyer, *Geschichte des alten Ägypten* (Berlin, 1887). But there seems to be a confusion here. Without wishing to dispute the occasional occurrence of barbaric-sounding proper names and expressions in syllabic scripts, I regard this as an entirely marginal phenomenon that has nothing in common with Iamblichus's theory of sacred language and its asemanticity. By its very nature hieroglyphic script is unable to reproduce asemantic sound patterns (which classical linguistic theory referred to as *voces inarticulatae*).