

Necromancy and the Oracles of the Dead

- Q1** What was necromancy and how would you define it?
- Q2** In what context was necromancy used and would you describe it as 'religious' or 'magical' or both?
- Q3** What were the Oracles of the Dead and where were they located?

What was necromancy?

Necromancy; originally a form of divination used to summon the dead, it was a term later used to describe demon conjuring. The theological view was that raising the dead was/is a divine act which was beyond human endeavour.

From the first attested Jewish necromancy Grimoire, the *Sefer ha Razim* , or *Book of Mysteries*, the following act of necromancy was found amongst its numerous spells.

"If you wish to consult a ghost, stand facing a tomb and recall the names of the angels of the 5th camp, holding in your hand a new glass bowl containing oil and honey mixed together and say thus:

'I adjure you, O spirit, Ram-bearer, who dwells amongst the graves upon the bones of the dead, that you will accept from my hand this offering, and do my will by bringing me N, son of N who is dead. Raise him up so that he will speak to me without fear and tell me the truth without deception. Let me not be afraid of him and let him answer whatever question I need to ask'.

Note: Ram-bearer is the Greek term for Hermes.

The definition of necromancy as magic or cultural norm will have varied over time, Social, political and religious changes will all have impacted on how necromancy Would be perceived, just as the victors of war would have done.

Deuteronomy 18.9-14

'Various forms of spell -casting and consultation with the dead are declared to be the practices of nations that will not enter the land of Israel and are pronounced abominable'

In what context was necromancy used?

The difference between what was considered to be natural magic, as described in Grimoires, that which is interconnecting, hidden or occult natural forces existing In god's universe which could be tapped by man, this includes plants, animals and Precious stones and the magic that was not natural and considered to be fraudulent,

pretence and illusionary or enacted through the power of demons. Necromancy, in the summoning of the dead placed the power with man, not god!

Thomas in *Religion and the Decline of magic*, describes necromancy as an ancient form of sorcery, he cites a magician from Toledo who was found to have a Saracen's head, which he intended to use to enclose the spirit to answer his questions and gives examples of people carrying body parts for protection or to obtain something they wanted, in essence using the dead for magical purposes. The final statute of the witchcraft act of 1604 made it a felony to use a dead body, or body part for magical purposes.

Is necromancy a religious act, magic or both? Emile Durkheim once wrote that; 'There is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive.....' It could equally apply to magic. How many of us have blown out the birthday candles and made a wish? Is it therefore pertinent to ask are magic and religion inextricably interwoven into our past, present and future?

Necromancy it could be argued falls into both categories of religion and magic, the Summoning of the dead by the necromancer and the taking of bread and wine (blood and flesh) during communion are both acts, be they, physical or psychological that bring the living and the dead together. The argument against necromancy being a religious act is that, necromancy is considered to be the summoning of the dead, placing the power with the human, rather than with god, whereas in the religious context god is omnipotent we humans obey and supplicate, or do we? Can the; if you deliver x for me then I will do y for you be considered supplication or bartering? Religious texts are littered with magical acts, burning bushes, disembodied voices, The turning of water into wine, dividing water to allow safe passage etc.

Oracles of the Dead

The Necromanteion of Ephyra was identified by the Greek archaeologist Sotirios Dakaris in 1958; and is considered to date from the 3rd or 4th century BC. It is 72 square foot in size with 11foot thick walls, with a series of subterranean Chambers.

This was the entry way to the underworld, where the living could commune with dead who after certain acts were performed may reveal the future to the living.

'Thus solemn rites and holy vows were paid to all the phantasm-nations of the dead'
Odyssey, Book 11

In the Odyssey, Homer sent Odysseus to seek the advice of a long-dead oracle, he descended into hades in search of the soul of Teiresias who he believed would foretell the future. Circe, considered to be Greek literature's first witch and an expert in necromancy instructed Odysseus in the art of necromancy.

You can see the Necromanteion on you tube; Nekromanteion-Oracle of Death

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzA8GCMxUjY>