

**COSMOLOGY, MAGIC AND DIVINATION:
MAGIC, ASTROLOGY AND DIVINATION IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD
WEEK 6 SOURCES**

LYCHNOMANCY = LAMP DIVINATION

1. An example of Lychnomancy (Lamp divination)

Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 2.11 (Latin, later 2nd century AD)¹

It was evening now and Pamphile was staring into her lamp. “What heavy rain,” she said, “there’ll be tomorrow.” Her husband asked her how she knew it, and she replied that her lamp had predicted it to her. Milo laughed at her claim. “We’re keeping a profound Sibyl in that lamp of yours, who observes all the business of the heaven and the sun himself from her lampstand watch-tower.” 12. At this I interjected, “This,” I said, “is the first time I have seen this variety of divination. It is hardly surprising if this little flame of yours, for all that it is modest and manmade, nonetheless remains mindful of that greater heavenly fire, as if of its own parent, and can consequently know by divine presentiment what that fire is going to do at the top of the ether and declare it to us.

2. PGM (Greek Magical Papyri) XXIIb.27-31²

Request for a dream oracle, to a lamp: Purify yourself before your everyday lamp, and speak [the following] to the lamplight, until it is extinguished: “Be well, O lamp, who light the way to Harsentephtha and to Harsentechtha, and to the great [father] Osiris-Michael./ [If] the petition I had made is appropriate, [show] me water [and] a grove. If otherwise, show me water and a stone.”

3. PGM (Greek Magical Papyri) VII.540-78³

Lamp divination: Put an iron lampstand in a clean house at the eastern part, and having placed on it a lamp not coloured red, light it. Let the lampwick be of new linen, and light the censer. Then make a burnt offering of frankincense on grape-vine wood. The boy, then, should be uncorrupt, pure.

Formula: “PHISO IAO AGEANOUMA SKABARO SKASABROSOU ASABRO, because I implore you this day today, this very time, to let the light and the sun appear to this boy, MANE OUSEIRI, MANE ISI, ANOUBIS the servant of all gods, and make this boy fall into a trance and see the gods, / all who are present at the divination. Appear to me in the divination, O high-minded god, Hermes thrice-great! May he appear, the one who [made] the four parts of the heaven and the four foundations of the earth, RESENNEETHO BASENERAIPAN THALTHACHTHACHOTHCH CHINEBOTH CHINEBOTH MIMYLOTH MASYNTORI / ASTOBI. Come to me, you who are in heaven; come to me, you who are from the egg. I conjure you by the ENTO TAPSATI LEGENISTHO ELEGE SERPHOUTH MOUISRO LEGE [having appeared and] the two gods who are about you, THATH. The one god is called ‘So’ the other ‘Aph,’ KALOU KAGOEI SESOPHEI BAINCHOOCH.”

¹ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 2.11. Cited from Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 206-207 (Source number 165).

² PGM XXIIb27-31, translated by D.E. Aune in Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p.261.

³ PGM VII.540-78, translated by Jackson P. Hershbell in Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp.133-134.

The formula to be spoken: “Come to me, spirit that flies in the air, / called with secret codes and unutterable names, at this lamp divination which I perform, and enter into the boy’s soul, that he may receive the immortal form in mighty and incorruptible light, because while chanting, I call, ‘IAO ELOAI MARMACHADA MENEPHO MERMAI / IEOR AIEO EREPHIE PHEREPHIO CHANDOUCH AMON EREPNEU ZONOR AKLEUA MENETHONI KADALAPEU IO PLAITINE RE AOTH IEI OEI MEDCHENOR ALACHAL PERECHAEL SERENOPH DOUNAX ANAXIBOA EREBE BO BEBOBIA ANESIODEU IAOA ENIOEAL / EMERO MASAIANDA.”

“Hither to me, O lord, riding upon immaculate light without deceit and without anger; appear to me and to your medium, the boy, MARMARIAU ANAPSICHALAO PEOE NIPSEOVA AIETY HARENNOTHES ANEROPHES ITHYAMAREM OSIER ANAPSICHYON PSYELEMICHALES, appear” (say it 3 times).

/If he says, “I see your lord in the light,” say: “O holy YMERY EIGESOU ENTOTERIOVA MENE SOMIOO ALAMAOR CHOCHENEMETOR,” and thus he will answer. Ask: “ARSERETOTHI OUEMANTOUR.”

LECANOMANCY = BOWL DIVINATION

PDM xiv.841-50⁴

Another method of vessel inquiry [the magician being] alone: Formula: “I am the lord of Spirits, ORITSIMBAI SONATSIR EPISGHES EMMIME; THO-GOMPHRYR PHIRIM-PHYNI is your name; MIMI soul of souls soul of souls GTHETHO-NI, I am Bastet PTHO BALKHAM whom BINYI SPHE PHAS bore. I am BAPTHO, GAMI-SATRA is your name, MI-MEO, IANYME.”

Its preparation: you go to a clean place; you bring a copper vessel; you wash it with natron water; you put a lok-measure / oil in it; you place it on the ground; you light a copper lamp; you put it on the ground near the copper vessel you cover yourself with a clean robe, you and the vessel; and you recite into the vessel, your eyes being shut, seven times, / You should open your eyes and ask it concerning what you wish. If you wish to make the gods of the vessel speak with you with their mouths opposite your mouth, you should recite: “IAHO IPH EOE GINNTETHYR NEPHAR APHOE.” They give you an answer concerning everything about which you will ask also.

If they do not tell you an answer, you should recite this other name “NGONGETHIGS MANTYNOBOE GOKSHIR-HRONTOR NTONTROMA LEPHOGER / GEPHAER-SORE.” If you recite these, they inquire for you truthfully.

DREAM DIVINATION

PGM VII.664-85⁵

Spell for obtaining dream revelations: Take a linen strip, and on it you write with myrrh ink the matter, / and wrap an olive branch and place it beside your head, beneath the left side of your head, and go to sleep, pure, on a rush mat on the ground, saying the spell 7 times to the lamp:

“Hermes, lord of the world, who’re in the heart,
O circle of Selene, spherical
And square, / the founder of the words of speech,
Pleader of Justice’s cause, garbed in a mantle,
With golden sandals, turning airy course
Beneath earth’s depths, who hold the spirit’s reins,
The sun’s and who with lamps of gods immortal

⁴ PDM (*Demotic Magical Papyri*) xiv.841-50, translated by Janet H. Johnson in Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p.238.

⁵ PGM VII.664-685, translated by E.N. O’Neil in Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p.137.

Give joy to those beneath earth's depths, to mortals
 Who've finished life. / The Moirai's fatal thread
 And Dream divine you're said to be, who send
 Forth oracles by day and night; you cure
 Pains of all mortals with your healing cares.
 Hither, O blessed one, O mighty son
 Of the goddess who brings full mental powers,
 By your own form and gracious mind. And to
 An uncorrupted youth / reveal a sign
 And send him your true skill of prophecy.

OIOSENMIGADON ORTHO BAUBAO NIOERE KODERETH DOSERE SYRE SUROE
 SANKISTE DODEKAKISTE AKROUROBORE KODERE RINOTON KOUMETANA ROUBITHA
 NOUMAILA PERPHEROU AROUORER /AROUER (say it seven times and add the usual, whatever
 you wish).

QUESTIONS

- 1/ What are the key features of these divination rituals?
- 2/ What similarities and differences can you see between lychnomancy and lecanomancy?
- 3/ What are the key features of the above dream divination ritual? In what ways is it similar to, and different from, the practice of dream incubation in Asclepius' healing sanctuaries?

THE STORY OF NECTANEBO

Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Alexander Romance*, 1-4 (3rd century AD, Greek and Armenian)⁶

1. The Egyptians are very wise, descended as they are from the gods. They it was that took the measurement of the Earth, tamed the waves of the sea, traversed the river Nile, invented astronomy, and gave the world the force of speech, the discovery of magical power. For they say that Nectanebo, the very last of the pharaohs in Egypt, gained mastery over all peoples by magical power. By speech he could subject all the elements of the universe to himself. For if a cloud of war had suddenly come upon him, he did not bother with the army-camp, processions of arms, the sharpening of steel or engines of war, but he would retreat into his palace, take a bronze bowl, fill it with rain water, and mold some little boats and little human figures out of wax, put them in the bowl, and recite a spell while waving an ebony wand. He would call upon the angels and upon Ammon, the god of Libya. So it was that he would destroy and prevail over enemies that attacked him, with lecanomancy of this sort and by [sinking] the boats.

2. So the kingdom held firm because of the man's great expertise, but after a lapse of time one of the men the Romans call *exploratores* and the Greeks 'spies,' came to the pharaoh and spoke as follows: "Greatest Nectanebo, abandon your peaceful lifestyle and take thought! For no small cloud of enemies, tens of thousands of them, are on the attack. There are Scythians, Arabs, Oxydraces, Iberians, Chinese, Caucones, Lapates, Bosporoi, Agroi, Zalboi, Chaldaeans, Mesopotamians, Agriophagoi, Euonymitai, and all the great races of the East. They come with an unnumbered army, tens of thousands of men, keen to capture our Egypt." So said the general, but Nectanebo just laughed and said, "You are to be congratulated on the vigilance with which you keep the watch assigned to you, but you spoke like a coward, not a soldier. For power does not manifest itself in numbers, but in

⁶ Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Alexander Romance*, 1-4. Translated by and cited from Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 55-57 (Source number 55).

application. A single spell can repel many, grasping hosts in a good hand.” So he spoke, and dismissed him.

3. Nectanebo returned to his palace and bade all leave him. Once alone he set up his bowl and filled it with water. He tossed the little boats up into the bowl, raised his wand in his hand, and used his powerful spell. Then he gazed into the bowl and saw the gods of the Egyptians steering the boats of the barbarian enemies. Accordingly he conjectured that the pharaoh of the Egyptians had now been betrayed by the blessed gods. So he shaved his head and beard to avoid being recognised, pocketed as much gold as he could carry, and left Egypt through Pelusium. After wandering through the lands of many peoples he arrived at Pella in Macedonia. He donned a linen tunic of the sort worn by an Egyptian prophet and astrologer and set up stall in public, offering divinations to all comers....

4. In Macedonia Nectanebo became so universally renowned for his perfect divinations that Olympias, no less, conceived the desire for a divination from him and summoned him while Philip happened to be out of the country, engaged in warfare. He presented himself at the palace and saw that her beauty surpassed that of the moon. He was in any case susceptible to women, but now he charged up his mind with erotic desire, extended his hand, hailed her, and said, “Greetings, Queen of the Macedonians.” He did not deign to address her as “mistress,” bearing in mind his own royal status. Olympias said, “Greetings, most excellent astrologer, come to me and take a seat.” When he had sat, Olympias said, “You are a truthful Egyptian diviner.” Nectanebo replied, “That is what those that have made trial of me say.” She said, “What form of divination do you utilize in making your own truthful pronouncements?” He replied, “That is a good question, O Queen, for there are many varieties of divination to choose from. There are dream-interpreters, omen-interpreters, augurs, prophets, Ammon-prophets, nativity-casters, mages and astrologers. Although I draw on all these methods, as a supreme prophet of the Egyptian school, I am basically a mage and an astrologer.” As he spoke he looked at her keenly. She noted this and asked, “For what reason, supreme prophet, did you look at me so intently?” Nectanebo said, “Because I remembered an oracle, Queen. For I was once told by my own gods that it was fated for me to give a divination to a queen and for my predictions to be found truthful.”

As he said this he produced a precious royal tablet, the form of which cannot be conveyed in words. Three bands separated its ivory, ebony, gold and silver sections. On its first circle it had the thirty-six decans, on the second the twelve zodiacal signs, on the middle one the sun and the moon. He put it on a stool. Then he opened a small box, this too of ivory, and emptied from it the seven stars and the nativity-ascendant sign, made from eight stones... He arranged them and illuminated this little heaven by placing them in a small circle. He added a sun made from rock crystal, a moon made from adamant, a Mars of hematite, a Mercury of emerald, a Saturn of serpentine, and the nativity-ascendant sign of white marble. He said, “Tell me, Queen, the year, month, day and hour of your birth.” She told him, and Nectanebo charted his own birth and that of Olympias, to see if their stars were in a favourable conjunction. Once she saw that they were, he said, “What do you want to hear about, Queen?” She said, “I want to learn about Philip. I hear rumour that after the war he will cast me off and marry another woman.” Nectanebo said, “The rumour of a current separation is false, for this is in fact destined to happen at a later point. However, as an Egyptian prophet and mage I can be of service to you in many ways, whenever you have need of me in such a matter.”

QUESTIONS

- 1/ What types of divination does Nectanebo utilise in the above passage?
- 2/ Why do you think Egypt is so significant in this story? Does its presence have any relation to the types of divination used in the story?

THE HOMER ORACLE: PGM VII.1-148 (PART)⁷

- The so-called Homer oracle, a list of 216 isolated and disconnected Homeric verses, is in fact a manual designed to provide the reader with an oracular response to a personal enquiry.
- Concerned with matters of daily life, the inquirer rolls three dice or knucklebones, each of which has six surfaces numbered from one to six – they use their dice throw to select their oracle (e.g. a throw of 5, then 4, then 1, would give the first response below).
- The lines appear to have been selected at random.
- The oracle attests to the magical power attributed to the Homeric texts, which make a number of appearances in the *Greek Magical Papyri*.
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- 5.4.1. Bad deeds don't prosper. The slow man for sure overtakes the swift, [*Odyssey* 8.329]
- 5.4.2 They shut fast and locked the doors of the hall [*Odyssey* 21.236]
- 5.4.3 Ah, poor man! Death's not at all on your mind [*Iliad* 17.201]
- 5.4.4 Odysseus has come and reached home, though he was long in coming [*Odyssey* 23.7].

ASTROLOGY

1. PGM III.275-81⁸

[Horoscope]: Moon in [...or] Virgo: anything is obtainable, perform bowl divination, as you wish; in [Cancer]: perform the spell of reconciliation, air divination...; in Gemini: perform spells of binding,...; [in] Libra: perform invocation...spell of release...necromancy; in Pisces...OIO or love charm; in Sagittarius: conduct business/...; [in] Capricorn: do what is appropriate; in...

2. PGM VII.284-99⁹

Orbit of the Moon: Moon / in Virgo: anything is rendered obtainable. In Libra: necromancy. In Scorpio: anything inflicting evil. In Sagittarius: an invocation or incantations / to the sun and moon. In Capricorn: say whatever you wish for best results. In Aquarius: for a love charm. Pisces: for foreknowledge. In Aries: fire divination or love charm. In Taurus: incantation to a lamp. Gemini: spell for winning favour. In Cancer: phylacteries. Leo: rings or binding spells.

3. Manilius 1.25-112 (A stoic philosopher and writer who wrote a didactic poem on astrology)¹⁰

It was by a gift of the gods that the earth was permitted a more intimate knowledge of the universe. For if they had wanted to keep it a secret, who would have been clever enough to steal the cosmic mystery that controls everything? Having but a human mind, who could have attempted such a gigantic task, wishing to appear to be a god against the will of the gods and reveal the movements of the heavenly bodies in the zenith and the nadir, underneath the earth, and describe how the stars obey

⁷ PGM VII.1-148, translated by Hubert Martin Jr. in Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 112-118.

⁸ PGM III.275-81, translated by E.N. O'Neil in Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 26.

⁹ PGM VII.284-299, translated by E.N. O'Neil in Hans Dieter Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, p. 124.

¹⁰ Manilius 1.25-112, translated by and cited from Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985, pp.325-327.

their orbits as they travel through space? You, god of Cyllene [Hermes], are the author and the origin of this great sacred tradition. Thanks to you, we know the farthest reaches of the sky, the constellations, the names and movements of the stars, their importance and their influence. You wanted to enlarge the face of the universe; you wanted the power of nature, not only its appearance, to be revered; you wanted mankind to find out in what way god was supreme.

Nature, too, offered her powers and revealed herself. She did not find it beneath her dignity to inspire the minds of kings; she made them touch the summits that are close to heaven. They brought civilization to the savage peoples in the East whose lands are divided by the Euphrates and flooded by the Nile, where the universe returns and soars away, high above the cities of dark nations.

Then the priests who offered worship in temples all their lives and who were chose to express the prayers of the people obtained by their service the favour of the gods. The very presence of the divine power kindled their pure minds, and god himself brought god into their hearts and revealed himself to his servants.

These were the men who established our noble science. They were the first to see, through their art, how fate depends on the wandering stars. Over the course of many centuries they assigned with persistent care to each period of time the events connected with it: the day on which someone is born, the kind of life he shall lead, the influence of every hour on the laws of destiny, and the enormous differences made by small motions. They explored every aspect of the sky as the stars returned to their original positions. They assigned to the unchangeable sequences of the fates the specific influence of certain configurations. As a result, experience, applied in different ways, produced an art; examples pointed the way; from long observation it was discovered that the stars control the whole world by mysterious laws, that the world itself moves by an eternal principle, and that we can, by reliable signs, recognise the ups and downs of fate....

...After human reason had connected every phenomenon with its true cause, it set out to explore the structure of the universe, starting at the bottom, and attempted to grasp the whole sky; it identified the shapes, gave the stars their names, observed the cycles in which they travelled according to eternal laws. It realized that everything moves according to the divine power and the aspects of heaven and that the stars by their manifold configurations influence our destinies.

QUESTIONS

- 1/ **Homer Oracle:** what are the defining features of this type of divination? Who do you think would have used the Homer Oracle? Do you think that the Homer Oracle tells us anything about ancient magical conceptions of ‘randomness’ or chance’ and/or the power of numbers?
- 2/ **Astrology:** What do these passages tell us about the use of astrology in magical practices? Is the use of astrology within these texts ambiguous in any way and if so, why? Why do you think that astrology formed such a crucial part of ancient magical practices?
- 3/ **(Manilius, passage 3):** How does Manilius explain the origins and operations of astrology? What ideas and concepts are his explanations and descriptions based upon?