

1. What was necromancy and how would you define it?

Types of Ancient Oracles: Oracle sanctuaries, Healing sanctuaries (incubation temples),

Oracles of the dead (Nekuomanteia) where 'the dead' reply directly to the enquirer:

- through the incubation procedure (the enquirer slept in the sanctuary), answer provided by dreams,
- through the human body ('reanimation'), answer provided by voice.

Nekyomanteion 'prophecy-place of the dead' - 5th century BC.

Psychagogion 'drawing-place of ghosts' and *Psychomanteion* 'prophecy-place of ghosts' - 4th century BC.

Psychopompeion 'sending-place of ghosts' - Plutarch, ca. 100 AD.

Nekryor(i)on, *nekromanteion* 'seeing-place of the dead' – Hesychius, 1st century AD.

Daniel Ogden, *The Ancient Greek Oracles of The Dead*, Acta Classica, Vol. 44 (2001), p. 168.

Divination as an act of personal communication: the spirits send a message at the time of consultation.

'... the focal reason for performing necromancy was the settling of an unquiet ghosts'.

Daniel Ogden, *The Greek and Roman Necromancy*, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 233.

'Necromancy could be chosen because the divination required was one that the dead in general were well placed to provide, such as the timing of the deaths of those still living, or the nature of the afterlife or the universe: When will I die? When will the emperor die? How will the war turn out?

Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, p. xvii.

Why the dead? What were their sources and kinds of knowledge?

- they are restless,
- the soul has more perspicacity without the body (the Pythagorean-Platonic explanation),
- they have power of the earth in which they resided (fertility as a power that looks to the future),

'But none of these explanations is completely satisfactory in itself, and the proliferation of such partial explanations suggests that they are post-hoc rationalizations and that the wisdom of the dead is best taken as a first principle: the dead were wise because they always had been and because necromancy did, after all, work.

Ogden, *The Greek and Roman Necromancy*, p. 231.

'Homer indicates that one way available to ghosts of keeping up with the intervening past was to keep track of those who subsequently died and came down to join them, and to interrogate them.

Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, p. 238.

- the future is prepared in the underworld, and the ghosts could observe these preparations. 'For Lucan, ghosts can derive knowledge of the future from watching the Fates (Parcae) spin men's lives in the underworld'.

Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, p. 244.

2. In what contexts was necromancy used and would you describe these contexts as religious or magical or both?

The purposes: Information from a specific ghost

About every-day life, secrets, etc.

Euthynous, the only son of Elysios of Terina died suddenly from an uncertain cause. Was he poisoned or not? 'I am the ghost of your son' and offered him a small written tablet: Euthynous lies in his destined death. It was not good for him himself to live, nor was it good for his parents'.

Plutarch, *Moralia*, 109b-d.

Ogden, *Ancient Greek Oracles of The Dead*, p. 179  the ghost

Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 188. - the demon

Rescue/advice for a person haunted by ghost

The tale of Pausanias, the Regent, who killed Cleonice: 'After that he saw her often in his dream, saying: 'Go to justice: hubris is a very bad thing for a man'. He sailed to Heracleia, called up the soul of the girl with propitiations and libations. It came before his vision and said that he would be delivered from his troubles whenever he was in Sparta. On arrival he immediately died'.

Plutarch, *Moralia*, 555c.

Reanimation:

The Thessalian Erichon reanimates a dead soldier for Sextus Pompey, Lucan *Pharsalia* 6.588–830, Latin, 65 A.D.

'The untimely dead, the dead by violence, and the unburied, the categories of ghosts much favoured for magical exploitation in general, would presumably not yet have drunk from it.' (Lethe/Mnemosyne).

Ogden, *The Greek and Roman Necromancy*, p. 248.

'Fortune is more powerful than we are. But if you are content merely to know outcomes in advance, many and easy are the ways to the truth that will lie open before us. The earth, the sky, chaos, the seas, the fields and the Rhodopaeen rocks will speak to us. But the obvious method, in view of the fact that there is such an abundance of fresh death around us, is to raise a single body from the Thessalian plains so that the mouth of a corpse only recently dead and still warm may make utterance with full voice.'

Lucan, *Pharsalia*

The procedure

Divination requires **institutionalized procedure**. Ghost-evocation technology is first laid out in Homer's *Odyssey* and remains fairly conservative throughout ancient literature.

- the rites take place at night and are focused around a pit and a fire, - Luna
 - libations of honey-milk, wine, water, olive oil, together with sprinkled barley.
 - black cattle (sheep) are sacrificed, their carcasses are burned whole (in "holocaust"), not eaten.
 - the blood from the cattle is allowed to drain into the pit for the ghosts to drink.
 - prayers are made to the ghosts and the underworld powers that reign over them (Hades, Persephone, Zeus-Typhon).
- 'Hecate, the lowest manifestation of my goddess, by whose grace the ghosts and I hold converse' Lucan.- the ghosts arrive in a pressing host and must be managed with a sword, since they remain frightened of bronze and iron.

Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, p. 179.

- the rites of necromancy must not be revealed.
- figurine not listed above, but very important as an agent. 'Then she crowned with laurel and fennel a dough cake molded to resemble a man and threw it into the pit.'

Heliodorus 6.12 (12 edited) in Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, p. 199-200.

- incantation lamentation, 'She invoked the moon with names that sounded foreign and strange But she sang more powerful, as it seemed, compulsive incantations into its ears again'

Heliodorus 6.12 (12 edited) in Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, p. 199-200.

'The voice contained the barking of dogs and the howling of wolves, the complaining cries of a scared owl and the night 痾 screech owl, the screeching and bellowing of wild animals, and the hissing of the snake. It expressed also the dashing of waves on rocks, the sound of the woods, and the thunder of a burst cloud. So many things did the single voice comprise.'

Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 667.

'When he had brought this prophecy to this conclusion, he stood in silence, but with a gloomy expression that asked for death to be returned to him. Magical spells and herbs were required to make the corpse fall. Fate could not reclaim the soul for itself, having already exhausted its right to take it once. Then Erichtho constructed a pyre, using an enormous amount of wood.'

Lucan, *Pharsalia*.

Would you describe these contexts as religious or magical or both?

'For the living and the dead to be able to communicate, the barriers between them had to be dissolved. Necromancy could accordingly be conceived of as taking place in a space located indeterminately between the world above and that below. At the same time, consultants and ghosts had to be brought into a common state of being in which to communicate with each other.'

Ogden, *The Greek and Roman Necromancy*, p. xvii.

About libations: These are **identical** with normal, nonmagical, tributary tomb-side offerings to the dead. They are of a nourishing, soothing, and propitiatory nature.

Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, p. 179.

Violation of natural law, danger! Contact with ghosts in itself could often be fatal to the living.

'You do not care about my burial rites, and you prevent me from mixing with the other souls. You care only about yourself. Hear now these prophecies which I have long been forbearing to reveal to you. Neither will your son return safely to you nor will you yourself escape death from the sword.'

Heliodorus 6.12 in Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, p. 199-200.

Danger! From Lucan, *Pharsalia*:

'You, Hecate, decaying and colourless in appearance as you are, are in the habit of showing yourself to the gods above only after first making up your face. I will show you to them and forbid you to alter your hell-face. I shall blurt out, Persephone of Henna, the meal that traps you beneath the vast weight of the earth, the agreement by which you love the somber king of the night and the corruption you experienced that induced your mother to refuse to call you back.'

'If she had attempted to raise up the complete armies, ranged against each other on the battlefield, and return them to war, the laws of Erebus would have allowed it, an the mighty monster would have drawn people up from Stygian Avernus to fight.'

3. What were Oracles of the Dead and where were they located?

'The conceptual home of necromancy in the Ancient Greek was probably the tomb'.

Ogden, *The Ancient Greek Oracles of The Dead*, Acta Classica, Vol. 44 (2001), p. 167.

'Nekyomanteia beyond the 'big four' are hard to identify with certainty. This is not surprising, given that even the four were unglamorous shrines and low in profile. Only Tanairon can be said with certainty to have been integrated into a state-sponsored sanctuary (that of Poseidon, controlled by Sparta).
Ogden, *The Ancient*, p. 169.

The Big Four:

Located in the natural caves:

- the oracles at Heracleia Pontica on the south coast of the Black Sea and Tanairon at the tip of the Peloponnese's Mani peninsula. Both connected with Cerberus (Heracleia Pontica: where Cerberus had vomited, dragged up on daylight by Heracles (aconite).

Located by the birdless lake:

- the Acheron in Thesprotia, Avernus in Campania.

'Erictho stationed it under the high roof of the mountain cave she had dedicated to her rites. Yews, never raising their tops to the sky, impenetrable to the Sun, cut off its light. Within the cave is a morose darkness and gray mould, the product of protracted night. No light is shed except that which is manufactured with a spell.'

Lucan, *Pharsalia*.

Regular staff: psychagogoi ("evocator"-men [*andres psuchagôgoi*])

'It is the dismal boundary between the hidden world and our own. It is such that the kings of Tartarus do not fear to let the dead pass to it. For, although the Thessalian prophetess does violence to the fates, it remains uncertain whether she is able to look upon the Stygian shades by virtue of drawing them up or by virtue of going down herself to them.'

Lucan, *Pharsalia* 642, Latin, 65 A.D.

Trick skull necromancy exposed - Hippolytus Refutations 4.41 Greek

'They lay a skull on the ground and make it appear to speak in the following fashion. The skull is made from an ox's abdominal membrane, shaped with the help of Etruscan wax and some prepared gypsum ... When he wants the skull to disappear, he surrounds it with coals and makes a show of burning incense. When the heat of the coals reaches the wax, it melts, and in this way the skull is believed to become invisible.'

Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, p. 202.

Archeon as 'magical theatre'. Sotrios Dakaris identified Archeon with a Hellenistic complex beneath the monastery of St John Prodromos at Mesopotamo. The consultants had progressed to the theatre through the corridors, experience of the ghosts was enhanced by the hallucinogenic beans. In 1979 Baatz provided beyond doubt that the place served for military purpose.

Ogden, *The Ancient Greek Oracles of The Dead*, p. 174

'We might rather expect to learn more about our own society from the fact that, perhaps rather more exceptionally, death and its representation have been pushed to its margins. In other words, the pressing question at the broad psycho-socio-logical level is not "Why did the ancients practice necromancy?" but "Why don't we practice it?"'

Ogden, *The Greek and Roman Necromancy*, p. xvi.