

2012-2013:
AHAN7011: COSMOLOGY, MAGIC AND
DIVINATION

**Seminar 1: Introduction to the
Module**



Aims of the Course

- To introduce students to the theory and practice of magic, divination and oracles as understood within Greek religion
- To locate such practices within classical and Hellenistic cosmology and the development of astrology
- To explore the wider context of ancient Near Eastern divination and magic
- To consider the legacy of Hellenistic and Classical divinatory, magical and oracular practices in post-Classical culture

Learning Outcomes of the Course

- By the end of this module successful students should be able to:
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- Demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the theory of magic and divination
- Demonstrate a critical understanding of cosmological frameworks in the Classical and Hellenistic worlds, especially the notion of individual participation in cosmic processes, and their legacy in the Near East.
- Display an advanced awareness of current academic debates on ancient divination and magic, and critically evaluate scholarly theories.
- Critically interpret the emergence of classical astrology, its nature and function, within a religious and divinatory context

Essential Reading

- Betz, Hans Dieter, *The Greek magical papyri in translation, including the Demotic spells*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992.
- Champion, Nicholas, *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Western Astrology*, Vol. 1, The Ancient and Classical Worlds, London: Continuum, 2008.
- Ogden, D., *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Course Schedule

- Weeks 1 and 2: Divination, Magic and Religion
- Week 3: Ancient Near Eastern Divination
- Week 4: Magic, medicine and religion and divination in Ancient Greece
- Week 5: Divination and Oracles in Ancient Greece
- Week 6: Magic, Astrology and Divination in the Graeco-Roman World
- Week 7: Magic, Theurgy and Philosophy in the Graeco-Roman World
- Week 8: Post-Classical Survival and Reception

Course Schedule

- Keep up with the weekly reading listed in the bibliography in the Course Handbook (p.9 onwards)
- Read the weekly lecture notes, handouts and slides on Moodle
- If you have any queries or questions:
- email Crystal (c.addey@tsd.ac.uk / addeycj@cardiff.ac.uk)

Cosmology, Magic and Divination: Webex Seminar Schedule

- **Seminar 1: Tuesday 14 May 2013 4pm**

Introduction to the Module: overview of the module, aims and learning outcomes and assessment.

- **Seminar 2: Tuesday 21 May 2013 4pm**

Anthropological Perspectives on Divination and Magic: Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*.

- **Seminar 3: Tuesday 28 May 2013 4pm**

Magic and Religion: Connections, Controversies and Boundaries

- **Seminar 4: Tuesday 4 June 2013 4pm**

- Paths of Initiation: Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*, Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* and the *Hermetica*.

Cosmology, Magic and Divination: Webex Seminar Schedule (continued)

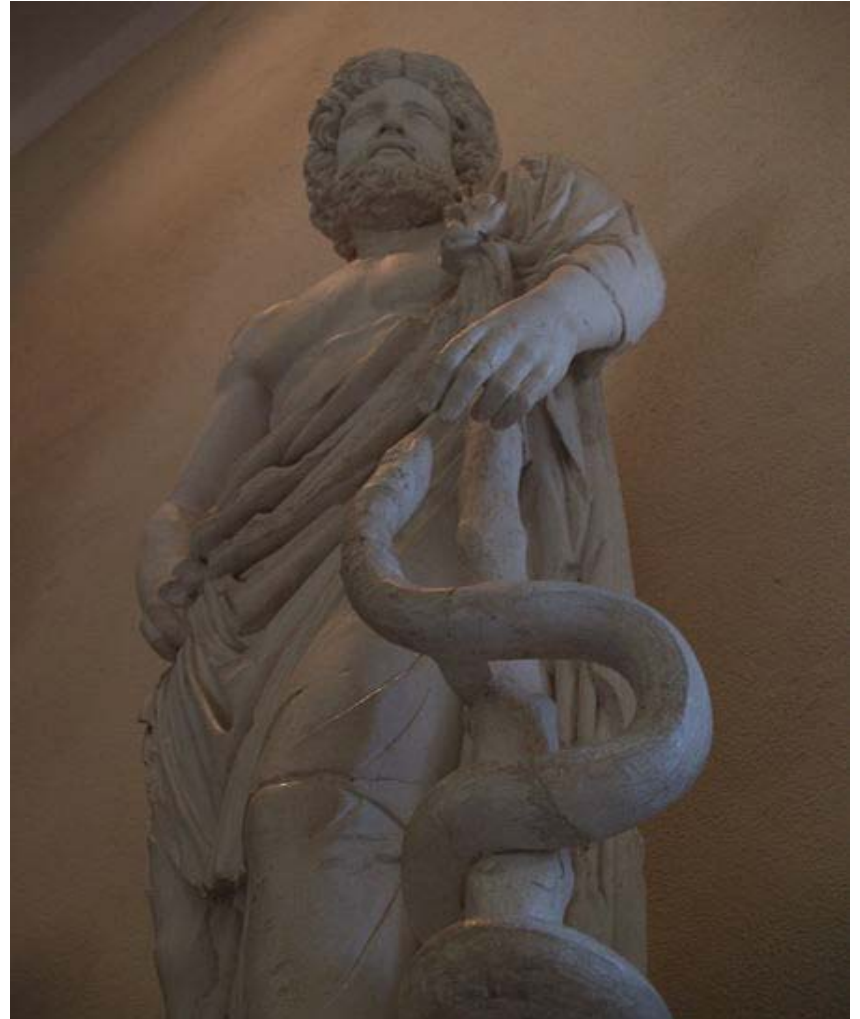
- **Seminar 5: Tuesday 11 June 2013 4pm**
Introduction to Ancient Greek Oracles
- **Seminar 6: Tuesday 25 June 2013 4pm**
Introduction to Theurgy
Dr. Dorian Greenbaum: Introduction to Hellenistic Astrology and the Greek Magical Papyri (*PGM*)
- **Seminar 7: Tuesday 2 July 2013 4pm**
Divination and Ritual in the Ancient World
- **Seminar 8: Tuesday 9 July 2013 4pm**
Graeco-Egyptian Oracles
- NOTE: No Webex Seminar on Tuesday 18 June 2013 (Sophia Centre Summer School)

Assignment 1: Critical Review

- **Assignment 1: Critical Review: Analysis of a Primary Source Document**
- **One 2,000 word assignment (40% of marks)**
- **Write a critical review of Cicero's arguments against divination in *De Divinatione***
- http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/de_Divinatione/home.html
- **OR**
- **Write a critical review of Iamblichus' arguments for divination in *De Mysteriis***
- <http://www.archive.org/stream/iamblichusonmys00taylgoog#page/n9/mode/1up>
- The Alexander Wilder translation of 1911 is on-line at
- <http://www.esotericarchives.com/oracle/iamblich.htm>

Assignment 1: Critical Review

- **Assignment 1 Due:**
- **Completion: Monday
17 June 2013,
Submission Monday 1
July 2013**



Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*

- Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, translated by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon and J.P. Hershbell, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003.
- Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries and Life of Pythagoras*, translated by Thomas Taylor, Dorset: Prometheus Trust, 2003 (available from Prometheus Trust with 20% discount for £13.60 (paperback) or £18.40 (Hardback): see www.prometheustrust.co.uk)
- Alexander Wilder translation: better to avoid if possible (Book 3 is Chapter 7 in his translation).

Assignment 1

- **Read the ancient source first**: it is important to read Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* (Book 3) and Cicero's *De Divinatione* before you start.
- Make notes on the ancient source.
- Then read secondary sources (the modern works of scholars) on these works.
- Why?
- The importance of examining the evidence directly
- The importance of developing your own views
- The importance of critical analysis

Assignment 1

- Introduction:
- What is the source?
- Who created the source?
- When was the source created?
- Where was the source created?
- Why was the source created?
- Introduce Cicero or Iamblichus, their work and their historical (and religious) contexts.

Assignment 1

- What arguments are given for or against divination?
- What context do these arguments occur within?
Hint: think about the dialogue form in each case.
Why might dialogue be used? How important is the literary form? How does the use of dialogue relate to philosophy and to religious practices?
- Read modern scholarly works on these ancient works.
- Include plenty of references and examples to support and illustrate your points.

Assignment 2: Essay

- **One 3,000 word essay (60% of marks) on one of the following topics (essay titles listed on next slide).**
- **Assignment 2 Due:**
- **Completion: Monday 15 July 2013,
Submission: Monday 29 July 2013.**



Assignment 2 Essay Titles

- 1.Can theurgy be considered a form of magic?
- 2. Analyse the cosmology, metaphysics and “world-view” of **ONE** of the following:
 - Near Eastern divination
 - Hellenistic astrology
 - Theurgy
 - Necromancy and Oracles of the Dead.
- 3.Critically discuss the relationship between divination, magic and religion in the ancient world.
- 4.Can the theory and practice of divination help distinguish between magic and religion?
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- 5.Compare and contrast the roles and uses of divination with those of curse tablets (*katadesmoi*) in ancient magical practices.
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- 6.Critically examine the connections between theurgy, philosophy and magic.
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- 7.Analyse the role of divination within relevant practices and the cosmological and philosophical views which made connections between theurgy, philosophy and magic possible.

What is Divination?

By divination we mean the attempt to elicit from some higher power or supernatural being the answers to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding. Questions about future events, about past disasters whose causes cannot be explained, about things hidden from sight or removed in space, about right conduct in a critical situation, about the time and mode of religious worship and the choice of persons for a particular task – all these have from ancient times and in all parts of the world been the subject of divinatory enquiry. (Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe, *Oracles and Divination*, Boulder: Shambala, p.1)

Divination

- In the ancient world, divination is not just about predicting the future. It is about discovering what is obscure, hidden or secret in the past, present and future.
- Many different types of ancient divination:
- E.g. Oracles, Catoptromancy (mirror divination), hydromancy (water divination), lecanomancy (bowl divination), augury etc.
- Divination often categorised according to two types: inspired (or natural) and inductive (or artificial)

Inspired and Inductive forms of divination

- Plato's *Phaedrus*, Cicero's *De Divinatione* (*On Divination*) and Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* (and others)
- Inspired (natural) divination: oracles, dreams
- Inductive divination: those types of divination which use signs or some intermediate media: astrology, augury, cleromancy etc.
- Modern examples of inductive: tarot cards, tea leaves, palm reading etc.

Iamblichus on Inspired and Inductive Divination

- Inspired Divination: “But it is a thing divine, supernatural, sent from heaven above; both unbegotten and eternal, it takes priority by its own nature.” (*De Mysteriis*, 3.1)
- Inductive Divination: “...this kind uses divine signs that have been perfected by the gods in various ways. From divine signs, in virtue of the relationship of things to the signs shown, the technique somehow draws conclusions and guesses at the divination, inferring it from certain probabilities.” (*De Mysteriis*, 3.15)

Oracles

- In ancient Greece and Rome: oracles were considered to come through a prophet or prophetess thought to be inspired by the gods.
- Ancient Egypt: oracles obtained through movements of a statue of a deity, 'voice' oracles etc.
- But note that in anthropological literature, the term 'oracle' is used to refer to many types of divination (e.g. Evans-Pritchard on the poison oracle of the Azande) which the Greeks and Romans would not consider oracles – they would consider these methods inductive divination.
- Ancient oracles and dream incubation: difficult to separate in any clear-cut way.



Magic and Religion

- Anthropological and historical debates about the nature of 'magic' and 'religion': how do we define magic and religion? Is it even possible to postulate a definition of 'magic' or 'religion' which is applicable to all cultures in all times?
- Vast anthropological literature on these questions.
- Most scholars now see 'magic' as a social and cultural category rather than a distinct type of ritual practice.