

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

CRYSTAL ADDEY

*Shall we write about the things not to be spoken of?
Shall we divulge the things not to be divulged?
Shall we pronounce the things not to be pronounced?
Julian, Hymn to the Mother of the Gods.*

*I shall sing of the god who rules mysteriously over nature, the god who permeates
the sky, the land and the sea and who governs the whole immense structure with
a unifying bond. Though the stars are very distant and remote, he [i.e. the god] makes us
feel their influence, as they give to the peoples their ways of life and destinies
and to every person a character of his own.
Manilius, 2.60-80 (extracted).*

*What is below is like that which is above,
And what is above is like that which is below.
They work to accomplish the wonders of the One Thing.
The Emerald Tablet.*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

What are the similarities and differences between astrology, catoptromancy, lychnomancy and lecanomancy? What cosmological frameworks and concepts underlie these types of divination? Who do you think used and employed these types of divination, and why? What do the Oracles of Homer (*Homeromanteia*) tell us about ancient ideas and concepts of prophecy and poetry? What cosmological concepts and frameworks underlie the use of astrology in the ancient world? Was astrology always seen as a type of divination? Why did people use astrology? What cosmological concepts and frameworks underlie the practice of necromancy and the Oracles of the Dead? Do necromancy and Oracles of the Dead reveal anything to us about ancient concepts of death, the afterlife and ghosts?

THEMES FOR THIS WEEK:

- The role of divination within ‘magical’ practices: astrology, hydromancy, lecanomancy and catoptromancy.
- The emergence of astrology in the Hellenistic World: the cosmology of astrology
- The *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM) and divination
- Oracles of Homer (the *Homeromanteia*): poetry and prophecy
- **Necromancy and Oracles of the Dead in the Graeco-Roman World**
- Necromancy and re-animation
- Oracles of the Dead
- Cosmology of necromancy and Oracles of the Dead: ideas concerning the Underworld, the afterlife and ghosts

Types of Divination

- Lecanomancy = bowl divination. One took divination from shapes or images in glitterings or cloudings or possibly reflections in liquid in the bowl.
- Hydromancy = water divination. Usually, this is a sub-category of lecanomancy, bowl divination, where water is the liquid used in the bowl.
- Lychnomancy = lamp divination. One took divination from images or shapes in the flame of the lamp.
- Catoptromancy = mirror divination. Divination from images in the glittering or distorted reflections of mirrors.

THE GREEK MAGICAL PAPYRI (PGM)

The above types of divination are all attested and utilized within the *Greek magical papyri* (PGM), suggesting that these divinatory methods were used by magical practitioners from at least the Hellenistic period (from around the third century B.C. onwards) until the Late Antique period (until approximately the fifth century A.D. onwards).

The *Greek magical papyri* is a name given by scholars to a body of papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt containing a variety of magical spells, invocations, formulae, hymns and rituals. The surviving texts date mainly from the second century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. This *Papyri* obviously represents only a small number of all the magical spells that once existed.¹

The history of the discovery of the *Greek magical papyri* is a fascinating subject. We know from ancient literary sources that a large number of magical books in which spells were collected existed in antiquity. Most of them, however, have disappeared as the result of systematic suppression and destruction. The episode about the burning of the magical books in Ephesus in the Biblical Acts of the Apostles (Acts 19:19) is well known and typical of such instances. The first centuries of the Christian era (in the Late Antique period) saw many burnings of books, particularly magical or pagan books. The systematic destruction of the magical literature over a period of time resulted in the disappearance of most of the original texts by the end of antiquity. The suppression of 'magical' literature has deprived us of one of our most important sources of ancient religious life. But not everything was lost. At the end of antiquity, some philosophers, astrologers and alchemists collected magical books and spells that were still available. Literary writers included some of their material in their works. We have the quotations of Neopythagorean, Neoplatonic, Gnostic and Hermetic writers and groups, who possessed copies of such magical books.² However, generally speaking, we have only a tiny fraction of the magical literature that must have been available in the ancient world.³

The *Greek magical papyri* are, however, original documents and primary sources. It is very important to note that the material assembled under the name the *Greek magical papyri* represents a collection of texts of diverse origin and nature. This collection includes individual spells and remedies, as well as collections made by ancient magicians, from the early Hellenistic period until Late Antiquity. Since the material comes from Graeco-Roman

¹ Hans Dieter Betz, "Introduction to the Greek Magical Papyri," *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells: Volume One: Texts*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986 (revised second edition: 1992), xli.

² Hans Dieter Betz, "Introduction to the Greek Magical Papyri," *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells: Volume One: Texts*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986 (revised second edition: 1992), xli. For a summary of the history of the discovery of the Papyri and their historiography see Betz's introduction, pages xli-xliv.

³ Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985, 17.

Egypt, it reflects a very broad religious and cultural pluralism. Egyptian religion has a strong influence on the *Papyri*. Most of the texts are mixtures of several religions – Egyptian, Greek, Jewish etc., to name the most important of these.⁴

The *Greek magical papyri* contains many sections that are Greek in origin and nature. They often contain invocations to traditional Greek gods and goddesses such as Zeus, Hermes, Apollo, Artemis and Aphrodite.

Much of the material also contains elements of a form of Judaism. Jewish magic was famous in the ancient world, but the origins and nature of the sections representing Jewish magic are far from clear. Did this material actually originate with Jewish magicians? How did it get into the hands of those who wrote the *Greek magical papyri*? If the texts in question come from Judaism, what kind of Judaism do they represent?⁵

There is a kind of syncretism present in the *Greek magical papyri* – although this is clearly more than just a mixture of diverse elements from Egyptian, Greek, Babylonian and Jewish religion, with a few sprinkles from Christianity. Despite the diversity of the spells and others texts, there is in the whole body of material a tendency towards assimilation and uniformity. This assimilation includes primarily the religious traditions already mentioned – the Romans, although in control of Egypt by the time most of the papyri were written down, left only a few traces in the material. Thus the papyri represent a Graeco-Egyptian, rather than the more general Graeco-Roman, syncretism.

We also have to be cautious about exactly what we mean when using the term ‘syncretism.’ For example, as the historian of religions A.A. Barb has noted, “Much that we are accustomed to see classified as late ‘syncretism’ is rather the ancient and original, deep-seated popular religion, coming to the surface when the whitewash of ‘classical’ writers and artists begins to peel off.”⁶

Who composed, used and utilized the *Greek magical papyri*? We do not know for sure and indeed diverse types of magical practitioners may well have used the spells and invocations contained therein. Some of the magicians writing and using the spells may well have been associated with temples of Egyptian and Greek deities. According to Egyptian practice, the magician was a resident member of the temple priesthood. Indeed, whether the Egyptians distinguished in any way between the phenomena which we would now term ‘magic’ or ‘religion’ is highly unlikely; the general consensus among scholars is that Egyptians did not differentiate between ritual practices in this way.

Some texts may reflect a different type of magician – a type we know from the Greek religious milieu. This type of wandering craftsmen seems keen to adopt and adapt every religious tradition that appears useful to him.

What deities are represented and invoked in the *Greek magical papyri*? A wide variety of gods and goddesses from different traditions feature in the papyri. For example, the goddess Hekate, identified with Persephone, Artemis, Selene and the old Babylonian goddess Ereschigal, is one of the deities most invoked in the papyri. Egyptian deities like Osiris and Isis are common; as are other gods like the Greek deities Hermes and Aphrodite, Apollo (identified with the sun god Helios) and even the Jewish god Iao. Astral deities such as Selene and the constellation of the Bear appear often in the papyri. Abstract deities are also frequently invoked, such as Nature (Physis), Time (Kronos, Chronos), Destiny (the Moirai) and the All (Aion).

⁴ Hans Dieter Betz, “Introduction to the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells: Volume One: Texts*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986 (revised second edition: 1992), xlv.

⁵ Hans Dieter Betz, “Introduction to the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells: Volume One: Texts*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986 (revised second edition: 1992), xlv-xlvi.

⁶ A.A. Barb, “Three Elusive Amulets,” *JWCI* (1964), 4, n.16.

Below are some brief notes on some of the types of divination attested in the papyri, including lecanomancy (bowl divination), catoptromancy (mirror divination), lychnomancy (lamp divination) and hydromancy (divination using water). The common use of boy mediums within these and similar types of divination practices are also briefly discussed.

LECANOMANCY

Lecanomancy is bowl divination. One took divination from shapes or images in glitterings or cloudings or possibly distorted reflections in liquid (typically oil or water) in the bowl. When water was used in the bowl, this procedure is often called hydromancy. This type of divination is also intimately connected with catoptromancy (mirror divination). The reading of tea-leaves is a very rough latter-day equivalent. Augustine tells us that pagans usually regarded these images as manifestations of ghosts. The notion that ghosts could manifest themselves in liquid sits easily with the practice of lake necromancy and indeed lecanomancy may have been practised at the lakeside oracles of the dead of Acheron and Avernus. Lecanomancy may have originated in the pouring of blood into a necromantic pit. One of the spells in the *Greek magical papyri* finds different sorts of power acting through different types of liquid: rainwater (emanating from heaven) summons the gods of heaven, spring water summons ghosts. One holds the vessel between one's knees, pours olive oil onto the surface, and bends over it, uttering a prescribed spell. The god or ghost communicates to one whatever one wishes, probably through glittering, to which the polished surface of the vessel could contribute, but perhaps through shapes formed by the oil. Lecanomancy often uses a boy medium to carry out the divination. The Greeks and Romans attributed lecanomancy to the Persians. Posidonius (2nd century BC) and Strabo relate that the Persians had *magoi*, necromancers, lecanomancers and hydromancers. Here is an example of Lecanomancy from the *Greek magical papyri* (PGM IV.154-285):

...I, with a desire to show you the industry in me, have sent you this magical procedure which, with complete ease, / produces a holy power. And after you have tested it, you too will be amazed at the miraculous nature of this magical operation. You will observe through bowl divination on whatever day or night you want, in whatever place you want, beholding the god in the water and/ hearing a voice from the god which speaks in verses in answer to whatever you want. You will attain both the ruler of the universe and whatever you command, and he will speak on other matters which you ask about.

Inquiry of bowl divination and necromancy: Whenever you want to inquire about matters, take a bronze vessel, either a bowl or a saucer, whatever kind you wish. Pour water: / rainwater if you are calling upon heavenly gods, seawater if gods of the earth, river water if Osiris or Sarapis, springwater if the dead. Holding the vessel on your knees, pour out green olive oil, bend over the vessel and speak/ the prescribed spell. And address whatever god you want and ask about whatever you wish, and he will reply to you and tell you about anything....and you who have used this spell will be amazed.

CATOPTROMANCY

Catoptromancy is the Greek term for a type of divination using the images in the glittering or distorted reflections of mirrors. 'Catoptromancy' is derived from the Greek word *katoptron*

meaning ‘mirror,’ or metaphorically, ‘reflection;’ presumably because one looks into a mirror as one would look into a reflective pool (this connects Catoptromancy with hydromancy). There were two types of Catoptromancy: the first type uses mirrors by lowering them into water – the practitioner would then utter an oracle based on his or her vision in the mirror. The second type invokes a god or *daimon* to appear as a luminous vision by using mirrors to conduct light; the god or *daimon* would then give the practitioner oracular information.

LYCHNOMANCY

One took divination from images or shapes in the flame of the lamp. It depended upon the manifestation of gods or ghosts. Again, this type of divination often uses boy mediums. Lychnomancy could be combined with lecanomancy: one spell in the Demotic papyri combines these types of divination, using both a bowl and a lamp and asking souls of the dead to appear in the bowl while it also asks ghosts to appear in the lamp.

THE USE OF BOY MEDIUMS

Boy-mediums are often used in these types of divination. It seems that they were typically hypnotised as the magician spoke incantations down into their heads, while they focused on glittering patterns in liquids, flames or mirrors. Some recipes explicitly speak of putting the boy-medium into a trance. The boy-medium had to be ‘uncorrupted’ and ‘pure’ (i.e. virgin). Apuleius states that such boys had a pure soul, one that was not excessively bound to the things of the body and that could be withdrawn even further from the body through the state of sleep, thus increasing its perceptual abilities.

HELLENISTIC ASTROLOGY

In the Graeco-Roman world, astrology and astronomy were not separated into discrete categories as they are in the modern world. In fact, the Latin words *astrologia* and *astronomia* both designate what is today called ‘astrology.’ Even in English the term astronomy had both meanings until the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment. The ancient Greek word *mathesis* ‘learning’ can mean specifically ‘astrology’, while *mathematikos* is not so much a ‘mathematician’ as an ‘astrologer.’ Since astrology is so closely linked to mathematics and astronomy, these were not considered discrete phenomena in the ancient world.

As we have seen, the first evidence for astrology comes from the Near East: from Mesopotamia. In later antiquity, every astrologer, whether he came from Mesopotamia or not, was called a ‘Chaldaean.’

From Babylonia, astrological lore travelled to other parts of the Near East, such as Egypt, but also to Greece. The Macedonian King Alexander the Great’s conquest of Mesopotamia in 331 B.C. and his subjugation of Asia brought Greece into contact with the cultures of Syria, Babylon, Persia, Central Asia and Egypt. During this Hellenistic period, the Greek world extended from Asia Minor to the Western Mediterranean and Greek became the international language. Thus, in the Hellenistic period, we see an intensification of cultural contacts and a flow of cosmological ideas between Egyptian priests, Babylonian astrologers and Greek philosophers. The transmission of astrology from cuneiform to Greek was part of this process of cultural mixing.⁷ In Egypt astrology was organized into a complex system. In

⁷ Nick Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Western Astrology: The Ancient and Classical Worlds*, London: Continuum, 2008, 173ff.

Egypt, Greece (from the Hellenistic period onwards) and Rome, astrologers were available to ordinary people and were consulted about all kinds of matters.

Horoscopic astrology (the reading of the natal chart in order to establish the character of the individual and to make inferences about the past, present and future) is attested from the Hellenistic period onwards and especially flourished in the Roman Empire and all over the Mediterranean World during the Late Antique period (second to sixth/seventh centuries A.D.). The earliest documentary evidence of Greek use of astrology dates from approximately 325 B.C. – it is a birth chart calculated for a baby named Aristokrates born on the morning of 3 June 325 B.C.⁸ But whether the child was Greek or simply had a Greek name is unclear; the problem is that as Greek became the educated language of Asia Minor, Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt, the distinction between who was or was not Greek became difficult to answer. The astrologer who cast this chart seems to have been Babylonian, since he wrote in cuneiform on a clay tablet.⁹

The evidence suggests that Babylon remained a hub of traditional activity and astrological innovation until the first century yet the focus on astronomical and astrological innovation shifted to Alexandria in the second century B.C., with the creation of the Great Library of Alexandria, a massive project initiated by the Graeco-Egyptian Pharaoh Ptolemy I, who took control of Egypt when Alexander's empire was divided among his generals. The Library was fully operational under the reign of his son, Ptolemy II (282-246 B.C.). The second librarian, Eratosthenes (c.285/80-c.194 B.C.) was the astronomical genius who measured the circumference of the earth.¹⁰

In the broadest sense, the encounter between Greece and Babylon was embodied in the mixing of the Platonic concept of the single, living cosmos and the Babylonian zodiac. Plato never mentioned the zodiac and did not discuss the use of astrology, yet his worldview and cosmological and philosophical frameworks and notions deeply influenced the Greek use of astrology. The zodiac became a living feature of the Platonic cosmos; the images which represented the zodiacal signs, or constellations, were considered to be much more than mere pictures; they were like religious icons which possessed numinous power: "The zodiac becomes a projection into the sky of the archetypes, the birth chart a map of the disposition of archetypes at the moment of incarnation."¹¹

The technical development of the zodiac seems to have taken place in the Hellenistic world between the fifth and first centuries B.C. It appears that the Greeks adopted nineteen constellations from the Babylonians, renamed and gave new mythologies to twelve, invented a further twelve and retained the archaic constellation, the Bear. The tidying up of the zodiac into the neat twelve-sign zodiac probably took place in Babylon under Persian rule and was adopted by Greek astrologers.¹² The meanings of the zodiac were worked out sometime between the fifth and first centuries B.C. In the literature of the first and second centuries A.D. they are recognizably the same as in any modern text.

There was a further process in Egypt where there was a transitional period in which the Hellenised Babylonian constellations were used alongside ancient Egyptian asterisms and the thirty six decans. The earliest surviving evidence of a Babylonian zodiac in Egypt is a carving in a temple in Esna, probably dating to the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221

⁸ Francesca Rochberg, *Babylonian Horoscopes*, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1998.

⁹ Nick Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Western Astrology: The Ancient and Classical Worlds*, London: Continuum, 2008, 176.

¹⁰ Nick Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Western Astrology: The Ancient and Classical Worlds*, London: Continuum, 2008, 177.

¹¹ Nick Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Western Astrology: The Ancient and Classical Worlds*, London: Continuum, 2008, 180.

¹² Nick Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Western Astrology: The Ancient and Classical Worlds*, London: Continuum, 2008, 181-182.

B.C.), which includes a combination of Babylonian images with Egyptian decans and northern constellations.¹³

We also see the rise of a kind of ‘astral mysticism’: the astrologer Vettius Valens’ comments on astrology are in some ways typical of the kind of devotion seen in ancient astrologers:

Once I had experienced the divine and reverent contemplation of celestial phenomena, I wished to cleanse my character of every kind of vice and pollution and leave my soul immortal. I felt that I was communicating with divine beings, and I acquired a sober mind for research.¹⁴

This short poem by Ptolemy also contains great religious feeling: by interpreting the will of the gods from the movement of the stars, Ptolemy feels as though he is directly in touch with the gods:

I know that I am mortal, the creature of a day. But when I explore the winding courses of the stars I no longer touch with my feet the earth: I am standing near Zeus himself, drinking my fill of Ambrosia, the food of the gods.¹⁵

This kind of astral mysticism was part of wider, mystical currents in Antiquity: by Late Antiquity, theurgic ‘astrology’ and divination would emphasise the soul’s ascent to the stars, the personal transformation of the soul made possible by the underlying idea that each human being contains a divine spark or element within their soul which has the potential to connect them to the divine realm.

Astrological Handbooks and Writers

Because astrology was a highly technical subject, it was often taught from handbooks in the ancient world, some of which have survived. The authors of these handbooks were probably reluctant to divulge their craft as a whole (owing to the sense of religious initiation involved in learning and practicing this type of divination, as with many other types of divinatory praxis), and may have held back certain information which was possibly passed on via oral tradition to their more advanced students. However, most astrological texts which survive are dated to the second century A.D. onwards; earlier texts, which might reveal the development of the complex rules which developed in the third and second centuries B.C. have completely disappeared.

Ptolemy, whose *Tetrabiblos* was written in the first half of the second century A.D., was one of the great scientists of his age as well as a fine mathematician and an able astronomical observer. In this work he attempts to prove ‘scientifically’ the influence of the stars on human life and life on earth in general. At the beginning he deals with critics and skeptics. Then he states some of the basic concepts and doctrines of astrology. The planets

¹³ Nick Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Western Astrology: The Ancient and Classical Worlds*, London: Continuum, 2008, 182-183.

¹⁴ Vettius Valens, *Anthologiae* 6.1 (= Kroll, p.242). Cited from Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985, 351.

¹⁵ Ptolemy, *Anthologia Palatina*, 9.577. Cited from Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985, 348.

have their properties through sharing one or more of the four elemental qualities: hot, cold, dry and moist.

Vettius Valens, the author of *Anthologiae (Excerpts)*, lived at about the same time as Ptolemy. His voluminous work comes closer to a systematic textbook than that of Ptolemy, even though the title suggests that it is not complete. It seems to have been written for practicing astrologers who wanted to add to their knowledge and experience.

Firmicus Maternus (c. 335 A.D.) wrote an introduction to astrology entitled *Libri Matheseos*. Like Ptolemy, he deals with philosophical questions relating to the operation of astrology and its place in the cosmos.

NECROMANCY

At the core of necromantic practice lay the ideas and practices of ghost-laying and ghost-placation, certainly conceptually and maybe historically. So one of the main reasons for consulting a ghost would often derive from the fact that one was being attacked or troubled by it in its restlessness. The revelation then sought from it would be the cause and remedy of this dissatisfaction, which was typically caused by want of perfect burial or desire for revenge upon the killer. Often one would call up a specific person's ghost because that person had information in life that one now needed to access: for example, a common question involved asking where the deceased individual had buried treasure. But one could also call up ghosts, known or not, and consult them on wider issues of no special relevance to the person from whom they had derived. Necromancy was often carried out in caves, marshes or by lakes and in dark woods. It was also commonly practised at graves and battlefields. One could exploit a ghost's affinity with the house in which it had lived to evocate it there. Reanimation necromancy was a different matter. It could, it seems, be performed anywhere one took a corpse, since in this case the rites were grounded in the corpse itself. Apuleius' Zatchylas reanimates Thelyphron in the middle of a public market.

Necromancy: Evocation of ghosts and the dead in magical ritual

Typical features of Necromantic rituals include the following: The rites take place at night and are focused around a pit and a fire. There are libations of honey-milk, wine, water, and sometime olive oil, together with sprinkled barley. These are identical with normal, non-magical, tributary tomb-side offerings to the dead. They are of a nourishing, soothing and propitiatory nature. Black cattle (usually sheep) are sacrificed. As usual with offerings directed toward the underworld, rather than to heaven above, their carcasses are burned whole (in 'holocaust'), not eaten. The blood from the jugulated throats of the cattle is allowed to drain in to the pit for the ghosts to drink. This restores to them, temporarily, an element of corporeality, and so aids their communication with the living. Prayers are made to the ghosts and the underworld powers that reign over them, in the latter case to secure the ghosts' temporary release. The ghosts arrive in a pressing host and must be managed with a sword, since they remain frightened of bronze and iron.

Necromancy: Oracles of the dead

Oracles of the dead were referred to as either *psuchomanteion* or *nekumanteion*.

- *Nekumanteion* = (neuter singular) can be provisionally translated as 'place of necromancy' or 'oracle of the dead.' This word is attested from the 5th century BC.
- *Psuchagogion* = 'drawing place of ghosts' – used in 4th century BC.

- *Psuchomanteion* = ‘prophecy-place of ghosts.’

Plutarch (*Moralia*, 555c) also provides an alternative technical name for an oracle of the dead, *psuchopompeion*, literally ‘sending-place of ghosts’ and tells us that the ghost was called up ‘with propitiations and libations.’ These terms were synonymous and were used interchangeably of the same oracles. Latin’s dependence upon the Greek terminology suggests that the Greeks introduced the Romans to oracles of this kind. The most well-known four (which these terms are used for when applied to a specific oracle): Acheron in Thresprotia, Avernus in Campania, Heracleia Pontica on the south coast of the Black Sea, or Tainaron at the tip of the Mani peninsula. However even these four were unglamorous and low profile.

The Heracleia and Tainaron *nekuomanteia* were based in natural caves. The Acheron and Avernus *nekuomanteia* were probably based in precincts besides lakes. Oracles of dead heroes are very similar to oracles of the dead, such as those of Trophonius at Lebadeia, Amphiaraus at Oropus and Faunus at Tiber: the ancients associated them closely with *nekuomanteia*, often mentioning them in the same breath and certain similarities in their ritual procedures (such as incubation and the use of fleeces). But significantly, hero-oracles are never alluded to under the term *nekuomanteion* or its synonyms. This suggests a conceptual difference between them: at *nekuomanteia*, one consulted any ghost of one’s choosing, whereas at hero-oracles, one consulted the hero himself. For the Oracle at Avernus, sources speak of resident staff. Strabo tells us that priests would guide people through the consultation process, and that they managed the place under contract. Maximus of Tyre says that the mantic cave was attended by evocators, *psychagogoi*.

Incubation and Dreaming at Oracles of the Dead

Incubation seems to have been the usual method of obtaining an oracle in all of the Oracles of the Dead. This involved invoking ghosts of the dead to give prophetic / oracular information. The consulters slept overnight at the *nekuomanteia* and encountered ghosts in their dreams. Ghosts were sought in dreams, since it was believed that they often visited the living spontaneously in this way (e.g. This is how Patroclus appears to Achilles in Homer’s *Iliad*). In general the association between sleep, death, dreams and night was very close in the ancient world. Hermes the god escorts the souls of the dead to the underworld – in Homer, he does this by taking them past the ‘people of Dreams’ and he guides them there with the golden rod with which he also lulls the living to sleep or wakes them. Sleep is used as a means of experiencing summoned ghosts also in the Greek magical papyri. Incubation was the method used also to receive prophecies in hero-oracles such as those of Trophonius, Amphiaraus and Faunus. The actual consultations at all of these oracles seem to have taken place at night and the full moon was a favoured time for necromancy. Like his fellow incubation-prophet Asclepius, Trophonius appeared to his consulters in both plain human form (sometimes with size and beauty of Olympian Zeus) and in the form of a snake. It may have been held that Trophonius was identified with the snakes said to live in his hole. The honey-barley cakes taken down were variously said to be for these snakes or for Trophonius himself. Snakes, significantly chthonic creatures, were often kept for prophecy and fed on honey cakes in the ancient world. Consulters of Amphiaraus’ oracle sacrificed a ram and then slept on the fleece and waited to receive the prophecy in a dream. Fleeces may well have been used in this way in *nekuomanteia* as well.

***Psuchagogoi*, ‘evocators’**

Psuchagogos = ‘evocator,’ ‘soul-charmer’. These individuals were probably based at *nekuomanteia* but traveled out from there to lay ghosts when necessary. They were often concerned with the laying of ghosts. Hermes himself, whose job it was to deposit the ghosts of the dead safely in the underworld, could take *psuchagogos* as an epithet. A Euripides scholiast asserts that *psuchagogi*, ‘summon up and drive out ghosts.’ Paradoxically it was often necessary to call up a ghost to lay it.

Rites of Evocation

The main significance of the basic rites of evocation lies in the fact that their system as a whole (pit, libations, barley offering, blood offering, holocaust and prayers) is identical to that of normal offerings to the dead at tombs.

- **Advance purification:** ingesting only certain foods and drinks and abstaining from all others, sometimes sleeping on the grass outdoors.
- **Time of Consultation:** at night, the time of ghosts. Incubation, the usual means of experiencing ghosts at tombs or in *nekuomanteia*, most naturally took place at night. Ideally the procedure begins at midnight and endures until dawn, when the ghosts must flee back to their graves or the underworld. Ideally performed when the moon was full. One might think that festivals at which ghosts returned to visit the living constituted particularly suitable occasions for necromancy although nothing in our evidence explicitly supports this supposition. The chief festivals in question would be at Athens: the Anthesteria and Genesia and at Rome, the Parentalia, the Lemuria and the thrice-yearly opening of the mundus, the underworld hole from which ghosts could emerge.
- **Pit and Fire:** rites normally organized around 2 focal points: a pit for blood and libations and a fire for the burning of the holocaust sacrifice. General rule – offerings that went into or around the pit were for the ghosts, whereas those that went into the fire were for the underworld gods. Sometimes ghosts are said to come out of the pit.
- **Libations:** libations were full ones as opposed to token ones. Their principal significance lay in their soothing and life giving qualities. Water, milk, honey and wine and olive oil.
- **Sacrifice:** usual sacrificial victim: a single black sheep or a pair of them. Also cockerels and black puppies could be used.

WEEK 6: BIBLIOGRAPHY
MAGIC, ASTROLOGY AND DIVINATION IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD

Panel Discussion: "Magic in the Ancient World" by Fritz Graf

Required Reading

Campion, Nicholas, *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Western Astrology*, Vol. 1, The Ancient and Classical Worlds, London: Continuum, 2008: Chapters 9 and 10: Archaic and Classical Greece (Homer, Hesiod and Plato); Chapters 11, 12 and 13: Hellenistic cosmology and astrology; Chapter 14: Roman astrology.

Dieter Betz, Hans (ed.), *The Greek magical papyri in translation, including the Demotic spells*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992: Use the "Table of Spells" (pp.xi-xxviii) at the beginning to look up any spells / rituals connected with magic, astrology and divination (for example, *PGM* III.275-281: Horoscope; *PGM* IV.835-849: Astrological Text; *PGM* IV.3209-3254: Saucer divination for Aprodite; *PGM* VII.1-148: Homer oracle etc.).

Ogden, D., *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2002: especially Chapter 9 (Further varieties of divination); Chapter 10 (curse tablets and 'prayers for justice'); Chapter 9 (ancient sources on Necromancy, Evocation, Oracles of the Dead and Reanimation): Chapter 8 (ancient sources on ghosts, ghost-laying, exorcism, werewolves).

Additional Reading (available online)

Collins, D., 'Nature, Cause and Agency in Greek Magic', *Transactions of the American Philological Association (TAPA)* 133.1 (2003), 17-49: **Available on JSTOR**.

Edson, Evelyn and Emilie Savage-Smith, "An Astrologer's Map: A Relic of Late Antiquity," *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 52, (2000), pp. 7-29: **Available on JSTOR**

Faraone, C., 'Molten Wax, Spilt Wine and Mutilated Animals: Sympathetic Magic in near Eastern and Early Greek Oath Ceremonies', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies (JHS)* 113 (1993), 60-80: **Available on JSTOR**.

Heilen, Stephen, "Teaching 'Astrology in Greece and Rome'. *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 98, No. 2 (Dec., 2002 - Jan., 2003), pp. 201-210

Available on JSTOR

Hordern, J.H., 'Love Magic and Purification in Sophron PS1214a, and Theocritus' *Pharmakeutria*, *The Classical Quarterly* 52.1 (2002), 164-173: **Available on JSTOR**.

Jones, Alexander, "The Adaptation of Babylonian Methods in Greek Numerical Astronomy". *Isis*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (Sep., 1991), pp. 441-453: **Available on JSTOR**

Lehoux, Daryn, 'Parapegmata: Astrology, Weather and Calendars in the Ancient World', PhD Thesis, University of Toronto', 2000.

<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/ftp03/NQ53766.pdf>

Neugebauer, O., "Demotic Horoscopes." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1943), pp. 115-127: **Available on JSTOR**

Riess, Ernst, "The Influence of Astrology on Life and Literature at Rome ." *The Classical Weekly*, Vol. 27, No. 10 (Dec. 18, 1933), pp. 73-78: **Available on JSTOR**

Riley, Mark, 'Science and Tradition in the *Tetrabiblos*', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 132, no 1, pp. 67-84, 1988.
Available on JSTOR

Riley, Mark, 'Theoretical and Practical Astrology: Ptolemy and His Colleagues', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 117, (1987), pp. 235-256:**Available on JSTOR**

Sarton, George Reviewed work(s): Astrology in Roman Law and Politics by Frederick H. Cramer. *Speculum*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Jan., 1956), pp. 156-161: **Available on JSTOR**.

Thurston, Hugh, "Greek Mathematical Astronomy Reconsidered". *Isis*, Vol. 93, No. 1 (Mar., 2002), pp. 58-69: **Available on JSTOR**.

Weinstock, Stefan, "Lunar Mansions and Early Calendars." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 69, (1949), pp. 48-69: **Available on JSTOR**.

Additional Reading (other)

Aaboe, A. "Scientific Astronomy in Antiquity." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*. Series A, Mathematical and Physical Sciences, Vol. 276, No. 1257, The Place of Astronomy in the Ancient World (May 2, 1974), pp. 21-42

Barton, T., *Ancient Astrology*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Cox Miller, P., *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Cramer, Frederick H., *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*, Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1996.

Dickie, M., *Magic and Magicians in the Graeco-Roman World*, London: Routledge, 2001.

Evans, J. (2004), "The Astrologer's Apparatus: A Picture of Professional Practice in Greco-Roman Egypt," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 35.1: 1-44.

Faraone, C., D. Obbink (eds), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Fowden, G., *The Egyptian Hermes* (1986), esp. pages 75-94 on *sympatheia*, *daimones* and Egyptian and Graeco-Roman magic

Iles Johnston, Sarah, John G. Gager, Martha Himmelfarb, Marvin Meyer, Brian Schmidt, David Frankfurter, Fritz Graf
Numen, Vol. 46, No. 3 (1999), pp. 291-325

Iles Johnston, S., *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999.

Noegel, Scott (ed.), *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.

Ogden, D., *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.