

Magic and divination¹

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1

IN 1947, in a series nowadays nearly forgotten, there appeared a small book by Samson Eitrem, *Orakel und Mysterien am Ausgang der Antike*; the series was *Albae Vigiliae*, edited by Karl Kerényi, whose 100th birthday was commemorated in 1997 and with whom Eitrem had close contacts, despite their rather different scholarly approaches to ancient religion. Eitrem's small book still is worth reading: its author traces the boom of oracular shrines and mystery cults in late paganism and explains it as the wide-spread and often fervent search for divine experience that found its expression especially in gnosticism and hermetism, but also in theurgy. He devotes two chapters to late antique magic as attested in the Greek magical papyri (texts in which he was among the eminent specialists of his time).² He established how in the papyri the quest for divine experience was very much alive, akin to what gnostics and theurgists were looking for (1947:37–47), and he examined the rôle that oracular Apollo played in these texts (47–57); he thereby emphasized the close association between magic and divination in them.

He was not the first modern scholar to connect magic and divination—but he did so in an entirely different way from his predecessors. For the evolutionary social anthropologists of the late 19th and early 20th century, the two phenomena were virtually identical in a very early stage of human history. How dominant Frazerian evolutionism was among classicists in his day is evident from the fact that even scholars who articulated their dissent from this contemporary *opinio communis* felt—like William Halliday—the need to pay tribute to it: Halliday opens his book on *Greek Divination* with a chapter on magic, stating there that 'divination ..., even after it has parted company with magic, has still the object of enabling the client to modify in his interest the course of events' (1913:43f.). The conflation of

1 I thank David Jordan and Jan Moyer, Chicago, for the help they gave me in editing my English.

2 He figures, together with E. Diehl and A. Jacoby, as one of the assisting editors of both volumes of PGM.

magic and divination is a corollary of the conception that magic, the forerunner of ancient religion, had the same aim as divination. In his thinking on earlier stages of religion, Eitrem unhesitatingly followed the then common Frazerian paradigms—as did the other great Nordic historian of religion, Martin P. Nilsson; but—again like Nilsson—he did not let this paradigm intrude into his occupation with the religions of late antiquity. This enabled him to make the decisive step I have just pointed out—of trying to understand the rôle divination played in the Greek magical papyri.

What I propose to do in this paper has been inspired by these chapters of Eitrem's. I shall examine the close association between magic and divination in later antiquity, not only in the magical papyri (although I shall rely very much upon them); and I shall try to understand why this association became dominant at a certain point in the history of ancient religion, whereas it had not played any conspicuous role before the Imperial epoch.

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At the end of antiquity and in the mind of the educated Christian, magic and divination were quasi identical. In his *Etymologies*, a vast encyclopedia of ancient learning for the early Middle Ages, Isidore, bishop of Seville, dedicates a chapter (8.9) to magicians or sorcerers (*De magis*). After naming Zoroastrian Persia as the cradle and home-land of magic, he tells how the fallen angels brought this nonsense (*vanitates*) to their human brides—and how 'for the sake of knowing the future and Hell and how to call it up,' there developed 'the arts of the *haruspex* and the *augur*, and what they call oracles and necromancy.' Magic, then, is nothing more than the various methods of pagan divination, including the ill-famed and more-literary-than-real necromancy. It is this conception of magic that survived into the Middle Ages, both in Byzantium (Maguire 1995) and the European West (Kieckhefer 1989, esp. 151–74; Flint 1991, esp. 88–101).

This conception was not Isidore's invention: it was the way most Christians of late antiquity looked at magic. This should not surprise us. Magic, as was clear since the beginning of this art, had to do with demons; it used their help to achieve its goals—in the vulgar understanding it was even, as Apuleius puts it, 'a communion with the divine world' (*Apol.* 25, *communio cum dis*). Divination, on the other hand, was the traditional way to come into contact with that world, in order to tap the gods' superior knowledge of the future. To Christians, following Paul's severe exhortations to the Corinthians, all pagan gods were demons: 'Whatever the gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice it to demons, not to God' (1 Cor. 10.20). In this rather simplistic perspective, divination and magic coincide.

We find an account fundamentally identical, though much more sophisticated, in Saint Augustine's *On Christian teaching* (*De doctrina christiana*) 2.30–7. He intends to fight superstition, which he defines as a form of idolatry (*i.e.* the religious veneration of any part of God's creation but also the consultation of and association with demons). Under this heading, he lists both magical and divinatory arts, including astrology and the observation of all sorts of natural signs: they had been given to mankind by the fallen angels 'in a sort of disastrous communion between humans and demons, as the result of an unreliable and deceitful friendship' (2.36).³ Already here, as in Isidore, the fallen angels have become bringers of culture; the source of this concept is the Hellenistic *Book of Enoch*, an apocryphal text very influential in early Christian thinking.⁴ This does not mean that divination or magic would never have attained their aims—literature and (perhaps) daily life were full of examples to the contrary, and Augustine was too clever a rhetorician to get himself entangled in the hopeless task of disproving all the evidence. And, even more to the point, he was not only one of the Fathers of the Church, but also the *Father of Semiotics*, as his modern colleagues are fond of stressing (Todorov 1982): thus he accepts the reality of divination and magic—and undercuts it on a different level. Many times an oracle has become true because the demons gave mankind a true account of the future, in order to strengthen their own credibility and entice man all the more. But divination and magic are, as is agreed, a communication between humans and demons. Every act of communication (or every language as its vehicle) functions on the basis of signs. Signs, however, have no natural meaning: all meaning is arbitrary and agreed upon between the partners in communication. Thus, Augustine insists, magic and divination function only as long as both partners adhere to the conventional meaning of the signs—which means: as long as one believes in it. Since Christians have interrupted their communication with the demons, to them, the signs have changed meaning. A Christian does not believe in magic or divination.

Augustine, in a way, is more affirmative than he should have been: when he wrote, the discussion about whether one really could lump together magic and divination had only just stopped. This discussion affected the first Christian emperors as well; they, not being semioticians but law-givers, contributed to it by their edicts (see Montero 1991, Fögen 1993, Potter 1994:177–80). Constantius, in the middle of the 4th century, identified divination and magic and indiscriminately

3 *Ex quadam pestifera societate hominum et daemonum quasi pacta infidelis et dolosae amicitiae constituta.*

4 See the edition of the Greek text by Black 1970; there is also a fuller Ethiopian version, Uhlig 1984, and a very influential Slavonic one, Böttich 1995. For the history of the text and its earliest stratum, see Hanon 1977 and Nickelsburg 1977; for a general account, see Grélot 1958 and VanderKam 1995.

condemned their practitioners to death: in an edict of 354, he grouped together *haruspices*, astrologers, *augures*, Chaldaens and sorcerers (*Cod.Theod.* 9.16.4 [Jan. 4, 357]). But this was just another indication of the fundamentalist ways of this emperor; others in the same century were less indiscriminate. Constantine, in two edicts of 319, forbade only the itinerant practice of the diviners (under the punishment of being burnt alive), but allowed them to practice quietly in their own houses (*haruspices*: 9.16.1; *haruspices et sacerdotes*: 9.16.2; Montero 1991:67–71, Fögen 1993:225–7). In a later edict, he ordained severe punishment of those sorcerers who, through their art, had harmed the life or the sexual integrity of other people (*Cod.Theod.* 9.16.3 [May 23, 321–4]).⁵ To Constantine magic, it seems, was not in itself a punishable offense, only its harmful applications. After Constantius and after the pagan roll-back under Julian (and its violent end), the situation became open again: in 364, the emperors Valentinian and Valens banned ‘nocturnal rituals with godless prayers, magical ceremonies, and dire sacrifices’—not only magic at its most harmful, but mystery rites as well; but, under pressure from the pagans, Valentinian had to rescind this law (9.16.7 [Sept. 9, 364]).⁶ He intervened also against astrologers (9.16.8 [Dec. 12, 370]),⁷ but not against divination in general, and in an edict of 371, Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian explained why: as long as divination had no evil purpose, ‘I deem that the art of the *haruspex* has no association with malevolent magic (*maleficium*), and I do not think that any part of religion sanctioned by ancestral tradition can be a crime ... We do not censure the art of the *haruspex*, but we prohibit its harmful use’ (9.16.9 [May 19, 371]).⁸

Thus, at least in the 4th century, there was a debate as to whether divination was part of (harmful) magic or whether the two could be dissociated; this debate had much to do with a new concept of imperial autonomy (see Fögen 1993:276–84). Soon afterwards, it seems, the rigorism in Theodosius’ decided the question—to the detriment of divination.

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But what about the pagans? How did they view the tangled relationship? The best answer, I think, can be found in the Greek magical papyri. In these books,

5 *Qui magicis adincti artibus aut contra hominum moliti salutem aut pudicos ad libidinem deflexisse animos deteguntur*; cf. Fögen 1993:42f.

6 *Ne quis deinceps nocturnis temporibus aut nefarias preces aut magicos apparatus aut sacrificia funesta celebrare conetur*; cf. Fögen 1993:38.

7 *Cesset mathematicorum tractatus*; cf. Fögen 1993:23f.

8 *Haruspicinam ego nullam cum maleficiorum causis habere consortium iudico aut aliquam praeterea concessam a maioribus religionum genus esse arbitror criminis ... nec haruspicinam reprehendimus, sed nocenter exerceri vetamus*; cf. Montero 1991:132, Fögen 1993:38f.

divination is as highly visible as that popular magical rite, the binding spell; in fact, divination rites and love-spells are the prevailing content of these books. The divination rites range from simple recipes for how to detect a thief to complex rituals to procure intimacy with a divinity through a dream or a vision. One papyrus (PGM II, in Berlin, 4th cent.) consists entirely of divination rites; in the two major texts (PGM IV, in Paris, 4th cent. and VII, in London, not much later), such rites account for about one fourth of all prescriptions.

In order to understand how these rites functioned, I shall have a closer look at some of them, starting from the simplest and ending with divination with the help of a medium and with a very complex ritual incubation.

Divination is a ritual procedure to help overcome problems in decision-making: knowledge of the future outcome is desirable when different courses of action seem equally feasible at a given moment, and even when the course of action had been already decided upon, divine confirmation was deemed useful. In such situations, a Greek or Roman would visit an oracular shrine and ask the god or hero for an answer to his questions; if the matter was more pressing, he could also simply pray to a divinity for a helpful sign—just as Odysseus, who had decided to attack the suitors, on leaving the house that fateful morning, still prayed to Zeus asking for two signs, one outside the house, one within; he undertook his revenge only after receiving both signs (Hom. *Od.* 20.95ff.). In a similar situation, an Egyptian magician would ask for a dream, as at PGM VII 255–9: before going to bed, he would address a short prayer to his lamp: ‘Hail, lord lamp, you who shine beside Osiris and shine beside Osir-entechtha, and my lord, archangel Michael: if it is advantageous for me to do this, show me a plant and water, if not, fire and iron.’ Here it is the lamp itself, promoted to the status of a mythological being (the lamp of Osiris, who is given both his general and his local names⁹) and, because the prayer had a the Jewish origin, the archangel Michael who are asked for help; in other cases, it would be a local god or demon.

Already a witch in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* had used a lamp in order to prophesy: her concern had simply been to forecast tomorrow’s weather, but the episode makes it clear that lamp-divination (lychnomancy) enjoyed a certain popularity already in the 2nd cent AD (e.g. PGM IV 1103, V 1–53 [lamp, bowl, medium], VII 348–58, 540–78, XXIIb 27–31). Even more popular and widespread was bowl-divination (lecanomancy),¹⁰ which appears several times in the magical papyri (IV 222f., 3209–354, V 1–53, 55–69, VII 319–34; see also Maspero 1923). It worked

9 Osir-entechtha is explained as Osiris and Khenty-khet, the local god of Athribis, *GMPT* p. 22 n.40.

10 Perhaps already practiced, outside magical circles, by a satyr in the painting of the Pompeian Villa dei Misteri: Matz 1963.

in a very simple way, by making use of a surface of water in a bowl unto which a little oil was added—the oil spread as a fine film upon the surface and took certain significant forms (because of the water, another term used was hydromancy; cf. Bouché-Ledercq 1874:184f.). In the great papyrus codex in the Bibliothèque Nationale (PGM IV), we find a prescription for such a ritual, which connects it with Aphrodite; nevertheless, it is not only a rite for erotic divination: it promises: 'the goddess ... will appear to you and will make a revelation concerning whatever you wish.' The rite is rather simple. After undergoing purification for seven days and preparing a special white bowl, which he fills with water and oil and whose rim he inscribes with magical words, the magician places the bowl on his knees and invokes the goddess. She will become visible on the surface of the bowl and, after an appropriate salutation, can be interviewed (3210–53).

Lecanomanancy, we might think, would work like a Rorschach test: the fine oil film on the surface of the water would yield any form the interpreter could imagine. But, surprisingly enough to our modern mind, it did not quite work this way: in our case, the practitioner sees the goddess Aphrodite herself who, by a gesture of her hand, signals her willingness to be interrogated. The ancient magician does not rely on his own power of intuition when interpreting signs on a surface: he meets the divinity in person whose superior knowledge will help. This is the rule in all these spells—therefore, one spell can be hydromancy and necromancy at the same time (222: αὐθοπτική λεκανομάντεια ἅμα καὶ νεκροαγωγή). Hydromancy was used already by Odysseus, Tzetzes tells us, to call up Teiresias from the dead (*Ad Lyc.* 813, p. 256.23 Scheer),¹¹ and Porphyry, in his letter on magic to Anebo, talks about visions with the help of water (2.2f.)¹²—and this lives on in early modern accounts of magical divination (Ginzburg 1989:108, 14th cent., Mantua). In a more scientific mood, the philosopher Iamblichus, in his *Mysteries of Egypt*, explains this and kindred forms of divination as an 'attraction of light ... which enlightens the ethereal and luminous substance around our soul with divine light, from which images of the divine enter into our imaginative faculty; they are moved by the will of the gods' (3.14 [132.11–15 Parthey]). But even the philosopher does not deny that a divine presence appears through the bowl, he is only a more cautious theologian for whom the gods do not mingle with humans, but send their images.

This tendency of Graeco-Egyptian magic becomes even clearer when contrasted with a divinatory ritual described in the Jewish *Sepher ha-Razim*, a book written at about the same date and in a similar, Alexandrian, location. Twice this text, which takes the narrative form of an ascent through the seven spheres unto the

11 'Ὁ καὶ ἀλληγορεῖται ὅτι καὶ λεκανομαντείαν ἐποίησε καὶ τὴν Τειρεσίου ψυχὴν ἠρώτησε 'in allegorical interpretation, he [Odysseus] made a bowl-divination and asked the soul of Tiresias.'

12 Οἱ μὲν δὲ ὕδατος φαντάζονται (in a long list of divinatory techniques).

Most Holy Throne, describes an actual divination rite; in both cases, however, it is divination by lot. The magician writes the possible answers to his questions on different strips of papyrus and puts them into a bowl of pure oil; he leaves the bowl for several days, and when he comes back, the right answers swim to the top of the oil. The book does not explain how this comes about but it vaguely implies that the angels of the respective spheres were responsible (Morgan 1983, ch. 1.3 [any question], 5 [to know the day of one's own death]). Monotheistic religion, I presume, is even more hesitant than the pious philosopher to let superhuman forces mingle with our world, even the force of angels.

Another, more spectacular method of divination is that with the help of a medium. The relevant rite, again from the great codex in Paris, bears the interesting title Σολομῶνος κατάπτωσις, 'Solomon's Collapse' (PGM IV 850–929): it provokes a trance in a medium who could be either a youth or an adult.

The rite, again, is straightforward. Medium and magician have to keep themselves pure from sexual intercourse for three days; then, the medium is seated upon unbaked (*i.e.* pure) bricks in an open space, he is dressed in ritual garments and adorned with different protective amulets and, like the magician, he wears a crown of ἀρτεμισία 'wormwood' (an absinth-like herb used, among other things, in ancient gynecology: Hopfner 1974:494, 502f.; Manniche 1989:80), 'for the god delights in the plant.' The magician says his formula seven times, offers a fumigation of incense and a libation of wine, beer, honey, or the milk of a black cow (not exactly the usual libations); then he again whispers the formula seven times into the medium's ear. Then the medium collapses: the god has arrived; the medium can be questioned. At the end, another rite makes the god depart and brings the medium back to normal.

The god, in this rite, has no specific name. This may be due to the text's presumably Jewish origin, which is suggested by its title—despite several Egyptian details: a spell in which several forms of Osiris can be spotted and where the myth of this god whose mutilated body had been carried away by the Nile is alluded to in the invocation: 'Come to me, you who became Hesies [*i.e.* Osiris] and were carried away by a river.' But whoever the god may be, again the magician does not look for a demon, but for a mighty god as his source of information.

Finally, the most complicated rite. Two magical papyri in the Berlin collection come from the library of a learned Egyptian in Thebes with a lively interest in magic, hermeticism, and gnosticism; we have other magical papyri from his library, among them the largest, that in Paris.¹³ The shorter of the Berlin texts (PGM II), written in the 4th century, contains one single, complex, divinatory ritual—the

13 For this library, see Powden 1986:168–72; it includes not only P.Bibl.Nat. suppl. gr. 574 (PGM IV) but also P.Berol. inv. 5025 (I) and 5026 (II).

connection between its isolated sections has been a matter of dispute, and I offer my own reconstruction.¹⁴ Its first part, whose beginning is mutilated (at least one major hymn is missing), must have been an incubation rite to make a divinity appear in a dream. The text as preserved begins with the end of a hymn to Apollo, the god who dominates the rite, calling him 'helper through your oracles' and asking him to 'come hither, foretell, give prophecies in this hour of the night;' later on, he is called 'Apollo Paian, who control this night, who are master of it.' Apollo, the Greek oracular god *kat' exochen*, is to appear during the night—i.e. in a dream.

Several sections of ritual prescriptions follow, which, though slightly disjointed, add up to a more or less coherent scenario. Before the fateful night, the sorcerer has to prepare himself: he fashions an ointment, from various substances, among them again *artemisia*. Its name is connected with Artemis and thus with the Moon, from time immemorial identified as Apollo's sister. Another ingredient is the heart of a hoopoe; in late Egypt the bird was closely connected with divination (Hopfner 1983:112). With this ointment the magician anoints his lips in order not to forget what he has seen and heard during his sleep—an obvious danger to everybody who seeks revelation in dreams. Similarly he had to prepare a magical ink from different herbs and pure water (a rare commodity in Egypt) and must put one drop of it into the right ear in order to hear everything the dreamer wishes. Finally, he writes a spell on laurel leaves, draws the image of a demon (whose descriptive name is 'Ἀκέφαλος 'The Headless One') on a strip of papyrus and rolls the laurel leaves into this strip; the roll has to be kept close to the head of the sleeper.

Next are the preparations for the night proper. Bedding has to be spread out on the ground—the magician does not sleep in his own bed but on a rush mat or simply on some rushes, which, before going to sleep, he purifies with ass's milk. Outside the bedroom, under the open sky, he performs a sacrifice; in order to do so, he puts onto his head a wreath made of seven laurel sprigs; every single laurel leaf has to be inscribed with a magical name, in the magical ink made earlier. Holding five more laurel twigs in his right hand, he intones a hymn to Apollo and, at the same time, burns on a censer (θυμιατήριον) a lump of frankincense, twelve pine-cones, and two roosters, one to Helios and one to Selene. This fumigation is the ordinary way a magician offers a sacrifice to his gods in the papyri:¹⁵ frankincense and pine-cones are burnt because of their fragrance—the gods, themselves smelling pleasantly, like pleasant smells—and the rooster is the universal sacrificial animal in

14 For different reconstructions, see the texts in PGM and GMPT as well as Hopfner 1974 and Eitrem 1947.

15 See my forthcoming contribution to the 1997 Göteborg Seminar on Greek sacrifice.

magical rites (see Aineias of Gaza: Hopfner 1990:339).¹⁶ Then the magician enters the bedroom, addresses a spell to his lamp, on which he burns another lump of frankincense; he lies down, still holding the laurel in his right hand; in order to ensure an even better memory, he may have in his mouth a leaf of cinquefoil with some magical characters on it.

The papyrus continues with two different formulae to be used if the first night is luckless—a usual procedure in order to force less willing gods. Then follows what the text calls 'an alternate procedure;' but it proves to be a different rite: here, the sorcerer not only lies down to sleep but also prays a long hymn at sunrise, begging Apollo-Helios 'to come now to me, come quickly ... with ambrosian mouth give voice to song'—and, later on and less poetically, 'I summon you, Apollo of Claros, Castalian one, Pythian.' The instructions end with a formula to get rid of the god 'in a worthy manner' when he has answered all questions.

Divination in dreams—as is intended in the first rite—of course has its age-old place in the cult of many shrines in Greece, Rome, and the ancient Near East, especially in shrines of healing heroes such as Asclepius or Amphiaraus. The ritual framework of these incubation rites is closely akin to the one described in the papyrus, as is shown by our literary and epigraphical sources (Deubner 1900; Graf 1992). An incubation sanctuary served as a sort of interface between humans and gods, as a place where the two could meet as closely as possible; therefore, such a sanctuary always contained two areas of sacred space—the ordinary space of the sanctuary with its altars, where people used to pray and sacrifice, and the more sacred where the meeting took place, the 'sleeping hall' (ἐγκοιμητήριον), the 'most interior' or 'impenetrable' room (ἄδυτον, ἄβατον). The patients entered this room only after preparatory sacrifices and, presumably, prayers—much as the sorcerer entered his bedroom only after his prayer and sacrifice in the court, under open sky; among the recipients of these sacrifices, there usually was Mnemosyne, the deified Memory: Asclepius' visitors, like the sorcerer, were eager not to forget what they had learned in their dream. In the *enkoimeterion*, one slept on the ground (on a bed of twigs, perhaps sometimes on the hide of a sacrificial animal); Asclepius' patients wore a specific ritual wreath during their sleep (in Pergamum one from olive leaves). Again, the parallels are close: the magician follows the specifications of an incubation rite, with the sole exception that he does not sleep in the sanctuary of a town, amidst a collectivity of other sleepers seeking dreams.¹⁷ Here, the

16 Παρὰ Χαλδαίοις καὶ Αἰγυπτίοις καὶ Ἕλλησι οἱ περὶ τὰς τελετὰς ἐγείροντες καὶ γοητεύειν τὰν πάλαι τελευτησάντων τὰς ψυχὰς ἐπαγγελλόμενοι ... ἀλεκτρούνα θύοντες ... λέγουσι προκαλεῖσθαι καὶ δεικνύειν 'Among the Chaldaeans, Egyptians and Greeks those who perform mystery rites tell that they sacrifice a rooster, when they wake up and announce that they would call the souls of long dead persons, and thus they would call them up and make them visible.'

17 See the not entirely decorous description in Aristoph. *Plut.*

definition of magic that Marcel Mauss (1997:14–6) has given—magic as the religion of isolated individuals—seems fitting enough.

All the more significant is that the second part of the text no longer conforms to this pattern but describes another ritual, the so-called ‘Presentation to Helios’ (σύστασις πρὸς Ἥλιον). It is a powerful rite during which a sorcerer bonds with the Sun God, the most powerful divinity in our material world; the two become familiar, and the magician thus can refer to his mighty friend when giving orders to lesser demons. Ordinarily, this rite did not serve divinatory aims but rather was part of the initiation of a magician: it was the familiarity with Helios that made a magician into the mighty professional he aimed to be (Graf 1994).

But we are not confronted with a meaningless conflation of two rites. Rather, the close relationship between seeing the god in a dream and meeting him personally in the morning tells us something about how the magicians viewed these two experiences. To us, they are different: a dream is something we can understand, to meet with a god in broad daylight we can less easily stomach—we would talk about visions or ecstatic experiences. To the magicians (as, presumably, to Plotinus or to any theurgist), the two were both realities. What mattered was to meet the god and to hear his answers to one’s pressing questions.

The rôle that Apollo plays in this and similar rites fits into this pattern, as Eitrem already saw. The magician does not just call Apollo, he calls him as lord of the two most famous late oracular shrines, Claros and Delphi. He makes lavish use of laurel, Apollo’s sacred plant, even addresses one hymn to ‘Daphne, Apollo’s holy plant of presage,’ wears a laurel crown like a priest of Apollo; in two similar spells, the magician is to wear a prophet’s outfit, προφητικὸν σχῆμα (PGM I 278, IV 933, both oracles of Apollo). Thus, it is less the paradigm of incubation shrines the magicians follow, but that of the major oracular shrines of Apollo. The magicians’ aim is to experience privately and individually what the enquirers in Delphi or Claros experienced only vicariously, through priest or Sibyl.

The rites presented so far show not all but the most important variations that the theme of divination takes in the magical papyri. Two things need to be stressed. In the papyri, divination uses forms also attested outside the realm of magic (with the exception of the third case, the *systasis*). And the rites have as their goal contact with a superior divinity, not with a minor demon. The Christian identification of magic and divination, because both dealt with demons, is true only under the specifically Christian, Pauline assumption that every pagan god is, in reality, a demon.

The association of magic and divination thus seems firmly established in the 4th century, although we see enough evidence for an earlier, independent existence of both phenomena. When, then, did the association and conflation begin?¹⁸

Moving backwards in time, we stop only briefly in around AD 157, for the trial of Apuleius, the Platonic philosopher who had, in the small town of Oea in Africa, married a rich widow and was accused, by the family of her former husband, of having won her by erotic sorcery. Among the many items in the long catalogue of accusations and evidence against the young philosopher, there figured a divinatory rite. Apuleius, so the accusation goes, had performed a nocturnal sacrifice in a secret room, in the presence of only a few intimate friends, during which a slave-boy fell down in a trance—which reminds us of ‘Solomon’s Collapse.’ Apuleius himself draws the parallel to magical divination—only to show the differences: he chides his accusers who should have mentioned the purpose of the rite, divination—but rustics as they were, they had not known this technical detail when inventing their tale. However this may have been, ritual divination with a boy medium in trance is attested, in a magical context, about 200 years before the date of the Paris papyrus (Apol. 31–3).

Another step backwards in time brings us to AD 49. In this year, according to Tacitus, who is our only witness, a Roman noblewoman, Lollia Paulina, was accused of having consulted ‘the Chaldaeans, the *magi* and the oracle of Clarian Apollo with regard to the imperial wedding’—not unnaturally, since Lollia was among those whom Claudius could have married; perhaps not unnaturally also, the accusation was orchestrated by Agrippina who had married him (Ann. 12.22). The combination of Chaldaeans (astrology), traditional oracle cult (an early instance of the fame of Clarian Apollo among Imperial Romans), and *magi* sounds suggestive: obviously, the *magi* were concerned with divination as well. We cannot be certain whether these *magi* practiced any of the forms of divination we know from the papyri; I should rather think that they were astrologers. But this is less important than the simple fact that already here—if Tacitus is to be believed—the *magi* were associated with divination.

Astrology as one form of the magical arts appears, some fifteen years later, in a famous text of the period, the elder Pliny’s history of magic in book 30 of his *Questions on nature*. The ‘nonsense of magic’—*magicae vanitates*, as he has it—originated from a powerful blend of three strong ingredients—medicine, religion, and astrology: we all crave for help when ailing, we all believe in powerful superhuman

18 See Fögen 1993 for a most important and original political answer.

beings, and we all 'hunger for information about our future, and the sky seems to us the most reliable source of information' (HN 30.1). Magic, then, comprises divination, at least in the form invented and made famous by the Persians, astrology; this should not surprise us, since Pliny is well aware that the *magi*, like the Chaldaeans, are Persian priests, specialists for the sacred.

The passage (like the one about Lollia) leaves us with some frustration, on two accounts. In the magical papyri, astrology is not very prominent; it lurks somewhere in the background as part and parcel of the general culture, but it plays no role in magical divination. *Magi*, on the other hand, in Rome could always mean both sorcerers and Persian priests—that is adepts of Oriental astrology, like the Greek μάγοι; more illuminated spirits, such as the unknown author of a Hellenistic book 'On the magoi' (Arist. fr. 36 Rose), would protest against this double meaning which ascribed to the noble Persians a foul art, and it may be that this is one reason why Latin preferred the descriptive *veneficus* 'poisoner' and later the more drastic *maleficus* 'evil-doer' to designate the sorcerer. One obvious conclusion thus may be that Pliny (once again) follows literature as opposed to social contemporaneous reality and that in this reality, sorcery and divination were indeed separate.

But reality, as we should know, is not that simple. Pliny and Tacitus at least show that, in the perception of their day (and perhaps already at the time of Claudius, if Tacitus indeed reported the actual wording of the accusation), astrological divination and magical sorcery were, if not combined, at least rather closely related. This perception seems to have existed—and to have had practical consequences—at an even earlier date. In AD 16 the young Libo Drusus—an incautious and easy-going youngster, as again Tacitus has it—was induced to dabble with 'the promises of the Chaldaeans, the rites of the *magi*, and the interpreters of dreams;' this resulted in his being accused of high treason and in Tiberius' expelling Chaldaeans and *magi* from Rome (Tac. Ann. 2.27). Here Chaldaeans and *magi* are providers of different rituals, although the context again points to divinatory rites for all of them: again, the accusation may be an invention, but *artes magicae* appear in close connection with divination.

This is the first instance of this connection: before the Imperial epoch, sorcery (*magia*) and divination never seem to come together.¹⁹ Scholars conclude from this that the association had something to do with the status of divination in Imperial Rome: questions about the future of the reigning emperor were construed as high treason already under Tiberius, as the case of Libo Drusus showed (Garosi 1976:78f.). This is but a special instance for a more general problem. The Roman

19 It is also highly suggestive that it is only the late Cassius Dio who invents a discussion on the subject between Augustus and his counsellors (52.36.2f.); see Fögen 1993:130f., Potter 1994:177.

state very much insisted on its monopoly of divinatory contact with the gods—it had its *augures*, *haruspices*, *quindecimviri*; while in practice itinerant soothsayers were tolerated already in Cato's time, the state felt threatened as soon as they entered the public domain. And since at least astrology had the same origin, in Roman thinking, as sorcery (both were arts from Persia), it was easy to combine the two and ban them as un-Roman, foreign, even if actual magic at this age had nothing to do with divination.

5

This is only one side of the question—the growing association of divination and magic in the minds of Imperial Romans. The association, however, was never undisputed: even a Christian emperor, as we have seen, could have his doubts about its correctness.

The other side of the question is the reason why and when divination became really the part of magical practice as we see it in the papyri. Divination through a medium could be included among magical practices in the 2nd century, as Apuleius shows; astrology, on the other hand, though associated with magic already in Julio-Claudian times, never really belonged. The inclusion of divination within the sphere of magic does not occur before late Hellenistic times. There is no Greek or Roman evidence before the reign of Augustus, nor is there Near Eastern documentation. On the contrary: an elaborate catalogue of magical aims, from the the early Seleucid period, does not mention divination, nor do earlier lists (Ungnad 1941f., Bottéro 1985). The inclusion of divinatory rites as magical must have happened at some time under the Empire, perhaps between Augustus and Apuleius.

Why this inclusion? Three reasons spring to mind. The first was suggested already by Eitrem in 1947, when he (discreetly) voiced his dissent from the traditional dichotomy between magic as a practical technique and theurgy as a cognitive experience. Imperial magic had moved from an art nearly exclusively concerned with secret ritual help in tricky situations to something in many respects close to the gnostic and hermetic enterprise of gaining direct knowledge of the supreme deity; the papyri show that both practical and cognitive aspects coexist in the same text. This interest in divine experience, however, could stimulate an interest in divination; after all, the basis of divination is the assumption that man is able to reach out for divine knowledge about the future. This may help explain why most divinatory rites in the magical papyri do not look for the help of a demon, they ask for divine revelations.

The second reason may be the move—characteristic of Imperial times—away from traditionally established religious institutions. True, the famous oracular and

incubation shrines survived and boomed even, at least from the days of Trajan and Hadrian onwards. But it was also when many private cults were flourishing, mystery rituals without much backing in public institutions: the quest for the divine and for salvation had become a rather individualistic enterprise. In this respect, the difference between ritual incubation in a shrine and magical dream rites is more than just another instance of the isolation of the magician: it reflects the privatization of public ritual.

A third reason lies in the general rôle magic plays in many societies as a means to cope with the difficulties of life (Graf 1997). The help that magic gave in agonistic situations could easily be extended to divination as well: after all, in most struggles, the outcome is uncertain; it would be useful not only to have ritual means to influence this outcome, but also to know the outcome better. In this way of looking at the question, divination is just a logical extension of magic's basic function.

6

In the end, a final differentiation imposes itself. Although it seems clear that divination was understood as a part of magic only by the society of the Roman Empire, the factual—not the conceptual—boundary between the two was always slightly hazy. Plato, in his *Republic*, talks about 'seers and begging priests' who sell the rich Athenians their art, which comprises private initiations and binding spells (364b–c). And the practice of the γόνος—another, less friendly term for the sorcerer—could contain all sorts of marginal rituals, not the least necromancy: the same specialist who could send the souls to the nether world—this must be the original meaning of the term γόνος, to judge from its etymology—could call them up again. On a more general level, the author of the Hippocratic treatise *On the sacred disease* accuses the religious healers of merely pretending to know more than ordinary mortals: although he does not refer to divination, but to diagnosis, the step from the one to the other is a short one.

Thus, at least among those marginal religious specialists of the classical and later epochs, distinctions are difficult to draw. After all, these people had to earn a living from men's spiritual (and often very practical) needs; the craving for foreknowledge is, among all of us, as potent as the craving for revenge, victory, sexual gratification, and the fear of death. We should be wary of drawing too clear distinctions—as the Derveni papyrus recently showed.²⁰ Its author, we all knew, had something to do with Orphism in its more philosophical form, and with mysteries—at least, he once speaks out against those specialists in initiation who, instead

20 See the contributions in Laks and Most 1996, esp. 93–128 (the new text, presented by K. Tsatsanoglou).

of illuminating their clients, do nothing of the sort. The newly published fragments add two more details about this man—that he had a sound knowledge of the rites of the μάγοι (whatever they were), and that he had something to do with divination: he is accustomed to enter, as he puts it, oracular shrines at the behest of others. Divination, μάγοι, and Orphism all blend into a mixture that is difficult to unscramble.

This does not mean that I plead for general obfuscation in our studies. I still hold that magic and divination were two different forms of religious activity before the Augustan age, and that the conceptualization of magic did not contain divination. But the two never were entirely shut off from each other. When the magical papyri included divination rites, when later the Christians bluntly identified magic and divination, they could build on earlier—Greek—perceptions and practices.

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