

ANNEMARIE LUIJENDIJK – WILLIAM E. KLINGSHIRN (EDS.), “My Lots are Thy Hands”: Sortilege and its Practitioners in Late Antiquity (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 188). Leiden – Boston: Brill 2018. xvii, 392 pp. – ISBN: 978-90-04-38410-1 (129 EURO).

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Out of ten contributions that formed the body of the volume on ancient divination that appeared in the “Religions in the Greco-Roman World” series of Brill in 2005, three were devoted to lot divination.¹ This is revealing for the significance of sortilege within the divinatory techniques, but also indicative for the scholarly focus that cleromancy received in the last decade, and perhaps as a sign foretelling the advent of a volume fully dedicated to this divination method published in the same series thirteen years later.

The present volume is a conference proceeding, as it gathers essays based on papers that were presented in 2011 at a conference convened at Princeton. The volume addresses topics related to lot divination, “arguably [...] the most widespread form of divination in antiquity” (p. 1). According to the firmly established structure of the series to which this volume belongs, the thirteen individual contributions are not associated in thematic chapters but left as individual parts. For convenience, the chapters are listed at the end of this review.

The succinct introduction (pp. 1–18) provides preliminary coordinates: lot divination is properly defined, and its mechanisms are briefly exposed. Moreover, this opening section addresses the issue of randomness – the prime component of sortition – and contrasts the signification it had for those consulting lots in divination with the modern sense of randomness. Furthermore, the editors explain the choice of the volume’s title (the quotation from Ps 30[31]:15–6), outline the scholarship of sortilege, and offer direction for future research.

The introduction is expanded on within a more extensive piece by the editors. Most of “The Literature of Lot divination” (pp. 19–59) is devoted to classifying lot texts from the 3rd to the 8th centuries into four groups according to the method of organisation and the technique through which an

1. SARAH ILES JOHNSTON – PETER STRUCK (eds.), *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 155). Leiden: Brill 2005.

answer is retrieved. Each text is succinctly treated, and bibliography on editions, translations, and scholarship is indicated.

As its title announces, in the second chapter “The Instruments of Lot divination” (pp. 60–77) KLINGSHIRN discusses the natural and artificial instruments of sortilege (and of other means of divination), namely their place within the set of arguments of those raising opposition to sortition and to divination at large. KLINGSHIRN voices the objections to (lot) divination (e.g., by Artemidorus or Porphyry) and their refutation (by Iamblichus). Augustin’s Christian position is similar to that of Iamblichus in that they both endorse the instrument of divination while disapproving of diviners. Also, Christian acceptance of lot divination was based on “God’s willingness to share divine knowledge with humankind” (p. 77).

In the next piece “Fateful Spasms” (pp. 78–100), COSTANZA deals with a lesser-studied form of divination, the art of interpreting involuntary movements of the human body, like twitches, tremors and shakes (palmomancy), which were “considered to be the direct expression of divine will” (p. 81). Contrary to what literary evidence suggests, palmomancy must have been a very widespread divinatory method, since it seems that it just required access to a twitch-book. Among others, the author argues against the erroneous labelling of palmomancy as chiromantic lore (p. 86), and based on palaeographical evidence, he remarks that scribes of twitch-guides sought to emulate the form of Christian manuscripts to promote their products. At the end of his piece, COSTANZA appends a repository of palmomantic papyri.

The following four chapters deal with bibliomancy, that is, consulting sacred books in divination. The first two contributions in this sequence cover similar material, a corpus of concise statements –called *hermēneiai* in the manuscripts– chained to portions of John’s Gospel (and, exceptionally, of that of Luke) in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, and Georgian biblical papyri and codices. Recent scholarship sought to find an initial function that these *hermēneiai* would have fulfilled, to which the oracular came later. In his chapter, however, WILKINSON (pp. 101–23) establishes that the *hermēneiai* and the Gospel text are indeed connected in sense and/or through common vocabulary, hence they are indeed oracularly interpretations (as their name suggests) of the Christian scripture that make it easy to use in divination. While WILKINSON focuses mostly on Greek and Latin material, in the next piece CHILDERS (pp. 124–37) introduces a new witness to the corpus of papyri and codices with such oracular answers, namely

a 6th/7th century Syriac Peshitta manuscript of John's Gospel. WILKINSON shows the direct relation between the *hermēneiai* attached to the text of John in this manuscript (*puššākē*) and those in Greek, Latin and Armenian gospels.

Next, MEERSON (pp. 138–53) takes up yet another lot text that alleges to interpret a sacred book, namely the Homeromanteion, a cento-like composition of 216 Homeric verses from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* consulted in divination. MEERSON argues that the quotes are selected not just based on their context within the Homeric poems, since in many cases the verses selected in the Homeromanteion would have been already acquired proverbial status, and, thus, multiple meanings that were remote from the initial ones. The compiler of the Homeric lines turned into lots, MEERSON concludes, must have been a well-versed exegete of Homer, such as Aristarchus.

The seventh chapter (pp. 154–72) by VAN DER HORST discusses the divinatory use of the Jewish scripture(s) and seeks to answer first the question of how may one interpret the fact that except for two ambiguous instances from the book of the Maccabees (2nd century BCE), the certain usage of the Jewish scripture(s) in sortition is attested only in late antique sources (3rd to 6th centuries CE). Even then, the author shows, bibliomancy appears in its cledonomatic form. VAN DER HORST emphasizes that this gap parallels the one in the usage of Homer for oracular purposes. This section on bibliomancy properly ends with the answer to whether one may speak of dependence in the use of the sacred book(s) in sortition by 'pagans', Jews and Christians, or rather not. According to VAN DER HORST, "these developments probably took place independently from one another and on parallel lines" (p. 172).

The next contribution (pp. 173–195) is devoted to *Sortes Barberianae* [SB], a lot system extant in just a sixteenth-century manuscript. In the preparation of a critical edition of SB STEWART offers a wide range of arguments for a reconsideration of SB by scholarship. For instance, STEWART reconstructs the steps taken by the compiler of both the SB and its *Vorlage* (the much more popular *Sortes Astrampsychi* [SA]) and shows that the compiler of the former did not entirely comprehend the intricate system of the latter.

Two unpublished fragments found at Oxyrhynchus are at the core of the next section (pp. 196–210). The content of the papyri reveals that they were part of two divinatory miniature codices, which, as KOČAR shows, were

used for drawing lots. KOCAR makes the case that the miniature books were produced by a Christian minister at the shrine of Saint Philoxenus, and that the oracular dicta must have been consulted by clients gathering at the Church to Philoxenus for the numerous celebrations taking place at this eminent religious site. KOCAR'S analysis of the papyri and their social context is built on observations that may aid the reader to better understand the material discussed throughout this volume –*e.g.*, the discussion on oracles being considered, in a oversimplifying manner, to be mere “‘survivals’ from ancient Egypt into late antique Christian Egypt” (p. 208); and also of the remark that material like the two papyri proves that the organization of the corpus of sortilege texts given in the first chapter, though useful, must not be taken as absolute.

Just like the previous chapter that attempted to flesh out the context of two particular Egyptian miniature lot books, the chapter by FRANKFURTER does the same for all divination textual types (lot books, ticket oracles, but also magical texts) of late antique Egypt (pp. 211–31). FRANKFURTER'S discussion revolves around the scribal ritual context. Through these textual artefacts, one envisages the mediation between the authority of the church and the daily needs of the laity since through the scribes' creative agency the utility of the Scripture was extended to diverse social crises. Also, given that in the lot collections the answers come directly from God, they have a “monotheizing character”, hence, they fulfilled a didactic function (p. 219). As previously KOCAR, FRANKFURTER also underlines the fact that the literary evidence of *sortes* and spells points towards the authorship of ecclesiastical scribes or literate monks, instead of ‘diviners’. FRANKFURTER parallels these late antique Christian ritual scribal experts to *däbtäras*, ecclesiastical affiliates that are producing exorcistic rolls in modern Ethiopia. He also notes that sortilege through tickets was by no means “a ‘heathen’ practice, nor even marginal to some putative orthopraxy” (p. 217).

The two following chapters interrogate the SA on two particular issues, namely the legal system and the economy, although the SA is supplemented by samples from similar divinatory literary artefacts (ticket oracles, letter to gods etc.). Looking at material that concerns legal matters from as early as 1550 BCE, NAETHER seeks to establish that oracles were indeed part of the Egyptian judicial system and that the divine justice (*Gottesurteil*) established through divination was needed in trials in certain cases (pp. 232–47). On the other hand, RATZAN proposes an engaging economic reading of SA and contends that qualitative change in the economic queries is notice-

able in Roman Egypt as compared to earlier times (pp. 248–89). RATZAN regards oracles as an information-gathering technique for individuals making economic decisions, and the shift, he argues, is dependent from similar changes of the socio-economical coordinates of Roman rule.

“Uncertainty” is what links RATZAN’S chapter to the last two ones. In the thirteenth chapter (pp. 290–308), we switch from the economic uncertainty to anxiety. NASRALLAH nuances the phrase through which Dodds, in his book from 1965, labeled the two centuries between Marcus Aurelius and Constantine I – “an age of anxiety”. NASRALLAH interprets a series of brief statements in the first person singular made by Tatian in his *Oration to the Greeks* as citations of *sortes* through which the Christian writer, the only among the Christian writers from the first two centuries that mentions cleromancy, overtly claims to resist this means of coping with anxiety. NASRALLAH places Tatian in the middle of the debate on free will vs. deterministic fate (*heimarmenē*).

Last, LUIJENDIJK continues the discussion and analyzes the vocabulary of doubt and doublemindedness, thus expanding on findings given elsewhere² (pp. 309–29). LUIJENDIJK records that exhortations not to doubt or vacillate emerge throughout the corpus of cleromantic Latin, Greek, and Coptic texts, and they replace the simpler label given to these texts – “truthful”. In this respect, *sortes* literary witnesses offer a terminology common to that of prayers (e.g., the “doublemindedness” of *sortes* texts has its correspondence in “who-hearted” from Christian narratives on prayers), which according to LUIJENDIJK was an ingenious strategy of bringing *sortes* into the realm of prayer. Indeed, “how does one respond to the vagaries of life? [...] With Christian prayer? With a ‘magic text’?” (p. 303) “Or with *sortes*?” one should add.

Because of the endurance of lot divination and the textual transmission of late antique lot texts in medieval Greek manuscripts, this volume certainly addresses not just those interested in the history of ancient and late antique divination but also scholars of Byzantium. The section in which the editors propose potential avenues for further research sets forth the task of investigating the connections between the divinatory material gathered in the manuscripts transmitting the SA or other lot texts. I would say that this need to be taken up by Byzantinists.

2. *Forbidden Oracles? The Gospel of the Lots of Mary* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 89). Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2014), pp. 77–8.

Just a few conspicuous typos and mistakes made their way into the volume without lessening its value: “Virginian lots” (p. 51, n106); “secrete knowl- edge” (p. 87); “Geogorius Kedrenus” (p. 149); “edited by edited by” (p. 232); “can discuss” lacks the subject (p. 246). As expected, the generous indices (pp. 375–92) make the book easily accessible, and the bibliography (pp. 331–74) incorporates entirely the vast array of references made within the volume.

The present volume with contributions from well-established scholars of the field is a timely addition to the scholarship of sortition in late antiquity and middle ages and a valuable instrument for further research.

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Keywords

divination; lot divination; oracle; sortition; *sortes biblicae*