

The divinatory kit from Pergamon and Greek magic in late antiquity

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Introduction

Divination was one of the most important features of the learned magical arts in the Imperial period.¹ Not only do the Graeco-Egyptian 'magical papyri' contain an abundance of recipes which claim to enable the practitioner to know the future, but several ancient authors attest that divination was of special interest to occultists. Recent scholarship has indeed recognised the importance of divination in ritual-magical practice,² but the relevant archaeological evidence has not been much discussed since the publication of the second volume of Th. Hopfner's *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber* in 1924. The major new evidence here has been the Near-Eastern divination- and incantation-bowls.³ The present article, however, is concerned with the possible implications of a much older find, the divination kit from Pergamon, and its recently-discovered analogue from Apamea in Syria, for the study of specifically theurgic divination. The rôle of magical ritual within theurgy has received considerable attention in recent years,⁴ but the relevance of the divination kits has not hitherto been noticed. I shall argue that the physical instruments employed in theurgic divination help us to understand several features of theurgic practice. I shall also stress the possible contribution of magical gems in the same context, for in them we can recognise images and attributes of divine beings with whom magicians and theurgists identified themselves during their performances.

The divinatory kits from Pergamon and Apameia

The German excavations in the Lower Town at Pergamon between 1886 and 1898 brought to light near Sultan-Emin mosque a complete set of instruments for private divination, which were dated by R. Wünsch to the late 3rd c. A.D.⁵ The objects are now in the Antikensammlung of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, which in 1999 moved back from Charlottenburg to the Museumsinsel. Although for technical reasons it has not been possible recently to re-examine the divination kit, Wünsch's original description, written in 1905, remains valid. The items contained in the ensemble can be described as follows:

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- 1 My use of the term "magical" is purely conventional and refers primarily to the specialised forms of non-collective religious ritual for a variety of purposes known to us from the 'magical papyri' and implied by the 'magical amulets', together with their theurgic analogues, especially the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which aimed at ritual *syntaxis* (contact with the divine). The term thus implies no opposition between 'religion' and 'magic'.
 - 2 S. Eitrem, "Dreams and divination in magical ritual," in C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (edd.), *Magika hiera. Ancient Greek magic and religion* (New York 1991) 175-87; F. Graf, "Magic and divination," in D. R. Jordan, H. Montgomery and E. Thomassen (edd.), *The world of ancient magic. Papers from the First Int. Samson Eitrem Seminar, Athens 1997* (Bergen 1999) 283-98.
 - 3 E.g., J. A. Montgomery, *Aramaic incantation texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia 1916); C. O. Isbell, *Corpus of Aramaic incantation bowls* (Missoula 1975); P. Ginoux, *Incantations magiques syriaques* (Louvain 1987); J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and magic bowls* (Leiden 1985); J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Magic spells and formulae: Aramaic incantations of late antiquity* (Jerusalem 1993); J. B. Segal, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaean incantation bowls in the British Museum* (London 2001).
 - 4 G. Luck, "Theurgy and forms of worship in Neoplatonism," in J. Neusner, E. Frerichs and P. Flesher (edd.), *Religion, science and magic: in concert and in conflict* (New York 1989) 185-225; S. I. Johnston, *Hekate Soteira* (Atlanta 1990) 77-148; C. van Liefferinge, *La théurgie, des Oracles Chaldaïques à Proclus* (Kernos Suppl. 9, Liège 1999).
 - 5 A. Conze and C. Schuchhardt, "Die Arbeiten zu Pergamon 1886-1898," *AthMitt* 24 (1899) 199-200; R. Wünsch, *Antikes Zaubergerät aus Pergamon* (JdI Ergh. 6, 1905); K. A. Neugebauer, *Führer durch das Antiquarium*, 1: *Bronzen* (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin 1924) 80-81.