

Divination in the Derveni Papyrus
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In this paper I will look at Column V of the papyrus and then, more briefly, at Column VI, in hopes of better understanding two issues. First, in what sorts of divinatory practices did the author of the Derveni Papyrus (hereafter the 'Author') engage, and what did he imagine those practices to accomplish? And second, what did he mean when he complained that other people disbelieved in (ἀπιστοῦσι) or misunderstood (ἀμα[θίη) what divination had to offer?¹

Let me clarify one thing at the outset. I will be using the word "divination" in a broad sense here: I define it as the acquisition of knowledge humans would not otherwise have, through a variety of methods. Likewise, I define "diviner" as anyone who practices one of these methods, from enthused mouthpieces such as the Pythia to a dream diviners to interpreters of omens and readers of entrails. Later in the paper, I will briefly discuss the question of who the

¹ Throughout this paper, unless otherwise noted, I will use the text of Tsantsanoglou and Parássoglou 2006.

Author of Columns V and VI is, in the sense of what sorts of rituals he included in his repertoire, but for the moment I will assume only, as most of us have,² that the Author was an independent ritual practitioner who could operate as a diviner, an initiator and perhaps other things as well, and that in our papyrus, among other things, he was trying to clarify for his audience the significance of some of the rituals that he offered.

The first question we need to ask about Column V is: who is the "we" of the phrase "for them *we* enter the *manteion* to enquire" (αὐτοῖς πάριμεν εἰς τὸ μαντεῖον ἐπερωτήσοντες) in line 4? Theokritos Kouremenos, in his commentary to the new edition, has already pointed out that Herodotus uses the phrase πάριμεν εἰς τὸ μαντεῖον of the Pythia entering the Oracle at Delphi, and that Euripides uses a similar phrase. In other authors we find variations such as κάτεισιw εἰς τὸ μαντεῖον.³ All of these reflect the fact that, before the Pythia became inspired, she entered a physically discrete space that had

² Tsantsanoglou 1997; West 1997 and 1983; Janko 1997 draws a parallel with Empedocles; Betegh 2004:78-83 leans towards the possibility that he was a *magos*. Henrichs 1984 is against these interpretations; he thinks the author is an anti-Orphic. Obbink 1997 is also cautious on the question although he notes that a firm case against the Author being a practitioner is yet to be made. Kouremenos 2006:45-58 reviews all previous discussions and leans towards the conclusion that he was not a practitioner.

³ E.g., Plu. *The Oracles at Delphi* 397a and *Obsolescence of Oracles* 438b.

been dedicated to the purpose. In other words, it seems that the "we" in *πάριμεν εἰς τὸ μαντεῖον* are people similar to the Pythia insofar as they operate out of one or more institutional oracles.⁴

This brings us to a problem: the Pythia and individuals like her did not also operate, as far as we know, as independent diviners, much less as private initiators, which are two aspects of what most of us assume our Author did. This is not to say that the two types of diviners opposed one another. Myth made independent diviners such as Calchas and Mopsus the founders of oracles, and certain families of *manteis* were historically affiliated with oracles: the Iamids were connected with the oracle of Zeus at Olympia, for instance.⁵ Oracles sometimes recommended the services of independent diviners such as Epimenides, who at the advice of Delphi was brought in by the Athenians to solve the problems they suffered after the Cylonian Affair. Independent diviners, moreover, sometimes recommended that their clients consult Delphi. Indeed, Plutarch says that it was the local *manteis* who told Athens to

⁴ The verb *ἐπερωτάω*, found in line 4 of Column V, is also common in descriptions of making enquiries at institutional oracles.

⁵ For details on these and similar stories, see Johnston 2008: 81-2, 94, 128,

enquire at Delphi when they could not solve the Cylonian problem themselves.⁶ So, there could be cooperation between institutional oracles and independent diviners but nonetheless, as far as our sources indicate, independent diviners never also served at institutional oracles in the sort of role that the Pythia did.⁷

Our Author goes on to mention two other sorts of divination: divination through dreams, in line 6, and, in line 7, what Tsantanoglou in 1997 and subsequently Kouremenos, in the commentary to the new edition, have interpreted to mean "omens" or "portents": ἄλλα πραγμάτα.

Both dream interpretation and the reading of omens are techniques characteristic of independent diviners. Putting that observation together with the Author's reference to institutional oracles in lines 3 through 5, I would interpret the fragmentary statements that open Column V as what remains of a generalizing statement. Our Author is not talking only about himself and people

⁶ Epimenides: Parke & Wormell no. 13 = Fontenrose no. Q65 = Diog.Laert. 1.10.110; cf. Plut. *Solon* 12, Pl. *Lg.* 642d4-643a1 and Jacoby at *FGrH* 457F4 (esp. 4e: Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.26.4). Discussion at Johnston 2008:119-25.

⁷ The reasons for this are obvious: institutional oracles took care to keep their diviners isolated, away from potentially corrupting influences, during the duration of their terms of service. And at most oracles, official business kept the diviner busy; he or she did not have time to freelance. Even if the Pythia gave forth inspired oracles only one day a month, she participated in divination by lot on other days, for instance.

just like him when he uses the first person plural. Rather, what he means to express is that humans have available to them a *variety* of methods for learning things that they would not otherwise know – including methods that the Author does not practice himself as well as some that he probably does – but that *all* of this divinatory effort is wasted because people either do not understand completely what divination tries to convey, or do not believe it, in spite of the efforts of experts such as himself.

More specifically in this case, as becomes clear as the column continues, people do not understand or believe what diviners can teach them about the "horrors of Hades" ("Αιδου δεινά). What are these horrors? And what questions are people asking during divinatory enquiries that leads to their revelation?

Let us start with the second issue. We seem to have the beginning of a question that people would ask an oracle in line 5: that is, whether it is *themis* (εἰ θέμις) to do something – we are missing the rest of the phrase. Kouremenos found the phrase puzzling in this context because he found virtually no evidence for use of the phrase εἰ θέμις or cognates within our records either of

questions that were asked of oracles or of the answers that they received. (The more common way of making an enquiry was to ask whether something was ἄμεινον or λωίον or both.⁸) The only instance that Kouremenos could cite for the use of εἰ θέμις in an oracular context comes from Porphyry's *On Abstinence*: Apollo tells a certain *episkopos* that it is not *themis* to sacrifice sheep unless they first have nodded their heads in assent.⁹

But we can, in fact, add a few more instances in which *themis* or its cognates appear in oracular questions or answers. In a fragment of another Apolline oracle, quoted by Porphyry in his *Philosophy from Oracles*, Apollo tells the listener to sacrifice animals 'in the proper way' (ὡς θέμις ἐστί).¹⁰ In a first century C.E. oracle that may be from Didyma, Apollo instructs his listeners about whom it is proper (θέμις ἐστί) for them to allow to enter the *anaktora* of Athena.¹¹ Somewhat similarly, in another Didymean oracle from the third century, Apollo says that it is "proper for him to give the enquirer an oracle" ([τῷ

⁸Cf. *Laws* 828a.

⁹ Parke & Wormell no. 537, = Fontenrose no. L147 = Porph. *Abst.* 2.9

¹⁰ Fr. 314 Smith line 24= Eus. *PE* IV.9

¹¹ Text at M. Wörrle, 'Inschriften von Herakleia am Latmos II: Das Priestertum von Athena Latmia,' *Chiron* 20 (1990) 19-58 = *SEG* 40 (1990) no. 956 = *SGOst* I, 1998, no. 01/23/02; discussed by Busine 2005:169 and 182-3.

χρησαί μ' εἰσαῦθις ἀνειρομένω θεμι[τόν σοι.]¹² As Busine notes, uses of *themis* and its cognates in these and other Apolline oracles suggest that the words of the god, as conveyed through oracles, are in conformity with established law or custom, or are of parallel significance. This should not be too surprising: the word *themis*, after all, means both "law or custom" and, especially in the plural, "oracular utterance." Themis herself was worshipped at oracular sites and mythologically credited with having run them at early stages of their existence.¹³ Oracles, laws and custom, in other words, shared the important job of informing people how to act properly, as well as to their own benefit.

It must also be remembered that there are numerous instances in which we do not have the exact phrasing of either the question asked of an oracle or the reply that it gave, especially in cases in which the enquiry has been embedded in a narrative source. If we had more examples of exactly what was asked and exactly what was

¹² *I. Didyma* 277 = Rob. D-56 = Fontenrose 29 = *SGOst* I, 1998, no. 01/19/10; text and discussion in Busine 2005:169 and 181-2. Cf. also a second-century oracle from Claros to the citizens of Kaisareia Troketta, which enjoins them to carry out Apollo's orders "in accordance with the law (or custom)": κατά τεθμον: Buresch, *Klaros*, p. 8-9 = *IGR* IV 1498 = Rob. C-14 = Merkelbach-Stauber, *EA* 27 (1996) no. 8 = *SGOst* I, 1998 no. 04/01/01.

¹³ See Johnston 2008:57-60.

answered, we might find yet other uses of *themis* or its cognates in oracular settings. Certainly, we know that the Delphic Oracle was credited with resolving a number of issues that, like those mentioned above, would better be described as issues of *themis* – that is, whether something was *proper* to do – than issues of whether something was *profitable* to do. Two cases can be used to exemplify this, in neither of which our source provides the specific words of the question posed to the oracle.

The first case comes from Herodotus. Cleisthenes wanted to throw the hero Adrastus out of Sicyon – that is, Cleisthenes wanted to abolish Adrastus' long-standing cult within the city. It is possible to imagine that the formal question that Cleisthenes put to the Oracle included a phrase built around the word *themis* – something such as "is it *themis* to abolish Adrastus' cult?" or "is it *themis* to remove Adrastus' remains beyond the borders of the city?"¹⁴

My second case also involves Sicyon. Plutarch tells us that in the late third century, the Sicyonians wanted to bury the corpse of their statesman Aratus within their city walls, in spite of a long-

¹⁴ Parke & Wormall no. 24 = Fontenrose no. Q74 = Herodotus 5.67.2. Apollo withheld his approval.

standing custom (*nomos*) against intramural burial and also in spite of, Plutarch says, local superstition (*deisidaimonia*) against such a thing. In other words, intramural burial contravened what was understood to be *themis*. We might imagine that the formal question put to Delphi was something such as "is it *themis* to bury Aratus' body within the city walls?"¹⁵

Column V might have discussed something similar. The Author seems to be complaining that divinatory experts know what the horrors of Hades are and that some of these experts, at least, enter *manteia* to ask whether it is proper to do certain things in connection with them, but that ordinary people persist in either disbelieving part or all of what the experts subsequently tell them or in misunderstanding it.

Exactly what it was that was questionably *themis* in this case must remain open, although my own hunch is that whatever followed εἰ θέμις was either very general, expressing the *sorts* of things that the experts might be expected ask, such as "is it proper to contravene our burial customs?" or was a specific question that

¹⁵ Plutarch *Life of Aratus* 53.2 = Parke & Wormall no. 358 = Fontenrose no. Q235. Apollo gave his approval.

exemplified the larger category, such as "is it proper to leave bodies unburied?" Not being a papyrologist, I cannot go further in suggesting phrases that would fit the lacuna. But in any case, what I want emphasize is simply that issues of *themis* are not out of place at oracles – indeed, they are very much at home.

I will return now to the first question that I posed above: what are the "horrors of Hades" that divination reveals? Scholars have tended to assume that they are the horrors that await the souls of people who have not been initiated: wallowing in mud or carrying water in a sieve, for example. This is understandable, given that the papyrus interprets an Orphic poem and Orpheus was known as a poet who described the fate of the soul in the afterlife and what to do about it.

But as Kouremenos has noted in his commentary, oracles were virtually never asked what the afterlife was like. He found one exception – according to Porphyry, Amelius enquired at an oracle about where the soul of Plotinus had gone after death.¹⁶ There is another exception from Didyma, where a man named Polites

¹⁶ Parke & Wormall no. 473 = Fontenrose no. H69 = Porphyry *Life of Plotinus* 22.

enquired in the late second century CE about what happened to souls after death.¹⁷ But both of these oracles are from a late period, when questions of a theological nature were more frequently being asked of oracles. The probability that during the fourth century BCE any of the oracles for which we have good evidence – Delphi, Dodona, Claros, Didyma – provided information about what awaited the souls of people who had not been initiated is virtually nil. Moreover, to turn to the other divinatory method specifically mentioned by our Author, we have no record of dreams indicating what would happen to souls in the afterlife, or how they should prepare for it, either.¹⁸

So, we are left with two choices. First, we could choose to imagine that there were divinatory specialists, as represented generally by the first person plural subject in Column V, who worked out of one or more oracles different from any we now know about, specializing in information about the fate of the individual

¹⁷ Polites at Didyma: Lactantius *Inst. Div.* 7.13 = *Theosophia Tub.* 37; cf. Fox 1986:192-93; Busine 2005: 213-14. Apollo replied "While the soul is still in the body, it tolerates the pains that cannot hurt it. When the body fades and dies, the soul ranges freely through the air, ageless, forever unwearied. For this is the ordinance of divine providence."

¹⁸ The closest we come is Er's out-of-body experience, but neither Er himself nor Plato calls that a dream, whatever Cicero chose to make of it. The standard way of conveying such information was through the inspired words of poets such as Orpheus.

soul in afterlife and what could be done about it. The Oracle of Orpheus on Lesbos might be a tempting candidate, were it not that what little we hear about it comes only from Philostratus and that Philostratus tells us it was used as a local alternative for those who did not wish to travel to Delphi, Dodona or other oracles in mainland Greece. In other words, it marketed itself as offering the same services as these others did.¹⁹

Our second choice is to assume that the oracles, dreams and portents concerning Hades to which our Author refers gave information of a different kind from what most scholars have presumed – not about the potentially horrible postmortem fates of the people who were in the Author's audience, but about something else of a horrible nature that was happening in Hades, or something horrible arising *out of* Hades.

And in fact, the institutional oracle for which we have the fullest record, that at Delphi, provided a lot of information about a particular sort of horror connected with Hades. From early times till late, Delphic oracles reported on the anger of souls who were

¹⁹ Philostr. *VA* 4.14 and *Her.* 28.9.

already in Hades, and how that anger could in turn affect the living.²⁰

These oracles I am talking about, at least according to the longer narratives in which most of them are embedded, were precipitated by people going to Delphi to find out why terrible things were happening – why their city had been beset by plague or famine, why the local women were sterile or why some other disaster had struck them – even, in one case, why they kept losing at the Olympic Games. According to the pattern common in these stories, Apollo tells them that the disasters are due to the anger of one or more ghost. Usually, Apollo goes on to explain *why* the ghosts are angry (they are murder victims, or their bodies have been left unburied, or they feel that they deserve heroic cult that has not yet been given to them). I collected all such Delphic oracles in an article I published a several years ago; they comprise just over 10% of our corpus. I offer just a few examples here to illustrate the way that most of the stories run.

²⁰ Johnston 2005.

In a case I have already mentioned, Apollo told the Athenians to end a plague and other disasters by calling in Epimenides to lay the ghosts of those who had been murdered at the altars of the Semnai Theai. In another instance, the inhabitants of Caphyae in Arcadia were told that they could stop a spate of miscarriages by burying the bodies of children whom they had stoned after the children had blasphemed Artemis, and to establish cult to the dead children.²¹ Similarly, Delphi told the Ephesian tyrant Pythagoras that he could stop a plague in *his* city by burying the corpse of a girl whom he had murdered and establishing cult to her.²² Apollo told the people of Delphi to end a plague by propitiating the ghost of Aesop, whom they had murdered.²³ To get back to that case of local pride and sporting disaster, Apollo told the Achaeans that the reason they repeatedly lost at the Olympics was that they had failed to establish cult for a dead athlete named Oibatas. They erected a

²¹ Children stoned to death in Caphyae: Parke-Wormall 385 = Fontenrose L91 = Paus. 8.23.7

²² Pythagoras the Tyrant: Parke & Wormall no. 27 = Fontenrose no. Q82ng = Sud. s.v. *Pythagoras Ephesios* (Ael. fr. 48 = Baton *FGrH* 268F3).

²³ Aesop and the people of Delphi: Parke & Wormall no. 58 = Fontenrose no. Q107ng = Hdt. 2.134.4.

statue of him at Olympia and started to win again.²⁴ And to end with a famous literary instance of the pattern: when the Thebans were beset by plague, famine and sterility, the Oracle told them to seek out the murderer of Laius and set the matter straight.²⁵

These cases and many others indicate that the Delphic Oracle repeatedly sent the message that the dead could and would make life miserable for the living until the living made things better for the dead: there were horrible things in Hades and they could make things horrible for those who dwelt above ground as well. Of course, I am relaying the pattern to you in the same way as our sources usually narrate it. That is: first, disaster strikes; then, puzzled people go to Delphi to ask what the cause is; and finally, they are told that certain ghosts are angry and must be propitiated. We must assume that in reality, the enquirers often already suspected what Delphi's answer would be – that is, we must assume that they went to the Oracle with some expectation of being told that a particular local scandal of either the recent or distant past had precipitated the current problem. It may even be that the enquirer

²⁴ The Achaean losing streak at the Olympics: Parke & Wormall no. 118 = Fontenrose no. Q169g = Paus. 6.3.8.

²⁵ Soph. *OT* 95-141.

had already been told what the problem was through a local form of divination and wanted Delphi to confirm it. Pindar provides an example of this when he says that Pelias first learned that the ghost of Phrixus wanted to be brought home from Colchis, where his body had been buried, when the ghost cried out to him in a dream.

Pelias – not being sure whether this was right – sent to Delphi to ask whether the dream should be heeded and Apollo confirmed Phrixus' request – thus precipitating the voyage of the Argo.²⁶

In any case, whether it be through knowledge of earlier dreams and portents, knowledge of local affairs, or simple common sense, if the Delphic Oracle operated like most oracles in most cultures do, then its officials probably had a good idea, consciously or subconsciously, of the answers that would be suitable for a given enquiry. They must have known, for example, that the Orchomenians would accept a command to bring home Hesiod's bones if they wanted to end a plague,²⁷ and that the Tegeans, in turn,

²⁶ Pi., P 4. 156-64.

²⁷ The bones of Hesiod: Parke & Wormall no. 207 = Fontenrose no. L42 = Paus. 9.38.3.

would accept a command to establish hero cult to their ancestor Skephros if they wanted to end a famine.²⁸

But having brought up Pelias' dream, let me pause for a moment on the broader topic of dreams. Our Author mentioned them in a manner suggesting that they could also make known the discontent of the dead. To give another famous example: we see this in the *Choephoroi*, where professional dream interpreters tell Clytemnestra that her nightmares were caused by Agamemnon's wrath. "Those under the earth hold a grudge and are angry with those who killed them."²⁹ According to a later passage in the same play, Apollo told Orestes that if he failed to avenge Agamemnon, not only would he get disgusting skin diseases, but the dead would send nocturnal "madness" and "fear" (*lussa* and *phobos*) upon him—really bad dreams, in other words.³⁰

Finally, to take up the third type of divination mentioned in Column V— ἄλλα πραγμάτα, omens or portents— we can find cases that fit the pattern as well. In the *Antigone*, for instance,

²⁸ Hero cult for Scephrus: Parke & Wormall no. 566 = Fontenrose no. L154 = Paus. 8.53.3

²⁹ Aes. *Ch.* 37 ff. The same sequence plays out in Sophocles' version of the story.

³⁰ Aes. *Ch.* 269 ff.

Tiresias says that he has been given signs (σημεῖα) that something is awry between the world of the living and the world of the dead. First, he sat at a special place that was dedicated to divining by birds – the παλαιὸν θᾶκον ὀρνιθοσκόπον – and heard bird cries like none he had ever heard before – mad and inarticulate. Then, he tried to sacrifice but the "omens of the rites failed,"³¹ as he put it. As he goes on to explain, all of these signs indicate that Creon must "yield to the dead" (εἶκε τῷ θανόντι). A second example comes from Aelian's *Historical Miscellany*: a fountain of blood erupted in the temple to Hera in Sybaris. When the Sybarites consulted Delphi, the Oracle explained that this reflected the fact that they had murdered a suppliant at Hera's altar.³²

Let me sum up what I have suggested so far. Drawing on the examples I have just offered and others like them, I suggest that when our Author talks about the "horrors of Hades" that are revealed by oracles or dreams or portents, he means miseries that *those already dead* are suffering, which causes them, in turn, to inflict

³¹ Soph. *Ant.* 998-1022.

³² the Sybaritic fountain of blood: Parke & Wormall no. 74 = Fontenrose no. Q123ng = Ael. *VH* 3.43.

miseries on the living. But understanding this doesn't solve all of our problems of course. We need to consider how the Author considered such information about Hades to be relevant to the kinds of rituals that he performed or expected other people to perform, and what disparity may lie between *his* interpretation of the information and that of the ordinary people, who apparently don't heed his advice.

I will start by eliminating some otherwise attractive possible interpretations. Oracles, dreams and omens about how the already dead were faring in the afterlife could not provide even a rough behavioral model for the living. In stories like those I have been telling you, the dead suffered because of things that were beyond their control: they had been murdered, for example, or had not received the cult they deserved. Nor are we to imagine, I think, that the Author means to suggest to his audience that they all need to assuage *specific* ghosts in the same manner as the oracles and dreams directed: it simply could not have been the case that all of them had committed murder or otherwise offended specific individuals among the dead.

This is not to say that our Author might not have performed, or directed others to perform, rituals that would solve problems such as those the Delphi Oracle described; the sort of practitioner whom most of us envision this Author to be wore more than one hat, and could have been a *psychagôgos* in addition to everything else.

Epimenides is an ideal example of such a combination: he was a *mantis*; he visited the Athenians at the Delphic Oracle's recommendation in order to lay troublesome ghosts; while there he established *teletai* for the Athenians and modified their funerary customs; and he even wrote theogonic poetry – the sort of poetry that our Author is interested in.³³ Epimenides, incidentally, shared yet another trait with our Author. According to Clement of Alexandria, Epimenides claimed to be able to purify anyone from any difficulty, whether of the soul or of the body, by means of *teletai*, and to identify its cause (καὶ τὸ αἴτιον εἶπειν).³⁴ Like our Author, Epimenides wasn't content with simply performing rituals; he

³³ Sources for Epimenides above n. 6.

³⁴ FGH 457 4e = Clem. Al. *Protrep* 2.26.4. Cf. also Pl. *Meno* 81a5-c4: "those who tell it are priests and priestesses of the sort who make it their business to be able to account for the functions which they perform" These priests and priestesses are also credited with the doctrine of metempsychosis and with the idea that one must atone for an 'ancient grief' after death in connection with how one's soul returns to the upper world."

wanted to understand how the problem they addressed had arisen and why the ritual would work. Another example of the kind of person I am describing is the sort of ritual specialist whom Plato derides at *Republic* 364-65, who is described as a *mantis*; as being able to erase misdeeds committed by an individual or his ancestors through purification and sacrifices; as being able to deliver those who were already dead from the miseries they suffer as well as prepare the living for the afterlife; and as crediting his techniques to treatises composed by Musaeus and Orpheus.³⁵

But to get back to our Author and his audience of people who didn't understand or believe what they needed to about the horrors of Hades. We start to get an answer as to what they were missing when we look at the next column of the papyrus. There, in the first two and a half lines, we are told that souls can be appeased by prayers and sacrifices and that impeding *daimones* can be fended off by the special songs of the *magoi*. And then perhaps, depending on what reading one accepts for the next bit, we are told that impeding

³⁵ Betegh 2004:370-72 notes that Empedocles' voice had magical power, he proclaimed oracles, he cured illnesses, he was a *mantis* and a propagator of cathartic and telestic rites and on one occasion raised the dead.

daimones and avenging souls (ψυχαί τιμωροί) are the same thing. I think that ψυχαί τιμωροί is the correct reading here because of what the Author goes on to say in lines 7 and 8: the knobs on the cakes that are offered are innumerable because the souls of the dead are innumerable. The inherent logic is that you must sacrifice enough of something to insure that everyone who should receive a bit of it, does so; ergo, souls of some kind are receiving sacrifice, and the most economical way to understand the whole passage is to assume that the souls to whom the *magoi* offer cakes are the same souls as those mentioned in line 4, in which case ψυχαί τιμωροί makes perfect sense.

What did these souls impede? As I discussed in *Restless Dead*, a number of mystery cults, probably including the Dionysiac mysteries whose promulgation was credited to Orpheus, taught that impeding *daimones* or similarly-named creatures could cause two problems. They might show up while someone was being initiated and stop him from completing the ritual successfully, or they might

impede an uninitiated soul's safe passage into the Underworld, or the better parts of the Underworld.³⁶

For example, in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Dionysus' passage into the Underworld is threatened by Empousa, a demon whose name is an appellative formed from the same root as "*empodôn*."³⁷ Demosthenes calls Aeschines' mother an "*empousa*" when referring to a role she played in a mystery cult dedicated to Sabazius; we can guess that she dressed up as an *empousa* and did something in the course of the rites that threatened to impede initiates.³⁸ Iamblichus, describing theurgic mysteries, says that initiates who have not properly purified themselves will be confronted by *kaka pneumata* that will be *empodiôn* for them.³⁹ Lucian's satire of a *katabasis* includes a confrontation with the Erinys Tisiphone; one of the characters says that this reminds him of what happens at Eleusis.⁴⁰ Threatening *phasmata* appeared during Hecate's mysteries on Aegina – mysteries that were said to have been established by Orpheus, by the way.⁴¹

³⁶ Johnston 1999:130-39.

³⁷ Aristoph. *Frogs* 293.

³⁸ Dem. 18.130

³⁹ Iamb. *Myst.* 3.31, 178.8-16.

⁴⁰ *Cataplus* 22.

⁴¹ D. Chrys. *Or.* 4.90.

Plutarch talks about confronting "all kinds of terrible things" (πάντα δεινά) either during initiation into mysteries or after death, if one has not been initiated.⁴² Proclus mentions that in the holiest of *teletai*, the initiates are threatened by chthonic *daimones* who attempt to distract them from completing the ritual.⁴³

Performing rituals to protect yourself from Underworld creatures who were variously called *empousai*, *daimones empodôn*, *kaka pneumata* that were an *empodiôn*, *erinyes* or *phasmata*, then, was crucial to winning a good afterlife – the kind of afterlife that mystery initiations promised. But *only* within mystery religions was it important, as far as we can tell: we don't hear about it outside of the context of mysteries. It seems to have been one of the innovations that mysteries introduced into eschatology.

One wonders how mysteries justified the idea: as I said above, it simply cannot have been the case that all potential initiates had

⁴² fr. 178.

⁴³ Other sources mention more vaguely that something frightening happened to initiates, or was seen by them, during mystery initiations: Aristid. 22.3 p. 28 and 41.10 p. 333 (Keil); Demetr. *Eloc.* chpt. 100; Plu. fr. 178; Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 3.18 pg. 151 Portus and also in *Alc.* 340.1. See also the late first century decree discussed by Clinton 1974:56-57. The words I translate as "frightening" and "shocking" are cognates of "*phrikê*" and "*ekplêksis*." Each is used in several sources. Plutarch refers to "*panta deina*," "all sorts of terrible things." On the process as a whole, Clinton 1992:84-7, Graf 1974a:126-39, Seaford 1981:254-63, Johnston 1999:130-39

committed murder or otherwise offended members of the dead. A possible answer is that blood-guilt was contagious. Even if you had committed no murder yourself, you could not be sure that everyone else in your family or town was clean. Given that one might inherit blood-guilt from even distant ancestors, as Plato reminds us in the *Phaedrus* and as many myths confirm,⁴⁴ a persuasive initiator could present the risk as being high enough to require everyone's attention. In *Restless Dead*, I discussed in some detail the likelihood that contagious blood guilt was the official reason for requiring participation in the Lesser Mysteries that preceded the Greater Mysteries held at Eleusis.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Phdr.* 244d5-245a1: "when grievous maladies and affliction have beset certain families by reason of some ancient sin, madness has appeared among them, and breaking out into prophecy has secure relief by finding the means thereto, namely by recourse to prayer and worship, and in consequence therefore rites (*teletai*) and means of purification were established and the sufferer was brought out of danger, alike for the present and for the future..." Cf. Burkert 1992:66. Cf. Orph. fr. 350 (Bernabé = 232 Kern) = Olympiod. *In Phd.* p. 87.13 Norv. where Orpheus describes how Dionysiac initiations bring relief both from the persecutions of "lawless ancestors" (*progonoi athemistoi*) and from the "difficult labors and endless sufferings" that await one in the Underworld.

⁴⁵ According to myth, these had been established by Demeter for Heracles' sake. He wanted to be initiated at Eleusis but she was forced to refuse him because he had blood on his hands. Once he had been purified at the Lesser Mysteries, he was free to go on. Representations show Heracles being treated at the Lesser Mysteries with the Fleece of Zeus, which is associated with purification from blood guilt in other contexts, and it is fairly clear that this Fleece was used on actual initiates during the Lesser Mysteries as well: details at Johnston 1999:132-36

Not all mysteries were as drawn-out as the Eleusinian, however; only Eleusis, as far as we know, had this two-stage process, and I assume that most mysteries incorporated both purification from blood guilt and confrontation by an impeding *daimôn* – from which the purified initiate emerged victorious – into the same ritual program. The idea of blood-guilt contagion also underlay many of the stories I mentioned earlier about plagues and famines, of course – it was Oedipus who murdered Laius, for example, but all of Thebes suffered until the score had been settled. Mysteries were taking an old idea and applying it more broadly, and then mysteries were promising to do something about it.

There is a difference, however, between the way that our Author presents these impeding *daimones* and the way that other mysteries present them. Only our Author explicitly identifies them with the souls of the (avenging) dead. This, I suggest, was his own innovation, or the innovation of an exclusive sub-group of initiators amongst whom he counted himself. It was also, I would suggest, what provoked the frustration that the Author expresses in Column V. As our Author sees it, the sorts of information about the horrors

of the angry dead that people take away from divinatory methods – for example, some ghost is mad and is causing a plague in your city; you must propitiate that ghost to restore the equilibrium – is only part of a larger problem. In his understanding, angry ghosts are much more pervasive sources of trouble; the horrors they can bring go beyond those narrated in the solutions provided by Delphi. The horrors include attacks against not only those who were personally responsible for their miserable situations or people who were closely associated with those who were responsible, but *anyone* who came into striking distance, including people who were being initiated – a process that brought them temporarily closer to the world of the dead – and people who had died without getting initiated. The "horrors of Hades," in other words, include the ψυχαί τιμωροί who have become δαίμονες ἐμποδών.

Our Author, then, understands relations between the living and the dead to be in an ongoing state of potential disruption, even when there is no plague or famine or losing streak at the Olympic Games to bring the matter to the immediate attention of the living, and he considers himself a specialist in adjusting those relations. And yet,

instead of doing what our Author knows that they should, people are overcome by error – that is, they do not understand or believe what he advocates – or they are overcome by pleasure – and here, I think he is referring to the same sorts of rituals as Plato famously complained of in the passage from the Republic that I mentioned earlier, where he said that *agurtai kai manteis* ** trick not only individuals but whole cities into thinking they are off the hook for both their own sins and those of their dead ancestors once they have participated in what Plato scornfully calls ἡδονὰὶ ἑορταί or παιδιᾶς ἡδοναί. Our Author rants against not only ordinary people who refuse to accept the full import of what he thinks divination can teach us about the Underworld but also against fellow initiators who fail to understand matters fully themselves, and therefore pass off simpler, easier rituals than those he advocates and practices himself.

A few words, before I close, about the Eumenides of Column VI and the Erinyes of Columns I and II. Outside of the Derveni Papyrus, we have only one piece of evidence that equates either the Erinyes or the Eumenides with the souls of the dead. In Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, the Chorus calls upon the ** "*potnia skia Oidipou*,

melain' Erinus."⁴⁶ Pace Erwin Rohde,⁴⁷ this single, poetic passage is not enough on which to build a theory about general Greek notions of the soul, particularly given that all of our other information suggests that both the Erinyes and the Eumenides were normally viewed as independent agents who sometimes interacted with, but were not identical to, the dead. In equating Eumenides with certain souls of the dead, then, our Author is again innovating both upon popular tradition and upon what other ritual experts said or did. If we were to read into the fragments of Column II an equation between souls and Erinyes – which I don't think we can do with certainty, unfortunately – then that would be our Author's innovation as well. Both innovations would fit well with the rest of what I have argued our Author does: he explains that the impeding entities that other mysteries talk about are really souls of the dead, and then goes on to explain that entities whom people usually call Eumenides are really the souls of the dead in a happier state.

The sequence of events narrated in Column VI, as far as we know it, could be reconstructed as follows, then. The impeding

⁴⁶ Aes. *Sept.* 976-77.

⁴⁷ Rohde 1925:178-80.

daimones, who were liable to cause problems for initiates and who were identified by our Author with the angry souls of the dead, first were approached by ritual experts who assuaged or appeased them with prayers, sacrifices and incantations that our Author credits to *magoi*.⁴⁸ Whether those who performed these rituals identified themselves as *magoi* or merely used techniques they thought had been invented by the *magoi*, I leave an open question.⁴⁹ By performing these rituals, the experts paid a penalty (ποινὴν ἀποδιδόντες) – they paid it on behalf of the initiates, I assume – and they thereby changed the impeding *daimones* into something else. (Here I am taking μεθιστάναι of line 3 in the same way as

Tsantsanoglou did in his 1997 essay, and as Glenn Most and Andre Laks did in their translation, rather than adopting the suggestion

⁴⁸ Notably, the more specific description of offerings in the middle of this column specifies water, milk and cakes, all of which are found in descriptions of offerings to the dead.

⁴⁹ Notably, however, only one of the many other references to *magoi* in classical sources, so far as I know, suggests any connection to the dead at all: at Hdt. 7.43, the *magoi* help Xerxes make libations and sacrifices to the dead heroes buried at Troy. Herodotus credits the true Persian *magoi* with a variety of functions, including the interpretation of dreams and portents such as eclipses, the propitiation of river gods through sacrifice and the recitation of sacred theogonies. *Magoi* in Greece similarly had a variety of skills, including the production of drugs and protective amulets and perhaps divination. Xenophon's description of them as "technicians of the divine" (*hoi peri tous theous technitai*) is likely to come close to the common Greek view: they knew a lot about the gods that was hidden from the average individual (Hdt. 1.107-08, 1.132, 7.37, 7.113-114; E. *Supp.* 1108-10, Pl. *Plt.* 280e1-2 and *Lg.* 933c6-d1; X. *Cyr.* 8.3.11. On the significance of "magos" cf. Graf 1995:32, who takes a slightly different approach.)

"remove" that is used by Gábor Betegh, or "drive away" that is used in the newer translation by Tsantsanoglou and Parássoglou.⁵⁰)

We are not explicitly told what the impeding *daimones* changed into, but if the change followed the prayers, sacrifices and songs, then it was a positive transformation – and thus when we hear a few lines later about "kindly ones" or "Eumenides" also being souls, it is most economical to assume that this was the end result. Now the initiates might safely approach these souls on their own, and make additional offerings, as lines 10 and 11 tell us. After this, the papyrus becomes fragmentary, but it may be the case, as Albert Henrichs suggested in 1984, that the initiates went on to make sacrifices to certain unspecified gods. The pattern makes sense, not only because, as Henrichs noted,⁵¹ it was common practice in many cults to sacrifice to lesser entities before sacrificing to gods, but also because it matches a pattern we know of from other mysteries, where the demons appear and are dealt with before the gods manifest themselves. Iamblichus is most explicit about this point: he says that the arrival of the gods during the mysteries actually helps to vanquish the last traces of the

⁵⁰ Tsantsanoglou 1997:110-112. Tsantsanoglou also noted here that the Author uses the noun *metastasis* in Col XV to mean "change".

⁵¹ Henrichs 1984.

kaka pneumata that impede initiates; but it is also hinted at by the fact that in the *Frogs*, Dionysius and Xanthias encounter an *empousa* as soon as they enter the Underworld – before they meet the happy band of initiates or proceed to Hades' palace.

To sum up: like most scholars, I understand the Author of Columns V and VI to be a ritual expert who wants to justify the particular techniques that he recommends by explaining what they really mean. In particular, he wants to explain the real identities of the entities to whom he directs his rituals, and why those entities must be given the attention he recommends.

To do so, he draws on a concept that is familiar to everyone: that the angry dead can harm the living. In this sense, our Author is actually preserving, and even valorizing, certain aspects of mainstream religious practices and beliefs. His complaint is only that the average person fails to understand or believe all of the implications, in spite of the fact those implications are crucial to their postmortem happiness. The Author also draws on knowledge that is specific to mysteries – although it is knowledge that to some degree was shared by non-initiates as well, if Aristophanes and Lucian could

satirize it: namely, that some sort of entity is apt to impede initiates during mystery rituals and impede the uninitiated after death.

The Author innovates upon both mainstream tradition and previous mystery practices by combining the two sets of beliefs and practices: that is, by understanding the first group of entities – the angry dead about whom oracles, dreams and portents inform us – to be the same as the second group – the impeding *daimones* against whom mysteries protect us. And then he innovates again, by arguing that these ghosts who were *daimones* can be transformed, once more, through ritual, into creatures who were traditionally understood to be goddesses, the Eumenides. It is a tightly woven set of connections, each step of which depends not only on the previous step, but also on a highly developed propensity to seek out analogies and relationships that are hidden to others. The final result, here as elsewhere in the Derveni Papyrus, is an idiosyncratic, cerebral religious system that can justify the individual planks of its doctrines with reference to existing beliefs and practices, but which, as a whole, undoubtedly would have struck someone of average religious disposition as counterintuitive.

We will not see anything quite like it for another five or six hundred years, when the equally cerebral Neoplatonists give birth to the equally idiosyncratic religious system known as theurgy. And that turn of events, by the way, went hand-in-hand with a huge burgeoning of interest in Orphic theogonies, for alongside their much revered *Timaeus* and *Chaldean Oracles*, the theurgists set the poetry of Orpheus, and then labored intensely to show how these three great sources of theological knowledge were in concord with one another, so that they might better decipher the hidden messages these works contained. What a shame it is that from the most industrious of these interpreters, Proclus, we have inherited a complete *Platonic Theology*, and quite a lot of what he said about the *Chaldean Oracles*, but relatively little of what we know to have been his extensive exposition of Orpheus' theogonic poetry. There, if anywhere, we might finally meet the match of our Derveni Author.

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