

AnneMarie Luijendijk and William E. Klingshirn, eds., *My Lots Are in Thy Hands: Sortilege and Its Practitioners in Late Antiquity, Religions in the Graeco-Romans World* 188, Leiden: Brill, 2018. Pp. xvii + 392. ISBN 978-90-04-38410-1. Hardcover, \$155.00.

- [1] AnneMarie Luijendijk and William E Klingshirn have presented an interesting joint publication on what is called divination/sortilege/cleromancy in late antiquity, proceeding from a conference organized in Princeton University at the end of 2011. The volume gathers a variety of contributions devoted to sortilege in different cultures: Egyptian, Greek, Jewish, Roman, and Syriac. The specified time frame for the texts included in the volume is the third–eighth centuries CE.
- [2] In the introduction (1–18) Luijendijk and Klingshirn, after accentuating that the predominant part of our knowledge about divination comes, not surprisingly, from textual evidence, describe the purpose of the work under review in the following way: “This volume attempts to summarize and standardize what we know of such texts . . . , while advancing new questions about their use and significance” (6). Even after reading only a few pages, one can realize that the sortilege took multiple forms and was practiced over centuries, up to this day. Trying to give the most general definition of what this term means Luijendijk quotes Evan M. Zuhause, who says that the practice involves “making mechanical manipulations with small objects such as dice, drawing long or short stalks from a bundle, and so on” (p1) in order to get to know the future or to make a decision.
- [3] The introduction is followed by a useful general chapter entitled “The Literature of Lots Divination” (19–59), which ends up with an attempt to classify existing texts into the following four groups: (1) books of fate; (2) *sortes* with general answers; (3) lot texts based on sacred books; and (4) individualized lots. Each group contains not only examples of texts, but also a list of their editions, translations, and studies (if available). Worth mentioning is the fact that this classification also includes texts only recently published, like fragments from Oxyrhynchus discussed by Alexander Kocar. The second and third chapter are devoted to instruments of lot divination. Chapters 4 to 7 discuss lots based on sacred books (like the Bible or Homer). Chapter 8 relates to the books of fate. Chapter 9 is devoted to newly discovered text—*sortes* with general answers from Oxyrhynchus. The remaining chapters focus on different functions of *sortes* in ritual, legal, economic context as well as their part in border theological discussions.
- [4] The book is fascinating not only because of the topic itself. Even though it consists of fourteen interesting articles, I would like to focus in this review on two aspects of divination: the Christian response to this phenomenon and the scope of information one can draw from divinatory texts. At the end, one can find the whole list of articles included in the book.
- [5] As one can learn from this volume, divination was constantly surrounded by controversy, not only among Christian authors. Laura Nasrallah (“I Do Not Wish to Be Rich’: The ‘Barbarian’ Christian Tatian Responds to Sortes,” 290–308), for example, cites the scientist Artemidorus who criticizes the use of dice, since dice are made from the bones of the dead and usually brings death (Oneiromancy 3.1–9). The main argument of Nasrallah, however, is that the Christian author Tatian not only criticizes the practice of sortilege (i.e., the casting of lots) in general, but also the divination by *sortes*, using a stoic-sounding list of the things to do (300). Obviously, Christian leaders had to respond to this old phenomenon. These responses vary not only from the author to the author, but also are nuanced depending on the form of divination. For instance, Augustine seems to accept

bibliomancy but condemn the casting of lots (*sortilege*). The controversy stems from the fact that divination, after all, was connected to the question of God/gods' engagement in the world and human affairs, but also associated with typical pagan practices. Because divination by lots is attested in the New Testament (Luke 1:9; Acts 1:26), Christians looked for aid in discovering knowledge from their God. It is interesting to trace the elements of Christianization in the famous lot book called *Sortes Astrampsychi*, where, for example, the question "Will I get the woman I desire?" changes into: "Will I become a monk?" (30).

[6] Speaking about the positive attitude of Christians toward divination, it is impossible not to mention the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* (dated to fifth–sixth century CE), a distinctively Christian lot book. In the closing chapter of the present volume ("Only do Not Be of Two Minds': Doubt in Christian Lot Divination," 309–29), Luijendijk points to several interesting details. One of them is the fact that, while the motive of doubt or double-mindedness does not explicitly come to the surface in ancient texts linked to divination, it is abundant in later Christian texts, the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* being an example (alongside other texts such as the so-called *Rhiktologion*, the *Sortes Sangallenses*, the *Sortes Sanctorum*, or the *Sortes Monacenses*). The *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* exhorts users not to doubt. This is interesting, as Luijendijk says, because doubt is connected with divination from the very outset, and it is also possible to doubt the response. The question is why the encouragement not to doubt appears so frequently in this text, so much so that it can be treated—according to the author—as a refrain (310)? Luijendijk suggests that the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* seems to present divination in a positive light by linking it with prayer. Divination, just as prayer, involves the conviction that God governs over everything and is to be trusted. She also suggests that the topic of doubt might connect this text to the Shepherd of Hermes, a work quite popular in Egypt at that time. The *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* seems to be an alternative for Christians who value the practice of *sortilege*. Based on these observations, one might ask whether the admonitions not to doubt did not result from the fact that some Christians were still fond of pagan divinatory services in fifth–sixth centuries.

[7] Another aspect that makes this book especially interesting for a broader audience than theologians is the fact that divinatory texts include an enormous array of information. Interestingly, Nasrallah mentions the inquiry from E.R. Dodd's book *Pagans and Christians*, where the author refers to Theophilus (second–third CE), who asks the oracle of Claros (291): "Are you a God or is someone else God?" Most of the questions, however, have a more practical character. That makes divinatory texts interesting from a social, anthropological, legal, or economic perspective. Based on these artifacts, for instance, it is possible to know that women also took advantage of these services.

[8] Especially interesting for me was a contribution penned by David M. Ratzan: "Freakonomika: Oracle as Economic Indicator in Roman Egypt" (248–89). Ratzan commences by examining general stylistic changes in oracles and, more importantly, changes in questions during the Roman period, as testified by Plutarch's dialogue "Why the Pythia Does Not Now Prophesy in Verse" (*De Pythiae Oraculis*) and a bulk of other evidence. According to Ratzan, the oracles do not only reflect the general atmosphere and concerns of the society, but also might give us some insights about its economic situation (understood broadly). Looking diachronically at these texts from economic perspective, Ratzan suggests that the differences in petitions may (among other things) reflect changes in the information market of the Roman Empire. While in the pre-Roman period one encounters more general questions, one finds more specific questions in later times. This is one example of specific legal petition (271):

Lord, if it is advantageous that we apply to the governor with a higher tender for 2,5% tax and it will be accepted, bring me this chit (out).

- [9] Ratzan highlights that this kind of petition suggests that the inquirer has done considerable research. The person needed to be well oriented in legal issues to formulate this question. At that time, we can also see that oracles served more private purposes. A number of so-called *meteōra* (unfinished transactions) in the Roman period also point to changes in how confident petitioners were in divinatory practices. The same phenomenon, Ratzan thinks, can be seen in different recensions of *Sortes Astrampsychi*. The clarity of responses in the early version of the text, which possibly comes from the Roman period (SA1), is no longer observable in the “bittersweet” responses of the later version (SA2). This indicates a better availability of information and a greater confidence in oracles during the Roman period.
- [10] All in all, divination is a very interesting and important avenue of research, which allows us to understand the ancient world better. This is especially recognizable when we realize that several texts and notes on the margins of the manuscripts were simply interpreted wrongly before the advancement of these studies. The book *My Lots Are in Thy Hands: Sortilege and Its Practitioners in Late Antiquity* forms is, on the one hand, an important point of reference for anyone interested in divination. The bibliography in the book covers more than forty pages (331–74). On the other hand, it is also an indispensable reading for a broader spectrum of scholars interested in different aspects of ancient history. The newly discovered texts and the ones still awaiting critical edition that are included in the book are a great asset that will make the volume valuable for a long time.

[11] Authors and titles:

Introduction

1. The Literature of Lot Divination / AnneMarie Luijendijk and William E. Klingshirn
2. The Instruments of Lot Divination / William E. Klingshirn
3. Fateful Spasm: Palmomancy and Late Antique Lot Divination / Salvatore Costanza
4. Hermēneiai in Manuscripts of John’s Gospel: An Aid to Bibliomancy / Kevin Wilkinson
5. Hermeneutics and Divination: A Unique Syriac Biblical Manuscript as an Oracle of Interpretation / Jeff W. Childers
6. Secondhand Homer / Michael Meerson
7. *Sortes Biblicae Judaicae* / Pieter W. van der Horst
8. The *Sortes Barberiniana*e within the Tradition of Oracular Texts / Randall Stewart
9. *Oxyrhynchus* and Oracles in Late Antiquity / Alexander Kocar
10. *Sortes*, Scribality, and Syncretism: Ritual Experts and the Great Tradition in Byzantine Egypt / David Frankfurter
11. Sortilege between Divine Ordeals and “Secular” Justice: Aspects of Jurisdiction in (Ritual) Texts from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt / Franziska Naether
12. Freakonomika: Oracle as Economic Indicator in Roman Egypt / David M. Ratzan
13. “I Do Not Wish to Be Rich”: The ‘Barbarian’ Christian Tatian Responds to *Sortes* / Laura Salah Nasrallah
14. “Only Do Not Be of Two Minds”: Doubt in Christian Lot Divination / AnneMarie Luijendijk

Anna Oracz

University of Regensburg