**CLST 360a Magic and Witchcraft in the Ancient World UBC, CNERS**

**Assignment III**

**Due November 29th in class**

**Instructor: Siobhán McElduff**

The aim of this assignment is to help you compare an ancient magical concern with a modern concern (albeit not one always marked as magic), in this case the re-animation of the dead or accessing them and their powers in some way. Although there is a vast gap between modern fasciation with zombies and especially the zombie apocalypse, and Greek and Roman necromantic rituals, both does say something about relationships with the dead and anxieties about their bodies turning on us.

The choice of texts (anything marked with an \* is to be found after these instructions). Select one and one only of these to critique! Yes, only one! How will you be able to chose

Literary representations:

1. Homer. Odyssey 11.12-224 (Luck, pages 224-227) + PGM XXIII Julius Africanus *Kestoi* 18\*
2. Seneca, *Oedipus*  lines 530-626 (Luck Reading 60, pages 244-46)
3. Lucan, *Pharsalia* 6.415-850 (Luck Reading 61, pages 246-256)
4. Lucian, *Menippus* 2.6-10\*
5. Heliodorus 6.12-5\*

Non-literary representations:

1. PGM IV 154-285
2. PGM 1928-2005

**How to do this**

1. Read through the various options given and select **one and one only**
2. Understand that both in antiquity and now different people had different perspectives on necromancy and its rules (or lack of them). There were legitimate ways to consult the dead via oracles, so it cannot all be socially and politically disapproved of, but at the same time raising the dead was clearly a bad and terrible thing to do
3. Write both:
   1. an ancient critique of whichever option you have chosen
   2. and a modern one which takes into account the various theories of why and how the ancients consulted their dead (much of this is in Luck if your notes aren’t helpful; I am also available in office hours or by appointment to consult. We will also talk about this in class again.)

These should be roughly equal length – **600-750** words for each section

Things/elements to consider (there are a lot of other things you could consider; this is meant to help you get a start rather than be prescriptive or complete)

1. Is this a literary representation or an actual spell from the *PGM?* Do you think that makes a difference? Why or why not?
2. Who is performing the necromantic ritual? An agent? The person themselves? How are they preparing for the ritual? Where do they live? Who are they (socially, politically, etc.)?
3. Where is the ritual taking place and who is present and why?
4. What is the ritual using and why? (Luck often has notes on the elements so use his index or that of Gager; you may also need to do some googling (Pliny the Elder + whatever ingredient you are looking for is very helpful. WebMD is useful for know if various things used or consumed are toxic or psychotropic)
5. Are there other similar rituals or texts we have read or that are in Gager or Luck which could add to our understanding of the one you are discussing?
6. From a modern perspective: What sort of social, sexual, or other anxieties does the ritual described speak to? On what principles is it working? What aspects of Classical society (that we have covered in class!) do they reveal?

If you use materials other than those provided and the texts provided for the class, please provide a bibliography.

**The texts (beyond the ones in Luck).**

**Literary representations:**

A Homer. Julius Africanus, *Kestoi* 18 (PGM XXIII) c. 230 CE[[1]](#footnote-1)

This is a later addition to the Homeric *Odyssey,* which expands on the necromantic ritual performed by Odysseus for those who found Homer unsatisfyingly simple. It is very much not original to the text and Julius Africanus claimed that he had discovered it an archive in his home town and added it back to its rightful place. (The … indicate issues in our text of this section of Julius Africanus, not cuts by me; the text is not complete unfortunately.)

But I drew my sharp sword from my thigh and sat there, and I did not allow the powerless folk of the dead to approach the blood. I said in reply:

(Here Homer has explained what one has to do.)

“O River, Earth and you who punish whoever of the dead is forsworn, be witnesses and accomplish this spell for us. I have come to inquire how I may come to the land of Telemachus, my child who I left on the bosom of his nurse.”

Such was his outstanding spell.

(Here Homer explains the spell that must be uttered.)

“Hear me, propitious god, overseer, well-sired Anubis…come, Hermes, snatcher, come to me underworld Zeus, with your fair tresses, grant that this spell should work and accomplish it. Come here Hades and Earth, imperishable fire, Sun-Titan, come also Yahweh and Ptah and Phre [Ra], guardian of laws, and greatly honored Nephtho and very blessed Ablanatho, with belt of fiery snakes, earth-tearing, Isis-headed, Abraxas, demon celebrated for your cosmic name, director of the earth’s axis and the star’s dance and the light of the Bears, come also for me Phren, outstripping all in self control...and Birth and Passing-of-prime and beautifully burning Fire, come Isis of earth and heaven, you who control dreams and Sirius who…” This is the invocation I made as I stood beside the pit. For well did I recall the instructions of Circe, who knows all the drugs that broad earth grows. Then there came the great wave of lion-fighting Acheron, Cocytus, Lethe, and great Pryiphlegethon, and a vast array of dead gathered around the pit, First came up the ghost of my comrade Elpenor.

D. Lucian, *Menippus or the Descent into Hades.* (170s CE)In this dialogue, written by the Greek-Roman-Syrian author Lucian, the cynic philosopher Menippus (200s BCE) goes on a search for wisdom. After visiting the philosophers and other traditional sources of wisdom Menippus is disappointed; as a result he decides to try to go to the underworld and talk to Tiresias, just as Homer had. This is a humorous piece and not meant to be taken seriously, but it does reflect various current ideas about how to enter the underworld.

Thus again disappointed of my hope, I was in yet a worse situation than before; it was small consolation to reflect that I was in numerous, wise, and eminently sensible company, if I was a fool still, lost in my quest for the truth. One night, while these thoughts kept me sleepless, I decided to go to Babylon and ask help from one of the Magi, Zoroaster's disciples and successors; I had been told that by incantations and other rites they could open the gates of Hades, take down any one they chose in safety, and bring him up again. I thought the best thing would be to secure the services of one of these, visit Tiresias the Boeotian,[[2]](#footnote-2) and learn from that wise seer what is the best life and the right choice for a man of sense. I got up with as fast as I could and headed straight for Babylon. When I arrived, I found a wise and wonderful Chaldean; he was white-haired, with a long imposing beard, and called Mithrobarzanes. My prayers and supplications at last induced him to name a price for conducting me down. Taking me under his charge, he commenced with a new moon, and brought me down for twenty-nine successive mornings to the Euphrates, where he bathed me, addressing the rising sun in a long formula, of which I never caught much; he gabbled indistinctly, like bad heralds at the games; but he appeared to be invoking spirits. This charm completed, he spat thrice upon my face, and I went home, not letting my eyes meet those of any one we passed. Our food was nuts and acorns, our drink milk and mead and water from the Choaspes,[[3]](#footnote-3) and we slept out of doors on the grass. When he thought me sufficiently prepared, he took me at midnight to the Tigris, purified and rubbed me over, sanctified me with torches and squills[[4]](#footnote-4) and other things, muttering the charm I mentioned, then made a magic circle round me to protect me from ghosts, and finally led me home backwards just as I was; it was now time to arrange our voyage. He himself put on a magic robe, Median in style, and fetched and gave me the cap, lion's skin, and lyre which you see, telling me if I were asked my name not to say Menippus, but Heracles, Odysseus, or Orpheus.

*Phi*. What was that for? I see no reason either for the outfit or for the choice of names.

*Me*. Oh, obvious enough; there is no mystery in that. He thought that as these three had gone down alive to Hades before us, I might easily elude Aeacus's guard by borrowing their appearance, and be passed as an *habitué*; there is good warrant in the theatre for the efficiency of disguise.

Dawn was approaching when we went down to the river to embark; he had provided a boat, victims, hydromel, and all necessaries for our mystic enterprise. We put all aboard, and then,

Troubled at heart, with tears welling, we went.

For some distance we floated down stream, until we entered the marshy lake in which the Euphrates disappears. Beyond this we came to a desolate, wooded, sunless spot; there we landed, Mithrobarzanes leading the way, and proceeded to dig a pit, slay our sheep, and sprinkle their blood round the edge. Meanwhile the Mage, with a lighted torch in his hand, abandoning his customary whisper, shouted at the top of his voice an invocation to all spirits, particularly the Poenae and Erinyes,[[5]](#footnote-5)

Hecate's dark might, and dread Persephone,

with a string of other names, outlandish, unintelligible, and polysyllabic.

As he ended, there was a great commotion, earth was burst open by the incantation, the barking of Cerberus was heard far off, and all was overcast and lowering;

Quaked in his dark abyss the King of Ghosts;

for almost all was now unveiled to us, the lake, and Phlegethon, and the home of Pluto.

D. Heliodorus, *Aethiopica/The Ethiopian Story[[6]](#footnote-6)* (4th century CE). In this section from a Greek novel written in the Roman empire two of the characters, a princess called Chariclea and an Egyptian priest called Calasiris, who are now searching for another person, Theagenes, a noble Thessalian man, who is in love with Chariclea. (She also loves him.)

…coming near to Bessa about sunset they saw a great and recent slaughter of, of whom the most were Persians, as might easily be known by their armour, and a few of those that lived in Bessa there also. They might conjecture there had been a battle, but they knew not who the parties were that had fought. They ranged about the dead bodies, looking to see if any of their friends were slain — for hearts in fear, careful for what they love best, do oftentimes expect the worst — until at last they saw an old woman who lay upon the dead body of one of the countrymen and wailed wonderfully. They decided therefore, if they could, to inquire somewhat of her; and so, coming to her, attempted at first to comfort her and appease her great sorrow. Which done, they asked for whom she lamented and what battle had been there — Calasiris talking to her in the Egyptian tongue — and she told them all in few words: that she sorrowed for her son, and came of purpose to these dead bodies that some armed man might run on her and kill her; and in the meantime she would do such rites to her son as she was able with tears and lamentations.

[A short section that has nothing to do with magic or necromancy has been cut; we start back with the old woman asking the heroes where they are going]

.‘But,’ she said, ‘strangers, where are you going?’ ‘To the village,’ said Calasiris. ‘It is not safe,’ said she, ‘to mix with those of us that are left, seeing that you are not known and come at a late hour.’[[7]](#footnote-7) ‘If you will vouch for us,’ said Calasiris, ‘we hope we shall be unharmed.’ ‘I cannot now,’ she answered, ‘for I must do certain night sacrifices. But if you can wait — and indeed there is no other way; you must, whether you want to or not — get you into some place away from these dead bodies to pass the night, and in the morning I promise I will host you and be your guarantor.

That is what she said. Calasiris told Chariclea all and took her with him and they went away; having gone a little past those bodies, they found a little hill. There he laid down with her quiver under his head, and Chariclea sat upon her bag instead of a stool. The moon had just risen, lighting all things with her brightness, for she was now three days past the full; and Calasiris, being an old man and weary with his travels, fell fast asleep. But Chariclea, because of the cares that troubled her, slept not that night but saw a wicked and monstrous performance, such as the women of Egypt do commonly perform. The old woman thinking she had now gotten a time when she would neither be seen nor troubled, first dug a trench, then made a fire on both sides of it, and in the middle laid her son’s body. Then taking an earthen pot from a three-footed stool which stood by her she poured honey into the trench; out of another pot she poured milk, and from the third a libation of wine. Lastly she cast into the trench a lump of dough hardened in the fire, which was made like a man and crowned with a garland of laurel and fennel. This done, she took up a sword which lay among the dead men’s shields, and behaving herself as if she had been in a Bacchic frenzy, said many prayers to the moon in strange outlandish terms. Then she cut her arm and with a branch of laurel sprinkled the fire with her blood; and after doing many monstrous and strange things beside these, at length bowing down to her dead son’s body and saying something in his ear, she awakened him, and by force of her witchcraft made him suddenly stand. Chariclea, who before had been looking with fear, trembled with horror and was utterly discomforted by that terrible sight, so that she woke up Calasiris and made him also see the spectacle. They could not be seen in their dark corner, but they saw easily what she did by the light of the fire, and heard also what she said, for they were not very far off, and the old woman spoke very loud to the body. Her question was this: ‘Would his brother, her son who was yet alive, return safe or no?’ The body made no answer, but by nodding gave his mother a doubtful hope of success according to her wish, and then fell down upon its face again. But she turned it over on its back and did not stop asking that question, with more earnest enforcements, it seemed, speaking in his ear. Sometimes she leapt, sword in hand, to the trench, sometimes to the fire, and at length she made the body stand upright again and asked the same question, compelling him to answer not by nods and gestures but plainly by word of mouth. While this was doing, Chariclea begged Calasiris earnestly that they might go near and ask the old woman some news of Theagenes. But he would not go, saying that the sight was wicked although they were compelled to endure it. It was not becoming for priests either to take delight or be present when such things were done. Their divination came from lawful sacrifice and virtuous prayer; the knowledge of sorcerers from traffic with dead bodies in the ground, such as this chance had allowed them to see the Egyptian woman use.

While he spoke thus, the dead body cried out very terribly with a hollow voice, as if it had come out of a deep cave, saying: ‘Mother, at the first I spared you, and suffered you to sin against nature and break the laws of destiny, attempting by incantations to make those things move which by nature are immovable. For even dead men, in so far as they can, have reverence towards their parents. But since you have yourself destroyed this, and proceed in the wicked and shameful deeds which you did at first begin, and are not content that a dead body stand up but force him to speak also, caring nothing for my burial and barring me from the company of the other spirits for the sake of your own private need: hear now that which till now I hesitated to tell you — Neither shall your son come safe home, nor you escape death by the sword. As you have spent thy life in such wicked deeds as these, you shall soon meet the violent death that is appointed for all like that. You have not just done these secret and hidden mysteries alone, but in the sight of others also, betraying to them the fortunes of the dead. Of these one is a priest — and that is so much the better, for in his wisdom he knows that such things should not be published abroad; and he is also well beloved of the gods; and he shall, if he hurry reconcile his sons who are ready armed to fight a bloody battle hand to hand. But the other — which is much worse — is a girl, who has seen and heard all that you have done to me, a woman distressed by love who wanders, all the world over almost, for her lover’s sake; with whom after infinite labours and infinite dangers in the furtherest part of the world she shall live in prosperity and kingly estate.

The body fell down when he had said this. But the old woman perceiving that it was the strangers who looked upon her, armed as she was with a sword, rushed against them like a wild woman. About the dead bodies she ranged thinking they were there in hiding, and meaning, if she could find them to rid them of their lives, as being crafty folk who by their spying upon her had caused her to have ill success in her witchcraft. At length seeking carelessly and angrily for them among the bodies, a truncheon of a spear that stood up struck her through the belly; and thus died she, fulfilling straightway by her actions the saying which her son prophesied to her before.

Non-literary. The following are a selection of necromantic rituals from the Papyri Magicae Graece (PGM). These were parts of spell books used by professionals and amateurs.

PGM IV 154-285

Inquiry of Bowl Divination and Necromancy Nephotes to Psammetichos, Immortal King of Egypt. Greetings. Since the Great God has appointed you Immortal King and Nature has made you an expert magician, I too, with a desire to show you the industry in me, have sent you this magical procedure which, with complete ease, produces a Holy Power....

Whenever you want to inquire about matters, take a bronze vessel, either a bowl or a saucer, whatever kind you wish. Pour water: rain water if you are calling upon the Heavenly Gods, sea water if Gods of the Earth, river water if Osiris or Sarapis, spring water if the Dead. Holding the vessel on your knees, pour out green olive oil, bend over the vessel and speak the prescribed spell. And address whatever God you want and ask about whatever you wish, and He will reply to you and tell you about anything. And if He has spoken dismiss Him with the Spell of Dismissal, and you who have used this Spell will be amazed.

The Spell spoken over the Vessel is: "AMOUN AUANTAU LAIMOUTAU RIPTOU MANTAUI IMANTOU LANTOU LAPTOUMI ANCHO'MACH ARAPTOUMI, hither to me, O NN God! Appear to me this very Hour and do not frighten my eyes! Come to me, O NN God, be attentive to me because he [I?] Wishes and Commands this ACHCHO'R ACHCHO'R ACHACHACH PTOUMI CHACHCHO' CHARACHO'CH CHAPTOUME' CHO'RACHARACHO'CH APTOUMI ME'CHO'CHAPTOU CHARACHPTOU CHACHCHO' CHARACHO' PTENACHO'CHEU" (a Hundred [Greek] Letters).

But you are not unaware, Mighty King and Leader of Magicians, that this is the chief name of Typhon, at whom the Ground, the Depth of the Sea, Hades, Heaven, the Sun, the Moon, the Visible Chorus of Stars, the whole Universe all Tremble, the Name that consists of 100 Letters. Finally, when you have called, whomever you called will appear, God or dead ,an, and He will give an answer about anything you ask. And when you have learned to your satisfaction, dismiss the God merely with the powerful name of the Hundred Letters as you say, "Depart, Master, for the Great God, NN, wishes and commands this of You!" Speak the Name, and He will depart. Let this Spell, Mighty King, be transmitted to You Alone, guarded by you unshared! There is also the protective charm itself which you wear while performing, even while Standing: onto a Silver Leaf inscribe this name of l00 [Greek] Letters with a Bronze Stylus, and wear it strung on a thong from the Hide of an Ass.

PGM 1928-2005

Spell of Attraction of King Pitys over any skull cup. His/prayer of petition to Helios: Stand facing the east and speak thus: “I call upon you, lord Helios, and your holy angels on/this day, in this very hour: Preserve me, NN, for I am thenor, and you are holy angels, guardians of the ardimalecha. And ororo /misren nepho adonai auebothi abatharai THOBEUA SOULMAI SOULMAITH ROUTREROUTEN OPHREOPHRI OLCHAMAOTH OUTE SOUTEATH MONTRO ELAT/CHOUMIOI LATHOTH OTHETH, I beg you, lord Helios, hear me NN and grant me power /over the spirit of this man who died a violent death, from whose tent I hold [this], so that I may keep him with me, [NN] as helper and avenger for whatever business I crave from him.” / At sunset the same man’s prayer to Helios:

“Carried on the breezes of the wandering winds, Golden-haired Helios, who wield the flame’s unresting fire, who turn in lofty paths around the great pole, /who create all things Yourself which you again reduce to nothing. From you, indeed, come elements which are arranged to suit your laws which nourish all the world with its four yearly turning points. Hear, blessed one, I call you who rule heaven and earth and Chaos and Hades, where dwell/daimons of men who once gazed on the light. And even now I beg you, blessed one, unfailing one, the master of the world, if you go to the depths of earth and reach the regions of the dead, this daimon send To move at midnight hours perforce at your commands, / from whose tent I hold this. And let Him tell to me (NN) whatever my mind designs, And let him tell me fully and with truth. Let him be gentle, gracious, let him think no thoughts opposed to me. And may you not be angry at my sacred chants. /But guard that my whole body come to light intact; Let him (NN) reveal to me the what and whence. Whereby he now can render me his service and at what time he serves as my assistant, /For you yourself gave these for men to learn, lord. Because I call upon your four-part name: CHTHETHO NI LAI LAM LAO ZOUCHE PIPTOE. I call upon your name, /Horus, which is on number equal to the Moirai’s names: ACHAI PHOTHOTHO AIE IAE At IAE AIE iao thotho phiacha (36 letters). Be gracious unto me, O primal god, O father of the world, self-gendered one.

After burning armara and uncut frankincense, go home.

Enquiry. Ivy with 13 leaves. Begin from the left side and write on diem one by one with myrrh, and after putting on the wreath / say over them the same names. And over the skull cup place the same writing on the forehead with the proper words: “soitherchalban ophrouror erekisithphe (formula) /iabe zebyth legemas thmestas mesmyra bauanechthen kai lophoto breLAX HARCHENTECHTHA APSOIER CHALBAN.”

And the ink: Serpent’s blood / and the soot of a goldsmith.

Tr.: E. N. O’Neil.

1. If you select this one you must take it in conjunction with the section from Homer’s *Odyssey* in Luck [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The same Tiresias whom Odysseus consulted. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A river in Afghanistan. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A type of plant of lily family. Its leaves were sometimes used in rituals to whip people with as part of purification. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Avenging spirits that were thought to pursue those guilty of great crimes. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Despite the title, the story covers more than Ethiopia and ranges over the Greek world. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Because they would be thought to be bandits, who were generally the only people trying to enter your town late at night. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)