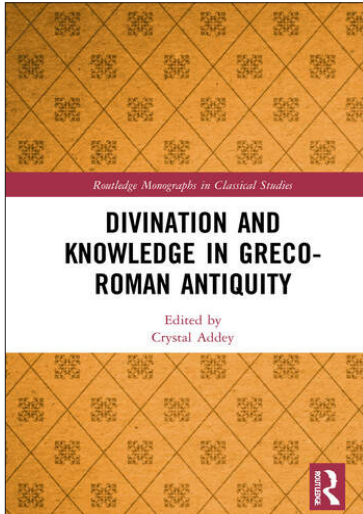
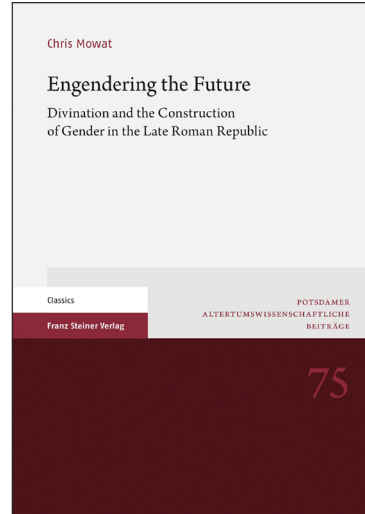


## DIVINATION AND KNOWLEDGE IN GRECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY & ENGENDERING THE FUTURE



ADDEY, CRYSTAL (2021). *Divination and Knowledge in Greco-Roman Antiquity*. Routledge monographs in classical studies. Abingdon & New York: Routledge. 320 pp. 160,00 \$ [ISBN: 978-1-1382-1299-2].



MOWAT, CHRIS (2021). *Engendering the Future. Divination and the Construction of Gender in the Late Roman Republic*. Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge, 75. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner. 201 pp. 49,00 € [ISBN: 978-3-5151-2934-3].

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THESE TWO VOLUMES ARE A WELCOME analysis about divination in Classical Antiquity, with a clear focus on its functioning in Greek and Roman religions. Despite their complementarity, they are not similar in their approaches to the subject, nor do they use the same case-studies to analyse how divination functioned in both Greece and Rome. Besides the fact that they both focus on divination, a central phenom-

enon of the functioning of religion in the ancient world, they address the subject with distinct focuses and in a different manner. The volume edited by Crystal Addey has several contributors, each of one writing a chapter that, while complementary, is independent from the remaining ones. The volume written by Chris Mowat is a highly revised version of his doctoral thesis on women in Roman divination at the end of the Republic, and such origin transpires into the book, with a much more focused study being delivered to the reader.

So that the reader may get a better idea on the contents and relevant historiographical contributions of each volume, it is important to present an independent analysis of each one, followed, at the end, by comparative final remarks. Due to no particular reason, we shall start with Crystal Addey's book.

Edited by Crystal Addey and published on Routledge's Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies series, the volume has several contributors. Crystal Addey, also author of one of the ten chapters, is a lecturer in the Department of Classics at the University College Cork and a part-time Tutor at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Her research so far has been focused on divination, with a particular specialization on Platonic tradition, Neoplatonism, Greek Oracles and Greek Theurgy. Her fellow contributors are almost all Anglo-Saxon specialists in Greek divination and religion, with a clear focus on Platonism and Neoplatonism. Even so, their research focuses on different elements of Greek religious worldview and religious practice, from Ralph Anderson's anthropological-inspired research, Leonardo Constantini's focus on literary texts, Dorian Greenbaum's study of ancient astrology, Antti Lampinen's ancient ethnographical research, Marilyn Lawrence, Danielle Layne and Elsa Simonetti's specialization in philosophy, to Giulia Pedruci's focus on gender roles in Greek divination.

As suggested by the roster of contributors, the book is relatively more focused on Greek cultural and philosophical approaches to divination than on Roman ones. Even so, the book is of importance to anyone who studies classical divination, because it offers a detailed analysis of case-studies with wider implications on how we assess epistemic value and knowledge in connection to divination, on ancient Greek philosophy and the intellectual thought on divination; and on how we understand what mental-frame was behind divinatory rituals and practices. If most books on divination tend to focus on its orthopraxical reality and its social and political functions, this volume attempts to refocus the debate on the epistemological aspects of divination. In the process, topics such as divine and human knowledge and agency are discussed, with a recurrent tendency towards ancient philosophical approaches.

The introduction is masterly written and is quite useful both to students or early-career researchers and to specialists. Useful for students because it offers a

well-crafted summary on the importance of divination in the classical world; it proposes a definition of divination; offers a very brief revision of the most important studies on classical divination throughout the last century, accompanied by an analysis of tendencies of historiography regarding the study of ancient divination in the last decades; and offers an outline of the mental and religious frameworks in which context divination must be understood. But the introduction is also useful for specialists because it allows them to see the forest that sometimes one loses track of when studying each individual tree.

Chapter one, drawing from its author's (Julia Kindt) extensive knowledge on Greek oracles, analyses the mode of communication of oracular communication (enigmatic voice), being a good contribution to oracular epistemology on human and divine knowledge.

Chapter two, through the analysis of some of Plato's dialogues, deals with the Platonist view of philosophy as an activity that does not make sense without the gods, an inspired activity that surpasses its merely rational aspect.

In the third chapter we find, once again, the issue of human and divine knowledge being explored, now in a military setting through Xenophon's thought. In it, Ralph Anderson analyses how divination was perceived to be complementary to the purely "rational" and "human" aspect of battle-planning, being thus incorporated into the roster of tools that a commander should use in his decision-making process. Essentially, the chapter shows us that divine knowledge was used to enhance human decision-making.

The same line of thought continues into the fourth chapter, by Dorian Greenbaum, now applied to a medicinal setting. In it the author shows that divination was used on par with human knowledge when elaborating a medical diagnosis and treatment.

Given that the issue of divinatory knowledge is at the core of the book, it is of no surprise that the fifth chapter, by Crystal Addey herself, readdresses the subject, now with a clearer focus on the use of divination to ascertain Kairos (the appropriate time for an action to be conducted under divine favour). Throughout the chapter Addey analyses the importance of kairotic expertise and time in several ancient divinatory practices.

Chapter 6 analyses the Pythia of Delphos in Plutarch's account to showcase the interlinking of human and divine agency and capabilities. Plato's stance on the complementarity between reason and religion is shown to have influenced Plutarch's portrayal, with a concomitant functioning of human and divine elements at the moment of divination.

The seventh chapter, by Giulia Pedrucci, continues the study of the Pythia, now reframed to analyse the role of gender in divination. Throughout the chapter its author analyses how male-centric gender notions impacted portrayals of the Pythia's

agency, focusing particularly on the late antiquity Christians' reductive depiction of the Pythia, reduced to a hysterical woman.

Chapter eight focuses on Roman imperial literature to study how divinatory practices impacted the ancient ethnographic discourse and classification of other cultures.

In the ninth chapter Leonardo Constantini addresses Apuleius' daimonological theory and the impact Socrates had in such formulation. Once again, the connection between the "rational" aspect of the human philosopher and the spiritual/divine world is highlighted as central to understanding Apuleius and latter Neoplatonic works.

The last chapter, by Marilyn Lawrence, continues the book's latter chapters' focus on theurgy at late antiquity, analysing the possible role of astrology within theurgic ritual.

The book edited by Crystal Addey is an important contribution for a better understanding of the philosophical thought behind ancient divinatory practices, particularly when it comes to the Platonist and Neoplatonist school, and some of the Greek and late ancient intellectual production regarding the connection not only between knowledge and divination but also between human and divine complementary agency. However, a criticism could be made that the emphasis put by the book on the intellectual and philosophic explanations of divination (an intellectualization of divinatory practices) underscores the centrality of classical religion's orthopraxy, limiting the analysis to philosophical discussions that, at times, feel too disconnected from the divinatory daily experience of ancient communities outside the philosophical circles and their erudite discussions.

Let us now move on to next book. Written in full by Chris Mowat and published by Franz Steiner Verlag in 2021, the volume is essentially a revised version of Mowat's PhD thesis, written from 2014 to 2018 at Newcastle University under the supervision of Federico Santangelo, Jörg Rüpke and David Creese. As the book suggests, Mowat is a researcher on the intersection between gender and religious identities in the Roman Republic, and on gender identities in the Roman world.

The book is divided in seven chapters (the introduction and conclusion are counted by its author as chapters), with five of them studying a different character and/or dimension of Late Roman divination, in an attempt to draw an overarching conclusion on the issue of gender identity's function in the Roman divinatory system of the Late Republic.

The first chapter introduces the reader to the thesis that will be defended, and explains the concepts, methodology and definitions adopted. Just like the introduction of Crystal Addey's book, this first chapter is expertly elaborated. In the introduction Mowat advances with an interesting goal: to study the gender-based rules underlying the Roman divinatory system, a system where, at first sight, the collegiality of positions

and offices would imprint (superficially) into the system a rather impersonal stamp. The clarity and detail etched by Mowat to the definition of all concepts utilized in his research is a welcome addition to the introduction, making the book's thesis clearer and allowing students and non-specialists to fully understand what is discussed in the subsequent chapters. There is, for example, a lengthy analysis of the difference between gender and sex, and of the performative gender's school of thought.

The case-study based approach to the analysis of different divinatory practices and traditions begins in chapter 2, with Mowat focusing his attention on Cicero's *De diuinatione*. In essence, what Mowat does is begin his study with the main Roman author on the philosophical and theoretical aspects of divination in the Roman world. It was a conscious choice, as the author admits, and it works rather well in creating a theoretical platform, a framework, for the book to then focus on practical aspects and actual practices. Throughout the chapter Mowat analyses how both brothers in the *De diuinatione* address the issue of gender throughout their discussion on divination. In the end, he concludes that despite the differences in attitude towards divination, the attitude regarding the role of women in such context is gender-based and relegates women to certain performative, sometimes subordinate, roles.

Chapter 3 studies the Sibyl(s). During this portion of his book Mowat analyses both the character of Sibyl (the supposed author of the Sibylline books used by Romans) and the books she produced. So, it is a study of her divinatory books as much as of her supposed identity. The chapter constructs an interesting reading of the functioning and utility of the books and of the college responsible for their custody and consultation: because the books were the by-product of female divination (they were, after all, taken as having been written by a woman diviner) they allowed the Roman state, comprised and ruled by men, to access divinatory knowledge that would be otherwise unattainable. In that sense, Mowat argues, the books allowed the Roman elite to safely cross the divinatory boundaries of gender without breaking the status quo.

The fourth chapter focuses on the expiation of prodigies, specifically on one kind of prodigy (understood as a contradiction of the natural order and, as thus, as a sign of the break of the *pax deorum*): the birth of an intersex baby. Making use of the concept of liminality (indeed, a very important tool to understand many of Roman religious practices and worldview), Mowat offers a slightly different suggestion: that the birth of an intersex child did not merely cross gender boundaries, representing instead a complete break of those boundaries, thus requiring an expiatory ritual murder. The chapter highlights the importance of gender in Roman religious worldview, with the necessity to remove those who transgressed such a binary.

Chapter 5 deals with the figure of Martha, a Syrian female diviner who accompanied the general Marius, making sacrifices and predicting the future. The chapter

deals with this curious character to show what role a foreign woman could play in the Roman non-official divinatory cosmos, the constraints limiting her actions, and the gender-based view that led to her criticism by ancient authors.

The sixth chapter deals mainly with the dream Calpurnia had in the night before the Ides of March and the assassination of her husband, Julius Caesar. The chapter attempts to interpret the episode of Calpurnia's prophetic dream at the light of Roman gender expectations. In essence, the author argues that while her gender did not disqualify her from having truthful prophetic dreams, it did somewhat exclude her from using those alleged dreams to influence the public decision-making process.

The conclusion of the book highlights the process of permanent negotiation and reinterpretation of boundaries between genders in the Roman divinatory sphere. Essentially, the book offers a very compelling thesis: that gender was important in Roman religious worldview and, particularly, in Roman divinatory practices, but not necessarily as an unmovable and unchanging cosmovision but, just like everything else, as something that was constructed and rethought by society, even if women did remain mostly relegated to a secondary and subordinate role in Roman divination, instrumentalized by men, but never enjoying freedom of action in the context of the official Roman divinatory apparatus.

To conclude our review, it is important to express our recommendation of these two books, that while different, are a relevant and complementary contribution to a better understanding of the divinatory and religious role of women and gender in classical antiquity. While the book edited by Addey deals predominantly with the philosophical aspects of divination, focusing mostly on Greek thought and divinatory practice, the book by Mowat deals more with the practical functioning of gender's role in divination (not ignoring the relevant theoretical and mental aspects of that practice), and is focused on divination in the Late Roman Republic. When considered jointly, they allow the reader a complementary and encompassing view of ancient divination and of the role women and gender played in it. If a reader had started to wonder if divination was still a subject capable of providing new insights on the classical world and its worldview, these books are certainly a good example of how much knowledge can still be produced and reinterpreted from studying classical divination.