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The current editorial address for the *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* is:

Peter van Minnen
Department of Classics
University of Cincinnati
410 Blegen Library
Cincinnati, OH 45221-0226
USA
peter.vanminnen@uc.edu

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Copies of books for review can be sent to:

AnneMarie Luijdenijk
Department of Religion
Princeton University
1879 Hall, room 132
Washington Road
Princeton, NJ 08544

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Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi. Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten*. Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 3. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010. xviii + 491 pages. ISBN 978-3-16-150250-7.

Although the title suggests a rather limited subject, thirteen fragmentary papyri from the third and fourth centuries AD, these papyri are used as a starting point for a much wider discussion. The papyri themselves are discussed in the central part of the work (pp. 62-278), around which a very wide web has been spun: not only did the *Sortes Astrampsychi* survive in adapted form during the Middle Ages and until the twentieth century, but other kinds of ancient and medieval oracles (not only oracles by lot) are also extensively discussed. As a result the book is somewhat ill-balanced. The reader finds a lot of unexpected information in unexpected places, and a casual user will probably miss most of it, the more so since the *Sachregister* (pp. 489-491) is too short for such a long and wide-ranging book with an opaque structure. The short conclusion of this long and multifaceted study does not really give a clue to the purpose of the author (pp. 428-431).

The first chapter, dealing with theoretical and methodological problems of defining magic, divination, and religion, offers a rather sketchy survey, quoting numerous scholars and theories, but does not contain a clear personal point of view. Parallels are given of oracles both in pharaonic Egypt and in classical Greece, including procession oracles in the New Kingdom, temple oracles in Delphi¹ and Dodona, Alexander's visit to Siwa, Lucian on Alexander of Abonoteichos, "speaking statues" (their existence is doubted on pp. 52-54), and even Egyptian letters and self-dedications to gods.

On pp. 18-21 a list of divination methods is given, where objects used (animal movements, smoke, dreams, texts) and methods applied (looking and interpreting natural phenomena, interpretation by an inspired person, oracle books, casting lots, letters to a god) are listed in a kind of random order. The left column, titled "divination method" largely overlaps with the "divination objects" of the right column, listing the same items under a more "scientific" name. It would have been far more useful to group the types of oracles according to divination methods rather than by objects. Different methods can also be combined, as in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* themselves, where casting of lots and consulting a book occur side by side.

¹ That, for Delphi, "private questions are not reflected in the literature" (p. 45) is contradicted by Plutarch, *Moralia* 408C, quoted on p. 138.

The second chapter (pp. 62-278) deals with the *Sortes Astrampsychi* in 21 subchapters of very uneven length (from a single page to over 50 pages). In the first of these (“Who was Astrampsychus?”) the reader is brought into contact with *Napoleon’s Book of Faith* (pp. 69-71), which is at best a far-away spin-off of the ancient oracle book. The list of thirteen papyrus fragments of the third to sixth centuries, on which the work is centered (pp. 77-79), is immediately followed by the medieval Byzantine manuscripts (pp. 79-80), which date from the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries but are completely preserved. Ancient and medieval sources are discussed together, although this may sometimes be problematical, e.g. for the hemerology on p. 86 (was the seven day week already in use when the *Sortes Astrampsychi* were first written?) and for the role played by priests (the author is inclined to attribute the *Sortes Astrampsychi* to the same milieu as the ticket oracles but does not offer proof of this). The largest subchapter (pp. 204-278) subdivides the questions posed in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* into fifteen categories, such as health, love and family life, travelling, inheritance and property, and theft (which could be considered a subsection of property), and ends in a tentative “portrait” of the typical client. The absence of women seems to distinguish the *Sortes Astrampsychi* from the ticket oracles, but since the questions are anonymous in the case of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, this is perhaps of little importance: the gender could easily be adapted to a female client.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the medieval *Sortes Sangallenses* and the *Sortes Sanctorum* (which do have a few precursors in the papyri), whereas in Chapter 5 (“Sortes im Zeitenlauf”) several other types of oracles by lot are discussed, in different periods, religions, and languages in a rather haphazard order (ending with “Losorakel aus aller Welt”).

Chapter 6 discusses the so-called ticket oracles, mainly known from papyri (demotic, Greek, and Coptic). A list of these oracles is offered on pp. 362-365, according to the fifteen categories which the author has distinguished for the *Sortes Astrampsychi* on pp. 218-276. Hundreds of ticket oracles found recently in Tebtynis and addressed to Soknebtynis, are, however, still awaiting publication and may completely overturn this rather subjective order (and certainly the pie chart of the gods on p. 399). The link between the ticket oracles (most of them with the choice between positive and negative answer) and the book oracles of the Astrampsychus type is far from self-evident and is not proven by pointing out that the same questions return in both. The problem is raised again by a sensational recent discovery in the eastern desert (see H. Cuvigny, *Chiron* 40 [2010] 245-299: for the first time we now have ticket oracles found inside a temple with full-fledged answers as in the *astragalos* oracles of Asia Minor, discussed on pp. 318-328).

In the final chapter attention is given to official prohibition of oracles by pagan and Christian emperors (rather disorderly). It is typical for this book, however, that also measures against astrologers, alchemists, incubation dreams, and even the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* are discussed here, whereas Constantius' reaction against the oracle practice in Abydos leads to a subchapter on "Bes as an oracle god" (pp. 415-417), which is out of place here.

This book contains an extraordinary amount of information, not only on the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, but on all kinds of oracle practices, from the pharaonic period to the Middle Ages and even beyond, but it misses a clear purpose, and the information is often difficult to find.

University of Leuven

Willy Clarysse

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