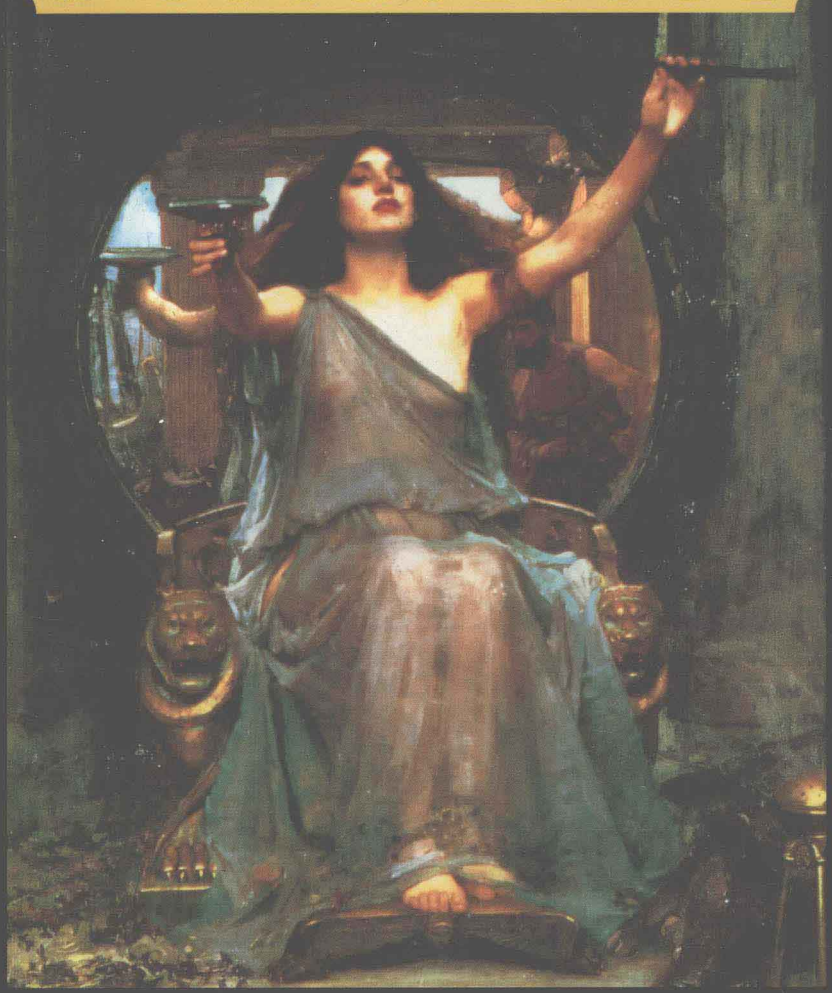
Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds

A SOURCEBOOK



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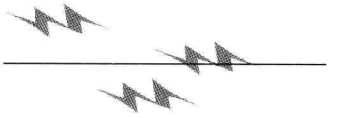

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D. O.

Abbreviations

ABBREVIATIONS FOR CORPORA OF MAGICAL DOCUMENTS

CT	Gager 1992
DT	Audollent 1904
DTA	Wünsch 1897
PDM	Betz 1992
PGM	Preisendanz and Henrichs 1973–74
SGD	Jordan 1985c
Suppl.Mag.	Daniel and Maltomini 1990–92
Tab. Sulis	Tomlin 1988

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	*Athens Annals of Archaeology*
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
AM	*Mitteilungen des deutschn archäologischen Instituts. Athenische Abteiliung*
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
Arch.Eph.	*Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς*
ARW	*Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*
ASG	*Abhandlungen der Sächsichen Gesellschaften. Philologisch-historische Klasse*
BCH	*Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*
BICS	*Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*
BJ	*Bonner Jahrbucher*
BO	*Biblotheca Orientalis*
BSA	*Annual of the British School at Athens*
CA	*Classical Antiquity*
CCC	*Civiltà classica e cristiana*
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, consilio et auctoritate Academiae litterarum regiae Borussicae editum*. 16 + ꝟols. Berlin. 1863–
CJ	*Classical Journal*
C&M	*Classica et Mediaevalia*
CP	*Classical Philology*
CPG	Leutsch 1839–51
CQ	*Classical Quarterly*
CR	*Classical Review*
CRAI	*Comptes-rendus de séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*
CW	*Classical World*
DK	H. Diels and W. Krantz, eds. 1952. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 6th ed. Berlin
EMC/CV	*Echos du monde classique/Classical views*

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ENS	*École normale supérieure*
EPRO	*Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romaine*
FGH	F. Jacoby, ed. 1923–58. *Die Fragmente der griechischer Historiker.* 15 vols. Berlin
GRBS	*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae* 1903–. Berlin
ILS	H. Dessau, 1892–1916. *Inscriptiones Latinae selectae.* Berlin.
JbAC	*Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near-Eastern Studies*
JOAI	*Jahreshefte des österreichischen archäologischen Instituts in Wien*
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JWCI	*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*
LCM	*Liverpool Classical Monthly*
LIMC	*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*
LS	C. T. Lewis and C. Short, eds. 1879. *A Latin Dictionary.* Oxford
MÉFRA	*Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'École française de Rome*
MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica.* 15 vols. 1877–1919
NJKlA	*Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum*
OMRL	*Oudheidkundige Mededelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden*
PBSR	*Proceedings of the British School at Rome*
PCPS	*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*
PG	J-P. Migne, ed. 1857–66. *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca.* Paris
PL	J-P. Migne, ed. 1841–64. *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina.* Paris
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis* 1903–. Paris
PP	*Parola del Passato*
QUCC	*Quaderni urbinati di cultura classica*
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*
RE	Pauly et al. 1893–
REA	*Revue des études anciennes*
REG	*Revue des études grecques*
REL	*Revue des études latines*
RGVV	*Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten*
RhM	*Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
RIB	R. G. Collingwood, 1965–. *The Roman inscriptions of Britain.* Sundry volumes. Oxford
RP	*Revue de philologie*
RSO	*Rivista degli studi orientali*
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum.* 1923–. Leiden
SIFC	*Studi italiani di filologia classica*
SO	*Symbolae Osloenses*
Syl.^{3}	W. Dittenberger, ed. 1915–24. *Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum.* 3rd ed. 4 vols. Leipzig
TAPA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
TrGF	Snell, B., R. Kannicht, and S. Radt, ed. 1971–. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta.* 4+ vols. Göttingen
VC	*Vigiliae Christianae*
WS	*Wiener Studien*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

Contents

Magic,
Witchcraft, and Ghosts
in the Greek and Roman Worlds

1
Introduction

THE AIM OF THIS BOOK

The aim of this book is to provide a selection of sources in translation for magic and ghosts in Graeco-Roman antiquity that does the following:

- Provides a very full account of the rich representations of sorcerers and witches and their rites in ancient literature.
- Provides a good range of the ghost stories and other sources for ghosts and ideas about them from ancient literature.
- Provides a useful selection from the many hundreds of curse tablets from antiquity, which can be striking in their language and their goals, including a number of recently deciphered ones of great importance. Texts bearing upon the closely related phenomenon of voodoo dolls are also represented.
- Provides a similarly useful selection of amulet texts.
- Provides a meaningful selection of recipes and spells from the often daunting corpus of the Greek magical papyri.
- Attempts to expose such connections as there are between the documentary evidence for magic and its representation in high literature, and to do the same for ghosts.
- Selects and presents sources with an eye to important developments in the new scholarship on these subjects.
- Exploits pre-Christian and especially archaic and classical Greek evidence to the full, without neglecting the later period.
- Presents this material in a fashion that is readily accessible to undergraduates and interested amateurs (whether approaching the material from an interest in ancient social history or from a more general one in the so-called occult).
- Allows the material, so far as possible, to "speak for itself," through careful sequencing of passages and through heavy use of cross-referencing.
- Gives clearly and systematically for all passages their chief significance, their authorship (or provenance), their citation, their date of composition, and their original language.
- Provides all sources in original translations. Particular care has been taken in the selection of text-editions for the magical documents.
- Includes a substantial, up-to-date, guide to further reading.

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In the last decade there has been an explosion in interest in ancient magic and the related field of ghosts among scholars of classical antiquity. This has generated new insights into these inherently fascinating subjects and, beyond this, into the broader social history of the ancient world. The new interest has been combined with an eagerness to widen the accessibility of the challenging source material on which the subjects depend, as is exemplified in the work of Hans Dieter Betz, David Jordan, Christopher Faraone, John Gager, Fritz Graf, Sarah Johnston, and their collaborators (see the bibliography). Such work has understandably given rise to a proliferation of undergraduate courses on ancient magic throughout United States and United Kingdom universities. But these courses have been hampered by the lack of a single-volume sourcebook that meets all the desirable criteria listed above, the need this volume aspires to fill.

The closest thing to such a sourcebook already available is Georg Luck's *Arcana Mundi* (1985), a title he translates as *Secrets of the Universe*. This book, compiled before the appearance of what we may call the "new scholarship" of ancient magic, remains a hugely important achievement. It can, however, be a difficult volume for a beginner to find his or her way around. It spreads its purview very wide, with the texts it classes as "magic" only occupying a single chapter out of six (large chapters are devoted to more specialized and late-antique-centered subjects such as astrology and alchemy). The documentary evidence for magic and ghosts is weakly represented. Space is given only to a few of the Greek magical papyri, while the curse tablets, the object of the most exciting developments in scholarship over the last decade, are almost entirely neglected, as are amulets. For the documentary material one must depend on more specialized sourcebooks. John Gager's *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (1992) is extremely useful but is inevitably limited to the genre it serves. The same is true of Hans Dieter Betz's *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (2nd ed., 1992), which provides comprehensive translations of the fundamental corpus of the Greek magical papyri. This large volume, which has room for only sparing fragments of exegesis, is scarcely less baffling to novice students of the papyri than their Greek originals are. For obvious reasons, a number of the texts translated here overlap with those to be found in these three books, but there are also many that will be found in none of them, and indeed some texts of considerable importance that are not, to my knowledge, available in English, such as the major piece with which I close the volume, Libanius's speech *Against the Lying Mage*, **300**.

THE PARAMETERS OF THE BOOK AND ITS STRUCTURE

The passages collected here translate literary and documentary texts written in Greek or Latin (occasionally both) produced throughout the Graeco-Roman world between the beginning of the Greek archaic period, 776 B.C., and the end of the Roman Empire, 476 A.D. (with a few run-overs). The primary focus is on magic in its pagan context; Christian sources are included where they shed important light on this, but there has been no systematic attempt to cover Christianity's reception of magic. A particular attempt has been made to give heavy coverage to material from the earlier end of this period, that from archaic and classical Greece.

The definition of "magic" is famously problematic, and authors of books on

the subject usually feel the need for many pages of philosophical reflection on the issue in their introductions. It is obviously desirable that a sourcebook, particularly one designed to be used by undergraduates, among others, should avoid the expression of any dogmatic view on the matter and leave its readers to make up their own minds on it. At the same time, it would be naïve to suppose that such a book could be compiled in the first place without any criteria of selection of material, and these criteria must proceed from, or lead to, some sort of definition of magic, however inexplicit, inchoate, or half-baked. The primary criterion I have in fact adopted for the selection of passages for this book is that of relevance to the subject matter of recent scholarly books on antiquity with such words as "magic" in their titles. I am aware that this will appear to be a disappointing sleight of hand to many of a philosophical bent, but it would have been pedagogically irresponsible to take any other course of action. Some recent discussions on the definitional problems of magic in ancient context can be found in *A Guide to Further Reading* I.8.

It would also be naïve to suppose, running commentaries aside, that the source passages, once selected, could be grouped and sequenced within the book without the entailing of a series of arguments about the configuration of ancient magic. If there is one overriding argument implicit in the book, it is, as the title itself indicates, the contention of the centrality of ghosts to ancient magic: they were not its only motor, but it is fair to say that they were its chief one. The importance of the role of ghosts in ancient magic has particularly come to the fore in recent work on curse tablets. The chapterization of the book has been developed to take this importance into account. Otherwise the book has been structured at chapter level in accordance with a number of overlapping categories: in part in accordance with sorcerer type (shamans, mages, Egyptians, neo-Pythagoreans, witches, etc.); in part in accordance with type of magical document (literary account, curse tablet, voodoo dolls, papyrus recipes [these being concentrated in chapter 11], amulets, and laws); in part in accordance with type of magical activity (necromancy, cursing, erotic attraction, etc.). Heavy cross-referencing between the passages reproduced extends the range of each chapter. Cross-referencing has also been used to draw together groups of passages united by themes unaddressed at chapter or subsection level. In this way one can quickly assemble passages relevant to the goddess Hecate, for example, or to healing magic, or to the technique of snake-blasting. Where particularly desirable, chronological factors have also been used in sequencing. Some of the sourcebook's focal subjects are treated in considerable detail, with the reproduction of series of passages on similar themes, in order to afford the reader opportunities for a greater depth of engagement. The advantages of such opportunities, in my opinion, outweigh the corollary retraction in the range of subjects covered.

The book begins with a series of chapters, 2–7, on sorcerer types, focusing first on men, then on women. These chapters include many narratives of a particularly appealing and accessible nature and so afford a relatively congenial entry into the study of ancient magic. Chapter 2 looks at the earlier homegrown Greek sorcerers of various kinds. First, consideration is given to the Pythagorean-inspired traditions of a group of men that supposedly flourished in the archaic period, whom we now call the Greek "shamans." These men had a number of miraculous capacities, many of which proceeded from their abilities to detach their souls from bodies during life. In the classical period a range of largely hostile sources constructs for us, under such terms as *goêtes* ("sorcer-

ers") and *magoi* ("mages"), an impression of a nebulous group of supposedly fraudulent and beggarly magical professionals who concerned themselves with such things as the curing of illness, the manufacture of curse tablets, and the well-being of the soul in the afterlife. Among these a subgroup of "evocators" (*psuchagôgoi*) is identifiable. Also in the classical period is found the phenomenon of the "ventriloquists" (*engastrimuthoi*, etc.), men or women with prophetic demons in their stomachs that use their hosts as mouthpieces. But already too in the classical period the Greeks were beginning to project the idea of the male sorcerer onto alien races, primarily Oriental ones, and many of the most exciting portraits of male practitioners in the Graeco-Roman tradition belong in this category. The developing trend in the representation of male sorcerers as Median or Persian mages, as Babylonian Chaldaeans, and as Egyptians is the subject of chapter 3. Chapter 4 looks in greater depth at three sorcerers from the first and second centuries A.D. for whom substantial and developed literary portraits survive. Two of these, Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abonouteichos, were neo-Pythagoreans and revived the work of the shamans. The first is known primarily from the positive portrait of Philostratus; the second is known almost exclusively from the extremely hostile portrait of Lucian. These two pieces accordingly constitute a useful antithesis. Also included here is a substantial portrait of Simon Magus, supposedly the great rival of Saint Peter. Our accounts of him may be almost entirely fictional.

Chapter 5 turns to the women—to witches, the representation of whom in the Graeco-Roman tradition is almost entirely fictive. First are a series of portraits, some of them extended, of the two great witches of Greek mythology, the kindred Medea and Circe. The tales about these women, already well established in the Archaic period, bestow a full range of powers upon them. Chapter 6 looks at other witches and witch-like women in Greek (and related Latin) literature, such as Deianeira, the wife of Heracles. Chapter 7 is devoted to the Latin response to such imaginary witches, first in poetry, in which witch figures became commonplace, and second in novels. The Romans liked to imagine their witches as altogether more bloodthirsty, gruesome, and morbid figures. Readers who prefer their magic in "Gothic" style should turn straight to the sections given to Horace's Canidia, Lucan's Erictho, and Apuleius's Meroe.

Ghosts and cadaverous material play an important role in the unlovely craft of the Latin witches, which leads conveniently to consideration of ghosts and the dead in their own right in chapter 8. The categories of dead most likely to be restless, and therefore to manifest themselves as ghosts or to haunt, were those who died before their time (*aôroi*), those who died by violence (*biaiothanatoi*), those, particularly girls, who died before marriage (*agamoi*), and those who were denied due burial after death (*ataphoi*). It was the restless dead who lent themselves most easily to exploitation for magical purposes. Much of this chapter is devoted to the laying of ghosts, and in this connection some entertaining stories about haunted houses survive. Attention is also given to the (Jewish-influenced) evidence for the expulsion of possessing ghosts from individuals. The souls of young boys could be so valued for magical operations that they could, in popular imagination at any rate, even be "manufactured" for the purpose. The supposed purity of the soul of the living boy in any case gave it a privileged position in attempts to communicate with ghosts and other powers. Finally this chapter looks briefly at werewolves, which were sometimes regarded as a kind of ghost.

The most direct use of ghosts for magical purposes was for necromancy, a

term I use here in its original sense to mean "divination from the dead," and this forms the subject of chapter 9. Ghosts could be evocated for divination either at oracles of the dead or at tombs. The existence of the former seems to be attested already in Homer's *Odyssey*. The Roman period sees the emergence of a new variety of necromancy alongside the evocation method, that of the reanimation of corpses. The roots of this form of divination in reality are difficult to fathom but may have been connected with skull necromancy. Other varieties of magical divination, some of them not entirely unconnected with ghosts, are also considered here.

Another important magical use for ghosts, directly or indirectly, was in the execution of binding spells (*katadesmoi* or *defixiones*). These form the principal subject of chapter 10. The main themes of these fascinating texts are now conventionally classified under five headings: legal curses, competition curses, trade curses, erotic curses, and the slightly distinctive "prayers for justice." All these varieties are exemplified here, apart from the erotic one, which is dealt with in the next chapter. Included with our treatment of binding spells are also some passages on the "evil eye," another variety of cursing, which, however, did not always proceed from intention.

Chapter 11 is devoted to erotic magic. Apart from being the subject of many of the more striking curse tablets, it is a particularly popular theme in the Greek magical papyri, which are given prominence here, and it is very often the chief concern of the witches in the literary portraits of them. It is also a subject of interest within the continually expanding field of ancient gender studies. Here consideration is given to the two principal varieties of erotic magic, curses of separation and curses of attraction, and to some of the paraphernalia particularly associated with the latter, the drawing-down of the moon, the *iunx* or "wryneck," and the *hippomanes* or "horse-madness" plant, gland, or secretion. This is also the place to consider some magical techniques ancillary to erotic magic, namely, those offering contraception or procuring abortion.

The next chapter, 12, turns to another category of magical document, *kolossoi* or voodoo dolls and similar magical images, and to the literary sources that bear upon them. These intriguing artifacts, it seems, preceded curse tablets, to which they are closely related and the functions of which they share for the most part. In chapter 13 consideration is given to a final category of magical document, amulets, and again the literary sources that bear upon them. Amulets afforded many forms of protection to their wearers and in particular were often curative or exorcistic. Many of them bestowed erotic attractiveness or general favor.

Finally, chapter 14 looks at some of the evidence for legislation against magic; this is surprisingly meager for Greek culture but more plentiful for Roman. The book closes with two forensic speeches on magical subjects. Apuleius's *Apology* is a defense against a series of charges of magical practice, chiefly erotic magic. Libanius's speech *Against the Lying Mage* is a fictitious speech based on an imaginary premise. Both speeches are interesting for the logical tricks they play with the concept of magic in a legal context.

THE PRESENTATION OF SOURCES AND THE COMMENTARIES

Every attempt has been made to present the sources in as clear a way as possible. Not only are these distributed across fourteen chapters, but they also

participate in a continuous numerical series. Each source's serial number is followed by essential information about it: its main significance, its formal reference, its original language, and its date of production (which, it should be noted, is not necessarily the same as the events referred to in it).

The translated source follows at once, without further introductory material, for the sake of immediacy. Care has been taken in the case of the documentary sources to base the translation on the best available published editions, since the difficulties of decipherment and interpretation can lead to significant variations between them. The editions used for the literary sources are usually listed in alphabetical order of ancient author or of corpus in the list of texts in the bibliography; occasionally, for some more obscure sources, direct reference is made in the heading (using the format of author and date) to items of scholarship listed in the works cited section of the bibliography. The translations printed here are all my own, but I do not disguise the fact that some previously published translations, particularly those offered by the editors of the more difficult and obscure documentary sources, have been of influence. I do not confront the reader with the niceties of textual disputes, except on the rare occasions where these have a particular bearing upon magical issues. The style of some of the documentary sources is less exquisite than that expected from the heights of classical literature, and this will sometimes be apparent in the translations provided. Round brackets in the translations, (. . .), are used merely in punctuation of the original text. Square brackets, [. . .], enclose the translator's brief explanatory material or the original word translated, with Greek terms transliterated. In particular, they supply the words used for such things as "sorcerers," "witches," and "sorcery," usually with the exceptions of *magos* and its derivatives, which go conveniently into "mage" and its derivatives, and *daimôn* and its derivatives, which go conveniently into "demon" and its derivatives. Angle brackets, <. . .>, are used, infrequently, to indicate significant editorial supplements to the ancient texts as preserved.

The translated source is then followed by a commentary or exegesis. The commentaries are of varying length, depending on the intrinsic importance of their source and on its strategic role within the sourcebook. The commentaries seek to shed light on major obscurities in the sources, to provide germane background information, and, above all, to draw attention to the source's relationship with the other sources in the volume. The frequent cross-references to such other sources utilize their serial number in bold type. Occasionally direct reference is made, in conventional format, to texts not included in the volume. There has not been room to explain every last obscurity in the cases of some of the richer and more complex texts, but I have not taken this as a ground for exclusion. Nonclassicists who want to know more about ancient authors and institutions represented here only by name are referred in the first instance to N. S. R. Hornblower and A. J. Spawforth's *Oxford Classical Dictonary* (3rd ed., Oxford, 1996), a categorical improvement on that work's earlier editions. For mythological references, M. C. Howatson's *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford, 1989) may be of use. Places are most conveniently located with the maps in *The Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*, edited by R. J. Talbert (Princeton, 2000).

2
Greek Sorcerers

SHAMANS

The earliest variety of indigenous male sorcerer attested for the Greek world is the "shaman." This term is commonly applied to a linked series of figures celebrated in the Pythagorean and Orphic traditions. They flourished, supposedly, in the archaic period. The notices of Herodotus and the fragments of Empedocles demonstrate that the notion of the shaman-type had at any rate already become established by the early classical period. No doubt it was much older. The modern term "shaman" is derived from the Tungus medicine man of that name. He detaches his soul from his body in an ecstatic trance. This detached soul then speaks with the gods in their own language and cures the sick by retrieving their souls from the land of the dead or by defeating death-bringing demons in battle. He also attracts animals to the hunt with his music and by defeating the gods that preside over them with his soul. The Greek shamans are similarly characterized by the ability to manipulate their own souls, be it by detaching them temporarily from their bodies and sending them on voyages of discovery, suspending them from life, reincarnating them, or "bilocating." The principal figures in the series, with their supposed *floruits*, are as follows:

Orpheus:	mythical era
Trophonius:	mythical era
Aristeas of Proconessus:	early seventh century B.C.
Hermotimus of Clazomenae:	seventh century B.C.?
Epimenides of Cnossus or Phaestus:	ca. 600 B.C.
Pythagoras of Samos:	530s–520s B.C.
Abaris the Hyperborean:	sixth century B.C.?
Zalmoxis of the Thracian Getae:	sixth century B.C.?
Empedocles of Acragas:	ca. 485–35 B.C.

A number of further themes recur in the representations of the shamans: extended retreats into underground chambers (a symbolic death and descent to the underworld, from which they return with enlightenment); divination; control of the elements; association with the cult of Hyperborean Apollo; dismissal of pollution and pestilence. For another possible archaic shaman see **140**; for later Greek "shamans" see **57–64**.

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