



Robert Wiśniewski

# Christian Divination in Late Antiquity

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in Late Antiquity



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# Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

The Late Antiquity experienced profound cultural and social change: the political disintegration of the Roman Empire in the West, contrasted by its continuation and transformation in the East; the arrival of 'barbarian' newcomers and the establishment of new polities; a renewed militarization and Christianization of society; as well as crucial changes in Judaism and Christianity, together with the emergence of Islam and the end of classical paganism. This series focuses on the resulting diversity within Late Antique society, emphasizing cultural connections and exchanges; questions of unity and inclusion, alienation and conflict; and the processes of syncretism and change. By drawing upon a number of disciplines and approaches, this series sheds light on the cultural and social history of Late Antiquity and the greater Mediterranean world.

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# Christian Divination in Late Antiquity

*Robert Wiśniewski*

*Translated by Damian Jasiński*

Amsterdam University Press



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Cover illustration: Oracular ticket from Antinoë discovered on 21 October 1984 at the East Kom (sector D 2 III) and published by Alain Delattre (2017). When found, the ticket was folded and tied with a string visible on the photo. The texts reads: ‘† God of the saint, if you want me to study medicine, answer me.†’ (© Alain Delattre – Mission archéologique d’Antinooupolis).

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# List of Abbreviations

<i>Ep.</i>	<i>epistola/ae</i>
<i>praef.</i>	<i>praefatio</i>
<i>prol.</i>	<i>prologus</i>
<i>s.a.</i>	<i>sub anno</i>
<b>BA</b>	Bibliothèque Augustinienne (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer)
<b>BHG</b>	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i> (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1895, 1909 <sup>2</sup> , 1957 <sup>3</sup> ), supplemented by <i>Bibliothecae Hagiographicae Graecae Auctarium</i> , ed. by François Halkin (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1969)
<b>BHL</b>	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina</i> (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1949 <sup>2</sup> ) supplemented by <i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina: Novum Supplementum</i> , ed. by Henricus Fros (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1986)
<b>BHO</b>	<i>Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis</i> , ed. Paul Peeters (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1910)
<b>CCL</b>	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols)
<b>CSCO</b>	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Leuven: Peeters)
<b>CSEL</b>	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna: F. Tempsky; Berlin: De Gruyter)
<b>CSLA</b>	<i>Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity</i> database, <a href="http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk">http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk</a> (Oxford)
<b>CTh</b>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i> , ed. by Theodor Mommsen (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905); trans. by Clyde Pharr: <i>The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions: A Translation with Commentary, Glossary, and Bibliography</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).
<b>GCS</b>	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag)
<b>ICUR NS</b>	<i>Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae. Nova Series</i> (Rome: Ex Officina Libraria Doct. Befani)
<b>ILCV</b>	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres</i> (Berlin: Weidmann)
<b>LCL</b>	Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press)
<b>MGH AA</b>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Auctores Antiquissimi</i> (Berlin: Weidmann)





- MGH SRM Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum* (Berlin: Weidmann; Hannover/Leipzig: Hahn)
- PG Patrologia Graeca = Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca (Paris: J.-P. Migne)
- PGM Papyri Graecae Magicae/Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri*, ed. by Karl Preisendanz and Albert Henrichs, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973–4).
- PL Patrologia Latina = Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina (Paris : J.-P. Migne)
- PO Patrologia Orientalis (Turnhout: Brepols)
- SC Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf)
- SH Subsidia Hagiographica (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes)
- Teubner Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Leipzig/Stuttgart: B. Teubner; Munich: K.G. Saur; Berlin: De Gruyter)

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# Introduction

Late antique Christians lived in a world where there was a general conviction that by resorting to special techniques, asking questions in special places or enquiring of special people, it was possible to learn about things that normally lay beyond human cognition. In many cases, this referred to knowing in advance what was going to happen in the future, but also to unravelling the mysteries of the present day and events that already belonged to the past. The methods in question were also believed to produce advice on what one should do or, more generally, help to discover the truth about the unknown. When talking about the wide array of such techniques the Greeks usually used the blanket term of *manteia*; the equivalent Latin term for this was *divinatio*. Among inhabitants of the Roman world, there were an enormous variety of methods applied in divination, including consulting oracles located in widely known as well as not-so-famous sanctuaries, questioning 'divine men', entranced magi and mediums, seeking prophetic dreams, observing the flight and singing of birds, examining the entrails of sacrificial animals, watching ripples on water, drawing lots, etc. Almost all of these practices involved an even broader repertoire of specific techniques, which at times required a specialist to perform the consultations and explain their results to the inquirer. The traditional view, most extensively presented in Cicero's *De divinatione*, distinguished the divinely inspired natural divination from its artificial counterpart, namely the sort of divination that required specialized knowledge about the relevant techniques. However, as we shall see, this learned distinction, which in fact was of little significance even to the traditional Greek and Roman practices, was entirely foreign to Christian divination, even on the theoretical side of things.

The main question which this book aims to answer is what did the late antique Christians do when they wanted to gain the kind of hidden knowledge that their non-Christian contemporaries gained using traditional Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Celtic and other divinatory practices? The situation of Christians in this respect was complicated. As we shall see, they usually did not deny that pagan divination happened at least to be effective, but at the same time they knew, or at least should have known, that they were not allowed to use it themselves. In practice, they behaved in diverse ways. Some probably renounced any hope of learning the hidden past, present or future. Those people, however, are barely visible in our sources. This is not to say that they did not exist, but the nature of our evidence makes it difficult to prove that a specific person did not use a divinatory practice (it is, for



that matter, equally difficult to prove that they did not pray or steal). As a consequence, we cannot say how numerous such people were; in any case, they are not of primary interest in this book. Other Christians did resort to the old practices. There is good evidence showing this, ranging from sermons and other literary texts to secular laws censuring those who sought the help of 'pagan' specialists. Their religion probably did not dramatically change their pattern of behaviour in the sphere we are interested in. Finally, there were also other Christians who tried to construct specifically Christian – or at least Christianized – divinatory methods, either because they found them more effective than those used by their non-Christian neighbours, or because they took the preachers' reproaches seriously, and felt a need for practices that would be both effective and acceptable in religious terms. It is these particular methods that I shall refer to as 'Christian divination'.

This book aims to answer some fundamental questions concerning this phenomenon. When and how did it emerge? What was the connection between Christian divination practices and the old methods used in the Mediterranean? What did the Christian divination techniques look like? Who used them, and in what circumstances? Who offered expert knowledge to perform such consultations? What were the attitudes of bishops, intellectuals and ordinary people towards divination?

## The current state of research

Before dealing with these questions, we should examine what has been done so far. In the nineteenth-century heyday of classical studies, divination was a topic that more often filled scholars with loathing than it sparked their interest. Those few who did decide to grapple with this subject felt the need to explain either themselves (for approaching a topic that was widely seen as embarrassing) or the ancients, whose dabbling in such practices gave the lie to the modern concept of classical civilization as radiantly illuminated by the triumph of reason. Consequently, some scholars were keen on rationalizing the role of divination in the ancient world: they argued, for example, that the Delphic oracle was simply a source of information on lands especially suited for colonization. Others relegated these practices to the sphere of folklore, making them appear insignificant when compared with the main intellectual advances of classical antiquity. Others still regarded some forms of divination, especially those attested to in Late Antiquity, as foreign influences that sullied the allegedly impeccable rationality of the Greek and Roman worlds.



Nevertheless, still in the nineteenth century, ancient divination became the primary topic of the hefty, four-volume monograph, *Histoire de la divination dans l'Antiquité*, published in Paris (1879–1882) by Auguste Bouché-Leclercq. This pioneering work remains irreplaceable to this day, notably for its sweeping breadth and the sheer amount of carefully scrutinized detail. Two book-length studies dealing with Greek divination, one by William Reginald Halliday (*Greek Divination: A Study on its Methods and Principles*, London 1913) and the other, much more recent, by Sarah Iles Johnston (*Ancient Greek Divination*, Oxford 2008), are markedly general in character and deal with periods much earlier than Late Antiquity. As for the practice of divination in the Roman world, no systematic attempt has been made to tackle the subject after the publication of the final volume of Bouché-Leclercq's monograph and this work that was compiled much more than a century ago is still a point of reference for the study of several aspects of ancient divination (at the beginning of this century it was reprinted in an unchanged form).

And yet in recent decades great strides have been made in the study of the topic; several previously unknown divinatory texts, and even whole categories of sources, have been discovered. Even more importantly, the attitude of scholars towards divination as a research topic has changed, and that change has brought about a flurry of studies viewing divination as a widespread cultural and social phenomenon, instead of a manifestation of superstitious curiosity or, with reference to research on early Christianity, an instance of 'pagan survival'.<sup>1</sup> This turnaround is owed in part to anthropologists, whose interest in divination dates back to as early as the first half of the twentieth century; their primary focus in this regard has been on the role that the phenomenon played in decision-making, maintaining social cohesion and explaining the world for a fair number of diverse societies, including those of modern Europe and America.<sup>2</sup>

The interest in divination among historians of Antiquity, which has been steadily growing, especially in recent decades, initially resulted in several collections of conference papers, the most interesting of which include *Divination et rationalité* (ed. by Jean-Pierre Vernant and others, Paris 1974), *Pouvoir, divination, prédestination dans le monde antique* (ed. by Élisabeth Smadja and Evelyne Geny, Paris 1999), *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World* (ed. by Leda Ciraolo and Jonathan Seidel, Leiden 2004), *Mantikê*:

1 See Frankfurter, 2018, pp. 7–15.

2 For the early anthropological interest see Evans-Pritchard, 1937. A useful summary of contemporary anthropological approaches to divination: Espírito Santo, 2019.

*Studies in Ancient Divination* (ed. by Peter T. Struck and Sarah Iles Johnston, Leiden 2005) and most recently *My Lots are in Thy Hands: Sortilege and its Practitioners in Late Antiquity* (ed. by AnneMarie Luijendijk and William E. Klingshirn, Leiden 2019).

For a long time, from among the wider spectrum of divination documented for the imperial period, only prophecy was subject to a distinct and extensive study; but the resulting book, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, by David Aune (Grand Rapids 1983), does not deal with the late antique evidence. Recent years, however have brought a number of monographs on various methods of divination. In her *Paroles d'Apollon: pratiques et traditions oraculaires dans l'Antiquité tardive (II<sup>e</sup>–VI<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Leiden 2005), Aude Busine deals with the functioning of Greek oracles under the Roman Empire. Another monograph, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi: Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten*, by Franziska Naether (Tübingen 2010), is devoted to one of the most popular texts used in divination in Late Antiquity. William Klingshirn, who authored several articles on late antique sortition-based divination, is working on a monograph tackling this phenomenon. AnneMarie Luijendijk published a thorough study on a recently discovered oracular text known as the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary (Forbidden Oracles?)* (Tübingen 2014). Dreams and visions, although not necessarily divinatory, have been studied by Martine Dulaey (*Le rêve dans la vie et pensée de saint Augustin*, Paris 1973), Patricia Cox-Miller (*Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination and Culture*, Princeton 1988) and Isabelle Moreira (*Dreams, Visions and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul*, Ithaca, NY, 2000), and currently Bronwen Neil is preparing a new publication on this topic. Ildikó Csepregi is preparing a book on Byzantine incubation (i.e. the divinatory method that consisted in sleeping in a sanctuary in the hope of receiving a revelatory dream), which is also extensively discussed by Gil Renberg in a substantial chapter of his *Where Dreams May Come: Incubation Sanctuaries in the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden 2016). The last two decades have also brought about a considerable number of research papers analysing specific divination methods, without which writing the present monograph would have been an impossible task (I will be referring to them in due course).<sup>3</sup>

As one can see, the topic has been attracting ever more interest from scholars, and the volume of available sources is accruing at an astonishingly brisk pace from new archaeological discoveries and the identification of previously unrecognized texts used in divination. The state of knowledge

3 An excellent up-to-date survey is provided in Luijendijk and Klingshirn, 2019.



is changing almost incessantly. Thus far, however, no attempt has been made to offer a comprehensive portrayal of late antique divination. In his *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), David Potter ventured to take a fairly broad perspective on divination throughout the imperial period, but as he was interested mainly in political divination, a number of methods (e.g. drawing lots, practising incubation, interrogating demoniacs) fell outside of the purview of his study. Also, twenty-five years later, our understanding of several divinatory techniques has evolved substantially, and the widening array of evidence calls for an approach that might tackle the topic in an encompassing manner. This book, focusing as it does on divination in late antique Christian milieus, is a step in this direction.

### The evidence and its intricacies

When studying late antique Christian divination, we have to address several source-related problems. First, the literary evidence attesting this phenomenon is scant. From the first centuries of the Common Era, there survives not a single text that might be regarded as dealing with Christian divination in a systematic manner, one that would make it even remotely analogous to Cicero's *De divinatione*. When reading Eusebius of Caesarea's *Praeparatio evangelica*, part of which is reserved for arguing the case against pagan divination, we find that the author is juggling clichéd literary images and almost completely ignoring the contemporary divination practices, Christian or not. The short treatise by Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, although its title is reminiscent of the work of Cicero, only explains why demons predict the future and does not deal with the means available to people for inquiring into hidden matters. Significantly, it does not even mention any specifically Christian methods of divination. In this book I will repeatedly be dealing with whether and how the literary image of divination that we find in these and other authors mirrors the social reality of the time. Here, it might suffice to say that the paucity of evidence is a result of the dominant attitude of Christian writers toward divination; as we will see in the first chapter, no matter what an average Christian may have thought of it, the clerical authors on whose testimony we largely depend for our reconstruction of the customs and practices of their flock were pretty unenthused by the Christian forms of divination and a long way from recommending them. But at the same time, as the following chapters will demonstrate, neither were they so eager to condemn them.





As a consequence, they usually remained silent and their writings tell us miserably little about Christian divinatory practices, mentioning them almost always merely in passing.

Among the literary texts, most information on the subject can be gleaned from historiography, Bible commentaries, various types of hagiography and sermons. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that incidental remarks on the subject feature in almost every genre of Christian literature. A significant number of practices are mentioned in the normative texts that inveigh against the use of various sorts of divination methods. Such mentions are found in imperial legislation, as well as in various church canons, but while the edicts issued by emperors are concerned almost exclusively with the pagan practice (and deal with it rather severely), the regulations issued by church councils refer mostly to practices that are clearly Christian in character or, at least, Christianized. Obviously, and regrettably, it is very rare that they give us any technical details about these methods: the bishops who sat on the councils that passed such laws had every right to assume that anyone who might be interested would know full well what was being prohibited.

In addition to the testimonies we might call ‘external’ – that is, descriptions, mentions and laws concerning divination – we also have ‘internal’ sources: specialized divination instruments produced and employed by Christians using such methods.<sup>4</sup> These artefacts can be divided into three groups: lots used in the shrines of Egyptian martyrs (which I will discuss in Chapter 5); sets of responses to divinatory questions (Chapter 4), some of which were appended to or in some other way included in biblical codices; and sanctuaries in which people possibly sought divinatory dreams (Chapter 7). There is a growing supply of this kind of evidence, and the new material may prove to be remarkably useful for the study of this subject. To give but one example, AnneMarie Luijendijk has recently published an edition of the hitherto completely unknown divinatory text and we can expect further publications of this sort.<sup>5</sup> Ongoing excavations may yield more such finds, but even if we consider only those discovered thus far, it is worth noting that no more than two dozen oracular lots found in Egypt have been made available to a wider circle of researchers, while many times more still await publication.

4 This distinction is particularly useful with reference to magic and divination; see Bohak, 2008, pp. 70–3.

5 Luijendijk, 2014. See also other identified but still unpublished divinatory books: Kocar, 2019, and R. Stewart, 2019.

The dispersed character of the evidence of course makes the research on Christian divination an extremely arduous task. The issue of scope, however, is only one of the evidence-related hurdles in the way of those who study this topic. No less important is that the various types of sources offer little else but an unwieldy assortment of vague glimpses, and it is indeed exceedingly difficult to piece them together to develop a broader, cohesive picture of the phenomenon in question. There are several reasons for this. First of all, the specialized terms used by late antique writers are usually non-specific and are hardly ever employed in a consistent manner, which often makes it difficult, or even impossible, to identify the method they are referring to. Secondly, the practices that are attested to by more than one type of evidence are very few. Most divination practices known to us from 'internal' testimonies (such as oracular books and tickets) are passed over in silence by the literary sources, and so we know very little of how they were actually used. Similarly, the methods known from literary texts (such as consulting prophets or opening the Bible at random) are not discernible in the archaeological evidence that might have helped to assess their character and geographical scope. Thirdly, the available sources, in addition to being scarce and disparate, come from various, often very distant times and places, which often makes it difficult to determine whether they are referring to one and the same practice when using a given term and, if they do so, whether the practice retained its character across various regions and historical periods. For instance, if we take the divination books whose use was condemned by the church councils held in Gaul, were they of the same kind as the fragmentary texts known from the excavations in Egypt? Similarly, in the case of the lots scribbled on papyrus found in the sanctuaries of the Nile Valley, was this a local practice used only in Egypt or a more widespread custom related to the unique case that we find in Gregory of Tours, namely the drawing of lots on the altar? Did the prophesying *engastrimythoi* ('belly-talkers') share the same characteristics as the *arrepticii* (the 'seized') mentioned in the Latin sources? Are we to believe that incubation, which is fairly well attested in the literary sources, should be regarded as the most common variety of all divination techniques solely on account of the number of literary testimonies? These are only a few of the questions that we are faced with when examining our evidence.

Acknowledging all these limitations, I must say that this evidence is truly fascinating nonetheless, and I will endeavour to make the best of it, using standard methods of historical study. In doing so, I will be trying to make the sources speak to each other, often reconstructing practices that are described in full in none of them and discussing the related technical



or quasi-technical terms. The contexts in which they appear will also be thoroughly examined with a view to finding out how important they were to the authors and what they knew and thought about their spread. The reticence (or verbosity) of the authors with regard to divination shall also be subject to careful inquiry, as it may prove particularly helpful in establishing whether the silence of the sources is a reflection of the limited popularity of a practice or simply has to do with the limitations of the evidence. Literary references, especially the biblical ones, will be discussed with a view to understanding what the authors preferred not to be explicit about (and for what reasons). I will also be examining lists of divinatory questions and sets of answers and will, by combining the former with the latter, try to determine who sought help from oracles, and when and why. I will scour the evidence to find out the attitudes of those whom our sources did not allow to speak their mind in their own voices; at the very least, I shall inquire into the assumptions that those who wrote about them (or to them) made about their thoughts. Furthermore, I will study the clientele of divination specialists, paying particular attention to their social status and gender, and try to find out what groups are over- or under-represented in the evidence. I leave it to the reader to judge whether this approach has been fruitful.

## Objectives and plan of the book

My primary intention is to find out what people would do when they craved hidden knowledge. Only the first chapter will be dealing more with theory than practice, and a fairly general theory at that. In it, I shall discuss Christian attitudes towards divination and try to explain the rationale behind them. Opinions expressed on this subject by such authors as Origen, John Chrysostom and Augustine are fairly well known, and in this regard there is going to be little novelty. More interesting are the attitudes of ordinary people, rank-and-file clergymen and monks, who did not necessarily share the opinions of the very select group of clerical or monastic writers. Run-of-the-mill individuals, however, usually remain silent in our evidence, and so it is specific actions rather than statements that allow us to inquire into their views: it is to those actions and to the various divination methods that the subsequent chapters of the book will be devoted. There, I shall be dealing successively with consulting holy men, using the Bible and other texts specially designed for use in divination, drawing lots by a variety of sortition-based methods, questioning demoniacs and practising incubation. On various occasions, I will also discuss divination techniques used in 'pagan'



milieus (or Jewish, but less frequently), but these will only serve as points of reference that might prove useful for the study of Christian methods. It must be stated at the very beginning that this book is not aimed at presenting the whole spectrum of techniques used by Christians in Late Antiquity, not least because it is beyond doubt that many of them used methods that were traditionally 'pagan' or had no evident religious characteristics. The methods I am going to examine were specifically Christian, or at least noticeably Christianized. Therefore, the principal objective of the book is to present the methods of those who – acknowledging that they could not use the long-established methods of divination – wanted to ferret out the truth about the hidden past, present and future, and conceived of their religion as a resource to draw on rather than a hurdle to overcome in trying to do so.

In consequence, this book leaves aside two types of late antique divinatory methods that were used by Christians. The first group consists of the long-established methods that were still in use in Late Antiquity but were not Christianized to any significant extent. In the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries Christians did not live in isolation from their 'pagan' neighbours, friends and relatives. Most of them were certainly well aware of how their non-Christian contemporaries inquired into hidden matters. Also, and no less importantly, many of them employed those methods in their own inquiries. The second group consists of practices that were also used by Christians but that hardly qualify as religious in nature. These include divination by numbers, which attributed numerical values to words, especially proper names, and then interpreted them according to a complex key, and physiognomy, a divinatory practice consisting in reading the hidden thoughts and predicting the future of individuals on the basis of their physical appearance.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, this category also includes astrology, which in Late Antiquity was indisputably immensely popular among both pagans and Christians, but was considered to fall outside the realm of the religious. Rather, for its practitioners, the relationship between the movements of the stars and planets and the earthly reality was a part of the natural order of the universe, entirely unsusceptible and immune to the work of gods or demons. The arrangements of celestial bodies, if one was capable of interpreting them properly, indicated future events just as automatically and without fail as the appearance of the Pleiades heralded the coming of winter. This dependence was purely physical. As a result, there is just as little reason in saying that there was any specifically

6 Both methods were mercilessly ridiculed by Hippolytus in the early third century; see Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 4.14–15.



Christian (or pagan) sort of astrology at the time as there is with regard to physics. Granted, astrology was fiercely condemned by several Christian authors and canonical regulations, regardless of its non-religious character, but the aversion to astrologers and their art did not stem from the belief that practising it involved coming into contact with demons (which, as we shall see, was the fundamental argument against practising other traditional methods of divination), but from the fact that their presupposed fatalistic worldview was utterly incompatible with Christian doctrine.<sup>7</sup> One has to admit that later attempts were made to Christianize astrology and demonstrate that not only was it compatible with the teaching of the Church, but also constituted a divine gift that should not be disparaged. Kocku von Stuckrad rightly points out that astrology did not have to be seen as utterly fatalistic. However, learned disputations on this topic began to occur well beyond the time frame adopted in this book.<sup>8</sup> All methods mentioned in this paragraph await a separate study.

The time frame of this book covers the period between the fourth and sixth centuries. The starting point is the time of immense change in Christian religiosity that occurred during the reign of Constantine the Great and his successors. I must point out, however, that the decision to discuss the issue beginning with this particular period was not based on an a priori assumption. In my research, I did examine earlier sources datable to the second and third centuries, and I will be referring to them in numerous instances. But in this early evidence there is simply no trace of divination practices that might be put on a par with those we see in later centuries. It is not my intention to accept, by default, the obsolete and rightly criticized claim that once the persecutions had ended and the new religion had been adopted by the Roman emperors, Christianity transmogrified into a 'paganized' religion of the masses. Nevertheless, Christian attitudes towards revealing hidden matters did change in this period, giving rise to the Christian divinatory practices that developed between the fourth and sixth centuries. The other end of the time frame is not as clear-cut: with a view to focusing primarily on the beginnings of Christian divination, I

7 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio evangelica* 6; Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 6.7; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra fatum*.

8 Bruning, 1990. For the beginnings of this phenomenon, see Dagron, 1981. Von Stuckrad, 2000, suggests that there was late antique Christian astrology, but this assumption rests on a very frail basis. The passage from the *Historia Augusta* (*Hadrianus* 8.3) that he quotes in support of his claim (the text has it that every Christian presbyter in Egypt was an astrologer) should be treated with caution: the author of that work, scathingly hostile to Christians, did not even try to describe their customs in a reliable way, especially with regard to divination.

traced its development until that practice came to take a mature, although by no means final, form, which appears to have taken place in the sixth century. Occasionally, I will be referring to later sources but only when they help us better understand the phenomena attested to in earlier testimonies.

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