# THE BIRTH OF THE TERM 'MAGIC'

Jan N. Bremmer

Although this book studies magic in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, it seems not inappropriate to start our collection with an investigation into the origin of this much abused term.[1] When and why did people start to use the term 'magic'? The practice of magic probably goes back several millennia, but the origin of the term has its roots in ancient Greece. This origin was investigated in a famous article by Arthur Darby Nock in 1933.[2] Nock (1902-63) was the best expert on ancient religion as a whole in the period of 1930-1960,[3] and it was probably his reputation that kept contemporary investigations into magic from taking the trouble to see whether his views can be improved upon. When the origin of the Greek terms ***magos*** and ***mageia*** is mentioned, scholars invariably refer to Nock.[4] Yet a closer look at Nock's article soon reveals that he did not collect all the available evidence and that his views on Iranian religion are outdated;[5] moreover, important new evidence has been discovered both on the Iranian and the Greek fronts since the appearance of his study. It is therefore appropriate to review the evidence once again.

## *The birth of magos and mageia*

It is evidently impossible to discuss the meaning of the terms ***magos*** and ***mageia*** for the whole of Antiquity. As the Magi were closely associated with the Persian king and his empire,[6] I limit myself to the period before the arrival of Alexander the Great, when their place in society and, perhaps, their

---

[1] I use the following abbreviations for references to the fragments of Greek historians and Aristotelic pupils: *FGrH* = Jacoby, ***Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker***. Wehrli[2] = Wehrli, ***Die Schule des Aristoteles***, 10 vols.

[2] Nock, 'Paul and the Magus'.

[3] For Nock, see the bibliography mentioned by Stewart in: Nock, ***Essays;*** see also Calder, ***Men in Their Books,*** pp. 233-234,284-285.

[4] See Rigsby, 'Teiresias', p. 110; Versnel, 'Some reflections', p. 194, note 14; Gager, 'Moses the Magician', p. 187, note 8; Graf, ***Magic,*** p. 20, note 1.

[5] As is noted by De Jong, ***Traditions of the Magi,*** p. 222, note 62.

[6] Bickerman, ***Religions and Politics,*** pp. 619-641 (with H. Tadmor); Briant, ***Histoire de l'empire perse***, vol. 1, pp. 256-258; De Jong, ***Traditions of the Magi,*** pp. 387-403 (a well balanced analysis of the early ***magoi).***

doctrines must have undergone more or less serious changes.[7] In this period, the oldest attestation of the word magos occurs in a passage of the philosopher Heraclitus as given by Clement of Alexandria in his *Protreptikos* (2.22.2). On the question as to who is the object of Heraclitus's prophecies, the Church Father provides the following quote: 'those who wander in the night (*nyktipolois*): Magi (magois), bacchants (*bakchois*), maenads (*lênais*), initiates (*mystais*).[8] There are various oddities in the quotation: the term used for 'bacchant' is not attested before Euripides, that of 'initiate' without any (implicit) qualification, such as 'of Eleusis', not before the Derveni papyrus (below) or the Orphic gold-tablet of Hipponium (v. 16: ca. 400 BC),[9] and that for 'maenad' not before Theocritus XXVI. As Clement's tendency to interpret and expand his sources is well-known, one may have one's doubts about the authenticity of the precise wording of the quotation.[10] On the other hand, we should never forget our lacunose knowledge of early Greek literature: it is only two decades ago that the word *nyktipolos* emerged in a fragment of Aeschylus's *Psychagogoi* (F 273a.8 Radt),[11] whereas before it was known first from Euripides. However this may be, the presence of magoi in this enumeration seems to be authentic, since its meaning hardly points to magic but to practitioners of private cults, just like the other three categories which all belong to the Orphic-Dionysiac sphere.[12]

This particular meaning of magos occurs only three times in our evidence, all in relatively early texts. In addition to Heraclitus we find it in Sophocles's Oedipus *Rex* (387-389). Unfortunately, the precise date of this play is unclear, but there is a general consensus that it belongs to the thirties or twenties of the fifth century. When Oedipus has concluded that Creon has conspired with Teiresias to overthrow him, he denounces him for setting upon him 'this magos hatcher of plots, this crafty begging priest, who has sight only when it comes to profit, but in his art is blind'. In this passage magos must mean

---

[7] This aspect of the Magi is not taken into consideration in recent studies of their position in the Persian empire, but seems to me highly likely.

[8] Heraclitus, fragment 14 DK. I follow the punctuation argued by Graf, ***Magic***, p. 21.

[9] For the most recent edition of the 'Orphic' gold tablets, see Riedweg, 'Initiation-Tod-Unterwelt', pp. 389-398.

[10] As do Marcovich, ***Heraclitus***, pp. 465-467; Lloyd, ***Magic, Reason and Experience***, p. 12, note 18; Rigsby, 'Teiresias', p. 110; Papatheophanes, 'Heraclitus of Ephesus'; Henrichs, 'Namenlosigkeit und Euphemismus', pp. 190-191; Burkert, ***Da Omero ai Magi***, p. 94, note 19. Its authenticity is accepted by Kahn, ***The Art and Thought of Heraclitus***, p. 262 (with some qualms); Conche, ***Héraclite***, pp. 167-170; Robinson, ***Heraclitus***, pp. 85-86; Graf, ***Magic***, p. 21.

[11] Henrichs, 'Namenlosigkeit und Euphemismus', p. 190.

[12] This is well observed by Graf, ***Magic***, pp. 21-22.

something negative like 'quack, charlatan',[13] still very much as in Heraclitus. The connection with the begging priests also occurs in On ***the Sacred Disease (c. 2).*** This treatise on epilepsy is ascribed to Hippocrates but generally dated to the end of the fifth century or even to the beginning of the fourth century; it is also the first pamphlet-length attack on magic in our sense of the word.[14] According to the anonymous author, those people who first called the disease 'sacred', were the sort of people who are 'now ***magoi*** and purifiers and begging priests and humbugs. These are exactly the people who claim to be very pious and to possess a superior knowledge'. In a derogatory manner, the ***magoi*** are again combined with begging priests and other private religious practitioners, as in Sophocles.[15]

The connection of ***magoi*** with magic starts to appear not in philosophy but in tragedy. Photius (s.v. *magous*) mentions that ***mageia*** occurred in the tragedians,[16] but until now the word has not turned up with any certainty in the available evidence." Our first example of ***magos*** occurs in Aeschylus's ***Persians (472 BC). In*** line ***317,*** a roll-call of the dead Persian commanders, the messenger to the Persian queen mentions ***Magos Arabos,*** 'Magos the Arabian'. From Elamite tablets found in Persepolis we now know that the name ****Magus*** was not uncommon among the Persians,[18] but Aeschylus's combination of Magos with Arabia also shows that he did not have a clue about the nature of the Persian Magi. And indeed, the frequent attempts at identifying Persian religious elements in his ***Persae*** have not been very persuasive.[19]

The situation is different with the later Euripides. In his ***Suppliants (1110)*** of ***ca. 424-420 BC,*** Iphis says how much he hates those who try to prolong their life with ***mageumata,*** 'charms, spells'; in the ***Iphigeneia in Tauris (ca. 414 BC)*** the messenger relates how Iphigeneia prepared the sacrifice of Orestes, 'while she sang barbarous songs like a ***magos' (mageuousa:*** 1338), and in the ***Orestes (1497)*** of ***408 BC*** a Phrygian slave ascribes the escape of Helen to 'black magic or the tricks of ***magoi*** or thefts by the gods'.

Towards the end of the fifth century we find the 'two arts of ***goêteia*** and ***mageia'*** in Gorgias's apology for Helen ***(c. 10).*** Although the passage is not

---

[13] Rigsby, 'Teiresias', p. 113, suggests 'kingmaker' and is followed by Hall, ***Inventing the Barbarian,*** p. 194, note 107, but refuted by Dawe, ***Sophocles,*** pp. 32-33.
[14] For a recent study with edition, see Roselli, ***Ippocrate: La malattia sacra.***
[15] For the begging priests see Stengel, 'Agyrtes 2', pp. 915-977; Fraenkel, *Aeschylus: **Agamemnon,*** vol. 3, p. 590f.
[16] Photius, s.v. *magous* = ***Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta,*** Adespota fr. 592 Snell-Kannicht.
[17] It has been suspected in Aeschylus F **36b.2 11.7 Radt by Cantarella, ***I nuovi frammenti,*** p. 21.
[18] Mayrhofer, *Onomastica*, p. 187; R. Schmitt, ***Die Iranier-Namen,*** pp. 38-39.
[19] See the refutation by Hall, ***Inventing the Barbarian,*** pp. 86-93.

crystal clear, it is the first certain mention of *mageia* in our texts. The second example occurs in the already mentioned On the Sacred Disease. As we have seen, the anonymous author connects magoi with purifiers, and the same combination recurs when the author somewhat later proceeds with the rhetorical question: 'if somebody is able to remove the disease by purifying and *mageuôn*...' (c. 3). However, the latter term comes close to our 'magic' when the author rejects as human trickery the feat of a man bringing down the moon '*mageuôn* and sacrificing' (c. 4).[20] Finally, at the end of his work he once again stresses that a real healer 'would not need to resort to purifications and *magiê* (*v.l.*: *mageumatôn*) and all that kind of charlatanism' (c. 18). It is clear that in the eyes of the author magoi are people who practise healing techniques comparable to those of purifiers and begging priests, that is, to people of an inferior theology and an inferior cosmology.[21]

We have three negative examples left. In his Republic (572e), which for our purpose may be dated to the first half of the fourth century,[22] Plato speaks about the son of a democratic man and his encouragement towards lawlessness by his father and relatives: 'when these dread *magoi* and tyrant-makers come to realize that they have no hope of controlling the youth in any other way, they devise to engender in him a sort of passion etc.' Less pronounced is his statement in the Statesman (280e), where we hear of the '*mageutikê* (sc. *technê*) regarding spells to ward off evils', but considering Plato's rejection of magic, it can hardly be interpreted in a positive manner; still, the passage is interesting, since it seems to be the first to speak of magic as a *technê*,[23] an expression which will later become especially popular in Latin.[24] Finally, in 330 BC Aeschines (3.137) denounces Demosthenes as a '*magos* and sorcerer' as no scoundrel before him has ever been.

Until now I have focused on the more dubious magoi, at least from a Greek point of view, but concomitant with them we also hear about authentic Magi, the hereditary technologists of the sacred from western Iran. These were probably mentioned first in Greek literature by Xanthos of Lydia, an area with a strong Persian presence.[25] Xanthos was an older contemporary of Herodo-

---

[20] For the trick, see Hill, 'The Thessalian Trick'; Marzullo, 'Aristoph. *Nub.* 749-755'; Gordon, 'Imagining Greek and Roman Magic', pp. 223-224. For more or less contemporary representations, see M. Schmidt, 'Sorceresses', p. 61.

[21] Cf. Lloyd, ***Magic,*** pp. 15-28; Graf, ***Magic,*** pp. 30-32.

[22] For this complicated question, see now Neils, 'The Dramatic Date'.

[23] Note now also its occurrence in ***Supplementum*** *Epigraphicum Graecum* 41.981 and, probably, in the papyrus *PLitPalauRib* 26 a7, b3, cf. Stramaglia, 'Innamoramento', p. 77.

[24] Clerc, ***Homines Magici,*** p. 154.

[25] Sekunda, 'Achaemenid colonization', pp. 7-29; Briant, *Histoire de l'empire perse,* vol. 1, pp. 721-725.

tus,[26] who had dedicated a part of his work on Lydian history to the magoi, which was later called *Magika*. In the two extant fragments he mixes fact and fiction by relating that the magoi practised incest (true) and wife-swapping (untrue),[27] but he is the first Greek to mention Zarathustra,[28] if in that curious and still unexplained Greek form of Zoroaster.[29] According to Momigliano, 'Xanthus also referred to the Magi without apparently connecting them with Zoroaster'.[30] Although our evidence is much too fragmentary for such a conclusion, his younger contemporary Ktesias certainly seems to have called Zoroaster a Magus.[31]

Xanthos's magoi do not look like 'charlatans', and neither do they, on the whole, in the work of Herodotus, who is still our best source on the position and nature of the earlier magoi. It is striking that the 'father of history' nowhere feels the need to introduce the magoi, but evidently presupposes familiarity with them on the part of his readers. According to Herodotus (1.107-8, 120, 128; 7.19) they were specialists in the interpretation of dreams and solar eclipses (7.37). They were also indispensable for libations (7.43) and for sacrifices (7.113-4, 191), where they sang a theogony (1.132). Moreover, they observed the rites of exposure and killed noxious creatures (1.140). At least one of these characteristics recurs in the early fifth-century Elamite tablets found in Persepolis, where Magi receive wine for their exclusively Magian *lan* ritual.[32]

It is only once that Herodotus (7.114) seems to connect the Magi with magic. That is when he uses the term *pharmakeusantes*, 'hocus-pocus', for their ritual in his report of the horse sacrifice by the Magi during the Persian crossing of the Thracian river Strymon. The verb derives from pharmakon, 'philtre, medicin', which produced not only the male *pharmakeus*, 'sorcerer', but also the female *pharmakis*.[33] In a subtle article, the Swiss archaeologist Margot Schmidt has pointed out that sorceresses were absent from the citizen women of classical Athens, since they lacked the social space to perform sorcery; whenever they are mentioned they are foreigners, such as Medea or the Thessalian sorceresses of the Clouds (749).[34] This Athenian social condition,

---

[26] See now Fowler, 'Herodotus', p. 64; note also the discussion in ***FGrH*** 1001.
[27] For the incest, see De Jong, ***Traditions of the Magi,*** pp. 424-432.
[28] Xanthos ***FGrH*** 765 F 31-2; cf. Kingsley, 'Meetings with Magi.
[29] For possible explanations of the form, see most recently Gershevitch, 'Approaches'; R. Schmitt, 'Onomastica Iranica Platonica', pp. 93-98.
[30] Momigliano, ***Alien Wisdom,*** p. 142.
[31] Ktesias ***FGrH*** 690 F 1; Kephalion ***FGrH*** 93 F 1 with the commentary by Jacoby.
[32] Briant, *Histoire de I'empire perse,* vol. 1, p. 258; Handley-Schachler, 'The *lan* Ritual'.
[33] For the terms, see Artelt, ***Studien,*** pp. 38-96.
[34] M. Schmidt, 'Sorceresses', p. 60; also Dickie, ***Magic and Magicians,*** pp. 79-95.

which may well have been prevalent in the whole of Greece, will also be the reason why both magos and *goês* (below) lacked female equivalents.[35] Considering the etymology, the term *pharmakis* was probably once limited to a woman who collected herbs for magic,[36] but gradually it must have absorbed (or: been ascnied) qualities from the male sorcerers.

After this brief excursion into Greek gender problems, let us now return to male magicians. Some of Herodotus's information about the Magi recurs in Xenophon's Cyropaedy, where they have to sing hymns to all the gods at sunrise (8.1.23) and to chose the gods to whom to sacrifice (8.1.23, 3.11). From Xenophon's younger contemporaries, Dino mentions that the Magi were interpreters of dreams (FGrH 690 F 10), and Theopompus (FGrH 115 F 64), in perhaps the most interesting piece of information of it all, that the Magi taught the resurrection[37]

In addition to these historians, it is especially the philosophers who were interested in the Magi. Plato's pupil Heraclides Ponticus wrote a dialogue Zoroaster (fr. 68 Wehrli$^2$), which, presumably, featured his Magus who had circumnavigated Africa before visiting the court of Gelo at Syracuse (fr. 69-70 Wehrli$^2$). According to Aristotle (fi. 6 Rose$^3$), the Magi were older than the Egyptians, and in his Metaphysics (1091b8) he included them among those who hold that 'good' is the source of all; other details can be found in his pupils Eudemus (fr. 89 Wehrli$^2$), Clearchus (fi. 13 Wehrli$^2$) and Aristoxenus (fr. 13 Wehrli$^2$). This Peripatetic interest makes it even more likely that the almost certainly spurious Platonic dialogue *Alcibiades* Maior has to be assigned to the same milieu, since it mentions that Persian educators teach their youths 'the *mageia* of Zoroaster, the son of Horomadzos: that is the cult of the gods' (1.122a). The explanation is clearly apologetic, just as Dino (FGrH 690 F 5) had already denied that the Magi practised 'black magic' (*goêtikên* mageian).

Having looked at all the testimonies regarding Magi and *magoi* in the fifth and fourth centuries, we can now draw the following conclusion: in tragedy, rhetoric and earlier philosophy, magos is a term of abuse, whereas historians and Aristotelian philosophers tend to take the Magi seriously. The two traditions converge, so to speak, in the late fourth century when the second group asserts the claims of the 'real' Magi against the abusive interpretation of the first group. Moreover, the abusive usage of magos is hardly attested before the

---

[35] *Magos* is not used for females until the Roman period, cf. Anthologia *Palatina* 5.16; Lucian, *Asinus* 4; Aesop. 117, ed. Halm; *Etymologicum* Magnum 103, 18, ed. Gaisford. Latin maga first appears in Seneca, Hercules *Oetaeus* 523, 526.

[36] For women using herbs in magic, see Odyssey 4.220 (Helen), 10.213 (Kirke); Sophocles F 534 Radt (Medea); Melanippides PGM 757 Page (Danaids); Apollonius of Rhodes 4.50-54.

[37] De Jong, Traditions of the Magi, p. 224-225; idem, 'Shadow and Resurrection'; Bremmer, Rise and Fall, pp. 47-50.

420s BC in Athens, when we suddenly start to find a whole cluster of references.

This development has not been taken into account in the two most recent explanations for the semantic development from Magus to magician. According to Peter Kingsley the Magi were always magicians in the eyes of the Greeks, since they controlled the weather and knew how to return from the dead.[38] However, attempts at controlling the weather were perfectly normal in Greek religion,[39] and Magical returns from the dead are not attested before Roman times.[40]

Fritz Graf, on the other hand, has looked for an explanation in Tylorian terms. In his Primitive Culture, Edward Tylor (1832-1917), one of the founding fathers of social anthropology and the history of religion, observes that many cultures called their neighbours 'magician', such as the southern Scandinavians did with the Lapps and Finns or, we may add, the Romans with the Marsi whom they, perhaps rightly, suspected of snake-charming.[41] However, like Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) in his classic study of magic, Tylor also observed that these neighbours are usually less developed.[42] Now there can be little doubt that the Greeks in general, and the Athenians in particular, had developed a rhetoric in which the Persians were 'the Other', the opponents whose despotism, slavishness, luxury and cruelty were the exact opposite of all the virtues of the Greeks.[43] However, at the same time they had been highly impressed by the Persians and in many spheres of life busily copied them.[44] One can thus hardly say that they looked down on Persia in the same way in which southern Scandinavians once viewed Lapps and Finns or Romans the Marsi. Although the element of 'the Other' may well have played a role, there is, I suggest, also a more concrete reason as to why the Greeks came to consider the Magi as magicians.

Before coming to that reason, let us first look at the question as to when the Greeks will have first witnessed Magi. According to (Pseudo?-)Aristotle

---

[38] Kingsley, 'Greeks, Shamans and Magi', and his interesting but usually over-confident Ancient Philosophy, pp. 225-226.

[39] Stengel, *Opferbräuche* der Griechen, pp. 146-153; Harrison, *Themis*, pp. 76-82; Fiedler, *Studien*; Nilsson, *Geschichte*, pp. 116-117; Blocker, 'Wetterzauber'.

[40] Lucian, *Necyomantia* 6; Gignoux, Les quatre inscriptions; Bremmer, 'Magic in the Apoctyphal Acts' in this volume.

[41] Tillhagen, 'Finnen und Lappen'. Marsi: Robert, Opera minora, pp. 934-938; Piccaluga, 'I Marsi', pp. 207-210; Gaiffier, Recueil, chapt. IX; Dench, From Barbarians to New Men, pp. 159-166; Horsfall, *Vergil*, p. 490.

[42] Tylor, Primitive Culture, vol. 1, pp. 102-104; Mauss, 'Théorie générale', pp. 26-27 (= Brain, p. 31).

[43] Hall, Inventing the Barbarian, pp. 56-100 and passim.

[44] See now the splendid overview by Miller, Athens; Gauer, 'Die Aegaeis'.

(fr. 32 Rose[3]) a Syrian Magus had predicted a violent death to Socrates, but this anecdote is just as untrustworthy as Seneca's report that Magi were present in Athens at the moment of Plato's death and had sacrificed to him – a story which looks like an invention by his later followers, who even claimed that Magi had come to Athens to learn from Plato.[45] Although these notices are unreliable, the Ionians must already have had opportunities to see Magi, who probably also accompanied Xerxes in AD 480, in the later sixth century. As in his *Acharnians* (91-122: 425 BC) Aristophanes parodies an embassy scene which assumes knowledge of a Persian embassy on the part of his audience,[46] Magi may also have been intermittently observed during such Persian visits in the course of the fifth century.[47] The fact that teachings of the Magi about the gods, the soul and demons become increasingly visible in the course of the fifth century is another indication of close Greek contacts with their Oriental neigbours.[48]

However this may be, we move onto firmer ground with a different notice. It is now forty years ago that in Derveni, a few kilometers from modem Saloniki, Greek excavators discovered the completely charred top of a papyrus roll on the funeral pyre in a tomb of about 300 BC. More than 200 ffagments were recovered which together make up more than 24 columns of text. The content proves to be an allegorical commentary on an Orphic theogony in terms of Presocratic physics, of which the original text must have been written around 420-400 BC.[49] The commentary constitutes the largest part of the extant papyrus (20 columns), but it is preceded by a much shorter theological introduction (6 columns). This part was already known, but more fragments have been published in 1997 and they, rather unexpectedly, reveal the activity of *magoi*.[50] In what is now column VI we read:

> prayers and sacrifices assuage the souls, and the incantation (*epôidê*) of the ***magoi*** is able to change the *daimones* when they get in the way. *Daimones* in the way are enemies to souls. This is why the ***magoi*** perform the sacrifice, just as if they were

---

[45] Seneca, *Epistula* 58.31; cf. Boyancé, ***Le culte des muses,*** p. 255, note 3; Westerink, ***Anonymous Prolegomena,*** p. 15: 6.20-2.

[46] Chiasson, 'Pseudartabas'.

[47] Embassies could make a lasting impression, as is well illustrated by the visit of the Byzantine emperor John VIII Palaiologos to the Council of Ferrara of AD 1438, which is often reflected in contemporary paintings, cf. Miller, ***Athens and Persia,*** p. 90; add Ginzburg, ***Indagine,*** pp. 35-37, 82-84.

[48] See the rich exposition by Burkert, ***Da Omero ai Magi,*** pp. 87-111.

[49] Laks and Most, ***Studies,*** p. 56, note 56 (Ch. Kahn: ***ca.*** 400 BC), p. 138 (D. Sider, who wonders whether this is not even too early) and p. 174, note 32 (W. Burkert: ***ca.*** 420-400 BC). *I* use the translation by Laks and Most, ***ibidem,*** pp. 9-22.

[50] Tsantsanoglou, 'The First Columns'.

> paying a penalty (...) And on the offerings they pour water and milk, from which they also make the libations (...) Initiates make preliminary sacrifices to the Eumenides in the same way as the ***magoi*** do. For the Eumenides are souls.

There are many interesting aspects to this fragment,[51] but for our purpose we will only discuss three of them. First, it seems now reasonable to assume that at the end of the fifth century wandering ***magoi*** (be it Persian or Hellenised ones) were present in the Greek world precisely at the moment we find the first references to 'magical' ***magoi.*** Unfortunately, we cannot say exactly where these private ***magoi*** practised, since nothing is known about the authorship or place of composition of the original text. Many possibilities have been canvassed, from Stesimbrotus to Prodicus, but none is really convincing.[52] The fact that the dialect is Ionic with an Attic overlay might suggest some connection with Athens,[53] but a recent study of the dialect of the mythographic fragments shows that at the end of the fifth century Ionic writers, who may have had no personal connection with Attica, already started to adopt Attic forms.[54] In any case, more than a century later the Athenian historian Philochorus did indeed read the commentary.[55]

Secondly, whereas libations of milk are attested for the ***Avesta*** and recur ***in*** Strabo's description of the Cappadocian Magi,[56] water seems to have been completely absent from Zoroastrian libations. Geo Widengren has compared the beaker with water in the Mithraic mysteries, but none of his many examples mentions Zoroastrian libations of water.[57] In other words, the author (or his Magi) must have adapted their rites to those of the Greeks, who actually did libate with water.[58] Thirdly, the ***magoi*** use incantations: the term used,

---

[51] In addition to Tsantsanoglou, 'The First Columns', see now for a first discussion of the new text by Henrichs, 'Dromena', pp. 33-35.

[52] The various suggestions have been listed and refuted by Janko, 'The Physicist', whose own suggestion, Diagoras, is hardly more persuasive than those refuted by him.

[53] Janko, 'The Physicist', p. 62.

[54] Fowler, ***Early Greek Mythography,*** vol. I, pp. xliv-xlv.

[55] Obbink, 'A Quotation'.

[56] Strabo 15.3.14 with the detailed discussion by De Jong, ***Traditions of the Magi,*** pp. 139-142. For Cappadocian Magi, note also ***Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae*** 50, no. 19 and ***Regional Epigraphic Catalogues of Asia Minor,*** vol. 2, no. 404.

[57] Widengren, ***Die Religionen Irans,*** pp. 181-184, followed by Henrichs, 'Dromena', p. 46; for water in the Mithraeic mysteries, see now also Gordon, ***Image and Value, VI,*** pp. 122-124.

[58] Graf, 'Milch, Honig und Wein'; Henrichs, 'The Eumenides'.

*epôidê*, is typical for a charm and as such already occurs in Homer;[59] it also fits the frequent references to the singing of the Magi.[60]

The activity of these *magoi* may well have given rise to a negative valuation for two reasons in particular. First, the incomprehensibility of their Avestan will have suggested *voces magicae* and possibly influenced Euripides's picture of the 'barbarous songs' of Iphigeneia (above).[61] Secondly, unlike Greek priests the Magi customarily whispered their Avestan and other ritual texts in a very low voice: Prudentius's *Zoroastreos susurros* (Apotheosis 494).[62] This whispering must have made the activities of Magi look like 'magical' rites in the eyes of the ancients, since murmuring was closely associated with magic by both Greeks and Romans.[63] In addition to them being 'the other', there are then also two very concrete reasons as to why (all?) Greeks will have looked at the Persian Magi as sorcerers. Although the Greeks must have seen Magi before, the available evidence strongly suggests that familiarity with wandering Magi became much stronger in the final decades of the fifth century, as is also illustrated by (directly or indirectly) the Derveni papyrus. The areas where this development took place must have been Ionia and Athens, exactly where we would have suspected the possible presence of Magi.

Now in religion, as of course in economics, it is not enough to prove a 'supply', but there must also be a 'demand' from religious 'consumers'. Fortunately, this 'demand' is well attested in late fifth-century Athens, where we witness a growing dissatisfaction with traditional religion and an increasing interest in private cults.[64] The presence of privately practising Magi perfectly fits this development.

---

[59] Lanata, ***Medicina magica***, pp. 46-51; Boyancé, ***Le culte***, pp. 33-59; Furley, 'Besprechung und Behandlung'.

[60] Herodotus 7.191; Xenophon, ***Cyropaedia*** 8.1.23; Curtius Rufus 3.3.9, 5.1.22; Catullus 90.5; Strabo 15.3.14; Dio Chxysostom 36.39, 42; Pausanias 5.27.5. For an excellent discussion, see De Jong, ***Traditions of the Magi,*** pp. 362-364.

[61] On the ***voces magicae,*** see now Brashear, 'The Greek Magical Papyri', pp. 3429-3438; Versnel, 'Die Poetik'.

[62] As is frequently attested, cf. Bidez and Cumont, ***Les mages hellénisés***, vol. 2, pp. 112-113,245, 285-286; Widengren, ***Die Religionen Irans,*** pp. 249-250; Greenfield, '*rtyn mgws*'. For the Near Eastern background of this custom, see Grayson, 'Murmuring in Mesopotamia'.

[63] Admittedly, our first Greek examples are only Hellenistic, but they are so widespread and persistent, that it seems hyper-critical not to assume the same for classical times, cf. Theocritus 2.11, 62: Orpheus, ***Lithica*** 320; Lucian, ***Necyomantia*** 7; Achilles Tatius 2.7; Heliodorus 6.14.4, Cf. Soverini, 'Hermes'; Moscadi, '"Murmur'"; Van Mal-Maeder, ***Apulée,*** p. 70; Valette-Cagnac, ***La lecture,*** pp. 42-47; Van der Horst, ***Hellenism-Judaism-Christianity,*** pp. 300-302.

[64] Bremmer, ***Greek Religion,*** pp. 84-97.

The development did not mean that from that moment on *magos/mageia* became the ruling designation for the area of magic, witchcraft and sorcery. The Greeks had already the terms *goês/goêteia*,[65] which continued to remain popular next to *magos/mageia*, perhaps even more popular, since Demosthenes, for example, uses *goês*, not *magos*, in his insults.[66] As Greek linguistic purists of the Roman period considered *goês* 'more Attic' than *magos*,[67] *mageia* and cognates never became really popular in later Greek culture. The Romans lacked this prejudice and thus used *magia*, *magicus* and *magus/maga* much more frequently than the Greeks ever did. However, the status of the Persian Magi always remained a positive factor in the valuation of the term *magos/magus*, as was still the case in early modern Europe,[68] and later 'magicians' therefore called themselves not *goês* or *pharmakeus*, but *magos/magus*.[69]

[65] Delling, '*goês*'; Burkert, '*Goês*'; Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, pp. *69-70;* Dickie, *Magic and Magicians*, pp. 13-14, 29-31.
[66] Demosthenes *18.276; 19.102, 109; 29.32.*
[67] Phrynichus *56.8*, de Bomes.
[68] Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. *215-216,232,247.*
[69] Except for the original Appendix which now appears at the end of this book, this chapter is the abbreviated, corrected and updated version of my 'The Birth of the Term Magic'. For information and comments I would like to thank Matthew Dickie, Peter van Minnen and Herman Roodenburg. Bob Fowler most helpfully criticised various versions and corrected the English.