

The *HOMEROMANTEION* and Early Byzantine Cento Poems: Divination, Biblical Stories and Performance of Homer in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium.

The magical papyri surviving today are only a few of a vast number, and consist an important testimony not only for the study of ancient magic and religion, but even more for the study of cultural practices, beliefs and values, and the reception, use and understanding of early Greek literature. In my paper, I investigate the complex relation between orality and literacy by analyzing a section of the magical papyri where disconnected and seemingly out of context Homeric verses are quoted. This section is generally referred to as '*Homeromanteion*,' the 'Homer oracle,' and can be dated around the fourth century C.E. It is a list of 216 verses from Homer, possibly from a type of manual directed to give oracular responses to daily concerns and inquiries about the future.

If we are to regard the *homeromanteion* as a *sui generis* cento-like text, then it is also worth asking how it relates to other literary patchworks that re-use Homeric fabric in times adjacent to the *homeromanteion*. A closer philological analysis that compares the *homeromanteion* and the cento poem by the Empress Eudocia Augusta of the late first half of the 5th century CE can offer some interesting results. Eudocia claims to have composed her poem as a revision of an earlier poem by a certain Patricius. Although Eudocia knew her Homer from a culture of reading and writing, and from manuscripts, her own poem reveals that orality was still in place in a modified way. Eudocia composed a poem about stories from the Bible made entirely out of Homeric material. A product of erudition, her cento indicates in various places, as Usher has convincingly argued, that Eudocia is not only a heir to a tradition of literacy but also of orality, through a recontextualized oral performance of Homer. With a closer analysis of concordances of the quoted lines in the *homeromanteion*, it is not, perhaps, surprising to see a great coincidence of lines that are found in both the *homeromanteion* and Eudocia's *cento* poem. Moreover, there is a common emphasis in both texts on verbs of speech and hearing, bringing out a new perspective on performance of Homeric lines through reading aloud or memorization of lines. Homer occupied an important role in schools of grammar and rhetoric which leads to a familiarity of the educated audience with these verses, as well as possibly, the ability to recognize and situate these verses in a completely different context. Homer continued to be the main textbook throughout antiquity. School practices give to Homeric verses a new cycle of orality, deprived of the archaic performance as a social activity, yet still part of a lively tradition. The pedagogical value recognized in Homer made the Homeric text accessible from Roman times to Byzantium. The schoolmaster's practices changed little in Late Antiquity and continue until the Byzantine era. The use of the Homeric text by a schoolmaster was subject to random selections. By comparing the *homeromanteion*, with the cento poems, we get a deeper understanding on the multiple meanings that are integral to the semiotics and poetics of texts that preserve Homeric lines in a re-shuffled context.

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