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CROSSROADS

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 88 (1991) 217–224

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Crossroads¹

Greek and Roman authors describe a variety of rituals or superstitions connected with crossroads. At the time of the new moon, suppers were taken to the images of Hekate found at crossroads. The corpses of those polluted by certain crimes were thrown onto the crossroads and stoned or burned. Ὀξυθύμια, polluted household refuse, was left at crossroads. Magic was performed there.

Although scholars of ancient religion have noted that these acts occur, none have identified the basic characteristic of crossroads from which they arise.² As a result, in some cases, rituals and deities associated with the crossroads have been linked with each other falsely and misunderstood. This brief review will show that the key to explaining rituals at crossroads, both as a group and individually, is remembering that crossroads are liminal points or transitional gaps between defined, bounded areas, that is, between roads or between the areas of land that roads define.

These rituals can be divided into two categories, both of which reflect their liminality: 1) those in which an individual sought help and protection at an uncertain liminal point, and 2) those in which the detachment of the liminal point was exploited.

The Greeks, Romans and many other ancient civilizations regarded both natural and man-made liminal points of all kinds—doors, gates, rivers and frontiers, as well as crossroads—as uncertain places, requiring special rituals.³ Liminal points were regarded in this way for two reasons, both of which are bound up inextricably in their liminality itself. First, liminal points often mark the beginning of an enterprise: the first step of any journey begins at a door, for instance. The Greeks and Romans, like many other ancient (and some modern) civilizations, attached special significance to such beginnings.⁴ Second, because of their lack of association with either of two extremes, liminal points eluded categorization—a threshold was neither in nor out of the house, a crossroad was part of neither road A nor road B nor road C. On the one hand, liminal points and boundaries structured the world, preventing it

¹ An abbreviated version of this article was presented at the 1986 meeting of the American Philological Association in San Antonio, Texas. I thank Professors Kevin Clinton, Christopher Faraone, Fritz Graf, and Ludwig Koenen for suggestions made during its revision.

² S. Halliwell's article, *JHS* 106 (1986) 187-90, concentrates on the literary and psychological implications of Oedipus' murder of Laius at the crossroads. Although he adduces some literary mentions of crossroads rituals in support of his arguments, Halliwell's aim is not to analyze these rituals themselves. The most recent discussion of Graeco-Roman crossroads rituals is found in R. Parker's *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford 1983) 30-31 and notes. This discussion, and most previous discussions, are very brief, occurring in the context of other studies (e.g., J. Frazer's remarks in the course of discussing the Lares in his edition of Ovid's *Fasti* [London 1929] II 616). The only previous study devoted primarily to Graeco-Roman crossroads rituals and beliefs is Th. Hopfner, *RE* VII A. 1 161-66 (hereafter cited as "Hopfner").

³ Cf. S.I. Johnston, *Hekate Soteira. A study of Hekate's roles in the Chaldean Oracles and related literature* (Atlanta 1990), ch. II (hereafter cited as "Johnston, Hekate").

⁴ See Johnston *Hekate* 25 and n. 17 for examples.

from becoming an unintelligible chaos. But on the other hand, ironically, the liminal point or boundary itself, because it didn't belong to either of the two extremes it separated, was a sort of permanent chaos. Liminal points were detached from the defined units of man's "organized" world.⁵

Special actions were necessary during the passage through such points of uncertain dissociation. The liminal nature of crossroads itself, then, which automatically made crossroads uneasy places, necessitated the first category of rituals—protective rituals. This category includes practices involving Hekate, the goddess of crossroads.

The issue of Hekate's connection with crossroads has been a confused one, which it is necessary to resolve before analyzing rituals associated with her. Previously, two mutually exclusive assumptions about Hekate's presence at crossroads have been held. One proposes that Hekate dwelt at crossroads because she was by nature a goddess of uncanny things, which were, in turn, by nature associated with the crossroads. The other argues that crossroads only became uncanny places because Hekate—an uncanny goddess—dwelt there. 'The two proposals share the unproven assumption that Hekate was at heart a goddess of uncanny things.⁶ This assumption has presented difficulties for scholars attempting to explain situations in which she manifests no uncanny aspects at all, such as in the *Theogony*.

Hekate's role as a goddess of crossroads actually is a single aspect of the broader role that she played from early times—that of guiding individuals through liminal points and during transitions of many types. Evidence for this larger role includes epithets such as "ἐνοδία," "προπυλαία," "λιμενοσκόπος," "πρόδομος" and "προθυραία," which describe Hekate's presence at liminal points.⁷ As a goddess who guided and guarded during transitions of all types, Hekate would have protected men against uncanny ghosts because ghosts were imagined to gather at liminal points (see pp. 223f., below). Naturally, she eventually became associated ever more closely with the ghosts themselves, for a mistress who could keep them at bay also could lead them on, and in her wrathful, unsupplicated moments give them free rein to wreak terror. It is a mistake, however, to emphasize this darker side of her nature to the exclusion of her protective characteristics.⁸ It may be useful to compare the

⁵ Cf. W. Burkert, *Homo Necans* (Berlin 1972), *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley 1979); M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London 1966), esp. chs. V, VI and VII.

⁶ E.g., H.J. Rose and C.M. Robertson, "Hecate," *OCD*²; M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion I* (Munich³ 1967) 725 (hereafter cited as "Nilsson, *GGR I*³"); Nilsson, *Griechische Feste* (Munich 1906) 394-8, esp. 395 (hereafter cited as "Nilsson, *GF*"); E. Rohde's various discussions of Hekate throughout *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* (1898), 2 vol.; see esp. II 82, n. 2 and II 407-13 (hereafter cited as "Rohde"; available in English in a single volume as *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, trans. W.B. Hillis [1925]; in the English edition see esp. 323 n. 95a and appendices VI and VII); Heckenbach, *RE VII* 2769-2782 (hereafter cited as "Heckenbach"), esp. 2770 and 2775; Hopfner, 164. The view of W.H. Roscher, *Lex. II* 1 1894 (hereafter cited as "Roscher"), approaches the view I put forth below, as does that of Th. Kraus, *Hekate* (Heidelberg 1960) 105-108. Heckenbach (2775) suggests briefly in passing that "...vielleicht ist Hekate ursprünglich nichts anderes als eine Wegegöttin, die später in andere Vorstellungskreise hineingezogen wurde...", although he seems most convinced by his arguments that she became associated with crossroads because she already was "Herrin der Geister."

⁷ See further Johnston, *Hekate*, esp. ch. II.

⁸ This—that Hekate may have begun by protecting people from ghosts rather than leading them on—has been suggested by Roscher and Kraus, although they argue from different evidence and viewpoints from mine.

double nature of Hekate's association with ghosts to that of Apollo's association with illness: his threatening role as the bringer of plague is not allowed to overwhelm his role as its averter.

Hekate's protective, guiding presence at the crossroads was ensured in several ways. Plutarch, Hesychius and Harpocration⁹ specifically mention that *hekataia*—shrines or statues of Hekate—were to be found at crossroads; additional authors allude to them (*e.g.*, Ov., *F.* I 141). Other authors, such as Aristophanes,¹⁰ indicate that *hekataia* also were erected at doors or gates; clearly, *hekataia* were associated with liminal places.

The very presence of *hekataia* at crossroads would symbolize and encourage Hekate's protection there. Rituals connected with them further ensured it. Several authors, including Demosthenes, Aristophanes, the third-century historian Apollodorus and Plutarch, mention that suppers were sent to *hekataia* at the crossroads.¹¹ At *Quaest. Conv.* 708f, Plutarch says that these suppers were intended for Hekate and also for the ἀποτρόπαιοι, the gods who averted evil. At *Quaest. Rom.* 290d, he similarly notes that Hekate suppers helped to avert evil. Hekate suppers asked for the goddess's protection against the dangers inherent in the crossroads.¹²

Nilsson emphasizes the opposite side, suggesting that her primary role was that of a horrific leader of a *Geisterheer*, who only secondarily kept ghosts away. Of Hekate's election to the demonic throne he says "... Böses zieht die Bösen an;" later he adds, "Als Herrin der Gespenster konnte Hekate auch am besten gegen sie Schutz gewähren," (*GF* 395-96). Similarly, at *GGR* I³ 724 he says, "Wer den Spuk sendet, kann ihn auch abwehren." The stress that I lay here on Hekate's aid against ghosts as a primary rather than secondary trait may seem to emphasize artificially the distinction between two coexisting and complementary roles. Yet such emphasis has been necessitated by the fact that her capacity to guard against ghosts has been treated previously as an afterthought of her horrific side. This has led to an oversimplification of her nature, which, in turn, has stood in the way of accurately interpreting some rituals associated with her, and some of her appearances in literature.

It further should be noted that Hekate's association with ghosts—that is, disembodied souls that could not find rest—also was motivated by her role as a guide of the dead; those who didn't successfully complete the transition between life and death would be doomed to wander with Hekate.

⁹ Plut. *Apotheg. Reg.* 193f; Harp. *s.v.* ὄξυθύμια; Hsch. *s.v.*

¹⁰ *e.g.*, Ar. *Vesp.* 804 and *Lys.* 64 with schol; Plut. *Apotheg. Reg.* 193f. Cf. Hsch. *s.v.* Ἐκάταια.

¹¹ Demosth. LIV 39; Ar. *Plut.* 594 and schol.; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 290d, *Quaest. Conv.* 708f; Apollodorus, *F.Gr.Hist.* 244 F 109 *ap.* Ath. *Deipn.* 325a. Cf. Ath. *Deipn.* 645a-b, who quotes several comic poets as describing cakes called ἀμφιφῶντες that were carried to temples of Artemis or to the crossroads. *Etym. Mag.* 95.1 describes them as being sent to Hekate. The suppers were sometimes eaten by the poor: Ar. *Plut.* 594-7; Call. *Hymn* VI 113. See also D.R. Jordan, *Glotta* LVIII (1980) 62-65, on a first-century B.C. lead curse tablet from the Athenian agora (inv. IL 493) that possibly describes Hekate as eating offerings. Why the offerings to Hekate were called "suppers" (δειπνα), rather than "sacrifices" is difficult to say. The term could be used to describe offerings to other deities, as well as Hekate, *e.g.*, to Herse, Aglauros and Pandrosos (Is. *fr.* 152 *ap.* Poll. VI 101), to Dionysus and Ariadne (Plu. *Thes.* 23); further citations in LSJ *s.v.* δειπνοφοία.

¹² The conclusion of this paragraph—that Hekate was supplicated for protection against dangers that lay in the crossroads—differs in emphasis from that of many previous scholars, who have stressed that Hekate is one of the dangers, and that the rituals just described are intended to fend her off just as they fend off the other spooks, rather than to win her aid against the spooks. See, for example, Parker, 30 and n. 65, who suggests that the meals were a way of "pinning the dangerous goddess at the crossroads by prophylactic offerings." See also 224: "It was ... to keep Hecate away that pious Athenians carried out meals for her to the crossroads each month." Rohde's interpretation of the meals associates them with offerings given to appease the dead (I 238 nn. 1-2 [Eng. ed., 198 n. 96-97]) and his remarks on Hekate and the ἀποτρόπαιοι (I 273 n.1 [Eng. ed., 214 n. 168] and I 275-76, n. 2 [Eng. ed., 215-16 n. 176]), indicate that he believes her to be a goddess who should be averted, rather than a goddess who may do the averting. Nilsson, although he suggests the more benign role that I discuss here, concentrates on Hekate's role as one of the evils that need to be avoided (see above, n. 8). Hopfner's discussion, 163, also rests on an assumption that Hekate is among those to be averted, rather than a

Hekataia could be supplicated at any time. But interestingly, Apollodorus indicates that a regular feeding was held on the νουμηνία, the night of the new moon. Information from the fourth-century historian Theopompos suggests that Hekate and Hermes also were crowned and cleansed at this time.¹³ Hekate—the liminal goddess—was supplicated at the crossroads—the liminal point par excellence—at the moment between old month and new, a disquieting point of temporal transition that marked a new beginning.¹⁴

Hekate is the most familiar Graeco-Roman crossroads deity; many of the rituals intended to ensure smooth transitions or ward off dangers there involve her. But it should be noted that Hermes and the corresponding herms, which also were erected at crossroads and other liminal points (*e.g.*, *AP IX 314*), undoubtedly served much the same function as Hekate and *hekataia* did. Hermes' general role as a god who aided during transition and at liminal points is indicated by his familiar portrayal as a god of travellers and by such epithets as "ἐνόδιος," "προπύλαιος" and "στροφαῖος."¹⁵ Theophrastus describes his superstitious man as piously anointing and worshipping a stone—a herm—that he chances upon at the crossroads. Tibellus promises to venerate the ancient stone, wreathed with flowers, that he finds at the crossroads.¹⁶

The first category of crossroads rituals comprises those that secured protection and success for the individual traversing a dissociated, uncertain liminal point or embarking there on a new enterprise. The second category comprises those that exploited the dissociation of the crossroads' liminality. Crossroads, precisely because they were unclaimed "nowheres," were among the few appropriate places to leave materials expelled from society. According to several sources, ὄξυθύμια, the polluted remains of household purification rituals, were left at the crossroads.¹⁷ Plutarch mentions purification materials called καθάρσια that were taken

potential averter herself. Heckenbach alone (2777) adequately takes into account her potential to fend off danger as well as lead it on.

¹³ See the passage from Apollodorus cited above, n. 11, which indicates that the suppers were taken at the time of the new moon, and Theopompos, *F.Gr.Hist.* 115 F 344, *ap.* Porph. *de Abst.* II 16, with comments by U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* (1931) I 166 and n. 5.

¹⁴ According to the fourth-century historian Philochorus, *F.Gr.Hist.* 328 F 86, at Athens, offerings also were sent to the crossroads on the sixteenth of the month—i.e., half a month after the new-moon offering, at the time of the full moon (discussion at J. Mikalson, *The Sacred and Civil Calendar of the Athenian Year* [Princeton 1975]). Cf. Athen. *Deipn.* 645a, which describes cakes taken to the temple of Artemis or to the crossroads at the midmonth; *Etym. Magn.* 95.1 says that they were sent to Hekate. Rituals at this time, too, can be understood as marking a temporal turning point or new beginning.

¹⁵ The protective duties of such liminal deities as Hermes could include apotropaically guarding what was inside a boundary from that which was without, as well as protecting the individual during passage through the dissociated boundary itself. This article discusses the latter function, although the two should be understood as coexisting in some cases.

¹⁶ Thphr. *Char.* XVI; Tib. I 1. 11-12. On Hermes as a guide at times and places of transition, see L. Kahn, "Hermès, la frontière et l'identité ambiguë," *Ktema* 4 (1979) 201-211.

¹⁷ Suda, Photius and the *Etym. Magn.* s.v. "ὄξυθύμια". These sources specifically call them the remains of household purifications that were left at crossroads. Cf. also Poll. II 231 and V 163, Hyp. fr. 79, *ap.* Harp. s.v. ὄξυθύμια and Eupolis, fr. 132 (*PCG V* [Kassel-Austin]; = fr. 120 Kock), all of which support the idea that ὄξυθύμια were cast off or polluted materials. The word also could refer to a scaffold erected for the purpose of hanging or whipping criminals (Harpocration, Hesychius, Photius, the Suda) as could the word "hekate" itself (Hesychius, s.v. "ἐκάτη"); on this cf. Plut. *Super.* 170b (= Sophr. fr. 2 in *Suppl. comic.* ed. J. Demiańczuk; also *Com. Gr. Fr.* ed. Kaibel, p. IX f [*addenda altera ad p.* 161]).

to crossroads; καθάρσια may be a broader term that includes ὄξυθύμια.¹⁸ Ὄξυθύμια and καθάρσια were disposed of at the crossroads because crossroads, being dissociated from any single man's or city's parcel of land, were appropriate places to leave undesirable, polluted materials.¹⁹

In late antiquity, ὄξυθύμια and other polluted remains became confused with Hekate suppers, which, as I indicated above, were taken to the crossroads to encourage Hekate's aid. The first clear sign of the confusion is in Plutarch, who mentions the carrying out of puppies in connection with both purification rituals and Hekate suppers.²⁰ Ὄξυθύμια itself first is connected with Hekate by Harpocration, who cites Didymus Chalcenterus' commentary on Hyperides' *κατὰ Δημόδου* as his source for the information, indicating that the confusion may be as early as the first century B.C.²¹ But classical and early Hellenistic sources that discuss ὄξυθύμια never identify it with suppers for Hekate; the passage often cited as evidence for such an equation need not be understood in that way at all (Dem. 54 39).²²

Modern scholars also have distinguished inadequately between the two rituals, suggesting that the pollution was part of Hekate's suppers.²³ This failure to distinguish lies behind the confusion between the two types of rituals—the protective and the exploitive—which in turn has hampered the analysis of crossroads rituals in general. It also lies behind the common tendency to exaggerate Hekate's role as a goddess of pollution, which complicates interpretation of passages where Hekate exhibits no such characteristics. Like some other divinities, Hekate was a goddess of pollution insofar as she was present at certain times associated with pollution, such as childbirth and burial. But her presence at these times was due not to

¹⁸ Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 280c and 290d; cf. Eust. *ad Od.* XXII 481, who says that καθάρματα are thrown onto the crossroads. All of the lexicographers mentioned in the previous note define "ὄξυθύμια" by such terms as "καθάρματα," "καθάρσια" and "ἀπολύματα."

¹⁹ Cf. also Luc. *Prom. Es* I: Lucian says, with uncharacteristic modesty, that if his words are to be compared to a sculptor's clay, it is clay that is little more than the sort of filth one finds left at the crossroads."

²⁰ At *Quaest. Rom.* 280c he says that people carry forth puppies to Hekate in company with other "καθάρσια;" at *Quaest. Rom.* 290d he says that the dog is an ingredient in Hekate's suppers and also an element in rituals concerned with "καθάρσια" and "ἀποτρόπαια." Attestations for the association of Hekate with the fish called "τρίγλη," considered by some to be polluted (see Parker, 362-3), are earlier (the fourth-century Antiphanes fr. 68.14, *ap.* Athen. *Deipn.* 358f, 313b-c; cf. *Deipn.* 325a-b).

²¹ Harpocration says that the household καθάρματα called "ὄξυθύμια" also were called "hekataia." *Etym. Mag. s.v.* ὄξυθύμια also calls them "hekataia." but describes them as καθάρματα τῶν νεκρῶν... ἢ... τῶν οἰκῶν.

²² Demosthenes accuses Conon and his friends of eating τὰ ἑκατάια and of gathering up the testicles of young pigs that were offered for purification when the assembly convened. It is worthwhile to look more closely at two other passages often adduced in favor of equating suppers for Hekate with ὄξυθύμια, as well, although they postdate Plutarch's confusing of the two: Lucian's hungry Diogenes (*Dial. Mort.* I 1) instructs Menippus to come to Hades bringing anything he finds at the crossroads—meals dedicated to Hekate or eggs from purification processes or "anything of that sort." Similarly, at *Catapl.* 7, Clotho asks "where is the philosopher called Cynicus, who was to perish from eating the dinner of Hekate and the eggs from purification processes and a raw squid besides?" In none of these three cases are τὰ ἑκατάια actually equated with the remains of purificatory processes; they merely share the characteristic of having been left at the crossroads.

²³ See, for example, Parker's discussion; Parker attempts to make some distinctions but nonetheless ends up associating Hekate suppers with pollution. Rohde, II 78-9 and notes (Eng. ed., 296 and notes), also makes little or no distinction between the two. Heckenbach, 2780-8 1, does seem to distinguish between *Hekatemahlzeiten* and the *Reste des Kehrichts* which are sent to the crossroads, although he regards the latter, as well as the former, as offerings to Hekate herself.

an intrinsic interest in pollution but rather to her role as a goddess who guides across transitions; as Rohde long ago said, Hekate was present whenever souls entered or left bodies, aiding them across the greatest boundaries man traverses (*Psyche*, II 81 [Eng. ed., 297]). Similarly, Hermes, a messenger god and guide of travellers, was *psychopompos*. Although the difference became blurred in later antiquity, Hekate and pollution originally were associated with crossroads for distinct reasons: she protected the individual during passage through an uncertain liminal point; polluted household scourings were left at crossroads because they were dissociated liminal points.

Other forms of pollution were expelled at the crossroads as well. At *Lg.* 873b-c, Plato instructs the officials of his state in the treatment of parricides. After the officials have executed the parricide, his corpse must be carried, naked, to an appointed crossroads lying outside the city. There, each official must throw a stone at the corpse's head "in order to purify the city." Following this ritual, the corpse must be carried to the boundary of the state and cast out unburied, "as custom decrees."

Nilsson suggested (*GGR* I³ 635) that this was a symbolic stoning, intended to represent the *Volksjustiz* that would have brought the parricide to an end in a less refined city than Plato's. Nilsson's conclusion undoubtedly is correct, but says nothing about the chosen location of the stoning. Plato states that the purpose of the stoning was to purify ("ἀφοσιώω") the state, i.e., like most other stonings, it expelled from the city the pollution that surrounded the parricide.²⁴ The place at which this was done was the crossroads; it seems likely that the expelled pollution was imagined to remain there, like the more tangible ὄξυθύμια cast out from households. The importance of this act and its location is underscored by the second part of the process. "Custom decreed" that a parricide be left unburied. The crossroads were an inappropriate place to leave the body for a reason that can be extrapolated from remarks Plato makes at 874b concerning the disposal of other (non-parricidal) homicides' corpses. He says that such unburied corpses must be cast out beyond the frontiers of their *victims'* states; i.e., murderers give offense to their victims' families even in death.

There is an understandable motivation, then, for abandoning the corpse of the parricide beyond the frontier of the state. Practically speaking, the symbolic stoning could have been carried out there as well; the fact that it was not indicates the importance of the crossroads as places where pollution was expelled and where those it had touched were purified. Conversely, the fact that Plato only prescribes this purifying treatment at the crossroads for the corpses of *parricides*—the most polluted and polluting of murderers—indicates that what is of concern is not the punishment of the murderer *per se* (which, after all, already would have been accomplished by this point) but the expulsion of particularly dangerous bloodguilt. A different, but analogous, solution to the problem is given by the fifth-century playwright Euripolis, who remarks that the προστρόπαιος ought to be burned at the crossroads (fr. 132

²⁴ Stoning is a method of execution or expulsion frequently (although not exclusively) found in connection with polluted individuals or scapegoats (who take on the pollutions of the city). See Burkert, *Structure and History*, 64 ff., with ancient citations; Nilsson, *GGR* I³ 108; cf. Parker, 194-5 with notes. The *locus classicus* is Philostr. VA IV 10-11: Apollonius tells the plague-beset Ephesians to stone an old beggar. When the act is completed and the pile of stones removed from the body, it is discovered that the old man was really a plague-demon, who, upon death, reverted to the shape of a dog.

PCG [Kassel-Austin; fr. 120 Kock]). This alternative combined the ritualized expulsion of pollution to a liminal place with the practical removal of the offending corpse (apparently, the custom of leaving the corpse unburied was not universal).²⁵

The second category of crossroads rituals—exploitive rituals—also includes the performance of magic. For example, at *Lg.* 933b, Plato mentions wax "voodoo" figures (κήρινα μιμήματα πεπλασμένα) that are left at crossroads. One of the spells in the Greek magical papyri instructs a love-sick magician to deposit a similar figure, made of wax or dough, at the crossroads; another instructs the magician to inscribe his spell on a three-cornered sherd picked up at the crossroads and then to hide the sherd again (*PGM* IV 2943-66; XXXVI 256-64).

Such spells were performed at crossroads because the restless souls who carried them out gathered there. There are no direct statements to this effect in Greek or Roman literature, but there is evidence that suggests such a belief was present, particularly among the Romans,²⁶ and, indeed, this is a common belief in many ancient and some contemporary cultures.²⁷ The fact that some Greek crossroads rituals were performed with the eyes averted supports the idea that ghosts or other uncanny creatures were expected to emerge there shortly.²⁸

Restless ghosts found at crossroads may have been souls chased there during exorcisms of adjoining areas. They may also have been the souls of those whose bodies were given over to that spot at death for various reasons. Such spirits would be imagined to linger there, taking part in the activity around the crossroads when they wished, as a selection from the *Greek Anthology* (above, n. 25) suggests, or when compelled to do so by a magician. This is not to imply, of course, that all crossroads, at all times, were believed to be fraught with active ghosts; under such circumstances the wayfarer scarcely could progress a mile without anxiety. The average man must have given as much thought to the traversing of ordinary

²⁵ *S. Ant.* 1199 ff. alludes to a custom similar to that Plato prescribes. The messenger says that Creon, in remorse for his treatment of Polyneices' body, went to the plain where it lay unburied and prayed to Pluto and Enodia to restrain their wrath and be kind. Nilsson, *GGR* I³ 724, suggested that Enodia is called on here because Polyneices' body, like those of other parricides, lies at crossroads. In this case it would seem that the "appointed crossroads" were far enough away that the corpse could be left there without offense.

Cf. Suetonius' description of an omen foretelling Vespasian's power (ch. 5): a stray dog dropped under the future Emperor's table a human hand that he had picked up at the crossroads (*trivium*). Hopfner, 162, suggested that it came from the corpse of a criminal, thrown out onto the crossroads. Hopfner's explanation would assume that the corpse remained at the crossroads for some time; again, the "appointed crossroads" in this case must have been, at the very least, outside of heavily travelled areas where a decomposing corpse would cause offense. Cf. also *AP* 9 159 (D.L. Page, *Further Greek Epigrams* [Cambridge 1981] LXII pp. 366-68 with commentary), which tells of a traveller who, finding a skull lying at the crossroads, threw a stone at it. The stone rebounded and blinded the traveller; he also suffered further punishments for his transgressions. This story reminds the reader of Plato's instructions concerning parricides and Suetonius' tale of the hand; we might guess that the deceased to whom the skull belonged was left at the crossroads because some extreme pollution was connected with him.

²⁶ For a thorough discussion of this question, see K. Meuli, *Mus. Helv.* 12 (1955) 206-35 (*Gesammelte Schriften* [Basel/Stuttgart 1975] I 251 ff.); cf. remarks in Frazer's edition of the *Fasti*, 454 ff.

²⁷ See J. A. MacCullough, "Crossroads," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, IV 331 ff.; and Frazer, *ibid.*, for examples. That ghosts dwell at Greek crossroads is an assumption (which remains to be addressed completely, however) of most modern scholars, notably Hopfner, who discusses its implications throughout his article.

²⁸ See, e.g., *A. Ch.* 98-99 with scholia and *PGM* LXX 16-17 (which tells the magician to flee after he has spoken a spell at the crossroads because "it is there that [Hekate] appears.")

crossroads in broad daylight as he did to every cat that crossed his path; only the δεισιδαιμόνων would shudder at either occurrence. But the potential for supernatural activity was there. If one sought contact with the unquiet dead, then a crossroads was the place to look. It is possible, too, that only selected crossroads became burial places for atypical corpses and, thus, repositories of restless ghosts. Plato describes the crossroads at which parricides' corpses are to be stoned as "τεταγμένη," indicating that it was not permissible to hold this ritual at just any random place where roads met. Similarly, perhaps, there were appointed crossroads for the burial of other stigmatized dead, chosen for their distance from the city or other qualifying circumstances.

By manipulating the souls who gathered at crossroads, the magician, in his own way, exploited the liminality of the crossroads that brought them there; he recalled the polluted souls that others had cast out. Similarly, magic often was performed at thresholds, where gathered ghosts expelled from the house, or at graves, where souls naturally lingered. The presence of souls at crossroads and other liminal points also explains why omens taken at these places were considered particularly significant. For example, twice the chorus of the *Agamemnon* emphasizes that the bird auspice was "ὄδιος" (lines 104, 157).²⁹ Even substances taken from the crossroads were imbued with daemonic power: Pliny advocates that women in labor wear an amulet filled with plants that have grown up inside a sieve thrown onto the crossroads.³⁰ Conversely, other magical acts were performed at the crossroads in an effort to keep at bay the souls dwelling there. Pliny advises the burying of frogs at crossroads as a precaution against fever (*H.N.* XXXII 113) perhaps this acted as an amulet to keep pinned to the crossroads the troublesome spirits imagined to bring disease.

Pindar once expressed his confusion as to how he should complete an ode by saying that he had been "whirled at the path-shifting crossroads" (*P.* XI 38). Students of Greek and Roman religion long have been "whirled at the crossroads" too, uncertain as to how the suppers, corpses and spells found there should be explained. But, as has been shown, the relationships between various deities and rituals associated with crossroads can be clarified by distinguishing two fundamental types of crossroads rituals—protective and exploitive. Both types ultimately grew from the liminal nature of crossroads, but in opposing ways. On the one hand, crossroads were uncertain, dissociated places of passage, where protective actions were necessary. On the other hand, by the very fact of their dissociation, they were convenient vacuums into which ancient man could dispose of his religious and societal refuse—or call up that refuse, in the form of restless souls, to aid him in the performance of magic.

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²⁹ Cf. the description at Ezek. 21:21 of the King of Babylon taking omens at the crossroads. A passage from Diogenes Laertius is also interesting: at *Vit.* 180, a man seeking advice about his forthcoming marriage is told by a temple priest to go to the crossroads, where some boys happen to be playing with spinning tops (βέμβικες); the boys—unknowingly—give him prophetic advice. Tops and other spinning devices could be magical or prophetic devices in their own right (see Johnston, *Hekate*, ch. VII). In this case, however, the boys were not engaged in prophetic pursuits purposely; their location at the crossroads seems to be the requisite element.

³⁰ *H.N.* XXIV 109; cf. Alex. Aphr. Pr. III 1-3; Galen *de Deibus Decr. libri III* IX 823 5-6 (Kühn); and *De Methodo Medendi libri XIV* X 786 7-8 (Kühn).