Invisibility, Belief and Narrative

Richard L. Phillips

➡ *For additional information about this article*

INVISIBILITY, BELIEF AND NARRATIVE[*]

Abstract: There are a number of invisibility rituals in the Graeco-Egyptian papyri whose presence in the corpus suggests that achieving invisibility was of interest to some in late Roman Egypt. But did anyone actually believe that such acts were possible? After highlighting the observations of various ancient (and modern) authors on this question, this essay turns to recent insights from Sarah Iles Johnston on the relationship of narrative technique and belief regarding Greek myth and considers how such techniques might have helped to affirm the validity of certain invisibility tales across time and space in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Keywords: invisibility, narrative, ritual, belief, magical papyri

Introduction: Invisibility and Belief in the Ancient (and Modern) World

A common question that arises in discussing the corpus of rituals from the Graeco-Egyptian papyri (also known as the *PGM*) is whether or not the reader should take some of the seemingly more fantastic claims within them seriously, such as the ability of the practitioner to achieve invisiblity.[1] The views of those residing in the ancient (and modern) world are divided. The authors or at least redactors of the extant invisibility formularies not surprisingly present them in a favorable light, bolstering formulary titles with words like "indispensable" (ἀναγκαῖος, *PGM* I 222) and "tested" (δόκιμος, *PGM* I 247) and invoking esoteric works of renowned practitioners (*PGM* VII 619).[2] Yet, the existence of a wide range of credence narratives[3] further suggests that the

---

[*] I want to thank my anonymous readers for offering constructive and very insightful feedback on my initial submission. This article is undoubtedly better because of their input. Nonetheless, for whatever shortcomings still remain, I am solely responsible.

[1] On the corpus of invisibility rituals in the *PGM*, see Phillips (2009).

[2] Of course, the reasons for these marketing strategies were anything but pure, since the intent was most likely to make these rituals more attractive to collectors or likely users, on which see Phillips (2009) 62–3 and Dieleman (2005) 254–84.

[3] Hansen (2017) 6 uses the term credence narrative "for stories that ancient narrators shaped in such a way as to present, or imply, a claim to historicity." Such narratives can include heroic legends (set in the age of heroes), historic legend (set in the human age), religious legend (focusing on the miraculous deeds of the gods), etc., on which see Hansen (2017) 7–25.

perspective of the *PGM* was not only shared by others in late Roman Egypt, but also throughout the Mediterranean realm.[4] Indeed in Lucian's *Lover of Lies* (2nd century AD), his leading character, Tychiades, critiques the surprising tendency of his learned colleagues, including philosophers from various schools of thought, to believe tales that would otherwise, *prima facie*, appear to be beyond belief and credible only to a lover of lies.[5] In the dialogue itself (35–6) Eucrates, Tychiades' ailing friend, famously tells the tale of the sorcerer's apprentice in which the Egyptian temple scribe, Pancrates, mysteriously disappears from Eucrates' presence.[6] But Lucian's disbelief that learned philosophers would be willing to readily accept such tales at face value is a reminder that even in societies where belief in the supernatural is pervasive, skepticism continues to persist.[7] The ancient world was no different in this respect and certainly had its share of "unbelievers" regarding human claims of achieving invisibility and transformation.[8] For example,

---

[4] There are a number of passages that suggest that ritual texts can bring about invisibility or transformation, e.g. on the Athenian stage Euripides tells us of Helen's disappearance before Orestes perhaps employing sorcery or the arts of the *magoi* (Eur. *Or.* 1494–7). Apollonius of Tyana disappears before the court of Domitian after quoting a line from Homer (Philostr. *VA* 8.5). In the Demotic tale of Setna II, the Nubian Horus Son of Paneshe turns to ritual to transform *in order not to be seen* (*Setna* II, col. 6/21–3). For the text see Griffith (1900) 198–201 and for translations Lichtheim (1980) 3.149 and Hoffman and Quack (2018) 143.

[5] Hansen (2017) 16–17 places Lucian's tale in the category of a belief legend which tends to raise "basic questions concerning the reality or nonreality of particular supernatural phenomena."

[6] "And after departing from me unnoticed, he went away not being perceived, but to where I do not know" (αὐτὸς δὲ ἀπολιπών με λαθὼν οὐκ οἶδ' ὅποι ἀφανὴς ᾤχετο ἀπιών).

[7] Whitmarsh (2015) 6: "Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, researching among the Azande of the Congo in the early twentieth century, spoke to one man who thought the witch doctors to be frauds; after probing a little further, Evans-Pritchard concluded that this was the general attitude of the people. It is not strange or exceptional to adopt a skeptical approach toward the supernatural: anyone in any culture at any time can do so." On the problematic notion of belief in antiquity, see Feeney (1998) 12–46.

[8] On the close connection of invisibility and transformation in the *PGM*, see Phillips (2009) 25–7 and (2019a) 222–4. A number of ancient authors comment about their disbelief of transformation rites as well. In the 5th century BC, Herodotus speaks of the Neurians in Scythia who once a year were said to transform and become werewolves. In the midst of telling this tale, he adds that for his part he does not believe these accounts ("the ones now saying these things do not persuade me, but they say nothing less and swear by it," ἐμὲ μέν νυν ταῦτα λέγοντες οὐ πείθουσι, λέγουσι δὲ οὐδὲν ἧσσον, καὶ ὀμνῦσι δὲ λέγοντες, 4.105). Similarly, Ovid, in his treatment of Pythagoras, relates stories about the Hyperboreans who supposedly could transform into birds after dipping nine times into Tritonia's pools as well as Scythian women who practiced the same arts by anointing their limbs with magical potions (*Met.* 15.356–60). After relating the story, he simply states that "he does not believe it" (*haut equidem credo*, 359). In the 4th century AD Augustine expresses skepticism over Lucius' transformation in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*: "Either these things are false or so unusual that with

Pliny the Elder, in his *Natural History*,[9] while referencing an invisibility rite involving a heliotrope plant and stone, calls it "the most blatant example of the shamelessness of the Magi." Moreover, the fourth century Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus tells the story of a count (Danielus) and a tribune of Scutarii (Barzimeres) who, when outmaneuvered on the battlefield, reputedly in the presence of the emperor (Valens) accused the Armenian king, Papa, of employing incantations (*incentiones*) of Circe that enabled him and his men to escape.[10] But in this case, Ammianus calls into question the validity of such accusations against the king, suggesting that Roman military leaders had fallen victim to better stratagem and that accusations of sorcery were merely fabricated charges (*falsa crimina*) intended to divert attention from their own incompetency on the battlefield.

Contemporary scholars have struggled to know what to make of such rituals as well. LiDonnici considers it to be "legitimate to ask who really was supposed to be impressed by the rhetorical frames that surround some of these spells when they appear in formularies, and whether the function of some of the *truly amazing and far-fetched applications* in a formulary (like invisibility, my italics and my parenthetical remark) might not reflect the traffic in more practical spells and their ingredients, and work to enhance the value of the others, justifying higher cost for the directions or the substances needed for, e.g., the basic fever amulet or erotic

---

good cause they are not believed" (*haec vel falsa sunt vel tam inusitata, ut merito non credantur*, *C.D.* 18.18).

[9] "In this also is even the most blatant example of the shamelessness of the *magi*, since when heliotrope plant is added together with heliotrope stone, with certain prayers spoken, they say that the one wearing it is not seen"(*magorum impudentiae vel manifestissimum in hac quoque exemplum est, quoniam admixta herba heliotropio, quibusdam additis precationibus, gerentem conspici negent*, 37.60.165). For a discussion of the term *magi* in Pliny the Elder, see Dickie (1999) 172–7.

[10] "And for the sake of explaining away their own conduct or the deceit, which they suffered because of a better stratagem, within earshot of the emperor (holding very fast to every rumor) they began to assail Papa with false charges, alleging that in wonderous ways he was skilled in the incantations of Circe, in transforming and weakening bodies, and adding that having crossed their lines by arts of this kind, after darkness was poured out over himself, and his form and the forms of his own men were altered, he would stir up sad cares (if he will have survived this mockery)" (*et leniendi causa flagitii sui vel fraudis, quam meliore consilio pertulerunt, apud imperatoris aures (rumorum omnium tenacissimas) incessebant falsis criminibus Papam, incentiones Circeas, in vertendis debilitandisque corporibus, miris modis eum callere fingentes: addentesque quod huius modi artibus, offusa sibi caligine, mutata sua suorumque forma transgressus, tristes sollicitudines (si huic irrisioni superfuerit) excitabit*, 30.1.17).

binding spell."[11] Certainly, her suspicion regarding the motives of the practitioners is not unfounded given some of the other marketing strategies of the surviving handbooks. Dieleman, addressing the tendency of some *PGM* texts to place invisibility within the framework of jail breaks, asserts that "it goes without saying that none of these spells were ever successful in turning anybody truly invisible or that anybody ever escaped from prison through use of such spells."[12] Although Dieleman is not wrong to highlight the element of showmanship in *PGM* XII 160 nor to call out the difficulty of achieving this kind of miraculous escape,[13] his use of the phrase, "truly invisible" seems to imply that invisibility here is akin to a vanishing act, which might in turn be taken by some to mean that the practitioner is trying to achieve immateriality.

Defining Invisibility in the PGM and Literary Texts: A Brief Overview
But how then should one interpret "invisibility" in the context of the Greek magical papyri and the broader Mediterranean world? The invisibility rituals of the *PGM* provide a number of lines in which the practitioner specifically asks to become invisible: "make me invisible (ἀθεώρητόν με ποίησον, *PGM* I 229); "you will be invisible for as long as you wish" (ἄφαντος ἔσῃ, ἐφ᾽ ὅσον χρόνον θέλεις, *PGM* I 257); "you will be invisible to everyone" (ἀθεώρητος | ἔσει πρὸς πάντας, *PGM* VII 621–2); "while wearing this (egg), you will be invisible…" (τοῦτο{ν} φορῶν ἀθε|ώρητος ἔσῃ, *PGM* XIII 236–7). In these examples we encounter words like ἀθεώρητος ("unseen") and ἄφαντος ("unperceived") that express the practitioner's desire to achieve invisibility. But what such words tell us about the

---

[11] LiDonnici (1999) 235. See also Johnston (2015a) 51: "One of the persistent challenges in understanding ancient magic is figuring out how its practitioners balanced what we moderns would call empirical reality with what we would describe as giving free rein to their imaginations. How often did practitioners really manage to see or hear the remarkable things that ancient spells promised them they would see and hear? When they did see and hear them, why did they do so? How did the spells—and choices made by the practitioner himself—predispose him either to succeed or to fail?"

[12] Dieleman (2012–13) 190.

[13] In making his point Dieleman (2012–13) 190 notes that in *PGM* XII 160–78, a charm to loosen shackles, open doors, and become invisible, the ritual suggests that it will afford the opportunity for the user to publicly display their virtuosity as a magician (*PGM* XII 160: ἐὰν δὲ θέλῃς δεικτ[ι]κόν τι ποιῆσαι, "if you want to do something worth seeing"). It might be the case that invisibility rituals were intended to be used in contexts like the one appearing in *PGM* XII, but other possibilities have been suggested as well, on which see Phillips (2009) 41–4. Dieleman's assertion does not take into account that individuals in the ancient world believed that such events could happen and if a jailbreak ever did occur, might explain such events in these terms. For ritual and narrative accounts of this kind of escape, see Phillips (2009) 33–40.

conception of invisibility in these rituals is not immediately obvious, since going "unseen" or being "unperceived" can have many connotations.

In her brief overview of invisibility in the *PGM*, LiDonnici highlights key terminology in nine invisibility rituals, six of which relate to ἀμαυρά and its cognates.[14] In exploring parallels she highlights how these words appear "in many contexts throughout ancient literature," primarily referring "to varieties of dimness, fogs, obscurity, blindness, difficult vision, etc." LiDonnici concludes that the language of these spells "are designed to create inconspicuousness rather than transparency."[15] Maintaining this line of thought in my own commentary to these rituals, I have highlighted the link between the word ἀμαύρωσις in *PGM* I 222 and 247 and its use in Greek medical literature where it describes an idiopathic eye disease, defined as an affliction of the eye "when there is complete obstruction of sight without a visible cause" (ὅταν παντελὴς παρεμποδισμὸς ᾖ τοῦ ὁρᾷν, χωρὶς φανερᾶς αἰτίας),[16] and in doing so have helped connect the dots to show how words like ἀθεώρητος and ἄφαντος in the *PGM* tend to be associated with acts that are seeking to affect the vision of others or helping the practitioner to go unnoticed.[17] Following in the footsteps of Pease and LiDonnici,[18] I too have taken a broad definition of invisibility in my previous work (including metamorphosis, darkness, and blinding) noting that "however conceived, 'invisibility' in practice usually meant going unnoticed or unobserved."[19]

Given what we know about invisibility in the *PGM*, in turning to literary narratives, we must be careful not to limit the scope of invisibility to "true" invisibility and to import contemporary ideas about it into our reading of such scenes, which often provide little explanation as to what going unseen or

[14] LiDonnici (1999) 228 cites: "ἀμαυροῖ, a verbal form in *PGM* I 102 and *PGM* V 488; ἀμαύρωσις, in lemmata from *PGM* I 222 and 247; ἀμαυρά in *PGM* XIII 235; and ἀμαυρωτικόν in *P.Oxy.* 3931." For a survey of other terms of invisibility in the *PGM*, especially regarding metamorphosis, darkness, and blinding, see Phillips (2009) 23–30.

[15] See LiDonnici (1999) 228: "These lexicographical arguments appear to indicate that what the practitioners achieve through these rituals is the ability to be un-noticed or unrecognized. The 'fly on the wall' is perfectly visible, as indeed is the wall itself in the case of *PGM* XIII 270–7." Generally speaking, human invisibility in the ancient world is not synonymous with immateriality. See nn. 20 and 21 below.

[16] See Phillips (2009) 84–7, s.v. ἀμαύρωσις, esp. its appearance in Pseudo-Galen, *Introductio seu medicus* 16 in Kühn (1827) 14.776, lines 8–9.

[17] Given the limited number of times that ἀμαύρωσις is used in the Greek corpus, Phillips (2019b) investigates the role that ritual ingredients can play in illuminating the meaning of invisibility in *PGM* I 222–31 and 247–62.

[18] Pease (1942) and LiDonnici (1999).

[19] Phillips (2009) 24.

unperceived really means and thus, can open the door for present-day readers to insert their own notions of invisibility into such contexts, especially the idea that invisibility involves immateriality.[20] A brief look at Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, to cite one example, illustrates that as in the *PGM* human invisibility could be defined fairly broadly—being achieved by affecting the perceptions of others, by covering or clothing one's own body, or by suddenly being raptured from sight (an act of disappearance, but not one of immateriality).[21] Moreover, in Homer the acquisition of invisibility involves many different mechanisms (inattentiveness, sleep, cloudy vision, night, clouds and mists, robes, the Cap of Hades, transformation, relocation, etc.), most of which are initiated by gods and goddesses and do not involve ritual activity. Because these mechanisms tend to shift over time as new philosophies and worldviews arise, a comprehensive summary of the language of invisibility in literary accounts is not feasible here.[22] Nonetheless, in approaching the topic of invisibility, belief, and narrative, it is important to have an awareness of how various kinds of invisibility could be constructed in antiquity.[23]

---

[20] Renehan (1980) 108–9 and 129 asserts that "so far as is known, Plato was the first thinker to recognize a mode of existence which is not in space," since "the world and all that was in it was more or less material" and the Greeks at this time "were not in a conceptual position to do otherwise."

[21] In Homer and elsewhere, however, the dead often vanish into thin air and at times in antiquity the line between the living and the dead seems to be blurred. For example, in *Il.* 23.65 the ghost (ψυχή) of Patroclus appears in a dream to Achilles, requesting proper burial and afterwards (100–1) departs like a vapor (ἠΰτε καπνός) into the earth. Similarly, phantom images (εἴδωλον) created by gods seem to have more fluidity than living humans, as Iphthime (*Od.* 4.796), who is sent in a dream to Penelope by Athena and then is able to leave the room by withdrawing alongside the door's bolt into the blowing winds (838–9). In *Ev.Luc.* 24.36–40 and *Ev.Jo.* 20.19 and 26, Jesus of Nazareth mysteriously enters the house where the disciples are present. Luke clearly rules out that he is a ghost, but such an entry is reminiscent to that of Iphtime's phantom. Ogden (2007) 239 makes a passing reference to the possible influence of ghost scenes on Pancrates' disappearance in Lucian's *Lover of Lies*.

[22] Pease (1942) 10 n. 72 cites the phrases ἀφανὴς ἐγένετο and *non comparuit* as being especially frequent, but does not provide an overview of language for various kinds of invisibility, e.g. affecting the perceptions of others, concealing oneself or being raptured. On the topic of invisibility and sight in Homer, including a survey on the language of invisibility in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, see Phillips (2020).

[23] Focusing his attention on Homer, Phillips (2020) discusses invisibility in the context of on-going research pertaining to sight and the senses in antiquity, including ancient theory of vision. In Homer we encounter evidence of extramissionist theories of vision, i.e. the idea that the eyes emit an active ray that makes vision possible, on which see Rudolph (2016) 39. Thus, it is not surprising to find gods and goddesses regularly concealing heroes in mists, which seems to prevent the rays of the eyes from seeing the person concealed within them. Indeed when discussing his planned rendezvous

Invisibility and Belief in Ritual Practice and Narrative

Returning to our initial line of inquiry, perhaps a better question to ask rather than "Did invisibility rituals work?" or "Did people ever go unnoticed?" is "Did society-at-large believe in the efficacy of such rites or did it believe that on occasion individuals did achieve invisibility?" and "if so, why?"[24] The present investigation explores this second line of inquiry. In doing so it turns to Sarah Iles Johnston's recent findings on narrative technique and belief in Greek myth and applies them to narratives involving the human acquisition of invisibility.[25] Although the invisibility rituals in the *PGM* reflect the vibrant hybridity of late Roman Egypt and the ritual traditions therein, wider net has intentionally been cast for this examination, a move that I believe is justified given the familiarity of the Greek mythic tradition in many of the texts found within the *PGM* and elsewhere in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.[26] The purpose of this essay, however, is not to situate these rituals within the literary context of late Roman Egypt,[27] but instead to explore the diverse landscape of invisibility narratives in the ancient Mediterranean world and to consider how narrative technique could be used to encourage the belief that invisibility on occasion had been (and indeed still could be achieved) by humans. In this sense it will give some insight into why stories about invisibility were so widespread in antiquity and why the presence of invisibility ritual in a late Roman Egypt handbook was perhaps not as outrageous as one might initially think.

---

with Hera on Mt. Ida (*Il.* 14.342–5), Zeus tells Hera that despite the fact that the sun has the sharpest vision, it will not be able to penetrate the golden cloud that envelopes them. There is no clear theory of vision in the *PGM*, which perhaps reflects its Egyptian roots, on which see Phillips (2019b) 199 n. 8.

[24] Meyer and Smith (1994) 4 observe that " … most would agree that we should not ask, 'Does it (i.e. ritual) work?' This is a question which allowed the negative appraisal of primitive magic as 'pseudo-science'." That said, if invisibility is not equated with immateriality, such acts become readily more achievable.

[25] In particular see Johnston (2015b), (2015c), (2016), and (2018). Cf. also Veyne (1988) 20 who years earlier asked the question, "Did the Greeks believe in (their) tales?" and Anderson (2006) 24–5.

[26] See e.g. Johnston (2015a). The Graeco-Egyptian papyri also exhibit an awareness of authors like Homer. See n. 35 below. Cribiore (1996) 49 and (2001) 194–7 offers a helpful overview of Homeric papyri and their use in school exercises. Dieleman (2012–13) 191 rightly notes that "no invisibility spells are attested among the extant Demotic magical papyri nor, for that matter, among the earlier pharaonic formularies," suggesting "that the *PGM* formularies are different in character from, even if similar to, the Demotic magical papyri."

[27] On which, see Phillips (2009).

In approaching both narratives and ritual texts relating to invisibility, it is important to recognize that each would have been influenced by folklore traditions that were pervasive across the Mediterranean region.[28] Evidence of invisibility narratives being transmitted orally range from the tales of the Homeric cycle sung by bards to stories, no doubt, shared in the presence of friends, much like the carefully crafted literary dialogues, where we find Glaucon's reference to the ring of the ancestor of Gyges in Book 2 of Plato's *Republic* (359d–360c)[29] or Eucrates' tale of the sorcerer's apprentice in Lucian's *Lover of Lies* (33–6).[30] At the same time, more light is beginning to be shed on folklore traditions regarding medicinal and ritual practices.[31] In the case of invisibility rituals from the *PGM*, we encounter *similia similibus* rites incorporating ingredients that possess elusive or blinding qualities that the practitioner hopes to become like, e.g. the eye of an owl and the *aglaophōtis* plant.[32] Remnants of similar kinds of ritual traditions are also present in invisibility rituals included in the *Natural History* of Pliny who is most likely using source material that has been derived from Ptolemaic Egypt.[33]

At first glance, I would assert that these kinds of invisibility rituals seem to be compatible with Hansen's broader category of credence narratives because they promote the idea that such ritual acts can produce legitimate results.[34] Although

[28] Although folklore is a difficult term to define, here I am thinking about what Anderson (2006) 4 calls "anonymously transmitted culture."

[29] See Anderson (2000) 20–1 and 107. Discussing the broader context of such tales (11), he notes that "It is however when we come to fiction proper, in Petronius, Lucian and Apuleius, that potentially philosophical occasions are used, sometimes facetiously, to contain clearly popular materials." Cf. in Petr. 63 Trimalchio's tale of the witches who stole the body of a dead boy and then disappear.

[30] On which, see Ogden (2007) 231–70. Of course, folktale motifs involving objects that bestow invisibility are known internationally, on which see Thompson (1955–8) 2.195–8.

[31] See Anderson (2006) 39–43 who discusses nonliterary sources of folklore such as the Greek Magical Papyri. Later (157) he notes how "A number of animals, plants, and minerals have acquired a folkloric identity of their own, both in the ancient world and beyond, sometimes at odds with scientific observation, sometimes overlapping or coinciding with it" and how "Animals and particularly animals from amphibians to mammals invite analogy to humans." Although such information could be imbedded in literary sources, like Pliny's *Natural History*, one can see how such information might have been included in "anonymously transmitted culture."

[32] *Similia similibus* rituals appear in the extant invisibility rituals from the *PGM*, on which see Phillips (2009) 89–90, s.v. λαβὼν στέαρ ἢ ὀφθαλμὸν νυκτίβαυ and (2019b), and in Plin. *Nat.* 28.29.115 and 37.60.165 (n. 9 above) On the possible Hellenistic origins of these kinds of *similia similibus* invisibility rituals, see n. 33 below.

[33] See Phillips (2011–12) 43–4 as well as Phillips (2019b) 200–2.

[34] See n. 3 above.

on occasion credence narratives have become invisibility rituals over the course of time, clearly invisibility rituals represent more than just literary narratives, since they promise to bring about a change to the immediate circumstances of their user through ritual action and invocation.[35] In the case of *similia similibus* rituals of the *PGM*, Tambiah's ideas about persuasive analogy in a ritual context can help us better understand the internal workings of such ritual acts, the basic idea being that the "analogical action (of rituals) conforms to the 'persuasive' rather than the scientific model … and the rite consists in persuasively transferring the properties of the desired and desirable vertical relation to the other which is in the undesirable condition … "[36] Thus, including ingredients like the eye of an owl or an *aglaophōtis* plant in balms used to anoint the body or face suggests that the practitioner seeks to affect the vision of others or to camouflage the person wearing them, essentially attempting to make the person using them go unnoticed. Although ritual texts are unlike literary narratives in the way they attempt to impact the world around the practitioner, narratives and rituals are both drawing from some of the same fabric of folklore, and, no doubt, the telling of credence narratives, whether in anonymously transmitted tales or literary masterpieces, went a long way in bolstering the belief among individuals within ancient Mediterranean society that under the right circumstances, attaining invisibility was possible.

Johnston on Narrative and Belief: Some Introductory Observations
Narrative can be a powerful tool in reinforcing the idea that achieving invisibility (in its many forms) was indeed within human reach. In a series of well-conceived essays, culminating in a recent book-length study, Sarah Iles Johnston, applying ideas developed in media studies and social psychology, explores the general role of narrative in creating and sustaining belief.[37] Though she focuses her attention more broadly on Greek myths, her findings and methodology are relevant and applicable to the current conversation regarding invisibility and belief and in turn

[35] In Philostr. *VA* 8.5, Apollonius of Tyana quotes *Il.* 22.13 (on the disappearance of Agenor) before becoming invisible in the presence of Domitian, on which see Phillips (2009) 23–4 and 53–4. On the ritual use of Homeric lines, see Schwendner (2002) and Collins (2008) 104–31. In the Middle Ages travelers commonly wore textual amulets quoting scriptural passages, e.g. *Ev.Luc.* 4.30: *Ihesus autem transiens per medium illorum ibat*, "Jesus, however, went passing through their midst." See Skemer (2006) 155 and 220. Johnston (2018) 67 does call attention to "the potential of mythic narratives to bring about changes in the outlook and behavior of its audience members" or what she notes Claude Calame calls the "pragmatic effect."

[36] Tambiah (1973) 212. On invisibility ritual and Tambiah on persuasive analogy and related bibliography, see Phillips (2019b).

[37] See n. 25 above.

can help us think about how narratives employ specific techniques that can bolster the popular belief that human invisibility could be achieved under the right circumstances. Although invisibility narratives at times seem to be part of the distinct border that Johnston discusses between what Tolkien calls the Primary World, i.e. the world in which we live, as opposed to the Secondary World, i.e. the world of fantasy,[38] more often than not they are depicted as occurring within otherwise familiar contexts, which suggests that they are more than boundary markers. Johnston highlights the fact that typically in Greek myth "that which is marvelous is situated squarely within familiar activities" and thus "integrated into the everyday world in such a way as to be accepted by audience members."[39]

   In discussing narrative Johnston makes some important preliminary observations about its nature.[40] Although modern narratives often turn to *persuasion by authority* to convince their audience, perhaps by citing respected sources, etc., it was very common in the ancient world, where belief in "invisible others" (i.e. gods, angels, demons and ghosts) flourished, for narratives to employ *persuasion through suggestion*. For this reason, stories were often carefully crafted to meet the needs of their audiences and hence could effectively communicate ideas and concepts shared by their own culture. This is not to say that narratives did not at times play an authoritative role as well.[41] Johnston makes the case that well-formulated narratives help "get people to believe in things they cannot experience through the normal five senses (such as invisible others) by means of persuasion through suggestion than by persuasion through authority and that a significant means of persuasion through suggestion is the telling of vivid, engaging stories. Vivid, engaging stories lay the groundwork for audience members to form

---

[38] See Johnston (2015c) 285–6 who points to many of the "striking features—geographical, botanical, zoological, technological, etc.—" that "make it different from the Primary World." She references Hades' cap of invisibility as one of the peculiar technological features indicating a Secondary World in Greek myths (288).

[39] Johnston (2015c) 290: "My initial conclusions, then, are that the story world of Greek myths is not a strongly secondary one, that the secondary qualities that it does possess focus upon single, circumscribed events or characters, and that those events or characters are often integrated into descriptions of the Primary World in such a way as to expand possibilities within the latter than highlight the extraordinariness of the former."

[40] In particular, see Johnston (2016) 143–4.

[41] In talking about narrative in the magical papyri, Johnston (2015a) 53 notes how " … the spells tap into what for centuries had been a source of enormous authority in the Greek-speaking world both implicitly (because of the role that these narratives had played in creating and sustaining belief in the gods …) and explicitly (because most of the narratives were credited to poets, who themselves carried tremendous authority)."

relationships with the stories' characters that can be just as cognitively and emotionally satisfying as relationships with people."[42] It is in just such kinds of "vivid" and "engaging" narratives that acts of invisibility are presented as occurring. The same kinds of narrative techniques that draw people into storylines and parasocial relationships with characters[43] also help to affirm popular beliefs, including the notion that occasionally and often by divine intervention invisibility was within the grasp of human beings.

Narrative Techniques and the Representation of Invisibility
The "X/Y Format" of Narration and the Importance of Narrating Belief. Johnston surveys a number of ancient (and modern) narrative techniques that make their stories and characters more vivid and engaging and thus more accessible to their audience. Some of these same qualities would have also made scenes in which individuals are credited with becoming invisible more tangible. For example, in considering the techniques used by narrators of memorates ("first person accounts of supernatural experiences") and vicarious memorates ("the retelling of another person's story"),[44] Johnston has highlighted the work of the sociologist Robin Woofitt who references what is termed the "X/Y format" of narration. "Narrators need to persuade audiences not only that the extraordinary experiences they relate really happened (what Woofitt calls the "Y" factor) but also that the narrators themselves are sane, normal people who function successfully within the

---

[42] Johnston (2016) 154.

[43] To help us understand the emotional connections that those in the ancient world would have had with their stories and the characters in them, Johnston (2016) 144–5 and (2018) 87–91 applies psychological theories related to *parasocial interaction* and *relationships* to the world of religious narrative. In doing so, she observes that when we think about social relationships with other people, we generally think of interacting with others reciprocally. However, psychologists have coined the term parasocial "to describe interaction that, rather than being between two people, is between one person and another person with whom the first one imagines himself or herself to be interacting." Individuals who engage in such parasocial behavior are said to be involved in *parasocial interaction* (PSI) or in a *parasocial relationship* (PSR). Although initially considered to be unusual behavior, psychologists have not only shown that PSIs and PSRs are fairly common, but that they can also involve a level of thought and emotion that reaches the same level as real relationships. In applying the idea of parasocial interaction to the ancient world, Johnston points out that such individuals would have seen the relationships with their own gods (and invisible others) as *social* relationships, i.e. reciprocal, whereas those outside of their religious system might consider them to be fictional and a manifestation of parasocial behavior.

[44] Johnston (2018) 98–100. The definition here belongs to Hansen (2017) 24. Johnson (2018) 102 notes that "From antiquity, we have no true memorates—there were no folklorists to record them."

familiar world (Woofitt's "X" factor)." This can be achieved through "vivid" and "engaging" narratives.

For example, in Lucian's *Lover of Lies*, Eucrates begins his tale of the sorcerer's apprentice by calling attention to the fact that it comes from his first-hand experience and not hearsay, no doubt signifying to his audience that the story to follow is credible.[45] The Pythagorean Arignotus vouches for the authenticity of Eucrates' tale when he reveals (somewhat unexpectedly) that the Egyptian scribe and holy man, Pancrates, had indeed been his own teacher and confirms this fact with a detailed description of him (34). Arignotus' familiarity with Pancrates plays another role at this juncture in that it gives an additional level of believability to the account that Eucrates proceeds to narrate regarding Pancrates' marvelous deeds, including his mysterious disappearance.[46] Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that such fabulous elements of Eucrates' trip are mentioned along with his more mundane activities, like his visit to the statue of Memnon, a noted pilgrimage site for Greeks and Romans alike, and his tutorial sessions under the supervision of Pancrates. Lucian's dialogue, of course, is skeptical of such accounts, but their presence demonstrates the kind of vicarious memorates and storytelling techniques that could encourage belief in such phenomena, including the corroborating testimony of a friend. While exploring how marvelous tales can be embedded within longer narratives, Anderson also highlights the way that narrative details of such stories can help to bolster belief. In particular, he examines Nikeros' well-known werewolf story in Petronius' *Satyricon*, and in doing so, observes how Petronius "has Nikeros tell the story as if he genuinely believes it, and corroborates it with tiny, trivial detail in a leisurely and discursive style."[47] Such narrative details help to confirm the story being told which in turn affirms that the storyteller is a "normal person" who "functions successfully within the familiar world."

---

[45] Although Lucian's work is a fictional dialogue, Eucrates' story is technically a vicarious memorate since Lucian is retelling the story. Eucrates begins his story with the following words: "but I will tell you even another story from first-hand experience, not one heard from someone else" (ἐγὼ δὲ ὑμῖν καὶ ἄλλο διηγήσομαι αὐτὸς παθών, οὐ παρ᾽ ἄλλου ἀκούσας, 33).

[46] Pancrates' marvelous deeds include walking on crocodiles and swimming with the beasts.

[47] Anderson (2006) 59 highlights Nikeros' use of non-essential details (e.g. the inclusion of the current owner's name of the house in question, i.e. Gavilla), the introduction of "lively speech mannerisms" (e.g. "as heaven would have it"), and promises of the story's veracity ("Don't think I'm only joking: I'd rather lose a whole fortune than tell a lie … ").

Episodic or Serial Narrative. Another narrative technique for drawing readers into a story is for stories to be told in *episodes* or *serial* format.[48] This is a concept well known to anyone who has ever been a dedicated fan of a serial broadcast or perhaps was part of the generation of readers who had to endure the long wait for another installment of the Harry Potter series. Dividing a story into shorter installments enables the storyteller to focus attention on specific episodes while allowing the audience members to continue to think about the characters and the plot of the story in between the tales, thus bringing them closer to the characters and events of the narrative. Of course, the ancient Mediterranean world was also familiar with a serial approach to storytelling. Athenians were often exposed to shorter episodes of much longer mythological cycles whether through performances of epics or comedies and tragedies. In later times, even students in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt encountered brief episodes of Homeric tales and plays from the likes of Euripides in their school exercises.[49]

But the act of encountering individual episodes would have also allowed people to remember how gods had helped heroes in times past achieve invisibility over the longer arc of the entire story.[50] In *Iliad* 20, for example, Trojan Aeneas finds himself on the verge of death at the hands of Achilles. After first having thrown his far-shadowing spear and pierced Aeneas' shield (273–4), Achilles, sword in hand, leaps upon Aeneas with the intent of killing him. However, at this very moment the earthshaker Poseidon intervenes to save him and in doing so makes Aeneas invisible to Achilles by shedding a mist over Achilles' eyes (κατ᾽ ὀφθαλμῶν χέεν ἀχλύν, 20.321). Afterwards, he lifts Aeneas up (ἀείρας) and swings him (ἔσσευεν) high from the ground, setting him on the edge of the battlefield (*Il.* 20.321–5). Once the wondrous mist has been lifted from his eyes, Achilles notes the marvel before his eyes, that Aeneas is gone and only his spear remains.

Such examples, no doubt, would have encouraged reflection on these particular, discrete episodes within the larger framework of the epic and highlighted the many ways that gods had come to the aid of various characters, removing them from danger or protecting them from a hostile encounter. Moreover, such stories reveal that invisibility is not simply a vanishing act, but encompasses a much broader range of divine activity. Invisibility can involve gods affecting the perceptions of

---

[48] Johnston (2015b) 201–6, (2016) 148–51 and (2018) 91–6.

[49] See n. 26 above. For the use of Euripides, including his *Orestes*, in school papyri, see Cribiore (1996) 49 and (2001) 198–9.

[50] Johnston (2015b) 203 also notes that episodic serials include smaller story arcs that are resolved within episodes.

others, as Poseidon clouds the vision of Achilles. Elsewhere, we remember that Hermes puts the Achaean guards to sleep so that King Priam can travel safely (*Il.* 24.334–8, 443–7) and Athena diverts the attention of Penelope as Eurycleia sees Odysseus' scar (*Od.* 19.476–9). Invisibility, however, can also include removing people from the earth (as Poseidon does to Aeneas) or even covering and concealing an individual. Proteus shape-shifts to escape from Menelaus (*Od.* 4.455–8) and Athena hides Odysseus in a mist as he travels among the Phaeacians (*Od.* 7.14–15). The awareness of such nuance would have prevented a one-dimensional, one-size-fits-all conception of what was involved in attaining (and explaining) invisibility. Certainly, it could encompass wondrous and next to unbelievable acts, e.g. the translation and apotheosis of heroes or the use of one-of-a-kind technologies, like the cap of Hades, but it could also involve the mundane as well, e.g. distracted perceptions or unexpected moments of sleep. No doubt, unexpected disappearances or the rare and fortuitous act of going unnoticed in one's personal life at some point also came to be associated with similar kinds of divine intervention, very much like the ones found within literary accounts.

Plurimediality. Another aspect of Greek mythological tales that Johnston asserts made them more vivid and engaging to their audience is that they were often told across more than one medium. The narratological term *plurimedial* is used to describe this phenomenon,[51] in which audiences encounter stories and characters across multiple formats, and thereby strengthen their personal connections to such narratives by providing a wider range of opportunities for exposure to and interaction with a given story.

Perseus' use of the cap of Hades to stealthily approach and then behead the gorgon Medusa offers a mythological example of an invisibility narrative represented in multiple contexts. The Perseus story itself appears in a broad range of literary texts,[52] only some of which explicitly include the cap of Hades. Its first appearance with Perseus in extant literature occurs in the *ekphrasis* of Herakles' shield in the Pseudo-Hesiodic *Scutum*, where it is described as "having the terrible gloom of night" (νυκτὸς ζόφον αἰνὸν ἔχουσα, 227). There is evidence that Perseus' adventures with his mother Danaë inspired Aeschylus to write perhaps a trilogy on

---

[51] For an introduction to the term "plurimediality," see Johnston (2015b) 206 n. 54 and also (2015c) 206–10, (2016) 151-4 and (2018) 156-63. Johnston asserts that given that plurimedial experiences are confined to the imagination of one person, they make the experience more personal. Johnston (2018) 156–7 adds the term "accretive" to describe the different instantiations of characters.

[52] For a listing of literary sources for the Perseus cycle, see Ogden (2008) 149–52.

the topic, of which only a few passages remain.[53] Despite its fragmentary condition, Ogden, notes how Aeschylus' stage adaptation is not always in harmony with other versions of the story. For example, Aeschylus has Hermes giving Perseus the cap of Hades,[54] whereas the noted mythographer, Pherecydes,[55] his contemporary, attributes this action to the Nymphs. Of course, many individuals also encountered the scene of Perseus, wearing the cap of Hades, as the subject of numerous iconographic depictions in the Greek world.[56] For example, as early as the late 6th century we see representations on Greek vases of the three Nymphs bringing Perseus equipment to defeat Medusa, including the cap of Hades (fig. 1 below). Although Perseus' triumph takes place at the fringes of the known world and hence, is far removed from the Primary World of the audience, such stories would have become more familiar to individuals because of these plurimedial representations that provided the observer an opportunity to visualize a scene from the tale and reflect upon how Perseus was able to achieve the impossible by the help of the gods.

But lesser known stories with more mundane acts of invisibility might have afforded audiences a better chance to envision how such events might relate to them as individuals. For example, in the *Odyssey* (19.476–9), Eurycleia observes a scar on the beggar Odysseus that reveals to her that this can be none other than

---

[53] We have the title of one play, *Polydectes*, and fragments from the *Phorcides* (*TrGF* fr. 261–2) as well as the satyr play, *Dictyoulkoi* (*TrGF* fr. 46a–47c).

[54] See Ogden (2008) 41, where he particularly draws attention to the ancient summaries of the *Phorcides* (*TrGF* fr. 262 i–vi). He also asserts that "by the time Aeschylus wrote his *Phorcides*, the quest narrative surrounding Perseus' decapitation of Medusa was evidently well developed" (40) and that Perseus' use of the cap against Medusa suggests that it was the Gorgon's gaze, not merely looking at the Gorgon, that petrified her victims (45). Of course, there are other times that individuals go unseen on the Greek stage, e.g. Ajax fails to see Odysseus in Soph. *Aj.* 69–70 and 83–5. Messengers also report miraculous events like the mysterious escape of the stranger in Eur. *Ba.* 616–22 and the disappearance of Helen in Eur. *Or.* 1494–7. See also the section below on crossovers.

[55] For Pherecydes' treatment of this episode, see Fowler (2000) 1.281 (fr. 11).

[56] See *LIMC* Perseus and for an overview the analysis of Ogden (2008) 45 who highlights Perseus' "dizzying range of headgear" in the iconographic record, concluding that "Perhaps we are meant to interpret anything Perseus is shown wearing on his head as the Cap of Hades, but the only images that can certainly be taken to represent it are the two in which the Nymphs present him with their gifts (nos. 87–8)."
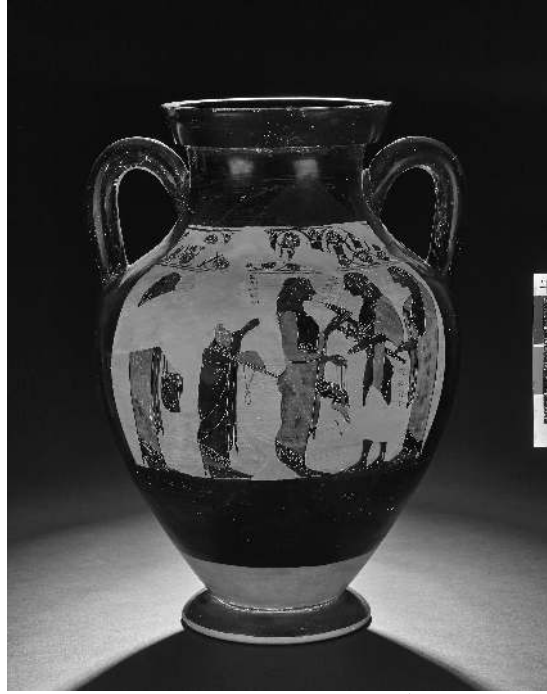
Figure 1: Three Nymphs present Perseus with gifts (Chalkidian black-figure amphora attributed to the Inscription Painter, ca. 550 BC, Caere, Italy. London, BM B155. © The Trustees of the British Museum. *LIMC* Perseus no. 88)

Odysseus himself. However, when she turns to get Penelope's attention, Athena distracts Penelope, reminding us that gods can be involved in all aspects of life, even a moment of inattention. Indeed it is this very episode (perhaps even including an unobservant Penelope) that seems to be portrayed in a fragmentary Alexandrian wall painting from the late 3rd to early 4th century.[57]

Deixis. Johnston notes that "Sometimes, narrators make a story more vivid by pointing out places or things that exist both in the story and in surroundings from the everyday world that are familiar to their audiences. By doing this, they subtly assert that the world in which the story takes place is just as real as the everyday world because it quite literally is the *same* world."[58] The Greek term used for this

---

[57] Hanfmann (1984) cites this scene on a wall painting from later Roman Egypt. For other images of Odysseus being bathed, see *LIMC* Odysseus (nos. 214–6) which includes a picture of a 1st century AD carnelian gemstone, depicting a servant, presumably Eurycleia, washing Odysseus' feet (no. 214).

[58] Johnston (2016) 147–8; see also (2015b) 188 and n. 24.

phenomenon is *deixis*. Although there are quite a few invisibility narratives in ancient literature, they usually do not involve *deixis* in a way that would reference immediate surroundings to their audience. Some of the reasons for this are fairly obvious. Heroic tales, like those of Perseus, often take place at the fringes of the world.[59] Even if the geography of a location, like Troy or Ithaca, was identifiable and perhaps grounded in historical legend, the audience had no intimate knowledge of such places. Lastly, extant invisibility rituals typically keep the context of their application open-ended and it is only from other ritual texts that we can know at best the kinds of contexts in which they might have been used.[60]

In the Greek world, however, we do encounter some disappearance scenes, often connected to hero cult, that are associated with more specific geographical locations. A well-known example appears in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which the audience learns how a cult of Oedipus came to be established in the Athenian deme of Colonus.[61] Although the end of the play culminates with the mysterious disappearance of Oedipus[62] and the requirement that the location of this site (and his grave) be kept a secret by Theseus,[63] King of Athens, and subsequent leaders, it is clear that the disappearance and heroization has occurred

---

[59] For example, Pherecydes has Perseus flying to Oceanos to find the Gorgons, on which see Fowler (2000) 1.281 (fr. 11).

[60] *PGM* I 101–2 and XII 160–2 imply that such texts might have been used for jailbreaks. On other possible contexts, see n. 13 above.

[61] In the play Oedipus explains how Apollo prophesied about his fate and the cult to be established: "For (Apollo), when he was proclaiming all that evil, spoke of this as a respite after a long time, when I came to a final land, where I should find a seat of the dread goddesses and a stopping-place for strangers, there I should finish my long-suffering life, with advantages by my settlement to those who had received me, and disaster to those who had sent me, who had driven me away. And he promised that signs of this would come, an earthquake or thunder or lightning of Zeus …" (Soph. *OC* 87–95); Oedipus tells the chorus of men from Colonus, "for I come holy and reverent, and I bring advantage to these citizens here," (Soph. *OC* 287–8).

[62] Currie (2015) 341 (citing Calame (1998) 345) writes, "The text leaves us guessing whether he has gone up to heaven in a kind of Olympian apotheosis or below in a chthonian heroization."

[63] "I myself, untouched by a guide, shall presently lead you to the place where I must die. Never reveal this to any person either where it is concealed or whereabouts it is situated; thus this place forever renders to you a defence against neighbors better than many shields and an imported spear of neighbors. But as to things which are accursed and moved by speech, you yourself will learn, when you go there alone; for I would not reveal them to any of these citizens, nor to my children, though I love them nevertheless. But do you always guard them, and when you come to the end of life, signify them to the foremost alone, and let that man always show them to his successor" (Soph. *OC* 1520–32); "Girls, that man instructed me never to go near to those regions and not to tell any mortals of the sacred tomb which that one holds," (Soph. *OC* 1760–3). On the disappearance of the body as a motif of heroization, see Currie (2002) 42 n. 172.

on Athenian soil. Moreover, as Nagy highlights in his translation and commentary to these lines (1586–1601), Sophocles cryptically alludes to six mystical landmarks that were believed to be located near the place where Oedipus was seen by mortals for the last time before he disappeared from the earth:

> "This (= the death of Oedipus) has already happened, and it was something that was outstandingly wondrous. As for how he started to depart from this world, you yourself know that full well, since you were here: he did not have any of his dear ones as guide, but rather he himself was leading the way for us all. Then, when he arrived at the Threshold for Descending (1591), with its bronze foundations rooted in the earth deep below he stopped still at one place where paths were leading in many directions, near the Hollow Crater (1593), which was where Theseus and Perithoos had made their faithful covenant lasting forever – it is marked there. Midway he (= Oedipus) stood there between that place (= the Hollow Crater) and the *Thorikios Petros* (1595), between the Hollow Pear Tree (1596) and the Stone Tomb (1596). Next, he sat down and loosened his filthy clothing. And then he called out to his daughters, ordering them to bring from flowing streams water for ritual washing and for libations — to bring him the water from wherever they brought it. And the two daughters went to the place of Demeter, the one who has the beautiful greenness. The place was a Hill (1600–1), and they went to it …" (Trans. Nagy (2013) 502–3)

Although the audience never learns the exact location of Oedipus' mysterious disappearance, they likely would have known that there was a shrine dedicated to him at Colonus.[64] Certainly, the inclusion of such mystical landmarks, given their Athenian location, would have caught the attention of the audience listening to the messenger's account:[65] Indeed Athenian citizens are being asked to believe that a human being has disappeared within the boundaries of their soil and is now protecting them from potential harm because they are honoring his cult.

Of course, scenes involving the translation of other mythical heroes in antiquity

---

[64] On the cult of Oedipus in Sophocles, see Currie (2015) 339 who thinks it "preferable to allow the cult a historical footing independently of Sophocles' play."

[65] For a discussion of the six mystical landmarks, see Nagy (2013) 503–16. Blondell (2002) 220 n. 164: "The audience would have recognized the significance of these landmarks, which is lost to us. The precise geographical description adds to the miraculous effect of the blind man's progress. The actual spot where Oidipous disappears must, however, have remained mysterious, since its secrecy is so heavily emphasized."

also provide examples of *deixis*, especially since cultic sites have been established at the location of their heroization. Thus, Herakles was believed to have ascended to Mt. Olympus from his funeral pyre on Mt. Oeta where there was an active cultic site in his honor.[66] No doubt, adherents to his cult could readily point to this locale as the very sight of his apotheosis. Though perhaps less familiar, Pausanias (6.9.6–9) recalls a similar story of the heroization of the boxer Cleomedes of Astypalaea, who was disqualified at Olympia in 484 BC because he killed his opponent. Upon his return home, he pushed over a pillar, resulting in the collapse of a roof and the death of 60 school-age boys and then took refuge inside a chest in the temple of Athena.[67] But when the Astypalaeans opened it up, he was nowhere to be found, having mysteriously disappeared. Upon sending an embassy to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, the Astypalaeans were told to set up a cult in honor of Cleomedes as "the last hero." Finally, the 4th century establishment of a shrine marking the ascent of Jesus of Nazareth at the Mt. of Olives in Jerusalem (*Act. Ap.* 1.9–12) offers an example that is more contemporary to the Graeco-Egyptian papyri.[68] Although the stories of heroes and their deaths are notoriously diverse,[69] the cases of Oedipus, Herakles, Cleomedes, and Jesus of Nazareth seem to offer examples of mysterious disappearance being associated with specific locales and cultic activities.[70]

Crossovers. Lastly, Johnston discusses another narrative technique called the

---

[66] See Currie (2015) 336 on literary references to the apotheosis of Herakles (Hom. *Od.* 11.602–4; Hes. *Th.* 954–5; Pind. *Nem.* 1.69–72; Eur. *Heracl.* 871–2, 910–6). Easterling (1982) 17 cites Eur. *Heracl.* 910–6 (ca. 430–427 BC) as "the first extant literary reference to apotheosis from the pyre," though vase paintings of the scene appear in the mid fifth century. See Stafford (2012) 173–4 for a survey of the apotheosis scenes on vase paintings. Burkert (1985) 210 notes how vase paintings show Herakles "riding towards heaven on a chariot above the pyre," on which see also *LIMC* Herakles (e.g. nos. 2916, 2917 etc.). There was cultic activity on Mount Oeta that celebrated Herakles' resurrection starting from the 6th century BC (Stafford (2012) 86 and 184–5). The scene of Herakles' death is portrayed most fully in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*, though mentioned elsewhere (Stafford (2012) 184). Currie (2015) 338 notes that both Herakles' end (Soph. *Ph.* 728), like that of Oedipus (Soph. *OC* 95, 1456, 1460–1, 1462–71, 1477–85, 1502, 1514 and 1606), is marked by lightning.

[67] See Pache (2009) 101 and Ekroth (2007) 104.

[68] There are multiple sites recognized for Jesus' ascension, but the establishment of the late 4th century shrine is credited to Poemenia. See the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* s.v. Olives, Mt. of and the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992) 5.13–5 s.v. Olives, Mt. of.

[69] Pache (2009) 91 notes, "Heroic death comes in all forms, including battle, murder, suicide, sickness, accident, poison, fire, and old age," adding that "the mortality of heroes is often presented as a mystery, in the sense either of being beyond normal understanding or, more literally, requiring initiation into the mysteries of the hero in order to be understood" (98).

[70] For other examples of heroes disappearing in antiquity, see Pease (1942) 13–18.

"crossover," in which a character from one story is interjected into the context of another. She cites the unexpected meetings of Oedipus and Theseus in Athens as well as Herakles' encounter with Meleager in the underworld as examples.[71] Johnston asserts that such crossovers "reward audience members with a sense of having special knowledge that makes them feel complicit with the narrator and thus further encourages them to buy into the narrative."[72] Indeed some of the more famous invisibility scenes involve these kinds of crossovers, but instead of characters "crossing over" into new stories, it is the use of familiar technologies that appears within new literary contexts. For example, in the adventures of the hero Perseus, the inclusion of the cap of Hades is reminiscent of the *Iliad*, book 5 where Athena wears it in order to evade Ares.[73] The cap of Hades is also referenced on the Greek stage. For example in his *Acharnians* Aristophanes jokingly alludes to the cap of Hades in reference to a dithyrambic and tragic poet by the name of Hieronymus who was known for his abundant hair.[74] In Sophocles' satyr play *Inachus*, the chorus senses the presence of someone whom they initially believe to be Hades, wearing his cap of invisibility.[75] Of course, over time the technologies of invisibility seem to shift and fall out of favor and for this reason, perhaps not surprisingly, the cap is not referenced in the corpus of the *PGM*, which is heavily influenced by Egyptian ritual.[76]

---

[71] Johnston (2015c) 299–306; see also (2018) 137–43.

[72] Johnston (2015c) 302.

[73] "Pallas Athena took hold of the whip and reins and straightway guided the single hooved horses towards Ares. He was stripping huge Periphas of his armor, by far the best of the Aetolians, the glorious son of Ochesius. Blood-stained Ares was stripping him; but Athena put on the cap of Hades so that mighty Ares would not see her" (λάζετο δὲ μάστιγα καὶ ἡνία Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη· / αὐτίκʼ ἐπʼ Ἄρηϊ πρώτῳ ἔχε μώνυχας ἵππους. / ἤτοι ὁ μὲν Περίφαντα πελώριον ἐξενάριζεν, / Αἰτωλῶν ὄχʼ ἄριστον, Ὀχησίου ἀγλαὸν υἱόν· / τὸν μὲν Ἄρης ἐνάριζε μιαιφόνος· αὐτὰρ Ἀθήνη / δῦνʼ Ἄϊδος κυνέην, μή μιν ἴδοι ὄβριμος Ἄρης, *Il.* 5.840–5).

[74] "Why do you go on turning these plans about and using cunning and bringing about delays? For all I care take from Hieronymus a dark and shaggy thick-haired cap of Hades" (τί ταῦτα στρέφει τεχνάζεις τε καὶ / πορίζεις τριβάς; / λαβὲ δʼ ἐμοῦ γʼ ἕνεκα / παρʼ Ἱερωνύμου / σκοτοδασυπυκνότριχά / τινʼ Ἄϊδος κυνῆν, 385–90). Olson (2002) 174–5, note on 387–90, points to Hieronymus' "extraordinary abundant facial hair or the like," citing Ar. *Nub.* 348–9 where Hieronymus is also mocked for his hairy body. For other references to the cap of Hades on stage and elsewhere, see Phillips (2009) 10–12 and 13 n. 65.

[75] "Very, very knowledgeable was this one of former times who spoke your name well, under the immortal darkness of the cap of Hades" (πολὺ πολυιδρίδας / ὅτις ὅδε προτέρων / ὄνομʼ εὖ σʼ ἐθρόει, / τὸν Ἀϊδοκυνέας / σκότον ἄ(β)ροτον ὑπαί, fr. 269c, col. II, lines 16–20). For the Greek text, see Krumeich *et al.* (1999) 324–5.

[76] With the rise of Christianity, such technologies as the cap of Hades from Greek myth are not

As mechanisms for achieving invisibility change over the course of antiquity, invisibility rituals become a familiar kind of "crossover" technology in their own right and are often found within a variety of literary narratives. There are very few portrayals of invisibility being paired with ritual texts in Greek literature.[77] In Homeric literature, Circe knows how to use φάρμακα to transform humans into animals (*Od.* 10.212–13, 235–40) and though she has the ability to go unseen before Odysseus' men (*Od.* 10.569–74), it is unclear how she as a goddess accomplishes this.[78] In Euripides' *Orestes,* Helen disappears before the eyes of Orestes and the messenger who describes the event suggests a number of explanations, including sorcery (φάρμακα) and the arts of the *magoi* (μάγων τέχναι).[79] The association of invisibility with the *magoi,* appears here first in extant literature and continues throughout antiquity. Pliny, too, references the *magoi* as he cites an invisibility ritual in his *Natural History,* most likely drawing his material

necessarily taken seriously. In response to Celsus' criticism (*Cels.* 1.66) as to why Jesus had to escape to Egypt if he were God, Origen thinks escape was a better option than having God inhibit Herod's free will or have Jesus wear the cap of Hades mentioned by the Greek poets. See Marcovich (2001) 69–70: "And it was better at any rate that the child Jesus avoid the plot of Herod and go and live 'in Egypt' with those who were raising him 'until the death' of the one plotting against him, than that providence with regard to Jesus should hinder the free will of Herod wanting to kill the child, or place what is called by poets 'the cap of Hades' or anything similar around Jesus, or that it strike those who came to kill him with blindness similarly to those in Sodom" (καὶ βέλτιόν γε ἦν ὑπεκστῆναι τὸ παιδίον Ἰησοῦν τὴν Ἡρώδου ἐπιβουλὴν καὶ ἀποδημῆσαι μετὰ τῶν τρεφόντων αὐτὸ 'εἰς Αἴγυπτον' 'ἕως τῆς τελευτῆς' τοῦ ἐπιβουλεύοντος, ἢ τὴν περὶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ πρόνοιαν κωλύειν τὸ ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν Ἡρώδου ἀναιρεῖν τὸ παιδίον θέλοντος, ἢ τὴν λεγομένην παρὰ τοῖς ποιηταῖς "Ἄϊδος κυνέην" ἤ τι παραπλήσιον ποιεῖν εἶναι περὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν, ἢ πατάξαι ⟨ἀορασίᾳ⟩ ὁμοίως τοῖς ἐν Σοδόμοις τοὺς ἥκοντας ἐπὶ τὴν ἀναίρεσιν αὐτοῦ).

[77] Graf (1997) 24: "The occurrences of these 'wizard's tricks' capable of making a person disappear are isolated in the fifth century; it is much later, among the sorcerers of the imperial era, that the ability to make oneself invisible or to make someone disappear was to play a certain role."

[78] In *Od.* 10.569–74 as Odysseus' men are preparing their ships along the shore, we are told that they fail to notice Circe who is passing through their midst: "But when we were going to the swift ship and the shore of the sea, grieving and pouring out big tears, meanwhile Circe went and bound fast alongside the black ship a ram and a black ewe, easily slipping by. Who could see with his eyes a god who does not want to be seen, whether going here or there?" (ἀλλ᾽ ὅτε δή ῥ᾽ ἐπὶ νῆα θοὴν καί θῖνα θαλάσσης / ἤομεν ἀχνύμενοι θαλερὸν κατὰ δάκρυ χέοντες, / τόφρα δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ οἰχομένη Κίρκη παρὰ νηῒ μελαίνη / ἀρνειὸν κατέδησεν ὄϊν θῆλύν τε μέλαιναν, / ῥεῖα παρεξελθοῦσα· τίς ἂν θεὸν οὐκ ἐθέλοντα / ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἴδοιτ᾽ ἢ ἔνθ᾽ ἢ ἔνθα κιόντα;). For other examples of gods not being visible to certain humans, see *Od.* 16.159–62, when Athena appears to Odysseus and his dogs, but not Telemachus, or *Il.* 1.197–8, when Athena appears to Achilles, but is unseen to the Achaeans.

[79] "She (Helen) disappeared from the bedchamber through the roof, O Zeus and Ge and Light and Night, either by sorcery or arts of the *magoi* or by theft of the gods" (... ἃ δ᾽ / ἐκ θαλάμων ἐγένετο διαπρὸ δωμάτων ἄφαντος, / ὦ Ζεῦ καὶ γᾶ καὶ φῶς καὶ νύξ, / ἤτοι φαρμάκοισιν ἢ μάγων τέχναις ἢ θεῶν κλοπαῖς, 1494–7). Willink (1986) 328, n. to 1495 suggests παλαμῶν instead of θαλάμων.

from Hellenistic ritual sources.[80] In imperial times invisibility would continue to be equated in literature with *ars magica* and often, but not always,[81] carried negative (and even illegal) connotations.[82] Such examples give insight into the history of invisibility ritual, and in turn offer evidence of such technologies "crossing over" into new literary and ritual contexts.

Some Concluding Thoughts on Invisibility, Belief, and Narrative
Invisibility is a complicated topic, beginning with the problem of how to define it. Thus, it is understandable that people in both the ancient and modern world are skeptical that humans can achieve it, especially since in the modern world it tends to be perceived as an act of immateriality. But in investigating the role of narrative in confirming these kinds of wondrous accounts, it becomes clearer as to why individuals in antiquity might have found them to be compelling. Johnston's insight on narrative and belief helps us to see how such techniques operate in the ancient and modern world alike—techniques like the "X/Y Format" of narration, episodic narrative, plurimedial representations, *deixis*, and crossovers. If these narrative techniques can indeed be used to draw their audiences into storylines, they are also able to affirm popular beliefs, including the notion that on occasion and often by divine intervention, invisibility, broadly defined, was within the grasp of human beings. Such beliefs are part of the cultural landscape into which the rituals of the *PGM* enter.

RICHARD L. PHILLIPS

Virginia Tech, rphllps@vt.edu

WORKS CITED

Anderson, Graham. 2000. *Fairytale in the Ancient World.* London.

---

[80] See n. 9 above. On the connections of this passage to earlier Hellenistic sources, see n. 33 above.

[81] The word "magic" could be used more positively to reflect the Egyptian and hence indigenous concept of *heka*, as in the *PGM* where we find a number of invisibility rituals, on which see Ritner (1995) 3363–4 and Phillips (2009) 5–7. Some authors writing in Greek will also avoid such connotations. For example, Apollonius of Tyana utters lines of Homer before disappearing before Domitian, but his invisibility is not paired with a language of magic. See nn. 4 and 35 above.

[82] In the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* (2.9.3), Simon Magus boasts of his ability to disappear because of his skill in magic. See Rehm (1965) 56: "I am able by my skill in magic to exhibit many signs and wonders, through which the reckoning of my glory and teaching is able to continue. For I am able to disappear before those who wish to take hold of me, and reappear again at will ..." (*qui possum magica arte multa signa et prodigia ostendere, per quae possit vel gloriae vel sectae nostrae ratio constare. possum enim facere ut volentibus me comprehendere non appaream et rursus volens videri palam sim ...*).

———. 2006. *Greek and Roman Folklore: A Handbook*. Westport, CT.

Blondell, Ruby. 2002. *Sophocles: The Theban Plays*. Newburyport, MA.

Burkert, Walter. 1985. *Greek Religion*. Cambridge, MA.

Calame, Claude. 1998. "Mort héroïque et culte à mystère dans l'Oedipe à Colone de Sophocle: Actes rituels au service de la création mythique." In *Ansichten griechischer Rituale. Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert*, edited by Fritz Graf, pp. 326–56. Stuttgart.

Collins, Derek. 2008. *Magic in the Ancient Greek World*. Malden, MA.

Cribiore, Raffaella. 1996. *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*. Atlanta, GA.

———. 2001. *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*. Princeton, NJ.

Currie, Bruno. 2002. "Euthymos of Locri: A Case Study in Heroization in the Classical Period." *JHS* 122: 24–44.

———. 2015. "Sophocles and Hero Cult." In *A Companion to Sophocles*, edited by Kirk Ormand, pp. 331–48. Malden, MA.

Dickie, Matthew W. 1999. "The Learned Magician and the Collection and Transmission of Magical Lore." In *The World of Ancient Magic*, edited by David Jordan, Hugo Montgomery and Einar Thomassen, pp. 163–93. Bergen.

Dieleman, Jacco. 2005. *Priests, Tongues, and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual (100–300 CE)*. Leiden.

———. 2012–13. Review of Richard L. Phillips, *In Pursuit of Invisibility: Ritual Texts from Late Roman Egypt*, in *Enchoria* 33: 189–91.

Easterling, P. E. 1982. Sophocles: *Trachiniae*. Cambridge.

Ekroth, Gunnel. 2007. "Heroes and Hero-Cults." In *A Companion to Greek Religion*, edited by Daniel Ogden, pp. 100–14, Malden, MA.

Feeney, Denis. 1998. *Literature and Religion at Rome: Cultures, Contexts, and Beliefs*. Cambridge.

Fowler, Robert L. 2000. *Early Greek Mythography: Text and Introduction, Vol. 1*. Oxford.

Graf, Fritz. 1997. *Magic in the Ancient Roman World* (Trans. Franklin Philip). Cambridge, MA.

Griffith, Francis Llewellyn. 1900. *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis*. Oxford.

Hanfmann, George M. A. 1984. "New Fragments of Alexandrian Wall Painting." In *Alessandria e il mondo ellenistico-romano: Studi in onore di Achille Adriani, Vol. 2*, edited by Nicola Bonacasa and Antonino Di Vita, pp. 242–55. Rome.

Hansen, William. 2017. *The Book of Greek and Roman Folktales, Legends, and Myths*. Princeton, NJ.

Hoffmann, Friedhelm and Joachim Quack, eds. 2018. *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur*. 2nd ed. Berlin.

Johnston, Sarah Iles. 2015a. "The Authority of Greek Mythic Narratives in the Magical Papyri." *ARG* 16.1: 51–66.

———. 2015b. "Narrating Myths: Story and Belief in Ancient Greece." *Arethusa* 48. 2: 173–

218.

——. 2015c. "The Greek Mythic Story World." *Arethusa* 48.3: 283–311.

——. 2016. "How Myths and Other Stories Help to Create and Sustain Beliefs." In *Religion: Narrating Religion*, edited by Sarah Iles Johnston, pp. 141–56. Farmington Hills, MI.

——. 2018. *The Story of Myth*. Cambridge, MA.

Krumeich, Ralf, Nikolaus Pechstein, and Bernd Seidensticker, eds. 1999. *Das griechische Satyrspiel*. Darmstadt.

Kühn, C. G. 1821–33. *Claudii Galeni opera omnia*, 20 vols. Leipzig.

Lichtheim, Miriam. 1973–80. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 vols. Berkeley, CA.

LiDonnici, Lynn R. 1999. "The Disappearing Magician: Literary and Practical Questions about the Greek Magical Papyri." In *A Multiform Heritage: Studies on Early Judaism and Christianity in Honor of Robert A. Kraft*, edited by Benjamin G. Wright, pp. 227–43. Atlanta, GA.

Marcovich, M. 2001. *Origenes. Contra Celsum, Libri VIII*. Leiden.

Meyer, Marvin and Richard Smith. 1994. *Ancient Christian Magic*. San Francisco, CA.

Nagy, Gregory. 2013. *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*. Cambridge, MA.

Ogden, Daniel. 2007. *In Search of the Sorcerer's Apprentice: The Traditional Tales of Lucian's Lover of Lies*. Swansea.

——. 2008. *Perseus*. London.

Olson, S. Douglas. 2002. *Aristophanes: Acharnians*. Oxford.

Pache, Corinne. 2009. "The Hero beyond Himself: Heroic Death in Ancient Greek Poetry and Art." In *Heroes: Mortals and Myths in Ancient Greece*, edited by Sabine Albersmeier, pp. 88–107. Baltimore, MD.

Pease, Arthur Stanley. 1942. "Some Aspects of Invisibility." *HSCP* 53: 1–36.

Phillips, Richard. 2009. *In Pursuit of Invisibility: Ritual Texts from Late Roman Egypt*. Durham, NC.

——. 2011–12. "On the Outside Looking In: Pliny's *Natural History* and the Portrayal of Invisibility Rituals in the Latin West." *MAAR* 56–7: 37–62.

——. 2019a. "Traditions of Transformation and Shape-shifting in *PGM* XIII 270–77." In *Cultural Plurality in Ancient Magical Texts and Practices: Graeco-Egyptian Handbooks and Related Traditions*, edited by Ljuba Bortolani et al., pp. 208–26. Tübingen.

——. 2019b. "Ritual Evidence and the Art of Going Unnoticed in *PGM* I 222–231 and 247–262." *BASP* 56: 197–203.

——. 2020. "Invisibility and Sight in Homer: Some Aspects of A. S. Pease Reconsidered." *HSCP* 111.

Rehm, Bernhard. 1965. *Die Pseudoklementinen. Vol. 2: Rekognitionen in Rufus Übersetzung*. Berlin.

Renehan, Robert. 1980. "On the Greek Origins of the Concepts Incorporeality and Immateriality." *GRBS* 21.2: 105–38.

Ritner, Robert. 1995. "Egyptian Magical Practice Under the Roman Empire: The Demotic Spells and their Religious Context." *ANRW* II 18.5:3333–79.

Rudolph, Kelli. 2016. "Sight and the Presocratics: Approaches to Visual Perception in Early Greek Philosophy." In *Sight and the Ancient Senses*, edited by Michael Squire, pp. 36–53. London and New York.

Schwendner, Gregg. 2002. "Under Homer's Spell: Bilingualism, Oracular Magic, and the Michigan Excavation at Dimê." In *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World*, edited by Leda Ciraolo and Jonathan Seidel, pp. 107–18. Leiden.

Skemer, Don. 2006. *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages*. University Park, PA.

Stafford, Emma. 2012. *Herakles*. London.

Tambiah, S. J. 1973. "Form and Meaning of Magical Acts: A Point of View." In *Modes of Thought: Essays on Thinking in Western and Non-Western Societies*, edited by Robin Horton and Ruth Finnegan, pp. 199–229. London.

Thompson, Stith. 1955–8. *Motif-Index of Folk Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, 6 vols. Bloomington, IN.

Veyne, Paul. 1988. *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Tales? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (Trans. Paula Wissing). Chicago.

Whitmarsh, Tim. 2015. *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World*. New York.

Willink, C. W. 1986. *Euripides: Orestes*. Oxford.