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THE POWER OF NAMES IN CLASSICAL GREEK RELIGION[1]

It has become a commonplace to say that, in classical Greek and Roman religion, to know the name of a god was to have power over him. The idea was rejected by Martin Nilsson,[2] but he did not argue the point at any great length and a more detailed discussion may be of use. In this paper, I shall examine those contexts where it might be maintained that gods' names possessed some kind of intrinsic power but I shall conclude that the phenomenon is marginal and not universally true of Greek religion as a whole. To do this, we shall have to consider the whole question of how far the Greeks were worried about divine names and what the motives for this may have been. Evidence derived from prayers is of particular importance in this.

Eduard Fraenkel states,[3]

In the early stages of religious thought a great expenditure of pious foresight and sometimes actual cunning is considered necessary in order to prevent a daemon or a god—generally thought of as reluctant—from using some malicious device so as not to comply with the wishes of the mortal who prays to him and to evade the magic or almost magic compulsion of his worship and his prayer. To know the name of a daemon is to acquire power over him ('ei wie gut dass niemand weiss, dass ich Rumpelstilzchen heiss'); the exhaustive enumeration, or if that is impossible the summarising, of all his names is therefore necessary for the prayer to take effect.

R. M. Ogilvie says,[4]

Gods, like dogs, will answer only to their names ... The invocation of a god by name has always been a central feature of prayer and magic. If you know the name of a god, you can make him listen. In the Old Testament, the name of Jehovah was for long a secret name, not to be named or written, because it was too powerful. In the New Testament the superstition is eliminated but believers 'who call upon the name of the Lord' will be saved. In Roman *and Greek* [my italics] religion, the first task was to discover the name of the god whom the worshipper wished to influence and invoke that name.

Carl Ausfeld seems in agreement with this,[5]

satis superque demonstratum mihi videtur esse summa cura atque diligentia permulta saecula in invocandis deis nomina tractata esse a Graecis, attamen minime miraberis, quod in precibus illa diligentia servata est, si cognoveris, quanta fuerit vis nominis et in omnibus precationibus antiquissimorum populorum et in rebus magicis.

Ausfeld goes on to quote several authorities on Indian and Egyptian religion with regard to the power of the name.

[2] M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*[3], p. 81: 'Es ist in der Tat erstaunlich, wie wenig die Griecher, in gegensatz zu vielen anderen Völkern an die wirksame Kraft des Bildes und auch des Names geglaubt haben u.s.w.'.
[3] In his commentary on Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* (OUP, 1950), line 160.
[4] *The Romans and their Gods*, Chatto & Windus, 1969, pp. 24ff.
[5] 'De Graecorum precationibus quaestiones', *Neue Jahrbücher Suppl.* 28, 1903, pp. 518f.

Fraenkel, Ogilvie and Ausfeld seem to be conflating things that do not always belong together. It is a matter of common experience that if one shouts the wrong name to somebody whose attention one is trying to attract from behind in a busy street, they will not respond. This is not because they are deliberately trying to ignore you, but because they do not even know that they are being summoned. It must surely be the same with gods. You cannot utter a prayer without naming the god to whom it is addressed.[6] Knowledge of the name is an essential prerequisite to any form of communication. There need not necessarily be anything magical about it. The invocation could be as simple as ὦ Ζεῦ βασιλεῦ or ὦ θεοί (Eur. *Tro.* 469f.). I do not understand why it is thought that one had to 'discover' the name of the god. This may be true of Roman religion,[7] but it need not be true of Greece. Fraenkel points out that the passage in Aeschylus is moving far beyond archaic superstition to speculate about the fundamental nature of Zeus. But he still claims that Greek gods are commonly thought of as recalcitrant and have to be compelled. What are we then to make of the role of χάρις in Greek religion? Most of our evidence leads us to the conclusion that worshippers thought they were involved in a reciprocal relationship, not one where the god had to be bound. Furthermore, if people thought they had tied the god down, what did they make of a phenomenon which one assumes must have been very common, namely unanswered prayer? Very few of the explanations of failed prayer are couched in terms of errors in nomenclature. There is one case, though, Xen. *Anab.* vii.8.1–6, where Xenophon is having bad luck in his financial affairs. This turns out to be because he has hitherto sacrificed only to Zeus Basileus and has neglected Zeus Meilichios. He meets with success once he has put this right. But he needs a seer to point out his mistake.[8] This feature is very interesting; it is a bit like ignoring somebody for mispronouncing one's surname. This is, however, an exceptional passage. It is important to remember that the difference between Zeus Basileus and Zeus Meilichios is not just one of naming. There were differences in iconography and sacrifice as well. For the most part, it must be safe to suppose that many people will have known to whom they wanted to pray or sacrifice and that they went ahead without having to 'discover' the name at all.[9]

The idea that knowledge of a name confers power is partly derived from observations about the divine name of God among the Jews. This, however, is surely a totally different matter. The common opinion now seems to be that it was not until the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C. that the Jews became worried about the

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[6] A seeming exception is Homer, *Il.* 10.462, where Odysseus invokes Athene simply as θεά. This case is probably a literary feature. The poet has introduced the prayer by saying that Odysseus was praying to Athene. It may well be that, from the audience's point of view, that does the job of the invocation. Alternatively, it could be argued that the omission of the name is a result of the close relationship that Odysseus has with Athene. There is no other θεά to whom he is likely to pray.

[7] According to Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* IV.22, Varro drew up a list of the minor gods and their different functions. Clearly this does show a legalistic interest in demarcation. I know of nothing similar in the Greek evidence. A passage in Pliny is particularly informative about the power of words. *N.H.* 28.3. tells us how the use of fixed formulae was seen as essential and we learn that in some ceremonies the prayer was dictated to the presiding magistrate from a script and that a piper played so that nothing but the prayer would be heard.

[8] The seer does not explicitly say that Xenophon sacrificed to A when he should have sacrificed to B. What he actually says is that Xenophon should be sacrificing to Zeus Meilichios if he wants money. The reader has to remember for himself that up until this point in the narrative, Xenophon has been sacrificing to Zeus Basileus.

[9] *Od.* 2.260 and 5.445 are prayers uttered by people who do not know which god is involved. They will be discussed later.

profanation of the Divine Name[10] and substituted Adonai for YHWH on the grounds that it was more reverent, cf. *Exod.* 20.7 and *Lev.* 24.16. It was only the medieval quabbalists who made magical use of the name of God to breathe life into the clay figure known as the Golem.[11] We find a similar thing in the magical papyri, where magicians claim to know the secret names of the god.[12] This does not seem to be a central feature of classical Greek religion and will be discussed further later. The Egyptians, though, clearly did think that one acquired power over a god if one knew his name.[13] This sort of anthropological material has been overemphasised in the case of the Greeks.

There are some grounds for attributing this kind of belief to the Romans, although we may want to call it legalistic rather than magical. Servius tells us[14] that the identity of the deity who looked after the city of Rome was a secret known only to the pontifices.[15] This was so that no enemy could use the Roman weapon of *evocatio* and charm the deity over to their side. Clearly this is an example of the name having power. Similarly, we know that the *pontifices* had a list of *indigitamenta*, prescribing which gods were to be invoked for which occasions (see n. 7). But this second piece of evidence may be of limited application. One imagines the *indigitamenta* had little to do with everyday prayers and sacrifices or the attitude of ordinary people to the gods.

There is more textual evidence for this legalistic feeling in Roman literary texts.

(i) Macrobius iii.9.10: *Dis pater Veiovis manes sive quo alio nomine fas est nominare.*
(ii) Servius (ad *Aen.* ii.351): *in Capitolio fuit clipeus consecratus, cui inscriptum erat 'genio urbis Romae, sive mas, sive femina' et pontifices ita precabantur: 'Iuppiter optime maxime sive quo alio nomine te appellari volueris.' nam et ipse (Verg. IV 576) 'sequimur te, sancte deorum, quisquis es'.*
(iii) Apuleius (*Met.* xi.2): *regina caeli, sive tu Ceres alma... seu tu caelestis Venus... seu Phoebi soror... seu nocturnis ululatibus horrenda Proserpina.*[16]
(iv) Hor. *Carm. Saec.* 16: *sive tu Lucina probas vocari/seu genitalis.*
(v) Hor. *Carm.* iii.5 we have the Messala Ode from which Norden has extracted so much:[17] *quocumque lectum nomine Massicum servas.*
(vi) Cat. 34.21 *sis quocumque tibi placet/sancta nomine (sc. Diana).*

[10] For the evidence of this, in the Lachish Letters, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. God, Names of.
[11] For the use of the name of God in Jewish theurgy, see M. D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism* (Tübingen, 1992), p. 18. Also important is A. C. Thiselton, 'The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings', *J. Th. S.* n.s. vol. xxv, pt.2 (October, 1974), 282–99.
[12] Although we have seen that for the Jews themselves the Divine Name was not originally magical, it is clear that ancient pagans thought it was. The words 'Adonai', 'Sabaoth', and 'IAO' frequently occur in magical texts.
[13] See P. L. Renouf, *Vorlesungen über Ursprung und Entwicklung der Religion, erläutert an der Religion der alten Ägypter, (autorisierte Übersetzung)* (Leipzig, 1881). On p. 181 we read, 'an vielen Stellen gründet Osiris seine Ansprüche einfach auf seine Kenntnis der Namen der Götter'; p. 211 (in a hymn) 'Dein Name soll mein Schutz sein.' For the power of the name in Vedic religion and Islam, see the references in Ausfeld, art. cit. p. 519.
[14] On *Aen.* II.351. Cf. Macrobius *S.* III.9.4.
[15] One thinks also of the secrecy surrounding the tomb of Oedipus in the *Oedipus Coloneus*.
[16] That this is a prayer to Isis has been disputed by J. Gwyn Griffiths, *The Isis Liber of Apuleius*, ad loc., and in *Class. Phil.* 63 (1968), 144ff. It may just be a prayer to the moon goddess. This makes no difference to our argument. If it were a prayer to Isis, one might suspect the influence of the well-known type of the Isis-aretalogy in the enumeration of the attributes of the goddess. As it is, though, it may simply be a highly wrought variation of the theme given in the other Latin examples. Griffiths also refers to Apul. *De deo Socratis* 15: cum ergo incertum est, quae cuique eorum sortitio evenerit, utrum Lar sit an Larva, nomine Manem deum nuncupant; scilicet ei honoris gratia dei vocabulum additum est.
[17] E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig/Berlin, 1923), pp. 143ff.

This Roman material is frequently presented alongside some superficially similar Greek passages in order to suggest that the two cultures felt the same way about the gods.

(i) Aesch. *Ag.* 160. Ζεύς, ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ' αὐτῷ φίλον κεκλημένῳ, τοῦτό νιν προσεννέπω.
(ii) Eur. *fr.* 912.2 N² Ζεὺς εἴτ' Ἀΐδης ὀνομαζόμενος στέργεις.
(iii) Eur. *Tro.* 884. ὦ γῆς ὄχημα κἀπὶ γῆς ἔχων ἕδραν, Ὅστις ποτ' εἶ σύ, δυστόπαστος εἰδέναι, Ζεύς, εἴτ' ἀνάγκη φύσεος εἴτε νοῦς βροτῶν, Προσηυξάμην σε.
(iv) Eur. *Bacch.* 275ff. Δημήτηρ θεά· Γῆ δ' ἐστίν, ὄνομα δ' ὁπότερον βούλῃ κάλει.
(v) Plat. *Prot.* 358a (A parody) τὴν δὲ Προδίκου τοῦδε διαίρεσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων παραιτοῦμαι· εἴτε γὰρ ἡδὺ εἴτε τερπνὸν λέγεις εἴτε χαρτόν, εἴτε ὁπόθεν καὶ ὅπως χαίρεις τὰ τοιαῦτα ὀνομάζων, ὦ βέλτιστε Πρόδικε, τοῦτό μοι πρὸς ὃ βούλομαι ἀπόκριναι.
(vi) Plat. *Crat* 400e ἐν ταῖς εὐχαῖς νόμος ἐστὶν ἡμῖν εὔχεσθαι, οἵτινές τε καὶ ὁπόθεν χαίρουσιν ὀνομαζόμενοι ταῦτα καὶ ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς καλεῖν.
(vii) Plat. *Phil.* 12c καὶ νῦν τὴν μὲν Ἀφροδίτην, ὅπῃ ἐκείνῃ φίλον, ταύτῃ προσαγορεύω.
(viii) Men. Rhet. (in Stengel, *Rhet. Gr.* III, p. 438, 11f.) gives an example of how to compose a prayer. ὦ Σμίνθιε Ἄπολλον τίνα σὲ χρὴ προσειπεῖν, πότερον ἥλιον...ἢ νοῦν...ἢ δημιουργὸν... (p. 445.26) ποίᾳ προσηγορίᾳ προσφθέγξομαι; οἱ μέν σε Λύκειον λέγουσιν, οἱ δὲ Δήλιον, οἱ δὲ Ἀσκραῖον, ἄλλοι δὲ Ἄκτιον. Λακεδαιμόνιοι δὲ Ἀμυκλαῖον, Ἀθηναῖοι πατρῷον.

Apart from the example from Menander Rhetor, it seems that the Greek material is really very different from the Roman. It is not a question of 'am I getting the right epithet' or 'am I addressing the right god', but 'have I got the right name for the power I want to address?' We shall therefore have to look more closely at the Greek evidence on its own, leaving aside for the moment the narrower question of magic with which we began, to see how far the Greeks were worried about divine names in general and what kind of feelings may have lain behind those worries.

The fact that εἴτε... εἴτε was a feature of prayer language has been established by Norden beyond dispute.[18] What is not clear is that its only function is to deal with difficulties of nomenclature. Sometimes, such formulae enumerate and describe the possible whereabouts of the deity. This may be an attempt to ensure that one gets the correct address, but may at the same time be a feature of literary and mythical embellishment (cf. Aesch. *Eum.* 292f.; *Bacch.* 556–75; Ar. *Nub.* 270ff.; Hom. *Il.* 1.35ff., 451–6; Theoc. *Id.* 1.123ff.). There seems in some cases to be an emphasis on what the god *likes* to be called. The Greek evidence gives us στέργεις (ii), χαίρουσιν (vi) and φίλον (vii). In the Latin examples we had *volueris* (ii), *probas* (iv) and *placet* (vi). The thought is presumably, 'There are so many places where your power is felt...' Indeed, in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, the poet twice asks himself (19ff., 207ff.) what aspects of the god he ought to concentrate on in order to praise him – πῶς τ' ἄρ σ' ὑμνήσω πάντως εὔυμνον ἐόντα;[19]. So it may well be that what has previously been thought of as simply a prudential prayer formula in fact has its origins in the hymnic tradition.

The passage from Plato, *Cratylus* 400e, does make it look rather as though prayers usually express ἀπορία not only about the whereabouts of the god (ὁπόθεν[20]) but also

[18] op. cit., pp. 143ff.
[19] There is something superficially similar at the beginning of the fragmentary *h.Hom.*1, to Dionysus. The poet relates several versions of the god's birth, only to reject them and give his own. Unlike the *Hymn to Apollo*, though, the primary object of this catalogue does not seem to have been praise. Rival versions are rehearsed like this in order to impress upon us that the poet's own version is even more prestigious than these traditional and well known ones.
[20] This might refer to present whereabouts but it could equally be a reference to the practice of mentioning the god's place of birth in one's invocation. One can, for example, invoke Athene

about their identity (οἵτινες). But if this were really νόμος, then why are the rest of the prayers in Greek literature not like this? Why do we have nothing in Homer and nothing in the inscriptions? Is it just an accident of the literary and epigraphic sources, meaning that we should take this small number of passages as the rule and the majority of the others as the exception? It is quite likely that Plato, in order to serve the argument, is elevating to the status of a norm something which only occasionally happened in Greek prayers. The immediate context of extract (vii) from Pl. *Phileb.* 12bc is relevant here. Before the remark about addressing Aphrodite in the way that is φίλον to her, Socrates says: τὸ δ' ἐμὸν δέος ... ἀεὶ πρὸς τὰ τῶν θεῶν ὀνόματα οὐκ ἔστι κατ' ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλὰ πέρα τοῦ μεγίστου φόβου. καὶ νῦν τὴν μὲν ᾿Αφροδίτην κτλ. There is a clear statement of an anxiety about getting the name right. However, as will be argued below, we should not assume that the concerns of characters in philosophical dialogues necessarily reflect the everyday preoccupations of the population at large. Socrates is, after all, describing his own religious scruples. One is not claiming that nobody ever wondered whether to call Apollo Δήλιος or Σμινθεύς, or that nobody ever worried about which god to invoke on a given occasion, but one wants to avoid saying that this was a typical worry for all Greek worshippers.

Philosophical influence may lie behind several of the Greek passages cited above. Plat. *Prot.* 358 is an example. The presence of Prodicus may help to explain the comic reference to concern about correct nomenclature. Prodicus, after all, was famous for his interest in ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων, and it is very likely that some such influence also lies behind Eur. *Tro.* 884 and *Bacch.* 275ff. Menelaus is so flabbergasted by Hecuba's prayer that he says (*Tro.* 889) τί δ' ἔστιν; εὐχὰς ὡς ἐκαίνισας θεῶν. Maybe he just means that one should not equate Zeus with inanimate objects and forces of nature in this way, but it is far more likely that he is poking fun at this highbrow prayer, more redolent of philosophical speculation than actual practice. It is less easy, though, to explain Aeschylus, *Ag.* 160ff. as a simple example of Sophistic influence. We know that Euripides' dramas were heavily influenced by intellectual speculation, but we might prefer to conclude that Aeschylus' chorus is indulging in some independent speculation of its own. The first part of Menander Rhetor's prayer (v. supra) is odd, too. Do people really worry whether to call Apollo νοῦς or δημιουργός? If they worried about anything, it would be more likely to be about epithets. But Menander Rhetor does imply that some of the differences in nomenclature were due to geographical factors. If one were a Spartan, one would just know which of the many possible epithets of Apollo was appropriate on any given occasion. We should remember, of course, that there would have been more than one epithet to choose from even in Sparta—᾿Αμυκλαῖος may have been a well known one but it was not the only one. One finds a similar thing in Call. *Hy.* ii.69–71. The poet wonders what epithet to give the god: ὦπολλον, πολλοί σε Βοηδρόμιον καλέουσι / πολλοὶ δὲ Κλάριον, πάντη δέ τοι οὔνομα πουλύ· / αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ Καρνεῖον· ἐμοὶ πατρώϊον οὕτω.²¹ This shows, incidentally, how important τὸ πατρῷον is in deciding these matters.²² At

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as Τριτογενεία (Ar. *Lys.* 347). It is difficult to know which sense is intended here. Both may be meant. One may favour the idea that birthplace is meant if one considers that this is the usual force of the word πόθεν in the common phrase τίς πόθεν εἶ;

²¹ Callimachus is in a similar quandary at *Hy.* i.4ff. This, though, is rather like *h. Hom.* 1ff., in that the poet is enumerating different legends about the god primarily in order to suggest that they are false.

²² For further reference to the importance of τὸ πατρῷον, cf. Σ AD on *Il.* 2.371. The Scholiasts tells us that the invocation of the Zeus-Athene-Apollo triad has led some scholars to

Call. *Hy*. iii.7, Artemis asks her father for πολυωνυμίην so that Phoebus cannot vie with her. This would suggest that many names confer glory.[23]

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that philosophical influence is a full and sufficient explanation for all worries about nomenclature. It is unlikely that, in a polytheistic system, nobody ever worried about divine names until the philosophers told them to. Presumably the parodic passage from Plato's *Protagoras* (358a), quoted above, relies for its effect on the εἴτε ... εἴτε formula being well known. Although I have suggested above that this formula may derive from the hymnic tradition of giving fulsome descriptions of a god's power and influence, this does not preclude the possibility that some people might have used it to help get round uncertainty about a particular god's whereabouts. One still suspects, however, that such questions cannot have been of persistent and central concern or they would have leaked over into the epigraphic record—where I have so far found no examples of such formulae.

One might at this point begin to wonder how all this relates to the question of the 'Unknown God', discussed by Norden. It is an example of a widespread Greek worry about divine names? Does it militate for or against the idea that names are intrinsically powerful? Norden proposed that the 'Unknown God' referred to by Paul in his sermon on the Areopagus (*Acts* 17.23) was not an indigenous Greek idea. It is certainly true that what references we have to altars of 'Unknown Gods' are from sources which themselves date from the Christian era, even if they purport to describe an earlier state of affairs.[24] I will not rehearse here the arguments of Norden. Recently, however, there has been a new contribution to the debate by P. W. Van den Horst.[25] On reconsideration of the literary and archaeological evidence, Van den Horst makes a good case for the existence of altars to unknown gods in pagan antiquity. His discussion is important, but does not necessarily alter the point argued so far. It is not denied that some Greeks sometimes were occasionally in doubt as to which god to address in a particular situation. It is now possible to say that this phenomenon was not limited to prayer, but may even have extended to the dedication of altars. Nonetheless, one could argue that the material upon which this new interpretation is based is as quantitatively marginal with respect to the mainstream of Greek religion as are the prayers discussed above. Van den Horst himself admits (*op. cit.* p. 34) that the archaeological evidence is scanty. It is also odd that all the literary sources mentioning this phenomenon date from after the composition of The Acts of the Apostles. However, the question here is not just how often Greeks found themselves ignorant of the name of a god but, more importantly, how they reacted to this. It seems most likely that this deliberately vague formula was invented to avoid giving offence in cases where the name of a god was not known. One finds no indication that incorrect invocations were thought to provoke divine wrath. This might lead one to extrapolate the conclusion that, even when people did know the name of the god they wished to invoke, that knowledge was simply a matter of politeness, the minimum prerequisite for effective communication in prayer. Ordinary people do not seem to have believed that the gods were like Rumpelstilzchen.

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assume that the poet was an Athenian since it was customary to invoke this triad in Athens. Plato, *Euthyd.* 302b–d shows how it is your religious affiliations in the phratry that determine under what epithets you worship your gods.

[23] A full bibliography on this point can be found in N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (OUP, 1974), p. 152.

[24] Paus. I.i.4; V.xiv.8; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* VI.iii.5; Tertullian, *Ad Nat.* ii.9; Lucian, *Phil.* 9, *Zeus Trag.* 6.; Diog. Laert. I.x.110.

[25] P. W. Van den Horst, 'The Unknown God', in R. Van den Broek, T. Baarda and J. Mansfeld (edd.), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden, 1991), pp. 19ff.

The idea that names are powerful is really a phenomenon of post-classical syncretism. It appears in late *defixiones*[26] and in the magical papyri.[27] Interestingly enough, it has been argued recently by Fritz Graf that when magicians declare that they know the god's name, they are not seeking to compel him but to display the extent of their pious learning.[28] Sometimes it is indeed to delight the god (*PGM* IV 1610ff. and Ausfeld, *art. cit.* pp. 519ff.). Furthermore, P. C. Miller[29] has shown how, in Gnostic thought, seemingly incomprehensible syllables which might seem to us like some kind of *abracadabra*, are actually attempts to capture the ineffable in human language. Nonetheless, it looks very much as though the magicians all too often strayed from the path of righteousness. *PGM* IV 410ff. instructs the practitioner to use just such syllables in the context of a love-spell. If one reads lines 400ff. it is clear that this is no high-minded Gnostic. He wants his beloved to be 'broken in' and joined to him 'head to head, lip to lip and belly to belly'. At line 398 we have ὁρκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ φοβεροῦ μεγάλου ιαεω βαφρενεμουν οθι λαρικριφια εθεαι φιρκιραλιθον νομεν ερ φαβωεαι. Whether the formula is φοβερόν for man or god or both, it is clearly thought to be a thing of power and not just proof of devoted study. An even clearer example, this time from a *defixio*, is Audollent 271: τὸ ἅγιον ὄνομα ὃ οὐ λέγεται...ὀνομάσω αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ δαίμονες ἐξεγερθῶσιν ἔκθαμβοι καὶ περίφοβοι γενόμενοι. At *PGM* VII 594ff. we have a flagrant example of the hijacking of a once religious vocabulary to make an amatory spell. The words Ἰαω, Σαβαώθ, and Μιχαήλ are all to be inscribed as a charm. The magician has to say that Μιχαήλ ἀρσενόθηλυς ἔφυ and then claim that it is not he who has said this but the woman whom he is trying to ensnare. The god should therefore send her to the magician, burning (with lust, one supposes). It is clearly to the world of magic that the idea of the Name of Power properly belongs. Confusion arises if we try to read it back into everyday religion.[30]

It may appear, though, that a qualification has to be made in order to take account of ἄρρητα ὀνόματα, those names which for one reason or another were not to be spoken. Do we not have here an example of names being thought uncanny, which cannot be dismissed as the result of decadence and syncretism? Pausanias (8.37.9), in describing a sanctuary of Despoina four stades from Acacesium in Arcadia, says that, just as Kore is an ἐπίκλησις of Persephone, so Despoina is just another ἐπίκλησις of the same goddess whose true name he is too afraid to reveal ἐς τοὺς ἀτελέστους. Euripides refers to Persephone as ἄρρητος κόρη (*Hel.* 1307). Herodotus twice declines openly to refer to a god whom we know beyond doubt must be Osiris (2.86.2, 170.1). This seems odd in the light of his statement at 2.3.2, τὰ μέν νυν θεῖα τῶν ἀπηγημάτων οἷα ἤκουον, οὐκ εἰμὶ πρόθυμος ἐξηγέεσθαι, ἔξω ἢ τὰ οὐνόματα αὐτῶν μοῦνον, νομίζων πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἴσον περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπίστασθαι. This is not the place for a

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[26] It is very common to find the formula ἐξορκίζω σε followed by catalogues of exotic, foreign names or Ephesia Grammata. The Sethianorum Tabellae (Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (Paris, 1904), Nos. 140–87) provide ample attestation of this. See also, for a fuller list, L. Cesano, '*Defixio*', in E. Ruggiero, *Dizionario epigrafico di antichità romane*, II, 2, fasc. 49–50, (Rome, 1908–9), pp. 1575ff.

[27] See A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie* (Darmstadt, 1966), pp. 110ff.

[28] In C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (edd.), *Magika Hiera* (OUP, 1991), p. 192.

[29] In A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality* (RKP, 1986), Ch. 20.

[30] I am not, of course, suggesting that Greek religion had any kind of canonically defined orthodoxy. It is surely beyond dispute, however, that there is a world of difference between the public prayers and sacrifices in the traditional religious calendar of a Greek polis and the lone activities of the practitioner of magic. This issue is well discussed by Fritz Graf, 'Prayer in Magic and Religious Ritual', in C. A. Faraone and D. Obbink (edd.), *Magika Hiera* (OUP, 1991), pp. 188ff., esp. pp. 196f.

detailed discussion of the possible meaning of those words.[31] Suffice it to say that, throughout Book Two, Herodotus gives rich and detailed descriptions of all manner of Egyptian religious observances going far beyond mere names. However, when it comes to Osiris, he can sometimes be strangely reticent. (It is noticeable, though, that he sometimes does write the name of Osiris openly, e.g. 2.42, 144, 156, but in these examples he is giving details of the myth rather than of actual cultic practice.) Why will he not give us the name? His scruples remind us of the fear of Pausanias with regard to broadcasting the true name of Demeter. It seems probable that Herodotus was unwilling to give details of the cult because it reminded him of the secrecy surrounding the mystery cults in Greece.[32] He must have thought that to reveal details about the cult of Osiris was to lay bare the quintessential nature of the Greek mystery rites, because they were in fact fundamentally identical for all peoples, or else that he would be committing an offence which in the eyes of the Egyptians would be every bit as serious as violating the secrecy of the mysteries was to a Greek. If, then, such ὀνόματα are ἄρρητα because of their connection with revered mystery religions, this may persuade us away from the conclusion that the name is a thing of power in itself. It is because of the σεμνότης of the Mysteries as a whole (rather than just of the name itself) that one is unwilling to bandy about sacred words in public. It is in this way, too, that we should view Pausanias' reluctance to divulge the true name of Despoina. One might, if one were really determined to see names as intrinsically numinous, suggest that the σεμνότης derives specifically from the power which resides in the names, but this would be going further than the evidence allows. There are δρώμενα as well as λεγόμενα, so we cannot explain the whole phenomenon of the secrecy in terms of the awe surrounding the spoken word alone.

In a similar vein, we can see that the use of euphemisms is bound up with all this. Persephone is sometimes called Kore. According to Plato (*Crat.* 404cd), this is because the name Περσεφόνη reminds people of the word φόνος. They therefore replace it either with Κόρη or Φερέφαττα. Now we remember that Pausanias said that Kore was an ἐπίκλησις for Persephone. But this does not mean that people do not know and sometimes use her real name. Pausanias himself remarks that Homer (*Od.* 10.491; *Il.* 9.457, 569) and Pamphos used the names in their poetry. In fact, the name Persephone is quite widespread in Greek poetry. This would not have been the case if it were seen as radiating some kind of dreadful, awesome power. It is likely that there was an element of whim behind people's choice of which name to use. If they felt grandiloquent, they might say Persephone. If they were feeling pious, they might use Kore instead. The same kind of thing applies to the name Hades. If people felt that the name was too dreadful to speak, they might call him Πλούτων instead. But, once again, both names were known and in use. It is therefore unlikely that 'Persephone' and 'Hades' were names felt to possess terrible power in themselves. Their numinousness depended on speakers and circumstances. If that could be switched on and off in this way, then the power of the names themselves cannot have been felt all that strongly. I do not therefore believe that the ἄρρητα ὀνόματα constitute an exception to my argument.

To conclude, then, we need to make two qualifications to the traditional view about divine names. The first is that although the Greeks, and the Romans to a far greater degree, were worried about accuracy in invocation, there is absolutely no reason to

[31] On this question, see How and Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus* (OUP, 1912), pp. 157ff. and especially the ref. to C. Sourdille, *Hérodote et la Religion d'Égypte* (1910), pp. 2–26.
[32] On the secrecy surrounding the Eleusinian Mysteries, see N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (OUP, 1974), pp. 304ff.

believe that this has any magical overtones in the case of the Greeks. Diggle hints at
this in his commentary on Euripides' *Phaethon* (v.226 = Eur.fr.781.12N²), where he
says that σιγῶντ' ὀνόματα mean 'names whose meaning is not obvious' rather than
'names that are hushed'. It would be odd if the speaker really meant that the name
'Apollo' was a secret. Secondly, we should not get the idea that such aporetic
invocations were the normal way of praying. The majority of the evidence is far more
straightforward. People seem to have known to whom they wanted to pray. There are
two well known examples of not knowing to whom to pray—*Od.* 2.260 and 5.445.
Here, though, the people concerned are genuinely ignorant. It is therefore the pious
and sensible thing to commit oneself to nothing more than indefinites. It must be
stressed that these are rare and special cases—the exceptions that prove the rule.[33]

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[33] In the ordinary narrative of the poem, speakers can also leave us in some doubt as to which
god was responsible for a particular event (*Od.* 3.166, 173f.) is counterbalanced by certainty in
other cases (*Od.* 3.119, 160). We might reasonably suppose that the prayer referred to by Nestor
in *Od.* 3.173 was of a similar type to *Od.* 2.260 and 5.445, i.e. expressed uncertainty about which
god to address. Such uncertainty over names is not a conspicuous feature in the evidence as a
whole.