

# The Magic Circle: Visually Representing the Woman of Endor (ovot)

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Résumé de l'article

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## The Magic Circle: Visually Representing the Woman of Endor (*ovot*)

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### Abstract

The interaction between Saul and the woman of Endor is a minor episode, not only within the first book of Samuel, but in the Tanakh as a whole. The woman, whose actions drive the narrative, is not named nor is very much known about her. All that the text reveals are her gender, domicile location, familiarity with the law (Saul's ban on *ovot* and *yid'onim*), and culinary possessions (flour and a calf). Through linguistic connotation her age range is surmisable: she is neither maiden nor elderly. Of her specific abilities, little is actually known as it is totally unclear what she did exactly that caused connection between the living Saul and deceased Samuel. Yet this woman, and the language used that describes her in a few verses without substantive information, have singularly driven wildly polarizing visual representations of the female thaumaturge for centuries. The artistically rendered visage of the Endoran ranges from the crone of gothic nightmares to hypersexual *femme fatale*, to gregarious earth mother, to occult adept perfecting her craft. Despite her shifting guise, one aspect remains consistent throughout the majority of images: the visual translation (or mistranslation) of *ovot*.<sup>1</sup>

Keywords: Endor, *ovot*, magic, Samuel, *vesica piscis*, circle

*Ovot*<sup>2</sup> [*ba'alat-ov* (singular, fem.) as in 1Samuel: 28: 3–25] is most often visualized as a thing rather than as a person or occupation. While *ovot* is literally redefined as “necromancer,” or recontextualized as “medium,” in artistic output it is rendered in strictest terms without semantic confusion as “skin bottle.”<sup>3</sup> Primarily this is the figure of the woman herself but is further supplemented by iconography that reinforces the imagery of containment. These include the pictorial setting of a cave or grotto, otherwise a cemetery, tomb or gravesite. Sometimes the Endoran is confined within a magic circle, or else Samuel's shade appears restrained therein. Most rarely used is the stark uterine or vaginal symbolic form, stringently denoting *ovot*.

One-hundred seventy-six images of the Endoran<sup>4</sup> scene were surveyed, with forty-seven percent of these situated within a cave, grotto, or gravesite, despite the narrative of 1 Sam 28 never specifically mentioning an exact locale.<sup>5</sup> Neither does the biblical text allude to circles, magical or otherwise, yet twenty-nine percent of artists include this in their pictures.<sup>6</sup> Female reproductive organs or *vesica piscine* forms within the picture plane account for a mere six percent of all pictures.<sup>7</sup> These are symbols that most fully and clearly illustrate the true meaning of *ovot* without any equivocation. The “skin bottle,” despite its lexical masculinity, functions more as a kind of womb, that which is most pointedly feminine. Certainly, the most potent visual iconography reiterates this form throughout the composition. However, what all but three percent of the

artworks reveal is the crux of the story in 1 Sam 28:12-20: that the woman of Endor facilitates a meeting between Saul and the ghost of Samuel.

The traditional definitions of *ovot* as either necromancer or medium cannot appropriately be applied to the woman; her role in the text is neither wholly as one nor the other. At times she appears to be a combination of both, yet she is simultaneously neither. For example, when a necromancer raises and communes with the dead, they solely possess that ability, and such powers are non-transferrable. But beginning with 1 Sam 28:15, such an exclusive capability is entirely absorbed by Saul. Additionally, 28:21 infers that the woman was absent from the location where Samuel holds his postmortem dialogue with Saul. Likewise predicated on this verse is the argument that *ovot* also cannot be interpreted as medium. In a paranormal sense, a medium is the interlocutor between the living and the dead. Put more practically, they are the conduit between forms, an intervening substance, as it were. Removal of the medium from the space where energy transmission occurs is to sever the connection completely. Based exclusively on what 28:21 connotes, the woman of Endor is no medium.<sup>8</sup>

Less problematic is the application of *yid'onim* to the woman of Endor and those of her ilk banned by Saul. This often rendered as “familiar spirit,” especially those “acquainted with the secrets of the unseen world.”<sup>9</sup> Certainly to apply the word “occult” is most apt for individuals like the Endoran, specifically in its characterization as knowledge forbidden from the uninitiated. But this noun is never explicitly applied to the woman in 1 Sam 28, where *ovot* is consistently used throughout the chapter.<sup>10</sup> Thus the question remains, what is *ovot* and how is it so present in the history of art?

To best define *ovot* and its ideal visual representation, certain existing archetypes must be eliminated. The narrative in 1 Sam 28 indicates that it is inappropriate to properly translate *ovot* as necromancer. Saul unambiguously requests in 28:8 that the woman ‘divine for me by a ghost’; this is not necromancy. Etymologically, necromancy is a mid-fifteenth century corruption of a Latin portmanteau of the Greek words νεκρός (*nekrós*, “dead, corpse”) and μαντεία (*manteía*, “divination”).<sup>11</sup> Although Samuel is deceased at the time of communication in 1 Sam 28, no divination via corpse occurs. At best, the supernatural events could be described as a result of

ψυχομαντεία (*psuchomanteia*, Latinized as *sciomancia*), “divination from shades” or the evocation of ghosts.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 1. Bavarian School. Detail of *Saul and the Witch of Endor* from *The Life of Saul and David*. C. 1180. Illuminated manuscript (Gumbertus Bible, University Library Erlangen-Nürnberg, MS 1, fol. 82v.). Attribution non-commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

However, several artworks set the scene at Samuel’s grave or tomb, his corpse emerging from a coffin, still enshrouded as in figure 1.<sup>13</sup> Any viewer unfamiliar with the biblical text would naturally assume that the Endoran is a necromancer, as this image unequivocally depicts divination from the dead. Samuel is indeed deceased, the female *ovot* is shown bringing him forth from his casket, physically supporting his cereclothed form, as Saul receives postmortem prophecy. The only problem with such illustrations is that they are predicated upon a precarious understanding of necromancy’s actual definition, let alone an inferred interpretation of the events in 1 Sam 28.

Even in Talmud and medieval Jewish texts that especially address necromantic ritual, the practitioner must be graveside, a feat impossible for the Endoran, Saul and his officers, considering the distance between her dwelling and Samuel’s tomb in Ramah.<sup>14</sup> These sources specify both a



licit and illicit form of necromancy, but regardless of methodology employed, they must be performed on or by the tomb itself: “questioning the immortal spirit [by] naming him...[or] questioning the corpse...by means of a skull.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, “the ghost, when called upon by name rises feet first from the grave,” which 1 Sam 28 makes patently clear does not occur.<sup>16</sup>

For *ovot* (or even *yid'onim* for that matter) to unconditionally indicate necromancer, a specific sacrificial libation of blood would have been requisite offering in 1 Sam 28. Ancient Near Eastern and Greek sources that expound on chthonic practices are adamant that such a gift is a precondition for rousing the dead.<sup>17</sup> Ancient sources such as Homer’s *Odyssey* are most definitive in terms of necromantic mechanics, specifically in the directing of drained blood (αιμακούνια, *haimakounia*) to flow into the divination pit for ghosts to drink.<sup>18</sup> Not only does the Endoran fail to carry out such a practice, seemingly well-known by necromancers throughout the Mediterranean, but 1 Sam 28 does not state anything about liquids or libaments of any sort.<sup>19</sup>

Usually the blood offering is taken from an animal, such as a ram or calf. I Sam 28:24 does indeed mention the presence of a “stall-fed calf” that the woman “hastily slaughter[s],” but only *after* Saul’s interlude with the deceased Samuel. Further, this animal forms the basis for a meal, not a necromantic sacrifice. The author of the text takes great pains to mention this fact, singling out the creature as main course, not as divinatory offering. Had actual necromancy occurred, there can be little doubt that the biblical scribe would have made mention, particularly since that is more momentous than culinary ingredients.

Also, if necromancy was the type of divination used in chapter 28, then perhaps the word תְּעוּבָה (te'onenu, “blood divination”) would have been used to describe the Endoran as in Lev 19:26.<sup>20</sup> Based on the prohibitions within and surrounding this verse it is the shedding of blood that is expressly abhorrent.<sup>21</sup> Thus the combination of divination with sanguinous libation would be the foulest of transgressions. As Maureen Bloom points out, Saul makes tremendous fuss over the actions taken by his own troops after their battle with the Philistines in I Sam 14:31-2, which echoes the Leviticus prohibitions.<sup>22</sup> Yet neither reference to the battlefield nor Leviticus words are used in chapter 28.

The compulsion translators have equating *ovot* with necromancy is primarily asserted on reverberations of the Leviticus injunctions. Since *ovot* and *yid'onim* are expelled by Saul from the

kingdom of Israel, the logical conclusion translators reach is that they must have presented such effrontery to Mosaic law that they could only be described as having engaged in the most infernal of practices. Beginning in the late medieval period, “the Latin *necromantia* [was]...used as a critical label for all illicit rituals.”<sup>23</sup> In the twelfth century, John of Salisbury confuses the Greek word for death, νεκρός (*nekros*), with the Latin for black, *nigreos*, and conflates *necromantia* with *nigromantia* or “black magic.”<sup>24</sup> It is this disordered thinking that seemingly justifies the expulsion of the *ovot* and *yid'onim* from Saul’s realm, and drives a substantial number of artworks where the Endoran is presented as a diabolically frightening creature, none more so than in Salvator Rosa’s enormous oil painting from 1668 (figure 2).



Figure 2. Salvator Rosa. *The Spirit of Samuel appearing to Saul at the house of the Witch of Endor*. 1668. Oil on canvas (Louvre, INV 584; MR 468). Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre)/Daniel Arnaudet /Art Resource, NY.

Rosa's woman of Endor is more of an anthropomorphic version of the Latin root word for Italian black magic practitioners (*streghe*), *strix*, "screech owl."<sup>25</sup> The crone with her gaping mouth, wide eyes, wild hair and decrepit physicality, combined with the painter's use of jagged tenebrism make her more a caricature than an illustration of the woman in I Sam 28. Rosa's "pointedly anticlassical" approach to the composition is not only applied to the female figure but also to the anamorphs and chimeric creatures crowded behind her, which collectively serve to reinforce the idea that she engages in black magic.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Rosa's woman is the quintessential *te'onenu* to which Lev 19:26 makes reference, those who conspire with demons and corpses through blood rites, blaspheming against the God of the Israelites to achieve their divinatory ends. However, the literary Endoran *ovot* is radically unlike Rosa's visual counterpart. Her actions in I Sam 28 exist severally, in her own unique space, far outside the realms of black magic, blood sacrifice, and necromancy, despite depictions by Rosa and other artists placing her there.

Other than invoking the spirit – not corpse – of Samuel at night (28:8), the incident at Endor has no resemblance whatsoever to ancient necromantic ritual. I Sam 28 is so ambiguous that it is not certain whether the divination is performed at night because that is the auspicious time for spiritual communication, or if Saul wished to conceal himself to utmost effect.<sup>27</sup> The basis for Saul's disguise may be out of militaristic necessity not only because of enemy recognition, but also to prevent the appearance of pre-battle abandonment by his own troops.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the reason for his physical dissimulation is based on fear of reprisal for his legal dissimulation should he be caught visiting one of the *ovot* or *yid'onim*. The author's point of mentioning the nocturnal visitation in I Sam 28 is not so much to set the scene for necromantic ritual, but rather to highlight Saul's masquerade in all its forms. Nighttime, in this chapter, seems to suggest far more about the king than about the Endoran *ovot*.

After "necromancer," *ovot* is translated most often in artworks as "Pythia," "pythoness," "pythonica," and various permutations thereof. This is the preferred term used in medieval illuminated manuscripts and literature, as well as French translations of the bible to the late nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> The earliest extant art depicting the Endoran certainly labels her as such

(figure 3), however she has even less in common with the Pythia than with necromancers. The Pythia, or pythoness, is the oracular mouthpiece of the Olympian Apollo, who in addition to presiding over prophecy, the arts, and all other forms of enlightenment, he is god of the sun, ultimate bringer of light.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, he is enemy of darkness in all forms, or as Plutarch notes, “Night has partnership in nothing with Apollo.”<sup>31</sup>



Figure 3. French School. Detail of *Saul and the Witch of Endor* from *Picture Bible* (prefatory cycle preceding a Psalter?). C. 1180 - 1200. Illuminated manuscript (Koninklijke Bibliotheek den Haag, Ms. 76 F 5, fol. 43r sc. 1A.) Attribution non-commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Additionally, the Pythia is a prognosticator, but the Endoran does not perform any of the actual prophecy in I Sam 28. It is therefore perplexing how this Hellenic priestess' appellation gets bestowed upon the Endoran woman as a substitute for *ovot*. The only connection seems to be the location of the oracular Pythia, a cave. Yet the Pythoness of Delphi did not commune with chthonic spirits, only with the god of the sun, despite her shrine's subterranean situation beneath the temple



complex. It is simply through conflation that this Greek clairvoyant mouthpiece to an Olympian deity gives her distinctive moniker to a nameless woman across the sea, located in a village near the base of Mount Gilboa.

The “Pythoness of Endor” appears as a label on the illustrations, or in the titles, of eighteen percent of artworks surveyed herein; the first produced circa 1180 (figure 3) and the last in 1902. Thus, for nearly a millennium art was produced, and reproduced, depicting the woman in I Sam 28 with an Apollonian misappellation. The Endoran was not Greek, not an acolyte of Apollo, not an oracle nor prophetess in any way. Yet because *ovot* became equivalent to Pythia, artists borrow more than just the anonym. They transfer Pythian accoutrements as well, such as the *τρίποδα* (*trípoda*, tripod), which first appears in a 1596 etching by Theodor de Bry (figure 4).<sup>32</sup>



Figure 4. Theodor de Bry. *Samuel Conjured by the Witch of Endor*. 1596. Etching on laid paper (Ashmolean Museum, WA2003.Douce.1905). ©Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

Here, she is referred to as *Phitonissa* in the label above the scene, placed on the far right of the picture plane, almost completely outside the action. Bry depicts her as the epitome of Delphian perfection, “chaste, either a virgin or a woman who no longer engaged in marital relations,” bare-breasted but not overtly sexual since these seem to get lost among the heavy folds of drapery wrapped beneath.<sup>33</sup> She stands by impassively, seemingly disinterested in the paranormal events unfolding before her. Despite the fact that she is young, pretty and topless, no male in the work takes notice of her, all eyes are focused on Samuel off-right.

The setting is an odd amalgamation of Greco-Roman courtyard in sixteenth century Amsterdam: the juxtaposition of Corinthian columns, barrel arches, and stepped gable roofs of the Dutch Renaissance, becomes all the more surreal when combined with the togaed figures and supernatural events. At the center of the composition is the flaming tripod on the ground, separating the kneeling Saul at left from the upright Samuel opposite him. While Strabo makes clear that the tripod is solely for the Pythia to mount, the woman delineated as such in Bry’s etching is nowhere near it.<sup>34</sup>

Bry does attempt to make the Endoran vaguely Grecian, the style and curls of her hair are reminiscent of Archaic pottery paintings.<sup>35</sup> Yet, she is no prophet; surprisingly she is not even the individual prophesying. Any Pythian augury had to be transmitted directly from the priestess’ mouth, but the transmission in I Sam 28:15-19 literally comes from Samuel as the Endoran was not even present at the time (indicated in 28:20). This has led to charges of ventriloquism, an unfounded accusation levelled against her by the exegetical tradition beginning in the third century CE.<sup>36</sup> The woman of Endor would need to have control over her faculties in order to throw her voice from another chamber if the allegation of ventriloquism were true, which would immediately forfeit her sobriquet of Pythoness. Pythias were renowned for their nearly deranged demeanor amid prognosticating, think Cassandra (another Apollonian votary) at the fall of Troy. Strabo describes her lips being imbued with *πνεύμα ενθουσιαστικον* (*pneuma enthousiastikón*, “breath of inspiration”).<sup>37</sup> The Pythia, was in a state known as *θεοληπτος* (*theoliptos*, “seized by a god, possessed”), she “spoke as if she were Apollo;”<sup>38</sup> her mind, body and personality at once sublimated and subdued by divine force. Although little is revealed about the woman of Endor, there is no doubt she has mastery over her circumstances and is no one’s mouthpiece.<sup>39</sup> Even if

she was the villain of the text, manipulating a vulnerable and mentally fragile king, it would be impossible for her to simultaneously function as both ventriloquist and Pythoness.

While *ovot* is neither necromancer nor Pythia, the closest reasonable translation may be found in the Greek LXX, where translators use *εγγαστριμυθους* (*engastrimythos*, “belly prophet”). Sometimes mistranslated as ventriloquist, this is based less on substantive etymologies and more upon inferences from the events in I Sam 28.<sup>40</sup> “Belly” is the more common rendering of *εγγαστρι*, although some Greek-English dictionaries prefer “womb” or “gut.”<sup>41</sup> Certainly much of the Christian exegesis is predicated upon utilizing *engastrimythos* as accusatory lexeme, not only for the Endoran, but all other females placed within the archetype. Or, as Margaret M. Mitchell so eloquently notes, “their interpretation of the tale of *εγγαστριμυθους* ... is based upon a pernicious and disastrous hermeneutic that would lead to absurd consequences.”<sup>42</sup>

The first extant mention of *engastrimythos* occurs in a medical text describing a female patient’s upper respiratory complaint (clearly not gastric).<sup>43</sup> This seems to support the idea that a literal translation of the word as “belly myther” is not what is important, despite the exegetical literature. The key is to understanding why *engastrimythos* was chosen as equivalent to *ovot* is in its root *γαστέρ* (*gastēr*). *Gastēr* is more than “gut” or “belly,” it is fundamentally “vessel,” “container,” and most notably, “bottle.”<sup>44</sup> The clearest visual expression of *gastēr*, or *ovot*, in art depicting the incident at Endor, is something implicit in I Sam 28—caves.

While the ancient location of Endor cannot be precisely determined, the general area is in a higher elevation, on terrain hillier and rockier than mountainous.<sup>45</sup> For artists unfamiliar with Holy Land topography, a basic reading of I Sam 28:4b may have led them to believe that Endor was in close proximity to Saul’s encampment at Mount Gilboa. Furthermore, Josephus states that the village was on the slopes of Jebel Dūhy, where caves are an important feature.<sup>46</sup> As a result, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, the Endoran scene is set within a cave or grotto in about a quarter of the art produced.<sup>47</sup> The fact that the real Endor (wherever exactly that may be) is in similar terrain is circumstantial.

Caves have been associated with oracular rites throughout the ancient Mediterranean region, and a few were designated as spots for communication with chthonic deities.<sup>48</sup> Certainly much has been written about their being entrances to the underworld, regarded as a kind of middle-

ground meeting place between the realms of the living and dead. However, it is their lesser-explored association with primordial earth goddesses (whether Gaia, Cybele, Asherah, Inanna or others) that best link caves with *ovot*.

If *ovot* is “skin bottle,” then perhaps a cave is “earth bottle,” a sort of inverse orientation of the female form. Or, as Joseph Campbell puts it: “[the Earth Goddess] is the cave itself, so that initiates who passed through the rites deep under the earth were returning to and reborn from her womb.”<sup>49</sup> The Endoran woman’s connection to caves as an extension of universal earth mother also serves to reinforce those maternal aspects that are notable in 28:22. Honoring the ancient custom of hospitality, sacred among many cultures and highlighted throughout the Torah, the woman acts a pious exemplar.<sup>50</sup> Her insistence that Saul eat after his initial refusal reveals a maternalism that exceeds the bonds of xenodochy. She first indulges his reluctance although his is “the response of a petulant child, too hungry to get up to eat, too distraught to be comforted.”<sup>51</sup> However, a notable counterargument is offered by Moshe Garsiel, who holds that the woman acts as temptress, forcing Saul to break his fast “like Eve tempts man to eat forbidden fruit.”<sup>52</sup> As a motif, it was not popular among artists exploring the topic, and forms the basis of a mere six percent of artworks, the most famous example executed by Rembrandt in the mid-seventeenth century (figure 5).<sup>53</sup>



Figure 5. Rembrandt van Rijn (or Workshop). *Saul and the Witch of Endor*. C. 1645. Indian ink heightened with white gouache (Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum, 13074) Photo © bpk/ Städel Museum.



Caves are therefore a clear link, not only to the motherly Earth itself, but with ancestors who once worshipped within them. This further strengthens arguments like Bill Arnold's, that *ovot* may signify "the deified spirit of one's ancestor and, metonymically, the phenomenon of the ancestor cult."<sup>54</sup> In art, the cave functions rather similarly to a bottle, where the substance can be seen or obscured, sometimes simultaneously. Such is the case in the painting attributed to Nicolaus Wolff (figure 6), where much of the outside landscape is hidden from those within the cave, but the viewer can both gauge the terrain of the landscape in the upper right (the quasi-Alpine atmosphere represented by the lone pine tree) and time of day (night, with the full moon partially seen behind clouds).



Figure 6. Attributed to Nicolaus Wolff. *Saul and the Witch of Endor*. 1783. Oil on canvas (Private Collection).

Within the cave, the primary events of I Sam 28:13-19 unfold. The Endoran has just commenced the ritual, as her body indicates forward movement, advancing along with her left knee, perhaps ready to exit through the opening on the right. Saul, kneeling on the ground, lifts his right arm in a defensive gesture to his chin with a look of shock and horror on his face. Samuel begins his prophecy, right arm raised with index finger extended, as though pontificating.<sup>55</sup> Wolff presents the cave as secondary *ovot*, an extension of the woman, as one that conceals and protects, as much as it reveals and threatens.

The same can be said of *ovot* when presented as a pit, or hollow, a less complex and flattened form than the cave. Cross-cultural phonetic and linguistic connections have been explored between the Hebrew *ovot* as “ritual pit” and terms designating a similar thing in Sumerian, Hittite, Ugaritic and Assyrian. What is most important about the ritual pit is that the space was considered a “sacred orifice,” only accessible to a designated individual.<sup>56</sup> The likening of a hole in the ground to an orifice recalls those few works of art where Samuel is not just summoned upward but almost comes forth in a rebirthing as in figure 7.



Figure 7. Bavarian School. Detail of *Samuel Rises from the Grave before Saul* from *Weltchronik*. C. 1390. Illuminated manuscript (Bpk/Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbestiz, Ms. Germ. Fol. 1416, fol. 172r). Attribution non-commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

This fourteenth century image is located on the upper right of an illuminated manuscript and is compositionally imbalanced. The left side bears much of the weight with a figural group of four, all polychromed in pink, green and touches of yellow, while the right shows the lone figure of Samuel in *grisaille*.<sup>57</sup> The monochromatic effect of Samuel's side does add some depth, dimensionality and dynamism as the ghost rises from the pit on the groundline. The most striking thing about the image is the *vesica piscine* shape from which Samuel emerges; this is the "sacred orifice," the earth's womb, explicitly visualized by the artist. It is notable that the woman of Endor, as the only female represented in both text and picture, stands quite apart from the overtly feminine contours or even its edges; only Saul's left foot is pivoted on its precipice.

Some viewers may be tempted to interpret this juxtapositioning of Saul and the vaginal structure as visual reiteration of Saul's engagement in illicit activity.<sup>58</sup> Not only has he sought out mantic assistance outside of those religiously prescribed (even if they were no longer efficacious for him), but from someone who is a foreigner.<sup>59</sup> Worse than being a non-Israelite engaged in thaumaturgic pursuits, the Endoran is female. Therefore, it is unsurprising that some visual analyses have overstate this illustration's meaning with its delicious implications of eros/thanatos particularly when observing "the conflation of sexual and mortuary imagery."<sup>60</sup>

But sexualizing the *ovot* (as ritual pit or human extension, thereof) is not the illuminator's intent, although gendering it is. This becomes especially clear when the maxim "form follows function" is applied: the geometry of the *vesica piscis* (the female reproductive organs) is something that can be both a pit (or hollow) to be filled with substance, or a container to be emptied and be brought forth, birthed as it were.<sup>61</sup> The medieval artist exemplifies that *ovot* is wholly feminine. This is precisely why chapter 28 first mentions the expulsion *ovot* from Saul's kingdom (28:3b, almost as a non-sequitur) and then states he wants his courtiers to find him a woman for mantic inquiry (28:7). The Endoran is an *ovot* in microcosm who channels the macrocosmic female in the form of cave or pit.

This gendering may also serve as the basis for *ovot* as illicit method of mantic inquiry. For example, *Urim* and *Thummim* are intrinsically masculine, particularly in terms of their religious association with the *kohen gadol* [high priest] and those individuals with socio-political access to

them (like Saul).<sup>62</sup> Female practitioners, especially non-Israelites, would naturally be viewed by institutional patriarchy as unsanctioned communicants.<sup>63</sup> As J. Kabamba Kiboko succinctly puts it, “because it is such a potent and important activity, divination may be carefully and strictly controlled.”<sup>64</sup> The *ovot* may be societally relegated to the Third Space, but the individual separated may not view that as necessarily negative, instead discovering an area of free expression and enterprise, something worth protecting.<sup>65</sup>

Certainly that is what the magic circle represents in iconographical reiterations of *ovot* in art. Perhaps it is the quintessential emanation of *ovot* in that it is omnidirectional, synchronously retaining and expelling in perpetuity. For those within its boundaries it may offer sanctuary and confidence, outside exclusion and vulnerability. One of the great ironies in art that recalls the narrative of I Sam 28 is that the Endoran *ovot*, banned from the kingdom of Israel, sometimes bars Saul from entering the confines of the magical shape. Such is the case in the 1886 painting by John William Waterhouse titled *The Magic Circle* (figure 8).<sup>66</sup>



Figure 8. John William Waterhouse. *The Magic Circle*. 1886. Oil on canvas (Tate Britain, N01572). Presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest 1886. Photo: ©Tate, London 2023.

The seemingly lone figure within the composition is a woman etching an encompassing circle in a landscape close to a cave, seen in the background. The stark, nearly barren land that

extends throughout the canvas highlights both her form and adjacent paraphernalia. There are a few signs of life scattered about: a snake, one toad, five crows, two individuals huddled together inside the cave, and a tall individual standing beside the entrance. This figure is presumably male based appareling of armor and helmet, with the head crowned. The hilltop above reveals a series of stone dwellings, with cypress trees interspersed, symbols of death and mourning.

The woman, described in the Tate Britain's label as having "the swarthy complexion of a woman of middle-eastern origin," is shown in right profile, lips slightly parted as though speaking.<sup>67</sup> Her black hair is styled half-up, a plait falling between her ear and face. In addition to large, beaded necklaces, a live serpent twists around her neck, its tongue extended in a hiss.<sup>68</sup> The reptile serves to enhance the supernatural quality of the picture and adds some exoticism along with the figures decorating her skirt's hemline; these reveal a winged gorgon, probably Medusa since there is a male figure chasing in pursuit.<sup>69</sup> Folded into the girdle knot at her waist is a collection of pink groundsel, a flowering herb associated with protection against evil.<sup>70</sup> Her left hand clutches a golden boline, while her right uses a long staff to seal the enveloping flaming circuit.

Waterhouse paints the Endoran barefoot, standing next to a smoking brass tripod; within its upward billowing draft are hints of the human aspect.<sup>71</sup> To the tripod's right is a spray of vervain, mixed with pink peonies.<sup>72</sup> In the ancient world, vervain was used in the casting of spells and divination, thus it is unsurprising to observe them in a scene taken from I Sam 28.<sup>73</sup> Peony derives from the name of an archaic Minoan god of healing, mentioned on a Linear B tablet at Knossos.<sup>74</sup> Seeds of the plant were used in a tincture prescribed during painful labor, while the dried root was given post-childbirth, reverberations of *ovot* as womb.<sup>75</sup> The plants Waterhouse sparsely illustrates outside the magic circle are tamarisk, a tree referred to twice in I Sam. The first reference occurs in 22:6 when Saul learns of David's return to Judah, an event that assists in leading him to the point where he seeks help from the Endoran. More important is the second reference in I Sam to tamarisk: Saul's bones are buried beneath one in Jabash in 31:13; it is the verse that ends the book.

Waterhouse not only presents the downfall of Saul in precis through various symbols scattered throughout the composition, but reinforces the strength of *ovot* at the same time. This is

through its personified form as central focus of the painting, and the associated objectified elements of the cave, pit and circle. The Endoran's ring does more than delineate mantic space here, it endows her with total agency and dominion, while Saul is relegated to the rear of the picture plane nearly indiscernible amidst the surroundings. The *ovot* is no longer the obscured, banished Other, but a commanding force driving the visual narrative. It is a powerful representation as critics agreed when exhibited at the Royal Academy later that year. Contemporary reviews consistently referred to it as one of the best pictures on view, and Waterhouse reiterated versions of the mantic female for the remainder of his career, although none from Tanakh.

Waterhouse's Endoran had (and has) the potential for cognitive dissonance in the collective psyche while on view at the Royal Academy. This is primarily because of the superficial tendency to dismiss her as another exemplification of the *femme fatale* archetype.<sup>76</sup> If she, and others like her, are personifications of feminine evil, then the diminishment of *ovot* into something abhorrent occurs (as in previous centuries). Further, regarding *ovot* as such allows for further female debasement where the soul is as hollow as the body, simply a hollow to be filled. There is no original substantive essence so everything about her, physically and metaphysically, is transmutable.

Yet this is a crude a rudimentary deconstruction both of Waterhouse's Endoran and *ovot* itself. It is simply predicated upon the idea that two things cannot coexist; a pregnant woman does not completely vacate her body and being in favor of a fetus, so the *ovot* does not absolutely purge for the divinatory purposes. *Ovot* functions a great deal like a gestational female, who in turns imitates the earth (Plato's *Menexenus* dialogue).<sup>77</sup> Like the earth or pregnant woman, the *ovot* engages in a type of procreation, gestation and birth when divining, acting in congress with all that is within and without for augural achievement. As embodiment of *ovot* in I Sam 28 and female, the Endoran neither acts nor is a vacuum, a psychic vessel. Perhaps this is reason for the triumphal reception of Waterhouse's *Magic Circle*, the unadulterated manner in which the Endoran is presented. She is more than "skin bottle," but has personhood, three-dimensionality, a woman with significant abilities and knowledge that a king desperately sought to find.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper was inspired by a series of discussions between the author and her late father, Gerald Korb, about Talmudic proscriptions for specific types of divination.

<sup>2</sup> See the Hebrew definition: <https://tinyurl.com/4fzdhaxd>; See also, <https://lib.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=13385>

<sup>3</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), 15. See also Hebrew-English dictionaries, such as Ehud Ben-Yehuda and David Weinstein *English-Hebrew Hebrew-English Dictionary* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), 4 Hebrew-English.

<sup>4</sup> I am using the word Endoran primarily to denote that her domicile is in Endor, therefore she is ‘Endoran,’ such as the term ‘Judaean’ would be used to describe an inhabitant of Judaea. While there is no scholarly precedent for this per se, I did find instances in fiction from the early part of this century that relate directly to the incident in 1 Samuel, especially in *The Choice* from 2008. I have been told that this is a fairly common reference to the Woman amongst evangelical Christians as they do not like to refer to witches or sorceresses. I found that giving her an identity, albeit based on geography, lessened her objectification. It is more akin to more Orthodox Christian texts that often refer to Jesus of Nazareth as ‘the Nazarene,’ or ‘Galilean.’ I should also add that I have also seen ‘Endorian’ used for some artworks, which does have older precedent, as in Dmitry Martynov’s 1857 oil painting.

<sup>5</sup> These images range from c.1180 to 1978, and are either paintings (fresco, tempera, oil on panel or canvas) or works on paper (watercolor, pencil, pen and ink, illuminated manuscript, etchings, woodcuts, engravings or other prints). Included in this number are only singular works, therefore none are duplicates or recycled in any way. For a discussion regarding reprints, reissues, or replications of this scene, see Charles Zika, “Recalibrating Witchcraft through Recycling and Collage: The Case of a Late Seventeenth Century Anonymous Print,” *The Primacy of the Image in Northern European Art, 1400-1700*, ed. by Debra Cashion, Henry Luttikhuisen, and Ashley West (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 391-404.

<sup>6</sup> The “pit” connoted in 1 Sam 28:13 is precluded from this count.

<sup>7</sup> *Vesica piscis* (literally “fish bladder”) geometrically refers to the almond shape (or, *mandorla*) formed in the space between two intersecting circles of equal diameter, most commonly seen today in Venn diagrams. See Euclid, *Elements*, trans. T.L. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), I: i. It is associated with divine feminine proportions in sacred geometry, its ratio of height to width  $\sqrt{3}$  (1.73), or 265:153. See Robert Lawler, *Sacred Geometry* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982): 31, as well as Margaret Naumberg, “Art as Symbolic Speech,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 13, no. 4 (June 1955): 441. For discussion of the *vesica piscis* in a cross-cultural context see Gillo Dorfles, “Communication and Symbol in the Work of Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 15, no. 3 (March 1957): 295-296.

<sup>8</sup> P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 417. McCarter translates *ovot* as “necromancers” and *yid'onim* as “mediums” in 28:3, which illustrates that many of these seemingly similar terms are used interchangeably and inconsistently. See Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 174 n.2, where he parenthetically notes “[t]here is scant biblical evidence for the claim that the necromancer was a medium from whose throat the ghost spoke”.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1906, 396.

<sup>10</sup> Although she herself refers to the *yid'onim* along with *ovot* as a group banned by Saul, but never precisely places herself within either one or the other.

<sup>11</sup> Andrej Kapcár, “The Origins of Necromancy or How We Learned to Speak to the Dead,” *Sacra* vol. 13, issue 2 (2015): 32.

<sup>12</sup> Maurus Servius Honoratus (Servius), *Commentary on the Aeneid of Virgil*, ed. by Georgius Thilo (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1881), 6.107. A synonym would also be ψυχάγωγος (*psuchagōgos*), “evocator of souls.” See Daniel Ogden, *Greek and Roman Necromancy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xx.

<sup>13</sup> There are eight out of the one-hundred seventy-six images that set the scene at Samuel’s grave with him rising from a coffin rather than a ritual pit or some such. First extant image is figure 1 herein, and the last is a 1675 etching by Johann Heinrich Schönfeld, later engraved by Gabriel Cöhinger that is currently in the collection of the British Museum (2015,7106.1).

<sup>14</sup> It is a distance of 90 km if the route is taken in a straight line, impossible considering Israel’s terrain.

<sup>15</sup> Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition, A Study om Folk Religion* (New York: Behrman’s Jewish Book House, 1939), 223.

- <sup>16</sup> Ludwig Blau, *Das alt Jüdische Zauberwesen* (Budapest: 1898), 53. See *Sefer Hasidim*, Bologna Version (S.Has.B. 1132); San. 65b, and Rashi on I Sam 28:12; and J. Freimann, *Das buch der frommen (nach der Rezension in Cod. De Russi, No. 1133)*, ed. by J. Wistinetzki (Frankfurt; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1924), S. Has. 324. This is also misstated in Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, ed. and trans. by Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof with Muriel Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), VIII.ix.11.
- <sup>17</sup> Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., "Second Millenium Antecedents to the Hebrew 'ôb," *Journal of Biblical Literature* vol. 86, no. 4 (Dec.1967): 385-401. Hoffner clarifies this more specifically on page 395 (n.6), and seems to be a reiteration of W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 221.
- <sup>18</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Emily Wilson (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), 10.524-31, Daniel Ogden further states that this is "a usual feature of literary accounts of necromancy;" see Ogden 2001, 8. See also Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, trans. R.C. Seaton (London: William Heinemann, 1912), III.1026-1028, where he is very specific about this point.
- <sup>19</sup> Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 41.
- <sup>20</sup> Although this is often translated as "divination or soothsaying," *sans* blood, it is not specified to which mantic practices it refers. See Michael D. Swartz, *The Signifying Creator: Nontextual Sources of Meaning in Ancient Judaism* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 55-74. The entirety of chapter 4 discusses divination.
- <sup>21</sup> Maureen Bloom, *Jewish Mysticism and Magic, an Anthropological Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 110.
- <sup>22</sup> Bloom 2007, 110.
- <sup>23</sup> Sophie Page, "Medieval Magic," *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 47, 49.
- <sup>24</sup> Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Le spectre de Samuel et la sorcière d'En Dor: Avatars historiques d'un récit biblique: I 'Rois' 28," *Études rurales*, no. 105/106 (Jan-Jun 1987): 46. See John of Salisbury, *Policraticus Book I*, ed. by C.C.J. Webb (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909), 12.
- <sup>25</sup> Sigrid Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews, the Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 124.
- <sup>26</sup> Linda Hults, *The Witch as Muse, Art, Gender, and Power in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 199.
- <sup>27</sup> Bill Arnold, "Necromancy and Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 2 (April 2004): 201.
- <sup>28</sup> McCarter, Jr. 1980, 420 n.7b. Endor is only 4-5 mi northeast of the Philistine camp at Shunem.
- <sup>29</sup> Charles Zika, "The Witch of Endor before the Witch Trials," *Contesting Orthodoxy in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, Heresy, Magic and Witchcraft*, ed. Louise Nyholm Kallestrup and Raisa Maria Toivo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 170. As late as 1864, French translations of I Sam 28 still referred to *la pythonisse d'Endor*. See Abbé Drioux, *La bible Populaire* (Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1864). But by the late twentieth century, she is *la sorcière* or *femme qui pratique la divination*, as in 1 Samuel 28 *La bible de Jérusalem* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1999).
- <sup>30</sup> Schmitt 1987, 41.
- <sup>31</sup> Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. Phillip H. De Lacy and Benedict Einarson, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), VII.566c.
- <sup>32</sup> Strabo, *Geographica*, ed. by H.L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1024), IX.3.5. Also, Bry's image is the first in which a true Hellenic-style tripod appears.
- <sup>33</sup> Yulia Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind, Descending Underground in the Search for Ultimate Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 124.
- <sup>34</sup> Strabo *Geographica*, IX.3.5. "...over the mouth [of the pit in the prophetic chamber] is placed a high tripod, which the Pythia mounts, receiving the breath, to utter oracles in both verse and prose." The dimensions between Strabo's tripod and that in Bry's illustration (figure 4 herein) are also markedly off.
- <sup>35</sup> Specifically female figures found on the terracotta amphora by the Andokides Painter that show Apollo and Herakles fighting over the Pythia's tripod. The work dates from the Late Archaic Period (c. 530 B.C.E.), and is currently in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (63.11.6; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/255154>).

- <sup>36</sup> This should not be confused with what the Mishna says is the diviner speaking from the armpit: “He that has a familiar spirit (such is the Python which speaks from his armpits).” See Herbert Danby, ed, *Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), San. VII 393.
- <sup>37</sup> Strabo *Geographica*, IX.3.5. See also, Ustinova 2009, 124; she says the Pythia’s state would not “manifest itself in visibly abnormal behaviour,” like a maenad’s ecstasy for example. But it is a form of spiritual possession.
- <sup>38</sup> Ustinova 2009, 159.
- <sup>39</sup> Alter 199, 174 n.12.
- <sup>40</sup> Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds, A Source Book* (New York: Oxford University Press; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2009), 31: “It is clear Philochorus spoke of women ventriloquists. It is less clear that he also said that they called up the souls of the dead.”
- <sup>41</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: American Books; 8<sup>th</sup> edition, 1882), 401. *The Modern Greek Dictionary* expunges mention of any sub-thoracic organ in its definition, thus *engastrimythos* becomes “one who can speak without moving his lips and gives the impression his voice comes from somewhere else.” So basically, ventriloquism.
- <sup>42</sup> Margaret M. Mitchell, “Patristic Rhetoric on Allegory: Origen and Eusthatus put 1 Samuel 28 on Trial,” *The Journal of Religion* vol. 85, no. 3 (July 2005): 442.
- <sup>43</sup> Sofia Torallas Tovar and Anastasia Maravela-Solbakk, “Between Necromancers and Ventriloquists: the ‘εγγαστριμυθοι’ in the Septuaginta,” *Sefarad* vol. 61, no. 2 (Dec. 2001): 420.
- <sup>44</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, “The Myth of Prometheus in Hesiod,” *Myth, Religion and Society, Structuralist Essays*, ed. by R.L. Gordon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 51.
- <sup>45</sup> George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (New York: A.C. Armstrong & Son, 1901), 377. See also Map VI therein.
- <sup>46</sup> Flavius Josephus (Josephus), *Antiquities*, trans. Henry St. John Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), VI.xiv.4. Jebel Dūhy is approximately 1690 feet. See T.G. Bonney, “The Kishon and Jordan Valleys,” *The Geological Magazine* vol. I, no. XII (Dec 1904, Decade V): 575.
- <sup>47</sup> Roughly another twenty-two percent set the scene in a cemetery, gravesite or tomb as stated in the beginning of this article, which together total forty-seven percent.
- <sup>48</sup> B.C. Dietrich, “Reflections of the Origins of the Oracular Apollo,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* vol. 25, issue 1 (Dec. 1978): 5.
- <sup>49</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Goddesses* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2013), 5-6.
- <sup>50</sup> Josephus *Antiquities*, VI.xiv.4. Op cit. See Uriel Simon, “A Balanced Story: the Stern Prophet and the Kind Witch,” *Prooftexts* vol. 8, no. 2 (May 1988): 164.
- <sup>51</sup> Esther J. Hamori, “The Prophet and the Necromancer: Women’s Divination for Kings,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* vol. 132, no. 4 (2013): 835. A very apt assessment.
- <sup>52</sup> Moshe Garsiel, “Torn between Prophet and Necromancer: Saul’s Despair (1 Sam 28, 3-25),” *Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible and Its World* vol. Tevet-Adar 5766 (Winter 2005): 174.
- <sup>53</sup> Figure 5 may be the earliest example by Rembrandt, although he revisited the scene at least twice more.
- <sup>54</sup> Arnold 2004, 201.
- <sup>55</sup> Compositionally, Wolff’s Samuel is identical to Raphael’s Plato in *The School of Athens* (1509-1511; <https://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/stanze-di-raffaello/stanza-della-segnatura/scuola-di-atene.html - &gid=1&pid=1>). Allusions to the Allegory of the Cave from the *Republic* as well as all that Raphael represents in the fresco can certainly be inferred.
- <sup>56</sup> Hoffner 1967, 394.
- <sup>57</sup> Grisaille (“greyed”) is painting rendered entirely in tonal variations of grey.
- <sup>58</sup> Hamori 2013, 831.
- <sup>59</sup> Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic, A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 38. As in “non-Israelite.” She is identified as a Midianite by Pseudo-Philo; see Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities*, trans. M.R. James (London: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1917), XIV:3 (240). While later scholars identify her as a Canaanite. See Brian B. Schmidt, “The ‘Witch’ of En-Dor, 1 Samuel 28, and Ancient Near Eastern Necromancy,” *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, eds. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995): 111. Here, Schmidt states that I Sam 28 “narrative’s chronological framework (the settlement of Canaan) and its geographical setting

(the Canaanite city of En-Dor) serve to characterize [the woman's actions] as an ancient and distinctly Canaanite practice.”

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Blekinsopp, “Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-Mortem Existence,” *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 45, fasc. 1 (Jan. 1995):12.

<sup>61</sup> “Form follows function” is a maxim of American architect Louis Sullivan (1856-1924). See Louis H. Sullivan, “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered,” *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, vol. 339, no. 3 (March 1896): 408. While the phrase itself is a principle of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century architectural design, it is apt in describing the *vesica piscis* and the female body. From a purely primitive biological standpoint, the function of the female body is reproduction of the species. Therefore, physicality and form are constructed (designed or evolved) to facilitate this. The *vesica piscis*, a repetitious shape throughout female genitalia and reproductive organs, is illustrative of Sullivan's maxim, as is the female body as a whole. For exterior and interior genitalia see Adriaan van de Spiegel and Giulio Cesare Casseri, *De humani corporis fabrica libri decem* (Venice: Evangelista Deuchino, 1627): pl. 85. For repetitions of the *vesica piscis* on exterior genitalia see Henry Gray and Henry Vandyke Carter, *Anatomy, Descriptive and Surgical* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1858): 746.

<sup>62</sup> Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997) 4, 125.

<sup>63</sup> Non-Israelite does not necessarily mean Canaanite polytheist, but perhaps may be an adherent of monolatry or some form of religious syncretism.

<sup>64</sup> J. Kabamba Kimboko, *Divining the Woman of Endor, African Culture, Postcolonial Hermeneutics, and the Politics of Biblical Translation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 5.

<sup>65</sup> The postcolonial term “Third Space” was coined by sociocritical linguist Homi K. Bhabha (b. 1949) in his seminal work *The Location of Culture* (1994). It is the ambivalent space of cultural identity where differing cultures, usually the colonized and colonizers, intersect. Those in colonized societies often must subsume the self in favor of the dominant culture, existing in a hybridized zone, or “Third Space.” While inhabitants of the Third Space, they are relegated to the status of “Other” in society. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994): 37-38.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Trippi, *J.W. Waterhouse* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 74. This is the most finished of at least three versions Waterhouse produced beginning around 1881.

<sup>67</sup> Tate Online, “The Magic Circle.” Accessed 20 January 2021. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/waterhouse-the-magic-circle-n01572>.

<sup>68</sup> A contemporary critic describes this as an *ouroboros*, however, the snake is not biting its tail, so it is not. See Tate, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/waterhouse-the-magic-circle-n01572>.

<sup>69</sup> Waterhouse, like Theodor de Bry before him in figure 4, references Archaic Greek pottery, but much more explicitly than his predecessor. The gorgon here clearly recalls those found on several examples in the British Museum, which Waterhouse would have had access to, such as a black figure olpe attributed to the Amasis Painter, acquired in 1849 (c. 550-30 B.C.E.; 1849, 0620.15). [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1849-0620-5](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1849-0620-5).

<sup>70</sup> Richard Folkard, *Plant Lore, Legends and Lyrics* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1892), 357. See C.J.S. Thompson, *The Mysteries and Secrets of Magic* (New York: Causeway, 1973), 302.

<sup>71</sup> Jennifer Reeve-Williams and Mark Williams, “The Face Inside the Circle: Optical Illusion or Subtle Magic in Waterhouse's Depiction of Sorcery,” *PRS Review* vol. XXVI, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 30.

<sup>72</sup> Trippi 2002, 77. Trippi describes them as white poppies, not peonies.

<sup>73</sup> Grillot de Givry, *Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy*, trans. J. Courtenay Locke (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2009), 167.

<sup>74</sup> Hellmut Baumann, *The Greek Plant World in Myth, Art and Literature*, trans. William T. Stearn and Eldwyth Ruth Stearn (Portland, OR: Timber Press, 1993), 100.

<sup>75</sup> Baumann 1993, 101.

<sup>76</sup> Literally “fatal woman” and a late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19<sup>th</sup> century archetype appearing in art and literature. She is a reiteration of the malevolent female, a witch or sorceress, only here transformed from the crone of prior centuries into hypersexualized nymph. See Virginia M. Allen, *The Femme Fatale* (Troy, NY: Whitson Publishing, 1983).

<sup>77</sup> Plato, *Platonis Opera Tetralogia VII*, ed. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903): IV:238a.



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Artist: Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn (1606-1669)

Location: Städel Museum/Frankfurt am Main/Germany

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