

Prognostication in the Medieval World

Volume 1

Prognostication in the Medieval World

A Handbook

Volume 1

Edited by
Matthias Heiduk, Klaus Herbers
and Hans-Christian Lehner

In collaboration with
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DE GRUYTER

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Federal Ministry
of Education
and Research

ISBN 978-3-11-050120-9

e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-049977-3

e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-049847-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020940018

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2021 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston

Typesetting: Dörlemann Satz, Lemförde

Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com

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In gratiam et in memoriam

Many people have wholeheartedly supported this handbook project over the years. They deserve great credit, and the editors would like to express their profound gratitude to all of them. The first word of thanks goes to the authors and the editors' collaborators Avriel Bar-Levav, Charles Burnett, Michael Grünbart, and Petra Schmidl whose contributions in written form as well as during discussions have added substance and color to the texts of these volumes. The generous resources made available to the ICRH by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research provided a secure financial framework for the project, covering not only personnel costs, but also expenses for workshops, work sessions and research stays. The ICRH administrative staff, above all Petra Hahm in her capacity as coordinator, have kept the background of the project running smoothly throughout the years. ICRH Fellows from various disciplines as well as members of the advisory board have provided input into the discussion and offered generous assistance. The editors would like to acknowledge their colleagues from Sinology and Tibetan Studies at the ICRH, who have been valuable dialog partners and interested supporters of the project, particularly Yung-Yung Chang, Martin Kroher, Michael Lackner, Zhao Lu, Michael Lüdke, Rolf Scheuermann, and Matthias Schumann. The editors are deeply grateful to the de Gruyter publishing house, above all to Laura Burlon, Robert Forke, Elisabeth Kempf, Jacob Klingner (+), and Kathleen Prüfer for their patience and commitment and for publishing this handbook. A particular word of thanks goes to Eric Schlager for his assistance in preparing the typescript and to Sue Casson for her tireless English proofreading. The editors are deeply indebted also to the libraries and museums for granting them the right to use pictures of their manuscripts and objects.

While it is a great joy for the editors to express their heartfelt gratitude to so many people, they also mourn the loss of a colleague who did not live to see the publication of this handbook. In March 2020, our dear colleague and friend, Miriam Czock, passed away. This handbook is dedicated to her memory.

Matthias Heiduk, Klaus Herbers, Hans-Christian Lehner

Matthias Heiduk, Klaus Herbers and Hans-Christian Lehner
Introduction

The Development of a Handbook-Project

The Tanakh, the Bible, and the Quran are rich in prognostics: From Late Antiquity onward, the three major monotheistic religions, including their internal variations (especially Sephardic and Ashkenazi Judaism, Latin and Byzantine Christianity, and Shiite and Sunni Islam), established their own emphases and characteristics of prognostication. However, these did not arise independently of one another. Their development resulted, in fact, from the lively exchanges and relationships between them. Whether directly or through reputation, the members of these religious cultures knew each other, despised or feared each other and regarded their colleagues as ideological opponents or allies. Knowing the teachings of another religion often led to an opposing position or to reflection on one's own position.

Some areas of anticipating the future, like apocalyptic thinking or political prophecy, belong to traditional topics of research in the field of Medieval Studies, besides that prognostication remained a marginal field until now. This handbook on prognostication in the Middle Ages now brings the different facets of prognostication together comprehensively for the first time. It emerged from a series of workshops held between 2016 and 2018, each dealing with prognostic elements within the Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions.

This project was, in turn, prompted by in-depth research carried out at the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities (ICRH) "Fate, Freedom and Prognostication. Strategies for Coping with the Future in East Asia and Europe" in Erlangen, established in 2009 by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The way in which people deal with issues of the future is analyzed across epochs and cultures under the leadership of the core disciplines of Sinology and Medieval Studies. As one of the largest interdisciplinary research projects on prognostication worldwide, studies in multiple disciplines were funded. A large number of international visiting fellows presented relevant work on the theme. At numerous events – workshops, conferences, seminars, and lecture series – individual aspects were deepened and their results published. The spectrum of this research ranged from astronomy and astrology to apocalypticism, from the history of science and philosophy to questions of divination and manticism in secular and canonical law, from hermetic tracts to personal preventive medicine, prophecy or observing favorable and unfavorable days, to name but a few areas. An annotated list of the most important relevant publications can be found in the publication by ICRH deputy director Klaus Herbers (Herbers 2019).

After the mutual exchange between Sinology, Medieval Studies and other disciplines was consistently sought and implemented, it seemed obvious to bring the

results together. This endeavor was carried out separately by the two leading disciplines, but approached in close exchange with one another, not least in order to discuss and decide on the various theoretical, methodological and structural issues within the dialogue.

The respective volume is now available for the field of Medieval Studies in its religious and cultural diversity. In this introduction, the three editors wish to outline the approach, reflect on the central terms “Prognostication, the Middle Ages, and the Medieval World,” and explain the compilation, structure and usage of this volume.

The Varied Forms of Prognostication in Different Societies – Uniform Western Traditions in the Middle Ages?

In 2013, Léon Vandermeersch argued (Vandermeersch 2013), with regard to Chinese history, that the Chinese pictographic scripture of the thirteenth century BCE was not invented in order to state the facts, but rather to record “divination.”

This language, he wrote, had developed from mantology. By relying on the examination of divinatory equations, the author concludes, among other things, that there was something like a divinatory rationalism, characterized rather by a “raison mantologique” than by a theological rationality (as in the European West).

Confronting this thesis with the Christian-Latin development, one aspect is striking: although, in the Christian world, the prophet was highly appreciated, fewer calculations were made to fathom the future. This more personal approach has been common in Christianity since the prophet figure was introduced in the Old Testament. Max Weber was so impressed by this concept that he even spoke of a “prophetic charisma” (Weber 1922, III, 4 § 10). He was referring to persons who possessed supernatural gifts that others lacked. The charisma of the prophet was different from that of the magician or priest. In the Latin West, however, prophecy gained importance above all when, in contact with Byzantium, the ancient Sibylline traditions became relevant. This resulted in the dichotomy between prophets and false prophets.

But what was typical for future visions? For a long time, it was claimed that utopian ideas were barely projected in the Latin Middle Ages (Cf. Hartmann and Röcke 2013, 3–9). Nevertheless, there were also scattered phenomena, directing hope toward the arrival of an earthly realm of peace. Especially the messianic chiliasm aimed at a real reform “in this life.” The word “chiliasm” is derived from the Greek term *χίλια chilia* for “thousand” (years), and can be traced back to the twentieth chapter of the Revelation to John, which deals with a “millennial”/thousand year realm of peace, preceding the end of all things. Probably the most impressive example of Christian chiliasm is provided by Joachim of Fiore. His ideas provoked a sustained impact. The philosopher

Ernst Bloch (Bloch 1959, 590) called Joachim's reflections the "most effective social utopia of the Middle Ages" ("die folgenreichste Sozialutopie des Mittelalters"). Joachim built an ideal by making use of biblical symbolism; his most essential source of knowledge remained the Bible. He illustrated this in his Book of Figures, the *Liber Figurarum*.

Conceptually, a third aspect should be emphasized: it is related to the structuring of earthly time. The historical ideas dominant in the Latin Middle Ages followed the doctrine of successive realms, which were finally, at the end of days and in certain forms, raised to another level. Classically, Karl Löwith (Löwith 1953) spoke of "world history and salvation" ("Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen") and thus of the "theological foundations in the philosophy of history" ("Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie"). Apocalyptic thinking, ideas concerning the Antichrist, but even the calendrical determination of the Christian salvation and far more belong, therefore, to the great prognostic designs of the Christian-Latin tradition.

Apart from these aspects – prophecy, utopia, the world ages and apocalypticism –, there were also traditions, that recalled mythical knowledge, developed further practical methods such as the use of lots or resulted from various practices (partially clinging to tradition). These include the position of the stars and their interpretation in astrology, the existing horoscopes, the reading of entrails in the ancient tradition, games and numbers, and many other procedures regarding medical and meteorological prognoses – some of which reached the West as part of cultural exchange.

However, time and space need to be defined more precisely for the large-scale overview intended in this handbook. To date, mainly the Christian-Latin traditions have been the focus but an increasing amount of medieval research is underlining the influence of the Arab-Muslim, Jewish, but also the Greek-Byzantine influences in Medieval History.

Focusing solely on "Occidental" conceptions that only concern the Latin-Christian area not only risk absolutization, but they also ignore the crucial exchange between the different worlds (cf. above all Borgolte et al. 2011; Herbers and Jaspert 2007).

Many works on medieval prognostics have already pointed out that Antiquity had a huge influence on medieval practices (e. g. Tuczay 2012). In the Greek-Byzantine East, prophetic traditions strongly evolved. One has only to recall the prophecy of Pseudo-Methodius, or the Sibylline writings which, in their later Latin versions as well, reveal strong references to the Eastern Mediterranean. After all, both the Jewish and Arab-Muslim traditions are of special significance, for they intermediated Ancient and Eastern knowledge to the Latin Middle Ages (primarily in the Late Middle Ages). In the present handbook, as stressed at the beginning, these different traditions are taken into account.

In the face of the new discussions arising about the Middle Ages (recently Bauer 2018; cf. also the review article by Lehner 2020), it is indeed challenging to define larger areas with uniform temporal boundaries for these varying geographical regions. The Islamic World for instance included large parts of Spain in the Middle Ages, but in very different ways and intensities during different periods.

For this reason, the difficult decisions in this context were allocated to the involved experts. We wish to express our sincere thanks for their manifold support! We operated with linguistic and religious criteria equally, because these overlap to some extent, too. The differentiation in the Western World is based not only on systematic considerations, but also on the evidence that the “Large Areas,” the Western Roman Empire, Eastern Roman Empire as well as the Islamic and Jewish worlds, emerged from Antiquity (cf. for example Pitz 2001).

The structure we have proposed does not suggest homogeneous cultural areas or periods; but without these “soft” geographical boundaries, this handbook would hardly have been achieved. The respective deviations from a scheme familiar to many at the same time reflect the state of research and the research opportunities within the corresponding disciplines.

Prognostication, the Middle Ages, and the Medieval World – the Evidently Non-self-evident

Why prognostication?

This handbook explores the views of the future in the Middle Ages. The emphasis is placed on the term “prognostication,” whereas other publications highlight “prophecy” or “divination.” This requires an explanation. The future can be anticipated in many different ways, as reflected in the vocabulary of the European languages and its abundance of terms, with all of their semantic ambiguities and overlaps. Many of these terms are loan words derived from ancient Greek and Latin (see also the etymologies in ↗ Demaitre, *Medical Prognostication Western Christian World*). The future can be foretold and predicted (*predicere*), foreseen (*providere*), forethought (*prognoscere*), and known beforehand (*precognoscere*). *Prognosis*, fore-knowledge, has proven to be the central term in this semantic field. When the processes required to gain that fore-knowledge are taken into account, the semantic field widens to include related terms such as prophecy (*propheteia*), the gift to communicate the knowledge revealed. Inspired by divinity, the prophet or prophetess interprets this knowledge, which may or may not be related to the future. Divination (*divinatio*) is the ability to recognize and interpret the signs sent by divine powers. It encompasses the past, present and future. In Hebrew and Arabic, the historical terms used for looking into the future are more or less the equivalents of prophecy and divination (↗ Bar Levav, *Prognostication Jewish Culture*; ↗ Schmidl, *Medieval Traditions Islamic World*). In European cultural history, however, the term “divination,” originally neutral, acquired a different connotation. The Christian doctrine associated divination with magic, which consequently became a negative term, smacking of superstition (↗ Heiduk, *Prognostication Western*

Christian World). Unlike the other terms, prognostication is a neutral expression, that clearly relates to the future and also points to both observation and calculation (see also ↗ Grünbart, Prognostication Eastern Christian World). In this handbook, prognostication is, therefore, used as the standard term for anticipating the future, free of all connotations. It includes the future-oriented forms of prophecy and divination, but also purely mathematical-calculative methods, without any metaphysical or cosmological framework.

If prognostication indicates gaining foreknowledge, the handbook places the focus on how people looked into the future, with which expectations and using which methods. That implicates the fears, hopes, desires, and daily problems that made them want to know the future. People wanted to know what would happen to them and their loved ones – who was the best person to marry, what were the chances of their children surviving, what could be done to stay healthy, when was the best moment to make a journey, and which business transaction would yield a profit. People also wanted to know what was in store for their community, country, and the whole of humankind: good fortune or hardship – would the harvest be good, the political situation stable? Was disaster looming, war, or even the end of time? Which conclusions the knowledge-seekers might have drawn from the wide range of possible answers in order to be prepared for what was to come, is, however, not covered by the subject of prognostication. There are merely a few references in this handbook to whether a prediction was, supposedly, right or wrong; for instance when the narratives of medieval commentators are cited.

This handbook pays equal attention to all forms of prognostication: prophecies inspired by a divinity, interpretations of dreams and visions, calculations of opportune or less opportune days or the influence of stars and constellations, the drawing of oracle lots, the summoning of spirits, or the calculations of assurance risks and the odds of gambling.

To this end, the expertise of many different research disciplines was collected and summarized. Until now, the access to prognostication in each discipline is defined by the specific characteristics of the historical evidence, so most publications on the subject are limited either to a “history of prophecy,” a “history of astrology,” or, under the heading of a “history of magic,” the history of divination, while this handbook presents the sum of what is known about the history of all forms of prognostication in the Middle Ages. The equal treatment of those different forms also breaks with a still widespread, traditional point of view which ranks, openly or implicitly, the subject on the basis of hierarchies of rationality, so the various methods of knowing the future are evaluated according to their degree of progressiveness or backwardness, dull superstition or enlightened spirit, scientific value or irrelevance, religious probity or insubordination, sophistication or primitiveness, or, quite simply, their degree of supposed truth or falsehood. Neither narratives of teleological progress nor accounts of the history of development based on such dichotomies form part of this handbook.

On the contrary – its content and conception may serve as an antidote to certain current forms of prophecy, such as economic forecasts, trend research or future technologies. Still, in spite of the editors' best efforts to present prognostication in all its diversity as a form of cultural achievement, they must admit that, on occasion, the reader may catch a glimpse of a certain rationality-based hierarchy in some of the articles. This is due to the academic diversity and different scientific cultures of the scholars involved in this project, which the editors did not wish to limit by imposing a compulsory vocabulary.

The Concepts, Practices, and Contexts of Prognostication

The purpose of this handbook is to provide a comprehensive view of prognostication, to shed light on its functions and structures in the social fabric, its significance for customs and the social order, but also to examine the concepts of prognostication prevalent in the medieval world and their practical application. Special attention is paid to the circumstances under which prognostication was practiced in daily life, the habitus of the people involved and their milieu. The particular emphasis which this handbook places on the practical aspects of prognostication is the result of an interdisciplinary dialogue at the IKGf. It became apparent that, more than any other aspects, practical applications allow hands-on comparisons between different cultural environments over the course of history, whereas the comparability of concepts quickly reaches its limits due to their enormous diversity. The focus on practices leaves sufficient room for relatively unconventional approaches to prognostication such as the study of images and artefacts. It also places the normative and classifying text genres in perspective. They represent the largest part of the historical legacy available for research and have, therefore, long been its main focus of attention. The conventional approach to research into prophecy and divination often builds upon the academic classifications of the Middle Ages – such as Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* – and the definitions they provide. Often, however, these works are examined out of context, without regard to the associated academic and theological discourse, and interpreted as a universal mirror of the medieval worldview. Comparable misconceptions are usually based on the assumption that daily life faithfully reflected the standards set in the legal texts. The genres of normative and classifying texts undoubtedly provide important historical sources, due to the classification schemes they offer and also their sheer abundance, but they usually describe things according to specific discourses or even from an outsider perspective. They rarely contain information about the daily practices of prognostication or the practitioners' perspective. Ideally, research should focus on the different settings in which prognostication was practiced – from the ruler's court, the places of learning and monasteries to the households of ordinary people – to convey an overall impression of its role within medieval life.

The editors are keenly aware of how difficult it is to carry out this type of research. The material available is scarce to begin with: the historical tradition offers little evidence in terms of a material legacy, and the written sources are usually limited to the aforementioned standards and classifications. The research is also influenced by the traditions and priorities of the various disciplines, so the degree of accessibility of the historical material varies considerably. An expert in astrological treatise literature, for instance, would not necessarily know what else the archives of a sovereign's court or a city state contained, and so might find it difficult to piece together instructions on the practice of prognostication and the accounts of the services related to it to create a coherent picture of daily astrological practice in the Middle Ages. The focus which this handbook places on the practical application of prognostication is, nevertheless, important, as it brings out surprising facets of what seemed familiar and points to the gaps in our knowledge and the research.

Which Time Period is Covered by the Term “the Middle Ages”?

In academic and everyday language, the Middle Ages traditionally denote a period in the history of Europe which spans the millennium between 500 and 1500 CE. This handbook, too, follows this convention and aims to provide an overview across this millennium. The editors understand – as mentioned above – that this timeframe is by no means self-explanatory. In the millennium between 500 and 1500, there was no such thing as a culturally coherent European continent, nor were there any common characteristics which would have clearly delimited this millennium from its preceding and ensuing periods. In terms of the history of development, Europe in the seventh century is closely linked to Europe in the fourth century, and Europe in the fourteenth century to Europe in the seventeenth century, whereas the seventh and fourteenth centuries have very little in common. If, therefore, as in this handbook, the term the “Middle Ages” is used in the conventional sense and applied to the whole European continent over the millennium between 500 and 1500, this is done for the purpose of spatial and chronological delimitation and is not to be understood as a political statement, claiming that a homogeneous occidental Europe existed at the time. By exploring the historical roots of “medieval” prognostication in Antiquity and pointing at further developments in the Early Modern Age, characterized by both changes and continuities, two detailed surveys in this handbook illustrate the flexibility of those period boundaries.

The editors chose to adopt a very broad approach to provide a better understanding of prognostication in “Europe in the Middle Ages.” As explained in the following section, the history of prognostication in Europe as such emerges only in its transcultural context, i. e. only when the history of Christian-Western Europe, Christian-Eastern Europe and non-Christian Europe as well as the history of Europe's neighbors, who were part of the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic empires, are taken into account. It

is important to emphasize once more that the term “Middle Ages” is used as a means of chronological delimitation, and is not to be understood as a period in Jewish, Islamic or Byzantine history. The use of both the term “Middle Ages” and the dates indicated according to the “common era” notation system in this handbook have been agreed upon by all participating research disciplines for the purpose of practicability. The fact that this handbook presents different cultural regions with different calendar systems and, consequently, different historical periodizations under the heading the “medieval world,” does not mean that these differences are being ignored. The articles about calendars, for instance, address this subject.

What Exactly is the “Medieval World”?

In view of the above, it has already become quite clear that the medieval world, as the focus of this handbook, is neither limited to a specific – however defined – cultural region such as “Latin Europe,” nor to the geographical continent of Europe (which was defined differently in Antiquity and the Middle Ages and ended at the banks of the Don in the East). With regard to the subject of prognostication, the editors consider it necessary to highlight the transcultural relations between the different regions. These relations result from the shared cultural heritage of Antiquity, which was transmitted, transformed or received again in a variety of philosophical concepts, scientific methods and the practice of prognostication in daily life in a Christian, Jewish or Islamic environment. Part of this common heritage found its expression in the prophetic revelations of the monotheistic religions. The fact that the medieval world did not end at the boundaries of the European continent is reflected in the history of prognostication, which has always been characterized by knowledge transfer between the Jewish, Greek-Byzantine, Latin-Western traditions and those of the Islamic world. The West profited most from the flow of this knowledge transfer. In many areas – including prognostication –, the foundation for many fields of knowledge was laid, starting with mathematical observation and calculation methods to empirical nature observation and cosmological interpretation methods, such as astrology. Knowledge transfer in the Middle Ages was more than simply the rediscovery of ancient wisdom, although this misconception is postulated repeatedly, even in academic publications. The knowledge which the West received above all from translations from Arabic was not a linguistically deformed version of the wealth of knowledge from the ancient Hellenistic world, but an amalgamation, further processing and enrichment of different concepts and traditions, being a post-antique cultural achievement in its own right. Catchphrases, such as statements about the presumably pure Aristotelianism of scholastic philosophy or a medieval renaissance of Antiquity, oversimplify and distort these historical facts.

But how can this complex and culturally interconnected medieval world be best described? The editors decided to divide the individual thematic blocks on prognosti-

cation into four parts, dedicated, respectively, to the Western-Christian, Eastern-Christian, Jewish and Islamic traditions, and to present them as equal to provide the reader with a tool for drawing direct comparisons. This “quadrinity” appeared to be the most pragmatic way of including the academic disciplines of Medieval Studies, Byzantine Studies, Jewish Studies and Islamic Studies in the project, each in their own right. Even this subdivision of the medieval world, however, is simply a means to providing a transparent outline of the subject which follows the cultural dominants Latin-Christian, Greek-Christian, Hebrew-Jewish and Arab-Muslim. It is by no means to be understood as a postulate claiming that there were four homogeneous cultural areas in the Middle Ages, because each of these areas is in itself highly heterogeneous. Many parts of Europe, for example, were only Christianized late in the Middle Ages, and Christianization has always been a lengthy process, sometimes stretching over the whole medieval millennium. This handbook attempts to do justice to “pre-Christian” Europe as well. Three overviews address the Celtic, Nordic and Slavic traditions of prognostication. They illustrate a recurring problem: these civilizations did not leave behind any first hand testimony in written form. What little is known about them is based on the outside perception of Roman writers or Christian missionaries and chroniclers, or on testimonies such as the Nordic sagas, which were either written by Christian authors or carry the distinctive marks of contact with Christianity. These historical sources do transmit a rather deformed image of “indigenous” worldviews and cultural practices. Pagan civilizations, like those of the Avars or Sami, whose testimonies related to prognostication are almost entirely either archeological artifacts that are difficult to interpret or post-medieval references, could not be included in the handbook because of the immensely difficult research situation related to these.

The differentiation between pagan and non-pagan is just one aspect of the cultural heterogeneity of the medieval world that all of the articles contained in this handbook are committed to represent. In the Christian West, there are not only sources in Latin but also in vernacular languages; the Christian East covers not only Byzantium, but also the Eastern European Slavic world; while the Jewish traditions come from the Mizrahi, the Sephardi, the Ashkenazy, the orthodox mainstream and the mythical branches. The authors of the articles on the Islamic world will have found it particularly difficult to develop an overview of the cultural and religious heterogeneity of the area between Andalusia and South-East Asia. The extremely difficult question of how to define and delimitate this Islamic world and relate it to Europe could only be answered by putting the focus on points of orientation in or near the Mediterranean region or concentrating on particularly influential traditions. In the end, the desiderata in many fields of research assisted the actual selection which allowed the authors to refer mainly to their own subjects.

This handbook does not present the medieval world within clearly demarcated borders, but this vagueness has its own appeal, as it offers the advantage of facilitating the investigation of a large number of historical phenomena and the equally

large number of traditions in the humanities devoted to their studies, free from any arbitrary restrictions.

How to Use this Handbook

This handbook is divided into three major sections. In the first part, as already mentioned, the legacy of antiquity, the developments in the pagan world, as well as an overview of the continuities and innovations of the early modern period are examined in separate survey articles. There is also an overview of the prognostics in the Latin-Christian, Greek-Christian, Hebrew-Jewish and Arabic-Muslim traditions. The findings from the individual studies in the following two sections are brought together here and supplemented at certain points. In addition, the functions of prognostication are analyzed, such as their social contexts, the role of experts and clients, or their occasions.

The second section forms the core of the handbook. Nine areas were identified in which medieval prognostication manifested itself. These are illuminated from the perspective of the four mentioned traditions. This includes the area “Eschatology and Millenarism,” already mentioned above, with the various eschatological scenarios. In the second subchapter “Prophecy and Visions,” the division into four traditions was abandoned, since this topic could not be separated from the eschatology in the Byzantine context. Explanations of special forecasting techniques follow. First of all, there is “Dream Interpretation,” which can be seen as an anthropological constant up to the present day. The distinction made here between visions and dreams has nothing to do with the transcendent status (of the dreamer/visionary), but rather refers to literary genres: while visionary reports emerged in the Middle Ages, particularly in monastic contexts, tracts on dreams look back to a tradition dating back to ancient times. Various techniques, which differed in the different traditions, are the subject of the “Mantic Arts” chapter. The other sub-chapters refer to “Astral Sciences,” “Calendrical Calculations,” and “Weather Forecasting.” It concludes with a contribution on “Quantifying and Managing Risks,” the forecasting of risks, now the basis of modern insurance. This is presented exclusively from a Latin-Christian perspective, since the research situation in the other areas has so far failed to illustrate this phenomenon clearly.

Each of these contributions follows an internal structure. A five-part system was developed and proposed to the respective authors. This envisaged the individual areas as: (I.) “Definitions and Terminology,” (II.) “Written Sources and Artifacts,” (III.) “Techniques and Manifestations,” (IV.) “Developments, Historical and Social Contexts,” and (V.) “Medieval Classifications and Discussions.” The authors adapted this proposal to the respective circumstances for largely understandable reasons. This is due to the research situation and research tradition: the individual traditions

can access diversely detailed arrangements of the respective topic. This also means that some contributions are shorter than others. Aside from that, of course, not every topic can be optimally represented by the intended internal structure. This applies in particular to the “Mantic Arts.” Cross-references between the individual chapters (represented by: ↗ author, chapter) refer to similar developments or to the fact that individual considerations in the different traditions were of comparable importance. In most cases, source citations are reproduced in English, and transliterations from Arabic and Hebrew were conducted in accordance with the respective standard transliteration systems. Names should be given in a standard form but, given the sheer number of cases, errors should be pardoned. The articles are intended to reflect the current state of research and offer further literature in short references in the text as well as in an attached “bibliography.” Editions of classical works (such as Thomas Aquinas or Cicero) were not included, as these passages are standardized in every edition.

The third section offers a “Repertoire of Written Sources and Artifacts.” This consists of detailed representations of text genres, text corpora, individual works or descriptions of certain objects as concrete manifestations of prognostication. The articles, which are concise in comparison to the chapters of the previous sections, are equipped with a bibliography which is divided into “Primary Sources” and “Secondary Literature.” In this section, the division into the different traditions has largely been abandoned. Therefore, space was created to undertake a closer examination of the special phenomena of individual traditions. Wherever necessary, this is indicated by cross-references both in the chapters of part II and in the repertoire itself. The repertoire benefited particularly from the research environment at the ICRH. Most of the visiting fellows of the past few years contributed a short entry here. On the one hand, this leads to a certain focus due to the competences of the contributors, while, on the other, it is the reason why the Christian West is most present in the repertoire. The handbook concludes with an extensive register of names and places.

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Part I: Introductory Surveys

David Engels and Alex Nice
Divination in Antiquity

Introduction

Divination in Antiquity

As Cicero observed, there was no ancient civilisation which did not practise divination. The Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Iranians, Greeks, Etruscans, and Romans all had their own systems in accordance with their geographical location and expertise. His predecessor, the Greek Stoic philosopher Chrysippus, defined *mantike* or *divinatio* succinctly and precisely:

[It is] the ability to know, to see, and to explain the signs which the gods send as warnings to men. Its duty is to know in advance the will (the *mens*) of the gods towards men and what it indicates, how this may be expiated, and atoned for. (Chrysippus, fr. 1189 = Cicero, *De divinatione*, 2.130, trans. Alex Nice)

Prognostication in the ancient world, therefore, was not simply a desire to know what would happen in the future, although this was, of course, an important concern, but a desire to understand the very will and mood of the gods. The processes of divination included not only the ability to recognise divine signs, but also the ability to interpret them, and, further, to know which ceremonies of propitiation or atonement were necessary, regardless of whether those signs were good or bad. In other words, it did not distinguish elements of prophecy and sacrifice from divination; they were features of it. Even when no express pronouncement about the future was required, these processes were closely connected with the desire to understand the will of the gods.

This understanding of the gods' will was achieved through a variety of divinatory practices. In his *De divinatione*, the only fully extant treatise from Greco-Roman antiquity on the subject of divination, Cicero (speaking through the persona of his brother, Quintus) famously partitioned ancient divination into “artificial” (or “technical”) and “natural” practices:

For there are two kinds of divination, the one involving a technique (*ars*), the other involving nature (*natura*). What nation or what state is there that is not influenced by the prediction of those who examine entrails or interpret prodigies and lightning or of augurs or astrologers or lots (these are the kinds which as a rule involve a technique) or by dreams or prophecies (these are the two classed as natural)? (Cicero, *De divinatione*, 1.11–12; trans. David Wardle)

In the case of the former, divination was very much a human endeavour, dependent on human skill and artifice (*ars*). It relied on the inductive or deductive methods employed by a priest or diviner through their observation and interpretation of sac-

rificial entrails (extispicy and hepatoscopy), omens from birds (augury) or portents, sometimes in their allegorical readings of written prophetic texts. In the case of natural practices, divination was inspired directly by the gods through dreams, oracles, and prophecy. A further distinction could also be made, often with regard to specific types of divination (for example, in Roman augural practice), between those signs which had to be sought and those which occurred spontaneously in the technical language of divination, these were respectively called impetrative signs (*signa impetrativa*) and oblativ signs (*signa oblativa*). Cicero's *De divinatione* provides an understanding of the general scope of prophecy and prognostication, and helps frame some of our discussion. However, the philosophical framework of the dialogue, which sets out the case for and against divination and, in the manner of the New Academy avoids a definitive conclusion, does not cover the full range of divinatory experience available in a variety of public and private contexts. For example, many of the details regarding the exact praxis of divination are lacking even when we are able to provide reconstructions from other sources. References to divination in private are rarely fleshed out in detail and often referred to with intellectual contempt. Cicero's schematic organisation also does not do justice to the interactions of divination with medicine or magic nor does it help the modern reader understand certain types of "fringe" divination such as necromancy (summoning the dead), cleromancy (divination by lot), lecanomancy (divination by the observation of the mixing of oil and water), or libanomancy (divination by smoke). The challenge in this chapter has been to showcase the enormous range of divinatory methods employed in antiquity and how divination was practised in both public and private, while demonstrating the ways in which individual societies had their own particular solutions for discerning the will of the gods.

Scope of the Chapter

This chapter then covers a grand scope, both geographically and historically, from the lands of ancient Mesopotamia and Iran in the East to the provinces of the Roman Empire in the West, from the third millennium BCE to the fourth century CE. The earliest written evidence that the heavens were routinely consulted can be securely dated to the twenty-second century BCE when King Gudea, the ruler of Lagash in Mesopotamia, consulted the gods prior to building a new temple. The variety and significance attached to prophecy and prognostication continued to be a vital concern into the high Empire when rival divinatory systems became a focal point in the contest between paganism and Christianity.

In a broadly synchronic manner, we survey the worlds of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Ancient Iran, Greece, Etruria, and, finally, Rome. Each section, by necessity, is more diachronic and attempts to present practices of prophecy and prognostication in their geographic milieu. Thus, the section on Mesopotamia includes the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian empires, covering a historical period from around 3100 BCE to the

fall of Babylon in 539 BCE. We discuss how the societies of ancient Mesopotamia treated divination as an exact science and how, in empirical fashion, they precisely recorded omens and the outcomes they predicted (for example, the celestial omen series Enūma Anu Enlil or the terrestrial omen series Šumma ālu); or developed a science of hepatoscopy working from, and recording their observations on, clay models of sheep livers.

The history of Ancient Egypt likewise begins in the late-fourth or third millennium BCE but continues well into the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. In contrast to the civilisations of ancient Mesopotamia, we discuss the emphasis placed on oracular consultation, in particular, the role played by the divine skiff. Egyptian divination also placed considerable emphasis on dreams and dreaming, especially in a political context.

The section on ancient Iran views divination from a Median and an Achaemenid perspective, a period lasting roughly from the seventh century BCE to the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great in 330 BCE. The evidence points to an interest in cleromancy (lot divination), prodigies, and types of celestial divination, including astrology.

Our knowledge about divination in Ancient Greece is mainly derived from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, although glimmers of earlier practice can be discerned in works as early as Homer. This section emphasises the transition from practices in the Near East which focused on the person of the individual to those which concerned the whole community. Sacrifice and augury were the pre-eminent forms of divination on a day-to-day basis, although oracles played an important role for major political decisions. This section also discusses the role of divination in private life where we find a range of divinatory practices (omens, dreams, oracles) pertinent to the individual and which impacted the daily lives of the ancient Greeks. A further subsection discusses the place of divination in philosophical works and in Greek historiography. Such works help to shed light on the ways in which the ancients contemplated divination and its influence on their lives, even if only with respect to the intellectual élites.

The section on ancient Rome, for which the evidence is somewhat firmer and richer, has been separated into sections on the Republic (510–531 BCE) and Empire (31 BCE–ca. CE 400). Here we study the importance of public divination at Rome through its major priesthoods (the pontifices, *augures*, and *(quin)decemviri sacris faciundis*) and contrast that with practices in private life. The chapter also traces the development and changes in divination at Rome from Republic to Empire: in particular the ways in which divination, including methods once only the preserve of private citizens, could be used to legitimise imperial rule from Augustus onwards. Subsections on Roman theoretical approaches to divination demonstrate the continuing importance of divination as a subject for philosophical enquiry from Cicero to the neo-Platonists. In contrast to the Greek philosophical sources, these works were often written by those who practised divination both publicly and privately. They, therefore, have a pragmatic concern to justify or deny the importance of divination in the everyday lives of the ancient Romans.

The advantages of such an approach are to privilege divination as a significant cultural phenomenon; to highlight the different ways in which divination developed in these societies; and how those societies employed prophecy and prognostication. However, this is not to underplay the extent to which there were elements of diffusion and dissemination of divination from one society to another. A particular case in point is the spread of astrology (and astronomy). Ancient sources and modern investigations suggest that it moved gradually eastwards from Babylonia, where it was practised by the Chaldaean priesthood, perhaps to Egypt, then Greece, and, finally, to Rome. There the term Chaldaeus could be used of any diviner who practised astrology and, sometimes, of those philosophers who studied astronomy. Transmission of divinatory practice seems apparent in other areas too. The conditional prescriptions in the Mesopotamian texts dependent on protasis (“if x”) and apodosis (“then y”) recur in the Etruscan brontosopic calendar faithfully transcribed by Cicero’s friend and polymath, Nigidius Figulus. Greek and Etruscan sacrificial practices may have been influenced by Mesopotamian hepatoscopy. Clay models of livers from ancient Mesopotamia, literary texts, and a bronze liver from Piacenza inscribed with Etruscan names for the gods and regions of the sky, suggest a direct correlation between Etruria and Mesopotamia. The Etruscans also acknowledged a special relationship with ancient Greece. Greek myth is a recurrent figure in their art. Images of divination include Greek prophetic figures such as Calchas and Orpheus. Roman sources allude to Persian origins for divination by water and fire. Recent scholarship suggests that traces of the Mesopotamian omen series may be present in Roman works on religion and divination, such as Cicero’s *De divinatione*. In one tradition, augury was introduced to Italy and thence to Rome through the activities of the Lydian king, Marsyas. A different, and more likely explanation, was that augury was transmitted to Rome from Etruria. The Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus explicitly refers to the training of the founder of Roman augury, Attus Navius, as taking place in Etruria under the guidance of the *haruspices*. Certain individual rituals such as the establishment of the *pomerium* (the sacred city boundary) or difficult religious questions concerning orientation, water, and unnatural births can also be traced to an Etruscan origin.

In sum, this chapter encourages the reader to consider the ubiquity of prophecy and prognostication in ancient societies, their vital importance for the political, military and economic functioning of the state, and their role in encouraging the hopes and allaying the fears of ordinary citizens.

Ancient Near East

Mesopotamia

The sources for Mesopotamian divination are manifold. They range from references to divinatory practices in historical chronicles, through prophetic texts and lists of *omina*, to comprehensive manuals covering the most diverse techniques for predicting the future. Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia seems to have covered a series of techniques broadly corresponding to those well-known from Classical Antiquity. Thus, the initiative for communication between gods and men could come from the former or the latter; a difference later called oblativ and impetrative divination.

In the case of oblativ divination, the divine message itself could be more or less clearly articulated, for example, through prophecies, dreams or oracular utterances, or be rather symbolic. The last category was clearly the most frequent and diversified case, and covers a variety of different forms such as meteorological or astronomical phenomena, the behaviour of animals (in particular, the flight of birds), teratological incidences, and others. Some of these oracles, such as the Marduk-, Shulgi-, Uruk- or Dynastic Prophecy, also served as tools of political propaganda. They enabled certain political groups to announce (or justify) their own advent in the form of *vaticinia ex eventu*, where past rulers and diviners were credited with having announced current (or ongoing) events and, thus, with lending them the authority of pre-determined divine resolutions.

In the case of impetrative divination, the divination specialists used a certain number of techniques producing more or less guaranteed responses. Thus, one popular technique was cleromancy; others, mostly attested in the early Babylonian period, involved lecanomancy (the observation of the mixing of oil and water), libanomancy (the analysis of smoke), aleuromancy (the scattering of flour), or hydromancy (the observation of ripples on water). In some way, the continued use of the ordeal, the single combat between two rival claimants, as a method for defining juridical responsibility, may also be considered as a specific form of divination. However, the most popular and refined form of impetrative divination was extispicy: the analysis of the inner organs of sacrificial animals, generally, but not exclusively, the lambs' livers. In the lore of the Babylonian seers, all possible shapes, colours, or deformations of an animal's liver (and sometimes also the lung, spleen, and intestines) were assigned a certain positive or negative value. The sum of these observations provided a positive (or negative) answer to the question posed to the relevant divinity (generally *Šamaš* or *Hadad*) at the beginning of the procedure. The result could sometimes be cross-checked by submitting the question to a parallel round of examination or rephrasing the question in a negative way. It was also appropriate to submit the same question to the gods but, simultaneously, to use different, although complementary, divinatory techniques (for example, relating to signs from the earth and from the sky). The div-

inatory manuals even explicitly advised this procedure because it corresponded best to the complex nature of the world itself.

Although there is rich evidence pointing to the existence of private practices, our sources mainly deal with public divination. Thus, each royal court seems to have employed the service of one or multiple divination experts (*bârû*) who enjoyed a high status and counselled the ruler on all important matters and decisions. Initially, the Mesopotamians employed a very broad array of divinatory techniques, then, during the third millennium, they specialised in extispicy, until this was somewhat displaced during the second millennium by the newly ascendant art of astrology. Astrologers were gradually considered as general experts in the lore of tradition and history. They were often simply called “scribes” (*tuššarru*), perhaps because of the close link between the recording of astrological and historical events. Aside from the *bârû* and the *tuššarru*, in neo-Assyrian and neo-Babylonian times, we also find augurs (who generally came from Syria: *dâgil iššûrî*), experts in unsolicited omens (*ašipu*), dream-interpreters (often women: *ša'iltu*), or prophets (*mahhu*).

In Ancient Mesopotamia, divination was considered an exact science, based on observation, verification, and an ever-growing wealth of parallel cases. Thus, the specific characteristics of livers examined during important acts of divination were conserved through the fabrication of clay models and may have had didactic as well as self-legitimising functions. Similarly, lists (*iškaru*) established the correlation between divine signs (*ittu*, under the form: “if x”) and the events to be expected (*pišru*, under the form: “then y”), these events were often separated according to the social status of the questioner (for example, ruler, noble or commoner). They sometimes provided stereotyped answers, sometimes even concrete historical events linked to a previous occurrence of the sign. A typical example from an extispicy-series runs:

If there is a Hole in the centre of the top of the Presence: A high priest will die, fall of a chief temple administrator, he for whom the extispicy is performed will die at the beginning of the year, or his son will die; or, one of his eyes will go blind, for warfare: Defeat of the leader of the army. Eclipse of the evening watch, for the king: Revolt. Or, a weir will collapse during the damming of its canal and take me away. (*Manzāzu*, tablet 6, A 15 D 15; trans. Ulla Koch-Westenholz)

These lists frequently focused on one type of sign, for example, extispicy, astrology, teratology, everyday-life omens, or dreams. They also served as an ever-growing archive of precedents with as many as 10.000 case-studies. Even after their slow canonisation in the second millennium, the resulting corpora were gradually enlarged by commentaries.

In this context, it should be noted that the aim of Mesopotamian divination was not necessarily to discover an immutable, pre-determined future, but rather to ask the gods about their general attitude towards the future. If the gods seemed unfavourable, there was always the possibility to enquire about the reasons of their wrath and/or to try to placate them through rituals of atonement, or, if the problem was linked to the malign involvement of a demon, through exorcism.

During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, alleged or real “Chaldaean”, who were generally associated with astrology, were popular. At Rome, they were considered as so troublesome that they had to be officially expelled from the city in 139 BCE and on several later occasions. However, their connections to the divination practices of ancient Mesopotamia are difficult to establish. This is even more true of the “Chaldaean Oracles”: a series of prophecies and theo-philosophical speculations based on Platonic concepts, written down or compiled by Julian the Theurgist (second century CE), son of Julian the Chaldaean. These “Oracles”, which rejected traditional divination and focused on the soul’s quest for virtue, were of tremendous importance to the evolution of Middle- and Neo-Platonism and were commented upon by Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, and Damascius. Although lost in late Antiquity, the “Chaldaean Oracles” were partly reconstituted through quotations from other sources and edited by Michael Psellus (eleventh century) and Georgius Gemistus Pletho (fifteenth century). Erroneously attributed to Zoroaster, they were long considered as the original source of later Jewish and Greek wisdom literature and continue to remain influential in Theosophy.

Egypt

Divination in Ancient Egypt is essentially associated with the oracles attached to its numerous temples and shrines, most prominently those of Amun at Thebes or Siwa. The most popular form of oracular consultation seems to have been to submit written questions to the divine skiffs which transported the image of the god during the many processions of the Egyptian religious year. The oracle could also be consulted outside of these processions at the temple, although this may have essentially been a royal privilege. The movements of the heavy skiff, uneasily borne by many carriers, were then interpreted as expressing assent or refusal. It was not infrequently that the questioner submitted the same problem to two or even three oracles in order to maximise the chances of receiving a satisfying response. Divination in Egypt then seems to have dealt less with the precise prediction of future events than with the gods’ attitude towards essentially binary decisions. It, therefore, appears that in many cases, ranging from the punishment of rebels to the setting-up of last wills, oracular consultation simply served to acquire the more-or-less formalised consent of the divine to pre-established decisions. Similarly, oracles were also used to legitimise important personnel decisions, for example, Ramses’ II confirmation of the nomination of the High Priest of Amun. The growing importance of temples in the country’s economy from the Middle Kingdom onwards probably explains why the official consultation of oracles with regard to administrative or juridical matters became gradually more frequent. The importance of the temples in decision-making also helps to explain why, in the 21st dynasty, the oracle of Amun in Thebes became the country’s official regent.

In addition to the binary responses of the divine skiff, there were other techniques permitting the gods to express themselves in a more complex way through verbal utterances, mostly in the context of consultations by high-ranking persons. A variety of methods through which the gods were considered to communicate with men were possible, including drug-induced visions, ventriloquism, and speaking tubes, but the exact techniques used are only imperfectly understood. As with the oracular consultations, the questions addressed to the gods generally did not concern a predetermined future, but rather the gods' specific attitude towards a decision already planned, or their help in clarifying past events.

Dreams also played a significant role in the divination of Ancient Egypt. They were thought to contain a message sent by the divinity. They could occur spontaneously but were often sought by sleeping in, or near, a holy place, a process known as "incubation". Their symbolism needed professional interpretation. Therefore, from the Middle Kingdom onwards, the Egyptians compiled dream-books, perhaps influenced by similar Mesopotamian dream-compendia, and as suggested by a dream-book from the Ramesside period of the thirteenth century, these provided precise interpretations of specific situations experienced in the dream, for example:

If a man sees himself in a dream dead – Good. It means a long life. If a man sees himself in a dream, his bed catching fire – Bad. It means driving away his wife. If a man sees himself in a dream drinking warm beer – Bad. It means suffering. If a man sees himself in a dream looking out of a window – Good. It means the gods hear his cries. If a man sees himself falling off a wall – Good. It means the issuing of a favourable edict. If a man sees himself looking after monkeys – Bad. It means change awaits. (P. Chester Beatty III r.; trans. K.M. Szkapowska)

As most of these dream-books were quite limited in their explanatory scope, there must have been professional dream-interpreters from very early times, although our sources concerning these mantic specialists, with the notable exception of Joseph, come only from the Hellenistic period. Dreams were also important to justify political acts which challenged traditional institutional procedures or which were linked to spectacular events. Thus, Thutmosis IV legitimised his accession by a divine dream; the High Priest Herihor justified his usurpation of power through a dream; and Ptolemy III referred to a dream to justify the creation of the cult of Serapis.

The narrative patterns of some of these political dreams, first deploring the current state of affairs, then announcing the restoration of the *maat*, the divine order, were analogous to those of prophetic texts. These texts were a specific literary form known throughout Egyptian history until the Roman age and show a close similarity to the Mesopotamian oracular texts. In them an ancestral authority is generally credited with having disclosed future events to a ruler or another important person. In their details, these narratives, such as the "Prophecy of Snofru", the "Lamb of Bokchoris" or the "Potter's Oracle", belong to the genre of the *vaticinium ex eventu* and pursue obvious political goals. Their structure, however, is generally the same and attests to the high malleability, and popularity, of these texts. Normally, the oracle first "predicts", from

a past perspective, the many evils which characterize the respective “contemporary” period of the oracle’s readership. It then announces the return of a semi-Messianic rightful ruler or restored social order which correspond to the respective political aims (or achievements) of the party for whom the prophetic text in question has been written or adapted, as demonstrated in the following extract from the “Oracle of the Potter”, predicting the demise of the Greeks and their capital Alexandria:

The Girdle-wearers will kill themselves as they also are Typhonians. Then Agathos Daimon will abandon the city that had been founded and enter Memphis, and the city of foreigners, which had been founded, will be deserted. This will happen at the end of the evols (of the time) when there came to Egypt a crowd of foreigners. [...] Then will Egypt flourish when the generous fifty-five year ruler appears, the king descended from Helios, the giver of good things. (P. Rainer 28–41; trans. Stanley M. Burstein)

Apart from oracles, dreams, and prophecies, other forms of divination seem to have played a rather minor role, at least up to the first millennium BCE. Thus, except for occasional mentions of solar and lunar eclipses and very specific *omina* also known from older texts, our knowledge about extra-oracular Egyptian divination comes essentially from the New Kingdom. There, oniromancy and hemerology are regularly attested, while astrology, augury, and wind-divination are sometimes mentioned as secondary forms. Although such practices have not left a major impact on the Pharaonic sources, it seems likely that the most diverse *omina* may have played an important part in popular religion. The landscape of divination may have changed by the first millennium BCE, as Herodotus insists not only on the Egyptians’ interest in hemerology and oracles, but also on their alleged compilation of vast lists of prodigies and their respective significance.

The growing influence of Mesopotamian, Iranian, and then Hellenistic divination, coupled with the gradual loss of the political power of the temples, sparked interest in diverse new forms of predictions, such as the interpretation of *omina* and, most of all, astrology, a discipline previously quite foreign to Ancient Egypt. Astrology soon became very important as indicated by the technical treatises from the Hellenistic period ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus, the fictional Pharaoh Nechepso, or his alleged counsellor, the prophet Petosiris. Throughout the imperial period, there is evidence of astrological calendars and horoscopes in Demotic or Greek; some horoscopes were even represented on tomb-ceilings. Astrology played such an important role in post-Pharaonic Egypt that, by Late Antiquity, the Egyptians were considered as the most skilled practitioners of the art.

Iran

Divination in Ancient Iran is only poorly attested and mostly filtered through ancient Greek sources. The account of Herodotus implies that the *magoi* were the principal

Iranian priestly cast without whom no sacrifice could take place. They were also considered experts in the analysis of dreams and of celestial phenomena, such as solar eclipses. In Sasanian times, the Ancient Iranians were associated with pyromancy. Roman sources also attributed this type of divination to Persian origins. This aspect of their divinatory art is scarcely surprising, given the divine importance of the fire for Zoroastrianism, which makes it quite probable that this form of divination had much older origins. The Greek historian Herodotus provides a lengthy account of a hippomantic ritual to divine the gods' will concerning the appointment of a new ruler. Despite its probable Indo-European roots, the credibility of the ritual is hard to establish. The Islamic scholar Ibn Qutaybah also related that the Persians inscribed the shafts of their arrows. When they chose one of those arrows at random to shoot at the enemy, the word inscribed was regarded as an omen; a specific form of cleromancy which might well go back to pre-Islamic times given the importance of bow and arrow in the Iranian society. Al-Nadīm (tenth century), in his catalogue *Fihrist*, attests the existence of numerous (now lost) Persian books on divination. The Samanide vizier Bal'amī, in his expanded Persian translation of al-Ṭabarī's *History*, quotes from a "book of divination" (*ketāb-e fāl*), which allegedly contained prodigies recorded during the time of Persian supremacy. Finally, the *Šāhnāma* describes an important number of divinatory practices and occurrences in its account of pre-Islamic times (for example, Alexander's death is predicted by the birth of a monstrous child; Khosrow II Parvēz guessed the downfall of his dynasty from the accidental fall of a quince from the top of his throne). Although many of these stories may reflect pre-Islamic traditions, their authenticity is notoriously difficult to ascertain.

Besides these poorly attested forms of divination, there are some hints, such as the "Bundahišn", as to the importance of astrology in Zoroastrianism, mostly through cosmological accounts. Certainly, the celestial bodies played an important theological role from the earliest Persian origins. They were major actors in the eschatological battle between good and evil and were variously assigned and reassigned, at different times, to one or the other camp. However, astrology is absent in the *Avesta*, and its presence as a proper divinatory discipline, seems to have been the result of Hellenistic influences. The Parthians and Sasanians translated Greek astrological texts (often influenced by Mesopotamian concepts) into Persian and adapted them to the different cosmological schools of Zoroastrian lore. In particular, they stressed the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn as responsible for many major political and religious events. During the Sasanian period, there also appeared the *starōšmār*. They were astrological professionals at the Sasanian court who cast the king's horoscope. After this, the cosmological and astrological texts, now mostly lost, were translated into Arabic, and later into Byzantine Greek and Mediaeval Latin. This process means that it is difficult to uncover a specific Zoroastrian concept of astrology.

The sources contain a few references to the alleged prediction of future historical events by semi-mythical foundation figures of Iranian society, for example Hys-

taspes or Zoroaster. The poorly attested “Oracles of Hystaspes” seem to have been a series of apocalyptic prophecies ascribed to Vištāspa, the patron and follower of Zoroaster. Legend identified him with the father of Darius I. There is some debate over the extent to which these prophecies, and the announcement of the coming of a Saviour King, stem from old Zoroastrian traditions or rather from a Hellenistic origin possibly inspired by the similar Egyptian and Mesopotamian oracles and superficially draped in an Iranian style. Similarly, the *Zand-i Wahman yasn* (sometimes erroneously labelled *Bahman-Yašt*) relates a conversation in which Ahura Mazda enables Zoroaster, to predict the future:

As is revealed in the Stūdgār, Zarduxšt sought immortality from Ohrmazd. Then Ohrmazd showed the wisdom of omniscience to Zarduxšt. And therewith he saw the trunk of a tree on which were four branches, one of gold, one of silver, one of steel, and one on <which> iron had been mixed. [...] Ohrmazd said to Spitāmān Zarduxšt, ‘The tree trunk that you have seen, <that is the material world which I, Ohrmazd, have created>. Those four branches are the four epochs that will come.’ (*Zand-i Wahman yasn* 1.1–6; trans. Carlo G. Cereti)

The text then further develops a world history divided into various and often inconsistent sub-sections, generally seven or ten periods. The first three ages represent the time leading up to the “millennium of Zoroaster”; the latter ages are compared to a tree which has a number of branches representing the eras of Iranian history. The similarity between the metals enumerated here and early Greek ideas of a gradual decline of world history and of the succession of Empires seems notable, although it is not at all clear who influenced whom, even more so as the last part of the prophecy appears to have been repeatedly remodelled to make it correspond to the respective present. The last branches led to a period of apocalyptic events and the final battles between good and evil.

Greece

Public Divination

Divination was a major constituent of ancient Greek civilisation and influenced all aspects of its everyday culture, including religion, politics, and economics. Greek divination seems to have shared many points in common with ancient Babylonian divination on the one hand and with Roman divination on the other. There was a bewildering variety of symbols, rituals, texts and experts, and divination existed in both public and private. At both levels, there were numerous techniques of oblativ and impetrative divination which sought to foretell the future or at least to understand the mood of the gods. Many of these techniques were inspired by external influences. The Greeks themselves thought that ornithomancy was Carian, and astrology either

Libyan, Egyptian, or Assyrian. There are also indications that they received extispicy from the Near East.

In contrast to the ancient Near East, however, Greek public divination transitioned from a procedure centred on the powerful individual (and, therefore, intimately linked to monarchic or aristocratic power) to a practice involving the whole community. It was, therefore, compatible with, and integrated into, democratic forms of constitution. However, the main divinatory techniques appear to have remained largely unchanged from the earliest periods of Greek history until the advent of Christianity.

Practically, the most popular forms of impetrative divination were the observation of the flight of birds and, most of all, the analysis of the inner organs of sacrificial animals. Homer had already stressed the importance of ornithomancy (mostly through eagles, falcons, or hawks). The auguries could either be performed by specialised seers or by private individuals on the basis of certain general rules. In Greek augury, the right side was more favourable than the left, and significance was attached to the number of birds, direction of flight, their appearance or actions in a specific context. By the Classical Age, ornithomancy seems to have been displaced by extispicy. In the Greek city, most acts of public life (for example, legislative or juridical procedures, military campaigns) were accompanied by sacrifices. The subsequent examination of the animal entrails, especially the liver, was carried out by relevant specialists, generally named *manteis*, sometimes *hieroskopoi*. In addition to reading the specific characteristics of the organs themselves (form, colour, etc.), the specialist also had to assess the flammability of the sacrificed organs and body parts. Inevitably, the political impact of the seers' prognostications led to numerous opportunities for ambitious politicians (for example, Tisamenus at Sparta or Lampon at Athens) to gain power by situating themselves as the privileged intermediary between the polis and the gods. Although *manteis* continued to be employed by military commanders and kings throughout the Classical and Hellenistic age, their importance in regard to the polis itself started to wane. This is clear at Athens, following the catastrophic failure of the Sicilian expedition, which had been largely approved of by the seers and whose failure was partly caused by the general Nicias' over-credulous belief in divination:

For he was one of those who are excessively terrified at heavenly portents, and was “addicted to divination”, as Thucydides says (7.50.4). And in one of the dialogues of Pasiphon, it is recorded that he sacrificed every day to the gods, and that he kept a diviner at his house, ostensibly for the constant enquiries which he made about public affairs, whereas most of his enquiries were really made about his own private matters, and especially about his silver mines; for he had large interests in the mining district of Laurium, and they were exceedingly profitable, although worked at great risks. (Plutarch, *Nicias*, 4.1–2; trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb)

From this date forward, references to diviners are virtually absent in Thucydides and in public speeches. Diviners only become important again in the Hellenistic period in the context of Philip II of Macedonia and Alexander the Great, who retained diviners, like the Telmessian seer, Aristander, at their court.

Unsolicited divine signs continued to be of great importance to the public institutions of the Greek city states. In contrast to the formulaic practices associated with imperatative divination, their often spectacular occurrences (for example, earthquakes, solar eclipses, or lightning) or highly symbolic nature (for example, in the domain of teratology) represented a continuous reminder that the gods were closely watching human affairs and cared to warn humankind about imminent dangers or the consequences of divine wrath. In all cases a public response was warranted. The progress of science, especially in the domain of astronomy, gradually divested many prodigies of their miraculous appearance. Nevertheless, the association of uncommon natural events with significant public events, in military and political contexts, continued to impress the ordinary citizen and to further belief in divination. However, in ancient Greece, unsolicited divine signs never acquired a political and collective importance comparable to the annual prodigies reported at Rome. They always remained somewhat on the margin, appearing only on special occasions. In stark contrast to Roman endeavours to identify the underlying divine reasons for prodigies and their careful expiation of them, in ancient Greece, prodigies do not appear to have been systematically collected nor met by any other political response than the termination of the intended action.

Another authoritative form of public divination was the consultation of oracles. The Oracle of Delphi, in particular, was regularly consulted throughout the whole of Greek history by the different city-states. It played a vital political role, most notably during the time of the Great Colonisation (seventh to sixth centuries BCE), where it influenced the dispatch of different colonising expeditions. However, as the Oracle's responses often eschewed any external control, it sometimes complicated, rather than simplified, collective political decision-taking, as its answers could be variously interpreted. After the Persian War, Delphi gradually lost its importance in public divination, because it had played an ambiguous role during the conflict and was accused of Medising (supporting the Persians). Although the oracle of Delphi continued to be a centre for private divination and a symbol of Greek religious unity, many cities increasingly consulted oracles situated within their own borders, for example, in Sparta, the chief magistrates (the ephors) often visited the dream oracle of Thalamai. Only in particularly critical times did oracles have renewed symbolic importance. This is seen in the importance of Siwa for Alexander the Great or Didyma for Seleucus:

It is said that while he [i. e. Seleucus] was still serving under Alexander and following him in the war against the Persians he consulted the Didymaeian oracle to inquire about his return to Macedonia and that he received for answer: 'Do not hurry back to Europe; / Asia will be much better for you.' (app., Syr. 12.56; trans. Horace White, Loeb)

But the new political form of the territorial state and the ideology of the new Hellenistic king as a *theios aner* ("a god-like man") shifted the traditional power of those oracles from the temple to the palace.

A further important means of consulting the gods with regard to public affairs was in the use of oracular books. Although the Greeks and the Romans had no tradition comparable to the monotheist scriptures, there were many books circulating in antiquity which contained compilations of oracles from diverse origins and of doubtful authenticity. They were generally held under tight control by the state authorities and could only be consulted on specific occasions. They provided a convenient means for seeking divine advice without the risk of much external interference since they were regarded as the authoritative words of the gods. Thus, the Spartan *ephors* consulted the “skin of Ephimenides”, probably a set of oracular texts inscribed on parchment, while Onomacritus compiled a series of oracles which was kept on the Akropolis for the Peisistratids, so that they could be freer of the influence of the Delphic oracle. These texts always required competent interpretation. Therefore, the city often employed *chresmologoi*, specialists in the compilation and analysis of oracles. They might practise privately or they could be attached to certain holy places. At times of political crisis, they could acquire considerable political influence, as in the case of Diopeithes in Athens. Along with other divination specialists, their influence started to wane from the fourth century onwards.

Private Divination

Private divination practices in ancient Greece are much less well-known than those of public divination, although the situation is marginally better than in Rome. The ritual forms of divination were broadly the same as those practiced in public, but the focus lay, of course, on the individual, not on the state. Therefore, some less conspicuous forms of divination, such as *omina* (chance words, sayings and deeds which could be allegorically interpreted) enjoyed a greater importance.

There was a rich wealth of individual *omina*. Often attested in the biographies of important individuals, there seems little reason to suppose that they were not also relevant to the general population. Almost every chance action or occurrence could seem relevant, from the slip of a tongue or sneezing to an accidental stumble, as long as it could be symbolically related to an ongoing or expected event. A special category of omens were signs later named by the Romans, as *omina imperii* and *omina mortis*. These played an important role in the legitimizing or condemning the power of rulers or politicians, a role which also continued into the Hellenistic age, as exemplified in the numerous *omina* associated with the rule of Alexander or Seleucus. *Omina imperii* generally occurred either at the birth of the concerned individual or prior to his accession to power. They indicated that the individual had the special favour of the gods, but did not necessarily imply that the individual had any special moral qualities. It is, therefore, sometimes difficult to attribute these signs to either positive or negative propaganda, such as the following example pertaining to the career of Pericles and his opponent Thucydides:

A story is told that once on a time the head of a one-horned ram was brought to Pericles from his country-place, and that Lampon the seer, when he saw how the horn grew strong and solid from the middle of the forehead, declared that, whereas there were two powerful parties in the city, that of Thucydides and that of Pericles, the mastery would finally devolve upon one man, – the man to whom this sign had been given. (Plutarch, *Pericles*, 6.2; trans. Bernadotte Perrin)

Conversely, *omina mortis* announced the individual's imminent demise and thus could either be interpreted as a sign of impending apotheosis or, more frequently, divine wrath.

Besides *omina*, another important form of divination in private life was oneiromancy (“dream divination”). Dreams were probably the most popular and widespread form of alleged interaction between the human and the divine. It was practised on an individual basis as well as in ritualized surroundings, for example, at incubation oracles. These were usually linked to the god Asclepius and became very popular in a medical context. There are numerous testimonies as to the context and significance of dreams, enabling the modern scholar to formulate hypotheses regarding the psychoanalytical disposition and psychological concerns of the ancient Greeks. Dreams were considered as a typically human characteristic. They were sent either by Apollo or Prometheus. Although it was generally known that many dreams were linked to an individual's immediate biographical experiences, nonetheless many philosophers held that the diminution of the individual's sensory functions and perceptions enabled the dreamer to better perceive messages sent by the gods. This, therefore, allowed the dreamer to gain insight into future events which it was impossible to acquire in a waking state. There must have been, from a very early period, lists containing the divinatory significance of dreams. Later, these were probably expanded into real compendia. Unfortunately, the only extant book on dream interpretation is Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica*. The work provides precise details on interpreting dreams with different interpretations dependent on the precise social status and biographical context of the dreamer:

But to give you some practice in the concept of similarities, the dream that I have provided shall suffice. A pregnant woman dreamt that she gave birth to a serpent. The child that she brought into the world became an excellent and famous public speaker. For a serpent has a forked tongue, which is also true of a public speaker. The woman was rich, to be sure, and wealth serves to pay the expenses of an education. Another woman had the same dream and her child became a hierophant [a priest]. For the serpent is a sacred animal and plays a part in secret rites. In this case, the woman who had the dream was also a priest's wife. Still yet another woman had the same dream and her child became an excellent prophet. For the serpent is sacred to Apollo who is the most versed in prophecy. This woman was also a prophet's daughter. (Artemidorus, *Oneirokritika* 4.67; trans. Robert J. White)

The level of attention to this kind of detail suggests the potential complexity of the analysis practised by formal specialists in oneiromancy and this work's importance for later dream-literature into the twentieth century cannot be overstated.

The rich Greek oracular tradition already mentioned was not just exploited by states and rulers, but also (and mainly so) by individual citizens. There was a bewildering array of Greek oracles geographically diverse and of greatly differing status. They ranged from the more than sixty official and spectacular sites such as Delphi, Dodona, or Didyma, to the most humble oracular rituals practised at neighbourhood shrines or by single priests. The questions asked by individuals were equally diverse. They could concern events such as travel, illness, marriage, infertility, legal problems, and so on. The techniques used were also varied. At some shrines, the medium produced prophetic utterances, sometimes with the help of hallucinogen substances, or inspired by the respective divinity (such as the Delphic Pythia), occasionally through the intermediation of a priest. At others, the priests analysed the sacrificial fire (as in the case of empyromancy at the Altar of Zeus in Olympia), drew lots (for example, the casting of light and dark beans at Delphi), or, the increasingly popular practice in imperial times, of oracles based on the casting of lots with symbolic or alphabetical signs.

A final, though much less important category of divination specialists relevant to private divination were the *prophetes* (“prophets”). The technical differences between the prophets and the *manteis* are sometimes difficult to ascertain. One key difference lies in the fact that the seers generally employed impetrative techniques, whereas the prophets were associated with spontaneous divination. They were also generally attached to an oracle where they demonstrated their talent by uttering words allegedly inspired directly by the gods.

The specialists mandated with providing a professional framework for divinatory practices in the private sphere were essentially the same as those within the context of public divination, as the Greeks, in contrast to the Romans, scarcely employed priesthoods which dealt only with political questions. Thus, prophets, seers, or cleromantic specialists constituted a rich and complex pattern of specialists. They were often ridiculed in contemporary literature, but nonetheless remained active and popular until Late Antiquity. The consultation of these specialists required payment for their services, which attracted additional criticism from philosophers and orators who thought their mercenary activities were unbecoming in the context of true divination. Unfortunately, the organisation of the various divinatory experts is largely unknown to us. However, the most prestigious groups of diviners may have been united by a hereditary aspect, as we know that the *manteis* of the archaic age often belonged to the aristocracy and later on constituted real family clans such as the *Melampidoi*, the *Clytiadai*, the *Telliadai*, or the *Iamidai*.

Theories on Divination

In contrast to the ancient Near East which has left little information regarding theoretical, synthetical, and critical approaches to divination, there is a wealth of information from the Greek world regarding theological, philosophical, and analytical understandings of divination. These theoretical interests are perhaps rooted in the fact that Greek divination, as opposed to divination in the Near East as well as Etruria and Rome, was often based on much more determinist conceptions of the future. This, therefore, prompted an early debate regarding divination, fate, and human free will.

Already Homer had talked about the implicit competition between seers and poets. His work suggested that there were limits to the credibility of both, even more so as the Homeric gods did not refrain from fooling humans by sending them biased dream messages or by breaking promises. Nevertheless, the period from the “Dark Ages” up to the Classical period must have represented somewhat of a high point of Greek divination, until the rise of philosophy in the sixth to fifth century led to a thorough questioning of divination and the place of seers in Greek society. From the very beginning of the written record, there was a conflict between utter rejection of traditional divination techniques on the one hand and conservative acceptance or philosophical sublimation on the other. A legitimate question that might be asked is which approach was, ultimately, more detrimental to divination itself? The philosopher Xenophanes fully rejected any mantic belief; other writers complained about the obviously ambiguous and unhelpful responses of many oracular utterances; while the Pythagoreans, on the contrary, had a positive attitude towards divination and were probably among the first to differentiate between natural and artificial divination. Similarly, while the sophists were very sceptical about tradition and divination, Socrates and his pupils adopted a more positive attitude. He himself not only consulted the Delphic Oracle but also, through the belief in his own daimonion, furthered confidence in the possibility of inspired communication between man and divinity:

You do know what sort of man Chaerephon was, how vehement he was in whatever he would set out to do. And in particular he once even went to Delphi and dared to consult the oracle about this – now as I say, do not make disturbances, men – and he asked whether there was anyone wiser than I. The Pythia replied that no one was wiser. And concerning these things his brother here will be a witness for you, since he himself has met his end. (Plato, *Apologia* 21a; trans. Thomas G. West)

Therefore, Plato and the early Academy, although they criticised many seers as sham and were opposed to artificial divination, considered spontaneous divination as one of the most beautiful arts. They focused on the idea of mantic inspiration, during which the thinking faculties of the individual were supplanted by the divine. This was regarded as a symmetrical reversal of man’s philosophical endeavour to send his spirit heavenwards towards the sphere of the divine in order to comprehend the true nature of his ideas:

There is also a madness which is a divine gift, and the source of the chiefest blessings granted to men. For prophecy is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona when out of their senses have conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and private life, but when in their senses few or none, [...] and in proportion prophecy is more perfect and august than augury, both in name and fact, in the same proportion, as the ancients testify, is madness superior to a sane mind, for the one is only of human, but the other of divine origin. (Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a–d; trans. Benjamin Jowett)

Aristotle and his school agreed, in the main, that the soul could communicate with the transcendent world, but focused mainly on the phenomenon of sleep. According to Aristotle, dreams were not the results of immediate divine intervention; he argued rather that the soul of man, delivered from the sorrows of the body, could autonomously fully commune with the divinity. This is also why the Peripatetics largely rejected artificial divination, albeit with some significant exceptions, such as Kratippos. Even Democritus and the atomists refrained from fully repudiating divination, despite believing that even the gods were only composed of atoms. They thought the gods were able to share their thoughts with men by sending them (material) images perceived during sleep. Like the Academy and the Peripatetics, the atomists rejected artificial divination. However, they believed that extispicy might work, not because of divine interaction, but simply because extispicy mirrored earthly conditions, for example the quality of the climate or the health of the sacrificial animal. This allowed them to make a number of scientific predictions relevant to these topics.

Evidence for theories about divination in Hellenistic philosophy is very fragmentary and indirect. Most of the information is distilled through much later sources: in particular Cicero's *De divinatione* and *De natura deorum*, which both drew heavily on Hellenistic literature, but also imperial compilations such as Diogenes Laertius' biographies of the philosophers. The main philosophical antagonists of this period, Stoicism and Epicureanism, also contradicted each other in relation to divination. Stoicism intimately linked the existence of the gods with the existence of divination; Epicureanism however denied any divine determinism and accepted only natural law. Thus, the Stoa, in its endeavour to consider the traditional order as divinely pre-established, also tried to legitimise popular beliefs regarding divination, although there were some significant exceptions to this tendency, notably Panaetius who adopted a rather sceptical attitude. In general however, the Stoics held the ideal sage to be, at the same time, a real mantis. His insight into the intrinsically Good was always rewarded by insight into the future. This explains why, in ancient times, royal power, and prophetic talent went hand in hand; a telling re-interpretation of Plato's philosopher kings. Epicurus, however, thought that the gods, being themselves purely material, were not involved in the creation of the world and had no reason whatsoever to interact with human beings. He believed that there was no common ground for any form of communication, and that all techniques of divination were, therefore, erroneous, a sham, or simply grounded on a misunderstanding of natural laws. Finally, the advocate of the Hellenistic "Middle Academy", Arcesilas, in line with his sceptical atti-

tude regarding the possibility of truth, adopted an attitude towards divination which outlined the arguments in favour and against its existence, an approach taken over by Carneades, the founder of the “New Academy”.

It seems relevant to mention the important role divination played in Greek historiography. In his *Histories*, Herodotus included a wealth of information regarding the most diverse forms of divination – Greek and foreign. It seems obvious, given the important conceptual place of oracles and dreams in his work, that divination had a vital role in human affairs. Thus, while human hubris is at the origin of conflicts such as the Persian Wars, the real trigger of the confrontation often consists in ambiguous divine messages, meant to fool those who err in order to hasten their fall. Thucydides criticised excessive belief in divination and explicitly focused on pragmatic and psychological aspects, while leaving out the “wonderful”. However, even he occasionally mentions divine signs, such as the list of prodigies at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. This demonstrates his interest in the importance of divination at times of extraordinary collective tension. Although the importance of public divination decreased during the fourth century, individual authors, such as Xenophon, continued to express their belief in the possibility of communication between humans and the divine. This belief came to full prominence in the Hellenistic period, when the popularity of the new literary genre of the biography and of the figure of Alexander the Great kindled once again the belief in the manifestation of the divine will through human agency. In particular, the biographies of the diverse Hellenistic rulers and politicians assigned an important place to prodigies, omens and oracles. Here too, of course, the philosophical debate on the reliability of divination led individual historians, such as Polybius, largely to exclude divination from their narratives. Nevertheless, following the general artistic orientation of the Hellenistic age, miraculous events seem to have occupied considerable parts of the historical narratives, although it is unclear how far these descriptions matched aesthetic requirements rather than actual religious experience.

Etruria

Traditionally, Etruria had a religion revealed through prophecy. The so-called *disciplina Etrusca* (“the Etruscan discipline”) was taught to the twelve peoples of Etruria by the small boy Tages who appeared fully-formed from a ploughman’s furrow. The words were written down and preserved in the *libri Tagetici* and the *libri Acheruntici*. Another myth related the transmission of books relevant to lightning lore by the nymph Begoe (Vegoia) (the so-called *libri Vegoici*). The Etruscan texts no longer survive and what we know about the *disciplina Etrusca* must be largely reconstructed from later, mainly Roman, sources.

The responsibility for divination lay in the hands of the *haruspices* (netsvis). At times the terminology *ars haruspicina* seems synonymous with the entirety of the

Etruscan discipline. The *haruspices* were a body of sixty priests drawn from the sons of Etruscan nobility, possibly representing each of the twelve cities of Etruria. Their lore may have been passed down from father to son: there is good evidence for “dynasties” of *haruspices* and families with inter-generational haruspical expertise. But there are other indications that there was a formalised system of education and a period of apprenticeship in the *ars haruspicina* for the sons of Etruscan *principes*.

The *haruspices* were experts in extispicy or entrail inspection. Of particular importance was the liver, although the heart, gall bladder, and lungs could also be observed. In this respect, the significance of the act is attested by its portrayal on Etruscan artefacts, sometimes in prognostic contexts. The discovery of a full-size bronze liver from Piacenza divided into forty-two sections, named with Etruscan and Italic gods, organised according to their heavenly and, perhaps, chthonic functions, indicates that *haruspices* had didactic models to inform their interpretations. Its similarity to clay models from Mesopotamia may indicate that the Etruscans had been influenced by their near-Eastern counterparts. Roman sources attest to a tendency for the *haruspices* to make predictions from their sacrificial observations, based on the favourable or unfavourable appearance of the entrails. The bronze liver model suggests that for the Etruscans extispicy was a complex process with multiple potential outcomes and interpretations.

The Etruscans were also specialists in fulgural (thunder and lightning) lore. They believed there were nine gods who threw thunderbolts and three types of lightning sent by Jupiter. If the brontosopic calendar preserved by John the Lydian from an original translation by the Roman polymath, Nigidius Figulus, is a genuine Etruscan document, then it gives some indication of methodology. It is written in a form reminiscent of Mesopotamian omen lists “if it thunders, then y”. The responses reflect a variety of agricultural, social, and political concerns, some of which are mirrored in the haruspical responses to sacrifice. Lightning bolts, on the other hand, seem to have been subject to wider variations in interpretation. They could be advisory, confirmatory, or monitory, with a further hierarchy within this trifecta, whereby the prognostication could be perpetual, limited, or deferred. Furthermore, the *haruspices*’ response was subject to restrictions according to whether they made their prediction on behalf of the state or in a private capacity.

The Etruscan *haruspices* also had a special responsibility for the interpretation of prodigies. At Rome they played an important role in confirming the responses of the Sibylline Books or when a particularly dire prodigy required their intervention. For example:

On a stormy night, while the city was taut with suspense because of the impending war, a bolt of lightning struck and destroyed the columna rostrata;* it had been set up on the Capitoline during the First Punic War to commemorate the victory of the consul Marcus Aemilius (the one whose colleague was Servius Fulvius). This event was regarded as a portent and reported to the Senate. The senators ordered the matter to be referred to the *haruspices* and also directed the decemvirs to consult the sacred books. The decemvirs proclaimed that the city had to undergo a ceremo-

nial cleansing, that a supplication and public appeal to the gods were necessary, and that there should be a sacrifice with full-grown victims both at Rome on the Capitoline and in Campania on the promontory of Minerva; in addition, there should be a ten-day festival for Jupiter Optimus Maximus as soon as possible. All these procedures were carefully carried out. The *haruspices* answered that the divine sign would turn out to be for the good and that it portended territorial expansion and the death of enemies since the ships' prows knocked over by the storm had been enemy spoils. Other events combined to heighten the atmosphere of superstition: it had been announced that at Saturnia it had rained blood in the town centre for three days in a row; at Calatia a donkey was born with three legs, and a bull and five cows had been killed by a single stroke of lightning; at Auximum it had rained earth. In response to these prodigies too, divine rites were performed, there was a one-day supplication, and a holiday was observed. (Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 42.20.1–6: 172 BC; trans. Jane D. Chaplin)

The *haruspices* were particularly implicated in cases where people or objects were struck by lightning, peculiar behaviour by cows or oxen, talking infants, monstrous human births, including hermaphrodites, violent storms, earthly flames and underground rumblings, and swarms of bees. In respect of these *prodigia*, the *haruspices* had characteristic patterns of expiation. For example, the disposal of prodigies by drowning or deportation, and burning. They also interpreted what prodigies portended in both a favourable and unfavourable sense. Their responses were typically concerned with military success or civil discord, death, and bloodshed.

Haruspical interpretation also demonstrates a concern with position or orientation. This may be relevant to their augural expertise which, amongst other things, involved rituals to establish the boundary of a city. For example, Plutarch records how Romulus set about building his new city:

He summoned men from Etruria who were used to giving detailed instructions according to certain sacred laws and formulae, and to act, so to speak, as the agents of holy ritual. A circular pit was dug [...]. In it were deposited offerings of all the things whose use is thought proper according to human custom, or is rendered necessary by nature. [...] They called this pit the *mundus*, the same word that they used for the heavens. Then they marked out the city around it, marking out the circle from the point of a compass. And the founder put a bronze blade on his plough, yoked up a bull and a cow, and himself drove them on, drawing a deep furrow around the boundaries, while his followers had the task of pushing back inside the city all the clods of earth the plough turned up and not letting a single one lie outside. It was with this line that they marked out the course of the wall, and it was called the *pomerium*. (Plutarch, *Romulus* 11.1–4; trans. Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price)

Etruscan bird lore observed unusual signs from diverse birds: crows, ravens, eagles, and owls. Practical evidence is supplied by the famous painting of the historical figure Vel Saties reading a bird omen, or the depiction of augurs in the “Tomba degli Auguri” in Tarquinii, each one holding a *lituus*, a symbol of augural authority, used to mark out regions on earth and in the sky. The attention to detail in other tomb paintings to the number, colour, size, and action of birds may further reflect this Etruscan interest in augury.

Other elements of Etruscan divination can be inferred from archaeological material. The evidence from the linen wrappings surrounding the Zagreb mummy and the Capua tile indicate that religious life was built around yearly calendars which designated the sacrifices, offerings, and prayers to be offered to specific deities on specific dates. Evidence from mirrors and other items suggests too that the Etruscans practised *lekanomanteia* (divination from bowls of water) or *catoptromanteia* (divination with mirrors). Moreover, they illustrate not only that Etruria might have inherited divinatory techniques from Mesopotamia, but that it could be a conduit for Greek and Italic divination. For example, this is amply expressed in the depiction of the legendary Greek seer Calchas reading the entrails or of the disembodied prophesying head of Orpheus floating down the River Hebrus. Alternatively another mirror depicts the Italic figure Cacu (Cacus), who appears less positively in the myths surround Herakles, playing the lyre and prophesying, about to be ensnared by the figures Avle Vipinas and Caille Vipinas (the Vibenna brothers from Vulci).

Although its exact nature is shrouded in the cross-cultural elements common to both Greek and Roman divination, the evidence which survives from Etruria then suggests a highly complex and developed system of divination. Nonetheless, it is possible to posit from the Piacenza liver or the detailed analysis of Etruscan fulgural lore that they had a particularly analytical approach to divination. Presumably only those trained as *haruspices* had access to their sacred texts. Those texts provided apparently precise and communication with the gods, but, like other sacred texts, they required expert exegesis by those specially trained as priests. However, this “bookishness” was complemented by a less restrained prophetic tradition which could be traced to the very origins of Etruscan religion. The combination explains why the Etruscan *haruspices* were freer than their Roman counterparts in offering allegorical and inferential interpretations of supernatural phenomena. It also helps to explain why the Roman state saw fit to utilise the *haruspices* at times of religious crisis and why, from the second to first centuries BCE, *haruspices* become more conspicuous as personal advisors to ambitious magistrates.

Republican Rome

Public Divination

In one succinct paragraph Valerius Maximus, writing in the reign of Tiberius, summed up Roman religion and divination:

Our ancestors wanted fixed and sacred ceremonies to be regulated by the knowledge of the pontiffs, authorizations for the successful conduct of affairs by the observations of the augurs, the prophecies of Apollo by the books of the seers, and the averting of omens by the Etruscan dis-

cipline. Also by ancient practice, attention is paid to the divine: through prayer when anything requires entrusting to the gods; through a vow when a favour is to be requested; through a ceremony of thanksgiving when a vow is to be paid; through receipt of a favourable omen when is necessary to consult either entrails or oracles; through sacrifice by which also the warnings of prodigies and lightning strikes are averted when a customary rite is to be performed. (Valerius Maximus, *Facta* 1.1.1; cf. Cicero, *De haruspicum responso* 9.18; trans. David Wardle)

Essential to an understanding of Roman religion, and consequently Roman divination, in the public sphere was the reciprocal concept of *do ut des* (“I give so that you may give”). In other words, mortals made sacrifices, vows, prayers, and offerings to the gods in order that the gods would grant their favour to the Roman state and populace. A feature of that reciprocal arrangement was the notion of the *pax deorum*. The “peace of the gods” however was not a fixed concept. It had to be actively sought with due care and attention to the appropriate rituals. This notion was of particular concern at times of political, military, and religious crisis. Such crises could be taken as indications of the *ira deorum* which, like efforts to obtain the favour of the gods, had to be assuaged through appropriate religious measures, including sacrifices and other ceremonies. In such situations, Roman divination was often not concerned with a more precise understanding of future events but rather to understand the will or intent of the gods and to ensure that the gods would become, or remain, well-disposed to a particular political, military or religious undertaking. This mediation between the human and the divine realm was achieved through Rome’s priests and her magistrates.

Four priesthoods had overall responsibility for divinatory matters, in addition to a variety of other religious concerns: the *pontifices* (pontiffs), public *augures* (augurs), the *decemviri sacris faciundis* (the Board of Ten, later Fifteen, in charge of the Sibylline Books), and the Etruscan *haruspices*. Membership of these bodies was restricted to the upper echelons of Roman and Etruscan society. In the case of the Roman priesthoods, members were chosen for life by their peers, and many were also serving senators. But in terms of the actual praxis of Roman divination, the responsibility for conducting sacrifices or taking the auspices often fell to those officials elected under their own auspices: the consuls, praetors, and censors. Furthermore, although it took advice from its public priests through a process of consultation and debate, the Senate was frequently the final authority on divine matters. Individual senators (and priests) could also play an important role in recognizing when a ritual flaw or other portentous sign had provoked the *ira deorum*, and reporting that to the Senate or appropriate college of priests. Religious and divinatory concerns were, therefore, never dissociated from the politico-military concerns of the Roman state and its individual magistrates.

The pontiffs, headed by the pontifex maximus, were entrusted with oversight of the *sacra publica et privata* (public and private sacred rituals), the maintenance of ancestral rites and ceremonies, and the adoption of new or foreign practices. They were responsible for ensuring that the populace did not become corrupted either

through a neglect of religion or through depraved religious practices. They were also to teach which prodigies (including lightning bolts) were to be recognised and expiated. Implicitly, this oversight also gave the pontifices power over the divinatory mechanisms necessary to maintain or to secure the *pax deorum*. In particular, from 304 BCE onwards, the pontiffs maintained control over the publication of a formal yearly calendar which prescribed those days most suited for religious activities, when they were disallowed, and other rites and festivals intended to maintain the goodwill of the gods.

The *auspicia* were the special concern of the public augurs who were both the conduits and interpreters of the will of Jupiter, the god of the auspices. Like the pontifices, the augurs maintained their augural lore in sacred books only available to those who were members of the priesthood. This lore primarily related to the observation of the flight and call of birds, which were categorised hierarchically. The eagle was most important but others, in particular vultures and crows, were considered important indicators of the divine will. Other signs also fell to the interpretation of the augurs including thunder and lightning (*ex caelo*), the *tripudium solistimum*, a special type of augury involving sacred chickens, those concerning certain land animals (*ex quadrupedibus*), and other overtly ominous events (*ex diris*). It was often not the augurs who carried out the observations but those state magistrates who held *imperium* (military authority): the consuls, praetors, and censors. Potentially a magistrate might also be an augur or an augur might be present as an advisor, but the augural college acted, much as the pontifices, as a consultative body who could make a pronouncement on the legality of the religious issue at hand.

Augural signs could either be *impetrativa* (“sought”) or *oblative* (“unsought”). Typical of the former were those ceremonies concerned with the inauguration of people, places, and institutions. The fullest and most informative account of what this ritual consisted comes in Livy’s anachronistic tale of King Numa’s inauguration:

After Numa was summoned he [...] was then escorted to the citadel by an augur [...]. Numa was seated on a stone, facing the south, while the augur sat to his left, his head covered and holding in his right hand a curved staff with knots which they called a *lituus*. Then, looking out over the city and the countryside, he prayed to the gods and marked out an area in the sky from east to west, designating the areas to the south “the right”, those to the north “the left”. He fixed in his mind a landmark opposite him far off on the horizon; then, shifting the staff to his left hand and placing his right hand on Numa’s head, he prayed as follows: ‘Father Jupiter, if it is heaven’s will that Numa Pompilius whose head I am now touching be king at Rome, I ask you to grant it by sending us favourable and clear signs within those boundaries that I have fixed.’ He then enumerated the auspices that he wished to be sent. And sent they were: Numa was declared King and descended from the sacred area of augury. (Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 1.18; trans. T. James Luce)

Properly regarded as *auguria*, the presiding augur or magistrate took up a position in a small sacred enclosure called an *auguraculum* (at Rome, situated on the Capitoline Hill on the very *arx*, close to the Temple of Jupiter). From there he would mark out

another, imaginary, *templum* in the sky specifying a line from east to west and one north to south with his *lituus* (a special, curved staff of office). With his hand placed on the object of inauguration he would wait for Jupiter to send an indication of his approval or disapproval. The value of the subsequent sign would depend on the quadrant in which the sign occurred.

The augural concern for orientation and the demarcation of sacred space also delimited the boundaries between peace and war. The *pomerium*, a sacred ditch which ran around the city, separated the city auspices (*auspicia urbana*) from the military auspices. Within the city the auspices were always taken by the presiding magistrate prior to the commencement of public business such as senatorial meetings or public assemblies (*comitia*). An unfavourable sign from Jupiter before those meetings or a ritual fault (a *vitium*), during the course of a *comitium* (for example, if lightning or some other prodigy occurred) would delay or annul the proceedings for one day. Where a political issue was particularly contentious this had the benefit of allowing passions to cool or creating space for considered reflection. However, in the later Republic, rival politicians increasingly made use of *obnuntiatio* (an announcement of adverse *auspicia*) to hamper the legislative ambitions of their opponents, as in the case of Bibulus' infamous observation of the skies in 59 BCE to prevent the legislative programme proposed by his consular colleague, Julius Caesar:

So Caesar was chosen consul with Bibulus [...]. He brought forward an agrarian law and when Bibulus announced an *obnuntiatio*, Caesar drove him from the forum by force [...] Caesar's conduct drove Bibulus to such a point of desperation that, until he departed office, hidden away at home, he did nothing else other than announce an obstruction of the auspices through edicts. (Sueton, *Vita divi Iuli* 19–20; trans. John C. Rolfe)

Such was Caesar's control over the Senate, however, that Bibulus' actions had minimal effect.

On campaign, the general was accompanied by a *pullarius* (a chicken keeper) and several sacred chickens retained in cages. Prior to a battle he would call on an auspical expert who would instruct the *pullarius* to tell him when the chickens began to eat. When some of the spelt fell from the chicken's beaks on to the ground, the *pullarius* would announce that there was now a *tripudium solistimum* and the gods had granted their assent to the engagement. It was widely considered that failure to observe the *tripudium solistimum* would lead to military defeat and disaster as in the case of P. Claudius Pulcher who, in 249 BCE, lost the Battle of Drepanum or C. Flaminius who was disastrously defeated at Cannae in 217 BCE.

The *decemviri sacris faciundis* and Etruscan *haruspices* were most clearly implicated in the interpretation of *prodigia*, although the pontifices, the Delphic Oracle, and even the augurs could sometimes be called upon to give their opinion. Such *prodigia* were a staple element of state sanctioned divination. Any event which appeared to defy nature and challenged human reason might be considered a sign from heaven: lunar and solar eclipses, two or three suns appearing in the sky, lightning strikes, St.

Elmo's fire, mysterious rumblings in the earth, rains of stones, meat, or blood, talking cows, two-headed sheep, five-footed horses, moving statues, interrupted sacrifices, hermaphrodites, Siamese twins, famines, plagues, and floods, occasional dreams and so on. By the third century BCE, *prodigia* appear to have become the clearest indication that something was amiss in human-divine relations. Their clustering at times of intense political and military stress (for example, during the Second Punic War) reflects too the religious and psychological concerns of the Roman populace during these periods.

Such *prodigia* were reported to the Senate, who had the responsibility for deciding whether they were *prodigia publica* and pertained to the state. These were then referred to the appropriate priestly body or bodies for interpretation. The *decemviri* consulted the *libri Sibyllini* ("the Sibylline Books"), until 12 BCE, housed in the Temple of Jupiter; the *haruspices* resorted to the lore found in their *libri fulgurales* and *libri rituales*. Normally these bodies recommended only those rituals necessary to appease the gods, for example, a *lectisternium* (a ceremony honouring the gods with wax images), a *suovetaurilia* (a sacrifice of a sow, sheep, and bull), or a *ver sacrum* (a sacrifice of new born animals). The priests reported their findings to the Senate for approval who instructed the consuls to oversee the various expiatory ceremonies prior to their departure for their military commands. The fact that consuls were not permitted to leave for their provinces until they had concluded their presidency of the Latin Festival and these expiation ceremonies, underscores the importance of the rituals as a divinatory mechanism intended to secure and to ensure divine favour.

At all points of this process regarding *prodigia* there was an element of negotiation. This can be seen in the Senate's willingness to refer the *prodigia* to more than one priestly body, sometimes, for example, summoning *haruspices* from Etruria to provide further exegesis; or referring the expiation ceremonies to the pontifices for their approval. On two historical occasions, the Roman Senate sent envoys to Delphi which recommended the importation of the foreign gods, Aesculapius and Cybele. The *responsa* themselves could be a question for debate. This is explicit in Cicero's speech *De haruspicum responsis* which argued that the expiation ceremonies required by the *haruspices* in response to a strange rumbling in the Ager Latiniensis applied not to his own house as his enemy Clodius had alleged, but to a series of events in which Clodius was implicated. Hints of similar debates emerge in 143 and 140 BCE when the Sibylline Books attempted to block the construction of a water course to the Capitol but were overcome by the *gratia* ("influence") of the pro-praetor, Q. Marcius Rex who was responsible for the project; or when C. Gracchus proposed colony at Junonia was prevented after wolves were supposed to have disturbed the boundary markers. The deliberative process around religion was also a political process which sought to come to an informed consensus regarding the ambition of individual senators.

In the Roman world great importance was attached to sacrifice to secure the *pax deorum* for a future venture or to atone for prior improprieties. Like other ritual practices associated with divination, there was "a complex diffusion of roles" among indi-

viduals of different status and rank. The magistrate was assisted by experts in sacrifice (*victimarii, popae*) and officials, like their Etruscan counterparts, called *haruspices*, with responsibility for reading the entrails. While the Etruscan *haruspices* assisted at some state sacrifices, there appears to have been another, less esteemed, lower class group of *haruspices* who performed similar duties of interpretation. A fault in sacrifice (for example, the missing lobe of a liver or diseased internal organs) was considered a *prodigium*. In Roman ritual, especially prior to battle, the sacrificant continued to make further sacrifices until there were no evident *vitia* and the *pax deorum* could be assured, a process known as *litatio*. Failure to reach the point of *perlitatio* (when the gods had finally accepted the sacrifices) was disastrous and, like the taking of the auspices, would temporarily delay action.

None of this, however, is to deny an element of prophecy in Roman ritual. There are occasional glimpses of a richer vein of divinatory experience. For example, in 213 BCE, the Roman populace, gripped by an outpouring of superstitious fervor, began to neglect their ancestral gods, and turned instead to foreign rites and practices. A senatorial order demanded that anyone holding books of prophecies, prayers, or sacrifice should submit them to the urban praetor. During the course of the investigation, oracles by a certain prophet named Marcius came to light. These seemed to have predicted the disaster at Cannae and offered recommendations to drive Hannibal out of Italy. Those prophecies were subsequently included in the Sibylline collection and led to the establishment of the *ludi Apollinares*. Later oracles suggest that the historical sources have perhaps painted a particularly sterile picture of the Sibylline Oracle. For example, a reading of one oracle in 87 BCE allowed the consul Octavius to expel Cinna and six *tribuni plebis* to guarantee “peace, tranquility and security” for Rome; in 63 BCE, P. Cornelius Lentulus, the Catilinarian conspirator, had laid claim to a Sibylline oracle predicting power in Rome for three Cornelii; in 56 BCE the Books tactfully thwarted Pompey’s attempt to restore Ptolemy Auletes. They encouraged a warm reception but predicted danger to the state should the Egyptian King be assisted with a multitude.; and in 44 BCE, the *quindecimviri* were alleged to have found a verse in the Sibylline Books which said that only a king could defeat the Parthians. In other instances, we know of Etruscan texts (the Vegoia text; that of an unknown *haruspex*) being incorporated into the collection and Cicero relates that the Senate listened to the prophecies of Publicius and Culleolus, or that they reacted to a dream of Cornelia to rebuild the Temple of Juno Sospita. It may simply be the case that for the Roman Senate the process of procuration was far more important than any positive or negative pronouncement on future events conveyed by an oracle and, that the prophecy was not normally divulged publicly.

Where the pontifices seem to have provided a mechanism for internal oversight, the Etruscan *haruspices* provided independent and external expert analysis. This procedure of consulting foreign diviners has little parallel in other ancient societies. The Etruscan *haruspices* permitted the Romans access to their specialist skills in certain types of prodigy, for example, those concerning thunder and lighting, orientation,

hermaphrodite births, and sacrifice. In contrast to the inductive processes associated with Roman divination, prediction always seems to have been a feature of haruspical interpretation.

From the second century BCE, those prescriptive responses begin to give way to more overtly prophetic indications of the future both on the part of the Sibylline Books and the *haruspices*. For example, when Cn. Manlius was about to attempt a crossing of the Taurus mountains, he was advised not to test the disaster predicted by the Sibylline Books, or in 152 BCE after a statue before the temple of Jupiter was blown over, the *haruspices* predicted the death of magistrates and priests; in 130 BCE they thought the crying statue of Apollo indicated the end of Greece. Increasingly too *prodigia* were related to specific individuals. For example, in 132 BCE a series of prodigies predicted the death of Tiberius Gracchus, in the 40s BCE such *prodigia* also foretold the ends of Pompey, Caesar, and Cicero.

Private Divination

It was once thought that diviners played a very small role in the private lives of Republican Romans and, if they did, only the lower classes were interested in such banal activities. The surviving evidence both literary and archaeological paints a much more vibrant and complex picture.

In the second century BCE, Cato the Elder famously forbade his *vilicus* (“farm manager”) from consulting *haruspices*, *augures*, *harioli* and *Chaldaei*, not because they were inaccessible to him or that consultation of such diviners was inappropriate but rather that they gave the *vilicus* access to the type of power of which only his master could make correct and proper use. Other authors give similar rosters of diviners: Plautus’ over-enthusiastic wife wanted money from her husband to give to the *praecantrices*, *coniectrices*, *hariolae* and *haruspicae*. The collocation of *harioli* and *haruspices* recurs in Terence. Quintus Cicero did not recognise *sortilegi*, *harioli* or *psychomanteis* (necromancers) but saved his harshest criticism for the openly mercenary Marsian augurs, village *haruspices*, circus astrologers, *coniectores* of the goddess Isis, and the *interpretes somniorum*. Later Juvenal would complain about the Jewish dream interpreters, Armenian and Commagenian *haruspices*, and the Chaldaeans. Although Etruscan *haruspices* could give private readings (Seneca the Elder drew a distinction between their public and private pronouncements), Roman augurs did not. The *haruspices* and *augures* mentioned in these sources may have mimicked their officially sanctioned counterparts but they lacked the same status. The village and foreign *haruspices* consulted inferior victims (frogs, doves, puppies), the terms “Pisidian” and “Soran” (towns in Italy) were used to ridicule Appius’ Claudius’ belief in the predictive power of augury. In addition to being well known for their augural expertise the *Marsi* had a reputation for snake charming and other dubious practices associated with magic. Such diviners provided the populace with additional outlets for their varied

religious beliefs. The *harioli* uttered prophecies in an inspired frenzy, the *coniectores* interpreted dreams, and the Chaldaeans (or *mathematici*) gave predictions based on horary astrology. Authors such as Cicero, Livy, and Valerius Maximus critiqued their activities because they demanded money for their services and preyed on the credulous but this is only further evidence for the pervasive presence of divination in the everyday lives of the Romans.

Throughout the Roman world, families and individuals retained their own mantic collections as the worldwide searches for books of oracles in 213, 83 and 12 BCE demonstrate. This supposes that such collections belonged in the hands of those who could both read and interpret them, the Roman elite.

Not only did famous prophets, like the *fratres Marcii*, or Publicius and Culleolus, belong to senatorial families but elite Romans could and did have recourse to diviners in a private capacity. Tiberius Gracchus the Elder consulted the *haruspices* because a snake had appeared in his bedroom; L. Aelius Tubero after a woodpecker had landed on his head. In both cases the individuals were faced with an invidious choice: their own life in exchange for that of their wife or the success of the state. The period from the second to first century BCE witnessed a blurring between state-sanctioned divination and the use of divination to promote one's own political ambition. Already in the third century BCE, Scipio Africanus had feigned a special relationship with Jupiter to enhance his own status. The tribune Gaius Gracchus consulted the *haruspex* Herennius Siculus, the general Marius was accompanied by a Syrian prophetess named Martha. The demagogue Cinna appreciated the company of "Chaldaeans, sacrificers, and Sibyllistai": the list is not meant to be flattering. His opponent, the dictator Sulla was guided by the *haruspex* Postumius and consulted Chaldaean astrologers. Aside from the obvious explanation that written sources are more plentiful from this period on, the Roman world had also been exposed to a variety of new religious and divinatory experiences, for example, the orgiastic rites of the Phrygian mother goddess, Cybele, the Bacchanalian cult of Dionysus with all its mystical and magical elements, or astrology which seems to have arrived alongside Greek philosophy and astronomical theory in the second century BCE. Furthermore, control over the divine could be viewed as an important feature of an aspirant generalissimo's claim to power.

Roman Theories on Divination

The study of Roman divination invariably begins with Cicero. His work *De divinatione* ("On Divination") is the only entirely extant work on the subject from ancient Greece or Rome. Written in 45 or 44 BCE, it is the second of a trilogy of books which dealt successively with the nature of the gods, divination, and fate. The *De divinatione* has two books, the first devoted to an essentially Stoic understanding of the importance and validity of divination presented by the persona of Cicero's younger brother, Quintus. In the second book Marcus himself presents arguments which refute the power of

divination. Schematically the work draws distinctions between divination through *ars* (artificial divination) and divination through *natura* (nature). In this scheme *haruspicy* (including extispicy, the interpretation of thunder (*fulgura*) and prodigies (*ostenta*)), augury, omens, lots and horary astrology belong to artificial divination; prophecy through inspiration (spontaneous (*vaticinatio*) or institutionalised (*oracula*)) and dreams belong to natural divination. The work is a sophisticated attempt to set out a complex Greek philosophical argument in pragmatic Roman terms. Ostensibly the dialogue follows the rules of the New Academy, setting out both cases while allowing the reader to make up his own mind. Yet the two sides are not equally balanced. Quintus' approach is more haphazard and more inclined to examples from poetry, not least drawing on Marcus' own work, *De consulatu suo*; Marcus' case, in contrast, is more organised, and more rigorously and pragmatically argued. Neither persona is wholly pro- or anti-divination. Quintus refutes the mercenary, low class characters who inhabited the back streets of Rome. Marcus concludes that superstition must torn up by the root, yet, as he had done in his earlier *De legibus*, acknowledges the value of augury and haruspicy for the sake of political expediency and popular control.

Cicero, however, was not the first Roman to theorise on the validity of divination. Already in the second century BCE the polymath and philhellene, C. Sulpicius Galus, was alleged to have explained eclipses from a scientific, rather than prodigious, perspective. Poetry and prose from the same period demonstrates an understanding of issues of reliability and validity of diviners and different forms of divination, critiquing those paid to divine or poking fun at the overly superstitious. Cato the Elder famously claimed that he was amazed when one *haruspex* saw another, that he did not burst out laughing.

Closer to Cicero's own time the historian Sisenna had disputed the validity of dreams but accepted the reliability of prodigies. Most significantly Varro's magisterial *Antiquitates rerum divinarum*, published just a few years prior to *De divinatione*, took a very different approach. His work emphasised the human institutions relevant to divination at Rome: *pontifices*, *augures*, *quindecimviri*, but adopted a Greek philosophical model for divination according to the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water.

Other authors tackled the question of divination in different ways. The pontifical and augural lore was a matter for learned exegesis. Already in the third century BCE Numerius Fabius Pictor had composed a work *Iuris pontificii*, but the most famous attempts to illuminate the lore of the *pontifices* were the works by the Augustan writers, M. Antistius Labeo and C. Ateius Capito. The grammarian Veranius published a work *Pontifical Questions* in addition to one on augury. There were further works on augury by Ap. Claudius Pulcher, L. Caesar, C. Marcellus, M. Messalla, Cicero himself and Varro, who had all been members of the augural college. But not all upper class Romans were solely concerned with state practices. Appius Claudius Pulcher was ridiculed for his belief in the predictive power of augury and had a reputation as a necromancer. No doubt, his augural work reflected his more esoteric interests. His contemporary P. Nigidius Figulus (pr. 58 BCE) wrote works on private augury, entrails,

dreams, published a brontosopic calendar, and two works on astrology. His erudition reveals an intimate knowledge of Roman, Etruscan, Greek, Babylonian and other Eastern systems of knowledge.

Empire

Public Divination

In the transition from Republic to Empire, Octavian (later Augustus) was quick to grasp hold of the nuanced semiotic possibilities presented by divination in its various forms at Rome. For Octavian divination became a means to exert his political superiority. When a comet shone for seven nights at the funeral games of Julius Caesar in 42 BCE, the Etruscan haruspex Volcatius interpreted it to mean the end of the ninth *saeculum* and the beginning of the tenth, an era marked by the ascendancy of Augustus to sole rule. The aspirant Emperor claimed the comet was Caesar's soul ascending to heaven and, by implication, his own divine birthright. Furthermore, he associated the astral symbolism with his right to rule by legitimising astrology: not only did he later publish his horoscope but also minted coinage which celebrated his zodiacal sign, Capricorn, and the *astrum Caesaris*.

Octavian also deliberately pursued a relationship with the god Apollo to undermine his political rival's, Antony's, association with Dionysus. A temple was dedicated and constructed on the Palatine, physically connected to Augustus' own house. Since the time of Sulla's dictatorship (83–79 BCE), Apollo and his associated symbols (tripod, Sibyl and cithara) were indications of a bright future. But under Augustus his role as a god of prophecy was emphasised. The Sibylline books were moved from the custody of Jupiter to the new temple and Sibylline prophecy became a feature of the poetics of the new régime. When the Secular Games were celebrated in 17 BCE, Horace's *carmen saeculare* ("secular hymn") connected Apollo with the change in *saecula*, and coinage depicted Capricorn wreathed with the laurel of Apollo.

The appropriation of the very name Augustus recalled the founding of Rome through augury and established a political and religious association with both Romulus and Numa. When the Emperor later assumed the mantle of pontifex maximus in 12 BCE, he had appropriated all the offices relevant to divination and ensured his position as the cornerstone of human-divine relations. Etruscan, Greek, and Roman divination and the populist appeal of astrology all served to emphasise the beginning of a new *aureum saeculum* the Emperor's guidance. *Res humanae* and *res divinae* would continue to be intertwined: the political well-being of the Emperor and the Empire depended on his satisfactory relationship with the gods.

The emphasis on the individual emperor changed the ways in which people viewed divination and the ways in which the ruling authorities could use it. Forms of divina-

tion previously appropriate only in a private capacity became items for public consumption, and could even influence public behavior. In addition to the public use of his horoscope, Augustus recorded his belief in dreams, *omina* (chance sayings and happenings), and portents in his own *Commentaries*. He and his successors consulted divinatory experts of all kinds. Astrologers, such as the neo-Platonists Thrasyllus and his son Balbillus, became indispensable advisors to the Roman Emperors from Tiberius to Vespasian. Their careers prospered if the Emperor prospered: if not, the alternative was often death. Emperors and members of their families consulted oracular shrines throughout the Mediterranean in efforts to demonstrate their claims to divinity: Germanicus at Claros; Titus at Paphos; Trajan at Didyma; Hadrian and Julian at Delphi.

While public *prodigia* were still reported and expiation ceremonies practised until the time of Constantine (for example, one of his edicts established that the *haruspices* could be consulted publicly if a building had been struck by lightning), they no longer retained the same yearly importance. Certainly they could be indicators of some significant event such as those which predicted the Boudican revolt in CE 60:

At this juncture, for no apparent reason, the statue of Victory at Camulodunum fell down – with its back turned as though it were fleeing the enemy. Delirious women chanted of destruction at hand. They cried that in the local senate-house outlandish screams had been heard; the theatre had echoed with shrieks; at the mouth of the Thames a phantom settlement had been seen in ruins. Now the bloody appearance of the Ocean, and the appearance of human bodies left behind by the ebbing tide, led the Britons to hope and the veterans to fear. (Tacitus, *Annales* 14.32.1–2; trans. Michael Grant, lightly adapted)

Tacitus' interest is in the psychological impact of the phenomena. But floods, earthquakes, and famine could now be dealt with by human agency and were not necessarily an indication of divine anger. Expiation ceremonies necessary to ensure the *pax deorum* are all but absent from the imperial written record. The haruspical order was so threatened that the Emperor Claudius wanted it protected by the pontifices lest it fell into obsolescence through lack of use. By the second century CE, the biographer and philosopher Plutarch was lamenting the decline of oracles, although these continued to be consulted well into the fourth century CE. Under the Emperors, sacrifice remained a cohesive social force into the third century CE as the edicts of Decius and Valerian demonstrate.

The focus on the persona of the Emperor meant that his religious welfare was of particular concern. Indications of divine favour and displeasure were sought in those dreams, omens, and portents which surrounded the ascendancy of a new ruler (the *omina imperii*) or predicted his death (*omina mortis*). In Suetonius, the Emperor Domitian's death was heralded by two omens:

A few months before he was killed, a raven on the Capitol cried out "All will be well," an omen which some interpreted as follows:
"Recently, a raven which was sitting on the Tarpeian rooftop,

Could not say 'It is well,' but said 'It will be.'"

They say that Domitian himself dreamed that a golden hump grew out on his back, and he took this as definite omen that the condition of the empire would be happier and more prosperous after his time. Admittedly in a short time it happened through the uprightness and moderate rule of the succeeding emperors. (Suetonius, *Vita Domitiani* 23.2; trans. John C. Rolfe, lightly adapted)

No doubt many of these *omina* gained clarity after the fact, but they reflect a propagandistic element on the part of the Emperor to promote his own divine right to rule and on the part of his opponents who tried to undermine that right. Such *omina* marked moments of upheaval and transition from one Emperor to another, offering a sense of continuity and allowing the Senate to recognise a new ruler as providentially assigned. Nowhere is this more evidence than in the panegyrics in honour of Trajan or Constantine, celebrating their divine descent. Moreover, when the focus of religion was on the Emperor's standing with the gods, such phenomena also reflected the psychological concerns of the populace at these moments of tension, confirming their worst fears or reassuring them that all was well between the human and divine realms.

Individual diviners now became part of the Emperor's entourage, all the better if they were not confined by the collegiate system of the *augures* or *haruspices*. Successive emperors actively and publicly consulted astrologers. Thrasyllus and his son Balbillus advised emperors from Tiberius to Nero. Their careers prospered in line with the fortunes of the Emperors. They had added respectability as well-known philosophers and political theorists in an age when Stoicism was the prevalent philosophy.

Private Divination

The willingness of the Emperor to look to other forms of divination also encouraged the populace to expand their own divinatory experience. Under the Empire, experts from Babylonia, Syria, and Judaea were embraced by the Roman populace. They actively consulted Chaldaean astrologers, Commagenian *haruspices* and Jewish prophetesses. Dream interpretation, as the references to Isiac *coniectores* or the works of Aelius Aristides and Artemidorus indicate, was an important and viable means of understanding the will of the Gods. It was no longer confined to occasional pronouncements in the Roman prodigy lists but could be discussed by Pliny the Younger and Suetonius Tranquillus as a guide to legal, political, or economic action.

Outside of the state apparatus for divination, there had always been other institutional means for approaching the divine. A case in point is the widespread existence of shrines which used sortition (or "lots"). In response to a question, the enquirer drew a stone or piece of wood or metal with an oracular pronouncement, not unlike modern day Chinese fortune cookies. The most famous of those shrines was that of Fortuna Primigenia at Praeneste (mod. Palestrina) established and maintained by the citizens

of the town who had become wealthy through trade with the East. Cicero relates its founding:

According to the annals of Praeneste Numerius Suffustius, who was a distinguished man of noble birth, was admonished by dreams, often repeated, and finally even by threats, to split open a flint rock which was lying in a designated place. Frightened by the visions and disregarding the jeers of his fellow-townsmen he set about doing as he had been directed. And so when he had broken open the stone, the lots sprang forth carved on oak, in ancient characters. The site where the stone was found is religiously guarded to this day. It is hard by the statue of the infant Jupiter, who is represented as sitting with Juno in the lap of Fortune and reaching for her breast, and it is held in the highest reverence by mothers. (Cicero, *De divinatione* 2.85; trans. William A. Falconer)

And hints at the process involved:

At the present time the lots are taken from their receptacle if Fortune directs. What reliance, pray, can you put in these lots, which at Fortune's nod are shuffled and drawn by the hand of a child? (Cicero, *De divinatione* 2.86; trans. William A. Falconer)

Presumably the involvement of a child acted as some kind of guarantee that the lots were not being manipulated. Nonetheless, the role of an intermediary, as with other forms of divination, was a way of mediating the god's message and gave it validity. In Cicero's account the temple site had reverence through its beauty and age but was only consulted by the common people. Archaeology, however, indicates the widespread importance of these sacred sites. Similar sanctuaries devoted to sortition are known to have existed throughout the Italian peninsula (for example, at Arezzo, Bahareno, Cumae, Saepinum, Viterbo). Certainly, Cicero's dismissal of sortition should not be taken too seriously: the goddess Fortuna was essential to the trading and business classes. The new imperial opportunities for economic interactions from East to West saw widespread and itinerant *sortilegi* making use of ritual implements and oracular texts like the second/third century *sortes Astrampsychi* to offer learned exegesis and instill confidence in their ability to relay the will of the gods to their clients.

Foreignness and eastern esotericism, then, rooted in archaic rites and accompanied by ancient ritual texts, offered a myriad of ways to alleviate the political, social, and economic concerns of a multi-cultural, multi-valent Imperial world.

However, none of that was without risk. Divination and its close relation, magic, were also regarded as subversive forces. Accusations of astrology and magic as foundations of treason trials, especially in the early Empire, represented a genuine anxiety on the part of the ruling authorities about the kind of power that individuals might acquire through their consultations. Between 33 BCE and CE 96 there were no fewer than ten praetorian edicts banning astrologers from Rome; Tiberius restricted the secret consultation of *haruspices*; Claudius forbade Druidic rites. The fourth century saw a renewed interest in controlling diviners. Constantine only permitted *haruspices* to make public sacrifices but urged their consultation if a building had been struck by lightning. Laws from Constantius onwards, when efforts were made to put an end

to all types of private sacrifice and divination, became increasingly oppressive and often violent, until the final prohibition against pagan sacrifice and the destruction of temples in CE 435.

It is no coincidence that concerns regarding religious boundaries were most marked in the earliest and latest years of the Roman Empire. Each occasion offered the Emperor and his officials an opportunity to refocus and to renew attitudes towards religion and, specifically, towards divination. Through their engagement with, and control of, divination, successive Roman Emperors, from Augustus to Theodosius II, could demonstrate the true location of divine power in the human realm.

Imperial Theories on Divination

The scepticism that pervades the second book of Cicero's *De divinatione* is largely absent from later, imperial Roman works. But there are no other books from antiquity which present a theory or theories of divination so clearly and precisely. A confirmed Stoic, Seneca the Younger could write about the scientific causes of eclipses but accept that certain signs were sent from the Gods. Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* is replete with signs drawn from his sources. The modern scholar must look to compendia such as Valerius Maximus' *Facta et dicta memorabilia* or works of paradoxography such as Phlegon of Tralles', *Book of Marvels* where examples of divination are given with little explanation, although that, in itself, suggests just how pervasive divination was in both public and private life. The interest and validation of astrology meant that the Empire spawned several astronomical and astrological works: Manilius, *Astronomica* and Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, perhaps the best known. Although both comment on the scientific circumstances of astronomical phenomena, neither scorns the art of prognostication through the stars. Another area which gained in importance was dream divination. The work of Aelius Aristides and Artemidorus, especially, point to the allegorical interpretations available for dreams.

Divination came back into its own with the highly sophisticated narratives of the Neoplatonists. The works of Proclus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and others, reserved a central place for divination in theurgy. In their narratives, human rationality and divine revelation are intimately connected, just as they are in Plato's *Theaetetus* or Cicero's *De re publica*, precisely because the Neoplatonist's objective was to assimilate himself to the divine.

Conclusion

Divination was embedded into all aspects of the ancient world. Politics, warfare, business, and the daily lives of the ordinary man, woman, and slave depended on a

carefully cultivated relationship with the divine without which society would scarcely have functioned. It was also, therefore, deeply embedded within the power structures of those ancient societies. In Babylonia, Etruria, and at Rome, the priests responsible for divination also guided the state in more mundane and practical political matters.

At the governmental level divination provided a means of delaying decisions and a mechanism for redirecting problems towards further discussion and debate; it could prevent a particular political process or annul magisterial appointments; more positively, it was a means to soothe public anxieties when faced with political, economic, or military hardship, thus helping to soothe both political and social tension; and, further, it legitimated action on the part of the government and leading officials by providing them with recourse to a higher agency. For this reason, modern scholars have often pointed to the unscrupulous use of divination to achieve political objectives. But belief in the gods was not confined to the lower classes; the upper classes were just as credulous even if they understood that divination could be manipulated in their own favour.

More generally divination helped the group and individual make decisions which were “particularly difficult, stressful, contentious and consequential” (Flower 2008). Divination helped to validate those decisions and to provide confidence for specific undertakings. It also, much like magic (of which it was a feature), gave society and individuals a sense of control in situations where the causes of disquiet could not be explained by the rational or scientific means at their disposal. For this the ancient populations had recourse to the pseudo-scientific responses of their seers, prophets, and diviners.

Although these ancient societies did not have anything which corresponds to monotheistic scripture, the use of written texts was widespread. As we have seen, numerous omen books are known from ancient Mesopotamia, for example, the celestial omen series *Enūma Anu Enlil* or the terrestrial omen series *Šumma ālu* or the numerous works on hepatoscopy and astrology. Similarly the Egyptians and Greeks maintained their own records. The Etruscans kept sacred books devoted to augury, sacrifice, and portents, and others which recorded the legendary prophecies of Tages and Vegoia (the *libri Tagetici* and *libri Vegoici*). The Romans had their own *libri augurales*, and the *libri Sibyllini* (“the Sibylline books”) which preserved the words of Apollo. Another significant text were the *Annales Maximi* which recorded the prescriptions and responses of the pontiffs. There was an emphasis on divination as a science or, at least, as a rational exercise which could accurately interpret the will of the gods. Their pronouncements give the impression of verifiable outcomes based on empirical observation and analysis. The omen books of the Mesopotamians, for example, often have an analogic structure corresponding to a conditional statement “if x, then y”; in Etruscan lore specific expiation ceremonies were attached to particular portents; the Romans had specific rules relating to the interpretation of bird signs. The knowledge contained in those texts was often jealously guarded. Only those with the right training or members of the priestly body responsible for

their care were allowed to access their secrets. The alleged antiquity of the sources and their acknowledgement by state authorities added to their aura of authenticity as the words of the gods. Even written records were open to inferential explanation, depending on the circumstances, timing, and location of the prodigious event. All of the texts required expert exegesis whether Chaldaean priest, Etruscan *haruspex*, or Roman augur.

Furthermore, forms of natural divination were always available. Some civilisations, such as the Egyptians or the Greeks, privileged inspired prophecy over artificial divination, deferring to the warnings conveyed by oracles or dreams. The Mesopotamians preferred inductive divination, even insofar as it applied to their individual rulers. Roman practice, in contrast, emphasised the importance of sacrifice and ritual in relation to state matters, but may, nonetheless, still have allowed elements of prophecy, notably through the agency of the *libri Sibyllini* and the Etruscan *haruspices*.

Alongside the formal state and public contexts, there were plentiful opportunities for the expert to offer private consultations or for itinerant and self-proclaimed divination experts to wander the Mediterranean providing advice to rich and poor alike. Those experts too, for example, the *sortilegi* or dream interpreters, also had recourse to books filled with “sacred” knowledge to promote their own claims to a privileged relationship with the divine through public displays of their expertise and knowledge. Sometimes those individuals mimicked the practices available at the state level. So, in Greece, there were itinerant dream diviners, in Rome, backstreet *haruspices*, augurs and Sibyllistai. The ancient Greek and Roman sources, in particular, worried about the exploitation of divination for financial gain. A topical metaphor for understanding ancient religion and divination is that of a “market-place”. The diffusion and variety of divinatory methods available for the average citizen suggest that, in some respects, this was more than a metaphor. The services of one diviner or another could literally be purchased for a price. No doubt reputation, reliability, and the sales pitch of the diviner were important factors in his/her financial survival.

Some final observations may be made. A ubiquitous ancient phenomenon, divination, prophecy and other methods of prognostication were diverse and complex. There seems to have been a genuine societal need for wide varieties of engagement with the divine. Ancient societies preferred no one method to the exclusion of all others, whether at the state level or in private. Furthermore, individual methods of prognostication were not constant and subject to fluctuations of interest and engagement. Notably, this can be observed in the varying fortunes of prodigy observation, astrology, or *haruspicy* across the millennia. This pluralism also lent itself to a certain fluidity and adaptation of divination in response to different or changed political and social circumstances. For the most part, there appears to have been relaxed state regulation and minimal interference until private practices threatened the social order, as occurred on various occasions during the Roman Republic and, more noticeably, with the advent of Christianity. In all cases, the survival of individual rulers and whole regimes depended on their ability to cultivate, appropriate, and actively demonstrate,

their own special relationship with the divine. This ensured the survival of prophecy and prognostication from one generation to the next both in public and in private.

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Elizabeth Boyle

Early Medieval Perspectives on Pre-Christian Traditions in the Celtic World

General Remarks

This survey considers the evidence from the early medieval Celtic-speaking world, principally sources in Old Irish (ca. 600–900) and Middle Irish (ca. 900–1200), Old Welsh (ca. 800–1100) and Middle Welsh (ca. 1100–1500), as well as some key sources in Latin that were written in Celtic-speaking kingdoms. Due to a combination of factors, primarily the accidents of manuscript survival, but also to some extent the circumstances of literary production, we have far more evidence from Ireland than we do from Wales, Cornwall, Brittany or the Isle of Man before ca. 1200. Welsh sources are far more plentiful from the thirteenth century onwards. The corpora of medieval Cornish, Breton and Manx sources are very small. Pre-conversion sources written by Roman ethnographers which discuss the practices of the “Celts”, or of Celtic Gaul or Britain, cannot be presumed to give a factual account of “Celtic” society, nor can they be presumed to apply to all areas of the Celtic-speaking world. The problematic nature of such external sources, written by non-Celtic-speakers with complex political and cultural agendas, has been well documented (e. g. Woolf 2011).

Literacy developed in tandem with Christianisation in Ireland (probably from the fourth century onwards). Some monumental *ogam* inscriptions may date from before the conversion period, although this is a matter of debate. We have no pre-Christian textual sources from Ireland. Our earliest sustained Latin textual sources are the writings of Saint Patrick, from the fifth century. Modern editions and translations of these can be conveniently located at the Royal Irish Academy website on Saint Patrick (www.confessio.ie). Our earliest Old Irish sources date from the late sixth or early seventh century. Wales was Christianised during the Roman era. However, aside from the corpus of epigraphic evidence, we have no pre-Christian textual sources from Wales. Our earliest extended Latin source from Wales is Gildas, *De excidio Britanniae*, from the sixth century (Winterbottom 1978). The date of the earliest vernacular sources is much-debated, with some arguing that the poetry of *Y Gododdin* may date from as early as the sixth century, although it survives only in a thirteenth-century manuscript. Many of our narrative sources are set in a pre-Christian context, but they were written by Christian authors who were using the pre-Christian setting as a literary device. Christian authors were strongly influenced by the Bible, by Classical authors and other literary texts, and by non-Christian neighbours (such as the first generations of Scandinavian settlers in Ireland) in their depictions of pre-Christian beliefs and practices. These sources tell us what Christian authors imaged pre-Christian belief to be; they are not accurate records of genuine pre-Christian practices.

Because the pre-Christian religious systems of the Celtic-speaking world were non-literate, and literacy developed as a result of contact with the Roman Empire, we do not have a canon of pre-Christian religious texts or evidence of any centralised moral authority. One explanation for the great variety and inconsistency in depictions of pre-Christian practices in our medieval sources is that it may reflect local variety in pre-Christian belief; alternatively, it may simply be the case that there is little or no genuine information transmitted into the Christian age and the variety therefore reflects the imaginings of the authors of our surviving sources.

Eschatology

In the seventh-century collection of writings on Saint Patrick by Tírechán, there is a reference to the fifth-century pagan king Lóegaire awaiting the *dies erdathe* (day of *erdathe*), which Tírechán glosses as “the day of the Lord’s judgement”, according to the teaching of the *magi* (Bieler 1979, 132–133). *Magi* is a term usually – though problematically – translated as “druids”, but it is perhaps better understood as *magi* in the biblical sense. Tírechán’s statement has been taken as meaning that pre-Christian beliefs in Ireland included eschatological teachings about the end of the world. John Carey, for example, has argued that Tírechán “preserves authentic traditions from the conversion period” (Carey 1996, 42), and Jacopo Bisagni has (tentatively) described the term *dies erdathe* as “the unique survival of a remarkable cultural-linguistic fossil” (Bisagni 2011, 18). However, the context for this concept is problematic, because it occurs in a passage where Lóegaire is describing his future burial. Tírechán states that Lóegaire believes that he will be buried in the manner of the pagans “armed in their tombs” on the ridges of Tara (Bieler 1979, 132–133). The problem with this is that the type of burial that Tírechán envisages for Lóegaire is not attested in the archaeological evidence for Ireland. Rather, Tírechán is describing contemporary pagan burials of a kind witnessed in Anglo-Saxon England and continental Germanic societies (↗ McKinnell, Pagan Traditions in Germanic Languages). He is drawing his ideas of pagan burial from contemporary parallels, rather than preserving a memory of the pre-Christian past. As such, we should be cautious of reading too much into this reference to eschatological doctrine in pre-Christian Ireland.

A second passage in Tírechán’s work has also been taken as evidence of eschatological teaching in pre-Christian Ireland. Here, we are told that some “unbelievers” reported that a certain deceased “prophet” had, at the mouth of a well, “made for himself a shrine in the water under the stone to bleach his bones perpetually because he feared the burning by fire” ([...] *et dixit increduli quod quidam profeta mortuus fecit bibliothicam sibi in aqua sub petra, ut dealbaret ossa sua semper, quia timuit ignis exust<ion>em*) (Tírechán, *Collectanea*, ed. Bieler, 152–153). Again, this has been taken as evidence of pre-Christian eschatological doctrine of a great conflagration at the

end of time and John Carey has linked it with the Classical account of Strabo (perhaps drawing on Posidonius) that druids in Gaul “say that souls and the cosmos are indestructible, but that sometimes fire and water will overpower them” (cited in Carey 1996, 45). In spite of Carey’s sympathetic view of the reliability of Tírechán’s account, even he concedes that there are many parallels to the idea of “conflagration and deluge” in Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic texts (Carey 1996, 47) and, again, Tírechán may be drawing on other models in his seventh-century construction of paganism, rather than preserving evidence of pre-Christian belief in Ireland.

Prophecy

Some Old Irish political prophecies survive, although the more extensive and sophisticated political prophecies date from the Middle Irish period onwards. *Baile in Scáil* (“The Phantom’s Frenzy”) seems to be derived from an earlier Old Irish narrative, although it only survives in its Middle Irish reworking (Murray 2004). The narrative is set in the reign of the mythical king Conn Cétchathach and purports to list all future kings of Tara descending from him. The last historically identifiable king in the poem is Flaithbertach mac Muirchertaig, king of Ailech, who became king in 1036. Despite being written in a Christian environment, perhaps in the 860s, but reworked in its extant form some time during or after the reign of Flaithbertach, the narrative setting is not overtly Christian. Rather, the author uses the familiar allegorical conventions of the feasting hall, the otherworldly apparition (the “phantom” of the text’s title, who possesses the prophetic knowledge), and the woman who dispenses the ale of sovereignty. One of the future rulers listed is a certain Áed Engach (in later Irish the form of the name is Aodh Eanghach) who becomes, in later medieval Irish texts, symbolic of the ideal ruler: in praise poetry, genealogies and historical writing from the thirteenth through to the eighteenth centuries, contemporary lords and kings are compared to him (Ó Buachalla 1989). In *Baile in Scáil* the “last ruler of Ireland” is said to be a certain Flann Cinuch, who is not a descendant of Conn Cétchathach. Here, then, we perhaps have the key to the purpose of this purported prophecy, in that it seeks to assert the rights of one particular dynasty – the descendants of Conn, that is, the Uí Néill – to the kingship of Tara (symbolically, if not politically, the high-kingship of Ireland): once the “unbroken” succession of Uí Néill kings comes to an end, so does the prophecy and by implication, since Flann is described as the “last ruler of Ireland”, so will Ireland’s sovereignty come to an end.

There are other political prophecies dating from the Middle Irish period, such as those attributed to Berchán (Hudson 1996). However, since these are placed in the mouths of Christian ecclesiastical figures (in the case of Berchán, an abbot), these can be read within the mainstream of medieval Christian political prophecies and do not shed any light on the depiction of pre-Christian practices. For an exemplary case study

of such prophecies being used to legitimate Middle Irish political-historical narratives see Ní Mhaonaigh (2014).

Prophecies, set in the pre-Christian past, which predict the coming of Christianity are very common in Old Irish literature, although the nature and methods of revelation vary from text to text. In many cases, characters are depicted as possessing a sort of “natural inspiration”; in other cases their prophetic powers seem designed to mirror those of the Old Testament prophets. In some versions of the Old Irish *Aided Chonchobuir* (“Death of Conchobar”), the eponymous character is depicted as having to spend seven years in a proto-penitential state: immobilised by a head injury, he can neither feast nor make love, ride a horse or become angry. However, on the night that Christ is crucified, he enquires as to the cause of the shaking of the elements. He is told (either by a *druí* “wizard”, in some versions, or by a Roman consul in others) about the Crucifixion. The news of Christ’s execution enrages him, and he launches into a linguistically complex, but very beautiful, poetic utterance about his desire to defend Christ. We are told that his rage caused a brain haemorrhage, which killed him, and that his blood “baptised” him and he was one of the first pagans to go to heaven. The different versions of this text are edited and translated by Meyer (1906).

In the Old Irish death-tale of Cú Chulainn, known as *Brisleach Mór Maige Muirthemni*, we see a very different form of prophecy about the coming of Christianity, featuring a host of biblical and apocalyptic images of the “lamb” and the “calf”. Cú Chulainn prophesies the coming of Christianity to Ireland “from the Alps of Europe”, and the Crucifixion, the Harrowing of Hell and the Resurrection: “A sister’s son of men will come; His law will fill every place; He will hinder your deception; Jesus will vanquish Hell for the tribes of Adam’s offspring in a vain realm [...]” (*Brisleach Mór Maige Muirthemni*, ed. Kimpton, 46).

We have a variety of examples of pre-Christian figures – both human and supernatural – prophesying a general breakdown in social order, sometimes as a sign of an approaching end time. These instances, however, draw heavily from Christian eschatology. For example, in the early Middle Irish text, *Cath Maige Tuired* (“The Second Battle of Moytura”), the war-goddess, the Morrigan, prophesies the end of world – “her dire predictions are of the breakdown and transgression of social bonds accompanied by the failure of Ireland’s fertility” (Williams 2010, 30). Similarly, the mythical scholar, Cenn Fáelad, is depicted as predicting an end of the world in which “There will be judges without knowledge, without information, without learning. There will be lords without wisdom. There will be women without modesty” (Smith 1929).

Multiple pre-Christian figures are depicted as prophesying a more general arrival of Christianity. One shorthand for the coming of Christians is the idea of the arrival of “adze-heads”, so-called because of the shape in profile of the head of a religious with his monastic hood pulled up. For examples of this, see the Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language (*EDIL*: www.dil.ie), s. v. *tálcend*. Another, found particularly in legal texts, is prophesying of the coming of the “pure/white language of the *Beati*”, in this case using a reference to Psalm 118 as a shorthand for all Christian sacred texts.

Again, examples can be found in *EDIL*, s. v. *biait* (*b*). This utilises prophecy to give a false sense of historicity to laws which were relatively recent creations: that the law-codes were written in the seventh and eighth centuries is well-established, but jurists sought to give them the appearance of having been written in the era of Patrick. For a seminal study, see Ó Corráin *et al.* (1984).

We have a large number of sources pertaining to political prophecy from later medieval Wales. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini*, which forms the seventh book of his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136) was hugely popular in Britain and beyond from the twelfth century onwards, and it has been argued that elements of Merlin's prophecies are derived from earlier Welsh sources. For example, it has been argued that his use of animal symbolism borrows elements from medieval Welsh heroic poetry (Edel 1983/1984; see also Jarman 1991). However, with Geoffrey, disentangling his uses of existing traditions from his own imaginative constructions is a vexed task (on Merlin as prophetic figure see also ↗ Lehner, Prognostication in Latin Historiography). Gerald of Wales, also writing in Latin in the twelfth century, evinces a similar interest in Merlin and in prophecy but this must be understood in its medieval Christian political context rather than being seen as evidence of the continuity of pre-Christian ideas into the Christian era (Padel 2006, 63–64).

Modern historians have frequently depicted the Welsh political rebel Owain Glyn Dŵr (d. ca. 1415) as being obsessed with political prophecy, but Helen Fulton has argued that this “is in fact a sixteenth-century English language construct” (Fulton 2005, 107). Fulton demonstrates that, far from being a “gullible Welshman foolishly led by prophecy”, when Glyn Dŵr made reference to political prophecies, he was actually engaging in a mode of political discourse which was dominant among his English contemporaries, many of whom would have read Geoffrey's *Prophetiae Merlini* (Fulton 2005, 108).

Clearly, however, some Welshmen did in fact continue to dabble (whether or not they believed) in occult practices: in a fifteenth-century Welsh poem by Ieuan ap Rhydderch we find references to both necromancy (*igmars*) and games of chance (*rhagman*, borrowed from Middle English *ragman*) as being amongst the more risqué items of knowledge of an educated gentleman (Breeze 1996, 32–33). We should view this more as a form of intellectual curiosity in the occult, such as was common throughout late medieval Europe, rather than as evidence of continuity of pre-Christian belief.

Manticism

Certain characters are depicted as possessing mantic abilities in medieval Irish literature, most notably Finn mac Cumail (Nagy 1997; Nagy 1985). However, although mantic practices are generally regarded negatively in medieval Christian literature, in the case of Finn his powers are frequently portrayed in positive terms. The author of

the early thirteenth-century *Acallam na Senórach* (“Colloquy of the Ancients”) shapes his complex and sophisticated narrative in order to frame Finn as a proto-Christian who uses his mantic abilities to prophesy the coming of Christianity (*Acallam na Senórach*, eds. Dooley and Roe). The source of Finn’s mantic powers is his thumb – these abilities are depicted as having been acquired in different circumstances in different Middle Irish tales, either because his thumb was trapped in a door to the otherworld, or because he burnt it while cooking a “salmon of knowledge”. In either case, he puts his thumb “under his tooth” in order to access his supernatural wisdom.

Metamorphosis and Transmigration

The seventh-century Hiberno-Latin theological tract *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae*, by Augustinus Hibernicus, seeks to explain biblical miracles on rational grounds. In one passage, where he discusses the possibility that one thing can be transformed into another, he outlines the importance of the idea that any given thing, at any given time, should “remain firmly within the bounds of its own nature”. Otherwise, he warns, “We would seem, indeed, to give our assent to the laughable tales told by the *magi*, who say that their forebears flew through the ages in the form of birds” (Carey 1998, 58). In his translation of this passage, Carey translates *magi* as “druids” and characterises Augustinus Hibernicus’s statement as evidence of the continued activity of druids in seventh- and eighth-century Ireland and of the teaching of a “doctrine of metempsychosis or reincarnation” (Carey 1998, 12). However, nowhere does Augustinus Hibernicus state that the *magi* he is referring to are Irish or contemporaneous to him: he could be referring to earlier Greek or Latin teachings on physical metamorphosis or the transmigration of the soul.

That being said, transformation into animal form is a frequently occurring feature in medieval Irish literature, although these metamorphoses are rarely for the purpose of prophecy or prognostication. Rather, many of the transformations from human to successive series of animals serve the purpose of giving a character a supernaturally long life in order that they can survive into the Christian era as a historical witness to events in the deep past, thus legitimating the account of “history” that is presented in the narrative. A particularly good example of this is the Old Irish *Scél Tuáin meic Chairill* (“Tale of Tuán son of Cairill”), where Tuán recounts to Saint Finnia the pre-Christian “history” of Ireland, which he has witnessed while in the form of a wild boar, then a hawk, then a salmon. However, even in his function as a historical witness, Tuán still describes himself as a “prophet” (*fáith*), although his only prophecy in the text is that Finnia’s house will flourish (Carey 1984).

Astral Sciences, Calendrical Calculation and Meteorological Phenomena

In seventh- and eighth-century Ireland, scholars produced a large number of computational texts, some of which represent scientific learning of an astonishingly sophisticated level (Warntjes 2010). Mark Williams has strongly (and rightly) criticised Peter Beresford Ellis for his “intellectual sleight of hand” in stating that computus depended on astronomical observations and “as astronomy and astrology ‘always’ go together, early Irish churchmen were necessarily familiar with a kind of astrology” (Williams 2010, xxvii). It is of course important to distinguish between astronomy and astrology and the two did not, in fact, “always” go together in the early Middle Ages. Certainly where we have a great deal of evidence of calendrical calculations and the scientific study of lunar and solar eclipses in early medieval Ireland, we have very little evidence at all of interest in any form of astrology.

It has become a commonplace that druids were interested in astral sciences, although there is little evidence to support this. One fleeting reference, upon which much has been based, is found in the First Latin Life of Saint Brigit, or the *Vita Prima*. In it, we are told regarding a certain *magus* that “One night this *magus* was keeping watch, as was his custom, contemplating the stars of heaven [...]” (*Nocte quadam hic magus erat vigilans suo more astra caeli considerans [...]*). Fergus Kelly cited this passage as evidence that Irish druids were “astrologers”; however, Mark Williams has raised several significant objections to this, not least the author’s possible debt to Isidore of Seville’s depiction of *magi* as astrologers (Williams 2010, 38–39, discussing Kelly 2001).

Nélatóracht (“cloud-divination”) is a practice which is clearly described in four Irish narrative texts, of which the earliest is *Acallam na Senórach*, dating from the first decades of the thirteenth century. The four texts are discussed in detail by Williams (2010, 42–49). However, there is a more ambiguous reference in an earlier source, namely the mid-twelfth-century Irish *Life of Saint Columba*. As Williams has noted, the fact that this instance of possible cloud-divination does not occur in earlier Lives of Columba suggests an eleventh- or twelfth-century date for the emergence of the cloud-divination topos in Irish literature. In the Columban text, we are told that Columba’s priestly guardian, Cruithnechán, consults a “prophet” about whether it is an auspicious time for Columba to begin his education. After the prophet had examined the sky (*O ra féig in fáith nem*) he declared that Columba should indeed learn to read (Williams 2010, 49–50). Mark Williams has convincingly argued that cloud-divination by “druids” and “prophets” in late medieval Irish literature is “a high medieval literary innovation” rather than a continuous cultural memory of pre-Christian practices.

By contrast, Williams has suggested that conjuring of mist or fog by druids may well be a “genuinely ancient and pre-Christian idea”. It occurs in the seventh-century *Vita Sancti Columbae* by Adomnán of Iona, and Williams has noted that the “specific

association with atmospheric vapours is in fact one of the few elements of the early Irish image of the druid which is *not* traceable to Isidore [of Seville] or the Bible” (Williams 2010, 51).

Instances of calendrical calculation only occur in a Christian context. For example, the (probably eleventh-century) hortatory diatribe *The Second Vision of Adomnán*, though predominantly written in the vernacular, begins with a Latin opening which connects the perceived moral decline of Irish society with the threat of a devastating fire and plague which will destroy Ireland when certain calendrical conditions converge (Volmering 2014). This text has been connected with the year 1096, when a “great fear” is recorded in certain medieval Irish chronicles, due to the convergence of most of those calendrical conditions. The concerns of the author of *Adomnán’s Second Vision* are mostly generic: the failure to adhere to Christian values; moral decline; the lack of proper provision for churches. It is within this context that the author then berates Irish Christians for backsliding into a sort of paganism “except only that they have not worshipped idols”. He accuses them of using magic and “spells and charms, and divination” (Volmering 2014). The author of the *Second Vision* seeks a return to an imagined “Golden Age” of Irish Christianity before the perceived decline of his contemporary society. The author also sees a clear connection between unregulated engagement with the supernatural – augury, spells and charms – and the need for the moral reform of society. However, his rhetoric of a return to “paganism” in Irish society needs to be understood as typical of this sort of genre of Christian reforming tract rather than as evidence of spells and charms being used in a consciously non-Christian context.

Prognostication through Flora and Fauna

It is often assumed in popular culture – due in part to the enduring influence of the mythological thinking of Robert Graves’s *The White Goddess* – that nature in general, and trees in particular, had a central significance in the religious beliefs of pre-Christian Ireland and Wales. One fascinating source is the Middle Welsh *Cad Goddau* (“Battle of the Trees”), which is preserved in the fourteenth-century Book of Taliesin. This poem, in which trees and shrubs combine forces as an arboreal army, fighting against a common foe, has attracted a great deal of interest, and its tree-list, which comprises some thirty-four items is of major importance to natural historians. However, Marged Haycock has argued convincingly that this poem is far from the “sacred grove mythology” or “mystical alphabet poem” of Graves and his adherents, but is rather “the first Welsh example of mock-heroic poetry” (Haycock 1990, 302, 306). In her close analysis of the list, she observes that in the poem there is “no correspondence at all with the order of the Welsh legal tree-tracts nor with the order of plants listed in the early nature poetry” (Haycock 1990, 302).

Tree-lists have often been singled out as a survival from pre-Christian “Celtic” religion, but as Haycock has pointed out, “tree-catalogues (like other lists) were a commonplace in Classical literature and were widely imitated by medieval authors” (Haycock 1990, 305; for a discussion of an Old Irish tree-list see Kelly 1976). Medieval Irish lists of trees have also been interpreted as mystical or quasi-religious survivals from the pre-Christian era. The fact that some of the names of letters in the *ogam* alphabet (an alphabet used for monumental inscriptions in the early Christian period) are tree-names – e. g. “B” is *beithe*, meaning “birch-tree”; “V/F” is *fern*, meaning “alder” – caused some early twentieth-century scholars to ascribe to the *ogam* alphabet some sort of connection with occult tree-lore, but this has since been disproven (McManus 1991). The association with trees is more likely to result from the use of wood as a medium for writing on.

Two short Middle Irish texts, preserved by a later scribe filling in blank spaces in Trinity College Dublin MS H. 3.17, tell us something about prognostication from bird calls in medieval Ireland. For example, the piece on ravens begins by stating that “If the raven call from above an enclosed bed in the midst of the house, it is a distinguished grey-haired guest or clerics that are coming to thee, but there is a difference between them: if it be a secular cleric the raven says *bacach*; if it be a man in orders it calls *gradh gradh* [...]” (Best 1916, 121 (text), 123 (translation, slightly adapted)). The Christian society within which such superstitions operated is clear from these opening lines, and the text cannot therefore be taken as preserving any pre-Christian lore. Similarly, the piece on wrens warns that if one hears a wren call “behind thee from the south, thou wilt see the heads of good clergy, or hear death-tidings of noble ex-laymen” (Best 1916, 122–123 (text), 125 (translation)). The “ex-layman” refers to noblemen who enter religious orders late in life). It is stated that the calls of wrens can also predict such misfortunes as sickness in one’s herds or the abduction of one’s wife.

Medical Prognostication

In the (seventh- or eighth-century) *Vita Prima* of Saint Brigit, it is a *magus* who interprets the meaning of Brigit’s nausea. He states that he is unclean, but that Brigit “is filled with the Holy Spirit. She can’t endure my food”. He thus sets aside a white cow milked by a Christian virgin for Brigit’s consumption (cited and discussed in McKenna 2002, 68). However, this is a spiritual diagnosis of a medical ailment, rather than an instance of medical magic or prediction *per se*.

Predictions made of the fate of unborn children are widespread in hagiography and narrative literature. For example, a *magus* predicts that the unborn Brigit will go on to free her mother from slavery and reign over her half-siblings (the passage is discussed in McKenna 2002, 71). In the Old Irish narrative *Longes mac nUislenn* (“The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu”) a *drúí* predicts that the unborn Deirdre will go on to be

the cause of bloodshed amongst the Ulstermen (Hull 1949). On a related note, the Old Irish “Book of Ogam” (*In Lebor Ogaim*), preserved in manuscripts dating from the fourteenth century onwards, describes something called “boy-ogam” (*macogam*), which is “a method of divining the sex of an unborn child by ‘dividing’ the mother’s name (i. e. the letters of her name) in two, an uneven division indicating a boy” (McManus 1991, 140).

We have some clear instances of medical prognostication in Irish narrative literature. In one version of the Old Irish *Aided Chonchobuir* (“Death of Conchobar”), we are told that the physician, Fíngen, could identify the number of sick people in a house, and the ailments from which they were suffering, based on the smoke that rose from their dwelling (Meyer 1906, 8–9).

The character of Dían Cécht recurs in numerous medieval Irish narrative texts as an archetypal physician with magico-medical skills. The association between Dían Cécht and medical learning clearly exceeds the bounds of narrative literature and we find intertextual references to Dían Cécht in medical, grammatical and Christian religious texts which demonstrate the interconnections between various branches of learning in medieval Ireland (Hayden 2014, 37–40; Hayden 2019). The presence of Dían Cécht in texts of undoubted Christian provenance and worldview exemplifies the complex – and as yet not fully understood – relationship between Christian authors and their depictions of pre-Christian practices in the literatures of the Celtic-speaking world.

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John McKinnell

Pagan Traditions of Prognostication in the Germanic Languages

Introduction – The Problem of Historical Sources

This survey covers only traditions in the medieval Germanic languages, principally Old Norse, but also Old English, Old High German and Old Saxon, and relevant related material in Latin.

Most of the sources for pagan Germanic prognostication are more recent than those in the other traditions considered within this project. The oldest significant written source is Tacitus, *Germania*, completed in 98 CE (Tacitus, *Germania*, ed. Anderson; trans. Rives). The oldest known runic inscriptions (e. g. Illerup Ådal, E. Jutland, Denmark) date from the late second century (Moltke 1985, 95–99; McKinnell et al. 2004, 43–44). The oldest surviving Old Norse poems (e. g. Bragi Boddason's *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Skj.* I A: 1–4 and I B: 1–4) were orally composed, probably in the mid-ninth century; and the most informative prose sources date mainly from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, one of the oldest being Ari Þorgilsson's *Íslendingabók*, whose surviving (revised) version was completed by 1148 (further see Jónas Kristjánsson 1997).

The manuscripts and the prose narratives are all post-Conversion (largely from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, although much of their subject matter is concerned with pagan times). Some inscriptions and picture stones are from the heathen period, but few of them are concerned with prediction (for Swedish picture stones see Jansson 1987; for northern England see Kopar 2012; for the Isle of Man see Cubbon 1977).

Some other sources are pre-Conversion but written by outsiders who were likely to misreport or misunderstand some of the traditions they record. In *Germania* ch. 10, for example, Tacitus is probably roughly accurate in describing casting of marked wooden chips (possibly marked with runes?) as a method of augury, but his assertion that the Germanic peoples predict the outcome of wars through single combat may misunderstand a system like that of the later *holmgang*, in which single combat is seen as an alternative to battle rather than a prediction of its outcome (Tacitus, *Germania*, trans. Rives, 81 and notes on 165–166 and 168).

In the manuscript tradition, some Eddic poems are probably of pre-Christian origin, but they were not fixed texts (see *Eddukvæði I–II* and translations in Orchard 2011). Skaldic verse (for which see *SP* and *Skj.*) is harder to modify and easier to date, and a good deal of it survives from the pre-Christian period, but most of it is concerned to praise the past achievements of rulers rather than to predict the future.

Even when a poem includes what looks like a heathen prediction, the poet may have been a Christian who was merely using heathen mythology as a literary device.

In *Porfinnsdrápa* 24 (Whaley 2009, 128; SP II: 258–259), Arnórr jarlaskáld says that the sun will turn black, the earth sink in the sea and the sky be torn apart before a finer chieftain than Porfinnr will be born in Orkney. This refers to heathen belief in Ragnarøk (see below), but Arnórr was a Christian, and this is a rhetorical flourish rather than a serious prediction.

In the pre-Christian period the Germanic peoples were not literate except in runes, and their mythology had no fixed canon of sacred texts. This made it possible for mutually incompatible traditions to exist side by side, and for Germanic heathenism to change and absorb outside influences.

However, there does seem to have been a generally accepted belief in an absolute Fate which neither men nor gods could avoid, although when and how it would come to pass might remain mysterious.

Germanic heathenism had no central organisation to control belief and behaviour and no canon of sacred written texts to impart the moral authority that could turn prediction into prophecy and dream into vision. I will therefore deal with these topics only under the headings of Interpretation of Signs and Dreams and Manticism.

Eschatology: The Fate of the World

The main predictive myth within the concept of Fate was that of Ragnarøk, the inevitable future downfall of gods and men in a cosmic war against giants and monsters, in which the world will be destroyed.

Important elements of this myth appear on pre-Christian and Conversion-period picture stones dating from the tenth and eleventh centuries: Heimdallr blowing his horn to warn the gods of the approach of their enemies (Jurby, Isle of Man, and probably Ovingham, Northumberland), Óðinn being swallowed by the wolf Fenrir (Kirk Andreas, Isle of Man, Heysham hogback side A, Ledberg stone, Östergötland, Sweden), Víðarr taking vengeance by killing Fenrir (probably Ovingham and the Gosforth Cross, Cumbria), and general Ragnarøk scenes at Skipwith, North Yorkshire and (probably) Sockburn, County Durham.

Descriptions of Ragnarøk in eddic poems whose substance is probably largely pre-Christian appear in several Eddic poems, notably *Völuspá* and *Vafþrúðnismál*, and in a prose elaboration based on eddic verse in Snorri's *Gylfaginning* chs. 51–53 (Faulkes 1982, 49–54). They agree that Ragnarøk is inevitable and that in it:

- Freyr will fall in battle against the fire-demon Surtr;
- Óðinn will be swallowed by the wolf Fenrir, who will in turn be destroyed by Óðinn's son Víðarr;
- Þórr and the World Serpent (*Miðgarðsormr*) will kill each other;
- The world will be destroyed by fire and will sink into the sea;
- A new world will then emerge from the sea.

However, there is disagreement about which of the gods will survive Ragnarøk. *Völuspá* claims that the innocent gods (Hœnir, Høðr and Baldr) will return, whereas the survivors in *Vafþrúðnismál* are Móði and Magni (“Courage” and “Strength”), the sons of Þórr, and the just avengers Váli and Víðarr. This suggests that the ideology of individual contributors to the poetic tradition could sometimes modify the details of the predictive myth.

At least one description of Ragnarøk (*Völuspá*) shows some signs of Christian influence. Its account of the chaos before the gods created the world echoes some lines of the Old High German *Wessobrunnergebet* (for which, see Schlosser 1998, 44–45). Its use of *mjótviðr* (understood as meaning “measuring tree”) for the World Tree Yggdrasil is probably a literal re-imagining of the Old Saxon or Old English *metod*, meaning Fate or God (literally “that which has been measured”, seen for example in the Old English *Cædmon’s Hymn* 2, composed ca. 680 (Hamer 1970, 122–123); and the giant Muspell is probably a personification derived from Old High German or Old Saxon *mu(d)spilli* “Doomsday” (literally “great event”), for which see e. g. the Old Saxon *Heliand* 2591 (Behagel 1933, 91) and the Old High German *Muspilli* (ed. and trans. Schlosser, 70–75). However, it does not seem possible to explain Ragnarøk as wholly derived from Christianity.

Eschatology: The Fates of Individuals

Fate could also be personified in the form of the Norns, female figures who were thought to preside over the fates of individuals. According to *Völuspá* 20 they are three giant women called Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld, often rendered as “Past”, “Present” and “Future”, though their names literally mean “Fate”, “Existence” and “Debt”. Elsewhere there are an unspecified number of norns, and *Fáfnismál* 13 says they are of various origins – some related to the gods, some to the elves, and some the daughters of Dvalinn (dwarfs). *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 adds that some are good (i. e. bring good fortune) and others bad (Faulkes 1982, 18). Mention of them does not necessarily imply belief: a runic inscription from about 1200 in Borgund Church, Sogn og Fjordane, Western Norway says “The Norns have done both good and evil – they created great trouble for me”, but the carver dates his inscription to the day before St. Óláfr’s day and it is in the shape of a cross (McKinnell et al. 2004, 129–130). This shows that allusion to the Norns could sometimes be no more than an elegant figure of speech.

The function and identity of the Norns seems sometimes to have merged with those of the *dísir* (ON) or *idisi* (Old High German – see *The First Merseburg Charm*, ed. Schlosser 108–109; Eis 1964, 58–61; McKinnell 2005, 197–200), spirits who probably originated as female ancestors and could affect the lives of their descendants for either good or ill. Thus in *Hamðismál* 28 (probably late ninth century in origin), Hamðir blames the *dísir* for inciting him to kill his half-brother Erpr and thereby making his

own death inevitable (*Eddukvæði II*, 412; trans. Orchard, 237). Similarly, in *Atlamál* 27 (probably twelfth century), Gunnarr's wife Glaumvǫr relates a dream in which the *dísir*, defined as “dead women”, summoned her husband to join them (*Eddukvæði II*, 387; trans. Orchard, 219).

The idea of *dísir* sometimes merged with that of the personal or family spirits called *fylgjur* (literally “female followers”) or *hamingjur* (female spirits who adopted the form of those they were sent to “fetch”), who might appear to a person or to their close family, usually just before their death, either in literal “reality” or in a dream – see Turville-Petre 1964, 221–230; for examples, see *Hallfreðar saga* ch. 11 (ÍF 8, 198; trans. Whaley, *CS I*, 252) and *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 19 (ÍF 9, 63; trans. McKinnell *CS II*, 29). It is not clear whether these spirits are thought of as controlling the fates of human beings or as agents of a Fate predetermined by some other power.

Dreams and Other Signs

The Content of Dreams

It is usually assumed in Norse sources that dreams are prophetic; there is no use of dreams as psychological allegory, such as we find in the *Roman de la Rose* and other European sources (↗ Schirmermeister, *Dream Interpretation Western Christian World*). Dreaming was regarded as passive reception of a “message” from elsewhere, and this is reflected in the impersonal construction *mik dreymdi*, literally “it dreamed me”. For this reason, dreaming did not usually carry the stigma that was often attached to manticism.

Sometimes the boundary between dreaming and waking vision is blurred: a dream-visitor may ask the dreamer if he is awake; he replies that he is, only to be told that he is in fact asleep, but it will turn out as if he were awake. The visitor may be either a hostile female (possibly akin to the *dísir*), as in *Fóstbræðra saga* ch. 11 (ÍF 6, 174–175; trans. Regal, *CS II*, 355), or a helpful male, as in *Flóamanna saga* ch. 15 (ÍF 13, 260; trans. Acker, *CS III*, 283). The dreamer may catch a glimpse of the dream-visitor leaving as he wakes up – see *Laxdæla saga* ch. 31 (ÍF 5, 84–85; trans. Kunz, *CS V*, 42) and *Óláfs saga helga* in Snorri's *Heimskringla*, ch. 188 (ÍF 27, 340–341; trans. Finlay and Faulkes 2014, 228).

In some dreams the supernatural being who is the object of *blót* (see below) comes to give an explicit message about the future – usually one which is unwelcome to the dreamer. In *Flóamanna saga* chs. 20–21 the god Þórr appears five times to Þorgils Örrabeinsstjúpr to reproach and threaten him for converting to Christianity (ÍF 13, 274–281; trans. Acker, *CS III*, 288–290); in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 26 Glúmr dreams that his dead kinsmen have come to tell him that the god Freyr has resolved to drive him off his estate despite their pleas for him (ÍF 9, 87–88; trans. McKinnell, *CS II*, 308); in

Páttir Þorvalds viðförla I ch. 3 the local spirit to whom Koðrán has offered *blót* appears to reproach him for the pain which he suffers from the holy water sprinkled by the missionary bishop who is staying with him (ÍF 15, 65–66; trans. Porter, *CSI V*, 361). In all these cases the prophecies are explicit and come true. From the Christian point of view heathen gods and spirits are either devils or wicked historical ancestors, but in medieval European dream theory devils could only cause *phantasmata* of no prophetic value (Macrobius, *Expositio in Somnium Scipionis*, trans. Stahl, 87–90), so the fact that these predictions are all fulfilled points to some continuing tradition of belief in the powers of the gods or spirits to whom *blót* was offered.

Dreams involving prophetesses (*seiðkonur* or *vǫlur*) are common, and sometimes seem to reflect a belief in the ability of the *hamr* “shape, personal nature” of a person to move beyond the body during sleep with the help of spirits known as *gandar* in order to gain hidden information (see also section 4.c. below). In *Fóstbræðra saga* ch. 23 (ÍF 6, 243–248; trans. Regal, *CSI II*, 383–386) two rival women are troubled in their sleep and when they wake are able to give information about the whereabouts and actions of their enemies; the first refers explicitly to her *gandar*, while the second continues to rely on heathen magic while claiming to be a Christian. A similar belief in the sinister powers of *vǫlur* may underlie the dream of Þórðr in *Haralds saga harðráða* ch. 81 (ÍF 28, 177; trans. Magnússon and Pálsson, 140), in which a troll-woman rides a wolf which she feeds with the bodies of those who are falling in battle. Although this dream is not interpreted, it clearly foreshadows Harald’s coming defeat and death.

However, since the dreamer was usually seen as a passive recipient and therefore not actively responsible for their predictions, these could sometimes be promulgated without social opprobrium or legal penalty, even when the dream informant was a figure from the heathen past. In *Laxdæla saga* ch. 76 (ÍF 5, 223–224; trans. Kunz, *CSI V*, 117) Herdís dreams of a dead *vǫlva* who complains that the penitent tears of Guðrún are scalding her in her grave, and in *Íslendinga saga* ch. 190 (*Sturlunga saga*, eds. Jóhannesson et al., I, 519–522; trans. McGrew and Thomas, I, 431–434) the dead Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, who is explicitly said to be heathen, appears in a dream to give information about the fates of important political figures; this is presented as a recent event, said to have happened in 1255. A development of this tradition appears in *Gísla saga*, where the hero repeatedly dreams of two “dream-women”, one favourable and the other hostile (chs. 22, 24, 30, 33, ÍF 6: 70–73, 75–77, 94–96, 102–109; trans. Regal, *CSI II*, 27–30, 38–39, 41–44). The “good” dream-woman gives Gísli moral advice and the bad one urges him towards the sin of despair, and in this respect they resemble good and bad personal angels; but they also tell Gísli how long he will live and how he will die, and there is no clear triumph of the good dream-woman over the evil one; these features are probably derived from native traditions about *spákonur*.

Another type of dream-visitor is the aggressively heathen dead male ancestor who comes to punish the dreamer for abandoning *blót* and veneration of his ancestors, and in these cases the punishment persists outside the dream. In *Bárðar saga* ch. 21, (ÍF 13, 168–170; trans. Anderson, *CSI II*, 26) Gestr Bárðarson is visited by his dead father, who

blinds him as a punishment for converting to Christianity; and at some time around 1206 a member of Snorri Sturluson's household is said to have dreamed that Snorri's heathen ancestor Egill Skallagrímsson came to him to express his disapproval of Snorri's impending move away from the ancestral family estate (*Íslendinga saga* ch. 16, *Sturlunga saga*, eds. Jóhannesson et al., I, 241–242; trans. McGrew and Thomas, I, 131).

However, most male visitants are saintly Christian figures who give advice and encouragement, recall the dreamer from sin, or make favourable predictions (St. Óláfr in *Fóstbræðra saga* ch. 24 [ÍF 6, 255–256; trans. Regal, *CSI* II, 389–390]; Óláfr Tryggvason in *Hallfreðar saga* ch. 10 [ÍF 8, 191–192; trans. Whaley, *CSI* I, 249] and in Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga* ch. 188 [ÍF 27, 340–341; trans. Finlay and Faulkes, 227–228]. Such dreams must have been widely believed in the twelfth century, for Sverrir (King of Norway 1181–1202) made astute political use of them, claiming dreams of being washed in a quasi-baptism by St. Óláfr and of being anointed by the prophet Samuel (*Sverris saga* chs. 5 and 10, ÍF 30, 8–9 and 16–17; trans. Sephton, 4–5 and 11–12).

Some dreams are used to predict the future and/or descendants of an unborn child, but although these might seem to parallel the predictions by Norns, they are largely derived from Christian sources. Some use the symbol of a great tree, which signifies noble descent or kingship and probably comes from Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Dan. 4 and/or the common medieval idea of the Tree of Jesse; the dreamer may be the pregnant mother-to-be, as in *Hálfðanar saga svarta* ch. 6, (ÍF 26, 90; trans. Finlay and Faulkes, 51), or another member of the family, as in *Bárðar saga* ch. 1 (ÍF 13, 104; trans. Anderson, *CSI* II, 238), where Bárðr dreams of his royal descendants and of a future change of faith in Norway. An adaptation of the tree to a number of leeks (traditionally the “best of grasses”, see *Völuspá*, Sigurður Nordal 1984, 15–16) appears in *Flóamanna saga* ch. 24 (ÍF 13, 293–295; trans. Acker, *CSI* III, 292–293), where the dreamer will become the father of the “leeks”, each of which branches to produce further descendants. Such dreams are usually interpreted on the spot, either by the dreamer himself or by another member of his or her family.

The Interpretation of Dreams

Most of the dream symbols are fairly easy to interpret. A man covered in blood is dead or will die (examples include *Gunnlaugs saga* ch. 13 [ÍF 3, 104–105; trans. Attwood, *CSI* I, 331–332]), while dream-women who sprinkle blood (e. g. *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 21; ÍF 9, 71–72; trans. McKinnell, *CSI* II, 299) or touch warriors with a cloth dripping with blood (as in *Íslendinga saga* ch. 122, eds. Jóhannesson et al., I, 403; trans. McGrew and Thomas, I, 308) signify a battle in which men will be killed; two instances in *Íslendinga saga* are presented as recent events, said to have taken place in 1209 and 1237. Hostile warriors often appear in dreams as animals, most often as wolves, a symbol which usually suggests treachery (Kelchner 1935: 77–143 cites nine examples, including *Harðar saga* ch. 31 [ÍF 13, 77; trans. Kellogg, *CSI* II, 226–227]). Snakes and

hawks also imply treachery (see *Gísla saga* ch. 14; ÍF 6, 46; trans. Regal, *CSI* II, 15), where the snake and the wolf are obviously synonymous symbols, and *Gunnlaugs saga* ch. 2 (ÍF 3, 53–55; trans. Attwood, *CSI* I, 306–307), where the hawk is contrasted with two eagles), while eagles and bears are complimentary symbols (see e. g. *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* ch. 12 [*FSN* III, 77; trans. Pálsson and Edwards, 60–61]; *Njáls saga* ch. 23 [ÍF 12, 64–65; trans. Cook, *CSI* III, 28], where the bear represents the *fylgja* “attendant spirit” of the hero Gunnarr). Oxen and boars represent fierce warriors but seem morally neutral (oxen represent the *fylgjur* of the men of Ljósavatn in a dream in *Ljósvetninga saga* ch. 16 [ÍF 10, 85; trans. Andersson and Miller, *CSI* IV, 244] and a boar is that of Hrólf’s brother Ketill in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* ch. 12 [*FSN* III, 76–77; trans. Pálsson and Edwards, 60–61]), and there are occasional examples of more exotic animals: dragon, leopard, lion and stag (see Kelchner). A few dreams present less obvious symbols, like the head-dresses and rings which are interpreted as representing Guðrún’s four husbands in *Laxdæla saga* ch. 33 (ÍF 5, 88–91; trans. Kunz, *CSI* V, 44–45).

Two eddic poems contain rival interpretations of dream sequences. *Atlamál* 14–26 (*Eddukvæði II*, 385–387; trans. Orchard, 217–219) presents two episodes in which the wives of the brothers Høgni and Gunnarr have multiple dreams which foretell the deaths of their husbands at the hands of Atli, King of the Huns, if they accept his invitation to visit him. Because they cannot honourably refuse the invitation, Høgni and Gunnarr supply harmless interpretations, in which they themselves seem to have little faith, while their wives either give correct interpretations or leave the dreams unexplained. In *Guðrúnarkviða II* 37–43 (*Eddukvæði II*, 360–361; trans. Orchard, 201–202) we meet a case of deliberately false interpretation: Atli asks his wife Guðrún to interpret four of his dreams which actually prefigure her murder of him and the fact that she will serve up the flesh of their two sons for him to eat. She gives false interpretations of the dreams, but is well aware of their true meaning. Again it is the man who is lulled into security with false rationalisations, and it seems to be suggested that women are better attuned to the meanings of dreams than men.

The disastrous interpretation of a dream is nearly always correct. This may be because dreams of impending disaster are useful in giving a story shape and suspense – it does not necessarily imply that they were commoner than propitious dreams in the actual social culture of medieval Scandinavia.

The historical “truth” of any dream is impossible for anyone but the dreamer to know, but dreams are commonly experienced within the conventions expected in the dreamer’s society, and historical experience itself may sometimes have been influenced by literary convention. Similarly, while some omens are clearly fabrications or importations of dream material into stories of waking life, others reflect a commonly accepted code of how chance occurrences were thought to be significant.

Omens Outside Dreams

Many omens outside dreams are portentous events giving warning of a coming disaster, usually one involving death. A rain of blood is either an omen or the cause of an epidemic in which many people will die; the ghosts of drowned men appear in the hall with their clothes dripping wet; a “moon of fate” (*urðarmáni*) appears on the inside wall of a hall, and is immediately and correctly interpreted as a prediction of a human death, perhaps because a human being’s allotted lifespan could be measured as a number of changes of the moon; for examples of all of these, see *Eyrbyggja saga* chs. 51, 54 and 52 (ÍF 4, 140–141, 148, 145–146; trans. Quinn, *CSI V*, 197–198, 201, 199–200).

Another death portent is when a military leader stumbles on the way to a battle, but this is sometimes given competing interpretations. The optimistic one, usually stated by the leader himself, may be derived from Suetonius, who says that Julius Caesar stumbled as he disembarked for his African campaign and turned it into a good omen by exclaiming “I seize you, Africa!” (Suetonius, *Vita divi Iuli*, ed. Rolfe 1913, I, 80–83); this is echoed, for example, in William of Poitiers’ life of William the Conqueror (Davis and Chibnall 1998, 189). But in most Germanic sources the true meaning of this omen is that the ruler’s personal spirit has abandoned him and he will be killed in the battle that follows. In *Haralds saga harðráða* ch. 90 (ÍF 28, 186; trans. Magnússon and Pálsson, 149) Haraldr harðráði invokes the proverb *fall er farar heill* “a fall means good luck on a journey” when his horse stumbles before the Battle of Stamford Bridge; but his enemy Harold Godwinsson is looking on and comments: “his personal spirit (*hamingja*) has probably left him”, and is soon proved right. Occasionally the spirits are visible to someone other than the victim, as when Una sees dead men riding to meet her husband in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 19 (ÍF 9, 63; trans. McKinnell, *CSI II*, 295). As with dreams, the disastrous interpretation usually turns out to be correct, and for the same literary reason.

A number of events which seem unremarkable to a modern reader are taken as warnings from personal and family spirits, as when someone is seized by violent yawning or sneezing when a dangerous enemy is near. In *Njáls saga* ch. 12 the magician Svanr begins to yawn violently, and realizes that the *fylgjur* “attendant spirits” of his enemy Ósvífr are approaching (ÍF 12, 37; trans. Cook, *CSI III*, 16). But people with no magical gift could also experience and interpret this omen, as in *Orkneyinga saga* chs. 93 and 103, when Sveinn Ásleifarson and Rognvaldr kali realise that their violent sneezes are a warning of the approach of their enemies (ÍF 34, 247 and 276; trans. Pálsson and Edwards, 168 and 186).

On the other hand, one very strange omen is regarded as a sign of rightful inheritance: a seal’s head comes up through the floor of the hall and can only be hammered down again by the predestined heir (*Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 53, ÍF 4, 147; trans. Quinn, *CSI V*, 200–201), or a giant is hammered into the ground by the rightful king of Norway (*Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* ch. 12, *FSN III*, 415; trans. Pálsson and Edwards, 139).

These portents seem to reflect a belief in beings sprung from the earth who are bent on destroying humanity and whose defeat by a chosen hero denotes his predestined right to authority over the land.

Manticism

Manticism may be defined as the attempt to acquire specific knowledge of future or hidden events by supernatural means. Medieval sources usually regard it with disapproval (↗ Rapisarda, *Mantic Arts Western Christian World*; ↗ Heiduk, *Prognostication Western Christian World*), but it is hard to decide whether this reflects the Christian view that one should not pry into God’s Providence, or whether it was already normal in pre-Christian times (perhaps because of the frequent association of prophecy with the disgraceful form of female magic known as *seiðr*).

Prognostication and Sacrifice to the Gods

In narratives set in heathen times the process of consulting gods or spirits is usually part of *blót*, honouring them with sacrifice; it was also called *at ganga til fréttar* “to go to find something out” or *at sjá á hlaut* “consulting lots”.

Tacitus (*Germania* ch. 10, ed. Anderson, trans. Rives, 81 and notes on 165–166) describes one method of doing this: “They cut a branch broken off from a fruit-bearing tree into slices (*surculos*), and after distinguishing them with certain different marks they scatter them at random onto a white cloth. Then the state priest, if it is a public consultation, or the father of the family, if it is a private one, prays to the gods and, looking towards the sky, picks up three of them, one at a time; each is interpreted according to the marks previously scored on it.” Something similar is probably implied in *Völuspá* K 61 (*Eddukvæði I*, 306; trans. Orchard, 14), where Hœnir will *hlautvið kjósa* “choose the wood of augury” in the reborn world after Ragnarøk, and in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 38 (ÍF 26, 70; trans. Finlay and Faulkes, 39), where King Granmárr of Södermanland goes to Uppsala “to make sacrifice so that there should be peace, as the custom was at the beginning of summer. Then the augury chip (*spánn*) fell for him in such a way as to suggest that he would not live long.”

Another method was to scatter blood from a sacrificed animal or human being from a *hlauttein* “augury twig” so that the random splashes of blood could be “read”. Blood could also be scattered over the building and the participants in the ceremony, as described in *Hákonar saga góða* ch. 14, with an admiring and probably contemporary quotation from Kormákr’s skaldic poem *Sigurðardrápa* (ca. 950; ÍF 26 167–168, trans. Finlay and Faulkes, 98–99; and see Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1997, 231–236). Even gods could be portrayed engaging in this kind of sacrificial augury, as they do

when trying to discover where they can hold their feast in *Hymiskviða* 1 (*Eddukvæði* I, 399; trans. Orchard, 76).

Those consulted by means of *blót* were often but not always gods. Flóki Vilgerðarson, about to leave Norway, invokes the patronage of Óðinn when he makes sacrifice to three ravens so that they will help him to navigate (*Landnámabók*, Hauksbók ch. 5, ÍF 1, 37; trans. Pálsson and Edwards, 17), while Þórólfr Mostrarskegg prefers to consult Þórr, first as to whether he should be reconciled with the King or leave the country, and then when he throws overboard the pillars of his high seat, on which there is a carved image of Þórr, saying that they will come ashore where Þórr wants him to settle (*Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 4, ÍF 4, 7; trans. Quinn, *CSI* IV, 133; *Landnámabók*, Sturlubók ch. 85, Hauksbók ch. 73; ÍF 1, 124–126; trans. Pálsson and Edwards, 45–46). Ingimundr Þorsteinsson is also said to have been forced to accept his destiny of settling in Iceland, but his patron god is Freyr: in *Vatnsdæla saga* ch. 12 (ÍF 8, 32–36; trans. Wawn, *CSI* IV, 16–17) he is told by King Haraldr hárfagri that Freyr wants him to settle in Iceland, and this is confirmed when he employs three Sámi shamans; in *Landnámabók* (Sturlubók ch. 179, Hauksbók ch. 145, ÍF 1, 217–219; trans. Pálsson and Edwards, 83–84) a prophetess tells him that he will find his lost figure of the god at the place in Iceland where he digs a hole in which to place the pillars of his high seat.

Blót in honour of other beings does not always include augury: for example, it does not seem to have been the purpose of the annual *blót* to the *dísir* at the beginning of winter (*Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 6, ÍF 9, 17; trans. McKinnell, *CSI* II, 275, and the heathen Anglo-Saxon *matrum noctem* “night of the mothers” in Bede’s *De Temporum Ratione* ch. 15 [ed. Jones, col. 2320]), or of the Swedish *blót* to the elves in Sigvatr’s early eleventh-century *Austrfararvísur* 5 (*SP* I, 590–592, quoted in Snorri’s *Óláfs saga helga* ch. 91 [ÍF 27, 137]; trans. Finlay and Faulkes, 89). But when *blót* is offered to local spirits the acquisition of esoteric knowledge is usually part of the motivation for it. Þorsteinn rauðnefr offers *blót* to the spirit in a waterfall; in the last summer of his life he knows that he and/or his large flocks are doomed, and when he dies they all fall into the waterfall (*Landnámabók*, Sturlubók ch. 355, Hauksbók ch. 313; ÍF 1, 358; trans. Pálsson and Edwards, 134). When asked to convert to Christianity, Koðrán á Gilja replies that he has a prophet (*spámaðr* or *ármaðr*) of his own, who lives with his family of spirits in a stone on the farm, tells him future events, guards his flocks and advises him (*Þáttur Þorvalds ens víðförla* I ch. 3, ÍF 15.2, 62–68; *Kristni saga* ch. 2, ÍF 15.2, 7–8; trans. Grønlie, 35–36).

According to Tacitus, Germanic augury also made use of the sounds made by specially bred white horses (*Germania* ch. 10, ed. Anderson, trans. Rives, 81 and note on p. 167). In some sources veneration of horses is associated with the cult of Freyr (e. g. *Vatnsdæla saga* ch. 34, ÍF 8, 90–92; trans. Wawn, *CSI* IV, 45), but although the eating of sacrificed horseflesh was an important part of heathen ritual and remained legal for a few years after the Conversion of Iceland (see e. g. Ari’s *Íslendingabók* ch. 7 [ÍF 1, 17; trans. Grønlie]), and some high-status funerals included the sacrifice of horses (e. g. in ninth-century Ribe [Denmark], see <https://projects.au.dk/northernemporium/>),

there is no evidence that horses were still used for prognostication in the Viking Age.

The earliest surviving law-code which prohibits *blót* is the Old English *Laws of Cnut* (1027–1034), which forbids heathenism of all kinds: *oððon blote oððon fyrhte* “whether in blood-offerings or in transmigration” (on transmigration see below); the Latin version, known as *Quadripartitus*, defines *blot*: *aut in sacrificio, id est secundum ritum Suuanorum* “whether in sacrifice, that is according to the religion of the Swedes, or [...]” (*Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. Liebermann, 312–313). This, and the absence of such provisions from earlier Anglo-Saxon legal codes, suggests that they reflect the practices of recent Scandinavian settlers in England. Most early Norwegian law-codes also forbid *blót*, although penalties vary from a fine of three marks (*Ældre Borgarthings Christenret* I.16, *NGL* I, 337–372) to outlawry and total confiscation of property (*Ældre Frostathings-lov* III.15, *NGL* I, 152). Only the Icelandic *Grágás* offers a definition of *blót*: “A person sacrifices to heathen spirits when they consecrate their property/livestock to anyone other than God and His saints” (*Grágás* ch. 18, 1997, 19; trans. Dennis et al., 38–39). The detailed provisions for penalties and defences suggest that *blót* continued to be practised in secret by some people after the Conversion, both in Norway and Iceland.

Prognostication through Transmigration

Predictive and effective magic are difficult to separate, since both tended to come under the heading of *seiðr* “enchantment”, which was practised by Óðinn but was usually the preserve of itinerant women and other social outsiders, often members of the Sámi (Lappish) people. In *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 Snorri explains: “by means of it (Óðinn) could know the fates of men and things that had not yet happened, as well as cause people to suffer death, misfortune or illness, as well as taking away people’s wits or strength and giving them to others. But so much perversion (*ergi*) is involved in this kind of magic when it is practised, that it was thought shameful for men to be involved in it [...]” (ÍF 26, 19; trans. Finlay and Faulkes, 11). *Ergi* seems to have involved a man “becoming a woman” in some way, possibly involving ritual transvestism like that described in *Germania* ch. 43 (ed. Anderson, trans. Rives, 94 and note on 306; see also Meulengracht-Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 1983, 19 and 63–64). There are a few stories of male *seiðmenn* other than Óðinn, but they are usually villainous foreigners, like the Hebridean Kotkell in *Laxdæla saga* chs. 35–37 (ÍF 5, 95–108, trans. Kunz, *CSI* V, 47–55) and the two *finnar* (Sámi) in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 32 (ÍF 26, 135–136; trans. Finlay and Faulkes, 78–79).

The commonest terms for women who practised *seiðr* are *völva* “prophetess” (probably from *vǫlr* “staff”) and *seiðkona* “enchantress”, but *spákona* “prophetess” and *vísindakona* “wise woman” also appear. Family sagas often use euphemisms such as *kona* [...] *fróð ok framsýn* “a wise woman who could see the future”; *þat tǫluðu*

menn, at hon væri fjölkunnig “people reckoned that she was skilled in magic”; or *nøkkut fornfróð* “rather skilled in ancient things”; for examples of all these terms see McKinnell 2005, 95–97.

Fictive descriptions of the practice of *seiðr* show a large measure of agreement – see e.g. *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4 (ÍF 4, 206–209; trans. Kunz, *CSI* I, 5–7), *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 3 (*FSN* II, 9–11); and a rather down-at-heel example in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 12 (ÍF 9, 41; trans. McKinnell, *CSI* II, 285–286). Similarly, in *Lokasenna* 24 Loki accuses Óðinn of having “banged on a drum like a *vǫlva*” (*Eddukvæði I*, 413; trans. Orchard, 87). The *vǫlva* is usually invited into his house by a named householder to prophesy for his household. She must be lavishly entertained and paid with valuable gifts, and may arrive accompanied by a group of helpers, or may need a group of women to help her achieve her trance through dancing, singing and/or drumming. The magic is often performed on a platform or mound (an ancient feature which also appears in Eddius Stephanus’s account of an attack on St. Wilfrid and his party by the heathen South Saxons in the year 666, for which he probably had an eye-witness informant [*Vita Wilfridi* ch. 13, ed. Colgrave, 28–29; trans. Webb, 119]). The trance involves a seizure in which the *vǫlva* opens her mouth wide and gasps for breath. During the trance the separable soul or *gandr* of the *vǫlva* or male magician (often one of the Sámi) typically makes a journey to discover hidden knowledge, heal sickness or revive a dead person. The earliest source for this is the Norwegian-Latin *Historia Norvegiae* ch. 4 (ed. Storm, 85; trans. Kunin, 6–7), which probably dates from the 1150s; however, the term *gandr* is probably of Norse rather than Sámi origin, and the two magic-workers in this account are both male (further see Tolley 2009, I: 246–269). The *vǫlva* often delivers her prophecies within the trance, in which case it is often said that “a song came into her mouth” from elsewhere; in these cases she speaks in verse, refers to her own faculty of “seeing”, and sometimes refers to herself in the third person, as in *Vǫluspá* K 22, 34 etc. (*Eddukvæði I*, 296 and 299; trans. Orchard, 8 and 10). In other cases, prophecies are given in response to questions when she has returned to her normal waking state.

Most early Norwegian law-codes forbid this kind of prophecy, which they describe as *at segja spár* “to speak prophecies” or *at fara með spásögur* “to go about with prophetic stories” (e.g. *Ældre Gulathings-lov* 28 [*NGL* I: 17]; *Ældre Frostathings-lov* III.15 [*NGL* I: 152]). Those who seek prophecies are said to *gera Finfarar, fara at spyria spa* “make a journey to the Sámi, to go and ask for prophecies”, *fara a Finmarkr at spyria spadom* “go to Finnmark to ask for prophecies”, or *trua a Finna* “to believe/trust in the Sámi” (*Ældre Borgarthings-Christenret* II.25, III.22 [*NGL* I: 362 and 372]; *Ældre Eidisvathings-Christenret* I.45 and II. 34–35 [*NGL* I: 389–390 and 403]). Making, seeking or listening to such prophecy are crimes comparable with murder, suicide and malicious enchantment. There are provisions for valid defences, and this suggests that the practice actually existed in medieval Norway, but in Iceland it appears only in legendary sagas about the distant past; some Icelandic legendary sagas even find it necessary to explain what a *vǫlva* is (see McKinnell 2005, 98–99).

“Sitting Out” and Prognostication by Contact with the Dead

An alternative to the trance was for the prophetess to “sit out” at night at a crossroads, on a mound or in a cave to wake the spirits of the dead.

However, Norwegian legal prohibitions suggest that the purpose of “sitting out” was “to wake up trolls and perform heathen practices by that means”. It is not always clear what is meant by “trolls”, for the same codes sometimes refer to magic-working women (or men) as trolls or *trylsk* “trollish”, especially when they are Sámi. “Sitting out” is another crime that cannot be financially compensated for.

Seiðr of all kinds is often associated with the Sámi people or their territory, and it is sometimes suggested that most historical *seiðkonur* and *vǫlur* were Sámi women. However, other stories make the magic-worker Hebridean, Russian or Greenlandic (e.g. *Laxdæla saga* ch. 35, ÍF 5, 95–100; trans. Kunz, *CSI V*, 47; Oddr Snorrason, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar* ch. 6, ÍF 25, 144–145; *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4, ÍF 4, 206 and 410; trans. Kunz, *CSI I*, 5–7), and it seems likely that these tales use the Sámi, as a mysterious people inhabiting the barren and frozen north, to fill an “Other-World” slot in the imaginative world of Old Norse culture.

In legendary sources *vǫlur* are sometimes implied to have non-human origins as trolls, giants or the dead, and some prophecies are directly delivered by the dead, or by dying characters who are not otherwise gifted with prophetic powers.

In Icelandic literary texts, *vǫlur* are usually employed as a literary motif. It is normally assumed that they tell the truth about an inevitable future, even in the few stories where a *vǫlva* makes what seems to be a conditional prediction (e.g. *Orms þátr Stórolfssonar* ch. 5, ÍF 13, 404–406; trans. Driscoll, *CSI III*, 458–459), or tries to deny the truth of what she has just foretold (e.g. *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 3, *FSN II*, 9–11). More often, she asserts that her prediction will come true whether the subject likes it or not (for examples, see McKinnell 2005, 98 and 105).

Prognostication in Runic Inscriptions

In runic charms it is often hard to distinguish between predictive and effective magic; for example, a runic love charm from Bergen, Norway (B 257) is obviously intended to be effective, but a similar curse in the Eddic poem *Skírmismál* 36 is clearly predictive (see McKinnell et al. 2004, 131–133; *Skírmismál* 36 in *Eddukvæði I*, 387; trans. Orchard, 65). A few inscriptions mingle prediction with petition to a god, as in a fourteenth-century charm from Bergen (B 241) which calls on Óðinn to reveal the identity of a thief (Knirk 1995). However most runic charms are practical in intent and clearly meant to bring about a desired result rather than merely to predict it.

Astral Sciences

The extent to which heathen Norse mythology was mapped onto the heavens is a subject of current academic debate, but it certainly included mythological explanations of sun- and moon-dogs, rainbows, the midnight sun and the names and origins of some stars, although it is difficult to identify which stars are meant (see e. g. Gísli Sigurðsson 2014, 184–198; Dubois 2014, 199–220). Viking Age seafarers were capable practical navigators and were probably able to make rough calculations of latitude from the elevation of the sun at different times of day, but I know of no evidence that they consulted the stars for predictive purposes.

Medical Prognostication

Norse medicine usually aims at practical cures rather than prediction or diagnosis, but *Fóstbræðra saga* states that after the Battle of Stiklarstaðir in 1030, wounded men were given a mixture of onion and herbs to eat: if their wounds smelt of onions, that was a sign that the gut was pierced and that they would die, whereas otherwise they might recover (*Fóstbræðra saga* ch. 24, ÍF 6, 275; trans. Regal, *CSI* II, 401–402).

Medical magic appears both in Eddic poetry (e. g. *Hávamál* 147 and *Sigrdrífumál* 12; *Eddukvæði* I, 352 and II, 315–316; trans. Orchard, 37 and 171) and in runic inscriptions, but the poems merely assert knowledge of a charm which imparts medical skill without including the charm itself, while most of the medical inscriptions attempt to bring about practical cures rather than to make predictions; often, as in a copper amulet from Sigtuna, central Sweden (McKinnell et al. 2004, 126–127), they tell the alien being who caused the disease that he has been found and must now flee. It might be possible to divide them grammatically, taking those which use the indicative mood as predictive and those which use the subjunctive or the imperative as merely hopeful, but this would be a modern distinction which probably did not exist in the minds of those who carved them.

Calendrical Calculations

When the *Alþingi* (the annual general assembly of the Icelandic commonwealth) was established in 930, the Norse calendar consisted of two seasons of twenty-six weeks each, so that any particular date always fell on the same day of the week, but this meant that the year had only 364 days, and in the later tenth century it was realised that this was too short and “summer was moving backwards into spring” (Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók* ch. 4, ÍF 1, 9–11; trans. Grønlie, 5–6). It was therefore decided to add an extra week every seventh year, and some years later this was further refined so

that the extra week was added in five specified years of each 28-year cycle. Although this correction of the calendar made obvious sense, it had to be validated by a symbolic dream before being accepted as law at the *Alþingi*, and after the Conversion to Christianity it survived alongside the Church calendar. Chieftains and priests then had to be mathematically competent enough to avoid celebrating Easter or arriving for the *Alþingi* on the wrong date; either of these errors made one liable to legal penalties.

Predictions Involving the Weather

One of the mythological signs of the approach of Ragnarøk is the *fimbulvetr* “mighty winter”, in which there will be three consecutive winters with no summer between them. In *Völuspá* (K) 40 the sunshine during the *fimbulvetr* is said to be black (*Eddukvæði I*, 301; trans. Orchard, 11); this has sometimes been interpreted as sunshine seen through a cloud of volcanic ash. If this is right, the image must have originated in Iceland, the only Norse-speaking area which experiences volcanic eruptions, and it cannot therefore be older than the beginning of the Norse settlement of Iceland around 870. More particular weather-omens include a rain of blood in *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 51 (*ÍF* 4, 139–145; trans. Quinn, *CSI* I, 197–199) which turns out to be either a prediction or the cause of a plague epidemic (see above under “Omens”), and the employment of a *völva* to predict when a famine will end (*Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4, *ÍF* 4, 206–209; trans. Kunz, *CSII*, 5–7).

Like most of the other types of prediction discussed here, astral, medical, calendrical and meteorological prognostications from the Norse-speaking area seem usually to arise from the perceived practical needs of individuals or social groups rather than from any spirit of scientific inquiry for its own sake.

Selected Bibliography

(Note: because of the nature of its contents, this bibliography is arranged in the order of the Icelandic alphabet: long (accented) vowels are regarded as separate letters and follow the corresponding short vowels; ð follows *d*; and the end of the alphabet has the order *x*, *y*, *ý*, *z*, *þ*, *æ*, *œ*, *ø*, *ø*, although in modern Icelandic *ø* and *ø* are both represented as *ö*).

Abbreviations

CSI: *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders I–V*. Various translators. Ed. Viðar Hreinsson. Reykjavík, 1997.

Eddukvæði I–II: Eds. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason; *ÍF*. 2014

- FSN*: Eds. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda I–III*. Reykjavík, 1943–1944.
- ÍF*: Íslensk fornrit. Reykjavík, 1933–.
- NGL*: *Norges gamle Love*. Eds. Rudolf Keyser, Gustav Storm Munch, and Ebbe Hertzberg. 5 vols. Christiania, 1846–1895.
- Skj.*: Ed. Finnur Jónsson; *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*. 4 vols. (A 1–2, B 1–2). København, 1908–1915.
- SP*: *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. Various editors. Turnhout, 2007–.

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Leszek P. Ślupecki

Prognostication in Pagan Beliefs among Slavs in the Middle Ages

We find the first account of Slavic pagan beliefs (Ślupecki 2020, in print) in a short text in Procopius' of Cesarea's *History of Wars*, which also includes the first information about the Slavic approach to prognostication. Procopius of Cesarea states, with regard to the Slavs:

As for fate, they neither know it or nor do they in any wise admit that it has any power among humans but, whenever death stands close before them, either stricken with sickness or before a battle, they make a promise that, if they escape, they will immediately make a sacrifice to the god in return for their life. (Procopius III, 14; trans. Dewing)

The Slavs would fulfill thereafter everything they had promised in return for their survival. The statement about Slavic ignorance regarding fate does not sound very promising for our research but is not entirely accurate, at least in regard to prognostication, as Procopius in the same account indicates otherwise. Referring to “rivers, nymphs and some other spirits” that were worshiped by the Slavs, he relates how they not only “sacrifice to all these” but also “make their divination (*μαντεία*) in connection with these sacrifices.”

Definitions and Terminology

Sources

Generally speaking, however, our knowledge of Slavic prophecies and prognostication is very limited. Precisely like Slavic paganism (Gieysztor 2006; Ślupecki 2013, 338–358) as a whole, the divinations that we can investigate thanks to written sources were recorded during the twilight of the pre-Christian beliefs of the Slavonic people in the tenth to twelfth centuries CE, and in more extensive detail in two separate regions exclusively: in Polabia and Pomerania on the one hand and in Rus' on the other, what follows simply from the fact that only there written sources brings enough material for the topic. Furthermore, the records were mainly (with the exception of those from Rus') composed in Latin by foreign authors, what provides us with information written, so to speak, “from outside” the Slavic culture and which includes in consequence very good, highly detailed descriptions of certain divinatory rituals (first of all, cleromancy combined with hippomancy) but says almost nothing about prophecies, which were very difficult to understand and describe without a deeper knowledge of that partic-

ular language and culture. Using Ciceros' terminology, one may also claim that, from Slavic divinations, we learn something about *artificiosa divinatio* (mostly from Polabia and Pomerania in the tenth-twelfth centuries) but virtually nothing about *divinatio naturalis*, like prophecies and dreams. For Polabia and Pomerania, valuable source information may be drawn, first of all, from such an external view on the divinations performed there already in a relatively institutionalized way, in the form of the oracles that were connected to the most important pagan sanctuaries of these Western Slavs (Ślupecki 1994). The relevant narratives one may find in accounts by Thietmar of Merseburg from the turn of the tenth to the eleventh century, in three St Otto's Lives (*Vita Prieflingensis*, Helmold, and Ebo), by Adam of Bremen and Helmold of Bosau, and in Saxo Grammaticus (all sources originate from the twelfth century; see also ↗ Lehner, Prognostication in Latin Historiography). For Rus', the most interesting information on prophecy and prognostication is provided by the Primary Chronicle (*Povest' vremennykh let*), composed at the beginning of the twelfth century, where the accounts of divinations and a kind of prophecy are, however, strongly influenced by the Scandinavian and Finnish tradition with regard to both the narratives and also the level of belief itself. The next stage of development of sources concerning Slavic divination is the process of, so to speak, offering mythographical descriptions of the Slavic pagan past, although these add little with regard to our topic. Nevertheless, a few accounts of this nature include interesting material, like the legend from the Bohemian dynastic tradition that ascribed divinatory and magical powers to the Czech heroine, Lubaša. Such mythographical and demonological elements occur infrequently in accounts of Slavic pagan divination. The following written sources already belong to the common European wave of medieval and early modern superstition (including the picturesque Cracovian legend about a sorcerer and a university master, Twardowski), which is already another topic. In very rich form, however, Slavic prophecy and prognostication reemerge in the nineteenth century in the ethnographical material.

Research Perspective

In listing the academic research on Slavic prophecy and prognostication (speaking only about works still actual today), one should begin with Szymon Matusiak's article (in Polish) from 1911 concerning the problem of *źreb* (= Latin *sors*) within the context of cleromancy and hippomancy (see below), and two studies by Rolf Wilhelm Brednich (from 1964 and 1967), both in German, about the idea of destiny and the role of the fatal sisters in the folklore of eastern Europe, together with a couple of studies dealing with the problem of Slavic hippomancy and cleromancy, including some of my own articles (Ślupecki 2006, 2008 and 2009) and a book-chapter (Ślupecki 2017, 196–207). Two papers focus on a general approach to the problem of Slavic divination, one written in French half a century ago by Frans Vyncke (1968, 303–332), and my own short study from the beginning of the present millennium (Ślupecki 2003, 73–80).

Genuine Terminology in a Linguistic Perspective

Despite Procopius' skepticism, one should stress that a vital element regarding prophecy and prognostication in the Slavs' pre-Christian beliefs is that the Slavs used the original Slavic vocabulary preserved in their languages, which are rich in genuine termini connected to destiny and divination. We should outline here at least some of the more important terms employed.

To begin with destiny, the Polish term *rok* (Linde 1951, vol. 5, 62), which means today simply a "year" originally denoted a definite term, or the last and ultimate day of such definite space of time and, in this last sense, was used in Old Polish juridical terminology to denote definite times for court assemblies (*roki sądowe*). From the same root originates the term *wyrok* ("a sentence"). From *rok*, however, derived also *urok* (today "bewitching" or – strangely enough – "glamour", originally simply "fate") and *prorok* ("prophet"), denoting, literally speaking "someone who says what must come" (Matusiak 1911, 195–196; Brückner 1927, 438, 463, 565). In the languages of the Southern Slavs, like Serbo-Croatian, exist the term *sreća*, denoting "fortune", "fate", "doom" – literally, "saying something that has already been predicated, decided and sentenced." With regard to proverbs (where one may find plenty of petrified old ideas), one should quote here after Julian Krzyżanowski (1972, 599), Polish fatalist saying: "jak nie urok to sraczka" (actually quite obscene), originally meant: "if not fate, so doom" is stressing the inevitability of destiny.

Turning to the techniques used for "artificial" divination, the tokens employed in cleromancy were called in Slavic *žreb* (see below) and *wróg*. The second term in Old Polish originally meant "fate" or "chance", but denotes first of all tokens cast or taken in order to discover the will of destiny. This supports translations from Latin, where the Old Polish term *wróg* renders the Latin terms *fatum* and *omen*. Whether *wróg* came to mean "fate" because of bad, unfavorable luck (*wróg* means today, in Polish, simply "an enemy"), as Matusiak (1911, 200) argued, or whether the semantic development was in quite the opposite direction is impossible to say. The linguistic identity of the names denoting the divinatory token (*wróg*) used in lot-casting with the substantive denoting an enemy (*wróg*) is less accidental as Aleksander Brückner (1927, 632; cf. Boryś 2005, 710–711) supposed. From **vorgb*, the Old Slavonic **vergti*, "to cast" (cf. Polish *wierzgać*, "to fling out") derives the substantive *wróżba* ("presage", "augury", "auspice"), *wróżbita* (masculine) and *wróżka* (feminine) meaning "fortune-teller", "augur", and "fairy", and the verb *wróżyc* ('forebode'). Another term denoting fortune-telling, recorded at a very early stage (see below), was *gadanie*, which even today preserves such a meaning in Russian, but in Polish has sunk to mean "twaddle, speaking about nothing." Another term for "seer" derives from another, but equally interesting root. The substantive *wiedźma* means toady simply "a witch", but derives from the root meaning "seeing" and "knowing", which is included in its etymology (Boryś 2005, 692) and – consequently – foreseeing appears to be one of most important fields of activity among witches in Slavic folklore. Several genuine terms denoting those

who practice sorcery and divination comes to the light e. g. in fifteenth century Polish sermons (FHRS 1931, 17, 76).

The substantives *źreb* and *wróg* convey the abstract meaning of “something what is already predestined, set out and inevitably marked” (Matusiak 1911, 199–200; Brückner 1927, 632) by the higher powers with nicks on the tokens for lot-casting. Because, through lot-casting (or lot-taking), people were assigned to be granted, in the real world, possession of – *exempli gratia* – part of a tract of land or, in the world of myth and belief, good or bad luck, the subsequent notions for destiny were *szczęście* and *dola*, both denoting a part of something that comes to someone as his share (Borys 2005, 118 and 598), in the sense of a good, valuable share (cf. negative opposite notions of *nie-dola* and *nie-szczęście*, built of the same substantives with the contradictory prefix “*nie-*”). In East- and South-Slavic folklore, at least, *Dola* was personified as a goddess or rather a kind of demon of destiny (Gieysztor 2006, 206–207). The term *los* (“destiny”, “fate”), the dominant term in Polish today for denoting “fate”, is clearly a loan word from High-Middle-German (Borys 2005, 290). Russian language uses even today the genuine terms *sud’ba* (“something that was sentenced”) and over mentioned *dola* (present still in Polish but considered somewhat of an archaism).

Slavic Gods and Demons of Destiny

Goddesses, Gods and Demons of Fate

It is not easy to establish who, in Slavic belief (or rather beliefs), was responsible for destiny and divination. Accounts describing the oracles within the main sanctuaries of the Polabian and Pomeranian Slavs and the gods worshiped there connect divination with questions concerning the success of planned military expeditions and future welfare (especially related to good and bad harvests). This suggests that the shape of destiny was regarded as lying in the hands of the (almost exclusively male) gods who were worshiped at these shrines, but there are sufficient traces to allow us to conclude that, among the Slavs, as among other peoples of the past, the power over destiny lay in the hands of supernatural female goddesses, comparable to the Roman *Parcae* or Old Norse *Norns* (Brednich 1964, 172–197; Brednich 1967). Such supernatural beings, appearing as a numerous but slightly anonymous group, bearing simply a collective name can (again, as in other mythologies) sometimes be reduced to three, slightly more personified characters. The first trace of their existence occurs in Procopius of Caesarea’s account, where he mentions some “nymphs” (and other demons) in connection to Slavic divination. Unfortunately, after this account from the sixth century, our sources remain silent on this topic for a long time, until some *Roshanitse* appear in late medieval old-Russian sources, who emerge also in South Slavic folklore as *rojenice* and other female demons like *sudenice* (“sentencing” fate) from Bulgaria,

Serbia and Croatia, and *sudički* from Bohemia, and as similar female demons in the folklore across all Slavic lands. It was believed that such females help people at their birth and shape at that moment their destiny, take care of them during their lifetime and finally remove them from this world at the appropriate time, which has been long predestined.

In Rus', the cult of Roshanitse was still alive in folk beliefs of the late Middle Ages when the Orthodox Church was seeking to suppress such rituals, which means that we have some source accounts in which – inter alia – *roshanitshnaia trapesa* (“a table for Roshanitse”) is mentioned, on which were laid bread, cheese, honey and grout, as offerings for Roshanitse and the god Rod (sources: Mansikka 1922, 142–159, 164–165, 246–247, 250, 305–307; cf. Brednich 1964, 174). A very slight trace of such kind of demons is also found in the late-medieval Polish accounts (Bracha 2001, 319). Contrary to typical pagan goddesses of destiny, the East Slavic Roshanitse appear in the company of the masculine god Rod. The collective name for Roshanitse (and the name of the god Rod) connects all of these characters with the notion of birth (from *roditi* – “giving birth”; cf. also: *ród* – “a kin”) and so, in consequence, with death and destiny (Gieysztor 2006, 204–207). It remains doubtful, however, that the god Rod (masculine) is the same character as Dola (feminine). Nevertheless, Rod, with his Roshanitse, appears to be a relatively important god rather like a demon. The hypothesis of the late Russian scholar, Rybakov (1987, 239–246), who posited that Rod may have been the most important god of the Rus' prior to the development of the cult of the god Perun – based as it is on the uncritical use of an account from *Slovo sviatovo Grigoria* (Mansikka 1922, 306) – is, however, unconvincing. Nevertheless, Rod acts in Russian Slavonic paganism as a god who creates humankind, or at least as a character who grants people fertility, based on the Old Russian text, *O vdunovenii dukha v tshelovieka* (Mansikka 1922, 163–165). It claims, in opposition to the opinion of the pagans, that the Christian God is the only creator of everything and not some “Rod who is sitting in the air and throwing clods of earth down, from which children are born.”

In the Western Slavic mythographical tradition, an echo of Roshanitse or similar demons features in an early twelfth century account by Cosmas Pragensis (*Chronica Boemorum* I, eds. Bretholz and Weinberger, 4–9) concerning Kazi, Tetka and Lubuša, the daughters of Krok (Croccus), legendary forefather of the Royal dynasty of Přemyslids. Kazi was described as a herbalist and witch doctor, Tetka as a pagan priestess who taught people about the heathen cult and Lubuša (the youngest) as the best one who, unfortunately, “was a sibyl” (*fuit phitonissa*). Her ability to foresee the future helped her, however when she – ruling already in the country as a kind of judge (or rather a duke-arbiter) – decided to take a ploughman called Přemysl as her husband and a true lord for the Czech people, finding him thanks to her second sight ability. In this way, the Přemyslids dynasty was established, according to the Czech tradition. This may pre-date the Cosmas account because already, in another Latin source probably from the late tenth century called *Kristiánova legenda* (Strzelczyk 1998, 120–124; Vyncke 1968, 319), there appears an anonymous *phitonissa* who, in a similar but shorter

story, advised the Czech people through auguries to build the city of Prague where Přemysl was elected to rule, taking as his wife “the aforementioned virgin fortune-teller” (*iuncta [...] in matrimonio supramemorata phitonissa virgine*). Both sources are already mythographical in nature, but reflect the genuine Slavic tradition regarding the very ancient rituals related to the enthronement of rulers (Słupecki 1997, 35–41).

Gods and Prophecies

To what degree were the Slavic gods able to influence destiny? Let us begin with Helmold of Bosau’s general description of the pagan religion (*ydolorum cultura*) of Polabian Slavs, that was re-born after the pagan uprising (Helmold of Bosau, *Chronica Slavorum* I, 52). Mentioning first three names of gods (Prove, Siva and Radigast), the canon of Bosau goes on to describe their priests (*his dicati erant flamines*) together with their “numerous kinds of rituals” (*et sacrificiorum libamenta multiplexque religionis cultus*). The priest should first announce, based on the result of lot-casting, the proper time for ceremonies (*solempnitates diis dicandas sacerdos iuxta sortium nutum denuntiat*). Once the people have gathered, they sacrifice (*mactant*) to the gods offerings (*hostias*) of cattle, sheep and sometimes human Christians (*de bobus, ovibus, plerique etiam de hominibus Christianis*) because, as Helmold stresses, “they please their gods with blood of those Christians” (*quorum sanguine deos suos oblectari iacitans*) and “when the priest sacrifices the victim, he drinks of its blood in order to be more efficient at understanding oracles” (*post cesam hostiam sacerdos de cruore libat, ut sit efficacior oraculis capescendis*). What Helmold’s comment stresses is that, in the opinion of many, the drinking of the sacrificial blood serves to summon up demons (what remains unclear is whether this reflects the opinion of many pagan Slavs or rather that of Christian clerics). Having completed the offerings according to custom (*iuxta morum*), the people began feasting and merrymaking, and – by this possibility – through drinking from the goblet (*patera*) circulating among them, they “blessed it, or rather cursed, in the name of gods” (*sub nomine deorum*), both good and bad gods, believing “that all good fortune is dispensed from a good god, and that bad luck allows the bad one” (*omnem proseram fortunam a bono deo, adversam a malo dirigi profitentes*). The bad god was named, according to Helmold, *Diabol sive Zcerneboch id est nigrum deum* (“The Devil i. e. Zcerneboch, the black god”). The major among the Slavic supernatural powers (*numina*), in Helmold’s estimation, was however “Svantevit, the god of the Rugian country” (*Zvanthevith deus terrae Rugianorum*) who was not only the most important (the Slavs in his opinion “other [gods] estimate to be a kind of half-god”, *ceteros quasi semideos estimabat*) but was also as “the most effective in prophecies” (*efficacior in responsibus*). Yet Saxo Grammaticus has more to say about the Svantevit cult and oracle (see below).

In Helmold’s account, one may distinguish various strata. On the level of the cult’s geography, Helmold’s knowledge about the cult and oracle of Svantevit and his

reference to three far more enigmatic gods are notable. This is sufficient to attest that Prove is a god of Wagria, despite the unclear meaning of his name. Riedegost should be rather in his place in the temple in Riedegost-Rethra, while Siva (god or goddess?) remains a total enigma. On the level of the content of the ritual, the performance of lot-casting is confirmed. The description of the priest ritually drinking the blood of the victims to gain oracular inspiration sounds like a horror story but finds a parallel in a letter of the Saxon bishops from 1108 calling for a crusade against the pagan Slavs – which may constitute crusade propaganda. Human blood within Slavic pagan ritual is mentioned in one further source only (written about the same time and in the same milieu), namely, in a letter by Bishop Adelgot, who wrote about bowls of the blood of human victims being offered to (the entirely enigmatic) Slavic god, Pripegala (Labuda 1975, 234–236; Strzelczyk 2001, 66). Contemporary Scandinavian parallels are available (e. g. in Eyrbyggja saga 4, and Hakonar saga goða 14, cf. Śtupecki 2009, 32–35; Śtupecki 2010, 356–357; ↗ McKinnell, *Pagan Traditions in Germanic Languages*). What remains as credible in Helmold’s account are the prophecies (*oracula, responsa*) spoken by the Slavic priests. They probably drink by this possibility in a normal way, like other people, rather some alcohol (see below). This brings us to the last stratum: the reference to the good and bad fortune granted by the good and bad gods of the Slavs, which information was widely discussed in the research on Slavic religion as evidence for the existence of an element of dualism within Slavic belief (obvious in folklore and possible but more doubtful in the early Middle Ages prior to Christianization; cf. Tomicki 1976, 47–66; Gieysztor 2006, 160–161). The evidently Christian name “Diabol” (from Latin, originally Greek, *diabolus*) is in Polabian heathenism, unsurprisingly, re-born after an episode of Christianization and, on this point also, Helmold’s information appears relatively credible. His Slavic name, Zcerneboch, finds some echoes in the *Knytlinga saga* (ch. 122), which describes among the idols worshiped on Rügen certain Tjarnaglofi (“Black-heads”). The efforts to detect, within Slavic religion, a “white” counterpart to “black” Zcerneboch, however, appear ungrounded.

In Rus’, it is impossible to demonstrate by name, apart from Rod who was connected to Roshanitse, any other god who was responsible for prophecies and prognostication. In *Slovo o polku Igorievie*, a legendary Russian bard, Bojan, bears the epitheton *vieshtshiy* (“seer”) and is described as the “grandson of Veles,” who was the Old Russian god of magic, what may suggest that Veles and his grandson were linked to oracles. Unfortunately, *Slovo o polku Igorievie*, contrary to the assumptions made by the old scholarship, is probably a very late source, standing closer to ethnographic records than to medieval sources (although not simply a fake, as some scholars assume, but rather an old bylina recorded very early by the eighteenth century, edited and eventually re-shaped at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and wrongly considered to be an Old-Russian medieval source).