

## CHAPTER 1

*Why Divination?*

In the town where I live, a few blocks away from the campus where I teach, there is a shop that specializes in providing materials to people who want to foretell the future – and in training them to do it. For a modest fee, a student can enroll in a course that covers the basic techniques of Tarot reading, having first chosen a deck of cards from the many styles that the shop has for sale. Those who don't have time to learn the techniques can arrange for a reading with the shop's proprietor, instead.

The shop is anything but *outré*. It is well lit and inviting, on a street of renovated Victorian brick houses. Nearby are restaurants, a doctors' office and a coffee shop. The proprietor supports the community by awarding scholarships to university students, and encourages customers to bring along their skeptical parents and friends. This is no fusty fortune-teller with a crystal ball, hidden in the backroom of a more respectable business, but an establishment that has woven itself into the fabric of a large, Midwestern American city. At the time that I write, it has occupied its spot for 12 years; there is a demand for what it offers. Nor is my city unusual in having such a shop. If anything, a web-search suggests that we are somewhat underprovided in comparison with our neighbors. Even small towns in my state usually have a place to buy divinatory tools and to have one's future told.

One might still assume, however, that this shop and others like it serve only a small percentage of the American populace. The setting of my own local store – near a large college campus – suggests that interest in things like Tarot cards is transient and age-linked; perhaps playing at divining the future is the kind of thing one does when young. Leaving aside such “scientific” techniques as weather forecasting, twenty-first-century Americans do not believe that they can foresee the future, much less that they can affect it – at least they don't believe that officially. Take horoscopes,

for example, which are probably the most familiar method of prognosticating: in a poll conducted by the National Science Foundation in 2001, only 15 percent of respondents admitted reading their newspaper horoscopes every day or “quite often” (NSF 2002).

And yet we have to wonder how truthfully the respondents were answering. Only a few unassailably serious papers (the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* being prime examples) choose not to run a daily horoscope column. Indeed, most newspapers position the horoscope fairly prominently in a section called “Entertainment,” “Arts,” “Leisure,” or some such thing, alongside the movie listings and the Sudoku puzzle. According to a 2005 survey commissioned by the Newspaper Association of America, this type of section, whatever you call it, is out-paced only by the local and national news sections in readership and, correspondingly, in costliness of advertising rates (NAA 2005). The money-crunchers at the newspapers must think that the average reader cares a lot about horoscopes, if they grant them such a prime position. If you peruse your newspaper electronically rather than in hard copy, you are likely to find the horoscope conveniently clickable on the side-bar menu alongside television programming, lottery numbers, sports results and the other sorts of things to which you might want easy access every day. And if you cruise Amazon.com ratings for books on astrology, you find that they are remarkably high (as are the ratings for books on Tarot reading).

In spite of what the NSF poll suggests, then, something attracts the average American to divining the future. The cynically-minded might point to the titles of the newspaper sections where the horoscopes are found. “Entertainment,” “Leisure” and even “Arts” can be taken to imply that prognostication is nothing more than a diversion (or that this is what people who indulge in it want to tell themselves, anyway). Perhaps it *is* only a diversion for some readers – but even this doesn’t mean we can dismiss it, for a game is only fun if you can suspend your disbelief to at least some degree. And for other readers it certainly is not just a game – the lucrative business of casting horoscopes and reading Tarot cards over the phone or internet could not be sustained as well as it is by people seeking idle amusement (let us not forget, either, that Nancy Reagan’s penchant for astrology was thought to have a big enough effect on her husband’s policies that it made the cover of *Time* magazine in May of 1988). Spirit mediums, to add a third popular form of divination to our list, advertise in the Yellow Pages of every American city – and are held up for admiration as the protagonists of popular television shows and movies. Divining the future, or at least thinking about divining the future, sits just as comfortably alongside computers, the internet, and everything else that we embrace as modern as it once sat alongside the telephone and

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telegraph during the Victorian period, when interest in spirit mediums ran extraordinarily high. Indeed, the desire to gain special knowledge has frequently renewed itself by building upon technological advances: the Spiritualist movement of the 1850s modified the speaking trumpet in order to hear angels; Henry David Thoreau and others thought they could hear the music of the spheres humming over the telegraph wires (cf. Schmidt 2000).

This book is not, however, a study of contemporary western attitudes toward foretelling the future – fascinating though that would be. Rather, I have opened a volume entitled *Ancient Greek Divination* with a look at the present and recent past in order to introduce what will be a continuing theme – that is, the very pervasiveness of divination. Even if we think we don't believe in it personally, divination is here, and for whatever reason, as a culture we take some trouble to make the simpler forms of it readily available. Similarly, the Roman author Cicero opened his treatise on the topic with the magisterial statement "I know of no people, whether they be learned and refined or barbaric and ignorant, that does not consider that future things are indicated by signs, and that it is possible for certain people to recognize those signs and predict what will happen" (*Divination* 1.2). It's likely that in antiquity, most people practiced or witnessed some form of divination at least once every few days: divination was always part of offering sacrifices to the gods, usually part of deciding whether to undertake a military maneuver, often part of puzzling out a bewildering dream, sometimes part of diagnosing and treating an illness or choosing a bride, and even, sometimes, part of understanding why your body was twitching or your child was sneezing. Walking through the ancient marketplace, you might glimpse a "belly-talker" who carried a prophetic spirit around inside of herself, an Orphic priest who could tell you what it meant if a weasel had crossed your path, or a state delegation setting out to consult the Delphic Oracle on a matter of public good.

Ancient divination, moreover, adapted itself to different cultures and different technologies just as readily as contemporary divination has. Cicero follows his initial claim with a list of some of the choices available: the Assyrians prefer to divine by looking at the sky because they live on plains, where the heavens are unobstructed by mountains; the Cilicians, Pisidians, Pamphylians prefer bird divination; the Greeks like to consult the Oracles at Delphi and Dodona, and so on (1.2 and cf. 1.91–4). Some degree of variability and adaptability is characteristic of all religious phenomena, but ancient divination was particularly pliant. A relatively straightforward goal – to gain knowledge of what humans would not otherwise know – manifested itself in a variety of ways that combined and

recombined themselves. The myriad means reflect a diversity that is culturally specific, but the underlying persistence of desire for divinatory knowledge reflects a basic human need.

### *The Ancient Discussions*

One thing does distinguish the Greeks and Romans from us, however, and that is their degree of self-reflection about the topic. Already in the mid-fifth century, intellectuals debated whether divination worked or not (Herodotus defends it against unnamed critics at 8.77) and as the centuries rolled on, they composed numerous treatises that took on the questions of whether it worked, how it worked and why the gods (or whatever) had established it. Many of these treatises survive only as titles or at best as summaries in Cicero's own discussion, but we know enough to at least sketch the central issues, which I will do briefly in this section. More detailed treatments of some issues will be found later in this book; the introduction to the first volume of August Bouché-Leclercq's *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité* (1879–82), now nearly 140 years old, is still the most complete discussion available, although it must be supplemented with the many notes in Arthur Stanley Pease's two-volume commentary on Cicero's *Concerning Divination* (1920/3) and now also with David Wardle's (2006) commentary on Book 1 of the same (esp. pp. 28–36).

But before we go on to that, it's worth thinking a bit more about *why* divination so fascinated ancient intellectuals. In contrast to divination, other religious behaviors were seldom examined very closely. We hear very little about sacrifice, for instance, which was considered one of the defining acts of ancient worship. (Lucian has a short and cynical essay on the topic, and Porphyry has a long treatise on why humans should abstain from animal flesh, which included abstaining from sacrifice, but otherwise, mostly what we have are brief comments that, far from asking how and why sacrifice works, assume that we already know.) Similarly, we seldom find ancient texts discussing prayer in a critical manner. Why then did divination, in contrast, draw so much attention?

Part of the answer is that divination more clearly involves participants in a two-way conversation. When you pray or sacrifice, you usually don't get an immediate response – sometimes you have to wait a few months to see whether the crops come in well or whether you conceive and deliver a healthy baby. When you cast the dice or read the entrails or put a question to the Pythia, you get an answer almost immediately. *Interpreting* it may take you longer, but at least you know that someone has heard you. Divination, then, more than any other religious act,

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confirms not only that the gods exist, but that they pay attention to us. The Stoic arguments for the validity of divination were built on this assumption, in fact: if divinity exists, it must be beneficent; if it is beneficent, then it will find a way to communicate with us because it wishes us to steer our lives according to divine will. (And vice versa, of course: if divination can be shown to exist, then so must divinity.) The salient questions then become, how do the gods communicate and how can we most effectively take part in this communication ourselves? These questions lead, in turn, to all kinds of interesting ruminations about how the physical and metaphysical worlds operate. Assuming that the gods communicate with us through the entrails of sacrificial animals, for instance, how does a properly informative liver end up in the specific bull or ram that someone chooses for sacrifice? Debates over divination sat at the tip of a very large iceberg of other questions about how the gods and the universe worked.

The variety of techniques employed in divination inevitably increases the number of questions. Enthused prophecy (prophecy whereby a god speaks through the mouth of a human) prompts consideration of what divinity is, existentially, and how it could ever join itself, even temporarily, to a feeble human body. Plutarch tried to solve this dilemma with a complex picture of the soul of the Pythia coming together with Apollo in a sort of vortex of whirlwinds; Lucan toyed with the possibility that what the Stoics called divine *pneuma*, or “breath,” which permeated the world, was inhaled by the Pythia and then struck her soul with prophetic knowledge – as we’ll see both below and in Chapter 2, there were other explanations for enthusiastic prophecy on offer, too (Plutarch, *Oracles* 404e–f; Lucan 5.88–99). The Stoics also thought that *pneuma* sustained *sympatheia*, a force that bound together the otherwise disparate parts of the cosmos, and they used *sympatheia* to explain techniques of divination that depended on reading the appearance or behavior of objects in the physical world. The good diviner knew about the sympathetic links between, say, the appearance of a night-owl during the day and political insurrection and could therefore predict what was going to happen when such a bird showed up. But this prompted such questions as how we should distinguish between the art of the diviner and the art of the doctor, the farmer, the sailor or anyone else who made it his business to learn how one thing signified another that was yet to come – is it divination to know that an olive crop will be abundant by looking at blooms early in the season, or is that just good arboriculture? Is it divination to predict rain by looking at a dark cloud, or is that simply the sort of practical meteorology that every reasonably intelligent person picks up the course of life? And what had established *sympatheia* in the first place? Fate? Lurking behind that possibility was the gigantic one of whether humans had free will: if a network of *sympatheia*

had been knit into the cosmos at the beginning of time, setting off complex chains of events, then mortals could scarcely expect to change the future. And if they couldn't change it, then what was the purpose of divination, as Lucian's *Demonax* pointed out (*Demonax* 37)? Dream interpretation often was explained by assuming that the human soul could disconnect itself from the sleeping body, but this led to questions about the nature of the soul itself, and what, exactly, it was encountering while wandering around. With all of these questions and others to ask, it isn't so surprising, then, that divination prompted more focused thought than other types of religious behavior.

Even before critical discussions begin to appear in our sources, we see attempts to collect and organize divinatory information. Hesiod, at the end of his *Works and Days*, assembles a list of lucky days that his readers should heed: the eleventh and twelfth days of the month, for example, are good for shearing sheep; the twelfth is also good for setting up a new project on a loom. The twenty-seventh is good for opening a jar of wine. Certain days are good for women to be born on, others are good for men – although the specific day will determine the niceties of a man's personality. Hesiod ends his list of days, and the poem itself, with the remark: "Happy and blessed is he who knows all these things, and does his work without offending the gods – judging the birds and avoiding transgressions" (lines 826–8). The *Works and Days* was, among other things, a poem purporting to scold Hesiod's badly behaved brother, Perses, and tell him how to live properly – thus, it is not surprising that we finish up with something more or less like this statement, but two things are notable. First, having knowledge of "lucky days" counts as part of living properly. Perhaps we wouldn't call this knowledge "divinatory" in the strictest sense of the word, but it comes close: like omen lists or catarchic astrological charts, a list of days and the activities appropriate for each of them foretells what will happen if a certain act occurs at a certain time (indeed, in the ancient Near East, more extended hemerologies – that is, lists of lucky days and unlucky days on which to do things – were recorded in the same style and contexts as other omen lists). That Hesiod could compose a detailed list of these predictions (all but eight days of the month are characterized by him as being good or bad for something) suggests that already in the archaic period, a fair amount of energy had been spent on collecting and organizing this material. We are still nowhere near to the really extensive, detailed lists of omens and astrological patterns that scribes had long been producing in Near Eastern cultures (writing came later to Greece than to the ancient Near East) but the concept is present: collect, organize and then disseminate predicative information.

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Also interesting is Hesiod's advice to "judge the birds." The verb I have translated as "judge," "*krinō*," and its cognates are parts of words that signify divination and the experts who perform it: an *oneirokritēs* is a dream interpreter, for example, and an *ornithokritēs* is an interpreter of birds. What Hesiod advises us to do at the end of his poem, then, is not merely to evaluate birds in some casual sense – are they healthy this year? – or even with a farmer's eye – are they the kind that are likely to eat my grain crop? – but to interpret what their appearances portend. Already a little earlier in the poem, when listing lucky days, Hesiod had advised that the fourth of the month was potentially a good day to lead home a wife – but only after the eager bridegroom had judged (*krinas*) the bird signs. It's not surprising that another poetic treatise called the *Ornithomanteia* (*Bird Omens*) was grafted on to the end of Hesiod's *Works and Days* at some point. Already, Apollonius of Rhodes had charged that the *Ornithomanteia* was spurious, but his need to assert this suggests that it was an accepted part of Hesiod's work during the Hellenistic period – lists of birds and their meanings were the sort of thing you expected a famous poet to provide (in this case as in others, the role of the scribe as a provider of religiously important information – so familiar in the Near East – was taken on in Greece by the poet). Throughout Greek antiquity, we hear about other lists of this kind, or treatises that similarly collected and organized such information. In the third century BCE, for example, an author who called himself Melampus, after a famous diviner of myth, composed one treatise on bodily twitches and their meanings and another on birthmarks and their significance. Books on dream interpretation collected types of dreams and paired each with what it signified – the only surviving example is that of Artemidorus, from the second century CE, but we know that others existed far earlier (Apollonius of Rhodes ap. scholiast on Hesiod, *Works and Days* 828 [p. 259.3–5 Pertusi = Hesiod *testimonium* 80]; Artemidorus, *Interpretation of Dreams*).

Another sort of divinatory list comes in a long speech made by Prometheus in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. Prometheus, a paradigmatic culture hero, claims to have done many things for mortals, including:

I devised the many methods of divination (*mantikē*), and I first judged what truth there is in dreams, and I first made known to mortals the meaning of chance utterances, hard to interpret, and of the omens one encounters while on the road; and I defined the flight of crooked-clawed birds – I explained which of them were auspicious or inauspicious by nature, and what their ways of life were and their dislikes and likes of one another and their alliances; and I also taught mortals about the smoothness of entrails and what color the gall ought to have in order to please the gods, and all

about the dappled beauty of the lobe of the liver. It was I who burned thigh-bones wrapped in fat and the long shank bone, thus leading mortals down the path of this darkly-signifying art, and it was I who opened their eyes to signs that are fiery and yet dim to understanding. (lines 484–99)

In other words, Prometheus taught mortals a variety of divinatory techniques: dream interpretation, cleidomancy, augury, the reading of entrails, and empyromancy. I will define and discuss the characteristics of each of these in later chapters, but at the moment the important thing is that the list could be made at all during the first half of the fifth century: “divination” was by now a conceptual category not too different from our own; it had taken within its embrace pursuits and techniques of markedly different types. Each of these would always have its own name as well, but *mantikē* was by now a unified field, a thing that could be treated ontologically as a whole. Notably, none of the other contributions that Prometheus claims to have made to the welfare of humanity (carpentry, time-telling, animal husbandry, seamanship, medicine, the mining of minerals) is treated in anything near the same detail. The emphasis on divination may be partially thematic (the play is about Prometheus’ possession of certain knowledge concerning the future that he refuses to share with Zeus, and Prometheus prophesies at length to another character in the play) but the tenor of the passage also suggests that the author took pride in composing this list of divinatory techniques – perhaps we are near here to the moment when the category had first begun to gel. In later antiquity, lists like Prometheus’ become much longer: Artemidorus mentions 17 methods of divination, for example, about half of which he says are unreliable (including divination from cheese, whatever that is) and the lexicographical encyclopedia known as the Suda goes on at great length, adducing equally obscure methods such as divination by flies (Artemidorus, *Interpretation of Dreams* 2.69; Suda s.v. *prophēteia*).

My use of the word “techniques” in the last but one sentence is important, however. What Prometheus leaves out of his list is any sort of enthusiastic divination – the Oracles at Delphi and Dodona are mentioned elsewhere in the play, but not here. Implicitly, then, the author distinguishes enthusiasm from techniques that Prometheus can *teach* to mortals. This distinction becomes explicit in our earliest critical discussion of divination, from Plato’s *Phaedrus*, which was written perhaps fifty to seventy years after the *Prometheus Bound*. Socrates discusses four types of divine madness there – divinatory, purificatory, poetic and erotic – and the particular blessings that each brings. Regarding the first of these, he reminds his friend Phaedrus of all the good advice that the Sibyls and

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the priestesses at Dodona and Delphi have given to cities and individuals while in a state of enthusiasm; while in their normal state, they were unable to do anything. Enthusiastic madness, which Socrates calls “the greatest of [divine] gifts,” is to be preferred, he continues, over the sane and utterly non-divine habit of enquiring into the future by means of birds and other signs, which depend on the diviner’s purely human understanding and the information he has acquired.

Later authors would call the second type of divination “artificial” (or “technical” or “learned”) and the first type “natural” (or “untechnical” or “unlearned”). Typically, natural divination was understood to include enthusiasm and dreams, and to be the older and more reliable form of divination because it was more directly communicated by the gods; dreams and enthusiasm were the only forms of divination that Aristotle and the Peripatetic philosophers found completely acceptable, in fact. Technical was understood to include everything else – anything that depended on acquired human skills, such as the reading of entrails, the behavior of birds and the heavenly bodies or the interpretation of portents. As we will see in later chapters, the distinction is more heuristic than real outside of intellectual circles: some diviners of myth were experts in both natural and technical methods of divination, and some oracular shrines offered both enthusiastic divination and some form of technical as well. And, as we have seen in the passage from the *Prometheus Bound* cited above, although dreams were understood as a “natural” method of divination, humans might need or wish to acquire special skills through which to interpret them. Nonetheless, the fact that ancient intellectuals so persistently made the distinction between natural and artificial types of divination is interesting: although they understood all kinds of divination to be a cooperative effort between gods and mortals, they were acutely aware that some forms relied more on human input – and thereby offered more room, perhaps, for intentional or unintentional human distortion (Peripatetics: Cicero, *Divination* 1.5. Division into natural and technical, e.g., Cicero, *Divination* 1.11–12, 1.34, 1.72, 1.109–11, 2.26–7).

Another important idea that we first glimpse in Plato is that divination is empowered by cosmic mediators called *daimones*, who serve as messengers between the gods and mortals. In the *Symposium*, Socrates quotes his friend Diotima, a woman well versed in divine things, as having once said to him:

[*daimones*] are interpreters and ferrymen, carrying divine things to mortals and mortal things to gods; requests and sacrifices from below and commandments and answers from above. Being midway between, [the *daimones*] make

each half supplement the other, so that the whole becomes unified. Through them are conveyed all divination (*mantikē*) and all priestly crafts concerning sacrifices, initiations, incantations, all prophetic power (*manteia*) and magic. For the divine does not mix with the mortal, and it is only through the mediation of [the *daimones*] that mortals can have any interaction with the gods, either while awake or while asleep. (202e–203a)

This idea was to have a long history, particularly when applied to enthusiastic divination. Its attraction lay, especially for later writers, in the fact that one could retain the traditional idea that oracles were divinely inspired and yet avoid associating Apollo or any other god too closely with the mortal bodies through whose lips the prophecies issued forth: it was really the *daimones* who bridged the gap and made the contact. Similarly, the Neoplatonists of late antiquity posited that it was the light emitted by divinity, rather than divinity itself, that entered the Pythia and other enthused mediums, as I will discuss in Chapters 2 and 3, and that it was a light-filled entity called the *pneuma* or “vehicle of the soul” within each of us that moderated the transmission of divine light into our individual souls – further strengthening the boundary between divine and mortal even as it provided a means of crossing it. Aristotle also adapted the daimonic idea for one of his several theories of dream divination, arguing that although sending dreams was below the dignity of the gods, dreams nonetheless had a creditable origin insofar as they emanated from the daimonic realm. The passage has puzzled modern readers – particularly since Aristotle goes on to equate the daimonic realm with Nature – but the essential idea of attributing dreams to the *daimones* that mediate between humans and gods is clearly there, whatever else we may say (*On Divination Through Dreams* 463b12–15).

In one of Plutarch’s dialogues, a group of friends – Cleombrotus, Demetrius, Ammonius, Didymus, Heracleon, Philip and Plutarch’s brother, Lamprias – discuss the daimonic theory at length in an effort to explain why the Pythia at Delphi has fallen silent in recent years. Cleombrotus says that the *daimones* have simply vacated Delphi – they may return again one day and reanimate it, as a musician returns to an instrument and makes it sound out again after a long silence. Demetrius wants more details, however: how, exactly, do *daimones* make oracles work? Ammonius replies that *daimones* are really just disembodied souls, and that as such, they can interact with the soul of the Pythia and tell her what is to come – like mixes with like. Lamprias adds that even embodied souls possess the power to foresee the future – although embodiment usually clouds it nearly to the point of uselessness. When we sleep, or when we are near death, however (that is, when our souls are most loosely tethered to our bodies), even our

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embodied souls can see the future. He then slides into what is usually a separate explanation for how Delphi works, which we already saw Lucan allude to and which we will examine in detail in Chapter 2: he says that the earth sends up a “potency” or a “vapor” that affects the soul of the Pythia, enabling it to prophesy. When Ammonius and Philip object that, having first expelled the gods from divination, Lamprias is now expelling the *daimones* as well, he explains that there are always two causes for any phenomenon: the divine and the physical. In an immediate sense, the Pythia may be inspired by the vapor, but it is the *daimones* who oversee the whole process, ensuring that it works smoothly (Plutarch, *Obsolescence* 416f–438e; cf. his *Isis and Osiris* 361a).

Thus, Lamprias (who some scholars assume represents the opinions of the author, his brother) manages to have his cake and eat it, too: like a good Platonist, he maintains the importance of intermediary *daimones* in divination and yet he embraces at the same time the more “scientific” theory of vapors. It wasn’t only pagan Platonists who were attracted by the daimonic theory, however: the Christian fathers (most of whom had training in Platonic philosophy) took it up eagerly as well, although in a very different spirit. For them, every pagan god, including Apollo, was really a demon – so of course they were happy to believe that it was *daimones*, that is, demons, who operated the oracles. Indeed, some of them suggested that these demons went so far as to literally enter the womb of the Pythia in order to speak out through her mouth (see for example the remarks of John Chrysostom, quoted on page 00).

Augustine spends quite a bit of time thinking all of this through, and expands the daimonic theory beyond enthusiasm to potentially any kind of divination. He starts from another perfectly good, long-established Platonic idea: *daimones* are creatures of the *aer* (that is, the part of the cosmos that lies between the earth and the heavens). They must, therefore, be aery by nature and able to move very swiftly. This explains why people in one place can “divine” what is happening in another: what is actually happening is that *daimones* are flying from one place to the other and telling the diviners what has just happened; the diviners then pretend to have discovered it by their own arts. Augustine famously exemplifies this idea by telling of how the destruction of the Alexandrian Serapeum in 391 CE was known almost immediately in his hometown of Carthage. As aery creatures, *daimones* can also penetrate the minds of mortals, discover what they are thinking and then convey this information to others – supplying diviners, again, with the means of making impressive statements. Finally, *daimones* are by nature very long-lived, according to Platonic theory. For Augustine, this suggests that they have had time to develop powers of observation that we short-lived mortals lack.

By reading the many subtle signs that nature provides, *daimones* could miraculously “foretell” such things as earthquakes and floods (Augustine, *Concerning the Divination of Demons*, esp. 1.1, 1.3 [7], 1.5 [9], 1.8 [12]; cf. Graf 2002).

But what exactly are the *daimones* telling the diviners – or rather, how are they telling it? Augustine, who was one of the first to theorize about what we now call semiotics – and who applied his semiotic theories to the practical challenges of living the Christian life – concluded that communication between humans and *daimones* was anchored in the same principle that enabled all communication: the two parties had agreed on a system of signs and their meanings. A good Christian who wanted to avoid entanglements with *daimones* had an easy way of doing so, therefore: he could simply refuse to participate any longer in their discourse – that is, refuse to read omens or any other kinds of divinatory sign in the agreed-upon way. For Augustine, then, all divination, including the “technical” forms, depended on *daimones*. The same idea underlies some divinatory spells in the magical papyri that were composed at about the same time as Augustine was writing, as we will see in Chapter 5: *daimones* or minor gods called “assistants” are expected to provide divinatory information to the magician (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.37).

The most significant discussions of technical divination took place among the Stoics, however, and were rooted in the idea of *sympatheia*, that force that pervades the cosmos and knits it together. Cicero mentions two books on divination by the Stoic Chrysippus (plus two more specifically on oracles and dreams), one book by the Stoic Diogenes of Babylon and two by the Stoic Antipater. These names take us from the second century BCE back to the second half of the third century – and the chain can be extended backwards even further, into the late fourth or very early third century BCE, if we are willing to assume that a book called *On Signs*, written by Zeno, the very founder of Stoicism, addressed divinatory signs in particular. Poseidonius extends the chain in the opposite direction, into the first century BCE, and outdoes all his predecessors by composing five books on the topic. These are now lost, but Cicero, who was Poseidonius’ friend, relied on his lines of argument when crafting Quintus’ Stoicizing defense of divination in Book 1 of *Concerning Divination* (see, e.g., 1.6, and compare Diogenes Laertius 7.4 and 7.149; see further Pease 1920/3: 60–2 and Wardle 2006: 28–36, 108–14).

The most straightforward explication of the idea of divinatory *sympatheia* comes when Quintus is challenged with the ridiculousness of imagining that the gods would stoop to orchestrating every omen – a charge that had been laid against divination by the Epicureans. Quintus replies:

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According to the Stoic doctrine, the gods are not directly responsible for every fissure in the liver or for every song of a bird; since, manifestly, that would not be seemly or proper in a god and furthermore is impossible. But, in the beginning, the universe was so created that certain results would be preceded by certain signs, which are given sometimes by entrails and by birds, sometimes by lightning, by portents, and by stars, sometimes by dreams, and sometimes by persons in a frenzy. And these signs do not often deceive the persons who observe them properly . . . Assuming that we concede the proposition that there is a divine power which pervades the lives of mortals, it is not hard to understand the principle directing those premonitory signs which we see come to pass. (1.118; Falconer's translation, adapted)

In other words, when the world was young, the gods had set things up so that some events always preceded others; it is our job to learn how to decode the signs of those connections. This doesn't settle the issue completely, however; the question then becomes exactly *how* the divine, immanent power of *sympatheia* makes divination work – what ensures that the proper signs are always tied to the proper events? Leaving aside the two means of natural divination in his list for the moment (dreams and frenzy), Quintus offers a couple of possibilities for explaining the technical methods. Is it possible that the divine power directs the sacrificing priest to choose an animal whose liver will be properly informative? Could it be that there is some divine sleight of hand at the last moment, that changes the shape of its liver as the knife falls? These possibilities are not dismissed, but in the end, Quintus retreats to quite a different, and typically Stoic, defense of *sympatheia* and its empowerment of divination. Understanding the immediate cause of any divinatory occurrence is irrelevant, he insists; what matters is the simple fact that he has been able to adduce so many historical cases where divination worked. Later philosophers such as Proclus, not content with that, returned to the problem and elaborated the theory of *sympatheia* into “chains” that stretched from the ultimate source of divine power, which sat transcendently above the world, through each level of the cosmos down into the smallest plants, minerals and animals. Things on the same “chain” resonated with each other and this resonance underlay both successful technical divination and successful magic. In the first case, you simply had to learn to read the resonances, and in the second, to make the resonances happen yourself (Struck 2004: Chapter 7).

One of the most interesting things about the sympathetic explanation for divination, as Peter Struck has discussed, is that its apologists had to enforce a semantic system that was founded on mystification. That is, if the links between a given occurrence and what it portends were as obvious as the link between a crowing rooster and the coming dawn,

divination would cease to be a special art – anyone would be able to do it. The technical diviner presents himself as performing an inductive task, then – he does not make his predictions by deducing “rational” relationships between things. He is also empirical – diviners must acquire and pass on to one another the correspondences that they have discovered. As antiquity wore on, this picture of *sympatheia* and the obscure signs it produced helped to mold the nascent field of literary criticism: by interpreting literature, the first allegorists understood themselves, like technical diviners, to be discovering hidden meanings that would unlock the secrets of the cosmos (Struck 2004: Chapters 5–7; cf. Cicero, *Divination* 1.12–13).

I temporarily left aside Quintus’ mention of dreams and enthusiastic prophecy – the two forms of natural divination. The Stoics defended these as well – and Chrysippus went so far as to fill a book with collected responses from Delphi. In Cicero’s treatise, Quintus offers two lines of defense for enthusiastic divination. He begins with an explanation that we will see again in the next chapter – that there was a special gas or vapor underground at Delphi that had the power to kindle the soul of the Pythia with inspiration. As was clear already in the passage from Lucan that I mentioned at the beginning of this section, this idea was easy to reconcile with the Stoic concept of *pneuma*. Later in the treatise, Quintus emphasizes instead that each human soul, having been derived from a great divine soul, has a capacity for divination. In some people, this is very highly developed. When the soul of such a person withdraws itself from the body, stimulated by a divine impulse, it can prophesy (1.37–8 and 1.79; 1.66–71 and 1.110–15). The two ideas are not mutually exclusive; as Lamprias probably would have said, the vapor provides the physical cause of enthusiasm and the nature of the soul provides the divine cause.

Dreams drew more extended attention; indeed, the discussion of dreams that Cicero puts into Quintus’ mouth is the most detailed of all his discussions. As in the case of technical divination, Quintus is made to argue mostly from example rather than from explanation, adducing numerous situations in which dreams had correctly forecast what was to come. Implicit, however, is the same opinion as was adduced to explain enthused divination – that the human soul has a natural talent for divination when it is not impeded by the concerns of the body – for Quintus cites Plato’s explanation of why some dreams are unreliable and others reliable: the unreliable dreams occur when the soul is not in a proper state to dream clearly because the dreamer has eaten too much or drunk too much (that is, the irrational part of the soul has been given the energy to tyrannize the rational part). Variations of this idea go back even further – Pythagoras is said to have forbidden beans because flatulence impedes

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clear dreaming – and it recurs frequently (Aristotle said in his treatise on dreams that the real root of the problem was the heat produced by food that the body had ingested – in extreme cases, this might prevent one from dreaming at all). Later elaborations posited that dreams were most accurate near dawn, when the effects of the previous night’s dinner were dissipated – although an especially heavy meal could spoil those as well. Some theorists formally stated the obvious, that there were two types of dreams altogether: those that were predicative and those that were not only distorted but completely meaningless because they had been induced by food or drink or other physical stimuli of waking life. The Hippocratics similarly argued that dreams were mere reflections of bodily disturbances, but stressed that this didn’t necessarily mean that they were useless: the treatise *On Regimen* outlined a series of connections between dreams and bodily conditions that could be used diagnostically by a well-trained doctor (Plato, *Republic* 571c–d; Cicero, *Divination* 1.62; Aristotle, *On Dreams* 461a; Artemidorus, *Interpretation of Dreams* 1.7; Struck 2004: 183–7; Hippocrates, *On the Sacred Disease* 18 and *On Regimen*, esp. 1.2).

Even Democritus (the founder of the Atomist school, which otherwise rejected divination) found merit in the idea of divinatory dreams: he understood everything in the world to be continually sloughing off *eidōla* (“phantoms”), which then might penetrate the soul of a sleeping person, causing him or her to dream of what these *eidōla* represent. Because these *eidōla* emanate even from another person’s thoughts or emotions, we sometimes dream of what another person has been thinking or feeling, which leads to a form of precognition. In autumn, when the air is rougher than usual, these *eidōla* don’t travel very well and our dreams are therefore rather faded and ineffectual (Cicero, *Divination* 2.120, Plutarch, *Table Talk* 8.10.2).

We learn more about the ways that the Stoics explained dream divination when Quintus tells us that Posidonius posited three reasons that the soul was able to divine accurately in dreams: first, because it was itself akin to the divine (being composed of the same *pneuma* as pervaded the rest of the cosmos – an idea that would be adapted by the Neoplatonists into the theory mentioned above, whereby *pneuma* mediates between the soul and the divine, enabling the soul to make predictions – e.g., Synesius, *On Dreams*); second, because the air is full of other, divine souls that convey true information to the soul of the sleeper; and third, because the gods converse with the soul when the body is asleep. All of these explanations, in one way or another, are underpinned by the assumption that the soul is quite different from – even at odds with – the body, and that the two can operate independently of one another when the body is subdued. The separability of the body and soul also was used to explain

why the soul was able to prophesy when the body is on the verge of dying, according to Posidonius (Cicero, *Divination* 1.64). In fact, among the intellectuals who tried to explain dream divination, only Democritus developed a theory that did not depend to at least some degree on the soul's independence from the body. Aristotle toyed with a variation of Democritus' idea when he suggested that all things in the world cause movements to pass through the air, some of which come to souls while a person sleeps, causing pictures from which mortals can then derive predictions (the best nights for dreaming, he adds, are therefore windless), but even here he predicates his theory on the assumption that when the body sleeps, the soul is freer to receive these impressions (*On Divination through Dreams* 464a). Artemidorus took the idea in a new direction; his rather complex theory of dream divination assumes not only the traditional idea that some outside agent (Artemidorus refuses to use the words "god" or "*daimon*") presents images to the sleeper's soul, but also that the soul itself takes part in choosing which predicative images will appear in its dreams (Struck 2005).

Popular belief went its own way as occasion demanded: Pindar expresses the idea of the soul's separability in an epinician poem, which suggests that this explanation was fairly well known already in the fifth century, but Homer and many other, later authors present dreams as standing at the head of the bed or next to the sleeper, with no implication that the soul is anywhere but where it normally is, or that the dream is anything but an actual entity. Similarly, when people dreamt at incubatory healing sanctuaries, they assumed that Asclepius or another divine healer was truly present, laying hands upon them.

However one explained it, confidence in dream divination motivated many people to write handbooks on what dreams meant, as I mentioned earlier. Notably, the production of such books rests on the assumption that at least some dreams must be *interpreted* – that is, that this supposedly natural form of divination nonetheless often required humans to apply some technical, learned skill before putting dreams to use, as Aeschylus' Prometheus already indicated. Artemidorus took this to an extreme, not only offering long lists of dreams and the future events to which he had discovered, after interviewing numerous dreamers, that they corresponded (e.g., "dreaming of boxwood, myrtles and rose laurels signifies wanton women," 2.24), but also outlining many criteria that had to be taken into account before a newly created interpretation could be relied upon, including some that would seem familiar to us, such as the dreamer's age, occupation and health (e.g., "dreaming that one has teeth of gold is auspicious only for literary men . . . to others it signifies that there will be funerary pyres in the house," 1.31; cf. 1.3, 1.8, 1.9). An interpreter

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who wished to follow Artemidorus' system would either have to study it closely for quite some time or keep the handbook ready; Artemidorus' opinion that "the interpretation of dreams is nothing other than the juxtaposition of similarities" (2.25) would not have been shared by most of his readers. But in any case, Artemidorus' book underscores, again, how artificial is the neat divination between natural and technical forms of divination.

*The History of the History of Divination*

Oddly enough, the ancient enthusiasm for talking about divination didn't transfer very well to modern students of antiquity. In 1974, Jean-Pierre Vernant, one of the twentieth century's most admired scholars of ancient religion, published an edited volume entitled *Divinatione et rationalité*, to which four classicists (Roland Crahay, Luc Brisson, Jeannie Carlier and Denise Grodzynski), as well as scholars of early China (Léon Vandermeersch, Jacques Gernet), Mesopotamia (Jean Bottéro) and Africa (Anne Retel-Laurentin), were invited to contribute. In the introduction, Vernant suggested that the study of divination could contribute to our understanding of ancient mentalities, that is, of the: "type of rationality . . . expressed in the game of divinatory procedure, the apparatus of oracular techniques and symbolisms, and the classificatory frameworks used by the seer to sort out, organize, manipulate and interpret the information on which his competence is based" (Vernant 1991: 303). It could also be used, he continued, to illuminate the structures of authority inherent in a culture – how we are "to situate the relations of the seer to other figures such as the king, priest and judge, who, in their roles, also have a power of decision." He encouraged scholars to take these issues as new starting points from which a better understanding of divination could be reached.

In inviting research on divination, Vernant was reacting to what had been a virtual absence of attention to its theoretical aspects among students of the ancient world. Considering the reasons for this dearth, and the history behind it, will help us to understand the current state of work on the topic. Things had started out promisingly enough in the late nineteenth century: Auguste Bouché-Leclercq published his massive four-volume compendium of information, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*. At the turn of the century, the eminent historian Jakob Burckhardt offered "Die Erkundung der Zukunft" as a (now almost forgotten) part of his *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, and in 1921 and 1924, Theodor Hopfer published the two volumes of his *Griechische-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber*, which set out to treat revelation in the context of the late antique

magical papyri (in reality, Hopfner ended up treating not only revelation, but virtually every kind of magical practice, divinatory or otherwise, that appeared anywhere in ancient sources; soon after, he offered important shorter studies of some specific types of magical divination). The first book-length English treatment of divination was provided in 1913 by W.R. Halliday, who had just earned his degree at Oxford under the tutelage of Gilbert Murray and L.R. Farnell, with outside help from the Cambridge scholar Jane Ellen Harrison – the last of whom he thanked at length in his preface for her “unwearying kindness in suggestion, comment, criticism and encouragement.”

In signaling his debts to Murray and particularly to Harrison, Halliday aligned himself with what we now call the Cambridge Ritualists, an affiliation that shows itself on almost every page of his book. *Greek Divination: A Study of its Methods and Principles* was not really a survey of the topic (he chose not to treat enthused divination at all, for example, except insofar as it peripherally became relevant to other matters) but rather was Halliday’s contribution to solidifying ideas that were dear to the Ritualists’ hearts, most notably that there was an inner core of primitivity in Greek religion; that as a result, there were deep similarities between Greek religion and tribal religions that could be elucidated through methods of ethnological research (the book draws extensively on cross-cultural comparisons); and that the figure of the sacred king was central to Greek religious thought and social practice (Halliday argues that the figure of the diviner is to be derived from that of king). Halliday also connected divination very closely to magic, positing that the diviner was a sort of failed magician—the magician promises to change the future whereas the diviner, having realized that he cannot change it, promises only to predict it. The first main chapter of the book, indeed, is entitled “Magic” and offers an extensive analysis that is indebted to the Oceanic idea of *mana* (the impersonal supernatural force inherent in sacred objects or individuals) – a concept that was also much used by Harrison in her book *Themis*, which had appeared the year before. In another chapter, “Divination and Magic,” Halliday argued that most divination is a form of magical speech. He returned to magic here and there throughout the book.

*Greek Divination* does not seem to have made much of an impact. One of the few acknowledgments of its appearance was a review in a 1913 issue of the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, which praises Halliday for using “comparative spectacles” and knowledge of “primitive cultures” to gaze at Greek life, and for seeking after the “pre-Olympian element” in Greek religion. In other words, the reviewer valued Halliday’s work precisely because it had taken up the Ritualists’ banner. (Like all *JHS* reviews of the time, this one was anonymous, although the prose is suggestive

of Harrison herself.) This Ritualist stance undoubtedly was one of the biggest reasons that *Greek Divination* had little effect on the scholarly world. Soon after its publication, interest in the Ritualists' approach began to wane among academics, perhaps in part because it was interrupted by World War I, but also because it was simply running out of steam. After the war, it fell even further out of favor: classicists began to re-embrace a picture of the Greeks as paradigmatically rational, and rejected comparisons between them and the "savage" and "primitive" peoples of whom the Ritualists had been so fond. Magic, which had just begun to gain credit as a serious academic subject before the war, was now set aside as well, to languish until the 1980s (see further on this in Chapter 5, where I return to Halliday's interest in pursuing the connection between divination and magic). Halliday did go on to enjoy a creditable career – he became professor of ancient history at the University of Liverpool – but that career was built largely in the still marginal field of folklore studies, which did not help to bring renewed attention to his first book. In 2003, a small firm, Kessinger Publishing, reprinted *Greek Divination* and reissued many of its individual chapters as pamphlets, but the fact that Kessinger offers these alongside books designed to introduce seekers to Mithraic ritual, works on the astral body, the collected poems of the mystic A.E. Waite, and treatises on ritual magic and demonology by Eliphas Levi has not helped to raise the status of Halliday's book in the academic world.

The next major contribution to the study of divination that appeared after Halliday's book was, like Bouché-Leclercq's four volumes, primarily a compendium of information. Arthur Stanley Pease's excellent commentary on Cicero's *Concerning Divination* (1920/3) copiously collected ancient information about a wide variety of Greek and Roman divinatory techniques. Pease began, moreover, the task of tracing a history of the debates about divination in antiquity. But after Pease, several more decades would elapse before further significant research appeared, and what did appear would continue to be mostly of a documentary rather than a theoretical nature. In 1950 Pierre Amandry published *La mantique apollonienne à Delphes: Essai sur le fonctionnement de l'oracle* and six years later H.W. Parke and D.E.W. Wormell followed with their two-volume *The Delphic Oracle*. Parke continued to contribute studies of institutional oracles with *Greek Oracles* (1967), *The Oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon* (1967) and *Oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor* (1985). In 1971, W. Günther contributed *Das Orakel von Didyma in hellenistischer Zeit* and in 1978 Joseph Fontenrose offered his update of Parke and Wormell's work, *The Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations with a Catalogue of Responses*. Although this list is not complete, it gives the tenor of mid-twentieth-century scholarship, which expended a lot of effort on

recovering and organizing both archaeological and textual information, and relatively little on understanding *why* divination was important to ancient cultures – or on asking how it could shed light on the social structures or mentalities of the Greeks and Romans. Notably, moreover, almost all of this work focused on institutional oracles, especially Delphi, rather than technical forms of divination or the figure of the independent diviner. These oracles were frequently mentioned by the Greek tragedians, by Plato, Herodotus, Thucydides and many other “mainstream” authors of Greek antiquity who were understood to help carry the torch of Greek rationality. If work on divination was to be done, this way of doing it fit the mood of the times.

The theoretical and methodological advances that had been made in the study of religions by the time that Jean-Pierre Vernant published his volume in 1974 made it all the more desirable finally to move toward answering questions such as those he had posed. The scholars whom he invited to contribute certainly heeded his call, and, although the amount of work on divination continued to be meager for a long time, those who came later heeded his call as well. Robert Parker’s examination of the Delphic Oracle, for example, took up the question of oracular authority and suggested that the interpretive process that followed an oracle’s delivery often transferred authority from the god who had spoken the oracle to those who received his words (1985). Giovanni Manetti used semiotic theory to approach ancient Greek and Mesopotamian divinatory systems, and in doing so demonstrated that very different divinatory mentalities underlay the two cultures, which in turn reflected the importance of written and oral methods of communication in each of them (1987). In the early 1990s, Polymnia Athanassiadi contributed a series of articles that showed how changes within divinatory practices during late antiquity could be used to help trace larger shifts in religious and civic authority and to pinpoint the areas in which pagan and Christian ideologies clashed. Lisa Maurizio investigated the values that ancient Greece ascribed to women and possessed prophecy by contextualizing the Pythia within information about female possession in other cultures, including those of contemporary Africa (1995). An edited volume brought out by Federica Cordano and Cristiano Grottanelli focused on sortition in the ancient world – a topic that had particularly been neglected up till then; several of the essays, most notably Grottanelli’s, showed how close examination of a divinatory method illuminates the manner in which abstract concepts such as “equality” are understood by a culture (2000). Hugh Bowden’s recent book on Delphi and Athenian democracy (2005) returns, in a sense, to the concerns of Parker’s pioneering article, asking how the oracle affected the emergence of a new form of government. Dream

divination attracted particular attention. To single out only one of a number of works on this topic, Patricia Cox Miller (1994) examined the way in which dreams and their interpretation provided a discourse through which both personal and societal patterns of thought could be articulated.

### *Divination and Magic*

But the one topic on which work still has hardly begun is divination and magic – a surprising situation, given the huge amount of interest in all other aspects of ancient magic that has blossomed during the past three decades, and an ironic situation as well, given that the relationship between magic and divination lay at the very heart of Halliday's early attempt to theorize divination, as we saw, as well as at the heart of most Christian attempts to defame the two pursuits, from late antiquity until well into the early modern period. This puzzling state of affairs brings me to the final part of my brief history of the history of divination. I will pick up the threads by returning to the middle of the twentieth century and looking at what was going on with the study of ancient religion more generally.

In 1941, Martin P. Nilsson published the first volume of his magisterial *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, which focused on the archaic and classical periods. The third edition of this volume, published in 1967, checks in at 843 pages excluding indices, but very few of these are spared for divination – there is a 27-page sub-chapter on Delphi and another, nine-page sub-chapter on divination more generally, about half of which is spent on Delphi and other institutional oracles. Most of the discussion of Delphi, moreover, focuses not on its divinatory practices *per se*, but rather on the Oracle's potential to steer political matters such as colonization and the tribal divisions of Athens, its role in validating new laws, and its influence on the calendar. That is, for Nilsson, Delphi is of interest primarily as an instance of how (as he sees it) Delphic priests could influence the civic life of Greek *poleis*. Again, Delphi's potential to be fit into the "rational" aspects of Greek life seems to have been attractive to a mid-century scholar. Even more importantly for the present investigation, although Nilsson expresses some admiration for Halliday's book, he revises Halliday's connection between magic and divination to the distinct advantage of the latter. Divination is not an enfeebled form of magic, Nilsson argues, but springs from the inborn tendency of humans to observe and conclude: if something unusual occurs before an important occasion such as the hunt, and the hunt turns out well, the occurrence will be remembered and perhaps elevated to the status of a "sign."

If anything, divination was originally a simple, natural art that was subsequently arrogated by magicians as another means to power. Nilsson otherwise leaves magic almost unmentioned in this first volume. The sort of magic that he does discuss, in a sub-chapter entitled “Zauberriten im Kult,” is limited to things such as “sacred marriage” and rituals to enhance fertility – in other words, this is “magic” in what we would now consider only the loosest sense of the word, and excluding all potentially distressing subjects such as curse tablets and love spells. It seems clear that for Nilsson and his mid-century readers, magic, and most forms of divination, were peripheral to religion as it was practiced by the Greeks.

Nilsson’s second volume, which was published 14 years later, covers the Hellenistic and imperial periods. Here, he shows a somewhat greater interest in both divination and magic – he discusses astrology as well as institutional oracles and ventures briefly even into the curse tablets – but he doesn’t go as far as one might expect, given that scholars of his time believed the imperial age to be the period when such dissolute phenomena began to flourish. The implicit message, again, is that magic and divination are of only tangential relevance to religion that is truly Greek. It fell to the Norwegian scholar Samson Eitrem to treat Greek divination in a smaller, far lesser-known book that was published between Nilsson’s two volumes (*Orakel und Mysterien am Ausgang der Antike*, 1947) and to treat magic in some of his articles, as well as in a manuscript on magic and divination that was left unpublished at his death in 1966. While Nilsson’s two volumes have served for decades as the primary resource for scholars of Greek religion and have never been out of print, Eitrem’s book is seldom cited and is scarcely available even second-hand. In 1997, on the fiftieth anniversary of its publication, Fritz Graf brought it back into the public eye by offering “Magic and Divination” as the first annual Eitrem lecture at the Norwegian Institute at Athens. In 1991, Dirk Obbink translated a small portion of Eitrem’s unpublished book on magic and divination and included it in a collection of essays on magic. Nonetheless, in spite of Obbink’s and Graf’s efforts, subsequent years have seen relatively few publications on the topic that Eitrem had hoped to revive.

Another book that appeared between the first and second volumes of Nilsson’s great history was destined to receive much more attention than Eitrem’s did: E.R. Dodds’s *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951) is still standard reading for classicists and for many outside of the field as well. In the preface, Dodds cautions that his work is not meant to serve as a “history of Greek religion, or even of Greek religious ideas or feelings . . . It is a study of the successive interpretations which Greek minds placed on one particular type of human experience – a sort of experience in which nineteenth-century rationalism took little interest, but whose

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cultural significance is now widely recognized" (n.p.). He never quite specifies exactly what sort of experience he means by this, but the rather self-defensive paragraph that follows, where he justifies his use of recent anthropological and psychological theories, ends with the query, "Why should we attribute to the ancient Greeks an immunity from 'primitive' modes of thought which we do not find in any society open to our direct observation?" In other words, we are to look to the title of his book for the theme that binds together his chapters, such as it is: they are all disquisitions on what he understands to be irrational elements in Greek religion. Several of the chapters touch on divinatory topics; one of the appendices, which had appeared four years earlier as an article in the *Journal of Roman Studies*, takes up theurgy, a form of magic that flourished in late antiquity and the Renaissance.

Dodds, then, was willing to engage with topics that Nilsson and others had largely avoided. And yet the results did not move work on either divination or magic forward as quickly as one might have hoped, for two reasons. One was that *The Greeks and the Irrational* was only the first shot across a very wide bow – for decades, the academy had insisted that the Greeks were consummately rational, and although Dodds's book was praised by reviewers, it would be a while before others began to follow where he had led. (Dodds had spent his earlier career working on Neoplatonism, which inevitably brought him into contact with topics such as dreams, oracles and magic, and had also published an edition and commentary of Euripides' *Bacchae*, which gave him reason to study some of the wilder elements of Dionysiac cult – in other words, he was unusually well prepared for what he did in *The Greeks and the Irrational*. His long-standing interest in contemporary spiritualism undoubtedly helped to prepare him as well.)

The second reason that *The Greeks and the Irrational* was slow to move the ball forward has to do with the specific manner in which Dodds treated divination and magic. About magic I will make only two remarks. First, the fact that his earlier work on theurgy was included as an appendix to the book suggests that Dodds felt the subject was important; he aimed to bring it into wider circulation by putting it side by side with his discussions of archaic and classical Greece. But second, and somewhat at odds with this apparent intention, he presented even theurgy – a highly intellectualized form of magic, developed by Platonic philosophers – as a late and degraded growth upon the formerly healthy body of Greek religion. In a phrase that has repeatedly been quoted since it was printed, Dodds characterized theurgy's sacred texts, the *Chaldean Oracles*, as a "manifesto of irrationalism" and declared that "as vulgar magic is commonly the last resort of the personally desperate, of those whom man and God have

alike failed, so theurgy became the refuge of a despairing intelligentsia which already felt *la fascination de l'abîme*" (1951: 287–8). In other words, even as he turned the spotlight onto this particular type of magic, Dodds reiterated the familiar opinion that magic was degenerate, and could best be studied only as evidence for cultural decline. How many scholars would leap to follow this lead?

He treated divination differently, using it as collateral evidence for exploring one of his book's central topics – the nature of the self in Greek thought. In Chapter 3 he takes up Plato's characterization of enthusiastic prophecy as a form of divine madness. Dodds begins by comparing enthusiasm to spirit possession (more recent scholarship similarly contextualizes it within what we now call "altered states of consciousness") and suggests that this irrational aspect of human behavior can help us understand the Greek idea of the self more generally. At the final turn, however, he pulls us back, and insists that when all is said and done, enthusiasm as we find it at Delphi actually served to guarantee a reassuring normalcy:

Greece had neither a Bible nor a Church; that is why Apollo, vicar on earth of the heavenly father, came to fill the gap. Without Delphi, Greek society could scarcely have endured the tensions to which it was subjected in the Archaic Age. The crushing sense of human ignorance and human insecurity, the dread of divine *phthonos*, the dread of *miasma* – the accumulated burden of these things would have been unendurable without the assurance that behind the seeming chaos there was knowledge and purpose. (1951: 75)

Inspired divination then, when held firmly under the control of a god who was not only a Nietzschean paragon of clarity and light but indeed a sort of sober Anglican cleric, was the very purveyor of rationality. There may be a certain element of truth to this (divination does, after all, tend to be called on in situations of uncertainty, and, as Robert Parker has shown, it can stimulate a more nuanced and focused discussion of an issue than had previously occurred), but Dodds has surely pushed the point too far. His description of enthusiastic prophecy neatly contrasted with the much wilder picture of Dionysian ecstasy that he was to discuss next, but Plato, after all, had categorized *both* the Dionysian and the Apollonian experiences as forms of madness. In Chapter 4, Dodds discusses dreams, which inevitably brings him to the topics of dream divination and dream incubation, and briefly to ancient theories of dream divination. Much of his discussion here is situated within tolerably mainstream thought of the time: Freud's ideas, to which he refers, had gained acceptability, and the dream

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as a literary device, which he treats at length, had already been studied by classical scholars.

In the final analysis, the effect that *The Greeks and the Irrational* had on the study of divination and magic was an interesting mix. As a widely praised book, it began to legitimate interest in all kinds of things that earlier generations of classicists had side-stepped. Without Dodds, it is hard to imagine the surge of work on ancient magic that began in the late 1970s and has continued ever since. But the book's effect on divination was apparently different, for divination has not been so quickly resuscitated as a respectable field. Why was this so? Why did divination continue to languish after magic took off?

Two observations can help us here. The first is inspired by the title of Vernant's 1974 collection – *Divinatione et rationalité*. After World War I, as I have noted, work on divination, such as it was, focused on institutional oracles and tended to emphasize the ways in which these oracles had worked to validate civically and politically important matters. Nilsson felt comfortable relegating most of what he said about magic to a late subchapter called “Der niedere Glaube” (“low” or “vulgar” beliefs) but most of what he said about oracles or even astrology was put under chapters entitled “The Religion of the State” or “Personal Beliefs,” and he chose to focus his attention on the role of its priesthood in putting the Pythia's ramblings to good use. Dodds topped off this trend by making enthusiastic prophecy, as it was practiced at institutional oracles, the standard-bearer of stability and common sense in times of turmoil. Meanwhile, other forms of divination that were less easy to subsume under the umbrella of rationalism as it was understood at the time – sortition, entrails reading, lecanomancy, etc. – by and large were simply ignored.

Magic, in contrast, had continued to be viewed by scholars and non-scholars alike as dark and irrational – as the ultimate foil to religion in a Frazerian or Tylorian sense. Nilsson and Dodds, again, both helped to keep this perception alive. From our backward-looking perspective, then, divination can be seen to have become somewhat of a *tertium quid* in the course of the twentieth century, stranded between rational religion at one end of a spectrum and irrational magic at the other end. Divination was never completely a respectable thing, but certainly it was far more respectable than magic.

Situating divination between magic and religion had surprising consequences for its fate as a field of study. It almost surely made divination a less appealing scholarly topic than magic during the late 1960s and the 1970s precisely because it was perceived to be further away than magic from the unrefined (and thereby, or so ran the argument of the day, the most deeply revealing) desires and beliefs of the ancients. As the western

world grew more aware of rapidly-disappearing non-western cultures, and more aware of its own colonialist effects on those cultures, scholars from many disciplines began to think more closely about the ways in which westerners had portrayed non-western societies. They became more sensitive to the tendency to impose “otherness” upon outsiders, and also to the fact that this tendency existed among the outsiders themselves; it was a nearly universal human trait. Such realizations in turn challenged the normative assumptions underlying both our own categories and those of other peoples. In this atmosphere, magic stood out as a prime candidate for re-examination, for no other category had so often been used, trans-historically and cross-culturally, as a way of distancing outsiders. In contrast, because the practice of divination had never acquired the same dangerously exotic stamp as had magical practices, and because the term “divination” had never acquired as deeply pejorative overtones as those that had prompted attempts to redefine “magic,” it failed to fascinate the same scholars who began to take up the study of magic (as well as the study of other exotically “primitive” phenomena such as initiation rituals, another growth industry of the 1960s and 1970s that hearkened back to the Cambridge Ritualists). In other words, one reason that divination may have failed to become a focus of scholarly interest in the 1970s and 1980s was that it wasn’t a dark enough target; by keeping divination rational, Nilsson, Dodds and others like them unwittingly set it up to become unfashionable.

My second observation follows upon the first. Although sociologists and anthropologists began to develop globalizing theories of magic (and critiques of the same) in the 1960s, anthropological work on divination tended instead to focus on the specifics of particular peoples’ systems. Where theories were offered, they seldom took center stage (instead, focus lay on the data being examined) and scholars seldom applied such theories beyond the culture for which they had first been developed (even E.E. Evans-Pritchard’s immensely popular *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, which theoretically influenced the study of magic for years to come, made little dent in the theoretical study of divination). Thus, even if scholars of antiquity had wished to take a new look at divination, well-developed theories through which they could do so were not easily available – Vernant had to go to some trouble to find the African models that he cited in the introduction to his volume. And, although classicists pioneered theoretical work in the humanities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and particularly helped to pioneer work in religion at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), they have seldom taken the lead in developing new theories since then. In this spirit it is worth remembering that

*Why Divination?*

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work on ancient divination never ceased – as I noted above, valuable collections of material were assembled in the middle of the century. It was simply a long time before scholars of antiquity moved on from assembly to evaluation.

With this in mind, we might think again about the work on divination that has more recently begun to appear, some of which was mentioned in the previous section. From where did these more theoretically sophisticated treatments of divination draw their inspiration, and what finally prompted them? The most important answer to the first half of that question is “Vernant” – most of the scholars whom I mentioned earlier cite his work in their notes; clearly, the questions that he posed and the models that he and his contributors provided helped to stimulate these later works (and certainly, they have stimulated my own thoughts in the present book as well). An answer to the second question is that much of the recent work involving divination seems to address, at least as much as it addresses divination, other topics that have enjoyed increased attention in recent years: gender, semiotics, late antiquity, the construction of authority, religion as a social phenomenon. Many of these studies have been immensely valuable and extremely interesting, but divination itself, in its own right, still needs attention.

*What This Book Will Do*

In short, there is a lot of ground to be made up – more than a single volume can hope to cover. The title of this book already indicates one choice that I made soon after I started writing: what I had intended to be a work on Greek and Roman divination was pared back to Greek divination alone, not only because I realized that the two cultures provided more material than I could present in one book but also because, more importantly, I realized that there were significant differences between the types of divination practiced by the two and between the intellectual and social structures that underlay them. Although I use some Roman sources – most notably Cicero – to supplement the Greek evidence on which I focus, I make no attempt to analyze Roman divination *per se*.

Another early decision involved making a choice between the general and the detailed. I am not by nature a writer of lengthy books, much less of multi-volume *compendia* like that of Bouché-Leclercq. I had to choose, therefore, between either focusing closely on a few selected topics within Greek divination or giving a broader, but less detailed, overview of the whole field. The more I investigated the path that scholarship on divination had taken during the past century – and in particular, as

I became aware that since Bouché-Leclercq, no single work had brought together a representative span of techniques that the Greeks would have called divinatory – the greater seemed the need to provide a general study. Although the ancients had divided divination into “natural” and “technical” types, the division was always somewhat artificial, as the discussion earlier in this chapter has already begun to show: institutional oracles often offered what were usually categorized as “technical” methods, such as lot divination and empyromancy, alongside enthusiastic prophecy, and even dreams – a “natural” method – often required skilled interpretation by humans trained in particular techniques. Until we begin to think of divination as an ontologically unified category (however blurry some of its exterior borders may be), we will risk misrepresenting and therefore misunderstanding its function and meaning in the ancient world.

Having said that, however, I must admit that I found it impossible to organize my material without making some divisions within the category of divination. To me, it seemed heuristically more valuable to do so not under the rubrics of “natural” and “technical” but those of “institutional oracles” and “independent diviners.” Certainly, there were overlaps between oracles and diviners as well, as we will see (each borrowed from the other those methods or claims that had proven profitable, and each could, on occasion, validate itself by referring to the other, as when an incubation oracle in Daunia claimed to have been founded by the mythic seer Calchas), but at least one significant difference does distinguish them. Whereas many oracles loomed large on the ancient landscape as panhellenically famous, long-established places, most independent diviners were known exclusively by those who dwelt in the same town as they did, or by those through whose towns they wandered, plying their talents; whatever panhellenic fame they could claim came from affiliating themselves with other people – with guilds of diviners such as the Melampids, the Telliadae or the Iamids (who in turn traced their lineages to famous diviners of myth). Because of these and other differences between oracles and diviners, the questions we ask about each type will vary – what do myths say about the nature of the *places* where oracles are located, for example? And what does myth say about the nature of the *people* who are diviners? How does a *place* validate itself as opposed to a *person*? How is each embedded in the surrounding social and cultural fabric?

The rest of this book, therefore, is divided in half. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on institutional oracles, starting with Delphi and Dodona and then moving on to Claros, Didyma and some others. Chapters 4 and 5 treat independent diviners (*manteis*), with Chapter 4 offering an overview of the diviner mostly as we know him in archaic, classical and Hellenistic

sources and Chapter 5 focusing on a type of *mantis* whom we often call a magician – one of the experts who, during the imperial period, composed the extensive collections of spells known now as the magical papyri. Many of these spells are divinatory in nature, and they provide detailed information on how divinatory procedures might be carried out by an independent specialist. This last chapter also provides an opportunity to return to the question that Halliday began to pose, but that received so little attention afterwards: why are magic and divination so often mentioned in the same breath?

Throughout all of these chapters, I have often thought of the challenges that Jean-Pierre Vernant posed in 1974; I have tried to situate divinatory procedures within the social, political and cultural *milieux* in which they were used, and to use them to shed light on the mentalities that employed them. I am, however, primarily a scholar of religion and myth; my attention therefore has been most strongly drawn to the tantalizing puzzles that our evidence presents concerning what was done during divinatory procedures and how those actions were rationalized; and concerning what was said about divination's origins and the gods who enabled it to function. My focus on divination as a religious phenomenon is, I hope, another step forward. In league with some of the recent scholars whom I cited earlier in this chapter (or whom I cite in chapters yet to come), I want to erase the erroneous impression, given by Nilsson and others, that divination stands only at the margins of Greek religion. It was central, and must be studied as such.

I have written this book with both scholars and general readers in mind. In hopes that the latter will find it welcoming, I have avoided the sometimes daunting panoply of footnotes; to serve the former, I have included the most important references to ancient sources and modern treatments parenthetically in the text (although not necessarily all of them where there are many; the bibliography at the end of each chapter should be consulted by scholars who wish to go further with a specific question). The bibliographies are subdivided according to the divisions within each chapter; works that are relevant to more than one division are listed under "General" at the top of each bibliography.

Most abbreviated titles of ancient works should be clear even to the non-specialist, but a few are clarified in the list on page 00. Ancient authors from whom only one work remains are usually cited by name alone (e.g., "Herodotus," "Pausanias"), but fuller citations for these are included in the list of abbreviations as well. I have used a Latinized method of transliteration for names of people and places (e.g., "Branchus") unless they are well known under the Greek transliteration. I have used a Greek method for most other Greek words although I have made occasional exceptions for

words that will look more familiar to the non-specialist under a Latinate form.

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