

## Prophecy and Provenance

### With an addendum on the Christian proscription of divination

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Divination is something that people *do* in order to bring benefit and wisdom into their affairs. Since like other practical arts and crafts it can be undertaken without much thinking-about it, divination's chaotic variety and liberality of scope render it unattractive to the philosophic mind schooled in clarity of definition and conceptual abstraction. Much folk divination comes over as superstitious and crass, and what passes as its theory is patently illogical. From the empirical point of view its phenomena are anecdotal and subjective, difficult to frame and replicate, and resistant to analysis. Ethnography has taken up the question of divination, but with very few exceptions this is about safely-distant tribes and cultures who are not us. Where anthropology has given an account of divination, the topic has often been treated as a subset of magic, thus losing focus on its distinctive epistemological features (Johnston, 2008, p.26).

There is a further 'spiritual' dimension to the marginalised status of divination in our culture, arising from the fact that divinatory beliefs readily enter the territory of paranormal agency, including the possibility of divinities and spirits. This courts controversy with long established religious conceptions, especially where revelation and prophecy form an important element of the religion. Even where diviners imagine for themselves only a generalised and non-personal interpretation of spirit, the comparison of divination and prophecy comes into view. At this point we encounter the crucial question of the *provenance* of divination, that-from-which these knowings are given and that-to-which these knowings intend.

The religious and theological controversy over divination, particularly in western culture, is often put down to the fact that its great religions are monotheistic and transcendent, where divination encourages either multiple divinities or pantheism. This is a battle line over which paganism and Christianity fought, but this argument is neither theologically nor hermeneutically sufficient, since it does not get to the root of a question that lies at the heart of both pagan divination and religious revelation. Christian hostility to divination as a pagan practice has had the effect of denying a significant comparison, since prophecy and revelation - definitive for the great religions – have been treated as other than divination, instead of being seen as sharing common ground. As with so much of paganism, medieval Christianity encompassed elements of the divinatory into its own understanding (Flint, 1991, p.157ff.), but the net effect was to cast divination into the wilderness of superstition.

The reader might be led at this point to assume that in defence of divination and other occult practices I am setting the scene for a New Age and neo-pagan complaint against

Christianity, but that is not my intention. In fact, standing on its own ground Christianity can bring up a powerful question concerning provenance against assumptions commonly found amongst diviners. The importance of this is that it reveals a pivotal issue in the hermeneutics of divination, taken up here through a consideration of the status of divination for the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is foundational for the ancient Israelite conception of deity, including the mode by which deity is expressed through prophecy and oracles. The legacy of this question remains with us today, especially in western culture, in the complex relationship of divination and religious thinking.

The religious question requires a closer look at what is primary for divination, the 'why' of its practice, and before we take on the issues raised by Judeo-Christianity, it will be helpful to take a step back and review what might already be indicated on the basis of the hermeneutic distinction of *theoros* and *hermeios* (Cornelius, 2014b). *Theoros* seeks a response from a source of knowing that is other-than *theoros*, with *hermeios* as mediator. The physical means employed will give clear evidence as to the external form of the process (e.g. whether the mode of divination is natural or artificial, whether we intend to consult Zeus or the *I Ching*), but these physical means do not govern the process by which meaning is derived nor do they authenticate the source of that meaning; hence the subsidiary nature of the 'how' question. Since *theoros* is responsible for what *theoros* brings and takes away, the parties involved employ appropriate ritual to express right attitude and aid the strongest possible presentiment for diviner and enquirer alike; however, how the oracle might respond embodies a possibility that is not finally in anyone's hands.

The 'how' question distracts us; from the point of view of hermeneutics it is a secondary issue. Plutarch puts the matter pithily in the essay *On the Sign of Socrates*. Challenged on the issue of whether Socrates took heed of mere sneezes as omens, he has Galaxidorus give this common-sense response:

I, on the contrary, should have been astonished if a master of dialectic and the use of words, like Socrates, had spoken of receiving intimations not from 'Heaven' but from the 'Sneeze': it is as if a man should say that the arrow wounded him, and not the archer with the arrow... the sign used by the power that signals is an instrument like any other.

(Plutarch, 1984)

The 'how' question is therefore subsumed in the 'why' and 'to what' of the divinatory source, that is, the *provenance* of the divination. This is borne out when we come to the Biblical treatment of divination. In the following discussion, I make extensive use of J. R. Porter's 1981 paper on Israelite divination. He observes that in order to understand the Israelite attitude to divination we require an interpretation that runs counter to a common tendency to classify divinatory methods by generic similarity of external form (ibid., p.194). This approach on our part also entails taking a middle course between the demands of modern religious-historical scholarship and traditional theology (Fohrer, 1973, pp.21-2).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Discussing the tension between these approaches, Fohrer acknowledges the limitations of critical-

## The Witch of Endor

The Biblical account of an early period suggests that some modes of divination were legitimated, but others were not, and this was established in the legal code (Porter, 1981, p.194). A fruitful case for our analysis comes from the story of King Saul and his consultation of the woman at the pit, better known as 'the witch of Endor' in I Samuel 28:3-25 (Jeffers, 1996, p.133ff.; Porter, 1981, p.194). We can be sure that when these texts were collated in something like the form we now know them, this was a theologically acceptable description of history, detailing the recalcitrant behaviour of the first king of Israel. Most scholars hold that the redaction of the ancient material is associated with the writing of Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Old Testament (or Hebrew Testament), in the late 7th century BCE, together with post-Exile insertions (von Rad, 1962, p.71).<sup>2</sup> These writings establish the theology of 'Biblical Yahwism' that later times understand to be the authentic Hebrew tradition.

This event dates to around 1000 BCE. King Saul, his rule and life threatened by the Philistine army, inquired of Yahweh by all legitimate means and was given no answer, 'neither by dreams, nor by urim, nor by prophets'. Urim refers to the *urim* and *thummim*, discussed below. Saul had already in his reign 'put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land', indicating that these were not an uncommon feature in Israelite culture. He was in despair for guidance, and in a bitter irony he breached his own laws and sought a necromancer to call up his deceased counsellor, the prophet Samuel. The spirit grumbled about being disturbed and delivered a prophecy that Yahweh would fulfil his earlier threat to overthrow the King, which miserable fate shortly occurred at the hands of the Philistines.

There is sufficient detail to warrant an attempt to recreate aspects of the scene. Even if some details are legendary amplifications, we would still gain a view of the imaginal interpretation from the later tradition about this manifestation of prophecy. In the account we see King Saul as theoros, the enquirer. Hermeios takes on a double mediumship in both the woman *and* the spirit, since the spirit itself was required to be a prophet, just as Samuel had been in life. Saul was in disguise when he asked the woman to call up Samuel. On calling up the ghost of Samuel, she 'cried with a loud voice' that she knew the enquirer was King Saul. Has she either consciously or subliminally registered his identity from clues in the situation and from his words, or has she been telepathically or supernaturally informed?

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historical methods in deriving any sense of the 'unique nature of Christianity and its God', which is a theological concern. Concerning the relationship of divination to religion, this is equally a *theological* debate. In that case a critical-historical or cultural-historical approach is inadequate because self-understandings by Jews and Christians of their own theology, and self-understandings by diviners of the ultimate meaning of their own practice, are integral to revealing the project of divination in western culture.

<sup>2</sup> The title of 'Old Testament' entails a fundamental theological claim by Christianity in its interpretation of the Hebrew canon, but contemporary non-Jewish scholars retain the name while being sensitive to the connotations (cf. the approach of von Rad, Jeffers et. al.).

We cannot tell. However, we are led to infer that Saul himself did not see the spirit: 'what sawest thou?', he asked of the medium. She described the figure and Saul knew this must be Samuel and bowed down. The conversation that follows appears to have been between Samuel and Saul, and is reported as if they were speaking, but there is no reason to suppose that the woman was not still intermediating, possibly speaking in the voice of the spirit. Had the spirit appeared as an auditory and visual phantasm *to Saul* then it is more likely than not that such a dramatic detail would have remained, correctly reported, in the narrative. The reasonable supposition is that the woman spoke the prophecy from Samuel (Porter, 1981, p.204).<sup>3</sup>

Where does the prophecy come from? We know from classical antiquity that it is a common feature of necromancy to treat the spirit contacted as the divinatory source, on the general principle that the dead have access to sources of knowledge and wisdom unavailable to the living (Ogden, 2001, p.231). However, in this singular situation Yahweh is that-from-which it comes, which is why there is no comparison with the conventions of the spiritualist seance. Here the great god and not spirit-Samuel is the provenance of divine communication, just as Yahweh has made known his commands through the prophet Samuel in his life. This is why King Saul as theoros *must* bow down. He does not bow to a ghost – he bows to the *address* by Yahweh. His bowing confirms what the whole report suggests of the theoros-hermeios relation. Yahweh can speak through any form he may choose, although the ritual code governing the covenant with Yahweh demands that theoros will not ordinarily (and 'ought not to') seek an oracle in this terrible way, sealing the enquirer's illegitimacy and his and the Israelites' doom. We observe once more that the mode employed to make divination does not have any relationship with its provenance, and it therefore offers no guide to its discrimination as truth. What matters for the Israelites and the editors of the sacred texts is the certainty that this is indeed Yahweh who responds.

### **Urim and Thummim in the Covenant**

Saul's breach of the covenant has already been indicated in the failure of *urim* and *thummim*. Direct reports of inductive divination are often veiled in the Old Testament, since in its dominant tradition 'many of the religious institutions and practices have been purged of the divinatory associations which ...we may justifiably suspect they once possessed' (Porter, 1981, p.194). Perhaps the most significant of all such institutions is that of the urim and thummim, which became for later tradition non-divinatory symbols of divine justice.<sup>4</sup> However, for the early Israelites they were a divinatory device by which

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<sup>3</sup> Porter suggests that this passage 'shows that a person with the requisite power was considered to be able to bring up the dead in visible form and to force them to speak audibly and foretell the future', but I do not consider that the text demands such a strong interpretation, or that the spirit was *visible to Saul*. It may be argued that Saul had originally been given a capacity to prophesy following his anointing as king by Samuel, and had been filled with god's spirit on more than one occasion (I Samuel 9-12); but that need not include prophetic 'hallucinatory' *vision* of a phantasm. The essentials of this incident are not however altered, either way.

<sup>4</sup> Van Dam (1997) traces the history of urim and thummim and their allegorical interpretation in later Jewish and Christian thought up to the Reformation.

Yahweh actively dispensed his justice or gave his guidance. The following details come from Ann Jeffers' comprehensive study of divination in the ancient Near East (Jeffers, 1996, esp. pp.209-15). The origin and etymologies of the urim and thummim are obscure, as are the details of their substance or appearance and their mode of operation. We do know that as well as a simple yes or no, they were able to provide a non-answer and a choice between alternatives. Their size can be deduced from the pocket or breast-plate in which they were carried; this was about twelve inches square and was fastened permanently to the high priest's breast. The high priest used them; however, the example that follows shows the king, once again the hapless Saul, making a decision concerning the form of the response.

The first book of Samuel includes an illuminating example of the use of this oracle in a time of war. Saul's son Jonathan, aided by omens, had already achieved success in the war against the Philistines. Faced with an urgent decision concerning further military action Saul accepted the high priest's advice that it was necessary to divine. However, Yahweh remained silent: the oracle refused to give an indication. In response to this serious ritual failure, and despite the dismay of the other Israelites, he ordered a trial by divination to reveal the transgression that was presumed to have created divine offence:

Therefore Saul said: 'O Lord, God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan, my son, O Lord God of Israel, give urim; but if this guilt is in thy people Israel, give thummim'. And Jonathan and Saul were taken, and the people escaped.

Saul now requested that the lots be thrown a second time in order to specify further the source of guilt (I Samuel 14:41). Here the sense of a 'throw' is indicated (Jeffers, 1996, pp.212,215). This second throw pointed to Jonathan who admitted the transgression, which was his unwitting breach of a rash war prohibition made under oath. The people demanded that Jonathan be saved, since he had been aided by God in defeating Israel's enemies, and on these grounds he was not sacrificed (I Samuel 14:42-5).

Noteworthy here is the common practice of building one divination on another, establishing a dialogue with the god within the unique context of the enquiry. There is no evidence to suggest that the urim and thummim were other than elementary in procedure and self-evident in interpretation, especially when required to indicate a straight choice or a yes-no answer. If this surmise is correct then this oracle may be located at the far end of the cognitive continuum amongst the simplest examples of 'bones', no more complicated in external form than the Azande poison oracle. A possible parallel between these two oracles is that Saul, perhaps by virtue of his kingship, appears to be free to choose the format of the divinatory response in advance and in an arbitrary manner. Saul says 'I give urim to this outcome, thummim to the alternative', just as in the poison oracle, 'I give "chicken live" to this outcome, "chicken die" to the alternative', with no special symbolism involved. Although this is plausible, it remains a speculation, since we have no secure indication

from Biblical sources one way or the other.<sup>5</sup>

These simple methods of divination, allowing public accessibility with little special knowledge, share in common a characteristic of assimilating the role of hermeios as interpreter within theoros as enquirer. Various individuals, if not all, assembled before Saul are likely to have been able to interpret the meaning for themselves. In this particular case, because it directly concerns them, they all partake as theoros. The comparison with the poison oracle holds in another important respect, namely that its authority is enhanced rather than lessened by its public nature and its simplicity; the life and death of a man, and even the integrity of the kingdom, depend on the public acknowledgment of a casting of lots.

Theoros remains responsible for what is brought and done: here theoros is Saul, but also the people for whom he speaks as king. The Israelites turn to their god in a desperate and confused state, and the function of divination is to resolve the dangerous state of conflicted intentions by referring these to divine authority. *As theoros, Saul must decide his action* following the oracle - the oracle determines the transgression because that is what theoros has asked it to do - but the acceptance of the divinatory judgment followed by the decision that Jonathan shall not die belongs to Saul and to the Israelite chiefs who in effect threaten the king not to harm him.

### **The Covenant and *participation mystique***

It hardly needs to be remarked that as with Socrates and the sneeze, the Israelites do not have a god called urim, yet they know that Yahweh will be as fully in the lots as a man is in his speech. The identification of the speaking of Yahweh with urim and thummim exemplifies Lévy-Bruhl's *participation mystique* (Cornelius, 2014a) and the Israelites are implicated in the same participation in hearing and obeying (*ob+audire*). For the fate of a man, a king and a people to hang on the casting of lots can only occur with the strongest possible forestructure or presentiment of interpretation in the collective imagination, demarcated ritually and precisely. Thus the participation of theoros is 'belief' continually nurtured by collective ritual observance, prayer and divination, embodied and made truth in speech and action.

The ruinous silence from Yahweh foreshadows the later alienation of Saul, culminating in necromancy and doom. This alerts us to the overarching context of these oracles in the sacred *covenant* granted to the Israelites, which Saul failed to truly honour. It is here that we determine the role of the high priest. He has no obvious interpretive function in the divination; a mediating role no doubt remains a possibility if some untoward dilemma,

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<sup>5</sup> Urim and thummim resembles the poison oracle in being a binary non-symbolic form, in the terminology I have adopted. Following the example of the poison oracle, note that a simple binary yes/no cast of lots can yield further answers such as 'no comment' if there is a pre-established procedure by which the throw is repeated within the same ritual - for example if urim had to come up twice out of two casts in succession before the result could be declared 'urim'. Repeat performance to validate simple binary oracles is recorded from comparable Mesopotamian oracles (Van Dam, 1997, p.42ff.).

dispute or extraneous signification were to arise. However, by being in charge of urim and thummim his primary function must be assumed to be the *ritual guarantee of provenance*, which is the covenant of Yahweh and his people. He defends and 'holds' the covenant. He therefore authorises the divination and sustains the channel of communication between the people and their god.

The meaning of the covenant is not theologically and historically settled until the Deuteronomic redaction; nevertheless the traditions establishing a binding law-giving relationship between the one god Yahweh and Israel are of considerable antiquity and cannot be put down to a later literary tradition.<sup>6</sup> In that case the incidents recorded in I Samuel and in other books of the Old Testament identify the covenant as the ritual field for all legitimate divinatory invocations, inductive as well as directly inspired. In particular, urim and thummim emerge as an authoritative inductive-divinatory expression of the covenant granted by Yahweh: their use is a symbol that 'proves' the covenant.

Hence we arrive at a theological and hermeneutic concord with respect to the legitimation of divinatory practices in the Old Testament: it is a statement of 'why' and 'to-what' and not 'how', defining divination by provenance and not by technical means. Those practices alone are legitimate that have an explicit foundation in the evolving relationship of the children of Israel and their one god, Yahweh. The evolving relationship with Yahweh entails the gradual unfolding in history of his destiny for his chosen people, revealed in divination and prophecy. For the Israelites, and therefore for the Old Testament, the covenant with Yahweh is the field of legitimate divination.

### **The Proscription in Deuteronomy**

This raises a question concerning the oft-cited proscription uttered by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:9-12. It is commonly taken to be a definitive rebuttal of all practices of divination:

When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shall not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord.

The list of terms suggests the existence of a range of technically differentiated and specialist practices of magic and divination well-known to the early Israelites and

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<sup>6</sup> von Rad (1962, p.132) discusses the many comparisons in the Hebrew Bible with Hittite covenants with gods from the 14th and 13th centuries BCE: 'there is now no doubt that the place of the "theological" conception of the covenant in Israel's cultic life was certain solemn ceremonies which must have constituted the climaxes of the religious life'.

associated with their neighbours, especially the Canaanites (Jeffers, 1996, p.16). Quite apart from the problem of reconstituting the exact meaning of these terms and the nature of the practices they refer to in their original context,<sup>7</sup> the internal evidence of the Old Testament leads to the following conclusion: the mention of 'divination' cannot be interpreted along the lines of the generic definition given by a secular analysis. This is because the word does not refer to all of what *we* now term 'divination', but only to illegitimate (uncovenanted) divination associated with foreign and polluting religious practices: 'the Old Testament has its own kind of classification and its own kind of rationale with respect to the divinatory and oracular' (Porter, 1981, p.194). Pollution is identified in practices that depend on spirits or gods other than Yahweh. This is made clear in Gideon Bohak's study of Jewish magical practices in the post-exile period. Concerning the statement in Deuteronomy, he observes:

...the prohibitions here are not so much on certain *practices* as on certain *practitioners*, who are presented as the exact opposite of the God-sent prophet. To him one may listen, to them one may not. This is an extremely important observation, for it seems that neither magic nor divination are forbidden *per se*.

(Bohak, 2008, p.14)

The defining intention of the diviner is to reach the spirit-source or the divine-other that is the provenance of the oracle; there may be various means 'how' this can be done, leading to technical distinctions between different means, but no one of these illuminates the ground of the practitioner's practice. The legitimacy of a practice is first determined by its god. The Deuteronomic editors of the Old Testament, thorough in their desire to purify the worship of Yahweh, are concerned to reveal his historical covenant rather than to discriminate against earlier divinatory forms deemed to be legitimate by the proper religious authority of the time. With our quite different imagination of the divine and of divination, we easily misread their intentions.

### **Divination and the Prophets**

The textual evidence of the Old Testament points to an early assimilation of legitimated omen-reading, dream and vision interpretation, and inductive divination, into the cult of Yahweh, coupled with a purging of foreign 'polluting' elements. In the course of the 9th century BCE the prophets began to take over the primary oracular function from the priests, a role that they fulfilled until the exile of the 6th century BCE (Porter, 1981, p.193f). This primary function is to the highest degree divination, since the prophet is a direct channel of communication, understood to speak from Yahweh to the whole people concerning his covenant with them. In my view it is appropriate to reserve the strong term 'prophecy' for this function of divination in that its claim to authority renders a whole nation or tribe as *theoros*. As *theoros* they cannot decide not to hear him. They are bound

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<sup>7</sup> Bohak (2008, p.15): 'most of these terms admit of no certain translation'. For this reason he advocates transliteration rather than the attempt at translation.

to respond, either to accept or to reject him as a 'false prophet', with no half-way house.

There are many examples of Old Testament prophecy that show the character of spontaneous natural non-inductive divination; in this mode the prophet occupies a position at or near the 'spirits' end of the cognitive continuum. The Hebrew for prophet, *nahbi*, has a verb form that means 'wild uncontrolled physical behaviour', such as is characteristic of Arab dervishes;<sup>8</sup> it is not necessarily connected with divination, and could occur as a feat of military prowess. Ecstasy might then be 'viewed as possession by the spirit of Yahweh, which changed a person's whole being, replacing him, in a sense, by the deity himself.' (Porter, 1981, p.208f). However, even where the Biblical account suggests some type of possession it is likely to be an oversimplification to assume in all cases 'change in the whole being', as if there is always complete displacement of the prophet's own sense of individuality. We discover the same ambiguity in Greek descriptions of the Pythia and of *mantike*; where Plato offers an image of 'divine madness' others bring out the possibility of the prophet's conscious awareness being engaged in the oracular speaking (Johnston, 2008, p.50f). Although the out-of-one's-mind connotation cannot be argued away, prophets clearly vary in their methods, and any one prophet might show different manifestations at different times. The evidence suggests that Old Testament prophecy might involve the whole spectrum of the cognitive continuum, with inductive divination intermixed with visionary, inspirational and possessed modes. The prophecies of Gideon bear out this supposition.

### **Gideon and the spectrum of divination**

The story of Gideon (Judges 6:36-40) demonstrates this intermixture in a sustained divinatory dialogue between man and god. He was visited by 'an angel of the Lord, face to face' who instructed him to destroy the altar of Baal. Following this 'the Spirit of the Lord' came upon him, in the inspiration that he must lead his nation against oppression by the Midianites. Yet he had doubt:

And Gideon said unto God, if thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, behold I will put a fleece of wool on the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then I shall know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

He 'proved' the divination by a further trial:

And Gideon said unto God, let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece,

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<sup>8</sup> Porter (1981, p.208). Jeffers (199, pp.81-95) extensively discusses the term *nahbi*, showing its application to a wide variety of divinatory, prophetic, magical and healing powers. She sees the *nahbi* as a continuation of the equivalent of the shaman of pre-Israelite times.

and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Here is a case where inductive divination is employed to test and prove prophetic inspiration - 'the spirit of the lord' - which still left him in doubt. This is the rational process of making a vital decision, requiring further judgment by divination before it is resolved. Gideon is *hermeios* and *theoros* in his own cause here, and because this is impetration, a bidding of god's response, he in advance sets the terms under which the response will occur. He must then as *theoros assent* to the divinatory decision that his prior inspiration truly was the command of god. The 'unique case' of this divination is understood in the context of a field of divine manifestation and dialogue guaranteeing its presentiment; the foundational and all-containing field is the covenant of Yahweh with Israel, which Gideon is called upon to fulfil.<sup>9</sup>

There is no need to think that the incident depends on paranormal phenomena in the physical realm, since a modern rationalist interpretation will explain this as likely to be the result of micro-meteorological variations over two nights, or of variations in the temperature of the fleece. We may presume that Gideon does not care *how* this could be, he will be concerned only *that* it is. This stands as a typical example of the simplest type of inductive divination, matching what has already been suggested in relation to *urim* and *thummim*, that binary forms of the 'bones' frequently employ symbolically neutral signs: dew or not-dew means nothing in itself. Equally typical of this simple form is the multiple cast in order to test the validity of a divination - this is not a naive statistical trial, but the 'say again?' of conversation, the check to make sure you have truly heard the other party, and they have understood you.

### **Second-sight and divining 'by the head'**

Sikhumbana's tripartite classification discussed earlier suggests three main modes of divination, namely by spirits, by bones, and by the head (cited in Cornelius, 2014a). Placing this classification along the cognitive continuum puts spirits and bones at either end of the spectrum with 'divining by the head' in a middle category. Both the experience of diviners and the evidence of their practices suggest a middle range of spontaneous imagination that is private and inspired, entering a distinctly 'altered state', yet consciously self-aware and not possessed. In many individual instances it undoubtedly plays a crucial supporting role alongside spirits and bones in giving birth to divinatory meaning. It shares with the spirits a provenance wholly through the person of the diviner as *hermeios*; since its internal logic is part of the diviner's own imagination ('in the head') and not in the objective

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<sup>9</sup> This is a good example of an extended divinatory dialogue involving several different modes along the cognitive continuum. The Lord speaks to Gideon throughout Judges 6. Gideon demands a sign at 6:17, leading to a miraculous manifestation of the angel at 6:20-22, following which he is fearful, and the Lord reassures him. The Lord speaks to him at 6:25-6 to command him to destroy the altar of Baal and set up an altar to the Lord in its place. Gideon is divinely inspired with a sense of mission on behalf of the Israelites at 6:34, but requires its proving in the divination of the fleece. The divination of the fleece appears to be no less authoritative than any other part of the series.

and public symbolism of the bones, theoros can only listen to the diviner's advice and take it or leave it.

Investigation of their own divinations by the few experienced diviners capable of honest self-analysis would be the most fruitful way of exploring divining by the head, but short of this lofty ideal there are divinatory practices that even from the outsider's viewpoint suggest the operation of this mode. It is common amongst many spiritualist mediums, psychics and clairvoyants who are not at that point manifesting signs of possession. Most obviously if the diviner simply responds to enquiry from the diviner's own spontaneous associations in the situation, then to the extent that this is indeed divination, it is divining by the head. The qualifier is important, since trust readily drains away in the absence of communicable realisation, convincing marks of possession, or the objective ritual of the bones. When theoros no longer grants authority to hermeios the presentiment of the divination is lost and a downward spiral ensues; the enquirer politely withdraws from taking the proceedings seriously, while the diviner's speculative interpretation reaches a nadir in arbitrary associations and personal opinion.

In 'divining with the head' the diviner employs some hunch, image or perception and interprets this directly for the enquirer. This might be purely internal to the diviner's consciousness, or it might be something presented through a body movement such as a tingling in the ears, or sensation in a limb; or it might be a sense impression, usually visual or auditory, from which he or she makes an association and therefore an interpretation.<sup>10</sup> For the current analysis, I bring into the 'head' category bidden private omens, that is, signs that belong to the diviner alone as meaningful, and that he or she either reveals or has sought out in order to make the divination. These are omens, bidden or unbidden, that have no shared or public recognition, but which instantaneously serve to express a revelation given to the diviner. The omens themselves are not taken away to be discussed - it is the revelation that counts. The key to this mode of divination is that the association is *spontaneous and realised* at the instant it is taken up, while neither its logic nor its presentation - whether internal or objective - may be obvious to anyone else, including an enquirer.

J.R. Porter's studies of the Old Testament prophets suggests that this mode of divinatory association may have been a common feature in their revelations, and my remarks draw extensively on his observations. Porter first gives an illustration of the method as employed by a Bedouin diviner, succinctly recorded in a 10th century CE Arabic text: 'he glanced at the first object on which his eye fell and he extracted from thence a notion which he applied to the matter about which he was to give a decision' (Porter, 1981, p.199). Porter

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<sup>10</sup> Sensation in the limbs is a common form of divinatory sign, as in the practices of the Highland Maya studied by Barbara Tedlock (1992, p.133). It is not material to the current discussion whether or not Sikhumbana would have classed all the phenomena I mention in this section as equally 'in the head'; I have taken the principle of non-rational spontaneous privately-meaningful association as the defining element. It is possible that Socrates' sneezes could be categorised here. However we may name the various examples mentioned, they fall somewhere in the middle of the cognitive continuum, and it is their relative status with respect to the poles of inspired/possessed and inductive divination that is of relevance in the current analysis.

suggests that 'a considerable number' of prophecies in the Old Testament conform to this pattern. The visions of Amos are typical in showing the prophetic use of metaphor. Here are two of five such visions:

Thus he shewed me: and behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, a plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more...

Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me: and behold a basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more..  
(*lit: 'the time is ripe for my people Israel'*).

(Amos 7:7,8 & 8:12 – Porter tr.)

These visions appear to spontaneously seize upon the literal seeing of a plumb-line, or perhaps a straight wall; and the sight of a basket of ripe fruit. What the Lord says is what is directly known by the prophet in a powerful instance of *realised interpretation* - there is no intermediating step of speculation. This is a more-than-real momentary identity between two realms, fusing literal and metaphoric vision in a unique revelation.

Even more remarkable for our purposes is the narrative of Balaam in Numbers 24; he is a non-Israelite diviner, but his prophecy is undoubtedly approved in this account, which is prefaced by the phrase 'he did not go and seek omens as before'; the exact meaning of this is ambiguous (Jeffers, 1996, p.77). He first sees the various Israelite tribes camped their tents in the desert; this is literal and ordinary vision. This 'immediately turns into second-sight', of which Balaam offers the following remarkable description:

The oracle of Balaam son of Beor,  
The oracle of the man whose sight is clear,  
the oracle of him who hears the words of God,  
who with staring eyes sees in a trance  
the vision from the Almighty.

Then follows the oracle:

How goodly are your tents, O Jacob,  
your dwelling places, Israel,  
like long rows of palms,  
like gardens by a river,  
like aloes planted by Yahweh,  
like cedars beside the water!

(Numbers 24:3-6, Porter tr. 1977, p.199-201)

This fits the pattern of the Bedouin diviner, discussed earlier. It is in verse, a characteristic of pre-Islamic Arab divination. We note that the manifestation appears to be unbidden, rather than bidden - the vision has been brought upon Balaam. There is also a profound alteration in consciousness, with a metaphor at the root of the vision. This is the word-play between the Hebrew 'tents' (*ohalim*) and 'aloes' (*halim*) which look and sound very similar. Porter (1977, p.199) is in my view right to name this vision, like those of Amos, as examples of *second sight* - the phrase is apt since an element of ordinary literal perception has been seized to create an oracle in metaphor. This therefore presents itself as inspired induction. As remarked upon earlier in relation to realisation (Cornelius, 2014a) the essence of oracular induction is the bi-presencing and dual-unity of the *participation mystique* whereby a non-literal and spirit-like understanding is momentarily fused in literal reality. Realisation here manifests in a surreal experience, communicated poetically.

### **An addendum on the Christian proscription**

With respect to the divine, Christianity takes on the ontological legacy of the ancient Israelites, and a direct lineage may be observed coming down from the Old Testament treatment of divination. The specific ground on which the stand is taken against pagan divination is that of the daimon - or to express the hostile Christian sense of this more appropriately, the *demon*. Hellenistic thought on the subject of divination, as represented by Plutarch and the neo-Platonists, had already established the close relationship of daimons with divination, and located these as intermediaries between mortals and the gods. Plato himself, in the *Symposium* (202e-203a) makes clear the intermediary role of the daimon in rites and divination. However, this subtlety and gradation of provenance proves to be the a weak link when challenged by the new religion. Two elements come together to work against daimons. The first is that they are considered to have intentions towards mortals that are erratic, if not completely hostile. For pagan and Christian alike in the early centuries CE, general opinion tended to ascribe misfortunes of all sorts to 'evil spirits' (Flint, 1991, p.20). In his attack on the pagans in *Contra Celsus* (I:32, VIII:32), Origen makes clear that God himself punishes the impure by unleashing these spirits on them (see also Brown, 2004, p.28).

The second element goes together with this and is theologically decisive. Since the daimons are intermediary, despite their immortality they are subject to passion and guilt, and on that account they cannot be true guides. Augustine refers to Plato's statement that 'gods never mix with men' (*Symposium*, 203a). The pagan will try to solicit god through the imperfect daimon; but at the heart of Christian doctrine, Christ is the incarnation of God in the corruptible body of man, and therefore 'the only sufficient mediator' (*City of God*, IX:17). Conversely, the corruptible *nature* of daimons - swayed by the whole range of passions known to man - means that '[they] are incapable of mediating between mankind and the God' (*ibid.* VIII:18).

Prior to Christ, intermediation occurred only through the rites and holy divinations of Israelites, or later through the prophets chosen by God. The role of the Old Testament prophets was none other than to confirm the Covenant of God with his people, and it is this

Covenant that, according to the Christians, passed to the New Law. In that passing Old Testament prophecy, like the whole Covenant with the Israelites as recorded in scripture, is reinterpreted as prefiguring the coming of Jesus Christ.

Augustine takes the question of the daimon into the heart of divinatory interpretation. Divination is condemned as a whole as intercourse with daimons. His scathing attack on astrology is conducted on both rational-scientific (Ciceronian) and theological grounds, thus blocking two separate streams of the astrological imagination, the natural-philosophical and the spiritual. Augustine creates a powerful combination that makes this the most influential critique of the subject in two thousand years. Astrology is spurious, it is not true science, yet astrologers sometimes hit the mark:

One has some justification for supposing that when astrologers give replies that are surprisingly true, they are inspired, in some mysterious way, by spirits, but spirits of evil, whose concern is to instil and confirm in mens' minds those false and baneful notions about 'astral destiny'.

(*City of God* V.7)

Inspiration by the spirit may taken as identical with *realisation of the symbol* in hermeios, the *en-theos* moment of interpretation in inductive divination. Astrology, like all forms of divination, does have the occasional capacity to be surprisingly true, which Augustine knows from his own experience. Yet from what prompting and within whose provenance?

When we examine these propositions concerning intermediation with the divine, the transmission from the Old Law to the New Law is reflected in a proscription regarding divination that is identical between Old and New in terms of *provenance*. Only divine communication that is directly from God is true divination - all else is polluted. To quote Origen in condemning omens and augury:

For the knowledge of the future the true God uses neither irrational animals nor ordinary men, but the most sacred and holy human souls whom He inspires and makes prophets.

(Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VIII:32)<sup>11</sup>

The Church Fathers therefore carry divination-as-prophecy through to its apotheosis, the ultimate intention of the Christian Deity.

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<sup>11</sup> As the previous discussion has shown, Origen's approach at this point does not wholly match the reports in the Old Testament with regard to inductive divination; quite apart from Urim and Thummim the ancient Israelites did observe omens and Gideon used a fleece. The question of ultimate provenance is not otherwise in doubt.

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