

## *Introduction*

This volume aims to explore the tension between two aspects of divination: while it is supposed to be a divine gift founded on inspiration, it also requires human conjecture and specific skills. Divination therefore is understood as involving not only a variety of methods of knowing but also a variety of types of knowledge. This tension can be understood as an arrangement along two different axes: one axis, concerning the mode of divination, is a spectrum which runs from entirely inspired divination to entirely conjectural divination; the other axis, which concerns the type of knowledge or the objects of divination, runs from contingency to transcendence.

These two axes correspond to divisions defined since antiquity. On the one hand, ancient authors recognised the division between ‘natural’ divination, based on *inspiration* (as in possession, oracles, visions, or dreams), and ‘technical’ divination, based on *conjecture* (as in augury, astrology, extispicy, and generally the interpretation of signs). The other division is between two domains of knowledge that are disclosed by divination: on the one hand, the material world and its events (*contingency*); on the other, the super-sensible dimension, including the divine sphere (*transcendence*). The combinations between modes and objects determine four main patterns of divination:

		object	
		<i>contingency</i>	<i>transcendence</i>
mode	inspiration	inspiration on contingency – $\alpha$	inspiration on transcendence – $\gamma$
	conjecture	conjecture on contingency – $\beta$	conjecture on transcendence – $\delta$

The present work is guided by the awareness that the divisions between these quadrants (especially between the two ‘lines’ of *inspiration* and

*conjecture*) are often blurred. Nevertheless, the subdivision proposed here can prove useful for taxonomic purposes. It is a valuable epistemic tool for classifying different divinatory phenomena, for studying their historical development, and for providing grounds for interdisciplinary and comparative studies.

This study focuses on later antiquity, specifically from the Late Roman Republic to the Byzantine period (first century BC – seventh century AD). This was an age marked by a wide interest in divination, and more broadly by an intense belief in the possibility of establishing close and personal connections with the gods, ‘vel somniis vel mysteriis vel medicina vel oraculis’ (whether by dreams or mysteries or medicine or oracles), as Marcus Aurelius emphatically states in one of his letters (Front. *ad Marc.* I.Vat.II9). This choice allows us to explore the profound changes which divinatory practices had undergone by the end of the Hellenistic period – a shift that had become all the more evident by the third century AD, and was accompanied by new trends in religious belief and philosophical reflection. While during the classical and throughout the Hellenistic age divination was expected to respond to mainly practical concerns, at the beginning of our era, besides issues of problem-solving and decision-making ( $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ), divination started to also address spiritual, philosophical, and theological questions ( $\gamma$ ,  $\delta$ ). Divinatory responses began to disclose eschatological truths and soteriological paths, and to expose the nature and destiny of the human soul, the real essence and names of the gods, and the structure and secrets of the cosmos. Hence the success of the ‘Chaldean oracles’ and of the so-called ‘theological oracles’; the circulation of oracle collections, the definition of authoritative texts and canons conceived as ‘sacred books’; and the success of charismatic figures, divine men, miracle workers, and itinerant prophets detached from official religious institutions. During this age, different religious, ethnic, and cultural groups (such as Jews, ‘pagans’, and Christians) resorted to prophecy to define their respective identities and traditions, to articulate their peaceful or polemical interactions, and more broadly to construct their own worldviews – a far-reaching endeavour, whose effects are still visible today.

The last decades have witnessed a blooming of studies on divination. They span different chronological scopes and cultural-historical contexts, and adhere to a wide range of methodological approaches.

Many introductions to the subject primarily engage with the techniques and the sociopolitical context of divination. Some works on divination focus on particular cultural contexts – for example, the Roman world

(Santangelo 2013; Driediger-Murphy 2019), the classical Greek world (Flower 2008; Eidinow 2011; Beerden 2013), or both (Driediger-Murphy and Eidinow 2019). And there is also significant work on the biblical (Hamori and Stökl 2018; Tiemeyer 2019), early Christian (Ibáñez 2010; Eyl 2019), and Byzantine worlds (Magdalino and Timotin 2019). In contrast, some provide a comparative view across cultures (Belayche and Rüpke 2007; Rosenberger 2013; Drake 2017; Kelly 2017; Frenschkowski 2018). There has been much excellent work on particular modes, methods, and writers, including on the Chaldaean oracles (Seng 2009), on Cicero (Wynne 2019), Plutarch (Simonetti 2017), and Origen (Hall 2021).

For a long time, scholars have been, with good reason, wary of offering large-scale theories of divination. Increasingly, however, scholars are turning their attention to the epistemology of divination and its relationship to other philosophical, religious, and scientific ways of knowing in antiquity. Notable recent examples include Annus (2010), Tanaseanu-Döbler (2013), Addey (2014), Struck (2016), and Erler and Stadler (2017).

In this volume we pursue both the social and intellectual angles of divination but our primary motivation and focus is the intellectual: we are concerned with the philosophical categories of divination, revelation, and epiphany, and their changing relationships in a period in which philosophical and religious culture was in flux. Our collection is unusual in its range. It includes examinations of ‘pagan’, Jewish, and Christian authors, and takes a wide-angled view of what is included in ‘divination’.

This volume is organised into three thematic Parts: Part I, Philosophical Perspectives on Divination, Revelation, and Prophecy; Part II, Status, Role, and Functions of Human Intermediaries; and Part III, Divine Transcendence and Pragmatic Purposes.

### **Philosophical Perspectives on Divination, Revelation, and Prophecy**

Part I explores the theories that ancient philosophers developed to conceptualise the many forms of communication occurring between the gods and humankind. The choice of the words ‘revelation’, ‘prophecy’, and ‘divination’ in the part title reflects the recurrent terminology employed in the chapters. ‘Divination’ (Latin: *divinatio*, Greek: μαντική) is the generic term referring to human–divine interactions, and to the activity of gaining information on the present, past, or future by employing ‘non-standard’ means of knowledge acquisition. As for ‘revelation’, its Latin antecedent *revelatio* only appears in later, Christian sources (see Lewis & Short *s.v.*

*revelatio*, and also its correspondent Greek ἀποκάλυψις). Nevertheless, the term in modern English covers the wider scope of every form of direct communication emanating from the gods and directed to humankind. ‘Prophecy’ originally designates the activity of the ‘prophet’ (προφητεία ← προφήτης ← πρό + φημί) – a title that applies to both the person who *speaks on behalf* of a superhuman entity, and the one who *deciphers* a divine message (see LSJ *s.v.* προφήτης).

Elsa Simonetti’s chapter ‘Theories of Prophecy in Philo of Alexandria’ (Chapter 1) examines Philo’s critical reactions against Graeco-Roman prophetic theories, in contrast with the scholarly emphasis generally placed on his indebtedness to Greek philosophical tradition. Which divinatory methods did Philo mark as treacherous, unethical and irreligious, and why? By focusing on the central categories of ‘truth’, ‘authority’, and ‘appropriate time’ for prophecy, Simonetti explores the relation between transcendent and contingent epistemic domains, from the complex theoretical perspective of a Jewish philosopher of the first century AD. (α, β, γ)

Andrei Timotin’s ‘The Neoplatonic Background of a Text on Prophecy Attributed to John Chrysostom’ (Chapter 2) concentrates on a work matured and composed within a Christian context, which proves strikingly original when compared to other writings of the Patristic tradition. Its most interesting feature is that it presents a systematic classification of all forms of predictive knowledge (inspired *and* inductive) – a taxonomy in which traditional Greek prophecy is, surprisingly, collocated in a respectable place. Timotin unearths the vast potential of this understudied Chrysostomian prologue, by focusing on the interactions between various forms of prophecy, their ethical-soteriological value, and on the notion of ‘prophetic time’ (in terms of ‘appropriate time’ as well as ‘historical time’). (α, β, γ, δ)

Ilaria Ramelli’s “‘Revelation’ for Christians and Pagans and Its Philosophical Allegoresis: Intersections within Imperial Platonism’ (Chapter 3) provides an examination of the conceptual and methodological intersections between the works of non-Christian and Christian Platonists, and throws into question the alleged reciprocal opposition between these two groups. Through the analysis of a wide range of sources, Ramelli demonstrates that both ‘pagans’ and Christians relied on exegesis *as well as* on revelation as pervasive and transversal ways of knowledge acquisition. Her chapter sheds light on the creative interplay and synergy between inspired and inductive modes of cognition in antiquity. (γ, δ)

Crystal Addey’s ‘Divination and Dialogue in Porphyry and Iamblichus’ (Chapter 4) argues that divinatory inspiration and philosophical dialectics,

rather than being mutually opposed, are two complementary and reciprocally enriching ways of acquiring knowledge. Addey shows that this text is not a defence against the attacks of Porphyry – whose stringent zetetic approach was misinterpreted by the Christian Church Fathers as a sign of scepticism. As this study demonstrates, Iamblichus' *De mysteriis* is not a grim controversy, but a cultivated dialogical exchange: its *genre* and core questions derive from the domains of Hellenic philosophy and traditional religion, and its spirit is that of a rational analysis of the gods and the appropriate ways to address and consult them. (γ, δ)

### Status, Role, and Functions of Human Intermediaries

Part II of the present edited collection concentrates on the person of the human 'prophet' or 'medium', who is responsible for the prophetic interaction's taking place. In the process of communication between humankind and the gods, specific figures stand out, as they possess the skills required for the delivery and reception of divinatory messages. The following chapters explore the various images of human intermediaries, and their specific features, within different cultural contexts in later antiquity.

Claire Hall's "The Holiest Man Ever Born": Sages, *Theoi Andres*, and the Shaping of Late Greek Prophecy' (Chapter 5) delves into the fascinating image of the independent prophet at the time of the decline of Greek oracles. Hall explores in depth the rise of the figure of the 'holy man', who is endowed with supernatural prophetic powers, and whose universal knowledge encompasses the heavenly and earthly dimension. What is the relationship between archaic, almost mythological, models of sages, such as Pythagoras or Socrates, and 'new prophets' like Alexander of Abonuteichos or Apollonius of Tyana? Through a thorough analysis of Christian, Jewish, and Hellenic sources, this chapter proves that rational understanding of the world and revelatory insight can perfectly coexist in one single individual. (α, β, γ, δ)

Hanna Tervanotko's 'Women and Divine Dreams in Jewish Texts of the Greco-Roman Era' (Chapter 6) presents an original perspective on female diviners in late Judaism. Recent scholarship has reread Jewish 'prophecy' (up to now considered in terms of 'divine inspiration'), through the lens of 'divination', intended in this context as a practice based on inductive reasoning, and aimed at the decipherment of divine messages. By embracing this shift of focus, Tervanotko explores the role of women as agents of divinatory practices in late-ancient Judaism and carefully examines the specific methods that they specialised in. As a result, this study

unfolds the image of a divinatory specialist completely foreign to the traditional figures of male prophets in the Hebrew Bible. (β, δ)

Georgia Petridou's 'Epiphany and Divination Reconsidered: The Case Study of the Iamata from Imperial Pergamum' (Chapter 7) scrutinises selected temple narratives that attest to successful iatromantic operations that occurred under the aegis of the god Asclepius. By contextualising Aristides' iatromantic skills and exclusive relationship with Asclepius, this contribution proves that his case may be far less exceptional than commonly assumed. The cures experienced by privileged and erudite patients at the Asklepieion are analysed in light of Petridou's own 'epiphanic schema' – of which they constitute a special instance, given the personal character of the 'crisis' and 'resolution' here at play. This analysis not only exemplifies that revelation can address contingent matters of private importance (in this case, individual health), but also that the figures of the prophet, consultant, patient, and doctor can all coexist in the same person. (α, γ)

Marco Zambon's 'The True Prophet in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies' (Chapter 8) examines a work preserved under the name of Clemens of Rome, composed in a Christian setting at the start of the third century AD. This homily deals with some crucial issues concerning prophecy: its epistemic function, the role of the prophet as a 'living image' of the divine, the truth ascribable to prophetic statements, and the contrast between Scriptural and revelational truths. Zambon demonstrates the lively interplay between early Christian reflection and the conceptual apparatus of classical theories of knowledge by focusing on some pivotal epistemological problems, such as: the relation between inductive and revealed ways of knowledge; the ontological status of the real prophet and of his statements; and the interface between fulfilled predictions on contingent facts and inspiration concerning atemporal, transcendent truths. (α, γ)

### **Divine Transcendence and Pragmatic Purposes**

This book's third and last Part (Part III) concentrates on the normative nexus between transcendence and contingency, which lies at the heart of every divinatory phenomenon. More precisely, the chapters here investigate the tension between, on the one hand, a set of theological foundations and metaphysical assumptions, and, on the other, the need to comply with wholly practical demands and everyday objectives. These objectives respectively fall into the sphere of politics, civic health, theurgic rites, and ideological-religious propaganda.

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Federico Santangelo's 'Revelation and Roman Augury' (Chapter 9) explores the concept of revelation in a context that might seem completely alien to it: late Republican augural consultations. Santangelo argues that augury not only gives access to a kind of incremental knowledge, but also discloses theological, atemporal acquisitions. Traditionally, augury has been conceived as a practice to aid with taking political decisions, but to date there has been little focus on the role of the gods themselves in that practice. If we concentrate instead on the gods and the ways in which they express their will through it, augury becomes a way to 'track down' instances of divine revelation and translate them into human space, time, and language. (β, δ)

Chiara O. Tommasi's "'For Thy Kingdom Is Past Not Away,/Nor Thy Power from the Place Thereof Hurl'd": Martianus Capella and a Prophylactic Oracle of Apollo' (Chapter 10) deals with a Delphic oracular response against pestilence, reported in Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (late fifth century AD). By retracing the history of this oracular hexameter through the works of Lucian and Porphyry, Tommasi sheds light on some decisive aspects of the polemic between adherents to Christianity and 'traditional' thinkers, in which reciprocal accusations and claims of therapeutic, iatromantic, and teratological capacities played a primary role. This up-to-now neglected evidence proves extremely useful for assessing the practical-protective value that was widely attributed to the messages that gods delivered through their oracular shrines. (α, γ)

Aude Busine's "'No Longer Does Phoebus Have a Cabin": Emperor Julian and the Fall of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi' (Chapter 11) offers a literary-historical analysis of the interactions between Christians and non-Christians in late antiquity, centred as they were around authoritative prophetic statements. In particular, Busine concentrates on an Apollonian oracle allegedly directed to the Emperor Julian (fourth century AD) and reported in the *Artemii Passio* (seventh century AD): she analyses and interprets it anew in the context of Byzantine polemics through a focus on forged oracles' predictions of the imminent decline of traditional temples. (α, γ)

These chapters also make several linked arguments. Part I treats self-conscious reflections by ancient authors on how divination and communications with the gods should be classified. It showcases the views of Jews (Philo in Simonetti, Chapter 1), Christians (Ps-Chrysostom and other patristic writers in Timotin, Chapter 2; allegorists in Ramelli, Chapter 3), and 'pagans' (middle Platonists in Ramelli, Chapter 3; late Platonists in



Addey, Chapter 4). In doing so, Part I shows that writers of the period were highly concerned with theoretical taxonomies of divination and communication with the gods. While earlier Greek philosophers had given some attention to questions of divine inspiration (most famously in Plato's *Ion*), it had never occupied a central place in philosophy, not even in epistemology. As Simonetti shows, writers from Philo onwards differed quite strongly from earlier Greek philosophical responses to conjectural divination: they neither, like the Stoics, accepted it and considered it theologically central, nor, like the Epicureans, did they reject it wholesale with other forms of divination. Instead, late 'pagan', Jewish, and Christian writers constructed elaborate taxonomies which placed conjectural divination in contrast with other, inspired forms. As Timotin points out, this includes an increasing focus on the temporal elements of prophecy: Jewish and Christian writers in particular began to sharply identify differences between the freely occurring transcendent divination of inspired prophets and the on-demand, contingent, spatially restricted divination of oracles.

The contributions in Part I also show that the taxonomy of divination was a highly rhetorically constructed practice, and a vehicle for differentiating different religious groups and practices with claims about legitimate and illegitimate divination. As Ramelli notes, the increased focus in our period on authoritative texts (both among Christians and Jews, but also 'pagans') changed the notion of revelation: access to revealed knowledge increasingly became conceptualised as possible not only through direct inspiration but also through conjectural allegorical exegesis of certain core texts. Additionally, as Addey shows, practitioners and defenders of different divinatory traditions drew on generic and stylistic features of philosophical discourse in complex and sophisticated ways which can make taxonomies of divination difficult to unpack.

Part II turns to the human medium. The chapters in this Part deal with questions of human authority and the division of divinatory specialisms between different subjects involved in mantic activities. In a number of ancient Greek divinatory practices, conjectural and inspired methods of divination sit side by side in roles occupied by different people. For example, at oracle sites, an inspired medium would receive a message from the gods, which would then be versified and interpreted by other specialists, themselves non-inspired conjectural diviners. As Tervantko (Chapter 6) points out, in Jewish dream interpretation, these roles were also usually separated. But as her chapter demonstrates, there are a number of both biblical and non-biblical cases of women interpreting their own dreams, blurring the line between inspired and conjectural dream



divination. In Chapter 7, Petridou examines traditional Greek epiphany and the possible types of human–divine interaction. She discusses the cases of elite patients who bypass medical and religious intermediaries to communicate directly with the divine. Hall (Chapter 5) and Zambon (Chapter 8) both explore the individual authority wielded by prophets, especially those who laid claim to combined transcendent and contingent knowledge, and who often made use of a mixture of conjectural and inspired methods. In general in this period, the boundaries between inspired and conjectural, contingent and transcendent divination, while becoming more clearly conceptually defined, also became more flexible and overlapping in terms of the practices and claims of individual diviners.

Part III examines in closer detail the interplay between contingency and transcendence. In Chapter 9, Santangelo uses an example often thought of as straightforwardly conjectural and contingent, that of Roman augury. Yet, as he shows, implicit in its functioning are a number of revelatory-transcendent claims. The augural practitioner acts as a medium, with huge authority, but the logic of that authority is on the basis of his conjectural ability at a craft that (theoretically) is available to others; this is closest to our own modern notions of future-predicting. Busine's contribution, on a reported oracle to the Emperor Julian, shows the way in which, within the context of a primarily contingent practice, the oracle was claimed to have delivered a transcendent meta-analysis of the long-term future and status of traditional Greek religion.

The chapters in this volume also form part of a dialogue with one another in ways that cut across our division of the book into Parts. For example, both Tervanotko's chapter on Jewish women's dreams and Santangelo's chapter on augury examine modes of divination often overlooked in theoretical accounts. Both chapters probe questions of divinatory specialism: Jewish dream interpretation was usually carried out by experts and not by the dreamer, although as Tervanotko shows, there are a number of cases of women analysing their own dreams. Santangelo's examination of augury argues that rather than being a narrow technical skill, augury, like dreaming, is a site of multiple possibilities, where contingent and transcendent knowledge overlap.

A similar pairing can be made between Petridou's chapter on the epiphanic aspects of divination and Tommasi's discussion of prophylactic oracles against disease. In contrast to Tervanotko and Santangelo, Petridou and Tommasi both focus primarily on inspired divination. Their chapters, quite different in their focus, highlight the ways in which medical divination could range from the intimate and personal healing examined by

Petridou to the much-more-distant prophylactic role of Apollo as plague god. But they also show the slippage between contingent and transcendent knowledge. For example, in Petridou's example of the epiphany of Asclepius to Aelius Aristides, the context is clearly inspirational-contingent: Aristides seeks a specific remedy to his illness in a time of personal crisis, yet his alarmingly personal encounter with Asclepius moves into the realm of the acquisition of transcendent wisdom.

Timotin's chapter, on a taxonomy of prophecy ascribed to John Chrysostom, ranges across conjecture, inspiration, contingency, and transcendence. Zambon's chapter also examines an early Christian attempt to taxonomise prophecy in the pseudo-Clementine homilies, this time with a focus on the diagnostic criteria required to identify true prophets. In the pseudo-Chrysostomian text, care is exercised around the ascription of veridical authority to certain types of prophecy. 'Inspired' prophets are implicitly placed above 'demoniacal' and 'popular' prophets, but pseudo-Chrysostom is clear that all three types can provide true predictions of the future. In pseudo-Clement, by contrast, the moral-pedagogical role of inspired prophecy is elevated above contingent future-predictive types.

What has emerged from our studies is the predominance, in the analysed sources from the first centuries AD, of instances in which divination is oriented towards the apprehension of transcendent truths (with a large prevalence of the category that in the preliminary conceptual table was named:  $\gamma$  – inspiration on transcendence). In other words, instances in which immortal, divine truths are achieved by means of prophetic activities are prevalent. Moreover, this kind of divinatory knowledge has turned out to be extremely epistemically reliable and ethically correct, according to the authors examined.

This result proves that the tradition of divination, substantially homogeneous from the classical age to the early imperial time, underwent a radical transformation in the beginning of our era. Our work has shed light on this fascinating phenomenon, which has attracted great scholarly attention, and attempted to explore its seminal developments, in light of the relation between divination and theological-philosophical discourse, as well as in the context of the wider cultural landscape. By so doing, we have tried to respond to a scholarly need, wonderfully synthesised by Peter Struck (2016): 218–19: 'This embrace of the revelatory, a change for the Greeks, is visible across the post-Hellenistic Mediterranean world. To understand it presents a scholarly project of intellectual history that has not achieved clarity, and will require much more work to unravel.'