

ANN JEFFERS

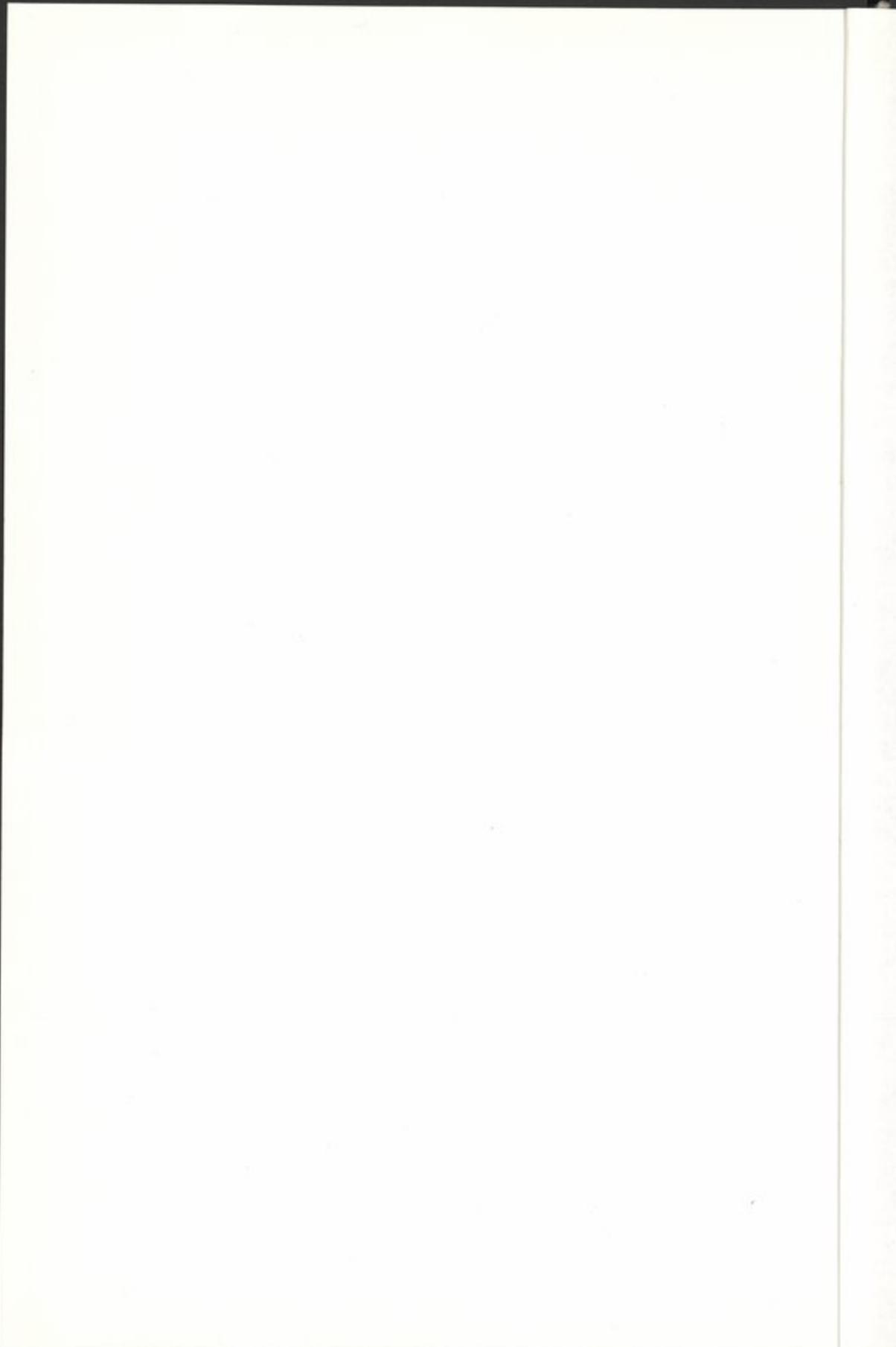
MAGIC AND DIVINATION  
IN ANCIENT PALESTINE  
AND SYRIA





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MAGIC AND DIVINATION  
IN ANCIENT PALESTINE AND SYRIA

# STUDIES IN THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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# MAGIC AND DIVINATION IN ANCIENT PALESTINE AND SYRIA

BY

ANN JEFFERS



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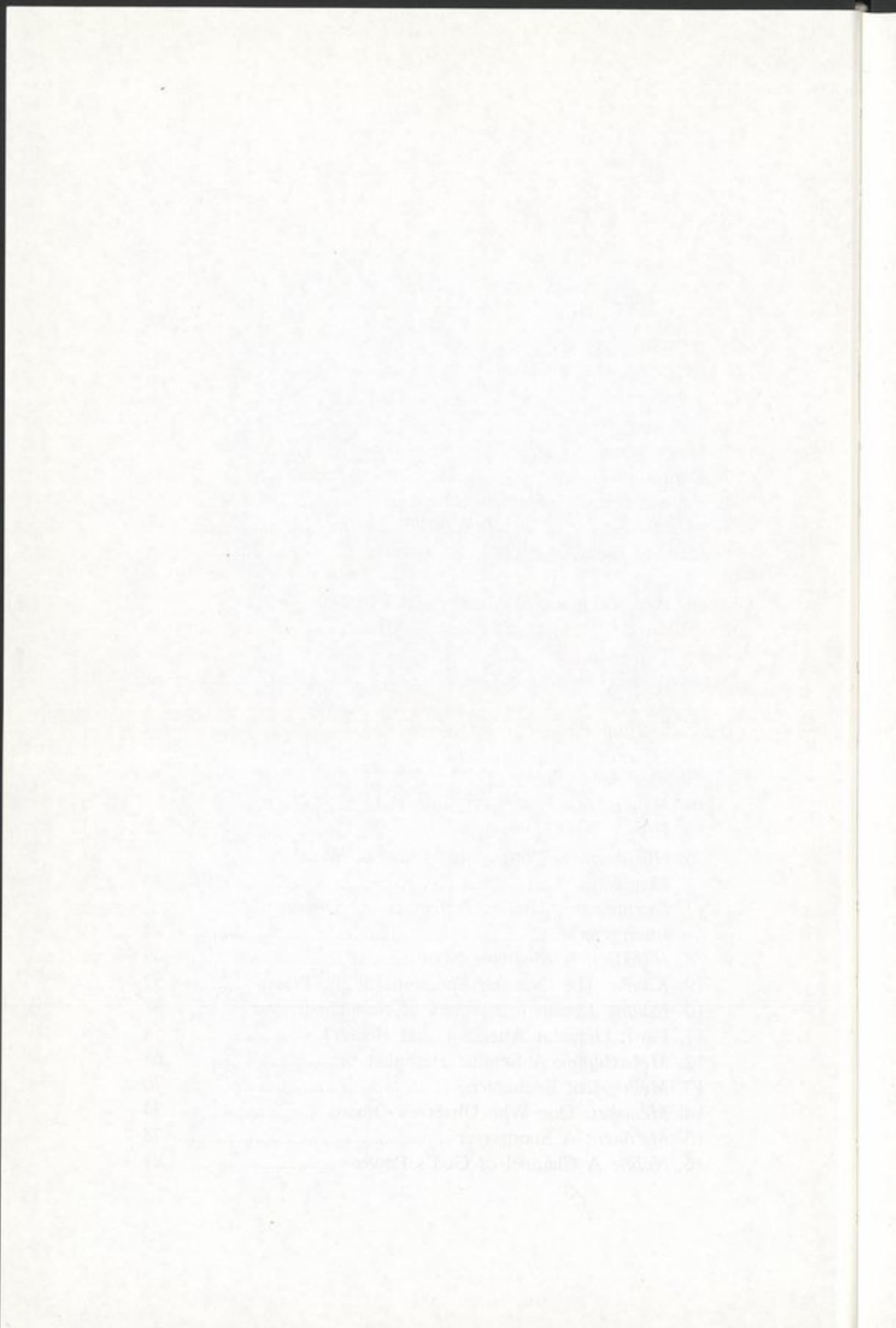
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*For Kathy*



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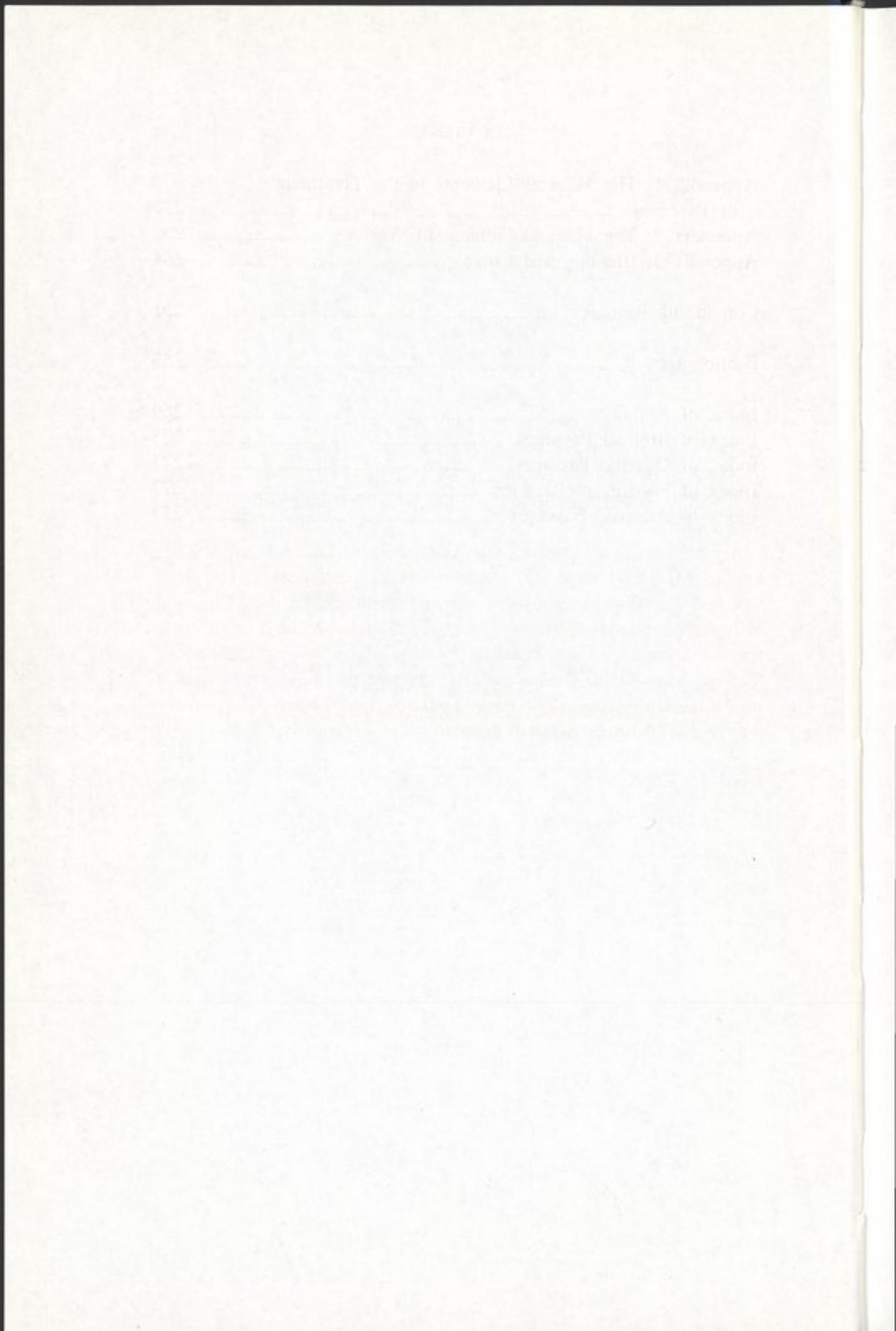
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When not otherwise stated, all the biblical quotations are taken from the RSV.



## PREFACE

This study stems from my long held belief that there is more to magic and divination in the Old Testament than meets the eye. Indeed the few verses in Dt 18:9ff. that purport to dismiss the whole subject as theologically preposterous make use of a vast, "home-grown" vocabulary—a vocabulary of specialists which is by no means limited to foreign practices and practitioners. It betrays to the curious reader a rich knowledge of who's who in magic and divination.

Also, such enthusiastic condemnation, in Deuteronomy and elsewhere of all practices magical and divinatory, brings immediate suspicion that, by the time of the redaction of the Pentateuch, there is an ideological consensus to edit out magic and divination as theologically unsound. The purpose, therefore, of this research is to record all traces of magic and divination in the Old Testament and in the closely connected (geographically and otherwise) Northwest Semitic world. The terms "magic" and "divination" will be explicated in chapter one and a justification offered for the geographical area chosen. The "evidence" perforce is mainly philological, but archaeological data has also been used, when relevant. Hence the title Northwest Semitic "world", instead of "literature".

Lastly and more importantly the present work does not purport to be an indifferent catalogue of wise men, magicians and diviners, but suggests that they and their activities be viewed and understood in the context of a particular world-view: that of Northwest Semitic/Syrian cosmology.



### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJSL	American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature.
ANET	The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament, ed. by J. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954).
An Or	Analecta Orientalia.
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament.
AV	Authorized Version.
BA	Biblical Archaeologist.
BASOR	Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research.
BDB	Brown, F.—Driver, S.R.—Briggs, C.A., A Hebrew and English Lexicon (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1959).
Bib	Biblica.
Bib Or	Biblica et Orientalia.
Bib Or Pont	Biblica et Orientalia, Pontificio Ist. Biblico Bib TB Biblical Theology Bulletin.
BLJDR	Bijdragen Tijdschrift voor Filosofie en Theologie.
Bib Leb	Bibel und Leben.
Bi Trans	The Bible Translator.
BO	Bibliotheca Orientalis.
BS	Bibliotheca Sacra.
BZ	Biblische Zeitschrift.
BZ NF	Biblische Zeitschrift Neue Folge.
BZAW	Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.
CAD	The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, ed. Gelb, I.J. et al. (Chicago: the Oriental Institute, 1956ff.).
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly.
CTA	Corpus des Tablettes en Cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras-Shamra Ougarit de 1929 à 1939, ed. Herdner, A.
DBS	Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplement, ed. Pirot, L. (Paris: Librairie Letouzey, 1928—).
Ency Brit	Encyclopedia Britannica.

Ency of Rel	Encyclopedia of Religions, ed. Eliade, M. (New York: McMillan, 1987).
ERE	Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. Hastings, J. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1908–1926).
Est Bib	Estudios Biblicos.
ETH R	Etudes théologiques et religieuses.
Exp T	Expository Times.
H	Holiness Code.
HDB	A Dictionary of the Bible, ed. Hastings, J. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1898–1901).
Heb An R	Hebrew Annual Review.
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual.
ICC	The International Critical Commentary.
IDB	The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, ed. Buttrick, G.A. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962).
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal.
JANES	Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia.
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society.
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature.
JCS	Journal of Cuneiform Studies.
JEA	Journal of Egyptian Archaeology.
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies.
JNSL	Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages.
JPOS	Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society.
JPSV	The Torah, The Prophets, the Writings (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962–1978).
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review.
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament.
JSOTS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplements.
J Th C	Journal of Theology and the Church.
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies.
KAI	Kanaanische und aramaische Inschriften, Donner, H.–Rollig, W. (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1964).
KBL	Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros, Koehler, L.–Baumgartner, W. (Leiden: Brill, 1953).
KTU	Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, ed. Dietrich,

MGWG	M.—Loretz, O.—Sanmartin, J. (Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976).
MT	Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums.
Num	Massoretic Text.
OA	Numen.
Or	Oriens Antiquus.
Or Lov Per (An)	Orientalia.
OTS	Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica (Analecta).
Pal Expl Q	Oudtestamentische Studien.
PRU	Palestine Exploration Quarterly.
RA	Le Palais Royal d'Ougarit, ed. Virolleaud, C. et al. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1970—).
RB	Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie Orientale.
RES	Revue Biblique.
RQ	Revue des Etudes Sémitiques.
RGG	Restoration Quarterly.
RHA	Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart.
RH Ph R	Revue Hittite et Asiatique.
RHR	Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse.
RSF	Revue d'Histoire des Religions.
RSO	Revista degli Studi Fenici.
RSV	Revista degli Studi Orientali.
SBL	Revised Standard Version.
SDB	Society of Biblical Literature.
Sct J Th	see DBS
THAT	Scottish Journal of Theology.
Th Dict NT	Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament.
TWAT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Kittel, G., transl. Bromiley, G. (Grand Rapids/London: Eerdmans, 1964).
UF	Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament.
UT	Ugarit Forschungen.
VT	Ugaritic Textbook, Gordon, C.H. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968).
Vulg.	Vetus Testamentum.
VTS	Vulgate.
	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum.

WUS	Worterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache, Aistleitner, J. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974).
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.
Z DMG NF	Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Neue Folge.
Z REL Gg	Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PROLEGOMENA: A SEARCH FOR DEFINITIONS AND METHODOLOGY

#### 1. *Introduction*

Magic and divination, as part of a system of ideas, certainly existed at an early stage of Israelite history. We cannot, however, ignore the fact that there are many traces of magic and divination left in the present texts that cannot be easily explained away by the use of literary criticism. We are faced with more than relics of an earlier system. Immediately several questions present themselves: What are magic and divination? How has the scholarly world understood them? What hermeneutics do we apply in dealing with heavily layered and ideological texts? What method should we use? To these (interconnected) questions I now turn.

#### 2. *The question of definition*

The first point I wish to discuss here is the problem raised by the definition of magic and divination. We all have an idea of what these words mean, but I cannot base a study on vague notions but will seek to work out an adequate definition.

Traditionally, magic is understood to represent the manipulation and coercion of hidden powers in order to act on specific events (e.g. a battle, the weather . . .) or individuals, manipulating hidden powers in order to benefit or heal people or to cause them harm. Divination is the art of reading signs in which the future lies hidden. It is understood that magic and divination are strictly separated from science and religion: it is either a degeneration from religion or a perversion of it. According to this understanding both magic and divination partake of a particular "pre-logical"<sup>1</sup> and "empirico-logical"<sup>2</sup> mentality which

<sup>1</sup> "Pre-logical" thought is a term introduced by L. Levy Bruhl (1926). "'Pre-logical' thought is characterized by not distinguishing between causal relationships and coincidences or purely artificial similarities".

looks beyond what we would call secondary causes.<sup>3</sup> These traditional definitions are unsatisfactory to say the very least as

1. they presuppose a neat historical progression (an "evolution") in the development of ideas;
2. they do not take heed of the world-views held by the people who undertake such practices: I do not think in a cultural vacuum, but in a constructed world which has its own rationale.

This all important idea is variously expressed: M. Eliade in particular deserves credit for elucidating the way that ontology (taken as a set of presuppositions about the nature of the world and the character of reality) recapitulates cosmogony.

In this sense most religious systems articulate some ontology. They posit a description of the world and make assumptions about what makes it the way it is. Cosmogony is the story or theory of the world's creation. In many religious systems, ontology and cosmogony go hand in hand. Ideas about creation shape and express conceptions of reality and vice versa".<sup>4</sup> Recent attempts to tackle this problem of definition while attempting to avoid the pitfalls mentioned above and taking into account the relationship between ontology and cosmogony are represented by Blythin in a seminal paper.<sup>5</sup> Arguing against "the widely held view that magic is primarily a technique of manipulation"<sup>6</sup> on the basis that any failure to produce the necessities of life would discredit magic, Blythin sees magic as a self-contained system of rationality, a way through which "men . . . realized their independence of the behaviour of natural phenomena".<sup>7</sup> It is impossible to understand magic as separate from the cosmology proper to the people who practise it. The "mechanics" of the world, i.e. how things work, are unimportant; in the words of Wittgenstein, "not how the world is, is the mystical, but that the world is".<sup>8</sup> In a holistic world in which there

<sup>2</sup> In "empirico-logical" thought, observation and simple deduction from experience, subconscious as a rule, play an important part.

<sup>3</sup> See Albright (1940) p. 98 who thinks that these two conceptions co-exist simultaneously down to the sixth century B.C.

<sup>4</sup> This quote is from H. Eilberg-Schwartz (1990) p. 218, a book brought to my attention by Dr. Wyatt. See also J.M. Hull (1974) p. 74, who also connects magic and creation; M. Mills (1990) p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Blythin (1969/70) p. 45; this reference has also been brought to my attention by Dr. Wyatt, to whom I am very grateful.

<sup>6</sup> Blythin (1969/70) p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Blythin (1969/70) p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> Cited by Blythin p. 50.

is an awareness of the "analogies" of nature with man's own life, sexuality and death, "magic mediates experientially the affinity between the structures of the world and those of man's own being".<sup>9</sup>

A second approach worth mentioning is that worked out by **M. Mills**, who also regards the world-view explicated in myths as an indispensable setting for understanding the "wonder workers".

She understands magic as "the attempt to put the energy available in these stories (the religious myths) to work",<sup>10</sup> to use "cosmic forces... to order and alter the natural environment and human affairs".<sup>11</sup>

Mention must also be made of the connection between magic and ritual: the world is ordered at creation (see Gen 1-2:4a) in a system of correspondences preserved by the use of rituals.<sup>12</sup> Magic is the harnessing of cosmic forces, or rather it is cosmic consciousness based on a system of correspondences between heaven and earth. I should add here that it is the awareness that we live in a holistic world<sup>13</sup> that gives magic and divination their place. In a universe always threatened by chaos, mankind expresses its wish for order (or disorder) by acting on the earth; the consequences of this action have their correspondence in heaven.<sup>14</sup>

As to divination, I would also suggest the need to understand it in its cosmic framework. How is anyone able to foretell the future but in a world where signs, any signs, are part of the whole, and therefore can be interpreted because the sign incarnates and reflects the whole situation at the moment when it is read.<sup>15</sup> In other words, I understand divination as the ability to relate the parts to the whole.

To sum up: both magic and divination must be understood in the wider context of the cosmology, that is the world view, shared by the people; thus they are seen as an expression of the order of society,

<sup>9</sup> Blythin, p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Mills (1990) chapters 1 and 2. Also see Murray (1992) p. 87f.

<sup>11</sup> Mills (1990) p. 126.

<sup>12</sup> Murray (1992) p. 70f.

<sup>13</sup> As the findings of the new cosmology show. We are going increasingly towards a "new", holistic understanding of the world. See the recent work on the new cosmology (I. Prigogine).

<sup>14</sup> It is well established that the Israelite prophets, for instance, link the moral attitude of the people to the general order of the world i.e. if the people practise justice and compassion, the fertility of the earth will ensue.

<sup>15</sup> It may be interesting here to compare Jung's idea of "synchronicity", as expressed in his foreword to R. Wilhelm's translation of the I'Ching (1967), rejecting the idea of causality.

limited neither by time nor space. These more refined understandings have brought scholarship to a drastic change of perceptions.

### *3. Review and assessment of critical scholarship*

Up to the mid-nineteenth century the only studies of magic were undertaken by Jewish and Christian scholars concerned with the problem of magic for their faith, both as a relic of paganism and as heresy.<sup>16</sup>

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, however, a series of anthropological works on magic and divination have shown that these practices are quasi-universal and that the "magic mentality" is at the root of many institutions, beliefs and behaviour. Anthropology has also tried to explain the underlying principles. I will present this anthropological background to the study of magic, and assess it for this specific research. Then I will survey the research done in the more specific field of Northwest Semitic magic, and especially in the Old Testament.

#### *3.1 Anthropological background to the study of magic*

Anthropology has had, rightly or wrongly, a great influence on the interpretation of the Old Testament.

3.1.1 The first important figure was E.B. Tylor<sup>17</sup> who regarded magic as a "pseudo-science" in which a direct cause-effect relationship between the magical act and the desired event is postulated (whereas in reality the link is one of association of ideas only). He did, however, advance beyond his predecessors, in that he studied magic not as a superstition or heresy but as a phenomenon based on the "symbolic principle of magic", a rational process of analogy, and he also realized that magic and religion are part of a total system of thought.

3.1.2 In *The Golden Bough*, Sir J. Frazer refined Tylor's views on magical thought, discussed the relationship of magic to religion and

<sup>16</sup> "Magic" Ency Brit vol. 25, p. 301.

<sup>17</sup> E.B. Tylor (1873).

science, and placed them all in an evolutionary scheme. He analyzed the principles of thought that lay behind the cause-effect relationship connecting magical and natural events. Magic, according to Frazer, can be sub-divided into two related classes which he dubs "homeopathic" and "contagious".<sup>18</sup> In the former class the magician simulates the effect he wishes to produce; the principle is that "like produces like", or that an effect resembles its cause (the law of similarity). The commonest form of the "homeopathic" type is that which uses "magical" images of the person or thing to be affected. Such images have been used to kill people, to increase herds, to stimulate conception. . . .<sup>19</sup> The latter, based on the law of contact or contagion operates by the magician's affecting an object or objects which were formerly in contact with the thing or person he wishes to influence. When things have been in physical contact with each other, they later continue to act on each other at a distance. In contagious magic the object replacing the image as the magical medium is usually some severed portion of the individual's body. Thus, spells can be successfully applied to hair, nails, blood, and even to someone's clothes.<sup>20</sup> According to Frazer, both forms are thought by the "primitive mind" to be capable of functioning in the natural as well as the human world.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently there is as much emphasis on magic controlling the weather as there is on its being used to cast spells on individuals. This reflects Frazer's distinction between private and public magic.<sup>22</sup>

Frazer added the notion of taboo as "negative magic", acting on the same principle of association.<sup>23</sup>

It must be noted that Frazer assumed an evolutionary development; he thus conjures up a static and linear picture of how human societies, science, social institutions and religious beliefs have originated and grown. This view of human culture is now untenable. Also Frazer and his school assumed that all races had passed through identical stages of social, mental and religious development.<sup>24</sup> People first believe

<sup>18</sup> Frazer (1900) vol. 1, p. 9ff.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11f.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 47f., 50-53.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 52-54.

<sup>22</sup> See the analysis of Frazer's system of thought by G.B. Vickery (1976) p. 40.

<sup>23</sup> Frazer, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 233-247, 297ff.

<sup>24</sup> Rogerson (1978) p. 12f.

in magic, then they come to realize the inefficacy of it all; from this they postulate the existence of omnipotent spiritual beings. The final stage in this very neat scheme is when "men" begin to recognize the existence of empirical natural laws.

In addition, Frazer was quite mistaken when he explained magic as a technique of coercion. Not one field anthropologist has ever met a "primitive" who believed he could alter the world. Frazer was an "arch-functionalist", reflecting in his work the type of society he was living in. Magic is a "functional technique for ensuring efficacious results"; this assumption has deeply influenced Old Testament studies.<sup>25</sup>

3.1.3 In what could be termed the third period in the history of anthropology,<sup>26</sup> two key words prevailed: "fieldwork" and "functionalism".<sup>27</sup> As these words suggest, scholars approached the study of societies by learning the language and living with the people. Their description of the society they were studying is viewed "in terms of the contribution of each particular aspect of its life to the maintenance of the society as a whole".<sup>28</sup>

Three names dominate this period, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard.

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's main hypothesis as far as magic was concerned was that its social function was to express the social importance of the desired event.<sup>29</sup> Malinowski, on the other hand, regarded magic as being opposed to religion, and as directly and essentially concerned with the psychological needs of the individual. It acted to extend his normal knowledge and competence in order to provide confidence in situations of (technical) uncertainty by "ritualizing optimism". Magic serves to express desires that are otherwise unrealisable in a small and technically limited community; counter-magic explains failure.<sup>30</sup> Evans-Pritchard, on the other hand shows how magic is an integral part of religion and culture.<sup>31</sup> Therefore the distinction between magic and religion is largely untenable and reflects an eth-

<sup>25</sup> For a development of this argument see Blyth (1969/70) p. 52f.

<sup>26</sup> I follow here E.E. Evans-Pritchard's division of the history of anthropology into three periods: "pre-Frazer", "Frazer and his school" and "functionalism" (1948).

<sup>27</sup> Rogerson (1978) p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Definition of functionalism according to Rogerson (1978) p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1933).

<sup>30</sup> Malinowski (1948).

<sup>31</sup> Evans-Pritchard (1965).

nocentric distinction between the "natural" and the "supernatural" which is not made by most religions. We have here a "sociological" or a "psychological" rationalization of the systems studied, despite the fact that all the field-workers acknowledge the existence of magic. Magic is seen as a function, not as a valid world view, at the same level as religion and technology.<sup>32</sup>

The implications of the anthropological work of this period for the study of magic and divination in Northwest Semitic literature of ancient Israel and Syria are as follows:

1. Our knowledge of ancient Israelite society is extremely limited. All we have are the literary sources and some archaeological findings (whose practical use is somewhat debatable in the area of magic and divination). In other words, all we know is what the texts tell us—complete with their ideological bias.
2. The only option is to study magic and divination from the inside,<sup>33</sup> from the clues given by the language, through the people's own appraisal of their own practices, and through the world-view these practices suggest;
3. We also have to keep in mind the inherent dynamism in every society. Even if magical practices seem conservative, an ancient society's world-view might be modified under some exceptional circumstances.

### *3.2 A review and assessment of scholarly research on magic and divination in ancient Israel and Syria*

Biblical scholars have usually relegated magic and divination to the background of pre-Israelite history. The Old Testament itself gives the impression that magical practices have been borrowed "from the nations" (Deut 18:14). G. von Rad expresses this view as follows:

... one thing is bound to strike the historian of comparative religion, namely the dwindling part played by magic in this religion. Its absence already gives the Israel of the time an exceptional position within all

<sup>32</sup> Mills (1990) p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> There seems to be no agreement among anthropologists on the use of the terms "magic" and "religion", so that these words cannot be relied upon as technical terms. However, it is possible to identify a body of behaviour which may be called "magico-religious". This varies considerably from one society to another, hence the necessity to appraise a society's own system of thought.

the fairly comparable forms in the history of religion, especially the religion of the ancient East.

and further on, he writes:

... we explain as deriving from the peculiar nature of Yahwism the limit here set to magic and its competency. Yahweh's invasive power, revealing himself on all sides as personal will, was absolutely incompatible with the impersonal automatic action of the forces of magic.<sup>34</sup>

Thus according to von Rad,

- i) magic belongs to an early stage of religious development;
- ii) its usage ceased with the advent of Yahwism.

Both points I ought to say I find questionable and I will argue against them in the course of this chapter.

I agree with von Rad's statements that the place of magic and divination in official Israelite religion was less prominent than in Babylonia or Assyria,<sup>35</sup> although it is essential to make the point that Israelites, Assyrians, and Babylonians partake of the same world view.

Indeed in the words of Mills, which sum up the traditional consensus:<sup>36</sup>

the Old Testament, ... rules out the acceptability of magic in any forms for the Israelites. Where there are signs of magic ... it is assumed that this is the case of the perversion of the accepted norm, the sort of thing for which the people were eventually to be punished by exile.<sup>37</sup>

The nineteenth century, as we have seen above, opened up a scientific interest in magic and divination. This sociological and anthropological interest was to be followed and explored in the field of Old Testament studies. The following scholars are the main (and relatively few) contributors to the subject of magic and divination in the Old Testament and the Northwest Semitic world:

3.2.1 W. Robertson Smith in a two-part article on this topic analyses the forms of divination and magic enumerated in Deut 18:10–11.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> G. von Rad (1962), vol. 1, p. 34f. A similar position is held by Y. Kaufmann (1950) p. 86 for instance.

<sup>35</sup> A. Lods (1927) pp. 1–16.

<sup>36</sup> There are a few exceptions, G. Fohrer (1969) being a notable one.

<sup>37</sup> Mills (1990) p. 15. In fact, she criticizes this view.

<sup>38</sup> W. Robertson Smith (1884) p. 272.

The traditional view<sup>39</sup> stated that this text gave "a brief general summary of all the worst kinds of divination current at the time of the author" and that "arrangement is not accidental". The basic and inalterable principle is that the prophetic word is the one legitimate guide for Israel even in the cases where other nations practise divination: all other ways of consulting the divine powers are heathenish. In other words the opinion was that all the practices enumerated in Dt 18:10-11 are of foreign origin; the law of Deuteronomy aims at

- i) expelling new foreign practices;
- ii) purifying the current religion from "traditional" usages.

While Robertson Smith insists that too much weight must not be laid on the fact that all forbidden practices are derived from the old inhabitants of Canaan, he argues that earlier writers (JE) assume that many forbidden superstitions existed even in patriarchal times. Indeed the old superstitions of Israel were of the general Semitic type and therefore closely akin to Canaanite usages. According to this scholar, although there were a number of practices borrowed from the Canaanites the syncretism would not have gone on so freely if there had not been a stratum of common religious ideas underlying both faiths, and derived from an original semitic tradition. It is a fact that divination and magic which were expressly heathen, i.e. connected with the worship of foreign gods, were illegal, but one has to note that they did not necessarily exclude "the use of many base superstitions in nominal connection with Jehovah-worship".<sup>40</sup> Moreover, practices forbidden by the deuteronomist writer were viewed as quite legitimate in older times.

But despite a promising start Smith separates magic from morality and religion, to concentrate solely on religion. He views magic merely as "an isolated erratic phenomenon",<sup>41</sup> and so he has no interest in developing the underlying principles of magic and divination. We are then faced with a more complex situation: old practices, both Israelite and Canaanite, some legitimate, some harshly condemned. This is part of the picture that needs reexamination.

<sup>39</sup> Ewald, cited by Smith, *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *op. cit.* p. 273.

<sup>41</sup> Blyth, *op. cit.* p. 52.

3.2.2 The first scholar who tries to explain the pattern of thought to which magic and divination belong is T.W. Davies.<sup>42</sup>

He approaches the subject from a broader point of view and does not limit himself to the study of Deut 18:10–11. He includes texts and expressions which do not appear in that passage of Deuteronomy, although he still remains close to it. He centres his study on the connection he establishes between magic, divination, and demonology. For instance he tries to understand magic as “an attempt on man’s part to have intercourse with spiritual and supernatural beings, and influence them for his benefit”.<sup>43</sup> The underlying belief is that the power in the world on which human well-being depends is controlled by spiritual agents: these agents are to be conciliated by words and acts which are thought to please them. As for divination, Davies defines it as “the art of obtaining special information from spiritual beings”.<sup>44</sup> Davies goes on to divide magic into two branches, namely “white” magic, which is “the intercourse with well-disposed spirits” and “black” magic where spirits are used to injure others”.

Davies is influenced by Tylor who postulates different stages in the evolution of man.<sup>45</sup> In the course of time, “the doctrine of souls” would give rise to that of independent spirits, which had never been confined to bodies and which were thus free to move and to act. Demonology would emerge at this point. The earliest endeavours to persuade these spirits to grant the knowledge and power wished for belong to the realm of magic. Concerning the relationship of magic and religion Davies follows Tylor’s conclusions that in the more advanced development of magic we have the beginning of religion. Davies sums up his views in the two following points:

- i) Magic, as the non-ethical attempt to influence the supernatural, may be said to accompany all grades of religion.
- ii) Since magic is a low form of religion, it may either precede the full realization of religion, or it may be a degeneration, a retreat from religion.

<sup>42</sup> Davies (1888).

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1ff.

<sup>44</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>45</sup> The stages as designed by Tylor are as follow: 1-fetishism, 2-totemism, 3-atavism, 4-polytheism, 5-henotheism, 6-monotheism. This evolutionary view is not tenable nowadays.

Magic and divination in the Old Testament both come under the category of intercourse with the spirit world; they belong to a polytheistic stage in the development of the religion of Israel, i.e. the nation and its leaders believed as much in the existence of other gods as they did in that of Yahweh. Although Davies grants a more important place to magic and divination, his work is dependent on evolutionary thought, i.e. on a desire to place magic at a lower stage of development in relationship to religion.

3.2.3 The idea that demonology provides the framework for understanding magical customs in the Old Testament and in the Semitic world (Arabia, Syria, Assyria, Babylonia) is made explicit by R. Campbell Thompson.<sup>46</sup>

From a study of the characteristics of evil spirits certain deductions can be made which have a direct bearing on the origin of magical and divinatory practices:

- i) All evil spirits could inflict bodily harm on man.
- ii) The relations between spirits and human beings were very close; they could intermarry.
- iii) In spite of the care taken to isolate persons or things which were taboo, a person might unwittingly break a taboo and incur the wrath of a resentful spirit and become ill. Then the demon had to be exorcised, i.e. transferred from the body of the patient into some other object. This is the origin of the atonement principle.

The techniques which are used by magicians are a form of sympathetic magic, i.e. "the ability of the magician to transfer a spiritual power from its abode into some object under his control". According to Thompson, "this force is not merely a source of power for the magician over the human soul alone but provides him with a means of attack or defence against such evil spirits or demons as may be arrayed against him".<sup>47</sup> The objects which are used vary considerably. They can be wax figures, nail-parings, hair, dust, knowing the name, spittle, rags, tying knots, etc. they are all used for the same purpose. Both Thompson and Davies follow Tylor in his theory that magic and divination are a product of a polytheistic type of society where everything might be explained through the alliance with spirits, where

<sup>46</sup> Thompson (1908).

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 142.

the spirits are manipulated to heal or to harm. We shall see however in the course of this study that there is no single solution, no single principle underlying every magical act. Techniques, motives and results are too widely varied to let themselves be neatly classified under such a convenient heading as demonology. Certainly the possession by a demon of a person, animal or object may explain some of the phenomena but cannot by any means encompass all of them. Lastly, Thompson's primary sources are later material and could hardly be transposed to the Old Testament.

3.2.4 From then onwards scholars are influenced by Frazer's division of magical principles into contagious and homeopathic magic. P. St Yves,<sup>48</sup> in his treatment of biblical magical actions, miracles and divination, considers the principle "like produces like" and indeed applies it in order to explain various biblical stories. However, his point of view differs slightly from Frazer's and is referred to as a "symbolic idealism".

Magic is empowered by symbolism and therefore the application of the sympathetic principle is the basic step in the spiritual transformation of the individual. The spiritual domain is not separated from the material one. One and the same magical operation which ought to ensure the transformation of the sap in the stem also ensures spiritual transformation. He who performs the magical act participates in the cosmic life and through this participation conducts his own spiritual progress. St Yves's ideas are interesting in that:

- i) they put magical ritual into a cosmic perspective by pointing out that it has direct implications for the individual who is not merely a mechanical performer but someone in control of his own destiny;
- ii) his ideas assume a continuity between the magic rite and its symbolism.

3.2.5 A. Lods postulates what he calls a magic mentality which is the basis of a great variety of institutions.<sup>49</sup> According to him and following his lead a great number of scholars,<sup>50</sup> magical beliefs and

<sup>48</sup> St Yves (1923).

<sup>49</sup> Lods (1927 a and b). For an extensive bibliography on the prevalence of magical ideas in Old Testament institutions see Lods (1927 a) p. 2 and the accompanying footnotes.

<sup>50</sup> For the bibliographic references for Schwally, Gressman, Duhn, Jirku, Mowinckel, Canney see Lods (1927 a).

practices did not constitute a superficial layer but in fact deeply underlie the beliefs of the Israelites. Lods is directly influenced by Levy-Bruhl in his understanding of magical thinking.<sup>51</sup> Although Levy-Bruhl did not present any theory of magic as such, he was centrally concerned with the mode of thought which he dubbed "pre-logical" or "pre-scientific".

According to him, "primitive" societies are mystically orientated towards using the supernatural to explain unexpected and anomalous events. Pre-scientific "collective representations" inhibit cognitive activities that would contradict them, so that events attributed to causes that are pre-scientific are not put to objective verification.<sup>52</sup> Lods lists three main features of this mentality which he is able to apply to the Israelite "magical mind":

- i) the "magical mind" is only interested in the primary cause of phenomena. Secondary causes have no importance whatsoever. Invisible forces are the source of every ill or good fortune. The recourse is to means and techniques which directly act on the primary cause ("like produces like");<sup>53</sup>
- ii) the second feature important for the understanding of "primitive" mentality is the confusion between the spiritual domain and the material one. The primary causes, the invisible causes, are the only ones of importance. Their power is similar to that of the human mind. It is possible to exert coercion on spirits; in other words propitiation is a form of magical technique;<sup>54</sup>
- iii) the third feature which characterizes this mentality is what Lods calls "pre-logical". This suggests a complete indifference to the principle of contradiction: an event may be at the same time present and future. This explains the attitude towards omens. The omen is not simply the sign that something is going to happen; it is the event itself.<sup>55</sup> There is a vast network of participation between things and beings, a "sympathy", an identity, a solidarity between the part and the whole, a person and his garment, his hair, and his name.

Lods' principal conclusions are two:

<sup>51</sup> See Lods (1927 a) p. 4ff. and (1927 b) p. 65ff.

<sup>52</sup> J. Middleton, "Theories of Magic", Ency. of Rel., vol. 9 p. 85.

<sup>53</sup> Lods (1927 a) pp. 4-5.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Levi-Strauss (1966).

- i) we must take into account this magical mentality. While we must qualify what this magical mentality is, Lods' contribution is important in that he acknowledges the existence of both magic and divination at all levels of society;
- ii) these beliefs and practices have a common semitic ground.

In fact Lods has also been influenced by Frazer's own bias towards evolutionary thinking. The magic mentality which Lods postulates is the product of such thinking. It has been demonstrated relatively recently<sup>55</sup> that, *pace* Lods and others, the so-called primitives do not mistake ideal for objective connections (i.e. they do not confuse the "supernatural" and the "natural" world), and that they have an impressive empirical knowledge (i.e. there is no confusion between science and magic, and certainly no "evolution"—or "devolution").<sup>56</sup> It is of course impossible to make generalisations. It would seem that a society must be approached as "objectively" as possible—and that means swapping our own world-view for that of the people whose system we study, by becoming an insider, a thoroughly "subjective" observer.

3.2.6 H. Wheeler Robinson and J. Lindblom have considered the relationship of magic, which they understand with Frazer as coercion, with prophecy and are keen to dissociate the two.

Robinson makes the distinction between form and meaning: the form is magical but the meaning is religious.<sup>57</sup> Lindblom distinguishes between "the inner power" (i.e. the *ex opere operatum* principle) of magic and the power of prophetic action which derives from the will of Yahweh.<sup>58</sup> Guillaume, who is also dependent on Frazer, is equally at pains to make a sharp distinction between prophecy, divination and magic. Although prophecy contains a "survival of the mimetic magic of man's prehistoric past", it is "declarative", a "development of the mysterious spoken word of a god which wrought its own fulfilment".<sup>59</sup> Fohrer makes a distinction between the symbolic action of the prophet, whose roots lie in magic, and the prophetic word, which expresses Yahweh's power only.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> See Blythin (1969/70) p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson (1927) p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> J. Lindblom (1962) p. 172.

<sup>59</sup> A. Guillaume (1938). His frame of reference concerns mostly the East Semitic world (Assyria and Babylonia) and the South Semitic world (Arabic).

<sup>60</sup> Fohrer (1966).

Such distinctions are quite artificial and do not explain "how the fundamental and logically contradictory difference between external coercion and submission could have taken place within similar forms". It seems more logical to see both magic and prophecy as expressing the power to "create and modify experience".<sup>61</sup>

3.2.7 In the field of divination, a "rational" approach has been attempted. Caquot and Leibovici<sup>62</sup> on the one hand and Vernant<sup>63</sup> on the other have applied their techniques of research to the written material available on the Old Testament.

Their aims are to establish a catalogue of techniques, to study the development and diffusion of divination and to study it in its socio-historical context.<sup>64</sup> These scholars agree with the anthropologists' methodology in that their interpretation of the divinatory phenomena is studied from the inside of the society of which it is part. The diviner is a scientist, and divination is a science whose aim is to gain a knowledge of reality. Divination is equal to a consultation with the gods; the diviner is the mediator between the "client" and the divinity.<sup>65</sup>

These observations are written more specifically about the Mesopotamian diviners; despite all the condemnations of diviners and magical practitioners in the Old Testament, we have to keep in mind that some of them had an official place and status in Israelite society.

Based on such studies, which classify divinatory practices and relate them to their socio-historical background, Eissfeldt<sup>66</sup> and Porter<sup>67</sup> have produced broad surveys of divinatory practices in ancient Israel.

3.2.8 There is a lacuna in this scholarship about magic and divination in ancient Israel and Syria—the Northwest Semitic world.<sup>68</sup> Reference can be made to Garcia de la Fuente,<sup>69</sup> who briefly surveys

<sup>61</sup> See Blyth (1969/70) p. 54.

<sup>62</sup> Leibovici and Caquot (1968) pp. 1-11.

<sup>63</sup> Vernant (1974).

<sup>64</sup> Leibovici (1968) p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Caquot (1968) pp. 83-113. He cites two articles by S. Cavaletti, "Di alcuni mezzi divinatori nel Giudaismo", *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 29 (1958) 77-91 and "Qualche notizia sulla mantica Giudaica", *ibid.*, 183-214 which I was not able to consult.

<sup>66</sup> Eissfeldt (1965) 141-45.

<sup>67</sup> Porter (1981) 191-214.

<sup>68</sup> A number of studies have been written on some of the data contained in Ugaritic literature and I shall mention them in the course of the following chapters. However, little has been written as an overall study.

<sup>69</sup> Garcia de la Fuente (1971).

the state of the divinatory practices in Canaan (including some Ugaritic data), J. Gray,<sup>70</sup> a defender of the theory that magic as an act of coercion was used in the agricultural rituals of Ugarit, and J. de Moor.<sup>71</sup>

3.3 *To conclude this section the following remarks can be made:*

- i) Divination and magic, as expressed in the list of forbidden practices of Deut 18:10–11, are part of a wider context. What is reflected is not only of foreign origin (Canaanite or Assyrio-Babylonian) but forms part of what could be termed a semitic mentality.
- ii) It is beyond doubt that the Hebrews also share in this Semitic mentality. Consequently no strict division between “science”, “religion” and “magic” should be attempted.
- iii) Anthropological studies encourage us to look at a society and its practices from the inside. The best “inside” view we could ever get of an ancient society is that provided by language.
- iv) In the philological records, as opposed to the ideological/theological data provided by the Old Testament, we can expect to find Hebrew words and expression connected with magic and divination. Sometimes they are of obvious foreign origin but they have nonetheless become part of Israelite culture.
- v) On the other hand, their similarities with other Northwest Semitic languages are likely to throw light on some difficult Hebrew words. Since the days of Robertson Smith, Davies, Thompson and Guillaume, we have gained access to a much larger corpus of texts which bear relationship to the Old Testament, namely the alphabetic cuneiform texts from Ugarit. By looking at the philological data we should expect to find many characteristics linking the evidence from the Old Testament with the practices common in the surrounding civilizations.

<sup>70</sup> Gray (1965) who examined magic in the Ugaritic agricultural rituals. See the critique formulated by Blythin, *op. cit.* 45f., 55f.

<sup>71</sup> J. de Moor (1987).

#### 4. *Methodology*

Biblical scholarly research on magic and divination has been based mainly on data from the Hellenistic and Roman periods.<sup>72</sup> When such research touched on the Old Testament, Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian data have been used as comparative material.<sup>73</sup>

In this study the world of the Old Testament is studied in its Northwest Semitic setting.<sup>74</sup> By Northwest Semitic I mean the area covering Syria-Palestine "used in its widest sense"<sup>75</sup> to include "the Aramean states (Syria) but also the Transjordanian states of Phoenicia,<sup>76</sup> as well as the polyglot communities on the northern periphery, such as Karatepe (Syria-Anatolia) and Arslan Tash (Syria-Mesopotamia).<sup>77</sup> "Syria-Palestine designates all areas West and North of the Syrian desert in which a Northwest Semitic dialect was spoken".<sup>78</sup>

As may be seen from section 3.2, no extensive work has been done dealing with magic and divination in the Old Testament in its Northwest Semitic background.<sup>79</sup>

##### 4.1 *Problems*

There are several problems which make the establishment of a methodology difficult:

4.1.1 The first problem we have to consider is that raised by the time-span concerned. The Old Testament on its own suggestion covers a vast period, from the far removed nomadic times to Daniel and the so-called intertestamental period. We cannot expect language to keep the same meaning over ten centuries or more.

<sup>72</sup> A. Bouche-Leclercq (1899) vol. 1; Blau (1970); Rossel (1953); Yamauchi (1964); J.M. Hull (1974); Isbell (1975); Alexander (1986); Mills (1990).

<sup>73</sup> e.g. the Maqlu tablets, see bibliography in Abusch (1987); on Babylonian and Assyrian material and its relevance to the Old Testament, see for instance Guillaume (1938), Thompson (1908).

<sup>74</sup> See Blau (1978) 21–44; Gibson (1962) 429; Lipiński (1977) 81–117; Moran (1961) 59–84.

<sup>75</sup> W.R. Garr (1984) 7.

<sup>76</sup> Including Ugaritic literature.

<sup>77</sup> Recent research brought to light the fact that the Arslan Tash incantation plaques are a forgery. They therefore will not be examined. For the literature on this topic see Teixidor and Amiet (1983) 105–109.

<sup>78</sup> Garr, *op. cit.* 6–7.

<sup>79</sup> I was not able to see F.H. Cryer's book (1992), which at the time of the completion of the present volume was not yet available.

We have the same problem with the Northwest Semitic material other than the Old Testament. The Ugaritic tablets are dated from about the thirteenth century B.C., and as such are hardly contemporary even with the earliest Hebrew literature, especially if we take into account the possibility that they may relate stories which are much older.<sup>80</sup>

4.1.2 Apart from the lapse in time during which meanings are bound to have evolved, we are faced with a cultural gap.<sup>81</sup> Geographically, Ugarit is not far away from Hebrew territory, and it also belongs to a Northwest Semitic group, but the distances may have been more significant at the time.<sup>82</sup>

It is difficult therefore to say exactly how important the Ugaritic sphere of influence was to the Old Testament world. However, the consensus is that there is some continuity of thought between Ugarit and the Israel of the Old Testament.<sup>83</sup> Close in terms of space and time are the inscriptions of Sefire,<sup>84</sup> and of Arslan Tash.<sup>85</sup>

4.1.3 The material available is difficult to assess

#### 4.1.3.1 The literature

Ugaritic literature presents itself on clay tablets often damaged or incomplete; the main argument is sometimes difficult to follow, let alone the deciphering of individual words. There are also some difficulties in establishing the literary genre of the tablets: are they epics, religious texts, rituals, incantations or popular tales? This makes matters difficult when one is looking at a particular theme like magic or divination. The Sefire tablets are of great interest here in that they record two treaties which list curses and magical rites which take effect if the treaty is violated.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Craigie (1983) 44.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, 68.

<sup>82</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>83</sup> This opinion emerges from a number of yet unpublished papers heard at the Symposium "Ugarit and the Old Testament" in Manchester, Sept. 1992.

<sup>84</sup> These are usually dated to the mid-eighth century B.C. and would therefore be roughly contemporary with the time of the "writing prophets" of the Old Testament. However any precise dating is made difficult by the fact that there seems to be four different hands in the text (see Gibson (1975) 19).

<sup>85</sup> The Arslan Tash tablets will not be examined here as their authenticity is now seriously questioned. See Teixidor and Amiet (1983) 105-109.

<sup>86</sup> Gibson (1975) 20.

The problem is even more complex when assessing the Old Testament material concerning magic and divination.<sup>87</sup> As we have already seen Deut 18:10–11, and indeed the other codes of law, indicate that there were groups in Israelite society who sought to prohibit divination entirely, or at least severely criticized it. From their particular understanding of Yahwism, magic and divination were only "shortcomings".<sup>88</sup> This outlook in the course of time came to be the dominant view and certainly the one held by the final editors and compilers of the Old Testament as we have it.

Three conclusions can be drawn from this:

- i) A change in attitudes to magic and divination can be traced which is not possible to discern in any of the other Northwest Semitic material. In particular there is evidence that necromancy, for instance, was legitimately practised, but later discouraged.
- ii) The dominant tradition of the Old Testament purged the religious institutions and rituals of their magical and divinatory associations.<sup>89</sup>
- iii) The Old Testament has its own kind of rationale with respect to the divinatory and oracular practices which it records. Some practices are official and are used in cases of the public interest, some are legitimate, more or less official and practised by official technicians. Lastly there are illegitimate ones.<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, unlike Assyria and Babylonia, no collection of omens or reports of extripices are to be found in the Old Testament, therefore depriving us of a convenient detailed picture of the rationale in use. We can only deal then with brief and incidental references.

#### 4.1.3.2 The archaeology

A brief word should be said by way of assessing the material available from archaeological findings. They are also problematic with regard to divination and magic.

Two points can be made:

- i) We know of devices used in divination like the urim and the thummim, the teraphim, the ephod or of magical practices like the tying of knots. In the case of the divinatory devices named

<sup>87</sup> Porter (1981) 193.

<sup>88</sup> Eissfeldt (1965) 142.

<sup>89</sup> Caquot (1959) 84.

<sup>90</sup> Le Fevre (1957, DBS) vol. 5, 735.

above we do not know what they looked like.<sup>91</sup> What then are we to look for among the archaeological artefacts? Wax figures used in magical practices to cast spells, or the tying of knots, as mentioned above, would be too difficult to identify, even if the materials of which they were made had been able to survive the erosion of time.

ii) On the other hand, there are archaeological artefacts which can be directly related to biblical practices. Three examples will show the problems involved in using that type of evidence.

– Models of livers in clay have been found in Ugarit, Hazor and Meggido,<sup>92</sup> confirming that hepatoscopy was indeed practised at some stage in the Northwest Semitic world. However, the inscriptions found on these do not tell us much about the way the liver was consulted, in what circumstances, or by whom.

– Arrowheads have also been found suggesting the practice of belomancy or rhabdomancy<sup>93</sup> in the Northwest Semitic world. But they are difficult to decipher. It is not easy to decide whether they really were used in a divinatory fashion and if so, how.

– Inscribed cups<sup>94</sup> reminiscent of the cup used by Joseph have been found. However they are of a period too late to fit in with the Old Testament material. We can conjecture whether or not they have retained older features which could throw light on the scant information we have on hydromancy.

4.1.3.3 The last problem I will mention is connected with the relationship between magic and divination, which we saw earlier are connected. Both presuppose a specific cosmology: magic is that which enables human beings to assert their independence of the forces of nature, a sort of cosmic consciousness. Divination is the ability to understand how the parts are related to the whole, enabling the practitioner to get a synchronic insight into past, present and future. Thus magic and divination are interrelated and necessarily overlap. Both are used, or so it seems, in times of crisis.

<sup>91</sup> See the relevant heading in chapter 4.

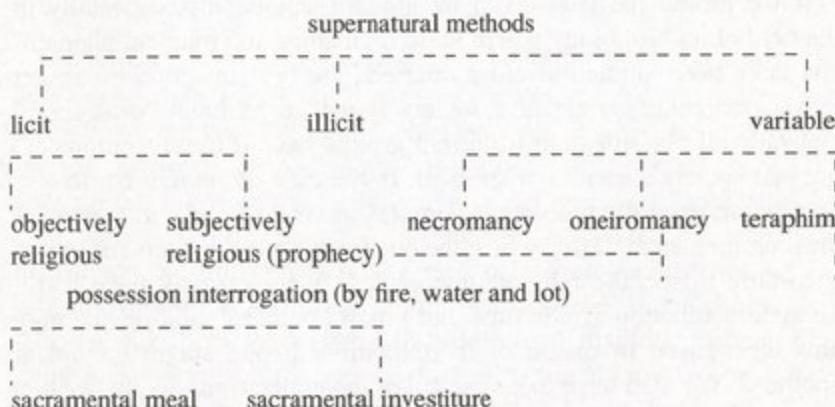
<sup>92</sup> See "Hepatoscopy", chapter 4.

<sup>93</sup> See "Rhabdomancy", chapter 4.

<sup>94</sup> See "Hydromancy", chapter 4.

#### 4.2 *In search of a methodology*

Plato, in an analysis which forms the basis of most modern treatments, distinguishes between "ecstatic" and "non-ecstatic" practice with the latter including all inductive and empirical systems of noting portents, studying entrails and so forth.<sup>95</sup> There have been various modern attempts to classify magical and divinatory rituals:<sup>96</sup>



Another model I will present has been suggested by Zeusse<sup>97</sup> who distinguishes three general types of divination based on indigenous meanings:

- those based on the immediate context when interpreted by the spiritual insight of the diviner (intuitive divination). This includes hunches or presentiments;
- those based on spirit manipulation (possession of non-human agents (augury) and possession of human agents (ordeals, dreams, oracles));
- those reflecting the operation of impersonal laws within a coherent divine order (wisdom divination).

All of these general reconstructions are elaborated from the outside: none of these methods takes into consideration the particular case of Semitic mentality. In fact it is very unlikely that the Hebrews viewed magic and divination as separate from their environment. Also

<sup>95</sup> Plato in Zeusse (1986) 375.

<sup>96</sup> Jevons (1900–1909) 613.

<sup>97</sup> Zeusse (1986) 374f.

anything may be used to divine and in each society there is a system which has its own logic. Therefore any classification must take into account internal data as to how one system views itself; but any attempt to sum up "the supernatural methods of divination" in tabular form as above is necessarily erroneous since the distinction between the "supernatural" and "natural" world is hardly one that the society itself was aware of.

If we follow the lead given by modern scholarship, especially in the field of anthropology where these divinatory and magical phenomena have been studied at close quarters, the best insight we can get into a particular system of a society is not an artificial construction and rational classification (different groups have different rationales) but that society's own view of itself. In the case of ancient Northwest Semitic material the problem is complex as we must take into account the long time-span during which the documents were written and edited according to specific religious ideologies. A person may have had a divinatory function at one time and not at another,<sup>98</sup> or a device may have been used in magic or in divination at one stage but not at another.<sup>99</sup> We also have to be careful of generalizations, as the written data is scarce. No system is fully elaborated in the text so we have to take it into account that a word can have a divinatory connotation in one text and nowhere else.<sup>100</sup>

The boundaries between magic and divination are blurred. Some devices, the arrows for instance, could at the same time be used for both magic and divination.

In view of the difficulties enumerated above I have decided to follow the Old Testament's own insight into its divinatory and magical practices, namely 1 Sam 28:6—

And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets—

thus justifying the following plan:

chapter 2: The "prophets" we understand in the widest sense of diviners, magicians and oracular practitioners.

chapter 3: Dreams and visions.

chapter 4: The Urim comprises all manner of techniques and

<sup>98</sup> See section "kohen", chapter 2.

<sup>99</sup> See for instance "Urim and Thummim", chapter 4.

<sup>100</sup> See the words connected with "Rhabdomancy", chapter 4.

devices used for the consultation of the divine will.

Appendices: magic being less easily identifiable through a philological survey I felt it necessary to group magical practices around three themes: blessing and curse, magic in warfare, and magic in the treatment of diseases.

Regarding my approach, I thought it best to work from a philological point of view. To complete the etymological research, I include an exegetical study of the texts in which words related to magic and divination occur. I believe that this method can to some extent solve the problems of time-span, and of the evolution of language in space and time, as it allows the Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Aramaic material to be incorporated. It must also be emphasized here that this plan and methodology are inclusive, i.e. they seek to incorporate data which does not normally have anything to do with magic and divination *per se*.

#### 4.3 *Literary presuppositions*

The literary assumptions adopted in this monograph are inspired by Whybray,<sup>101</sup> and the author of this monograph quite happily endorses the belief that the redaction of the Pentateuch is at the very least exilic, indeed reaches well into the post-exilic times. The dominating ideology is that of the Second Temple, and is marked by the need of the returnees to assert their identity. This is a complex issue but it seems that this identity had to be asserted polemically, confirming their realization that their cosmology presents many similarities with those of the neighbouring (and not so neighbouring) countries and expressing their need to distance themselves from these. I believe that one of the casualties is the understanding of magic and divination: it was now perceived that magic and divination had too much in common with "the nations", and the Pentateuch is certainly explicit about its desire to distance itself from any possible magical and divinatory associations. However in spite of the polemics and the late dating of the Old Testament documents, some old traditions were recorded: indeed one is led to believe that some of these traditions are so early that they still reflect some continuity with the Ugaritic world.<sup>102</sup> Some of these traditions reflect also magical and divinatory

<sup>101</sup> Whybray (1987).

<sup>102</sup> See the Symposium "Ugarit and the Old Testament", 1992, especially the yet unpublished papers of J. Day and J. de Moore.

practices current at the time of the return. This last point will be amply illustrated in the course of the monograph.

Lastly a word about the method used in tracing these practices. The etymology of each of the terms connected with magic and divination will, when possible, be examined. However it is the history of usage and more importantly the semantic context that will suggest possible connections with magic and divination.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DIVINERS, MAGICIANS AND ORACULAR PRACTITIONERS

#### *General Introduction*

This chapter records all the specialists operating in the field of magic and divination. The etymology of each word studied has been emphasised. This is one means of understanding or, in some cases, revealing the original technique. As these words have been used sometimes over a rather long span of time, we need to look at their linguistic use in both biblical and extra-biblical texts in order to demonstrate the dynamism of their linguistic use. I believe that the nine terms and expressions connected with divinatory practices dealt with by Deut 18:9ff. are by no means exhaustive and I have taken an "inclusive" view: all (or almost all) those terms will be discussed which at one stage or another have a meaning connected with magic and divination (rightly or wrongly).

There are two sections. One deals with skilled people who, I am certain, took an active part in oracular or magical consultation. The method which they used is sometimes more difficult to ascertain. The second section is made up of "disputed cases", i.e. it includes people who might have been involved in magical and divinatory practices but where there is not enough data to be certain of the nature and the extent of their involvement. For these the question must remain open. That all of these are part of ancient Israelite life (1 Chr 12:32) may be deduced from the sheer number of words used to designate magicians and diviners.

#### SECTION ONE: UNDISPUTED CASES

##### 1. *‘Iš ‘Elōhîm: a Man of God*

###### 1.0 *Introduction*

"Man of God" is an expression commonly used in the historical books, where the person concerned appears to be a professional holy man.

He was thought of as possessing special skills and powers enabling him to invoke the aid of supernatural forces. He had the ability to foretell the future and accomplish wonders. Before examining the texts which best illustrate this divining function, a few remarks have to be made about the use of 'îs 'Elôhîm. Firstly, this title is never used of a priest, nor is it used of "classical prophets".<sup>1</sup> Secondly, it is best illustrated by reference to the stories about Elijah and Elisha "who might be recognized as paradigmatic men of God".<sup>2</sup> Thirdly we should distinguish an older use from a more recent one.<sup>3</sup> Lastly the title itself implies a closeness to the deity, a participation in the holiness of the deity.<sup>4</sup> It is less determinate than the term "seer" or "prophet", although it includes some of their functions and also conveys the meaning of divining and miracle-working.

### 1.1 *Judges 13, a testimony to the divining function of the 'îs 'Elôhîm*

This text relates the coming of a "man of god" to Mano'ah and his barren wife in order to inform them of the birth of Samson:

Behold, you are barren and have no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son (v. 3).

This narrative<sup>5</sup> shows the man of God<sup>6</sup> as omniscient: he knows both present and future,<sup>7</sup> and issues directions as to the child's upbringing.

<sup>1</sup> See Ramelot (1928–1979) vol. 8, 927.

<sup>2</sup> McCarter (1984) p. 175.

<sup>3</sup> See Hallevy (1958) p. 237–244, esp. 243 who distinguishes two periods; one is the period covered by the historical books where the 'îs 'Elôhîm is a type identifiable with a Shaman type, and a post-exilic period where the 'îs 'Elôhîm is a temple official whose function has been forgotten.

<sup>4</sup> Ramelot, op. cit. p. 927f. and Mills (1990); the former connects this title with the Ugaritic *ans*, "to be familiar with"; hence the man of God is familiar to God. Also in Akkadian there are a number of analogies: *awilu*, *amilu* in relation to a deity would mean "a servant devoted to a deity".

In Arabic there is also a parallel *Du 'ilahin*, "inspired", "possessor of the spirit". In that line of thought, see Hallevy's argument that the proper translation of 'îs 'Elôhîm is "Divine Man", someone endowed with superhuman, divine qualities and powers" (p. 237).

<sup>5</sup> This is so despite the fact that a later hand has made some additions or alterations. Chapter 13 belongs to the old stratum of the book (Moore (1895) p. 314; Hallevy (1958) p. 238, n. 6).

<sup>6</sup> In fact in the narrative the 'îs 'Elôhîm and *mal'ak* Yahweh are the same person (v. 60); they certainly have the same task.

<sup>7</sup> Other examples of this divining function are to be found in 2 Kings 4:15–17 when Elisha, a man of God, announces to the Shu'ammite woman that she will bear a son;

The appearance of the man of God is awe-inspiring (see v. 6).<sup>8</sup>

This role of seeing and shaping the future is clearly formulated in a number of passages. In 1 Sam 9:6 "All that he (the 'îs 'êlôhîm) says comes true"; he can be rewarded by gifts of money.<sup>9</sup> Another aspect of this all-knowing faculty is the power to see into the distance. Elisha sees from his house Gehazy receiving a present from Na'aman (2 Kings 5:26). From Dothan he sees and hears everything that is happening at the council of the Syrian captains (2 Kings 6:8–12); he also sees the soldiers of the king of Israel who come to arrest him (vv. 32–33) while they are still at a great distance from his house.

### 1.2 *The miracle working "Man of God"*

In the cultural code of ancient Israel the 'îs 'êlôhîm is perceived as someone who has the ability to "tap into" the forces of nature: in the story of 2 Kings 1 he brings down fire from heaven when the injured Ahaziah sent to inquire of Baal Zebub. He brings down rain and drought (1 Kings 17–18), he also heals the sick (2 Kings 8:7–8; 5:3) and afflicts people with disease (2 Kings 5:20–27).<sup>10</sup>

### 1.3 *Conclusion*

The 'îs 'êlôhîm portrayed in the historical books is a "seer", i.e. someone who because of his position in relation to the divine can see the whole in the parts and thus is able to predict the future and at the same time is aware of what is happening in the present. He can be at different places at the same time (a shamanistic feature).<sup>11</sup> He also has power over nature. In many ways his functions are similar to that of the *nabi*.<sup>12</sup> We are meant to think of a human being channelling the divine;<sup>13</sup> he can detect world forces and use them; indeed he is

cf. also the story of the anonymous 'îs 'êlôhîm who predicts to Eli the death of his sons and the extinction of his dynasty (1 Sam 2:27–35).

<sup>8</sup> According to Hallevy (1958) p. 239 this fear stems from the feeling of holiness; cf. the story from the woman from Zareptah (1 Kings 17:18). The man of God is considered "holy"/qadosh, see 2 Kings 4:9.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Sam 9:7–8; 2 Kings 4:42; 5:15.

<sup>10</sup> The power of inflicting a disease and of curing it is illustrated by the anonymous man of God from Judah who brought a disease upon Jeroboam and by prayer cured him of it (1 Kings 13:1–6); cf. also 2 Kings 6:18–20.

<sup>11</sup> Kapelrud (1967).

<sup>12</sup> These two functions will be explored at length under 16: *nâbî*: A Channel of God's Power.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Mills (1990) p. 135: "The man of God is not a human messenger but is in fact

a man to whom one might appeal for assistance with problems ranging from illness to famine.

## 2. *'āšepîn: Professional Exorcists*

### 2.0 *Introduction*

Because the Aramaic word 'āšepîn occurs only in the Hebrew (1:20; 2:2) and in the Aramaic part (2:10.27; 4:4; 5:7.11.15) of the book of Daniel and nowhere else, it is difficult to provide a great deal of evidence to support any theory. The famous list in Dan 2:2 in which it occurs is understood by scholars as being fairly general and the context itself does not allow one to discern who they were and what they were doing, apart from the fact that their field of activity bears some connection with dream-interpretation. But are they only "dream-interpreters" or is their field of activity broader? I will examine the etymology of the word to see if it throws any light on its use and then I will examine the Old Testament texts in which it occurs to see if any more can be said.

### 2.1 *Etymology*

From an early date scholars<sup>14</sup> agree that 'āšepîn was a Babylonian loan-word āšipu, meaning "exorcist",<sup>15</sup> with the more subtle meaning of "diagnostician", someone who "recites prayers and incantations". According to Burden,<sup>16</sup> "the šiptu utterers were skilled in counter-magic ceremonies and adjurations".

The word also appears in Ugaritic aspt meaning "quiver, arrows", with a root 'sp "to gather".<sup>17</sup> One should point out here that the semantic context of words related to this root suggests "to go in, enter", an idea perhaps connected with exorcism.<sup>18</sup>

a cosmic spiritual energy appearing in human form". See also Hallevy, p. 237 who gives as a translation of 'îš 'ēlōhîm "Divine Man", "someone endowed with superhuman, divine qualities and power".

<sup>14</sup> Whitehouse (1908–1921) vol. 3, p. 210; Davies (1898).

<sup>15</sup> CAD, vol. 1, part 2, p. 41; see also Parpola (1971) who gives the same Babylonian origin. He equates the Aramaic 'āšepîn with the Hebrew 'aššāpîm and the Akkadian asipi, "exorcists". The form is ultimately derived from the Sumerian ISIB, "exorcist", see McLaurin (1975) 27.

<sup>16</sup> Burden (1974) p. 106.

<sup>17</sup> McLaurin (1975) 28, ft. 2; cf. 2 Kings 13:15ff. and "Rabdomancy" in chapter 4.

<sup>18</sup> Palache (1959) 8.

## 2.2 *Joseph, a member of a guild of magicians*

The etymology of the name "Joseph" is traditionally related to *ysp*, "to add",<sup>19</sup> but in fact it is more probable that it is related to *sp* "to take away", with the possible meaning "to exorcise".<sup>20</sup> On this basis and also on the analysis of the texts connected with the Joseph cycle a case may be made for his being a member of a guild of magicians.<sup>21</sup> Note the references to his early prophetic dream in Gen 37:5–7, 37:9–11, his coat, endowed with magical power,<sup>22</sup> his particularly significant exclamation in Gen 44:15, and his special position *vis à vis* Elohim in Gen 41:15–16; 42:18.

## 2.3 *The psalms of the sons of Asaph*

Similarly if the name Asaph is related to the same root,<sup>23</sup> there is a possibility it refers to a function within the Levitical caste, that of "exorcist".<sup>24</sup> The association with music is noteworthy as there is a strong connection between prophecy and music<sup>25</sup> and exorcism and music.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.4 *‘Āšēpîn in the book of Daniel*

In the entire passage where it occurs, ‘āšēpîn is always found in connection with other specialists<sup>27</sup> consulted about Nebuchadrezzar's dream. It has been translated by the LXX: magoi (Vulgate: magi) which to the Greek translators probably conveyed the same idea as the Assyrian āšipu, "exorcist". Granted that the book of Daniel, though written in Palestine about the middle of the second century B.C., conforms to the mode of thought and expression prevalent in Babylon, it is possible that the Hebrew and the Aramaic words in Daniel have the same meaning as the Babylonian. But in this case how does "exorcist" fit the context of the dream of King Nebuchadrezzar? If

<sup>19</sup> McLaurin (1975) ft. 2, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> McLaurin (1975) ft. 4, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> McLaurin (1975) 27–45.

<sup>22</sup> McLaurin (1975) 33ff.

<sup>23</sup> Ps 1; 58; 83; Isa 36:22; Ec 12:11; 1 Chron 6:24 (Hebr).39 (Engl); 9:15; 15:17.19; 25:1.2; 26:1; 2 Chron 5:12...

<sup>24</sup> McLaurin (1975) 36; Murray (1992) 78.

<sup>25</sup> 2 Kings 3:15; Exod 15:21.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Sam 18:10.

<sup>27</sup> Dan 2:2 with ḥartummîm, mēkašsepîm, kašdîm. These words will be examined in the course of this chapter.

we take into consideration the fact that the interpretation of dreams in Babylon, especially of nightmares, required the use of exorcists to cast out the demon responsible, it seems that the word fits the context quite well.

2.5 Therefore the 'ašpîn of the book of Daniel are exorcists called to exercise their special knowledge of demonology. They were called to interpret the dream of the king, to ease his mind by chasing the demons away or to undo the work of the givers of nightmares, i.e. black magicians and, perhaps, to ask the demons themselves the key to Nebuchadrezzar's dream.

### 3. *Gāzérîn: From Sacrificial Diviners to Dream Analysts*

3.0 *Gāzérîn*, an Aramaic word found in the book of Daniel, has the general sense of "diviners".<sup>28</sup> The Aramaic root means "to cut", "to divide", "to determine", "to decide".<sup>29</sup>

3.1 This meaning of the root *gāzérîn* is to be found in the Sefire Text iA, line 40<sup>30</sup> in the section devoted to magical rites with wax models, rites which would come into effect should Mati'el break the treaty.

Line 40:

This calf is cut up, so shall Mati'el be cut up, and his nobles shall be cut up.

This text of the eighth century B.C. describes a ritual of sympathetic magic. The calf mentioned in the text is not a real animal but a wax model<sup>31</sup> identified symbolically with Mati'el. If he breaks the treaty his fate will be identified with that of the cut calf.

3.2 In the book of Daniel, which is written much later, the *gāzérîn*, "cutters" and "dividers" originally involved in magical ceremonies are

<sup>28</sup> Dan 2:27; 4:7; 5:7.11.

<sup>29</sup> This word has also come to mean "decree" (Job 22:28; Esther 2:1).

<sup>30</sup> Gibson (1975) p. 18ff.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42, n. 40.

set alongside other types of professional dream interpreters and diviners.<sup>32</sup> We are left very much in the dark as to what function they really perform. The LXX's translation does not throw any light on their activities as the Hebrew word is only transcribed into Greek.<sup>33</sup> The Vulgate gives a particular interpretation: it renders *gāzērîn* by "aruspices". There have been various attempts<sup>34</sup> to define their functions more precisely, all of them based on the etymology. As the *gāzērîn* are traditionally associated with Babylon it has been assumed that astrologers are intended,<sup>35</sup> i.e. people who sectioned the skies in order to draw omens from the observation of celestial bodies, although it seems that may include hepatoscopists.<sup>36</sup> In Daniel the word might be understood in the general sense of "diviners".<sup>37</sup> This would suit the context well, where all sorts of court specialists are called on to interpret the dream of the king.

3.3 Although it is unwise to try to extend the meaning of a word across different cultures, albeit cultures which share the same world-view, and across centuries (however conservative magic is), it is quite tempting to think that they represent more than a touch of Babylonian colour and that the *gāzērîn* are sacrificial and divinatory specialists of the court. I would like to add that their function as dream interpreters retains something of their original duties: "cutting" the dreams in the sense of analysing them part by part.

#### 4. *Hbr Hbr: A Spell Binder*

##### 4.0 *Introduction*

*Hbr hbr* figures in the list of magicians and diviners of Deut 18:9ff. and therefore requires attention, especially as there is some difficulty with the translation.

<sup>32</sup> The root *ggr* occurs in Nabonidus' prayer. Milik (1956) p. 408 translates it by "devin"; according to the prayer his duties were medical (p. 411). This passage is very important as it may date from before Daniel.

<sup>33</sup> *Gazarēnoi*.

<sup>34</sup> See in particular Davies (1898); Montgomery (1927) 163.

<sup>35</sup> KJV, AV, RSV.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Parpola's translation of *gāzērîn* by "haruspices" p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> Montgomery (op. cit.).

The etymology of the root *ḥbr* was understood traditionally to be West Semitic. Dictionaries and lexicons all trace the root to two different stems: 1—"gefarbt", 2—"binden".<sup>38</sup> This second meaning, "to join", "to bind" can be related to the activities of someone involved in the magical practice of the tying of knots, a practice well attested in the Ancient Near east.<sup>39</sup> Even the idea of charming serpents, an activity which has been attributed to the *ḥbr* *ḥbr*, in some way fits this category: the serpents are "bound" by the spell of the charmer. This interpretation has been taken up by the Talmud which gave the root *ḥbr* the same meaning as *lhš* (probably basing its interpretation on the context of Psalm 58:6, that of a portrayal of the "wicked"). In Arabic the semantic field is broader but may come under three headings: i) to beguile or lead; ii) to be joined with, be at one with, or to hit upon an agreement; iii) to tell (a story), to inform; i.e. it indicates that which is heard.<sup>40</sup> The root is also found in Ugaritic and the idea of people bound together is conveyed.<sup>41</sup> More recent scholarship has argued for an Akkadian etymology.<sup>42</sup> The biblical root *ḥbr* could be traced to the Akkadian *habaru* which has the basic meaning of "sound", "noise".<sup>43</sup> This underlying idea of sound or muttering seems to make sense of a number of Old Testament texts where *ḥbr* occurs. The Akkadian etymology may be of some interest in that it changes the emphasis in regard to the field of activity of the *ḥbr* *ḥbr*. Instead of being connected with principles of sympathetic magic, i.e. the tying of knots which results for instance in the general impotence of the victim, the *ḥbr* *ḥbr* would be a person who binds his victims by the use of words, mutterings, incantations, curses. In the light of this hypothesis I will now examine the Ugaritic and Hebrew material connected with these magical practitioners.

#### 4.1 *The ḥbrm in Ugaritic texts*

The root *ḥbr* appears in the Ugaritic inscription of Ras Ibn Hani 78/20 in the list of evil doers who should be expelled by the powerful words of the incantation.

<sup>38</sup> Cazelles (1973–1986) 721–726.

<sup>39</sup> Gesenius 190, "to bind, of magical knots".

<sup>40</sup> Cazelles op. cit. 721.

<sup>41</sup> Aistleiner (1963) no. 895 gives the meaning "Gefahrte".

<sup>42</sup> Finkelstein (1956) 328–333.

<sup>43</sup> CAD, vol. 6, p. 16.

1.10: ḥbrm w̄glm d̄tm lk

Avishur translates:

The binders and the Youth soothsayers depart.<sup>44</sup>

No clue is given as to their precise field of activity. The only thing we know is that they were responsible for harming people. In this case we can only suppose that the ḥbrm were muttering the necessary incantations in order to harm someone by making them ill. The more common meaning of ḥbr, "comrade" is also related: comrades can be linked together by sworn words, oaths and the like. The ḥbrm of our text could therefore be members of a group of "mutterers of incantations" allied by the swearing of an oath.

#### 4.2 Note about the ḥbr in the Sefire treaty (IA4)

Ḥbr appears in line 4. It is translated by Gibson<sup>45</sup> as "confederacy" and this seems to corroborate the meaning of binding people together by the taking of an oath. A confederacy is a political unity and we may well think this was cemented by a sworn oath or in any case by some declaration which would somehow join people together.

#### 4.3 Note about the Phoenician hbry from Spain

We also find hbry in the recently published Phoenician inscription from Spain<sup>46</sup> where "certain persons" have been described as "bny s̄f l̄strt hbry tnt". Sola-Sole translates it by "oracle priests of Astarte, the companion of Tanit", and Dahood: "mediums of Astarte and spell-casters of Tinnit". Although I think it possible that the "companions of Tanit" were bound by magical deeds, it is more probable that this inscription is concerned with oaths.

In any case both translations are possible if we take "companions" in a broader sense, i.e. people bound together by an oath of some sort and if we take "spell-casters" in a narrower sense, i.e. people

<sup>44</sup> Avishur (1981) 16.

<sup>45</sup> Gibson (1975) 28f. We should note here that both Gibson and Fitzmyer (1967) 29 transcribe ḥb[r].

<sup>46</sup> Sola-Sole (1966) 97–108. The date has been established as being about 730 B.C.

who were primarily bound together by an oath and could have exerted their magical skills.

#### 4.4 *The Old Testament*

There are only three places in the Old Testament in which the *ḥbr* *ḥbr* as a noun or as a verb has a significance for magic:

4.4.1 In Deut 18:11 the *ḥbr* *ḥbr* is cited along with those who question the 'ôb and the *yiddēōnî* and practise necromancy. No detail is given as to what exactly they were doing to incur the wrath of the Deuteronomic school. The LXX translates it along with the *měkaš-šeþpîm* of v. 10: *pharmakos epaeidōn epaoidēn*, a sorcerer employing incantation (the Vulgate has: "incantator").

It is worth noting that the word incantation should be understood as a series of powerful words which are pronounced, muttered.

The modern translations have:

RSV: "a charmer";

Jerusalem Bible: "who uses charms" (after the LXX);

JPSV: "one who casts spells".

#### 4.4.2 Isa 47:9.12

LXX: *pharmakou te pharmakeuomenou*;

Vulgate: "incantatorum/incantatoribus";

RSV: "enchantments";

Jerusalem Bible and JPSV: "spells".

In the two texts the *ḥbr* is paired with *kěšápîm*. If the *měkašpîm* are specialists in herbs, the *ḥbr* *ḥbr* could be the accompanying mutterers: words of power have to be pronounced to give the herbs their full (harmful in this case?) potential.

#### 4.4.3 Psalm 58:6 where the *ḥbr* *ḥbr* are parallel with the *melahâšîm* and *ḥkm*.

LXX: *pharmakou te pharmakeuomenou*;

Vulgate: "incantatoris", "venefici incantantis".

RSV: "enchanter";

Jerusalem Bible: "the snake-charmer's spells".

Psalm 58 provides us with a very valuable testimony in that the psalmist accuses people of falsely accusing the innocent. Dahood translates the expression by "weaver of spells", retaining the essentially oral character of the root.<sup>47</sup>

The New Jerusalem Bible's translation "so as not to hear the magicians' music, however skilful his spells" is to be dismissed: it does not fit the context and in particular the association with the *hbr* *hbr*: whisperers. I believe it indicates muttering, whispering, saying incantations or pronouncing curses. The translation "spell-binders", or "weaver of spells" seems to me to convey best the idea of binding through oral activity.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Two ideas run parallel in west Semitic languages where the root *hbr* is used. Firstly, it conveys through the meaning of "association", "company"<sup>48</sup> the concept of binding, and secondly the idea of "spell". Akkadian (and perhaps Arabic) suggests that the activity behind the root is primarily an oral one.

This seems to be confirmed by the context of Ps 58. The *hbr* is someone who may be part of a group, a company of people who are bound together by an oath, and whose activity could be that of a spell-binder, using his power over words to cast spells and therefore binding, or tying people to his power.

### 5. *Hōzeh: A Court Seer*

#### 5.0 Introduction

The etymology of the word *hōzeh* does not present much difficulty. There is an Aramaic root *hzh* which is the usual word for "to see". Its meaning in Hebrew however covers a broad semantic field denoting the "natural" way of seeing with the eye and also the various ways of seeing in the "supernatural" sense.<sup>49</sup> Jepsen, when studying the occurrences of the verb, noted that out of fifty uses of the verb, thirty

<sup>47</sup> Dahood (1968) 60.

<sup>48</sup> Hos 6:9; Prov 21:9; 25:24.

<sup>49</sup> Jepsen (1973-1986) 822-835.

have the meaning of "to see" and twenty have the meaning of "to see in vision".<sup>50</sup> All the derived terms (in particular *ḥazōn*) appear in the context of vision. Coming back to the *ḥōzēm* themselves, their connection with divination is fairly well established<sup>51</sup> as I will show in the texts analyzed in this section.<sup>52</sup> Two problems must be highlighted at this stage:

- i) *ḥōzeh* is used along with the *nābi'* and the *rō'eh*.<sup>53</sup> Should they be distinguished or not? This question has already been extensively discussed: for the sake of clarity I shall opt for the distinction suggested by Wilson<sup>54</sup> that the role of the *ḥōzeh* appears primarily in texts originating in the south of Israel and when it does not, it refers to figures located there. The second problem lies in what their specific function was;
- ii) it is easier to establish the *ḥōzeh*'s connection with divination than to define precisely the nature of his duties: the *ḥōzeh* "sees" but he also "hears" in a context where the reception of the word of God plays an important part. Did he use any technical devices, and if he did, in what ways? Did he go through certain preparatory rituals? These are some of the questions which have to be kept in mind when examining the texts where the word occurs. But before turning to the Old Testament, I shall examine the Aramaic Text of Zakir of Hamat which contains a reference to the *ḥōzeh*. This text will be studied in the next section to see what light it sheds on the Old Testament *ḥōzeh*.

### 5.1 *The ḥzh of the Zakir stele*

This stele dates from about the second quarter of the eighth century B.C.<sup>55</sup> and describes how King Zakir of Hamat, victim of a coalition

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 822; see the noun form *hazon*: KBL 285; BDB 302. On "Vision", see chapter 3.

<sup>51</sup> See other Semitic languages, for instance Arabic *ḥaza* "to prophesy as an augur", Aramaic *ḥzh*, "fortune teller", "seer".

<sup>52</sup> The word *ḥōzeh* is attested seventeen times: five times in the prophets (Amos 8:12; Mic 3:7; Isa 28:15, 19:10, 30:10); twice in the deuteronomistic books (2 Sam 24:11 [Gad]; 2 Kings 17:13); and ten times in the Chronicles.

<sup>53</sup> For a distinction between *rō'eh* and *ḥōzeh* see Jastrow (1909) 42–56; Johnson (1962) 12. For scholars arguing for the synonymy of the two terms see van den Oudenrijn (1925) 294f., 406f. This author suggests an Aramaic origin for *ḥōzeh* and an Arabic origin for *rō'eh*; Lindblom (1965) 90: "Perhaps there existed a dialectal difference but about this we know nothing with certainty"; Guillaume (1938) 43; Orlinsky (1965) 172 thinks that the distinction between the two terms depends on chronological regional factors.

<sup>54</sup> Wilson, *Ency. of Rel.* vol. 12, 14–23.

<sup>55</sup> Gibson (1975) 6ff.; KAI no. 202, p. 208.

of sixteen kings who fought against him, appeals to his god Baalshamayn. I shall quote here verses 11 & 12b, which are particularly important:

(11) But I lifted up my hands to Baalshamayn, and Baalshamayn answered me, and Baalshamayn (spoke) (12) to me through seers (ḥzn) and messengers ('ddn).

Ḥzn is in parallel with 'ddn<sup>56</sup> whose meaning is not very well established. Ramelot translates it by "those who reveal" (the words of God); we therefore have "those who see, and those who tell", two specific categories of prophets.<sup>57</sup> Zakir invokes his god who in turn answers him. But is the word of Baalshamayn perceived by both "seers" and "revealers" in the same way, or have they a different function, i.e. the "seers" see visions, and the "revealers" tell the news? Do the seers have to be accompanied by interpreters? These questions remain unanswered.

## 5.2 *The ḥōzeh in the Old Testament*

As seen above the ḥōzeh often comes accompanied by other titles like nābī' or rō'eh. I shall try to determine if his function is complementary or synonymous.

### 5.2.1 David's seer 2 Sam 24:11–13<sup>58</sup>

And when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet of Gad, David's seer (ḥōzeh), saying, "Go and say to David, 'Thus says the Lord, three things I offer you; choose one of them, that I may do it to you'.... Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me.

In this passage we find both titles attributed to Gad. It has been said that nābī' "is a marginal gloss that has crept into the text".<sup>59</sup> Since this combination does not appear in the text, does it mean that there was a special attendant, the official diviner, as it were, at the special

<sup>56</sup> Ramelot (1928–1979) vol. 8, 901, translates this word by "devins". He thinks there is a connection with prophetism (cf. 2 Chron 15:8; 29:9). This may be confirmed by the use of this root 'dd in Ugaritic ("to tell": the nominal form of 'dd, "herald"). See Ugaritic 'dd in Gibson (1975) 15, ft. 12.

<sup>57</sup> Ramelot, op. cit. 902.

<sup>58</sup> In Greek ḥōzeh is usually translated as prophets in 2 Chron 19:2; 29:30; 35:15.

<sup>59</sup> Jastrow (1909) 50.

service of the ruler?<sup>60</sup> There are indications that Gad is consulted by David in order to determine what course he should pursue. When David comes to the king of Moab and asks that his parents should remain there "till I know what God will do for me" (1 Sam 22:3), he clearly intends attempting to ascertain the future; accordingly we find Gad telling him "do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah" (1 Sam 22:5). In 2 Sam 24:11f. we again find Gad intervening when, after the people are counted, David is portrayed as having become conscious of having sinned. The king appeals to Yahweh (v. 10) and through Gad the answer comes that one of the three calamities forecast will happen. Jastrow wrote that "these utterances are precisely the kind of alternative interpretation of signs that we encounter in the various omen texts of Babylonia and Assyria, and it is only reasonable to conclude that the *hōzeh*, like the Babylonian *bārū* priest, had recourse to some method of divination, by means of which he secured specific answers to inquiries put to him".<sup>61</sup>

But it seems to me that no matter how elaborate the techniques of divination, it is difficult to obtain a very sophisticated result, as in 2 Sam 24. In the cultural world of ancient Israel it was understood that divine communication could be perceived by the naked ear so to speak—there are biblical precedents.<sup>61</sup> The auditory phenomenon is normally (in the text of 1 Sam 3 for instance) not provoked; it is completely unexpected. Were there techniques used by diviners to provoke an auditory message from a divine authority? No texts as far as I know give us that information. Just as visions could be induced (with the aid of musical instruments 2 Kings 3:15) so could auditory messages. The question remains open.

### 5.2.2 *Hōzeh Hammelech*

I shall now briefly examine other texts where diviners are designated as *hōzeh hammelech*: 1 Chr 25:5 (Heman) and 1 Chr 25:3 (Jeduthun). Since both of these, as is also the case with Asaph, are connected with the Temple service, with Levites and singers (1 Chr 15:19; 2 Chr 5:12), the prophetic powers associated with them were not dissociated originally from priestly functions.

This points to a time in the religious history of the Hebrews when

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, 52.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Sam 3.

divination formed a part of the priestly office and when the now separate functions of prophet, priest and diviner were blurred. It should also be noted that the office of the *hōzeh* was connected with the use of musical instruments, bringing him close to ecstatic phenomena, like the early *nābī* (1 Chr 25:5). The passage in Chronicles admittedly is late but may express an older view of the *hōzeh* as ecstatic prophet.<sup>62</sup>

### 5.2.3 Isa 30:9–10: an example of the parallelism between *hōzeh* and *rō'eh*

... They are a rebellious people, ... who say to the seers (*rō'îm*) "See not"; and to the prophets (*hōzîm*) "Prophecy not to us what is right; speak to us (*dabbērû lānû*) smooth things, prophesy (*hâzû*) illusions ...

In this text there does not seem to be a significant distinction between the two terms for seer. The emphasis is on the seeing, the visionary aspect as well as the oral one: their word is *dābar*, a powerful medium translating words into actions. The act of uttering "smooth things" is to give them life. Such is the power attributed to them.

### 5.2.4 Mic 3:7 and Amos 7:12

In Mic 3:7 the parallelism is between *hōzîm* and *qōs̄mîm*.

In Amos 7:12, in the narrative of the prophet's encounter with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, the latter says to Amos:

O seer, go flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there.

What is of interest in this passage is the accusation of professionalism against Amos. This is an important point: Amos denies being in league with professionals. He does not deny being a channel of God's power.

## 5.3 *Conclusions*

From these texts a number of observations can be made.

### 5.3.1 *Hōzeh* often occurs as a title

### 5.3.2 This type of seer is a professional, working in royal courts for the benefit of the king, and is therefore different from the *nābī*

<sup>62</sup> We should also mention Is 29:10 which puts *hōzim* in parallel with "prophets" but it is probably a gloss.

who seems to be primarily an individual with no such institutional role.

5.3.3 Judahite historical traditions suggest that visionaries were particularly active during the period of the early monarchy (David, Solomon, Rehoboam) while some of the writing prophets indicate that they continued at least until the exile.<sup>63</sup>

5.3.4 The title "seer"/"visionary" refers to the distinctive means by which those figures received their revelations. We can say very little as to the particular way in which they received their visions. They may have been artificially stimulated, through music for instance, but we do not know for certain if this happened in all instances. The seeing is probably not necessarily to be understood in the physical sense. We should also note that the *ḥōzeh* could hear a divine communication.

#### 6. *Hâkāmîm: A Professional Class of Wise Magicians*

##### 6.0 *Introduction*

The problem of etymology is not central in the case of the *ḥâkāmîm*. The problem is rather one of definition and the translation of *ḥâkāmîm* by "wise men" does not help. In this section I shall be looking firstly at the semantic field of *ḥkm* and secondly at the texts where the *ḥâkāmîm* may be involved with magical practices.

##### 6.1 *Hâkāmîm: a problem of definition*

*ḥkm* is a frequently used word in the MT and is taken generally<sup>64</sup> to mean "wise", "skilful", "cunning". It differs from the *ḥr̠tm* whose general involvement with magic is clear (if nothing else is). The *ḥkm* does not appear originally to have had an exclusive reference to either magic or divination.<sup>65</sup> The Aramaic *ḥakkin* and the Greek *sophoi* suggest the idea of wisdom, but as Wilckens put it,<sup>66</sup> "the common

<sup>63</sup> 1 Chron 21:9; 25:5; 29:29; 2 Chron 9:29; 12:15; 19:2.

<sup>64</sup> BDB 314; KBL 297.

<sup>65</sup> Davies (1898).

<sup>66</sup> Wilckens (1964–1976) vol. 7, 476ff.

translation "wise" is unfortunate, and to a large degree inexact. If knowledge is presupposed in detail, this is not so much a deeper knowledge in the theoretical mastery of the questions of life and the universe as the solution of a practical kind on the basis of concrete demands". It involves the cleverness and skill needed for practical action and can include the magical deeds of the magician. We have the best example in the person of King Solomon whose wisdom entailed knowledge of all the created order (1 Kings 4:29–34). To him is attributed "the active power of the Deity working in and through him".<sup>67</sup> In wisdom through its connection with creation there is "magic". Wisdom is the working knowledge of the universe, that which makes one aware of the connection between the parts and the whole.

### 6.2 *Study of the biblical texts where ḥākāmîm can be identified with magicians*

A number of texts seem to understand the ḥkm as a magician and I shall discuss here one where this last meaning is a possible explanation. In Gen 41:8, mentioned more extensively under section 7, where it must be noticed that the ḥartōm and ḥakam may be appositioned or a case of hendiadys, (although they could also be understood as two separate nouns), Wilckens<sup>68</sup> thinks that the ḥākāmîm of Pharaoh are similar to the priestly soothsayers and are men who practise the mantic technique of knowing the future through interpretation of dreams. However, as we saw in the previous section, this can only be deduced from the context and is only one skill among others, as the two other occurrences of the word show in Gen 41:33.39: where the phrase 'iš nābōn wēhākām: "a man discreet and wise", occurs, it is in the context of the famine policy, and of the appropriate people in charge. In such a crisis, wisdom is probably viewed as the power to get in touch with the forces of creation, especially useful when dealing with a threat of famine. So, from Genesis we can conclude that the ḥākāmîm are a category of learned men who could interpret dreams (or cure their ill effects) and have a broad vision of things and events so enabling them to deal with the crisis on practical terms.

In Exod 7:11 it is said of Pharaoh:

wayyiqrā' . . . laḥākāmîm wēlamkaššépîm,

<sup>67</sup> Mills (1990) 52.

<sup>68</sup> Wilckens op. cit.

the usual translation is "he called... the wise men and the magicians", but as in the Genesis narrative no distinction is made in the ensuing narrative between the two groups and here the only activity attributed to them is magical. They respond to Moses' turning of his rod into a serpent by doing the same with theirs "by their secret acts". No mention is made of any other kind of "wisdom", and here again we must equate wisdom with magic.

In Deut 2:4-5 the "wise men of Babylon",<sup>69</sup> frequently mentioned in the Aramaic portion of the book of Daniel, were summoned by the king to interpret a dream that had perplexed him. Parpola identifies these "wise men" with the "masters" (UMMA = NU) of the Babylonians and the Assyrians. He gives the translation "scholars", a very broad concept which includes magic and divination. Another important fact, as in the previous texts where *ḥākāmīm* appears, is that it is always accompanied by other words more readily identifiable with magical practitioners.<sup>70</sup> Generally from the evidence yielded by the Daniel texts the function of the *ḥākāmīm* is the interpretation of signs and dreams.

The *ḥākāmīm* are mentioned in Isa 3:3, and condemned, along with other key state professionals, when the prophet appears before the ruling class of the Davidic kingdom to utter his message of doom. The list of "typical pillars of society" is difficult because they are enumerated, mostly in pairs, "but in a curious order, or lack of order".<sup>72</sup>

the counsellor (*yo'ēs*) and the skilful magician (*ḥākam ḥārāšīm*) and the expert in charms (*nēbōn laḥas*).

LXX: *sophon architektona* (the wise artificer (cf. Vulg. "Sapientem de architectis": the cunning craftsmen).

The Greek and the Latin versions understood *ḥkm* in a technical way: the enumeration is of persons of recognised strength (judges, prophet, elder) and so the introduction of a magus could not be right. Or could it? In the context, it seems that it is precisely those people who provide order and security in the present structure of the state who will be shattered. Hence we notice two things which might throw

<sup>69</sup> Aramaic: *ḥakimin*.

<sup>70</sup> Parpola (1971) 9.

<sup>71</sup> Dan 1:20 = *ḥaḥarṭummīm ha'āssāpīm*; 2:2 = *ḥārtūmmīm 'āssāpīm mekaššēpīm kaśdīm*; 2:27 = 'āšpīn ḥartummiñ *gāzērīn*; 4:4 = *ḥartumayyā' 'āšēpāyyā kaśdayē' wēgāzērāyyā*; 5:11 = *ḥartummiñ 'āšēpīn kaśdā'īn gāzērīn*.

<sup>72</sup> Gray (1912) 61ff.

light on the *ḥkm* and might be able to identify his role:

- *ḥkm* appears in the segment of the verse after *yo'es*, “counsellor”;
- and before *nābōn laħas*, “expert in charms”, putting the emphasis on the demise of experts in giving counsels, who may use magical or other means. It may be that what is disposed of are the various categories of people whose role is to keep order in society. In this context it is possible that the *ḥākāmīm* have a “magical” role. They would be those in charge of the forces of creation.<sup>73</sup>

Although the *ḥākāmīm* are mentioned elsewhere in Isa<sup>74</sup> we will look briefly at Isa 19:11–12 as it provides a new clue as to the type of activity with which they were involved.

The passage, an oracle against Egypt, possibly refers to those who interpret the future: Yahweh is about to visit Egypt and to punish it by bringing about civil war, confusion in counsellors; complete destruction of the country and the drying up of the Nile. This is chaos or uncreation. The *ḥākāmīm* of Egypt, political advisers and diviners, are normally perceived as being able to understand the connections between things and events. They are now made to be so confused that they are not able to connect or foresee anything. I suggest that *ḥākāmīm* may have the broad meaning of counsellor, that divining abilities are understood as part of a counsellor's functions.

This last meaning of *ḥākāmīm* as diviners might well be found in Esther 1:13, if the text was not so corrupt:

laħākāmīm yōd'ē hā'ittīm.

The Persian king asks the advice of “the wise men who are experts in times”. It is probable that the reference is to groups of learned men at court, of which one group consisted of astrologers.<sup>75</sup> However, the text is notably difficult<sup>76</sup> as well as being very late and it would be unwise to draw more definite conclusions.

<sup>73</sup> See also Jer 50:35 where *ḥākāmīm* could mean learned men implying their use of magical skills.

<sup>74</sup> Isa 44:25; 47:10 both texts deal with oracles of doom against Babylon and *ḥkm* is mentioned among sorcerers, astrologers, soothsayers.

<sup>75</sup> Whybray (1974) 16.

<sup>76</sup> In view of the corrupt text some versions have, and indeed the RSV translates, “All who were versed in law and judgement”, but this is difficult to ascertain.

### 6.3 Conclusion

What have we learned about the *ḥākāmîm* as a class of "wise magicians"?

Firstly they seem to appear at both foreign and Israelite courts and so are an international institution.

Secondly their field of activity is variable: plain diviners (*Isa* 19:11–12), possibly astrologers (*Esther* 1:13), dream interpreters (in *Dan*), oracular practitioners (*Isa* 3:3). Their fields of activity are variable and a precise understanding of the *ḥākāmîm* can be gained only from the other more specific words with which they are sometimes associated.

Thirdly when *ḥākāmîm* are listed along with other magicians or diviners our understanding of their function is modified.

Fourthly we can say that the *ḥākāmîm* are educated people, found in courts alongside other palace officials, who possess concrete skills and that they can also be involved with magic (they have the learning for that), but not necessarily so. The context and its association with other words will determine that.

Last and more importantly it is the notion that they are associated with the forces of creation that gives the *ḥākāmîm* their magical colouring.

## 7. *Hartummîm: Miracle Performers or Dream Interpreters*

### 7.0 Introduction

There is a general consensus among scholars that *hartummîm* designates some type of professional magicians.<sup>77</sup> Its more precise meaning has yet to be established. What is their field of activity? Are they miracle performers or dream interpreters? To establish this I shall search in two directions—the etymology of the word and the context in which it appears.

<sup>77</sup> BDB: "engraver, writer, only in the derived sense of one possessed with occult knowledge, diviner, astrologer, magician"; Koehler-Baumgartner: "epithet of magic practising priests"; Gesenius: "Zauberer".

### 7.1 *The etymology*

There are several possible etymologies of the word ḥarṭom. The opinion used to be,<sup>78</sup> and still generally prevails,<sup>79</sup> that the word derives from the Hebrew word ḥeret, a chisel to cut with (Exod 32:6), or a sharp metallic instrument to write with (Isa 8:1). Then ḥarṭummîm would mean the scribes, the learned class, a meaning closely connected with ḥâkâmîm.<sup>80</sup>

An Arabic origin of the word has also been suggested: ḥarṭum, "snout", hence "leader", "the snuffler, who speaks through his nose",<sup>81</sup> which would be a fair description of the magician who works through muttered incantations.

Another trend has been to seek an Akkadian origin. Kiritu has been suggested<sup>82</sup> with the meaning of "a place dug, a grave, a ditch", but philologically this hypothesis is no longer tenable as the "t" of kiritu represents a t, not a ṭ. Also the Akkadian "K" is not equivalent to the Hebrew ḥ. More recently Parpola,<sup>83</sup> in his list of correspondences, compares the Aramaic and the Hebrew ḥarṭummîm/ḥartummin to the Akkadian ḥartîbi which he translates as "interpreters of dreams". In fact ḥartîbi is listed by the CAD as an Egyptian loan word.<sup>84</sup>

### 7.2 *The field of activity of the ḥarṭummîm*

Much has been speculated<sup>85</sup> about the field of activity in which the ḥarṭummîm ḥarṭom can be equated with kahin and includes in its field of activity "the interpretation of the phenomena of nature, or the augur who inspected the liver for omens, or the magicians who employed various divining means to ascertain the temperament of divine powers".<sup>86</sup> From that perspective we have a rather broad interpretation of the ḥarṭom as the interpreter of divine manifestations. If we look at the texts themselves, two more skills are revealed: those of miracle working and of dream interpretation.

<sup>78</sup> Davies (1898).

<sup>79</sup> BDB, 355; KBL, 333.

<sup>80</sup> See ḥâkâmîm in this chapter.

<sup>81</sup> Montgomery (1927) 138.

<sup>82</sup> Davies (1898).

<sup>83</sup> Parpola (1971) 9.

<sup>84</sup> Lambdin (1953) 145–155.

<sup>85</sup> Mueller, TWAT vol. 3, 189–192.

<sup>86</sup> Wood (1916) 55f.

The word is infrequently used in the MT. There are three relevant text areas (Hebrew or Aramaic) where the word is used with reference to foreign practitioners.

7.2.1 The first narrative is found in Gen 41:8.24, the tale of Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's double dream, when the latter's own experts, the ḥartummîm were baffled.

MT: *wayyišlah wayyiqrâ' 'et kol ḥartume miṣrayim.*

LXX: *kai aposteilas ekalese pantas tous exēgētās Aigypiou.*

Vulg: *misit ad omnes coniectores Aegypti.*

The RSV and the JPSV are unanimous in translating ḥartummîm by "magicians" consistently through chapter 41. They attempt in vain to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Their role as dream interpreters is specified by the LXX through its translation (*exēgētēs* is an interpreter of dream prodigies?). According to Muller,<sup>87</sup> the Egyptian demotic magician became a "mantic" interpreter of dreams because magic also served to protect from evil dreams and to prevent their fulfilment. It is possible that the word was borrowed directly from Egypt.<sup>88</sup> But if we look at the MT only we are struck by the association of the ḥartummîm with the ḥakāmîm (the wise men). In the narrative which follows no distinction is made between the two groups and we have already examined this problem in section 6. We note Whybray's view on the topic.<sup>89</sup> According to him this could be a case of hendiadys, meaning "all Egypt's cleverest magicians". In view of this I believe that, although their skill as depicted in Gen 41 seems to be limited to dream interpretation, it is better to opt for a more general rather than a particular definition, an inclusive one, rather than an exclusive one.

Is it possible that ḥartummîm in this chapter refers to a general class of educated people, whose training has included the learning of magical skills?<sup>90</sup>

7.2.2 The second text I shall examine is taken from Daniel<sup>91</sup> which is dependent on the "Joseph story".

In Dan 1:20 when ḥartummîm appears, it is set in the context of the presentation of Daniel and his three friends to the Babylonian king,

<sup>87</sup> Mueller.

<sup>88</sup> Vergote (1959) 66–73.

<sup>89</sup> Whybray (1974) 15.

<sup>90</sup> Skinner (1910): "the possessors of occult knowledge of all sorts, including interpretation of dreams".

<sup>91</sup> Dan 1:20; 2:2.

Nebuchadrezzar, who "in every matter of wisdom and understanding found them ten times better than all the magicians (ḥarṭummîm) and enchanters ('ăšepim) that were in all his kingdom".

Again in this text ḥarṭummîm is associated with a Babylonian loan word.<sup>92</sup> These words have been translated by the LXX as epaoidoi and magoi (Vulg.: ariolos and magi). The early commentators understood them as "necromancers who used the souls of the dead and astronomers"<sup>93</sup> or as "physicians and dream interpreters".<sup>94</sup> In the RSV, "magicians and enchanters" are "umbrella" terms, the latter representing Egyptian magic and the former Babylonian magic and, as Montgomery states, "they are (these two terms) not to be treated as having a technical meaning; the writer has no special knowledge of the elaborate development of those castes".<sup>95</sup> So in this text it refers to persons having a general magical knowledge. Dan 2:2 also shows a marked dependency on Gen 41 and is also concerned with Nebuchadrezzar, who like Pharaoh was very much troubled by a dream. He sent for the court ḥarṭummîm and other specialists.<sup>96</sup>

It is striking that the ḥarṭummîm in this list are mentioned along with other magicians despite the differences of function. The general impression given by such lists (see also Dan 2:27; 5:11) is of a confused intermingling of the various terms. We should note the fact that ḥarṭummîm is with one exception translated by epaoidoi in the LXX, "charm-singers". However, one cannot help thinking that the meaning conveyed by the Greek (and the Latin) translations served the conviction that Israel's religion was superior to the pagan religions, for all the prestige which was associated with the latter. It does not mean that it was an accurate translation.

7.2.3 The last group of texts where ḥarṭummîm is used is in the Exodus narrative, in particular Exod 7:11.22; 8:3.14.15; 9:11.

Refinements may be added to what has already been said on the uses of ḥarṭummîm.

LXX translates this, except in 9:11 (pharmakoi, those who use drugs for magical ends), by epaoidoi tōn Aigyp̄tiōn (the singers of charms, the incantation singers of the Egyptians) cf. Vulg. incantationes

<sup>92</sup> See 2. in this chapter.

<sup>93</sup> Rashi.

<sup>94</sup> Ibn Ezra.

<sup>95</sup> Montgomery (1927) 137.

<sup>96</sup> All these terms are examined separately in this chapter.

aegyptias, except for 9:11 where it is translated by malefici, wizards.

These different interpretations show the uncertainty of the translators.

Ex 7:11 is of particular interest because it uses a loan word, *mēkaššēpîm*,<sup>97</sup> from the Akkadian *kašāpu*, as a synonym for *ḥâkāmîm*. This terminology is accepted internationally. Regarding the activity of the ḥartummîm, we note in every instance the use of *lātēhem*: "their secret arts". Although this last detail does not give us much detail as to the modus operandi, we can draw a few conclusions from the use of ḥartummîm in Exodus.

7.3.3.1 These ḥartummîm were a powerful caste (note the constant use of the plural).

7.3.3.2 They were, if not identified, nonetheless categorized with two other types of mantic practitioners: *ḥâkāmîm* and *mēkaššēpîm*. The former does not enlighten us very much, apart from telling us that they were skilled people. The latter are generally taken to be associated with "sorcerers".

7.3.3.3 The mention of their use of "secret arts", if it does not throw light on the actual method, links the ḥartummîm with a category of people involved with magical manipulations as the whole story of their confrontation with Moses and Aaron shows.

#### 7.4 Conclusion

The evidence given by both texts and research into the etymology helps us to know a little bit more about the ḥartummîm.

From the etymology it can be ascertained that the word has an Egyptian source, and from the texts themselves what comes across is a class of skilful people with a broad magical knowledge. The specific meaning of ḥartummîm as "dream interpreters" is deduced more from the context of the stories of both Joseph and Daniel than from what we know of the word itself. Vergote showed that originally in Egypt the term in question applied to religious functionaries who took part in the liturgy (which included incantations and the like). If we allow for some shift of meaning, and take account

<sup>97</sup> KSP: "to bewitch, to cast an evil spell" (CAD, vol. 8, 292).

of the fact that in the two stories of Joseph and Daniel the convocation of these court specialists corresponds primarily with the ruler having a bad dream and subsequently being upset by it, we would tend to understand the title as covering a wide field of "educated activity", from the study of dream books to the art of healing (cf. the translation "physicians" by Ibn Ezra) which also includes the art of exorcism.

### 8. *Hārāšîm: Medicine Men*

#### 8.0 *Introduction*

This word occurs only once under this form in the Old Testament, in Isa 3:3, the list of key officials denounced by the prophet. Although the meaning of the root remains unknown<sup>98</sup> the word has long been known from Aramaic, Syrian<sup>99</sup> and Arabic<sup>100</sup> and has also been found more recently in Ugaritic<sup>101</sup> with the general meaning of "magic", "sorcery". Its use in Ugaritic seems to prove that it is an old West Semitic word. I shall examine the Ugaritic text in which the root occurs and attempt to draw some conclusions for the text of Isa 3:3.

#### 8.1 *The Ugaritic*

8.1.1 We find a reference to the root *ḥrš* in the *Keret* epic: KTU 1.16, v. 1.25f.:

[a]nk (26) *iḥtrš*. w[a]škn  
 (27) *āškn.ydt*. [m]rš  
 gršt (28) *zbln*.

I myself will cast a spell (*iḥtrš*) and will create  
 I will create (what) will banish (his) illness  
 (and) drive out the plague.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>98</sup> BDB 361; KBL 338 (Zauberei).

<sup>99</sup> *harša*.

<sup>100</sup> Robertson Smith (1884) 124f., notes the use of *hrs* in Arabic in the words used for the special food given to women in childbirth, and "consisting of *Fariqa* and the like (literally "shredded")". In Arabic it has the unambiguous meaning of medicinal broth, which emphasizes the similarity of function between the *ḥarāšîm* and the *mēkašpîm*. Note also that Smith gives the Aramaic *hrs* as the equivalent of *mēkašpîm*.

<sup>101</sup> *ḥrš*; see Segert, (1984) 186.

<sup>102</sup> Gibson (1978) 100; Gray (1964) 27 translates v. 26 as "I myself resort to magic".

When Keret, king of Ugarit, fell ill, El, the supreme deity of the Ugaritic pantheon, addressed himself to the assembly of the gods saying: "Who among the gods can remove the sickness, driving out the malady?". After repeating the question seven times without any of the gods volunteering for the task, El decided to act himself and spoke the few lines quoted above. Part of the next section is missing, but from what follows it is clear that El fashioned a creature, from mud or clay, called Sha'taqat, who brought about the complete recovery of the king. Her method is important for the hrs is described here: Sha'taqat washed his body clean of sweat and restored his appetite for food. As a result "death on the one hand, is broken; Sha'taqat, on the other has prevailed".<sup>103</sup>

The following can be noted from this text about the use of hrs: it occurs in the context of an illness. And in this case we have two possibilities: either we have a case of apotropaic magic,<sup>104</sup> or a case of more straightforward healing using plants, which would seem reasonable to accept, especially in view of the Arabic evidence. Although the latter practice is much more recent we cannot ignore the indication it gives. With regard to the methods used by Sha'taqat, it suggests that the physical cleanliness of the body was brought about by the use of medicinal plants. But this is only a suggestion as the tablet is badly damaged.

#### 8.1.2 KTU 1.19 IV, 60

yd [.] mhṣt . ḥaq[h]t . ḡ zr  
 tmhṣ . alpm .ib . št [ ]  
 s t hršm . l ahlm

The hand that slew the hero Aqhatu  
 will slay a thousand foes of the Lady!  
 She puts a spell on the tents.<sup>105</sup>

hršm is used here in a different context. Pughatu wants to take revenge on her brother's killer Yattpanu, "warrior of the Lady" (Anat). In this text, as indeed in KTU 1.1, II, 3f. 10,<sup>106</sup> the hršm is to be connected with warfare. However in view of the previous text (KTU 1.16 V,

<sup>103</sup> ANET 1486; see this text analyzed in Appendix 1.

<sup>104</sup> Gray (1964) 74.

<sup>105</sup> de Moor (1987) 265.

<sup>106</sup> "(I) will put (a spell on your enemies), (sorcery) o(n) those who harass you", *ibid.*, 20. As the text is considerably damaged, it is difficult to draw any conclusions.

25), and also of the etymology, it is possible that it might refer to some brew made of plants, "the drug to drink" (l. 64) that Pughatu gives to her brother's murderer. Only fragments of the end of this text remain, making next to impossible to decide what killed Yatpanu (if indeed he was killed).

### 8.2 *Hârâšîm in the Old Testament*

*Hârâšîm* occurs in Isa 3:3 under the form of *ḥâkam hârâšîm* where it appears in the list of the officials deported to Babylon:

LXX: *sophôn architektona*;  
Vulg.: *sapientem de architectis* (the wise artificer).

The RSV renders it as "the skilful magician" and the JPSV translates "skilled artisan"<sup>107</sup>, thus showing the biases of the translators.<sup>108</sup>

It seems that, although the root is difficult to fathom, it is possible that it has some connection with crafts and design, and certainly deals with something concrete.

The handling of the medicinal plants is concrete enough and would account for the understanding of the word as "magician"; the healing by plants was not understood from a purely chemical point of view but from a "spiritual", "magical" one. It was often understood that it is the spirit in the plant which heals and thus the person using it is a magician, i.e. someone who has control over the world of spirits. It can in fact be better explained by a system of correspondences: the plant is the part that represents symbolically the whole; by manipulating the parts one brings about changes in the whole.

### 8.3 *Conclusion*

It is of course difficult to know for sure what the abilities of the *ḥârâšîm* were, but in the Ugaritic and the Hebrew texts where it occurs it could well be that Smith was right in seeing the *ḥârâšîm* as the medicine men. In the specific context of Isa 3:3, the list of key professionals could well include the "medical doctors" of the time, men knowledgeable about the virtues of herbs, among its soldiers, judges, counsellors and charmers.

<sup>107</sup> Kissane (1960) 36 "skilled craftsman".

<sup>108</sup> Kaiser (1972) deletes *ḥârâšîm* on the assumption that it is an exilic gloss. 292.

9. *The Oracular Functions of the Kōhēn*

9.0 *Introduction*

Unlike the etymology of the term *lēwî* which is so unclear and gives us no indication of any possible connection with oracular or divinatory practices, the word *kōhēn*, “priest”, can be more easily traced. It is a West Semitic term known in other ancient societies. In Phoenician inscriptions it is found as the official name of the priest.<sup>109</sup> We also have the feminine form *kūnōt*. It has also been found more recently in the Ugaritic texts unearthed at Ras Shamra.<sup>110</sup> The existence of the Arabic word *kāhin* as a cognate to the Hebrew *kōhēn*, however, has led to theories which sought to find the origin of the very institution and nature of the Hebrew priesthood in soothsaying, the Arabic *kāhin* system.<sup>111</sup>

Although there is a very important difference between the *kāhin*, “soothsayer” and the Hebrew *kōhēn*<sup>112</sup> this connection does help to manifest the importance of the oracular work of the early priesthood.<sup>113</sup>

Three etymologies have been proposed:<sup>114</sup>

9.0.1 From a cognate of the Akkadian *kānu* which means “to incline before”, so that a priest would be one who gives homage to God.<sup>115</sup>

9.0.2 From *kōhēn*, “to be firm, established, lasting”, so that a priest would be one who stands before God at the altar.<sup>116</sup> It does then

<sup>109</sup> rb *khn̪m*, KAI 59:2 (Phoenician, from Piraeus in Attica, 3rd c. B.C.).

<sup>110</sup> Gordon (1965) text a and b; 18:1; 62:54f. for instance.

<sup>111</sup> Haldar (1945) 162ff., 178, 189, 197; Guillaume (1938) 198ff.; Gray (1925) chapter 13.

<sup>112</sup> In fact as most scholars state today the philological problem of the Arabic *kāhin* is probably a false one, as far as the nature of the Hebrew priesthood is concerned. The Arabic word itself may well be derived from a Northwest Semitic language: the Arabs borrowed largely, in matters connected with the cultus, from the Israelites. However, for a different opinion, see Castanini (1987) 273–277: this scholar derives Nabataean *khn̪*, which he argues is unconnected with Hebrew, from Arabic.

<sup>113</sup> The Hebrew *kōhēn* and the Arabic *kāhin* might originally have been identical (both were the guardians of an oracular device at the sanctuary). However their functions diverged: the *kāhin* gradually lost his connection with the sanctuary; the *kōhēn* acquired sacrificial functions.

<sup>114</sup> The results of scholarly research on the topic of the etymology of *kōhēn* have been summed up by Cody (1969) 26–29.

<sup>115</sup> Dhorme (1933) 117f.

<sup>116</sup> Stade (19) vol. 1, 471; Haupt (1922) 372–375 thinks that *kōhēn* is a modification of *kun*, which root expresses something which is true or right.

designate the priest as offerer, or, since "standing before one" is used of service in general, as servant of the deity.

9.0.3 There is yet another possible etymology: the Syriac *Pa'el* verb *kahhen* which has two senses: "to be a priest", and "to make prosperous, flourishing".<sup>117</sup>

So we see that the root meaning of the word *kōhēn* does not support its being used as a designation of the seer. Nevertheless, oracular consultation was one of the functions of the priest and without going as far as Kuenen when he suggests that the essential task of the Hebrew priest was oracular consultations,<sup>118</sup> it must be mentioned that the *kōhēn* was, in the "early" stages, certainly expected to consult the deity. It would seem that divination, i.e. the attempt to foresee the future or the unknown either by means of one's own mantic powers or by the interpretation of omens, must be distinguished from oracular consultation (regarded as "the attempt to obtain advice or judgement from an infallible guide or indicator").<sup>119</sup> This, however, is a spurious distinction. The *kōhēn* would perform mainly oracular consultations. This is indeed one of his duties along with cultic, sacrificial, therapeutic, instructional, judicial, administrative and political functions. I shall concentrate here on his oracular capacities. The texts of the Old Testament which will be discussed below will highlight this specific function. But before that I shall turn to Ugaritic texts in search of evidence of the *kōhēn* in his role of oracular consultant.

### 9.1 *The Ugaritic khnm*

We saw in 9.0 that the word *khnm* and especially *rb khnm* occurs in Ugaritic texts indicating that there was a structural organization of the clergy. The word also appears in lists of guilds of various artisans and functionaries and is sometimes paired off with *qdsm*.<sup>120</sup> From these texts no clear duties of the *khnm* may be determined. On the other hand it is clear that some *khnm* were attached to the army in the capacity of priests: that would provide a parallel to the ephod-bearing priests who accompanied the field expeditions of David

<sup>117</sup> Cody (1969) 28.

<sup>118</sup> Kuenen (1869/70) vol. 1, 101.

<sup>119</sup> Cody (1969) 16, ft. 40.

<sup>120</sup> Cutler and McDonald (1977) 13–30; cf. in Gordon (1965) the following texts: 63:1; 81:1; 82:1; 113:72; 115:9; 169:6; 400:vi:200; 1026:6; 2020:4; Tarragon (1980) 134ff.

and Saul, or perhaps even of the palladium-bearing sons of Eli in 1 Sam 4:3f. This can also be related to the remark in 2 Sam 11:11 that the Ark was with the tents of the army.<sup>121</sup>

The priests most probably had field duties.<sup>122</sup>

The Phoenician inscriptions do not give any reference to khnm acting as diviners or oracular practitioners and in any case too little is known about their regular duties.

## 9.2 *The Old Testament*

The word kōhēn occurs frequently in the MT, over seven hundred times in fact, and is consistently rendered in the LXX by the common term for priest. I shall now look at those texts which show the kōhēn in his oracular functions. They are found in early sources on priestly activity and in the subsequent priestly codification of priestly functions. The pre-monarchical priests in the Old Testament are primarily associated with the sanctuary, and they appear as consultants of oracles.

### 9.2.1 The kōhēn, an ēphôd consultant by right?

#### 9.2.1.1 1 Sam 2:28:

I chose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me.

In this text defining the functions of the kōhēn, the reference to the ēphôd is not that of the priestly vestment (cf. v. 18) but something that is carried, and which holds the sacred lots by which Yahweh is consulted. We come across it in the Book of Judges,<sup>123</sup> but it is not mentioned in post-Davidic narratives.<sup>124</sup> The role of the kōhēn in this context is understood as a consultor of Yahweh. The following examination of the three texts of the book of 1 Sam where there are examples of a priest acting as consulting the will of God will reveal this.

#### 9.2.1.2 1 Sam 14:18f.: A case of priestly consultation of the ēphôd before the battle.

This text is riddled with difficulties but without going into details it seems that we must read (with LXX) ēphôd instead of 'ârôn. As the

<sup>121</sup> Cody (1969) 20; see also fn. 57 listing the literature on this topic, and the discussion.

<sup>122</sup> See appendix 2, "Magic in Warfare".

<sup>123</sup> Judg 17:5; 18:14f.; Gideon's ēphôd (Judg 8:26f.) is perceived as an idolatrous emblem.

<sup>124</sup> There is one allusion in Hos 3:4.

commentators of the text noted, the tradition may not have favoured the *ēphôd* as a means of obtaining an oracle, and so the legitimate ark was mentioned instead. The LXX has preserved the original text, especially as the ark was located in the distant Kiriath-Jearim and is not mentioned between 1 Sam 6 and 2 Sam 6.<sup>125</sup>

Saul, wishing to consult God before joining battle asks Ahijah to inquire of the *ēphôd*. One interesting detail (v. 19), i.e. the order from Saul to Ahijah to "withdraw his hand", is significant as to the modus operandi of the *ēphôd*. The priest was most probably about to draw lots. Saul stops him and goes out to battle without consulting his oracle.

9.2.1.3 In 1 Sam 23:9–12 and 1 Sam 30:7f. David himself consults the *ēphôd*. We note that in each instance the priest Abiathar brings it and is present during the consultation. We further note the complexity of the answer resulting from the consultation (this will be examined in detail in the section devoted to the *ēphôd*).

9.2.1.4 Judg 18:5: this text will be examined under section 11 of this chapter and it is enough to say here that it is only when the *lêwî* is made *kôhên* that he consults the God. The *ēphôd* is one of the devices belonging to the shrine of Micah and although the text is not specific as to how the *lêwî* consulted God for the Danites, it may be assumed that he used the *ēphôd*.

9.2.2 1 Sam 22:10.13.15: an unspecified oracular consultation. Doeg, the Edomite, in response to Saul's accusation of betrayal, tells him what he has observed in Nob and denounces Ahimelech, a priest, for having inquired of the oracle for David. The verb used for the consultation here is *š'l*, which, like its Akkadian equivalent *sa'alu*, is used of the priest's asking of the god.<sup>126</sup> This function is of importance because of its antiquity: the centralization of worship is not presupposed and the role of the priest recalls the old practice of consulting God before the battle.<sup>127</sup> There is no mention of how the consultation is performed nor what device is used. Bearing the other texts in mind (cf. fn. 19) it is possible that the *ēphôd* was used but one cannot be completely certain.

<sup>125</sup> Driver (1913) 110; Hertzberg (1964).

<sup>126</sup> Garcia de la Fuente (1971) chapter 1.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. 1 Sam 14:3.18–23; 22:10.13.15.

### 9.2.3 The problem of the šēlāmîm sacrifice.

The involvement of the kōhēn with the šēlāmîm sacrifices has given rise to the idea that when performing this specific type of sacrifice the priests were in fact acting in a divinatory capacity. Haldar suggested as much when he remarked that "the situations in which the šēlāmîm sacrifices were performed also suggest that this category of sacrifice was divinatory",<sup>128</sup> especially in relation to the offering of the livers (Lev 3:3f.) or in connection with bērît rites (Ex 24:5), or before a war (1 Sam 10:8).

### 9.3 Conclusion

As we have already noted, the functions of the lēwî and of the kōhēn sometimes overlap. We are given the impression, especially in Judg 17–18, that the lēwî (we assume duly trained) could become kōhēn when they were attached to a sanctuary. The kōhēn would be able to embody his professional oracular training in the ritualistic apparatus attached to shrines, temples. That is how we encounter the kōhēn at the beginning of his historical development, still practising openly his oracular functions, especially in the context of war (a crisis). It is possible that the consulting oracle before the battle was accompanied by a šēlāmîm sacrifice. The oracular device used in the cases mentioned in this section may have been the ēphôd, but no clear indication is given as to how it worked. This remains an unsolved question. The priestly oracular consultation is understood by the exilic/post-exilic editor to belong to an "early" time, mainly the period of the Judges, and is understood to be attested up to the times of Saul and David. As to the later times, and especially those recorded by the Deuteronomist, what is valid for the lēwî applies equally to the kōhēn, although we have to be careful not to identify them completely. The reform of Josiah in 621 B.C., putting an end to the high places and centralizing the worship in Jerusalem, terminated the accepted and practised oracular functions of the kōhēn.

<sup>128</sup> Haldar (1945) 212.

<sup>129</sup> Paton (1893) 1–14.

10. *Kaśdîm: Dream Interpreters of Nebuchadrezzar*10.0 *Introduction*

The word *kaśdîm* "bore among the ancients very different meanings from time to time".<sup>130</sup> It designates first of all the inhabitants of Chaldea, and second the members of the Babylonian priesthood.<sup>131</sup> A third meaning is to be found later: "the epithet *chaldaios* was applied as a title of honour to the Greeks who had studied in the Babylonian schools and proclaimed themselves disciples of the Babylonians".<sup>132</sup> Finally it designated charlatans who professed to foretell the future according to the stars.

But as Cumont himself remarks, these bits of information, furnished mainly by Diodorus Siculus and Philo of Alexandria, are of value only for the period immediately preceding these authors. So we are left with the problem of deciding which of these meanings, if any, applies to the *kaśdîm* of the Old Testament.

10.1 *Kaśdîm in the Old Testament*

The word *kaśdîm*, whose Akkadian origin cannot be denied,<sup>133</sup> appears in the MT under two aspects:

10.1.1 A racial one, i.e. the people dwelling on the lower Euphrates and Tigris, and especially the people ruled by Nebuchadrezzar.<sup>134</sup>

10.1.2 A special class of learned people linked somehow with magicians. In this case the occurrences of the word are quite scarce, being limited to the book of Daniel, where the word designates a special class of people.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Cumont (1960) 16f.

<sup>131</sup> ibid., 16, writes that "at the period of the Achaemenid kings, in the official processions of Babylon, there walked first the magi, that is to say the Persian priests established in the conquered capital, then the Chaldei, that is the native sacerdotal body".

<sup>132</sup> ibid., 16.

<sup>133</sup> Parpola (1971) 9 equates *kaśdîm* with *tipsârîm* and the Akkadian *tupsarri* = astrologers.

<sup>134</sup> This fact was pointed out quite early by Davies (1898) who thought the word *kaśdîm* derives its meaning from the establishment of the neo-Babylonian kingdom. For references of the word in this context see *Jer* 32:4; *Hab* 1:6; *Ezek* 23:14; *Isa* 23:13; 48:14; *Dan* 2:4; 9:1.

<sup>135</sup> *Dan* 2:2.4.

The word *kašdîm* appears in Dan 2:2 in a list of other professional classes invoked by the king Nebuchadrezzar: The LXX translates it by *chaldaioi* (Vulg.: *Chaldei*), and the English translations all have "Chaldeans" which leaves the word open to interpretation.

Although opinion is that in this passage the several classes of diviners are listed with no technical or exact sense,<sup>136</sup> we can try to interpret the word in its context at the time when it was written.<sup>137</sup> In other words the following verses contain some clue as to what their role was.

Dan 2:4 Then the Chaldeans said to the king (in Aramaic), 'O king, live for ever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.'

From this verse we learn two things:

Firstly that "Chaldeans", as a word, sums up all the previously mentioned occupations, therefore it is a comprehensive term. Secondly, that the Chaldeans are a professional class of dream interpreters.<sup>138</sup>

### 10.2 Conclusion

From this scanty evidence and bearing in mind that the date of the text is fairly late, I suggest that as a comprehensive term, *kašdîm* may include several meanings, i.e. soothsayers, exorcists, and even perhaps "astrologers", all classes of people which were ideologically unacceptable to the Jews by the time of Daniel. It seems more likely that the emphasis in Daniel on *kašdîm* is signifying "dream interpreters", with no details included as to the techniques they used to carry out this skill.

## 11. *Lēwî: Oracular Attendant and Healer?*

### 11.0 Introduction

There are various problems associated with the word *lēwî*. The most important one has been the question of origin. We are confronted

<sup>136</sup> Montgomery (1937) 143.

<sup>137</sup> The date of the book is rather late, about 200 B.C., but the passage in question may be earlier than that (see Montgomery, *op. cit.* 75).

<sup>138</sup> Collins (1975) 220.

with two alternative traditions. The first, without going into detail unnecessary for this study, links it to the Torah in general, and the Priestly tradition in particular. Priests are of the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, descended from and named after one of Jacob's twelve sons, though usually represented as being different from the other tribes in certain respects.<sup>139</sup> In the second set of biblical traditions, priestly groups are less systematically presented but are apparently authentic; they are, in their initial stages, professional associations.<sup>140</sup> There is still no scholarly agreement as to the solution of this problem.<sup>141</sup> A second problem arises from its association with *kōhēn*, a word usually used for priest. To what extent *lēwî* and *kōhēn* can cover the same function has been disputed, especially in the study of the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>142</sup> It seems, nevertheless, that it is preferable not to use the terms "priest" and "levite" indiscriminately any longer.<sup>143</sup> A bigger problem still arises in defining the term *lēwî*. A number of etymologies have been proposed apart from the obvious connection with the name Leah (*lēâ*) which is given as that of the mother of Levi.

11.0.1 The Hebrew *lēwî* can come from the root *lwh* in the Niph'al = "to join", "to attach oneself".<sup>144</sup> In fact, it could be a play on words as Num 18:2.4 may show: the tribe of Levi is to be joined to Aaron.<sup>145</sup>

11.0.2 Others have linked the etymology of 'levite' with that of the South Arabian cultic officials who are called by the term *lawi'a* in the Minaean inscriptions,<sup>146</sup> which have been variously dated between 1500 BC and 700 BC. The meaning of *lw'* (fem. *lw't*) has been defined as "person pledged for a debt or a vow".<sup>147</sup> From these inscriptions

<sup>139</sup> They had no territory of their own, and relied on cultic service for support (Deut 18:6f.).

<sup>140</sup> Judges 17-18.

<sup>141</sup> This problem of the origin of the *lēwî* has been discussed in all biblical encyclopaedias and dictionaries: see in particular Levine (1986) vol. 8, 523-532; vol. 11, 534-536; Cody (1969).

<sup>142</sup> Wright (1969-1976) vol. 3, 877.

<sup>143</sup> Abba (1977) 266: "The Deuteronomist... reserves the term "levite" for a subordinate order of cult officials".

<sup>144</sup> BDB 532; KBL 476-477.

<sup>145</sup> Abba (1977) 877.

<sup>146</sup> These are inscriptions dating from the Minaean trading colony which once flourished at El-<sup>2</sup>ula, the biblical Dedan, see de Vaux (1967) 227.

<sup>147</sup> Grimme (1924) 166-199; cf. also Albright (1953) 109f.

comes the etymology proposed by Pedersen: *lēwî* means originally "consecrated to the temple".<sup>148</sup>

11.0.3 Another Arabic root may be found in *lawâ*, "to turn, twist, wind" (the supposed root of *liwyâ*, "wreath", and "leviathan"), an etymology which gave rise to Mowinckel's proposal to see in *lēwî* the sense of swinging around in a dance, a reference to ecstatic cult dancers at a sanctuary.<sup>149</sup>

11.0.4 An Assyro-Babylonian word *li'ù le'ùu* "wise", "prudent", has also been connected with the Old Testament "Levite".<sup>150</sup>

11.0.5 In the LXX, the Hebrew *lēwî* appears in its Greek form *leuitēs* or *leueitēs*.

11.0.6 All of this is quite confusing, and I shall conclude with Abba: "Poor documentation aside, what these etymologies are actually positing is more logical than linguistic, reflecting known cultic functions. If the term derives from a single verbal root, it is not presently established and any definition must be according to context and usage".<sup>151</sup> But despite all these difficulties and the uncertainties as to what the word actually means, I certainly think that the term *lēwî* is to be included in this study of magicians and oracular practitioners because of the involvement of Levites with certain actions that I will demonstrate as being related to various healing scenes, divining, and cursing powers. I will study the Levites in these specific roles through a number of biblical texts. The book of Deuteronomy offers a vast documentation on the role of the Levites, and so most of my examples will be taken from it with the exception of one instance from the book of Judges.

### 11.1 *Deut 10:8f.*

In this text the duties of the Levites are stated by Moses:

At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to him and to bless in his name, to this day.

<sup>148</sup> Pedersen (1926) 680. For a criticism of the use of Minaean inscriptions to explain the etymology of *lēwî* see de Vaux (1967) 280; Burney (1970) 437.

<sup>149</sup> Mowinckel, cited by Cody (1969) 30.

<sup>150</sup> Muss-Arnold (1899/1900) 222; CAD vol. 9, 160 gives "capable, skilled" for *le'u*.

<sup>151</sup> Abba (1977) 523.

The idea that it is not just priests but specifically Levites who should be carriers of the Ark<sup>152</sup> seems to be Deuteronomistic (after the reform of Josiah and before the new reforms which were to take shape when Judah was recovering from the Exile). Although it is doubtful that priests of any kind were required to carry the Ark at the time of the entrance into Palestine it seems to me that the Ark was believed to be associated with divine powers.<sup>153</sup> The Levite, who attended the Ark itself, must have participated in some ways in this power—I am aware that the evidence to support this in Deut 10:8f. is feeble but hold that, in view of Deut 17:8–13, the Levites have important powers in the solving of legal problems in particular and I wonder whether this does not come from their contact with the Ark. This leads to our next text:

#### 11.2 *Deut 17:8–13: the Levite, judge of the tribunal of the sanctuary*

v. 8: If any case arises requiring decision between one kind of homicide and another, one kind of legal right and another, or one kind of assault and another, any case within your towns which is too difficult for you, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God will choose, (v. 9) and coming to the Levitical priests (*hakōhānîm hal-ĕwiyyim*) and to the judge who is in office in those days, you shall consult them (*wĕdāraštā*) and they shall declare to you the decision (*dēbar hammišpāt*). (v. 10) Then you shall do according to what they declare to you from that place which the Lord will choose; and you shall be careful to do according to all they direct you; according to the instructions (*hatôrâ*) which they give you, and according to the decision (*hammišpāt*) which they pronounce to you, you shall do.

The study of the vocabulary used in this short passage suggests that the people coming to the sanctuary in the hope of resolving a criminal or civil point of law are in fact seeking an oracular decision through *hakōhanim halĕwiyyim*. It has been argued that both *tôrâ* and *mišpāt* refer to an oracle, a divine decision.<sup>154</sup> Also *dāraš*, “to ask, to inquire”, is often used in a case of consultation of the divinity and is part of

<sup>152</sup> As opposed to the idea of Levites as custodians of the Ark or of its sanctuary.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. the episode of the “wandering Ark” in Philistine territory, narrated in 1 Sam 6. See the section devoted to the Ark as an oracular instrument in chapter 4.

<sup>154</sup> Some scholars and in particular Haldar (1945) 100 and 154f. posit the identity of *tôrâ* and *mišpāt* with the word of God (cf. Deut 17:11; Is 2:3 . . .): “It may be said that Yahweh himself speaks through the priests and gave his *tôrâ*”. Also in the Old Testament,

"divining" vocabulary.<sup>155</sup> The lack of precision concerning the person to consult suggests that it is God Himself who is inquired of (through His intermediaries).

### 11.3 *Deut 33:8ff.: the Levitical function of oracle giving*

This passage set in the last discourse of Moses just before his death is of great interest in that it presents clearly the association between the Levites with the 'urîm and tummîm.

v. 8: And of Levi he said, "Give to Levi thy tummîm and thy 'urîm to thy godly one,<sup>156</sup> whom thou didst test at Massah, with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Mer'ibah;

v. 9: ...They observed thy word and kept thy covenant.

v. 10: ... They shall teach Jacob thy ordinances, and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thee, whole burnt offerings upon thy altar".

Opinions differ as to the date to assign to these blessings.<sup>157</sup> Here the Levites are described as official consultors of the will of God through the technical medium of the 'urîm and tummîm,<sup>158</sup> establishing their functions as diviners. Further elements in this text corroborate this function. The Levites seem to have been regarded as a professional class of diviners; they had to decide/divine in difficult cases who the guilty person was and who the innocent, as the reference to their handling of the tôrâ and the mišpât seems to show. The priestly tôrâ is the "instruction" or "decision" about what was right and what was wrong, what was to be done and what was not to be done,<sup>159</sup> and

priests and prophets act as judges: they are entrusted with the settlement of legal disputes, their methods being "the ordinary oracular ones" (Haldar (1945) 154).

<sup>155</sup> On drš as referring to oracular inquiry, see García de la Fuente (1971): cf. 1 Kings 14:5; 22:5-28; 2 Kings 3:11; 8:7-13; 22:11-12.

<sup>156</sup> The Jerusalem Bible translates this section as "grant to Levi your Urim, your Thummim to the one you favoured".

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Tournay (1958) 191-210 who opts for the eighth century; Cross and Freedman (1948) 203 hold a much greater antiquity for the blessing of Moses as a whole. Cody (1969) 114: "Even those who hold an older origin for the poem as a whole would not refuse to admit, on the grounds of style, metre and context, that vv. 9b-10, at least, are then a later addition within the framework of the primitive blessings of Levi. The section using the singular—Levi (esp. v. 8) strikes a more archaic tone than the section using the plural—Levites.

<sup>158</sup> See the section devoted to this topic. Whatever they were is in fact irrelevant for this particular passage; it is enough to say here that they were used as a divinatory technique.

<sup>159</sup> Ploger (1951) 157-192.

may have been a development from the primitive oracular consultation. The same could be said about the *mišpāt*.

Another element which points to the levitical function of decision-making through consultation of God's will is the reference to sacrifices. Along with the manipulation of the 'urîm and *tummîm*, sacrificial divination was important, as Halder reminds us,<sup>160</sup> as it points to other texts like 2 K 16:15 when King Ahaz gives Uriah, the *köhēn*, ritual instructions and says "and the brazen altar shall be for me to inquire (*lebaqqer*) by". Also the evidence for hepatoscopy, probably performed or originating on the altar of sacrifice,<sup>161</sup> puts the emphasis on the link between divination and sacrifice. It is also possible, and this will be our last comment before concluding the evidence from this passage, that the incense-smoke (*qetora*) is a device whose smell induces the trance necessary for divination. This text suggests that the Levites are involved in more than merely judging cases through "ordinary" wisdom. Deut 33:8–13 would suggest that they are in fact involved in a type of judgement provoked by artificial methods. The answers to legal inquiries are obtained through technical means such as the *urim* and *tummim*, and various sacrifices, all geared to obtain a "true" judgement from Yahweh.

#### 11.4 *Judges 17–18: the lēwî as diviner*

This text sets up a clearer picture of a *lēwî* operating "free-lance" in a sanctuary as a diviner. The story may be the earliest biblical reference to a *lēwî*. Micah, a man who lived somewhere in the Ephraimite hills before there was a monarchy in Israel, built a temple and installed in it several cult objects, among which were an "ephod" and "teraphim". He appointed one of his sons as priest. About that time "a young man from Bethlehem, from the clan of Judah, who was a "lēwî" (Judg 17:7), arrived at Micah's residence while en route to seek his fortune in Northern Israel. After conversing with him, Micah invited him to live in his household and serve as priest in his temple. But soon afterwards, the Danites, whose quiet establishment in the district allotted to them by Joshua was made impossible by the resistance of the Philistines and the Amorites (Josh 19:1), sent five

<sup>160</sup> Halder (1945) 101.

<sup>161</sup> Lev 3:3ff.

of their tribe to find a suitable place for settlement elsewhere, and these five members of the tribe, while passing through the highlands of Ephraim, stayed for a night at the house of Micah, and recognized the Levite who at their request consulted the oracle for them (šeal-nā'bē'lōhîm: 18:5) and promised them success in their expedition.

A few points must be noted:

- (i) In the sanctuary built by Micah, there are oracular devices (an ephod and teraphim) that he made himself. They are presented as if they rightly belong to the shrine.
- (ii) The Levite, who was "consulting God" for the Danites has been made priest by Micah; the latter "fills the hand" of the Levite.<sup>162</sup>

Later, when the Danites take over Micah's house and steal "the carved image, the ephod and the teraphim and the idol cast in metal", they persuade the Levite to come with them and act as priest. In this context it appears that there is no consultation of oracular devices without a priest, i.e. a Levite whose "hand had been filled". Nothing is said of how the consultation was made.

According to the text a Levite is a "mobile professional", who, provided he is installed as the priest (kōhēn) of a sanctuary, can act as a diviner, using the oracular devices belonging to the holy place.

### 11.5 *Deut 27:9–26: the power of cursing of the Levites*

This passage contains a series of imprecations to be pronounced by the Levites, and responded to by the people, declaring God's curse against twelve typical forms of sin, all beginning with 'arūr. Even if the setting is ceremonial, it is interesting to note that the actual cursing is done by the Levites themselves. It could be an acknowledgement that they possess the power to direct doom on people by their skilful use of words.

### 11.6 *Deut 24:8: the Levite in his healing capacity*

Take heed, in an attack of leprosy, to be very careful to do according to all that the Levitical priests shall direct you; as I commanded them, so you shall be careful to do.

<sup>162</sup> On this expression and its possible meanings, Cooke (1900–1909) vol. 4, 99f. Possibly the Levite's hand was filled with small oracular devices (the 'urîm and thummîm).

As Driver states on his commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy,<sup>163</sup> "The law as it stands here, cannot be taken as proof that Lev 13–14 existed in its present shape at the time when Dt was written". That there was a *tôrâ* on the subject whose principles had authority seems without question. It is also interesting to note that the expression *hakōhānîm halewiyyîm* occurs in the narrative of 2 Kings 5 where Naaman is healed from leprosy by Elisha. It seems that it is yet another hint of the latent faith-healing powers of the Levites/priests. The question of the healing function of the Levite must remain open.

### 11.7 Conclusion

The details of the role of the *lēwî* as the oracular attendant lie more in the individual examples discussed than in its (ill-defined) etymology. We see that although the *lēwî* is an institution which through the centuries seems to have degenerated (they are assigned to menial tasks and become temple-singers after the Exile),<sup>164</sup> in Deuteronomy's time and before, there is evidence of the Levite's participation in oracular activities either as a judge of litigious cases or as a plain diviner, always acting, it seems in the context of a sanctuary. Whether or not the *lēwî*'s task overlaps with *kōhēn*'s or whether he was subordinate to him is something we examined in the section devoted to *kōhēn*, but he seems to have had a consultative power in his own right, up to the monarchical period.

## 12. *Mēkaššēpîm/kēššāpîm: A Semitic Herbalist*

### 12.0 Introduction

The word *kēššāpîm* or *mēkaššēpîm*, referring to a certain class of magicians,<sup>165</sup> is difficult to understand for a number of reasons. The etymology itself is very uncertain. This leaves us with a number of difficult choices because of the scarcity of texts where the root and

<sup>163</sup> Driver (1902) 275.

<sup>164</sup> But in fact there is a relationship between singers, music and prophecy, divination, see 'âšépîn and 2 Kings 3:15.

<sup>165</sup> BDB "magicians", 506; KBL "Zauberer" 459.

its derivative appear.<sup>166</sup> Neither the etymology nor the texts enable us to grasp a full picture of the functions of the *kəššāpîm*. The LXX and the Vulgate have uniformly rendered the root by *pharmakos* and *incantator*, putting forward the idea of curing by the use of herbs, while reciting incantations (cf. the LXX text of incantation Deut 18:11: *pharmakos epaeidōn epaoidēn*). The modern translators have rendered the root by “sorcerers” or “sorceries” thereby giving a derogatory meaning to the term. We need to examine these translations to see if they do justice to the root and if they can be improved. We will study closely the root in its Northwest Semitic background as we have evidence of its existence in the Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra and Ras Ibn Hani. Finally we have to note the particular distribution of the root; three times in the Pentateuch, otherwise in the prophets.

We will examine firstly the etymology of the root, and secondly the information in the Ugaritic and the Hebrew texts.

### 12.1 *The etymology of the root kšp*

12.1.1 The traditional view was that the root comes from the Arabic *ksf*, “to uncover”, “to reveal”, and so divination seems to be implied.<sup>167</sup> This would, however, necessitate impossible changes in the root<sup>168</sup> and this etymology has been dismissed.<sup>169</sup> It has been argued that *kšp* derives from another Arabic root *ksf*, “to eclipse” (of sun and moon).<sup>170</sup> From this would come the meaning “to look dark, troubled”. It has been suggested that there be seen in that idea: “to be obscure, then pale, white”.<sup>171</sup> The *kšp* would be then a pale-faced, troubled person.<sup>172</sup>

Another proponent of an Arabic etymology understands it to mean “to cut” and proposes “herbs or drugs shredded into a magic brew”,<sup>173</sup> backing up his statement with the text of Mic 5:12 (Hebr 11) to which we will return later.

<sup>166</sup> Exod 7:11; 22:17; Deut 18:10; 2 Kings 9:22; Isa 47:9.12; Jer 27:9; Mic 5:11; Nah 3:4; Mal 3:5; Dan 2:2.

<sup>167</sup> Cited by Davies (1898) 47ff.

<sup>168</sup> The Arabic letter corresponds to the Hebrew *š* or *ṣ*, not *š*.

<sup>169</sup> Fleischer, cited by Davies, op. cit. 48.

<sup>170</sup> Davies (1898) 47ff.

<sup>171</sup> Davies (1898) 48.

<sup>172</sup> Isa 47:11.

<sup>173</sup> Robertson Smith (1884) 112–128, especially 126.

12.1.2 Traditional scholarship traced the origin to a probable Akkadian origin, from *kharashu*: restraining, compelling, binding.<sup>174</sup> However, modern scholarship relates Hebrew *ksp* to the Assyrian *kassapu*: "sorcerer"<sup>175</sup> and this root indicates malevolent magic. The noun itself can be traced to *kispu*, "bewitchment".<sup>176</sup>

## 12.2 *KSPM* in Ugaritic Literature

The root *ksp* occurs in the Ugaritic text from Ras Ibn Hani 78/20 which contains a mention of *kspm* at v. 9. In this incantation, an evil spirit inhabiting a young man is addressed and the aim is to cast out the demon.<sup>177</sup> In order to achieve this, the demon is "addressed with a warning as to what its fate will be should it stay. The order of banishment is then reiterated, apparently to the inflictors of the disease",<sup>178</sup> one type of which is *kspm*.

v. 1: *kspm dbbm*  
*ygrs hrn hbrm*  
*wglin d'tm*

(9) sorcerers, enemies!  
 Horon will expel (10) the binders  
 and the Youth soothsayers.<sup>179</sup>

This tri-colon verse can be understood as an address to the adjurer, to black-magic practitioners,<sup>180</sup> and may be put in parallel with the list of Deut 18:10–11.

Because of the nature and content of the text, commentators are inclined to give a derogatory meaning to the *kspm*. It is, however, also possible that the class of practitioners incriminated was wider in meaning, including both people who could do good, i.e. people who use plants and herbs to cure, and people who could do harm, i.e. people who use the (chemical) power of the plant to harm or kill someone.

<sup>174</sup> Delitzsch (1886).

<sup>175</sup> André (1973–1986) vol. 4, 375–381.

<sup>176</sup> CAD vol. 8, 292; 454.

<sup>177</sup> De Moor (1980) 429–432.

<sup>178</sup> Avishur (1981) 15.

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*, 27.

<sup>180</sup> André, *op. cit.* 378.

12.3 *What we learn from the Old Testament about the měkaššépîm and the root kšp*

The root, and especially the word měkaššépîm itself occurs mostly in combinations of two or more in the Old Testament. They are condemned as heathens or appear in foreign courts.

12.3.1 In the text in Deut 18:10–11 the měkaššépîm appear in a list of practices and practitioners that are an “abomination” to Yahweh (v. 12) because of their heathen connections (v. 9) which spoil the proper relationship with Yahweh. Because of the polemic character of the text it is difficult to make out what this special class of people was engaged in; it is thought that these practitioners are in fact diviners,<sup>180</sup> because of the way the qōsémîm and the mě’ōnénîm are mentioned once again in v. 14 and are played off against the true prophets. In other words the qōsémîm and the mě’ōnénîm summarize all the terms used previously. I tend to think that the question is more complex and that the list includes all the known practitioners, whether they have their origin in the heathen world or not. They are banned because of the world-view they hold, a world-view that is similar to that of the surrounding cultures. In Exod 22:17, the only significant fact is that it is the only case of the use of the feminine form of the root, indicating an activity which can be pursued by both males and females;<sup>181</sup> the death penalty for the měkaššépâ is listed for them. A number of texts give details of pagan practices such as 2 Kings 9:22 (note the parallel with zěnūnê = harlotries), among those introduced during the reign of Manasseh, and Lev 20:6 where there is a parallel with the öböt and the yidde’önîm.

In Jer 27:9 the kěššápîm appear in a list of false prophets who are not to be heeded. We should also note Mal 3:5. In this rather late text měkaššépîm opens up a connection with intruders who show no fear of God, and are associated with “adulterers” and “perjurors”. Little is shown by these texts except that the practitioners of kšp are described in an increasingly derogatory fashion, where their original function seems to have been forgotten.

One text which is interesting because it can give us information about the activity of the kěššápîm is Mic 5:12–13:

<sup>180</sup> Against Burden (1973) who sees the female kšpah as more harmful than her male counterpart!

RSV = "and I will cut off sorceries (kešāpîm) from your hand, and you shall have no more soothsayers (mě'ōněnîm)".

This text "must refer to a method of procuring information from supernatural sources since it is grouped here with "soothsayers", i.e. diviners".<sup>182</sup> On the other hand mě'ōněnîm = diviners is an equation which is difficult to confirm. It may have been a more general term. The kešāpîm of this verse may denote drugs and is rendered by the LXX pharmaka and by the Vulgate as "maleficia". This may corroborate the view that they had something to do with herbs.

12.3.2 We also find the měkaššepîm in foreign courts. We must remember that the various categories of magicians and diviners are often described as being of a non-Israelite source (cf. the ḥartummîm). In Babylon, they are cited along with the 'ašpîn, gāzērîn, ḥâkāmîm, kaśdîm (Isa 47:9–12; Dan 1:20; Dan 2:2.10.27; 4:4.7; 5:7.11.15). The context is that of the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream; commentators<sup>183</sup> seem to think that they are listed with no technical or exact sense. Nineveh is a beautiful whore who uses kešāpîm (Nah 3:4). Jezebel introduces kešāpîm into Israel (2 Kings 9:22). They are also present in the Egyptian court of Pharaoh (Exod 7:11). However, all we can draw from the text as far as their activities are concerned is that they are involved in the magical challenge Moses and Aaron prepared for them.

#### 12.4 Conclusion

All in all we gain very little information from the Old Testament, except that the měkaššepîm were connected with pagan practices either Canaanite (Deut 18:10–11) or foreign (Mesopotamian or Egyptian); but we note their presence in royal courts which shows that they must have had a specific role among the other skilled professionals. The text Mic 5:11 suggests that there is a link with the use of the root in the Ras Shamra text, connecting it with plants and medicinal herbs. That practitioners in all ages have abused their knowledge and that these practices were also found in the neighbouring countries effectively helped the writers of the various OT texts concerned to stigmatize

<sup>182</sup> Mays (1976) 126.

<sup>183</sup> Montgomery (1927) 143.

their practices. All these texts are polemic and therefore depict only a one-sided picture of these practitioners, i.e. the bad side. It is reasonable to think that these were herbalists.

### 13. *Mělahāšim: Enchanters*

#### 13.0 *Introduction*

This hapax legomenon is a piel participle from the root *lhš*,<sup>184</sup> and occurs in Ps 58:6. There is no problem as to the etymology, and the root is well attested in Northwest Semitic languages, with the general meaning of “to whisper”, “to charm”.<sup>185</sup> There are examples of the Ugaritic root *lhšat*,<sup>186</sup> Aramaic *lhaša*,<sup>187</sup> Phoenician *lhšt*,<sup>188</sup> all with the same basic meaning.<sup>189</sup> Whether or not the origin of the word is to be found in serpent-charming there is still a connection between the two fundamental meanings of “whispering” and “charming”. The whisper can be used in incantations in order to induce a state of semi-hypnotism in the animal (in the case of serpent-charming) or the person; the practitioner gains control over the animal or the person (in cases of illness for example such incantations would be used in order to get control and so chase away the demons responsible for the state of sickness).

It is necessary to study a few examples of the use of the root *lhš* in order to ascertain the field of activity of the *mělahāšim*, firstly in Northwest Semitic literature and secondly in the Old Testament.

<sup>184</sup> *Lhš* is listed separately from *nhš* in the lexicons and dictionaries. Last century Davies (1898) had thought *lhš* merely a dialectical variety of *nhš*, “a serpent”. I choose along with BDB and KBL to separate the two roots and to study them under different headings (for a survey of *nhš* see *mnhš*).

<sup>185</sup> BDB 538; KBL 480.

<sup>186</sup> Tomback (1978) 157. WUS, no. 1458, 170 gives das Flüstern, “a whisper” for *lhšt*.

<sup>187</sup> Aramaic *lhaša*, “witchcraft, sorcery”, Tomback (1978) 157.

<sup>188</sup> Although *lhšt* occurs in the Arslan Tash tablets, the evidence is too dubious to be used. See Teixidor and Amiet (1983) 105–109.

<sup>189</sup> I should mention here the Akkadian *laħāšu*. The CAD lists several meanings: “to whisper” (*luħħušu*), “to murmur prayers” (*litħusu*).

13.1 *(M)lhš in northwest semitic literature*

13.1.1 *Mlhš*<sup>190</sup> in the Ugaritic Serpent Incantation KTU 1.100.<sup>191</sup> The interpretation of this text, to say nothing of its restoration, has raised many difficulties.

These have already been presented and discussed in the most recent articles devoted to the study of this text.<sup>192</sup> They range from a conjuration to prevent snakebite<sup>193</sup> to a magical ritual of fertility.<sup>194</sup>

One interpretation that has been suggested takes into account most, if not all, of the problems of the text: KTU 1.100 would be used "by members of the Ugaritic priesthood in an annual rite devoted to exorcising Ugarit of serpents and thus protecting her people" ... as "a libretto for the ritual".<sup>195</sup> However, despite these problems of interpretation, the translation of *mlhš* does not vary much. It is rendered in English either by "conjurer"<sup>196</sup> or "charmer",<sup>197</sup> in German by "Beschwörung", "Beschwörer";<sup>198</sup> in French by "magicien".<sup>199</sup> The Ugaritic text reads:<sup>200</sup>

I. 5 'qšr.lnh.mlhš.abd.lnh.ydy<sup>201</sup>

From it, O charmer destroy,  
From it cast out venom.<sup>202</sup>

*Mlhš* seems to refer to a "snake charmer", as Astour puts it.<sup>203</sup> On the other hand, we know that the Ugaritic root *lhš* means "whisper". If we stay with this etymology, the *mlhš* would be more an incantator than a snake charmer. His power over snakes comes from the similarity in sound between his whispering and the hissing of serpents.

<sup>190</sup> Dahood (1968) 60.

<sup>191</sup> This text is otherwise classified RS 24.244 (UT 607).

<sup>192</sup> The bibliography previous to 1977 is given by Young (1977) 291; see also Pardee (1978) 105–108. For more recent discussions see Tsevat (1979) 159–178, Bordreuil (1983) 299–301, for minor philological corrections.

<sup>193</sup> Astour (1968) 13–36; Dietrich, Loretz, Sanmartin (1975) 121–125.

<sup>194</sup> Cazelles (1969) 502f.

<sup>195</sup> Pardee (1978) 108.

<sup>196</sup> Astour (1968) 16.

<sup>197</sup> Pardee (1978) 75.

<sup>198</sup> Dietrich (1975) 503.

<sup>199</sup> Cazelles (1969) 503.

<sup>200</sup> KTU 1.1000, 106.

<sup>201</sup> This line recurs at 1.11, 16, 27, 32, 34, 37, 42, 47, 53, 59.

<sup>202</sup> Pardee (1978) 105ff.

<sup>203</sup> Astour (1968) 17; cf. also de Moor (1987) 147.

They are in “sympathy” and thus the incantator can act against the snake. Therefore a magical act is performed.

### 13.1.2 Lhšt in the Arslan Tash incantation plaques.<sup>204</sup>

#### 13.2 *Mělahâšim and Lâhaš in the Old Testament*

13.2.1 Ps 58:6 presents an interesting parallel with the Ugaritic text KTU 1.100. The image is the same in both texts. The mělahâšim are expected to have some power over snakes, although it should be noted that in Ps 58:6 the image is used figuratively:

vv. 4–5: They (the wicked) have venom like the venom of a serpent, like the deaf adder that stops its ear, so that it does not hear the voice of charmers (mělahâšim) or of the cunning enchanter (hôbêr hâbârîm mehukkâm).

LXX renders mělahâšim by epadontōn.

From this text, as in KTU 1.100, the role of the “charmer” is used “positively”, that is, they are expected to have control over the snakes/the wicked. By their “whispering” they can counter the hissing of the wicked. Both Eccl 10:11 (“If the serpent bites before it is charmed—lâhaš—, there is no advantage in a charmer”—hallâšôn) and Jer 8:17 (“For behold, I am sending among you serpents, adders which cannot be charmed”—lâhaš) convey the same idea.

### 13.2.2 Ps 41:7 is an example of a text which presents the use of the root lâhaš rather negatively:

All who hate me whisper (yitlahâšû) together about me; they imagine the worst for me.

This verse could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly it could be just a case of harmful gossip from the psalmist’s enemies as the translation of the Jerusalem Bible suggests:

All who hate me whisper to each other about me,  
reckoning I deserve the misery I suffer.

But in view of the general context which is that of a Psalm of illness, with the implication that illness does not have natural causes,<sup>204</sup> I agree

<sup>204</sup> See Appendix 1.

with Dahood,<sup>205</sup> that incantation is intended here. Incantation is used here to cause harm, to worsen the psalmist's condition or to make him die.

The LXX's translation: *kat' emou elogizonto kaka moi*, "against me they devised my hurt", seems to refer to a concrete situation.

13.2.3 Isa 3:3 presents us with another example of a person, a *nābōn lāhaš*. Isa 3, which is discussed elsewhere,<sup>206</sup> deals with a list of Jerusalemite officials all of whom are denounced by the prophet.

"The experts in charms" (LXX: *suneton akroatēn*, 'the intelligent hearer'; Vulg.: *prudentem eloquii mystici*, practised in mystic speech).

Who is this person? No hint is given by the text as to what he is. But in view of the previous textual evidence, we should retain the meaning of "charmer", "incantator", somebody who uses words for protecting or harming people.<sup>207</sup>

13.2.4 The last example of the root does not seem to fit in with this, at least not at first sight. It occurs in the list of the ornaments of the women of Jerusalem which will be taken by the Lord, in Isa 3:20: *wēhallēhāšim* unanimously translated by the English versions by "amulets"/"charms". Do these amulets "probably consist of something inscribed with magic formulae"?<sup>208</sup> The original purpose of these inscriptions was to protect the bearer against demons.<sup>209</sup> The amulets may have been inscribed originally and their shape may have been that of earrings.<sup>210</sup> Though we have no direct evidence, here the etymology of *lāhaš* suggests amulet. We assume then that whatever these objects are, they are designed to protect against illness or child-bearing difficulties (the wearers are women) if the formula is "whispered" according to probably prescribed rituals.

<sup>205</sup> Dahood (1968) 60.

<sup>206</sup> See the sections *ḥākāmīm*, *harašīm*.

<sup>207</sup> Gray (1962) 64 takes the word more literally, "he that has understanding of whispering charms".

<sup>208</sup> *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>209</sup> Davies, *Magic* 1898.

<sup>210</sup> cf. Gen 35:4 where earrings are associated with foreign gods.

13.3 *Conclusion*

From all the texts we have studied the meaning of *lāhaš mělahāšim* seems fairly consistent. It is always connected with whispering incantations. Although it may originally have had a connection with serpent-charming, I tend to think that the association has more to do with the sound produced. On the other hand perhaps the consciousness of one's power over various creatures came from the observation of the serpent charmer imitating the snake over which he wanted to have control. The world of the Ancient Near East is full of demons, spirits "who whisper and twitter". Some "charmers" may have used their whispering techniques in order to gain control over all these creatures (for good and for harmful purposes). Hence the *mělahāšim* belong to the realm of magic where not only do words have a creative power, their tone and rhythm are equally important.

14. *Měnahēš: One who Observes Omens*14.0 *Introduction*

*Měnahēš* occurs both in the book of Deuteronomy<sup>211</sup> and the Code of Holiness<sup>212</sup> in lists of prohibited diviners and divinations. The corresponding verb *niheš* occurs only in the piel and is commonly rendered in dictionaries and lexicons by "practise divination, divine, observe signs"<sup>213</sup> or "look for omens", which could be "lucky or unlucky".<sup>214</sup> The meaning of "spells"<sup>215</sup> is noted by both KBL and BDB.

14.1 *The etymology*

In a study of the linguistic background five roots<sup>216</sup> must be examined. Considered in its Semitic setting, it is worth noting that there is a

<sup>211</sup> Deut 18:10.

<sup>212</sup> Lev 19:26; cf. 2 Kings 21:6 = 2 Chron 33:6; 2 Kings 17:17.

<sup>213</sup> BDB 638; this is also the view of Joines (1974) 2-3.

<sup>214</sup> KBL 610; a lucky omen in 1 Kings 20:33 and in Gen 30:27.

<sup>215</sup> In such texts as Num 23:23; 24:1.

<sup>216</sup> Fabry (TWAT vol. 4) 385: "Zur Konsonantengruppe *nhš* gehören im Heb. das Verb *nhš* pi "wahrsagen" und die Nomina *nahāš* "Zauberfuch", *nahāš* I "Schlange", *nahāš* II, *n̄hušah*, *n̄hošat* I "Bronze" mit dem adj. *nahuš* "ehern", *nehošat* II "weibliche Scham?" und *nehuštan* als Bezeichnung für die "Eherne Schlange".

corresponding root in Arabic, *nahiša*, “unlucky, ominous”,<sup>217</sup> “ordinarily used of bad luck and unlucky things or signs”.<sup>218</sup> According to Robertson Smith, “this may well be a narrowing of the meaning as unlucky omens are observed more frequently than lucky ones”.<sup>219</sup> The verb also exists in Aramaic with a root meaning “to discover”, “to research”,<sup>220</sup> “to divine, learn by omens”.<sup>221</sup> The problem of the connection with *nāhāš*, “snake”, has to be considered in the light of the hypothesis that omens were originally read from the movement of serpents.<sup>222</sup> There is no evidence of a connection with regard to this question as we do not have proof of a method of divination directly involving snakes in ancient Israel.<sup>223</sup> The verb can be traced back to the root *hš* “to make noise softly, twitter, whisper” which semantically could suggest a link. But *niheš* may be the verbal form of *nāhāš* or of a common Semitic root *nhš*, “to bewitch”.<sup>224</sup> The latter however cannot be verified.

#### 14.2 *The Old Testament texts*

It was noted above that the *piel* form is connected with a form of omen divination in Hebrew. We will now proceed to examine a number of Old Testament texts<sup>225</sup> where the root occurs and then determine what method(s) of observation are used by the *mēnahēš*.

The relevant texts can be grouped into three categories. In the first, a specific type of divination is referred to; in the second it is connected with observation of signs and it appears that in the third the meaning would be close to that of “spells”, “charms”.

**14.2.1 Gen 44:5.15: A case of hydromancy (divination by water).** This passage is in the “Joseph story” of the book of Genesis and represents the final test of Joseph’s brothers: Joseph had arranged for

<sup>217</sup> *ibid.*, 385.

<sup>218</sup> Robertson Smith (1884) 114.

<sup>219</sup> *ibid.*, 114f.

<sup>220</sup> Fabry (1973–1986) 385.

<sup>221</sup> BDB 638.

<sup>222</sup> Baudissin, cited by Davies (1898).

<sup>223</sup> Fabry *op. cit.* 385.

<sup>224</sup> This discussion of the works of Sauermann and Dietrich is cited by Fabry, 385. For the bibliography on the topic see 384f.

<sup>225</sup> As far as I know the root *nhš* with the meaning “to divine, to draw omens from” is not found in Ugaritic; *nhš* occurs in KTU 1.1000 but its meaning is unambiguously “snake”.

his cup to be put in the sacks of his youngest brother. When he sends his chamberlain to get it back the latter has to say to them (v. 5):

Is it not from this that my Lord drinks, and by this that he divines (MT: *nahēš yēnahēš*? The LXX has *oiōnismō oiōnizetai*; cf. Vulg.: *augurari solet*).

This means, firstly, to take omens from the flight and cries of birds, and then generally to forecast the future. But in fact to the Greeks any omen is an *oiōnos*.

In this text, what exactly is the omen obtained from? Is it from watching the play of light in a cup of liquid?<sup>226</sup> Or, as we know from Babylonian practice, had it more to do with lecanomancy, i.e. the pouring of oil into a vessel of water and, from its movement, deducing omens according to a set of fixed rules of interpretation?<sup>227</sup> Or is it perhaps the way in which the water fell into a cup?<sup>228</sup> Not enough details are given to be able to make a definite statement but we do know from the use of the verb in v. 15 that through this type of divination, it is possible to discover hidden things, to know about hidden deeds:

Joseph said to them, What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed divine? (*nahēš yēnahēš*).

#### 14.2.2 Gen 30:27; 1 Kings 20:33; Numb 24:1: the search for omens

14.2.2.1 In Gen 30:27 Laban tells Joseph of his reluctance to let him go home as he has taken omens (*nihašti*) and learned that the Lord has blessed him because of Joseph. No details are given as to how the omen was taken or interpreted. Neither LXX nor the Vulgate is helpful here. The only thing we can infer from this text is the type of omen which was searched for; Laban's answer tends to show that he got a positive omen, a "lucky" one. It may be assumed that this type of omen is fairly popular as it is easily interpreted.

<sup>226</sup> Robertson Smith (1834) 114.

<sup>227</sup> Skinner (1930) 483f.

<sup>228</sup> Mayes (1979) 281 suggests that in Gen 44:5 the reference is to "a form of divination involving the reading of dregs in a cup or perhaps the observation of reflections on the water in a cup".

14.2.2.2 Num 24:1 shows Balaam who, deciding to bless Israel, does not trouble to observe omens. He then falls under the influence of Yahweh's spirit.

This verse presents an interesting situation. Literally, "he went not to meet omens (nehāšim) as time upon time (he had done)".<sup>229</sup> It may be noted that "the phrase is used of several immediately preceding successive occurrences, or of successive occurrences constituting a general custom or habit. If it is used in the former way here, it refers to previous observations of omens by Balaam during his visit to Balak; if in the latter, to his general custom in his profession of curser and blesser".<sup>230</sup> I would opt for the latter as it is difficult to establish that the text refers to a search for omens and no further precise indication is given; only that one "goes (hālak) to seek omens", perhaps indicating that they are to be found in nature and encountered unexpectedly as in the case of cledonomancy.

14.2.2.3 Such an instance is to be found in 1 Kings 20:33,<sup>231</sup> where Ben-hadad's men are looking for an omen (yēnahāsū) and interpreted the answer of Ahab as a positive one. The Jerusalem Bible translates "The men took this for a good omen".<sup>232</sup>

Num 23:23 = naḥaš as a spell?

For there is no enchantment (naḥaš) against Jacob, no divination (qesem) against Israel.

The understanding of naḥaš in this context presents some difficulties. The meaning of "spell", "enchantment"<sup>233</sup> has been rejected<sup>234</sup> on the basis of its parallel with qesem which is regarded as a form of drawing lots.<sup>235</sup> Naḥaš is a technical device used in order to discover hidden things, as I have already established and it has nothing to do with "magical means of injuring others".

<sup>229</sup> Gray (1956) 359.

<sup>230</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Cledonomancy or divination through the hearing of a chance word is examined under *nābi'* in this chapter.

<sup>232</sup> See KBL 610 which interprets the verb in the positive sense of "lucky omen".

<sup>233</sup> See BDB, KBL.

<sup>234</sup> Gray, (1956) 355.

<sup>235</sup> See *qōsēm qēsāmīm* in this chapter.

14.3 *Conclusion*

The verb *naħaš* seems to refer to a search for natural signs, omens derived from natural phenomena. This probably implies a large variety of uses, as the quality of the results differs widely from the basic “lucky/unlucky” omen to the more complex discovery of hidden things. Thus the *měnahēš* referred to in Deut 18:10 might be some omen observer, a skilful man who has the ability to recognize and interpret the signs with which nature is endowed.

15. *Mě'ōnēn: A Soothsayer*15.1 *The problem of etymology*

We find mention of [mě]’ōnēnîm in various passages of the Old Testament,<sup>236</sup> all connected with foreign divinatory practices.<sup>237</sup> Opinions differ widely<sup>238</sup> as to the actual meaning of the root. Commentators in the last century were already putting forward various solutions. There is a possible derivation from an Arabic root used to designate a “hoarse sound”,<sup>239</sup> in which case the mě'ōnēnîm are “hoarsely humming soothsayers”.<sup>240</sup> It is also possible to regard mě'ōnēnîm as a denominative from ‘ānān, “cloud”,<sup>241</sup> thus denoting either one who observes the clouds with a view to obtaining an oracle or one who brings clouds and storms.<sup>242</sup> There is also a class of interpretations represented by the Palestinian Targum on Deuteronomy which takes the word as coming from “an eye”, and so would signify “to glance upon, to smile” (with the evil eye).<sup>243</sup> The LXX equivalent of mě'ōnēn is *klēdonizomenos*,<sup>244</sup> meaning one who judges from omens

<sup>236</sup> Gray (1956) 355.

<sup>237</sup> Deut 18:11.14; Lev 19:26; Judg 9:37; 2 Kings 21:6 = 2 Chron 33:6; Is 2:6; Mic 5:11; Jer 27:9; Isa 57:3.

<sup>238</sup> Mainly Philistines (Isa 2:6) and Canaanites (Deut 18:11).

<sup>239</sup> Mě'ōnēn is a participle of a Hebrew form; however the root is difficult to establish.

<sup>240</sup> Robertson Smith (1984) 119.

<sup>241</sup> *ibid.*, 121.

<sup>242</sup> Davies (1898).

<sup>243</sup> This particular task is part of the Shaman's abilities: Brown (1981) 374–400; Kapelrud (1967) 90–96.

<sup>244</sup> Cited by Smith (1884) 116f. See Macho (1968) 510, where mě'ōnēn is rendered by *hdwdy 'ynyn* “ofuscadores de ojos” (“Those who dim eyes”).

(*kledōn*) generally or cledonism in particular.<sup>245</sup> More recent commentators, while acknowledging the uncertainty of the etymology, tend to adopt an Arabic origin.<sup>246</sup> It would come from *ghanna*, “to emit a hoarse sound”, therefore the *mē'ōnēn* is “one who divines from noises or practises incantations”,<sup>247</sup> or from another Arabic root ‘*anna*, “to appear”, “to present oneself”, and “to cause to appear, to raise”.<sup>248</sup>

### 15.2 *The role of the mē'ōnēnîm in the Old Testament*

I am now going to examine whether we are given any idea about their specific field of activity. From Deut 18:11 we know that they are a specific kind of diviner, as the *mē'ōnēn* is incorporated along with several other divinatory specialists.<sup>249</sup> It is said that people should “listen” to a *mē'ōnēn* in Deut 18:14, Jer 27:9. Thus they are not necessarily shown things but are prophesied to, perhaps by someone in a trance, or they have things explained to them. The word plays an important role: perhaps the *mē'ōnēn* is an oracle giver, the verb itself representing the action of giving an oracle.

But what did these diviners use to practise their art?

#### 15.2.1 Isa 2:6b may give some clues:

Because they are full of diviners ('ōnēnîm) from the east and of soothsayers<sup>250</sup> like the Philistines, and they strike hands with foreigners.

This text is set in the general context of the day of Yahweh and shows how Israel had forsaken Yahweh. The last part of the verse is quite difficult<sup>251</sup> and has given rise to many different interpretations. The JPSV translates it as follows: “They abound in customs of the aliens”. The Targumic version replaces “customs” with “children”. The LXX has: *kai tekna polla allophula egenēthē autois* (“and many alien children

<sup>245</sup> That is the LXX in Deut 18:10; 2 Kings 21:6–2 Chron 33:6; Isa 2:6.

<sup>246</sup> Cledonism or the putting of a prophetic sense on words spoken in reference to another object has been discussed more extensively under section 16 of this chapter.

<sup>247</sup> Mayes (1979) 200; Driver (1895) 225.

<sup>248</sup> Mayes (1979) 280.

<sup>249</sup> Gray (1912) 54.

<sup>250</sup> Likewise 2 Kings 21:6 = 2 and 2 Chron 33:6, which refers to Manasseh's apostasy, mention soothsaying as a thing “displeasing to Yahweh” (v. 6). It is mentioned along with magic (*nḥš*). The end of the sentence has other terms easier to identify; “mediums”, “necromancers” (*ōb*) and “wizards” (*yidde'ōnim*). See “Necromancy”, chapter 4.

<sup>251</sup> The MT has only the first term (*wē'ōnēnîm*).

were born to them"); Vulg. "et pueris alienis adheserunt", literally "and they cling to the children of foreigners". If we accept the reading 'önénim<sup>252</sup> what form of divination is expressed here? Is there a relationship between divination and "striking hands"? "Striking hands" may either mean "to form alliances" or "to engage in commercial relations"<sup>253</sup> but neither is obviously relevant in this particular context; it might indicate that a diviner or a magician could be hired (e.g. 1 Sam 9:7) or might simply be the sign that some arrangement had been concluded.

There remains the possibility of a reference to a magic rite<sup>254</sup> whose details have been lost.

### 15.2.2 Mic 5:12

And I will cut off sorceries (kěsápim) from your hand, and you shall have no more soothsayers (mě'önénim).<sup>255</sup>

This verse is part of Micah's announcement of God's punishment and deliverance of Israel; one of the ways in which Israel went wrong was her involvement with "a certain area of the supernatural that had early been marked off as forbidden territory for God's people".<sup>256</sup> What concerns us is the possible relationship between the two parts of the verse. Are the kěsápim part of the magical apparatus proper to the task of the mě'önénim? If this is the case, the mě'öněn would be someone who handles herbs, either medicinal or harmful.<sup>257</sup> It could also refer to some sort of divinatory device, some object, small enough to be held in the hands, with which divination would be performed; the mě'önénim are not perceived as "cloud-gazers" but as technicians using concrete devices. On the other hand, if the two parts of the verse are not directly related but are only connected by the fact that they both refer to "abominable practices", we are still faced with the problem of the precise activity of the mě'önénim: are they cloud-

<sup>252</sup> Gray (1912) 52ff.; Kissane (1960) 28.

<sup>253</sup> Gray (1912) 53, mentions that "the word kn'nim has been conjecturally substituted for önenim and rendered by "traders", the argument being that the Philistines were great traders, and also that this hypothesis "would increase the suitability of "foreigners" in the parallel". But we cannot forget either that the Philistines also consulted oracles (2 Kings 1:2), or that the Israelites were also involved in magical and divinatory practices.

<sup>254</sup> Kissane (1960) 28.

<sup>255</sup> Cf. The Jerusalem Bible, 1145; also Marti, cited by Gray (1912) 53.

<sup>256</sup> The other English versions agree with the RSV.

<sup>257</sup> Allen (1983) 357f.

gazers, incantation makers, diviners of a sort which it is difficult to specify? The last text is likely to provide more information about their methods.

15.2.3 Judg 9:37: the diviner's tree.<sup>258</sup>

The reference may be to a method used for obtaining oracles from trees.<sup>259</sup> The *mē'ōnēnîm* might therefore well be the interpreters of such an oracle. They would possibly interpret the oracle by listening to the whisper of the moving leaves.<sup>260</sup> But again we do not have enough information to know for certain what kind of divination these *mē'ōnēnîm* practised.

15.3 *Conclusion*

The investigation of these texts has yielded very few clues.

15.3.1 That *mē'ōnēnîm* practise a type of divination.

15.3.2 That this may imply an oracle.

15.3.3 That this oracle seems to be drawn from the observation of some natural phenomenon originally, as its root seems to imply, and that it used equipment.

15.3.4 Lastly, this type of divination is associated with Philistine and Canaanite peoples, but the Hebrews adopted it and may have even followed their guidance.

16. *Nābî': A Channel of God's Power*

16.0 *Introduction*

The word is found in West Semitic languages and is sometimes used of people who demonstrate foresight, foretelling, and clairvoyant

<sup>258</sup> See the discussion of the root under *mēkaššépîm*.

<sup>259</sup> This tree has been identified as the tree of Moreh, also in the vicinity of Shechem (Gen 12:6): this identification is in fact uncertain. See Moore (1895) 260.

<sup>260</sup> Smith (1884) 118.

functions. In the Old Testament, the root is common (the noun itself appears more than three hundred times). It is applied to a remarkable range of characters appearing in texts from Genesis (20:7) to Malachi (4:5), and to disparate personalities from an Aaron (Exod 7:1) to an Elijah (1 Kings 17–19; 21), from the “true” to the “false” (e.g. 1 Kings 22), from the relatively primitive (1 Sam 10) to the relatively sophisticated (the Isaiahs), from the highly visionary (Ezek 1–2) to the concretely ethical (Amos or Nathan in 2 Sam 12; or Elijah in 1 Kings 21), from a seemingly objective perspective (of Amos) to an intensely participating attitude (Jeremiah). And these examples suggest the range of applications of the term in the Old Testament.<sup>261</sup> These few examples show how difficult it is to conjure up a clear picture of the *nābī*. The difficulty is increased by the uncertainty of the basic meaning: common words in long usage are characteristically etymologically difficult, and they carry with them a significant history which is at least as important as the etymology. The derivation is controversial. The Akkadian *nabû*: “to call”, “to proclaim”,<sup>262</sup> and the Arabic *naba'a*: “to come forward” or “into prominence”, and its causative “to bring forward”, especially to do so by speech, “to announce”, “to impart”,<sup>263</sup> are usually adduced in the explanation of the root *nb*. There remains the possibility of a West Semitic root, but this is not without problems as the word is not a genuine verbal form in Hebrew. However, a Canaanite origin has been posited by Kuenen, who connected the Hebrew *nābī* with the root *nby*, “to bubble up” as if the prophet was one who bubbled up under inspiration.<sup>264</sup> This theory was quite successful, even in recent scholarship,<sup>265</sup> but must be regarded with caution. For an understanding of the word *nābī*, the decisive question is whether the qatil form is to be taken as active or passive. Previously

<sup>261</sup> On this particular form of divination, cf. Judges 4:5 and “Rabdomancy” in chapter 4.

<sup>262</sup> Napier (1969–1976) 396.

<sup>263</sup> Many scholars, in particular Dhorme, Albright, Koehler-Baumgartner, have adopted an Akkadian origin for *nābī*. The Akkadian root *nabû* has been known to have, since the third millennium to the middle of the first century BC the meaning “to call” (CAD, vol. II, part I, 31). In Babylon the king is “the one called by the gods” and a comparison has been made with the prophets, “the called”, cf. von Soden (1952) 161. This etymology has had so much success that Cazelles wrote in his review of Monloubou (1968) and in agreement with him: “l’explication du nom par l’akkadien *nabû* est de beaucoup la plus probable” (1968) 520. For the discussion of this etymology and a more cautious approach cf. Ramelot (1928–1979) 922, and von Rad (1967) 6ff.

<sup>264</sup> But in fact the word may be a loan-word from the Hebrew (1900–1909) 108.

<sup>265</sup> Kuenen (1877).

an active sense "speaker", "proclaimer"<sup>266</sup> was almost universally held, but more recently the passive form "the called", has claimed greater attention.<sup>267</sup>

Either is conjectural and it is always possible that the word could very quickly have become a fixed term irrespective of its original meaning. The question is further complicated by the Greek translation "prophētēs", which is yet another label on this difficult and unsolved question of what prophecy is. It is therefore difficult to write about the *nābī* without mentioning the general problem of prophetism but we have to be careful not to confuse the two. The question is chiefly that there are on the one hand institutional prophets who appear in groups or individually and who are linked in all kinds of ways, but that on the other hand the most striking prophetic figures are individuals who bear little or no discernible relationship to institutional prophecy.<sup>268</sup> The distinction between the two groups is a difficult one (and an important one for this subject) and has been given considerable attention by scholars. Lindblom in particular has drawn a comparison between classical prophets and primitive ones<sup>269</sup> and it seems that the ecstatic phenomenon<sup>270</sup> is less common in the great prophets than at an earlier stage of "primitive" prophetism.<sup>271</sup> It appears that the early prophets display extraordinary gifts (this is well attested as we shall see in more detail).<sup>272</sup> The question for us is to determine:

- 1) whether or not this particular "magical" power is a characteristic of the *nābī* at all times;
- 2) whether or not the distinction between the symbolic action of the Old Testament prophets and the "primitive" magical action of the early prophets is consistently valid.<sup>273</sup>

<sup>266</sup> Holscher (1914), Smend and Haldar (1945).

<sup>267</sup> Barth (1894) and Haldar (1945) 109.

<sup>268</sup> Albright (1946) 231f., 332; Guillaume (1938) 112f., Johnson (1962) 24.

<sup>269</sup> The sources often make it difficult to draw any solid conclusions.

<sup>270</sup> Lindblom (1962) 216f.

<sup>271</sup> Mauchline (1938) 295, defines ecstasy "as the name applied to those types of experience in which the experient becomes temporarily alienated from the physical and the sensible world, and enters into rapport with a whole field of consciousness which is denied him in his normal state".

<sup>272</sup> Lindblom (1962) 217; Wilson (1979) 321-337.

<sup>273</sup> The ecstatic phenomenon is universal; Kapelrud (1967) showed that a number of shamanistic features are common to several cultures, including that of the Old Testament.

This particular question of the continuity of prophetism has again been very much debated.<sup>274</sup> My purpose here is to show that at one stage or another the *nābī*<sup>2</sup> has had special features which could be classified as divinatory and/or magical. I shall select several texts from the Old Testament but firstly I shall examine the Ugaritic and Phoenician *nābī*<sup>2</sup>.

### 16.1 *The Ugaritic and the Phoenician nb'*

The evidence is very scarce: *nb'* is found in the expression (bn) *nb'* 'm, "Berufener des [Gottes] 'Amm,"<sup>275</sup> but nothing is said about his role.

In the Lachish ostraca (c. 600 B.C.), the word *nb'* was found in III 20 and XVI 5 (and perhaps VI 5) which yield nothing further than a truncated name. The ostracon III 20 presents the figure of an intermediary entrusted with the delivery of Tobiah's letter. Nothing is said about the divining functions of the *nb'*.

### 16.2 *The nābī in the historical books*

The first text I shall examine is 1 Sam 9:9 which is explicit about the divining role of the *nabi*<sup>2</sup>:

#### 16.2.1 1 Sam 9:9: the *nābī*<sup>2</sup> is attested as seer.

He who is now called a prophet (*nābī*<sup>2</sup>) was formerly called a seer (rō'eh).

The passage is an annotation, much later in date than the context, and cannot have been written before the name *nābī*<sup>2</sup> had been long current and attached to a succession of men. The LXX, apparently

<sup>274</sup> Lindblom (1962) 172, defines the difference: "the power of the magical action was dependent on the inner power connected with them and their performance in accordance with definite magical laws; the power of the prophetic actions like the power of the prophetic word was derived from Yahweh's will. The prophetic actions were never directed to occasional and merely personal ends, but always served the main end of the activity of the prophets, the fulfillment of Yahweh's plan". In fact the distinction, if there is any, is dubious as the world-view behind both actions is exactly the same.

<sup>275</sup> For instance Lust (1973) 234-250, for whom there is a continuous development of the prophetic institution (shown by the constant use of the expression *daraš yahweh* in connection with prophetic consultation) and Orlinsky (1965) 154 who states that "ancient Israel recognized the diviner in its midst in the person of the early prophet". Both agree that Israel's prophets had a mantic function.

presupposing a slightly different text, conveys the sense that the term "seer" was in the past simply a common, popular name for "prophet".<sup>276</sup> The words *hōzeh* and *rō'eh*, both related to "seeing" appear elsewhere in contexts suggesting some parallelism in function with the *nābī*.<sup>277</sup> Therefore, in view of the evidence considered, we are justified in concluding that prophet and seer, by either designation, were understood as exercising in common the function of "seeing", i.e. apprehending that which is not normally accessible.<sup>278</sup> However the office of the *nābī* is broader in scope than merely "seeing". It is implied in a text such as 2 Kings 4:27 that a *nābī*, Elisha in this case, should know everything. "Yahweh has hidden it from me, he has not told me". This gift of second sight is well documented along with the gift of healing as the text shows.

#### 16.2.2 "Seeing" and "hearing"—1 Kings 14:1–17

The son of King Jeroboam is sick. The king sends his wife as a messenger to the prophet Ahijah. She has to take gifts with her. The *nābī* is supposed to reveal what is going to happen to the child. No cure is asked for. Ahijah foretells the death of the child and announces doom for the house of Israel.

The following remarks can be made about this text:

- the terminology used is fairly technical (*dāraš dābār*)<sup>279</sup> and is characteristic of oracular consultation;
- 1 Kings 14:1–17 belongs to a pre-existing prophetic source;
- Ahijah is not consulted in a sanctuary but at his home;<sup>280</sup>
- no cure is asked for from the *nābī*. What predominates is the search for information. The *nābī* is the one who informs people of what is going to happen to them;<sup>281</sup>
- presents<sup>282</sup> are brought which implies that the information is delivered for a fee.<sup>283</sup>

<sup>276</sup> Muller (1973–1986) 145: the root occurs in Ugarit but as a proper name.

<sup>277</sup> The LXX reads: *prophētēs*.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Isa 29:10; Amos 7:12; 2 Kings 17:13; 2 Sam 24:11 ...

<sup>279</sup> Napier (1969–1976) 897.

<sup>280</sup> On *daraš* used in oracular consultation, see Garcia de la Fuente (1971) 280, and notes pp. 290–291.

<sup>281</sup> 1 Kings 14:14.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. also 1 Sam 9:7–10.

<sup>283</sup> The story of the wife of Jeroboam recalls in its outlines 2 Kings 8:7ff. where the king of Aram, ill, sends Hazael to Elisha to learn from him the outcome of his illness.

Second sight is a phenomenon shared by many prophets and attested to in many narratives. I shall cite but a few: both Elijah and Elisha predict various calamities, e.g. a drought in 1 Kings 17:1, the death of Ahaziah (2 Kings 6:9), and the words that the Syrian king spoke in 2 Kings 6:12 (could it be a case of telepathy?). He is able to foretell a famine (2 Kings 3), the death of the Syrian king, and in the story of the healing of Naaman (2 Kings 5) he knows what Gehazi has done. The last example is to be found in 2 Kings 3:9–17 where Elisha sees water for the kings of Israel, Judah and Edom. V. 15 is of particular importance because it mentions a musical instrument played during the proceedings. It is not clear from the text whether the music produces ecstasy and therefore "seeing", or whether Elisha actually went in search of water (cf. the tradition of water diviners using a rod) as the context may suggest: "That stream-bed shall be filled with water".

Apart from "seeing" (in the past, present or future), it should be noted that the *nābī* can "hear" events before they are perceptible to others. Elisha heard men coming before they arrived (2 Kings 6:32) and Elijah heard the sound of rain before it fell (1 Kings 18:41). His position (at the top of Mount Carmel, bowing down to the earth and putting his face between his knees) may be characteristic of seers.<sup>284</sup>

Even if we allow that the stories were about events after they had happened, they are of interest because they show what was expected from a *nābī*.

#### 16.2.3 The healing power of the *nābī*.

An example of this power is found in 2 Kings 5, the healing of Naaman the leper by Elisha. The prophet does not even see the army commander of the king of Aram; "he sends him a messenger" and orders him to bathe seven times in the Jordan; he will then be cleansed of leprosy. When the treatment succeeds, Naaman offers to pay Elisha, who refuses.

Whether or not the illness afflicting Naaman is leprosy or some lesser skin disease<sup>285</sup> is unimportant. What is important is the way he is treated. Note in particular in v. 10b the use of the number seven. The significance of the number seven has been studied extensively,

<sup>284</sup> "Seeing" is true of individuals as well as of groups of prophets; cf. the *bēnē nēbī'īm* in 1 Kings 2:3ff. who live in Bethel and warn Elisha of the fate of Elijah.

<sup>285</sup> Gray (1984) 359f. refers to the posture of the dervishes in exercise. It "may induce concentration".

for instance with regard to its use in incantations in particular. It appears to be magically potent. It may be that, since "seven is the number of completeness",<sup>286</sup> the order to bathe seven times would reestablish Naaman within the "right" order of the universe and thus bring about his "wholeness", his health.

The second feature to be noted for discussion is that Elisha refuses the present (= the fee) brought by the soldier. In other words it is customary to pay the healer. Why is Elisha breaking the tradition in this matter? The answer is given in v. 16: Elisha considers himself to be the instrument, the channel through whom God operates: *hay yhwh âšer 'āmadtî lēpānāyw im 'eqqāh*. The healing of the king Hezekiah by Isaiah, related in 2 Kings 20:5f., is also interesting: Hezekiah had received a death sentence from God speaking through the *nâbî* Isaiah. But Yahweh "changed his heart" and ordered Isaiah to deliver a message of recovery to the king. Isaiah then ordered him to "bring a fig-cake poultice", applied it to the ulcer and the king recovered.<sup>287</sup> This time an external means is used. The story is narrated as if Yahweh, having condemned Hezekiah, thought it was not worth fighting the disease. Then, when Yahweh decides to add fifteen years to the king's life, the medical knowledge of the time is used. It may be that the mention of the fig poultice belongs to a different stratum thus recording the "physician" aspect of the function of the *nâbî*.<sup>288</sup>

It is worth mentioning also in this context the instances of resurrections performed by the *nâbî*.<sup>289</sup> In 1 Kings 17:17ff. and 2 Kings 4:29–37 the same details are narrated:

- a prayer to Yahweh alone with the dead body;
- the prophet stretches himself on the body;
- Yahweh answers the prayer: the "soul" comes back (the child/young man sneezes); he is alive.

All these miraculous actions are Yahweh's using the *nâbî* as a channel. That much is clear from all the texts: the emphasis is on the prayer to Yahweh.

<sup>286</sup> Cf. footnote 6, p. 459 of the Jerusalem Bible.

<sup>287</sup> For the bibliography about seven, see Pope (1969–1976) 294–295; Kapelrud (1968) 494–499.

<sup>288</sup> 2 Kings 20:7.

<sup>289</sup> Montgomery (1951) does not mention this possibility.

16.2.4 The use of external means by the *nābī*

The *nābī* is a channel for Yahweh's power to manifest itself but in many texts the *nabi* uses an implement generally belonging to him to perform "magical" actions, e.g. his staff.<sup>290</sup> Even his clothes possessed power, e.g. Elijah's mantle (2 Kings 2:14). This power which is peculiar to the *nābī* is transmitted to the objects he owns: it is "contagious". He uses the objects in sympathetic magic (2 Kings 6:5f.: as the stick floats so will the iron axehead).<sup>291</sup> Most important of all is his word.

16.2.5 Excursus on rain-making of the *nābī*

The use of water offerings in order to obtain rain seems to have been condemned by the Biblical authors. It is possible however that such a ritual was intended by Samuel in 1 Sam 7:6ff.<sup>292</sup> This text is set in the context of the struggles between the Philistines and the Israelites: the Israelites "drew water and poured it out before Yahweh" (v. 6) while Samuel prayed. In v. 10, there is mention of the thunder frightening the Philistines. The text does not show any link between the water offering and the thunder but suggests that the ritual in question may have been replaced by the holocaust. The ritual of water offering, as an act of mimetic magic, is known to us from two other sources:

- 1) The Ugaritic Baal epic: Baal asks for a window to be installed in his palace "to cause the clouds to be opened with rain when the Skilful One opens the window".<sup>293</sup>
- 2) In the text of Zech 14:16–18, which relates to the Sukkot festival (which is much emphasized by the Talmud), it seems that people made it a regular habit to pray to the Lord for rain. "Then every one that survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of booths. And if any

<sup>290</sup> 1 Kings 17:17ff.: the widow's son raised to life by Elijah. The tradition of a similar cure by Elisha is also found in 2 Kings 4:29–37. See the Ugaritic legend of Keret UH 126, V, 26ff. In 1 Kings 13:31 the bones of the prophet have the power to resurrect a dead man. These cases are examples of contactual magic, whereby the contact with a particularly powerful source of life reestablishes life where it was no more. The *nābī* can also strike people with blindness (2 Kings 6:18) or leprosy (2 Kings 5:27).

<sup>291</sup> Like Elisha's staff (cf. 2 Kings 4:29ff.); the stick used to get back the iron axehead (2 Kings 6:5f.); a handful of meal made noxious food sound (1 Kings 4:38ff.).

<sup>292</sup> Delcor (1976) 404–419.

<sup>293</sup> Patai (1930) 254–286.

of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the king, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain upon them" i.e. the rain necessary for future harvests.

Although we do not know whether the worship of God and the keeping of the feast were accompanied by water libation, it seems that the final aim of the Sukkot festival was to secure rain.<sup>294</sup>

The ancient Israelites were close to their land (e.g. Deut 11:10-17), its soil, sky and nature. It seems that they tried, along with the neighbouring peoples, to control the rain, by what may have been imitative or sympathetic magic, i.e. the simulation of rain by sprinkling water or other fluids, by mimicking clouds, imitating thunder and lightning, or in the case of the Baal epic, making windows (to allow water to flow from the upper layer of waters that the ancient peoples of Palestine and Syria believed surrounded the earth).

16.2.6 The creative power of the prophetic word. The decisive feature in Old Testament prophecy is the *dābār*, the "word". However difficult the etymology of *nābī* is, the feature which prevails is the oral quality of the *nābī*'s function. The *nābī* has to pass on the *dābār* YHWH which he receives. "A word is an image of the thing it expresses."<sup>295</sup> It is so closely identified with the thing itself that not to have a name is not to exist. A thought that crystallises in words may become an incantation, and the words exercise a profound effect on the general and particular behaviour of the person who utters them. The words have become something that transcends in power the source from which they sprang. "No longer subject to revision by reason, they seem to have acquired the *energeia* of a new creature and the power of an external imperative".<sup>296</sup> The whole of the Semitic world was permeated with the belief that the solemn pronouncements of accredited persons—whether priests, prophets, diviners or magicians—possessed an authority not only over the mind, but also over the course of events. What such men said must surely come to pass because they spoke

<sup>294</sup> Gordon (1965): UT 51:VII:15-18. Gray (1965) sees another reference to a similar rite of "imitative" magic in the Keret epic UT 126:IV: 11ff. where El bids the "water pourer of the house of Ba'al" and his consorts ascend to the roof and performs their office (these texts are listed in KTU 1.4: VII: 15-18; KTU 1.16: IV: 14-17).

<sup>295</sup> Patai (1930) 253.

<sup>296</sup> For a discussion of the term *dābār*, as denoting both "word" and "thing", see Grether (1934) 59ff.

in the name, and with the authority, of a supernatural power.<sup>297</sup> There are many examples of such creative words in the miracle narratives related above. One example is 2 Kings 1:9–18: Ahaziah has fallen ill and sends his men to consult Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, about the outcome of his illness.

Elijah the Tishbite intercepts them and announces the death of Ahaziah. When the king sends fifty soldiers with the order to come to him, this is what Elijah answers:

v. 10: if I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.

I shall simply note the role of the *nābî*<sup>298</sup> in this text: he brings down fire from heaven.

Later on (v. 17a) the same emphasis is put on the word:

So he died, according to the word (dābār) of the Lord ...

There is a direct cause/effect relationship. The Jerusalem Bible translates:

And, in accordance with the word of Yahweh that Elijah had uttered, he died.

The uttered word brings death.

The content of the word which is to be transmitted is mostly conveyed in the first person. In the prophets, then, it is formulated as a saying of Yahweh. It often begins with a participle.<sup>299</sup> This shows that the saying of Yahweh is usually about an imminent action of Yahweh. This action may mean salvation or destruction; the saying of Yahweh is either promise or threat. The word of promise may be events in the immediate future<sup>300</sup> or more distant events.<sup>300</sup> In the so-called writing prophets the promises are above all eschatological expectations in the broadest sense.

In any case the *nābî*, both in the historical books and in the latter prophets, does not merely pass on the word which he has received from Yahweh. They are not involuntary instruments. They themselves are responsible for the correct delivery of the message; they can

<sup>297</sup> Guillaume (1938) 20f.

<sup>298</sup> For the idea of the powerful word in the Semitic world, see Pedersen (1926) 167f.

<sup>299</sup> 2 Sam 12:11; 1 Kings 11:31; Am 6:14 ...

<sup>300</sup> 1 Kings 11:31; 20:12.28; 2 Kings 20:5f.

intercede:<sup>301</sup> their intercession is powerful, effective. They may bring about doom by their prophetic words, but they may also, through their words, bring about redemption.<sup>302</sup> It is difficult to determine the true cause/effect relationship between the *nābī*<sup>2</sup> and the event. Again it appears that this phenomenon is more prominent in the historical books but it cannot be ignored that the later prophets who foretold fortune and doom were also feared and hated. Why should it have been so if their words were not in some way powerful? Equally difficult is the assessment of the magical element in the so-called symbolic acts of the prophets.

Under this sub-section, devoted to the creative power of the prophetic word, a few words need to be said about cledonomancy—the acceptance of the fatal word or of the spoken omen. This practise is well attested in the Arabic world and the Mesopotamian one and the Old Testament furnishes a few examples. I shall limit myself to the cases of cledonomancy spoken by the *nābī*<sup>2</sup>.

One example in 2 Kings 7:1–2 is the oracle Elisha pronounces against the officer of the king during the siege of Samaria. The prophet has announced to the king that on the morrow there would be a plentiful supply of food in the city which was then on the verge of starvation. Since there was every reason to doubt this prophecy, a man replied, "If Yahweh were to make windows in heaven such a thing might happen". Elisha's answer is a reasonable foreshortening of the method of drawing an omen from the object on which the eye falls and the extraction of a notion applicable to the problem in question. The notion of the window was given him, and from that notion the oracle proceeded, "You shall see it with your eyes but shall not hear". Here the connecting link is the window, something through which a man looks at happenings in which he can take no part. The man himself suggested the fate that was to befall him.<sup>303</sup> More examples of this method used by the *nābī*<sup>2</sup> are found in 2 Kings 19:4 = Isa 37:4; Jer 21:2.4–5; 22:2.4.

#### 16.2.7 The Creative Power of the Prophetic Deeds

The effective power of the prophetic word is increased by specific actions. These actions illustrate dramatically what the prophets had

<sup>301</sup> 2 Sam 7:8ff.

<sup>302</sup> 2 Sam 7:8ff.

<sup>303</sup> For non-prophetic examples cf. 1 Sam 14:8–10; Gen 24:12f.; 1 Kings 20:30–35.

to proclaim. They were more than mere illustration; they were also creative. One text demonstrates this: 1 Kings 22:11—the prophet Zedekiah made for himself horns of iron and said, “Thus said Yahweh, ‘with these you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed’”.<sup>304</sup> This an act of mimetic magic: Zedekiah is acting out the forthcoming confrontation with the Syrians, therefore ensuing victory.<sup>305</sup>

Another significant prophetic action is the sign or token. The sign, ‘ōt,<sup>306</sup> is a survival of divinatory or magical ritual and it is also a development of the mysterious spoken word of a God who brings about its fulfilment. In any event the symbolic act was conceived as initiating the event of which it was the symbol—it can denote any physical object to which some special meaning has been given. For instance in 2 Kings 20:8–9, the sign given to Hezekiah is the turning back of the shadow on the steps. As Isaiah makes the shadow retreat the king recovers from the sickness. The borderline between potent action and symbolic action is tenuous: in Isa 20:3 the prophet goes about Jerusalem “naked and barefoot” as “a sign and portent” of the future captivity of the Egyptians and Ethiopians on whom Israel is tempted to rely. Is it a symbolic act, a gesture of warning or is Isaiah setting in motion the drama he is enacting? It is sufficient to note that, at the time, it was believed that the acted sign, the prophetic deed, led up to the future event, and had a definite effective power in procuring its fulfilment.

16.2.8 Note on Deborah the prophetess and her judicial function  
Did the nābi’ have a judicial function? No clear examples are to be found except in Judg 4:4–5:

Now Deborah, a prophetess (nēbî’â), the wife of Lapp’idoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah....

Deborah dispenses justice on the authority of Yahweh as she has been endowed with divine gifts. Her historical position is not quite clear (it is impossible to distinguish between the oldest traditions and later additions to them) but nevertheless it seems possible that Deborah

<sup>304</sup> Guillaume (1938) 164ff.; Caquot (1968) 96f.

<sup>305</sup> Of the same nature is the action with the bow and arrows in the narrative about Elijah and Joash (2 Kings 13:14–19); cf. also 1 Kings 11:29ff. where Elijah tore his mantle into twelve pieces and gave ten of them to Jeroboam, thus symbolizing that Jeroboam should have ten of the Israelite tribes to reign over as a king.

<sup>306</sup> ‘ōt occurs 79 times in the Old Testament, of which 25 relate to the “plagues” of

originally belonged to the old seer type.<sup>307</sup> She used to sit under a holy tree delivering her instructions.<sup>308</sup> She may have been inspired by the sound of the leaves on the tree, or she may have used oracular techniques (cf. *mišpāt*) under the tree and been divinely inspired by its shadow.

#### 16.2.9 Ezek 13:17–19: a case of false prophetesses

There are many references in the Old Testament to “false” prophets, motivated by greed and evil. One striking example of their activities is the denunciation of Ezekiel:

(18) Thus says the Lord God: Woe to the women who sew magic bands upon all wrists (*limtaprōt kēsātōt 'al kol 'assilē yāday*), and make veils (*wē'ōsōt hammispāhōt*) for the heads of persons of every stature, in the hunt of souls (*lēsōdēd nēpāšōt*)! Will you hunt down souls belonging to my people, and keep other souls alive for your profit? (19) You have profaned me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, putting to death persons who should not die and keeping alive persons who should not live, by your lies to my people, who listen to lies.

This passage has received a great deal of attention at least since Frazer<sup>309</sup> and is a condemnation of women exercising influence by magical means over their clients.

The passage has been variously interpreted:<sup>310</sup> these women were diviners. “To put to death” or “to keep alive” meant no more than simply to give favourable or unfavourable omens.<sup>311</sup> Other commentators have paid more attention to the magical actions of the women: the passage is a description of means used in order to gain power over people.<sup>312</sup> There is also a possible reference to the practice of binding the medium during seances.<sup>313</sup> However this explanation leaves an important question unanswered; how does a medium hunt a *nēpeš*?

Egypt. On this word, see Robinson (1946) 34ff.; and Fishbane (1975) 213–234.

<sup>307</sup> Lindblom (1965) 96; Holsher (1914). Richter regards the notice that Deborah was a prophetess as a very late addition to the text.

<sup>308</sup> On the role of trees in oracular consultation, see “Rhabdomancy”, chapter 4.

<sup>309</sup> Frazer (1918) 510f.; Lods (1927) 13.

<sup>310</sup> For a thorough review of the main opinions relating to the interpretation of this text, see Saggs (1974) 1–12.

<sup>311</sup> Cook (1936) 144–149; Mowinckel (1921) 65 thinks that “giving life to *nēpāšōt* which should not live” is a reference to necromancy.

<sup>312</sup> Eichrodt (1959) 94–97 and Zimmerli (1979) 296–299.

<sup>313</sup> Dummermuth (1963) 228–229.

Parallels are found among the practices of Babylonian witches: "Their main techniques involved making images of the victims and binding their knees and arms: alternatively they could gain power over the victims by obtaining substances or objects intimately connected with them, such as hair or pieces of old clothing, or even dust on which the person had stepped".<sup>314</sup> It was the images of the victims which were bound and veiled. The witches' purpose in prowling about the streets could be to obtain secretly those items which would bring about the downfall of a person. The grain or barley may have been used to block the mouth of an image already made.

The "witch" could either condemn a victim to death or liberate (unbind).

From a lexical point of view, two words have to be mentioned: *kēsātōt*, which has an Akkadian cognate *karu* "to bind", the root most commonly used of binding in a magical sense. Parallel to it is *mispāhōt*, usually rendered as "veils"<sup>315</sup> but perhaps more correctly translated as nets: the witch would then "catch" enemies in the magical sense.<sup>316</sup> Another word has caused a lot of problems: the *nepeš*, which could denote "a physical entity of some kind". Examples can be found in the Old Testament where *nepeš* can have this meaning.<sup>317</sup> In view of the preceding remarks we could conclude from the text of Ezek 13:17-19 that the *bēnōt hammitnab'ōt*, the "soul hunters", were practising something similar to that practised today in "modern" voodoo, i.e. the making of images of people tied up, the search for personal objects belonging to them, and their burying by which, through the system of correspondences, the person represented by the image should die. The hunt for souls could also represent the search for those intimate objects which are most marked by someone's personal smell. The word *nepeš* designates also the life principle,<sup>318</sup> and in this case I suggest that what the prophetesses are hunting is the personal life

<sup>314</sup> Saggs (1974) 4f.

<sup>315</sup> The word is a hapax legomenon. The root *sph* has been related to some skin disease (Lev 13:2.6-8). The translation "veils" may be only a guess based on the following expression *al roš*. Cooke (1936) takes it to be a reference to an amulet worn on the head of the witch.

<sup>316</sup> Saggs (1974) 6 postulates a metathesized form for an underlying *mispāhōt*. The postulated word would represent the plural of Akkadian *musahiptu*, meaning a "net". Perhaps the *al roš* may be then explained: the prophetesses wanted to get hair from their victims (hair as part of the body of a person is used in magical ceremonies).

<sup>317</sup> 1 Sam 25:29 for instance.

<sup>318</sup> Porteous (1969-1976) 428.

principle of a particular person in order to embody it later in the image/statue of their victim. "Putting to death persons who should not die" refers to this practice. The barley and bread are the prices they receive for their work. There remains the "keeping alive of persons who should not live" which has hardly been dealt with by the commentators. The modern voodoo practitioners are well known (and feared) for their skills in bringing the dead to life and using them as slaves (something to do with the disruption of order?), their senses being dimmed (cf. the "zombis" of the Caribbean). True or not, the belief still exists that one can revive the dead, and put a soul back into a body. These prophetesses then may have distorted the power of life and death attributed to the early *nābī*?

#### 16.4 *Conclusions*

A few summary remarks on the *nābī'īm*:

16.4.1 They are people, men or women, individuals or "brotherhood", who receive a share of "raw" power.

16.4.2 This power is neutral and can be used for good or for ill, for healing or for killing.

16.4.3 This power, furthermore, is contagious: it is transmitted from its source to all sorts of implements and materials (staff, pieces of clothing, . . .).

I can conclude that the Israelite *nābī*', certainly in the early stage of development when such ability is clearly shown, was taking over from "Shamans" (the fees taken attest a well organized professional caste). Little by little he became the instrument, the channel of Yahweh's power, appearing unexpectedly to deliver his omens. The later prophets' emphasis was more on the word of Yahweh, an actual message to be delivered, than on physical miracles. But in effect the veil between the magical power of the word and its result is very blurred. Finally, it should be noted the continual allusions to "false" prophets who continue to take fees and perform all sorts of magic. The occurrences of these practices are not denied; they are simply denounced as evil when they turn people away from the real power of Yahweh, or rather from a certain "orthodox" understanding of the Yahweh deity.

17. *Qōsēm Qēsāmîm: One Who Obtains an Oracle by Drawing Lots*

17.0 *Introduction*

This expression, which designates a type of diviner, occurs in Deut 18:10. The root, either in its verbal form or nominal form, is that most commonly used in Hebrew to express the idea of divining in general.<sup>319</sup> Both BDB<sup>320</sup> and KBL<sup>321</sup> translated this word as “to practise divination” for the verb, “divination” for the noun. It is also unequivocally rendered in Greek by the general terms *manteuomenos* *manteian*. Understandably for such a general word it refers to a wide range of techniques. I shall try now to see whether or not it can be traced to one original method.

17.1 *The etymology of qsm*

The root qsm may mean cutting into pieces (the pieces of wood to be used as lots).<sup>322</sup> But most scholars relate it to “the old Arabic *istiqsam* prohibited in the Koran (Sura V. 4), i.e. the procuring of a divine sentence by drawing a lot at the sanctuary with headless arrows”.<sup>323</sup> This view, expressed about a century ago, is still valid: “the etymology (of the word *qesem*) implies that some form of lot-casting was intended”, and refers to the Arabic cognate verbal form *qasama* which was used (in conjugation X).<sup>324</sup> Although we are not sure whether *qesem* is a common Semitic word or a Hebrew word borrowed from the Arabic its meaning is quite well established: it is a method of drawing lots, perhaps originally with arrows, but more probably by drawing lots by manipulation of wood.<sup>325</sup> In any case, as we shall see in the Old Testament texts, the root occurs in a great number of passages, over a large span of time. It has both a derogatory meaning (e.g. Deut 18:10 . . .)<sup>326</sup> and an innocent one (e.g. Prov

<sup>319</sup> Driver (1960) 223.

<sup>320</sup> 890.

<sup>321</sup> 844.

<sup>322</sup> Halevy (1958) 238; BDB 890; Toy (1959) 326.

<sup>323</sup> Smith (1884) 277.

<sup>324</sup> Davies (1980) 555.

<sup>325</sup> See “Rhabdomancy” in chapter 4.

<sup>326</sup> Cf. 2 Kings 17:17 . . .; see also the denunciation of false prophecy by the “writing prophets”: Ezek 13:6; Jer 14:14.

16:10). I shall examine the use of the root with particular emphasis on the techniques evoked or implied, as well as the type of situations in which this device was used.

### 17.2 *The use of qesem as a general device for divination*

Apart from the instance of Ezek 21:26 which hints at the use of qesem as divination by lots, but only as one of the threefold inquiries made by Nabuchadrezzar, king of Babylon,<sup>327</sup> qesem is used in a more general way and it is applicable to all sorts of different methods.

Num 23:23, which is part of the Oracles of Balaam, shows a parallel between nhš and qsm. As nhš is connected to all types of divination based on natural phenomena, qsm suggests the use of the same general methods.

In Mic 3:6, where the prophet condemns the indictment of crowd-pleasing prophets, the use of qsm should not be seen as derogatory;<sup>328</sup> the verb in this context most likely means "to do as a prophet does" without specific reference to the use of any technical means.<sup>329</sup> But the recurrence of the root in v. 11 along with allegations of illegal profit-making suggests some sort of consultation through lots. The charge is laid against those who corruptly "sell" their oracles for money.

The taking of legal decisions or in any case an important decision by means of consulting the oracle, i.e. drawing lots, might be supported by Prov 16:10:

Inspired decisions (qsm) are on the lips of a king; his mouth does not sin in judgement.

It may be noted:

- 1) that the literal translation of qesem is "oracular decision";<sup>330</sup>
- 2) that this is supported by the LXX;
- 3) that the noun which parallels qesem is mišpāṭ, whose original meaning might also have been "oracular decision".<sup>331</sup> "The

<sup>327</sup> This particular inquiry is referred to by Ezekiel as qilqal bahiṣṣim and is examined in "Rhabdomancy", chapter 4. Another possible reference to such a mode of consultation is Ez 12:24: miqsam ḥālāq where ḥālāq has the meaning of "to divide, to share".

<sup>328</sup> Hillers (1984) 46.

<sup>329</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> Toy (1890) 324.

<sup>331</sup> Haldar (1945) 100.

meaning is not that God speaks through the king. The term oracular decision is literally divination, the consultation of the deity".<sup>332</sup> Here the term is used figuratively. In fact the king appears in this text "in a judicial capacity, and the proverb simply affirms that his inerrant judgement (v. 10b) is based on the decision rendered by the lot".<sup>333</sup> Since the lots were used in case of legal difficulties<sup>334</sup> or in decision-making<sup>335</sup> I understand *qesem* in this context to mean a judgement attained through the drawing of lots. Lastly I shall briefly mention 1 Sam 28:8<sup>336</sup> where *qesem* occurs in connection with the 'ôb:

Divine (qsm) for me by a spirit (bâ'ôb).

Without going into the intricacies of this text whose date is so difficult to establish, or into the problem posed by the 'ôb,<sup>337</sup> I suggest that the term *qesem* has become so general that it includes the invocation of spirits.

### 17.3 Conclusion

From a possible original root meaning "to part, to fragment, to divide" and thus a type of divination which used fragments (of stone, wood . . .) the meaning of the word *qesem* widened considerably to include all sorts of different methods of divination, from casting lots to divining through spirits, including its use in the context of (judicial) decision-making. The *qōsēm qēsāmîm* of Deut 18:10 is a diviner. His special skills, although they might earlier have been based solely on the casting of lots, now involve the use of any oracular means likely to help his decision-making.

<sup>332</sup> Toy (1890) 324.

<sup>333</sup> Davies (1980) 555f.: the fact that *qesem* in Prov 16:10 is said to be on the lips of the king implies that the word here refers to a verdict which he was able to pronounce by using this particular form of divination.

<sup>334</sup> Smith (1884) 277.

<sup>335</sup> Ezek 21:26.

<sup>336</sup> See "Necromancy", chapter 4.

<sup>337</sup> *idem*.

18. *Rō'eh: a seer*18.0 *Introduction*

Rō'eh means quite literally "seer", insofar as it is originally a participial form of the common Hebrew verb, "to see", "to perceive" (not necessarily with the eye), "realize", "look at", "choose", "select".<sup>338</sup> The word rō'eh itself occurs only nine times in the Old Testament.<sup>339</sup> In seven of these instances it refers to Samuel and in the remaining cases it is applied to Hanani.

From the gloss of 1 Sam 9:9 "that the nābī<sup>340</sup> of today was formerly called the rō'eh"<sup>340</sup> we should note the overlapping of functions,<sup>341</sup> in this case the two words are not necessarily synonymous. A presumption in favour of the rō'eh belonging to an earlier grade of culture, thus reflecting a more primitive view of the manner in which the will and intention of the gods were to be ascertained, is sometimes assumed.<sup>342</sup> I agree with that view insofar as the nābī<sup>3</sup> is understood as a general term which has itself taken over an older function, possibly a more specialized one.<sup>343</sup> However, the few occurrences of the rō'eh make it difficult to reconstruct the old office of "seer".

Two texts from the Old Testament will be examined with special emphasis on the role and techniques of the seer: 1 Sam 9 and 2 Chr 16:7–10.

18.1 *1 Sam 9: the lost asses of Kish*

In this passage belonging to the "Saul" document in the book of Samuel Saul, son of Kish, is in search of asses which his father has lost. After a lengthy journey he calls on Samuel, the seer, in order to find out where the asses are. The seer is to be offered a quarter of a shekel as his fee for providing the required information. Saul

<sup>338</sup> KBL, 864; BDB, 909.

<sup>339</sup> 1 Sam 9:9.11.18.19; 1 Chr 9:22; 26:28; 29:29; 2 Chr 16:7. In 2 Sam 15:27 Zadok is called a "seer" but the text is difficult.

<sup>340</sup> This verse is also discussed under nābī<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>341</sup> The LXX in many instances fails to take into account any distinction between rō'eh, hōzeh and nābī<sup>3</sup>, using prophētēs indiscriminately for all three. However the LXX translates ho blepōn for rō'eh in 1 Sam 9:9.11.18; 1 Chr 9:22; 29:29 and prophētēs in 1 Chr 26:28, 2 Chr 16:7.10 (for Hanani).

<sup>342</sup> Jastrow (1909) 42.

<sup>343</sup> This is the view expressed by modern commentators, e.g. Kyle (1984) 177.

and his companion encounter the seer on his way to the high place, where the people are to join him for a sacrificial meal. But Samuel has been forewarned by Yahweh of this meeting with Saul and informs him of three things:

- 1) at the grave of Rachel, Saul will encounter two men who will tell him that the asses have been found;
- 2) at Elon Tabor he will encounter three men on the way to Bethel with sacrifices for the sanctuary;
- 3) at Gibeath-Elohim he will encounter a company of *nēbī'îm*, and the spirit of Yahweh will descend upon him.

Several ideas about Samuel are interlocked here: Samuel the seer used various methods of divination ("all that he says comes true");<sup>344</sup> he was believed to have the gift of seeing what was happening in places far beyond the range of physical sight and of foreseeing events which would happen in the future. Samuel the prophet received the word of God and declared it. There is also the possible role of Samuel as priest.<sup>345</sup> Leaving aside the last two functions we can see that Samuel was renowned for his ability to see and reveal secrets (past-present-future) and to foresee future events, and was also paid for his services. We are not told how this seer obtained his knowledge, only that Yahweh imparted to him what he saw and knew. Did he get his knowledge from "dreams or a supernormal perception"?<sup>346</sup> Or was his function the equivalent of the Babylonian *barû*,<sup>347</sup> "omen inspector"? The *rō'eh* therefore would be an "inspector" who looks at something with a view to obtaining an answer to a given question. However, the answers given to Saul by Samuel are too complex in form to be deduced from the examination of omens. Are we to understand that Samuel got his answers from dreams, visions or direct inspiration?

### 18.2 2 Chr 16:7–10: Hanani the seer

Outside the Books of Samuel, the title "*rō'eh*" is bestowed upon one other person, namely Hanani, who comes to Asa, king of Judah, and

<sup>344</sup> V. 6.

<sup>345</sup> Jastrow (1909) 44f. The priestly function is assumed by Samuel in the "blessing of the sacrifice" (vv. 12–13).

<sup>346</sup> Lindblom (1965) 90.

<sup>347</sup> Jastrow (1909) 42; *barû* is the participial form of the stem *barû* which is the common

foretells disaster through wars, because the king "relied" upon Aram and not upon Yahweh.

The story in *Chronicles* is open to suspicion. However, the use of the old term *rō'eh* may be taken as evidence of the antiquity of the tradition.<sup>348</sup> Again in this story nothing is said of the methods used to obtain this information. Was Hanani attached to the court of Asa? Was he an independent, free-lance seer? All we know is that he was a professional diviner, since *rō'eh* appears as a title.

### 18.3 *Conclusion*

*Rō'eh* is probably an old term, referring to a type of diviner. The note in *Chronicles* hints that there may have been a continued use of the term. Seers probably had their own professional secrets. However, the scarcity of texts does not allow us to draw any more conclusions as to how exactly they ascertained the will of God: by dreams, or omen inspection? The question remains open. The seers were paid for their service but we do not know whether they officiated in special places or not. Moreover the seer appears in the texts as someone quite independent, coming and going where and when he wants, not attached to any particular court.

There is no mention ever of "the *rō'eh* of a king".<sup>349</sup>

one in Babylonian for "to see", or "look at something". The *barū* is essentially a divining priest, someone who "inspects" the signs and interpret them (CAD vol. 2, 115).

<sup>348</sup> Curtis and Madsen (1952) 389.

<sup>349</sup> Orlinsky (1965) 172f.

## SECTION TWO: DISPUTED CASES

1. *Pō'älē 'āwen: Evildoers*1.0 *Introduction*

A heated debate arose years ago among scholars as to the identity of the *pō'älē 'āwen*.<sup>350</sup> Mowinckel translated as "evildoers" or "workers of iniquity" and took the word itself to indicate supernatural or magical power.<sup>351</sup> They were sorcerers who by their potent spells brought about the afflictions of the pious sufferers, and the Psalms where they occur were used to ward off or counteract the evil effects of the black arts practised by these evildoers. The essential feature of Mowinckel's theory is that the activities of the *pō'älē 'āwen* were the cause of the sufferings of the pious. His theory was much criticised by Birkeland<sup>352</sup> who rejects it totally and thinks that the people incriminated are in fact foreigners. The etymology of the word should be of help to us in defining the field of activity of the *pō'älē 'āwen*.

1.1 *Etymology*

We get very little help from the Northwest Semitic area. The root *un* is found in Ugaritic five times.<sup>353</sup> For three notoriously difficult passages<sup>354</sup> the suggested meaning is "Unheil", "Trauer".<sup>355</sup>

BDB gives several meanings for the word 'āwen: "trouble", "sorrow", "wickedness", "idolatry", including the meaning of "sorcery", "evildoing". The possibility that 'āwen can mean "mourning" should be ignored<sup>356</sup> following KBL which separates the roots *anah* and *awn*.<sup>357</sup> More likely 'āwen has the same origin as *aon*, "kingdom", "power". Only the vocalization is different. In this instance the basic meaning is the idea of power, used either in its positive or negative aspect.

<sup>350</sup> Anderson (1945) 18–29 gives a summary of the views expressed by the various protagonists.

<sup>351</sup> Guillaume (1938) 279–289; Mowinckel (1921).

<sup>352</sup> Birkeland (1955).

<sup>353</sup> WUS, no. 295.

<sup>354</sup> AB VI, 15; I Aqhat 40; II Aqhat II, 8.

<sup>355</sup> Bernardt, TWAT (1973–1986) 151–159; the Ugarit *zn* should not be connected with 'āwen.

<sup>356</sup> Bernardt TWAT (1973–1986) 151.

<sup>357</sup> Cf. also Cazelles (1979) 58.

In any case only a particular context can determine meaning. The *pō'älē 'āwen*, who as a rule seem to appear in groups, are involved in all sorts of mischief: they are the enemies of those who pray (Psalm 5:5), use words as their weapon (Ps 5:10; 64:5; Is 59:4), and are oppressors of widows, orphans, and foreigners. Although a description of their activities recalls ecstatic, magical behaviour—they scream and jump about (Ps 59:4; 64:3; 94:4), they scream at twilight like hungry dogs (Ps 59:6)—we must be cautious and limit our investigation to a domain often identified with magic, i.e. illness. I shall investigate specifically the so-called Psalms “of illness”.

### 1.2 *The Psalms of illness and the pō'älē 'āwen*

Psalm 6 is a penitential prayer<sup>358</sup> which suggests a causative relationship between the *pō'älē 'āwen*, and illness, as v. 9–10 suggest:

The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer. All my enemies shall be ashamed and sorely troubled; they shall turn back, and be put to shame in a moment.

For the Israelites, as for all Semitic people, “illness originates in one’s own sin or in the curse and magic arts of evil-minded people”.<sup>359</sup>

Psalm 28 is a prayer for help. Healing takes the form of a prayer calling for the punishment of the evildoers, the *pō'älē 'āwen*, who have inflicted pain to the worshipper<sup>360</sup> (see especially vv. 3–5). Here again, ‘āwen refers to the operative evil power, pregnant with disaster, which has been brought forth by the *pō'älē 'āwen*, who by means of potent curses and other words of magic have brought weakness and illness.

Psalm 41:5–9 is “a prayer, a petition to Yahweh to deliver from enemies and make happy in the land”.<sup>361</sup> It is a most interesting psalm in that it throws light on the activities of the *pō'älē 'āwen*:

- (v. 5) My enemies say of me in malice:  
When will he die, and his name perish?
- (v. 6) And when one comes to see me,  
he utters empty words (šawē' yēdaber)  
while his heart gathers mischief ('āwen),

<sup>358</sup> Briggs (1907) 9.

<sup>359</sup> Pedersen (1926) 432f.; Lods (1925) 181–193; see Appendix I.

<sup>360</sup> Mowinckel (1967) 3ff. Against him, see Briggs (1907) who sees the Psalm as a collective and not a personal cry for help.

<sup>361</sup> Briggs (1907) 360ff.

when he goes out, he tells it abroad.

(v. 7) All who hate me whisper (yitlahăšū)  
together about me; they imagine the worst for me.

(v. 8) They say: "A deadly thing (bělfiya'al) has fastened upon him; he will not rise again from where he lies. Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me."

v. 6 šawē' puts the emphasis on the emptiness of speech, on falsehood. Could it be a way of accusing someone of uttering curses or evil incantations at the bedside of the sick man so that he gets worse and eventually dies?

v. 7 'awen: it is tempting to adopt here the sense of procreative power which "gradually has come to be used of the false strength, the magic power".<sup>362</sup>

v. 7 yitlahăšū probably means "whisper incantations", balancing v. 6 in which the enemy was uttering empty words, curses.

v. 8 dēbar bělfiya'al: the root 'yl is one of the denominations of positive action. bělfi denotes the negative action. Furthermore, it has been suggested that deber be read as "pestilence", the name of a demon,<sup>363</sup> which stresses the supernatural character of the attack. Demons are invoked to hasten the Psalmist's death.

### 1.3 Conclusion

For the pō'älē 'awen to be connected with sorcery, i.e. the power to harm someone by using non-human agencies (like demons, words, and the like), it has to be in a context which people already associated with supernatural forces.

Illness is a very likely domain because disease is not believed to come from natural causes. Therefore, in Psalms where the cause of the disease is attributed to people, especially to pō'älē 'awen, the probability is that they are seen as being directly responsible for the illness, that they are capable of putting a maleficent power to work, as the etymology of 'awen perhaps shows. We know that the word is their weapon and that the word is considered to be a living, potent agency. It is possible that, in the right setting, the pō'älē 'awen are not so much "workers of inequity" as the LXX puts it, giving it a moral sense which it is unlikely to have had, but "cursers", who use words and incantations to harm or kill people.

<sup>362</sup> Pedersen (1926) 431.

<sup>363</sup> Caquot (1956) 53–68.

2. 'Ārī'ēl: *An Oracle Attendant?*2.0 *Introduction*

In two passages of the book of Isaiah, namely Isa 29:1–7 and 33:7<sup>364</sup> this term is believed to be associated with divination. This section will investigate the grounds for such an opinion by looking at the problems involved in the study of this word and then examining the textual evidence.

2.1 *The problems*

2.1.1 The translations given in the Hebrew lexicons and dictionaries are somehow remote from the idea of divination, and are further complicated by the fact that 'ārī'ēl is found under different forms.<sup>365</sup> There are four main Old Testament texts<sup>366</sup> to be considered along with the Mesha stone.<sup>367</sup> BDB gives it the meaning of "lioness of El", a name applied to Jerusalem,<sup>368</sup> and "altar-hearth".<sup>369</sup> It is also a proper name.<sup>370</sup> As to the form found in Isa 33:7, BDB has "form and meaning dubious". Gesenius<sup>371</sup> and KBL<sup>372</sup> do not elaborate further.

From this data it can be seen that 'ārī'ēl may designate either persons<sup>373</sup> or objects.<sup>374</sup>

2.1.2 Despite various attempts to elucidate it, the etymology remains obscure.

I shall briefly sum up the research:

<sup>364</sup> May (1939) 60; Haldar (1945) 132.

<sup>365</sup> Isa 29:1.2.7; Is 33:7; Ezek 43:15.

<sup>366</sup> 2 Sam 23:20–2 Chr 11:26; Ezek 43:15; Isa 29:1–7; 33:7; Ezra 8:16.

<sup>367</sup> Line 12.

<sup>368</sup> BDB 72. This translation applies to Isa 29.

<sup>369</sup> In the case of Ezek 43:15.

<sup>370</sup> In Ezek 8:6 it is a masculine proper name and designates a chief man among returning exiles (BDB, 72).

<sup>371</sup> Gesenius, 58: "Gottesherd", "Herd d. Altars"; and gives "Jerusalem" for Isa 29.

<sup>372</sup> KBL, 81: 'ārī'ēl', "form and meaning dubious".

<sup>373</sup> Feigin (1920) 131–137. In 2 Sam 23:20, Feigin reads "a proper name or hero"; Ezek 8:6 "a personal name".

<sup>374</sup> Ezek 43:15, "altar-hearth", "part of the altar on which the sacrificial victims were burnt. According to Feigin (1920) 134 'ārī'ēl on the Mesha Stone designates "a masseba" or "an image of God".

- The traditional literal explanation of the word is “lion of God”.<sup>375</sup> Others, still trying to explain the word from the Hebrew, follow the Targum and understand it as “the hearth of God”. This view is fairly popular with modern scholars.<sup>376</sup>
- An Assyrian etymology has also been suggested.<sup>377</sup> ‘arî’ēl would come from arallu which is a name for the underworld, or for the mountain abode of the gods.<sup>378</sup>
- Finally, there seems to be a connection with a Ugaritic term ary, “associates”, and ‘ārfēl can be explained as a compound of the Ugaritic word with el.<sup>379</sup>

In relation to the passages in Isaiah, we must decide whether the references are to people or to objects; if the reference is to people their role is more likely to originate in the Ugaritic institution, in which case it conveys the idea of association; however if it originates in the Assyrian world, the reference is to the world of spirits. A study of the texts might throw light on the question.

#### 2.4 *Isa 29:1–7 and Isa 33:7: a discussion*

The first problem we face with regard to these texts is their *Sitz im Leben*. Do they concern Yahweh’s plan regarding Judah’s future<sup>380</sup> or are they to be seen as “cultic”?<sup>381</sup>

##### 2.4.1 Isa 29:1–7

v. 1 Ho Ariel, Ariel,  
the city where David encamped!  
Add year to year;  
let the feasts run their round.  
v. 2 Yet I will distress Ariel,  
and there shall be moaning and lamentation,  
and she shall be to me like an Ariel.

<sup>375</sup> See dictionaries and lexicons.

<sup>376</sup> For instance, Grogan (1986) 185ff.

<sup>377</sup> Albright (1920) 137–142.

<sup>378</sup> CAD vol. 1, 226: “arallū”, “a poetic name for the nether world, the abode of the dead”.

<sup>379</sup> May (1939) 53.

<sup>380</sup> Grogan (1986) 210: “there can be little doubt that the text is about the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem and their departure from it”.

<sup>381</sup> Halder (1945) 130–134; Gunkel (1924) 177–208. According to these scholars Isa 29 is connected to the New Year festival; for references, see Halder (1945) 133.

v. 3 And I will encamp against you round about,  
 and will besiege you with towers  
 and I will raise siegeworks against you.  
 v. 4 Then deep from the earth you shall speak,  
 from low in the dust your words shall come;  
 your voice shall come from the ground like  
 the voice of a ghost, and your speech  
 shall whisper out of the dust.  
 v. 5 But the multitude of your foes shall be like  
 small dust, and the multitude of the ruthless  
 like passing chaff. And in an instant,  
 suddenly,  
 v. 6 you will be visited by the Lord of hosts  
 with thunder and with earthquake and great  
 noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the  
 flame of a devouring fire.  
 v. 7 And the multitude of all the nations that fight against  
 Ariel and her stronghold and distress her,  
 shall be like a dream, a vision of the night."

This passage may have been inspired by the period preceding the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians (701 B.C.).<sup>382</sup> It describes how the city of David will be besieged, captured and destroyed: it "will become like one grovelling in the dust".<sup>383</sup> By this punishment the impious and the unjust will be exterminated and the nation will be purified.

The MT does not present any textual problems. The LXX translates the Hebrew quite closely, as does the Vulgate. Neither of these versions throws light on the MT as both fail to translate 'ări'ēl.<sup>384</sup>

In v. 1 the linking of the city with David and in v. 8 the reference to Mount Zion establish the identification of Ariel with Jerusalem.<sup>385</sup> But why call it Ariel? The last clause of v. 2 makes this clear. According to Grogan "the Hebrew for hearth sounds like the Hebrew for Ariel".<sup>386</sup> Jerusalem therefore is viewed as a place of sacrifice.<sup>387</sup> This view is followed by many scholars.<sup>388</sup>

<sup>382</sup> Kissane (1960) 311; van der Toorn (1988) 209 gives 703 as a possible date for Is 29:1-8.

<sup>383</sup> Kissane (1960) 310.

<sup>384</sup> LXX: ouai Ariēl polis. Vulg.: Vae Ariel, Ariel civitas.

<sup>385</sup> Grogan (1986) 185f.; May (1939) 61f.

<sup>386</sup> Grogan (1986) 186f. Ariel is used here to provide a play on the word harel or hariel, meaning "altar-hearth", the highest part of the altar on which the fire was kindled.

<sup>387</sup> Against the interpretation that it means here "the lion of God", perhaps suggestive of the strength and majesty of a royal city. However the interpretation "altar-hearth" is clearer in view of the mention of the feasts.

<sup>388</sup> Grogan (1986) 191.

The main criticism of that view is that neither "Jerusalem" nor "altar-hearth" fits in with all the instances of Ariel in the passage, especially that in vv. 2ff. Many proposals have been put forward, from Hades<sup>389</sup> to the qubbah<sup>390</sup> but again there does not seem to be a single answer.

The association of 'är'ēl with divination is deduced from the context, especially in v. 4 which has been linked with necromantic practices.<sup>391</sup> But what about vv. 1 and 7? A "cultic" interpretation seems to solve a number of difficulties: Isa 29:1-7 may be a description of the office of the cultic officer who is participating in the "descensus" procession and who is going to announce his oracle during it. Therefore, 'är'ēl may be translated by "oracler",<sup>392</sup> which fits in quite well in a cultic context but still does not explain v. 8. I suggest that Ariel is connected with the altar-hearth and that, as a place of sacrifice, the altar-hearth is also linked with divinatory practices.

Ariel could be an oracler personifying Jerusalem. In a cultic ritual such as described in Isa 29, the city's survival is at the heart of the ceremony. The city is personified by a cultic diviner whose task is to give an oracle on the future of a Jerusalem threatened by the Assyrian armies. The oracle may have been obtained through necromancy.<sup>393</sup>

#### 2.4.2 Isa 33:7<sup>394</sup>

Behold the valiant ones ("Ariels" = 'er'ellām)<sup>395</sup> cry without, The envoys of peace weep bitterly.

The Text of the LXX is longer and more interpretative but does not throw light on the meaning of 'er'ellām:

Behold now, those whom we feared shall cry out because of you: messengers shall be sent, bitterly weeping, entreating for peace. (cf. Vulg. "Ecce videntes clamabunt foris, angeli pacis amare flebunt", translates almost word for word the MT, rendering 'er'ellām by videntes").

<sup>389</sup> Albright (1920) 137ff.; Jeremias, cited by Feigin (1920) 133 also connects the 'är'ēl with the underworld through the Babylonian word arallū (see footnote 15).

<sup>390</sup> May (1939) 63 assumes the 'är'ēl to be a military rather than a religious instrument. He calls it a "sacred palladium" such as the ark or the tent of meeting.

<sup>391</sup> May (1939) 60; Halder (1945) 132f. May thinks "that the use of the roots 'ób and spp together suggests that the imagery is oracular". See 'ób under the "Necromancy", chapter 4. See van der Toorn (1988) 209.

<sup>392</sup> Halder (1945).

<sup>393</sup> See in particular v. 4 and "Necromancy", chapter 4 for full treatment.

<sup>394</sup> The MT text is difficult. Most translations render it by a plural.

<sup>395</sup> The RSV renders 'er'ellām by "the valiant ones".

Various interpretations have been suggested for the reading of the 'er'ellām in this verse.

Some are based on the context, taking 'er'ellām as a plural meaning "nobles", or "camel riders",<sup>396</sup> or "destructive spirits of the underworld",<sup>397</sup> or "heroes".<sup>398</sup> Other translations, based on the parallelismus membrorum, render 'er'ellām by "messengers", "envoys".<sup>399</sup> The *Sitz im Leben* is liturgical<sup>400</sup> and Is 33:7–24 would "fall into four distinct units, each marked by a firmly kept liturgical form: lament (vv. 7–9); oracular response (vv. 10–13); torah liturgy (vv. 14–16), prophetic promise (vv. 17–24)".<sup>401</sup>

In this context we may take the 'er'ellām to refer to people responsible for the divinatory aspect of cultic life.<sup>402</sup> When they are placed in parallel with "messengers of peace" they are important people.<sup>403</sup> What were their duties? We can infer from the liturgical context that there is a place for oracle-givers; they "cry without" because of the message they have to deliver to Judah.

## 2.5 Conclusion

There is no single solution to the problem of the 'ārî'ēl' in the texts of Isa 29 and 33. However, I think that in both cases the likeliest meaning is connected with divination and the delivery of oracles, hence "oracle-attendant" or "oracular". Nothing is said explicitly of the method they used but I suggest that they may have obtained their oracle through the consultation of the spirits of the dead.

<sup>396</sup> Feigin (1920) 133 lists the ancient interpretations.

<sup>397</sup> Albright (1920) 138.

<sup>398</sup> Cf. RSV which probably owes its translation to 2 Sam 23:20.

<sup>399</sup> Kimhi, cited by Feigin (1920) 134.

<sup>400</sup> Clements (1980) 266; Gunkel (1924) 177f. Murray (1982) 211–213 suggests for the setting a ritual of cosmic repair: "Is 33 reflects a ritual, . . . ; it was one for the control of hostile forces, both supernatural and political".

<sup>401</sup> Clements (1980) 266.

<sup>402</sup> Haldar (1945) 58f. thinks that 'ar'elim is an hendiadys (with mlk) which "means that the messenger idea is also allied with ariel". May (1939) 58f.: "They were originally those who had charge of the ariel; as an instrument of the cult compared to the sacred tent, or the ark, and used like these as battle emblems and for divination in deciding the course of a military campaign". They became with time especially brave warriors.

<sup>403</sup> Irwin (1977) 144 proposes "leaders", i.e. important figures in the community.

3. *Tipsār: Astrologer?*

3.0 *Tipsār*, usually translated by “scribe”, “recruiting officer” occurs only twice in the MT, namely in *Jer 51:27* and *Nah 3:17*. This word is understood to be a Neo-Assyrian loan-word.<sup>404</sup> *Tipsār* would come from the Akkadian *ṭupšarru*, “tablet-writer”.<sup>405</sup>

3.1 Parpola is the first to challenge the above interpretation of *Nah 3:17* when he relates the Hebrew *tipsār* to the Akkadian *ṭupšarru* and consequently translates it as “astrologer”, i.e. scribes specialized in the observation and interpretation of celestial and terrestrial omens.<sup>406</sup> This translation of *Nah 3:17* makes more sense of the general context: the observation of stars being made at night, the astrologers would have to leave their posts when the sun rises.<sup>407</sup>

3.2 It should be asked whether we should not retain the translation of *tipsār*, “astrologer” for *Jer 51:27*. This verse is set in a long oracle pronounced by the prophet against Babylon. In the description of the preparation for war it is said: “Appoint a *tipsār* against her (Babylon)”. As we know from other sources diviners were consulted in times of war, their word creating the circumstances which ensured victory. Is it possible that it is an astrologer or diviner who is appointed to “help” the victory?<sup>408</sup>

4. *Minnēzārîm: Diviners?*4.0 *The traditional interpretation*

This term occurs in *Nah 3:17* only and has been previously translated by “prince” or “guards”.<sup>409</sup>

<sup>404</sup> BDB 381; KBL 356.

<sup>405</sup> Von Soden (1981) 1395: “Schreiber”.

<sup>406</sup> Parpola (1971) 9–12; this position is similarly adopted by Cathcart (1988) 196–197, rejecting his previous translation of “recruiting officer” (1973) 42ff.

<sup>407</sup> Cathcart (1988) footnote 44.

<sup>408</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>409</sup> BDB, 634; KBL 538. See also Cathcart (1973) 146 who gives the bibliography.

#### 4.1 *New evidence from Akkadian literature*

It has been said that only a frequent Akkadian name for a high official comes into consideration as corresponding with *tupšarru*. There seems little doubt that we should read simply "thy manzaze".<sup>410</sup>

This proposal is further supported by a neo-Assyrian letter published by Parpola where *tipsār* is used in parallel with *manzaze*.<sup>411</sup> If we follow the Akkadian origin, the *minnēzārīm* would be palace officials. These officials are involved in divinatory sciences, as the letter published by Parpola shows: the *manzaze* are cited along with "scribes, "haruspices", "exorcists", "physicians", "augurs".

#### 4.3 *Conclusion*

It seems, one way or the other, that the *minnēzārīm* have a strong connection with divination, although no details are given as to their methods. I suggest that we read this term as a synonym for *tipsārīm*, "astrologers".<sup>412</sup>

### 5. *Nōqēd: Sheep-tender or Hepastocopist?*

#### 5.0 *The problem*

The word *nōqēd* occurs only twice in the whole of the Old Testament<sup>413</sup> and has always traditionally been translated by "sheep-raiser", "sheep-dealer", or "sheep-tender".<sup>414</sup> Etymologically *nōqēd* was thought to come from Arabic in which *naqad* is the name of a particular breed of sheep, proverbially ugly, but producing exceptionally good wool. The derivative noun *naqqād* signifies one who watches over that particular breed.<sup>415</sup> This view has been criticized,<sup>416</sup> and an Akkadian origin has been put forward.<sup>417</sup> The *nāqīdu* is a "herdsman".<sup>418</sup> In

<sup>410</sup> Torczyner cited by Cathcart (1988) 8.

<sup>411</sup> Parpola (1971) 10.

<sup>412</sup> See this word in this sub-section.

<sup>413</sup> 2 Kings 3:4 and Am 1:1.

<sup>414</sup> BDB 667; KBL 632.

<sup>415</sup> e.g. Hammershaimb (1970) 17.

<sup>416</sup> See in particular Montgomery (1904) 94 who thinks that "the Arabic parallel is provincial, and it seems a far cry to use such a special term for the general designation of shepherd".

<sup>417</sup> KBL, 632.

<sup>418</sup> CAD (1956-1989) vol. 2, 333.

Mesopotamia the *rabu buli* was the chief supervisor of enormous herds: the *naqidu* was under him. Those who actually herded the flocks were the *rē'ū* (= *ro'îm*), herdsmen under the control of the *nāqidu*. The latter were often responsible for five hundred cows and two thousand sheep and goats.<sup>419</sup> Moreover, the term "sheep-raiser" is very easy to derive from the original meaning of the root *nqd*, "to puncture": as the ancient Israelites marked their slaves they also marked their sheep and other animals to distinguish them from those of others.<sup>420</sup>

If then the term *nōqēd* is so well attested in Semitic languages (it is a very old term which is also found in Sumerian with the meaning "shepherd") with the general meaning "shepherd", "sheep-raiser", why is it necessary to consider it in this study of magicians, diviners and oracular practitioners? There are two reasons. Firstly, another etymology for *nōqēd* has been suggested, deriving from another Akkadian term *naqādu*, meaning "to probe".<sup>421</sup> The *nōqēd* would designate an hepatoscopist, i.e. someone who examines the liver of sheep for divinatory purposes. Secondly the word *nqdm* has been noted in Ugaritic material,<sup>422</sup> especially in lists of various functionaries attached to the palace. To this must be added a slender piece of evidence from beyond Ugarit, namely the Moabite inscription named after King Mesha.

The Ugaritic and Moabite data will be examined first and the conclusions drawn will be considered in the light of the Old Testament *nqd*.

### 5.1 *The Ugaritic evidence*

The Ugaritic data can be classified into four distinct groups:<sup>423</sup>

5.1.1 The Ugaritic text KTU 1.6 (UT 62).VI.55 is part of a colophon on a literary tablet containing a portion of the Baal cycle. In this text, a senior official (called *Atn-prln*) is described as "chief of priests",

<sup>419</sup> Kapelrud (1961) 5–7.

<sup>420</sup> Murtonen (1952) 170–171.

<sup>421</sup> Bič (1951) 293–296; see also Gray (1965) 213, footnote 8. However CAD translates *naqādu* by 1—"to beat, throb, palpitate", 2—"to worry, to fear, to be anxious about", 3—"to be in a dangerous situation". Bič has been extensively criticised, cf. Murtonen (1952), Kapelrud (1961), Segert (1967), Wright (1975).

<sup>422</sup> Though the primary data concerning *nqd* in the Ras-Shamra texts are in the Ugarit language, there are also pertinent texts in Akkadian and Hurrian from Ugarit.

<sup>423</sup> Craigie (1982) 29–33.

rb khnm and chief of nqdm, traditionally translated "shepherds".<sup>424</sup> The text was found in the High Priest's library, suggesting a general religious context. From this information it may be inferred that the nqdm were "a category of religious personnel with a "social character". They would have been responsible for the temple flocks and may also have been engaged in sacrificial activity".<sup>425</sup> But whether the nqdm were all religious functionaries or whether they were employed in such institutions as the temple is not very clear from the text.

5.1.2 In five texts, the word nqdm is used in a list of guilds or professional groups.<sup>426</sup> The four Ugaritic texts all list the term nqdm in the same position in the list: tnnm, nqdm, khnm, qdšm. The problem is to determine the pairing of words. If nqdm is grouped with khnm, the argument for the nōqēd as part of a religious association seems valid. In fact, when we examine closely all the lists of professional groups, it appears that many of the groups referred to are neither religious nor cultic. Also in one of the lists<sup>427</sup> which appears to be indicating the number of bowmen to be conscripted by both town and professional groups, the term nqdm is very clearly associated with the preceding word (tnnm), not the following one (khnm) which in any case is associated with qdšm. Of course, whether nqdm is religious or not in this case depends on the meaning given to tnnm.<sup>428</sup> On the other hand it remains a possibility that both these professionals were associated with the temple along with the khnm and the qdšm. Given the wide range of professions represented the only conclusion to be drawn from these texts is that the nqdm are royal dependents.

5.1.3 The third group<sup>429</sup> are more explicitly economic and administrative in character. The nqdm could qualify for land grants, pay

<sup>424</sup> Dussaud (1941) 101–102: "Nous avons l'exemple de deux corporations, celle des prêtres (kohanîm) et celle des pasteurs (nqedîm) qui ont le même chef (rab) en la personne de Atn-prln".

<sup>425</sup> Craigie (1982) 30.

<sup>426</sup> KTU 4, 68 (UT 113). 71; KTU 4, 126 (UT 169); KTU 4, 416 (UT 2019). 5; KTU 4, 745 (RS 25, 417). 4 are all in Ugaritic. PRU VI, 93 is in Akkadian.

<sup>427</sup> KTU 4, 68 (UT 113) 71.

<sup>428</sup> Cutler and McDonald (1977) 13–30 opt for tnnm = producer of sheep product; Craigie (1982) 31 also thinks they are involved in some aspects of sheep trade. Other opinions are collected by Cutler and McDonald.

<sup>429</sup> KTU 4 (UT 308) 12; KTU 4, 103 (UT 300) 44.

their taxes, and one text describes the receipt of weapons by a group of nqdm, "probably a further indication of their status as royal dependents liable to military service".<sup>430</sup>

5.1.4 The Hurrian text appears to contain a ritual of some sort and is difficult to interpret. There is a possibility that the use of nqd in this text associates "shepherdship" with Hurrian deities, but in Ugaritic as indeed in Hebrew, God is given the epithet of rō'eh, but never of nōqēd. To sum up the Ugaritic data, it has been inferred that nōqēd may have designated some kind of religious functionary. Whether the nqdm were from the secular social world<sup>431</sup> or whether they were temple officials in charge of sheep belonging to the temple<sup>432</sup> is still open to discussion. What we do know of them, i.e. that they were royal dependants, subject by law to both taxation and conscription and eligible to receive grants of land, is not enough to enable us to be certain of their field of activity. De Tarragon concludes (and I agree with him): "la fonction des nqdm paraît plus religieuse que profane, d'après les contextes. Le sens d'une racine autre que nqd 'pasteur' reste à trouver".<sup>433</sup>

## 5.2 *The Moabite inscriptions of the Mesha stone*

... And as for Beth Baalmeon, I led (my shepherds: n[q]dy) up there.<sup>434</sup>

The expression nqdy may reasonably be restored in lines 30–31. The word means a "breeder of sheep" and describes a group of shepherds who were servants of King Mesha. The nqdm in this inscription appear also to have been royal dependents.

But to return to our task, which is to inquire whether the biblical nōqēd may be associated with hepatoscopy, we need to use the previously discussed Ugaritic and Moabite data, along with the etymology, and consider it directly in relation to the two biblical texts in which nōqēd occurs.

<sup>430</sup> Craigie (1982) 32.

<sup>431</sup> Engnell (1967) 89.

<sup>432</sup> Hammershaimb (1970) 17; Kapelrud (1961) 5–7.

<sup>433</sup> de Tarragon (1980) 136.

<sup>434</sup> Gibson (1971) 75–77.

### 5.3 *The biblical texts*

5.3.1 2 Kings 3:4 records that Mesha, king of Moab, used "to pay the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams in tribute". He is described in this same verse as *nōqēd*. The LXX seems embarrassed by the term (Kai Mōsa basileus Mōab ēn *nōkēd*) which it does not translate (cf. Vulg. which ignores it: Porro, Mesa rex Moab, nutriebat pecora multa). All translations agree in rendering *nōqed* as "sheepmaster".

In this text it seems that the term *nōqed* as it applies to a king may have sacral connotations: "Hence *nōqed* must denote King Mesha as a sacral person, and probably as the high priest in principle".<sup>435</sup> But what then is the link between sacred kingship and hepatoscopy? One of the functions of the king in the ancient Near East was that of consulting the divinity through oracular means, generally in critical situations. It is therefore possible that Mesha King of Moab had been known to use hepatoscopy, a manner of divining through the observation of the entrails of a sacrificed sheep, as King Nebuchadrezzar had himself done (Ezek 21:26). The term, applied to Mesha of Moab, may not necessarily be restricted to sheep breeding as such but may also include the breeding of sheep for divinatory purposes. The *nōqed* would then be an inclusive word which would explain why the term *rō'eh* (meaning exclusively "shepherd") was not used.

5.3.2 Amos 1:1: The statement "Amos who was among the shepherds of Tekoa" presents some difficulties. The LXX translates *nōqed* by Akkariem ek Tekoue, a place name, (cf. Vulg. which renders it "pastoribus de Thecue").

In another account of his vocation,<sup>436</sup> it is said that he was a cattleman (*bōqēr*) and a fruit farmer (*bōlēs šiqmîm*). Does the internal evidence of the Book of Amos support the interpretation of *nōqed* to include more than simply agricultural activity? In the light of the Ugaritic material and of 2 Kings 3:4 *nōqed* appears to be:

- a high ranking functionary responsible for a large part of the temple herd;
- an important person economically;
- a person possibly connected, through his occupation, with

<sup>435</sup> Engnell (1967) 87–89.

<sup>436</sup> Amos 7:14–15.

temple sacrifices and therefore divination. How then can noqed be reconciled with bôqér and bôlēs?

The designation of the prophet as bôqér opens up an interesting semantic field: dictionaries give it the meaning of "to examine closely, to observe". The study of the root suggests firstly a certain action (and perhaps specifically an inspection of the intestines), then the time in which it took place, i.e. in the morning.<sup>437</sup> Amos thus could have been not a nâbî' but a member of the upper class Judean agricultural set, breeding sheep for the temple of Jerusalem. He may have been involved in the direct sacrifice and examination of the entrails/liver of his sheep.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion we may say that in view of the extra biblical material the translation of nôqêd as "sheep-raiser" may be accepted but that it does not cover the whole of his function. The nqdm were a group connected to the religious personnel of the temple, and they had quite a high social status (cf. Amos). The mention of the king of Moab as a nôqêd seems to confirm this; whether the word as it seems to be used in the Ugaritic texts can be applied in the Old Testament context is a difficult matter to establish. It is equally difficult to establish whether or not the temple connection, even in Ugaritic times, led to the active participation of the nqdm in sacrifices and divinatory rites. What remains is the possibility that nôqêd in the Old Testament might have covered a broader semantic field that included both sheep breeding,<sup>438</sup> specifically connected with the Jerusalem temple, and participation in divinatory rituals.

#### 6. *Sôhär'îm: Those Who Ensnare*

The verbal form of this word means "to go around", "to travel about",<sup>439</sup> and has been previously translated by "trafficker", "trader", which

<sup>437</sup> Bič (1951) 295; Mowinckel (1924) draws attention to the expression bôqér, giving it a divinatory, as well as an omen sacrifice connection.

<sup>438</sup> Segert (1987) 409–410 stresses the post-biblical Hebrew nêquddâ, "point", used for marking points in the writing. Thus the naqidû may have had to mark animals already counted by some sign. But this does not seriously alter my conclusion.

<sup>439</sup> BDB, 695; KBL, 654.

in fact suits quite well most texts in which the noun occurs.<sup>440</sup> However, there is still some difficulty in translating *sōhārīm* in Isa 47:15 by "traders", as it does not seem to make much sense in the context, i.e. an oracle of doom against Babylon which its astrologers, diviners, sorcerers would not be able to counter. If we can trace the etymology of *shr* back to the Akkadian *saharu*,<sup>441</sup> then a fundamental meaning of the root from which all the usages are derived comes through: the word is used for both "merchant" and "sorcerer" and also "beggar". It may be that all interpretations deserve serious consideration,<sup>442</sup> and Isa 47:15 could be translated by "magicians".<sup>443</sup> But what type of magical skills have they got? Perhaps an answer is given to us in Ps 91:4, a psalm of deliverance against various attacks<sup>444</sup> where the Psalmist compares the faithfulness of Yahweh to a "sōhērāh".

This word was previously translated by "buckler", "shield",<sup>445</sup> but if we accept that the Psalm is a poem celebrating the protective power of Yahweh against demonic threats, the *sōhērāh* is likely to refer to the supernatural "encircling protection of Yahweh".

This is a nice twist to the meaning prevailing in Mesopotamia where evil magic may surround a man.<sup>446</sup> The Psalm shows how Yahweh can turn evil into good. Incidentally this shows once again that the supernatural power is basically neutral: it is turned into good or into evil according to who has control over it. We could say that when *sōhārīm* is used in relation to foreign people, the meaning is bound to be negative. I propose to translate Isa 47:15 as "those who trap people in their magic circles" (instead of "those who ensnare"). When, however, the word is used in connection with Yahweh it may be seen as a beneficial supernatural protection, a magical circle in which one is safe.

<sup>440</sup> cf. for instance Gen 37:28; 2 Chron 1:16; Ezek 27:36; 38:13.

<sup>441</sup> Cathcart (1988) 199; McIntosh (1973) 56–68; CAD (1956–1989) vol. 15, 46ff. gives *Saharu*, "to turn", "to turn around", "to do business", "to encircle", said of magic or sorcery (in cases when evil magic surrounds a man).

<sup>442</sup> Cathcart (1988) 191; McIntosh (1973) 56f.

<sup>443</sup> The RSV translates by "who have trafficked". It is worth mentioning that the Jerusalem Bible renders *sōhārīm* by "wizards".

<sup>444</sup> The adversaries of the Psalmist are magicians, against Caquot (1958).

<sup>445</sup> See the various translations.

<sup>446</sup> For reference see CAD, footnote 3.

7. *Rěšā'îm: The Wicked Ones*7.0 *The problems*

The case of the *rāšā'îm* is a difficult one due mainly to the very general meaning of the word. The root means "to be wicked"<sup>447</sup> and the noun *rěšā'îm* itself occurs quite often in the Old Testament, especially in Wisdom literature and in the Psalms.<sup>448</sup> It has been uniformly translated by the LXX and the Vulgate as *hamartolón* and *peccatorum*, both meaning "sinners". Mowinckel was the first to suggest that *rěšā'îm* could be related to magical practices.<sup>449</sup> His thesis was that many of the Psalms are prayers to God to free his worshippers from the spells of sorcerers. Mowinckel's thesis has been widely criticised, and *rěšā'îm* is of such frequent occurrence that we cannot always posit this more specific meaning. "Only a definite context can decide that it means in any particular passage practitioners of the black arts".<sup>450</sup>

Sorcerers are *rěšā'îm*, but *rěšā'îm* are not necessarily sorcerers. *Rěšā'îm* describes different groups of people: "apostates" as opposed to "law abiding" Israelites (Pss 1; 37; 73), or members of two different religious parties.<sup>451</sup> In all instances, what is characteristic of the *rāā'* is not that he is an impious person, but that "he is not right", that he is not a "normal" man with a "normal" soul and "normal" abilities.<sup>452</sup> I consider this to be more accurate than the more restrictive translation that understands *rěšā'îm* as the national and political enemies of Israel.

I shall now examine a number of Psalms where the *rěšā'îm* are mentioned and I shall try to define their field of "wickedness" in order to decide whether or not this pertains to the field of magic and sorcery.

<sup>447</sup> BDB 947; KBL 910-911 both give the treble meaning of "guilty", "impious", "wicked".

<sup>448</sup> Apart from the Psalms, *rěšā'îm* occurs in Job and Proverbs, and, sparsely, in the prophetic literature: e.g. Isa 48:22; 57:20,21; Jer 5:26; 12:1; 23:19; Mal 3:18.

<sup>449</sup> Mowinckel (1923).

<sup>450</sup> Cited by Guillaume (1938) 272.

<sup>451</sup> Birkeland (1955).

<sup>452</sup> Guillaume (1938) 211.

7.1 *The texts*

7.1.1 Psalm 3, as a Psalm for protection, may deal with magical threat. It is generally agreed that this Psalm is a morning prayer and speaks of the Psalmist who, confronted with relentless enemies, puts his trust in God's help. The problem here is that the enemies are not identified.

Some commentators<sup>453</sup> have understood them to be national enemies.<sup>454</sup> However, a few details in the Psalm point to a more personal experience. The time of the day (early morning) suggests that the Psalmist has been attacked during the night, darkness being particularly fraught with danger: as Psalm 91 reminds us, sorcerers and demons lay their traps and snares at night. Furthermore, the vocabulary and expressions used confirm that impression:

v. 7b I am not afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about (sābīb).<sup>455</sup>

This could be interpreted as the magical circle that sorcerers use to trap their prey, imprisoning him as in a snare.

v. 8c You shall break the teeth of the wicked (rēshā'īm).

This verse is a reminder of the muttering, the whispering of the incantation singers who say their words of doom through their teeth. The destruction of their teeth means that they will not have any means left to perform their evil deeds.<sup>456</sup>

The whole Psalm gives the picture of a light-giving Yahweh, whose presence dissipates the terror of darkness. It is likely that the "wicked ones" were indeed "sorcerers" operating during the night.

7.1.2 Psalm 17 is a prayer for help: the Psalmist is persecuted by enemies and asks for divine intervention. Two elements are of interest in this Psalm, firstly the list of wicked deeds he has not performed and secondly the description of the "wicked ones". This might enable us to define their field of activity.

v. 3 If you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress.

<sup>453</sup> Cheyne (1904) 9–10; Kissane (1964) 10; Briggs (1096) 24f.

<sup>454</sup> They identify these enemies as Arabians and Jerahmelites, see Cheyne (1904).

<sup>455</sup> LXX: tōn kuklō epithēmenōn underlines the idea of circle.

<sup>456</sup> Against Briggs (1907) 26.

The reference to the night may be understood as a sign that the Psalmist is trying to clear himself of any suspicion of practising witchcraft. If he is in his bed and is not involved in magical utterances, he could have a claim to the protection due to the righteous.

Vv. 9–12 also have a great importance as they are descriptive of the evildoers' action:

e.g. v. 9b literally: my enemies at the peril of my soul who surround me. This reminds us of the reference in Ezek 13:18 to women, hunters of souls, the "sorceresses", whose practices are severely condemned by the prophet. No precise details are given here but the danger to the *nepesh* could be a pointer that the enemies, the *rēšā'îm*, are involved with sorcery. v. 10b with their mouths they speak arrogantly.

They boast of their power and work on paralysing their prey as the next verse shows:

v. 11 They track me down; now they surround me;  
they set their eyes to cast me to the ground.

This verse emphasizes how powerless the Psalmist is, on his own, without being able to fight back. Only a supernatural power could provoke such a reaction.

The following verse with its mention of a lion, an animal of the desert and therefore perceived as demonic, confirms this idea.

7.1.3 Finally Psalm 91, which I believe is a prayer against demons or magical attack.<sup>457</sup> Whether this is a psalm connected with magical or mantic practices will determine the meaning of the *rēšā'îm* in v. 8.

I shall briefly note the vocabulary related to this theme:

- the root *lûn* (v. 1): to spend the night in order to obtain something, is used in the context of incubation dreams (Aqhat 1.17 II; 1 Kings 3:3–5 ...).
- *pâh yâqûš* (v. 3): the snare of the fowler is a symbol of unexpected danger and reminds us of the imagery used for the implements belonging to magicians or sorcerers (Ezek 13:18).

<sup>457</sup> Against Caquot (1958) who takes the Psalm to be the expression of the triumph over the enemies of the nation; Wensick (1941) 14–22; Nicolsky (1927) 14; Franken (1954) 36; Wevers (1956) 85 all think of Psalm 91 as a talisman. It is worth noting here that the Talmud Babli, Shebu'ot 15b uses it as magical protection.

- *sōhērāh* (v. 4) is a hapax legomenon implying the idea of “going around”<sup>458</sup> and of supernatural protection.
- *mipahad lāy-ělāh* (v. 5), “the terror of the night”, “the arrow that flies by day”, and in v. 6, “the pestilence (deber) that stalks in darkness”, “the destruction that wastes at noonday”, all show the action of powerful forces.<sup>459</sup> Could it be the result of the actions of the *rēšā'īm* (v. 8b), the “wicked magicians” who are so powerful that only the supernatural protection of God can deliver the unfortunate who becomes their victim?

## 7.2 Conclusion

In assessing the results of this investigation of the *resa'im* in the narrow sense of “sorcerers”, I can make several conclusions:

7.2.1 It is difficult to decide for certain if the *rēšā'īm* are involved or not in witchcraft because these activities are rarely, if ever, discussed in great detail.

7.2.2 After thorough examination of the texts, it seems from the contexts that the individual prayers for deliverance from a personal enemy (as opposed to a national enemy) applied to sorcerers.

7.2.3 The third element which my research has revealed is that the presence of a certain type of vocabulary associated with the practices of the *rēšā'īm* (e.g. *sbb*, *shr*, *npš*, *dbr*, *phḥ*),<sup>460</sup> along with the fact that the night is the normal setting of these Psalms, suggests that the attack described is of a supernatural kind; an attack which comes from the *rēšā'īm* themselves. Also, the feeling of utter helplessness described by the Psalmist gives a hint of the supernatural strength of these attacks. It is, then, reasonable to think that the Psalmist would be able to fight most “human” attacks, and we can conclude that he is here confronted by superhuman agencies.

<sup>458</sup> McIntosh (1973) 56–62.

<sup>459</sup> The commentators, although they do not always agree on the nature and origin of those dangers, all agree that they are to be feared.

<sup>460</sup> We know from the Babylonians that nets and snares are the current terms for the magic arts (Pedersen (1926) 448).

8. *Rākāl: Magician or Trader?*8.1 *The problem*

The root *rkl* was traditionally taken to mean “to go about (for trade or for gossip)”<sup>461</sup> and *rākāl* was rendered by “merchant” or “trader”.<sup>462</sup> However, we must not ignore the possibility of translating this word by “magicians”,<sup>463</sup> on the basis of a comparison with Isa 47:15 where *sōhāraīk*, also previously translated by “traffickers”<sup>464</sup> may designate “sorcerers or sorceresses”.<sup>465</sup> The possibility that there is a connection between magicians and traders is therefore raised. This may be further justified by the fact that in the context of Nahum 3 the term *rōkēlayk* is used in a derogatory way (the passage is a general condemnation of the Assyrian capital, Nineveh): your sorcerers act as corrupted merchants; they sell their skills (maybe their amulets and talismans). In view of the general suspicion in which Assyrian or Babylonian culture and cultus was held by the Israelites, I suggest this translation is very likely.

The question now is to see whether it is possible to pursue the matter further and examine other texts in which the word occurs in an ambiguous context to see if they challenge the traditional translations.

Such a text can be found in Neh 3:31–2 in the passage about the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem. The *rōkēlīm* are mentioned along with various types of participants in this task. These include all sorts of guilds, from the goldsmiths’ guild to the ointment mixers, including the priests and levites. The house of the *rōkēlīm* is said to have been directly in front of the Inspection Gate. This was not a residence but a place where their supplies were kept. In the light of Nah 3:16, I think it possible that these traders belonged to some sort of guild, dealing or specialising in herbs, amulets. The same could be true about Neh 13:20 where the “merchants” are reprimanded for “spending the night in front of the wall” (v. 21). Of course it could be just that they are trading during the Sabbath but the use of the verb *lūn* has other connotations than to “spend the night”. It has been

<sup>461</sup> BDB, 940.

<sup>462</sup> Driver (1906); Cathcart (1973) who at the time adopted this translation; Maier (1980).

<sup>463</sup> Especially in Nahum 3:16–17; see Cathcart (1988) 199.

<sup>464</sup> See Chapter 2, *sōhārīm*.

<sup>465</sup> Cathcart (1988); Akkadian *saharu* means both “to do business” and “to encircle, siad of magic or sorcery” (CAD (1956–1989) vol. 15, 46).

used in connection with incubation dreams.<sup>466</sup> So, again, we are left with some uncertainty. Did Nehemiah refer to the *rökəlîm* as a guild of diviners (using dreams to foresee) and specialist traders in "magic potions"? In Ezek 17:4, the parable of the two eagles told by the prophet, the term "merchants" or "magicians" could be interchangeable. The first one broke off "the topmost of the young twigs of the cedar and carried it to the land of "Canaan" and set it in a city of "merchants" (*rökəlîm*)". This refers of course to the land of Babylon, renowned for its trade and its divining/magical tradition. The general meaning of the texts remains the same if we translate, not "city of merchants", but rather "city of magicians".

### 8.2 Conclusion

It is indeed possible that the term *râkâl* conveys the idea of professional magicians, and perhaps more particularly the idea of a guild dealing with "magical" products which can be sold for profit. The double idea of trading/dealing in magical terms has necessitated the reexamination of a few texts, but we remain unsure which meaning is more correct.

### 9. *Passing Children through Fire: A Divinatory Ritual?*

*"There shall not be found among you any one who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire": child sacrifice or divinatory practice?*

This verse belongs to the list of divination methods prohibited by Deut 18:10 and is still the cause of many debates. Two main approaches are taken:

- On the one hand this verse is taken to refer to child sacrifice and as such does not belong to this list: "it is simply an addition caused by the use of the term "abominable practices" of the burning of the children in Deut 12:31".<sup>467</sup>
- On the other hand, because the whole verse is part of the list

<sup>466</sup> See Chapter 3, especially the section on incubation dreams.

<sup>467</sup> Mayes (1981) 280.

of prohibited divination practices,<sup>468</sup> it could refer to some pagan cult connected with divination in which fire plays a decisive role. The children would not be sacrificed but simply passed through fire, as the Greek translators understood it.<sup>469</sup> It may be worth pointing out that the vocabulary used is not sacrificial,<sup>470</sup> and that the action of passing the children through fire is associated with the Molech ritual which itself has to do "with initiation and dedication to foreign cults".<sup>471</sup> This is confirmed in the Rabbinic literature and in the book of Jubilees which understand Molech worship to involve the transferring of children to the pagan sphere either by sexual intercourse with gentiles or by delivery to pagan priests and diviners.<sup>472</sup> These rites may have been connected with divinatory practices.<sup>473</sup> Assuming that it is indeed divinatory ritual which is prohibited here, we still know little about the divinatory methods used in the Molech rituals in general and how the passing of children through fire helped to read signs (by the direction of the smoke, by being singed or unscathed) in particular. There is not enough data available to be gained from the texts.

<sup>468</sup> Cogan (1978) 77; Heider (1985) 258ff. suggests (as an unproven possibility) that the practice of passing the children through the fire may be part of the cult of the dead.

<sup>469</sup> The LXX translates this verse as "There shall not be found in thee one who purges his son or his daughter with fire"; cf. Vulgate: "Nec inveniatur in te qui lustret filium suum aut filiam ducens per ignem".

<sup>470</sup> Weinfeld (1970) 411–413.

<sup>471</sup> Weinfeld (1970) 412; Heider (1985).

<sup>472</sup> This conclusion seem to be indicated by such texts as Lev 18:21; 20:2–5; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer 32:35.

<sup>473</sup> Plataroti (1978) 286–300. Plataroti invokes for support of his thesis the fact that passing the children through fire occurs twice in the context of divination (Deut 18:10–11; 2 Kings 21:6).

## CHAPTER THREE

### DREAMS AND VISIONS\*

#### 1. General Introduction

1.1 *Dreams and visions are a recognized means of God's revelation (Num 12:6–8). As such they can be understood as messages announcing future events.*

There are distinct words or expressions used in the Old Testament to render "dream" and "vision", although we should note already that the two phenomena are difficult to disentangle.<sup>1</sup> Before analyzing in detail their similarities and differences, I shall examine the etymology of the terms involved and seek to define a precise semantic field for each.

#### 1.2 Etymology

##### i) The Word for Dream: *Hălôm*

The etymology of the stem *Hlm* is the subject of debate. According to KBL (as opposed to BDB) both meanings of the root are to be taken in association,<sup>2</sup> "to be healthy, to be strong" and "to dream". The element linking these two distinct meanings is probably the sexual dream which first occurs during puberty.<sup>3</sup> From this special meaning the word probably developed into a general term for dream.<sup>4</sup> The verbs used for "interpreting dreams" are in Hebrew: *pātar*, and in Aramaic: *pěšar*. We have Hebrew *sabar* occurring once (Judg 7:15). The first two words (cf. Akkadian *paṭāru* and *pašaru*) mean "to dissolve, to analyse", and the root of the latter denotes, literally, "to break up".<sup>5</sup>

\* The first part of the chapter (Dreams) has been published in another version in *Irish Biblical Studies* 1990.

<sup>1</sup> They are mentioned together in various passages: Gen 31:10; Is 29:7; Job 20:8; 33:15; cf. also I Sam 3 where dream and vision are mixed up.

<sup>2</sup> KBL 303f.

<sup>3</sup> cf. the Arabic *ḥalama*, to become manly and to dream (see dictionaries and lexicons).

<sup>4</sup> KBL 303; Ehrlich (1953) 1f.

<sup>5</sup> Mendelsohn (1976) 868. More specifically on the *pesher* in the Old Testament see Finkel (1963/64) 357, but both *ptr* and *psr* "as found in the Old Testament (either as a

## ii) The Words for Vision:

Hāzōn comes from the verbal root Hāzāh, "to see". The noun expresses a mysterious perception belonging to the realm of the numinous.<sup>6</sup>

Mar'āh is also used for vision.<sup>7</sup> The root is rā'ah, "to see". The noun is used for general and prophetic seeing.<sup>8</sup> However, it does not seem necessarily to refer to the state of being awake.<sup>9</sup>

Hezyōn läyēlāh, "vision of the night"<sup>10</sup> has to be distinguished from Hālōm. It seems that although the two words are reserved for a form of revelation, hālōm is rather the general and neutral term, whereas Hezyōn läyēlāh has a narrower, more intense meaning.<sup>11</sup> There is little difference in the use of the two terms;<sup>12</sup> only Job 4:13 suggests that the Hezyōn läyelāh takes place during sleep or shortly before falling asleep, in half-sleep:

Amid thoughts from visions of the night,  
when deep sleep falls on men...

In addition to this vocabulary we should note the importance of the dābār in communication by dream or vision. In the pre-exilic prophetic writers dream and vision tend to be relegated to the background. More prominence is given to the dābār. In the final prophetic period, visions, auditions, and dreams appear more commonly than in the early prophetic period. While by the term hālōm we are to understand only those revelations seen or heard in a dream, and while mar'āh and hāzōn are linked with the concept of external or internal hearing, the term dābār has grown beyond its original reference to audition and has attained a more general and wider meaning as the object of all these forms of revelation.<sup>13</sup>

substantive or verb, 9 times in Gen 40-41, and 30 times in Daniel), are used in connection with uncovering a solution to dreams or visions".

<sup>6</sup> Ehrlich op. cit. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Num 12:6; 1 Sam 3:15; Dan 10:16; Ezek 43:3; "visions of the night": Gen 46:2; Ezek 1:1; 8:3; 40:2.

<sup>8</sup> Ehrlich, op. cit. 7.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Gen 46:2 which is about a night vision; mār'āh probably means a dream like appearance in this instance.

<sup>10</sup> Job 4:13; 20:8; 33:15.

<sup>11</sup> Ehrlich, op. cit. 3. There is a suggestion made by K. van der Toorn (1988) p. 434, that, at least in some psalms, the dream-vision is associated with the resolution of a judicial ordeal.

<sup>12</sup> For the literature on this subject, see chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ehrlich, op. cit. 7.

### 1.3 *Distinctions and resemblances between visions and dreams: a problem of definition*

A vision is "the recognised psychological condition, an emotional excitement in which the person is no longer master of his own thoughts or will"<sup>14</sup> (Num 24:2ff.). It has been studied by anthropologists and a number of observations can be made:

- i) It can be induced and terminated ritually (like dreams).
- ii) It is characterised by a superimposition of a visionary (and/or auditory) perception of the ordinary environment: this is in fact the phenomenon of in-depth vision with ordinary and non-ordinary perception overlapping;
- iii) The use of rhythmic stimulation can be used sometimes for inducing visions.

It can easily be seen from this description that to define vision simply as a waking state, as opposed to the sleeping state of dreams, is not enough. We need a more refined distinction. Neither can we distinguish them by attributing "outer seeing" to the vision and "inner seeing" to the dream.<sup>15</sup> Apart from the fact that both processes come from the inner self, they are equally real for the prophet. Furthermore, to make things even more difficult, we know that even in dreams it is possible to observe oneself dreaming, so the superimposition of perceptions is not only applicable to visions. Lastly it should be noted that the textual evidence we have in the Old Testament on dreams and visions is hardly an anthropological document: no precise description of the induction (if any), working, or results of either dream or vision is given. There are also the problems resulting from the transmission of these texts. The visionaries and dreamers themselves sometimes weave elements into their descriptions which have nothing to do with the vision.<sup>16</sup>

As to the mantic content of dreams and visions, both dreamer and visionary see, regardless of time and distance.<sup>17</sup> While we have attempted to distinguish between dream and vision from the psychological point of view, it may be that their true distinction lies at the

<sup>14</sup> Goodman (1986) 282.

<sup>15</sup> Ehrlich, *op. cit.* 8.

<sup>16</sup> Another trace that the terms are used loosely is shown by the use of the Greek which stands for both dreams and visions.

<sup>17</sup> Pedersen (1926) 140.

level of content, as Ehrlich suggests. A dream, according to him, is too blurred and indeterminate to allow poetry. The vision shares with the dream the free play with the substance of reality. However, it distinguishes itself through a stricter development, a more deliberate construction, and a clearer if sometimes still to be determined significance.<sup>18</sup>

Dream and vision are essentially related. In both, things appear which are impossible in the normal conscious state. In the first sub-section, which is devoted to dreams, I shall try to classify them in order to analyse the mantic element present in their core. The second sub-section, which deals with vision, will show that the mantic element in the vision is always intermingled with poetry, that is, in a literary format. Form and content are indivisible.

## 2. *The Mantic Function of Dreams*

Numerous dreams are related in the Old Testament and great attention is given to them as they are considered to be communications from the divinity,<sup>19</sup> as Num 12:6 shows.<sup>20</sup> Dreams seem to have been a recognised way of consulting the divinity (1 Sam 28:6) at one stage and then to have fallen into disrepute along with most of the means used by man to consult God's will (Deut 13:1-5 threatens the death penalty for any spurious "dreamer of dreams"). Dreams can be passively "received" by both ordinary people and by cult specialists, prophets and kings, or dreams can be specifically sought in situations of extreme necessity.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.1 *Search for a typology of mantic dreams*

In the Old Testament, various types of dreams are recorded giving rise to different typologies. A distinction between "message dreams" including "political divination" and "apocalyptic dreams" has been

<sup>18</sup> Ehrlich, op. cit. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Mendelsohn, op. cit. 868; cf. Gen 40:8.

<sup>20</sup> Gray (1903) 124.

<sup>21</sup> Such is the case for the few real incubation dreams we have access to in the Northwest Semitic world. For instance, the dream of Keret is sought for after the king's seven sons die: there is no heir to the throne remaining. Also in the case of Daniel in the Aqhat tablet, the lack of a son drives him to undergo a complex incubation ritual. 1 Kings 3 may not be at first sight a case of emergency but what is asked by Solomon is of prime

made.<sup>22</sup> Oppenheim however stated that dream experiences were recorded on "three clearly differentiated planes":

- i) Dreams as revelations of the deity.
- ii) Dreams which reflect, symptomatically, the state of mind, the spiritual and bodily "health" of the dreamer.
- iii) The mantic dreams in which forthcoming events are prognosticated.<sup>23</sup>

Lastly we will mention Ehrlich's typology which includes:

- i) Incubation dreams.
- ii) Symbolic dreams.
- iii) Commands and directions which God communicates through dreams.<sup>24</sup>

If we are to examine more particularly the mantic aspect of dreams, none of these classifications is really useful. Each category cited above contains, in itself, a mantic element. This will be seen in the typology I propose to adopt for a more relevant approach to the problem.

i) The "Simple" Message Dream

In this case "announcements are delivered in plain language"<sup>25</sup> either directly,<sup>26</sup> or by presenting features of everyday life.<sup>27</sup> These dreams are not necessarily mantic, although they might contain threats of repercussions if the message is not acted on.<sup>28</sup> I shall take the message dream in its wider sense; is the event that is "brought to pass" a mantic dream (Gen 41:32)? This type of dream is dreamt by the Israelites and is self-explanatory, i.e. it does not need the help of a professional interpreter to understand it.

ii) Symbolic Dreams

These also contain an insight into the future but they can be solved by professional interpreters only. In the Old Testament, this type of

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importance for the survival of the kingdom: the art of government (v. 9). I would also add 1 Sam 28:6 where dreams are one of several means of communication set at the disposal of human beings.

<sup>22</sup> Kilborne (1986) 482.

<sup>23</sup> Oppenheim (1956) 184ff.

<sup>24</sup> Ehrlich; see table of contents.

<sup>25</sup> Mendelsohn, *op. cit.* 868.

<sup>26</sup> For instance Gen 20:3; 31:11-24...

<sup>27</sup> Gen 37:5ff.

<sup>28</sup> Gen 20:3ff.

dream is reserved for the "Gentiles".<sup>29</sup> Such are the cases of the dreams of Pharaoh (Gen 41) or of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadrezzar (Dan 2). In the same category is the dream of the Midianite found in Judg 7:13.

### iii) Incubation Dreams

Incubation dreams are dreams which are stimulated through the use of a particular ritual.<sup>30</sup> The main condition, it seems, is that the subject spend the night at a "holy" place. I would add that incubation is a phenomenon which can be experienced spontaneously<sup>31</sup> or contrived artificially.<sup>32</sup> The ritual is performed in order to ask for something.<sup>33</sup> In the case of incubation dreams, the mantic element lies in the communication made by the divinity, in the confirmation that what has been asked for will come to pass, e.g. the wisdom of government requested by Solomon, the wife and heir by Keret, the perfect son by Daniel.

## 2.2 Mantic dreams in Ugaritic literature and in the Old Testament

### 2.2.1 The simple message dream

One dream which illustrates this category is to be found in Gen 37:5ff. in which Joseph dreams that he was binding sheaves with his brothers and that his sheaves "arose and stood upright" while his brothers' sheaves "bowed down" to his (v. 7). The dream recurs and this time the "sun, the moon and eleven stars were bowing down" to Joseph (v. 9). The content is fairly clear.<sup>34</sup> Joseph is informed of his own

<sup>29</sup> Oppenheim, *op. cit.* 207.

<sup>30</sup> Deubner cited by Ehrlich, *op. cit.* 13, gives the following definition of incubation: "In deorum templis ad dormiendum se prosternabant, quia certis ritibus atque caere monitis effectis animoque bene praeparato atque prosus in res divinas converso verisimillimum erat illum per somnum apparitum esse deum in cuius temple incubant". We have to keep in mind that this definition derives from the Greek attitude to uses of incubation. It relates here details of the rituals connected principally to the shrine of Asklepios in Epidauros.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel (1 Sam 3); Jacob (Gen 28:10ff.).

<sup>32</sup> Solomon in 1 Kings 3; also Isaac in Beer-Sheba (Gen 28:10f.). Perhaps also the anonymous psalmist in Ps 91. In Ugaritic literature this seems to be the case in the dreams of Keret and Daniel.

<sup>33</sup> Solomon is asking for the wisdom of government, the Psalmist for deliverance, in later Greek sources, people sleep in sanctuaries to obtain healing (see fn. 30).

<sup>34</sup> This passage is traditionally attributed to E.

destiny.<sup>35</sup> The dream is a prognostication of the future.<sup>36</sup> The reaction of Joseph's brothers might suggest, as Pedersen puts it, that "a man is responsible for his dreams . . . Dreams are realistic and if they are indeed true and fixed, then the contents must also some day project themselves in outer events . . . Through his dreams Joseph has become a potential ruler, and some day this potentiality will be fulfilled, unless it is extirpated".<sup>37</sup> This passage shows that dreams are understood to contain in themselves their own fulfilment.

### 2.2.2 The symbolic dream

This dream also carries a message but needs an interpreter. It is dreamt by Gentiles. In Gen 40:9ff. two officials of Pharaoh's court who were made destitute through the loss of their respective occupations, tell their dream to Joseph. Although the scene happens in Egypt there is no Egyptian detail. As the narrative is told to an Israelite audience, the rules of interpretation of dreams applied by Joseph are not Egyptian but reflect the divinatory art of dream interpretation as it was practised in Israel.<sup>38</sup> The symbolism of both dreams is quite clear as both the chief baker and the chief butler see themselves acting in their official capacities. The chief butler (v. 9–11) acts normally, the chief baker is somehow prevented from fulfilling his function (v. 16–17). Joseph's skill consists in finding a meaning for the number three ("three branches; "three cake baskets"); "the three branches are three days" (v. 12), "the three baskets are three days" (v. 18). In three days the chief butler will be re-established in his charge, in three days the chief baker will be put to death.

The same can be said about Gen 41, Pharaoh's double dream. The symbolism is quite obvious, especially for an agricultural people: the fat cows symbolise prosperity, the gaunt ones, famine. The number seven gives the key to the interpretation of the dream (seven cows = seven years). Likewise Nebuchadrezzar's dream, interpreted by Daniel (Dan 2), also contained a prediction for the future. In his analysis of the king's dream, Daniel relates each part of the statue to its symbolic

<sup>35</sup> Caquot (1959) 114.

<sup>36</sup> Ehrlich op. cit. 122.

<sup>37</sup> Pedersen (1926) 137. According to him, Joseph's brothers want him out of the way in order "to prevent the persistence of the dreams or, what comes to the same thing, they prevent his soul from carrying through its claim to unfold itself according to its nature". Against this, Ehrlich (1953:122f.) thinks that the psychic origins of dreams are unknown to the Old Testament.

<sup>38</sup> Caquot, op. cit. 112.

political significance. The different types of metals from which the statue is made provide the clues to the reading of the political future of Nebuchadrezzar's kingdom.<sup>39</sup> From these three stories several elements emerge:

- From a purely literary standpoint there is a pattern common to the narrative presentation of dreams (setting of the dream, information about who experiences it, when, under what circumstances, the content of the dream itself, its fulfilment).<sup>40</sup>
- Dreams are understood to be a communication from God.
- The content of the dreams originates in the (cultural) surroundings of the dreamers (even the composite statue of Dan 2).

Judg 7:13–14 is also a symbolic dream received by Gentiles. It differs slightly from the above pattern. Here neither God nor angel is concerned and the content of the dream is not taken from everyday life. In addition, this is the only symbolic dream to be found outside the Joseph/Daniel tradition. "Behold, I dreamed a dream; and lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian, and came to the tent, and struck it so that it fell, and turned it upside down, so that the tent lay flat" (v. 14). And his comrade answered, "This is no other than the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; into his hand God has given Midian and all the host." This dream was dreamt by a Midianite soldier and interpreted by an anonymous soldier friend of his. They were both overheard by Gideon who understood the scene as an omen of his future victory over the Midianites. Returning to the camp, Gideon prepared for an immediate attack and won the battle. Whether the dream is understood as a form of cledonomancy (Gideon by chance heard this dream when obviously preoccupied by the war against the Midianites)<sup>41</sup> or as a sign in itself ("the Midianites lack the strength of victory: the suggestion is that their soul is inferior, a soul of defeat, and therefore it must create dreams of defeat, whereas victory is created in the soul of Gideon")<sup>42</sup> is debatable. If we see it from an Israelite's perspective, the dream was sent by God to the Midianites as a warning.

The dream reveals several things. The story shows that any dream

<sup>39</sup> Montgomery (1927) 185ff. We should also note the dependency of Daniel on Joseph's story.

<sup>40</sup> Oppenheim, *op. cit.* 186ff.

<sup>41</sup> Guillaume, *op. cit.* 214.

<sup>42</sup> Pedersen, *op. cit.* 138.

can be interpreted as an omen. Dreams which carry political significance are not reserved exclusively for men in power (potentially or not). The symbolism again is quite clear: the cake of barley bread represents the peasants, the tent the nomads. In addition, there is possibly a word play on *lehem*, "bread" and the root *lhm* "to do battle".<sup>43</sup> So we here have in Judg 7:13–14 a unique example of popular interpretation based on wordplay.

Lastly I shall examine the symbolic dream of the Ugaritic god, El, which also suggests a belief in the "truthfulness" of dreams and in their prognostic value for the future.

El's dream: KTU 1.6 I 4–9

b ḥlm . ltpn . il . d pid  
 b dṛt . bny . bnwt  
 šmm . šm\*n . tmtrn  
 nhlm . tlk . nbtm  
 w id' . khy . aliyn . b\*\*l\*  
 k it . zbl . b'l . arṣ

De Moor translates:

In a dream of the Benevolent, Ilu the good-natured,  
 in a vision of the Creator of creatures  
 the heavens will rain oil,  
 the wadis will run with honey,  
 and I will know that Ba'lū the Almighty is alive,  
 that his Highness, the Lord of Earth, exists.<sup>44</sup>

The goddess Anat returns to El and announces that Mot is no more. She invites El to dream in order to discover whether or not Baal can come back to life. If El dreams of heavens raining oil and the wadis running with honey then she will know that Baal is alive. El has his dream and sees the signs that Anat desires him to see; nature is plentiful again and accordingly Baal, god of fertility, is alive.<sup>45</sup> This poem was probably part of a religious drama reflecting the rhythm of rainy seasons and dry ones.<sup>46</sup> This would not have been understood by the audience if the idea that dreams can uncover the future was not already accepted. We should also note that against Judg 7, the Ugaritic text

<sup>43</sup> Caquot, op. cit. 112.

<sup>44</sup> De Moor, op. cit. 91.

<sup>45</sup> Gibson (1978) 17; see also Gordon (1943) 38.

<sup>46</sup> Caquot, op. cit. 104.

assumes that not everybody can have mantic dreams, not even goddesses: only El, head of the Ugaritic Pantheon, can dream such dreams. As in the Old Testament, there seems to be a "monopoly" of mantic dreams, with this difference: the Old Testament God, being less accessible than El, more remote, sends mantic dreams to people chosen by him for this purpose. In some ways he is also in control of them.<sup>47</sup>

### 2.2.3 Incubation dreams

Here we see ways of inducing a message dream. This can happen spontaneously by spending the night in a holy place for instance, or it can be induced artificially. There are several examples of the induced incubation dream in both Ugaritic literature and the Old Testament and I shall now analyse them to see if there is a recognisable pattern. The mantic element is contained in the message transmitted by the divinity to the dreamer. KTU 1.14, I:26ff.: The dream of Keret:

(1.26) He (Krt) entered his bedroom, he wept,  
repeating his angry cries, shedding tears.  
His tears poured forth  
like shekels to the ground  
like pieces of one fifth on his bed.  
While he was weeping, he fell asleep,  
while he was shedding, slumber (came),  
sleep overpowered him and he lay down,  
slumber (came) and he curled up.  
And in his dream Ilu descended,  
in his vision the Father of Man,  
and he approached the questioning Kirtu.<sup>48</sup>

Keret has lost his seven sons and there is no heir left to the throne. In what appears to be an incubation dream<sup>49</sup> Keret asks El for descendants. El gives him precise instructions: Keret must wash and sacrifice, and then prepare an expedition in order to ask the king for Pabil's daughter, Huray, in marriage. Keret should tell Pabil that Huray was given to him and that she bears him offspring in the dream (III, 46–51).

This passage raises two questions: is it an incubation scene, and what is the relationship between what happens in the dream and the

<sup>47</sup> Schmidtke (1967) 242.

<sup>48</sup> Translation by de Moor (1987) 193.

<sup>49</sup> Engnell (1967) 151; see Caquot, op. cit. 105. Against them see Ottosson (19??) 987f. who does not think incubation took place (Keret is in his room, not a temple).

future events narrated? I do not think that incubation has to be taken so strictly that the dream must necessarily take place at a sanctuary. In any case I do not know for sure where the scene is happening but we would consider a king's dwelling to be an appropriate place. The weeping of Keret may have been induced with the intention of reminding us of ritual weeping in times of crisis for the community.<sup>50</sup> If so, it is provoked and may be part of an incubation ritual.<sup>51</sup> As to the relationship between what happens in the dream and the future events, it seems that the desire for an heir is so much part of Keret that, grounded by the dream, it is brought to realization in the future.

A much clearer Ugaritic text about incubation rituals is to be found in KTU 1.17, I:1ff., the "dream" of Daniel in the Aqhat text.<sup>52</sup> Daniel, a chief or patriarch, undergoes a seven day rite of incubation in the hope of obtaining a son: Daniel after offering drink<sup>53</sup> and food<sup>54</sup> to "the gods" (1.3 and 4) "besprinkles his cubicle", and "his clothes"<sup>55</sup> (1.5–6) and goes to sleep.<sup>56</sup> The ritual also involves a prayer or "supplication". This was performed during the offering<sup>57</sup> and repeated for six days. Daniel asks for a perfect son and requests the gods to intercede in his favour. El gives him a favourable response (1.48–71): Daniel's sterility will be cured (1.48–57) and a model son will be given to him (1.58–71). We have here a much more elaborate pattern of:

- i) Sacrificial offering.
- ii) Purification (?) of the dwelling.
- iii) Going to sleep.
- iv) Intercession.
- v) Fulfilment of the dream.

This pattern is also to be found in 1 Kings 3: Solomon at Gibeon. According to Ehrlich, it is the only case of incubation in the Old

<sup>50</sup> Gray (1964) 34.

<sup>51</sup> The rites to be accomplished after the dream (washing and sacrificing) may also be post-incubation rituals: Obermann (1946) 10, ft. 13.

<sup>52</sup> We should note that the word *ḥlm* does not appear in the text.

<sup>53</sup> Oberman (1946) 8f.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Sprinkling of blood, of oil, of water, are used in the rituals of the Hebrews for a variety of purposes (e.g. expiation, purification...).

<sup>56</sup> Of the four verbs involved, three are clear and common: *y'l*, ("he goes up"); *yskb* ("he lies down", "he sleeps"); *yln*, ("he retires for the night"). Cf. Obermann, op. cit. 9.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, 10; on the idea that Daniel uses a magical ritual see Muller (1969) 90–94.

Testament.<sup>58</sup> Although I would not completely agree with them because other texts contain elements which can be identified as incubation rituals,<sup>59</sup> the narrative of 1 Kings 3 does exhibit the complete pattern found in KTU 1.17:

(v. 4) And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings upon that altar. (v. 5) At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, "Ask what I shall give you"...

Solomon then asked God for an 'understanding mind to govern the people' and that was granted to him.

(v. 15) And Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. Then he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

We note the following features:

- i) The sacrificial element (v. 4).
- ii) The emphasis on the setting of the scene at night time (v. 5).
- iii) The apparition of the divinity followed by an intercession (vv. 5.9).
- iv) The fulfilment (v. 12).
- v) Conclusion of the dream (v. 15: "behold it was a dream").

In fact, biblical dreams located at sanctuaries (Beersheba, Bethel, Shiloh) "doubtless had connexion with a ritual praxis that induced such phenomena".<sup>60</sup> This last dream story is very clear; no interpreter is needed, it is a direct communication from the deity.

In the three preceding cases we can infer a number of facts about incubation.

The precondition for the incubation is the belief in the reality of the dream. Dreaming at a holy place is necessary for the incubation,

<sup>58</sup> Ehrlich, *op. cit.* 55.

<sup>59</sup> Gen 46:1-5 deals with a night vision. In Gen 15:1-6 Abraham receives a divine word but no sacrifice has been performed. Ehrlich dismisses the fact that Psalms may contain allusions to incubation, in particular Ps 3:6; 4:9; 63:3. Although I agree with those cases, I think it is possible that Ps 91 contains an allusion to it. In fact *yitlonan* can be translated by "spending the night in order to obtain something". That is the opinion of Caquot (1958) 25, whose opinion I share: "le fidèle passe la nuit pour provoquer le songe, c'est le procédé bien connu de l'incubation".

<sup>60</sup> Montgomery (1951) 105.

(or in a special place like the palace of a king). Incubation is therefore a dream revelation which the person attains at a holy place. He/she can actively seek contact with the transcendent world. The person is not expected to wait passively. Through incubation, the person looks for concrete assistance through the powerful being or godhead, particularly for healing, teaching or prophecy.<sup>61</sup> Spending some time in the holy shrine which is seen as the dwelling place of God, or of an empowered being, was necessary for contact with the power whose assistance the person wanted to secure, especially since it was accepted that the workings of this power were linked with certain shrines. The necessary incubation rituals had as their objective the appearance of the divinity.

The introductory rites and the subsequent ceremonies, as well as the manner in which the divinity appeared, and the form and content of the oracles all could take diverse form. Purification rituals, fasting, various forms of sacrifice, special preparation of a sleeping place, use of special vestments, prayer, self-mortification and ritual weeping were used as preparations. Where the preparatory rituals are clearly for the purpose of cleansing the soul of the body's impurities, as well as the establishment of good relations between the divinity and the individual, the closing ceremonies represent a thanksgiving for the appearance of the God who proved himself to be sympathetic. Perhaps also the suppliant wished to show the god, through the closing ceremonies, that he would abide by the oracle which had been announced in the dream.

The person can also behave passively during the incubation as the two following texts will show:

Gen 28: The dream of Jacob at Bethel

On his way to Haran, Jacob spends the night at a shrine which he came upon by chance. The sacredness of the place is revealed to him by a dream of a ladder leading from earth to heaven.<sup>62</sup> So here we should not look for a preparatory phase. But the other elements of the incubation are present:

- i) The insistence on the night setting ("and he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set" (v. 11a).

<sup>61</sup> Ehrlich, *op. cit.* 13f.

<sup>62</sup> Skinner (1930) 375. This section, according to him, consists of a complete Elohistic narrative, with a Yahwistic insertion (vv. 13-16). Therefore the structure of this dream

- ii) The location in a sacred place ("Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep" (v. 11b). The stone itself here may be the abode of the deity.<sup>63</sup>
- iii) The dream oracle ("The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants" (v. 13b).
- iv) The post-incubation ritual ("pouring oil over the top of the monument" (v. 18), "I will pay a tenth part of all you gave me" (v. 22).

### 1 Sam 3: A dream oracle or a dream theophany?

Samuel, while sleeping in the sanctuary at Shiloh, hears a voice calling him. The voice proves to be the voice of Yahweh who reveals his determination to destroy the house of Eli.<sup>64</sup>

Although the word "dream" is not to be found in the passage, it seems that the setting is that of a dream. The elements composing the narrative are those of a spontaneous "auditory message dream"<sup>65</sup> but the setting suggests an incubation in a shrine (v. 2); and a dream oracle is given (vv. 11-14). The practice of sleeping regularly in a shrine probably enabled Samuel to participate unconsciously in the holiness of the place. Being a child, and therefore more open to such influences, he is the perfect recipient of a dream-oracle.

Finally, Daniel, the "wise interpreter of dreams", must be mentioned (Dan 2). But as Collins remarked,<sup>66</sup> "the emphasis falls on the wisdom of Daniel and his God; the actual content of the dream-interpretation is relatively disregarded". In fact, the dream is unimportant, it is only the form in which Daniel's apocalyptic message is cast.

### 2.3 Conclusion

All of the different categories of dreams we have examined have a number of common features: the underlying belief is that dreams are a reality, and that communication with the deity can be established

is more complex: the oral communication of God to Jacob is accompanied by the perception of a different picture, cf. Otto (1976) 165-190.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.* 376.

<sup>64</sup> Smith (1899) 25ff.

<sup>65</sup> Gnuse (1982) 388.

<sup>66</sup> Collins (1975) 220.

artificially or spontaneously through them. There seems to be a monopoly of dream-sending by one god (spirits do not send dreams). The dream narrated in 1 Kings 3 is an incubation dream and we have already noted that incubation is linked with holy places. With the Deuteronomic reform many local traditions linked with the shrines were suppressed and lost. In the period after Deuteronomy the dream loses its revelatory character and indeed comes to be contrasted with true prophecy.<sup>67</sup> Incubation eventually came to be regarded as a heathen ritual belonging to alien gods and cults, against which the Old Testament takes such a firm stand.<sup>68</sup> According to those groups which oppose this heathen element in Judaea and Israel, there is no definite time and form of divine manifestation. Nor has man the right of calling forth God, whatever the procedure, be it prayer, sacrifice or special technique.

### 3. *Oracle Visions in the Old Testament*

#### 3.0 *Introduction*

We have seen in the general introduction to this chapter that the vision has its closest affinities with the dream. Like the dream, the vision is a recognised source of prophetic oracle (Num 12:6; Jer 23:25ff.) but it is distinct from it in that the person remains awake and that certain physical changes occur:<sup>69</sup> the person is no longer master of his own thought or will.<sup>70</sup> The reception of oracles through a visionary experience is emphasized by the fact that the Hebrew terms employed are immediately related to the Old Testament designations for "seer": *ḥāzōn*<sup>71</sup> and *mār'āh*<sup>72</sup> as Napier remarked.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Jer 23:25–32; 27:9; cf. also Dt 13:1–6.

<sup>68</sup> Is 65:4.

<sup>69</sup> This phenomenon has been observed and studied by anthropologists: "the pupils zmay widen, muscles become rigid, and breathing seems shallow". B.W. Lex, a medical anthropologist maintains that "two opposing arousals of the nervous system are experienced. Their alternating action produces relaxation. Simultaneously, the brain synthesizes b-endorphinines (the body's own painkillers). These physiological changes must be produced before the vision can occur. In some way then, the body becomes a perceiving organ for the sacred dimension of reality". See Goodman (1986) 282.

<sup>70</sup> Num 24:2ff.

<sup>71</sup> See *rzḥ*, chapter 2.

<sup>72</sup> See *ḥ'ḥ*, chapter 2.

<sup>73</sup> Napier (1969–1976) 791.

This is also shown by the parallelism between *hazôn* and *qesem*.<sup>74</sup> The two terms are in fact used as synonyms, and as Johnson writes, "this appears to be confirmed by the fact that the verbal form of the root *hzh* is found in conjunction with the term *qsm* to denote what seems best rendered as the "observing" of the latter."<sup>75</sup> However, the vision should not be taken too literally as having a constant reference to a strictly visual experience. It can also be an auditory one as the parallelism with *dbr* shows.<sup>76</sup>

"Visions come in all shapes and colours"<sup>77</sup> and it is a rather difficult task to find a proper typology, especially when we want to study the visions in which a prognostication is made. Various typologies are presented in Long's study,<sup>78</sup> but while the oracular element appears in each category, none deals specifically with oracular revelations. I shall then examine a number of texts where the vision contains an oracular element.

### 3.1 *The oracular vision in the pre-exilic prophets*<sup>79</sup>

#### 3.1.1 Num 24:4: the vision of Balaam

... the oracle of him who hears the word of God,  
who sees the vision of the Almighty,  
falling down, but having his eyes uncovered.

Balaam describes himself here as someone who is in the habit of receiving communications from God<sup>80</sup> in which both the visual and the auditory are interwoven. "Falling down" is an interesting detail; to Gray it may refer to either the physical exhaustion experienced at the end of the prophetic frenzy or to the state experienced during the communication of the divine.<sup>81</sup> In view of the research done by medical

<sup>74</sup> Jer 14:13f.; Ezek 13:6f.23; 21:34; 22:28; Mic 3:6.

<sup>75</sup> Johnson (1962) 34.

<sup>76</sup> Jer 18:8; Ezek 7:26; especially Ezek 12:21–28. Cf. Johnson (1962) 15. A verbal message, with no reference to a voice or appearance, is spoken of as a vision (Isa 1:1; 21:2; 22:1; Mic 1:1; Hab 2:12; Ps 89:19).

<sup>77</sup> Long (1976) 355.

<sup>78</sup> ibid., 353f. divides the reports into 1) oracle-vision, 2) dramatic word-vision, 3) revelatory-mysteries vision; Sister relates the literary forms of vision-reports to a prototype in dreams (1934); Lindblom finds that the reports of vision fall into two groups: a pictorial and a dramatic one (1962); Horst (1960) has a threefold typology: 1) a "presence" vision, 2) a word symbol vision, 3) an event vision. Niditch (1980) adopts a "synchronic" approach.

<sup>79</sup> Niditch (1980) acknowledges divination patterns.

<sup>80</sup> Gray (1956) 361.

<sup>81</sup> ibid., 362.

anthropologists<sup>82</sup> I think that falling down precedes the vision.

### 3.1.2 1 Kings 22:17: Micaiah's vision

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, is on a visit to Samaria, when Ahab asks his co-operation in recovering Ramoth-Gilead which the Syrians are retaining contrary to the conditions of the latest peace. Jehoshaphat declares his willingness to join the expedition, but suggests that at the outset they inquire for "the word of Yahweh". Ahab's 400 prophets give optimistic augury, but Jehoshaphat asks for a true prophet of Yahweh and Ahab sends for Micaiah who reports a vision of doom:

I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd; and the Lord said, "These have no master; let each return to his home in peace".

Allowing for possible literary embellishment, this vision may be the spontaneous working of a prophet's inspired imagination "throwing truths into physical form".<sup>83</sup> Nothing is said about how Micaiah induced his vision.

### 3.1.3 Amos 8:1-2 a case of oracle through word-play<sup>84</sup>

Thus the Lord God showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit (qayis). And he said, "Amos, what do you see?". And I said, "A basket of summer fruit". Then the Lord said to me, "The end (qes) has come upon my people Israel.

Amos has a vision of a basket of fruit which assumes ominous significance. The vision is an answer to Amos' preoccupation with the state of the country. The oracle is in fact made out of the word-play<sup>85</sup> between qayis and qes; a basket containing summer fruit represents the last of the crop, the end of the year, and by analogy, the approaching end of Israel's kingdom.<sup>86</sup> In the end, the visionary image is merely

<sup>82</sup> See fn. 69.

<sup>83</sup> Patrick (1900-1909); see chap. 1 part 2, 361.

<sup>84</sup> Niditch (1980) 21ff., 34ff. examines Amos' visions under what she calls stage I of the symbolic vision form. "The very interpretation of symbols in the vision of stage I has the power to bring about that which is predicted. The associative technique smacks of divinatory techniques. More basically, the question/answer pattern of the form is rooted in the dream-vision interpretation situation" 247.

<sup>85</sup> These observations are equally valid for Amos 7:7-8 where the visionary plumb-line suggests a metaphorical divine plumb-line for destruction; see also Long (1976) 357. Another word-play is found in Jer 1:11-12 where an oracle about the future can be discerned. Niditch (1980) 41ff. put it in the same category as the Amos visions.

<sup>86</sup> Harper (1960) 176.

the occasion for the oracle, and the vision/report is an opportunity for proclamation.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.2 *Visions of the slaughter of the guilty (Ezek 9:1–10; Isa 21:1–10)*

These texts are particularly interesting in that they mix the auditory with the visual element (cf. v. 1 and v. 2). Oracle and visionary images are interwoven showing the close connection between altered perception and poetic composition. They contain elements of mantic vision, images which depict the future, but these are too closely interwoven with the poetry for us to be able to discern a pattern.

### 3.3 *Daniel, a post-exilic visionary (Dan 7 and 8)*<sup>88</sup>

The question here is how to disentangle the literary form of the vision from the divinatory pattern of the symbols. The “answer is obtained largely according to the various attitudes toward theological inspiration”.<sup>89</sup> The only thing which can be said of mantic visions is that what is seen (or described as being seen) is in various ways a pointer toward the future. It is to be taken as a warning of something yet to materialize, and perhaps to be avoided, in the lives of men or of nations.

### 3.4 *Conclusion*

3.4.1 There is definitely some evidence in the Old Testament that visions are a means of communication from the deity.<sup>90</sup>

3.4.2 That visions contained, at times, oracles whose future fulfilment was announced is also clear from a number of texts.

3.4.3 Although we find traces of visions (either auditory or visual, or both) containing a clear prognostication of the future, these are scarce and are to be found mainly in the early prophets.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Long (1976) 357.

<sup>88</sup> For Niditch (1980), the visions of Dan 7 and 8 belong to a stage iii, “the baroque stage of the symbolic vision form” where a divinatory pattern is also found (see p. 232).

<sup>89</sup> Montgomery (1964) 103.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. the eschatological perspective of Joel 2:28.

<sup>91</sup> Morgan (1900–1909) 871 sums it up: “Pre-exilic prophets make more sparing use

3.4.4 The form the oracle takes is extremely varied (word-play, pictorial vision, auditory phenomena), which makes a strict typology difficult to establish.

3.4.5 Moreover the vision becomes very quickly a "literary and poetical form consciously employed to embody and communicate truths that have become clear to the inner consciousness".<sup>92</sup> In other words, although something of the flavour of divination adheres to the inner logic by which visions function,<sup>93</sup> it is almost impossible to disentangle it from the literary frame of prophetic proclamation.

3.4.6 Despite the foregoing, visions are a literary construction, or have become so; they are perceived and no doubt are believed to be a signpost to the future. All visions, because they are produced by an altered state of mind, contain the possibility of contact with the divine and as such are able to represent situations which are not bound by space and time.

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of the direct visual form. In Ezekiel it is more common, but has lost its earlier imaginative spontaneity, and assumes more the character of an artificial construction. It is not found in Deutero-Isaiah, nor in Haggai, but it reappears in Zechariah, and continues, in its most artificial form, to be employed by apocalyptic writers".

<sup>92</sup> Napier *op. cit.* 791; this also corroborates Ehrlich's idea (see the introduction to chapter 2).

<sup>93</sup> Long (1976) 361, ft. 24.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DIVINATORY TECHNIQUES AND DEVICES

#### *General Introduction*

I shall examine in this chapter various forms of divination mentioned in the Old Testament and in the Northwest Semitic world. This will include a study of astrology in the wide sense of "reading omens from celestial phenomena",<sup>1</sup> hepatoscopy or liver divination, hydromancy or divination by means of water, necromancy, a method of discovering future events or of obtaining advice which relies on the invocation and questioning of the spirits of the dead, and lastly rhabdomancy, a form of divination which uses wood as a medium for ascertaining the divine will. Most of these techniques are connected with one another. For instance, astrology and hepatoscopy are two aspects of the same unity; the liver is an aspect of the microcosm, the stars are an aspect of the macrocosm. In some way, following this principle, there is also a link between hydromancy and astrology in that the water reflects the stars: it is the microcosmic aspect of the universe. Equally, a connection between rhabdomancy and hydromancy is made in some texts<sup>2</sup> where there is a clear link between the spring numen and the sacred tree.<sup>3</sup> The principles underlying these techniques seem to be of at least two kinds:

In the case of astrology, it is the very order and movement of the stars which is taken into account. The principle elaborated in the first chapter, i.e. the part reflects the whole (the microcosm reflects the macrocosm), is shown here at work. The stars in the sky reflect the divine will, they give clues about the future. Hepatoscopy "works" on the same basis.

<sup>1</sup> Long (1969-1976) 76.

<sup>2</sup> Exod 15:22.

<sup>3</sup> Wood (1916) 19 mentions that at four different spring shrines it is known either by direct assertion or implication that one or more holy tree such as the oak, palm and tamarasik existed. The numen of the spring passed into the tree. Also James (1966) 1, suggests that behind the symbolic beliefs related to the sacred tree and the water of life "lie the basic themes of creation, redemption and resurrection, resting upon the conception of an ultimate source of ever-renewing life at the center of the cosmos, manifest and operative in the universe, in nature and in the human order".

The predominant belief is that both water and wood (manipulation of sticks, or arrows) are potent life-giving or life-bearing agents. Sources of manifested life such as these are also channels of a greater power with which contact is possible and which can be used to unveil unknown events or actions;<sup>4</sup> the power contained in them is "contagious".

The association of necromancy with the kingdom of the dead puts it into a different category. The principle here is based on a specific cosmology and anthropology:

- i) The belief in an underworld.
- ii) The belief that this underworld is populated with the spirits of the dead.
- iii) The belief that these dead spirits keep their earthly powers (cf. Samuel the seer) or, if we consider the great number of unnamed spirits of the dead, that they have a better insight (and interest) in the wordly affairs of the living.

Next to be examined in detail are the various divinatory implements employed to ascertain God's will. These come under two categories:

- i) Divinatory devices associated with Israel's religious life and whose origin and function we do not know. These are the ephod, the ark, the tent of meeting (symbol of God's presence) and, to some extent, the teraphim.
- ii) Widely used methods of lot-casting,<sup>5</sup> so self-evident to the users or onlookers that detailed descriptions and instructions were not written down, at least not in the texts which concern us here. The best known lot-casting devices are the 'urîm and thummîm. As all these devices are more or less connected with one another the picture is unclear.

The ephod and the 'urîm and thummîm (which it contained)<sup>6</sup> may have constituted, in effect, a single oracular device.<sup>7</sup> Both ephod and 'urîm and thummîm were somehow connected with the teraphim.<sup>8</sup> The

<sup>4</sup> For instance in the case of judicial ordeals, prognostications of the future, making selective choices ...

<sup>5</sup> Lindblom (1962) 164–178; Dommerhausen (1973–1986) 991–999.

<sup>6</sup> Exod 28:28–30.

<sup>7</sup> Garcia de la Fuente (1971) 242, and footnote 113, p. 259.

<sup>8</sup> The ephod and the teraphim are mentioned together in Judg 17:5; 18:14,17,18,20; Hos 3:4. It has been suggested that the teraphim is the prototype of the 'urîm and the thummîm: Lods (1906) 233–234; Moore (1895) 282.

latter is associated with the 'ôb and yidde'ônî,<sup>9</sup> the dead spirits invoked during necromantic practices.

The ephod has been thought to be a substitute for the ark.<sup>10</sup> We would expect to find a strong relationship between the ark and the tent of meeting.<sup>11</sup>

The principles governing these oracular devices derive primarily from the very symbolic presence of the divinity in them (ephod, ark, tent of meeting), the presence of spirits ('ôb, yidde'ônî, teraphim); or, in the case of lot-casting devices, because the material of which they are made<sup>12</sup> may convey the potency of the divine will. The lots, and the pattern they create when thrown, may also reflect the universe; the universe in a microcosm.

Any attempt to classify divinatory techniques and devices is necessarily artificial.

#### SECTION ONE: DIVINATORY TECHNIQUES

##### 1. *Astrologers and the State of Astrology and Hemerology in Ancient Israel and Syria*

###### 1.1 *Introduction*

My aim here is not to question the validity of a belief in forecasting the future through celestial observations, (astrology, or any divining science for that matter, was the domain of the ancient scientist)<sup>13</sup> but to show that traces of it are to be found in the Old Testament. I may

<sup>9</sup> To the extent that teraphim and the 'ôb and the yidde'ônî are all associated with necromancy. They are indeed mentioned together in 2 Kings 23:24.

<sup>10</sup> May (1939) 45; Arnold (1917). The connection between the ark and the ephod is based on 1 Sam 14:18 where the LXX has "ephod" for the Hebrew "ark". According to May, the ephod might have been a synonym for the ark, which itself may have been a miniature temple.

<sup>11</sup> De Vaux (1967) 276 thinks that they probably originate from the nomad period in the history of the Hebrews. De Vaux has shown that the ark was sheltered under the tent and that the tent was the place of meeting with Yahweh precisely because it contained the ark, the resting place of Yahweh.

<sup>12</sup> See 'urim and thummîm; also note that the primary sense of gôrâl, the most common word for lot, is "stone", "pebble" (Lindblom (1962) 166).

<sup>13</sup> Parpola (1971) 12.

add that belief in astrology,<sup>14</sup> i.e. the interpretation of the movements of the stars as a fulfilment of the will of various godly powers so that man, by watching such movements, can determine the approach of fortune or misfortune,<sup>15</sup> was not brought to Israel by the Assyrians, the Babylonians or the Hellenists although most of our references to astrology are to be traced to this period.<sup>16</sup>

In all probability all the nations of the Ancient East have, like the Babylonians and the Assyrians, professional astrologers, by whom the stars were consulted, horoscopes drawn, and lucky days predicted.<sup>17</sup>

In fact investigation of Judahite cultic practices during the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. suggests that "there is no evidence of Assyrian cults imposed upon Judah in any biblical source."<sup>18</sup> This is confirmed by Assyrian sources: vassal states were free of any cultic obligations toward their Assyrian overlord and his gods, and did not suffer any interference in their native cults.<sup>19</sup>

(In other words, astrology was not necessarily a science imposed or introduced by Babylon during their occupation of Israelite territory. For that reason I shall therefore try to show:)

1.1.1 That the Ugaritic material confirms the belief that astrology was widely spread and practised at a very early time.

1.1.2 That there are quite definite traces of (Israelite) astrology during the pre-exilic period.

1.1.3 That there are proper Hebrew expressions to designate astrologers.

<sup>14</sup> Against Caquot (1968) 106f. and Mendelsohn (1962-1968) 304:

Astrology, to judge from the evidence of the Old Testament, was unknown in Ancient Israel, and the few passages that mention astrologers refer exclusively to the Babylonian practice.

<sup>15</sup> Clements (1973-1986) 79ff.

<sup>16</sup> See especially Dan 1:20.

<sup>17</sup> Pinches (1898) 191-194. This is followed by more recent opinion, e.g. J.G. Taylor (1993).

<sup>18</sup> Cogan (1974) 84-88; McKay (1973) 45-59.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. McKay's conclusions corroborate Cogan's: "solar, lunar and astral religions were familiar to the Israelites in many forms from almost every one of their neighbours and that in Palestine itself they were known from earliest times and during the period of the monarchy".

1.2 *The evidence from Ugaritic literature*

The texts from Ras-Shamra provide us with sources where this practice of astrology is fully attested.<sup>20</sup>

KTU 1.78: 1–6 (UT 143) [face A]:

b ॥ . ym . ḥdṭ  
 hbyr . 'rbt  
 špš tgrh  
 ršp  
 kbdm tbqrn  
 skn

During the six days of the new moon of the month, Hyr, the sun setting and Rsp, being her porter, then let the devotees divine danger.<sup>21</sup>

It has been said that despite the difficulties of interpretation, the text "clearly refers to astrology";<sup>22</sup> the text in question refers to a time of danger forecast by the positions of various planets.

Alternatively KTU 1.78:1–6 could refer to an eclipse of the sun.<sup>23</sup> If so ršp may refer to the planet Mars.<sup>24</sup> During a total eclipse of the sun the stars appear in the day-time; in this case, Aldebaran, a bright red star was visible and it was easily mistaken for the red planet Mars.<sup>25</sup> Side B of the tablet contains a prediction about the consequences of the celestial phenomenon described on side A. This side is badly damaged but could read as follows:<sup>26</sup>

w(?) . (k)bdm . tbq(r)n  
 skn  
 Die Lebarn überprüfte man: Gefahr.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Cf. references given by Garcia de la Fuente (1971) 162, footnote 11.

<sup>21</sup> Cited by Gray (1965) 194.

<sup>22</sup> Gray (1965) 194. Gordon (1965) 264; Segert (1984) 156 describes it as a "solar eclipse oracle".

<sup>23</sup> See Sawyer and Stephenson (1970) 468–489 who take 'rbt sps to refer to an eclipse of the sun (although no technical term for an eclipse is attested in Ugaritic as yet; in the Old Testament, see Amos 8:9).

<sup>24</sup> ršp is translated by Sawyer and Stephenson as Mars, Reshep corresponds to Nergal (itself identified with Mars).

<sup>25</sup> Against the identification of ršp with Mars, see Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartin (1974) 465.

<sup>26</sup> Sawyer and Stephenson (1970); Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartin (1974).

<sup>27</sup> Dietrich (1974); against this translation see Sawyer (1970) who reads: (This means) the overlord (bdm) will be attacked (tbq[r]n) by his vassals.

The idea expressed here is an association of hepatoscopy with the observation of celestial phenomena. This text could throw light on the circumstances of hepatoscopic consultation: an unusual celestial configuration (reflecting a disruption of the "normal" order in nature, and thus a time of danger) requires an explanation. The consultation of a liver,<sup>28</sup> a microcosm in itself, seems an appropriate method of interpreting a cosmic phenomenon.

Another Ugaritic text alluding to astrology is Aqhat.<sup>29</sup> Pgt, Aqhat's sister, gets herself ready to look for his body and avenge him. Their father, Dan'il, exhorts her:

1.51 yd [?t]  
1.52 hlk . kbkbm

She knows the course of the stars (also 1.56).

Set in this context, "knowing the course of the stars" along with a list of skills, seems to be part of the normal educational accomplishments of well brought up people (women?).

Can we see also in "tant . šmm . 'm . arṣ", "the murmur of the heavens to the earth", an allusion to astrology? Astrology which is based on the principle of the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm would be well illustrated in this line.

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### 1.3 *Traces of astral beliefs and astrology during the pre-exilic period of the Old Testament*

The belief-system in Ancient Israel was favourable for astral beliefs and astrology.<sup>30</sup>

1.3.1 The use of a lunar-solar calendar in the OT times necessitated fairly precise astronomical data.<sup>31</sup> Although Judean astronomy was largely limited to seasonal observations, "probably for calendrical and agricultural purposes",<sup>32</sup> it is highly unlikely that purely calendrical

<sup>28</sup> See "Hepatoscopy", chapter 4.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon (1943) 68.

<sup>30</sup> Long (1968) 77.

<sup>31</sup> Holladay (1968) 173, suggests that as the feasts are tied to the phases of the moon, "an organised priesthood would have had to involve itself in at least the rudiments of astronomy in order to establish both the upcoming feast-days and to insert the intercalary days and months to adjust the 354 1/4 day lunar year to the 365 1/4 day solar year".

<sup>32</sup> McKay (1973) 48 gives also in footnote 28 a number of references where the sun, moon and stars are described as marking off the seasons: Gen 1:14-19; Ps 104:19. Other

observations were rigorously separated from those of a more ominous significance.<sup>33</sup>

1.3.2 Besides such elementary astronomy, astral religion was widespread in the Ancient Near East, including the Israelite world.<sup>34</sup> For instance, the "Queen of Heaven", worshipped in Judah at the end of the seventh century,<sup>35</sup> had astral attributes before the time of Assyrian domination.<sup>36</sup> This mother-goddess was also represented as an astral deity at Ugarit, Megiddo, Gezer, Beth-shan and Tell es-Safi.<sup>37</sup> If we view the cult of the queen of Heaven as part of the popular religion of the day, it must be equally correct to view the cult of the Host of Heaven in the same setting.<sup>38</sup>

Later prophetic invective shows the real extent to which astral worship was a part of everyday Israelite religion.<sup>39</sup>

Josiah purged the land (2 Kings 23:4–5; 11–12) but solar-lunar worship was still a problem for Jeremiah<sup>40</sup> and Ezekiel.<sup>41</sup>

1.3.3 There is some archaeological support for the existence of early astral cults in ancient Israel:<sup>42</sup> motifs of stars have been found on a votive altar from Gezer. Other instances are to be found in Megiddo, Ugarit, Beth-shan.

#### 1.4 *Textual evidence for belief in astrology in the Old Testament*<sup>43</sup>

Although Deuteronomy<sup>44</sup> and the prophets generally condemned astrology, the fact remains that the belief in its worth, if not the actual

texts as in Amos 5:8–9; Job 9:9; 38:12–15.31–33 mention some of the major constellations that had a connection with the agricultural seasons.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Zatelli (1991) 86–99.

<sup>35</sup> Jer 7:17–18; 44:16–19.

<sup>36</sup> McKay (1973) 47.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> 2 Kings 21:3; on the worship of the šeba' haššamayim, see Cogan (1974) 84f.

<sup>39</sup> Linked with Hoshea (2 Kings 17:16), Manasseh (2 Kings 21:3–5), Ahaz (2 Kings 23:12).

<sup>40</sup> Jer 8:2; 19:13.

<sup>41</sup> Ezek 8:16.

<sup>42</sup> McKay (1973) 46, 54.

<sup>43</sup> The following section does not pretend to give an exhaustive list of all the references to astrology in the Old Testament. For a fuller treatment, see Zatelli (1991) 86–99.

<sup>44</sup> Deut 4:19:

practice, existed before the exile and before the Assyrian domination.

1.4.1 One such an example is to be found in Judg 5:20, namely the song of Deborah which alludes to a belief in the influence of the stars upon human events:

From heaven fought the stars,  
From their courses they fought against Sis'era.  
LXX: Ex ouranou paretaxanto hoi asteres,  
ek tribon auton paretaxanto meta Sisara.  
The stars from heaven set themselves in array,  
they set themselves to fight with Sisera out  
of their paths. (Vulg. follows the LXX).

The LXX text may be clearer, placing a greater emphasis on the notion that although the original astrological configuration was not favourable, the stars re-arranged themselves to produce the conditions necessary for victory.

Judg 5:20 has been variously interpreted:

1.4.1.1 The stars are direct agents: the earlier commentators thought the reference was to angels. Others, taking up the ancient belief that stars are animated beings, understand the passage as some supernatural help given by the stars themselves.<sup>45</sup>

Or again, later commentators see a reference to a rainstorm (the stars being a source of rain in the Ras-Shamra texts), which would have thrown the Canaanites into confusion.<sup>46</sup>

1.4.1.2 The reference to the stars is a poetical description of the power of Yahweh.<sup>47</sup>

1.4.1.3 I think that there may be a third way of interpreting the text. Judg 5:20 is a very old poem and replete with poetical imagery. We cannot expect a comprehensive description of what was in the mind of the writer. Instead of trying to read into the text a late interpretation (e.g. the omnipotence of Yahweh) or a "rational" one (the rainstorm),

And beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them and serve them, things which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.

<sup>45</sup> All those instances are listed by Moore (1895) 158.

<sup>46</sup> Gray (1967) 289f.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Moore (1895) 158.

or a barely credible one (the intervention of the stars themselves, or angels) perhaps what is stated here is a belief in the influences of the stars: specialists could have known in advance, by observing the course of the stars, that a given event would be favourably or unfavourably influenced.

1.4.2 A second instance may be found in Josh 10:12c–13c:

Sun, stand thou still at Gibeon,  
and thou Moon in the valley of Ai'jalon.  
(v. 13) And the Sun stood still, and the  
Moon stayed, until the nation took vengeance on  
their enemies.

It is worthwhile highlighting the following points in this text:

1.4.2.1 The poem is intimately related to the geographical area occupied by the Gibeonite confederacy.

1.4.2.2 The sun and the moon “stand” still, whatever that may mean; the possibility is that the sun is understood to be shining very strongly in the east, over Gibeon, and the moon is setting in the west, over the Ai'jalon valley.

⇒ 1.4.2.3 This latter phenomenon is somehow to be connected with the defeat of “the enemy” by “the nation (Israel)”. We may have here an incantation or prayer directed toward the establishment or preservation of conditions which will favour the defeat of the enemy.<sup>48</sup> The *Sitz im Leben* of the poem belongs most probably to the sphere of astrology: the heavenly bodies “determined” all human activities, particularly those which bore upon the body politic. The law of correspondence of the parts to the whole works at all levels throughout the cosmos: a certain configuration of the heavens reflects symbolically a corresponding configuration of human events.

Josh 10:12c–13c is an astrological prayer invoked in order to defeat Israel’s enemies.

1.4.3 Another passage from the pre-exilic period in which we may find traces of astrology is 1 Sam 9:25: “A bed was made for Saul on

<sup>48</sup> Holladay (1968) 169; Zatelli (1991) 89.

the roof and he lay down there". Both LXX and Vulg. translate: "He had a talk with Samuel on the roof and went to bed", in the scene where Samuel and Saul meet, just before Saul's anointing. Commentators have noted that there are abundant examples of such behaviour in modern Oriental life, though no other Old Testament example.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps some significance is to be attached to the detail that Samuel speaks to Saul "on the roof": a possible allusion to divination through the heavenly phenomena. We cannot rule out the possibility that this is an allusion to astrology (although that would run against the spirit of the Pentateuchal ideas);<sup>50</sup> this incidentally fits the context i.e. checking whether the stars give the right configuration for the anointing/the coming to kingship of Saul. Samuel, being a seer, is the ideal interpreter of natural signs.

#### 1.4.4 Amos 5:26.

MT: *ûněsā'tem ēt sikkūt malkēkem we'ēt kiyyūn tṣalmēkem kôkab 'ělōhēkem ăser 'ăsītem lākem.*

You shall take up<sup>51</sup> Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves.

The LXX has ten skenen instead of *ēt-sikkūt* (tabernacle) and reads Moloch instead of *malkēkem* "your king". Another major textual problem is *kiyyūn*. LXX has Rhaiphan, "Raephan", a proper name. Vulg: imaginem.

Both LXX and Vulg. interpret the passage as referring to an act of idolatry.

Sikkūt and *kiyyūn* have previously been identified with stars,<sup>52</sup> but a recent study showed that the reading "Sakkut", referring to a specific star, can neither be proved nor refuted, and should be regarded by biblical exegesis as hypothetical.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless there are other indications in the text which may show "an indictment of idolatrous practices connected with astrology":<sup>54</sup> e.g. the pairing of *tṣelelm* with *kôkab*,

<sup>49</sup> Smith (1899) 65.

<sup>50</sup> Jastrow (1909) 48f.

<sup>51</sup> Some scholars have translated this verb by "carry away": Hammershaimb (1970) 92ff.

<sup>52</sup> These forms have been connected with the Akkadian *Sakkūt* and *Kaymanu*/ *Kaywanu* respectively, which points in turn to the god *Ninurta* and the planet *Saturn*.

<sup>53</sup> Borger (1988) 70–81.

<sup>54</sup> Speiser (1947) 5–6; Harper (1905) 136ff.; Wolff (1969) 310.

which has a parallel in Babylonian-Assyrian astronomy where astral bodies are pictured in human form. The charge of star-worship seems to be confirmed by the fact that representations (*tšelem*) of the stars are actually used. But this use represents only a popular understanding of the real workings of astrology. Perhaps then we should see in Amos 5:26 the popular expression of a more serious science.

1.4.5 As has already been stated above, there are indeed Hebrew terms for the different kinds of astrologers whose etymology is not to be found in Akkadian,<sup>55</sup> showing that celestial forecasts were not altogether a novelty. The words designating stars, moon or sun, or even constellation<sup>56</sup> seem to be part of a common stock of semitic words.

Isa 47:12–15 contains three such expressions:

1.4.5.1 *haḥōzîm bakkōkābîm*: the star-gazers. LXX: 'astrologoi tou ouranou; Vulg: augures caeli

*Hōzeh* is a term that has been studied in detail, but for our purpose two statements can be made:

- The word belongs to an early period in the religious history of the Hebrews.
- It formed a part of the prophetic office before the period of the differentiation of the diviner from the true prophet of Yahweh.<sup>57</sup> So a better translation than "gazers" would be star-diviners, astrologers. Both LXX and Vulg. have understood it as such.

1.4.5.2 *hōberēw šamayîm*: the dividers of heavens.

LXX: *horōntes tous asteras*; Vulg.: *qui contemplabantur sidera*. The hapax legomenon *hōbērēw* presents some difficulties. Its primary meaning is "to bow down".<sup>58</sup> It has been connected with an Arabic word

<sup>55</sup> Like for instance the much discussed *tpsr* which Parpola (1971) 9ff., relates to the Akkadian *tupsarru*, and translates "astrologers", i.e. scribes specialised "in the observation of celestial and terrestrial omens"; Cathcart (1973) 42–44.

<sup>56</sup> Mazzalot: see 2 Kings 23:5. BDB "perhaps signs of the zodiac", adding that it is "probably a loan-word from the Assyrian *manzaltu*, *mazaltu*", "dwelling" or "station" of the sun." But I think it is a word common to the Semitic world. It exists in Aramaic: *mzl*, star of fortune or fate; in Phoenician: *mzl* = *tuche*, fortune; Ugaritic: KRT I. 99–100 and 187–188 (Gray (1964) 43).

<sup>57</sup> Jastrow (1909) 50f.

<sup>58</sup> BDB, 211.

habara, "to divide", lit. "to cut into large pieces", a meaning which suits very well, since the Babylonians divided the sky for astrological purposes into areas of the zodiac.<sup>59</sup> The interpretation "divide" would suit the text better than Parpola's translation: "viewers of the heavens".<sup>60</sup>

1.4.5.3 *môdî'im lehôdâsîm*: monthly prognosticators.

Vulg: supputabant menses.

"Those who make known each new moon" would be persons, like the Assyrian and Babylonian astrologers, who noted lucky and unlucky days, and prepared calendars based on astrological calculations.<sup>61</sup>

### 1.5 Conclusion

Although the textual evidence is difficult to assess, it nonetheless seems that there are traces of astrology in the Old Testament. The "star worship" mentioned by the Deuteronomist should not be understood as worship of the stars per se, but as evidence that the stars and constellations were studied and that conclusions were drawn from them. The Ugaritic texts certainly attest to such a practice and even list it among the things educated people are supposed to know about. It is only when the Israelites associated the observation of the stars with their Babylonian oppressors and their "pagan" cults that a ban on what was the emerging practice of astrology was imposed. The result is that details which could have pointed to the practice of such a science have been excised from the text. *Jump to note*

## 2. Hepatoscopy in the Northwest Semitic world

### 2.1 Introduction

Hepatoscopy, or divination by studying the appearance of an animal's liver, was a widespread practice in the Ancient Near East. The reasoning behind such a form of divination may be found in an understanding of anatomy as a reflection (a correspondence) of the universe and of the god's disposition at the moment of sacrifice. The liver, because

<sup>59</sup> Canney (1908–1921) 80–83; Westerman (1969) 193. See footnote 34.

<sup>60</sup> Parpola (1971) 11.

<sup>61</sup> Canney (1908–1921) 83.

it contains a disproportionately large amount of blood compared to the other organs of circulation, was considered to be the seat of blood and hence of life itself.<sup>62</sup> As such, it was the organ which best portrayed the disposition of the gods.

As the will of the gods could be read at a macrocosmic level, i.e. in the stars, so it was also reflected at a microcosmic one, i.e. in the liver, both being understood as vehicles of divine manifestation.

Furthermore, by its being sacrificed, the animal passes from the domain of the human to that of the god: "the gods express their disposition by means of the victim itself in the moments preceding, accompanying and following the sacrifice . . . but the clearest and most decisive indications were provided by the examination of the entrails of the sacrificial animal by experienced specialists".<sup>63</sup>

It is time now to turn to hepatoscopy in the Ancient Near East: we will concentrate on the Northwest Semitic area, firstly Ugarit, and secondly the Old Testament evidence.

## 2.2 *Evidence of hepatoscopy in the Ancient Near East*

Hepatoscopy is a science which was handed down from the Sumerians to the Amorites of Babylonia and in the West, to the Hittites, to the ancient Arabs, and eventually to the Greeks and Romans.<sup>64</sup> The greatest evidence of hepatoscopy from practically all periods of Babylonian and Assyrian history comes from Mesopotamia: apart from the actual clay models, important collections of liver omens have been found, prepared in the baru-academies attached to the temples. Also at Mari, thirty-two models of livers have been found. It should be added that the observation of a liver was not unknown in Canaanite Palestine<sup>65</sup> as both the discoveries of clay models of livers in Megiddo<sup>66</sup> and Hazor<sup>67</sup> show, indicating that the Hebrews possibly practiced this form of divination.

<sup>62</sup> Wood (1916) 46; Cooke (1936) 233; Mendelsohn (1962–1968) 857.

<sup>63</sup> Bloch (1986) 455.

<sup>64</sup> Wood (1916) 46.

<sup>65</sup> Mendelsohn (1962–1968) 857.

<sup>66</sup> ANET 595: an uninscribed clay model of a liver dating from 1350–1150 B.C. was found.

<sup>67</sup> Yadin (1959) 84, plate 12c.

### 2.3 *The Ugaritic evidence*

There is some archaeological evidence that suggests the use of the liver in divination practices in Ugarit. Inscribed models of livers and lungs have been found (15 in all):<sup>68</sup> the liver tablets are KTU 1.127 (lung); 1.142; 1.143; 1.144 (1.155 is not yet published).

Although these texts are formally dependent on the Babylonian models, they present a number of distinctive features, for instance the prescriptions of sacrifices leading to an extispicium. There are also "archive" tablets whose object is to record specific and notable consultations, i.e. when the predictions were fulfilled.

The fact that the texts give information on the sacrifices to be performed on specific occasions seems to prove that these documents are original, i.e. part of an assimilated tradition as opposed to a direct Babylonian influence.<sup>69</sup>

There is also some evidence of the practice from literary texts. One text in particular has been quoted by some scholars<sup>70</sup> as a possible reference to hepatoscopy.<sup>71</sup> This is KTU 1:19, III 38: Dan'ilu, Aqhat's father, with the help of Baal, uses the body of Sml, the mother of Eagles, to seek an omen concerning the death of his son:

ybq' . kbdh . wy\*h\*d .

He splits open her innards/liver and looks.

The text itself seems well established but the interpretation varies widely. The passage may be read literally and understands Dan'ilu "to seek the remnants of his dead son from the gizzards of the vultures in order to bury them and so to cover the unburied blood which brings disaster on the land".<sup>72</sup> The context itself suggests that the splitting of the kbd is to look for "fat" and "bone" of Aqhat, in other words for proof of his death. It seems unlikely that the reference to kbd is purely gratuitous, especially as we know how much Ugarit was in cultural, economical and political contact with the Hittites and with

<sup>68</sup> For the relevant literature, see Xella (1978) 329, footnote 52.

<sup>69</sup> Xella (1978) 329; Dietrich and Loretz (1986) 99–100.

<sup>70</sup> See in particular Dussaud (1937) 318–320; Garcia de la Fuente (1971) introduction; May (1939) 63.

<sup>71</sup> Dussaud (1937) 318:

Les aigles abattus vont servir à Daniel pour en tirer un presage.

<sup>72</sup> Gray (1957) 120–121; cf. also Watson (1977) 73 (against Dussaud and Garcia de la Fuente).

Mesopotamia, where hepatoscopy was practised.<sup>73</sup> A common Semitic background is suggested by the fact that the liver was also thought of as the seat of emotions among the people of Ugarit.<sup>74</sup>

#### 2.4 *The Old Testament evidence*

It is usually agreed that hepatoscopy has very little place, if any, in the divinatory skills of the Hebrews.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, we have some evidence which we can classify under two types: archaeological and literary. Both need to be examined carefully.

##### 2.4.1 The Archaeological evidence

Clay models of sheep's livers have been found as we mentioned already in Megiddo (Megiddo VII) and Hazor (Temple II, area H). Mention must also be made of the tablet of hard-baked red clay which was found in Gezer, in the shape of a beast's liver and coloured with lines, possibly connected with "divination practice".<sup>76</sup>

"The most important of the few objects discovered in this temple was found in a heap of pottery near the altar, belonging to the final phase of the temple. It is the only inscribed liver model found in Palestine, and one of the very few from this period (the latter part of the fifteenth century, B.C.) to be found in the entire Near East. From what has been deciphered so far, it seems to contain a series of evil omens. Several fragments of other liver models were also found".<sup>77</sup>

A single model liver was also found in Megiddo but it bears no inscriptions.

In any case the archaeological evidence is fairly ancient and although it shows that at a certain stage hepatoscopy was practised, very few traces are left in the Old Testament texts.

##### 2.4.2 The literary evidence

The literary evidence is of two types, what could be called positive evidence, i.e. the explicit mention of hepatoscopy, and negative, i.e. the ritual attempt to get rid of the liver of the sacrificial victim.

One text in the Old Testament refers explicitly to hepatoscopy: the

<sup>73</sup> See footnote 7.

<sup>74</sup> Gray (1957) 282 quotes the text found in Gordon UH 75, I, 12-13.

<sup>75</sup> Caquot (1968) 106f.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. McAlister (1912) 453f.

<sup>77</sup> Yadin (1959) 83-84.

consultation of the liver by the king of Babylon as one part of the three-fold process of omen consultation before deciding which road to take (Ezek 21:21 Engl.). No details as to the modus operandi are given:

He looks (rā'â) at the liver (bakkâbēd).<sup>78</sup>

All the commentators see this consultation as "a typically Babylonian feature".<sup>79</sup> It would be quite difficult to justify the use of hepastocopy by the Hebrews on the strength of this alone, so I shall turn now to the sacrificial texts concerned with the burning of the lobus caudatus of the liver of the sacrificed animal.

Nine passages of the Pentateuchal codes refer to this ritual.<sup>80</sup> I shall now examine in detail Lev 3:3-4:

And from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as an offering by fire to the Lord, he shall offer . . . the appendage of the liver (w'et hayyōteret 'al hakkâbēd).

That the hayyōteret 'al hakkâbēd refers to the lobus caudatus (the part of the body in question) has been successfully demonstrated.<sup>81</sup> The *Sitz im Leben* of the passage is that of the instructions for the peace offering ritual: after the blood rite the offering "layman" had to cut out from the slaughtered animal those parts which the ritual required to be handed over to the priest for burning on the altar, as Yahweh's appointed portion of the sacrificed animal. These portions are incinerated in a prescribed manner.

The hayyōteret 'al hakkâbēd that the Talmud calls "the finger of the liver",<sup>82</sup> because in a sheep it reaches upwards on the right like a finger, is the caudate lobe. It can easily be separated from the rest of the liver when the kidneys and their fat have been removed.<sup>83</sup>

If the right lobe was missing it was taken as a warning of the utmost seriousness. Although nothing is said in the existing text about the reason for the extraction of the liver and its appendages, we are led to speculate that "this prohibition is aimed against using the sacrificial animal for purposes of divination among the Hebrews".<sup>84</sup> That there is

<sup>78</sup> LXX: *kai kataskopesasthai*, "and to examine" (cf. Vulg.: *exta consuluit*).

<sup>79</sup> Cooke (1936) 233; Zimmerli (1969) 444.

<sup>80</sup> Exod 29:13.22; Lev 3:3-4. 10.15; 7:4; 8:16.25; 9:10.19.

<sup>81</sup> Rost (1967) 35-41.

<sup>82</sup> Cited by Snaith (1967) 38.

<sup>83</sup> The AV and RV translations are due to the Vulgate: *et adipem jecoris* (cf. LXX: *ton lobon ton epi tou hēpatos*).

<sup>84</sup> Porter (1981) 207; Caquot (1968) 106; Haldar (1945) 212.

a link between sacrifice and divination has been shown: "how frequently the reception of divine oracles is narrated in the context of the offering of sacrifices".<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the occasions during which the sacrifices were performed also suggest that this category of sacrifice was divinatory.<sup>86</sup>

### 2.5 Conclusion

The study of Lev 3:3f. shows that there is a strong possibility that the ritual performed was aimed at eradicating hepatoscopy completely. As we saw the archaeological data suggests very ancient traces of this science in Syro-Palestine. Perhaps because of its obvious Babylonian associations, and more certainly because of the advanced skills and training necessary for its successful interpretation, it was easier in some ways to get rid of this method of divination altogether.<sup>87</sup> Other technically simpler divinatory methods would be more difficult to eradicate.

One last question remains: if hepatoscopy was practised at one time, as suggested by Lev 3:3, there must exist words for the technicians who sacrificed and interpreted the livers. The *nōqēd* and the *bōqēr* have been seriously considered by a number of scholars to be "hepatoscopists", although the philological data is scanty. I examine these two words more closely in the chapter devoted to the oracular practitioners.

## 3. Hydromancy: Potent Waters in the Northwest Semitic World

### 3.0 Introduction

There is only one explicit reference to divination by means of water in the Old Testament, and that is in Gen 44:5–15: the cup belonging to Joseph is said to be the one which he uses for divination. In the Northwest Semitic literature there is also one possible reference to hydromancy in KTU 1.19, II, l. 1, where *Pagat* is said to draw water. I shall discuss both texts below. It is enough to say now that occurrences of

<sup>85</sup> Haldar (1945) 207f.

<sup>86</sup> For the association of *šelāmîm* sacrifices with divination, see Haldar (1945) 212.

<sup>87</sup> This may be suggested by the fact that the prohibition of hepatoscopy does not appear in Deut 18:9ff.

this specific type of divination are rare,<sup>88</sup> and their modus operandi unknown. There are in addition a number of texts which bear traces of a time when certain wells and springs were the place of judicial consultation.<sup>89</sup> That water was also used in trial-ordeals is shown by Num 5:11–28. Water is also known to have had a “magical” cleansing effect and was used as such in the cult.<sup>90</sup> Before examining the texts in which water appears to have an oracular potential I shall try to show what it is that makes people believe in its potency.

### 3.1 *The potency quality of water*

Water is ambiguous: it is chaos or salvation (life and/or death) it can save or condemn. Its positive aspect stems from the fact that as an essential element to human life and the growth of plants, “it symbolizes a generative or life-giving quality<sup>91</sup> very similar to creative power. It is thus divine and sacralizing”.<sup>92</sup> Yet it is also capable of playing a negative role: water symbolizes the unruly powers opposed to God’s sovereignty.<sup>93</sup> Water therefore is life, energy and death and as such participate in the domain of the divine. The ambiguous nature of water is of particular importance for our subject because the “stream is impregnated, so to speak, with the vital energy of the deity”<sup>94</sup> and so it can be used as a means to interrogate the deity.

### 3.2 *Divining by means of water*

#### 3.2.1 As noted above the only recorded instance is in Gen 44:5–15:<sup>95</sup>

V. 5: Is it not from this (the silver cup) that my lord drinks, and by this that he divines (nhš)?

There is a great diversity of opinion as to what the modus operandi is but this has already been discussed.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>88</sup> That is in Old Testament times. For Talmudic references and practice see Schwab (1890) and Isbell (1975).

<sup>89</sup> For instance, Gen 14:7.

<sup>90</sup> Ezek 36:25; cf. the cleansing rituals of Num 19:1–10 and Deut 21:1–9 (see 4.5).

<sup>91</sup> 2 Kings 5.

<sup>92</sup> Rudhardt (1986) 358. On the water being given by God: Amos 9:6; Job 5:10.

<sup>93</sup> Jer 4:23–26.

<sup>94</sup> Oesterley and Robinson (1932) 34.

<sup>95</sup> Isbell (1975).

<sup>96</sup> See nhš, chapter 2.

In any case no detail is given in the text. Because *nhs* may be related to the observation of natural phenomena, I think that only the observation of water is meant here (as opposed to lecanomancy or the divination from the motion of oil in the water) with the aim of inducing visions:

v. 15: What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed divine.

3.2.2 In Ugaritic literature also, water is viewed as both positive<sup>97</sup> and negative<sup>98</sup> but the only possible reference to hydromancy is to be found in KTU 1.19, II.1:

sm<sup>2</sup> . pgt . lkmt[.]m\*y\*

Listen, Pughatu, (you) who carry water  
on your shoulder.<sup>99</sup>

This passage is set after the death of Aqhat. Pughatu is asked by their father Dan'ilu to prepare his ass to go in search of his son's remains. Although some commentators<sup>100</sup> suggest that what is described is "a task of women in the evening", in view of the following verses:

who scoops up dew from the wool  
who knows the course of stars!,

I would like to introduce a different proposal, that here there is a possible reference to astrology (see chapter 4, section 1). The lines quoted above bring to mind the passage in Judg 6:36–40 where a sign is given to Gideon by means of a fleece.<sup>101</sup>

In the Ugaritic passage the death of Aqhat brings upon the country a threat of drought, therefore it is possible to see in Pughatu's action an act of magic in order to make clear her desire for rain.<sup>102</sup>

Her first action, i.e. "to carry water on her shoulder" might be connected with this ritual. On the other hand, the passage might refer to a threefold divination ritual performed in order to find out what had

<sup>97</sup> KTU 1.19, I, l. 40ff.; KTU 1.3, II, l. 38ff.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. the story of the conflict between Baal and Yam in KTU 1.2.

<sup>99</sup> De Moor (1987) 257 translates as such: "(Pughatu) who observes (the water)", against Dietrich and Loretz: "Pgt, Trägerin des Wassers".

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., footnote 180; Gibson (1978) 85, 115. Also Caquot, cited by Dietrich and Loretz (1986) 96.

<sup>101</sup> Margalit (1978/1979) 60.

<sup>102</sup> Delcor (1976) 404–419; Patai (1930) 254–286.

happened to her brother and to recover the body, as burial rites must be accomplished for the safety of the community.<sup>103</sup>

### 3.3 *Judicial waters*

The "judgement" by water can be made in many different ways. In the names of wells and springs we find only allusions to the seeking of oracles. We do however have a ritual described in Num 5 where waters are used in an ordeal situation. I shall also examine this.

#### 3.3.1 Gen 14:7 'ê̄n mišpāt, "the spring of decision".

This is the alternative name for 'Ain Kadis and it is found only in this passage. Since qadesh means "holy" and mišpāt "judicial decision", it is a plausible conjecture that the name refers to an ordeal involving the use of "holy water" from the sacred well.<sup>104</sup> Another possibility is that people came to the well in order to obtain a decision about some dispute.<sup>105</sup>

How exactly the ordeal was performed and the oracle obtained is not elaborated upon. Would those who interpret the waters contemplate them,<sup>106</sup> expecting to "see" in the well what they needed, or would they add poison to the waters, or alternatively would they consult the spirit of the well<sup>107</sup> in a ritual similar to 1 Sam 28? It is difficult to say.

#### 3.3.2 1 Kings 1:9 'ê̄n rōgēl, "the well of inquiring".<sup>108</sup>

This spring is believed to have been a place where people came to ask what they should do to cure an ailment.<sup>109</sup> But En-rogel was a sanctuary, and a place of sacrifice. If the etymology of rōgēl is indeed connected

<sup>103</sup> Ginsberg, cited by Dietrich and Loretz (1986) 98.

<sup>104</sup> Robertson Smith, cited by Skinner (1910) 263; see also mē mērībā, water of controversy.

<sup>105</sup> Oesterley and Robinson (1932) 35.

<sup>106</sup> Godsey (1930) 217-238.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. 'ôb, in "Necromancy", chapter 4. On the belief that wells were the embodiment of a supernatural being see Num 21:17-18. For Wood (1916) 18, "the following spring embodies the numen and exhibits its presence by animation, then it was fitting for the primitive inquirer seeking the divine to throw into the water to the deity such offerings as jewelry, precious metals, webs of linen, libations of wine, food . . . thus by an act of violation, expressing acceptance or rejection of these gifts, manifested by corresponding movements of the water itself, the spring numen was credited with oracular powers".

<sup>108</sup> The translation is from Oesterley (1932) 38. The traditional interpretation is to render rōgēl by "fuller" (Montgomery (19) 73; BDB 920).

<sup>109</sup> Oesterley (1932) 38.

with the notion of inquiry<sup>110</sup> then this would be a place very similar to Endor in 1 Sam 28 where spirits of the dead were invoked. Since waters also symbolized death<sup>111</sup> there is a possibility that hydromancy, and the use of judicial waters and necromancy are all interconnected.

### 3.3.3 Num 5:11–28: the test by ordeal.<sup>112</sup>

This text describes how a woman suspected of adultery which cannot be legally proved may be subjected to an ordeal. Very briefly, what happens is this:

- The accusing husband (who must take with him an offering of barley meal) brings his wife to the priest (v. 15).
- The priest brings her “before the Lord” (v. 16).
- He makes her take an oath (v. 19).
- Then he gives her to drink a potion described as “water of bitterness that brings the curse”<sup>113</sup> (v. 19).
- If the woman is guilty the potion will “cause bitter pain” (vv. 24–27); if innocent “she shall be free and shall conceive children” (v. 28).

This text describes a unique law but seems to suggest traces of trial by ordeal in early Israel.<sup>114</sup> From our standpoint, which is to establish the use of water in judicial matters, i.e. determining the innocence or the guilt of a person, Num 5 presents a good case. But again we are left with the question of how the decision of the deity was given, and what was the reasoning underlying the use of ordeal by waters. Water has an ambiguous nature: it was believed to cause harm or blessing. How did this happen? The answer is to be found in the fact that waters are full of “supernatural” energy, but they are neutral; then the oath which is pronounced brings about positive energy in the water (the fertility of the woman) if the woman is innocent, or negative energy (decay) if the woman is guilty.

<sup>110</sup> The root can mean “to search out” or “inquire” about something: Judg 18:2; 2 Sam 10:3.

<sup>111</sup> Deut 21; Num 19; see Rudhardt (1986) 357.

<sup>112</sup> The question as to whether this text deals with a test by ordeal, i.e. the use of judicial water or an oath, as stated by Lehmann (1969) 77, is difficult, although the connection between the two is well established (Gray (1903) 45). For more texts possibly related to ordeals by water see van der Koorn, with an updated bibliography on Num 5:11–28 in p. 437.

<sup>113</sup> This potion consists of “holy water” with which dust from the floor of the tabernacle has been mingled, and into which the written words of the oath have been washed.

<sup>114</sup> For a demonstration of this point, see Gray (1903) 45f.; Press (1933) 122–126.

### 3.4 *Washing sins away: the "magical" power of water*

Two related texts will be briefly analysed in order to show its cleansing properties: Numb 19:1–10 and Deut 21:1–9.

3.4.1 Num 19:1–10: the red heifer and the water of purification. This text refers in detail to the prescribed ritual for the removal of the pollution contracted through contact with the dead. The cleansing is done by the use of a liquid of which the main ingredient is the ashes of a red cow. This story has had many interpretations<sup>115</sup> but I am only concerned here with showing, and possibly explaining, the potency of water. What gives it this power to wash away the uncleanness and at the same time to defile the clean?<sup>116</sup> The other ingredients which make up the water for impurity (*mê niddâ*) are "cedarwood and hyssop and scarlet stuff", and they are burnt with the heifer. It is possible that the properties of these elements (especially the hyssop and the cedar) are believed to be special. Both the hyssop and the cedar can be used as fumigants and if hyssop is really *Origanum marjorana* as the Jewish tradition has it<sup>117</sup> then the idea may have been to get rid of any evil influence. This theory is plausible in the context, i.e. a death ritual. The water is mixed with ingredients which give it a positive quality, that of getting rid of all bad influences surrounding a death, or the state of sin,<sup>118</sup> according to which interpretation one favours. It acts as an exorcism. The power of this water is such that improper handling defiles, as is the case with all "sacred" objects.

3.4.2. Deut 21:1–9: the role of water in the ceremony for the expiation of an unknown murderer's crime.

Although there is no consensus among scholars about the general interpretation of the text<sup>119</sup> it seems that there are three different stages in the story.<sup>120</sup> I shall concentrate particularly on the necessity to perform

<sup>115</sup> For a good synthesis of the interpretations, see Gray (1903) 246ff.; Smith (1908) 153–156 ("Numbers 19 is an ancient rite to the dead"), Morgenstern (1973) 142ff.

<sup>116</sup> These contradictory effects of water have been noted by many commentators (Smith (1908) 155 . . .).

<sup>117</sup> Gray (19) 251.

<sup>118</sup> V. 9:

the water for impurity, for the removal of sin.

<sup>119</sup> A history of the interpretation of the text is to be found in Zevit (1976) 377ff.; Morgenstern (1973) 143.

<sup>120</sup> Zevit (1973) 389f., distinguishes a pre-Israelite ritual whose "purpose was both

the ceremony near running water (*nahal 'ētān*).<sup>121</sup> What are the circumstances in which the “*'eglā* ritual” is to be performed? Is it when a man’s corpse is found in the open country, and when his killer is unknown, so that “obviously, his murder could not be avenged”?<sup>122</sup> There are two possibilities as to the function of this stream:

- Its purpose is to provide purifying water in order to ward off the spirit of the dead man.
- Or the water is to be used in a divinatory ritual performed in order to discover the murderer and so be able to avenge the dead and give rest to his spirit.

In both cases the water is full of energy and power, as the deity is believed to be present in it.<sup>123</sup>

### 3.4 Conclusion

The belief that water is potent can be explained through the worldview prevalent in Israelite religion. Although it is extremely difficult to date the texts, it seems that this is an old belief, as names attached to some springs, wells and rivers show. As to the more precise question of divination by means of water there are very few instances recorded in the Northwest Semitic world and no technique of divination is ever described, so that we are left to speculate as to the *modus operandi*.<sup>124</sup> Finally a belief in the therapeutic value of running water (e.g. 2 Kings 5:14) is expressed even in late prophetic texts, as Ezekiel’s vision of the river shows.<sup>125</sup>

juristic and prophylactic centering around a propitiatory sacrifice”, “early Israelite ritual” performed for the same reasons but sanctioned by tradition and rationalised, and a “late Israelite ritual” dominated by the Deuteronomic movement.

<sup>121</sup> On this expression, see Driver (1895) 243f.

<sup>122</sup> Morgenstern (1973) 143.

<sup>123</sup> Zevit (1973) 389.

<sup>124</sup> At a much later period, bowls may have been used for hydromancy, but again, the *modus operandi* is not clear. One new element is introduced (perhaps) in the writing of incantations inside the bowl (Isbell (1976) 15–23, and (1974) 405–407).

<sup>125</sup> Ezek 47:9.12; Wood (1916) 19.

4. *Necromancy in the Northwest Semitic World*

4.0 *Definition and purpose of necromancy*

4.0.1 Necromancy, or divination by means of communication with the spirits of the dead, presupposes "the belief in a form of life after death and the continued interest of the dead in the affairs of the living. As such, it may well be associated with complex funerary and post-funerary<sup>126</sup> customs and with ancestor-worship".<sup>127</sup> Also it implies that those who are able, or who are supposed to be able, to give information regarding the future "must clearly possess powers denied to men of ordinary nature".<sup>128</sup>

4.0.2 The purpose of such an operation is to obtain directly from the spirits of the dead information concerning the causes of past events or the course of future events.

4.1 *Necromancy in the Old Testament: the status quaestionis*

In the Old Testament such a practice seems relatively infrequent though it must have been popular enough to justify Deuteronomic,<sup>129</sup> Levitical<sup>130</sup> and prophetic condemnation.<sup>131</sup> It is even prohibited in the "historical books".<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless the Old Testament contains a full description of a necromantic ritual in the, by now, classic text of 1 Sam 28.<sup>133</sup> This text suggests that before Saul tried to put a stop to it, necromantic practices were in vogue at the beginning of the monarchy. Equally, Isaiah is well aware of these practices when he declares:

And the spirit of the Egyptians within them will be emptied out, and I will confound their plans; and they will consult the idols and the sorcerers, and the mediums and the wizards (Isa 19:3).

<sup>126</sup> Deut 21:1-9.

<sup>127</sup> Bourguignon (1986) 345; Whitehouse (1900-1909) 606; Lods (1906); Vattioni (1963).

<sup>128</sup> Oesterley (1921) 124.

<sup>129</sup> Deut 18:11.

<sup>130</sup> Lev 19:31; 20:6.

<sup>131</sup> Isa 8:19-20; 28:7-22. On the latter text see van der Toorn (1988) 199-217.

<sup>132</sup> 1 Chr 10:13. For the reason why the practice was condemned, see Schmidtke (1967) 248: according to this scholar it is demonic.

<sup>133</sup> This text will be studied in detail below.

The prophet knows quite well that the people resorted to such things. So when we read that Manasseh "practised soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards" (2 Kings 21:6 = 2 Chron 33:6), "we must see in his action, not so much the resuscitation of practices which had fallen into desuetude, but rather the official recognition of what had long been done by the people".<sup>134</sup>

That necromancy was practised by the Israelites may perhaps be deduced from the fact that no prohibition against it is found in Exod 20:22–23:33. That it is not even mentioned<sup>135</sup> in this code of law does not mean that it did not exist but rather that it was so commonly practised, or at least that it was connected so closely with the cult of the dead, there was no reason for prohibiting it.<sup>136</sup> In the course of time it became a threat to the worship of the one god, as indeed did most of the other divinatory practices,<sup>137</sup> and was condemned: "For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord".<sup>138</sup> This practice was further discredited in the Holiness Code of laws<sup>139</sup> which declares it to be punishable with death. Despite all the efforts made to eradicate necromancy, we find it is still practised in Judea long after the exile.<sup>140</sup>

#### 4.2 *Necromancy in the West Semitic world*

In Ugaritic literature there are several references to the evocation of the dead.<sup>141</sup> Whether or not there is a direct cause/effect relationship between these evocations of the dead spirits and divination may be debatable, but I shall discuss that in detail in 4.4 of this chapter.

The Aramaic and Phoenician literatures do not seem to yield any data associated with necromantic practices.

<sup>134</sup> Oesterley (1930) 129.

<sup>135</sup> It is difficult to decide why necromancy is not mentioned. Like other techniques and devices it eventually became prohibited during the exilic/post-exilic period.

<sup>136</sup> Sustaining that view is Oesterley (1930) 129f. That the invocation of the dead was practised long before the oldest code of law is shown by Ugaritic literature (see section 4.5).

<sup>137</sup> The divinatory and the magical practices condemned by the various codes of law were at one stage legitimate.

<sup>138</sup> Deut 18:12. In conformity with this Josiah "put away the media and the wizards and the teraphim and the idols . . ." (2 Kings 23:24).

<sup>139</sup> Lev 22–26; and Lev 19:31; 20:6.27.

<sup>140</sup> Isa 65:2–4.

<sup>141</sup> KTU 1.22, II, 1. 4; KTU 1.161.

### 4.3 *The semantic field of necromancy*

"One that inquires of the dead"<sup>142</sup> (dōrēš el hammētîm) is either synonymous with, or at least includes, the consultation of 'ôb and yiddē'-ônîm.<sup>143</sup> I shall examine both terms in order to try to define more clearly what the practice of necromancy involved.

#### 4.3.1 'ôb

##### 4.3.1.1 The problem of etymology

The etymology of 'ôb is most uncertain, as is generally acknowledged. KBL postulates two different roots<sup>144</sup> and BDB suggests a possible reference to 'wb, "to have a hollow sound".<sup>145</sup>

In fact there are three different interpretations of the etymology of 'ôb:

– The first one is based on Job 32:19:

Behold, my heart is like wine that has no vent;  
like new wineskins (ke'ôbôt), it is ready to burst.

The LXX translates 'ôb as eggastrimuthos in this instance;<sup>146</sup> what may be intended here is some exorcism through the stomach.<sup>147</sup> This interpretation requires a Hebrew etymology for 'ôb. In this particular case BDB's proposal to trace 'ôb to a root 'wb might be acceptable.

– The second interpretation originates in the attempt to find its etymology in the Arabic 'wb: "to come back", "to return".<sup>148</sup> However, this etymology seems to have fallen out of favour: the Arabic

<sup>142</sup> Deut 18:11.

<sup>143</sup> Deut 18:11. Driver (1895) 226, thinks that the two are somehow connected. "Asking the dead" is probably "a comprehensive term, intended to bring within the terms of the prohibition whatever other forms of the same superstition, not already mentioned, were in vogue". For an up-to date bibliography on the 'ôb, see Ebach, Rutersworden, Bochum (1977) 57, footnote 3. Both 'ôb and yiddē'-ônî(m) occur together in Lev 19:31; 20:6.27; 1 Sam 28:3.9; Is 8:19; 19:3; 2 Kings 21:6 = 2 Chr 33:6; 2 Kings 23:24.

<sup>144</sup> KBL, 18:

bag of goat skin and spirit of the dead.

<sup>145</sup> BDB, 15 where 'ôb is translated by "necromancer" or "necromancy", but neither definition fits all the cases.

<sup>146</sup> There are two exceptions: 32:19 and 2 Kings 21:6.

<sup>147</sup> Hoffner (1973–1986) 141.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 142. Apart from 'ôb, the root 'wb is not to be found in the Bible (Lust (1974) 135). For the scholars who adopted this etymology, see Lust (1974) 135; van Hoonacker (1897/1898) 157–160.

word has no cognate use in the old Semitic languages like Ugaritic, Akkadian and Phoenician.<sup>149</sup>

— Thirdly (and more recently) the opinion is that it is not a Semitic word but a “Wanderwort”.<sup>150</sup> It occurs in Sumerian, Ugaritic,<sup>151</sup> Hurrite and in Hittite, and in all of these languages it means “mundus”<sup>152</sup> or “sacrificial, votive pit” (“Opfergrube”).<sup>153</sup> The word ’ôb is therefore very old and its origin goes back beyond 2000 B.C.

#### 4.3.1.2 Textual evidence

As can be seen from the various possible etymologies, the search for a meaning is complex. As I mentioned above (see notes 19 and 20) the lexicons give translations which do not fit all the cases.

We read in 2 Kings 21:6 that Manasseh “made” (?âšâ) an ’ôb and yiddé’ônîm. Therefore at that time they are concrete objects.<sup>154</sup> A talisman or fetish has been suggested.<sup>155</sup>

Two more important pieces of information can be gained from Isa 8:19 and 29:4:

Isa 8:19:

And when they say to you, “Consult the mediums (?ôbôt) and the wizards (yiddé’ônîm) who chirp (haméapsépîm) and mutter (hammahgîm)”, should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead (yidrôš . . . el hamméâtîm) on behalf of the living?

This warning against necromancers poses a lot of textual difficulties.<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless the condemnation is quite clear and it provides a number of interesting details about the nature of the ’ôb. The ’ôb and yiddé’ônîm are associated with the spirits of the dead; they can be consulted (drôš) for the purpose of foreseeing the future;<sup>157</sup> they also can be heard

<sup>149</sup> Hoffner (1973–1986) 141.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. ib (WUS, no. 8) and ilib (WUS, no. 188); cf. Dietrich, Loretz and Sanmartin (1974) 450–451.

<sup>152</sup> Vieyra (1961) 47–55, was able to show that a large degree of probability exists for deriving the Sumerian, Hittite, Ugaritic and Hebrew from a common source: the Hebrew ’ôb was a ritual pit for communication with the netherworld.

<sup>153</sup> Hoffner (1967) 385ff. For a critique of Hoffner’s derivation of ’ôb from the Hittite a-a-bi, see Lust (1974) 134, who opts for a different interpretation: ’ôb would be the “ghost of the deceased fathers”.

<sup>154</sup> Wohlstein (1967) 349. Cf. 2 Kings 23:24 where ’ôbôt and yiddé’ônî(m) are set in parallel with teraphim, idols and the like.

<sup>155</sup> Smith (1904) 239.

<sup>156</sup> Gray (1912) 158 discusses these problems.

<sup>157</sup> Wohlstein (1967) 349f.

and the noise they make is comparable to the piping<sup>158</sup> and murmuring<sup>159</sup> of birds.

In Isa 29:4,<sup>160</sup> Jerusalem (which is called Ari'el) is compared to a woman who speaks from the depths of the earth and as a result her voice is muted because of the dust. It is also said of her that her voice "will be like the 'ôb that comes from the earth". The 'ôb then is a word for the dead spirits who are under the earth, i.e. who have their abode in Sheol.<sup>161</sup> It is further maintained by scholars that the 'ôb lets his words filter to the surface of the earth without great coherence. We are reminded here of the muffled, incantatory words of the magicians.<sup>162</sup> We can go further and suggest that the rustling of the wind in the leaves of trees, all the muffled, rustling noises of nature may be the expression of an 'ôb, ready to be listened to and interpreted by various specialists. Again in this text we are dealing with the spirits of the dead.

Where does the use of 'ôb in Job 32:19 come into this equation: 'ôb = dead spirit? In divination there is a connection between an oracle and wine. Such a connection may come from Canaan and must have taken place in Israel's oldest area of settlement where wine is an important means of stimulating ecstasy. On the other hand, can the meaning "giver of oracles" be derived from "wineskins"? It can be seen (KBL) that there are not necessarily two roots, but that spirits of the dead, oracle giver and an artificial stimulant, wine, are all interconnected.

Lastly 1 Sam 28:7, where the "witch" is called baalat 'ôb<sup>163</sup> (cf. Lev 20:27, a woman with whom is an 'ôb) does not contradict the idea that the 'ôb is related to the spirits of the dead. It also makes the distinction between the 'ôb and the person who uses it. The supposition that the 'ôb refers to a human skull<sup>164</sup> can hardly be considered. The suggestion that it is a pit<sup>165</sup> must also be rejected.

<sup>158</sup> mesapsep is used of the thin notes of birds (Isa 10:14).

<sup>159</sup> 'ehgeh is used of the song of doves (Isa 38:14; 59:11).

<sup>160</sup> See this text analysed in the "Disputed cases section", chapter 2.

<sup>161</sup> Wohlstein (1974) 351.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., suggests that the magicians merely want to identify with the dead by speaking like this.

<sup>163</sup> See 4.5.

<sup>164</sup> Smith (1904) 239f., who bases his judgement on Talmudic and Rabbinic tradition.

<sup>165</sup> Hoffner (1967) 401:

the 'ôb is primarily a ritual hole in the ground dug to give infernal deities . . . access to the upper world for a brief interval of time. Officiating at such a pit would be a woman called ba'alat 'ôb.

We are left then with little evidence: the 'ôb appears at times to be a tool, an instrument used to get in touch with the spirits of the dead; in this case the object in question emits a muffled sound. Also there is evidence that the 'ôb is another word for the spirits of the dead. Both are certainly strongly connected. Lastly, without trying to force the evidence, I think it possible that wine or other stimulants were used to evoke a vision of the dead spirit in order to acquire knowledge of things to come. Etymologically speaking the hollowness suggested by the Hebrew root may refer to a "prop" used to contact dead spirits.

#### 4.3.2 *yiddē'ônîm*

The task of determining the etymology of the *yiddē'ônîm* is much simpler. The root is *yd'*, "to know", "to have insight", and refers then to one who knows what is going to happen. Both BDB<sup>166</sup> and KBL<sup>167</sup> give two meanings: "soothsayer" and "familiar spirit". Contrary to the 'ôb, which sometimes stands by itself, *yiddē'ônî* is always used in conjunction with 'ôb. What is the relationship between the two? Are there any differences, as some scholars think,<sup>168</sup> or are they synonymous, as it seems reasonable to assume, the *yiddē'ônî* being only descriptive of the 'ôb?<sup>169</sup> I think it reasonable to consider these two terms as synonymous. It is hard to prove that there is any distinctions, that the two terms are distinct. The data for forming a proper judgement is too slight. Can they be regarded as two aspects of the same spirit? The addition of *yiddē'ônî* to 'ôb would convey the notion that the spirit so returning is knowledgeable, and therefore able to answer the questions of the inquirer.<sup>170</sup> The fact that in all the parallel instances of its occurrence *yiddē'ônî* invariably follows 'ôb supports its being considered as an interpretation.

<sup>166</sup> BDB, 396.

<sup>167</sup> KBL 367.

<sup>168</sup> Smith suggests it means "acquaintance", cited in Driver (1895) 226. Driver himself understands the *yidde'oni* to be a "familiar" spirit, i.e. a spirit which is at the beck and call of a particular person, and imparts to him its superior knowledge.

<sup>169</sup> Oesterley (1930) 134.

<sup>170</sup> Davies (1898) thinks it a case of hendiadys: "one who seeks a departed spirit that is knowing". Lods (1906) 251, suggests that the *yidde'oni* possessed the necromancer himself, and then gave him knowledge. On the other hand, the necromancer himself has been called *yiddē'ônî* because of the knowledge he gained from the spirits.

4.4 *The modus operandi of the consultation of the dead*

## 4.5.1 Modus operandi of the Ugaritic consultation of the dead.

KTU 1.161:

This text is "a description of a spiritualistic session held within the royal ancestor cult".<sup>171</sup>

ll. 1-4: spr . dbḥ . zlm  
 qritm. r\*p\*i . a [rṣ]  
 qbitm . qbṣ . d [dn(?)]  
 qra.b\* \*lkn . rp\* [i.arṣ]

Report on the sacrificial banquet of the shades. You invoked the Saviours of the earth, You summoned the Assembly of Didanu  
 He invoked Tarmennu, the Saviour . . .".<sup>172</sup>

The following comments can be made:

- The designation of the spirits of the dead as "shades"<sup>173</sup> must be noted. It is interesting because it infers that some form, probably human, appears. This is corroborated by the apparition of Samuel described in 1 Sam 28 where the prophet is identified by his coat (the coat was part of the prophet's special dress), which suggests that only the general outline was visible.
- "Qritm" is a technical term for the invocation of the spirits,<sup>174</sup> confirming the *Sitz im Leben* of the passage.
- The expression "Saviours of the earth" may give us an insight into the function they are believed to fulfil: their role might be to help the living.<sup>175</sup> How exactly this help is given is unknown but some of the deeds the spirits of the dead can perform may include giving advice (about a decision, see 1 Sam 28), or concrete help (to protect a city against its enemies, e.g. KTU 1.119),<sup>176</sup> or even reviving the dead (e.g. Aqhat in KTU 1.22, I, 1. 4). The spirits of the dead are invoked during the night as lines 13ff. seem to infer:

<sup>171</sup> De Moor (1987) 165f.

<sup>172</sup> Translated by de Moor (1987) 166. On the Ugaritic Rephaim see L'Heureux (1972); Caquot (1960) 75-93.

<sup>173</sup> De Moor suggests:

They are made visible in the form of smoke.

<sup>174</sup> De Moor (1987) 166. See also 1 Sam 28:15; Job 5:1; Prov 9:18.

<sup>175</sup> See the etymology *repa'im*, "healers" (Caquot (1960) 91).

<sup>176</sup> See Healey (1978) 87, who thinks that their purpose is to "ensure blessing on the city of Ugarit and its royal family"; also Caquot (1960) 90.

l. 13: Throne of Nigmaddu, weep for yourself!  
 And let his foot-stool shed tears,  
 before him let the royal table weep!  
 But let it swallow its tears,  
 let the [tears] disappear completely!  
 Be hot, Sun,  
 Yes, be hot, great luminary!<sup>177</sup>

The rising of the sun chases the spirits away, back to their own world.

– From l. 27ff. we see that following the disappearance of the spirits the king sacrifices. The number of these ancestral spirits must also be noted: there are seven of them. Whether this number represents danger, loaded as it is with supernatural strength, or an indefinite number of spirits, or their “completeness”<sup>178</sup> is difficult to judge from this context. It is enough to remember the symbolic power underlying this number.

#### 4.4.2 KTU 1.22, IV, 1. 4; KTU 1.20; 1.21.

After Pughatu, sister of Aqhat, succeeds in killing the murderers of her brother, Dan'ilu, their father, still does not find rest and asks Ba'alu for help. Ba'alu answers that the only possibility of seeing Aqhat(u) again is to invite the spirits of the dead heroes into his house to celebrate the New Year Festival with him.

KTU 1.21, II fragment “A” is a prayer of invocation of the dead spirits to the palace of Dan'ilu:

l. 10ff. I invite you [to my house],  
 I call you [to] my [pala]ce.  
 May the saviours [flutter] to the holy place,  
 may the [ghosts] flutter to the [holy place]!

Then a sacrifice is offered in KTU 1.20, I, 1. 1ff.

l. 1ff.: . . . [may] the Saviours take part in the  
 sacrifice,  
 . . . [may] the ghosts be served,  
 [may they ea]t like the long dead.

<sup>177</sup> De Moor (1987) 167.

<sup>178</sup> Kapelrud (1968) 499.

Eventually Dan'iliu succeeds:

The Saviours arrived at the threshing-floors, the gh[osts at] the plantations.<sup>179</sup>

He then takes a vow:

If [my son Aqhatu becomes ki]ng over Ammurru,  
gras[ps] the throne of his kingship,  
the seat of the throne of his do[minion],  
I will [always] call the Saviour [to my house],  
[invite the ghosts] to [my palace]!<sup>180</sup>

And according to the next fragment KTU 1.22, IV, it seems probable that Aqhatu is brought back:<sup>181</sup>

Look! [your] off [spring],  
[he who will gras]p your hand,  
your lips will kiss the boy!

This deed was done through the evocation of the name of "Ilu" (l. 6): "There the name of Ilu gave substance to the dead". However, the recall of Aqhat(u) from the kingdom of the dead does not last very long: he has to leave again (cf. Samuel who goes back to Sheol once the consultation is over) leaving his father "crying".<sup>182</sup> The passage implies that Aqhat(u) remains with Dan'iliu during the seven days of sacrifices. When this "magical" lapse of time is over the ghosts and spirits of the dead go back to where they belong.

#### 4.2 *Modus operandi of a Hebrew necromantic consultation*

##### 4.2.1 1 Sam 28:7-25: the ba'lat 'ôb of Endor

The circumstances of the consultation are a time of crisis (v. 15). The king had forbidden mediums to call forth the spirits of the dead (1 Sam 28:3).<sup>183</sup> In his last desperate period, when everything went wrong and the Philistines were victorious, Saul tried in vain to seek divine guidance. The Lord did not answer him either "by dreams, or by urim, or by prophets" (v. 6). He therefore asked his servants to seek out for

<sup>179</sup> KTU 1.20, II, l. 7-8 (translated by de Moor, (1987) 269).

<sup>180</sup> KTU 1.22, III, l. 17-20 (translated by de Moor (1987) 270).

<sup>181</sup> De Moor (1987) 271, footnote 289.

<sup>182</sup> KTU 1.22, IV, l. 29-30.

<sup>183</sup> The prohibition which King Saul tried to enforce on his subjects is in line with that which is condemned in Deut 18:9ff.

him "a woman who is a medium" as the RSV translates it, but more precisely in Hebrew "one who reigns over spirits" (v. 7)<sup>184</sup> so that he can seek advice in this terrible national crisis. A suitable woman<sup>185</sup> was found in Endor.<sup>186</sup>

The time at which Saul and his companions arrive at the woman's place is significant: it is night time (v. 8). I think that the prime reason for choosing that specific time is not so much Saul not wanting to be recognized,<sup>187</sup> but rather that the night is the propitious time for invoking spirits, and for consulting the deity.<sup>188</sup> The next stage of the procedure requires special attention, in particular the formulation of Saul's command to the woman:

v. 8b: And he said, "divine (qāsōwm̄ nā) for me by a spirit (bā'ōb), and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you.

Saul used the verb *qāsam* which means "to practise divination", especially by mechanical means.<sup>189</sup>

He wants the divination to be practised "by a spirit" (*ba'ob*), but whether the *'ob* is instrumental in bringing up a particular spirit or whether it is the *'ob* itself<sup>190</sup> which is "brought up" is not specified by the text. Since the use of the verb *qāsam* implies a mechanical means

<sup>184</sup> We should note here that in Greek a woman who has an *'ob* is rendered by *gunaika eggastimthon*, a ventriloquist. Lods (1906) 243, translates: "une femme qui a pouvoir sur l'esprit des morts", therefore identifying *'ob* with the spirits of the dead, as does Schmidtke (1967) 240ff. A third possibility is offered by Hoffner (1967) 141ff. who suggests that the woman is mistress of the pit through which the spirits of the dead are invoked.

<sup>185</sup> That it is a woman who is the mysterious possessor of an *'ob* and not a man has been explained by Mowinckel (cited by Kapelrud (1967) 93). He is of the opinion that "because the calling forth of the spirits was forbidden, it was not exercised by men in Israel. It had sunk down to female necromancy". However this statement poses more questions than it answers: for instance does it mean that women are less law-abiding than men, or that, for one of the most socially vulnerable sections of society, necromancy is a remunerated function not to be despised in time of need? (It is interesting to note in particular that the "mistress of the *'ob*" lives in isolation. Is she a widow, a divorced or unmarried woman?—all of them share in the "unfortunate" position of not having a man to support them financially.

<sup>186</sup> On the name "Endor", see Brown (1981) 399 who identifies the Gergasi with the Teucrians in Dor of Wen-Amon's story, and the "witch" of Endor with the Gergithian Sibylla. Against this opinion, see Margalith (1985) 109–111 who demonstrates (quite successfully) that "Dor has a perfectly good semitic etymology:—“living area”, in Ugaritic, *dr*;—assembly of the gods". Margalith concludes that "the latter may be the original meaning of En-Dor, the spring of the oracular sanctuary".

<sup>187</sup> Smith (1899) 240 who is of the opposite opinion.

<sup>188</sup> See Hoffner (1973–1986) 144. Cf. the dream-incubation phenomena.

<sup>189</sup> The Greek translation in the LXX is *manteusai* which may have the same connotation; cf. *qōsēm qēsāmīm*, chapter 2.

<sup>190</sup> See 4.4, chapter 4.

of divination, it seems that the *'ôb* is the instrument for the divination.<sup>191</sup> The woman hesitates for the obvious reason that necromancy is banned from the land and she is afraid of being lured into a trap (v. 9). The man Saul wants to consult is Samuel, the seer, (v. 11) the man who had once anointed him king.

It will be noted that as in the Ugaritic text KTU 1.161, one can summon someone in particular:

He invoked Ulikenu, the Saviour,  
he invoked Tarmennu, the Saviour,  
he invoked Sidannu and Radanu. . .<sup>192</sup>

Then the woman may have either performed an invocation (cf. KTU 1.61, II.2-4), or used some means to induce a vision of the person who is "brought up". This vision is entirely personal; nobody else can share it.<sup>193</sup> She may have been in a trance, or smoke or incense may have played a role.<sup>194</sup> In any case, when the woman saw Samuel, "she cried out with a loud voice" (v. 12) either because the sight of Samuel made clear to her who Saul was,<sup>195</sup> or because Saul's command was enough. In the event it is she alone who sees Samuel. Hence Saul's question: "What do you see?" (v. 13a). Her answer is particularly interesting:

v. 13b: I see a god coming out of the earth.<sup>196</sup>

"*’elohîm*" is translated variously by the English versions:

Jerusalem Bible: "a ghost"; JPSV: "a divine being".

The Greek and Latin versions, translate it as "gods" (*theous; deos*).

In fact, the word *’elohîm* does not here mean "a god" (as it is usually translated), but a being which was not of a human character, that is, what we should prefer to call a spirit, a ghost.

This superhuman being comes from Sheol, the underworld of the dead. Something may be missing from the text. On the one hand, this

<sup>191</sup> Cf. the Jerusalem Bible's translation: "Disclose the future to me", he said, "by means of a ghost". See also Kapelrud (1967) 95 who says that *'ôb* has been thought to refer to a tool through which one could bring up spirits from the earth (a bullroarer for instance).

<sup>192</sup> II. 4-6 (translation is by de Moor (1987) 166). The reading of the name is uncertain; however they seem to refer to remote ancestors of the king.

<sup>193</sup> This fact has been noted by the commentators (Smith (1899) 241).

<sup>194</sup> Kapelrud (1967) 94; Vattioni (1963) 476. This idea would justify the Greek *gunaika eggastimuthon*: during her trance a spirit could speak through her.

<sup>195</sup> Kapelrud (1967) 94; Smith (1899) 24.

<sup>196</sup> See also the Ugaritic parallel expression "ilm arṣ", cited by Vattioni (1963) 470 (who translates: "speetri della terra").

spirit or ghost may have come up from a specific place, perhaps a pit or a well as suggested by the etymology;<sup>197</sup> on the other hand, if we accept that the woman had a vision, what she relates belongs to her inner picture of the scene and it is not necessary to postulate a sacrificial well.

Still unable to see anything, Saul questions the woman about what she perceives (v. 14):

An old man wrapped in a robe.<sup>198</sup>

Before the spirit, unseen by him, Saul prostrates himself in reverence. Samuel starts the dialogue:

Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?

Unlike the Ugaritic spirits who seem quite easily invoked, especially if a promise of resurrection is made,<sup>199</sup> Samuel would prefer to remain undisturbed.<sup>200</sup> As in the Aqhat(u) text, the pretext for invoking the spirit of the dead is a great crisis, affecting the nation, in this case the war with the Philistines. Although the *Sitz im Leben* is more difficult to determine in the Old Testament than in the Ugaritic texts, I would imagine that the royal ancestor cult is performed on rare occasions: the invocation of the dead spirits in 1 Sam 28 is perhaps one such time. Saul asks Samuel (who can hear him) what he is to do (v. 15). Saul's answer is uncompromising:

Why then do you ask me (š'l), since  
the Lord has turned from you and become  
your enemy? (v. 16)

This has the weight of an oracle of the doom which has fallen on Saul: he "is a dead man",<sup>201</sup> his sons will also die and the people of Israel will be delivered into the hands of the enemy. "The implication for Saul is that his life's achievement is to be blotted out. Israel is to revert to where it was at Saul's first appearance (v. 19).<sup>202</sup>

v. 20 Then Saul fell . . . there was no strength in him for he had eaten nothing all day and all night.

<sup>197</sup> Hoffner (1967) 394.

<sup>198</sup> Such as Samuel wore in his lifetime (1 Sam 15:27).

<sup>199</sup> KTU 1.21, II. 1. 7.

<sup>200</sup> Only on very few occasions does Sheol itself rouse them: Samuel seems disturbed at having to be involved in earthly matters again.

<sup>201</sup> Gunn (1980) 108.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 109.

This passage gives an interesting indication of the possible preparatory fasting rituals to be undergone before the consultation rather than an account of the sheer physical exhaustion either normally occurring<sup>203</sup> or resulting from the preparatory ritual for war.<sup>204</sup>

The next verses conclude the story. Nothing is said of how the woman comes out of her trance, or how she dismisses the apparition but she appears at once to be full of concern for him (vv. 21–22) and offers him something to eat and quickly kills her fatted calf (v. 24). This action of hers has an uncanny echo in the sacrifices made to the spirits of the dead (the banquet to which they are invited). Even if the story does not directly connect the two (sacrifice and invocation), there remains the possibility that sacrifice was at one stage performed with the invocation (cf. the Ugaritic rituals: KTU 1.20: the ghosts need the food and drink provided in the sacrifices).<sup>205</sup>

We find in the text of 1 Sam 28 certain similarities with the Ugaritic passages:

- Reason for invocation: a crisis of national importance.
- Time of day: hours of darkness.
- Invocation: by summoning the name of a spirit.
- Dialogue with the spirit: the question is asked.
- Answer.

The difference lies in the fact that there is no explicit sacrifice in the narrative of 1 Sam 28, and that there is no closing ceremony in this Old Testament passage (though we might expect that the "spirits" were dismissed). Finally this last comment indicates what we are not told about the necromantic consultation. What were the special qualifications of this woman? Who was she? Were there many like her? Was living on one's own (as she seems to have done) a prerequisite for consulting the spirits, or was the important factor the location (En-Dor: the fountain of Dor, a place of oracular consultation)?<sup>206</sup> Was her vision an inner one (trance-induced) and in this case was the 'ôb used? (The fact that she alone saw Samuel seems to indicate a trance). All these questions remain unanswered by the text.

<sup>203</sup> Smith (1899) 242.

<sup>204</sup> Gunn (1980) 109.

<sup>205</sup> Schmidke (1967) 246, also thinks it, that supplying the dead spirits with offerings is likely.

<sup>206</sup> Margalith (1985) footnote 28.

## 4.2.2 Isa 65:4: a case of necromantic incubation?

Necromantic practices are still found after the exile.<sup>207</sup> This passage found in the so called “Trito-Isaiah” is a diatribe against idolatry put in the mouth of the Lord:

V. 2: I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, . . . a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens, and burning incense upon bricks; who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places.

“They who sit in the graves” may have been those<sup>208</sup> who sacrifice to the dead but the text does not tell us exactly what their purpose was, what they hoped to gain by sitting by/in the graves. Were sacrifices offered in the graves themselves, as we must assume from *baqqēbārīm* (and not *'al qēbārīm*)? Nothing is known to us of such a practice and it is tempting in this case to refer to the LXX: “They lie down to sleep in the tombs and in the caves for the sake of dreams . . .” This translation establishes a relationship between “sleeping in tombs” and “spending the night in secret places”. What is denounced is a mixture of incubation dream and necromancy; by lying in or among the graves it is hoped to get in touch with the spirits of the dead in order to consult them. The spirits are believed to be more easily accessible in the<sup>209</sup> graveyards. Jerome gives an explanation of this practice with more macabre details:

“In the temples of idols”, he says, “where they were accustomed to lie upon the skins of the victims stretched upon the ground, to gather future events from their dreams”.<sup>210</sup>

This is most probably a case of necromantic incubation. Can it be that as the dead person rests in the underworld so too his *'ôb* lies with him, probably in the grave itself or adjacent to it.<sup>211</sup> That would explain why those who seek to “bond” with the dead spirits are to be found in the graves. Although dead spirits are not mentioned explicitly in the verses, it is to be assumed that it is they who are being referred to.<sup>212</sup>

<sup>207</sup> Oesterley (1930) 131.

<sup>208</sup> Vitringa, cited by Delitzsch (1884) 477.

<sup>209</sup> See Healey (1966) 433–435, who translates “they sit in graves and spend the night in wailing” and argues for an interpretation of an illicit funerary cult.

<sup>210</sup> Cited by Delitzsch (1884) 477.

<sup>211</sup> Schmidtke’s idea about the *'ôb* in 4.4 (as a memory attached to a person) (1967).

<sup>212</sup> Schmidtke (1967) 244; Heider (1985) 389f. also agrees that in this text we have a practice of incubation.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

I may sum up as follows: necromancy is well attested in the Northwest Semitic world as both Ugaritic literature and a study of the Old Testament demonstrate. Although the rituals of invoking dead spirits are different in the two literatures, there are some similarities; a pattern may be discerned consisting of a summoning, a dialogue and a request, with some sacrificial element. Still there are gaps in our knowledge and understanding of how exactly the invocation is performed: through a person in a trance, with or without the help of an instrument/device (the 'ôb)?

From the study of the technical terms used for necromancy, the 'ôb and the yiddé'ônî, several points can be stressed:

- They are connected with a specific form of divination, i.e. necromancy.
- The consultation involves the spirits of the dead but by what means we cannot be certain.
- They are not people, although some persons, especially women, seem to be able to use them.
- As to the difference between the two terms, I do not think that there is enough evidence for taking a firm stand, especially as there is no text in which the yiddé'ônî may be studied separately.
- To conclude, the study of the passages from the Old Testament establishes reasonably clearly that necromancy was practised all through the history of Israel,<sup>213</sup> in spite of vigorous efforts to root it out. During and after the Exile the practice became even more discredited. The reality is that down to post-exilic times laws were enacted to eradicate necromancy, and such laws bear witness to the very existence of that which they sought to destroy.

#### 5. *Rhabdomancy*

##### 5.0 *Introduction*

In the whole Semitic world, trees are thought to represent life. Rooted in the soil they link heaven and earth, and in their growth, foliage and fruitfulness they represent the renewal of life. In this way "worship"

<sup>213</sup> Oesterley (1930) 131 reaches the same conclusion.

of trees (or rather a world-view in which some created things embody the powers of life associated with a deity) prevailed through the Canaanite and pre-exilic Israelite period.<sup>214</sup> The rustling of the leaves in the wind,<sup>215</sup> the mysterious budding of the twigs,<sup>216</sup> perhaps even the shadow of the trees,<sup>217</sup> all offered natural means by which the will of the deity might be divined. The divining arts by which the tree numina were consulted in the Canaanite period passed into the hands of a special class skilled in the oracular arts. The two names *ēlōn mōreh*, the oak of the teacher,<sup>218</sup> and *ēlōn mē'ōnēnîm*, the oak of the soothsayers/diviners,<sup>219</sup> surely imply such a role. Deborah,<sup>220</sup> Gideon<sup>221</sup> and Saul<sup>222</sup> may have officiated as oracular diviners, specializing in tree oracles.

There seems to be a deep-rooted belief that wood as part of the tree was endowed with power.<sup>223</sup> Rhabdomancy, or divination by throwing sticks or arrows, the omen being deduced from the position in which they fall,<sup>224</sup> stems from this belief and there seem to be traces of this practice in the Old Testament.

Eight specific words are directly related to a tree's power to respond to entreaties, and all eight words are used of instruments through which this power is expressed.

These instruments are used in divination or in magical practices. Since their basic substance is wood they connect in some way with the "spirit" of the wood, which is believed to be, or rather to represent, the channel of divine manifestation, and so they are endowed with a specific power. By association this power, which expresses itself through the piece of wood, can be applied to a situation. Strength can be extracted from the piece of wood; there is a symbolic correspondence.<sup>225</sup>

<sup>214</sup> Oesterley and Robinson (1930) 26f.; Wood (1916) 21–26.

<sup>215</sup> 2 Sam 5:24ff.

<sup>216</sup> Num 17:17ff.

<sup>217</sup> Judges 4:4f.

<sup>218</sup> Gen 12:6–8.

<sup>219</sup> Judg 9:37.

<sup>220</sup> Judg 4:5.

<sup>221</sup> Judg 6:11ff.

<sup>222</sup> 1 Sam 22:6.

<sup>223</sup> This has been noted by Liverani (1977) 212–216:

leur caractérisation religieuse est bien connue: justement par leur taille exceptionnelle ils sont considérés convenables pour servir de passage vertical du niveau humain du monde au deux autres niveaux: celui inférieur des morts et celui supérieur des dieux"; James (1966) 1–3f.; "the sanctity of trees was due to their being permeated with the life displayed in their growth akin to that of a human or animal organism".

<sup>224</sup> Burden (1973) 104.

<sup>225</sup> For instance in the battle of Rephidim in Ex 17:8–13 (see below), or in the story of

It is somewhat difficult to separate these words from one another. ḥes is sometimes used instead of ḫš and vice versa. ḫš and maqqel we take as synonymous, as in Hos 4:12. Kidon seems to have the same function, and be applied in the same way as matteh.

I shall examine all these words separately in the context of the narrative in which they occur.

### 5.1 ḫš: "wood", "tree"<sup>226</sup>

This word is the most general, in its direct association with "nature worship".<sup>227</sup> It is thus likely to be used in some magical or divinatory practices.

#### 5.1.1 KTU 1.3, III 21–23: the tree as a sign of nature in Ugaritic literature

it . ly . w . argmk hwt . w . atny . rgm  
 ḫš . w . lhšt . abn

For I have a word which I want to speak to you  
 a message which I want to communicate to you,  
 a word of trees and a whisper of stone.<sup>228</sup>

At the beginning of the passage Baal is giving instructions to his servants to go to Anat and do obeisance before her. They are to tell her to perform "a ritual act performed in connection with the season of ploughing".<sup>229</sup> Then they are to hasten with all speed to him to receive an important communication; this will be the secret of the lightning, a secret carried on the wind which sighs through the trees and is the means of communication between the firmament above and the earth and ocean beneath.<sup>230</sup> Only Baal knows this secret.

I think that the expression "a word of trees" expresses the belief that signs can be read through the sound of the leaves of the trees.<sup>231</sup>

the iron axehead in 2 Kings 6:5–7, when the lost iron axe is retrieved through an act of "correspondence" magic: its fate is being associated with a stick thrown in the water.

<sup>226</sup> BDB, 781; KBL, 724f.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. its association with idols: Deut 4:28; 28:36; 2 Kings 19:18; Isa 37:19; Isa 40:20 where the idols are made of wood.

<sup>228</sup> De Moor (1987) 9.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Gibson (1978) 9.

<sup>231</sup> See Deborah giving judgement under a palm tree (Judges 4:4f.) and David who, after inquiring of Yahweh concerning his attack against the Philistines, is told that when he hears

Even if in the context it is more "natural" to think of the rustling of leaves as the first sign of the wind which precedes storm and lightning, how does "a whisper of stone" fit into the description of a sign before the storm? Stone and wood are both signs of nature to be read and interpreted.

5.1.2 The locus classicus illustrating this idea is preserved in Hos 4:12:

My people inquire of a thing of wood (be'ēsō yis'āl),  
and their staff (ūmaqlō) gives them oracles.<sup>232</sup>

All the commentators agree that the exact process of divination cannot be deciphered. Yet this is a description of some divination method, as the vocabulary of the passage shows.<sup>233</sup> 'ēs and maqel are parallel in the passage and so seem to reflect a similar sort of device.<sup>234</sup> It would appear that these terms may be understood as designating an oracular practice, but that still does not enlighten us about the modus operandi of the consultation.<sup>235</sup>

I find it difficult to agree with the hypothesis that 'ēs refers to the teraphim<sup>236</sup> as no consensus has yet been reached on the teraphim. Be'ēsō yis'āl has been understood as "a staff with a wooden image carved on the top; a diviner's wand; a miniature asherah".<sup>237</sup>

We still do not know how it was used. There is also a possibility that the 'ēs/maqel were used as a technique of rhabdomancy "in which a stick is thrown so as to learn the answer of the deity from the way it falls".<sup>238</sup> The text of Ezek 21:21 comes to mind. There we can

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the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees it will be time to bestir himself (2 Sam 5:23-24).

<sup>232</sup> There are no critical problems in this verse. No corrections are necessary.

<sup>233</sup> The use of the verbs sā'al, "to ask, to inquire", and nagad (Hiphil), "to make known, especially of something previously not understood, concealed or mysterious". Furthermore we note the passage as translated by the LXX: en symbolois épérōtōn, kai en rhabdois autou apēggellon auto, "they asked counsel by means of signs, and they have reported answers to them by their staves".

<sup>234</sup> Harper (1905) 259 describes the two different techniques. One ('ēs) by the "wooden teraphim"; in this he is followed by May (1969) 73; "idol of wood", suggests an asherah or an oracle tree. Maqqēl is understood as an oracular staff of some sort.

<sup>235</sup> The LXX does not present any details as to the means of consultation.

<sup>236</sup> Harper (1905) 259.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.; see "asherah" at the end of the section on "Rhabdomancy". For a wide range of possibilities, see Wolff (1961) 104f.

<sup>238</sup> May (1969) 73.

understand that it is the divine will which makes the arrows fall in one direction or another.<sup>239</sup>

The most striking thing in the technique referred to in Hos 4:12 is the singular of both 'ës and maqel. Possibly this is a collective singular, in which case one finds parallels among other people. In Hellenistic times "the simplest form of rhabdomanteia or rhabdois manteuesthai was the writing of "Yes" and "No" on two rods which were then drawn".<sup>240</sup> There were also more complicated forms and one thinks of the sophisticated Chinese I'Ching using 49 yarrow sticks. There is yet another possibility, the throwing of sticks into the air and watching how they fall;<sup>241</sup> a pattern could be interpreted by the priests whom the prophet Hosea denounces.<sup>242</sup>

5.1.3 Other texts from the prophetic tradition can be added to this study of traces of rhabdomancy in the Old Testament, for example:

Jer 10:3 kî ḥuqqöt hâ'ammîm hebel hû' kî 'ës miyya'ar kérâtô ma'âshêh yëdê hârâš bamma'âšâd.

For the customs of the people are false. A tree from the forest is cut down, and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman.

The LXX adds: kai chôneuma, or a molten image.

The context in which this verse is set is of particular interest. In this chapter, Jeremiah preaches that idols are vacuous but Yahweh is the creator.<sup>243</sup>

Scholars have claimed a number of textual problems and in particular the "awkwardness of the transition"<sup>244</sup> between verse 2 and verses 3 and 4. However, it is possible that the text forms a coherent unit. Verse 2 refers to astrological rites and stresses their lack of foundation and truth. Coherence is gained if we see in v. 3 another divinatory rite which, according to the prophet, also deserves to be condemned, i.e. it is a reference to rhabdomancy.<sup>245</sup>

<sup>239</sup> Foote (1902) derives maqqēl from qalal, "shake", and mentions the parallelism of 'ës with maqqēl in 1 Sam 17:7.

<sup>240</sup> Schneider (1964-1976) 966-971.

<sup>241</sup> Gaster (1908-1921) 80.

<sup>242</sup> Against the interpretation of Hos 4:11-12 as referring to rhabdomancy, see Day (1986) 405f.

<sup>243</sup> McKane (1986) 216.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>245</sup> As opposed to a condemnation of the making of idols as McKane (1986) 221 suggests.

### 5.2 *Matteh*: “rod”, “shaft”, “staff”, “branch”<sup>246</sup>

All the texts dealing with this term relating to magical or divinatory techniques show a tension between a traditional element and a later theological reading. *Matteh* seems to be linked in the popular imagination with supernatural powers. Later, however, it is Yahweh who is seen as using *matteh* exclusively as an instrument for manifesting power.<sup>247</sup> Therefore there seems to be an attempt to deny the fact that it was a potent instrument of power in itself.

5.2.1 The first text to be examined is Exod 4:2. It is a text where *matteh* is seen as a concrete instrument endowed with supernatural power.<sup>248</sup>

In Exod 4:17 the demonstrative “this” has to be noted. Is it possible<sup>249</sup> that the author of the passage<sup>250</sup> is trying to distance Moses from being associated with the rod since he has become an instrument of God? But why should he try to distance Moses from the *matteh* unless it was seen as a potent instrument in itself? J/E and later P are careful to state that the rod is only an instrument used by Yahweh and not potent in itself (“this rod”, not any rod; meaning the rod of God, the one given to Moses). Nevertheless, it is very clear from the story related in Exod 7 about the memorable contest between Moses/Aaron, champions of Yahweh, and the Egyptian magicians/wise men that although Aaron/Moses’ rod is the more powerful, those of the Egyptians also possess great power.

5.2.2 Exod 17:8–13: “The rod of God is in my hand”.<sup>251</sup>

In the battle of Rephidim, as the Hebrews prepare to defend themselves against the Amalekites, Moses goes to the top of the hill with the “rod of God” in his hand. It is not very clear what role the rod plays in this

<sup>246</sup> BDB, 641.

<sup>247</sup> Moses is taught three miracles by Yahweh which are to be “signs” giving assurance of his divine commission.

<sup>248</sup> Hyatt (1971) 82:

the magical trick performed here is probably based on the knowledge of an Egyptian snake charmer’s trick. The sign appears to be the reverse of the trick in which the charmer makes the snake straight and rigid by some form of mesmerism, and then breaks the spell when he grabs the snake by the tail.

<sup>249</sup> Simian (1973–1986) 818–827.

<sup>250</sup> J, according to Hyatt (1971).

<sup>251</sup> Exod 17:9.

narrative; it is not mentioned in the course of the story which follows. *Matteh hā'ĕlōhîm* is a sort of magic wand:<sup>252</sup> when Moses holds it up the Hebrews win and when, weakened by tiredness, he lowers his arm, the Amalekites prevail.

The difficulties of this passage must be emphasized.<sup>253</sup> The rod still appears to be in correspondence, to symbolize the fate of the battle to which it lends a pattern.<sup>254</sup> The introduction of Elohim into the story in v. 9 justifies the use of the rod which otherwise could have been perceived as a magical device (which surely it is!).<sup>255</sup> I would conclude therefore that the older layer of the story points to a magical act, and this was covered up by a later redactor.

5.2.2.1 The next text is Num 20:1–13, a “wilderness scene”, where Moses and Aaron draw water from the well for the Israelites (*matteh* appears three times in the middle of the story (vv. 8, 9, 11) disrupting the rather clear and logical development of the narrative. The tension seems to be between the use of *matteh* and the power of the word of Moses and Aaron (v. 8). The redactor (P?) might have tried to correct<sup>256</sup> the traditional element of Exod 17 by inferring theological connotations: Moses and Aaron’s power came from Yahweh and not from any magical source. This episode brings to mind the divining rod used by water diviners in rural places all over the world, a wooden fork which vibrates near water. Could the earlier narrative have pictured Moses/Aaron, under pressure from their angry (and thirsty) people, finding a water hole with this method, an account overlaid by the later more “correct” theology of the word of Yahweh?

5.2.2.2 The last text I have chosen to illustrate the uses of *matteh* as a method of inquiry is Num 17:7ff.

Only Aaron’s rod sprouted when it was presented with eleven others in the sanctuary, indicating that Aaron was the divinely chosen priest. The background of the story may be an instance of an old practice of

<sup>252</sup> Dhorme (1933) 134.

<sup>253</sup> “Hand”: singular at v. 11; “hands”, plural at v. 12. See Hyatt (1971) for the discussion of the problem and how in Ex 14:16 both hand and rod occur together, making it possible to interpret Ex 17:11 as Moses holding on his hand with the rod in it. The plural in v. 12 could be explained by the fact that he alternates hands in holding the rod.

<sup>254</sup> Bregson, quoted by Dhorme (1933).

<sup>255</sup> Simian, *op. cit.*

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

inquiring/divining by the observation of budding plants.<sup>257</sup> Matteh can also mean "branch", "bough" and therefore is directly related to the tree: a tree or a part of it could have been used in divination.

### 5.3 *Maqqēl*

This word, whose etymology remains uncertain,<sup>258</sup> describes a very thin branch usually used as an instrument or for a symbolic purpose.<sup>259</sup>

There seems to be only one text in which this word appears to have a magical or a divinatory connection: Gen 30:31–39. Jer 1:11 shows its symbolic usage. These texts represent different aspects of magic or divination but nevertheless have one thing in common: in each case *maqqēl* is endowed with a certain power used for various divining purposes.

#### 5.3.1 Gen 30:31–39

This is the story of Jacob's stratagem to get his legitimate reward after the stipulated fourteen years in the service of Laban: Jacob asks for all the speckled and spotted sheep and goats<sup>260</sup> as his price for staying longer with his father-in-law. The latter is satisfied by the terms of the agreement, especially as "the part-coloured animals form a very small proportion of a flock, the Syrian sheep being nearly all white, and the goats black or brown".<sup>261</sup> However Jacob finds a way to outwit Laban through "prenatal conditioning" of the flock by means of visual aids, i.e. by partly peeling the rods so that patches of white (spots and speckles)<sup>262</sup> would show, and placing these rods in the drinking troughs; the female seeing them would conceive speckled or spotted young.

It is "a well established physiological law that the females, seeing the reflection of the rams in the water, blended with the image of the parti-coloured rods were deceived into thinking they were coupled with multi-coloured mates"<sup>263</sup> and therefore conceived multi-coloured lambs. The actual means used could reflect a more "primitive" type of

<sup>257</sup> Porter (1981) 191–214 suggests a connection with ancient nature worship.

<sup>258</sup> Two trends in etymological research about *maqqēl* are notable: Schwally (and subsequently taken up by a number of scholars) supposes *maqqēl* to be derived from *qalal*, "casting rods". The other trend links it with the Arabic root *bql*, "to sprout".

<sup>259</sup> Andre (1973–1986) 1129–1132.

<sup>260</sup> Gen 30:32.

<sup>261</sup> Skinner (1910) 391.

<sup>262</sup> LXX adds *oti estin ho misthos mou enōpion sou.*

<sup>263</sup> Skinner (1910) 391f.

thinking based on the principles of imitative magic: "the like produces like".<sup>264</sup> To get a she-goat to produce a spotted/speckled kid Jacob would have used a spotted and speckled model (maqqēl).

The (J) account is in some way backed up by the E narrative<sup>265</sup> where, in a dream sent by God, Jacob sees "streaked, speckled and mottled" flock.

Both texts are the product of a certain type of world-view, which assumes a system of symbolic correspondences:

- In the J account, this involves a belief in symbolic action related to the primary cause of the phenomenon. Jacob's peeled, mottled rods constitute the physical means which in some way corresponds with the invisible forces responsible for producing speckled or spotted animals.
- The principle is the same in the account of the dream about the speckled animals.

### 5.3.2 Maqqēl used in a symbolic way.

Maqqēl is used symbolically in a number of texts, e.g. Jer 1:11, the vision of the almond tree,<sup>266</sup> and Zechariah's parable of the two shepherds.<sup>267</sup> The special impact on the audience's imagination may come from the fact that maqqēl as such belongs to the "living vegetation" which, as shown above, has associations with the divine world, a piece of wood embodying the divinity.

### 5.4 *Kidōn*

Special note must be taken of *kidōn*, which belongs to the same group. With the meaning of "javelin", "dart",<sup>268</sup> it is used in Josh 8:18–26 in an action of "correspondence" magic.<sup>269</sup>

<sup>264</sup> Frazer (1900) 1.

<sup>265</sup> Gen 31:10–12. No rod is mentioned in this text: the dream in itself is enough to bring forth the reality. Note also the rest of the story about ewes conceiving brown lambs after looking across at the brown fowl across the water. The principle of correspondence is used.

<sup>266</sup> The almond rod is representative of the protection and the power of Yahweh and a guarantee that his words will be fulfilled. The word of God is not necessarily always in this piece of rod-wood-oracle because in good prophetic tradition he is the master of his word, but it finds in the rod a suitable channel.

<sup>267</sup> Zech 11:4–17 where maqqēl appears three times, in vv. 7.10.14. Then the two rods of the shepherds are given symbolic names.

<sup>268</sup> BDB, 475.

<sup>269</sup> Gray (1967) 92.

v. 18: Then the Lord said to Joshua, Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai; for I will give it into your hand.

There seem to be originally two traditions in this text which are now intermingled.<sup>270</sup> According to v. 18 this was the signal from Joshua to order his troops to enter the city. However, v. 26, which depicts Joshua as stretching forth the javelin until the victory was complete, treats the act as one of "correspondence" magic; the "fate" of the battle is associated with the handling of the javelin:<sup>271</sup>

v. 26 For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the javelin, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

### 5.5 *Hēš: its divinatory and magical use*

Divination by arrows is mentioned explicitly only once in the Old Testament,<sup>272</sup> when Nebuchadrezzar, at the parting of two ways, uses divination to decide whether he should proceed towards Jerusalem or towards Rabbah-Ammon. One text stands out concerning the use of arrows in magical practices: Ez 21:26 (Heb). Some scholars<sup>273</sup> believe that it deals with divinatory practices on the basis that "in their wars against the Arameans and following a prevailing custom, the Kings of the Divided Monarchy considered divination a necessary prerequisite before an impending battle".<sup>274</sup> I shall try to show that 2 Kings 13:15ff. might indeed have an element of divination (i.e. to know whether the Israelites are going to defeat the Arameans or not). The text also contains an interesting example of "correspondence" magic (influencing events through symbolic actions).

In this section I shall concentrate on the two texts dealing explicitly with divination (Ezek 21:26) and magic (1 Kings 13:15ff.) through the use of arrows.

a) *Hēš* as a divination device: Ezek 21:26 (Heb). Until it reached the Orontes valley, the road to Jerusalem and Ammon was the same. South of Ribla<sup>2</sup> it was divided, one branch leading South-West into Palestine and to Jerusalem, the other South-East to Ammon. Damascus<sup>275</sup> was the point at which the ancient trade routes separated.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Joshua's act might have been influenced by Moses' upraised hands at the battle of Rephidim (Exod 17:11ff.).

<sup>272</sup> Ezek 21:26 (MT); RSV: 21:21.

<sup>273</sup> Iwry (1961) 27–37.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>275</sup> Cooke (1936) 231–233.

As the Ammonites had been plotting with Judah to throw off the yoke of Babylon, Nebuchadrezzar had as good a reason to march against them as to march against Jerusalem. How is the choice to be made? The king of Babylon uses a threefold type of divination,<sup>276</sup> of which divination by arrows is the first.

The main problem we have about this type of divination,<sup>277</sup> to which we alluded above, concerns the method used: how does the king of Babylon use the arrows so that they may indicate to him which city to attack, Rabbah Ammon or Jerusalem? The problem rests on the understanding of *qilqal bahiṣṣim*. Opinions vary as to whether divination by arrows belongs to belomancy (i.e. divination by means of throwing or firing the arrow),<sup>278</sup> rhabdomancy (i.e. through sticks or rods),<sup>279</sup> or sideromancy (i.e. divination by scrying, using for that purpose the metal of the arrow).<sup>280</sup> This is reflected by the various translations:

LXX: *tou anabrasai rhabon, make bright the arrows.*

AV: *Make bright arrows.*

RV: *He shook the arrows to and fro.*

There seem to be two major ways of translating the expression and especially the verb *qilqal*, perhaps influenced by the practices which are already known from neighbouring cultures. The first interpretation understands it as a reference to scrying,<sup>281</sup> (the AV we already cited). The arrows described in Ezek 21:21 are real ones with pointed metal heads.<sup>282</sup> A possible hint of the method used may be given by Eccles 10:10 where *qilqal* means "to grind", "to polish", i.e. to give a smooth surface to an object. It may be deduced that "the king of Babylon

<sup>276</sup> Divining with arrows, consulting the teraphim and looking into the liver: see "Hepatoscopy" and "Teraphim" in this chapter.

<sup>277</sup> We know for certain that it refers to a divination practice. Inscribed arrowheads have been found, see Bordreuil (1992) for the most recent find.

<sup>278</sup> With regard to divination by arrows, note the text of 1 Sam 20:20ff. 63, which has sometimes been quoted as an example of a remnant of a wide and popular form of divination. However, the examination of the text itself does not support such an interpretation. David was afraid that his life would be threatened by Saul if he appeared at Saul's court for the festival of the new moon. So Jonathan designs an ingenious device which will be used to warn David of danger, using arrows for this purpose. If the arrows shot by Jonathan are beyond a certain stone heap where David is hidden, David is in danger and must flee from Saul, but on the other hand, if they fall before the heap of stones, then David is safe to come back to Saul's court. The text of 1 Sam 20:20ff. does not seem to qualify as a text of divination.

<sup>279</sup> Caquot (1968) 88, 105.

<sup>280</sup> Cf. the translation of the AV: "made his arrows bright"; Haupt (1917) 84–92.

<sup>281</sup> Haupt (1917).

<sup>282</sup> Hoffner (1973–1986) 132.

did not strike the arrows but polished them for the purpose of scrying".<sup>283</sup> Pictures could be conjured up by gazing into a crystal or into its equivalent (metal of a sword, or a piece of eyeglass).

This translation can be criticized on three points:

- The first is that a philological argument (because it means "to polish" in Eccles 10:10, it should mean the same thing in Ezek) is not acceptable. The same word used in two different contexts does not necessarily mean the same thing.
- Second, the texts relating to scrying polished finger-nails, or the iron in arrows, are too late<sup>284</sup> to be taken into consideration.
- My third argument stems from a very practical point of view: it would be very difficult to see anything clearly in something as small and narrow as the metal of a pointed arrow. The second interpretation which takes *qilqal* to mean "to shake", "to shuffle",<sup>285</sup> seems to assume that the arrows were inscribed like those used by the Pre-Islamic Arabs; it was the custom to seek divine guidance by drawing lots with headless arrows inscribed with names. These were placed in a quiver and whirled about, and the one which first fell out was taken to express the decision of the god.<sup>286</sup>

Jerome for example understands the practice as the mixing, in a quiver, of arrows inscribed with the names of cities; the city to be attacked being the one which was drawn out.

Estius alone thinks that a bundle of them were thrown up, to see which way they would fall; since they fell on the right hand, the king of Babylon marched towards Jerusalem.

Yet, although the road to Jerusalem was to the right (assuming that the parting of the ways is Damascus), the method described seems very vague: how many arrows were used? What if they fell all around? Which number of arrows determine which road to take? And what if they fell in equal numbers each side? And what about the arrows pointing in other directions? Would the will of God direct him towards a completely different city? When we know how well regulated the Babylonian systems of divination were, this method seems a little too imprecise.

<sup>283</sup> Haupt (1917) 87.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., where Haupt cites Worell and Daiches, who both report more recent divination and magical practices.

<sup>285</sup> BDB, 886, relates *qilqal* to the root *qalal*, "to shake".

<sup>286</sup> This practice is called El-Meysar and is forbidden by the Koran (Cooke (1936) 232; Zimmerli (1979) 443f.).

It is time now to consider other theories suggested by archaeological finds of Phoenician inscribed arrows.<sup>287</sup>

I shall point out a few interesting facts about these findings that affect our subject. These arrows were part of a hoard of 26, only three of which were inscribed. They may have been the same type as those consulted by the king of Babylon: the arrows may have been previously inscribed, the king may have shuffled and drawn the "Jerusalem" arrow. Soldiers may have had in their quiver two types of arrows, one type uninscribed and used in warfare and the other type inscribed, the latter being used as a means to assign tasks,<sup>288</sup> or for consulting the divine will.<sup>289</sup> In the scene described in Ezek 21:26, we have to assume the existence of two arrows—one inscribed "Jerusalem" and the other "Ammon".

Lastly it is also possible to take *ḥeṣ* to mean good luck rather than arrow,<sup>290</sup> but this term is hardly appropriate under the circumstances, i.e. an attack on the city of Jerusalem or Ammon.

The most probable solution is that the term refers to the arrows being shaken, i.e. he grasps hold of the arrows (see the RV) in his right hand (v. 27). It seems to eliminate the throwing of arrows, either by shooting or scattering them on the ground. If we take into account the evidence given by the El-Kadr finds,<sup>291</sup> it may refer to the shuffling of the two arrows in a quiver (after all, the king of Babylon intended to attack one of the two cities; this method has to yield an answer).

b) *Ḥeṣ* used in the form of a magical ritual: 2 Kings 13:15ff. The scene shows us Joash, king of Israel, asking the prophet Elisha to help him to overcome the troops of Aram.

Two acts are enfolded in this "magical" drama:<sup>292</sup>

— With his hand on the king's hand, standing at the window facing Aram, the prophet bids the king shoot an arrow to the east: in this way he symbolically enacts the victory over Syria.<sup>293</sup>

<sup>287</sup> Cross and Milik (1954) 5–15 found arrows inscribed with personal names in El-Kadr, dating from about the 11th century B.C.; Milik (1956) 3–6. The inscriptions can be found in Gibson (1982) 6.

<sup>288</sup> E.g. bearing personal names; it must be said that no arrow bearing the name of a city has been found.

<sup>289</sup> See the very good summary given by Gibson (1982) 1. It is suggested that soldiers carried two types with them.

<sup>290</sup> Iwry (1961).

<sup>291</sup> See the references in footnote 74.

<sup>292</sup> Montgomery (1951) 434–435.

<sup>293</sup> V. 17.

— vv. 18–19: Then Elisha gives an omen for the precise number of victories. The result depended upon the will-power and (vital?) energy of the king Joash, i.e. his confidence. When, at the order of Elisha, the king is to strike the arrows on the ground, he strikes only three times, and the prophet chides him on the loss of his great opportunity.

But let us look at this passage in more detail. In this case of correspondence magic, Joash comes to Elisha for help in jeopardizing future events for the Aramaeans and so ensuring the victory of his own troops. The magical act of shooting arrows in the direction of the Arameans is purely symbolic as is the act of striking the earth with an arrow. The number of victories corresponds to the number of strikes.

The gesture of the king is given special importance when Elisha, a man of God, puts his hands on the king's. Elisha is the medium between God and the king and he continues to fulfil the function of magician. His strength is thus communicated to Joash. The magical ritual comprises the action and the word, manifesting will-power.<sup>294</sup> The word *yereh*, "shoot" in the imperative is commonly used in incantations. It is the word at its most powerful.

c) Before concluding this chapter it shall be noted that *hṣ* occurs in the Sefire Treaty<sup>295</sup> where the breaking of Mati'el's bow and arrows symbolises the decline of his military strength, should he break his promise.

Here again we have a case of correspondence magic, where the breaking of arrows has a symbolic effect on their owner (as weapons the arrows are closely associated with a man, a part of himself).<sup>296</sup> To break a man's weapon is to break the man himself. Is it possible that the association of the arrow with masculinity and hence virility would make the curse more terrible—not only would Mati'el's military strength be broken, but that of his descendants as well?

d) In Ugarit, *hz* also occurs as a symbol of masculinity. In the tale of Aqhat(u), when Anat the Warrior Goddess seeks to secure for herself the bow and arrows fashioned by Kothat-wa-Khasis, she wants to "enhance the "quasi-masculine" bellicose attributes"; more precisely,

<sup>294</sup> Against Dhorme (1933) 132–144, who sees in the scene elements of "primitive" magic: the action of firing the arrows is sufficient in itself.

<sup>295</sup> Fitzmyer (1961) 187–272; see especially line 38.

<sup>296</sup> Hoffner (1966) 327.

the possession of the bow and arrows would give her, symbolically, strength and power.<sup>297</sup>

### 5.6 *šēbet*, "rod", "sceptre"<sup>298</sup>

Isa 11:4: And he shall smite the earth<sup>299</sup> with the rod of his mouth.

This passage describes the rule of the future Davidic ruler; the king will make use of the divine power he has been given to smite sinners dead with a word.<sup>300</sup>

The interesting thing here is that the word is identified with the rod, so retaining its inherent power of destruction, cursing<sup>301</sup> or, at least, the belief that such a power may be symbolized by the rod.

### 5.7 *The asherah*

Lastly I should mention the asherah<sup>302</sup> which occurs in Northwest Semitic/Syrian literature and in the Old Testament.<sup>303</sup> In the Old Testament the asherah refers to both an important Canaanite fertility goddess<sup>304</sup> and the wooden cult object that symbolises her.<sup>305</sup> As a cult object<sup>306</sup> made of wood<sup>307</sup> and associated with idolatry,<sup>308</sup> it makes me wonder whether it was ever used in magic or divination rituals. In fact it may be suggested that it is an asherah that is referred to in Hos 4:12–14,<sup>309</sup> which as was shown above is probably connected with some divination practices. However, the connection is less than certain and nowhere in the Northwest Semitic/Syrian literature or indeed in the Old

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 330. On the materials required to produce Anat's bow see Sukenik (1947) 11–15.

<sup>298</sup> BDB, 986.

<sup>299</sup> The Jerusalem Bible reads '(ayin)rš for '(aleph)rš; also Gray (19 ) 212.

<sup>300</sup> Gray (1912) 218.

<sup>301</sup> See the section on the power of the word in *nābī*, chapter 2.

<sup>302</sup> This term appears under different forms: asherah, asherim, asheroth.

<sup>303</sup> For a survey of "Asherah" in the MT and in the Northwest Semitic literature see Day (1986) 385–408 and Olyan (1988).

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., Olyan suggests that the asherah is native to Israel.

<sup>305</sup> For biblical references, see Reed (1962–1968) 250–252 and Olyan (1988).

<sup>306</sup> It was probably located in the sanctuary (Deut 16:21).

<sup>307</sup> LXX: *alsos, alsē*, "groves"; *dendra*, "trees" (followed by Vulgate).

<sup>308</sup> 1 Kings 14:23f.: The association of the asherah with a fertility goddess suggests, as in the case of the other cult objects like the ark or the tent which both symbolize the presence of Yahweh and are used in divinatory practices, that the asherah also is the channel of a deity's presence.

<sup>309</sup> Day (1986) footnote 76.

Testament do we find a clear reference to the divinatory or magical uses of the asherah.

### 5.8 *Conclusion*

Trees are perceived as a visible channel of life, a link between heaven and earth, and as such they are particularly apt symbols of the power of the deity. Their power manifests itself under many forms, from the simple rod to the asherah, the arrow and the javelin. Their common denominator is the wood which is believed to retain the vitality manifested in "the powers of growth and fruitfulness"<sup>310</sup> of the trees.

As representatives of life, trees and artefacts made of wood can transmit their strength and vitality according to a principle of "magical" correspondences. They may also be used as divinatory devices as they can channel divine energy and are used to ascertain the will of the deity (according to the principle that the part symbolizes the whole).

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<sup>310</sup> James (1966) 32.

## SECTION TWO: DIVINATORY DEVICES

1. *The Ark: A War Oracle?*1.0 *The problem*

On the strength of the textual evidence in 1 Sam 14:18<sup>311</sup> where the Hebrew "ark of God" is read in the LXX as the "ephod", some scholars have held the view that the ephod and the ark are closely connected—if not synonymous.<sup>312</sup> As the ephod is known to be used in consulting the will of God in certain passages,<sup>313</sup> the ark would also be used in oracular consultation. In fact scholarly opinions differ widely on this subject:<sup>314</sup> the general view is that nothing can be ascertained because of the lack of data.<sup>315</sup>

Leaving aside the debate about the relationship of the ephod with the ark, I shall examine in this section whether there are traces of divinatory functions related to the ark itself. I will look at its etymology, its origin and the texts in which the oracular function can be discerned. Despite recent opinion that the ark has nothing to do with oracular consultation,<sup>316</sup> I intend to show that in some passages the ark is involved in some divinatory act.<sup>317</sup>

1.1 *The terminology*

The Hebrew word for "ark" is *'ärôn*, "chest"<sup>318</sup> and as its name indicates designates a box. Etymologically the word "seems to yield no

<sup>311</sup> This text is discussed in this chapter under the section "Ephod".

<sup>312</sup> Arnold (1917) demonstrates that the ephod is a substitute for the ark by a later scribe. Morgenstern (1928) 122, Irwin and May (1936) 45, recognize "at least in some instances" the similarity between the two, and even their possible synonymy in particular cases.

<sup>313</sup> 1 Sam 14:18; 23:9; 30:7; Judg 8:27; 17-18.

<sup>314</sup> The following scholars defend the idea of an "oracular" ark. Apart from Arnold (1917) and Morgenstern (1928), mention must be made of Gressman (1920) 35ff. who bases his argument on Exod 33:7, although this text deals with the tent of meeting. Blenkinsopp (1964) 428ff. The majority of scholars reject this idea, e.g. Lindblom (1962) 173, footnote 1; Fohrer (1969) 97-102; de Ward (1977) 2; Phillips (1970) 62.

<sup>315</sup> Garcia de la Fuente (1971) 237.

<sup>316</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>317</sup> Judges 20:27-28; 1 Sam 6; 2 Sam 11:11; 15:24f. All these texts will be discussed in the course of this section.

<sup>318</sup> KBL, 84.

satisfactory and convincing interpretation, and therefore likewise no indication of what it might have connoted originally".<sup>319</sup> There are at least four different interpretations of what the ark was:

- The embodiment of the presence of Yahweh.
- A war palladium.
- A container, whether of a fetish stone or of the two tablets of the decalogue.
- A portable throne for the invisible presence of Yahweh.<sup>320</sup>

We should most probably understand several parallel ancient ideas which largely overlap, and not a linear development from 1 and 2 Sam to the "container" idea of D, and the elaborate conception of P.<sup>321</sup>

### 1.2 *Origin and history of the ark*

The ark first appears in the wilderness wanderings in Num 10:35–36 where it is expressly recognised as the leader of the host, and in some sense the dwelling place of Yahweh. In Num 14:44, again a military context, the ark is intimately associated with Moses. The ark is then carried over Jordan to Canaan (Josh 3–4). We know of the prominence given to the ark in the siege of Jericho (Josh 6) and the sacrifice in the presence of the ark on Mount Ebal (Josh 8:33).

The history of the ark becomes obscure until its reappearance at the Shiloh sanctuary<sup>322</sup> where it comes to be regarded "as a major cult object and source of oracular revelation".<sup>323</sup> It remains there until the end of the "Judges period", in the care of Eli and his family and Samuel.

These stories follow the legends attached to the ark which are preserved in 1 Sam 4–7. Underlying these narratives is the conviction that the presence of the ark secures the presence of Yahweh himself in the camp of the Hebrews. Its capture by the Philistines and the story of its restoration also emphasises this belief.

<sup>319</sup> Morgenstern (1928) 249, reviews the previous attempts to correlate 'ărôn to the Akkadian a-ra-nu, "grave", but this is somewhat doubtful (the word is not cited in Assyrian dictionaries). The ark has also been identified with the coffin of Tammuz. It was held that just as the dead (and about to be reborn) Tammuz rested in the coffin, so the newly born Yahweh rested in the ark (Winckler, cited by Morgenstern (1928) footnote 164).

<sup>320</sup> Davies (1969–1976) 222.

<sup>321</sup> Morgenstern (1928).

<sup>322</sup> Joshua 18.

<sup>323</sup> Morgenstern (1928) 229.

After a short stay at Bethshemesh, the ark is removed to Kiriath-Jearim, where Eleazar is appointed as its guardian, before David removes it to Jerusalem where it is safely deposited "in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it" (2 Sam 6:17). The last time we meet with the ark as the representative of Yahweh is on the field of battle in the campaign against the children of Ammon (2 Sam 11:11).

This last chapter in the history of the ark opens with its removal by Solomon from its tent and its installation in the inner sanctuary of the temple (1 Kings 8). From this point onwards there is no mention of the ark in the older historical books.

We retain the following from this brief study of the history of the ark:

- It is believed that it hosts the presence of Yahweh and so inherent in the ark is an important power.
- Its presence is decisive in wartime.

These two elements lead us to believe that the ark bears similarities to the qubba of the pre-Islamic Arabs; its presence permitted prognostication or divination during the course of battle and was attended by a qualified oracular priest for this purpose.<sup>324</sup>

### 1.3 *The oracular function of the ark in wartime*

#### 1.3.1 Judges 20:27–28:

And the people of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, and Phineas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying:

"Shall we yet again go out to battle against our brethren the Benjaminites, or shall we cease?" And the Lord said, "Go up; for tomorrow I will give them into your hand".

This text is "a special witness to the fact that the sacred box was the organ of priestly divination".<sup>325</sup> The passage is a description of the preparations for the second battle against the Benjaminites. The first battle was lost (vv. 18–25) and the Israelites withdrew to Bethel and wept, fasted and offered sacrifices to Yahweh (v. 26). Then they consulted the oracle again (vv. 18–23) but this time the ark seems to play

<sup>324</sup> Morgenstern (1928) 210f., 245.

<sup>325</sup> Arnold (1917) 95f.

some part in the divinatory processes.<sup>326</sup> How this was achieved is not explained by the text but as in the consultation of the ephod we should note:

- A preparatory phase (weeping, fasting and offering sacrifices).
- The question demanding an alternative answer “yes” or “no”.
- The oracular answer. It can be imagined, especially in view of the way in which the question was formulated, that originally the answer was a “yes” or a “no”. Yet no other method of inquiry could produce such a complex answer (except perhaps sleeping besides or in the ark, in order to obtain an incubation dream). Undoubtedly the text has been interpreted.

It should be noted that the text in which the ark is introduced is probably a late gloss.<sup>327</sup> The gloss shows that the ark was believed to play a role in divination and especially in the prognostication connected with decisions in wartime.

### 1.3.2 1 Sam 6: the wandering ark

During the war against the Philistines, the Israelites were defeated and the ark captured. The ark wrought such devastation (1 Sam 5) that the Philistines decided to return it to its original owners. Having established that the ark was still an incredibly potent object, capable of bringing diseases, I shall concentrate on a specific episode, how the ark selects the road it wishes to take.

That the ark is used as a divinatory device is attested by the fact that in v. 2 the Philistines call for advice from “priests and diviners” (*lakkōhānîm wělaqōsēmîm*).<sup>328</sup>

Only people who are knowledgeable about “potent” objects could deal with it. They advise the Philistines to send the ark back to the Israelites along with offerings (v. 3). These offerings are models of tumours and of mice,<sup>329</sup> of plagues the Philistines have suffered much from. By making models of them, the Philistines hope to be healed and to be rid of the mice (through the symbolic use of “parts” on the whole). The ark, by carrying them away, would act as a direct agent

<sup>326</sup> Moore (1895) 433.

<sup>327</sup> Moore op. cit. Apart from the fact that the ark is supposed to be at Shiloh instead of Bethel, there is no other mention of the ark in the Book of Judges.

<sup>328</sup> See these two words in chapter 2.

<sup>329</sup> The Vulgate has *mures aureos*, “golden mice”. See also Geyer (1981) 293–304.

of the healing process. The second step the Philistines are advised to take is this:

Take and prepare a new cart, and two milch cows upon which there has never come a yoke, and yoke the cows to the cart, but take their calves home, away from them . . . and watch; if it goes up on the way to its own land, to Bethshemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm; but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us . . . (vv. 7-9)

The selection of the road was a function characteristic of the pre-Islamic *qubba*.<sup>330</sup>

### 1.3.3 2 Sam 11:11

This text only alludes to the presence of the ark in the Israelite camp during the war against the Ammonites and I wonder whether the "box" accompanying the Israelite army is "a wonder-working palladium" or an instrument of priestly oracles. On the basis of the parallel with 1 Sam 14:18f., the ark in this text has been seen as an instrument of divination and nothing else.<sup>331</sup>

However, we saw that it is difficult to bring in 1 Sam 14:18f. as a parallel as it seems well attested that the ephod is used in this latter text. Even assuming the synonymy of the ephod with the ark, there is nothing in this text to show that a divinatory inquiry takes place. Indeed the ark is not mentioned again in this chapter. Therefore there is little if any evidence that in this particular text the ark is used as a divinatory device.

### 1.3.4 2 Sam 15:25ff.

... The king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his habitation; but if he says, 'I have no pleasure in you', behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him."

This passage is set after the usurpation of Absalom. David retires to the Jordan valley to gather his men. He then seems to use the ark in an oracular consultation. The ark may well have been identical with "the box of Yahweh militant" which David removed from Kirjath-Jearim

<sup>330</sup> Morgenstern (1928) 240.

<sup>331</sup> Arnold (1917) 77f.

to Jerusalem early in his reign as king of Israel.<sup>332</sup> No details are given to show how the ark was used, although it seems that it could only provide a "yes" or a "no" answer.

#### 1.4 Conclusion

The textual evidence points to a use of the ark during wartime; from this we may infer that the ark, hosting the presence of Yahweh, was a dangerously potent object which had to be cared for by specialists (priests/diviners). However, the divinatory function of the ark is difficult to demonstrate as there is very little data to show that it was indeed used as such or how it was consulted.

The impression I get from reading the texts (especially Judges 20:27–28) is that lots were consulted in the presence of the ark (it acted as a catalyst?).

In this case the ark is somewhat similar to the ephod in that the oracle is consulted beside it, or the lots used are kept in it. They might both be "containers" of sacred lots, with the difference that the ark is believed to be more potent and that it is consulted during battles.

### 2. *The Use of the Ephod in Divination*

#### 2.0 Introduction

The word ephod<sup>333</sup> is used apparently with different meanings which may be organized into two main groups:<sup>334</sup>

- In some passages the ephod appears to be some sort of garment.<sup>335</sup>
- In other passages the meaning of ephod suggests some kind of portable image or idol.<sup>336</sup> Although the true meaning is most

<sup>332</sup> Arnold (1917) 80ff.

<sup>333</sup> Much has been written on the ephod. A quite complete bibliography may be found in Friedrich (1968) 10–12; Garcia de la Fuente (1969) 151–155 provides an update and supplements Friedrich. There has not been to my knowledge any further major work on the topic.

<sup>334</sup> Davies (1969–1976) 118–119; Phillips (1970) 62f.

<sup>335</sup> 1 Sam 2:18; 2 Sam 6:14 which is an ephod of linen. For the more specific priestly vestment, see Exod 25:7; 35:9.27. Exod 28:4.31; 39:1–21.22 discusses its fabrication.

<sup>336</sup> Judg 8:24ff.; 17:5; 18:14ff.; 1 Sam 21:10; 23:6; 30:7; Hos 3:4. In fact there is some ambiguity as to whether it might have been a garment all along which would have been worn during the oracular consultation (Davies op. cit. 119).

uncertain, its connection with divination is fairly well established.<sup>337</sup> I shall concentrate on the oracular use of the ephod.<sup>338</sup>

Since the same word is used to describe two different objects, it is possible to suggest that there must be an inner connection between these two uses.<sup>339</sup> I shall look at the etymology and origin of the ephod. Then we will survey the textual evidence enabling us to study the nature and function of the ephod and its particular divinatory use, if any.

## 2.1 *Etymology and origin*

### 2.1.1 *Etymology*

As KBL bluntly puts it, the word ephod is "without etymology".<sup>340</sup> But this did not prevent scholars from working on the problem and several suggestions have been put forward. I shall present only the most recent ones.

2.1.1.1 An Assyrian cognate: epāttum, "a garment", "a wrapper".<sup>341</sup>

2.1.1.2 Another opinion relates the ephod to the Egyptian ifd, "cloth of linen".<sup>342</sup> Apparently the Egyptians used this type of material in the making of sacerdotal vestments; in time the ifd came to designate the sacerdotal garment specifically.

The Hebrews would have had borrowed both the word and the object during their stay in Egypt, and in imitation of Egyptian's religious institution the Hebrews started to use this type of fabric in a religious context.

In later times a distinction was made between the ephod used by priests and the ephod used by laymen.

The latter was "ephod bad", "of linen".<sup>343</sup>

<sup>337</sup> Sellin (1934) 185ff. in particular pointed out the role of the ephod as an oracular technique of the Hebrews.

<sup>338</sup> The ephod is seen as an oracular device or directly consulted in 1 Sam 14:18; 23:9; 30:7f.; Judges 8:27; 17:5; 18:14.17.18.20; Hos 3:4. These texts will be examined in the course of this section.

<sup>339</sup> Phillips (1970) 63.

<sup>340</sup> KBL, 75; Foote (1902) 44f.

<sup>341</sup> CAD, 183, epattu, "a costly garment"; Albright (1941) 39 suggests that the ephod may have been related to the old Assyrian epadatum; then (1968) 174f., Albright makes the ephod derive from the Akkadian epādu, "a wrap, a round plaid".

<sup>342</sup> Friedrich (1968) 31ff.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

2.1.1.3 In this survey of the mantic devices in the Northwest Semitic/Syrian world, I should mention that the word *'epd* occurs in Ugaritic where it means specifically a woman's garment.<sup>344</sup> Etymologically the ephod seems to have the basic meaning of "covering", either in the form of a garment or a case.<sup>345</sup>

### 2.1.2 Origin

According to some scholars, the origin of the ephod is to be found in the meeting of the people from the desert with the Hebrews.<sup>346</sup> The former had a box containing two stones that they probably used to consult the oracle, especially before a battle.<sup>347</sup> The Hebrews would have adopted this primitive oracular ephod from the desert nomads but changed its function. These stones were used in a type of divination<sup>348</sup> as the stories of Micah<sup>349</sup> and Gideon<sup>350</sup> show. Little by little the ephod was assimilated by the religious authorities to the Yahwist cultus.<sup>351</sup>

### 2.2 *Nature and function of the oracular ephod*

There have been many hypotheses regarding the nature of the oracular ephod. According to some the ephod is the garment of a divine statue;<sup>352</sup> according to others it is a statue.<sup>353</sup> It could also be an ill-defined object of cult,<sup>354</sup> or a box used as an oracular device,<sup>355</sup> or a sacerdotal vestment used as an oracle,<sup>356</sup> or a "miniature temple" in which lots and teraphim are to be found,<sup>357</sup> or a pouch in which the lots are kept.<sup>358</sup>

<sup>344</sup> Albright (1941) 39 and (1968) 175.

<sup>345</sup> Phillips (1970) 63.

<sup>346</sup> Friedrich (1968) 55ff., 71; Morgenstern (1942/1943) 153–266.

<sup>347</sup> This recalls the qubba of the pre-Islamic Arabs.

<sup>348</sup> That they were used as statues is refuted by Friedrich (1968) 68ff.: the ephod in these texts is "ein Mittel das der Mantik diente". See Garcia de la Fuente (1969) 253, footnote 68f.

<sup>349</sup> Judges 17:5; 18:14–20.

<sup>350</sup> Judges 8:27.

<sup>351</sup> Friedrich (1968) 68f.

<sup>352</sup> Sellin (1935) 187; Elliger (1958) 34ff.; Lindblom (1962) 171; Elhorst (1910) 273ff.

<sup>353</sup> Thiersch (1935) 116 (firstly it was the garment, then the statue itself), but see footnote 16.

<sup>354</sup> De Vaux (1961) vol. 2, 140, 202f.

<sup>355</sup> Foote (1902) 39.

<sup>356</sup> Sellin (1935).

<sup>357</sup> May (1939) 44–45.

<sup>358</sup> Friedrich (1968) 17–20, 68–70.

We see how difficult it is to define the nature of the oracular ephod; only by studying the few texts in which the ephod is actually consulted can we glean information. I shall concentrate on the function of the oracular ephod, its *modus operandi*.

2.2.1 1 Sam 14:15ff.: The consultation of the ephod by Ahijah. The text of the LXX "is to be adopted unconditionally"<sup>359</sup> here:

And Saul said to Achia, bring the ephod; for he wore the ephod in that day before Israel.

This consultation takes place during the war against the Philistines; Saul takes the first steps towards consulting the divine will (v. 18). The consultation itself falls into two parts:<sup>360</sup>

- The king asks a question (v. 19: "and while Saul was talking to the priest");
- The priest gives the answer of Yahweh.

In 1 Sam 14:18ff., the king is interrupted and asks Ahijah, who was in the process of consulting the ephod, to withdraw his hand. This last detail shows that here the drawing of the lot was meant. The fact that the ephod was being carried even into the battlefield signifies that the ephod was of a manageable size; that it is a priest who consulted it emphasizes the sacred character of the ephod. Priests had at certain times precise oracular functions.<sup>361</sup> On the nature of the ephod very little can be gained from the texts.

2.3.2 1 Sam 23:6.9 and 30:7–8: David consults the ephod

1 Sam 23: David had delivered Keilah from the Philistines.

Abiathar the son of Ahimelech brought the ephod with him when he fled to David at Keilah.<sup>362</sup> The sanctuary at Nob had its ephod and this was the only thing which Abiathar, the sole surviving refugee among the priests of Nob, carried with him when he escaped to David. The text informs us that he went down with an ephod in his hand. This

<sup>359</sup> Smith (1904) 111. In the MT Ahijah is told by Saul to bring the ark, but elsewhere it is the ephod which is used for divination, as by David in 1 Sam 23:9 and 30:7f. So the LXX may be right in reading "ephod" for "ark" in 14:18. For the possible use of the ark in divination see this chapter under the section "Ark".

<sup>360</sup> Smith (1904) 111.

<sup>361</sup> See "Köhēn" in chapter 2.

<sup>362</sup> On the textual problems of this verse, see Smith (1904) 211.

expression does not necessarily mean that it was a small object which could be held within one hand, for the expression "in his hand" means "in his possession".<sup>363</sup> Abiathar's ephod can be seen as "a battle emblem and divination instrument".<sup>364</sup> Its mantic function was put to use by David himself when he suspected that Saul "was putting evil against him", i.e. summoning his people to besiege David and his men (v. 8).

After asking Abiathar to bring the ephod to him (v. 9), David explains his situation to the Lord, how he is trapped in the city of Keilah (v. 10). He then asks two questions of the oracle:

Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down? (v. 11).<sup>365</sup>

After his invocation and demands there follows a short prayer:

O Lord, the God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant.  
The answer is given: "He will come down".

Two things should be noted. First that the answer fits both questions; only one answer is necessary. Second that considering the type of questions asked, only a yes/no answer is expected. The answer to the oracle is "yes". This is further confirmed by the last question David asks the divinity:

Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?

Again we have only two possible answers from the oracle; in this case it is positive. Although we still know nothing of the shape and size of the ephod or of the method of consultation, we know that as in the previous passage it is likely that the ephod either is lots, or contains lots. Furthermore, as in 1 Sam 14:19, the text suggests that the consultation is made through set formulae (invocation/demands/prayer/answer), and the demands are formulated in such a way as to obtain a "yes" or a "no" answer (which fits in with the lots system used for divination).<sup>366</sup>

1 Sam 30:7-8: These observations are equally valid for another of David's consultations of the ephod in 1 Sam 30:7-8. Again David's

<sup>363</sup> May (1939) 51 and footnote 40.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> The text of the Vulgate is disordered: the question at the opening of the verse receives no answer and is repeated later.

<sup>366</sup> In that way it is very similar to the use of the Urim and Thummim as consulted in 1 Sam 14:40f.

enquiry has for its object the strategy he should follow, in this case in his fight against the Amalekites. There is no invocation or prayer but the same type of question is formulated requesting a "yes" or a "no" answer.

### 2.3.3 Judg 8:27: Gideon's ephod in Ophrah

The character of Gideon's ephod has raised much debate<sup>367</sup> which may be summed up as follows:<sup>368</sup> it could be a golden image of Yahweh; or the image of the deity with pockets for the oracle;<sup>369</sup> or, again, some scholars have postulated a connection between the ark and the ephod.<sup>370</sup>

Let us look at the text. We are told that Gideon made an ephod of gold and he put (ysg) it in the city of Ophrah and it "ensnared Israel".

The root ysg is not used in the Old Testament to describe the placing in position of a stationary object such as an idol or a stone.<sup>371</sup> In fact this root is very appropriate as it denotes the idea of "setting up", "establishing" the ephod cult in Ophrah.<sup>372</sup>

Earlier commentators have suggested that the strong disapproval of this ephod-cult may come from the fact "that the redactional source of the passage is E2; whereas the passage in 1 Sam which seems to regard the ephod as the natural and appropriate means of ascertaining the will of God, belongs to the much older narrative of J".<sup>373</sup>

We have in this text an interesting variation on the nature of the ephod. It could still be a box, but a very sophisticated one, containing lots. Without talking of an "ephod-cult" I suggest that it was consulted regularly by the people of Ophrah and that due to the ban on all sorts of divination, or under the influence of a stricter school regarding the means of oracular consultation (i.e. to outlaw them or some of them), it came to be scorned.

### 2.3.4 The ephod and the teraphim in Judg 17–18 and Hos 3:4 Judges 17:5: "Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and teraphim".

These objects are part of the apparatus belonging to a private shrine and are mentioned along with "the graven image" and "the molten

<sup>367</sup> Burney (1976) 240.

<sup>368</sup> Davies (1962–1968) 118.

<sup>369</sup> Burney (1976) 243.

<sup>370</sup> May (1939) 50.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, cf. KBL 395, "set, place".

<sup>372</sup> Burney (1976) 241.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*

image" (Judg 18:17). We know that the Levite who officiated as a priest for Micah made an oracular inquiry at the request of the Danites (Judges 18:5). It is important here to stress the similarity between the ephod and the teraphim by suggesting that in many passages where only the ephod is mentioned, we are to understand also the presence of the teraphim.<sup>374</sup> This would certainly give it a mantic function but as the modus operandi of the teraphim is not clear, it does not tell us what it looked like. In this particular text there is no direct reference to the consultation of the ephod although we are entitled to suppose that the oracular consultation mentioned in this passage is obtained through it. Was it then used along with the teraphim, or on its own? We do not possess enough evidence to make a valid decision.

The ephod is also paired with the teraphim in Hos 3:4:

For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim.

This text<sup>375</sup> seems to show that both the ephod and the teraphim were acceptable in "orthodox" worship. It is noteworthy that Hosea, who boldly censures idolatry, allows the use of ephod and teraphim.<sup>376</sup> How could they give oracles? Perhaps the ephod was the pouch and the teraphim the lots.<sup>377</sup> My study of the teraphim suggests that the ephod and the teraphim are two different methods of consulting the will of the divinity. The ephod would refer to the sacred lot and the teraphim to the consultation of the spirits of the dead; there is in fact too little evidence to prove that the ephod is always paired with the teraphim, or to prove that the teraphim is a sacred lot.

### 2.3 Conclusion

- From the study of the etymology of the ephod we may conclude that the basic idea involved "covering". The type of covering differs widely, from a box to a garment or a pouch.
- The ephod was used to ascertain the will of the divinity according to a set pattern of invocation/demand/answer. This pattern could be shortened in times of emergency.

<sup>374</sup> May (1939) 49.

<sup>375</sup> Hos 3:4 is also analysed under "Teraphim" in this same chapter.

<sup>376</sup> Foote (1902) 29.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

The ephod produced a "yes" or a "no" answer.

- As to its nature we may be certain the ephod is linked with lots, but whether it designates the "container" (pouch or box) or the lots themselves, or both, there is not enough textual evidence to say.
- Lastly, with the general ban on divination the ephod was declared idolatrous. After the exile the term is never applied to an oracular consultation and always refers to the vestment worn by the high priest.

### 3. *The 'ûrîm and Thummîm: A Sacral Method of Inquiry*

#### 3.0 *Introduction*

The urim and thummim are "oracular media by which the will of God in relation to particular problems was ascertained".<sup>378</sup> They occur in relatively few texts in the Old Testament,<sup>379</sup> sometimes together as a hendiadys: 'ûrîm wêthummîm,<sup>380</sup> or in reverse order "thummim and urim".<sup>381</sup> Only twice is "urim" mentioned on its own.<sup>382</sup> Probably both objects are being referred to here; the joint expression refers to one method of divination.<sup>383</sup>

Much has been written about the urim and the thummim<sup>384</sup> but questions concerning their origin, their etymology, their nature and how they were consulted remain unresolved. Yet from certain references to them it appears that they are part of the apparatus of the priestly oracle.<sup>385</sup>

I shall examine these problems in this section while summing up the available data on what can be called "the cultic lot apparatus".<sup>386</sup>

<sup>378</sup> Mendelsohn (1962–1968) 739; see also Robertson (1924) 67.

<sup>379</sup> Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8; 1 Sam 14:41; 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65.

<sup>380</sup> Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65; and also in 1 Sam 14:41, if we follow the reconstitution of the MT according to the LXX.

<sup>381</sup> Deut 33:8.

<sup>382</sup> Num 27:21; 1 Sam 28:6.

<sup>383</sup> Garcia de la Fuente (1971) 237.

<sup>384</sup> For the views of earlier scholars, see the bibliography in Kennedy (1908–1921) 841; Muss-Arnolt (1900) 193–221. I will mention only four scholars: Lindblom (1962) 167f.; Robertson (1964) 67–74; Lipinski (1970) 495–496; Garcia de la Fuente (1971).

<sup>385</sup> Ex 28:2ff.

<sup>386</sup> Lindblom (1962) 166f.

### 3.1 *Origin and etymology*

#### 3.1.1 The origin of the urim and the thummim

The origin is probably quite remote in time. One argument in favour of their antiquity has been put forward by Jirku<sup>387</sup> who regards the "m" ending of these words in the singular as confirmation of their ancient origin. The Israelite popular mentality took over these words from the Canaanite people<sup>388</sup> and the transition from the singular to the plural must have taken place at a time when the meaning of these words was no longer understood.<sup>389</sup>

The use of the urim and the thummim is otherwise not documented in the Northwest Semitic/Syrian world. They may have originated first in a non-Semitic area,<sup>390</sup> or in Assyria or Babylonia,<sup>391</sup> or perhaps in Egypt,<sup>392</sup> but these are speculations for which we have no supporting evidence.

#### 3.1.2 The etymology

Both Genesius<sup>393</sup> and BDB<sup>394</sup> derive urim from 'ôr, "light". KBL<sup>395</sup> lists three possible derivations:

- From 'rr, "accursed", "curse-bearing".
- From the participle passive of 'rh, "plucked off".
- "A meaningless word formed for the formal completion of thummîm". As for the thummim, in the Hebrew lexicons and dictionaries it is derived from tm, "to be complete, finished".<sup>396</sup>

But while the hypotheses put forward to explain the etymologies of the urim and the thummim are countless, none of them is wholly convincing. Without listing all of them,<sup>397</sup> I will just note that the commentators have followed the LXX,<sup>398</sup> or have tried to find derivations

<sup>387</sup> Jirku (1953) 79–80.

<sup>388</sup> Garcia de la Fuente (1971) 237.

<sup>389</sup> Jirku (1953) 80.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 80, footnote 5.

<sup>391</sup> Muss-Arnolt (1900) 218f.; Lipinski (1970) 495f.

<sup>392</sup> Cerny (1941) 135–141.

<sup>393</sup> Gesenius, 17.

<sup>394</sup> BDB 22.

<sup>395</sup> KBL 22–23.

<sup>396</sup> KBL, 1032; BDDB, 1071; Gesenius, 806.

<sup>397</sup> Jirku (1913) 29–40, lists many derivations; see also Robertson (1964) 70, who gives about ten different interpretations of the urim and thummim dating from the Middle Ages to the present century.

<sup>398</sup> For references see Robertson (1964) 70.

which accounted for what are presumed to be the negative/positive aspects. KBL mentions for instance that 'rr would represent the negative side and tmm the positive,<sup>399</sup> indicating what was satisfactory to God and what was not.

The interpretations of the LXX and the Vulgate are unhelpful: Urim is usually rendered by *dēloī*<sup>400</sup> in Greek and by *doctrina* in Latin. Thummim is rendered by *alētheia*<sup>401</sup> and *veritas*.

An East Semitic derivation has also been put forward in the Babylonian *urtu* ("command", "decision") and *tamitu* ("oracle").<sup>402</sup>

### 3.2 *The nature of the Urim and Thummim*

The same uncertainty exists concerning the raw material the Urim and Thummim were made of, their shape and the symbols or signs inscribed on them, if any. Only their size can be deduced from the description of the *ḥōšen*,<sup>403</sup> a kind of pocket (usually translated "breast-plate") in Exodus<sup>404</sup> and in Leviticus.<sup>405</sup> This pocket, bearing twelve precious stones, was about twelve inches square, and was fastened permanently to the high priest's breast, with an opening to allow the high priest to take out the urim and thummim, kept within.<sup>406</sup> This suggests that they were small objects, perhaps stones rather than dice (the breast-plate "could scarcely have been used as a dice-box, for it could not be removed from the ephod").<sup>407</sup> They may have been made of metal or wood,<sup>408</sup> or were small sticks,<sup>409</sup> or even arrows.<sup>410</sup>

<sup>399</sup> Wellhausen, cited by Robertson (1964) 70.

<sup>400</sup> In all the texts except Ezra 2:63: (*heōs anastē hierous*) *tois phōtizousi kai tois teleiois*; Neh 7:65: (*eōs anastehiereus*) *phōtisōn*.

<sup>401</sup> Or in 1 Sam 14:41 by *hosiotēs*, and Ezra 2:63 (see footnote 23).

<sup>402</sup> Muss-Arnolt (1900) 219.

<sup>403</sup> *Ḥōšen hammišpāt*, "the breast-plate of judgement".

<sup>404</sup> Exod 28:2ff.

<sup>405</sup> Lev 8:8.

<sup>406</sup> The constituents of the ephod are roughly the same as for the breast-plate.

<sup>407</sup> Foote (1902) 33.

<sup>408</sup> Robertson (1964) 71f. thinks that they are the twenty letters of the Hebrew alphabet which were used in their numeric functions and divided between even and uneven numbers. To number one the name 'wr was given, to the final number tm was also suitable. The two classes became known as 'ūrim and thummim; Press (1933) thinks they are wooden objects and refers to Hos 4:12.

<sup>409</sup> Foote (1902) 21; Garcia de la Fuente (1971) 80.

<sup>410</sup> See footnote 32; most scholars who think the urim and the thummim are sticks also discuss the possibility that they are being consulted on the *belomancy* model transmitted by the pre-Islamic Arabs. But arrows would be too big to fit in such a small pouch.

The problem about what type of objects they are is that they needed to be able to deliver four possible answers: negative,<sup>411</sup> positive,<sup>412</sup> or no response,<sup>413</sup> or a selective answer (i.e. to make a choice between two things or persons).<sup>414</sup> This assumes that we are dealing with more than two objects.<sup>415</sup>

### 3.3 *The method of consultation of the 'urîm and thummîm*

The method of consultation of the lots may be illuminated by the verbs for lot-casting: *hippîl*, *hišlîk*, *yârâ*, *hêfil*, *yâdad* ("to cast", "to throw"), and *nâtan* ("to put", "to lay down").<sup>416</sup> The lot "comes out" (*yâšâ*),<sup>417</sup> or "comes up" (*âlâ*),<sup>418</sup> "falls on someone" (*nâpal*),<sup>419</sup> "it catches a person" (*lâkad*),<sup>420</sup> "is shaken on the lap" (*hûṭal*).<sup>421</sup>

We do not know with any certainty that the same ways were applied in the consultation of the urim and the thummim. The verbs cited above imply that a number of techniques were used and that there were perhaps different kinds of lots; the urim and thummim are after all only one particular type.

I shall consider briefly all the texts concerning the urim and thummim, with particular emphasis on 1 Sam 14:41, which is the only text to yield clues as to how the sacred lot was used.

#### 3.3.1 Exod 28:29–30

The information concerning the sacred lot in this text is about the place where they were kept (the breast-piece of the high priest's garment), a hint about their size and shape<sup>422</sup> and their association with the cultus.

<sup>411</sup> and <sup>412</sup> According to Num 27:21, Joshua was commanded to direct his questions to the priest Eleazar, who in turn "shall inquire for him by the judgement of the urim before the Lord; at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in". It is possible then to assume that answers may be positive or negative.

<sup>413</sup> 1 Sam 28:6.

<sup>414</sup> 1 Sam 14:41.

<sup>415</sup> Against Jirku (1953) 33f. who thinks that the urim and thummim represent one object, a stone or a tablet and that they represent "heads and tails"; or Lipinski (1970) 496, who thinks of two stones, a white one (alabaster) and a black one (haematite).

<sup>416</sup> Lindblom (1962) 167.

<sup>417</sup> Num 33:54; Josh 16:1; 1 Sam 14:41.

<sup>418</sup> Lev 16:9–10; Josh 18:11.

<sup>419</sup> Ezek 24:6.

<sup>420</sup> Josh 7:14 (three times); 1 Sam 14:41–42. Press (1933) 230 writes that *lâkad* is a technical term for ordeal.

<sup>421</sup> Prov 16:33.

<sup>422</sup> See comments in 3.3.

Their location in the *ḥōšen mišpāt*, "the breast-piece of judgement" implies that they were used for oracular purposes.<sup>423</sup>

What they were actually made of is more difficult to decide. The statement in v. 29:

So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breast-piece of judgement upon his heart

has given rise to the idea that the Urim and Thummim are objects inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>424</sup>

### 3.3.2 Lev 8:8

This verse describes Moses consecrating Aaron and his sons in compliance with the command given in Ex 29:1–37. It does not add anything to the preceding text as the passage concerns only the location of the urim and thummim in the high priest's breastpiece: "and in the breastpiece he (Moses) put the urim and thummim".<sup>425</sup>

### 3.3.3 Deut 33:8

According to this verse the origin of the consultation of the urim and thummim belongs exclusively to the tribe of Levi and it traces back to Moses the existence of these oracular objects. It confirms the oracular function of the priests and levites.<sup>426</sup>

### 3.3.4 Num 27:21

This passage has already been referred to in footnotes 411 and 412. Some scholars attribute it to a sacerdotal source.<sup>427</sup> It describes the consecration of Joshua as head of the community and as successor of Moses. Unlike Moses, who received his instructions directly from Yahweh (Num 12:6–8) and who receives oracles (Exod 33:7–11), Joshua cannot consult the deity directly. If he needs to do so, he must ask through the intermediary, Eleazar, the priest who "will inquire (wěšā'äl) by the judgement of the urim (běmišpaṭ hā'ūrīm)". The text confirms the fact that the urim is a cultic form of lot-casting: only members of the priesthood may consult it.

<sup>423</sup> Robertson (1964) 67.

<sup>424</sup> Hyatt (1971) 282.

<sup>425</sup> Snaith (1967) 65.

<sup>426</sup> See *kōhēn* and *lēwî* in chapter 2.

<sup>427</sup> Garcia de la Fuente (1971) 243, footnote 128.

## 3.3.5 1 Sam 28:6

The legitimate modes of inquiry a king has at his disposal are listed in this verse: dreams, urim or prophets. Any of these oracular media could produce a negative, positive, or a non-answer to all the questions formulated by King Saul. In this particular case none of these media gives an answer. It also seems that a medium can only be consulted once; if it fails, it cannot be consulted again but another method of inquiry must be tried.

## 3.3.6 Ezra 2:63 = Neh 7:65

These two texts stress that only a priest can consult the sacred lot:

The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.

Since post-exilic Israel had neither the sacred breastpiece nor the urim and thummim, it is quite safe to assume that the age of Ezra and Nehemiah no longer knew about the nature of the urim and thummim.<sup>428</sup> In any case the passage is ambiguous: does Ezra mean to emphasize the need for urim and thummim under the new dispensation, or does he have it in mind to introduce them anew?<sup>429</sup> No information is given as to how the sacred lot was consulted. However, these texts do indicate that they are consulted by a priest.

By far the most instructive text on the technique of consulting the sacred lot is 1 Sam 14:41.

## 3.3.7 1 Sam 14:41

The MT is difficult<sup>430</sup> and scholars<sup>431</sup> have emended it on the basis of the LXX. It reads as follows:

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.

<sup>428</sup> Muss-Arnolt (1900) 197.

<sup>429</sup> Mendelsohn (1962-1968) 740.

<sup>430</sup> Toeg (1969) 493-498 for a detailed discussion; against the correction of the MT by the LXX, see Lindblom (1962) 172-178.

<sup>431</sup> Cited in Muss-Arnolt (1900) 195; Smith (1899) 121f., who discussed the arguments for the adoption of the LXX text.

Dēloī stands for 'ûrîm, and hosiotēta for tummîm.<sup>432</sup> The context is given by vv. 37–42: Saul tries to find out from God, at the priests' request, whether he is to pursue the enemy. The method of inquiry is not mentioned; but whatever it was, it was unsuccessful. Saul inquired again in order to find the reason for God's silence, realizing that someone must have transgressed. This time the attempt is successful: he and Jonathan are designated. Then the lots were thrown a second time (v. 42) at Saul's request (happîlû bēnî ūbēn yônatān suggests that the lots were thrown down). At last Jonathan is seen to be guilty but is saved by the people (v. 45). The urim and thummim appear in this text to be two objects, one of which gives the affirmative the other the negative answer to the question.<sup>433</sup>

### 3.4 Conclusion

We have gathered very little information about what the urim and thummim were. I hold that:

- They were part of the high priest's garments.
- They were associated with the breastpiece of judgement.
- They could give a yes/no answer.

## 4. *The Tent of Meeting as a Place of Oracles*

### 4.0 Introduction

The 'ôhel mō'ēd is a sacred tent, a portable sanctuary, said to have been erected by Moses.<sup>434</sup> It was the place in which the god of Israel revealed himself to, and dwelt among his people. It also housed the ark and accompanied Israel during the wilderness period. It is recorded that it was located at different times in several places in Canaan after Israel's settlement in that land and it was finally replaced by Solomon's temple. It was Israel's portable sanctuary from Sinai to its final resting place, Solomon's temple.<sup>435</sup>

<sup>432</sup> hosiotēta does not elsewhere translate thummim.

<sup>433</sup> Smith (1899) 122.

<sup>434</sup> Morgenstern (1918) 28; Davies (1962–1968) 498.

<sup>435</sup> Davies (1962–1968) 498.

The expression<sup>436</sup> is almost always rendered in Greek by *hē skēnē tou marturiou*, “the tent of the testimony”.<sup>437</sup> The Hebrew *ma'ad* means “to meet by appointment”,<sup>438</sup> hence “tent of meeting”, where Yahweh meets with Moses and Israel.<sup>439</sup> The purpose of this meeting may be further defined as communication, and so “tent of meeting” really means “tent of revelation”, “tent of the oracle”, “tent of testimony”.<sup>440</sup> In other words the *'ōhel mō'ēd* was believed to be an oracular place where a meeting between the human and the divine was possible;<sup>441</sup> *'ōhel mō'ēd* is in fact “an archaic term denoting Israel's early shrine”.<sup>442</sup>

In view of this I shall examine the origin and history; it will be seen that this will bring us to Ugaritic sources. Then I shall turn to the Old Testament passages in which the *'ōhel mō'ēd* appears to be an oracular place. Three texts will be analysed from this perspective: Exod 33:7–23; Num 11:16–30; 12:4–10.

#### 4.1 *Origin and History of the 'ōhel Mō'ēd*

##### 4.1.1 Ugaritic origin of the *'ōhel mō'ēd*

We find the *'ōhel mō'ēd* mentioned in extra-biblical material. Although there is an Arabic literary parallel in the institution of the *qubbah*, the domed camel-borne tent, this comes well into the Christian era and we are far away in time and culture from the early Israelites.<sup>443</sup>

The discovery of Ugaritic literature threw some welcome light on the institution of the *'ōhel mō'ēd*, by introducing a “Canaanite” parallel much closer in time to the Israelite tent of meeting than the *qubbah* of the pre-Islamic Arabs.<sup>444</sup>

According to KTU 1 V, 6–9, El lives in a tent at the source of the cosmic waters.<sup>445</sup> But I must point out that besides being a dwelling,

<sup>436</sup> If we follow the “traditional” source theory, it occurs in P about 130 times and several times in E (Exod 33:7; Num 11:16; 12:4; Deut 31:14).

<sup>437</sup> Cf. Vulgate *tabernaculum testimonii*.

<sup>438</sup> BDB 416; KBL 388.

<sup>439</sup> Exod 29:42–43; Num 17:4.

<sup>440</sup> Davies (1962–1968) 498f. who bases it on Exod 29:42; Num 7:89.

<sup>441</sup> Cross (1973) 322; Cross speaks of “the priestly penchant for refurbishing an archaic term and using it with a narrowed, technical meaning”.

<sup>442</sup> Cross (1973) 300.

<sup>443</sup> Clifford (1971) 221. For the literature published comparing the Tent of Meeting and the Ark with nomad tent-shrines, see Cross (1947) 59f. and Clifford (1971) 221, footnote 2.

<sup>444</sup> For the relationship between the Ugaritic tent of El and the Israelite Tent of Meeting, see Cross, (1947 and 1973); also an extensive bibliography (1971) 221f., foot-note 3.

<sup>445</sup> According to one text, KTU 1.3.V. 3–34, the tent is on a mountain.

the tent of El "is a place of authoritative decree or oracle (thm)".<sup>446</sup>

KTU 1.3, V, 30-34:

thmk . il . hkm . [.] hkmk  
'm . 'lm . hyt . hzt . thmk  
mlkn . allyn . b'l . tptn  
in . d 'lnh . klnyy . qsh

"Thy decree, O El, is wise  
Thy wisdom lasts forever.  
A life of good fortune is thy decree.<sup>447</sup>  
Our king is Aliyan Baal,  
Our judge, above whom there is no other".

It seems that the method used to obtain a decision resembles that of an incubation in a sacred place. The principle underlying the two is very much the same. The tent is on the mountain, close either to the abode of the gods or to the "source of the two rivers" (we saw in a previous reference that water can be used for scrying). It is in a place of power, easily identified with it and giving to those dwelling in it the potential to make divinely inspired choices. It may be assumed that the place where the tent is has more significance than the actual dwelling. We notice in the Old Testament texts that when Moses is told to erect the Tabernacle (miskan),<sup>448</sup> the instructions are given on the mountain (Exod 26:30).

Also, in the Ugaritic texts the tent is basically a place of (divine) assembly where the gods could meet and pronounce judgement, and take decisions.<sup>449</sup> The Gods were directly inspired by the potent place where they dwelt.

#### 4.1.2 History of the 'öhel mō'ēd in the Old Testament

According to some scholars it originated in the desert period and can be traced to Moses specifically, and it may correlate with the formation of the covenant amphictyony.<sup>450</sup> The central institution was the tent of the Assembly<sup>451</sup> which was used for both religious and political

<sup>446</sup> Clifford (1971) 233.

<sup>447</sup> De Moor (1987) 17, translates this line by "long live the sharpness of your judgement".

<sup>448</sup> Translation given by Clifford (1971) 223.

<sup>449</sup> The m'd appears to be the Canaanite parallel in the tale of Wen-Amun (1100 B.C.) where the word mō'ēd occurs referring to the city assembly of Biblus: see Wilson (1945) 245.

<sup>450</sup> Cross (1947) 55.

<sup>451</sup> Cross (1947) 65.

gatherings. It is difficult to decide where the tent stood in the Israelite encampment, as the sources are at variance.<sup>452</sup>

Little is known about the early history of the 'ôhel mô'êd; its first station was believed to be at Shechem (although it must be noted that the tent is not explicitly mentioned: Josh 8:30–35; 24); the official sanctuary during the major phase of the period of the Judges was at Shiloh<sup>453</sup> which continued as the central sanctuary until its destruction at the hands of the Philistines after the battle of Ebenezer, when the Ark was captured.

The period following is largely a blank in the history of the 'ôhel mô'êd. The ark reappears and is at its height in David's "Tent of Yahweh" (2 Sam 7). David brought the ark and the desert-born tradition of Israel's Tabernacle together, to Jerusalem.

I shall conclude this brief survey by quoting Cross: "The motifs of the desert tent maintained themselves in these sanctuaries, arising out of the Sinai experience, continuing into the time of David, and projected in ideal form throughout the religious thought of Israel".<sup>454</sup>

It may be deduced from this that the 'ôhel mô'êd is a very old institution, and that like its Ugaritic counterpart it was a place for joint political and religious meetings. It was believed to be a source of power<sup>455</sup> regardless of its structure<sup>456</sup> as its location shows. If outside the camp it is too dangerous to approach. If it is in the camp, it protects. It is also placed in sanctuaries.<sup>457</sup>

#### 4.2 *The oracular function of the 'Ôhel Mô'êd in the Old Testament*

Exod 29:42: It shall be a continued offering throughout your generations at the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with the people of Israel.

The text may be understood as an interpretation "by the priestly source

<sup>452</sup> The priestly account places the tent in the middle of the camp (Exod 29:42). There are also passages where the tent stands unprotected outside the camp (Exod 33:7).

<sup>453</sup> Davies (1962–1968) 502; Cross (1947) 56.

<sup>454</sup> Cross (1947) 57.

<sup>455</sup> Num 12: Miriam was in the tent of meeting when struck by leprosy.

<sup>456</sup> In Exod 33:7 and Num 11:26–27 the tent is very simple (E?); in Exod 25–31, the structure is more complex (P?).

<sup>457</sup> The typical priestly designation for the tent-sanctuary is miškân, "tabernacle", which almost certainly originally meant "tent" (Cross (1947) 65).

of the original Canaanite meaning<sup>458</sup> which was "the tent of meeting of the divine assembly under the presidency of El".<sup>459</sup> P reinterprets the 'ôhel mô'ēd as the place of meeting between man and God.

Three texts illustrate the oracular function of the 'ôhel mô'ēd.

#### 4.2.1 Ex 33:7-23

v. 7: Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; and he called it the tent of meeting; and everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp.

In this passage the tent appears to be primarily a place where Yahweh was consulted; in other words it was used for divination.<sup>460</sup> The scene is set during the journeying through the wilderness and it can be inferred from the dialogue between Moses and Yahweh that the purpose of the meeting is to ask directions as to what to do and where to go. We should also note this important factor: the scene takes place on Mount Horeb. As we know from Exod 26:30, Moses is told to make the miškān according to a pattern shown him on the mountain. The replica tent that Moses is to make is in accord with the principle that the part corresponds to and reflects the whole. The similarity of form between the earthly dwelling of the god and its heavenly prototype brings about the presence of the deity,<sup>461</sup> i.e., the tent, in reproducing a heavenly pattern,<sup>462</sup> acts as a direct oracular medium. The divinity is asked questions to which clear answers are given.

It is hard to know how this consultation was performed as no sign of ecstasy, provoked or spontaneous, is recorded. We only know that Moses was the oracular priest,<sup>463</sup> and that there was always someone in the tent in case the deity decided to communicate.<sup>464</sup>

<sup>458</sup> Clifford (1972) 226f.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

<sup>460</sup> Morgenstern (1943) 28, 32; see Clifford who also believes this text to refer to the tent as an oracular place.

<sup>461</sup> Clifford (1972) 226.

<sup>462</sup> The fact that Yahweh descends to the door in the form of a pillar of cloud, in order to confer with Moses, means that "he dwells somewhere aloft" (Morgenstern (1943) 30) presumably in the mountain. This appears to confirm that the tent, made from a heavenly pattern, is in "correspondence" with it. The cloud symbolises this very well as it "links" heaven and earth.

<sup>463</sup> Morgenstern (1943) 44, footnote 290; Moses acted as a priest along with Joshua.

<sup>464</sup> Exod 33:11.

## 4.2.2 Num 11:16-30

Although this passage is from a different tradition to the preceding one,<sup>465</sup> some interesting details are revealed. Moses is commanded by the Lord to bring "seventy men of the elders of Israel" (v. 16) to the tent of meeting and to let them stand there with him. The purpose of this command is made clear to Moses: the Lord will take "some of the spirit which is upon Moses and put it upon them" (v. 8).

The context is of particular importance as the story is set during the journey through the wilderness. The people complain about the lack of meat and the passage shows how their complaint was heard and answered; it also deals with Moses' complaint that he alone is incapable of bearing "the burden of the people" and needs divine assistance.<sup>466</sup>

Several elements of the previous story are to be found in Num 11: "the Lord comes down in the cloud" (v. 25) at the door of the tent of meeting which presumably has been set up outside the camp.<sup>467</sup>

This text is important as it is one of the oldest traditions we have about the tent of meeting. The picture we are given of the 'ōhel mō'ēd is that of a scene in which God appears and speaks. The division of the spirit was effected (v. 25) and resulted in the prophesying of the elders. Two men, Eldad and Medad,<sup>468</sup> who had remained in the camp when Moses and the elders went out of the tent, started to prophesy when the spirit rested upon them. From this we may infer that the place of meeting once visited by the deity remains charged with divine power and that this power is contagious. Although we do not know for certain that the men had not been inside the tent we may safely believe that they had, hence the necessity of having a priest always in attendance there.

## 4.2.3 Num 12:4-10

In this passage the Lord meets Miriam, Aaron and Moses at the tent of meeting. His appearance and the setting of the scene is very much the same as in Num 11: "He came down in a pillar of cloud" (v. 5). Aaron and Miriam are ordered to come forward to receive the decisive divine answer to their joint complaint against Moses:

<sup>465</sup> Exod 33 is attributed to JE; Num 11 to a P source. See Morgenstern (1918) 125f.

<sup>466</sup> See commentaries on the passage: Gray (1903) 100f.; Noth (1968) 83: they agree in finding two distinct elements in this story although they are not from two independent literary "sources".

<sup>467</sup> Noth (1968) 88.

<sup>468</sup> On Eldad and Medad, see Gray (1903) 114, who gives evidence that these were not among the group of seventy elders.

v. 6 And he (the Lord) said, Hear my words: if there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision (bammar'â), I speak with him in a dream.

v. 7 Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house.

v. 8 With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the Lord.

These verses illustrate the ways in which the divine word is transmitted: by "vision", "dream" and "prophet". Moses' authority is re-established because the Lord speaks to him directly. The medium of communication between God and Moses is the 'ôhel mô'êd, the Tent of Assembly where divine advice is sought and divine decisions carried out.

#### 4.3 Conclusion

The Ugaritic data brings a new understanding of the 'ôhel mô'êd as a political and a religious assembly of the gods and the passage KTU 1.3. V, 30–34 may be interpreted as a description of an oracular decision obtained through the medium of the "Tent of Assembly". The tent, representing the abode of the deity, brings about the divine presence wherever it may be. This seems to have been reinterpreted in order to have the 'ôhel mô'êd as a place where man and God meet and where divine will is revealed. That the 'ôhel mô'êd appears to be connected with divination is demonstrated by the three texts we have chosen. It was certainly regarded as the place where a prophet would receive oracular instructions. To conclude, the 'ôhel mô'êd, as a place of divine/human mediation, is a place of great power as the distribution of the spirit (its positive aspect) and the leprosy inflicted on Miriam (its negative aspect) show. The tent of meeting as an oracular medium operates as such only during the wilderness tradition.

### 5. *The Mantic Function of the Teraphim*

#### 5.0 Introduction

The Hebrew lexicons and dictionaries translate "teraphim" by "decaying ones", "idol",<sup>469</sup> "a kind of idol", "object of reverence",<sup>470</sup> "eine

<sup>469</sup> KBL, 1041.

<sup>470</sup> BDB, 1076.

Art Hausgötter, deren Bilder im Hause standen".<sup>471</sup> Despite the association of teraphim with idolatry there is evidence in the Old Testament that they were used for divination purposes. I shall mention briefly 1 Sam 15:23 where the prophet condemns the use of teraphim as iniquitous and compares its use with divination. That they were used for purposes of divination is evident from 2 Kings 23:24, where they are mentioned in the same category as the 'ôb.<sup>472</sup> Likewise in Judges 17:5 (and perhaps in Hos 3:4) it is clearly implied that the teraphim stood in a sanctuary, which would have been an obvious place to come to if an oracle were sought.<sup>473</sup> Probably the clearest evidence that the teraphim are used as a divinatory device is to be found in Zech 10:2. Finally the consultation of the teraphim by the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar in Ezek 21:26 must be noted.<sup>474</sup>

I shall examine all of these texts, but before going on the origin and etymology of the teraphim must be researched in the hope that it will give an insight into how the device was consulted. It is only by knowing what a teraph is that we may understand its divinatory use.

### 5.1 *General problems related to the study of the teraphim*

We are faced with various problems:

- The term "teraphim", which is found only in the plural in the Old Testament, "is of disputed derivation and uncertain meaning".<sup>475</sup> Close examination of the texts shows that "teraphim" does not consistently designate the same type of object. They appear to be sacred lots (cf. the Greek of Hos 3:4) or idols (Gen 31:19),<sup>476</sup> and they can also be connected with necromancy (2 Kings 23:24).
- The data concerning their origin is contradictory. The teraphim are at times foreign devices (Gen 35:2.4), and at other times Israelite sacred objects (Judges 17; Hos 3:4).
- At times they seem to be legitimate cult objects (Hos 3:4; Judges

<sup>471</sup> Gesenius, 814.

<sup>472</sup> In Josiah's reform as recorded in this text, the teraphim are destroyed along with other instruments of idolatry and necromancy; see 'ôb in "Necromancy", chapter 4.

<sup>473</sup> Oesterley (1930) 135.

<sup>474</sup> Belomancy and hepatoscopy are also practised.

<sup>475</sup> Johnson (1962) 31, footnote 3.

<sup>476</sup> As idols, or statues their size is variable: they can fit in a saddle bag (Gen 31), or they be life-sized (1 Sam 19:11-17).

17:5). However in other passages they are held in contempt (Zech 10:2), or prohibited (2 Kings 23:24);

– The LXX sometimes simply transliterates<sup>477</sup> and sometimes gives its own interpretation.<sup>478</sup>

### 5.2 *Search for the etymology of the teraphim*

Though the etymology is uncertain many proposals have been made, some more convincing than others, but with no definite solution to the problem.<sup>479</sup>

#### 5.2.1 A Semitic origin

Scholars put forward views which presume textual corruption, whether deliberate or otherwise. It has been argued that the original PTRYM “interpreters” has been deformed into TRPYM through metathesis.<sup>480</sup> The reason for such a change lies in the idea of “name-tabu”, i.e. these objects, endowed with the ability to reveal the future, were dangerous and so could not be called by their real name. They may have been “mantic devices designed to be consulted on the interpretation of dreams”.<sup>481</sup> This theory is very tempting but no textual evidence has been found showing that PTRYM stood where TRPYM now stands.

Others assume that the t is a preformative. Here two alternatives have been proposed:

– rp', to heal"<sup>482</sup> hence the association with the difficult rephaim (as denoting the shades of the dead in Ugarit).<sup>483</sup> According to this proposal the objects in question may be associated with ancestor worship.<sup>484</sup> In fact it is probably the similarity between the

<sup>477</sup> Theraphin, tharaphein, therapein, or theraphein.

<sup>478</sup> It is also rendered by kanotaphia, “monuments of the dead” and eidola (Gen 31: 19.34–35).

<sup>479</sup> For a complete bibliography of this term see: RGG; Johnson (1962) 31, footnote 3; Ackroyd (1950/1951) 378f.; Labuschagne (1966) 115, footnote 130; Moore (1895) 381f. should be consulted for the Jewish commentators' perspective on the topic. For a non-semitic origin and etymology, see Hoffner (1967) 230–238 and (1968).

<sup>480</sup> Labuschagne (1966) 117, implicitly following Tanchum.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Barnes (1928–1929) 177–179; Smith (1931/1932) 33–36 both derive “teraphim” from rp', “to heal” as denoting “those who bring health”. 1 Sam 19 fits this.

<sup>483</sup> See “Necromancy”.

<sup>484</sup> Schwally (1892) 35ff.; Oesterley (1937) 100f. If the derivation from repha'im is correct, the root is probably to be seen in the Babylonian rabu or rapu, which is used for the

transliteration of teraphim into Greek letters (see footnotes 9 and 10) and the Greek verb *therapeuo*, "to treat medically" which set the Jewish translators of the Old Testament to thinking about the etymological relationship between *trpym* and *rp*. But what has happened to the aleph in *rāphā*?<sup>485</sup>

— *rpy*, to be languid, limp".<sup>486</sup> However there are serious linguistic problems in parting from the tri-consonantal root *trp*.<sup>487</sup>

Then there are the views "which conclude that the tri-consonantal root is *trp*".<sup>488</sup> There is a Semitic root *trp* which is found in post-biblical Hebrew and which denotes the idea of "obscenity", "decay".<sup>489</sup> Thus the teraphim are "the decaying ones", "the vile things".<sup>490</sup> There is a difficulty with this etymology. These words are late and there is no guarantee that they are not themselves derived from teraphim and have received the notion of obscenity from the post-biblical interpretation of teraphim, the original meaning of which had long since been lost. They can in consequence provide no independent testimony to a Semitic root *trp*.<sup>491</sup>

Although the verb *tarifa* is found in Arabic, "to live in opulence, luxury",<sup>492</sup> this root is not attested in old South Arabic inscriptions.

If we examine the inscriptions from the period contemporaneous with the Hebrews, there does not seem to be any such root. A study of the Ras-Shamra texts has led one scholar to believe he had found evidence of the word *trp* in a Ugaritic text. This word he translates by "Teraphim".<sup>493</sup> But many difficulties arise. Briefly, the root may be *trp*, "to sag",<sup>494</sup> or possibly *rpy*.<sup>495</sup> In any case the form is so problematic that no case can be safely made for teraphim.

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sinking of the heavenly bodies into the underworld. Teraphim refers to those who have sunk down to or disappeared into the underworld. See Burney (1970) 421.

<sup>485</sup> Hoffner (1968) 62.

<sup>486</sup> Cited by Moore (19) 282.

<sup>487</sup> Hoffner (1968) 62.

<sup>488</sup> Toreph, tarputh and their cognates which are found in Hebrew in the Targumim. For reference see Hoffner (1967) 234, footnote 23.

<sup>489</sup> The root is used particularly in the intransitive *hiph'il* where its meaning is "to rot, to decay, to become weak". See Labuschagne (1966) 115, footnote 4.

<sup>490</sup> Albright (1962) 311.

<sup>491</sup> Hoffner (1967) 234.

<sup>492</sup> Cited by Hoffner (1967) 234.

<sup>493</sup> See Albright (1941) 39. The Ugaritic text in question is KTU 1.5, I, 1. 4: *ttkh . trp . smm . krs.*

<sup>494</sup> Albright (1941) 40. See Emerton (1978) 73-77: "the skies will be hot"; de Moor (1987) 70: "the heaven came loose".

<sup>495</sup> WUS, 296, no. 2531: "schwach niedersinken".

### 5.3.2 A non-Semitic origin

A Hittite origin for the teraphim has been suggested. Study of Hittite texts has shown the occurrence of a word *tarpis* used to define the Babylonian word, *shēdu*. Like *shēdu*, the Hittite *tarpis* has the double meaning of "protective deity" or of "evil spirit", "demon".<sup>496</sup>

Is this meaning appropriate for the Hebrew word *teraphim*? It may be, as the *teraphim* were used to make inquiries of chthonian deities (cf. the parallel of the *teraphim* with *'ôb* and *yidde'ônî* in 1 Sam 28: 3-9; Isa 8:19; 19:3).<sup>497</sup> Although the Hittite texts from Boghazköy are "roughly contemporaneous with the Hebrew patriarchs",<sup>498</sup> I have some doubt about the degree of influence Hittite culture had upon southern Palestine: very little evidence is found, especially where such a mantic/cultic device is concerned. I am disposed to accept the chthonic aspect of the *teraphim*, more because of their association with the *'ôb* (and possibly an ancestor-worship cult), than because of any Hittite origin. In any case we still do not know how the *teraphim* were consulted, as even the basic question of their shape and size has not been solved yet. I now turn to the texts of the Old Testament in which the *teraphim* are used for divination.

### 5.3 *The Teraphim as a mantic device in Old Testament texts*

I shall examine those texts in which the *teraphim* appear to be oracle givers/mantic devices:

#### 5.3.1 2 Kings 23:24

Moreover Josi'ah put away the médiums (hā'obôt) and the wizards (hayyiddé'ônîm) and the *teraphim* (hatterâpîm) and the idols (haggillulîm).

The *teraphim* is associated with the *'ôb*, the *yidde'ônî* and the *gillulîm*. We should probably conclude that they are grouped together because of the similarity of their natures, as most scholars have assumed.<sup>499</sup> The *teraphim* are somehow connected to the underworld but the text gives no details of shape, size, general appearance and instructions as to how they were used. Are we to understand that they are used to call up a spirit as the *'ôb* was? This seems to be the most likely option.

<sup>496</sup> Hoffner (1967) 236.

<sup>497</sup> See Hoffner (1967) 237 and (1968) 66f.

<sup>498</sup> Hoffner (1968) 67.

<sup>499</sup> De Waard (1977) 4.

## 5.3.2 1 Sam 15:23

... For rebellion is as the sin of divination (qesem), and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry (tērāpîm).

In this text, Samuel, denouncing Saul's disobedience after the battle against the Amalekites, seems to class his unauthorized sacrifice with certain practices, especially divination. Qesem is in parallel with tērāpîm thus establishing teraphim as a (mechanical)<sup>500</sup> mantic device.<sup>501</sup>

## 5.3.3 Judges 17:5 and Hos 3:4

These two texts throw light on the teraphim for they are directly connected with the cult of Yahweh.

Judges 17:5:

And the man Micah had a shrine, and he made (ya'aš) an ephod and teraphim, and installed one of his sons, who became his priest.

Here the teraphim is parallel with ephod.<sup>502</sup> Both are manufactured.<sup>503</sup> These two objects appear to be the elements which are essential to every shrine. From the story of Micah and the wandering Levite we know that these objects were used "to inquire of God" (18:5).<sup>504</sup> Whether they were used in combination or separately is not mentioned and is open to speculation. The fact that we find the teraphim in a private shrine, (Micah's), and later in the shrine of a whole tribe, (the Danites': Judges 18:19-20), suggests that its use was quite legitimate.

Hos 3:4:

For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim.

The prophet Hosea envisages depriving Israel of these cultic objects as part of a period of discipline. The Greek text of the LXX is particularly interesting as it renders teraphim by dēla, "lots". This translation suggests 'ôrîm and "may be due not to a different Hebrew text but to a desire to avoid mentioning this repugnant object".<sup>505</sup> Against that

<sup>500</sup> See qōsēm qěsāmîm, chapter 2.

<sup>501</sup> Against Smith (1904) 129, who thinks that the mention of the teraphim is incorrect, and follows Symmachus.

<sup>502</sup> See Burney (1970) 421; Gray (1967) 364.

<sup>503</sup> 'âsâh may denote this meaning. See KBL 740.

<sup>504</sup> According to Burney (1970) 421, the teraphim were used as oracle-givers. On this line of thought see Hoffmann and Gressman (1922) 75-137.

<sup>505</sup> Ackroyd (1950/1951) 379, footnote 8.

opinion I think that the teraphim here are a legitimate method of inquiry to be found in the cultus.<sup>506</sup> The fact that, as a punishment, Israel is deprived of their use is sufficient demonstration. Perhaps the consultation of the teraphim does not involve the drawing of lots, but we may retain the basic idea that they are a method of inquiring from the divinity. 1 Sam 15:23 and Hos 3:4 may, however, suggest a consultation involving some sort of mechanical manipulation.

#### 5.3.4 Zech 10:2

For the teraphim utter nonsense, and the diviners (qôsêmîm) see lies;  
the dreamers tell false dreams,  
and give empty consolation.

In this text the teraphim are condemned along with qôsêmîm and the interpreters of dreams. Instead of the word teraphim being listed in a text with other similar devices, it seems here that the three terms denote different categories. This observation does not necessarily contradict the fact that the teraphim have something in common with qsm,<sup>507</sup> and that both devices somehow work "mechanically", but the technique involved, whatever it is, implies a very different skill. Furthermore it is notable that in this passage the teraphim represent a person or a medium who expresses himself/herself through an object, probably very similar to the 'ôb, through which an oracle is given. It is tempting to think that the spirits of the dead (invoked and consulted) are meant here. In that case we have a triple condemnation, encompassing most of the divinatory methods: evocation of the spirits of the dead, divination by lots, and divination by dream interpretation.

#### 5.3.5 Ezek 21:21 (Engl.)

This text is considered last because it concerns an alleged form of Babylonian divination:

For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination (qesem); he shakes the arrows, he consults the teraphim (ša'al battérâpîm), he looks at the liver.

<sup>506</sup> Harper (1905) 221:

These (the ephod and the teraphim) represent means of discovery of the divine will and were used in worship.

<sup>507</sup> Against this opinion, see Mitchell, Smith, Brewer (1912) who think that the teraphim "were idols and were probably made to the resemblance of human beings." The LXX reads : "to inquire of the graven images" (ererôtësai en tois glyptois).

Nobody would dispute that the teraphim is used here as a mode of inquiry of the will of God, considering that the verb *qsm* is involved.<sup>508</sup> However, we are faced again with the problem of how the inquiry was made. It is a difficult question as it is possible to render the expression either by "enquire of" (the teraphim)<sup>509</sup> or "inquire through".<sup>510</sup> In the latter case the teraphim will be the medium rather than the source of the response.<sup>511</sup> But even if the consultation of the teraphim is perceived as a Babylonian divinatory device, it appears that:

- People were familiar enough with it to be able to understand what the king was doing.
- The teraphim might be a person/medium.

### 5.3.6 Note on 1 Sam 19:11–17 and Gen 31

With a view to the qualities which seem to constitute the teraphim, i.e. that they are the medium through which the will of God is consulted, I wonder whether such texts as 1 Sam 19 and Gen 31 which *a priori* do not contain any reference to divination should not be re-examined.

Gen 31: Much has been written on this text but three main trends of interpretation can be discerned:

- The teraphim are household gods.<sup>512</sup>
- They are figurines of the fertility goddess.<sup>513</sup>
- Whatever they are, they may have given a right of possession of property, as did the *ilani* at Nuzi.<sup>514</sup>

Although the last theory appears to be the most probable, it would not be contradictory to assume that the teraphim stolen by Rachel are the oracular mediums owned privately by families or clans: the same upset would have been caused if these were linked to property rights.

1 Sam 19:11–17: when Michal wished to conceal David's flight, "she took an image (*tērāpîm*) and laid it on the bed and put a pillow of goat's hair at its head, and covered it with clothes" (v. 13).

<sup>508</sup> Cooke (1936) 232; Zimmerli (1979) 444.

<sup>509</sup> Judg 1:1; 1 Sam 22:10, 13, 15.

<sup>510</sup> Cf. Num 27:21; 1 Sam 28:8.

<sup>511</sup> Cooke (1936) 233.

<sup>512</sup> Skinner (1910) 396.

<sup>513</sup> Albright (1962) 237.

<sup>514</sup> DRAFFKORN (1957) 127.

The text does not make clear whether Michal stood them by David's bed to alarm Saul's men,<sup>515</sup> or whether she put them in the bed to simulate David's figure.<sup>516</sup> However, the shape appears to be important. The data again does not contradict the fact that they were oracle-givers. If they were beside the bed, it may have looked as if David was consulting them and thus should not be disturbed. If they were in the bed, their purpose was to give the impression of David's shape,<sup>517</sup> and what they were made of was irrelevant.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

From the study of the texts in which the word *teraphim* occurs it appears that:

- They are used as a mantic device.
- They might be connected with the cult of the dead, and more precisely with the invocation of the spirits of the dead.
- They are the medium of invocation of spirits of the dead and therefore an oracle-giver.

Some questions are still left open, such as their general appearance, the most important being the *modus operandi* of the consultation of the *teraphim*.

The *teraphim* were used by the Israelites cultically in the period of the Judges along with other devices inherited from the pre-Israelite past. They were condemned in the historical books. Hosea the prophet predicted that their use would cease, indicating that they were in use in the eighth century B.C. down to at least the time of Ezekiel and Zechariah, when the *teraphim* are condemned as a source of false predictions: Yahweh is the only true source of revelation.

<sup>515</sup> Ackroyd (1950/1951) 378 translates "she placed the *teraphim* by his bedside" (*pel-hammitṭâ*), following Barnes (1928/1929) 177f., cited by Ackroyd, footnote 4.

<sup>516</sup> This reading is suggested by the Hebrew variant *'al-hammitṭâ*; cf. Smith (1931) 31-36.

<sup>517</sup> For various interpretations of this passage see de Waard (1977) 5f.

## APPENDIX ONE

### THE MAGICAL ELEMENTS IN THE TREATMENT OF DISEASES

#### 1.0 *Introduction*

Among primitive races, disease was either regarded as the result of hostile magic gaining a hold upon a person, or else its incidence was ascribed to a violation of taboo. In either case a background of magic . . . is presupposed.<sup>1</sup>

This opinion may be applied to some extent to the Old Testament and the Northwest Semitic/Syrian world where the causes of diseases are sometimes directly ascribed to demons of one kind or another. I shall consider firstly the etiology of diseases as it was understood by the Old Testament and the Northwest Semitic/Syrian literature and, secondly, I shall try to assess the traces of magical mentality and methods used in the treatment of illnesses.

#### 1.1 *The etiology of disease*

Illness is believed to come from either "natural" or "supernatural" causes.

1.1.1 I shall not elaborate on the natural causes. They were obviously acknowledged by the Old Testament writers.<sup>2</sup> A few examples will suffice.<sup>3</sup> Where accidents occur, as several texts show, no one is held responsible. There is the case of Mephibosheth who became lame because his nurse dropped him (2 Sam 4:4); also Ahaziah was said to have fallen through the lattice in his upper chamber (2 Kings 1:2). Mention must be made of a case of "rational etiology" (1 Sam 25:37).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thompson (1908) 96; Harrison (1962-1976) 347.

<sup>2</sup> As for the rest of the Northwest Semitic literature, and in particular in Ugarit, we do not possess enough data to be positive. I can only suggest that it is possible. In the story of Keret's illness part of the passage which could enlighten us is missing; we know nothing about how the disease started.

<sup>3</sup> For further references and development of this question see Lods (1925) 182f.; Gelin (1928-1979) 963f.

<sup>4</sup> Lods (1925) 183.

There was an awareness of blindness, as a result of old age (e.g. Gen 27:1; 1 Sam 3:2) and of epidemic (1 Sam 6 acknowledges this possibility).

However the general mentality of the people tends to ignore the secondary causes.

### 1.1.2 Supernatural causes

These can be of different sorts, and were attributed to the intervention of God, or a demon, or an ill-purposed human being.

1.1.2.1 Sickness is understood to be sent by God as a punishment for transgression or as an expression of his wrath (e.g. Exod 4:11; Deut 32:39).<sup>5</sup>

The intervention of Yahweh was conceived, especially in older times, as something very concrete and rather brutal. Leprosy for instance (Exod 4:6; Num 12:9–10) and tumours are sent at his will (1 Sam 5:6).

In this category we find that God delegates his power to a whole series of intermediaries: the “angel” who strikes all of the Egyptian first-born children (Exod 12:12), the Satan, allowed to strike Job with “loathsome sores” (Job 2:7) and “the evil spirit sent by the Lord” to torment Saul (1 Sam 16:14). The belief that one is “struck by God’s hand” (Job 19:21; 16:12f.) is expressed in the Psalms (39:11–12; 78:49).

1.1.2.2 Sickness is used by Yahweh alone or by his ambassadors for “educational” purposes; sickness is also used as a redemptive tool.<sup>6</sup>

1.1.2.3 Apart from the spirits delegated and sent by Yahweh<sup>7</sup> to bring diseases on the people or the individual, there are a number of “personifications” of diseases. They are described as coming up from Sheol (Hos 13:14) or as “the first-born of death” which consume Job’s limbs (Job 18:13). I should also mention, in Ps 91:5–6, the possible names of demons/plagues,<sup>8</sup> in particular deber, “pestilence”<sup>9</sup> and qeteb, “destruction”.

<sup>5</sup> Harrison (1962–1976) 848.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Deut 28:22; Lev 26:16.

<sup>8</sup> Caquot (1956) 53–68.

<sup>9</sup> See Habakkuk 3:5, where deber is described as going before Yahweh.

We also find demons named in Isa 13:21; 34:14.<sup>10</sup> One of them is the she-demon, Lilith.<sup>11</sup> Flies were also regarded as demons that certain gods could inflict upon people<sup>12</sup> (or could remove from people), hence the title Baal-Zebub, the Lord of the flies, mentioned in 2 Kings 1:2–6.<sup>13</sup>

In Ugarit too it appears that the people were afraid of evil spirits and demons threatening their health, sanity and general well-being.<sup>14</sup> KTU 1.82 is an incantation against various evil-spirits.

1.1.2.4 Illness may also result from men or women who are able to use magical means like the women in Ezek 13:17f., who may have used "correspondence" magic;<sup>15</sup> or men of God<sup>16</sup> as in 2 Kings 5:27 who can, by the power of God's word, literally transmit leprosy from one person to another.

Curses<sup>17</sup> can be used to provoke and prolong sickness. David in 2 Sam 3:29, by pronouncing such a curse, condemns the house of Joab to suffer various ailments. The Psalms too contain curses whose specific aim is to bring ill-health upon one's enemies:

Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see;  
and make their loins tremble continually.<sup>18</sup>

Job boasts that he never uses this means:

I have not let my mouth sin by asking for his life with a curse.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.2 *Traces of magical practices in the treatment of sickness*

1.2.1 In the treatment of diseases a special place must be given to propitiatory actions/rites. We find prayers to the gods already in Ugaritic

<sup>10</sup> Lilith for instance.

<sup>11</sup> Lilith is mentioned in Is 34:14.

<sup>12</sup> Lods (1925) 185; Gelin (1928–1979) 965.

<sup>13</sup> I cannot help feeling that there is some common sense in identifying the flies with demons. As medical research shows, flies are carriers of various diseases and fevers; also on a more subjective level as anyone who has ever lived in hot countries would testify it is surely reasonable to identify flies with demons as flies can be demons!

<sup>14</sup> De Moor (1987) 175, and footnote 1.

<sup>15</sup> See this passage discussed in chapter 2 under *nabi*.

<sup>16</sup> See in chapter 2, 'īs 'ēlōhîm, where this aspect of his function as healer is discussed.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 3. I should mention here that a benediction can be pronounced to annihilate a curse: 2 Sam 21:3.

<sup>18</sup> Ps 69:23; see also Ps 109:8–9.13.17–20.

<sup>19</sup> Job 31:30.

literature; in fact most of the incantations sometimes used in rituals were believed to exorcise the sickness, that is, the demon or evil spirit associated with sickness. This is probably the case of the above-mentioned incantation KTU 1.82. Here the prayer is aimed at Baal who is expected "to smite Tunnanu".<sup>20</sup>

In the Old Testament there are prayers to God in order to be healed:

Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed;<sup>21</sup>  
 The Lord kills and brings to life;  
 he brings down to Sheol and raises up.<sup>22</sup>

This role of God as a healer is perhaps best preserved in the Psalms, in particular Psalm 6. Attention should be directed to verse 9 where the Psalmist changes rather quickly from his complaint and description of various ailments to his deliverance. The basis of his assurance<sup>23</sup> may be a ceremony of expiation or an oracle delivered by the priest. Similarly in 1 Sam 6:2-9, it can be inferred that the remedy to be used was obtained through oracular consultation (if Yahweh is responsible, he knows how to heal it).

### 1.2.2 Magical transfer of disease

#### 1.2.2.1 In Ugaritic literature

Ugaritic literature provides us with an interesting passage: KTU 1.16 III, 6<sup>24</sup> where El, the supreme deity of the Ugaritic pantheon, is said to resort to magic in order to cure Keret. He fashions an image of loam and despatches a woman called Sha'taqat to the ailing monarch. Should we see in this incident "the common practice of envoutement, whereby the figure of a sick man is made out of mud, clay, mould or wax in order to transfer the malady to it? Accordingly, it is an image of Keret himself that El here fashions, and Sha'taqat is simply the (divine) witch who is commissioned to perform the magical rites".<sup>25</sup>

#### 1.2.2.2 In the Old Testament

Both prophets and priests are known to heal through what seems to be a symbolic transfer of a vital force to a sick person or a dead body,

<sup>20</sup> De Moor (1987) 175.

<sup>21</sup> Jer 17:14; 1 Kings 8:38.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Sam 2:6.

<sup>23</sup> Mowinckel, cited by Gelin (1928-1979) 966; see also Ps 28:6; 31:20; 118.

<sup>24</sup> See chapter 2, under *ḥārāšim*.

<sup>25</sup> Gaster (1947) 287.

or through a transfer from the person to an animal, a liquid or a manufactured representation.

In 2 Kings 4:29–37<sup>26</sup> the man of God stretches himself on a dead boy. It has been suggested that his purpose in performing such an action is to place the parts of his body through which “his supernatural power” might best exert itself in contact with the parts through which the *nepesh* is supposed to leave the body; this is done in order to force it to come back.<sup>27</sup> The *nepesh* eventually obeys; life is restored to the boy.<sup>28</sup> Without elaborating too much, it is possible that the contact with a “holy man”, himself a channel of God’s power, suffices to restore health or life. He transfers his life-force by symbolic “contagion” to a person who needs it.<sup>29</sup>

In 2 Kings 5:10–14:31, which recounts the story of Naaman, the leper cured by bathing in the waters of the river Jordan, the disease is transferred to the waters<sup>30</sup> and disposed of.

Two texts are particularly relevant concerning the transfer of the disease to objects. In 1 Sam 6 the Philistines plagued with epidemics consult their diviners who suggest propitiatory actions (sending back the ark with presents to its original owners) and magical rites. These consist of the making of objects representing the tumours which afflicted them along with representations of the mice which also plagued them. This last ritual seems to be an instance of correspondence magic: the illness is identified and concretely represented and then expelled in an attempt to be rid of it.<sup>31</sup>

Similar in purpose, in Num 21:4–9, is the story of the invasion of poisonous snakes which so devastated the people of Israel that Moses intervened on their behalf and made a bronze serpent after consulting Yahweh. To be healed from the burning bite, the people were to look at the statue. This could be another case of correspondence magic where a representation of the danger or of the disease helps in some way to exorcise it. Then there is a symbolic transfer of the disease through eye contact with the snake statue.

<sup>26</sup> Parallel to 1 Kings 17:21 which belongs to the Elijah cycle. 2 Kings 4:29–37 has been treated under “Rhabdomancy”, chapter 4.

<sup>27</sup> Lods (1925) 188f.

<sup>28</sup> For an example of a “resurrection” resulting from contact between a dead person and the bones of a holy man, see 2 Kings 13:21.

<sup>29</sup> This passage has already been examined under *nabi*, chapter 2, and referred to in “Hydromancy”, chapter 4.

<sup>30</sup> Lods (1927) 64; see “Hydromancy”, chapter 4 for the therapeutic effect of water.

<sup>31</sup> Lods (1925) 190.

To conclude this section I must consider the case of a transfer of sickness to an animal. This is illustrated by the rituals for cleansing the lepers in Lev 14:1–8, 49–53.<sup>32</sup> The details of the rituals are complex and involve two birds.<sup>33</sup> One, which is sacrificed, might represent “the spirit of leprosy”.<sup>34</sup> The second bird is released into the air, presumably taking the disease with it.

### 1.3 *Conclusion*

The magical principle behind the treatment of diseases can be identified as that of correspondence or symbolic magic, the more important effect being the transfer of the illness into a concrete thing, liquid, person or animal through various rituals. We should also note that the means used to heal a person can be used to harm him, showing that the forces used in rituals are fundamentally neutral.

<sup>32</sup> This reading of a ritual used to get rid of leprosy is difficult to interpret. See Snaith (1967) 99ff.

<sup>33</sup> Zech 5:5–11; Lev 16:21–22.

<sup>34</sup> Lods (1925) 191.

## APPENDIX TWO

### THE MAGICAL ELEMENT IN WARFARE\*

#### 2.0 *Introduction*

War is very much part of life in ancient Israel.<sup>1</sup> So much so that it is part of its religious institutions as the "holy war" suggests.<sup>2</sup>

The basic idea underlying the "holy war" is that Yahweh is "Lord of Hosts" in the double sense that he commanded both the pleroma of non-human powers and the citizen army of Israel in its just fight for liberation from Canaanite, Egyptian, Transjordanian and Philistine overlords.<sup>3</sup> Therefore war is begun at the command of the god, or at least with his approval, manifested by omens; it is also accompanied by sacrifices and conducted with the help of the god who ensures victory, for which he is thanked with an offering of a part of the booty.<sup>4</sup> The link between the divine warrior and his people is made through a covenant binding the entire Israelite people as a tribally articulated community to its Lord.

We see that in a situation such as this the commander of the army has an important responsibility to keep himself and his men consecrated for Yahweh.

Warfare can be considered under three headings: first preparatory rituals before battle; second the battle itself, and third the concluding rites, once the battle is over. In each part, traces of magic and divination can be found, practices which can sometimes be related to the extra-biblical texts of Northwest Semitic/Syriac literature.

\* This appendix appeared in slightly different form in *The Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* (1990).

<sup>1</sup> For a thorough analysis of warfare, see de Vaux (1961) part III.

<sup>2</sup> The problem of the ideology and practice of the holy war is beyond the scope of this monograph. For a summary of the main theories regarding this topic, see de Pur (1981) 5–38 (especially his comprehensive bibliography 39–49), and Gottwald (1976) 942–44, who offers a brief but comprehensive bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> Gottwald, *op. cit.* 943.

<sup>4</sup> de Vaux, *op. cit.* 258.

2.1 *Preparatory rituals before battle: consultation and ritual protection*

2.1.1 Before embarking on war, leaders generally made efforts to gain religious approval. Therefore inquiries were made and the god's will ascertained.<sup>5</sup> The consultation was sometimes performed before the ark as Judg 20:27–28<sup>6</sup> and 1 Sam 14:18<sup>7</sup> show, before a priest wearing the ephod with urim and thummim (1 Sam 14:18;<sup>8</sup> 1 Sam 28:6; 1 Sam 30:7);<sup>9</sup> through a prophet (e.g. Micaiah in 1 Kings 22:15),<sup>10</sup> by means of dreams (Gideon, Judges 7:13),<sup>11</sup> or even through a familiar spirit (the mistress of the 'ôb, 1 Sam 28:7).<sup>12</sup>

According to the narrative these consultations were made from "early times" down to the reign of King Zedekiah<sup>13</sup> (Jer 21:1; 37:7.17; 38:14) and that of King Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 20:3) during the war against the Edomites.<sup>14</sup> Their format is given by 1 Kings 22:5–6–2 Chron 18:4–5:<sup>15</sup>

– An introductory line, for instance:

And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Inquire (drs) first for the word of the Lord.

– The question:

Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I forbear?

– Introduction to the oracular answer:

And they said.

– The oracle proper:

Go up; for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.

<sup>5</sup> See Isa 30:2; 31:1 who condemns the alliance with the Egyptians made without consulting the Lord. On oracular inquiries in a military setting, see Christensen (1975) 19. It may be that the oracles against foreign nations acted as warning: see Geyer (1986) 129ff.

<sup>6</sup> This passage is analysed under the "Ark of Meeting", chapter 4.

<sup>7</sup> Hebrew only; see this passage treated under "Urim and Thummim", chapter 4.

<sup>8</sup> LXX only.

<sup>9</sup> The two last texts have been mentioned in "Urim and Thummim".

<sup>10</sup> See nabi<sup>9</sup>, chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> See "Dreams", chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> See "Necromancy", chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> 586–570 B.C.

<sup>14</sup> The Books of the Chronicles date approximately from 400 to 200 B.C.

<sup>15</sup> Garcia de la Fuente (1971) 279. This format is only found in the passage cited above (1 Kings 22:5–6) and in 1 Kings 22:15–II Chr 18:14.

2.1.2 Once the deity is consulted and the need to engage in warfare has been expressed, the next step is to protect the army. At the individual level ritual cleanliness is required; as a group they have to be bound together by various rites.

– Ritual cleanliness:

The warriors had to be in a state of ritual cleanliness,<sup>16</sup> i.e. “made holy” (Josh 3:5). This involves washing of their clothes and abstaining from sex. The warriors had to condition themselves ritually for the presence of God (God is felt and understood to be present in the ark). This presence protects them. That soldiers abstain from sex is made clear in 1 Sam 21:5 where David says:

Of a truth women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition.<sup>17</sup>

It is clear from the Pentateuchal legislation that the sexual act renders one unfit for any sacred ceremony until the proper purification has been undergone.<sup>18</sup>

In a sacred war the men have to be ritually clean when they face their God. Any breach of this state would jeopardize military operations. As well as being bound to the deity through ritual cleanliness, the warriors have “bonded” with their chief commander. This can be achieved through sacrifice: in 1 Sam 11:5–11 Saul, receiving the news that Nahash the Ammonite had besieged Jerusalem, “took a yoke of oxen, and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, ‘Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!’”

The usual context is that of cutting up a sacrificial victim.<sup>19</sup> But whether it is threat or sacrifice, signs of a “magical” type of mentality can be perceived. What was done to the oxen will similarly be done to the people if they do not obey. Their response is immediate:

The dread of the Lord fell upon the people, and they came out as one man,

thus ensuring the victory against the Ammonites.

– Magical protection of the warriors:

<sup>16</sup> de Vaux, *op. cit.* 258. In Ugaritic literature it is tempting to note the attitude of Anat who had herself made up by her attendants before battle (KTU 1:3; II:1ff.).

<sup>17</sup> See also 2 Sam 11:11 where Uriah does not visit his wife while on campaign.

<sup>18</sup> Smith (1904) 198.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 78.

The protection required by the soldiers was a physical protection which included the anointing of protective weapons:

Ye mountains of Gilbo'a,  
let there be no dew or rain upon you,  
nor upsurging of the deep!  
For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,  
the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil (2 Sam 1:21).

It has been thought that what David is lamenting is the shield of Saul left to rust or rot in the field:<sup>20</sup> I think however that the death of Saul is attributed in this text to the fact that Saul's shield is not anointed: Saul had no proper protection.

Indeed it is conceivable that in preparation for war, the shields of the warriors were consecrated by anointing.<sup>21</sup>

Arise, O princes,  
oil the shield (Isa 21:5).

Another more important ceremony which is part of the preparatory rites of war is the ritual cursing of the enemy.<sup>22</sup> One famous example of this is found in Num 22:5–6. The Israelites after their victory over the Amorites, are settled on the border of Moab and fill Balak, king of Moab with fear. The Moabites prepare for battle but in order to ensure their victory Balak hires a foreigner whose name is Balaam, famous for the efficiency of his cursings and blessings, to come and formally curse Israel before the war begins:

Come now, curse this people for me,  
since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I shall  
be able to defeat them and drive them from the land;  
for I know that he whom you bless is blessed,  
and he whom you curse is cursed.

We also come across this practice in Num 21:29 and in 1 Sam 17:43f. (before the fight between David and Goliath).

Although cursing is a formidable weapon it is possible to preserve oneself from it and to return it. Mic 5:4–5 might be an example of countering a magical ritual:<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 261.

<sup>21</sup> Sziksza (1969/1976) 139; Lods (1927) 62.

<sup>22</sup> On "Curse" and its implications see Appendix 3.

<sup>23</sup> Cathcart (1978) 48; Saracino (1983) 267f.

And this will be protection from the Assyrian:  
 If he comes into our land,  
 if he treads in our castles,  
 then we will raise against him seven shepherds,  
 eight chiefs of men;  
 and they will rule the land of Assyria with the sword,  
 the land of Nimrod with the bare blade.  
 And they will save us from the Assyrian,  
 if he comes into our land,  
 if he treads in our country.<sup>24</sup>

There are a number of incantatory elements in these two verses,<sup>25</sup> and we must keep in mind the possibility that this text refers to the curses being sent back to the Assyrians.

## 2.2 *Magical practices during wartime*

These magical practices have two goals:

- Determining the right route by which to attack or await the enemy.
- Using coercion over events in order to ensure victory.

The first goal deals more with divination than magic and I refer to the various consultations cited in the previous chapter. To this should be added Ezek 21:21 where King Nebuchadrezzar uses a three-fold method of divination to decide which road to take.<sup>26</sup> I shall now elaborate on the magical means used to secure the victory of the Israelites; they express their place in the cosmos, manifest their control of the situation.

Already in Ugaritic literature KTU 1.119 introduces a ritual designed "to deliver" the city of Ugarit from any enemy laying siege. A complicated ritual and several sacrifices (l. 1–25) follow the incantation-prayer:

1.26 When a strong one attacks your gate,  
 a warrior your walls,  
 raise your eyes to Ba'alu (saying):  
 O Ba'alu, please chase away the strong one from our gate,

<sup>24</sup> Translation by Cathcart (1978) 39.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance the sequence  $x/x + 1$ .

<sup>26</sup> See this text under "Rhabdomancy", "Hepatoscopy" and "Teraphim", in chapter 4.

the warrior from our wall!  
 The bull, O Ba'alu we shall consecrate, . . .  
 the vows to Ba'alu we shall fulfil, . . .  
 1.34 then Ba'alu will listen to your prayer.  
 He will chase away the strong one from your gate,  
 the warrior from your walls.<sup>27</sup>

The rituals used among the Israelites are described in detail in two texts: 2 Kings 13<sup>28</sup> and Josh 6. In the latter text the battle of Jericho presents a number of interesting features. The Lord laid down his instructions for the battle. I shall briefly recall the details:

- v.3 You shall march around the city, all  
 the men of war going around the city once.  
 Thus shall you do for six days.
- v.4 And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams'  
 horns (teruah) before the ark;  
 and on the seventh day you shall march around the city  
 seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets.
- v.5 And when they make a long blast with the rams' horn,  
 as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all  
 the people shall shout with a great shout; and the walls  
 of the city will fall down flat.

The following magico-ritualistic features can be observed:

- The “circling” of the city, recalling the making of the magical circle, thereby isolating their enemies.
- The use of the number seven (seven priests; seven days; seven times) is considered potent in magic. It was also used in incantations.<sup>29</sup>
- The sequence six/seven =  $x/x + 1$  is also found in incantations.<sup>30</sup>
- The use of the teruah: music was used sometimes to ward off evil spirits.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Translation by de Moor (1987) 173f.; see also Saracino (1983) 263ff. Similarly in the Mesha stele the belief that Chemosh can deliver Mesha is expressed in l. 4 (see Gibson (1971) 75: “He delivered me from all assault”; see also in l. 4b: “He (Chemosh) let me see my desire upon all my adversaries”.

<sup>28</sup> See this text under “Rhabdomancy”.

<sup>29</sup> Cathcart (1978) 46.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 45.

<sup>31</sup> Lods (1926) 239–264.

"The people of Israel" are thus performing an incantatory ritual against the city of Jericho: by carrying out an exorcism of the city, the Israelites demonstrate their control over the defences of the city which then falls into their hands.

### 2.3 *After the battle*

Two points must be noted here. First, the practice of the *herem*,<sup>32</sup> or the consecration of things.<sup>33</sup> Destruction of booty is part of the rules laid out for the holy war. It is accompanied by a curse:

Joshua laid an oath upon them at that time,  
saying, "Cursed before the Lord be the man that rises up and  
rebuids this city, Jericho" (Josh 6:26).

The curse in ancient Israel was thought to operate automatically, and was effective on all those associated with the person cursed.

Secondly, the treaty between the victors and their opponents, which usually put an end to the war. The treaties were accompanied by curses to be made effective in case of non-observance. An example of this survives in the Sefire treaty concluded between Barga'ayah and Matiel his vassal, head of the kingdom of Arpad.

It has been suggested that the magical use of the *eidola* of wax, in an organized ritual for the protection of treaties, was aimed at binding Barga'ayah and Matiel.<sup>34</sup> These rituals were described as follows: a wax model, representing a city, was burnt; the wax symbolized the threat of fire to the city of Arpad (to be started by the victors if the treaty was not respected). More wax *eidola* were made in the images of men and women.<sup>35</sup> One of them represented Matiel. In the Old Testament, Deut 28 and Lev 26 present parallels to treaty curses,<sup>36</sup> and give an impressive list of divine threats covering all areas of life.

<sup>32</sup> Brekelmans (1959) 377–83.

<sup>33</sup> BDB 356; the practice of the *herem* is also found in the Mesha stone: Gibson (1971) 75f.

<sup>34</sup> Picard (1961) 18f.:

Le rite magique des *eidola* de cire brûlée, attesté sur trois stèles araméennes de Séfiré vers le milieu du VIII<sup>e</sup> av. notre ère.

<sup>35</sup> ibid, 85, ft. 3. The author suggests that the *eidola* are pairs.

<sup>36</sup> Hillers (1964) 30–42.

#### 2.4 *Conclusion*

The idea of the holy war as an institution at the time of the Judges is now questioned.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless a number of elements show that war was sometimes dedicated to Yahweh. In this context a number of "magical" features can be found:

- The oracular consultation either before the battle (to make sure that one is doing what God intends one to do), or during the battle (in order to choose a strategy).
- The warriors protected themselves and their weapons by special rituals aimed at making them holy, i.e. enabling them to participate in the deity's power. Therefore they had first to send powerful curses towards their enemies, or return curses made by them. They were helped to do this by the accompanying priest or prophet.<sup>38</sup>
- The war was ended with two different curses: the *herem* which was a curse on the city which had fallen to the Israelite forces, and treaties which (using the principle of correspondence between the part and the whole) included various practices designed to bring a multitude of disasters if their terms were not respected.

<sup>37</sup> For a theological evaluation of the holy war, see de Pury (1981) 35–38.

<sup>38</sup> Christensen (1975) 18.

## APPENDIX THREE

### THE MAGICAL ROOTS OF BLESSING AND CURSE

#### 3.0 *Introduction: definition and problem*

In the Ancient Near Eastern world in general, and the Northwest Semitic environment in particular, blessings and curses were a fixed part of the cultus and had a prominent place in everyday life.<sup>1</sup>

A curse or a blessing may be defined as a wish, expressed in words, that evil or good might befall someone.<sup>2</sup> These two activities are closely related: the same people are usually empowered to do both, and the forms given to blessings and curses are frequently parallel.<sup>3</sup>

The character of Semitic thought makes interchange easy between idea, word, and act, and also between mechanical, psychic and verbal force. A curse or a blessing may be regarded now as a spirit, now as a thing, now as a word, but in each case it is charged with symbolic meaning. Or again, it may be regarded as accompanying the material object; its energy has the potential to become kinetic when discharged.<sup>4</sup> Therefore the magical element in the composite act of blessing and cursing is to be found in the word acting as a symbolic link between people and events.<sup>5</sup> It is thought that "blessing and curse share with magic the characteristic of unqualified and irrevocable execution ... There is no time limitation on the working out of a curse".<sup>6</sup>

Also, the power of blessings and curses "has an adhesive or contagious characteristic: anyone blessed of Yahweh is able to transfer blessing (Gen 12:1–3), and a cursed person is a danger to the whole land (1 Sam 14; Josh 7)".<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, "the origins or roots of blessings and curses in magical practice can be seen in their formulations, which are characterized by the features of incantation ("Zaubersprüche"): schematic and

<sup>1</sup> Gevirtz (1961) 140; Harrelson (1962–1976) 446.

<sup>2</sup> Crawley (1908–1921) 367.

<sup>3</sup> Little (1986) 182. For instance Deut 28.

<sup>4</sup> Crawley (1908–1921) 368.

<sup>5</sup> Lefevre (1928–1979) 749.

<sup>6</sup> Brichto (1963) 5. An example of the irrevocability of the blessing is given in Gen 27:35 (the blessing of Jacob).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

rhythmic organization, frequent antithetical parallelism, and repetition to strengthen the force of the utterance".<sup>8</sup> The problem is that it is very difficult in many cases to distinguish between those blessings and curses which belong to the realm of magic (in which the words and actions of the one who blesses or curses are entirely in his control and accomplish his purposes at his bidding) and those which are strictly religious in their understanding and use (where the blessings and curses are thought to have their origin and effect in the power and purpose of the deity). Nevertheless this distinction between a magical world and a religious one is artificial in that the principle of power-laden words, accompanied by gestures and symbolic actions or not, is present in both the magical and the religious world.<sup>9</sup> The difference may perhaps lie in the understanding of the origin of the power. Whether it is believed that the word itself is inherently powerful or whether the power is given by the supreme God or by spirits, the fact remains that there is an acknowledged correspondence between a word and an action.

Three subsections follow:

- The terminology.
- A typology of curses and blessings.
- The instances in which a cursing or a blessing ceremony is enacted. Instances of Northwest Semitic literature will be cited in the course of these subsections.

### 3.1 *Terminology*

The vocabulary connected with blessing and cursing will now be examined. Traces of magical thought will be sought.

3.1.1 The English "curse" renders at one time or another the Biblical Hebrew stem 'ārar, qillēl, 'ālā(h), qābab/nāqab, zā'am, as well as the nouns šebū'ā(h) and *herem*.

- 'ārar and its noun me'ērā(h) is one of the most "powerful absolute curse(s), i.e. it is one which detaches the soul from the

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See Brichto (1963) 4; cf. Harrelson (1962–1976) 446.

community, from the family, the town or the people".<sup>10</sup> The execution of this curse brings destruction and death.<sup>11</sup>

The corresponding Akkadian cognates are *arārum* and *arratum/erretum* respectively.<sup>12</sup> *Arratum* is something that could be loosened, unbound,<sup>13</sup> hence a form of restraint or bond. Accordingly, the stem 'rr connotes "to bind, hem in with obstacles, render powerless to resist",<sup>14</sup> confirming that these spells could not be reversed. The basic meaning of supernatural spell underlies the Hebrew 'ārar in several unambiguous passages.<sup>15</sup>

– 'ālāh and *qillēl* refer to the power of the curse, to the words spoken, and to the effect of the words. 'ālāh is frequently co-ordinated with the noun *šebū'ah*.<sup>16</sup> The etymology of 'ālāh is obscure<sup>17</sup> but its double meaning of "curse" and "oath"<sup>18</sup> are well established. The 'ālāh would be part of an oath (*šebū'ah*), "namely, the sanction(s) or the invocation of the sanction(s)".<sup>19</sup>

It is also present in every *bērît*, "covenant", which by definition is an agreement solemnized by an oath. The power of the word as an independent entity is emphasized. A number of examples of this can be found in Num 5:19–27, where a conditional curse is brought upon the woman accused of adultery, and in Gen 26:28–31, where Isaac, moving to Beer-Sheba, makes a covenant with Abimelech, king of Gerar, so that no harm may befall him or his people. Note also Deut

<sup>10</sup> Pedersen (1926) 451.

<sup>11</sup> In Gen 4:11 Cain's curse ('ārūr) excluded him from the tilled land; it means that every connection with it was thus severed; the cursing of the snake (Gen 3:14) means that it was excluded from the community of animals; in Job 3:3 to be cursed is the same as to perish.

<sup>12</sup> The first scholar to point out the importance of the Akkadian cognates in the understanding of 'ārar is Scharbert (cited by Brichto (1963) 17: "das man gewöhnlich als (durch ein Zauberwort) binden, bannen erklärt, und mit arab 'arrā: 'fortjagen, vertreiben".

<sup>13</sup> CAD vol. 2, 304.

<sup>14</sup> Speiser (1960) 198.

<sup>15</sup> I have already cited Gen 3:14 and 4:11; I should also add here Num 22:6 which expressed the mandate of Balaam, engaged by Balak to immobilize Israel: "Come, cast a spell (imperative form of 'ārar) for me against the people".

<sup>16</sup> Brichto (1963) 22.

<sup>17</sup> Brichto (1963) 15f. cites Scherbert's statement: "Manche Lexikographen stellen das hebr. 'lh mit dem akk. eltu: "Verbindlichkeit", "Haftung" zusammen, jedoch zu unrecht, denn eltu gehört zum stamm a'alu das hebr. 'lh aber zum stam 'lj/w, von dem das arab. 'ala(w): "schwören" abgeleitet ist".

<sup>18</sup> BDB, 46.

<sup>19</sup> Brichto (1963) 25.

29:9–20, the address of Moses to the Israelites in the territory of Moab. The 'ālāh uttered makes the imprecations or sanctions which are pronounced highly dangerous if the covenant is violated.

With qillēl, the etymological interest lies in the fact that the force of the basic stem in virtually all Semitic languages is "to be light, swift".<sup>20</sup> This verb has a wide range of meanings, from verbal abuse to material injury.<sup>21</sup>

Despite this, in a few cases qillēl has the force of malediction, curse: 1 Sam 17:43; 2 Kings 2:24; Deut 23:5 and Josh 24:9.<sup>22</sup> It is worth mentioning here Pedersen's statement: "the curse gnaws the substance of the soul, it threatens to make light the "heavy" soul of him who is full of honour... he who is made "light", so that his soul is emptied of its whole substance, is no better off than the great sinner; the law of life does not act in him".<sup>23</sup>

– Qābab/nāqab can be said to have the connotations of curse from its repeated use in the Balak/Balaam narrative (Num 22:11.17; 23:8.11.13.27), from Job 3:8 in its close association with 'rr, and from Proverbs where it is used as an antonym to berākā (Prov 24:24–25). Zā'am's meaning as curse is also contextual, either parallel to qbb (Num 23:8; Prov 24:24) or to 'rr (Num 23:7).

3.1.2 The most common verb used to express blessing is brk (piel). This term refers to the power inherent in the spoken words, to the words themselves, and to their effect. A clear trace of "magical" blessing is found in Gen 48:14–15, the blessing of Jacob, to whomever he gave it, has a life of its own and cannot be retracted.

### 3.2 *Typology of blessing and curse*

3.2.1 In the typology of blessing found in the Hebrew scriptures a first type is the pronouncement of blessing: it is found in imperative<sup>24</sup> or indicative<sup>25</sup> forms. Both forms reveal the Israelite conception of

<sup>20</sup> BDB, 886.

<sup>21</sup> Brichto (1963) 176.

<sup>22</sup> These passages have been discussed in Brichto (1963) 172ff.

<sup>23</sup> Pedersen (1926) 442.

<sup>24</sup> Gen 1:28; 24:60.

<sup>25</sup> Gen 27:29; 1 Sam 25:33.

the power which is inherent in the spoken word of blessing. The second type may have become more prominent in the later Israelite cultus and it indicates how the power of blessing is inseparably connected with the purpose of the deity.<sup>26</sup>

3.2.2 A typology of curse and related formulae has been put forward by Blank.<sup>27</sup> Although he admits that the "power of the curse originally derived from the effective power of the words which expressed it",<sup>28</sup> Blank separates the curse formula from the spell, the oath and the means employed to neutralize a curse. According to this author the curse occurs in the Bible in three forms:

- I The simple curse formula.
- II The composite curse.
- III Freely composed curses.

Forms I and II are, for the most part, profane wishes. Form III usually has the character of an imprecatory prayer.<sup>29</sup> However, attempts to elaborate a typology of curses are quite artificial. I choose to classify them according to the area of life with which they are concerned.

### 3.3 *The use of curse in various fields of activity*

#### 3.3.1 In war<sup>30</sup>

#### 3.3.2 The use of the oath in legal matters

The oath is a conditional curse and may be used to discover the unknown perpetrator of an offence. It is employed in Judges 17:1f. by the mother of Micah the Ephraimite, against the unidentified thief who took her silver. It obtains a confession from her son.

It is also used to ascertain the guilt of a person suspected of an offence (Num 5:12ff.) where the ceremony consists of symbolically imbibing with the water the words of the curse.<sup>31</sup> The flying scroll

<sup>26</sup> Harrelson (1962–1976) 447; for a different typology:

(i) the blessings given by God (who is the absolute master of every blessing),  
 (ii) the blessings conferred by God through an intermediary. See Ries (1986) 250f.

<sup>27</sup> Blank (1950/51) 73f.; for a typology of treaty-curses, see Hillers (1964) 12ff.

<sup>28</sup> Blank (1950/51) 73f. For examples of each of these forms, see Blank (1950/51) 73–83.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>31</sup> See Blank's commentary (1950/51) 88, and footnote 53.

in the vision of the prophet Zechariah (5:1–4) settles upon the home of the guilty, enters the house and once there consumes timber and stones.

Exod 22:7.10 also suggests that oaths are used to identify the guilty or to determine if the suspect is guilty. Oaths have been incorporated into judicial or religious practice and may have been pronounced at the sanctuary.<sup>32</sup>

God's involvement is as the one who fulfils the conditional curse. The use of curses and blessings in the keeping of the law as in Deut 28 should also be noted.

### 3.3.3 In the cultus

Blessings and curses had a very important place in the religious life from patriarchal times. In the case of Gen 27:1–45 and Deut 33, the blessing was considered to be a power of life and peace to be continued after the death of a tribal leader.<sup>33</sup> Blessings and curses were also part of the festival of covenant renewal held by the confederacy of the twelve tribes of Israel prior to the establishment of the monarchy (Josh 24; Dt 11:26–32; 27–29).

After the establishment of the Jerusalem cultus, the powers of blessing and cursing were centred in the person of the king, the priesthood of the royal cult and the cult prophets. It was in the cultic sphere that the basic understanding of blessing was developed. Yahweh was understood to be the source of all blessings; blessings were given in his name. Similarly, the curses were drawn into the official cultic practices. The old demonic powers continued to be threatening and had to be countered. It was not any longer a matter of finding the right formula. Rather, Yahweh's intervention was sought to break the hold of such powers upon the individual or the community<sup>34</sup> (Ps 41; 58; 59; 141).

<sup>32</sup> Blank (1950/51); Hyatt (1971) 238.

<sup>33</sup> This idea of blessing being an expression of life is found in Ugaritic literature (KTU 1.15, II) where Keret asks Ba'al to give him (?) children:

Surely you will have to bless Kirtu, the nobleman, surely you will have to fortify the gracious lad of Ilu (de Moor (1987) 205).

The same idea is found in the story of Daniel who obtains a blessing from El in order to have progeny. After offering the gods sacrifices for seven days the hero obtains a benediction; his nepeš receives an increase of vital force, npš yh. The term brk is the same as in Hebrew (KTU 1.17, I, 1.35f.).

<sup>34</sup> Harrelson (1962–1976) 447.

### 3.3.4 *Miscellanea*

The cursing of the cities introduced by the "Woe" formula can be found in Isa 29:1; Jer 13:27; Nah 3:1; Zeph 3:1. There is a remarkable example of the cursing of a city in Ugaritic literature, namely KTU 1.19. III, 1.45ff.: Danil curses the three towns which lie nearest to the place of the murder of his son, Aqhat, calling down banishment and blindness on the inhabitants and loss of vegetation on their fields for their share of the guilt (Deut 21; Num 19).

### 3.3.5 *Protection against curses*<sup>35</sup>

There seem to be three ways in which to neutralize a curse. The first method is to destroy symbolically the words which express it (Jer 36:23). The second one is to destroy the source of the curse, i.e. the man who uttered it (2 Sam 16:9; 1 Kings 2:46). The last method (and by far the most effective) is to counteract a curse, i.e. to administer a blessing as an antidote (Judges 17:2; 1 Kings 2:45; 2 Sam 21:1-3; Ex 12:32). The implication is that God's blessing is the most efficacious of all blessings.

### 3.4 *Conclusion*

From the above survey, several features can be isolated regarding the magical roots of cursing and blessing:

- The etymologies of the various terms used to designate curse have a magical connotation when they convey the idea of the symbolic power of the word.
- Care must be taken to distinguish between the degree of strength of curses and blessings. The blessings and curses in the name of the deity are particularly powerful, and probably quite old as well, as the texts from Ugaritic literature tend to show.
- Lastly, I note the particular importance of blessings and curses in war, legal matters and cult, i.e. in domains where "magical" ideas were certainly prominent.

<sup>35</sup> On blessing and curse in the Psalms, see Mowinckel (1967) 44-52.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although at first glance the Old Testament does not provide much evidence of magical practices and divination, a number of conclusions can be reached.

In discussing the role and skills of the diviners, magicians and oracular practitioners, I have noted their prevalence in society, especially during the period before the exile.

Both lay men and women and people who have some part in the cultural life are involved in divinatory and magical activities. Indeed most if not all of the religious leaders and functionaries have had, at one stage or another, recourse to magico-divinatory methods; I would even go so far as to say that they were expected to have the power and the means to ascertain God's will. They generally operated in crisis situations, crises national (war, politics) or personal (disease, private business, the judicial area).

An examination of the techniques and devices used in magic and divination has been fruitful, and useful in throwing light on the basic "magical" mentality which underlies them. I suggested that the hermeneutical principle is cosmological: the world envisaged is marked by the correspondence which exists between heaven and earth.

This world-view seems to be found at the basis of most of the techniques. Signs found in nature correspond to signs found in the human sphere.

The role of the diviner is to seek the sign and interpret it. At the same time one can symbolically control events, through incantatory prayers for instance: these will eventually shape human events. The magician or the diviner understands the established order of the universe in a symbolic way and acts within it. The Old Testament is very much part of the Northwest Semitic / Syrian world.

The condemnation of the magical arts and of divinatory techniques as foreign is most probably a Second Temple reading: that these practices were an integral part of the Ancient Near East is evident, and the condemnations of these practices as foreign only highlight a change in emphasis, i.e. a "narrowing" in perspective. The new "ideology" envisages a new dogma—a "pure" Yahwism, uncontaminated by foreign "harlotries" (Deut 18:9ff). This leads to suspicion and a condemnation of all the magical and divinatory practices that are shared by the people

of the ancient Near East (only a few techniques or practitioners do not have their equivalent in Aramaic, Phoenician or Ugaritic texts), although many traces remained in the Old Testament literature. Eventually the final edition of Old Testament was governed by the intuition that all of the powers of nature have their source in the one God. In this lies the uniqueness of the Old Testament.

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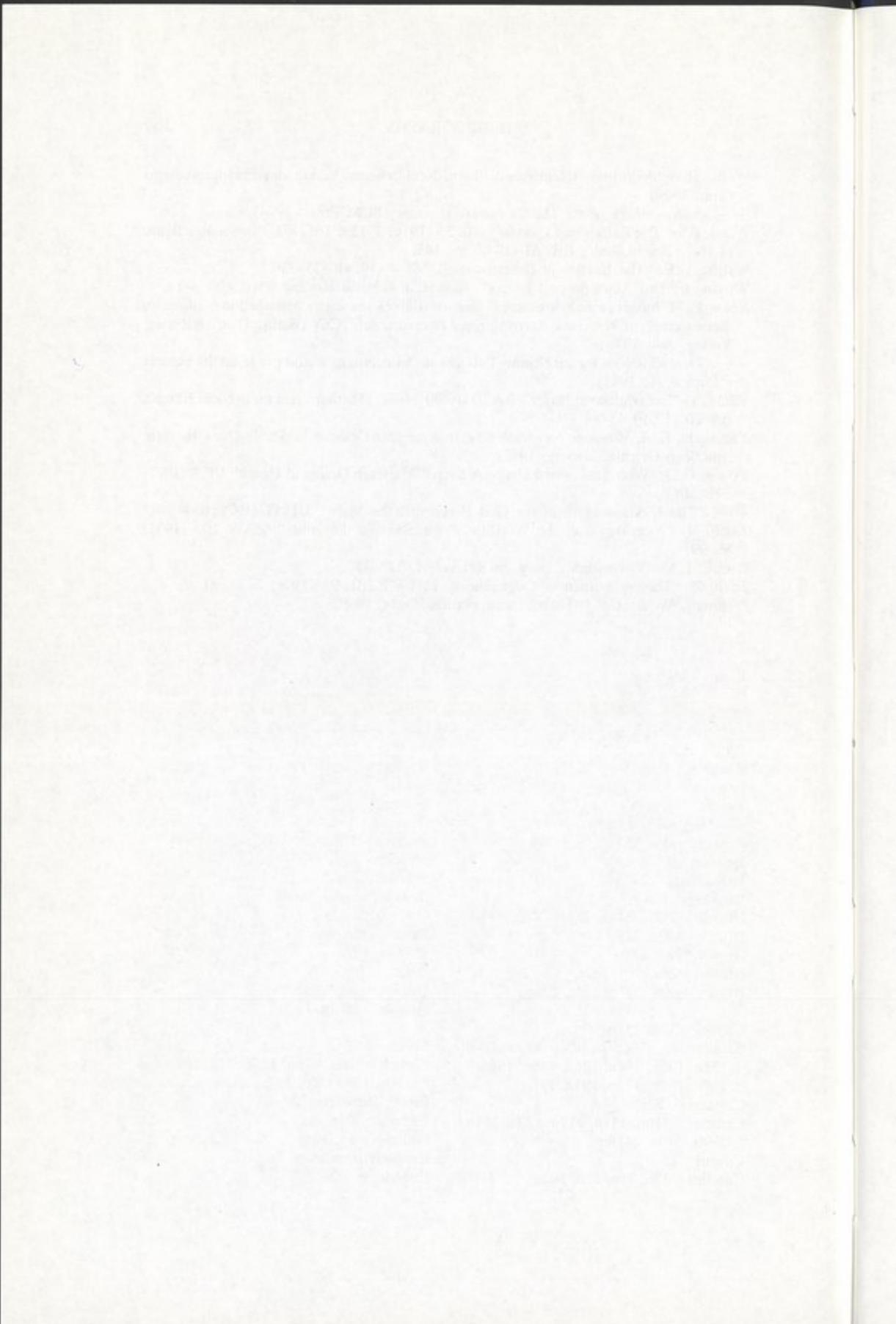
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