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Nissinen, Martti

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Martti Nissinen

Why Prophecy Is (Not) Magic?*

1. Divination, Prophecy, and Magic: Differences and Interfaces

Divination, magic, and prophecy are closely related concepts that nevertheless should not be confused with each other. The purpose of this short essay is to bring some clarity to the use of these three concepts as analytical tools by way of mapping their differences and interfaces. I will first outline my own understanding of the meaning of each concept, and then present a heuristic model, applying it to a specific case, the healing prophets.

Prophecy, according to the widely accepted definition, is transmission of what is believed to be divine knowledge by non-technical, non-inductive means. To be called prophecy, the divine message needs to be transmitted by a person we call a ‘prophet,’ who acts as the mouthpiece of the deity, without using any objects from which the divine knowledge is supposed to be interpreted.¹ In earlier scholarship, divination used to be considered something completely different from prophecy and more related to magic; today, however, it is the general scholarly consensus that prophecy should be viewed as another, yet distinct, form of divination.² Divinatory acts are usually performed in order to

* It is my utmost pleasure to congratulate Christoph Levin, a long-term friend and collaborator of the community of Finnish biblical scholars and a doctor *honoris causa* of the University of Helsinki. The essay published here in his honor repeats some of the contents of my chapter on “Divination,” in Risto Uro et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). I thank Oxford University Press for the permission to republish this content, here recontextualized and *fortgeschrieben*! I would also like to thank Gina Konstantopoulos for her useful comments and for correcting my English.

¹ The classic formulation of this definition is that of Manfred Weippert, *Götterwort in Menschenmund, Studien zur Prophetie in Assyrien, Israel und Juda*, FRLANT 252 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 231–232; cf. my own qualifications in Martti Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 19–23.

² See, e.g., Anne Marie Kitz, “Prophecy as Divination,” *CBQ* 65 (2003): 22–42; Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, “Prophetismus als Divination. Ein Blick auf die keilschriftlichen Quellen,” in *Propheten in Mari, Assyrien und Israel*, ed. Matthias Köckert and Martti Nissinen, FRLANT 201 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 33–53; Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison*, CHANE 56 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 7–11; Esther J. Hamori, *Women’s Divination in Biblical Literature: Prophecy*,

acquire and transmit superhuman knowledge, and this is also the purpose and function of prophecy.

It is necessary, however, to distinguish between different methods of divination. Some divinatory practices are based on cognitive processes related to the systematization of omens recognized in observable objects or phenomena, such as stars (astrology), entrails of sacrificial animals (extispicy), or the flight of birds (augury). These methods are usually called technical, inductive, or artificial. The other type consists of divinatory methods that do not involve omens and observations, but communicate messages believed to be received intuitively, typically in an altered or 'inspired' state of consciousness. These methods, including prophecy and visionary activity, are referred to as intuitive, inspired, or natural divination.³

The division between technical and intuitive divination is far from absolute, however. In Mesopotamian sources, the distribution of divinatory roles is quite clear-cut. The job descriptions of, for example, haruspices, astrologers, and prophets never overlap, and especially the methods of technical divination require specialization through education, which makes their use virtually impossible for an untrained person. In Greek and biblical sources, however, the technical/intuitive divide is less sharp, and people can be found using different methods of divination, which do usually not require a thorough education.⁴

The terminological separation should not, therefore, be introduced in an essentialist way, but, rather, as a heuristic tool that works as long as it has enough explanatory power. The division of divinatory methods into the technical and intuitive types makes sense; on the one hand, it is recognized by the sources, whether biblical, Greek, or Mesopotamian; and on the other hand, the two types represent different cognitive modes. While technical divination, such as extispicy, utilizes a logico-scientific mode in explaining superhuman causality by way of systematized observation, intuitive divination, such as prophecy, is based on a narrative mode in transmitting divine knowledge to the audience without using any analytical means.⁵

Necromancy, and Other Arts of Knowledge, AYBRL (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2015), 19–35.

³ For the types of Mesopotamian divination, see Ulla Susanne Koch, *Mesopotamian Divination Texts: Conversing with the Gods, Sources from the First Millennium BCE*, GMTR 7 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 15–18; for the distinction between technical and inspired divination in Greek sources, see Yulia Ustinova, "Modes of Prophecy, or Modern Arguments in Support of the Ancient Approach," *Kernos* 26 (2013): 25–44.

⁴ For the more flexible functions of Greek diviners, see Michael A. Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 2008), 84–91; for the variety of the roles of biblical diviners, see Hamori, *Women's Divination*, 26–31.

⁵ See Harold Torger Vedeler, "Ancient Near Eastern Omens and Prophecies as a Function of Cognitive Modes," *JAH* 3 (2015): 93–117.

Divination is motivated by the conviction that everything on Earth is dependent on the divine will, the full knowledge of which, however, is beyond the cognitive capacity of human beings. Therefore, it is necessary to consult superhuman, full-access agents who possess the strategic information necessary for humans to be able to act in the best possible way.⁶ Consulting superhuman sources of knowledge is often a professional activity, the diviners constituting the link between humans and their divine informants. Divination is supposed to have an effect on human decisions and its goal is often to bring about change. However, divination normally forms only an initial part of the decision-making process, detecting and defining its preconditions but not participating in its realization.

Magic, on the other hand, should not be conceptually equated with divination. Divination and magic share many features regarding the communication between the human and the superhuman, such as agency, symbolic interpretation, and ritualization, but it is nevertheless necessary to make a conceptual difference between divination and magic. Magic can be defined as symbolic ritual activity with the purpose of attaining a specific goal by means of divine-human communication and superhuman assistance, relying on specific skills, actions, and knowledge required from the human agent.⁷ For the major part, this definition could concern divination as well; however, a terminological distinction of magic and divination suggests itself because of differences in their practice and purpose.

Magic is itself a means of attaining a certain goal and actively bringing about an intended change, whether beneficent or harmful. The result can be either beneficial or harmful, and it may be attempted, for example, by means of healing, expelling a demon, causing damage, or warding off evil. The magician is an agent whose activity is supposed to have a direct effect to the patient – not *ex opere operato*, however, but typically as the result of the alleged divine-human collaboration.⁸ Magic is often ritual activity, involving symbolic performative acts symbolically representing the object, patient, and purpose of the activity. The symbolic elements may be verbal (blessing, curse, incantation, prayer, etc.) and/or material (liquids, foodstuff, figurines, etc.), and they form part of the ritual ensemble consisting of human, superhuman, and material components.

Both divination and magic are discussed as family resemblance, or polythetic, categories, that is, consisting of an ample but unspecified amount of common characteristics present in the majority of members of each category

⁶ See Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 31–32.

⁷ Rüdiger Schmitt, *Magie im Alten Testament*, AOAT 313 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag), 92–93.

⁸ Schmitt, *Magie*, 91.

but not necessarily in all of them.⁹ Divination and magic are both based on the idea of divine-human communication and collaboration. What makes the difference is the purpose and function of the divinatory and magical action, as well as the agency of the actors.

Magic and divination have much in common, especially the alleged collaboration of the human and superhuman agents and the crucial function executed by the human agent. Some forms of magic and divination may be practiced by any individual; however, their most-valued practitioners tend to be professionals acknowledged and ‘certified’ by their own community or at least a part of it. Both the diviner and the magician must be believed to possess special skills and capacity of acting in collaboration with divine agents. The superhuman agency is taken for granted both in magic and in divination, but since it is beyond everyday perception, it cannot be confirmed in the same way as ordinary things. Diviners and magicians may be distrusted, either because their competence is found doubtful, the superhuman powers represented by them are not believed in or because they are found to be hostile or strange.¹⁰

The difference between magic and divination is evident in terms of function, representation, and agency. The function of divination is to acquire and transmit superhuman knowledge. A diviner, whether a prophet, an augur, a haruspex, or an astrologer, receive and interpret messages and omens that are believed to be of divine origin, informing their audience about the meaning and interpretation of these messages and omens. Drawing consequences is the responsibility of the recipients who are supposed to act accordingly. The function of magic, again, is to bring about a change: healing, expelling a demon, causing damage, or warding off evil. Magic is, therefore, expected to be efficient in a more direct manner than divination, typically by way of ritual action.¹¹

The diverse functions of magic and divination cause different performances. How divination works depends on the method. In Mesopotamia, for instance, the performance of a prophet typically happened orally in an altered state of consciousness in a public space such as a temple, while the haruspex (a diviner investigating the entrails of sacrificial animals) performed the divinatory ritual privately in an ordinary state of mind, informing the consultant on the divine judgement by way of a written report.¹² Both ways, the result of the performance is an oral and/or written verbal summary of the acquired divine

⁹ Cf. Jesper Sørensen, *A Cognitive Theory of Magic*, Cognitive Science of Religion Series (Lanham, Md.: Altamira, 2007), 49; Jan A.M. Snoek, “Defining ‘Rituals,’” in *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, SHR 144.1 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 3–14, 4–7; Risto Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 28.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Flower, *Seer*, 132–152.

¹¹ See Marian W. Broida, *Forestalling Doom: “Apotropaic Intercession” in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, AOAT 417 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 47.

¹² For the ritual procedure, see Koch, *Divination Texts*, 122–127.

knowledge. Spoken and written verbal expressions are also used in magical acts, but their function and contents are performative rather than narrative; that is, they are not meant for transmission of information but for fulfilment of the purpose of the act. Even the role of the material element is different in a magical performance compared to a divinatory act: The sheep liver or the constellation of stars functions as the platform of the omen to be interpreted, while the material used in magic may be directly related to the efficacy of the act (for instance, water), represent the patient of the act (for instance, hair), or symbolize the divine protection (for instance, amulet).

Differences in function and performance entail differences in agency. While the diviner receives and intermediates superhuman knowledge, the magician puts such knowledge into practice. The agency of the magician is often more proactive and goal-oriented than the agency of the diviner, because the emphasis of the divinatory agency is on the preconditions of the action, while magical agency is bound to the effect.

In spite of the differences in function, performance, and agency, magic and divination are not completely separate practices, and the roles of the diviner and the magician may overlap. In the biblical imagination, a prophet such as Isaiah or Jeremiah may be found performing what is best described as a magical act, either by way of healing (2 Kgs 20:7//Isa 38:21) or writing ominous words on a scroll (Jer 51:59–64) or on another surface (Isa 8:1; Ezek 37:16).¹³ A Mesopotamian diviner may use a prophet's hair and a fringe of a cloth to test the veracity of her or his prophecy;¹⁴ and in the Greek magical papyri from the Roman Egypt, divination appears as but one of a variety of magical practices.¹⁵ On the conceptual level, magic and divination are, therefore, polythetic categories sharing certain family resemblances. As practices, magic and divination should be understood as interrelated methods of divine-human communication.

2. The Action Frame of Divination and Magic

In his cognitive theory of magic, Jesper Sørensen launches a useful model of human action, which links human action both with its allegedly divine precon-

¹³ Cf., e.g., Reinhard G. Kratz, *Prophetenstudien. Kleine Schriften II*, FAT 74 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 24.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Esther J. Hamori, "Gender and the Verification of Prophecy at Mari" *WO* 42 (2012), 1–22; Matthew J. Lynch, "The Prophet's *šārtum u sissiktum* 'Hair and Hem' and the Mantic Context of Prophetic Oracles at Mari," *JANER* 13 (2013): 11–29.

¹⁵ Cf. Emilio Suárez de la Torre, "Divination et magie: Remarques sur les papyrus grecs de l'Égypte gréco-romaine," *Kernos* 26 (2013): 157–172.

ditions and its presumed effects, comprising the conditional space, the action space, and the effect space.¹⁶

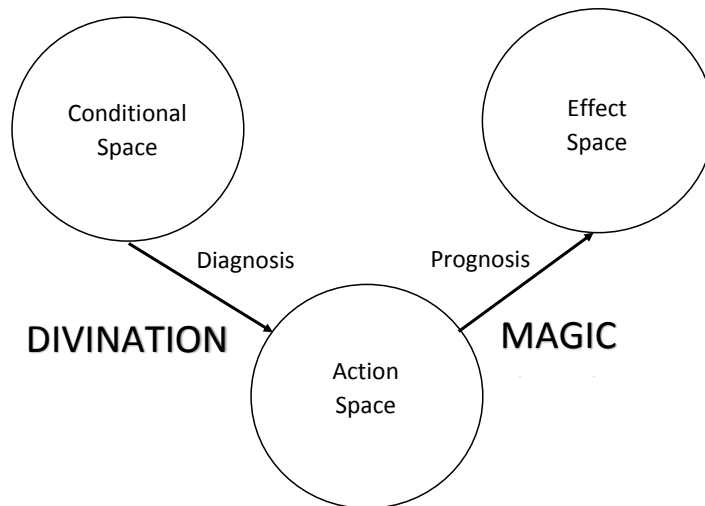


Figure 1: A simplified adaptation of Sørensen’s “ritual event frame.”

The above figure is a simplified adaptation of Sørensen’s “ritual event frame,” that is, an integrated whole of conditions, actions, and results including a causal sequence of diagnostic and prognostic processes linking the conditional space with the effect space through human action. In the case of actions involving alleged divine-human communication, such as rituals, the notions of causality are, of course, different from an ordinary human action. Ritual action, also in magical contexts, occupies a space blending the phenomena of everyday life and a sacred space free of the constraints of ordinary experiences. Therefore, ritual action removes actions, agents, and objects from their ordinary perceptual domains and conveys symbolic interpretations for the conditions, the actions, and the effects. Consequently, the symbolic interpretation concerns the diagnostic and the prognostic part of the action as well.

Symbolic interpretations, which are attached to existing cultural, mythological, and theological models, largely replace ordinary perceptual clues as the explanation of the diagnosis and the prognosis, hence enabling a causal interpretation of the efficacy of the ritual. Symbolic interpretations necessarily “se-

¹⁶ See Sørensen, *Cognitive Theory*, 141–153; cf. Broida, *Forestalling Doom*, 22–26.

vere the causal and intentional connections between recognition of event-state and actions performed in reaction to this recognition,”¹⁷ the causal connections being based on associative learning and interpretation containing “highly counter-intuitive ideas and representations that ensure their memorability and transmission.”¹⁸

This counter-intuitive type of causal connections is, of course, typical of divinatory and magical actions, in which both the conditions and the effects are not immediately apparent but a matter of symbolic interpretation. I find Sørensen’s model especially helpful in making the difference between magic and divination. Both are actions involving human and divine agents, but the agencies of the diviner and the magician belong to different parts of the action frame.

Divination can be understood as a cognitive process linking human action with its (presumed) preconditions and its (presumed) effects. In a divinatory act, the transfer of divine knowledge serves as the diagnosis which connects the superhuman conditional space with the human action space. The agency of the diviner (prophets included) is that of an intermediary whose action may inspire the prognosis, but who is not actively involved in causing the effect. The prognosis, again, is the expectation of what consequences should be drawn from the acquired divine knowledge, linking the action space with the effect space. This is typical of a magical act. The magician is an agent whose activity is supposed to have a direct effect to the patient as the result of the alleged divine-human collaboration.

3. Healing Prophets in Mesopotamian, Greek, and Biblical Sources

Now that I have done my best to keep two types of action, magic and divination, functionally and conceptually apart from each other, it is time to start deconstructing the model. This is because divination and magic nevertheless overlap to some extent, and the activities of some diviners can be best characterized as magical acts. Such diviners are not very numerous in ancient Near Eastern or Greek sources, and their presence in the texts does not oblige us to demolish the prevalent definitions of prophecy, magic, and divination altogether. Instead, they show that our definitions are never able to fully grasp the reality, and we should always allow some room for spaces of interaction where things are not as neatly organized as our categorizations would require.

¹⁷ Sørensen, *Cognitive Theory*, 151.

¹⁸ Sørensen, *Cognitive Theory*, 152.

As an example, I would like to present prophets who are involved in processes and practices of healing, clearly operating at the interface of divination and magic.¹⁹ Such cases, even though they are not very common, can be found in Assyrian sources, in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in Greek sources documenting the use of oracles for health issues.

Healing prophets are virtually absent from cuneiform sources. I am aware of only one text that brings persons with prophetic titles in connection with healing, that is, the Ritual of Ištar and Dumuzi (K 2001+).²⁰ The text is 209 lines long, and it has been preserved in several copies from Nineveh and Assur, which may indicate its relative importance as a ritual text. It concerns the healing of a man who is seized by a spirit of a dead, a demon, or by any evil thing. Before the main part of the text comprising a long sequence of incantations to be recited by the sick person, there are instructions, first concerning the preparations of the ritual on the 28th day of the month Tammuz, and then concerning the set-up of the bed of Dumuzi on the following day, and the offerings for the gods (Dumuzi, Ištar, and the Anunnaki) and for the spirits of the ancestors of the family. The offerings include libations, incense, and food placed for the personnel present in the ritual. In addition to the exorcist who is in charge of the ritual and the sick person himself, the following people are mentioned at the bed of Dumuzi: the “shepherd boys” of Dumuzi (*kaparrāti*²¹), a “frenzied man” and a “frenzied woman” (*zabbu zabbatu*), and a male and a female prophet (*mahhû mahhûtu*).

Apart from the food placed for them, nothing is said about the performance of these people in the ritual. The “shepherd boys” are probably there to intercede on behalf of the sick person, but the role of the prophets and (other) ecstasies can only be imagined. Their ritual duties were probably related to their ability of mediating Ištar’s presence in an ecstatic manner, impersonating the goddess and mediating her words as answer to the prayer of the sick person. The presence of prophets in the Ritual of Ištar and Dumuzi indicates that their participation in healing rituals was sometimes expected. However, the virtual absence of prophets from cuneiform sources dealing with healing probably reflects reality in suggesting that prophets did not play an active role in healing rituals and were not routinely involved in them.

¹⁹ For the magical aspect of ancient Near Eastern medicine and healing, see, e.g., Manfred Dietrich, “Heilkraft der rituellen Magie nach Aussage altorientalischer Texte,” in *Identities and Societies in the Ancient East-Mediterranean Regions: Comparative Approaches*, ed. Thomas R. Kämmerer, AOAT 390.1 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011), 31–45.

²⁰ K 2001+; see Walter Farber, *Beschwörungsrituale an Ištar und Dumuzi. Attī Ištar ša ḫarmaša Dumuzi*, Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission 30 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977), 128–155. The pertinent passage is translated also in Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, WAW 12 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 175–177.

²¹ The word is feminine plural of the masculine word *kaparru*.

Moving from Mesopotamia to ancient Greece, we can find Greek diviners, or seers (*mantis*), involved in roles that extended beyond divination, such as healing and purification, which often mean one and the same thing.²² Thus the Delphic Pythia calls Apollo, the principal oracular deity, “healer-seer (*iatro-mantis*), omen-interpreter and purifier,”²³ as if these were the skills the diviner inspired by Apollo could be furnished with. The legendary seer Melampus was hired to cure the women of Argos of their madness.²⁴ The Cretan seer and wonder-worker Epimenides purified the whole city of Athens after the sacrilege that took place in 632 BCE.²⁵ A wandering *mantis* called Abaris taught the Spartans how to avert the plague by way of sacrifices;²⁶ Pythagoras is told to have cured plagues,²⁷ and so on.

Such healing seers are known from the archaic age, and they probably existed even in the fifth and fourth century, even though we know of them only *per viam negationis*, that is, through the harsh criticism of the professional practitioners of medicine in the Hippocratic treatises.²⁸ Even Plato disparages their activities, lumping together *agyrtai* (“beggar-priests”) and *manteis* who “frequent the doors of the rich and persuade them that they have obtained from the gods, through sacrifices and incantations, the power to heal them through pleasant rituals if some wrong was committed either by them or their ancestors.”²⁹

Sometimes, but not very often, the act of healing performed by a seer in Greek sources is the curing of an individual person of his or her illness. Empedocles, for instance, is said to have raised a woman from the dead.³⁰ Health issues were one of the main reasons why private persons came to inquire the

²² For the Greek healers and healing in Greek sources, see, e.g., Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, Blackwell Ancient Religions (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 119–125; Flower, *Seer*, 27–28, 212; cf. Fritz Graf, “Healing,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Greek Religion*, ed. Esther Eidinow and Julia Kindt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 515–518.

²³ Aeschylus, *Eum.* 61–63. The name used by the Pythia of Apollo, Loxias, refers to him especially as the interpreter or prophet of Zeus.

²⁴ The story is referred to in many sources, e.g., Apollodorus 2.2.2; Herodotos 9.34; Pausanias 2.18.4.

²⁵ Plato, *Leg.* 642d refers to Epimenides as *anēr theios*, a title reminiscent of the Hebrew *ʾiš hā-ʾēlōhīm* “man of God;” cf. Ruth Sauerwein, *Elischa: Eine redaktions- und religionsgeschichtliche Studie*, BZAW 465 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 178–184. Other sources mentioning this event include, e.g., Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 1; Plutarch, *Sol.* 12; Diogenes Laertius 1.110.

²⁶ Apollonius, *Mirabilia* 4.

²⁷ Porphyry, *Vit. Pyth.* 29.

²⁸ Hippocrates, *Mul.* 1; *Morb. sacr.* 1–4.

²⁹ Plato, *Rep.* 364b–e.

³⁰ M.R. Wright, *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), fr. 1012; Diodorus Siculus 8.60.

oracle of Dodona. The lead tablets include oracle queries such as the following: “Thrasymboulos asks to which god he should bring an offering of appeasement to become healthier with regard to his eye.”³¹ The question reveals that the client was not expecting to be cured by the oracle but was inquiring about divine advice. The same can be said of the consultation of Aelius Aristides who sent his adoptive father Zosimus to Claros to consult Apollo about his health and was advised by Apollo to turn to the sanctuary of Asclepius near Pergamon.³²

More often than not, the *mantis*, such as the above-mentioned Epimenides or Abaris, is consulted when a plague or another crisis hits a larger group of people, such as the entire city. In such cases the seer is not, in fact, performing acts of healing but diagnosing the reason for the catastrophe and prescribing a solution to it. This is the function of the most famous Greek prophets who delivered words of Apollo in an altered state of consciousness, and who were consulted by people and communities even in health matters. The Delphic Pythia is never found curing people of their diseases, but she is consulted, for instance, by the ruler of Delphi when the city was hit by a famine and plague.³³ The same is true for the prophets of Claros who were consulted by several cities with regard to emergency situations (*loimos*), such as a plague. Several of the preserved oracles from Claros are probably related to the Antonine Plague, a pandemic that tormented the Mediterranean people in the 160’s CE.³⁴ Again, the delegations from different cities did not come to Claros to be cured there, but to obtain divine instruction how to ward off the plague. The oracles give cultic commands concerning offerings and praise-singing, and this is exactly what the inscriptions from Claros report the delegations to have performed “according to the oracle” (*kata chrēsmon*).³⁵

³¹ Sotirios Dakaris, Ioulia Vokotopoulou, and Anastasios-Foivos Christidis, *Ta χρηστήρια ἐλάσματα της Δωδώνης*, Vol. 1, 344–345 (no. 1393); Esther Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 107 (no. 10).

³² Aelius Aristides, *Hier. log.* 3,12; see Reinhold Merkelbach and Josef Stauber, “Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros,” *Epigraphica Anatolica* 27 (1996): 1–53, 35–36. Cf. Veit Rosenberger, “Individuation through Divination: The *Hieroi Logoi* of Aelius Aristides,” in *Divination in the Ancient World: Religious Options and the Individual*, ed. Veit Rosenberger, PAWB 46 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2013), 153–173, 155–160.

³³ Plutarch, *Quaest. Gr.* 12.

³⁴ See Merkelbach and Stauber, “Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros,” nos. 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, and 24; Christian Oesterheld, *Göttliche Botschaften für zweifelnde Menschen. Pragmatik und Orientierungsleistung der Apollon-Orakel von Klaros und Didyma in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, Hypomnemata 174 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 44–48; Christopher P. Jones, “Ten Dedications ‘To the Gods and Goddesses’ and the Antonine Plague,” *JRA* 18 (2005), 293–301.

³⁵ See, e.g., Jean-Louis Ferrary, *Les Mémoires de délégations du sanctuaire oraculaire de Claros, d’après la documentation conservée dans le Fonds Louis Robert (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres)*, Mémoires de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 49 (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2014), 223–24 (no. 11).

Turning now to the Hebrew Bible, we can find a few prophets who are quite directly involved in healing, performing the healing ritual by themselves.³⁶ In fact, most healing miracles in the Hebrew Bible are performed by a prophetic figure. King Jeroboam's hand, stretched out against the "man of God" who had proclaimed against the altar at Bethel, withered so that he could not draw it back to himself until the prophet entreated God and the hand of the king was restored to him (1 Kgs 13:1–6). When King Hezekiah fell ill, the prophet Isaiah first proclaimed as divine word that he is going to die, but God heard the prayers of the king and eventually promised to heal him. The one who presides the act of healing is Isaiah who orders to get a lump of figs that was then applied to the boil and the king was recovered (2 Kgs 20:7//Isa 38:21).³⁷

Elijah, having miraculously fed a widow and his son in Zarephath, even raises from the dead this same son who has meanwhile got ill and died. Elijah performs a ritual in the upper chamber of the widow's house, saying prayers and stretching himself three times upon the child (1 Kgs 17:17–24). Similar stories are told about Elisha, Elijah's successor.³⁸ He, too, performs a feeding miracle for a widow and her sons (2 Kgs 4:1–7), and raises from the dead the son of the Shunammite woman, whose birth he had earlier predicted. Elisha prayed to God, got up on the sickbed and lay upon the child, put his mouth upon the child's mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands, causing the child to revive (2 Kgs 4:31–37). Even Naaman, the commander of the king of Aram, was cured of his leprosy with the help of Elisha, but this time Elisha himself did not perform the ritual but instructed Naaman to go and wash in the river Jordan seven times to recover (2 Kgs 5:1–14). Sometimes the prophet cures people of symptoms he himself has caused on behalf of God. Elisha first asks God to strike the Arameans with blindness and then, having (mis)led them to Samaria, to open their eyes again (2 Kgs 6:18–20).

4. Healing Prophets at the Interface of Divination and Magic

Having now briefly surveyed the Mesopotamian, Greek, and biblical sources mentioning prophets involved in healing, we can make some observations concerning their divinatory and/or magical agency. As we have seen, prophets and prophetic figures (that is, persons who act as prophets among other activities) assume different roles in healing rituals.

Mesopotamian sources do not know healing prophets other than the ones present in the ritual of Ištar and Dumuzi, whereby they probably impersonate

³⁶ For the following, cf. Schmitt, *Magie*, 219–255.

³⁷ The healing of Hezekiah by Isaiah is missing from the parallel text in Chronicles, which only mentions the sign given by God (2 Chr 32:24).

³⁸ For the Elisha narratives, cf., e.g., Sauerwein, *Elischa*.

the goddess Ištar and thus participate in the sick person's treatment, perhaps mixing magical and divinatory agencies in some manner. Elsewhere, prophetic figures may themselves perform the healing ritual without the help of any other intermediaries, even though this does not happen very often. Some Greek *manteis* such as the above-mentioned Empedocles can be referred to, but even in Greek sources, such figures are not common. Interestingly, the foremost prophetic healers are to be found in the Hebrew Bible, often carrying the title "man of God" (*'iš hā-'ēlōhīm*). The healing rituals performed by Isaiah, Elijah, and Elisha clearly occupy the effect space in the above-sketched event frame and should, therefore, be classified under magic rather than divination. Elijah and Elisha are the prime actors in these rituals, but at the same time it is made clear that they act in collaboration with God, which makes their activity no less magical, since magic *is* divine-human collaboration.

On the other hand, the prophets' association with healing may be indirect and belong to the diagnostic part of the ritual event. Elisha does not himself heal Naaman but gives him proper instructions how to become cured of leprosy. Greek oracles at Delphi, Dodona, and Claros typically prescribe solutions to problems rather than take care of them directly, and this is also true for healing: people are told by oracles what kind of offerings and rituals are necessary to ward off the reasons for the disease or plague. This form of action clearly belongs to the conditional space of the ritual event, and the agency of the prophets is divinatory rather than magical. In fact, this is the only way inspired speakers in Greek sources are associated with healing, while those *manteis* whose divinatory toolbox is more varied may assume more active roles in processes of healing.

The survey of Assyrian, Greek, and biblical references to prophets involved in healing shows that prophets performing the act of healing themselves and thus assuming a magical rather than divinatory agency is not a common figure. Such prophets – Isaiah, Elijah, Elisha, and even Moses³⁹ – can be found especially in the Hebrew Bible. Their deeds are described in legendary narratives difficult to anchor within historical phenomena or circumstances.⁴⁰

³⁹ It is noteworthy that the concluding assessment of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy (Deut 34:10–12) depicts him as the greatest prophet of all times, who not only communicated with God face to face but also performed all the signs and portents (*kāl hā-'ōtōt wē-hammōpētīm*) on behalf of God. It is no wonder that from early on, Moses was depicted as a magician; see Louis H. Feldman, *Philo's Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); idem, "Josephus' Portrait of Moses: Part Three," *JQR* 83 (1993): 301–330.

⁴⁰ The narrative in 2 Kgs 20:1–11 is often believed to be based on an earlier legend edited by the Deuteronomistic redactors; thus, e.g. Ernst Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige. 1. Kön. 17–2. Kön. 25*, ATD 11,2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 433 (verses 1–2a, 3b, 7). The narratives about Elijah and Elisha are the result of a complicated process of literary growth, but many scholars believe that the traditions of these prophets are based on

The relative silence of cuneiform sources with regard to prophets involved in healing may be explained by the high degree of differentiation of magical and divinatory agencies in Babylonian and Assyrian societies. Healing and medicine were the domain of the *asû*, who was a specialist in pharmacology, and the *āšipu*, who diagnosed and treated diseases, performing even healing rituals.⁴¹ All this was beyond the expertise of Mesopotamian prophets, and this is why they seem to have played a walk-on role, if any, in healing rituals.

The job descriptions of the Greek seers were much less fixed than those of Mesopotamian specialists. Since the seers were regarded as “competent to deal with any situation that fell under the broad rubric of things sent or caused by supernatural powers,”⁴² they could be consulted even in the case of sickness. Sarah Iles Johnston talks about “a sort of happily triangular *convivencia*” of divination, healing, and purification, whereby “the *mantis* always constituted the apex of such a triangle, even as the two other angles shifted back and forth a bit.”⁴³ The inspired Greek prophets, however, were never directly involved in healing rituals but performed their divinatory agency instead. We have seen that healing is not presented the main occupation of other *manteis* either in Greek sources, many of which deal with more or less legendary figures of the past, such as Epimenides, rather than with contemporary practices.

Both magic and divination are types of divine-human communication, and healing in particular is a process involving both the diagnostic and prognostic parts of human action. This enables the overlap of magical and divinatory agencies, especially in societies in which the distribution of these agencies is flexible and diviners are able to act in different functions according to culture-specific expectations. However, it is important not to forget that ~~the purpose of~~ magical or divinatory actions in literary texts ~~the purpose of~~ serves literary purposes.⁴⁴ How we see ancient prophets, diviners, and magicians acting in biblical prophetic books and in the works of Greek historians certainly corresponds to the ideas of the authors about how magic and divination works but cannot be taken as an

older traditions; cf. e.g., the reconstruction of the growth of the Elisha narratives by Sauerwein, *Elischa*. Schmitt, *Magie*, 383–385 labels the ninth century BCE as “die Zeit der großen Gottesmänner,” interpreting the Elijah and Elisha narratives as carriers of traditions of multitasking “men of God” from the Omride Northern Kingdom. The problem in the religio-historical positioning of these traditions is the lack of parallel figures and phenomena in ancient Near Eastern sources; see Sauerwein, *Elischa*, 215–222.

⁴¹ See JoAnn Scurlock and Burton Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 8–10.

⁴² Flower, *Seer*, 29.

⁴³ Johnston, *Divination*, 121.

⁴⁴ Thus Mark S. Smith in his forthcoming article “The Magical Lives of the Gods in the Ugaritic Literary Texts.” Thanks are due to him for letting me read the manuscript prior to publication.

accurate historical image of the phenomenon without the analysis of the literary purposes of such descriptions.

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