

## LEGITIMATE AND ILLEGITIMATE DIVINATION IN MEDIEVAL WRITINGS<sup>1</sup>

Mihai DRAGNEA

University of South-Eastern Norway  
Raveien 215, 3184 Borre, Norway  
[mihaidragnea2018@gmail.com](mailto:mihaidragnea2018@gmail.com)

*This article analyzes the characteristics of divination since the early Christianity, canonical regulations on the practice and the arguments for which it was condemned by the theologians. It will also analyze the semantic ambivalence of medieval vocabulary in relation to divinatory practices. Since only God's prophetic power was allowed, all types of prognostication of the future without His approval were considered false and illegitimate. What this article will show is that from the early Middle Ages onwards, the divination was distinguished by other prognostic methods through the nature of the divine messages and human reasoning.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Divination, Canon law, Medieval Theologians, Superstitions, Human reasoning.*

### Introduction

The divinatory practices remained for a long time the subject of controversial debate among scholars. In the last decades divination was an object for research in various disciplines. Scholars focused mostly on theological aspects of divination and its relation with superstitions, magic,<sup>2</sup> astrology and demonology.<sup>3</sup> Moral and legal lines were drawn

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<sup>2</sup> Claire Fanger's *Rewriting Magic: An Exegesis of the Visionary Autobiography of a Fourteenth-Century French Monk*, University Park, 2015 is a careful study of permitted and forbidden forms of magic in medieval Catholicism. For the history of magic in the West in both theory and practice, the nature of magic, its boundaries and key features from antiquity to today, see David J. COLLINS (ed.), *Magic and Witchcraft in the West: From Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge, 2015; Bernd-Christian OTTO and Michael STAUSBERG (eds.), *Defining Magic: A Reader*, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Dorian G. GREENBAUM, *The Daimon in Hellenistic Astrology*, Leiden, 2015; Helen R. JACOBUS, Anne Katrine de Hemmer GUDME and Philippe GUILLAUME (eds.), *Studies on Magic and Divination in the*

between divination, prophecy and magic.<sup>4</sup> Divinatory practices were also analyzed from an epistemological point of view in relation to medieval scientific prognostication,<sup>5</sup> or in wider context of the European and Asian folklore.<sup>6</sup>

For a long time scholars analyzed prophecy separately from divination. The Bible (Old Testament) was the main source for all kind of arguments. Divination was seen as an illegitimate prognostication of the future because it has been practiced outside of the ancient Israelite prophetic tradition. Divination was a magic practice, while prophecy appeared to be a legitimate religious phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> However biblical passages regarding divination and prophecy were contradictory.<sup>8</sup>

This article follows the idea that divination is a specific term that covers a wide range of practices belonging to a common category (i.e. prognostication of the future). By divination we understand human practices as part of a cultural phenomenon, which allow obtaining information about the future through a certain profession and only in connection to the divine realm. However, divination was not restricted to future events, since everyday mysteries were targeted as well. Yet the main perception on divination was related to the future. It has been recognized that divination and prophecy were not separate and opposing categories of prognostication of the future. Scholars also admitted that prophecy could be easily integrated within the wide range of divinatory practices.<sup>9</sup>

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*Biblical World*, Piscataway, 2013; Jean-Patrice BOUDET. *Entre science et nigromance. Astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident médiéval (XII<sup>e</sup>-XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, Paris, 2006; Simon A. GILSON, «Medieval Magical Lore and Dante's 'Commedia': Divination and Demonic Agency», *Dante Studies*, vol. 119, 2001, pp. 27–66; Valerie I. J. FLINT, «The Transmission of Astrology in the Early Middle Ages», *Viator*, vol. 21, 1990, pp. 1–28.

<sup>4</sup> Heiko WENZEL, «Drawing a Line between Prophecy, Magic and Divination», *Volume Studies on Magic and Divination in the Biblical World*, (eds. Helen R. JACOBUS, Anne Katrine de Hemmer GUDME and Philippe GUILLAUME), Piscataway, NJ, 2013, pp. 77–88.

<sup>5</sup> Matthias HEIDUK, Klaus HERBERS and Hans-Christian LEHNER (eds.), *Prognostication in the Medieval World*, Berlin, Boston, 2020; Volumes 1 (2019) and 2 (2020) of the *International Journal of Divination and Prognostication* edited by Michael LACKNER and Charles BURNETT and published by Brill or Alexander FIDORA, «Divination and Scientific Prediction: The Epistemology of Prognostic Sciences in Medieval Europe», *Early Science and Medicine*, vol. 18, n. 6, 2013, pp. 517–535.

<sup>6</sup> Anna WING BO TSO, «Divination or Death Traps? The Semiotic Language in Chinese Folklore and Fortune-Telling», in eds. Michael LACKNER, Kwok-kan TAM, Monika GÄNSSBAUER, and Terry Siu Han YIP, *Fate and Prognostication in the Chinese Literary Imagination*, Leiden, 2020, pp. 177–195; Barbara TEDLOCK, «Divination as a Way of Knowing: Embodiment, Visualisation, Narrative, and Interpretation», *Folklore*, vol. 112, n. 2, 2001, pp. 189–197; Thomas A. GREEN (ed.), *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*, vol. 1, Santa Barbara, CA, 1997, pp. 198–205.

<sup>7</sup> Esther J. HAMORI, «The Prophet and the Necromancer: Women's Divination for Kings», *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 132, n. 4, 2013, pp. 827–843, here 827–828.

<sup>8</sup> It has been stated that there is no clear distinction between magic and religion among many ancient cultures, including the Hebrew one. The attitude, action and intention of the practitioners cannot be distinguished by social and moral differences. Justin J. MEGGITT, «Did Magic Matter? The Saliency of Magic in the Early Roman Empire», *Journal of Ancient History*, vol. 1, n. 2, 2013, pp. 170–229, here 179–180. Furthermore, the term «magic» comes from the Greek *magikos* (lat. *magicus*), with reference to a Persian priestly category. Through their high knowledge, they are responsible to a wide range of practices which are not directly connected: astrology, medicine, divination, sorcery etc. Edwin M. YAMAUCHI and Marvin R. WILSON, *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity*, vol. 3, Peabody, MA, 2016, p. 201.

<sup>9</sup> Martti NISSINEN, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, Atlanta, 2003; Lester L. GRABBE, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel*, Valley Forge, PA, 1995, pp. 139–141.

The content of this article does not, due to its objective limitations by length and scope, encompass the entire reality of divination in the various Christian environments during the Middle Ages, but includes several representative examples from the Latin (Roman Catholic) parts of Europe of the time. The perception of medieval clergy on this matter was complex and included theology, philosophical considerations and canonical arguments. The distinction between divination and prophecy was based on moral arguments.

This article will offer a brief theological and semantic analysis of divination in relation to prophecy. It will also show that from the point of view of the Christian theologians, prognostication of the future was a practice which implied supernatural powers, and accepting or denying its legitimacy was a theological and semantic question. It was important from where the inquirer received the prophetic power. As long as the source of faith was the Christian God, a prophecy was true and thus legitimate. Only God's prophetic power was legitimate, while all types of prognostication of the future beyond His divine network were considered false and illegitimate superstitions.

Anti-superstitious treatises were written by clergy since the Late Antiquity. The primary sources used for this article are five of the best known treatises on divinatory practices written in Latin like the *De divinatione daemonum*<sup>10</sup> of St. Augustine (d. 430), the *Etymologiae* of St. Isidore of Seville (d. 636),<sup>11</sup> the *Decretum* of Gratian (completed in 1140),<sup>12</sup> *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury<sup>13</sup> (d. 1180) and *Summa theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274).<sup>14</sup> The first treatise on divination and astrology in vernacular language were written by Nicole Oresme (d. 1382) around 1356.<sup>15</sup>

## 1. Divination in a broader sense in Late Antiquity

The term Cleromancy designate an ancient form of divination using sortition, casting of lots, or casting certain items such as dice, bones, or stones. Through these an outcome could be determined by more or less random means, and which is believed to reveal the will of God(s), or other immaterial beings. To designate these practices in a broader sense, the ancient Greeks used the term *manteia* (»μάντειᾶ«). This referred not only to what was going to happen in the future, but also to the unraveling of everyday mysteries. The equivalent Latin term for the Roman world was *divinatio*, which referred to a large variety of practices in divination. Oracles were consulted, and various practices were performed in

<sup>10</sup> In this article I used the Latin critical edition Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, (ed. Joseph ZYCHA), vol. 41, Vienna, 1900, pp. 599–618.

<sup>11</sup> I used the Latin edition Isidorus Hispalensis Episcopi, *Etymologiarum Sive Originum*, vol. 1, Books I–X, (ed. Martin Wallace LINDSAY), Oxford, 1911.

<sup>12</sup> The Latin edition used is *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, (ed. Aemilius FRIEDBERG), CIC, 1, Graz, 1959.

<sup>13</sup> The Latin edition which was used is John of Salisbury, *Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis Policratici sive de Nugis Curialium et Vestigiis Philosophorum Libri viii*, (eds. Clemens C. I. WEBB), vol. 1, Oxford, 1909.

<sup>14</sup> The Latin edition used in the text is Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae: II<sup>a</sup>-IIae q. 57–122 cum commentariis Caietani*, ed. Leonis XIII P. M., vol. 9, Rome, 1897.

<sup>15</sup> *Livre de divinations*, in Nicole Oresme. *Contro la divinazione. Consigli antiastrologici al re di Francia (1356)*, (ed. S. RAPISARDA), Roma, 2009, pp. 78–288 (with Italian translation).

sanctuaries. In most of the cases, this required a specialist to perform the ritual and explain the results to the inquirer.

From Hebrew Bible and Old Testament we know that cleromancy was a common occult practice in both ancient Judaism (Urim and Thummim)<sup>16</sup> and early Christianity.<sup>17</sup> There were many types of divination, among which we may mention the ancient Roman *auguria* (divination from the observed behavior of birds, also known as *ornithomancy*; an omen) or Gaulish divination practiced by the so-called *caragii*, a local custom about which we do not know much. Since the fifth century, Christians have practiced various types of *sortilegium*. The most common were related to divinatory consultation of the Bible. This is known as bibliomancy or in Latin, *sortes biblicae*, and meant opening the Bible to a random page or its use as a prophetic book.<sup>18</sup> We do not know how widespread the opening of the Bible was in the late antiquity. It could have been practiced by a specific group (i.e. literate churchmen who had access to biblical codices),<sup>19</sup> but not the entire population. It is also not specified whether the biblical divination was practiced occasionally or systematically and how exactly the procedure took place.

From a modern perspective we can say that in theory, *sortes biblicae* was legitimate because it was rooted in the Bible, but in practice it was seen as a non-ecclesiastical custom because it was not compatible with canon law. It was considered that every Biblical passage related to prophecies, was accurate in terms of divination. The Bible was the word of God, and thus it was used as a legitimate source of knowledge regarding future events. The style in which the discourse of condemnation of the early Christian writers is constructed follows the Jewish prophetic tradition. In the Old Testament, in most cases, divination as a practice appears to be condemned.<sup>20</sup> However, there are few opposite situations such as the mention of Joseph who used a chalice to practice divination.<sup>21</sup> In these cases, divination was condemned because it was practiced by a sorcerer, a medium, a charmer or a necromancer, and not by the high priests of the Israelite tribes in pre-monarchic Israel. Moreover, it was a practice outside of the Mosaic Law. During the reign of Solomon, divination appears as a royal prerogative in legislation. King's divinatory prerogative was taken from

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<sup>16</sup> These are part of the Jewish liturgical vestments (i.e. *hoshen*), the »breastplate of judgment« worn by the Israeli high priests and were used to predict military decisions. Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; 1 Samuel 14:42. Beside *Urim* and *Thummim* are mentioned other two methods of divination: interpretation of dreams (incubation) and advice of prophets (the second led to the creation of the so-called Montanist movement in early Christianity). 1 Samuel 28:3–6. Other examples of casting lots in the Hebrew Bible and Old Testaments are: Book of Leviticus 16:8, 19:26; Numbers 26:55; Book of Joshua 18:6; Book of Jonah 1:7; Book of Proverbs 16:33; Deuteronomy 18:10; 1 Chronicles 26:13; Book of Psalms, 22:18.

<sup>17</sup> »Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.« Acts 1:26.

<sup>18</sup> Gerald KRUTZLER, *Kult und Tabu: Wahrnehmungen der Germania bei Bonifatius*, Münster, 2011, pp. 169–170. The earliest record of biblical divination is the Life of Anthony, written by Athanasius of Alexandria around 360. Robert WISNIEWSKI, *Christian Divination in Late Antiquity*, Amsterdam, 2020, pp. 89, 104–105.

<sup>19</sup> The use of random Biblical passages for divination could have been performed by the clergy after prayer. Valerie I. J. FLINT, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, Oxford, 1991, pp. 96–97.

<sup>20</sup> Leviticus 19:26, 20:27; Numbers 23:23; 2 Kings 17:17, 21:6; Deuteronomy 18:10–12; 2 Chronicles 33:6. It was also condemned in the Book of the Twelve Prophets from the Hebrew Bible: Sirach 34:5; Isaiah 2:6, 47:13; Micah 5:11.

<sup>21</sup> Book of Genesis 44:5–15.

the Israelite prophets,<sup>22</sup> and the wisdom from God. Thus He answered orally by means of the king, and the level of accuracy was decided by the king's emotions.<sup>23</sup>

What we might notice is that in early Christianity, divination was condemned first, because of its pagan origin, and only then the practitioners.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore it was also condemned by the Roman imperial legislation soon after Christianity itself became legal. At the beginning of the fourth century, in the Roman Empire, various forms of divination were practiced by Christians<sup>25</sup> and non-Christians, including the Greco-Roman *hepatomancy* (*hepatoscopy*). The Roman practice was *haruspicina*, in which a trained person called *haruspex* (pl. *haruspices*) was able to discover the future through the inspection of the entrails of sacrificed animals (e.g. the livers of sacrificed sheep and poultry). In 319, the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (d. 337) legally forbade the *haruspices* and *sacerdotes* to practice divination and other non-Christian rituals and customs only in private space. The public practices were still allowed. To avoid any suspicion, haruspices were denied access to people's homes, even if they were in a friendly relationship. Those who ignored this ban were severely punished. If *haruspex* was caught performing the divination in a private house, he could be burned alive and the person who asked for divinatory services was dispossessed of his property before being exiled to an island.<sup>26</sup>

As Christianity gained ground over other religions in the Roman Empire, divination was condemned along with other »pagan« cults. It was not eradicated, but survived in various complex forms. The practice techniques were more and more Christian. The churchmen who practiced *sortes biblicae* took the prophetic divinatory function and acted as messengers of God's words to the people. As a consequence the ecclesiastical authorities rejected the ancient practice methods which provided answers to those who wanted to know hidden matters. This idea finds its explanation in the fifth book of the New Testament. The divination must have been a widespread practice among the apostles. In the New Testament, before he ascended to Heaven, Jesus refused to answer the apostles the question of when the Kingdom of Israel will be restored, arguing that they were not allowed to have access to God's omniscience.<sup>27</sup> The apostles did not possess the divinatory function from the prophets of the Old Testament, and therefore through the transmission of grace, the bishops did not have the ability to know the hidden matters. What we have to mention is that the divine prohibition was related

<sup>22</sup> According to Giovanni Filoramo, biblical and late antique Christian prophets had four functions: divinatory, reformatory, political and eschatological. Giovanni FILORAMO, *Veggenti, profeti, gnostici. Identità e conflitti nel cristianesimo antico*, Brescia, 2005, pp. 159–162.

<sup>23</sup> Proverbs 16:10.

<sup>24</sup> Divination as a pagan practice was condemned by early Christian writers like Clement of Alexandria (*Protrepticus* 2.1), Tertullian (*Apologeticum* 22, 35), Marcus Minucius Felix (*Octavius* 26), Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (*Catecheses ad illuminandos* 4.37; *Mystagogic Catecheses* 1.8) and John Chrysostom (*In epistulam ad Galatas* 1.7). Robert WISNIEWSKI, *Christian Divination*, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> The early Christian writers such as Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373), Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395), Jerome of Stridon (d. 420) and others emphasized the divinatory power of the so-called »monk-prophets« as a gift from God, along with other attributes of holiness. A prophecy was genuine only if the prophet pronounced the God-given words with consciousness. For more details about the prophetic character of the »holy monks« in early Christian hagiography, see Robert WISNIEWSKI, *Christian Divination*, pp. 50–58, 77.

<sup>26</sup> For the legal background of the ancient cults during Constantine the Great, see John CURRAN, »Constantine and the Ancient Cults of Rome: The Legal Evidence«, *Greece & Rome*, vol. 43, n. 1, 1996, pp. 68–80, here 70–71.

<sup>27</sup> Acts 1: 7.

to hidden matters only at the highest level (i.e. knowledge about the Trinity; the union of the Son with the Father and the Holy Spirit in Heaven).<sup>28</sup> Yet divinatory on worldly matters was not forbidden. This is why the apostles cast lots to select Matthew as a successor for Judas.<sup>29</sup>

## 2. Divination at St. Augustine of Hippo

The treatise on demonic divination (*De divinatione daemonum*),<sup>30</sup> written between 406 and 410, contains records of a dialogue between Augustine and some interlocutors about God's allowance for pagan sacrifices and divination. The conversation takes the form of a continued written discourse which starts from a comparison between Christianity and paganism. The followers of pagan gods share an attitude justified by what it seems to be an Aristotelian form of knowledge (*scientia*). No doubt Augustine was influenced by Platonic epistemological and ethical ideas. The interlocutors ask him various questions on divination, to which he answers with epistemological arguments, placed in a larger moral-theological context. Augustine's intention is to strip divination from its divine character.

Augustine identified the source of divinatory knowledge. Various arguments rooted in the Bible were used to establish a semantic distinction between what we may call in a theoretical sense divinatory practices. Augustine clearly stated that divination is the work of demons (*divinatione daemonum*).<sup>31</sup> Through their superior nature (an aerial body which allow them a high level of sense-perception and swiftness of movement)<sup>32</sup> and longevity, demons are able to predict or report (*praenuntiant vel nuntiant*) things in advance.<sup>33</sup> Such kind of prognostications often comes on things which they are going to do themselves on earth (to put sickness on people), or things which they know by natural signs (*signa naturalia*) are going to take place sooner or later. The best example is a doctor who can anticipate how patients' health will evolve. This is due to his profession and knowledge, and not to a prophetic power.<sup>34</sup>

The existence of divinatory power among the celestial beings and holy persons is not denied by Augustine. Holy angels and prophets (*prophetae Dei*) received divinatory power from God (*angelica et prophetica oracula*), but only in limited quantity and in certain cases. Because they are the messengers of the infallible God, who is the source of wisdom and justice, their predictions are true, and not false, like the demonic ones.<sup>35</sup> The divination is an evil tool substituted from God by demons and used to divert His plans on earth and to destabilize His order. The demons pretend they are divine (*simulasse divinitatem*) and try to fool people that they could exercise the divinatory power (*suam ostentare divinationem*).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Acts 1: 6.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 1: 26.

<sup>30</sup> The context in which the treatise was written and its context were analyzed by Karin SCHLAPBACH, »De divinatione daemonum«, *The Oxford guide to the historical reception of Augustine*, (eds. Karla POLLMANN and Willemien POLLMANN), Oxford, 2013, pp. 132–134.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, I, 1, p. 599.

<sup>32</sup> The physical description of demons by Augustine was influenced by the Platonic view, as expressed in later Latin texts by Apuleius and Porphyry.

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, III, 7, p. 604.

<sup>34</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, V, 9, p. 607.

<sup>35</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, VI, 10, p. 608.

<sup>36</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, VII, pp. 612–613.

Without real divinatory power, demonic prediction is not considered valid. Demons are described as being perverse, because they possess the ability to sneak into people's minds and influence them to commit evil deeds.<sup>37</sup> Yet demons are aware of the accuracy of predictions made by God through his prophets.<sup>38</sup> The demonic predictions are false also because demons deceive naive humans out of enthusiasm and share a hostile will towards God and His divine agents. They deceive in a desperate attempt not to lose the weight of their authority among the people who worship them.<sup>39</sup>

From a moral standpoint, divination was evil (*mala*). In legal terms, divination was unjust (*iniusta*). It was not described as a standalone act, but rather was placed in the same category with other evil acts such as homicides, adulteries, thefts and robberies. In some cases, the »Omnipotent and just God« (*omnipotentissimus et iustissimus Deus*) allows these things to take place through His rational judgment, and not with impunity (*iudicii sui ratione permittit, non utique impune*).<sup>40</sup> However such evil things are contrary to religion (*contra religionem*)<sup>41</sup> and thus should not be considered good (*bona*) only because God has allowed them to take place.<sup>42</sup>

### 3. Divination in the Early Middle Ages

What the early medieval clerics know about divination was taken mostly from the Church Fathers. By the early fifth century, various divinatory practices appeared were seen as illegitimate. It was hard to distinguish between ancient divination and prognostication of future events through rational analysis. Divination in certain forms was practiced within the Christian community beyond the ecclesiastical control. This alerted the ecclesiastical authorities and theologians, who issued regulations against divinatory practices.

The biblical lot divination was a phenomenon often accompanied by prayers and fasting. Probably the ones who practiced it were mostly certain clerics, who have been marginalized by the ecclesiastical authorities. The laity was also involved, but only as applicants. The punitive measures adopted at the councils<sup>43</sup> (i.e. excommunication) targeted not only clergy, whose involvement was considered a violation of canon law and thus a misappropriation of the Christian faith,<sup>44</sup> but also laypersons who practiced various forms of divination.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, V, 9, p. 607.

<sup>38</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, VII, p. 612.

<sup>39</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, VI, 10, p. 610.

<sup>40</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, I, 2, p. 600.

<sup>41</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, II, 5, p. 602.

<sup>42</sup> Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, II, 4, p. 601.

<sup>43</sup> Divination and magic were prohibited at several councils such as Orleans (511), Eauze (551) and Auxerre (585). Gregory HALFOND, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils, AD 511–768*, Leiden, 2010, p. 173.

<sup>44</sup> For more details on difficulties in the use of the technical term as well as the confusion between the *sortes sanctorum* and *sortes biblicae*, the canons that forbade the practice, and the due punishments, see William E. KLINGSHIRN, »Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination«, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 10, n. 1, 2002, pp. 77–130, here 85, 88, 107, 124.

<sup>45</sup> At the Synod of Vannes (c. 465) it was stated the following: »Si quis clericus, monachus, saecularis divinationem vel auguria crederit observanda vel sortes [...] ab ecclesiae communione pellantur«. *Apud* Christian HORNUNG, »Klerus und Magie: Zur Verurteilung magietreibender Kleriker in der Spätantike«, *Religion*

Besides *sortes biblicae*, the clergymen also practiced a more archaic type of divination by using a specific divinatory text. The most widespread is known as *sortes sanctorum* (»lots of the saints«). The practice of using this text was first attested in the acts of the synod of Vannes in Gaul. It has been argued that this specific divinatory text was in fact a codex which contains answers selected by throwing three six-sided dice with Roman numerals. This allowed offering fifty-six different answers on future events. In Asia Minor, the dice were known under the ancient Greek term *astragaloi* (»knucklebones«).<sup>46</sup>

Even if it was practiced by clergymen, *sortes sanctorum* followed non-Christian methods. The model of inspiration was the Greek one, and included various European polytheistic beliefs.<sup>47</sup> According to prelates at the Council of Agde (506) in southern France the *sortilegi* are certain persons who practice a »fictitious religion« (*fictae religionis*).<sup>48</sup> We can assume that in the Early Middle Ages, the word *sanctus* included both living clergy, and deceased persons who have been canonized and venerated locally (e.g. martyrs). The ritual was practiced at celebrations of saints' feasts, which caused the clergy at some councils like Auxerre (585 or 578) to be concerned about the association with the cult of saints. More specifically, there was a fear that Christian holiness would be confused with soothsayers and fortune-tellers, and that *fides Christiana* would be diverted. Ecclesiastical writers have usually attributed the divinatory power of oracles to the »unclean spirits or demons«. The demonic power was exercised by soothsayers and fortune-tellers through consecrated statues (idols).<sup>49</sup> It was thought that the demons dwelt in pagan shrines and when the ritual of divination took place, they entered the body of the practitioners. Following this they became possessed and acted as intermediaries between the divine and the human world (Plato's view of *daimones*). The early Christian writers would have identified *daimones* with the evil spirits from the Gospels. The demons were a sort of lesser deities so their divination power, an attribute reserved exclusively for the omniscient God, was not only limited but also inaccurate. It was based more on logic and human reasoning and less on divine matters. Since Christians also shared the belief in divination, any contact between them and oracles was intended to be avoided. The techniques used to perform the divination were religious in nature and this attracted people (both newly converted and catechumens) to the pre-Christian cults. This is confirmed by the fact that in fifth-century Gaul, a deceased person who was locally canonized by the ecclesiastical authorities was honored not only as a martyr saint, but also as a bearer of divinatory knowledge.<sup>50</sup>

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*als Imagination: Phänomene des Menschseins in den Horizonten theologischer Lebensdeutung*, (eds. Lena SEEHAUSEN, Paulus ENKE and Jens HERZER), Leipzig, 2020, pp. 303–314, here 307, n. 20.

<sup>46</sup> The oldest codex where this divinatory text can be found dates back to the ninth century. Robert WISNIEWSKI, *Christian Divination*, pp. 115–120, 123.

<sup>47</sup> For the ancient Greek influence in the Latin *sortes*, see Randall STEWART, »The Textual Transmission of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*«, *Illinois Classical Studies*, vol. 20, 1995, pp. 135–147, here 136–138.

<sup>48</sup> Allen E. JONES, *Social Mobility in Late Antique Gaul: Strategies and Opportunities for the Non-Elite*, Cambridge, 2009, p. 301.

<sup>49</sup> »Isti igitur impuri spiritus, daemones, ut ostensum magis ac philosophis, sub statutis et imaginibus consecratis delitiscunt et adflatu suo auctoritatem quasi praesentis numinis consequuntur«. *M. Minucii Felicis Octavius*, with introduction and notes by T. FAHY, Dublin, 1919, 27.1, p. 396.

<sup>50</sup> According to primary sources there were even cases when cults of local bishops replaced the cults of previous saints. Raymond VAN DAM, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul*, Berkeley, 1985, pp. 170–172.

#### 4. Divination in Isidore of Seville

The second source, *Etymologiae*, also known as the *Origines* («Origins») is an encyclopedic work finished by Isidore of Seville around 625. It contains information mostly from liberal arts. Yet the emphasis is mainly on the theological and moral aspects of Nicene Christianity. The author was born around 560 and educated as a pupil of his older brother Leander, a well-known fighter against Arianism and close to Pope Gregory I (d. 604).<sup>51</sup> Isidore became Bishop of Seville in 600, being an influential churchman in the Visigothic Kingdom. He presided over two important Church councils in the Visigothic *Hispania*, Seville (619) and Toledo (633). Isidore was inspired not only by the theological works of the Church Fathers, but also Roman authors such as Tertullian, Martial and Pliny the Elder.<sup>52</sup> His book *Etymologies*, which is divided into topics, pays attention to the knowledge of human and divine matters. Isidore's aim was to demonstrate that various natural phenomena which took place by their cause were not divinely inspired and did not applied rationality. He deeply opposed the ones who consulted the supernatural through various types of divination.

One of the main protagonists of Isidore in divinatory matters was the *sortilegi* who practiced a «fictitious religion» (*fictae religionis*). Their knowledge of divination was taken from some specific divinatory texts («holy books»). A *sortilegus* is a person who predict certain events that would happen in the future by interpretation of certain writings, including the Bible.<sup>53</sup> As a *magus* (magician) and *divinus* (diviner), a *sortilegus* is a practitioner skilled in the *artes magicae* or *artes prohibita*.<sup>54</sup>

Isidore grouped them all in a sub-chapter called *De Magis*. Perhaps the author wanted to emphasize their occult profession in a broad sense, although there was a difference between them in terms of working methods. The instructions on magic art of divination came from evil angels (*mali angeli*).<sup>55</sup> The *magi* performed occult actions<sup>56</sup> usually by trickery,<sup>57</sup> while a *sortilegus* and *divinus* could offer secret knowledge. The diviners were divided into several categories (*incantatores, arioli, haruspices, astrologi, augures, pythonissae*). The diviners were able to predicts in a deceptive way the future of people because they pretended they were filled with divine inspiration.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>51</sup> For the link between Pope Gregory I, Leander and Isidore, their legacy on the religious life in early medieval Spain and struggle against Arianism, see Jamie WOOD, «A family affair: Leander, Isidore and the legacy of Gregory the Great in Spain», *Isidore of Seville and his reception in the early Middle Ages*, Amsterdam, 2016, pp. 31–56.

<sup>52</sup> For the historical background in which *Etymologies* was written, as well as Isidore's biography, chronology, sources consulted, editions and literary influences, see Stephen A. BARNEY et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 3–28.

<sup>53</sup> «Aut quarumcumque scripturarum inspectione futura promittunt». *Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm*, 8.9.28, p. 326.

<sup>54</sup> *Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm*, 8.9.2–3, p. 323.

<sup>55</sup> *Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm*, 8.9.3, p. 323.

<sup>56</sup> *Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm*, 8.9.4–10, pp. 323–324.

<sup>57</sup> *Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm*, 8.9.3, p. 323.

<sup>58</sup> «Divinitate enim se plenos adsimulant et astutia quadam fraudulenta hominibus futura coniectant». *Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm*, 8.9.14, p. 325.

Isidore's classification of divination was taken from the ancient Roman scholars Varro (d. 27 BC) and Cicero (d. 43 BC). The first divided the diviners into four categories (*genera*) based on the four elements of nature: earth (*geomantia*), water (*hydromantia*), air (*aeromantia*) and fire (*pyromantia*).<sup>59</sup> Cicero divided the diviners into two *genera* following Plato's distinction between *furor* (demonic inspiration) and *ars* (technical skill). Isidore seems to follow more Cicero and split the diviners into three subgroups according to the Platonic classification.<sup>60</sup> In the first subgroup we have the diviners which take the knowledge directly from demons (*incantatores* and *arioli*).<sup>61</sup> Another subgroup includes those who mastered technical skills (*astrologi*, *sortilegi* and *salisatores*).<sup>62</sup> Between the two groups is a mixed category where we can find *haruspices* (demonic inspiration), augurs and *pythonissae* (technical skills).<sup>63</sup>

In the first half of the seventh century, divination in various ways was still a common practice to which not only the laity but also the clergy appealed. The canon 29 issued at the fourth Council of Toledo held under Isidore's supervision in 633 condemned all deacons, priests and bishops who were caught consulting magicians, soothsayers, diviners, augurs, casters of lots and other diviners who performed similar arts. As punishment, they were deposed from their ecclesiastical ranks and sent to a monastery where they will receive penance to atone for the sin of divination, considered to be sacrilege.<sup>64</sup>

## 5. Divination in *Decretum Gratiani*

The arts of divination did not disappear in the High Middle Ages. It became more and more an unorthodox practice within the clergy. After all, they knew the Bible so that they could use it as a divination tool. This was without the consent of the higher ecclesiastical authorities. Gradually the Church incorporated certain elements from the ancient divination which were adapted to contemporary times. Most of the knowledge about divination acquired by medieval authors came through the Latin Church Fathers. It was emphasized that early medieval theologians were tolerant of magic practices as long as it did not mix with the doctrine of free will and divine providence<sup>65</sup> and did not violate the canon law.

A well-known theologian and canonist who wrote about the involvement of clergy in divination is Gratian. His main work, *Decretum*, a compilation of legal and theological

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<sup>59</sup> *Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm*, 8.9.13, p. 325.

<sup>60</sup> For the classification of magicians and diviners following Plato in Isidore's *Etymologies*, see William E. KLINGSHIRN, »Isidore of Seville's Taxonomy of Magicians and Diviners«, *Traditio*, vol. 58, 2003, pp. 59–90.

<sup>61</sup> *Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm*, 8.9.15–16, p. 325.

<sup>62</sup> *Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm*, 8.9.22–29, p. 325–326.

<sup>63</sup> *Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm*, 8.9.17–21, p. 325.

<sup>64</sup> Concilium Toletatum IV, Can. 29 *apud* Dieter HARMENING, *Superstitio: Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters*, Berlin, 1979, p. 172.

<sup>65</sup> John Scott LUCAS, *Astrology and Numerology in Medieval and Early Modern Catalonia: The Tractat de Prenostication de la Vida Natural Dels Háomens*, Leiden, 2003, p. 8.

texts collected from various sources and written around 1140.<sup>66</sup> His work became a useful didactic tool for many ecclesiastical lawyers and decretists and might have influenced the ecclesiastical courts and judges working with them. It has been argued that Gratian narrowed the juristic purview of magical practices, which in Augustine was related to superstition in a broad framework. Augustinian texts on magic and superstition became a juristic manual for medieval lawyers.<sup>67</sup>

Gratian's work is important for us because it contains some regulations on sorcery and divination practiced by *sortilegi et divini* («soothsayers and fortune-tellers»).<sup>68</sup> Not surprisingly, Gratian does not have his own definition of divination, but he uses that of Isidore of Seville, which he transposes into his contemporaneity. According to Gratian, *sortilegi et divini* exercise the profession (science of divination) under the guise of religion. This could take place first through *sortes sanctorum* and second through prognostication of the future by inspection of any kind of scriptures (holy books),<sup>69</sup> including the pages of the Gospel.<sup>70</sup> Both acts are described as a sort of false promises. Gratian does not specify whether divination is a sacrilegious act committed consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally. We know that such kinds of magic practices were treated as *sacrilegium* by the canonists because they violated canon law. Gratian did not approve or reject this idea. In his text there are no mentions whether or not divination is a sacrilege. He only stated that a *sacrilegium* is committed rather through «ignorance» (*nesciendo*) or «negligence» (*negligendo*).<sup>71</sup>

Gratian made a distinction between divination by prophetic power and prediction through professional knowledge (licit medicine). He also made a distinction between practitioners. Various forms of divination were practiced not only by the laity but by the clergy as well. Prediction of the life or death of the sick was allowed as long as they were not made through «Pythagorean necromancy», which was an illicit act.<sup>72</sup> Divination could be also made by using certain tablets with numbers or by the moon.<sup>73</sup> Illicit divinatory practices within the clergy were performed through consultation of «dream books» entitled with «the false name of Daniel», or through the «lots of the blessed Apostles». <sup>74</sup> This could be explained by the

<sup>66</sup> For the context in which was written, its importance for the medieval canon law, editorial style and published editions, see Anders WINROTH, *The Making of Gratian's Decretum*, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 1–33.

<sup>67</sup> Superstition was analyzed by Augustine in a broad context in *De Doctrina Christiana* and *De civitate Dei*. Edward PETERS, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law*, Philadelphia, 1978, p. 75.

<sup>68</sup> For divination practices banned by Gratian and other thirteenth century decretalists like Bernard of Pavia and Bernard of Parma, see Lotte KERY, «Mantische Praktiken und Divination», *Mittelalterliche Rechtstexte und mantische Praktiken*, (eds. Klaus HERBERS and Hans Christian LEHNER), Köln, 2020, pp. 119–144.

<sup>69</sup> «Sortilegi sunt qui sub nomine fictae religionis per quasdam, quas sanctorum seu apostolorum uocant sortes, diuinationis scientiam profitentur, aut quarumcumque scripturarum inspectione futura promittunt». *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, Pars 2, Causa 26, Qu 2, C UN, p. 1020.

<sup>70</sup> *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, Pars 2, Causa 26, Qu 2, C 3, p. 1021.

<sup>71</sup> For divinatory practices as sacrilegious acts in Gratian, see Krzysztof BURCZAK, *Sacrilegium in Gratian's Decretum*, Lublin, 2012, pp. 120, 276–277.

<sup>72</sup> «Per Pitagoricam nigromantiam egrotantium uitam uel mortem». *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, Pars 2, Causa 26, Qu 7, C 16, p. 1045.

<sup>73</sup> «Siue per quosdam numeros litterarum, et lunae». *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, Pars 2, Causa 26, Qu 7, C 16, p. 1045.

<sup>74</sup> «Siue qui adtendunt somnialia scripta, et falso in Danielis nomine intitulata, et sortes, que dicuntur sanctorum Apostolorum». *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, Pars 2, Causa 26, Qu 7, C 16, p. 1045.

fact that divination was related to sorcery which was considered an amalgam of practices through which practitioners subordinated themselves to the forces of nature and not to God and true faith legitimized by ecclesiastical authorities. Gratian explicitly said that divinatory practices mentioned above are considered a crime against the »Christian faith and baptism«, because are related to paganism and apostasy and their practitioners are »the enemies of God«. <sup>75</sup> These acts are seen as hostile to God, who will shed eternal wrath. They can only be corrected by ecclesiastical penance, the result of which will be reconciliation with God. <sup>76</sup>

It has been emphasized that just like Augustine and Isidore, Gratian draws attention to the relationship between divination and magic and connection to heresy. <sup>77</sup> However he offered no arguments to confirm why divination is a sin or why it should be regarded as a heretical act. Gratian lets us understand that divination is a sin, which can be indirectly framed along with more serious ones such as adultery, homicide, etc. From a canonical viewpoint, the only penalty which could be applied for priests who committed such kind of acts was excommunication. Yet Gratian does not even tell us if excommunication is the most effective way to stop such kinds of illegitimate practices. He only sneaks the divination between such more serious sins, in order to justify the excommunication.

One thing was for sure in Gratian, namely that disobedience to higher ecclesiastical authorities is worse than any form of divination. In Causa 26 he mentioned the case of a priest who was a soothsayer and fortune-teller. Because of that he was rebuked by his bishop. The priest did not stop so he was excommunicated by the bishop. Later, when he was about to die, he was reconciled by another priest through penance, again without consulting the bishop. <sup>78</sup>

What we notice from this statement is the relation between disobedience (*inobedientia*) and authority (*auctoritas*) within the ecclesiastical network. We can also notice the relation between sacerdotal and episcopal powers in reconciling sinful clergy through penance. From a canonical viewpoint, Gratian emphasized the importance of ecclesiastical hierarchy in the process of reconciliation of clergy who were excommunicated. Indeed a bishop was able to reconcile a sinful priest who was excommunicated by another priest. Since the priests received ecclesiastical power from bishops through ordination, they were unable to reconcile sinners with the same ecclesiastical rank who were excommunicated by their superiors. The only exception is when a priest is about to die and the bishop is unable to perform this action. A priest could be also reconciled without the diocesan bishop's approval only by the pope or a metropolitan. <sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> »Sciant, se fidem Christianam et baptismum preuaricasse, et paganum, et apostatam, id est retro abeuntem et Dei inimicum«. *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, Pars 2, Causa 26, Qu 7, C 16, p. 1045.

<sup>76</sup> »Iram Dei grauius in eternum incurrisse, nisi ecclesiastica penitencia emendatus Deo reconcilietur«. *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, Pars 2, Causa 26, Qu 7, C 16, p. 1045.

<sup>77</sup> Corinne J. SAUNDERS, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*, Woodbridge, 2010, p. 82.

<sup>78</sup> »Quidam sacerdos sortilegus esse et diuinus conuincitur apud episcopum; correctus ab episcopo noluit cessare; excommunicatur; tandem agens in extremis reconciliatur a quodam sacerdote episcopo inconsulto; indicitur penitencia sibi sub quantitate temporis canonibus prefixa«. *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, Pars 2, Causa 26, p. 1019.

<sup>79</sup> Regulations on excommunication within the ecclesiastical hierarchy can be seen in *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, Pars 2, Causa 26, Qu 6, C 1–5., pp. 1036–1037.

## 6. Divination at John of Salisbury

Another reliable source for the divination in the twelfth century is John of Salisbury, who was the Bishop of Chartres (1176–1180). He is considered a well-known figure of the twelfth-century renaissance, and one of the most influential political theorists of his time. After he received his education in Paris, John returned to England in 1148 as a secretary of the Norman archbishop of Canterbury, Theobald of Bec (d. 1161). For more than a decade he acted as an English emissary to the papal curia, traveling often to Rome.<sup>80</sup> After the death of Theobald, John of Salisbury continued his career as secretary to his successor, Archbishop Thomas Becket (d. 1170). Furthermore, John supported Becket in the dispute with King Henry II (r. 1154–1189) regarding the rights and privileges of the Church.<sup>81</sup>

In *Policraticus*, written around 1159 and dedicated to his friend Thomas Becket, John stated that in his time there were still people who possessed magic arts. John of Salisbury also tells us how, as a youth, he began his apprenticeship with a soothsayer-priest (probably a Christian priest who practiced a certain type of divination). His accounts on magic are drawn from Isidore of Seville.<sup>82</sup> Like Isidore, John considered that *sortilegi* are those who, under the auspices of a *ficta religio*, predict the future.<sup>83</sup>

In John's time many ancient methods of divination were not practiced anymore, but certain books for divination by dream were still used, as well as palm-reading (*chiromancy*). The palmistry was performed both to the royal and archiepiscopal courts. Not only a nobleman, but also an ecclesiastical figure could apply to discover the truth on future events which are hidden in the lines of the hand.<sup>84</sup> This form of divination was regarded as an error which has no foundation in human reason.<sup>85</sup> Thomas Becket, while royal Chancellor and Archdeacon of Canterbury, probably at Henry's urging, consulted a palmist before organizing a military campaign.<sup>86</sup> This prophecy ended up in a tragic way. The English army was defeated in 1157 in Ewloe wood (near Flintshire) by the Welsh prince Owain Gwynedd<sup>87</sup> and John had to justify the failure.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>80</sup> For John's ecclesiastical career, see Julie BARRAU, »John of Salisbury as Ecclesiastical Administrator«, *A Companion to John of Salisbury*, (eds. Christoph GRELLARD and Frédérique LACHAUD), Leiden, 2015, pp. 105–144.

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Becket was canonized in 1173 by the Pope Alexander III (1159–1181). Because he supported Becket in his dispute with Henry, John was considered the agent of Alexander III. A collection of primary sources about the biography of Becket is James Craigie ROBERTSON (ed.), *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury (Canonized by Pope Alexander III, AD 1173)*, vol. 3, Cambridge, 2012.

<sup>82</sup> For magic practices in the medieval royal courts, see Richard KIECKHEFER, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 95–115.

<sup>83</sup> John of Salisbury, I, 12, p. 53.

<sup>84</sup> »Chiromantici quoque uera quae in rugis manuum latent se nosse gloriantur«. John of Salisbury, II, 27, p. 143.

<sup>85</sup> »Quorum errorem quia ratione non nititur non necesse est rationibus impugnare, licet eo ipso illos expugnet ratio quod deficiunt ratione«. John of Salisbury, II, 27, p. 143.

<sup>86</sup> John of Salisbury, II, 27, p. 143.

<sup>87</sup> John of Salisbury, II, 27, p. 144. For more details regarding the prophecy of the battle in 1157, see Paul DALTON and David LUSCOMBE, *Rulership and Rebellion in the Anglo-Norman World, c.1066–c.1216: Essays in Honour of Professor Edmund King*, London, 2016, p. 153.

<sup>88</sup> John finds arguments in a story from Old Testament on the battle between the Philistines and Israel in 1 Kings (1 Samuel), 28 and 31. There it is stated that Saul was dethroned true a false prophecy. It is also emphasized the disobedience of Saul. John of Salisbury, II, 27, pp. 144–146.

Becket was criticized by John not only for consulting a palmist, but also for reading the future in stars. The astrological divination was not accepted because the stars were not able to send warning signs before certain events could happen. In other words the human interpretation of astrological signs is not a rational profession, but only an error drew from superstition, and it would destroy the free will. However God can send celestial signs but to guide humans, not to unravel the hidden mysteries.<sup>89</sup> What we notice is that palm-reading and astrological divination were labeled as illicit prophecies. These were false due to the lack of human reasoning and thus should not be practiced by the clergy.

From all divinatory practices, John paid attention to divination by dream (*oneiromancy*), which was classified following the Macrobian model. Four types of dreams were highlighted: *insomnia* (a torturous dream which resulted from anxiety and drunkenness), *phantasma* (hallucinatory dream or nightmare which is the effect of the mental or physical disorder), *somnium* (enigmatic dream which can bring truth and reality) and *oraculum* (a dream in which a message is sent from the supernatural world by ancestors, angels or deities). The first two categories were separated from the last two because they have no oracular significance and the cause of them is psychological. The third was used by God to send messages to prophets and saints through angels. However, if the person did not receive a prophetic gift from God then the interpretation of dreams (*oraculum*) might be an error.<sup>90</sup>

## 7. Divination in Thomas Aquinas

In *Summa theologiae*, written between 1271 and 1272, Thomas Aquinas, a well known figure within medieval scholasticism, placed astrology and divination in a theological context for understanding superstition and idolatry. For Thomas, *astrologia* was nothing more than a science of the stars, which also included *astronomia*. It was emphasized that Thomas made no clear distinction between astrology and astronomy, as we do in modern times. Therefore »the science of the stars« was a legitimate mode of knowledge because it did not contradict the Christian doctrine.<sup>91</sup> Thomas believed that the science of the stars was a legitimate discipline of knowledge. This could be used to predict the future as long as it was practiced within the doctrinal limits of the Church.

Unlike his predecessors, Thomas he made a theoretical distinction between superstition, idolatry and other activities which could be integrated within the two (e.g. divination). He described two types of superstitions, both based on irrational belief. The first is the superstition (*superstitio*) which is opposed to the »good faith« (e.g. *fides Christiana*) because it offers divine worship (*cultus divinus*) in an inappropriate way.<sup>92</sup> The second was

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<sup>89</sup> John of Salisbury, II, 18, 19, pp. 107–113.

<sup>90</sup> Jan R. VEENSTRA, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France: Text and Context of Laurens Pignon's Contre Les Devineurs (1411)*, Leiden, 1998, pp. 182–184.

<sup>91</sup> For the relationship between astrology and divination in Thomism, see H. Darrel RUTKIN, »Is Astrology a Type of Divination? Thomas Aquinas, the Index of Prohibited Books, and the Construction of a Legitimate Astrology in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance«, *International Journal of Divination and Prognostication*, (eds. Michael LACKNER and Charles BURNETT), vol. 1, n. 1, 2019, pp. 36–74.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Aquinas, II–II, Qu. 92, Art. 1, 2, pp. 298–299.

the superstition in which the divine worship was offered to anyone except the Creator (*cuicumque creaturae*). This type was also divided into three categories (without a specific hierarchy) according to the source of faith for the divine worship and methodology. In the first category were those who offered divine worship to a creature and not to the Creator. Their inability to distinguish between Creator and creature according to Christian doctrine made them be regarded as idolaters. A second category included certain practices (*observationes*) in which divine worship was not oriented directly to God, but through some human actions according to His indications.<sup>93</sup> Finally, the third and most important for us is divination. Through *divinatio*, Thomas understood an illicit form of predicting certain events which could have happened in the future (*quaedam praenuntiatio futurorum*).

Thomas rhetorically asked whether or not divination is a sin (*utrum divinatio sit peccatum*) and described its demonic character. He also presented four main types (*speciebus*) of divination: »by the stars« (*per astra*), »by dreams« (*per somnia*), »by augurs and other similar observations« (*per auguria et alias huiusmodi observations*), and »by lots« (*per sortes*).<sup>94</sup> The divinatory power of the practitioners came from demons through agreements made with them.<sup>95</sup> In most of the cases divinatory practices comes from demonic activity (*operatio daemonum*) because diviners openly invoke the demons for this matter. Furthermore the diviners receive the advice and assistance of demons. Divination is also demonic because demons comply with these human inquiries, offering nothing real except illusions.<sup>96</sup>

No doubt that Thomas understood the complexity of divination in both theory and practice. He did not reject divination as a whole, but only certain divination practices. He agreed on the fact that future events could be most often foreknown and foretold with certainty (*per certitudinem praenosci possunt et praenuntiari*), but only when they follow their natural course and the effects are observed and interpreted in a rational way. This was not a genuine method of divination as it was described in ancient times, but rather a deductive logic. Thomas did not deny that people could predict certain future events, but only said that such actions would be illegitimate. In other words the prognostication of the future was a result of causality. The only one who had divinatory power was God, but of course in most cases He didn't share it with humans. Only God had genuine cognitive abilities, while human cognition was an imitation. The only legitimate way to know the future beyond the human reason (*ratio humana*) was through God's revelation (*nisi Deo revelante*). The practitioners received messages on future events which came from the divine sphere (*suscipit*), and not the divinatory power itself. This was accepted as legitimate practice, although it was not named *divinatio*.<sup>97</sup>

To confirm this statement Thomas offers three examples of legitimate prognostication of the future through interpretations deriving from human reason. Of course the practitioners were not called diviners (*divini*) by Thomas, who is mentioning Isidore, because they did

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Aquinas, II–II, Qu. 92, Art. 2, p. 299.

<sup>94</sup> Thomas Aquinas, II–II, Qu. 95, Art. 1, p. 311.

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Aquinas, II–II, Qu. 92, Art. 2, p. 299.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Aquinas, II–II, Qu. 95, Art. 2, p. 311.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Aquinas, II–II, Qu. 95, Art. 1, p. 311.

not usurp the divinatory power in an inappropriate manner (*indebito modo*). Moreover their activity was not a fraud like divination, and the practitioners have not committed a sin (*peccatum*). The first example is the *astrologus* (astronomer in the modern sense) who through his knowledge are able to predict future eclipses. Thomas highlighted another type of astrologer who can say if rains or droughts will come. Legitimate practitioners could also be the physicians (*medici*), who by the nature of their profession and knowledge can foretell how the health of the sick persons will evolve, or if they will die.<sup>98</sup>

Concerning the divination by dreams, Thomas is ambivalent. His comments on divinatory dreams are always made from a theoretical point of view. No doubt he was aware of the different attitudes towards this type of divination in the Bible. In his text we can find quotations from Old Testament (Numbers 12 and Job 33) and explanations of the practice by Joseph and Daniel. He also emphasized three known arguments which could support the idea that divination through dreams is not illegal. First the readers have to know that the Bible contains records which says that God himself communicates with people in dreams.<sup>99</sup> Another argument is based on a critic of Aristotle's claim that only people with no prophetic gifts have the purest dreams regarding their future. On the contrary, the Old Testament contains records on persons with prophetic power like Joseph and Daniel who have interpreted dreams. Thomas also emphasized that humans always believed that certain dreams could mean something about their future and therefore such experiences should not be denied.<sup>100</sup>

The counterargument (*sed contra*) of Thomas for these examples is the prohibition of the »observance of dreams« from Deuteronomy 18:10, along with divination practiced by *arioli* and *auguri*.<sup>101</sup> In an attempt to develop his counter-argument, Thomas tells us that divination in a proper sense is based on a false opinion regarding the future and should be treated as a superstitious and unlawful thing. The persons who interpret dreams does not divine (*divinare*), but rather he receive divine messages and thus the action is not divine (*divinum*).<sup>102</sup> From his text we can understand that Thomas did not reject the dream divination which could have taken place through divine prophecy or physical causes. He only believed that such cases are extremely rare and occur in a special context. What appears to be non-negotiable is that the prognostic dreams (in a divinatory way) are sent by demons and not by God.

What we can notice is that over time the *sortes sanctorum* involved genuine methods, while *sortes biblicae* were seen as unorthodox practices within the Church, based on the »holy words« of the Bible. The divination must have been a fairly widespread phenomenon, since it was so zealously condemned. In terms of popularity, *sortes sanctorum* was the most frequently used book in the late antique Gaul, while *sortes biblicae* appears to be more a local practice.<sup>103</sup> It is obvious that the reasons for practicing divination were complex. Any

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<sup>98</sup> Thomas Aquinas, II-II, Qu. 95, Art. 1, p. 311.

<sup>99</sup> One example is Job 33:15-16.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Aquinas, II-II, Qu. 95, Art. 6, p. 323.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Aquinas, II-II, Qu. 95, Art. 6, p. 323. We have to mention that Thomas used the Vulgate text, where we can find about the »observance of dreams«. The original Hebrew text does not contain references to »dreams«.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Aquinas, II-II, Qu. 95, Art. 2, p. 311.

<sup>103</sup> Robert WISNIEWSKI, *Christian Divination*, p. 124.

lay person, peasant or noble, male or female, could have appealed to divination in order to get access to hidden knowledge. Of course, the interests could have been both material and spiritual. After all, the faith of medieval man was not limited only to the norms of the church, but experienced a more complex dimension, fueled by superstitions. He was curious and had questions, to which he had to find answers by any means. In this way the divination could be seen as the easiest solution to unravel the mysteries of the future and provide the necessary optimism.

## Conclusion

The writings contain many explanations on divination which can be interpreted by using various disciplines. The purpose of this article was to reduce the complexity of analysis and to focus on clerical perception on divination in the Middle Ages. Even if they are not called »diviners« by medieval theologians, angels and prophets in the Old Testament had divinatory power. Prognostications of the future which came through angels or prophets were legitimate. The ones outside of the divine hierarchy were illegitimate and thus treated as superstitions or demonic practices. The true divinatory power belongs to God and He could share it only through a divine hierarchy. Humans occupied the last position in this ontological hierarchy and they were unable to receive the prophetic gift. God could reveal the future to humans only through certain methods like dreams. The divine message could be delivered through angels, who acted as God's messengers. The angels, prophets or humans who received divine messages on the future were not called diviners, because only God could divine. Divination was one of His prerogatives as being omniscient and omnipotent. Since demons are always depicted as rejecting the divine hierarchy, being a diviner who performs divination meant a direct association to demonology, idolatry and in a broad sense, paganism.

## SAŽETAK

### LEGITIMNO I NELEGITIMNO PRORICANJE U SREDNJOVJEKOVNIM SPISIMA

*U radu autor analizira karakteristike proricanja tijekom ranog kršćanstva te kanonske propise o proricaju i argumente zbog kojih su ga teolozi osuđivali. Također se analizira semantička ambivalentnost srednjovjekovnog rječnika u odnosu na proricateljsku praksu. Budući da je bila dopuštena samo Božja proročka moć, sve vrste predviđanja budućnosti bez božanskog odobrenja smatrane su lažnim i nelegitimnim. Ono što ovaj članak pokazuje jest to da se od ranog srednjeg vijeka nadalje proricanje razlikovalo od drugih proricateljskih metoda kroz prirodu božanskih poruka i ljudskog razmišljanja.*

*KLJUČNE RIJEČI: proricanje, kanonsko pravo, srednjovjekovni teolozi, praznovjerje, ljudsko razmišljanje*