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MANTIC PERSPECTIVES IN GREEK TRAGEDY.  
WORDS, PERSONS AND PERFORMANCES<sup>1</sup>

Greek tragedy is an important source for research on various rituals and religious activities: sacrifices, prayers, *hikesiai*, lamentations, funerals, processions and – of course – divinations. Words connected with divination are often inserted into dialogues or songs; in addition there are *dramatis personae* – important and influential professionals in divination – and passages of tragic texts focused specifically on places, techniques and what I would refer to as the ‘theology’ of divination. The number of these ‘mantic’ allusions, words, persons and performances in the corpus of Greek tragedy is substantial; and together they create an important dimension – the ‘mantic perspective’ – which becomes one of keys to the secret power of tragic poetry.<sup>2</sup> I will return to this point in my conclusions.

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<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to believe but at present no single monograph of the presence of mantic themes in Greek tragedy exists. There are only fragmentary works, discussing either a single author or general questions. These works also lack detailed analyses and parallels, which would allow for synteses and for drawing conclusions which would allow for new paths in research. Among these works are J. Jouanna,

Many ancient authors – including Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Artemidoros, Cicero, Varro, to name just a few<sup>3</sup> – attempted to understand and explain divination in different ways. Their texts clearly demonstrate how divination was a performative and religious activity that pervaded every possible level of public and private life – exactly as we used to say about sacrifice or, following Jan Bremmer remarks,<sup>4</sup> Greek religion in general.

Oracles, divinations, *manteis* and *propheteiai* are ‘omnipresent in Greek tragedy’,<sup>5</sup> especially the oracles at Delphi<sup>6</sup> and Dodona (Aesch. PV 658–66; 829–35; Soph. *Trach.* 169–72; 1164–72; Eur. *Andr.* 883–90; *Phoen.* 979–84).<sup>7</sup> The Delphic oracle is mentioned in fourteen of the thirty-three surviving tragedies, which include thirty-four consultations of the Pythia,<sup>8</sup> who also appears as a *dramatis persona* in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus and in *Ion* by Euripides. This all-pervasive presence of the mantic in tragedy is built by

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‘Oracles et devins chez Sophocle’, in J.-G. Heintz (ed.), *Oracles et prophéties dans l’Antiquité. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg 15–17 juin 1995* (Paris 1997), 283–320; J.C. Kamerbeek, ‘Prophesy and Tragedy’ *Mnemosyne* 18 (1965), 29–40; R.W. Bushnell, *Prophesying Tragedy. Sign and Voice in Sophocles’ Theban Plays* (Ithaca and London 1988); L. Bowman, ‘Prophesy and Authority in the *Trachiniae*’, *AJPh* 120 (1999), 335–350; Ch. Segal, ‘Time, Oracles, and Marriage in the Trachinian Women’ in *Sophocles’ Tragic World. Divinity, Nature, Society* (Cambridge, Mass. 1995), 69–94; L. Bowman, *Klytaimnestra’s Dream: Prophecy in Sophocles’ Elektra*, *Phoenix* 51 (1997), 131–151; A.E. Hinds, ‘The Prophecy of Helenus in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*’, *Class. Quart.* 17 (1967), 169–180; R.L. Kane, *Prophecy and Perception in the Oedipus Rex*, *TAPA* 105 (1975), 189–208; S. Lattimore, ‘Oedipus and Teiresias’, *CSCA* 8 (1975), 105–111.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. P. Bonehere, ‘Divination’ in D. Ogden (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Religion* (Oxford 2007), 145–159, esp. 146.

<sup>4</sup> J. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford 1999), 2–4.

<sup>5</sup> L.R. Lanzillotta, *Prophecy and Oracle*, in *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Greek Tragedy*, online version: [http://theol.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/2012/ProphecyandOracle/Prophecy\\_and\\_Oracle\\_versin\\_rep\\_1.pdf](http://theol.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/2012/ProphecyandOracle/Prophecy_and_Oracle_versin_rep_1.pdf) (accessed 22.09.2013), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. S. Vogt, ‘Delphi in der Attischen Tragödie’, *Antike und Abendland* 44 (1998), 30–48.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. M. Dieterle, *Dodona. Religionsgeschichtliche und historische Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Entwicklung des Zeus-Heiligtums* (Zurich and New York 2007).

<sup>8</sup> L.R. Lanzillotta, *op. cit.*, 4.

words and characters, by the use of terms laden with long tradition and by personages present in oldest mythical narratives.

#### WORDS

One of the difficulties in dealing with this subject is purely linguistic. In English we have such words as 'oracle', 'divination', 'prophecy', 'inspiration', 'possession', 'madness' and 'fury'. 'Mantic' appears only as an adjective, and only in technical sense. In poetry we have also 'vatic', from Latin *vaticinium*. There are, of course, numerous other adjectives, including 'oracular', 'prophetic', 'mad' and 'furious'; dictionaries also suggest 'perceptive', 'prescient', and 'divinatory', all of which sound strange and rather affected. In these words we can see mostly the Latin tradition: 'oracle' and 'oracular' from *oraculum* (comes from 'ora' – 'mouth' and 'orare' – 'speak'); 'divination' from *divinare* ('to make out or interpret things hidden from the senses, practice divination'<sup>9</sup>) and *divinus* ('of or belonging to the gods',<sup>10</sup> from *divus*, that which appears in a moment); 'inspiration' from *inspirare* ('to draw deep breaths, to infuse'<sup>11</sup>); possession from *possessio* ('occupancy',<sup>12</sup> in fact from the verb *possideo* – 'to have, to occupy'). Only 'prophecy' has Greek origins (προφήτης from πρόφημι – 'say before'<sup>13</sup>); although 'madness' and 'fury' (also from Latin) recall Greek words and their meanings. 'Mad' and 'madness'<sup>14</sup> probably have no connection with Greek or Latin at all.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, 564.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, 928.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, 1410.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1x<sup>th</sup> edition with Supplement, red. H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H.S. Jones, Oxford 1996 (further as LSJ), 1539.

<sup>14</sup> They come from Proto-Germanic *ga-maid-jan*, what is demonstrative form from *ga-maid-az* – 'changed in worse, abnormal'. Cf. Online Etymological Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=mad>), sv.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. W.W. Skeat, *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology* (Ware 1993), 264.

Cicero was the first writer who paid attention to the differences in terminology when discussing this *phainomenon* in Greek and Latin traditions; we will follow his distinctions in our investigation:

1 1 Vetus opinio est iam usque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque et populi Romani et omnium gentium firmata consensu, versari quandam inter homines divinationem, quam Graeci μαντική appellant, id est praesensionem et scientiam rerum futurarum. Magnifica quaedam res et salutaris, si modo est ulla, quaque proxime ad deorum vim natura mortalis possit accedere. Itaque ut alia nos melius multa quam Graeci, sic huic praestantissimae rei nomen nostri a divis, Graeci, ut Plato interpretatur, a furore duxerunt.

1 1 There is an ancient belief, handed down to us even from mythical times and firmly established by the general agreement of the Roman people and of all nations, that divination of some kind exists among men; this the Greeks call μαντική – that is, the foresight and knowledge of future events. A really splendid and helpful thing it is – if only such a faculty exists – since by its means men may approach very near to the power of gods. And, just as we Romans have done many other things better than the Greeks, so have we excelled them in giving to this most extraordinary gift a name, which we have derived from *divi*, a word meaning ‘gods,’ whereas, according to Plato’s interpretation, they have derived it from *furore*, a word meaning ‘frenzy.’ (tr. W.A. Falconer)

It is interesting to note that for Cicero the most important aim of divination is not ‘a knowledge’ – *scientia rerum futurarum* – but ‘approaching very near to the power of gods’ (*proxime ad deorum vim natura mortalis possit accedere*).

The problem of applying English words to the ancient Greek practices is a problem of translation. The case is complicated and must always involve a compromise between the literal meaning and the stylistics of the generic and artistic context; however, to fully understand these terms, they should become subject to the in-depth linguistic, historical and cultural analysis. There are many

technical terms evoking ‘mantic’ subjects, which must be understood in the proper way – that is with respect to their cultic and ritual context – even when they are used metaphorically.

The English words continue at least three etymological and semantic traditions:

1. connected with a divine power in general (divination).
2. connected with speaking (prophecy, oracle).
3. connected with madness (*mania*, *manteia*).

The first of these groups is typical for Latin. In the Greek language we have only the latter two meanings; the first meaning is found only in Latin (and is, in Cicero’s opinion, the best one). However, the most important meaning – and one which is characteristic only for the Greeks – is madness (*mania* – *mainomai* – *mantis* – *manteia*).

One may risk the statement that all Greek tragedy is about madness. The madness of Heracles, of Medea, of the Furies, of Pentheus, of Agaue and her sisters, of Bakchai from Lydia, and also of Teiresias and Cadmus, of Ajas, of Cassandra, of the terrified suppliant women of Aeschylus, of Prometheus, of Teiresias and Oedipus. All these tragic characters are intended to exist on the border of human existence; they are people who cannot see, or who perceive reality in a different way. By this definition, prophecy is a kind of madness. But what did this mean for the ancient Greeks, and what it can mean for modern scholars? To answer the first question we must not ignore the famous quotation from Plato (*Phaedrus* 244c and 265) – discussed by Cicero, the Church fathers, Eric Dodds,<sup>16</sup> Walter Burkert,<sup>17</sup> Richard Seaford,<sup>18</sup> Jan Bremmer, Oliver Taplin and many others – dealing with ancient religion and theatre:

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16 E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), 64–100.

17 W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass. 1987), 19.

18 R. Seaford, *Dionysos* (London 2006), 57, 81, 106, 135.

The first passage is as follows:

ἀπλοῦν τὸ μανίαν κακὸν εἶναι, καλῶς ἀνέλεγετο· νῦν δὲ τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν γίγνεται διὰ μανίας, θεία μέντοι δόσει διδομένης. ἦτε γὰρ δὴ ἐν Δελφοῖς προφητὶς αἴτ' ἐν Δωδώνῃ ἰέρεια μανείσαιμὲν πολλὰ δὴ καὶ καλὰ ἰδίᾳ τε καὶ δημοσίᾳ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἤργασαντο, σωφρονοῦσαι δὲ βραχέα ἢ οὐδέν· καὶ ἔαν δὴ λέγωμεν Σίβυλλάν τε καὶ ἄλλους, ὅσοι μαντικῇ χρώμενοι ἐν θέῳ πολλὰ δὴ πολλοῖς προλέγοντες εἰς τὸ μέλλον ὠρθωσαν, μηκύνοιμεν ἂν δὴλ ἀπαντὶ λέγοντες.

But there is also a madness which is a divine gift, and the source of the chiefest blessings granted to men. For prophecy is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona when out of their senses have conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and private life, but when in their senses few or none. And I might also tell you how the Sibyl and other inspired persons have given to many an one many an intimation of the future which has saved them from falling. (tr. B. Jowett)

In next lines Plato says *expressis verbis* that *manike* derives from *mainomai* and *mantike* from the same, with a 'T' inserted.

And the second passage: *Phaedrus* 265

ΣΩ. Μανίας δέ γε εἶδη δύο, τὴν μὲν ὑπὸ νοσημάτων ἀνθρωπίνων, τὴν δὲ ὑπὸ θείας ἐξαλλαγῆς τῶν εἰωθότων νομίμων γιγνομένην.

ΦΑΙ. Πάνυγε.

ΣΩ. Τῆς δὲ θείας τεττάρων θεῶν τέτταρα μέρη διελόμενοι, μαντικὴν μὲν ἐπὶ πνοιᾷ Ἀπόλλωνος θέντες, Διονύσου δὲ τελεστικὴν, Μουσῶν δ' αὖ ποιητικὴν, τετάρτην δὲ Ἀφροδίτης καὶ Ἑρωτος.

soc. And of madness there were two kinds; one produced by human infirmity, the other was a divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention.

PHAEDR. True.

soc. The divine madness was subdivided into four kinds, prophetic, initiatory, poetic, erotic, having four gods presiding over them; the first was the inspiration of Apollo, the second that of Dionysus, the third that of the Muses, the fourth that of Aphrodite and Eros.

In Plato's interpretation μαντική τέχνη – the art of prophesying – and all other words of this group (μάντις, μαντεία, μάντευμα, μαντεῖονetc.) derive from the noun μάνια and the verb μαίνομαι. This is probably true. There are, as is common among etymologists and historians of language, *vota separata*<sup>19</sup> searching for a falsification or confirmation of this conception, but I will follow here the ancient tradition with the blessing of the etymological dictionaries of Frisk,<sup>20</sup> Chantraine<sup>21</sup> and most recently Robert Beekes.<sup>22</sup>

The word stem μαν- in all these words is the same in μαίνομαι and μῆνις as well as μένος.<sup>23</sup> The first one means 'to be furious, to be mad', the second means 'fury', and the final one means 'power'; all are focused on possession and strong emotion. Μαντεία in the same way as μανία ('frenzy') is connected with the last word – μένος – and both denote a kind of frenzy, 'not as the ravings of delusion, but ... as an experience of intensified mental power'.<sup>24</sup>

The other group, less often used, is connected with 'speaking' and appears as πρόφημι (or προφητεύω as in *Ion* 369, 413), προφήτης (Eur., *Orestes* 364: Νερέως προφήτης Γλαῦκος; Eur. *Bakchai* 211: προφήτης λόγων – Teiresias about himself and 551; Aesch., *Septem*: μέγας προφήτης about Amphiaraios, one of the 'Septem', *Agamm.* 409, 1099, *Eum.* 19 – Διὸς προφήτης) or προφήτης, especially Φοίβου προφήτης for Delphic Pythia (*Ion* 321, 1322). It is surprising that none of these words appear in Sophocles.

Jan Bremmer, in his article in the *New Pauly* points out the difference between a 'prophet' (*prophetes*) as 'a manager of an oracle' and a 'normal seer' (*mantis*) recalling Herodotus (8, 36; 9, 93)

19 Cf. M. Casevitz, 'Mantis: le vrai sens', REG 105 (1992), 1–18.

20 H. Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg 1960), sv.

21 P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris 1968), sv.

22 R. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden and Boston 2010), 892–893, 902–903, 930–931.

23 Cf. Frisk, vol. 2, 172–173 and 208.

24 W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 162.

and Plato<sup>25</sup> (*Chrm.* 173c: τοὺς δὲ ὡς ἀληθῶς μάντιες καθιστάναι ἡμῖν προφήτας τῶν μελλόντων). Generally speaking this interpretation is correct, but I am not sure how well it stands up to a detailed examination. In the *Charmides* passage above, *prophetes* is not used in a technical sense, but is simply etymological, denoting someone who speaks in advance, about the future. The examples cited above of the use of *prophetes* in tragedy would appear to contradict Bremmer's opinion: these are synonyms.

But there is also another important group of Greek words designating divination – arguably the most important group from a statistical perspective – which has no continuation in any ancient or modern language. Somewhat surprisingly, we find that the main words for divination are: χρηστήριον, χρησμός, χρησμοδία. What is divination according to the etymology of these technical terms?

We find 43 occurrences of words from this group (only χρησμός, χρησμοδία) in the texts of tragedians, including fragments, which is a substantial number. In Euripides: *Cycl.* 696 – παλαῖος χρησμός; *Med.* 676: χρησμὸν εἰδέναι θεοῦ; *Herac.*, 403, 473, 488, 606, 1028 (χρησμῶ παλαίῳ Λοξίου), 1038 (χρεσμὸν θεοῦ); three times in *Ion*: 424, 785, 1569 (χρησμοὶ θεοῦ); twice in *Electra*: 400 (χρησμοὶ Λοξίου) and 1303; *Iph. Taur.* 105 (χρεσμὸν θεοῦ); *Bacch.* 1333; *Phoeniss.* 409, 642, 866, 1703 (twice χρησμοὶ Λοξίου). In Sophocles – three times in *Oedipus Rex*: 711 and 797 about the oracle for Laios, 1200 – (χρησμοδόν); once in *Oed. Col.* (970) and once in *Electra* (38). In Aeschylus 10 times (*Agamm.* 1178, 1252; *Choeph.* 270, 297; *Eumen.* 622, 713; *Pers.* 739; *PV* 662, 775, 873).

And there are 26 occurrences of χρηστήριον. 8 occurrences in Euripides' *Ion*: 299, 409, 419, 1320 (χρηστήριον Λοξίου – 243, 974, or θεοῦ – 727, 1611); *Med.* 667 (Φοίβου χρηστήριον), *Andr.* 1112, *Hec.* 594, *Electr.* 1272, *IT* 1262, *Hel.* 822, *Bacch.* 1336, *IA* 750. In Sopho-

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<sup>25</sup> 'Prophets' in H. Cancik, H. Schneider (eds), *Brill's New Pauly. Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*, vol. 12 (Leiden 2008), 28. H. 8, 36; 9, 93.



cles – *Ajax* 220, *Oed. Col.* 604, 1331. In Aeschylus – *Suppl.* 450, *Septem* 26, 748, *Agamm.* 964, 1270, *Eum.* 194, 241.

The basic meaning of these fundamental words for Greek divination derives from  $\chi\rho\acute{\eta}$ <sup>26</sup> – the Indo-European  $g^hreh_1$  – a word which, both as substantive and a verb, means ‘it is necessary, one must, should’ or ‘need, necessity, duty, custom’.<sup>27</sup> What does this say about divination? Burkert translates  $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$  as ‘service’, or more precisely ‘a place where god offers a *service*’;<sup>28</sup> we might imagine it as a kind of a spiritual ‘gas station’, restaurant, or information center.

In the same morphological and semantic group we have the verb  $\chi\rho\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha\iota$  (to use, to treat, to need), and the nouns  $\chi\rho\rho\acute{\epsilon}\iota\alpha$  (desire, wish, help, service or function), and  $\chi\rho\eta\mu\alpha$  (something which one needs, object, thing, as well as goods, property and money). If we compare these with words such as  $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omicron\nu$  (a justice court)  $\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\alpha\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omicron\nu$  (a workshop, any place in which work is done) or  $\pi\omicron\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omicron\nu$  (a drinking cup) it seems that  $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omicron\nu$  must be a place, where people (or gods?) deal with their needs, necessities, and duties. When we look at this basic Greek vocabulary, an oracle is a privileged place where people face their fundamental needs and desires and ask for their duties and necessities.

#### PERSONS AND PERFORMANCES

There are mantic personalities, which enrich the world of tragedy with mystery and religious authority: Teiresias, Cassandra, Calchas, Helenos, Glaukos prophetes of Nereus, Dionysos and Amphiaraos (Aesch., *Septem*, 569). In Greek tragedy, we find three categories of person who deals with oracles.

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<sup>26</sup> Beekes, *op. cit.*, 1648–1649.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> *Greek religion*, 114.

1. The most important is the *prophetis*. In *Eumenides* and in *Ion* we find this person in the form of Pythia.<sup>29</sup>

2. There are many professional seers:

TEIRESIAS – a strong character in four plays: Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus Rex* and Euripides *Bakchai* and *Phoenissai*.

CALCHAS, son of Thestor, brother of prophetess Theonoe, responsible for divination about the sacrifice of Iphigenia. He never appears on stage in the extant tragedies, but there is no other character whose absence is so influential and strong.

CASSANDRA – a character in Aeschylus *Agamemnon* and in Euripides' *Troïades*. She is a daughter of Priamus and Hecuba, a twin of Helenos

HELENOS (Soph., *Piloct.* 606 and 1338 – Ἑλενος ἀριστόμαντις; Eur. *Hecuba* 87, *Helena* 751) – son of Priam and Hecuba, twin brother of prophetess Cassandra. He is the one who prophesied that Greeks would win if they stole the Trojan Palladion; he also persuaded Neoptolemus and Philoctetes to join the Greeks in the war.

GLAUKOS (Eur. *Orestes* 364 – Νηρέως προφήτης Γλαῦκος, ἄψευδῆς θεός; he appears before Menelaus announcing to him the death of his brother Agamemnon by the hand of Clytaemnestra). Aeschylus was supposed to write a play about Glaukos (Γλαῦκος Πόντιος). He was a prophetic sea-god, born mortal and turned immortal after eating a magical herb.

AMPHIARAOS/Amphiareos (Aesch., *Septem* 569, *Suppl.* 158; Eur. *Phoeniss.* 173, 1111: ὁ μάντις Ἀμφιάραος; Soph. *Electr.* 837, *Oed. Col.* 1313). Euripides wrote a tragedy about Amphiaraos, which is lost but a substantial number of fragments survive. Amphiaraos was king of Argos, the son of Oecles and Hypermnestra.

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<sup>29</sup> The character of Pythia is discussed in details in the present collection by Yana Zarifi-Sistovari.

THEONOE: A character in Euripides *Helen* 865–1029, 1624–1657 (esp.: 13, 145, 529, 821, 859, 1648). A daughter of the prophet Thestor, sister to prophet Calchas.

TROPHONIOS (*Ion* 300, 393, 405) – the legendary builder of the first temple of Apollo at Delphi and later himself the possessor of a celebrated oracle at Lebadeia.

3. There are also non-professional *manteis* who play an important rôle in mantic *technē* as teachers and masters, they are a kind of ‘meta-manteis’:

PROMETHEUS who in *Prometheus Vincit* 484–499 presents himself as a master of divination (μαντικῆς ἐστοίχισα), with respect to various methods (*technai*) including: dream interpretations (ἐξ ὄνειράτων ἀχρῆ / ὑπαργενέσθαι; also in Aesch. *Cho.* 21–41 and Eur. *IT* 1252–84); cleidomancy, the interpretation of casual acts, utterances, omens (κληδόνες, σύμβολα, also in Aesch. *Ag.* 255–257, 1247 and 1652); ornithoscopy, the interpretation of birds flights or movements (γαμψωνύχων τε πτησιν οἰωνῶν σκεθρῶς / διώρισ’, also in Aesch. *Ag.* 104–159; Soph. *Ant.* 998–1004; Eur. *Phoen.* 840; Eur. *Bacch.* 347); hieroscopy, the reading of entrails (σπλάγχων τελειότητα, also in Eur. *El.* 826–833); empyromancy, the reading of the smoke and flames upon sacrificial fire (φλογωπὰ σήματα, also in Soph. *Ant.* 1005–1011 and Eur. *Phoen.* 1255–1258):

τρόπους τε πολλοὺς μαντικῆς ἐστοίχισα,  
κάκρινα πρῶτος ἐξ ὄνειράτων ἄχρῆ  
ὑπαρ γενέσθαι, κληδόνας τε δυσκρίτους  
ἐγνώρισ’ αὐτοῖς ἐνοδίους τε συμβόλους.  
γαμψωνύχων τε πτησιν οἰωνῶν σκεθρῶς  
διώρισ’, οὔτινές τε δεξιῶι φύσιν  
εὐωνύμους τε, καὶ δίαιταν ἦντινα  
ἔχουσ’ ἕκαστοι, καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους τίνες  
ἔχθραι τε καὶ στέργηθρα καὶ συνεδρίαι·  
σπλάγχων τε λειότητα, καὶ χροιάν τίνα  
ἔχουσ’ ἄν εἴη δαίμοσιν πρὸς ἠδονῆν

χολή, λοβοῦ τε ποικίλην εὐμορφίαν·  
κνίση τε κῶλα συγκαλυπτὰ καὶ μακρὰν  
ὄσφυν πυρώσας δυστέκμαρτον εἰς τέχνην  
ᾧδωσα θνητούς, καὶ φλογωπὰ σήματα  
ἔξωμμάτωσα, πρόσθεν δ' ἔπαργεμα.

And I marked out many ways by which they might read the future, and among dreams I first discerned which are destined to come true; and voices baffling interpretation I explained to them, and signs from chance meetings. The flight of crook-taloned birds I distinguished clearly – which by nature are auspicious, which sinister – their various modes of life, their mutual feuds and loves, and their consortings; and the smoothness of their entrails, and what color the gall must have to please the gods, also the speckled symmetry of the liver-lobe; and the thigh-bones, wrapped in fat, and the long chine I burned and initiated mankind into an occult art. Also I cleared their vision to discern signs from flames, which were obscure before this. Enough about these arts. (Aesch. *Prom.*, 484–499, tr. H.W. Smyth)

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ, in *Antigone* 998–1014 describes the technical details of hieroscopy and empyromancy:

Γνώση, τέχνης σημεῖα τῆς ἐμῆς κλύων.  
Εἰς γὰρ παλαιὸν θᾶκον ὄρνιθοσκόπον  
ἵζων, ἴν' ἦν μοι παντὸς οἴωνοῦ λιμήν,  
ἀγνώτ' ἀκούω φθόγγον ὄρνιθων, κακῶ  
κλάζοντας οἴστρω καὶ βεβαρβαρωμένω·  
καὶ σπῶντας ἐν χηλαῖσιν ἀλλήλους φοναῖς  
ἔγνων· πτερῶν γὰρ ῥοῖβδος οὐκ ἄσημος ἦν.  
Εὐθὺς δὲ δείσας ἐμπύρων ἐγευόμην

βωμοῖσι παμφλέκτοισιν· ἐκ δὲ θυμάτων  
Ἦφαιστος οὐκ ἔλαμπεν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ σποδῶ  
μυδῶσα κηκίς μηρίων ἐτήκετο  
κάτυφε κἀνέπτυε, καὶ μετάρσιοι  
χολαὶ διεσπείροντο, καὶ καταρρυεῖς  
μηροὶ καλυπτῆς ἐξέκειντο πιμελῆς.

You'll know – once you hear the tokens of my art.  
 As I was sitting in my ancient place  
 receiving omens from the flights of birds  
 who all come there where I can hear them,  
 I note among those birds an unknown cry-  
 evil, unintelligible, angry screaming.  
 I knew that they were tearing at each other  
 with murderous claws. The noisy wings  
 revealed that all too well. I was afraid.  
 So right away up on the blazing altar  
 I set up burnt offerings. But Hephaestus  
 failed to shine out from the sacrifice –  
 dark slime poured out onto the embers,  
 oozing from the thighs, which smoked and spat,  
 bile was sprayed high up into the air,  
 and the melting thighs lost all the fat  
 which they'd been wrapped in. The rites had failed-  
 there was no prophecy revealed in them.  
 (tr. Ian Johnston)

In addition to the three categories described above, there is a very special character: ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ. In the typology of *maniai* in Plato's *Phaedrus* (above), Dionysos is responsible only for 'telestic madness' connected with mystical initiation. But at the same time he:

- prophesies professionally in the *Bakchai*;
- is a god of Delphi together with Apollo (*Eum.* 24: Βρόμιος δ' ἔχει τὸν χῶρον, οὐδ' ἀμνημονῶ; *Bromius has held the region – I do not forget him* [tr. H.W. Smyth]);
- in the *Bakchai* of Euripides he is the one who offers the best explanation of the essence and theology of mantic experience.

A fragment from *Bakchai* (298–301) by Euripides contains both description of mantic performance and an explanation of its deepest meaning:

μάντις δ' ὁ δαίμων ὄδε· τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον  
 καὶ τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει·

ὅταν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἐς τὸ σῶμ' ἔλθῃ πολὺς,  
λέγειν τὸ μέλλον τοὺς μεμνηνότες ποιεῖ.

This god's a prophet, too, for in his rites –  
the Bacchic celebrations and the madness –  
a huge prophetic power is unleashed.  
When the god fully enters human bodies,  
he makes those possessed by frenzy prophets.  
They speak of what will come in future days.  
(tr. Ian Johnston)

In this fragment we find a 'theology of divination', as it contains the best explanation of oracular activity from a theological perspective. Dionysos appears here as a *theologos manteias*, a person who knows the very essence of divination, rather than a teacher of mantic techniques (such as, for instance, Prometheus). In the field of *manteia*, he is both a master and a teacher of teachers. He does not teach (*mathein*) what to do, but rather what happens and what to feel (*pathein*). He is the highest authority in divination.

Prophesying is not merely an outlook onto the future, but also a means of explaining and understanding the reality of the present. Prophesying is a special kind of cultic performance, and tragedy is full of such divinations, of words, persons, and descriptions of mantic performances.

Greek tragedy aims to be 'prophetic' in a general sense, what means that it tries to explain the world, in a way that reflects the mantic perspective: tragic poets say 'do this!' and 'do not do that!'. They also say 'you should try to understand this or that in this or that way', or 'I am going to explain you the reason for this situation and the possible result of your activity'. In the prophetic manner one can see a gnomic aspect of tragic poetry. Poets express wisdom and mystery using the same tools as prophets, specifically double meaning and ambiguity; Pythia herself used to speak in poetic meters. But this is a subject for another time.

Walter Burkert in his canonical paper on sacrifice and tragedy wrote that ‘the essence of the sacrifice pervades tragedy’.<sup>30</sup> By extension, we could also say that ‘the essence of prophecy, divination, and oracles pervades the whole of tragedy’. While it is not my intention to construct a new theory of sacrifice in tragedy – comparable to that of the ‘ritualists’ in Cambridge – it is nonetheless interesting to examine the prophetic dimension of Greek tragedy. J.C. Kamerbeek wrote that ‘sometimes (as in the case of Oedipus) we may ask whether the drama is interpretation of the oracle or the inverse’.<sup>31</sup> I think that drama, much like an oracle, attempts to be an interpretation of life. In both cases we ask the same: why? what for? and how?

Sometimes the boundary between oracle and tragedy seems to be consciously blurred, as in *Oedipus Rex*: Pythia delivers prophecies, the Delphic priests interpret her words, a messenger of Teiresias delivers the oracle and Oedipus tries to understand it – but finally the audience is faced with both the question and the oracle. Possession, frenzy, *mania*, performance, ritual and strictly religious context – all these elements can be observed both in tragedy and in divination. We need to realize how many figures from tragedy perform a kind of divination, and in how many scenes can we observe the tragedy from the perspective of divination and how many words connected with *manteia* exist within the text of the tragedies that have survived.

As yet, no one has tried to connect the possible origin of tragedy with divination. It would, in any event, be close to impossible. But instead of G. Murray’s *Excursus on the Ritual Forms in Greek*

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<sup>30</sup> W. Burkert, ‘Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual’, *GRBS* 7 (1966), 115; quoted and discussed by H. Lloyd-Jones, ‘Ritual and Tragedy’, in *Ansichten griechischen Rituale. Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert* (Stuttgart and Leipzig 1998), 272.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Prophecy and Tragedy’, *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, 8, 1 (1965), 30.

*Tragedy*,<sup>32</sup> which started the debate on the origins of Greek tragic poetry, we may wish to imagine an *Excursus on the Prophetic Forms of Greek Tragedy* as inspiration for the new research on a ritual core of the drama.

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<sup>32</sup> G. Murray, 'Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy', in J.E. Harrison, *Themis. A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge 1912), 341-363.