

Jeff W. Childers
Divining Gospel

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Jeff W. Childers

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Oracles of Interpretation in a Syriac Manuscript of John

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Dedicated to my wife,
my very good fortune,
Linda D. Childers with love.

Preface and Acknowledgements

I fell into this project quite by accident. While consulting a Syriac manuscript of John's Gospel in the British Library for reasons that had nothing to do with divination, I encountered the strange statements that are the subject of this book. They fascinated but puzzled me, and once it became obvious they had nothing to do with what I was working on at the time, I took a few notes and promptly filed the notes away. I knew next to nothing about *hermêneiai*, save what I had gleaned from sparing references in some manuals on New Testament textual criticism. I did not recognize the true nature of the manuscript on first look.

Some years later I was editing a volume of collected essays that included an article on Greek *hermêneia* manuscripts of John. That article was concerned solely with the New Testament text, not oracular statements or lot divination. But while editing the article something prompted a recollection of the Syriac material I had seen a few years before. It occurred to me to pull out my old notes on the manuscript (London, British Library, Add. 17,119) so that I could compare what I had seen in it with the assorted Greek and Greco-Coptic fragments that had been published in scattered journals. What I found drew me to study the manuscript and other lot divination texts more closely. This book, like many works of scholarship, is the outgrowth of a series of tangential journeys, reporting what I have found while looking for something else.

Preliminary versions of portions of this material have been presented in different conferences and symposia. I am appreciative of the valuable conversations and helpful feedback those opportunities occasioned as I was developing aspects of this research. Some of those essays have appeared in print and are cited in the notes and the bibliography.

I am very grateful to Sebastian Brock (Oxford) for his assistance with difficult aspects of the Syriac text. My indebtedness to his astute and patient tutelage remains enormous. Liv Ingeborg Lied (Oslo) has been a constant source of encouragement in my study of the Syriac manuscript, supplying helpful insights from the standpoint of New or Material Philology. The "Bible as Notepad" conference that she convened at the MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society in Oslo, Norway (2014), and the "Snapshots of Evolving Traditions" project that she led were crucial to the progress of this work. Erich Renhart (Graz, Austria) made an extremely valuable contribution by sharing with me his research on the Armenian palimpsest prior to its publication and permitting me to employ his work in this study. These three colleagues exemplify high scholarly virtues, not only by the quality of

their own work but by their collegial investment in others' success.

My colleagues in the Graduate School of Theology and at Abilene Christian University have also been models of support and encouragement. I am appreciative of the time I was granted by the university to finish this project and all the conversations with colleagues in Abilene that have enriched the quality of this work. Several of my students have assisted me in various ways – running down sources in the library, posing constructive questions, and offering helpful insights about the ancient texts. I am especially grateful to Jamey Walters, James Prather, Laura Locke Estes, Ethan Laster, and Ryne Parrish. My colleague Dwayne Towell offered a number of helpful suggestions on an early draft of the book.

I would like to thank those who funded various elements of this research, especially the Center for the Study of Ancient Religious Texts at Abilene Christian University that helped me acquire necessary materials, such as digital images of many manuscripts; the Franklin Research Grant of the American Philosophical Society that funded my travel to European libraries in the summer of 2017; and the Carmichael-Walling research funds at Abilene Christian University that have funded my travel to conferences, where I presented portions of this material for scholarly engagement and improvement.

Like every scholar working on ancient manuscripts, I am indebted to the libraries that preserve them and to their staffs who so ably support the work of those who research them. The various libraries that have *hermêneia* manuscripts used in this study are credited in Chapter Three and elsewhere in the book, accordingly. I appreciate the assistance those libraries have rendered me, in answering queries, supplying digital images, and granting permission to publish the materials. In particular, I am grateful to the British Library in London and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, where I spent very pleasant days examining some of the key manuscripts directly. I have appreciated their continued assistance and the permission they granted to publish images and other material from the manuscripts in this book.

It has been a great pleasure working with the editors and staff at de Gruyter. In particular, Albrecht Doehntel provided many helpful suggestions that have improved the work and Aaron Sanborn-Overby has labored diligently and affably to make it ready for publication. As series editor of *Manuscripta Biblica*, Martin Wallraff has offered every encouragement and valued assistance in finishing the project.

More than anyone I thank the person to whom this work is dedicated, my wife, Linda D. Childers, who has been unwavering in her support of the pursuit and completion of this project. My life is immeasurably richer because of the

part she has played in it. In our years of life together, I have been glad to welcome the promise offered by *Puṣṣāqā* 228: “This matter will turn out happily.”

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1 Opening the Gospel

1.1 Inscribing a Divining Gospel

One day Gewargis sat down to copy a book. Gewargis was an accomplished scribe who lived and worked in late antique Roman Syria during the late sixth or early seventh century. The language of the text was Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic and a major literary language throughout much of the Middle East. The text was that of a book very well known in Christian circles: the Gospel of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist.

Gewargis had over eighty leaves of good parchment with which to work. Since parchment was expensive and the task of copying a lengthy text like John laborious, the book represented a substantial investment of resources and time. Gewargis knew that the project deserved great care in its execution. He had a steady, practiced hand and was up to the task of producing a book of good quality that its readers would use and value for many years.

In most respects the book was ordinary, as divinely inspired sacred books go.¹ It consisted of leaves of parchment folded into bifolia and gathered into groups of five for the most part, so that each stitched gathering, or quire, supplied the scribe with ten clean pages on which to write. The first page of each quire was signed with a number, to help organize the book for eventual binding once the copying was finished. It was important to keep the gatherings straight and orderly. On the fresh pages of the codex Gewargis would copy the entire text of the holy Gospel of St. John, from start to finish. In all these ways the book was much like any other Syriac Gospel book being produced in Late Antiquity for use in churches and monasteries, or even for personal use.

In other ways the book was most unusual. Unlike most copies of the Gospel, this one was not part of a *tetrevangelium* – a volume having all four canonical Gospels that included Matthew, Mark, and Luke also.² This codex would contain only the Gospel of John. The size was rather unusual as well, being a fairly compact volume of relatively tall and narrow proportions (about 22 x 13 cm).

The book was certainly not miniature but it was relatively small and handy. The typical Syriac Gospel codex of the period was considerably larger (about 36 x 28 cm). The inclusion of all four Gospels and the larger format made them big and heavy, whereas Gewargis' book would be more portable and handier to use. Perhaps the book's slim profile accounts for why our scribe copied the text into a single, narrow column of about four–five words per line, rather than using the traditional two-column layout (see Fig. 1.1). The tall, narrow column set amidst ample margins of blank space would draw the reader's focus to the body of text in the center of the page.

Furthermore, Gewargis' book would not include the typical sections, chapter divisions, and harmony notations commonly found in Syriac Gospel manuscripts. These tools helped users find specific passages for public readings, assisting them in their study of scripture, comparing Gospel parallels, composing homilies, and preparing commentaries. Helpful as these tools were for so many of the uses to which Christian readers often put their sacred texts, Gewargis' book would not need them. Liturgical notations were also absent, as this was not a book meant for ecclesial use in corporate worship.

Most striking of all, however, were the brief statements interspersed throughout the Gospel, statements that were certainly not part of John's original text and would not feature in the great majority of manuscripts of John. At fairly regular intervals, pointed declarations and terse instructions interrupted the narratives and speeches of John's Gospel.

The declarations addressed the reader rather than characters in the narrative, persistently using the second person singular to do so in a direct fashion. For instance, in the middle of Jesus' nocturnal conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus (Ioh. 3,8) comes the prediction, "The thing you were expecting will happen." At Ioh. 6,45 occurs the promising assertion, "You will profit much in this matter." At Ioh. 11,7, just before Jesus' disciples question his decision to return to Judea comes the blunt injunction, "Do not do this matter." At Ioh. 13,37, the reader is exhorted, "Do not be distressed by this matter." Near the end of the Gospel (Ioh. 21,3), the text insists, "In five days the matter will turn out well for you." Most of the statements seem positive, but occasionally one strikes a foreboding note, as in the middle of Ioh. 18, where it says, "The matter is evil." Although Gewargis made sure that the statements fit physically into the flow of the Gospel text, using a script of exactly the same size and style, they could strike the

¹ The manuscript is presently housed in the British Library, London, with the shelfmark: Additional MS 17,119 (London, BL, Add. 17,119). See the description in Wright 1870, 1,71–72.

² Transcription of Syriac Gospel manuscripts in preparation for *Novum Testamentum Graecum Editio Critica Maior* has turned up only one other manuscript containing only the Gospel of John; see 4.2 below.

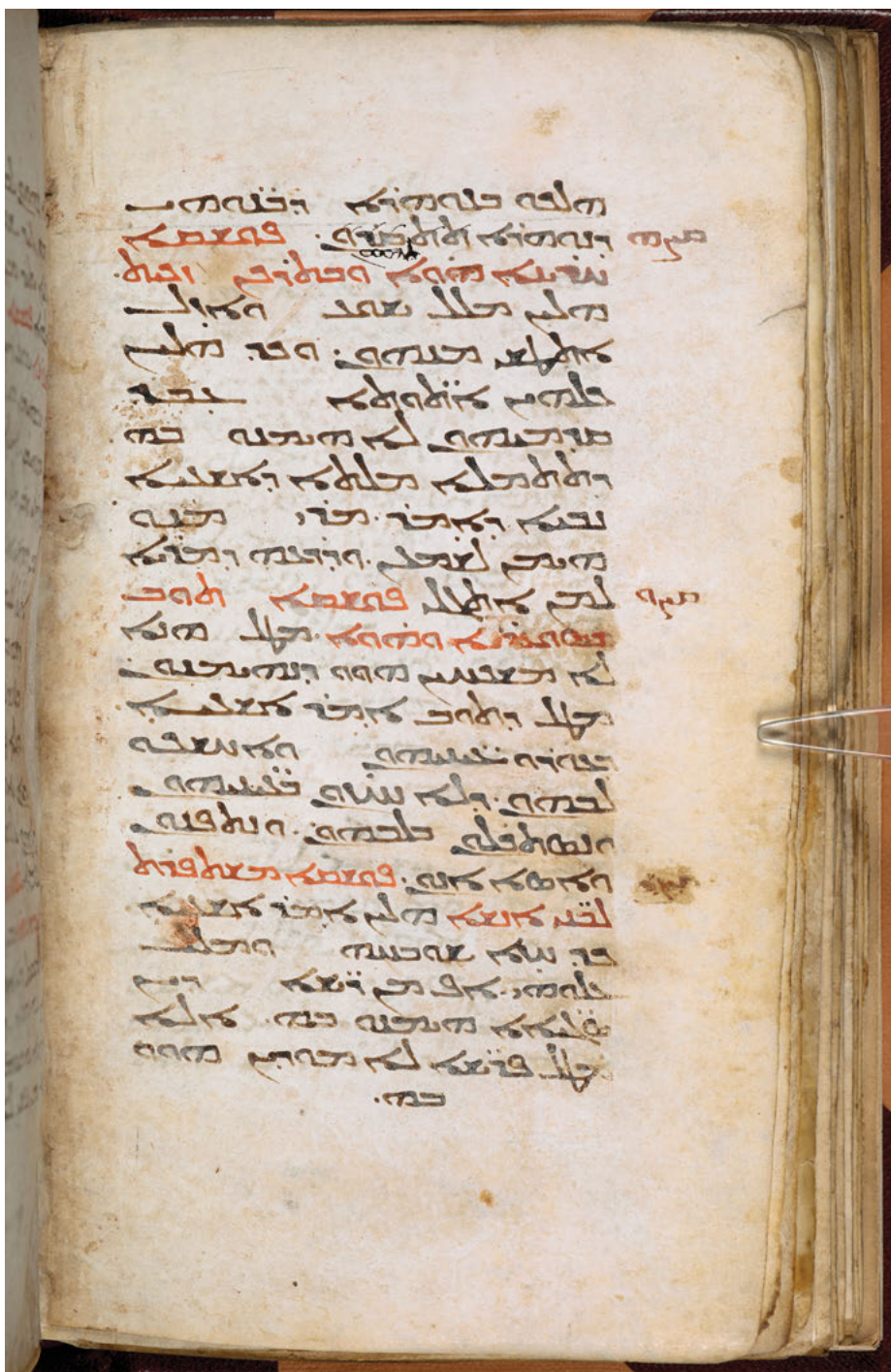


Fig. 1.1: British Library Additional 17,119, fol. 52, verso (loh. 12,36–42); *Puššāqē* 195–197) ©The British Library Board (Add. 17,119 Syriac). Image used by permission.

reader as interruptive exclamations or even asides to the narrative. They were in fact separate statements, attached to specific segments of the Gospel text.

As he worked, Gewargis would write several lines of Gospel text using ink of the dark chestnut hue common in ancient Syriac manuscripts. At specific breaks in the text he would put down his reed pen and pick up another, to write the additional statements in rich red ink, after which he would return to copying the Gospel text in dark ink. Every opening of the book featured several of these additional statements, breaking up the dark brown streams of writing on each page with momentary infusions of rust-colored text that caught the eye and arrested the reader's attention (see Fig. 1.1).

Gewargis copied 308 of the statements into the text of John's Gospel, carefully numbering each one in the margins. For the numbers he followed the convention of using corresponding letters of the Syriac alphabet:

ܐ = 1
 ܐ = 2
 ܐ = 3

And so on. When he had finished copying it all out, including the final statement numbered 308 (ܘܨܘܕ), on the very last page he signed his work, appealing to the reader's prayerful petitions in a manner common among Christian scribes: "Pray, master, for the unworthy Gewargis, who wrote this, that he might receive mercy on the day of judgment."³

Once the job was done, Gewargis had before him a complete copy of the Gospel of John, in the familiar Peshitta version that was routinely read in Syriac churches and monasteries everywhere. Any Syriac Christian reader who picked up this book would recognize the Gospel instantly. Yet infused into this neat volume were also hundreds of additional statements that might strike some readers as very unusual and certainly foreign to the text of John's Gospel. It is possible that our scribe himself designed the book and added these statements on his own, but it is more likely that he copied an exemplar he had before him, essentially replicating an earlier Syriac book of the same style and contents, with identical or at least very similar form. That is not to say Gewargis did not leave his own stamp on the material of his book. It would have been practically impossible for him to have simply duplicated the exemplar in every detail. As the scribe copied he would undoubtedly have altered various aspects of the text's contents and the book's format. Some

of these changes would have been accidental ("scribal errors") but others may have been intentional edits and revisions. By accident and through deliberate alteration, texts were fluid in Late Antiquity.

Finished with his labors, Gewargis had produced what we may call a *Divining Gospel*: a copy of John's Gospel enhanced with an apparatus of material designed to assist the book's user in the practice of *sortilege*, making the book a tool to be used in a type of fortune-telling. Sortilege is the practice of telling the future by drawing lots. The Divining Gospel incorporates a specialized system of *sortes* ("lots") or oracles for use in the practice of divination. Rather than including the kinds of tools that would be helpful for the conventional reading of the Gospel in the church, a monastery, or even in the cleric's study, Divining Gospels have an apparatus that mark them out for an entirely different purpose: text-based divination.

Such a volume might strike today's readers as rather strange. Even modern scholarship has had difficulty identifying the true nature of this book and others like it, misconstruing the sortilege material or simply ignoring it due to its strangeness. It may be that modern assumptions about scripture and the expected use of sacred books has made it more difficult for scholars today to appreciate the book for what it is. Yet Gewargis gives no indication that he saw anything strange about the book that he copied. Divination was a common, albeit contested Christian practice in the world of Late Antiquity. And sacred books were routinely venerated as mystical and powerful objects, not just carriers of textual information.

Presenting, analyzing, and contextualizing Gewargis' manuscript is the purpose of this book. We will lay out the plan of the present study at the end of this chapter. But it will be helpful first to consider some of the fascinating and often surprising features of the late antique Christian book culture that produced and used volumes like the Divining Gospel.

1.2 Christians and Their Books

1.2.1 A Bookish Religion

It is perhaps only slightly over-generalizing to say that ancient Christians loved books. From the beginning Christians have relied on books. Although Jesus, the Jewish prophet from Nazareth, was not reputed to be an author or even an owner of books, he referred often to the sacred texts of Judaism, confident that his audience would recognize in them an extraordinary authority. His expert

³ Folio 83r.

knowledge of the scriptures and his facility in discussing them with other experts were matters of great renown in the early traditions about him.

In turn, Jesus' followers were obsessed with books. They pored over the sacred books of Judaism, in Hebrew and Aramaic and in translation, especially Greek (LXX). But they also quickly got busy about the task of making their own books and sharing them widely. Early Christians produced books of all kinds: books recounting Jesus' words and deeds; books filled with stories about his early followers; books preserving the correspondences and instruction and preaching of influential Christian thinkers; books of prayers and liturgy and church order. Early Christians were a bookish group. Indeed, books were one of the most essential aspects of Christian religious life.⁴

It must be acknowledged that Christianity inherited its bookish impulses largely from ancient Judaism, itself a religion that had come to receive a traditional set of texts as constituting a corpus of divine revelation. Although the boundaries of what would come to be known as the Jewish canon were not precisely defined and questions regarding its proper interpretation and use would remain perpetually unsettled, the notion that certain texts were uniquely authoritative was a strong feature of late Second Temple Judaism. But alongside and often in conversation with the uniquely sacred scriptures, many other writings circulated widely in Jewish circles and became part of the Jewish religious tradition as well. Jewish authors composed detailed interpretations of their scriptures, prayers and blessings, heroic accounts of faithful men and women, and penetrating discussions of topics theological, practical, and spiritual.

As a religion Judaism, like Christianity, included a great deal of verbal content. Both religions were rather wordy and both religions tended to welcome the inscription of their verbose content into texts. If early Christianity was bookish it owed a great deal to the bookishness of Judaism.

Rampant book production implies the expectation of having a readership. Literacy in the ancient Greco-Roman world may have been more widespread than once thought, perhaps especially in Jewish and Christian circles, yet it was not commonplace.⁵ Estimating ancient literacy rates requires a fair amount of conjecture. Even defining literacy can be difficult. Scratching out a bill of sale or deciphering a brief contract is quite different from the ability to compose, interpret, and criticize sophisticated literature. Yet both types of activity reflect education and qualify as kinds of literacy.

Optimistic estimates of basic literacy in the urban centers of the ancient Greco-Roman world hover around ten percent, often a little lower. Given the relative bookishness of Judaism and Christianity, including the naturally educative processes of formation within their communities, the two groups may have boasted literacy rates higher than the average. Yet Harry Y. Gamble estimates that "ordinarily not more than about 10 percent" of Christians in any given setting were literate to the point of being able to read and write at relatively high levels.⁶ Nevertheless, texts were fundamental to Christian identity and practice. Although literacy was certainly not a requirement for becoming Christian, it is evident that from a very early time Christian communities relied heavily on texts and on the literate leaders who could read and interpret them.

The quantity and distribution of surviving ancient manuscript evidence corroborate what we see even more strikingly in the writings of early Christians, who refer constantly to one another's texts: Christians were relentless in their creation and use of books.⁷ This was true not only for those who would come to be counted among the orthodox but also for representatives of diverse groups, such as Gnostics and Marcionites, Elkasaites and Manichaeans, and many others. Indeed, the processes of identity formation for most groups of Christians depended heavily on the composition and circulation of the books that propounded particular beliefs as well as the books that refuted them.

The Christian reverence for books was so well-known that the confiscation and destruction of books became a matter of imperial policy in Diocletian's efforts to repress Christianity in the early fourth century CE. As far as Christians in North Africa were concerned, those who surrendered sacred books to the authorities were *traditores* ("traitors") and enemies of the faith. Holding to the group's respect for the books had become practically equivalent to holding the faith, and a testimony worthy of similar sacrifice.

1.2.2 Books Dynamic in Form and Impact

In the first century, Christians transmitted their texts in the form of rolls, sheets of papyrus or leather parchment fastened together to make long strips that could be rolled up horizontally on sticks. By about the late second century, the book-form of the codex, that is now so familiar, had taken hold in Christian circles.⁸

⁴ See the study in Gamble 1995, 1–41.

⁵ See the studies in Harris 1991; Humphrey 1991.

⁶ Gamble 1995, 5; cf. Bagnall 2011, 25–26.

⁷ See Hurtado 2006, 24–41.

⁸ Hurtado 2006, 43–93.

In one of the most remarkable developments of ancient Mediterranean culture, the codex quickly became standard not only among Christians but for book producers of all types. The stately roll had long been the form of choice for literary and sacred texts, yet the codex was handier and more portable. It was far easier to locate particular passages in a codex than in a roll. Whereas rolls were fairly limited in the quantity of text they could contain, codices were capable of holding a sizable corpus of texts in volumes of modest proportion. As a textual tool, the codex possessed an attractive utility for people who relied on large numbers of extensive texts. Scholarship has not reached a lasting consensus regarding the place of Christian usage in explaining the rapid supplanting of the roll by the codex across the culture.⁹ Yet it is clear that early Christians saw the advantages of the technological development of the codex and exploited it fully for their own purposes. Formally, respect for a book came to mean respect for a codex. Furthermore, the technology by which a reader could refer rapidly and accurately to particular places in a book would turn out to be critical for the efficient use of the Divining Gospel, with its series of Gospel segments and attached *sortes*.

Their obsession with texts meant that Christians depended on activities of book production, collection, and preservation.¹⁰ Some aspects of these processes as used by Christians remain uncertain, but we know that early Christian producers of books were also often the users of their texts. Furthermore, we know that early Christian libraries existed and that even some individual Christians became known for their personal book collections. In the third century for instance, Origen's collection supplied the founding corpus of one of the most impressive early Christian libraries, that of Caesarea Maritima in Palestine. Although Isidore of Seville's estimate that the theological library of Caesarea contained 30,000 volumes is surely inflated, the literary richness of the library attracted many users and its collection swelled through the donations of further benefactors before its eventual destruction in the seventh century.¹¹

Books were expensive and therefore precious. Even where we may expect that many early Christians relied on private book production and personal networks of publication, the costs of making and acquiring books was substantial and book collections were valuable. The fact that a number of our earliest surviving manuscripts were discovered in Egyptian garbage dumps¹² does not negate the

observation that people also worked hard to preserve the books they valued. In their ascetic rigor, the desert fathers show ambivalence both about the propriety of book ownership as a material extravagance and the exercise of learned interpretation as an expression of intellectual pride. Yet so much of even their religious life was based on familiarity with the sacred texts.¹³ In time, monastic communities would become prolific producers of texts, centers of scholastic learning, and the most ardent transmitters and guardians of the books of the Christian tradition. For many monasteries, their most precious material treasures consisted of their books.

Despite the Hebrew and Aramaic background of the earliest Christian leaders, Greek rapidly became the most widely used literary language in Christian circles. Greek suited the contexts of the ancient Greco-Roman world more than any other single language. However, since early Christianity was profoundly multi-cultural and geographically disparate, many Christian texts became the objects of lively translation projects so that they passed rapidly between and among communities speaking not only Greek but also Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and eventually many other languages.

The varied cultures represented by these languages reflect networks of different Christian communities, each producing and consuming their own texts, developing their own overlapping but distinct Christian intellectual traditions and book cultures. Indeed, in numerous instances, the very alphabets by which texts could be written and read were devised by Christian missionaries, specifically to provide ways of getting Christian texts into languages like Armenian, Gothic, and Georgian. Wherever Christianity went its books inevitably followed, spawning more and more books along the way.

Of course the most important Christian book was the Bible. As we already noted, Christians inherited from the Jews their great reverence for the Jewish Bible, which the church received as the First Testament. In time the canon of the New Testament had taken shape and its books received widespread affirmation alongside the "Old Testament" as the fundamental authority for Christian belief and practice.¹⁴ In a sense, for orthodox Christians the authority of all the other texts they produced was somehow based on that of the Bible. Homilies, theological treatises, liturgy, catechetical materials, creedal statements – all were seen to be derived from and illuminating the text of sacred scripture.

⁹ See Bagnall 2009, 70–90; Nongbri 2018, 21–24.

¹⁰ See the study in Haines-Eitzen 2000, 3–39, 77–104.

¹¹ Carriker, 2003, 1–30; also Gamble 1995, 155–161.

¹² See Luijendijk 2010, 217–254.

¹³ See Burton-Christie 1993, 115–116; Clark 1999, 45–69.

¹⁴ See the classic study of Metzger 1988a.

Within a few generations of the Apostles' time, many Christians had come to see the Bible as their touchstone, the fount of religious authority and a source of help and salvation for those in need of divine succor.

1.3 Books as Objects

1.3.1 Materiality and Meaning

Even those who did not own copies of the Bible themselves or were ill-equipped to read and interpret biblical manuscripts could not fail to be impressed by the aura of reverence surrounding the Bible due to its place in the drama of liturgy and its authority in Christian preaching and in prayer. Indeed, at least some people directed their veneration more to the holy book as a sacred object rather than as the carrier of sacred verbal content that they themselves consumed and sought to understand, whether by reading or hearing. This observation invites us to consider the possible differences between the ways the intellectual elites of Late Antiquity conceived of books and other popular ideas and uses of books in their society. Scholarship's tendency to privilege the more intellectualized reflections of elite authors has colored its perspective on the significance of books and texts for late antique Christians.

Gamble's landmark *Books and Readers in the Early Church* highlights the self-consciousness with which early Christian authors engaged and produced texts, drawing together and interpreting the many references to books and reading and writing that we find in their own writings. Gamble's might be considered a literary study, since it is concerned principally with explicit mentions of books, writing, and reading on the part of Christian authors. It gives us a valuable glimpse of the ways certain Christians conceived of and used texts – but only a partial one, for it favors the explicit deliberations of learned elites, that cannot fully account for the variety of perspectives and uses that Christians had for their texts and books. Yet even in the discussions of those ancient learned authors, who stress the need for careful reading and thoughtful interpretation, we see an awareness that some late antique Christians were using their texts in more exotic ways. In Gamble, the last few pages deal with what he calls the “magical use” of Christian books, by which codices and other textual artifacts functioned objectively as agents of supernatural power rather than principally as carriers of verbal content.¹⁵

One way to get past the narrow perspectives offered by the deliberative reflections of intellectuals is to pay greater attention to the material features of books. Books are not just carriers of texts; they are objects. Their materiality can open up to us nuances of meaning and purpose that may escape or be inconsequential to the meditations of the learned. As material objects, books have physical features, such as height and weight and the textures of their materials. Ink has color and pages have layouts. It is possible to decorate a book with lines and pictures and symbols that convey meaning beyond the verbal. Both the filled spaces and the empty spaces on a page convey something about the circumstances of a book's production, assumptions about its purpose, and details regarding its contexts of usage. Page layout carries function but also conveys meaning.

The import of such things as a book's material features to its users may be tied to the intentions of the craftsman or scribe or artist or even a later annotator, as deliberate acts of expression and communication, or perhaps just reflecting their conceptions of the book. But a book's features may also have significances that are incidental to an author's or craftsman's original intent, as any work of art may have meaning apart from (or even in spite of) the artist's intention and any object can evoke aesthetic appreciation apart from its creator's purposes. Furthermore, seeing the book as a material object also prompts us to consider more carefully the contexts of a book's locations and uses, whether ecclesial and liturgical or otherwise. “Whatever else a text may be or may signify, it is a physical object.... Yet the physical object is also a social artifact.”¹⁶ A book created to serve one purpose may be put to another. The publisher of a large dictionary may not have foreseen the owner's use of the book as a doorstep – just as early editors of John's Gospel surely did not intend its text to be synthesized with fortune-telling materials or utilized in amulets.

Recent studies have shown us that an appreciation of the materiality of books can correct and deepen our understanding of early Christian book culture, including books of scripture.¹⁷ By treating Christian textual artifacts as material objects, these studies seek to gain further clues “on the ground” through analyzing the manuscripts themselves and exploring their archaeology. Attending to such things as the manuscripts' physical characteristics, patterns of scribal practice, geographical distribution of

¹⁵ Gamble 1995, 237–41.

¹⁶ Gamble 1995, 43.

¹⁷ E.g. see Hurtado 2006, 1–13; Bagnall 2009, 1–24; and Nongbri 2018, 10–20.

surviving material, and the economics of book production, these studies illuminate the social contexts of book creation and use, contributing greatly to our understanding of the history of early Christian book culture.

Attending solely to the ways ancient Christian authors talk about their texts and books can distort our view of how books actually functioned in their world; it is important also to consider the textual artifacts themselves. Interesting and helpful as it is to know what Christian authors like Origen and Augustine say about books, their testimony cannot give us anything like a complete picture of what their Christian contemporaries generally thought about books and all the ways they actually used them. The physical testimony of the manuscripts enriches the picture we get from authors, opening for us a wider understanding of the different places of the Christian book in Late Antiquity. Seen as artifacts deserving study in their own right, manuscripts reveal a great deal about the circumstances and priorities of their use, thereby nuancing (or even at times revolutionizing) our understanding of the social contexts in which they were used.

Furthermore, these studies show us the importance of seeing Christian books within their contexts as part of a larger book culture – larger than that defined by Christianity, or even just “conventional” Christianity. Scholarship has not always been aware of its own biases in its reading of early Christian book culture, biases that privilege the attitudes of the learned elites and distort our understanding of the ways many Christians conceived of and used their religious texts. Identifying and challenging these biases have raised important questions about accepted aspects of Christian book history, such as the development of the codex and palaeographical methods of dating the earliest Christian texts.¹⁸

1.3.2 A Case Study: Gewargis’ Complex Book

Gewargis’ manuscript is the main subject of this study. It provides a clear and specific case, validating the aforementioned concerns (London, BL, Add. 17,119). The book’s character as a Divining Gospel has long been obscured to modern eyes largely due to the neglect of the manuscript’s material features.

The manuscript’s sixth–seventh century date make it an important early witness to the Syriac version of John’s Gospel. Philip E. Pusey and George H. Gwilliam collated

the manuscript for the edition of the Syriac Peshitta Gospels they published in 1901. However, they treated the book simply as a Gospel manuscript, designating it “number nine” in the list of codices examined for the edition. The brief note they give about the manuscript reads, “Cod. Add. 17119, 6th or 7th century; contains only S. John.”¹⁹ They give no indication of its remarkable features beyond the fact that it “contains only John.” They presumably mean by that to show that the book does not include other biblical content, especially other Gospels, but the terse description also leaves the reader thinking that we are dealing with a simple copy of John alone, which is in fact very far from the truth. The manuscript’s extensive extra-biblical content – its *sortes* – and its very unusual format receive no notice in Pusey’s edition. The text – and especially the familiar biblical text – eclipses the very existence of anything else in the book, including features that are integrally tied to the biblical text and help supply its own purpose in this strange little volume.

In a sense, scholarship treated Gewargis’ book as simply a repository of biblical text, a mine of textual data to be quarried and extracted for its own sake and applied into a different context for a new purpose: namely, a modern eclectic reconstruction of the primitive Syriac Peshitta Gospel. In such a project, our manuscript becomes a “witness” to something else, something beyond and other than itself. Pusey’s editorial work and the resulting edition that Gwilliam completed are not to be faulted on this score. Much late-nineteenth-century scholarship was obsessed with the Bible, including the discovery and recreation of its original texts, in various versions. As editors, Pusey and Gwilliam had particular and defensible reasons for extracting biblical texts from their sources. Indeed, we are grateful for their work; the 1901 edition remains an indispensable tool for the study of the Syriac Gospels. We do not know what Pusey or Gwilliam thought about the manuscript’s additional materials or how they evaluated its use and purposes as a codex. They may have presumed that readers who wanted to know more about the manuscript could refer to the British Library’s catalogue, though the curious person who did so would find the catalogue gravely misleading on this point, as we shall see.²⁰

¹⁸ On these specific topics, see Bagnall 2009, 11–18; Nongbri 2018, 47–82.

¹⁹ “Cod. Add. 17119, saec. vi vel vii; continet S. Joannem solum;” Pusey/Gwilliam, 1901, ix; a note on p. 485 says that Pusey collated the manuscript up to Ioh. 2,13 and Gwilliam did the rest.

²⁰ Pusey provides catalogue references for the manuscripts he uses. On the problems with Wright’s catalogue description of London, BL, Add. 17,119, see 4.2.2 below.

The fact remains that when one uses the Pusey/Gwilliam edition of the Peshitta one gets a certain sense of our manuscript, as a simple carrier of the text of John – i.e. a Bible, presumably a Bible in the usual sense, whatever that may mean. The manuscript was reduced in its meaning to being simply another voice testifying to a particular form of the Gospel text as it was in such-and-such a century. But a fuller study of the codex itself, such as we provide here, yields a very different picture, one that discloses crucial features of the text’s context and the book’s original significance. Whether intentionally or not, such features as these end up being effaced when the biblical text is isolated and extracted, with little regard for the material particulars of its original context, beyond what may be useful for dating. The first (and until now only) modern appropriation of our manuscript’s contents in the 1901 Peshitta edition gives no indication that we are dealing with something special, a Divining Gospel. In that sense earlier scholarship provides a regrettably incomplete picture not only of our manuscript but also of the Bible’s various actual roles in centuries past.

On the one hand recent studies emphasizing the materiality of books reinforce certain long-standing views: for instance, the view that texts and the books that carried them were indeed very important and deeply formative for many Christians. Christians loved books. Also, the quantity and nature of the surviving manuscript evidence confirms a picture we see in the writings of early Christian authors generally: that among the many religious texts Christians used, sacred scripture was valued most highly and commanded a unique respect. Studies focusing on the material characteristics of Christian texts support these long-held opinions, among others.

On the other hand, attending to the materiality of early Christian books also invites us to enlarge our appreciation for the diverse ways in which these texts were actually being used. Informed by the insights of New Philology, the present study emphasizes the materiality of books and the implications of the fluidity of their texts (and paratexts).²¹ Without such emphases it would be difficult for us to appreciate the real use of Divining Gospels within actual contexts. In Chapter Four we will return explicitly to the subject of New Philology, though its methodological perspective will be seen to inform this study at many points. Attending to the artifactual qualities of manuscripts enriches our understanding of them and their uses. In order to appreciate more fully the significance of

Gewargis’ book as such, not just as a conserver of ancient biblical text but a meaning-rich object in its own right, we must reflect on uses of sacred books and texts that were far less conventional, though widely popular.

1.4 Sacred Books as Objects of Power

Jewish religious leaders revered their sacred books. They developed customs of copying, storing, using, and even disposing of sacred books in ways that reveal a certain awe for the holiness not only of the text but also of the artifacts bearing the text. In Jesus’ day, select portions of the Hebrew scriptures adorned the doorposts (*mezuzōth*) of Jewish homes in order to convey blessing, protection, and a respect for God’s word (see Deut. 6,4–9). Scrupulous Jews would bind portions of scripture onto their wrists and foreheads in phylacteries (*tefillin*), a practice commented on by Jesus (Matt. 23,5) but illustrative of Jewish attitudes about the efficacy of wearing textual artifacts connected with the Bible (see Ex. 13,9; Deut. 6,8; 11,18). The Jewish practice of storing sacred texts in a *genizah* prior to their ceremonial burial is well known, though it is uncertain just how ancient these practices of ritualized disposal were. In more esoteric contexts, portions of Hebrew scripture feature prominently in the practice of Jewish healing and protection rituals (“magic”) dating from an early period, supplying material for amulets, among other things.²²

As we have seen, Christians inherited their reverence for scripture from Jewish attitudes. Christian practices reinforced deep reverence for the holy text and holy books. Christians were constantly reading sacred texts in church liturgy and for purposes of preaching and theological or devotional reflection, but such ostensibly conventional functions constitute only some of their uses. Seen as instruments of the divine, the sacred books of scripture could function as agents of spiritual power in other ways as well. Indeed it seems certain that the regular use of scripture in liturgy and for such things as exorcism and healing prayer would have contributed greatly to the view that appears widespread by Late Antiquity: that the words of inspired Christian scripture – and perhaps any objects bearing the sacred text – carried extraordinary power. The church’s dramatic ceremonies infused the contexts of the Bible’s use with an aura of mystery while clerical rhetoric about scripture reinforced the sense that the biblical text

²¹ See Lundhaug/Lied 2017, 6–10.

²² See Angel 2009, 785–98.

conducted a current of saving power that flowed from a divine and otherworldly source.

The grand ceremony of public liturgy was not the only context of use capable of imbuing scripture with an aura of mysterious power. In ascetic practice, in settings far removed from the increasing pomp of the liturgy in the growing churches of late antique cities and towns, scripture was the weapon of choice. Popular tales of the desert fathers and mothers graphically depicted the ability of simple repeated biblical phrases to repel demonic onslaught.

One celebrated story tells of a brother whose meditation on scripture created an invisible barrier at the entrance to his cell, blocking a demon from entering: “He lacked the strength to enter as long as the brother was meditating but, while he rested from meditating, then the demon would go into the cell and do battle with him.”²³ In another story, merely uttering the succinct phrase, “the New” (τὴν Καινὴν) as shorthand reference for “New Testament” was potent enough to make a demon vanish.²⁴ Ascetics saw scripture as a veritable arsenal of words to be deployed in battle against dark forces. Their attitudes and practices both reflected and impacted popular understandings of the divine efficacy of sacred words and books.

1.4.1 Inscribing Amulets with Scriptural Potency

One compelling indicator of the commonness of these attitudes towards the biblical text is the prevalence of late antique amulets containing portions of Christian scripture. In their study of Greek amulets from Egypt, Theodore S. de Bruyn and Jitse H.F. Dijkstra define amulets as:

texts that were written to convey in and of themselves – as well as in association with incantation and other actions – supernatural power for protective, beneficial, or antagonistic effect, and that appear to have been or were meant to have been worn on one’s body or fixed, displayed, or deposited at some place.²⁵

In simpler terms, amulets are ritual objects inscribed with texts that people wear or carry, believing they provide the bearer with protection or help. A great many textual amulets survive in manuscript form, especially in Egypt

(mainly in Greek and Coptic), where they were clearly very popular and where the ritual experts who crafted and deployed them thrived. But we should also acknowledge that in Egypt the climate is particularly conducive to manuscript longevity. Amulets were used in other parts of the late antique Christian world as well, yet fewer of them have survived from outside Egypt for us to study.

Many of these amulets incorporate Christian elements, including the words of divine scripture. For instance, at Oxyrhynchus a piece of papyrus was found, tightly folded and tied up with string (*P.Oxy.* VIII 1151). Dated to the fifth century, its text begins with a symbol of the cross † and the words, “Flee hateful spirit! Christ pursues you. The Son of God and the Holy Spirit have overtaken you. O God of the sheep-pool, rescue your servant Joannia....” The text goes on to cite the opening verses of John’s Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word...” (Ioh. 1,1), followed by a request for healing from fever. The petition uses Christian liturgical language and invokes the intercessions of Mary *Theotokos*, John the Evangelist, and several other saints who were venerated locally. The inscription incorporates multiple cross symbols and a staurogram † at the end.²⁶ It appears that this item was crafted for Joannia as a remedy against fever, presumably within a ritual context of some kind, by an able scribe, almost certainly Christian, to be kept in a manner not well suited for regular reading but easily carried or worn.

Amulets such as Joannia’s can serve as important witnesses to the biblical text.²⁷ But they also attest to the diverse ways scripture functioned in Joannia’s world. In these applications the text’s verbal content was certainly not insignificant, but no more significant and perhaps even eclipsed by considerations of the spiritual power the text symbolized, apart from or at least alongside the verbal meaning of the words themselves. We must presume that Joannia expected to enjoy the curative and protective efficacy implied by the amulet’s text through owning and carrying the inscribed object as the product of religious ritual, tidily bound in string, rather than by continually reading and deliberating on its words.

It is important to remember that an object like Joannia’s amulet would evoke respect due to a range of properties, of which the inclusion of sacred scripture is but one. The language of prayer and liturgical formulae, the invocation of saints, the use of arcane graphic symbols, the writing of the subject’s name – all are important aspects of the inscription. Crucial also is the ritual context within

²³ *Apophthegmata Patrum*, anonymous collection, 366; text from Wortley 2013, 239. See the discussion in Burton-Christie 1993, 123.

²⁴ *Apophthegmata Patrum*, anonymous collection, 632; translation in Wortley 2013, 513.

²⁵ De Bruyn/Dijkstra 2011, 168.

²⁶ De Bruyn 2017, 107–08.

²⁷ See the conclusions in Jones 2016, 180–87.

which the amulet is executed and presented to a client, though we know next to nothing about this. The authority and social status of the ritual expert who presumably conducted the ceremony and presented the item to Joannia also lend potency to the object. Finally, even the simple manner of carrying the amulet on one's person would also impact its perceived effect. The material features of the object and the ritual actions associated with its making, delivery, and use affected its potency.

In certain important ways amulets functioned more like religious relics than like texts. But these objects, however parallel they may be to relics, incorporate texts and it is the frequent use of scripture on them, so common in the world of Christian Late Antiquity, that makes these amulets instructive for our study. Some amulets incorporate scripture formulaically, as part of a larger inscription, usually a prayer or an adjuratory formula, as in the case of Joannia's amulet. In some cases, an amulet uses just one or more scriptural *incipits*, i.e. the opening lines of a biblical text, often one of the Gospels or the Psalms, where the *incipit* may be seen to refer to a larger biblical context, even up to a whole book of the Bible (or perhaps the entire Bible itself).²⁸ The Lord's Prayer was common; extracts from Ps. 90 (91) even more so.²⁹ The opening words of the Gospel of John (*In principio*) were especially popular. It is clear that the very presence of sacred texts on these items was seen to contribute potency to the object, though the verbal content and its meaning are significant too.

1.4.2 Magic or Christian Ritual?

Characterizing these sorts of scriptural objects as "magical" is tempting but such an identification is problematic and potentially misleading. In recent decades scholarship on historic magic practices has flourished, with one result being a growing hesitancy to use the term "magic," at least not without substantial qualification.³⁰ A religious adherent might call something magic in order to slight the nefarious practices of others, whereas Western academic positivists might use it contemptuously of ritual practices they see as unreasonable and incredible. The use of the term can reveal more about one's desire to differentiate his or her (superior) culture from that of another rather than illuminate what is actually going on in these texts and the practices they reflect. Some have taken to

using the expression "ritual power" instead.³¹ The term "magic" has often been deployed pejoratively to classify a range of ritual practices meant to achieve such effects as supernatural healing, divination, protection from the demonic and other dangers, and attacks on one's foes or perceived threats. Traditional discussions have tended to distinguish magicians from priests, physicians from sorcerers, and magical practice from religion and medicine, disparaging any combination of these things as syncretism, a derogation of proper religion due to the corrupting influence of "pagan" customs or naive superstition.

Pitting magic against religion and medicine is not a recent phenomenon. The tradition owes something to the attitudes of various ancient and late antique authors who sought to expose chicanery or were concerned to protect Christians from the Devil and his works. Lucian of Samosata's *Lover of Lies* (Φιλοψευδής) satirizes superstitious folk who are taken in by fantastic tales of healing magic. Not long after, Origen speaks of "magic and sorcery, which is effected by the work of evil spirits" (μαγείαν καὶ γοητείαν, ἐνεργουμένην ὑπὸ πονηρῶν δαυμόνων).³² One Christian and the other non-Christian, these are just two examples of many authors we could cite, showing that skepticism and suspicion regarding magic and divination and other popular ritual practices are not recent innovations.³³ However, in modern historical study the delineation of magic from religion – and specifically from normative Christian practice – owes a great deal to modern biases, and it is these biases that some current scholarship seeks to check.

When it comes to the historical study of magic, properly defining terms and distinguishing categories remain the subject of considerable debate.³⁴ The practice of magic is different from relying on an amulet and spell-casting is certainly not the same as divination. Incantations and charms are not identical to prayers. Yet many of these apparently distinct things can connect or overlap, especially in popular practice, where academic definitions do not apply and the idealizing directives of certain sanctioned officials (e.g. clergy) may not be known or appreciated. In particular, some ritual experts might be practitioners of several of these ostensibly distinct expressions, providing a significant point of contact between them as they offer a menu of services to their

²⁸ See Sanzo 2014, 151–82; Rapp 2007, 202.

²⁹ De Bruyn 2017, 157–72; Amundsen 1945, 141–147.

³⁰ Studies exemplifying recent approaches occur in Mirecki/Meyer 2002.

³¹ See Meyer/Smith 1999, 1–9.

³² Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 2.51; text from Borret 1967, 1.404.

³³ See the discussion of ancient polemics against magic and various exotic ritual practices in de Bruyn 2017, 17–42; Johnston 2008, 144–50; also Sanzo 2014, 10–14.

³⁴ See Fowler 2005, 283–86.

clients – or parishioners. For indeed, it is apparent that the late antique practitioners of whom we speak might well be Christian priests or ascetics.

It is not the purpose of this study to advance the discussion of magic in general, nor “Christian magic” in particular. But current insights on the subject require us to acknowledge that modern attempts to delineate the practice of religion from other popular ritual practices – such as divination – can be problematic and unhelpful.³⁵ The evidence shows that in early and late antique Christian communities a great variety of beliefs and practices existed together, sometimes in tension with what we consider to be normative or more conventional religious practices, though often even that tension may be more presumed on our part than clearly evident from the historical context. Normative Christian discourse and popular practices we encounter in other sorts of evidence, like Joannia’s amulet, do not always agree.³⁶

Joannia’s reliance on an amulet would not necessarily be considered the practice of magic according to modern definitions of magic, though one could argue that the amulet’s production may have entailed “magic,” or that Joannia’s attitude towards her amulet as a powerful object implies a trust in magic. But it definitely also indicates a trust in Christ the Son of God, the efficacy of prayer, and the power of scripture. The person responsible for crafting her amulet was almost certainly Christian, probably a cleric or monk – a recognized official of the Christian church.³⁷

Trying to determine which categories – clergy or magician, healing prayer or incantation – best fit Joannia’s practitioner does not take us very far in understanding the ritual practice in which they and she were participating, as patron or client. It is equally unhelpful to define the amulet, its maker, or its user as merely syncretistic,³⁸ or to attempt erecting sharp distinctions between Christian and non-Christian elements. Brice C. Jones contends that the debate about whether to call ritual papyrus and parchment artifacts with scripture “miniature codices,” thereby classifying them as rather conventional biblical witnesses, or “amulets,” thereby emphasizing a different and more exotic function, can introduce a false polarity into the consideration of such items.³⁹ Seen from the vantage point of their original functions in historic social and religious contexts, they may be both. “The boundary

between an apotropaic practice and a devotional practice cannot always be clearly drawn.”⁴⁰

In the discussions of some late antique authors, as in the frameworks of much modern scholarship, the categories of magic and religion are distinct. Yet a great deal of the surviving documentary evidence blurs such distinctions. Many amulets from Late Antiquity have no elements that would be considered distinctly “Christian;” many have some Christian elements alongside elements that are not specifically Christian – or are often considered specifically non-Christian (i.e. “pagan”);⁴¹ others may be seen to have only Christian elements, so far as such elements may be distinguished.⁴² As a result of his analysis of fourth-century papyri, Malcolm Choat concludes, “far too much effort has been spent on attempting to define mutually exclusive Christian and non-Christian categories. Neither tradition nor usage are sufficiently delineated to allow such precise definitions.”⁴³

Hence, we should not be surprised to encounter something like the *Divining Gospel*, a book that blurs modern distinctions between conventional uses of scripture and so-called popular “superstition.”

1.4.3 Ambivalent Attitudes Towards Popular Religious Practices Involving Scriptural Artifacts

Making the observation that an analysis of actual late antique practice requires blurring (or abandoning) some of our modern categories is not to say that late antique Christians never displayed ambivalence or even outright hostility towards some of these practices. We have already noticed that both Christian and non-Christian intellectuals in the ancient Greco-Roman world (e.g. Origen and Lucian) warn their ostensibly gullible readers against the irrational excesses of popular practice. We encounter similar concerns in the writings of prominent late antique Christian leaders as well. In the authors we are about to discuss, we will focus specifically on what they say about popular ritual practices involving biblical texts and books of scripture, practices that treat them as amuletic.⁴⁴

Near the end of his exegetical *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 43, John Chrysostom (+407) exhorts his listeners:

⁴⁰ De Bruyn/Dykstra 2011, 180.

⁴¹ See the collection in Meyer/Smith 1999, 31–251.

⁴² Sanzo 2014, 10–14.

⁴³ Choat 2006, 100.

⁴⁴ For brief discussion of some of these examples, see Gamble 1995, 238–39; De Bruyn 2017, 24–30.

³⁵ Johnston 2008, 146–48.

³⁶ See De Bruyn 2017, 17–42, 235–46.

³⁷ De Bruyn 2017, 108; see Frankfurter 1997, 115–35.

³⁸ See Frankfurter 2003, 339–85; De Bruyn/Dykstra 2011, 178–82.

³⁹ Jones 2016, 120–22.

“Let us make a little chest for the poor at home, and put it near the place where you stand praying. As often as you come in to pray, first deposit your alms, then send up your prayer...” Apparently, Chrysostom believes that few things enhance Christian prayers the way almsgiving can do. But he is well aware that many in his congregation have a different practice, as he goes on to intimate: “Not even the Gospel hanging by your bed is more important than your laying up of alms, for if you hang up the Gospel and do nothing, it will not do you so much good. But if you have this little coffer, you have a defense against the devil and you give your prayer wings...” (*In ep. 1 ad Cor.*, 43,4).⁴⁵

Apparently, some people in Chrysostom’s congregation were in the practice of hanging up Gospel books near their beds in order to give their nightly devotionals a powerful boost. Chrysostom makes clear his preference that people should internalize and embody the teachings of the biblical text rather than use sacred textual objects as amulets or charms. Yet his references attest to an apotropaic use of scripture that must have been fairly common practice in his day, at least in some Christian circles; nor does he explicitly condemn it.⁴⁶

Chrysostom makes a similar appeal in his exegetical *Homilies on John* 32, scolding those who seem to care more about the opulence of their gold-lettered editions of the Bible than knowing the contents of scripture. Chrysostom may have the Gospel of John specifically in mind, when he insists:

The scriptures were not given to us solely so that we may have them in books, but that we might engrave them on our hearts.... I say this not to prevent you from acquiring books – on the contrary, I encourage and eagerly pray that you do so! But I want you to convey the letters and meanings from those books into your mind, so that it may be purified when it receives the meaning of the letters. For if the devil will not dare approach a house in which a Gospel is lying, how much less will any demon or sinful nature ever touch or come into a soul that carries such meanings. (*In Ioannem*, 32,3)⁴⁷

45 Καὶ κιβώτιον πενήτων ποιῶμεν ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκίας, καὶ παρὰ τὸν τόπον, ὃν ἔστηκας εὐχόμενος, ἐκεῖ κείσθω, καὶ ὡσάκις ἂν εἰσέλθῃς εὐξασθαι, κατὰ θες πρῶτον τὴν ἐλεημοσύνην, καὶ τότε ἀνάπεμπε εὐχὴν.... Καὶ γὰρ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου κρέμασθαι παρὰ τὴν κλίνην οὐκ ἔλαττον τὸ ἐλεημοσύνην κείσθαι. Εὐαγγέλιον μὲν γὰρ ἐὰν κρεμάσῃς μηδὲν ποιῶν, οὐδὲν τοσοῦτον ὠφελήσῃ· τοῦτο δὲ ἔχων τὸ κιβώτιον, ὅπλον ἔχεις κατὰ τοῦ διαβόλου, τὴν εὐχὴν ὑπόπτερον ποιεῖς. (*PG* 61,372)

46 See Kaczynski 1974, 326–29.

47 Οὐ γὰρ διὰ ταῦτα ἐδόθησαν αἱ Γραφαί, ἵνα ἐν βιβλίοις αὐτὰς ἔχωμεν μόνον, ἀλλ’ ἵνα καὶ ἐν καρδίαις αὐτὰς ἐγκολάψωμεν.... Καὶ ταῦτα λέγω, οὐ κωλύων βιβλία κεκτηῖσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ παραινῶ τοῦτο καὶ σφόδρα εὐχομαι· βούλομαι δὲ ἐξ ἐκείνων καὶ τὰ γράμματα καὶ τὰ νοήματα εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν περιφέρεσθαι τὴν ἡμετέραν, ἵνα οὕτω καθαίρηται δεχομένη τὴν τῶν γραμμάτων νόησιν. Εἰ γὰρ ἐν οἰκίᾳ,

In this instance, Chrysostom argues on the basis of his audience’s respect for the Gospel codex or scriptural amulet as an object of power. Some Christians in Antioch must have believed that having a copy of the Gospel in their homes would ward off evil spirits. Chrysostom does not disagree, though he clearly longs for them to internalize the Gospel’s teachings and live according to their principles in daily life. “The scriptures are divine charms” (Θεῖαι εἰσὶν ἐπωδαὶ τὰ γράμματα), he goes on to say, encouraging his listeners to apply them as remedies to the passions of their souls. Since he is commenting on John’s Gospel here, it is not unlikely that the practice to which he refers involves copies of that Gospel in particular, or at least portions of it, for reasons that we shall see.⁴⁸

In his *Homilies on the Statues* 19, Chrysostom draws again on local Antiochene practice, imploring his audience to learn the teachings of scripture rather than merely rely on the apotropaic power of phylacteries: “Do you not see how the women and little children hang Gospels from their necks as powerful protection, carrying them around everywhere they go? You should inscribe the commands of the Gospel and its laws on your mind” (*Hom. ad. pop. ant.*, 19,14).⁴⁹ We should see the reference to “the women and little children” as revealing Chrysostom’s intent to belittle the practice rather than an indication of social realities; some Antiochene men probably carried scriptural amulets as well. Chrysostom makes a similar comment in his *Homilies on Matthew* 72, illustrating his explanation that God commanded the Jews to wear phylacteries because of their tiresome forgetfulness about his commands, “like many of our women now have Gospels hanging from their necks” (*In Matthaëum* 72,2).⁵⁰ Chrysostom does not actually condemn the practice. Perhaps Chrysostom’s own bibliocentrism leads him to be less harsh on popular ritual practices using Christian scripture. Yet he wishes to diminish them by comparing them to inferior and unspiritual Jewish practices and to relativize them as being far less consequential than reading the Gospel text and seeking to live by it.

ἐνθα ἂν Εὐαγγέλιον ἦ κείμενον, οὐ τολμήσει προσελθεῖν ὁ διάβολος, πολλῶ μᾶλλον ψυχῆς νοήματα τοιαῦτα περιφερούσης οὐχ ἄψεται ποτε, οὐδὲ ἐπιβήσεται δαίμων, ἢ ἁμαρτίας φύσις. (*PG* 59, 187)

48 Sanzo contends that Chrysostom and Augustine are talking about objects containing only select portions of the Gospel/s rather than entire codices (Sanzo 2014, 161–64).

49 Οὐχ ὄρας, πῶς αἱ γυναῖκες καὶ τὰ μικρὰ παιδία ἀντὶ φυλακῆς μεγάλῃς Εὐαγγέλια ἐξαρτῶσι τοῦ τραχήλου, καὶ πανταχοῦ περιφέρουσιν, ὅπουπερ ἂν ἀπίωσιν; Σὺ τὰ παραγγέλματα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ τοὺς νόμους ἔγγραφόν σου τῇ διανοίᾳ. (*PG* 49, 196).

50 ὡς πολλοὶ νῦν τῶν γυναικῶν Εὐαγγέλια τῶν τραχήλων ἐξαρτῶσαι ἔχουσι. (*PG* 58,669)

In 398 in his *Commentary on Matthew* 23, Jerome leverages the same practice in his attack on what he sees as the Jews' overly physical view of scripture that is evidenced by their reliance on phylacteries. Jerome's rhetoric is practically the same as we see in Chrysostom: "Among us there are superstitious little women who keep doing this up to the present day with little Gospels and with the wood of the Cross and with things of this sort. They have a zeal for God, to be sure, but not according to knowledge" (*Comm. in Ev. Matt.* 4,23,5–7).⁵¹ The rhetorical move by which late antique commentators illustrate their interpretations of Matt. 23,5 using Christian women and their prophylactic Gospels appears to have become an established exegetical tradition. From his mountain fastness in Egypt, Isidore of Pelusium († ca. 450) composed a letter to one Epimachos, responding to the question, "What does it mean, 'to enlarge their phylacteries?'" In his criticisms of "the Jewish professors" (οἱ τῶν Ἰουδαίων καθηγηταί) he echoes both Chrysostom and Jerome, pointing to the analogy of Christian women who carry, "little Gospels" (Εὐαγγέλια μικρά) as protective objects (*Ep.* 2,150).⁵²

Such practices were not confined to the eastern locales of Syrian Antioch, Bethlehem, and Egypt. In North Africa in about 407 CE, Augustine (†430) refers to something similar in his *Tractates on John* 7:

When your head aches, we praise you if you place the Gospel at your head rather than running to an amulet. For human weakness has come so far, and so lamentable are they who run to amulets, that we rejoice when we see a person lying on his or her bed, laid out with fever and pain, who will place hope on nothing other than the Gospel placed at his or her head – not because it was done for this reason but because the Gospel is preferable to amulets. (*In Joh. tra.* 7,12)⁵³

Once again, it may be that the practice to which Augustine refers is one involving the Gospel of John in particular, since he is commenting on Ioh. 1,34–51 in this *Tractate*. We cannot know for sure. He does seem to allow for the efficacy of the practice; that is, Augustine implies

⁵¹ Hoc apud nos superstitiosae mulierculae, in parvulis Evangeliiis, et in crucis ligno, et istiusmodi rebus (quae habent quidem zelum Dei, sed non juxta scientiam), usque hodie factitant.... (*PL* 26,168). Translation from Scheck 2010, 260.

⁵² *PG* 78,604.

⁵³ Cum caput tibi dolet, laudamus si Evangelium ad caput tibi poneris, et non ad ligaturam cucurreris. Ad hoc enim perducta est infirmatus hominum, et ita plangendi sunt homines qui currunt ad ligaturas, ut gaudeamus quando videmus hominem in lecto suo constitutum, iactari febribus et doloribus, nec alicubi spem posuisse, nisi ut sibi Evangelium ad caput poneret: non quia ad hoc factum est, sed quia praelatum est Evangelium ligaturis. (*PL* 35,1443)

that sleeping with a Gospel codex or scriptural amulet at one's pillow might remedy a headache. Or perhaps we should consider his point in light of the comments in the other authors, as a rhetorical allowance of a popular practice merely for the sake of commending his preferred practice – in this case, abandoning other sorts of practices – specifically, the tied ritual objects (*ligaturae*) that were apparently common in Hippo – and trusting in God and his Word for bodily relief instead.

Perhaps we should not be surprised that these late antique Christian preachers and exegetes do not dismiss popular reliance on Gospel artifacts for protection and healing. None of them seems especially keen on the practice, but they are relatively accepting of it. For Augustine, the Christian use of a Gospel artifact for healing is relative to an unacceptable reliance on "non-Christian" *ligaturae*. For Chrysostom and Jerome, the use of Gospel artifacts for protection is relatively inferior to the internalization and embodiment of Gospel principles, yet not forbidden. These interpreters are surely concerned to maintain appropriate communal boundaries in relation to non-Christian groups and their practices – especially Jews and "pagans."⁵⁴ The reliance on Gospel artifacts for supernatural help may not be ideal in relation to the Gospel's other, nobler uses as a guide to belief and ethics, but it is not non-Christian. Indeed, for Chrysostom and Augustine at least, reliance on Gospel artifacts for supernatural help is potentially a Christian distinctive; at least it is more "Christian" than some alternatives.

The practice of wearing portions of the Gospel or carrying Gospel codices as protective devices continued to enjoy widespread popularity. In the Latin West of the eighth century, Alcuin of York (†804) makes essentially the same argument Chrysostom does, extending it to include the protective use of saints' relics. He is a witness to customs (*consuetudines*) that are commonly practiced by many but have the potential to distract people from true holiness: "They carry amulets [*ligaturas*], believing them to be something holy. But it is better to imitate the examples of the saints in one's heart than to carry their bones in little bags. And it is better to hold the written teachings of the Gospels in one's mind, than to carry them, written on strips of parchment, around one's neck." Caesarius of Arles (†542) had said something very similar a few centuries before: "it is better to retain the Word of God in one's heart than to hang scripture around one's neck."⁵⁵ Yet Caesarius parrots neither Augustine or Chrysostom in his

⁵⁴ See Sanzo 2017, 227–46.

⁵⁵ Both quoted in Rapp 2007, 201 and n.29.

categorical condemnation of amulets. In his view, Christians should rely only on the Eucharist and anointing of the sick and prayer. Even amulets with scriptural contents and clerical origins are the devil's tools, threatening to undue a person's baptism.⁵⁶

Given the sorts of claims that late antique Christian leaders make for the supernatural efficacy of such things as Baptism, Eucharist, anointing with oil, healing prayer, saints' relics, and of course, scripture, they could hardly insist on a thoroughly demystified understanding of Christian rituals, words, and artifacts. Consequently, questions about the ritual use of artifacts involving scripture continued to arise, with pastors and theologians seeking to navigate the territory between what was acceptably Christian and what was deemed dangerously demonic. In the Middle Ages Thomas Aquinas (†1274) addresses it in a section on "superstition in observances" in his *Summa Theologiae*. In response to the question, "Whether it is unlawful to wear divine words on the neck?" (*suspendere divina verba ad collum*), Aquinas answers:

It would seem that it is not wrong to wear inscribed amulets (*divina verba*) about the neck. Sacred words should be no less efficacious when written than when spoken, and it is legitimate to utter them for the purpose of producing certain effects, for instance, to heal the sick.... Therefore, it seems legitimate to wear sacred words on one's person, as a remedy for sickness or for any kind of distress.⁵⁷

Inasmuch as Christians are right to trust in divine words that are spoken, Aquinas sees nothing wrong in wearing an amulet inscribed with scripture or other "divine words" – provided the intention is right and the practice not too esoteric. The question itself is a reminder of the problems one could encounter in popular practice when users of amulets paid little attention to the meaning of the words. Aquinas goes on to stress the importance of trusting in God alone when engaging in such practices, also citing Chrysostom's desire that people bind the words of scripture on their hearts rather than around their necks. Furthermore, he cautions against the use of esoteric signs with the verbal inscription (beyond that of the cross) or anything whatsoever that could be associated with the invocation of demons, including the use of language whose sense is not understood by the wearer.⁵⁸

Although these examples range from late antique Syrian Antioch to the late medieval West, they illus-

trate important realities involving the reception of scriptural artifacts in Christian contexts, from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages.

First, practices involving scriptural artifacts that were used for protection and other forms of supernatural help were popular and widespread. We could cite even more evidence, but our survey has been sufficient to establish and support the claim.⁵⁹ Furthermore, we see that reverence for the holy text often extended to the *object* carrying the text, whether a small portion of parchment or an entire book.⁶⁰

Secondly, many Christian leaders show ambivalence towards reliance on scriptural artifacts for supernatural aid. Though most do not seem to be willing to ban the artifacts or their use outright, they do wish to relativize and regulate them, for a variety of reasons. For some, it is a matter of reinforcing Christian boundaries in relation to Jews and other non-Christians. In other contexts, the chief concern is to elevate spiritual matters in the face of perceived superstition. Yet even the authors' ambivalence attests to the widespread popular reverence for sacred books and textual artifacts as objects of power. Again, we could cite more evidence, including ecclesial canons. In the next chapter we will address some of the same questions, from the standpoint of the practice of lot divination by Christians, observing similarly ambivalent approaches on the part of ecclesial authors (see 2.4). Here it is enough to notice that in the conception of many Christians, from Late Antiquity and well into the Middle Ages, engaging a book's verbal content was not the only way to access its power. As a sacred object, the Holy Bible lent divine potency to such things as prayers for protection or healing as well as to divination – though some parts of the Bible were seen to be more potent than others.

1.5 Elf-Charms, Incubi, and Codex-Relics: John's Gospel in Popular Imagination and Ritual Use

It will not have escaped the reader's notice that some of the examples mentioned above involve codices of John's Gospel or excerpts from John. The Syriac codex at the center of our study is basically a copy of the Gospel of John, albeit one with distinctive qualities. This is not

⁵⁶ De Bruyn 2017, 30.

⁵⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2,2,96,4; translation from O'Meara/Duffy 1968, 40,79–80.

⁵⁸ See Rider 2011, 92–107.

⁵⁹ E.g. see examples illustrating "scriptural holiness" in Rapp 2007, 194–222.

⁶⁰ See Frankfurter 1998, 268.

incidental. What was it about the Fourth Gospel that made it so special not only to patristic commentators and theologians but also in the popular religious practices we have been considering?

We wish to clarify certain common conceptions about John's Gospel that were not front-and-center in patristic commentary, regular liturgy, or mainstream ecclesial discussion, but were in fact characteristic of the popular Christian consciousness for centuries. In order to do so, it is necessary for us once again to draw on a rather broad range of evidence, geographically disparate and extending chronologically as far as the early modern period. In much the same way that night photography requires slow shutter speeds and a wide aperture in order to capture what is truly present in the dark sky, gaining a full appreciation for the fascinating but often muted role of John's Gospel in popular Christian practice requires taking in a broad range of evidence. The resulting portrait will provide a crucial backdrop for understanding the Divining Gospel.

In order to capture the richness of the background, we begin in an unusual place, with Anglo-Saxon leechcraft. The medieval manual known to modern scholars as *Lacnunga* contains an assortment of Anglo-Saxon remedies, charms, and prayers in a compact manuscript of the late tenth- to mid-eleventh century (London, BL, MS Harley 585).⁶¹ Instructions for the charm *Lacnunga* XXIX begin as follows:

Bis is se halga drænc wið ælfsidene wið eallum feondes costungum:

Writ on husldisce: "In principio erat uerbum" usq(ue) "non conprehenderunt."⁶²

This is the holy drink against elf-magic and against all the fiend's torments:

Write on a housel dish: "In the beginning was the word..." up through, "... did not comprehend it."

As the recipe goes on to explain, the remedy against affliction caused by meddlesome elf-influence (*ælfside*)⁶³ and the devil's other torments involves concocting a drink from fresh water infused with herbs and mixed with consecrated wine, over which masses and hymns are sung and prayers spoken. But the procedure begins with a ritual inscribing the opening words of John's Gospel (Ioh. 1,1–5) in Latin on a housel dish or

paten – a eucharistic bread dish that is then used to make the drink. In the making of the elixir the words are effectively washed from the housel dish and blended into the herb-infused water. In other words, the sacred words of scripture are not just read aloud to accompany the chanting of the liturgy – the words of the Gospel are literally mixed into the medicine and drunk by the person who has fallen prey to elf mischief and become ill. Do we have here an instance of "sympathetic magic," or "liturgical medicine?" Karen L. Jolly insists that the attempt to establish reliable distinctions between what is "Christian" and what is "pagan" in the practices prescribed by texts like that of *Lacnunga* XXIX is futile, disclosing the intellectual and religious biases of modern scholars rather than illuminating the practices of medieval people.⁶⁴

The opening verses of John's Gospel, *In principio*, are not the only portions of scripture that feature in the healing ritual of *Lacnunga* XXIX. However, the opening words of John are the first words of the charm and this passage from the Bible is distinguished by its frequent use in many such contexts. The dramatically evocative opening of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..." along with the subsequent statements laden with mystery and power in the verses that follow, find repeated use in many prayers and other formulae of healing or protection. Pettit explains, "[t]his was a popular passage for use in charms and remedies throughout the Middle Ages and later."⁶⁵ Its use begins much earlier than the Middle Ages. John's opening statements of power feature prominently in early Coptic amulets with scriptural incipits.⁶⁶ Passages from John are also used apotropaically in Arabic amulets and in Syriac ritual healing prayers.⁶⁷

Many examples illustrate widespread and continued reliance on John in such ways. At the end of the twelfth century, St. Hugh of Lincoln is reported to have expelled the Devil from an English village by reciting the opening words of John.⁶⁸ Written into the cartulary of the Benedictine monastery of Eynsham in central Oxfordshire is a late thirteenth-century ceremony for warding off sheep murrain. After conducting a mass in honor of the Holy

⁶⁴ Jolly 1996, 113–23, 140–43.

⁶⁵ Pettit 1996, 327. See helpful discussion and bibliography in Bächtold-Stäubli/Hoffmann-Krayer 1932, 4,731–33; and examples in Jones 2016, 60–80.

⁶⁶ See further examples indexed in Sanzo 2014, 206. Portions of the other canonical Gospels are also used in this manner.

⁶⁷ For Syriac examples, see Cambridge, Mass., Harvard, Syr. 156 (Goshen-Gottstein 1979, 103–05), and Gollancz 1912, xxvi, lix, lxi; for Arabic examples, see Bosworth 1976, 128.

⁶⁸ Decima/Farmer 1985, 2,125–26.

⁶¹ See the edition, introduction, and commentary in Pettit 1996, 16–17. Images of the manuscript available: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_585 (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁶² *Lacnunga* XXIX, lines 102–103 (fol. 137r). Text from Pettit 1996, 181.

⁶³ See the discussion of *ælfside* in Pettit 1996, 326–27.

Spirit and making an offering, the priest gathers the sheep into a cote and performs a complex charm, commencing with a recitation from the beginning of Ioh. 1, *In principio*.⁶⁹ Formulae such as these often entail a sequence of carefully selected passages, including those from elsewhere in the Bible, but *In principio* is among the most important.

As William C. Jordan points out, the prologue of John in such contexts “emphasizes the absolute creative power of God to give life.”⁷⁰ However, it should be noticed that the prologue also presumes a backdrop of cosmic conflict and emphasizes the victory of light over its opponent, the darkness (Ioh. 1,4–5), themes that are also very suitable for prayers of help and charms of protection. The prologue culminates in the declaration, *verbum caro factum est* (“the Word became flesh...;” Ioh. 1,14), a fundamental profession of Christian doctrine and a statement of the most profound mystery. By deploying John’s opening passages, one is appealing not only to the creative force of God’s Word, but also to the power of divine light to defeat darkness and evil, against the dramatic mystery of Christ’s embodiment in the material realm.

The popular use of John’s Gospel as an agent of mystical power continues into the early modern period. In an attempt to show that demonic intercourse with humans is well-attested fact, the sixteenth-century Scottish historian and philosopher Hector Boece tells the tale of a priest near Aberdeen who burst in upon a beautiful well-born lass being ravished in her bedchamber by a hideous monster who had impregnated her.⁷¹ A horrified mob assembled and torches filled the room with light. But it was not until the priest, described as “a person of upright life, not ignorant of the sacred disciplines” (*sacrae disciplinae haud ignarus*), stood and boldly recited aloud, *In principio* that the demon quailed and finally yielded. When the priest reached the climactic words, *verbum caro factum est* (“the Word became flesh”), the incubus shrieked and fled, bursting through the roof of the bedchamber, its departure causing the room’s furnishings to catch fire in its wake.

Although the early modern period saw increasing skepticism about the efficacy of such things, some people continued to inscribe portions of John’s Gospel on amulets or even to use the very book itself for protection.⁷² For instance, Catholic Auvergnat soldiers attempting to take Protestant Geneva by surprise in the foiled *Escalade* of 1602 were found to have in their possession pieces of parchment inscribed with esoteric symbols and the verse,

In principio erat verbum. At the bottom of the parchment was written, “Whoever possesses this certificate cannot perish today, neither by water nor by sword.”⁷³ Unwilling to trust their safety and success only to physical weapons, the soldiers carried armaments designed to give them a supernatural edge, featuring the formidable excerpt from John.

In the aftermath of the Reformation, Protestants criticized Catholic priests and monks as “the vilest witches and sorcerers” for a wide range of popular practices, such as giving “St John’s Gospel to hang about men’s necks,”⁷⁴ presumably as protection against evil and misfortune. The injunctions of the Protestant Edward VI in 1547 forbade the Christian from “bearing about him holy bread, or St. John’s Gospel,”⁷⁵ targeting, among other things, the talismanic use of copies of John. A few years later, the popularity of such practices prompted Reginald Scot in his famous exposé of magic and witchcraft to lampoon them:

The first chapter of S. Johns gossell in small letters consecrated at a masse, and hanged about ones necke, is an in-comparable amulet or tablet, which delivereth from all witchcrafts and divilish Practices. But me thinkes, if one should hang a whole testament, or rather a bible, he might beguile the divill terrible.... But if the hanging of S. Johns gossell about the necke be so beneficiall; how if one should eate up the same?⁷⁶

The MP from Kent saw no sense in these practices. If the prologue to John’s Gospel possessed such remarkable potency that people were inclined to hang that brief portion around their necks, why would the same credulous souls not wish to suspend the entire Bible from their necks? Better yet – why not just eat the Gospel in its entirety and enjoy its full potency from the inside-out?

Despite such skeptical attacks, often delivered in support of Protestantism against the manifold errors of “Popery,” the enduring popularity of such remedies meant that there was money to be made for the enterprising cleric or magician. In the early seventeenth century a certain sorcerer in Nottingham was known for selling copies of John’s Gospel for ten shillings apiece as protection against witchcraft.⁷⁷

Although a variety of biblical texts and textual objects containing scripture were put to apotropaic or curative use, the Gospel of John has held a special status in this regard,

⁶⁹ Salter 1907–08, 1,18.

⁷⁰ Jordan 2009, 70.

⁷¹ Boece 1527, 8,154.

⁷² See Le Blant 1894, 8–13.

⁷³ Le Blant 1894, 11.

⁷⁴ Thomas 1971, 52.

⁷⁵ Gee/Hardy 1896, 428, n.2.

⁷⁶ Scot 1584, 220–21.

⁷⁷ Thomas 1971, 187, 249 (also 31, 36, 52, 275–76, 607); see also Gifford 1593, sig. B1v.

perhaps due first of all to the mystical qualities of its powerful language. As the book that most directly professes the doctrine of the incarnation (Ioh. 1,1–14), it symbolizes – or perhaps even embodies, for some – the very presence of Christ. In time, the tradition of its use in these ways, originating in the early centuries of Christianity, became authoritative, so that people and priests regularly turned to John’s Gospel for various kinds of supernatural aid.

In addition to the formulaic recitation of John’s words in prayers and other sorts of rituals, many Christians from Chrysostom’s day to at least the seventeenth century were in the habit of carrying objects inscribed with Johannine texts or even wearing copies of John around their necks. These practices demonstrate the special reverence, long held in the popular Christian imagination, that objects inscribed with words from John commanded. Most of these objects were not complete books. The larger part of them would have consisted of short extracts from the Gospel, especially its opening portion.⁷⁸ However, some references to the apotropaic use of “the Gospel” or “St. John’s Gospel” may have in view volumes containing the whole of John.

Some codices of John, though lacking features that would definitely link them to the sorts of practices we have been discussing, have extraordinary characteristics that would support our seeing them functioning as amulets in themselves. The smallest extant Latin biblical manuscript is the Chartres St. John, a tiny early codex of John (71 x 51 mm) from the late fifth or early sixth century (Paris, BnF, lat. 10439). In addition to providing an elegant and simple text of John for devotional reading, this petite tome may have served as a protective amulet before it was put into the reliquary of the Virgin’s shirt at Chartres in the eleventh century.⁷⁹ Whether it was originally intended to function as a sort of codex-amulet is unknown, but its disposition shows that it came to be seen that way.

Similar is the artifact reputed to be the oldest intact European book, the famous Stonyhurst Gospel (London, BL, Add. 89000). Also a diminutive volume (138 x 92 mm), this Latin codex of John was long believed to have been buried with St. Cuthbert (†687) when he was reinterred at Lindisfarne in 698.⁸⁰ Although its origins are uncertain, the codex was probably made in Wearmouth-Jarrow and discovered when the saint’s remains were transferred to Durham

in 1104. The clergy at Durham kept the codex in a leather case with a silk cord so that it could be worn; select visitors to the Cathedral got the privilege of hanging it around their necks.⁸¹ Several factors contribute to the medieval reception of the Stonyhurst Gospel as a relic, including its age and especially its association with the miracle-working saint, whose exploits against the devil were famous. But at least one decisive factor in its reception as a relic was integral to its original execution and purpose: it was a specialized codex devoted solely to the Gospel of John. It sits alongside a tradition of medieval “Irish pocket Gospel books,” in which John features prominently.⁸² The original owner, though not Cuthbert himself, surely recognized this portable codex as having special qualities.⁸³ These were books but they could also be used as relics or amulets.

1.6 Divining Gospel: An Overview

1.6.1 The Unique Character of the Syriac Version

Both the Chartres St. John and the Stonyhurst Gospel stand alongside many other indications that textual artifacts containing portions of John’s Gospel – up to and including entire codices of John – were held to be objects bearing special power. We see constant and extensive evidence for this, from the early centuries of Christianity into the early modern period. Perhaps more than any other Gospel, the Gospel of John, a book of great majesty, mystery, and comfort for many Christians, was seen to embody the presence of the incarnate Christ as the Word of God.⁸⁴ People recognized the power of the incarnation not only in John’s teachings and text but even in certain material objects inscribed with John – including codices of the Gospel.

One way this peculiar reverence for John expressed itself in Late Antiquity is in the production of the Divining Gospel. We have not given much consideration yet to one of the most common expressions of respect for scripture as an agent of divine power and wisdom – the use of the Bible for divination. Along with the Psalms, though even more so, the Gospel of John offered especially rich opportunities for text based divination. As we have seen, some specialized uses of John entailed the formulation of

⁷⁸ See Sanzo 2014, 151–82; Rapp 2007, 202.

⁷⁹ McGurk 1994, 8. Images available: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52503882m> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁸⁰ See Brown 1969, 29–37; cf. see the discussion of the book’s early history in Gameson 2015, 129–32. Images available: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_89000 (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁸¹ Skemer 2006, 51–52.

⁸² See Meehan 2015, 83–102; also Rapp 2007, 204–05, 208.

⁸³ Brown 1969, 41–43; cf. Gameson 2015, 129–30.

⁸⁴ Cf. Rapp 2007, 199.

special prayers or the crafting of curative amulets. In other instances, portable codices of John were carried about and understood to emanate protective power and benefit to the bearer. In the case of the Divining Gospel, John was seen to be the ideal home and partner for an apparatus of divinatory material designed to provide practical knowledge upon request and to help guide the inquiring seeker in the right path, with God’s help.

Popular reverence for scripture, and John in particular, combined with the abiding interest in divination to produce the Divining Gospels – first in Greek, then rapidly in various translations. Portions of Divining Gospels are known to survive in Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Latin, and Armenian, now often only in very fragmentary form. Yet this diverse evidence also points to an array of significant Christian communities in which scripture functioned not just in the usual ways – e.g. in liturgy, exegesis, theology, and for personal devotion – but also as a technical framework for divination. Apparently these Divining Gospels were being produced and used throughout the late antique Christian world. Although they appear in different languages and varied formats, they share a great many features and even identical contents, justifying their treatment as a distinct genre.

In the Divining Gospels, an elaborate system of sortilege is fused with the text of John, enabling users to relate the message and power of scripture to the problems and questions of everyday life in a unique way. The manner by which the fortunes, or *sortes* help the user interpret and apply scripture was different from that used by theologians, commentators, and homilists – and not entirely sanctioned. From the period of the ancient church through the Middle Ages, practices of divination aroused criticism and regular prohibition. Official ambivalence about the propriety of these tools must have contributed to their demise and destruction, the near extinction of what had once been widespread. Today we are left only with scattered, imperfect, and often puzzling evidence from which to gain partial insight into these artifacts and their original use.

The Syriac book that Gewargis wrote is a unique surviving example of this once widespread phenomenon. After a series of adventures that we will describe later, the manuscript came to the British Library in London in the nineteenth century. Identified as London, British Library, Add. 17,119 (BL, Add. 17,119), this manuscript is the chief subject of the present study. Although we have a number of other examples in different languages, they are mostly fragmentary, incomplete, and even illegible. Some of them are very ancient, sharing content, structure, and other features with the Syriac version and illuminating our understanding of it. But no extant manuscript has a

set of *sortes* precisely like that of the Syriac manuscript; it is older and more legible than several of our other manuscripts and its system of *sortes* is more complete than any others yet to be identified. It warrants focused analysis and provides crucial keys for understanding the others.

The designation “Divining Gospel” is a modern one. It is intended to denote a copy of John’s Gospel incorporating an apparatus of material for use in sortilege, or “drawing lots,” for the purpose of telling fortunes. In scholarly discussion these tools are also known as books of *hermêneiai*, from the Greek term meaning “interpretation” (ἑρμηνεία) that often accompanies the statements. They have also recently been called *Sortes Ioannenses* (“Johannine lots”).⁸⁵

In this study, we refer generally to the oracular statements in the apparatus using the Latin term *sors* (plural *sortes*; i.e. “lots”) or the English term “oracle.” Although the latter may also refer to the medium by which a fortune is told, as in the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, we mainly use it here for the actual statement of response itself. The use of the terms *sortes* and “oracles” is common in the literature discussing these materials. When referring to the *sortes* of the Divining Gospels in particular, we normally use the term *hermêneia* (plural *hermêneiai*) that we find in the Greek sources or the synonymous Syriac term, *puššāqā* (plural *puššāqē*), when the Syriac oracles are under discussion. In practice, this means that the terms *sortes*, oracles, and *hermêneiai* refer variously to the oracular statements of the Divining Gospels in all the versions, with *puššāqē* reserved specifically for the Syriac version.

1.6.2 The Plan of the Present Study

In this chapter we have established the reasons why late antique Christian editors would choose a biblical codex – and John’s Gospel in particular – to host an extensive divinatory apparatus.⁸⁶ We have also raised numerous cautions about drawing lines too sharply in order to separate cleanly the supposedly conventional uses of scriptural artifacts from the other uses to which they were commonly put. Allowing for blurred categories will help us bring the actual historic significance of the Divining Gospels into clearer focus.

In the next chapter we will turn to the matter of divination, a subject closely related to some of the topics of

⁸⁵ Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 53.

⁸⁶ As we will see in Chapter Two and subsequent chapters, John was not the only biblical target for use in divinatory tools, but its use was exceptional in important ways.

this chapter but one to which we have not given much attention so far. We will briefly describe ancient practices of divination in Greco-Roman society, with special focus on the methods and tools for sortilege one might encounter in the world of Late Antiquity, along with the varied Christian appropriations of and responses to divination (Chapter Two). After briefly surveying the history of scholarship on what is being called here the “Divining Gospel,” we will outline the contours of the manuscript evidence for them (Chapter Three). Though sketchy in places, the surviving evidence consists of manuscripts in different languages and spanning several centuries. Our analysis will show that the different versions share a common ancestry.

Although we will often attend to the non-Syriac evidence, we do so for the sake of understanding better the Syriac version. The focus of our study is the manuscript London, BL, Add. 17,119, both as a material object and as a carrier of text. Codicological analysis of the Syriac manuscript will assist in telling the story of its origin, the alterations it endured, and the evolution of its use (Chapter Four). At the core of this study, we will present the divinatory contents of the Syriac manuscript here for the first time, translating the text and showing its relationship to parallel materials in the other versions, where extant (Chapter Five).

We will use the extensive data of the Syriac version and its parallels to discuss different proposals for understanding the nature of the material, demonstrating its divinatory function. Our exploration of the material’s chief

topics will enable us to draw a partial picture of its use and its users (Chapter Six). A further study of the apparatus in relation to the Gospel of John will help clarify the relationship between the sortilege material and the Gospel text, enabling us to understand the *hermêneiai* as interpretations and to draw a more refined picture of the use of the Divining Gospel in context (Chapter Seven). In the final chapter we will seek to explain the reasons for the eventual demise of the Divining Gospel (Chapter Eight).

The presentation and interpretation of the material of the Divining Gospel opens a window onto a phenomenon that was once common but has not been thoroughly researched and is presently little understood. Although the study of these materials can instruct us in many different areas it especially illuminates our understanding of the Christian practice of sortilege. This study also extends our knowledge of the place of scripture in late antique Christianity into territory that has been rarely explored. It requires us to broaden the practice of “interpretation” to encompass a dynamic conversation between clients, scripture, *sortes*, and practitioners of the Divining Gospel.

These reflections in turn underscore the significance of materiality for historic Christian practice. The Divining Gospels are not simply vehicles of a text that can itself be considered apart from the sacred nature of the object in which the text resides. Text and object, form and function, matter and spirit are seen to share inextricable bonds in the Divining Gospels, as they do in late antique Christian conceptions of scripture and in the relationships between the Bible and those who sought help from it.

2 Divination in Late Antique Christian Practice

2.1 *Tollo, Lege*: A Famous Instance of Christian Sortilege

One of the most famous Christian conversion stories in history turns on an episode of divination using a sacred text.

Long before he became bishop of Hippo, Augustine sat in a Milanese garden, wrestling with his own passions and agonizing over critical life decisions, when he heard what he took to be a child's voice from somewhere over the wall chanting, *tollo lege, tolli lege* ("Take and read, take and read"). Accepting this message as a command from God, he picked up a codex of the Apostle Paul's epistles, opened it, and read the first passage catching his eye: "not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom. 13,13–14; NRSV).¹ "All at once," he reports later, "with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled."² Convicted and transformed, Augustine committed himself to Christianity as a result of that experience.

We wish to notice several things about this celebrated event. As Augustine himself discloses in his *Confessions*, a great many factors are in play, leading up to this moment in his life and the consequences of it, including his conversion to Christianity. In one sense, we might see this incident simply as Augustine's reading and personally applying a biblical passage – in this instance, a passage from Romans that triggers remorse over a dissolute lifestyle and subsequent repentance. However, Augustine is at pains to emphasize God's initiative and involvement in the entire experience. Later he claims the voice he heard was that of an angel, not a human child. He understands himself to be the recipient of a supernatural message informing and prompting his action, a message that involves a mysterious voice, an apparently random selection from a book, and the words of scripture. Also, within its late antique context, certain features of the event are reminiscent not so much of patristic Bible interpretation but text-based divination. Picking up a sacred book, taking a random passage, and receiving the text as a divine directive for one's course of action – these were all familiar activities in the realm of divination. In particular, the terms *tollere* ("take") and *legere*

("read") were technical terms in the practice of *sortilegium*, in which one seeks to acquire knowledge about future events or actions by taking a *sors* (lot) and reading it.³

Augustine is reading scripture and applying it, but the manner in which he does so is striking. Even in his own retelling of the event, he recalls that he had in mind a similar incident in the celebrated life of St. Antony, when Antony was present at the public reading of the Gospel, "Go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Matt. 19,21; NRSV). According to the well-known legend, Antony takes the admonition – for which Augustine uses the term *oraculum* in his description of the ascetic's conversion – to be directed towards him personally. Antony carries it out immediately and literally.⁴ Both Antony and Augustine were "attributing divine significance to a biblical verse heard by chance,"⁵ with Augustine especially doing so in ways that were reminiscent of ancient text-based divination. *Sortes biblicae* was not an uncommon practice in Late Antiquity.

Augustine was converted and baptized in 386 and wrote his *Confessions* in 397–98. Not long after, in a letter he wrote as bishop in 400, he remarks, "as to those who take lots (*sortes legunt*) out of the pages of the Gospel, although it is preferable that they do this rather than run to consult demons, nevertheless I am displeased with this custom of trying to turn the divine oracles to secular business and to the vanity of this present life, when they were intended to speak for the sake of another life" (*Ep.* 55.20,37).⁶ Here Augustine expresses displeasure at the use of scripture for divination with the aim of getting answers to questions about secular business and earthly life – but he does not condemn *Sortes biblicae* outright. Perhaps the practice is not ideal, probably because most people were using it to address worldly concerns – but at least using scripture in this way is better than seeking your fortune at a "pagan" shrine, the abode of demons. We are reminded of Augustine's ambivalence towards the use of scripture for protection or healing – he

¹ Augustine recounts the episode in *Confessiones* 8,29.

² Translation adapted from Chadwick 1991, 153.

³ See the discussion of divination in Augustine and Anthony in van der Horst 1998, 151–53.

⁴ The episode is described in Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 2.

⁵ Van der Horst 1998, 151.

⁶ *Hi vero qui de paginis evangelicis sortes legunt, etsi optandum est ut hoc potius faciant, quam ad daemona consulenda concurrant; tamen etiam ista mihi displicet consuetudo, ad negotia saecularia, et ad vitae huius vanitatem, propter aliam vitam loquentia oracula divina velle convertere.* (*PL* 33,222)

has no praise for the popular use of Gospel books to cure headaches, though he concedes that doing so is better than “running to an amulet” (see 1.4.3 above).

Augustine’s attitude towards the practice of divination was complex.⁷ Yet he attests to christianized adaptations of practices that had long been common in the culture, by which people drew lots or read signs in order to acquire knowledge and receive guidance. Augustine acknowledges that God may speak “through a lot” (*per sortem*), and in other ways that we would classify as divination (e.g. through dreams or by the stars). In describing “the many ways in which God speaks to us,” Augustine provides a list that maps nicely onto most of the techniques of divination being practiced in Late Antiquity, even though he would not have called them such.⁸ Yet he is cautious about practices that bring one into consort with the demonic or rely upon the services of ritual practitioners who do not have ecclesial sanction. And he disapproves of seeking God’s special guidance for the pursuit of strictly worldly ambitions.

The complexity we see in Augustine reflects the complexity we find in Christian attitudes generally in Late Antiquity. Various avenues of divination were available to people in the ancient Greco-Roman world, many of which were extremely popular and most of which continued to find some expression in the world of Late Antiquity. Christian attitudes towards these practices were ambivalent. Some Christians were skeptical of mantic practices generally (see 1.4.2), others were concerned mainly about keeping an appropriate distance from false gods and the demonic. Yet we have ample evidence that Christians continued to practice various forms of divination, some of which were adapted specifically for Christian use. The Christian appropriation of these practices was diverse and often inconsistent.

Ancient divination is not a new subject of analysis. As long ago as the middle of the first century BCE, Cicero reflected extensively on the Roman practices of divination that were familiar to him in his treatise, *De divinatione*. A large body of evidence, of many different types, comes down to us, making clear just how important divination was to the institutions and individuals of the ancient world. The artifacts and practices of Assyrian, Greek, and Roman divination have been objects of numerous modern studies. Yet the subject has been attracting fresh analyses and the body of scholarship on ancient divination is growing rapidly.⁹

In this chapter we offer a brief sketch of major ancient and late antique divination practices in order to focus on a particular set of practices and tools: those associated with text-based divination, especially as they came to be adapted for use in Christian contexts. A review of selected tools and practices of text-based divination used in the late antique Roman world, Byzantium, and the medieval West will help us appreciate the background to the composition and use of the Divining Gospel.

2.2 Dealing with Uncertainty: Patterns of Ancient Divination

2.2.1 Reading the Signs for Direction

People in the ancient world were in a constant state of “omen-mindedness,” to use Sally M. Freedman’s term.¹⁰ This was true not only in ancient Mesopotamia, as evidenced by the massive bodies of extant Akkadian omen collections that Freedman has helped to edit. Throughout the ancient Mediterranean world we encounter all sorts of evidence – literary, documentary, epigraphic, archaeological – showing us that people everywhere were constantly on the lookout for messages from the gods. The world was an unstable place and life was filled with uncertainty. People sought reliable knowledge about the future and protection against its hazards; they sought explanations for such things as drought and famine and defeat in battle, as well as the means by which to get healing or remedy disaster. They sought clear direction as to which course of action would be most profitable. They wished to know what the gods required of them so that they might comply and enjoy their favor. Kings and slaves, merchants and generals, men and women, physicians, politicians, and philosophers – people from every station of life sought to acquire special knowledge from the gods or clear insight into the mechanisms of fate. Professionals with the skill to interpret the omens or to work the technology of divination played important roles in a world full of signs – from the royal court to the village market, helping kings and peasants cope with the uncertainties of daily existence.¹¹

Messages might come to a person in dreams or visions, for which one could seek the aid of *oneiromanteis* – the diviners of dreams – to get sound interpretations. Ornithomancy or augury observed the behavior of birds.

⁷ See Klingshirn 2007, 113–40.

⁸ Quote taken from Klingshirn 2007, 114.

⁹ See historiographical surveys in Beerden 2013, 9–17; Johnston 2008, 17–27.

¹⁰ Freedman 1998, 1,1.

¹¹ See Beerden 2013, 195–222.

Seers watched the sky for portentous manifestations, like storms and lightning. Natural phenomena of all kinds were closely scrutinized for clues. Some beasts and birds were considered favorable but others were ill-omened. Cleidonomancy hearkened to chance utterances, like the voice Augustine hears in the garden. Sneezes and bodily twitches could be fraught with import, the interpretation of which was informed by specially composed treatises. Many omens such as these came unbidden, cryptic messages within mysterious portents, sent by the gods to those who were attentive enough to notice and with sufficient skill to read.¹²

Yet people also found ways to ask the gods more directly for knowledge, unwilling to rely solely on signs that might happen to appear. Generals employed haruspices to examine the entrails of sacrificed animals in order to confirm the gods' approval before battle. Elections and Senate meetings in Rome were postponed until the certified body of augurs, taking auspices from the sky or by watching sacred chickens feed, signified that it was alright to proceed with important affairs of public life. Astrologers consulted the stars; lampadomancers watched the form, color, and movement of the flame in oil lamps; *engastri-muthoi* were "belly-talkers," who claimed to be possessed by demons that prophesied (cf. Act. 16,16). Hydromancy divined using water, while catoptromancy involved looking into a mirror. Traveling merchants visited local shrines, throwing dice and consulting bodies of inscribed oracles (astragalomancy) in order to determine whether a proposed partnership or imminent business trip was auspicious. People sought the assistance of diviners to locate lost objects as well as missing people.

Among the more reputable and ostensibly reliable divinatory practices involved consulting one of the illustrious institutional oracles. Ancient Greece was home to the most famous ones.¹³ In a mountainous region about 170 km northwest of Athens stood the sanctuary dedicated to the god Apollo, home to the Delphic Oracle, already venerable when the *Odyssey* mentions it by the early seventh century BCE. The Pythia at Delphi was the oracle *par excellence*, a priestess of Apollo who channeled messages from the god while in a trance, suspended over a deep chasm in the earth. The Pythia's prophecies could be notoriously puzzling and hard to interpret. They were rare, too, since for much of its history the Pythia was available for consultation only one day each month, for nine months of the year. Expanding the circle of Pythias to

two or even three could not meet the growing demand of inquirers. Alongside the enthusiastic prophecy of the conversational Pythian oracles they practiced other forms of divination at Delphi too, including lot divination. People could pose questions for which the attendants at Delphi used a kind of binary lot divination, requiring simple positive or negative answers. This sort of divination was available more frequently than the Pythias' prophecies and was presumably less expensive.

The Oracle at Dodona is often mentioned in ancient sources alongside that of Delphi, though the two were rivals. One travelled to remote Dodona to get the counsel of Zeus and Dione. Ancient sources describe various unconfirmed methods of divination in use at Dodona, involving priestesses, female doves, a sacred oak, and ringing cauldrons. But the archaeological evidence from Dodona attests one method in particular: the use of small lead tablets (*lamella*), inscribed with questions that can normally be answered "yes" or "no." Hundreds of them have been recovered, including many palimpsests, tablets that were recycled for repeated use. Clients brought to Zeus and Dione such questions as whether the querent should marry, whether he will have offspring, or whether it would be advisable to begin raising sheep. Presented with a binary question scratched into lead foil, the priestess in charge of the oracle at Dodona could easily supply a definite answer, e.g. by drawing lots that were marked or colored in such a way as to indicate the gods' answer – "yes" or "no."

The metallic records of divination at Dodona are reminiscent of what we see earlier in the Assyrian extispicy queries, in which we find records of questions that are laid before the god (e.g. Shamash), beseeching the deity to provide one sign or another, indicating whether the inquirer ought to do a particular thing or not.¹⁴ We see traces of this kind of divination being practiced in other parts of the ancient Greco-Roman world as well, though the corpus from Dodona is the most extensive yet to be recovered.

The oracles of Delphi and Dodona were not the only famous ones. Claros and Didyma served the coast of Asia Minor. Shrines devoted to Aesclepius at Epidaurus, Pergamum, and elsewhere focused on healing divination, especially through incubation oracles. Many local shrines of antiquity, large and small, offered divination services. One common practice associated with specific localities, especially in Anatolia, involved the use of dice (κύβοι; *kyboi*) or knucklebones (ἀστράγαλοι; *astragaloï*),

¹² See the survey and bibliography in Johnston 2008, 125–43.

¹³ See Johnston 2008, 33–108.

¹⁴ See Beerden 2013, 158–65.

sometimes called *Sortes alearum*, i.e. “dice oracles.”¹⁵ For instance, in any of several towns one could find a statue of Hermes, the gods’ messenger, sitting in the marketplace, with a series of fifty-six responses inscribed on its pedestal. Each response, or oracle, was keyed to a particular combination of numbers. On a table nearby sat the five knucklebones a passing querent could use to find the answer to his or her question; a set of five of them generated fifty-six different possible outcomes. Dice (κύβοι) were cubes with six sides, like modern dice. Knucklebones (ἀστράγαλοι) have four sides, each with an assigned value: one, three, four, and six. The sum of opposing sides was seven, as with dice, but knucklebones yield a different range of probabilities than dice because the concave (three) and convex (four) sides of a knucklebone are more likely to turn up than its “flat” (one) and “twisted” (six) sides. The passerby who rolled one one, three threes, and one four (1-3-3-4) would be directed to the fourteenth entry on the pedestal, bearing the name Poseidon and his response: “You kick against the goad, you struggle against the waves, you search for a fish in the sea: do not hasten to do business. It does not help you to force the gods at the wrong time.”¹⁶

Presumably it was up to the querent to decide how this response addressed the question and how to act accordingly. In this case, Poseidon’s answer in this instance is decidedly negative, advising the person not to undertake the business or pursue the matter for which the god’s input was being sought. The engraved responses are associated either with various personal gods, such as Zeus, Poseidon, Sarapis, and Aphrodite, or with more abstract entities, like Victory, the Seasons, and Good Hope. Although commerce and travel appear to be among the most common themes in the background to these marketplace dice oracles, most of the responses are very general and therefore applicable to a wide range of possible questions and topics. One family of terms that show up repeatedly and help generalize the responses are “the omnipresent terms *πρᾶξις*, ‘business,’ and its cognates,”¹⁷ like *πρᾶγμα* (*prāgma*) and the verb, *πράσσω* (*prassō*), “to do.” Alongside recurring vague expressions such as ὅσα θέλεις... (“whatever you seek...”) and ὅσα βούλει... (“whatever you wish...”), the terms *πρᾶξις* and *πρᾶγμα* (“business, matter, action”) appear again and again. They seem to have become part of the conventional idiom of oracular response by the second century CE, the period to which

the dice oracle texts belong. The texts are designed to be open to any of a number of “matters” about which a person might wish to inquire.

Simpler still were the so-called ABC oracles, for which inscriptions have also been found in Greece and Asia Minor. These consisted of twenty-four brief oracular statements, arranged in an acrostic fashion according to the Greek alphabet, so that the first begins with A, the second with B, the third with Γ, and so on.¹⁸ The mechanism of selection is unclear, but techniques involving five normal dice (κύβοι) or special dice would work; modern museums have a number of ancient twelve-sided and twenty-sided polyhedra in their collections, with letters of the Greek alphabet inscribed on their faces, very suitable for various games of chance, including divination. The third response (Γ) in one set of oracles excavated in ancient Adada in Pisidia reads, Γλυκὺς μελίσσης καρπός, ἔ[τ]ι πλεῖ[ον] π[ό]νος (“Sweet produce of the bee, but even more distress”). The twentieth (Υ) is less poetic but also less ambivalent, albeit still vague: Ὑπόσχεσιν τὸ πρᾶγμα γενν(α)ίαν ἔχει (“The matter shows excellent promise”).¹⁹ As with the aforementioned dice oracles, these tend to give general responses that would be appropriate to many different topics, manifesting similar generic vocabulary, such as the term *πρᾶγμα* (*prāgma*; “matter”).

Some shrines in ancient Egypt were also renowned for their divination services, including those using texts. One technique going back at least to the era of the New Kingdom at Thebes involved presenting a question to the deity at his or her shrine by having a scribe write the positive and negative forms of the god’s answer on ostraca. Both answers would be presented in a procession as part of the oracular rites, during which the priests would somehow signal the god’s answer by choosing the appropriate text, with its affirmative or negative message.²⁰

By the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, these traditions had developed into the widely used “ticket oracles,” for which we have a great deal of written evidence. For instance, in one set of Demotic texts from the Ptolemaic period, Stotoëte, son of Imhutep, begs “the great Lord Soknebtynis... if it is a good thing for me to live with Tanwē, daughter of Ḥapē, she being my wife, send out to me this petition in writing.”²¹ Its companion text has the opposite, “if it is *not* a good thing....” Essentially, the petition was being presented to the god in the form of opposing answers to the question – one negative and one

¹⁵ See Graf 2005, 51–97; Johnston 2008, 99–100; Fox 1986, 209–10; Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 37–40.

¹⁶ Graf 2005, 87.

¹⁷ Graf 2005, 70.

¹⁸ See Heinevetter 1912, 33–36, 39–52.

¹⁹ Text from Heinevetter 1912, 34.

²⁰ Frankfurter 1998, 146–49.

²¹ Browne 1976, 57.

positive. Through some process of sortition supervised by the priests, one of the tickets would be produced as the god's answer to Stotoëte as to whether he ought to marry Tanwē. Numerous papyri and parchment "tickets" in Demotic, Greek, and Coptic have been recovered in Egypt, coming from different locations and with dates spanning the centuries, well into the Christian period.

The use of divinatory ostraca continued to find currency in Egypt as well. Sherds used as fill in the rebuilding of a shrine in the *praesidium* of Dios (eastern Egypt) in the third century CE have oracular answers written on them, addressing various πράγματα ("matters") in a manner similar to the Greek dice oracles of second- and third-century Asia Minor.²² The language and style reflect the Greek oracles and the ostraca mention deities such as Apollo, Kronos, and Leto. The ostraca texts were probably drawn from a book that contained the oracular formula and, we presume, some arcane method of selecting the response, perhaps involving dice. Yet this technique also has an individualized quality, similar to that of the ticket oracles, and not very different from what we see at Dodona and was undoubtedly used in many places, including those shrines whose main claim to fame was their conversational oracles, such as Delphi.

In the ancient world it was natural for oracles to be anchored to particular locations like Dios and Delphi, given a shrine's associations with a certain deity, its ritual traditions, and its staff of expert diviners. However, the formulae we see in the inscribed tablets from Dodona, the rather similar ticket oracles of Egypt, and the efficient replication of dice oracle mechanisms in Anatolia show us that divination could also be textual in nature.²³ The revival of oracular prophecy in the late Roman period²⁴ came to encompass the use of textual instruments. Texts might come in the form of individual questions and answers, or as part of an oracle collection with an elaborate selection apparatus. Whereas texts and oracular procedures using them might also be anchored to particular places, the fact is that texts and the divinatory mechanisms using texts were far more mobile than the located rituals of a shrine. Once copied, the texts were easily transported, or as in the case of the Hermes inscriptions and ABC oracles, easily replicated in other locations. This need not mean that textual material had been disconnected from the gods,

since oracle texts often mention specific deities. Nor is it the case that oracles rendered into a portable textual apparatus had necessarily been displaced from a sacred location, since a book could also function as a kind of sacred location.

2.2.2 The Technologies of Text-Based Divination

Text-based divination techniques took a number of different forms in the ancient world. The lead tablets of Dodona and ticket oracles of Egypt represent one technique using texts, in which clients presented concerns to the god in the form of written queries, or even as a pair of ready-made answers (tickets) from which the god could choose within the context of a divination ritual. The ABC oracles and other dice oracles represent a rather different technique, in which a person would invite the gods to intervene in the seemingly random choice of the correct answer, drawn out of a corpus of general answers that were carefully arranged in an apparatus with numerical or alphabetical keys.

Another form of cleromancy – divination by drawing lots (*sortilegium*) – involved the use of sacred texts. By the Roman period, for example, the poems of Homer and Vergil were commonly revered as specially authoritative, due to the status of their authors, their familiarity to the learned, and the presumably divine origins of their inspired texts. The works of Homer invited careful exegesis and even allegorical interpretation in order to penetrate the surface of the text and retrieve the deep philosophical and moral teaching that lay within. Verses from Homer were seen by some to bear special power and occur frequently in the magical papyri.²⁵ As part of the enterprise to uncover the hidden meanings of such texts, one could also consult them for supernatural guidance; some shrines kept copies for this very purpose.

The most common way of using a sacred book for divination was simply to open the book randomly to a passage and read it as though it were a divine response to one's concern. In the late second century, for instance, Hadrian consulted the *Aeneid* in this way, opening to a passage of Vergil that seemed to predict his rise to power.²⁶ We have many accounts of this use of *Sortes Vergilianae*, stretching from antiquity into modern times – including the notorious episode told of Charles I at the Bodleian Library in

²² Cuvigny 2010, 258–76.

²³ The survey of lot divination texts here is very selective. For recent discussion and bibliography of known lot divination literature from the ancient and late antique periods, see Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 19–59.

²⁴ On the subject of the "oracular revival," see Fox 1986, 204–13.

²⁵ See van der Horst 1998, 162; Collins 2008, 211–36.

²⁶ Loane 1928, 185–86.

Oxford in 1642/43, in which the king chances upon the curse of Dido as his unhappy fortune (*Aeneid* 4,615–20).

A more complicated way of using classic texts for divination involved the construction of specialized tools, such as the *Sortes Homericæ*, in which verses of Homer were assembled into an apparatus specifically designed for efficient sortilege. One such book that has survived in fragmentary form is the *Homeromanteion*, that consisted of 216 answers selected from passages of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. The answers are arranged in groups of six quotations, each of which is preceded by three numbers (e.g. 3-2-4). The user would review a list of appropriate days and times for consulting the oracle, then pray to Apollo while focusing on their question. By rolling a six-sided die (κύβος) three times, the user would hit on one of the quotations in the book, taking it as the god's answer to their question.²⁷ The answers required interpretation. For instance, if the querent rolled 4-2-1, they would hit on response 115, a quotation from *Iliad* 4, 62: "Come now, let us make these concessions to one another."²⁸ The import of this response might not be immediately obvious to the person seeking the god's advice. The *sortes* in the *Homeromanteion* appear to have some sort of topical arrangement that would help ensure their applicability to specific questions, though the organizing principles are not entirely clear (cf. 6.3.1 below).

Another form of text-based divination involved so-called Books of Fate. Theodore Skeat defines Books of Fate as "systems comprising a fixed table of specific questions with a fixed number of alternative answers to each question."²⁹ Rather than giving general answers, such as we see in the dice oracles, these books provide the luxury of finding direct responses to particular questions. In comparison to some of the other text-based systems, the corpus of material on which the practitioner or user draws is far larger. These books also involve complex systems of organization, designed to assist the user in correlating appropriate answers to specific questions while also cloaking the mechanism in an aura of mystery.

The most instructive example of an ancient Book of Fate is the *Sortes Astrampsychi*,³⁰ a Greek text that came into existence perhaps by the late first century, though

it was subsequently edited.³¹ It circulated in two major editions (known to scholars as *ecdosis prior* and *ecdosis altera*), the second of which came to consist of an introduction, a series of ninety-two numbered questions (numbered from 12–103), followed by 1030 answers arranged into 103 numbered decades.³² The introduction includes a pseudonymous letter under the name of the Egyptian magician Astrampsychus, claiming the book to be the work of the philosopher Pythagoras.

By means of an arcane and complex method of selection explained in the introduction, the diviner in possession of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* would assist the inquirer in discovering an answer appropriate to the topic of the question chosen. For example, an inquirer might wish to ask, "Will my wife have a baby?" – i.e. question number twenty-four in the list (κδ εἰ τίττει μου ἡ γυνή). According to the instructions, the practitioner should ask the inquirer for a number from one to ten. We may speculate that he chose his lucky number, six. Adding the two numbers together yields thirty (24+6), so the diviner would consult the number thirty on a table included with the apparatus, which in turn points to decade 102 in the answer bank. Each decade of answers corresponded to a particular god. Upon turning to the specified decade 102, one finds a variety of seemingly disconnected answers, but when the diviner reads the text to the inquirer's number six, it provides the following answer: "You'll father a child, but the child will be worthless" (γεννᾷ, ἀλλ' ἄχρηστον ἔσται τὸ γεννώμενον)³³ – and so the inquirer had the answer to his question. The answers actually tend toward the positive.³⁴

A book such as the *Sortes Astrampsychi* has the advantage of offering the inquirer answers that appear to be tailored specifically to his or her needs. The questions deal with a variety of subjects: "Will the traveller return? Will I get my deposit back? Will I profit from the matter? Will I inherit from my parents? Will I become a senator? Have I been poisoned? Am I safe from accusation? Will

²⁷ Van der Horst 1998, 162–65; Meerson 2019, 138–53; see also Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 49–52.

²⁸ Text from Meerson 2019, 141.

²⁹ Skeat 1954, 54; see Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 27–36.

³⁰ See texts in Browne 1983, 1–40; Stewart 2001, 1–84; Brodersen 2006, 25–141; with extensive study and bibliography in Naether 2010, 62–278.

³¹ Stewart 1995, 135–47.

³² See brief discussion and translation of this edition by Randall Stewart and Kenneth Morell in Hansen 1998, 285–324.

³³ Text from Stewart 2001, 9, 84.

³⁴ For example, in response to the question, "Will I profit in the matter?" (question 81), *Sortes Astrampsychi* preserves ten answers, three of which are negative (58,1; 73,8; 81,10); the other seven are positive (9,7; 26,4; 66,5; 67,6; 78,4; 85,2; 87,3), though some guardedly so (e.g. ὀλίγον κερδαίνεις; "you will profit a little;" 26,4; see Stewart 1983, 9, 13, 24, 27, 30, 33, 34, 35). In the complex tradition of this text, recensions vary, sometimes accentuating the positive even more. For the mainly positive tenor of ancient lot texts, see Naether 2010, 204–06; Luijendijk 2014, 26–27; Stewart 2019, 193–94; Ratzan 2019, 276–85.

I soon be caught as an adulterer?” and so forth. Furthermore, the obscure procedures for finding an answer enhance the sense of supernatural mystery in the use of the book. The arrangement of material shows great care towards that end.³⁵ Each question has ten possible appropriate answers, but these answers are cast in an apparently random way into the massive database of possible responses. Yet the arrangement is far from random. The answers are staggered throughout the decades, so that the first answer is number one in the first decade, the second is number two in the next decade, and so on. By adding eleven decades of fake answers, the composer of the apparatus increased the volume of apparent responses. Beginning the list of questions with number twelve ensures that the dummy answers would never be chosen. Finally, the 103 decades were shuffled in order to randomize their sequence.

For the adept user of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* the accompanying key ensured that the only possible answers to a given question were the ten that specifically addressed the chosen topic. Yet to the client it would undoubtedly look as though a magically appropriate response had been pulled at random from a pile of 1030 answers, with only the provision of a number he or she had named to guide the outcome. The mechanism of this clever tool is worth consideration in some detail because it illustrates the impressive strategies that were available to users of ancient lot divination texts. The mechanism and accompanying instructions also highlight the role of the user of such books in managing both the technical aspects of the selection process as well as the personal aspects of a client's consultation.

2.2.3 Scribes and Seers: Oracles as Literary Tradition and *Manteis* as Interpreters

The evidence for divination in the ancient world points to a process of development, from reliance on conversational oracles tied to specific locations to the use of standard written manuals like the Books of Fate, with their portability, repeatable processes, and the broad applicability of their results. If we may speak of such a process of development in the technology of ancient divination, we do so only to capture one part of the picture in broad and imperfect strokes. Certainly the development from shrine to book was neither uniform nor strictly linear.³⁶ A great

variety of divinatory enterprises continued to operate side by side and even a single individual may be expected to have practiced different modes of divination without necessarily being preoccupied with whether their *choix du jour* fit certain over-arching historical trends. On any given day, activities at Delphi, the dice oracles of Anatolia, and the ticket oracles of Egypt may have all been bustling, while consultations with augurs, dream-diviners, astrologers, and practitioners of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* continued unabated. Furthermore, location continues to be an important factor, as we see even in the divinatory activities that take place at some saints' shrines for centuries after the development of portable divination manuals. Yet an increased reliance on texts as vehicles of divine communication marks an important development in ancient religion, one that certainly includes the growth in the use of lot divination texts.

The priestly scribal culture of Egypt may provide the most likely catalyst for the popularization of lot divination texts. Written *sortes* were in use elsewhere, of course, and no specific locality could corner the market on the use of sacred books for divination. However, it was the priestly scribes of a culture who acquired and preserved the sort of knowledge used in divination,³⁷ and Egyptian traditions were especially rich in expressions that combined the scribal and the religious. The scribal culture of Egypt, with its own rich textual traditions and the infusion of Greek thought, was a great consumer, adapter, producer, and disseminator of intellectual traditions in the Roman period. This included anything religious and the esoteric as well. Egypt was reputed to be the source of the most potent magic and a native habitat of skilled seers. It is not surprising that the *Sortes Astrampsychi* claim an Egyptian heritage, nor that many of the ancient divinatory texts we have come from Egypt.

Now we must allow that the deserts of Egypt provided a suitable environment for the preservation of ancient texts, but this is only partly (perhaps largely) due to its climate. Another important reason Egypt supplies us with so many texts of great antiquity is that so many texts were being produced and used there. This includes divination texts. In his study of the changing activities of oracle shrines in traditional Egyptian culture, Frankfurter describes “the evolution of a priestly scribal apparatus to develop local oracles from a ritual form into a literary tradition.”³⁸ The monuments of this literary tradition include the *Sortes Astrampsychi* but also undoubtedly many other

³⁵ See Hansen 1998, 289–90.

³⁶ Frankfurter 1998, 153–61.

³⁷ Johnston 2008, 133.

³⁸ Frankfurter 1998, 152.

sortilege texts and practices, not all of which originated in Egypt but were at least refined, packaged, and promulgated there.

In the fertile ground of the Egyptian religious and intellectual ferment, traditions of divination and textuality were combined to produce material that could be passed on in book form, to be translated and further adapted in subsequent generation of use. Late Roman Egypt provides a likely setting for the catalytic recensions of divination texts into popular sortilege tools such as the Books of Fate and the Christian Divining Gospel.

Observing the rise of text oracles in Egypt as an alternative to temple oracles, Frankfurter remarks, “[t]he very notion of oracle rite has therefore clearly shifted into a self-conscious textuality; and it would seem that one of the major functions of this textuality is its independence from the temple structure, its mobility, efficiency, and general practicality (even if restricted to a limited and literate number of specialists).”³⁹ Whereas the religious and intellectual scribal culture of Egypt may be the most likely setting for the development of divination into a sophisticated textual phenomenon, it was the utility of the books themselves that commended their use to practitioners and subsequent editors and translators. Although shrines could still provide the best locations for consulting lot divination texts, due to the sanctity of the setting and the availability of able practitioners,⁴⁰ the fact remains that books were mobile, efficient, and practical – not least because they could be used just about anywhere by anyone who was literate and had a modicum of skill. This, and the possibility of using them independent of temple activities and priestly hierarchies, underscores the role individual ritual practitioners played in promoting these tools and guaranteeing their popularity.

Operating independently of the institutional oracles, freelance diviners were common in the ancient world. Some were itinerant while others remained local. Their services were for hire, of course, and many freelance *manteis* (μάντις) or seers boasted a wide range of exotic skills. Not only were they typically adept at various divinatory techniques but regularly offered their skills as healers, exorcists, and so on. In their prognosticatory role they were essentially advisors and counsellors. As Johnston declares, “the religious expert, especially the freelance religious expert, could wear a lot of different hats as occasion demanded.”⁴¹ Johnston goes on to explain the

appeal of the freelance *mantis*, for both the practitioner and the client:

The oracles had the advantage of prestige based on longevity and special location, but the independent diviners had the advantage of neighborhood convenience and greater flexibility – they could incorporate new techniques into their methods more easily than could an institution whose rituals were watched over by priests who were often appointed and supervised by a civic office.⁴²

Many divination techniques required no books. However, the development of lot divination texts offered the freelance or individual seer an exceptionally useful resource. In the ancient tradition, the *mantis* deals with new phenomena, scanning the heavens, reading entrails, peering into the fire, or facilitating consultations with the goddess at her shrine. The *chresmologue* (χρησμολόγος) mainly reviews the records of older oracles, exegeting their authoritative ancient texts but interpreting them for application to contemporary circumstances. Lot divination texts enable the user to combine these modes of acquiring knowledge, since their sortilege mechanisms engaged the individual client to produce fresh phenomena, yet they do so in relation to a text whose codification and ancient pedigree enhance its authority. This would be especially true for tools that used recognized sacred texts, like Homer – or later, the Bible.

Since the apparatus of tools like the *Sortes Astrampsychi* are complex, and the responsive statements within the Books of Fate appear ready-made, some scholars have presumed that the practitioners actually played little role in the process of divination, beyond working the mechanism and reading the answer. Gudmund Björck’s view on this has been influential. He contends that tools such as these may even have been private instruments, perhaps functioning more as occult games rather than serious avenues of knowledge, but certainly not requiring competent diviners and skilled *chresmologues*, such as the ancient institutional oracles could boast. David Potter claims that the practitioner was merely a passive agent, manipulating the mechanism and transferring divine wisdom from the book to the client.⁴³

These views reflect a modern bias towards certain classical phenomena, like the storied institutional oracles, as well as being dismissive towards the “superstitions” of late antique popular practices, such as divination by lot. In ways that are analogous to recent critiques of modern scholarly discussions of “magic” (see 1.4.2), recent studies

³⁹ Frankfurter 1998, 181.

⁴⁰ See Frankfurter 2019, 217–18.

⁴¹ Johnston 2008, 137–38.

⁴² Johnston 2008, 141.

⁴³ Björck 1939, 86–98; Potter 1994, 25.

of ancient divination have challenged the categorization of tools like the Books of Fate as mere “do-it-yourself oracles.” If, as the anthropologist of tradition-based knowledge systems Philip M. Peek has influentially claimed, “[a] divination system is often the primary institutional means of articulating the epistemology of a people,”⁴⁴ then widely popular written tools of lot divination like the Books of Fate deserve serious study. Attending more closely to the implied social contexts of these practices and exploring what the books actually imply about the human interactions inherent in their use requires us to draw a different and far richer picture of their importance than dismissive accounts will allow.

Tales told about consulting ancient oracles and seers or making sense of the signs often dwell on the matter of interpretation. This enhances the drama of the narrative, of course, whether it be the notoriously puzzling promise of the oracle at Delphi that only “wooden walls” could protect Athenians from the invading Persians or Constantine’s consultation of advisors versed in “divine mysteries” to ascertain the meaning of the cruciform sign he had witnessed in the sky and in his dreams. Yet the persistent notice of the interpretative stage in divination or sign-reading is not merely a plot device. Although divination implies that the data obtained comes from a divine source, the human activity of interpretation facilitates the transformation of that data into effective knowledge. Divination and interpretation go hand in hand, as contemporary anthropological studies of divination show.⁴⁵ In order to be effective, diviners must be interpreters. Text-based divination raises special interpretive problems for the practitioner, illumined by David Zeitlyn’s anthropological research. He summarizes:

When texts figure in divination, diviners have a dual role. At each consultation they must satisfy themselves, their client, and a possible audience that they have followed the correct procedures to identify the verse or text chosen by the divination. Then follows a second stage. The client has a particular question, but the text selected was not composed to answer it. Interpretation is needed to satisfy the client that the question has been answered.⁴⁶

If we discount the importance of interpretation, taking the bare textual bones of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* to embody the total content of its use, then perhaps we may be excused if we dismiss the book as the manual to a clever game. But even the book’s preface takes pains

to instruct the practitioner in the best ways to maximize the mystery of the consultation and reinforce the perceived authority of its result. The evidence we have will not let us dismiss the place of the practitioner as the orchestrator of a successful consultation and interpreter of its meaning. Both the professional *mantis* and the amateur seer had available to them massive bodies of lore – oral, written, and modeled by example – that undoubtedly informed their ritual practices and use of lot divination texts.

We may allow that divinatory tools could have been used privately, that the solitary owner of a lot divination text may have used it to find his or her own fortune, rather than the fortune of anyone else. But fulfilling the requirements of merely private usage cannot account for the number, variety, and complexity of the tools we have. Nor can private usage make sense of the instructions we see in the the *Sortes Astrampsychi* nor of many accounts we read of divination. Although some of the tales of text-based divination that come down to us from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages allow us to imagine a private scene, in which inquirer and book might have been the only participants, many others describe scenes involving more people. At least much of the time, even text-based divination entailed the inquirer’s consultation with another person, not just the mechanism of the book.

In the ticket oracles or the oracular *lamella* from Dodona we can easily perceive the dynamic personal elements that are inevitably present in an episode of divinatory consultation. Similarly, amulets that are customized for the client can give us striking insight into the mind and circumstances of human individuals, as we saw with Joannia’s healing amulet earlier (see 1.4.1). It would be tendentious to presume that such dynamic personal elements were in fact absent from episodes of consultation involving lot divination texts, on the basis of the streamlined and standardized texts we find in Books of Fate and elsewhere. To the contrary, the evidence we have in which personal and interpersonal elements are memorialized for us, albeit vestigially and partially as in tickets and amulets, should increase our appreciation for the necessity of similar elements being in play, even where they are not explicitly documented for us in detail, e.g. in lot divination texts. Interpersonal aspects of ancient encounters can be among the hardest for us to recover and investigate confidently. But this limitation should not cause us to forget that in ritual actions like divination, the most decisive elements are the human elements and the most significant pieces are not the artifacts but the people.

The performative aspects of ancient divination were crucial to the effectiveness of the enterprise, even

⁴⁴ Peek 1991, 2.

⁴⁵ See the collection of articles in Peek 1991.

⁴⁶ Zeitlyn 2001, 227.

where the divination was text-based. The place of what Beerden calls the *homo divinans* was more than merely instrumental.⁴⁷ In the case of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, the role of the practitioner implied by the text goes beyond that of managing the apparatus, complex as that could be.⁴⁸ The practitioner would have to discern which of the 135 or more questions would be most appropriate to the inquirer's concerns. Differentiating between different sorts of questions presumes that the consultation included an interview, perhaps with significant exchange of information. It is likely that a prayer, such as we see prescribed in some editions of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, took place, along with other ritual elements connected with the querent's getting their number from a divine source, e.g. rolling dice or drawing numbers out of a bowl. Then there was the business of representing the answer to the client, something that could range from simply reading the response, to more extensive conversations about what an answer might mean and how to enact it.

The book clearly expects that drama and mystery were crucial to the enterprise and intrinsic to a satisfying consultation. Ideally, the practitioner's approach with a client would take that into account, as well as any of a number of other variables that could shape the encounter. For instance, unlike the ticket oracles with their customized rhetoric, the formulae in Books of Fate cast their questions and answers in the singular number and masculine gender. Yet we may presume that some inquirers would be female or perhaps multiple persons (i.e. plural). The practitioner would easily be able to adjust responses accordingly on the fly.⁴⁹ Though the surviving evidence amounts only to a partial skeleton, it offers at least partial glimpses into what would have been a full-bodied consultation between client and practitioner.⁵⁰

2.2.4 Christian Appropriation of Text-Based Divination

Although the transformation of local oracles into a literary tradition posed the diviner with certain challenges, the technology of lot divination texts also opened up fresh opportunities for the enterprising practitioner, for reasons

we have already noticed. These were opportunities that some Christian ritual experts profitably exploited.

The two characteristics of late antique divination we have been discussing – the development of oracles as a literary tradition and the role of the divining practitioner as an interpreter – give us insight into the background of the Christian appropriation of ancient divinatory practices. Early Christian convictions were at the forefront of the culture's increasing reliance on texts as vehicles of divine communication. The premises of divination could be very compatible with Christian beliefs. The *mantis* facilitates a contact between the human and divine, “but their purpose is to discern the gods' will and how humans might accommodate it, rather than the opposite.”⁵¹ The diviner is not trying to manipulate the gods. This expectation fit Christianity well, given its emphasis on divine sovereignty and the need of the faithful to discern and conform to God's will. As ancient Christian prayers and amulets show, many Christians implored God, hoping they could influence his action. Yet this expectation did not always square well with Christian teaching about God's sovereignty and wisdom. The Christians' duty was to rely on God's knowledge and fulfill his desires, not seek to manipulate God and enforce their own wishes. Furthermore, Christianity's reverence for its sacred texts as the chief authoritative source of that knowledge indicates another point of compatibility, in principle at least, between Christianity and text-based divination, that sought to read the divine will through an examination of the written word.

Finally, Christianity's knack for evoking and empowering popular leadership resulted in a proliferation of religious authorities and sacred advisors, supplying a ready and expanding body of Christian ritual experts of all sorts. As the ritual activities in Christian shrines came to supplant local oracles, holy men and women came to assume the role of *manteis* in Late Antiquity.⁵² Some, like priests and monks, operated within institutional parameters, while others, in the manner of freelance practitioners, operated outside the boundaries of ecclesial regulation and approval. The non-Christian legacy that was evident in many of the mechanisms of divination and the unlicensed status of freelance seers both help to account for the suspicion with which some Christians viewed the tools and practices of divination.

Yet to judge by the widespread dissemination and use of christianized books with lot divination texts, there was a ready market for them. With the transition to Christianity in Late Antiquity, the scribal enterprise in places like

⁴⁷ See Beerden 2013, 55–105, 138–69.

⁴⁸ See the discussion in Klingshirn 2005, 108–11.

⁴⁹ See Naether 2010, 94–96.

⁵⁰ Our study of the Syriac version of the Divining Gospel will give us further opportunity to glimpse a plausible portrait of these episodes (see 6.5; 7.4).

⁵¹ Johnston 2008, 114.

⁵² See Frankfurter 2003, 339–85; Frankfurter 2019, 211–31.

Egypt adapted to changing circumstances, as scribes were producing more texts that were distinctly Christian, with Christian users in mind. Furthermore, the scribes themselves were often users of Christian books.⁵³ Yet the scribal culture of late antique Egypt still had one foot in the world of pre-Christian antiquity, as did many of the readers and users of the texts it produced. Just as that scribal culture was able to fashion a literary tradition out of local oracles, it also became proficient in translating the tools of lot divination into the Christian idiom of an emerging culture.

Once again, Egypt provides a likely context for instigating the project of christianizing ancient lot divination texts, a process that continued for centuries and in varied settings. As Frankfurter observes, a corpus of christianized lot divination texts “required scribes accustomed to translating clients’ concerns into a form that could be ritually resolved by an oracular procedure.”⁵⁴ Conversant with the traditions of text-based divination that they helped create and intimately acquainted with the mechanisms of sortilege, the increasingly Christian scribal institutions of late antique Egypt had ready access to the necessary resources. The texts in hand would require only adaptation, not complete transformation, in order to gain acceptance in a culture that was also widely conversant with the tools and practices of text-based divination.

Before we examine the Divining Gospel as a particular instance of this adaptation, we need to sketch in more detail the background of early Christian attitudes towards divination. We also need to consider the variety of Christian adaptations of tools and techniques, particularly sortilege involving lot divination texts.

2.3 Christian Divination and Sortilege

2.3.1 Knowledge from God, Knowledge for God

Like their neighbors, the Christians of Late Antiquity also lived in a world brimming with uncertainties and felt the same desire for special knowledge. Christians too believed in the possibility of divining God’s will and insight. Christians too engaged in rituals for the purpose of accessing the divine, both in ecclesial contexts and outside them. The habits, processes, and tools of divination were a

part of the religious culture and in use all around them. Consequently, a variety of divinatory practices find expression in Christian contexts, most of them not very different in most respects from the practices of non-Christians.

Modern skepticism towards divination and other popular ritual practices has perhaps caused scholars to accentuate the voices of pre-modern Christian intellectuals who are critical of divination, without allowing sufficiently for the wide influence of such beliefs and practices within Christian communities. Nevertheless, it must be said that from early days the Christian tradition could be ambivalent toward the place of divination in the life of the believer. For one thing, the Bible tells numerous stories about the use of divination and some of these are couched as problematic. Consulting a wooden idol and using a divining rod is described as sinful, while the Babylonians’ reliance on astrology for supernatural guidance is a subject of mockery (Hos. 4,12; Is. 47,13). Discerning the future or one’s best course of action by reading the liver of a sacrificed animal or “shaking the arrows” is depicted as belonging to foreign rituals (Ez. 21,21), something inappropriate for God’s covenant people to practice. When Ahaziah of Samaria falls through a lattice in his upper room and sends messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub in order to find out whether he will recover, he is killed in divine judgment for seeking knowledge from a foreign god (II Regn. 1,1–17).

On the other hand, Elijah’s interventions in response to Ahaziah’s crime show that the problem was not the practice of divination as such. The appropriate course of action would have been for Ahaziah to consult Elijah in order to divine the Lord’s counsel. The Bible is not always condemning towards or dismissive of divination. At times it puts divination in a positive light, or at least tacitly approves of it, in the hands of a pious practitioner. Joseph accurately divines the future by interpreting dreams and is reputed to practice hydromancy using a silver cup (Gen. 40–41; 44,4–5). Gideon’s divinatory ritual involving the fleece earns no criticism as such and proves effective (Jud. 6,36–40). The division of land to Israel’s tribes was governed partly by casting lots (Jos. 18,6). The truth about the renegade Jonah is also determined by casting lots (Jon. 1,7).

Divination even finds a place in Israel’s cultic practices and the priestly establishment. For instance, Aaron draws lots to determine which of two goats is to be the scapegoat (Lev. 16,8). The breastplate of the High Priest is designed to accommodate the Urim and Thummim, devices to be used in divination (Ex. 28,30). Saul uses Urim and Thummim to divine whose sin was responsible for his misfortune with the Philistines (1 Sam. 14,41–42). King David has a seer, and jobs in the liturgical service are

⁵³ Haines-Eitzen 2013, 479–95.

⁵⁴ Frankfurter 1998, 152, 195.

apportioned by lot, as are gatekeeping roles in the temple (1 Par. 25,5,8; 26,13). The priest Zechariah is chosen by lot to serve in the Jerusalem Temple, according to the priestly custom (Luc. 1,9). The Roman soldiers' use of lots to divide Jesus' garments is at best a neutral depiction of divination (Matt. 27,35 and parallels) – certainly a shameful act yet also a confirmatory fulfillment of prophecy (see Ps. 22,18). When the Apostles draw lots to choose Mathias as Judas' successor, we see divination put in a decidedly positive light (Act. 1,26), as the instrument by which God discloses his will. Some Christian clergy drew inspiration for their own self-understanding as God's select ministers from this episode (see 7.4 below).⁵⁵

Though not a central feature of many biblical narratives or instruction, divination as such is not really at issue in the Bible. Lot divination, in particular, repeatedly features as an apparently acceptable practice, given the right conditions. The important thing is that the diviner seek knowledge from God, rather than turning to other supernatural entities such as “pagan” gods. By extension, practices done within the context of the faithful community's approved religious customs by recognized representatives – such as the high priest, the Lord's prophet, or the Apostles – were seen in a different light than practices affiliated with the exotic rituals of other religions or conducted by those outside the orthodox establishment. These biblical impulses seem to have informed some early Christian perceptions regarding the appropriateness of lot divination as a means of securing divine knowledge.

Also, inasmuch as proper divination should seek to acquire knowledge only from God and not from other sources, the Christian should ideally do so for the sake of discerning God's will, especially about spiritual matters. As we saw in the first part of this chapter, Augustine does not necessarily prohibit Christians from practicing divination, yet he presupposes that they should use Christian rather than “pagan” sources, so that their knowledge will derive from God – and that they do it for the right

⁵⁵ Despite biblical precedent, electing clergy by casting lots did not become normal in early Christianity (see Lienhard 1998, 265–66; di Berardino 2014, 554–55). However, we hear occasional echoes of the custom, as in the Visigothic practice prescribed in Canon 3 from the Second Council of Barcelona (599): after the clergy and laity elect two or three episcopal candidates, the bishops should fast and then consecrate “the one on whom the lot fell” (*quem sors... monstraverit*; text from Bruns 1839, 67). Within certain communities, drawing lots has played some role in clergy selection processes – even in 2012 Pope Tawadros II was chosen by lot as leader of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt (see Saad/Riegels/Westbrook 2014, 139–53).

reasons.⁵⁶ His own experience with divination at the time of his conversion may be seen to fit these two ideals: appropriate Christian “divination” seeks knowledge from God for the sake of God's will. This is not to say that Christians always adhered to these ideals when engaged in lot divination. Augustine's statement about drawing lots from the Gospels indicates that he thought it necessary to check what he saw as non-ideal practices and inferior motives (*Ep.* 55.20,37). But for at least some influencers within Christian communities, the possibility of adhering to these ideals helped provide space for the practice of divination. The widespread occurrence of Christian sortilege and the proliferation of specialized tools confirm that there were sufficient practitioners and clients to occupy that space.

2.3.2 *Sortes Biblicae*

Given the ubiquitousness of divination in the ancient world, it is not surprising that Christians would also engage in it. We are not concerned here with all the different ways ancient Christians may have taken to the practice of divination, whether privately, or through clergy and in official ecclesial contexts. Here we wish to focus specifically on the Christian practice of lot divination using texts. We have already mentioned the use of *Sortes biblicae*, featuring prominently in the legend of St. Antony and in Augustine's description of his conversion. Just as many held the texts of Homer and Virgil to be channels of divine inspiration, the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity were seen as sources of mysterious knowledge, especially by the faithful, for which at least one avenue of approach was the technique of lot divination.⁵⁷

In short, a person could open the Bible at random (or some part of the Bible, since nearly all biblical codices contained only part of scripture), taking the resulting passage as God's message for them in that moment. Randomness and spontaneity created space for God to work, apart from human effort. The Gospels and Psalms quickly became favorites to use for this type of lot divination, though Paul's Epistles and other parts of the Bible come into play as well. This particular version of bibliomancy has continued to be an extremely common practice down

⁵⁶ See the discussion of Augustine's epistemology in relation to divination in Klingshirn 2007, 113–40.

⁵⁷ For the use of sacred books as “instant oracles,” see van der Horst 1998, 143–73; for the less well-studied early development of Jewish practices specifically, see van der Horst 2019, 154–72; also Meerson 2006, 388–411.

through the centuries, attesting to the persistent belief that the words of scripture may carry an extraordinary message for the believing seeker, especially at a critical juncture of life, when they feel the need for supernatural knowledge or guidance.

Although prior scholarship has read a number of ecclesial proscriptions as repeatedly banning this use of scripture, Klingshirn has shown that many of the restrictions we find were actually aimed at a different and particular kind of divination, using the *Sortes Sanctorum*,⁵⁸ to which we shall turn shortly. The reliance on scripture as a fundamental tool for the practice of sortilege turns out to have been one of the most widespread and long-lived conventions in text-based divination as practiced by Christians. The *Sortes biblicae* provides crucial background to the Divining Gospel, given the synthesis of sortilege material and the Gospel of John that we find in the latter. The impulses behind *Sortes biblicae* are the same that encouraged the development and use of the Divining Gospel.

2.3.3 Christian Ticket Oracles and Shrines

Not all lot divination practiced by Christians relied mainly on scripture. In Late Antiquity, some shrines devoted to Christian saints became known for their divination services.⁵⁹ For example, one might come to the shrine of the martyr Colluthus at Antinoë in Egypt for dream-incubation, seeking the saint's guidance on a matter. But the specialists at St. Colluthus also offered a ticket oracle service. More than 200 tickets have been recovered at the site, using essentially the same formulae and procedures that we see being used at non-Christian shrines.⁶⁰ The querent would prayerfully submit two tickets to the saint, one that worded their request positively and the other negatively. By some unknown ritual, the ticket chosen by the saint would be returned to the person in order to answer her question.

The shrine of St. Philoxenus at Oxyrhynchus also used ticket oracles, for which we have recovered several papyrus examples.⁶¹ P.Rendell Harris 54 reads, "My Lord God Pantocrator and Saint Philoxenus my protector, I beseech you by the great name of the Lord God, if it be

your will and you are helping me to take the banking business, I beseech you to order me to learn this and to speak." Its companion is actually P.Oxy. XVI.1926, cut from the same sheet of papyrus and written in the same hand, but in the negative form: "I beseech you... if it be not your will for me to speak either about the bank nor the office of weights and measures, to order me to learn this, that I may not speak."⁶² The unnamed querent seeks business and career guidance from God by means of St. Philoxenus. Although the practice of using ticket oracles at Christian shrines seems to have been especially prominent in Egypt, we have evidence that it occurred elsewhere too.

2.3.4 Christianized "Books of Fate"

Although ticket oracles were written out and followed conventional formulae, they could be highly customized to address the person's concerns. We presume they were typically commissioned on request. Books of Fate were less flexible, since their answers were fixed. They made up for this rigidity by including a great many specific answers and by using clever selection mechanisms. They also had the advantage of portability, and what drama they lost due to the absence of connectedness to a sacred location such as a saint's shrine they could partly make up for through the dramatic appeal of the techniques the practitioner used to access their wisdom. Perhaps even their artifactual location – a special book – contributed to their distinctive mystique. Meant to be used over and over, sortilege tools like the *Sortes Astrampsychi* found ready application in Christian contexts, though requiring some adaptation.

Most of the texts of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* that have come down to us, though derived from non-Christian sources, have actually been christianized. Editors revised the material for use by Christians with Christian clients. For instance, the names of the gods at the head of each decade of answers are changed to names of biblical characters.⁶³ A portion is added to the preface, instructing the practitioner and the querent to say together a prayer to God Almighty. Certain questions deemed less appropriate for Christians to ask are slanted differently, e.g. question 55, "Will I get the woman I desire?" (εἰ λαμβάνω ἥν θέλω γυναῖκα;) becomes "Will I become a monk?" (εἰ γίνομαι

⁵⁸ Klingshirn 2002, 77–130.

⁵⁹ See Frankfurter's explication of the Christian shrine as a "restoration of the local oracle," Frankfurter 1998, 193–95.

⁶⁰ See Papini 1998, 393–401; Frankfurter 1998, 193–95; Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 55–58; Naether 2010, 401–02.

⁶¹ See Papaconstantinou 1994, 281–86; Kocar 2019, 196, 200–02; Frankfurter 2000, 469–71.

⁶² Translated from the text edited in Youtie 1975, 253. See further examples of ticket oracles translated in Meyer/Smith 1998, 52–55. Image of P.Oxy. XVI.1926 available online at the searchable POxy database: <http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁶³ See the list in Browne 1983, 4–5.

μοναχός;), and question 100, “Will I soon be caught as an adulterer?” (εἰ καταλαμβάνομαι ἄρτι μοιχός;) is changed to, “Will I be caught by the ruler?”⁶⁴ (εἰ καταλαμβάνομαι ὑπὸ ἄρχοντος;). However, the Christian editors did not actually change much, leaving most of the *sortes* intact. A redactor of one of the medieval manuscripts of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* shows clear awareness that the now-Christian work has a non-Christian heritage.⁶⁵

The *Sortes Astrampsychi* inspired similar tools that were also used by Christians. The *Sortes Barberiniana* adapt and simplify the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, correlating 110 questions with 1100 answers. The editor has enriched the material by adding topics having to do with farming, battle, and flight.⁶⁶ It omits dummy answers and its solitary manuscript includes no operating instructions.

The *Sortes Sangallenses* is a Latin Book of Fate similar to the *Sortes Astrampsychi*. It survives in a fragmentary form as the underwriting of a palimpsest, copied around 600.⁶⁷ Its Christian elements show that the composition comes from no earlier than the fourth century.⁶⁸ Each section has twelve responses, fifty-four of which have survived fairly intact so that we now have 525 statements that show us a great deal about the nature of the book. The list of over 100 questions does not survive; neither do any operating instructions. Some of the responses seem general, like response twelve in dodecad two: *Cum gaudio optinebis, quod desideras* (“You will joyfully obtain what you desire”). However, the specificity of many of the statements show that the material, like that of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, was composed to respond to specific questions. For instance, statement nine in dodecad twenty-two has, *Noli timere calumniam, q[ua]m pateris* (“Do not fear the false accusation you endure”), designed to serve a querent seeking information about a possible court case.⁶⁹ The statements, originally numbering more than 1600, may be grouped into many different subject areas addressing such things as lifespan, inheritance, lost objects, travel, trials, healing, enemies, and runaways.⁷⁰

Most of the statements speak to the inquirer directly, in the second person present or future tense. Like the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, the corpus includes dummy answers and responses are shuffled in order to enhance the

apparent randomness of the selection. The arrangement into dodecads suggest the likelihood that dice played a role in the selection process,⁷¹ either two six-sided κύβοι or a twelve-sided polyhedron such as we took note of previously. However, the client could also simply have picked a number between one and twelve or drawn numbers out of a bowl or urn. We do not know precisely how the response number would have been chosen, and practices may have varied. In his close analysis of the surviving material and reconstruction of the apparatus, Klingshirn plausibly proposes a technique by which the practitioner would apply the formula $q+R-1=D$, where subtracting one from the sum of the question number (q) and response number (R) would yield the proper number of the dodecad (D), to which they would turn in order to read the numbered response.⁷²

The *Sortes Sangallenses* does not address the sorts of clerical matters that are referenced in the christianized forms of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*; it never mentions bishops, priests, or monks. Its vision is basically secular. Yet it exhibits a Christian orientation. For example, response 7,9 has, *Fac testamentum ita ut pauperibus dimittas et anima tua d[e]o commendes* (“Make your will so that you free the poor, commending your soul to God”).⁷³ The Christian themes in the text show that the book found use in the Christian world of late antique Gaul. However, it was basically discarded in the early Middle Ages, when the codex was pulled apart, its pages trimmed, and its text erased to make way for glosses and patristic texts copied in the early ninth century. It would appear that the specific social concerns *Sortes Sangallenses* addressed and the world that its terminology constructed made it less useful in a western medieval context than it had once been. Klingshirn’s explanation makes sense: “Although individual responses could easily be altered, the work’s overall level of detail could not be. It thus ran head-on against the limits of its adaptability.... [T]he *Sortes Sangallenses* was structurally too peculiar and sharply Roman to survive the transition from late antiquity to the early middle ages.”⁷⁴

The *Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum* may be “loosely described as a rhyming and simplified version of the *Sortes Sangallenses*.”⁷⁵ Dating probably to the eleventh century, it is preserved in Latin manuscripts as early as the twelfth century. The text borrows from the *Sortes*

⁶⁴ Texts translated from Browne 2001, xiv.

⁶⁵ Browne 1976, 54, n.6; van der Horst 1998, 166.

⁶⁶ See the discussion in Stewart 2019, 173–95.

⁶⁷ Text, translations, and topical analyses in Winnefeld 1887; Dold 1948; Meister 1951; bibliography in Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 31–34.

⁶⁸ Klingshirn 2005, 105.

⁶⁹ Texts from Dold 1948, 21, 40, 74, 92; see Klingshirn 2005, 119.

⁷⁰ See topic headings in Dold 1948, 11–13.

⁷¹ Dold 1948, 10.

⁷² Klingshirn 2005, 120; also Meerson 2006, 394.

⁷³ Text from Dold 1948, 25; see Klingshirn 2005, 111–12.

⁷⁴ Klingshirn 2007, 116–17.

⁷⁵ Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 35 (discussion and bibliography, 34–36).

Sangallenses yet renders the statements in verse. It offers the user a set of instructions, including twelve questions from which to choose. Each question correlates to a subset of twelve responses, presented in groups of twelve, resulting in 144 answers overall. The ubiquity of the number twelve undoubtedly encouraged the association of the material with the twelve Patriarchs, just as its ancestors associated groups of *sortes* with particular gods or saints. The answers are distributed in a staggered fashion throughout the corpus, including a number of fake or dummy answers that the user would never be able to choose. After posing one of the twelve questions, the selection technique involved rolling dice. The answers can be fairly specific, but not to the extreme degree we find in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* or even the *Sortes Sangallenses*. Part of the simplification characterizing this book is the editors' generalizing of topics into twelve relatively broad categories. It will be instructive to present the full set of questions, translated by Meerson in a fashion that preserves their poetic diction:

- (1) Whether you would be deceived or not, while thinking this way?
- (2) The lost thing, how soon would be found?
- (3) Whether the road would be safe or difficult would be?
- (4) Whether the sick would prevail or go dying?
- (5) Whether would follow the peace or hopelessly vanished?
- (6) Safe or injured, or would he return whom you're expecting?
- (7) Whether your strongest petition would be declined?
- (8) Would he be trustful whom you are joining?
- (9) Would the accused be denounced or nicely defended?
- (10) Would you be killed in the following war?
- (11) Would one maintain (his estate), or be fleeing victorious army?
- (12) Would in the rest of my life be my fortune the same, or another?⁷⁶

These questions address such topics as health and healing, finding lost items, entering into partnerships, safety in travel, the return of a loved one, and the outcome of a legal trial – all topics well represented in early lot divination texts. Question 12 is an especially broad catch-all, inquiring after the general fortunes of one's future. The *Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum* attests to the afterlife of *Sortes Sangallenses* in Christian contexts. It also illustrates how editors drawing on Books of Fate could adapt *sortes* to be rather less specific, organizing the material accord-

ing to a fairly small set of subjects – in this case, twelve – that are pointed enough to address a client's particular question but general enough to find flexible application. The selection of Christian divination texts we consider next specialize in offering even more general answers.

2.3.5 Lot Divination Texts with General Answers

Whereas some lot divination texts offered very specific answers, some had more general responses. What these tools lost in the ability to offer specific answers to the client's queries they gained in flexibility and ease of use. Like the dice oracles of Anatolia, they offered responses that were open to a range of different interpretations, yet seemed broadly appropriate to the situation. Furthermore, the mechanism of their use was not so finicky and subject to malfunction in case of copyist mistakes or if some part of the key or the instructions were lost.

The famous *Sortes Sanctorum* was such a text, consisting of general statements. Although the text probably has ancient non-Christian origins, it comes down to us in a succession of christianized revisions. The earliest edition for which we have definite evidence was Greek and appears to have consisted of 216 *sortes*, accessed by means of three successive dice rolls.⁷⁷ In time the *Sortes Sanctorum* was shortened to fifty-six statements, accessed by rolling three dice together and totaling the numbers rolled.⁷⁸ Translated into Latin and disseminated widely, the *Sortes Sanctorum* (also occasionally known as the *Sortes Apostolorum* by the thirteenth century) became a target of ecclesial condemnation and regulation as early as the fifth century.⁷⁹ Editors sought to reduce the text's heterodox features in order to make it more acceptable for Christian use.

Late medieval church authorities in the West conflated this work – and the early condemnations of it – with any of a number of other divinatory texts. That confusion was codified in Charles Du Cange's influential *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae Latinitatis* (1678), so that modern scholarship has tended to read the title, *Sortes Sanctorum* as though it applied to practically any use of early lot divination by Christians, including the use of the Bible itself (i.e. *Sortes biblicae*). Klingshirn has helped disentangle the confused snarl of references, showing

⁷⁷ Wilkinson 2015, 101–02.

⁷⁸ See editions in Harris 1901, 117–27; Cartelle/Guardo 2004, 63–97; bibliography in Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 42–44.

⁷⁹ See Klingshirn 2002, 84–86; see also further discussion of this text in 2.4 below.

⁷⁶ Meerson 2006, 393, n.18; Latin text in Skeat 1954, 43.

that “[b]etween the fifth and eleventh centuries, *sortes sanctorum* referred neither to biblical lot divination nor to any *genre* of divination at all; rather, like *Sortes Apostolorum*, it served as the title of a specific text, extant in manuscripts of the ninth through sixteenth centuries.”⁸⁰ *Sortes Sanctorum* was in fact the title of a particular Book of Fate (albeit in different translations and editions) and not a catch-all for many different lot divination texts and practices. This clarification helps us properly identify the work. Klingshirn recommends identifying it by its incipit, *Post solem surgunt stellae* (“After the sun the stars come out...”). The clarification also confines many instances of early ecclesial condemnations of lot divination to this work in particular.⁸¹

Answers in the *Sortes Sanctorum* are general in nature. For instance, a roll of two sixes and one one would produce the following response in one edition: *Quod postulas nunc ita veniet cum magno gaudio, securus esto, Deum roga, et noli timere* (“What you are seeking will come to you with great joy; be unconcerned; entreat God, and do not fear”).⁸² The phrase, *quod postulas* covers nearly any concern the querent might wish to ask about. Throughout the *sortes*, we find such general responses, often positive but sometimes negative and regularly cautionary. A roll of one six and two twos yields the following: *Quod cogitasti infirmum est, aliud cogita, ad lucrum pertinent que cupis* (“What you are considering is weak; think of something else; what you desire pertains only to profit”).⁸³ Many of the statements have a touch of the religious or moral, as in the two examples given.

The so-called *Sortes Monacenses* is a Latin collection of oracles surviving in a ninth- or tenth-century manuscript, originally fifty-six statements, constituting a hybrid of two earlier systems, one of which appears to be related to an ancestor of the *Sortes Sanctorum*.⁸⁴ Like the latter, the answers of the *Sortes Monacenses* are general in nature, though it has been less thoroughly christianized than its more well-known cousin. One of its systems appears to have required the roll of three dice. However, many of its *sortes* are coded with letters of the alphabet, indicating that the organization or selection mechanism of at least

one of the original systems was alphabetical. The descriptive title, “*Sortilegia* through letters and sacred books mentioned by St. Gregory of Tour” (*Sortilegia per literas et sacros libros quorum meminit divus gregorius turonensis*; fol. 106r) is in a later hand, yet it highlights not only the alphabetical mechanism (*per literas*) but also points to the use of sacred books in the process. The title evokes tales told by Gregory of Tours in the *History of the Franks* about using sacred books – particularly Psalms and the Gospels – for sortilege (see especially *Historia Francorum* 4,16; 5,14). Noticing a reference to the Psalter in the early part of the material, Rudolf Thurneysen believed that in one of the systems, the user would open the Psalter, take a letter from the Psalms and use that letter to find the corresponding oracle.⁸⁵ The Psalms were very popular for the simple practice of *Sortes biblicae*, but specialized sortilege tools were also developed to accompany their use for divination (see 2.3.6.2 below).

The fragmentary Vatican Coptic lot book PVat.Copt. 1 comes from the seventh-eighth century. Though now very incomplete, it once contained answers numbering at least 219. The *sortes* are arranged one after the other on the page, with horizontal lines broken by ornamental dots separating each entry. Alphabetic numbers preface each statement. The numbers suggest the practitioner may have used a dice-rolling technique, but since a succession of three six-sided dice yield only 216 possibilities and we have at least 219 represented here, the original set of *sortes* may have been far greater. Alternatively, the selection method may have involved something besides a simple succession of dice rolls.⁸⁶ In any case, this tool offers general answers that would be appropriate to a wide range of queries. For example:⁸⁷

[o	o]γνογμοκρτ̄ ρ̄μ̄ῑαι [ρ̄]ωβ πᾱι	(fol. 7v)
[70]	There is grief in this matter	
ρ̄ζζ	ο̄γμεταβολη̄ [ε̄να]νογστε	(fol. 9r)
167	A change [that is] good	
ρ̄φζ	ᾱρ̄δε ε̄ροκ ε̄α[π̄ρ̄ῑσε] ε̄χμ̄πειρ̄ᾱβ	(fol. 11r)
197	It is appropriate for you to [labor] on this matter	

In form, these *sortes* recall others we have already seen, in Christian sources like the *Sortes Sanctorum* and even in the non-Christian dice oracles and ABC oracles. They are

⁸⁰ Klingshirn 2002, 81.

⁸¹ See the thorough study in Klingshirn 2002, 77–130.

⁸² Text from Cartelle/Guardo 2004, 72; also in Harris 1901, 119; see Table 6.1 below.

⁸³ Text from Cartelle/Guardo 2004, 78; see also Harris 1901, 121.

⁸⁴ The text is in the manuscript München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14846. Digital images: http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00104066/image_213 (accessed 7 June 2019). See bibliography in Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 44–45.

⁸⁵ Thurneysen 1886, 92.

⁸⁶ Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 45–46.

⁸⁷ Digital images: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Pap.Vat.copt.1 (accessed 7 June 2019). I have relied on Lantschoot for plausible reconstructions of missing text (Lantschoot 1956, 13, 46, 50). Translation of the oracles in Meyer/Smith 1999, 251–56 (text 126).

general in nature and address topics broadly, often by reference to the generic “matter” under consideration: Coptic ⲁⲟⲃ (hōb). The statements are not especially religious or moral, yet mentions here and there of God, angels, the Lord, Christ, and “our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” show that they were used in a Christian context.

The Coptic *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* includes expressions and vocabulary similar to what we find in P. Vat. Copt. 1 and other lot oracle collections, yet its responses are longer and more ornate. This lot collection is attested in four different miniature codices, the most complete of which comes from the sixth century.⁸⁸ It may go back to a fourth-century Greek text. The extant sources include no explicit instructions for how to use the book. Since it has only thirty-seven responses, and they are all fairly general in nature, the procedure may have been simply a matter of opening the book at random and reading the *sors* on the selected page. However, the selection method may have included other techniques for choosing numbers, such as rolling dice. The general answers employed by this text would be applicable (and probably most welcome) to nearly any querent. For instance:

20 A little longer and you will receive the fulfillment of your life. For the Lord is your mediator. Endure, and you will receive the hope of your salvation, because the power of God is greater than that of humans. And they will marvel at you.

31 Walk and go immediately. Do not delay. Because it is God who fights for you. He will cause your enemies to be subject to you. If you are patient for a little, you will receive the hope of your salvation and you will be at rest.⁸⁹

The incipit in the fullest manuscript entitles the book, “The Gospel of the Lots of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, she to whom Gabriel the archangel brought the good news” (πεγαγγελιον ἡνεκληρος ἡμαρια τμααυ μπχοῖς ἰϛ πεῗϛ τεπτα γαβριηλ παρχηαγγελος εἰνε νας μπρενογχε).⁹⁰ Despite calling itself a Gospel (εὔαγγελιον; *euangelion*), the book contains no narratives or other material that we normally associate with the Gospel genre. The text alludes to scripture often, especially to passages with consolatory or victorious language, but the oracles do not quote scripture literally. However, the book is a tome of “good news” (i.e. *gospel*), since the statements are irrepressibly hopeful in tone. Furthermore, the designation “gospel” implies that God himself is the provider of the good news,

a belief reiterated constantly through these *sortes*, where the Lord God is named repeatedly as the source of help and object of trust. The mentions of Mary and Gabriel surely recall the scene in which an anxious but humbly receptive Mary is the recipient of the most extraordinary good news, brought to her by the angelic messenger (Luc. 1,26–38).⁹¹ Furthermore, as the mother of Christ, Mary is held to be the intercessor *par excellence* from Christianity’s early days. The book is a lot divination text but it is also a Gospel, if we accept its own self-designation.

Our sources for the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* provide no narrative framework to help us understand the full intent of the text’s association with Mary. However, the language of “gospel” and references to Mary and Gabriel are undoubtedly meant to evoke hopeful expectations about the authority and efficacy of the book as a channel of divine knowledge and instruction. Luijendijk pictures the book’s user sharing its opening words with the client at the beginning of a consultation in order to prepare them for the encounter with the divine and to evoke a sense of trust in the result of the exercise – trust being a very important theme in the text.⁹² Although one would expect that Christian users and clients recognized important differences between this book and the canonical Gospels that were being read in churches – the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* was presumably never viewed as a serious contender for the same status – the title *Gospel* would undoubtedly cause users to perceive significant associations between this lot divination text and scripture.

Used in different contexts in a variety of languages, lot divination texts with general answers provided the user with a highly flexible tool. However, the lack of specificity in the answers confronts us again with the need to acknowledge the crucial role of the interpreter in the process of divination. An effective consultation – the kind that might guarantee return customers – would likely require more of the practitioner than merely reading a vague oracle over a person. In her presentation of the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary*, Luijendijk depicts a “three-way conversation” between book, diviner, and client. Through the dynamic interaction of these participants, a consultation could produce knowledge that was useful to the inquirer. The next category of texts we consider puts the interpretive qualities of Christian lot divination into a distinctive light.

⁸⁸ Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 47–48. Editions in Papini 1998, 393–401; Luijendijk 2014, 98–144; Kocar 2019, 197–200.

⁸⁹ Translations from Luijendijk 2014, 126, 138.

⁹⁰ Luijendijk 2014, 98.

⁹¹ See the discussion in Luijendijk 2014, 18–20, 26–32.

⁹² See Luijendijk 2019, 309–29.

2.3.6 Lot Divination Texts with *Hermêneiai*

2.3.6.1 *Rhiktologia*

The term *rhiktologia* (ῥικτολόγιον) came to be used of a type of lot divination text in the Byzantine tradition. In Byzantine Greek usage, ῥίχνω and ῥίπτω mean “to throw” and τὰ ῥίπτα are dice; *Rhiktologia* are therefore books of dice oracles, although it is not always clear what role dice may have played in the lot-selection process.⁹³ Paul Canart and Rosario Pintaudi identified several recensions, for which the earliest evidence is a fourth- or fifth-century papyrus fragment from Egypt (Firenze, Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli” PSI Congr.XVII 5).⁹⁴ The latter preserves four partial responses, each having a staurogram or christogram Ϡ and two numbers. One number belongs to a sequential series (69–72); the other corresponds to two dice rolls (e.g. 3-4). The statements offer general responses. Their style and language are conventional for lot divination, yet it is clear that they were intended for use by Christians, for they mention God and angels and allude to scripture. Numerous agreements between this fragment and later examples of *Rhiktologia* (especially Paris, BnF, gr. 2510) shows that it is somehow related to an early ancestor in the background to that tradition.

We have several Greek *Rhiktologia* manuscripts attesting to at least four different recensions. Although these recensions are in later manuscripts, parts of them go back to much earlier sources and it will be instructive to consider the contents, structure, and selection devices of the Byzantine *Rhiktologia*, for they have features that can illuminate perplexing aspects of earlier lot divination texts using scripture, including the Divining Gospel of Late Antiquity.

The recension having text most like that of the early papyrus fragment is Paris, BnF, gr. 2510, dated 1384 (fol. 88r–97v).⁹⁵ This recension has ninety-three numbered responses. At the end of the *sortes* is a graphic chart, drawn with six concentric circles, having numbers arranged in a spiral pattern from the outermost circle to the center (fol. 97r). The numbers are actually from 1–100 (α–ρ).⁹⁶ How dice would be useful to access this simple

mechanism is unclear. Yet it is easy to imagine the user or client simply closing his or her eyes and putting a finger on the chart to choose a number, then turning to the appropriate response in the *sortes*. Alternatively, one could toss a small object onto the chart in order to select a number.⁹⁷ By comparison, a nineteenth-century Greek *Rhiktologion* manuscript from the island of Amorgos instructs the user to toss a grain of wheat onto its chart of fifty-eight numbers in order to discern which statement is being indicated (see 6.5 below).⁹⁸

The fifteenth-century manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library MS, Barocci 111 has seventy-two numbered responses (fol. 205v–211r).⁹⁹ This copy has an apparatus similar to that in Paris, BnF, gr. 2510. Prefacing the responses is a simple list of the numbers 1–72 (α–οβ) arranged as text at the bottom of the page (fol. 205r), in an informal grid pattern. Above the rows of numbers is a separate device, a well-drawn spiral chart that contains the numbers 1–150 (α–ρν) proceeding from the center to the outside. A brief description explains that the upper device is ὁ κύκλος τῆς ψαλτήρος, “The Circle of the Psalter,” while the lower set of numbers is for τὸ ἅγιον εὐαγγέλιον, “The Holy Gospel.” It appears that both charts were designed for use in processes of lot selection; the lower one being for the seventy-two *sortes* of this *Rhiktologion*, and the upper spiral for use with a separate copy of the Psalter. A convention must have developed by which sortilege using the Psalter did not merely open the book at random but employed a chart and something like a finger-pointing exercise to choose the Psalm. The fact that these charts are included together in this manuscript shows that the two practices of sortilege – one involving the Psalms and the other the *Rhiktologion* with its emphasis on the Gospels, were closely associated.

The manuscript Paris, BnF, gr. 2243 (dated 1339) and the sixteenth-century Paris, BnF, gr. 2149, which is probably a copy of the former, preserve an edition of the *Rhiktologion* with thirty-eight oracular responses. Drexel edited this text.¹⁰⁰ Once again, we find a chart prefacing the material, in this case a rectangular grid with thirty-eight

actually clear of numbers in the more carefully drawn chart on the preceding folio. The spiral with 82 numbers gives the impression of being a flawed or practice attempt to execute a chart for use with 93 *sortes*, though it may have been intended for a different purpose altogether.

⁹⁷ Drexel proposed these methods for the recension he edited (Drexel 1941, 311).

⁹⁸ Text edited in Megas 1958–59, 210.

⁹⁹ Images available: <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/p/19b1c2cc-360f-4cdf-8e20-078bcd71c67> (accessed 7 June 2019).

¹⁰⁰ Edited by Drexel 1941, 311–18. Images of Paris, BnF, gr. 2149 available: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b107228072> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁹³ See bibliography on early forms of *Rhiktologia* in Luijendijk/Klinshirn 2019, 46–47.

⁹⁴ Naldini 1983, 12–15; Canart/Pintaudi 1984, 85–90. Images available: <http://www.psi-online.it/documents/psi-congrxvii-5> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁹⁵ Images: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b107235078> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁹⁶ On the next (back) page is a similar spiral, drawn with five concentric circles (fol. 97v). However, its numbers are from 1–82 (α–πβ), and the last several numbers appear crammed into the central space that is

slots, each filled with a Greek number corresponding to one of the *kephalaia* (α–λη).

A final recension containing fifty responses is preserved in Paris, BnF, gr. 2091, of the fifteenth century (fol. 1r–6v).¹⁰¹ Also on its first page is an ornamental rectangular chart, listing the numbers 1–50 (α–ν) in order, with varying quantities of numbers in each square of the chart (fol. 1r).

The different recensions share a basic structure. They are divided into chapters, or *kephalaia* (κεφάλαια). Each numbered *kephalaion* consists of a brief quotation or adaptation of a biblical text and a divinatory explication called the *ἐρμηνεία* (*hermêneia*), i.e. the “interpretation” of the scripture being quoted. The Gospels are cited much more frequently than other parts of scripture, explaining the title accompanying some recensions of the work: “*Rhiktologia* of the *kephalaia* of the Holy Gospels” (Ῥικτολογία ἐκ τῶν τοῦ ἁγίου εὐαγγελίου κεφαλαίων).¹⁰² The Byzantine *Rhiktologia* style themselves as repertoires of interpretations of (largely) Gospel passages that the user accesses through sortilege.

The recension that Drexel edited will illustrate further. We have already observed that it includes a chart like the others, presenting the thirty-eight numbers of its statements in a graphic format within a grid that is clearly designed to assist the user in selecting one of the *sortes*. The work’s brief preface claims that the text provides knowledge, “concerning every matter whatsoever you may wish to examine, whether good or bad, from the chapters (*kephalaia*) of the Holy Gospel” (περὶ παντός πράγματος, οὗ ἂν βουληθῆς σκέψασθαι, εἴτε ἀγαθοῦ εἴτε φαύλου, ἐκ τῶν τοῦ ἁγίου εὐαγγελίου κεφαλαίων).¹⁰³ In keeping with the generic use of the term *πρᾶγμα* (*prāgma*; “matter, deed, action”) that we have seen in other Greek lot divination texts, the *hermêneiai* of the *Rhiktologia* offer the user general answers, statements that are normally very hopeful in tone. The very first *kephalaion* begins with a citation of Ioh. 1,1 – a passage held to be an agent of great supernatural power (see 1.5 above): “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God.” In fact, the Gospel of John is especially well represented in the *Rhiktologion*, as the following three examples show:

β’ Ἐγένετο ἄνθρωπος ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἰωάννης, οὗτος ἦλθεν εἰς μαρτυρίαν.
Ἐρμηνεία. Εἰς φῶς ἔρχεται τὸ παρὸν πρᾶγμα. μέριμναν ἔχεις πολλήν, ἀλλὰ δόξασον τὸν θεόν.

2. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came as a witness. (Ioh. 1,6–7a)

Interpretation: The present matter is coming to light. You have reason to be very anxious, but glorify God.

ἰθ’ Εἶπεν ὁ κύριος τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην· Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅτι κλαύσετε καὶ λυπηθήσεσθε ὑμεῖς, ὁ δὲ κόσμος χαρήσεται. Ἐρμηνεία. Ἀδικία μεγάλη σοι, ἄνθρωπε, ἀλλὰ καὶ νῦν λυπεῖσαι καὶ ὕστερον ἢ λύπη σου εἰς χαρὰν γενήσεται, καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα σου μένει καὶ δέδωταί σοι, τῷ κυρίῳ μου.

19. The Lord spoke this parable: “Truly I tell you, you will weep and grieve, but the world will rejoice.” (Ioh. 16,20)

Interpretation: You will have great injustice, O human, but although it is presently yours to grieve, later your grief will turn to joy, and your matter remains and has been given to you by my Lord.

λδ’ Εἶπεν ὁ κύριος τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς· Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ θύρα. δι’ ἐμοῦ ἐάν τις εἰσέλθῃ, σωθήσεται.

Ἐρμηνεία. Τοῦτό σοι ἔστω γνωστὸν κατὰ τὸ ῥήτον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ὅτι χαρὰ σοι ἔσται καὶ τῷ οἴκῳ σου καὶ διάφορον. καὶ χάριν μεγάλην σοι προξενεῖ κύριος ὁ θεός σου καὶ εὐφραίνου ἐν τούτῳ καὶ τέρπου.

34. The Lord said to his own disciples, “I am the door. If anyone enters through me, they will be saved.” (Ioh. 10,9)

Interpretation: Let this be known to you in accordance with what is stated in the Gospel, that there will be joy and advantage for you and your house, and the Lord your God will grant you great joy, so take pleasure in this and be glad.¹⁰⁴

The term *ἐρμηνεία* (*hermêneia*) prefaces each statement after the biblical quotation, usually in the body of the material though at times abbreviated (*ερμ-* [*herm-*]) in the margin (thus in Paris, BnF, gr. 2091). Although the statements are called *hermêneiai*, it is evident they do not explicate the biblical text in the usual sense. The statements use language that is conventional in many lot divination texts having general answers. However, they also exhibit thematic resonances with their associated passages, echoing their moods or reflecting particular dynamics in the passage (e.g. from grief to joy). The statements are not especially religious and have a general focus, though they presume the user or querent should wish to honor God, especially as protector and source of help.

The evidence of the Byzantine *Rhiktologia* shows us a particular, though structurally varied, type of lot divination text that not only boasts late antique ancestry but finds its way into other ecclesial traditions, as we will see when we examine a Syriac version of the tool in subsequent chapters (see 6.4.1; 7.2.2).

In summary, we highlight several aspects of the divinatory tools considered in this section. They have a set of oracular statements that provide general responses to

¹⁰¹ Images available: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10722793m> (accessed 7 June 2019).

¹⁰² Drexel 1941, 311; Canart/Pintaudi 1984, 86.

¹⁰³ Text from Drexel 1941, 312.

¹⁰⁴ Text from Drexel 1941, 313, 315, 317–18.

a querent's question. They organize their statements into sequentially numbered series corresponding to tables that accompany the material and appear to aid lot selection. They associate themselves closely to specific passages of scripture, particularly the Gospels. The oracular statements themselves are conceived of as "interpretations", i.e. *hermêneiai*, of Gospel passages (*kephalaia*). We may speculate that in many of its features the *Rhiktologia* tradition basically draws on tools and techniques that had become conventional in at least some corners of the Christian East. Consulting these tools could also be considered a manner of consulting the Gospel, so that the expression "drawing lots from the Gospel," might be applied to *Sortes biblicae* but might also refer to the use of specialized sortilege tools with strong Gospel content, such as the *Rhiktologia*.

2.3.6.2 Psalms *Hermêneiai*

Sulpicius Severus reports that when the people of Tours acclaimed Martin as bishop (sometime between 370–72), a certain group of detractors opposed his election on the grounds that the hermit was unfit for the episcopate, since he dressed so poorly and his hair was disgusting. Amidst the clamor and confusion in the church, someone took hold of a Psalter and read aloud the first verse that presented itself: "Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger" (Ps. 8,2; NRSV). Convinced that the Psalm had been chosen by the divine will in support of Martin and to censure his opponents, the people shouted in acclamation of Martin's episcopacy (*Vita Martini*, 9).

The Psalms were a favorite source for *Sortes biblicae* from early times. Indeed, many readers of the Greek Psalms and their Latin versions read what was understood to be the biblical sanction for using the Psalms this way: "my lots are in your hands; deliver me... Let your face shine upon your servant; save me..." (Ps. 30,15–16 [31,15–16]).¹⁰⁵ The Vulgate transmitted the reading "lots" (*sortes* for κλήροι) rather than "times" (καίροι), the latter corresponding to the text-form occurring in the Hebrew, some Septuagint manuscripts, and other versions.

The popularity of using the Psalms for sortilege also prompted the development of a specialized apparatus occurring in a number of Byzantine Psalters. As early as the eleventh century, we find Greek manuscripts with a set of marginal rubrics – an apparatus for the divinatory

use of the Psalms.¹⁰⁶ In many Psalters they are written as a series of notes in the margins, accompanying each Psalm. In other manuscripts, they occur in a separate list.¹⁰⁷ Also as early as the eleventh century, we have manuscripts in which scribes have added the statements to Psalters that did not originally include them, often in the margins. Georgi R. Parpulov edited a set of these statements from a handful of early manuscripts. Recognizing their function in sortilege, he describes the sentences as "divinatory," "advisory," and "prognostic."¹⁰⁸ The manuscript, Washington, D.C., Dumbarton Oaks MS 3 (BZ.1962.35), dated 1083, gives the apparatus the following heading: "True revelation of concerns, if they are conducted with faith" (ἀποκάλυψις ἀληθῆς ἐνθυμῆσεων, ἐὰν μετὰ πίστεως πράττηται; fol. 2r). After a brief set of instructions, the prefatory material calls the statements themselves, "*Hermêneiai* to the Psalms" (ἐρμηνείαι εἰς τοὺς Ψαλμούς). Hence, these are the Psalms *hermêneiai*.

The earliest definite example of a Greek Psalter copied with divinatory *hermêneiai* that were original to the manuscript is Paris, BnF, gr. 164, dated 1070.¹⁰⁹ For instance, Psalm 132 (133) begins with the exclamation, "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!" (Ps. 132,1 [133,1] NRSV). In the upper margin nearby is the similarly positive statement, μεγάλη συγκρότησις σοι γίνεται ("Great acclaim is coming to you;" fol. 163v). Psalm 28 (29) extols the Lord for his strength and sovereignty; in the upper margin we find this statement: μετὰ κόπου τὸ πρᾶγμα σου πληροῦται ("With labor your matter will be fulfilled;" fol. 34v). Not all the statements are positive. Psalm 59 (60) begins, "O God, you have rejected us!" The *sors* in the margin reads, κρυπτόν πρᾶγμα κείται ("The matter lies hidden;" fol. 71v), indicating the lack of a definite answer to the client's question. Psalm 5 begins with a plaintive appeal, begging the Lord to hear the psalmist's cries. The marginal statement reads, τοῦτο νῦν οὐ γίνεται ("This will not happen soon;" fol. 9v).

There is one statement for each Psalm. The contents of the statements are fairly consistent throughout the

¹⁰⁶ See the preliminary study in Canart 2011, 3–15.

¹⁰⁷ Paris, BnF, gr. 164, dated 1070, is an early example of a manuscript that has original *hermêneiai* in the margins; images available: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b550060713> (accessed 7 June 2019). The manuscript Washington, D.C., Dumbarton Oaks MS 3 (BZ.1962.35), dated 1083, is an early example of a manuscript with the Psalms *hermêneiai* compiled into a list prior to the Psalms themselves (fol. 2r–3r). Images available: <https://www.doaks.org/resources/manuscripts-in-the-byzantine-collection/ms-3/view> (accessed 7 June 2019).

¹⁰⁸ Parpulov 2010, 88; Parpulov 2014, 56, 75, 310, edition in 310–15.

¹⁰⁹ See Parpulov 2010, 88, 102; Parpulov 2014, 56; cf. Canart 2011, 15.

¹⁰⁵ Ἐν ταῖς χερσίν σου οἱ κλήροι μου; *in manibus tuis sortes meus*; see discussion in Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 12–13.

manuscript tradition; variant forms tend to say the same things in slightly different ways. The statements follow a basic pattern: they are brief and general in focus. They employ the conventional language of lot divination texts aimed at general queries, including the frequent use of *πράγμα* (*prāgma*; “matter, deed, action”) to cover any of a number of possible topics. The statements are even more secular than those of the *Rhiktologia*, their style and content reminding us of the terse statements we find in the ancient dice oracles or the *Sortes Astrampsychi* (although these are much more general in focus than the latter). They mention God several times (statements 19, 24, 26, 31, 32, 41, 70, 71, 72, 79, 116, 143) but do not name Jesus Christ or mention the Lord. The statement accompanying Psalm 1 references Joseph’s endurance as the cause of the grace (or gifts) he received.¹¹⁰ The statements often exhort the querent to trust or even to change (μετανόησον; statements 34, 103, 104, 129) but these exhortations are not necessarily religious.

The statements do not mention specific details in the Psalms to which they are attached but they do echo the affiliated Psalm’s mood or theme. Some manuscripts include a title for the oracular statements: ἐρμηνεΐαι εἰς τοὺς Ψαλμούς (“*Hermêneiai* to the Psalms”). Like the *Rhiktologia*, these tools present their oracular statements as *hermêneiai* (“interpretations”) in relation to the biblical text. The term *hermêneia* occurs frequently with the statements, often in an abbreviated form (ἐρμ; *herm-*) that implies a common awareness of the intended sense of the word in this context. Given the general nature of their contents and pervasive lack of specific references to the Psalms (or other scripture), we conclude that most of the statements were not composed in relation to particular Psalms. They were largely borrowed from existing lot divination texts, or at least inspired by the conventions of those texts. General statements, by their very nature, would not require much adaptation, even if drawn from a non-Christian corpus. They undoubtedly underwent revision for the sake of adapting them to the Psalms context and the modest amount of textual variation we find suggests that revision was ongoing. Yet it is the statements’ placement with resonant Psalms that particularly indicates intentionality in correlating these “interpretations” with scripture.

¹¹⁰ Paris, BnF, gr. 164 has Ἰωσήφ χάρισματ[α] πολλ[ά] δι’ ὑπομον[ῆς] (“Joseph [got] many gifts through endurance”); Washington, D.C., Dumbarton Oaks MS 3 (BZ.1962.35), has ὡς Ἰωσήφ ἠξιώθη χάριτος διὰ τῆς ὑπομονῆς (“As Joseph was made worthy of grace through endurance”); see Parpulov 2014, 310.

Some manuscripts also include a preface that gives some instruction as to how one should use the Psalms *hermêneiai*. The preface occurs in a number of manuscripts, with slight variations between them. One early example of this preface occurs in the twelfth-century manuscript London, British Library, Royal 2.A.vi:

Ἐὰν ἔννοιαν ἔχῃς ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ σου ἢ ὀφείλῃς ἐπιχειρῆσαι πράγματι, νῆστις ἀνάπτυσσε τὸ Ψαλτήριον καὶ ποιήσον τρισάγιον πρότερον σχολαίως· καὶ οἷος ἀν ψαλμός σοι ἐξέλθοι, ψηλάφησον τὸ κεφάλαιον αὐτοῦ, ἦγουν τὸ ψηφίον, καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνου τοῦ ψηφίου μέτρησον ἕτερα ἕξ ψηφία, ἵνα γένωνται ἀμφότερα ἑπτὰ, καὶ τὸ ζ’ ἀναγίνωσκε· καὶ εἴ τι γράφει, ἔχε αὐτὸ ἐν πληροφορίᾳ. Μόνον ἐκ πίστεως προσέρχου.¹¹¹

If you are preoccupied with something in your soul or if you must undertake some matter, while fasting, open up the Psalter at random, first reciting the Trisagion. And whatever Psalm turns up for you, mark its title (*kephalaion*), taking note of its number. From that number count six other numbers, so that together they make seven. Read the seventh, and accept whatever it writes with full assurance of fulfillment. Only, you must approach by faith.

According to this method, after preparing oneself by fasting, the user or client would start the divining process by reciting a liturgical prayer and then simply opening the Psalter at random, in the manner of *Sortes biblicae*. However, this procedure heightens the drama slightly by asking the person to do a further calculation, modifying the number of their chosen Psalm by six, thereby rounding it out to a sum of seven – a number laden with heavenly symbolism.

In a decisive departure from the *Sortes biblicae*, the querent looks not just at the text of the Psalm he or she chose but reads the *hermêneia* accompanying that Psalm. In many manuscripts, the 150 *hermêneiai* are numbered like the Psalms themselves, making them that much easier to identify. Upon reading the *hermêneia*, the person should faithfully receive it as the divinely authorized response to their concern. For instance, the person who opened to Psalm 127 (128) could add six and turn to Psalm 133 (134), finding there not only the succinct doxology of that Psalm, but also its corresponding *sors*: μὴ λυποῦ· ὃ ἐπιθυμεῖς, ἐπιτυγχά[νεις] (“Do not grieve; you will attain what you desire;” fol. 164r).

Not every Psalter manuscript with *hermêneiai* has the aforementioned instructions, though many do. Selection techniques may have varied. Some users probably accessed the Psalms *hermêneiai* in a fashion like that of *Sortes biblicae*, taking whatever Psalm they get on first

¹¹¹ Fol. 15v; text from Parpulov 2014, 310.

opening the book, without bothering to do further calculations. Also, we recall the “Circle of the Psalter” included with the *Rhiktologia* in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS, Barocci 111. Its spiral device with 150 spaces on a single page would make an attractive and effective means of choosing a Psalm, perhaps by finger-pointing, or dropping a pebble or grain seed; indeed, the spiral would appear to have no other purpose than providing a simple but elegant way of randomly choosing a Psalm.¹¹²

The Psalms *hermêneiai* are Byzantine tools, but they occur in other languages besides Greek. Canart draws attention to a Slavonic version and Outtier studies related versions in Armenian and Georgian manuscripts.¹¹³ Given what we know about the biblical-literary culture, along with the distribution and preservation of the manuscripts themselves, it is likely that these books were owned by churches and monasteries. Clergy and monks would have been the primary users of these books, and it may be that the typical querent was clerical. However, as we have noted, the responses are very general – especially in the Psalms *hermêneiai*, designed to be suitable for inquirers of any social station who might be asking about any matter of concern, secular or otherwise. The intended users or clients are not necessarily clerical, though they may be, but the material argues at least for a Christian context of usage.

The Psalms are among the most frequently read parts of scripture, in both ecclesial and monastic settings, as well as in personal devotion and study, in every Christian language. This has been true since the early days of Christianity. Manuscripts of the Psalters are especially numerous, so it is not surprising that using the Psalter for *Sortes biblicae* has been a widespread and long-lived Christian practice. Though not yet well-studied, the practice of using the special divinatory apparatus of the Psalms *hermêneiai* became widespread too, in the Christian East, from at least the eleventh century. Yet, as with the *Rhiktologia* and their late antique ancestry, aspects of the Psalms *hermêneiai* go back to much earlier times than the Byzantine manuscript tradition would suggest. For one thing, as we have repeatedly observed, using the Psalms for sortilege has a long Christian legacy. Furthermore, the style and contents of the statements themselves undeni-

ably go back to a much earlier tradition of lot divination texts, with roots in the divination texts of Late Antiquity that were themselves adapted from non-Christian models for Christian use. Although we have no early evidence for Psalms *hermêneiai* as such, the composers of the Byzantine tool were relying on sortilege material that was already old by the time they incorporated it into the Psalter.

Then there is the matter of the designation, *hermêneiai*, “interpretations.” Both the *Rhiktologia* and the Psalms *hermêneiai* style their “prognostic sentences,” or *sortes*, as “interpretations.” This puts the material and the process of accessing it into a special relationship with Christian scripture.¹¹⁴ The *Rhiktologia* use the sacred text heavily but are not themselves biblical manuscripts (though the term “Gospel” could have functioned as a shorthand way of referring to them, given their frequent Gospel citations). The Psalms *hermêneiai* are incorporated into biblical manuscripts and therefore not only rely more deeply on the content of scripture but draw more directly on the mystique and authority of the sacred book, the efficacy of which we have already indicated (see 1.4).

Even if there is no late antique model for Psalms *hermêneiai* as such, we do have a late antique model for doing what they do – incorporating an apparatus of *sortes* into a biblical codex and conceiving of them as “interpretations.” As Canart observes,¹¹⁵ the late antique precedent for doing this is to be found in specially designed copies of John’s Gospel, that have striking parallels to the Byzantine Psalters: they too incorporate a body of numbered *sortes* that are individually attached to segments of scripture. Most distinctly, these *sortes* are also called *hermêneiai* in the John manuscripts. Of course, these Gospel manuscripts are the books that we have dubbed, “Divining Gospels,” and are the main focus of this study. Our evidence for copies of John with *hermênenai* is much earlier than that of the Byzantine Psalters. We agree with Canart that the Divining Gospels came first, and that Psalms *hermêneiai* (and possibly the *Rhiktologia*) are the result of a Byzantine project of continuing and developing materials and procedures that go back to the Divining Gospels of John, with their specialized apparatus of oracular *hermêneiai*.

¹¹² Cf. the Greek *Rhiktologia* from Amorgos described above for an example of dropping a grain of wheat; see 6.3.1 below for an example of a finger-pointing technique prescribed in a Syriac lot divination book.

¹¹³ Canart 2011, 8–9; Outtier 1993, 182–83.

¹¹⁴ We will delve into this subject more deeply in Chapters Six and Seven.

¹¹⁵ Canart 2011, 3.

2.4 Proscribing Text-Based Divination

The foregoing discussion is not a comprehensive study of Christian lot divination texts. Yet the evidence we have surveyed is sufficient to make it clear that text-based divination had become a significant and widespread Christian practice in Late Antiquity, a practice that continued to develop in the medieval West and the Byzantine East.

Early Christian leaders had regularly condemned divination, under various names, by which could be meant any of a variety of traditional soothsaying techniques. Like other non-Christian ritual practices, various types of divination were seen as irredeemably tainted due to their association with the “pagan” gods, i.e. demons. Yet as we have seen, a number of expressly Christian techniques of text-based divination developed nevertheless. The practice of *Sortes biblicae* was particularly impactful, but more specialized sortilege tools circulated widely as well, showing the strength of lot divination practices among Christians. Opinions varied as to their appropriateness. Even divination practices with expressly Christian qualities drew criticism from some, though the evidence is far from univocal. The tradition presents us with a diverse picture, indicating an institutional ambivalence towards the use of text-based divination by Christians.

Divination was more readily accommodated to Christian use than many other popular ritual practices were. Divination may be seen as a “neutral technology.” Its techniques are not bound up inextricably with a particular religious commitment. Governing cosmic narratives may play little role in determining the shape of most sortilege activities. Consequently, the tools and methods of some forms of divination can be adapted with little change for use within different religious systems.¹¹⁶ What changed was the *source* of divine knowledge to which a person turned for insight, i.e. the God of the Christians rather than Apollo, the Bible rather than Homer, the holy man or woman rather than a shrine dedicated to a local god. Christian prayers and rites took the place of petitions and offerings to the gods.

It was not difficult to adapt the questions and answers of *Sortes Astrampsychi* so that they fit within a basic Christian framework. This is not to say that sortilege tools were devoid of moral perspective and religious assumptions. Their very effectiveness presumed a fundamentally religious view of the universe. Indeed, it was precisely the moral-theological framework within which many Christians’ seemed to be operating when they turned to divina-

tion for the sake of earthly gain that so offended Augustine. But those were subtle matters of adjudicating motive. The more overtly objectionable components could be expunged fairly easily. In the case of lot divination texts, simple revisions could erase or supplant references to “pagan” gods and immoral activities, while the inclusion of Christian formulae sanctified the material. The mechanisms of inquiry and selection could be readily adapted to meet the needs of the emerging Christian clientele. Robin Lane Fox explains, “[a]lthough the sites of inspired pagan oracles were classed as seats of demons, the ‘neutral technology’ of divination was promptly revised in Christian dress. The best evidence for its absorption lies in the continued attempts of fellow Christians to penalize its use.”¹¹⁷

The variety and widespread dissemination of christianized lot divination texts speak to their ready reception among many Christians. On the other side, the criticisms that ecclesiastic authors bring against them and the restrictions we find in assorted canons reveal an impulse to curb their use. We will not attempt to provide here a full account of the church’s varied and evolving stances on text-based divination, offering only a brief study in order to illuminate the negative attitudes towards the use of lot divination texts that we find in some Christian sources. Those attitudes help explain the limited survival of lot divination books and, in particular, the marginal space Divining Gospels come to occupy in the tradition.¹¹⁸

The evidence we have is often vague. Our authors and the compilers of canons do not always supply enough information to clarify precisely what practices they are describing or discussing. Certainly not every proscription against reading omens or practicing divination should be taken as including the condemnation of christianized lot divination texts or *Sortes biblicae*. For instance, when Augustine speaks disparagingly of “those who take lots (*sortes legunt*) out of the pages of the Gospel” (*Ep.* 55.20,37), he does not explain the practice, its tools, or its context. Is he talking about *Sortes biblicae*, such as he himself had practiced, using a Gospel codex? Or does he have in mind a specialized sortilege tool, such as the Divining Gospel, or some ancestor to the Byzantine *Rhiktologia*, that presents itself as “Chapters from the Holy Gospel?” (cf. Firenze, Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli” PSI Congr.XVII 5). Could he even have in mind something like the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary*? Also, is Augustine talking about private use, or are his listeners meant to understand that he is referring to their consultations with expert practitioners, perhaps

¹¹⁶ See Fox 1986, 404, 677–78.

¹¹⁷ Fox 1986, 677.

¹¹⁸ We will return to this topic in Chapter Eight.

people outside the church? Whatever the practice, its tools, and its context, we know that Augustine does not actually ban it, even comparing it favorably against “running to consult demons.” But he is certainly not fully approving of whatever it is that he means, being especially critical of Christians who do it with secular motives for material concerns. This one reference in one of Augustine’s pastoral letters illustrates some of the main difficulties we face interpreting the evidence: not only is Augustine’s stance rather less than unequivocal, but we cannot even be certain precisely what it is he has in mind.

Several factors account for the negative assessment of divination we find in many ecclesiastic authors. In antiquity, even non-Christians denounced the popular reliance on divination, while declaiming other common superstitions. Reasoned critics of popular ritual practices were eager to warn against charlatanry and irrational excesses, including those encountered in many forms of divination. One such treatment is to be found in the exposé, “Alexander the False-Seer” (Ἀλέξανδρος ἡ Ψευδομάντις), in which the second-century satirist Lucian tells tales of an influential charlatan who used a linen snake-puppet to charm gullible clients. Lucian explains that oracle-mongers exploited the hopes and fears of people for their own gain (*Alexander the False Prophet*, 8.12.26). One gets the impression that the landscape was filled with people who made a fortune by telling fortunes.¹¹⁹

Early Christians took up the same reasoned criticisms and amplified them, adding to their accusations of chicanery very grave warnings against the demonic influences lurking behind the magic and divination, as they saw it. Many “magicians” were also diviners. Although non-Christian conceptions commonly linked magic and divination, Christian polemics nearly always did so. For Christians, the concerns went beyond rational objections to include the religious. Divination, like magic, was either skulduggery or the work of demons. The word “sorcery” has its origins in the Latin *sors*, or “lot,” showing how closely linked magic and divination could be within the framework of Christian rhetoric.¹²⁰ Hence, late antique Christian authors and church leaders had available to them a strong tradition of skepticism on which they could draw when it came to the subject of divination. For Christians in particular, negative perceptions brought on through rational analysis were intensified by the ostensibly “pagan” origins and associations of these practices.

¹¹⁹ See Spickermann’s study of Lucian’s “ethic-religious stance to religion, rejecting the notions of magic, oracles, superstitions, and all-too-exotic deities” (Spickermann 2013, 150).

¹²⁰ See Johnston 2008, 144–79.

We recall again Augustine’s concerns about Christians running off to consult demons about the future.

In addition to the reasoned and the religious objections to popular practices of divination that some Christians held, we must allow something like an institutional objection, as well. To take Augustine’s example yet again, we observe not only his open concern about the dangers of consorting with illicit spiritual sources of knowledge (i.e. demons), but also the implied concern about consulting the human agents of that knowledge (i.e. ritual practitioners). Confining oneself to the resources of the Catholic Church, as Augustine saw it, with its approved traditions of sacraments, scripture, and clerical hierarchy, was the best way to ensure that one would avoid the dangers of the heterodox or the demonic. As part of his campaign both to “christianize” and “depaganize” the people of his diocese, Caesarius of Arles (†542) followed Augustine in this as in many things, preaching often against the many forms of divination that were popular in late antique Gaul and exhorting his flock to seek their knowledge and help from God alone – through the approved structures of the church. Yet “since the bishop’s version of Christianity did not authorize any forms of divination... there was little chance of eradicating these practices.”¹²¹ In other words, given the absence of ecclesiastically sanctioned divination practices, unsanctioned practices of fortune-telling were bound to flourish. Caesarius’ repeated injunctions against divinatory practices reveal the strength they held in his diocese.

Christianized versions of divination practices were trickier to manage than overtly “pagan” ones. This was especially true for practices using the Bible. Just as Chrysostom and Augustine disparage the amuletic use of scripture yet are understandably reluctant to undermine belief in its supernatural power (see 1.4.3), divination practices using scripture posed the problem of being grounded in the conviction that God speaks through the Bible. This was a conviction that ecclesiastic authors enthusiastically promoted.

Late antique Gaul was just one environment where the *Sortes biblicae* figure prominently. We have already noticed the episode of Martin’s episcopal election. Gregory of Tours (†594) also recounts several instances of *Sortes biblicae*, where ritual consultations with scripture are taken to reveal the divine intent regarding specific Frankish notables, from the conversion of Clovis to the rejection of Merovech, son of King Chilperic.¹²² The account of Merovech illustrates what must have been a common procedure. In order to get God’s word on a matter, he placed three books on St. Martin’s

¹²¹ Klingshirn 1994, 218–221, 226–27 (quote from 219).

¹²² *Historia Francorum* 2,37; 4,16; 5,14.

tomb: the book of Kings, the Psalter, and the Gospels. After three days of fasting and prayerful vigils, he approached the tomb and opened each book in turn, reading the first verse on the page that he happened to open – in his case, a series of disappointing declarations about his inauspicious future (*Historia Francorum* 5,14).

Gregory's descriptions of *Sortes biblicae* place its operation in the hands of clergy within the confines of the ecclesial establishment. Whereas it might be easy to identify the “pagan” diviner as someone to avoid, what about confessedly Christian freelancers, particularly those who use Christian materials, like the Bible and christianized lot texts? Freelance practitioners were not necessarily approved and regulated by the ecclesial establishment, but this did not make them non-Christian.¹²³ As the late antique church came to deal with diversity of belief by developing means of defining and regulating orthodoxy, it dealt with diversity of practice through the regulation of orthopraxy. Religious authority came increasingly to be limited to that which was recognized through the official church channels of hierarchy and canon. However, the concomitant rise of alternative forms of authority exercised through the charismatic offices of holy men and women often undermined efforts to consolidate power institutionally.

The rise of ascetic holy seers were paralleled by the evolution of late Roman provincial *sortilegi* into individual practitioners of sortilege using the Bible or christianized materials, in the western provinces at least.¹²⁴ The rise of Christian *sortilegi* in the West, the founding of ticket oracles at martyr's shrines in Egypt, and the development of Christian lot divination books all over the place, constitute one kind of response to the strong impulse to accommodate “the domestic orthodoxy of popular... Christianity.”¹²⁵ Clerical reproof and canonical regulation represent another kind of response. Both the adaptive and regulative responses are propelled in part by the desire to corral religious practices within the bounds of recognized ecclesial authority.

Ecclesiastical and monastic canons express the regulative impulse. In various canons we find several attempts to regulate text-based divination although, as we have noticed, it is not always clear exactly what practices are being regulated. From the late antique Syriac-speaking Christian East, the *Admonitions for Monks*, Canon 19,

attributed to Rabbula of Edessa (411–35), has the following injunction:

126 ܘܠܗܘܢ ܕܗܘܢܝܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ ܠܗܘܢ
Let none of the monks take an answer from a book for anyone.

The term “answer” (ܠܗܘܢ) must refer to an oracle or *sors* being retrieved by a monk on behalf of a querent, but retrieved from where? The source book (ܠܗܘܢ) could be scripture, so that we are dealing here with *Sortes biblicae*, but it could also be some other kind of lot divination text. The canon prohibits some form of text-based sortilege, but we cannot know precisely what the practitioner monk was being forbidden from doing, nor whether their main clients would be other monks, clergy, or laypersons. Considering the *Admonitions'* restrictions against monks' engaging in secular affairs, including the “business of buying and selling” (ܠܗܘܢܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܘܢ ܠܗܘܢܘܢ; Canon 11), Canon 19 may be seen as an attempt to regulate the behavior of monks – including any lucrative extra-curricular activities – rather than an outright condemnation of sortilege.¹²⁷ Yet it definitely contributes to a picture of institutional ambivalence about the Christian use of divination texts.

On the other side of the Mediterranean, between 462 and 468, the metropolitan bishop Perpetuus of Tours convened a council in Brittany to consecrate the new bishop of Vannes. The last canon from the Council of Vannes declares, that “some clergy are devoted to auguries and, under the label of what pretends to be religion – what they call ‘saints lots’ (*sanctorum sortes*) – profess a knowledge of divination, or by looking into any kind of writings whatever predict future events,”¹²⁸ stipulating that any cleric involved in such activities – whether as practitioner or client – is to be expelled from the church. Once again, the prohibition does not target divination as such but seeks to regulate the clergy. It singles out one lot divination text in particular, the *Sortes Sanctorum*.¹²⁹ But it also targets clerics who would be “looking into any kind of writings

123 See the discussion of quasi-institutional ritual experts, in Frankfurter 1997, 167–73.

124 On these developments, see Klingshirn 2006, 137–61.

125 Frankfurter 1998, 195.

126 Text from Vööbus, 1960, 31; text of Canon 11 from p. 29. See literature in Kauffhold 2012, 248–49.

127 See Klingshirn 2002, 127.

128 Quod aliquanti clerici student auguriis et sub nomine confictae religionis quas sanctorum sortes uocant, diuinationis scientiam profitentur aut quarumcumque scripturarum inspectione futura promittunt (text and translation in Klingshirn 2002, 84–85).

129 Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum* has been the object of an incisive study by Klingshirn 2002, 77–130, who demonstrates that between the fifth and eleventh centuries the term *Sortes Sanctorum* denoted the title of a particular lot divination text and was not employed as a generic reference to any and all types of sortition, including the *Sortes biblicae*, as many scholars have presumed (see 2.3.5 above).

(*scripturae*) whatever.”¹³⁰ The latter restriction is vague but could be aimed at any manner of text-based divination. The *Sortes Sanctorum* that Vannes mentions (also sometimes known under the title, *Sortes Apostolorum*) fell under frequent censure. Rejecting traditions of its apostolic origins and offended by its vestigial “pagan” elements, the authorities repeatedly sought to prohibit its use and its users but their injunctions must have had only limited effect. Canons issued from councils at Agde (506), Orléans (511), and Auxerre (561/605) all ban the use of the text, extending the proscription of use to include the laity and monks. The *Sortes Sanctorum* continues to be targeted for attack in western sources, including a number of penitentials.¹³¹

Neither Orléans nor Auxerre mention the divinatory use of other writings, like we see in the canons from Vannes and Agde. Auxerre lists practitioners of sortilege (*sortilegi*) among those not to be regarded. By the eighth century, however, divination using the Bible falls under explicit condemnation, alongside recurring restrictions against the *Sortes Sanctorum*. The anonymous Latin “Sermon on Sacrilege” denounces the latter, going on to condemn *Sortes biblicae* as well: “whoever through the holy scriptures expects that God will do for him what those scriptures indicate... that man is not a Christian but a Pagan (*Sermo de sacrilegia* 8).¹³² Attempts to regulate *Sortes biblicae* recur in western medieval sources from the eighth century forward, sometimes along with routinely vague injunctions against the use of other writings for sortilege, revealing once again both the persistent popularity of these practices and the institutional ambivalence towards it.

In 789, Charlemagne issued the following proscription against text-based divination, in *Duplex Legationis Edictum* 20:

De tabulis vel codicibus requirendis, et ut nullus in psalterio vel in euangelio vel in aliis rebus sortire praesumat, nec divinationes aliquas observare.¹³³

Concerning inquiries by means of tables or books, and that no one should presume to cast lots in the Psalter or in the Gospel or in other things, or perform any divinations.

The precise nature of the restricted practices is unclear, but it would appear to entail *Sortes biblicae* along with other types of text-based divination. The edict highlights

the Gospels and Psalms, books that diviners were constantly using for sortilege. However, the mention of books (*codici*) and “other things” (*alii rei*) could have in view any number of specialized lot divination texts.

Composed nearly a century earlier, the very first canon in a list of rules attributed to Jacob of Edessa († 708) makes a similar proscription, this time aimed at ascetics in the Syriac-speaking East:

לך וגם לדתך לחטא פה דכך כן אהייליך: אה כן גסה:
אה כן חקקה ונחמני געלישך.¹³⁴

It is wrong for a monk to take an answer from a Gospel, or from David, or from the lots that are called, “of the Apostles.”

Once again, the canon regulates monastic behavior, not divination *per se*. But it prohibits monks from engaging in *Sortes biblicae*, possibly meant to include specialized sortilege books with the Gospels or Psalms (David) as well (see 2.3.6.2). The term חקקה (*pesē*) is related to פֵּשָׂא (*pešā*) and means “portions,” therefore also “lots” (see 7.1.1). Some particular text is meant; whether something related to the *Sortes Sanctorum* or another *Sortes Apostolorum* is unknown; other divination texts circulated under that name, including a version discussed more fully in Chapter Six (6.3.1).

A more detailed presentation of the problem occurs in a treatment of canonical issues structured as a series of questions and answers between Jacob of Edessa and the priest Addai. In question 34 Addai asks about sortilege:

אדאי: אה וגם למלתמ אה לדתך לחטא פה דכך: אה לעפא
אה לרע אטיב. אה כן סו ונחמני חקקה געלישך. אה כן
אהייליך. אה כן גסה. אה חקקה אה כן חטא אטיב.

חפ: לך וגם לך לחטא פה דכך חטא. לך כן חקקה
סו דלך אהמס, געלישך. אה ונחמני ונחמני, אה אהמס
כן אהייליך. אה כן גסה. אה כן חטא אטיב חקקה. סו
גם ונחמני סו. אה כן מלתמ אהמס, אה חקקה ונחמני
כן חקקה סו. אה כן גסה. אה כן גסה. אה כן גסה. אה
אטיב: אה כן גסה. אה כן גסה. אה כן גסה. אה כן גסה.
אטיב כן גסה. אה כן גסה. אה כן גסה. אה כן גסה.¹³⁵

Addai: Is it right for clerics or monks to take answers, either for themselves or for other people, from what is called, “Lot of the Apostles,” or from the Gospel, or from David, or from any other book?

Jacob: It is not right for a Christian to take answers at all – not from the Lot, which is not of the Apostles but of the Evil One and

¹³⁰ Klingshirn 2002, 85–86.

¹³¹ McNeill 1933, 454–56.

¹³² Et qui per scripturas sanctas Deum, quid ei facturus sit, expectatur, quid ipsas indicent scripturas... iste non christianus, sed paganus est (text from Klingshirn 2002, 105).

¹³³ Text from Boretius 1883, 64 (MGH, Capit. 2,1,64); translation from Klingshirn 2002, 110.

¹³⁴ Text from Vööbus 1960, 95. See literature on Jacob in Kaufhold 2012, 249–52.

¹³⁵ Text from Lamy 1859, 134 and Kayser 1886, 2; see also the French translation in Nau 1906, 53. See the discussion in Tannous 2018, 230–31.

his disciples, nor from the Gospel, nor from David, nor from any other book whatsoever. As for whoever does this, if he is one of the clerics and cannot be convinced to abstain from this filth, he should lose his status; if he is a monk, and learned, and also has some ordained rank, along with losing his status he should also be excluded from Communion for a designated time; likewise for a layperson.

The thirteenth-century Syrian Orthodox bishop Gregory Bar ‘Ebroyo (Barhebraeus) repeats essentially the same prohibition in his “Book of Directions” (*Nomocanon*).¹³⁶ Once again, the focus is on clerics and monks as practitioners of sortilege using books, either for each another or for laypersons, though the lay practitioner would appear to be included, practically as an after-thought. Those who refuse to abstain are to be deposed and disciplined. Guilty laypersons are excluded from the Eucharist for a time. And once again, the most prominent books being used would appear to be the Gospels, the Psalms (David), and the particularly pernicious, *Sortes Apostolorum*, though the prohibition includes the use of any other kinds of books for this purpose too. The tenth-century manuscript London, BL, Add. 14,493 adds a clause to the end of Addai’s question in order to make perfectly clear what the purpose of this “answer-taking” practice would be: “in order to know what will come to pass or chance to happen” (ܘܢܝܢܘܢ ܘܢܝܢܘܢ ܘܢܝܢܘܢ).¹³⁷

At around the same time, the ascetic mentor Anastasius of Sinai, who died probably shortly after 700, also addressed a question regarding the Christian practice of text-based sortilege. Question 57 goes, “Is it right for a Christian to open for sortilege?” (Πρέπει ἄρα τῷ Χριστιανῷ ἀνοίγειν ἐν λαχητηρίῳ; *Quaestiones et responsiones* 57).¹³⁸ “Opening” (ἀνοίγειν) here surely refers to opening a book, though the question does not specify whether the Bible or some other divination text is meant. As we have it in the compilation of Anastasius’ *Quaestiones et responsiones*, the question remains vague. The term λαχητηρίον (*lachmêtêrion*), translated here “sortilege,” refers to the practice of drawing lots, though it also came to be used in the title of a particular lot divination text, called “*Lachmeterion of the Holy Apostles*,” known from one medieval manuscript.¹³⁹ We see no reason to assume Anastasius has that book particularly in mind. His answer to the question about text-based divination is as follows:

¹³⁶ Text from Bedjan 1898, 101.

¹³⁷ The somewhat earlier manuscript, London, BL, Add. MS 14,631 omits the clause. A scribal editor presumably added it for the sake of clarity.

¹³⁸ Greek text in Richard/Munitiz 2006, 108.

¹³⁹ See Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 54.

Answer 1. We find no encouragement anywhere to do this, but the Fathers, to prevent the faithful going to sorcerers and soothsayers, thought up *lachmeterion*.

2. Therefore anyone who wishes to open (a book) should first supplicate God with prayer, and then, after the prayer, open (the book), asking God if He really orders one to open (the book) about the subject in question. Then if He persuades you, open, but if He dissuades you, do not open.¹⁴⁰

As Luijendijk observes, Anastasius appears uneasy about the practice.¹⁴¹ Although he does not forbid it, he sees it as an accommodation put forth by unnamed ecclesial authorities designed to divert the faithful from consulting outsiders, sorcerers and diviners. Again, he does not indicate what book is being opened, but he must surely mean the *Sortes biblicae* at least. The elliptical references to “opening,” without specifying an object, could mean that he has books of scripture in mind. But he may also have in view any of a wide variety of divinatory texts that were circulating in his day, christianized or otherwise. His principal concern is that Christians who practice text-based sortilege do so from within a Christian framework, by avoiding outsider specialists and by prayerfully submitting the entire procedure to God, while remaining open to the (preferable) stance of abandoning the practice altogether. He does not deny that the believer might gain knowledge through the process about whatever subject he or she presents (here again πράγμα [*prāgma*]). Although in Anastasius we perceive echoes of the hostility towards divination we find in authors like Augustine and Caesarius, his allowance for a christianized version of sortilege “shows that the patristic fight against divination was lost.”¹⁴² Commenting on the canonical proscriptions against divination we find in medieval middle eastern sources, Jack Tannous affirms, “the fact that some Christians, even among the clergy, did not view practicing a

¹⁴⁰ Translation adapted from Munitiz 2011, 171. The statement refers repeatedly to “opening,” without specifying the object. Where we have supplied, “book,” Munitiz supplies the more specific, “Bible,” but we find that rendering potentially misleading. The Greek text is edited in Richard/Munitiz 2006, 108–09:

Οὐδαμοῦ εὐρίσκομεν ἐπιτροπὴν τοῦτο ποιεῖν, ἀλλ’ οἱ πατέρες, διὰ τὸ μὴ πορευέσθαι τοὺς πιστοὺς εἰς φαρμακοὺς καὶ μάντας, ἐπενόησαν τὸ λαχητηρίον. 2. Ὁ γοῦν βουλόμενος ἀνοίξει, πρῶτον δι’ εὐχῆς παρακαλέσει τὸν Θεόν, καὶ μετὰ τὴν εὐχὴν ἀνοίξει, ἐρωτῶν τὸν Θεόν, εἰ ἄρα κελεύει αὐτῷ ἀνοίξει περὶ τοῦ πράγματος αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ἐὰν ἐπιτρέψῃ σοι, ἀνοιξον· εἰ δὲ ἀποτρέψῃ σε, μὴ ἀνοίξης.

¹⁴¹ Luijendijk 2014, 87.

¹⁴² Luijendijk 2014, 88.

wide variety of forms of divination as incompatible with Christianity.”¹⁴³

2.5 Contested Practice, Marginal Books

Our survey in this chapter has been all too short to do justice to the variety of evidence we find for divination in Christian Late Antiquity and to the recently expanding scholarship devoted to the subject. The evidence we have considered here consists of different genres of material coming from many different contexts stretching across the centuries and various literary traditions – including late antique, medieval, and Byzantine; Greek, Coptic, Latin, and Syriac; homiletic, hagiographical, canon law, and of course, the lot divination texts themselves. The diversity of materials and the range of contexts should caution us against over-generalizing in our interpretation of the evidence or forcing it all to fit into a single line of development. Yet our evidence makes it clear that a remarkably varied assortment of divination practices and tools were adapted for Christian use in Late Antiquity, finding widespread popularity in many different Christian contexts from that time forward. In particular, the surviving evidence for lot divination texts and the persistent practice of *Sortes biblicae* show the great appeal that text-based divination had for many Christians. Clerics, monks, and laity all appear to be implicated in their use.

It is also clear that these practices and their tools were not uniformly approved. Ecclesial authors repeatedly criticize the practices, attempting to restrict and regulate them. Although recent scholarship shows that ecclesiastical authorities were not as quick to condemn the divinatory consultation of the Bible as scholars once presumed (e.g. Klingshirn), repeated proscriptions against various kinds of mantic practices using scripture and other texts suggest both the popularity of these things and their problematic nature.

Although in many instances we do not know precisely what drives these prohibitions, we have observed several factors, any of which may be more or less operative, depending on situations. These include: 1) the concern to avoid practices with ties to paganism, 2) the desire to focus the Christian imagination on more spiritual matters, especially when it came to the use of scripture, and 3) the impulse to regulate the activities of clergy and monks,

particularly activities that were seen as more worldly and perhaps even lucrative.

But alongside these factors we also detect, 4) the concern to guard against outside threats to ecclesial authority. Divination claims access to extraordinary knowledge, the power of which ostensibly grants authority to those who practice text-based divination and to the books they use. Religious experts operating outside the bounds of the ecclesial establishment threaten the authority of those within it.¹⁴⁴ This is true even for Christian experts utilizing Christian materials, if the person is not sanctioned by or subject to the church. “Divination is thus contested because it is believed or perceived to give access to divine knowledge and thereby to authority in one’s community.”¹⁴⁵ Most of the various attempts to restrict or regulate text-based divination that we have considered manifest this concern to some extent, either placing the practices, tools, and practitioners outside the boundaries of orthopraxy, or seeking to circumscribe a tightly controlled space for qualified versions of the practices within those boundaries.

When considering the practice of sortilege in Christian contexts, one of the most significant early sources occurs in a body of material yet to be considered. Our overview of the Christian adaptation of lot divination, its tools and techniques, along with varied attitudes towards its use, has not yet taken into account the kind of book Gewargis copied, that we described briefly in the previous chapter: the Divining Gospel. The Divining Gospel combined the qualities of a Gospel codex, with its aura of divine authority, and a lot divination text. Its designers and users exploited what had become a rather lively fortune-telling industry using biblical manuscripts, to which the Divining Gospel makes a marked contribution. These are the original divinatory *hermēneiai* that the *Rhiktologia* and Psalms *hermēneiai* later imitate, offering oracular responses styled as interpretations of scripture. Along with other lot divination texts, the Divining Gospel was created in Late Antiquity, borrowing content and strategies from the “neutral technology” of the lot divination traditions that were being reworked, especially in Egypt, for use by emerging groups of Christian practitioners and clients. The survey in this chapter supplies background that will be crucial for understanding many details of this tool’s format, terminology, and mechanism of use, to be considered in the chapters to follow.

¹⁴³ Tannous 2018, 229.

¹⁴⁴ See Sanzo 2017, 227–46.

¹⁴⁵ Luijendijk 2014, 80.

Like other lot divination texts, the Divining Gospels circulated widely in different languages and in multiple Christian communities, as we shall see. However, also like the others, the scarce and often fragmentary state of the surviving manuscripts shows that these books were eventually pushed into the margins of community practice as forbidden oracles. The portrait of development,

use, and mixed reception we have attempted to draw in this chapter will help explain not only the great popularity and remarkable circulation of the Divining Gospel but also its eventual demise. In the remainder of our study, we will focus our attention on the *hermêneiai* manuscripts of the Divining Gospels, eventually tightening our consideration to one Syriac book in particular.

3 Divining Gospels: A Suppressed and Neglected Genre

3.1 Using the Christian Gospels for Divination

In the year 624, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius was conducting a counter-offensive against the Persian army led by Khusro. After suffering years of devastating loss due to the relentless advance of the Shah's armies, Heraclius finally had Khusro on the run, plundering towns and torching fire temples as he chased him deeper into Persian territory. Still Khusro eluded direct confrontation. As winter began to set in, Heraclius' advisors debated whether the army ought to continue the pursuit or turn and winter in Albania instead. In order to resolve the debate, Heraclius availed himself of a problem-solving strategy common in his day: divination. The chronicler Theophanes Confessor reports: "The emperor commanded that the army purify itself for three days. Then, upon opening the divine Gospels (ἀνοίξας τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγέλια), he found a passage instructing him to winter in Albania. So at once he turned and hurried to Albania."¹

Unfortunately, Theophanes provides us with no further details. What Gospel text would have sent Heraclius to Albania? Did he merely open the codex randomly to a passage and somehow divine from it a clear course of action (*Sortes biblicae*) – or did he use more elaborate techniques and esoteric mechanisms by which to determine a course of action on the basis of the passage he read? Was it a plain Gospel codex or a book especially designed for the purpose of divination? Who else was involved in the process – members of the clergy, for instance? Did Heraclius' religious advisors help him interpret the scripture in this way? As we have already seen, a variety of divinatory tools and techniques could have been available to Heraclius, there being a long tradition of sortilege on which to draw, even within a Christian framework. Theophanes is very helpful on many details of Heraclius' campaign, but rather vague about the emperor's practice of divination, leaving us with many unanswered questions.

In the previous chapter we saw that some ecclesiastic authorities expressed considerable ambivalence about the use of scripture in divination. Yet tales exposing such practices as fairly normal are recounted through the centu-

ries and the pervasiveness of divination artifacts involving scripture, such as the Divining Gospels described in this chapter, manifest a widespread popular ambivalence – or outright rejection – of the ecclesial proscriptions themselves. Probably the most common way of practicing *Sortes biblicae* involves turning to a passage of scripture at random in order to find guidance in the words on which one happens to land. This method is at least compatible with Theophanes' bare description of Heraclius. As we have seen, such notable figures as Antony of Egypt and Augustine of Hippo famously receive clarity about their respective vocations in such a way. This method of *Sortes biblicae* has never ceased being a popular way of receiving supernatural guidance from scripture.

Yet other methods of using scripture for divination were also available. More specialized oracular devices using the biblical text existed to aid the use of scripture in sortilege. The surviving evidence of its early forms is scarce and fragmentary. For reasons we discussed in Chapter One, books containing the Gospel of John were especially popular for "esoteric" purposes, including their use as Divining Gospels (see 1.5). In these books an apparatus for sortilege accompanies the Gospel text.

Many of the surviving relics of this phenomenon have a particular layout: after citing a selected portion of John's Gospel and allowing blank space on the page, the manuscript gives a *sors*, or oracular statement, preceded by the title ἑρμηνεία (*hermêneia*; i.e. "interpretation, commentary, translation"). Scholars have come to call these artifacts *hermêneia* manuscripts² due to the frequent and technical use of the term *hermêneia* or its corresponding translations (e.g. ܩܘܪܒܐ, *puššāqā*, in Syriac). Although usage varies, the term *hermêneia* most often occurs as the heading for each entry in the divinatory apparatus. This late antique usage of the term is taken up and developed later, as we see in the Byzantine *Rhiktologia* and the Psalms *hermêneiai* (see 2.3.6).

We designate these artifacts "Divining Gospels:" copies of John's Gospel that include a specific traditional collection of oracular statements that are each tied to selected portions of the Gospel text, constituting a volume designed for use in sortilege. Many of the earliest examples are frag-

¹ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, A.M. 6114 (de Boor 1883, 308,14–17); the episode is also cited in Greatrex/Lieu 2002, 200.

² See Casson/Hettich 1950, 2.79–81; Roca-Puig 1966, 229; Metzger 1988b, 162; Metzger/Ehrman 2005, 297–98.

mentary. Portions of Divining Gospels exist in the major languages of the ancient Christian world – Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Latin, and Armenian. They display considerable variety in content and placement of their *sortes*, making it clear that the processes of translation and transmission produced significant variation in the materials. However, they exhibit such commonality, even across different languages and geographical contexts, down through the centuries, that they clearly belong to the same tradition.

The Psalms were widely used for divination and Psalters attracted their own sets of *sortes*, typically one per Psalm, that are also called *hermêneiai*.³ It is certainly the case that other Gospel texts were combined with divinatory material in order to form specialized sortilege books, such as the Byzantine *Rhiktologion* with its divinatory *hermêneiai* (see 2.3.6 above).⁴ The tone and contents of these other tools are similar to those we find in the Divining Gospels. Yet this is also the case with a variety of *sortes*, such as those we find in the *Astrampsychi* collection, since the oracular statements are responding to similar questions in conventional ways. Various oracular materials share many features. However, the material in the Divining Gospels are distinct in that they are integral to codices of John's Gospel in particular, and also because their *sortes* share a substantial amount of the same verbal content, sequence, and positioning. In the Divining Gospels we are dealing with a relatively well-defined and coherent tradition.

The characterization of the *hermêneiai* in the Divining Gospels as essentially divinatory has not been a unanimous one, prompting us to survey the modern scholarship on these materials. Though most scholars have understood them to be divinatory in function, some recent discussions propose that the *hermêneiai* are to be seen as primarily exegetical or even liturgical. The evidence considered here and in the next two chapters will confirm the long-standing view that their main function was divinatory, validating our use of the terms sortilege, oracles, and *sortes* when discussing these materials. We will examine the known evidence for the Divining Gospels, classifying the manuscripts according to their page layouts and whether the sortilege material is original or secondary to the execution of the manuscript. Some books were intended to be divinatory tools from the beginning, whereas others acquired their divinatory materials as a body of annotations, though seemingly modeled on the former. The following survey of manuscripts will show

the dissemination of the oracular system. Finally, a comparison of *sortes* across the evidence will show the inter-related nature of the materials in most of the manuscripts.

Although this study is concerned primarily with the Syriac version, situating the lone surviving Syriac manuscript within the larger Divining Gospel tradition will inform our knowledge of the Syriac version even as the Syriac contributes to a better understanding of the other versions and manuscripts.

The Divining Gospels have not been extensively studied as such, their relative neglect being due probably to several factors. First, the surviving evidence is meager and fragmentary. Second, where the biblical *hermêneia* manuscripts have attracted attention, it has often been their qualities as New Testament witnesses that have interested scholars.⁵ Finally, the materials are mysterious in many ways and not easy to interpret. The last factor helps to account not only for the scholarly neglect of these books but also for the range of views regarding their nature and the function of their material, a subject to which we now turn.

3.2 “Silly Apophthegms:” *Hermêneiai* and the Divining Gospel in Modern Scholarship

In his 1864 edition and study of the famed Gospel-Acts manuscript Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (Manuscript 15 below), Frederick H.A. Scrivener took note of what he described as “the scrawl” in the margins of the manuscript in certain places, including those attached to the Gospel of Mark. Bezae had included seventy-one of these statements, with two missing due to a damaged folio, leaving sixty-nine. Unimpressed by these particular annotations to the Gospel, he described them as “moral apophthegms, some of them silly enough.”⁶ Apparently he interpreted statements such as ἐρμίνηα + ἀπο λυπίσ ησ χαρὰν⁷ (“*herminêa* + from grief to joy;” fol. 292v) and ἐρμίνια + εὐανπίστευσης χαρὰ σὺ εἰσθῶ (“*herminia* + if you believe there will be joy for you;” fol. 308v), with their cross-shaped symbols attached, to be rather incoherent exhortations, warnings, or moral injunctions, appended to the Gospel pages in a fairly crude hand. In other words, although his estimation of the quality of the handwriting and orthography was fair, he did not really understand the nature

³ See Outtier 1993, 181–84; Outtier 1996, 77–78; Parpulov 2010, 88; Parpulov 2014, 56, 310–315; Canart 2011, 3–15.

⁴ Drexler 1941, 311–18; Canart/Pintaudi 1984, 85–90; Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 46–47.

⁵ E.g. Metzger 1988b, 162–69; Parker 2006, 48–68.

⁶ Scrivener 1864, xxvii; edition of the Greek *sortes* in 451–452.

⁷ The *sortes* in Codex Bezae exhibit much orthographical variation.

or purpose of the statements. Scrivener’s study focused on the manuscript’s biblical text and with respect to the cryptic statements he did not go much beyond editing them, noting their strangeness, and designating the hand of their origin as “M₃.”

During the middle part of the nineteenth century the British Library came into possession of a great many Syriac manuscripts from Deir al-Surian, the Syrian Monastery in the Wadi al-Natrun region of Egypt northwest of Cairo. William Wright catalogued the extensive London collection, including an unusual copy of the Syriac Peshitta version of John’s Gospel (London, BL, Add. 17,119), copied in the sixth or seventh century near Damascus – i.e. Manuscript 13 below, and the main subject of the present volume. Wright published the subscription of the codex in 1870, including its reference to John Chrysostom (fol. 82v); he notes that the manuscript incorporates “308 [ⲛⲟⲩ] rubrics in the volume, referring, as it would seem from the above subscription, to the homilies of John Chrysostom on this Gospel.”⁸ Wright quotes a few of the statements without further comment, apparently satisfied to have identified them, at least tentatively, as having something to do with Chrysostom’s *Homiliae in Ioannem*.⁹ As we shall see in Chapter Four, the subscription’s reference to Chrysostom turns out to be a red herring, so far as understanding the *sortes* goes. Yet Wright’s erroneous suggestion may help account for the fact that scholars give no further notice to the Syriac rubrics in this manuscript. When Philip E. Pusey and George H. Gwilliam collated the manuscript for the 1901 edition of the Peshitta Gospels, no mention was made of the rubrics,¹⁰ nor do we find any published indication in the intervening years that the *sortes* occurring in London, BL, Add. 17,119 attract any attention, prior to the present author’s investigations.

In his review of John Wordsworth’s 1883 edition of the Latin text of the Gospel of Matthew in the remarkable Latin Bible from St-Germain-de-Prés, manuscript Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 (Manuscript 14 below), M. Samuel Berger reacted to Wordsworth’s discussion of the monogrammed scribal signature at the end of John’s Gospel.¹¹ Berger compares the scribe of the signature with the scribe who had loaded the margins of that particular Gospel with peculiar notes. Wordsworth did not attend to the annotations in question, as they pertained to the Gospel of John in the manuscript, but Berger gives a short description, pointing out that John had been divided into 316 sections, of which 185 were accompanied by “brief maxims, having no rela-

tion to the Gospel text, written in a barbarous Latin....” He provides a few examples by way of illustration, insisting, “it is not possible to see in these singular notes anything other than formulae of good fortune, of the sort that have been called *sortes sanctorum*.”¹² To Berger it was obvious that the annotations in the margins of John’s Gospel in this manuscript, albeit composed in “barbarous Latin,” were meant to serve a divinatory purpose, akin to the manner of sortilege defined by Du Cange in his *Glossarium* as “*Evangelii aut cujuslibet libri sacri inspectio, ῥαψωδομαντείας species*” (“looking into a Gospel or any sacred book whatever, a type of *rhapsodomancy*”).¹³ In this, Berger follows the convention of identifying nearly any use of a Christian lot divination text as belonging to the “*sortes sanctorum*.” He also emphasizes that they lack any substantial relationship with the Gospel text.

J. Rendell Harris does little to disguise his disappointment with certain aspects of Wordsworth’s edition in his own review.¹⁴ Among these are Wordsworth’s incomplete presentation of the manuscript’s special features. “The time will come,” Harris predicts, “when all editors will feel the fitness of presenting a codex, as far as possible, in the shape in which they find it.”¹⁵ Harris understood the value of attending to a manuscript as an artifact whose very materiality bears witness to crucial features of its history and use. He did not subscribe to the seemingly default perspective that manuscripts were to be treated solely as vehicles of (biblical) text waiting to be extracted and reinstalled into modern editions. “Ninth century glosses... are sometimes worth reading,” he insists, lamenting the fact that more attention had not been paid to the manuscript’s many annotations.

It is to the annotations that Harris turns in his own study, published a few years later in 1888, in which he attends to “one or two trifling points in connection with the St. Germain MS,” including the *sortes* that Berger had described.¹⁶ Harris further correlates many of the 185 Latin statements in the margins of Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 with the aforementioned sixty-nine Greek statements in Codex Bezae, showing that they are closely related in content and sequence, with the Greek set being less full and more corrupt. As for the nature of the statements, Harris con-

⁸ Wright 1870, 1,72.

⁹ See discussion in Childers 2013a, 327–32.

¹⁰ Pusey/Gwilliam 1901, ix.

¹¹ Wordsworth 1883, xiii.

¹² Berger 1884, 364: “courtes devises, sans aucune relation avec le texte de l’Évangile, écrites en un latin barbare Il n’est pas possible de voir dans ces singulières notes autre chose que des formules de bonne aventure, de celles que l’on a appelées *sortes sanctorum*.”

¹³ Charles du Fresne, sieur du Cange 1678, 3,904.

¹⁴ Harris 1884, 93–96.

¹⁵ Harris 1884, 94.

¹⁶ Harris 1888, 59.

cludes, “(t)here is not the slightest doubt that M. Berger’s explanation of these marginal sentences (which had been copied for Dr. Wordsworth by Mr. G. L. Youngman, but not understood by him) is correct. The book has been used for purposes of divination....”¹⁷ Harris expanded on this in his intensive study of the annotations in Codex Bezae, publishing and analyzing both sets of *sortes* as instances of what at the time were being called *Sortes Sanctorum*.¹⁸ He concluded that both sets derive from a previous system, whose archetype had been written into the margin of a copy of John’s Gospel, and that Bezae’s Greek *sortes* were probably translated from Latin, perhaps to cloak their possibly dubious nature in a predominantly Latin context. However, he allows that the Latin archetype of both may go back ultimately to a Greek original, given the widespread occurrence of Greek *sortes* in the ancient world.¹⁹ Harris’ comparison of the *sortes* in these manuscripts with the system of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* and that of a palimpsest from St. Gall (the so-called *Sortes Sangallenses*) strengthen his characterization of the material in the biblical manuscripts as divinatory in nature.

Archaeological work in Egypt triggered an avalanche of manuscript discoveries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sites such as the rubbish mounds of the ancient city of Oxyrhynchus yielded massive amounts of papyrus and parchment fragments that have helped redefine our understanding of late antique culture. Whereas so much of the modern reading of ancient and late antique Christianity had previously been based on the carefully curated literary preserves of great monastic libraries, discoveries in the Egyptian desert afforded scholars a different vantage point from which to view historic Christian belief and practice. Alongside literary artifacts were the many documentary remains, testifying to a world occupied largely by non-elites, whose concerns could be rather different than those of the venerated authors and ecclesial authorities whose great works had defined the canon of received Christian thought. The new discoveries greatly enriched our understanding of the breadth and variety of popular religious belief and practice in late antiquity.

Among the many discoveries was a host of Christian biblical manuscripts, often very fragmentary but also very old. The papyri in particular quickly garnered attention as possibly unsurpassed witnesses to early forms of the biblical text, though the circumstances of their deposition –

often as discarded copies in garbage heaps – and their diverse and irregular texts incited debate about their value as witnesses to scripture.²⁰ In addition to textual content, their formal aspects and scribal qualities prompted scholars to conceive of the world of ancient Christian literature more broadly than before, especially in areas of popular religious practice.²¹

The new discoveries included a small group of manuscript fragments, often unprovenanced but mostly Egyptian, containing discreet portions of John’s Gospel with special annotations accompanied by the title ἐρμηνεία (*hermêneia*). Unsurprisingly, some scholars, such as Peter Sanz (1946), presumed the annotations should be seen as hermeneutical glosses on the biblical text, perhaps drawn from patristic commentary or a cycle of exegetical homilies, unknowingly echoing Wright’s conclusions regarding the statements in the Syriac London, BL, Add. 17,119; the term *hermêneia* (“interpretation”) naturally suggests this line of thought.²²

In 1950 Lionel Casson and Ernest L. Hettich published Greek *hermêneia* fragments found at Nessana in southern Palestine, fragments that are among the very few early *hermêneia* found outside Egypt. The editors take note of the fact that the occurrence of the ἐρμηνεία-statements seems to dictate the amount of text on a page and page layout, but do not offer views as to the purpose of the material.²³ In 1953 Otto Stegmüller published two of the fragments preserved in Berlin (Manuscripts 1 and 9 below), showing that their statements were connected to the ones Harris had identified in Codex Bezae, and Paris, BnF, lat. 11553.²⁴ Stegmüller rejects the reading of the *hermêneiai* as interpretive glosses, recognizing them as “Bible oracles,” part of the system of divination Harris had located in medieval Gaul that could now be traced back to sixth- and seventh-century Egypt. In particular, by comparing the statements’ content and sequence, Stegmüller reinforces the understanding of these materials as part of an early oracular system on which they all draw.

Herbert Hunger published in 1959 a similar papyrus fragment housed in Vienna (Manuscript 4 below), claiming that its *hermêneiai* made no sense as biblical commentary but functioned instead as oracular responses, agreeing with Stegmüller that the statements were divinatory in nature.²⁵ Ramón Roca-Puig published P.Montserrat Roca 83 in 1966

¹⁷ Harris 1888, 59–60; see also Poulin 1979, 133–34, who reiterates the views of Berger and Harris, classifying the material in a general way as *Sortes Sanctorum*.

¹⁸ Harris 1901, 45–74.

¹⁹ Harris 1901, 70, 73–74.

²⁰ Aland/Aland 1995, 95; Epp 2013, 1–39.

²¹ See Hurtado 2006, 1–14; and the illustrative translation collection with commentary in Luijendijk 2008.

²² See Sanz 1946, 59; Aland/Aland 1995, 85.

²³ Casson/Hettich 1950, 2,79–111.

²⁴ Stegmüller 1953, 13–22.

²⁵ Hunger 1959, 8–11; Hunger 1970, 71.

(Manuscript 3 below), classifying it as a *hermêneia* manuscript but also pointing out that the poor state of preservation of this and similar fragments makes it impossible to do more than speculate as to their original contents and functions.²⁶ Hans Quecke added to the repertoire in 1974, publishing an article in which he described seven *hermêneia* fragments, five papyrus and two parchment, including those of Stegmüller (Manuscripts 1, 3, 7–10, and 18 below).²⁷ He supplemented his list in 1977, adding Hunger’s papyrus fragment from Vienna to his analysis. Kurt Treu published a Greco-Coptic fragment from Berlin in 1991, calling it a *Bibelorakel*.²⁸ By this point, the established scholarly opinion was that the *hermêneiai* are indeed oracular, not exegetical – and that they bear no substantial connection to the content of John’s Gospel, despite the fact that they always reside in codices of John (Codex Bezae excepted). Joseph van Haelst’s *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* (1976) listed the manuscripts as “*oracles bibliques*.”²⁹

When the International Greek New Testament Project³⁰ turned its energies to the production of a critical edition of the Gospel of John, it was inevitable that the *hermêneiai* manuscripts should attract attention as early witnesses to the Gospel. Bruce M. Metzger analyzed five of the fragments in 1988, maintaining that while most seem to be of the opinion that the *hermêneiai* were “a kind of rudimentary commentary on the sacred text,” he argues, “such apparatus provides the means of telling fortunes.”³¹ Following Stegmüller and Harris, Metzger describes the interrelationships between the known materials, dismissing any reading of the *hermêneiai* as exegetical comments on John, and pointing out functional parallels in other Books of Fate, such as *Sortes Astrampsychi*, *Sortes Sangallenses*, and the Byzantine *Rhiktologion*. David C. Parker studied eight of the *hermêneiai* manuscripts in 2006 for the purpose of showing that they are worthy witnesses to the Greek text of John and valuable for textual criticism.³² Brice C. Jones echoes Parker’s views, inviting New Testament textual scholars to give greater attention to manuscripts having non-continuous portions of biblical text, proposing that the occurrence of the term “*hermeneia*” in a manuscript be used as one criterion for identifying non-continuous New Testament witnesses.³³

At conferences that took place in 1990 and 1994, Bernard Outtier reported the existence of Caucasian materials that were part of the same system Harris and Stegmüller had identified – namely, two Armenian manuscripts with statements parallel in content and placement to those that had already been studied in Greek, Latin, and Coptic sources (Manuscripts 11 and 12 below).³⁴ Outtier also draws attention to a parallel phenomenon in Greek, Slavonic, Armenian, and Georgian Psalters, in which a divinatory statement accompanies each Psalm (see 2.3.6.2 above). Outtier insists that the *hermêneiai* in manuscripts of John, “are in no way biblical commentaries, but rather oracular responses.”³⁵ Although the Syriac London, BL, Add. 17,119 yet remained unidentified as a Divining Gospel, Outtier’s work showed that the *hermêneiai* were much more widespread and impactful across multiple Christian traditions than was previously imagined.

Stanley E. Porter’s extensive work with biblical papyri led him to write articles in 2006–07 challenging the *status quo* in New Testament textual criticism by which non-continuous text manuscripts are routinely dismissed from consideration in the face of privileged categories of evidence. In this plea for a more expansive appreciation of evidence he is not alone.³⁶ Porter demonstrates the value of non-continuous text manuscripts for clarifying the history of the New Testament text, including lectionaries, amulets, and *hermêneia* manuscripts.³⁷ His analyses of these “under-privileged” manuscripts lead him to consider the functions of such materials as the *hermêneiai* within their original contexts of use. Focusing especially on the early fragments, Porter rejects the common opinion that the *hermêneiai* were originally divinatory, tentatively arguing for something of a return to an earlier view of them as essentially exegetical.³⁸ In the face of the striking arbitrariness one meets in the *hermêneiai* of Codex Bezae (Manuscript 15 below), Porter acknowledges that the statements may have been debased to a merely oracular function in that manuscript, but claims that in the earlier *hermêneia* fragments we have a sort of running commentary on the biblical text. He notes further that the Latin *hermêneiai* are secondary additions to the margins of Paris, BnF, lat. 11553, so that we might expect a degree of corruption to have confused their placement in relation to the text of John, confusion that undoubtedly contributed

²⁶ Roca-Puig 1966, 229–31.

²⁷ Quecke 1974, 407–14; Quecke 1977, 179–81.

²⁸ Treu 1991, 55–60.

²⁹ van Haelst 1976, 157–63, 167, 344–45, 354–55.

³⁰ See description of the project: <http://www.igntp.org> (accessed 7 June 2019).

³¹ Metzger 1988b, 162.

³² Parker 2006, 48–68.

³³ Jones 2016, 34–37.

³⁴ Outtier 1996, 74–78; Outtier 1993, 181–84.

³⁵ Outtier 1993, 181: “malgré ce titre, ne sont aucunement des commentaires bibliques, mais bien des réponses oraculaires.”

³⁶ For instance, see Parker 2006, 48–68.

³⁷ Porter 2006, 322–25.

³⁸ Porter 2007, 578–79.

to the impression that the comments have nothing to do with the biblical text and should therefore be considered oracular. Drawing attention to certain resonances between the *hermêneia* material in some of the earlier fragments and the contents of John's Gospel, Porter maintains that the statements are integral, for "it is easy to see a conceptual, if not a verbal link, between the biblical passage and the ἐρμηνεία statement," due to what he describes as their "Johannine flavour" – for instance, their shared language of "faith/belief".³⁹

Curiously, though Porter prefers to see the *hermêneiai* as exemplifying the early Christian community's "theologically reflective and interpretive" capacities rather than anything to do with divinatory practices (except in Codex Bezae's corrupt form),⁴⁰ he seems unwilling to abandon the oracular characterization entirely. He acknowledges that the statements, though originally intended to summarize the sense of their associated passages, have an unusual stylistic quality, proposing that the "miraculous elements" in John may have inspired the author of the statements to use "oracular biblical language" in the exegetical summaries. "In other words," he concludes, "the statements are neither strictly commentary nor simply unattached oracular pronouncements, but biblically motivated and connected reflections on the biblical text."⁴¹ By this summation Porter clearly wants us to appreciate the conceptual connections he discerns between the *hermêneiai* and the contents of John's Gospel, in contrast to many scholars, including Berger, Harris, Stegmüller, Quecke, and Metzger. However, he agrees that the *hermêneiai* may owe something, at least stylistically, to the special aura of mystery early Christians perceived in John's Gospel. Furthermore, despite his protestations against prevailing views, he apparently cannot bring himself fully to dismiss the possibility that the *hermêneiai* serve an oracular function, although he denies it is their only function or that their divinatory purpose operates in isolation from the biblical text.

At a conference in 2003 Erich Renhart provided a much fuller description of the Armenian palimpsest of John's Gospel with *hermêneiai* to which Outtier had called attention (Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2; Manuscript 11 below), though the resulting article was not published until 2009.⁴² Renhart followed this in 2015 with a book-length study of the Graz manuscript and edition of its *hermêneiai*. Alongside superb codicological and paleo-

graphical studies and a reconstruction of the palimpsest, Renhart employs ultraviolet photography in order to edit the *hermêneiai* in the lower writing of the palimpsest.⁴³ The manuscript divides the text of John into 318 sections, each of which presumably had a statement attached; 279 of these are at least partly legible now, of which 229 are basically intact. Renhart is satisfied that the statements are oracular in function though his discussion of their original use is brief; he calls the statements *Los-Sprüche*. His comparison with another defective Armenian manuscript of John (Erevan, Matenadaran, 9650; Manuscript 12 below) shows that the two have many of the same *hermêneiai*, even sharing identical locations and sequence.⁴⁴

In 2014 Wally Cirafesi advanced a new proposal, one that, like Porter, focuses mainly on the early papyrus fragments. Struck by the bilingual nature of some of the sources, Cirafesi suggests that the term ἐρμηνεία in these sources should be taken to indicate "translation" rather than "interpretation."⁴⁵ He rejects seeing the *hermêneiai* as biblical commentary or oracular statements, proposing that they are tools to facilitate the liturgical use of scripture. His view seems to have been prompted especially by the observation that some of the fragments include Coptic versions of their Greek statements; even the Greek sources betray evidence of Egyptian influence, especially paleographically and in their ornamentation. He goes so far as to claim that "all of the manuscripts in which the ἐρμηνείαι occur are either bilingual or evince the influence of a bilingual context,"⁴⁶ by which he means the contexts of Greco-Coptic Egypt from which the Johannine papyri derive and the Greco-Latin social setting/s out of which Codex Bezae and Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 derive. In a bilingual context one may assume that worshippers would find translations of liturgical material into Greek, Coptic, or Latin beneficial. However, Cirafesi offers very little evidence to support the reading of specific *hermêneiai* in the papyri as liturgical in content or function (see 6.1.3 below).

Like Porter, Cirafesi does not fully answer the way that the longer and occasionally more intact sets of *hermêneiai* in Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 and Codex Bezae problematize his proposal for their function. Qualifying the *hermêneiai* in the latter codices as "clearly later additions to the manuscripts," he excuses these sets as applications of a different sort than we encounter in the early sources, so that they are not particularly helpful for understanding

³⁹ Porter 2007, 575–77, 579.

⁴⁰ Porter 2013, 63–64.

⁴¹ Porter 2007, 579.

⁴² Renhart 2009, 215–32.

⁴³ Renhart 2015, 119–34.

⁴⁴ Renhart 2015, 143–49.

⁴⁵ Cirafesi 2014, 45–48.

⁴⁶ Cirafesi 2014, 46.

the original purpose of the *hermêneiai*.⁴⁷ The study does not engage the Armenian materials or divinatory Psalters⁴⁸ and is ignorant of the Syriac version. Although the bilingual aspects of some of the early manuscripts beg further explanation, we do not find a liturgical reading of the *hermêneiai* to be helpful in illuminating their function.⁴⁹

Despite the problems with Cirafesi's largely speculative proposal, his insistence, resonant with that of Porter, that the *hermêneiai* are not arbitrary but connect to the contents of John's Gospel, represents a key insight. Kevin Wilkinson reinforces this view, developing it more fully. Wilkinson does not incorporate the Armenian and Syriac evidence in his 2019 article, but he reads the Greek, Coptic, and Latin evidence very closely. In particular, he treats the *hermêneiai* of Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 and Codex Bezae with greater care than we see in either Porter or Cirafesi. He finds the latter scholars' denial of any divinatory purpose for these materials to be curious: "(t)hat the *hermêneiai* are oracles is self-evident," he remarks.⁵⁰ The books containing these materials were designed with sortilege in mind, i.e. they are aids to bibliomancy. But is it true that no substantive connection exists between the *hermêneiai* and the associated passages of John's Gospel, as most prior studies had presumed? Comparing the extant *hermêneiai* with their biblical passages, Wilkinson demonstrates that strong thematic and terminological connections tie the two together, in at least many instances, although one must acknowledge sporadic dislocations. The later evidence, especially in Paris, BnF, lat. 11553, shows further corruption in oracle placement but to a large extent exhibits a pattern of intentionality, thereby supporting Wilkinson's thesis.⁵¹

In a series of articles triggered by the identification of the Syriac version in London, BL, Add. 17,119,⁵² Childers shows the interrelationship between the Syriac and other versions, arguing for the essentially oracular nature of the *hermêneiai*. Like Wilkinson, Childers sees the *sortes*

as integrally tied to the verbal contents of John's Gospel.⁵³ Yet in addition to the verbal and conceptual connections, he argues that we must recognize also the material significance of the *sortes*' location in a sacred codex of John. Both Gospel as content and Gospel as physical book help determine the significance of the *hermêneiai* for those who designed and used the Divining Gospels.⁵⁴

The foregoing survey of modern scholarship on the Divining Gospels prepares us to do something scholars have yet to do – to consider in detail the full range of the known artifacts themselves.

3.3 Erased and Broken: The Fragmentary Evidence for Ancient Divining Gospels

In what follows,⁵⁵ every known instance of the Divining Gospels will be classified according to their basic codicological features, dates, language/s, the manner by which the divinatory material is connected to the Gospel text (e.g. original or secondary), and the formal structure of the materials, i.e. their arrangement on the page. Although the verbal contents of the manuscripts' texts is indispensable to our understanding of these books and their interconnections, formal features such as page layout can supply us with important clues about how these books were conceived of and used.

One of the most noticeable aspects of this tradition is its fragmentary nature. The majority of manuscripts survive as scraps, with barely a few lines of intact text. One Damascus fragment is lost and we rely on a surviving photograph of a solitary leaf and Hermann Freiherr von Soden's description to guide us. In some instances, the fragments are so damaged or otherwise incomplete that we cannot be certain they came from Divining Gospels, though their characteristics lend support to that speculation. By contrast, the early Syriac manuscript London, BL, Add. 17,119 preserves the largest surviving number of *hermêneiai*. One remarkable source has *hermêneiai* without accompanying Gospel text – possibly not a Divining Gospel as such, but it provides a very useful and suggestive comparison to the others. Together these artifacts preserve elements so closely related that most of them

⁴⁷ Cirafesi 2014, 63–66.

⁴⁸ Cirafesi (2014, 61–63) has been influenced by Crum, who connects the ἐπισημεία in a Sahidic papyrus from Antinoe (Manuscript 6 below) with scriptural anaphora, particularly those using the Psalms (Crum 1904, 175–76); see 6.1.3 below.

⁴⁹ Childers 2018, 68.

⁵⁰ Wilkinson 2019, 106, n.12.

⁵¹ Wilkinson 2019, 107–18.

⁵² The Syriac manuscript was the subject of a presentation in the Program Unit "Religious World of Late Antiquity: *The Materiality of Texts/the Word as Object*" at the annual conference of the Society of Biblical Literature, Chicago, 20 November 2011; published in Childers 2019, 124–37.

⁵³ Childers 2016, 180–82; Childers 2017, 260–63.

⁵⁴ Childers 2018, 66–67, 80–82.

⁵⁵ An earlier form of the following material was published in Childers 2018, 70–80.

appear to derive from the same basic system: an apparatus of divinatory *hermêneiai* connected with manuscripts of the Gospel of John, i.e. Divining Gospels.

Given the fragmentary nature of the evidence, inconsistent identification of the presence of *sortes-hermêneiai* material in manuscript catalogues, and basic lacunae in our knowledge of manuscripts, it would not be surprising if the following list turns out to be incomplete. As new *hermêneia* sources are identified and discovered, the following survey will help researchers analyse them.

3.3.1 Overview of Manuscripts

Table 3.1 lists the manuscripts under discussion. They are classified according to four basic types. The first type (A) are manuscripts with *hermêneiai* that are original to the copying of the manuscript but having a page layout that clearly segregates the *hermêneia* from the Gospel text, by such means as spacing and changes of text alignment (for example centering). This first, segmented type may have been the earliest type of layout (see 7.2.5 below). The second type (B) has *hermêneiai* that are original to the book's production but they appear in-line with the Gospel text, i.e. they are integrated into the columns of the Gospel text. The third type (C) consists of manuscripts in which the *hermêneiai* are secondary additions to the books, written into the margins at some point after the books' original production. The fourth category (D) consists of manuscripts that are distinguished by particular defects making it uncertain that they were originally part of a Divining Gospel. Some of these have Gospel text but no *hermêneiai* – though it is likely that at least some of them once had *hermêneiai* – and one of them has *hermêneiai* but no Gospel text.

Date estimates are given according to century. These are assigned on the basis of manuscript catalogues and the discussions of learned palaeographers. In some instances, i.e. in the third type of manuscript described above, the Gospel text and the sortilege material may be dated differently. None of the manuscripts presented here can be dated precisely. The dating of biblical papyri in particular has been a topic of lively debate, with recent studies challenging an established trend towards the early dating of such manuscripts.⁵⁶ The following survey takes account of the most current discussions of these manuscripts' dates, but this study does not attempt a fresh and independent dating of the manuscripts. Whereas New

Testament text-critical study strives for precise dating, the present study is served well by fairly broad date-ranges and in most instances it is doubtful that revised dating would necessitate significantly different conclusions for our purposes.

In the table that follows the manuscripts are numbered in chronological order within the three categories according to the date estimates and listed by their current library designations. In addition to Gregory-Aland numbers for New Testament witnesses (GA),⁵⁷ where applicable, alternative references are given, along with numbers according to the following classifications: van Haelst,⁵⁸ the Trismegistos list of magical papyri (TM), and the Leuven Database of Ancient Books (LDAB).⁵⁹ Notes supply references and database details.

Figures are provided for selected manuscripts. These may be divided into two types: 1) images of the manuscript itself (in many instances images of the manuscripts are available for viewing online); and 2) graphic figures designed to depict reconstructions of basic layouts, showing the placements and relationships between biblical text, headings (for example “ερμηνια”), the *hermêneiai*, ancient translations of the *hermêneiai*, and numbers that accompany the oracles. Not all these items occur in every instance. The figures are not exact representations of the manuscripts. They are the creations of the author, yet the image shapes and proportions are based on the remains of the actual manuscripts (as known from catalogues, photographs, and digital imaging), as is the amount and positioning of text. Gray silhouettes approximate the manuscript leaves in their present state, usually derived directly from photographic images of the actual manuscripts, with bold outlines indicating the likely or at least possible original outline of the pages. The fragmentary nature of so many of the manuscripts necessitates a certain amount of speculation in reproducing the layouts; furthermore, each image depicts only a representative sampling of the layout of each manuscript. Despite their incomplete and partly speculative nature, the reconstructions illustrate the many shared characteristics of these artifacts, delineating certain peculiar features as well.

⁵⁷ The Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung maintains an up-to-date catalogue of the *Kurzgefaßte Liste der griechischen Handschriften des neuen Testaments* with Gregory-Aland numbers: <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/liste> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁵⁸ Van Haelst 1976.

⁵⁹ Trismegistos Magic: <https://www.trismegistos.org/magic/index.php> (accessed 7 June 2019); LDAB: <https://www.trismegistos.org/ldab/> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁵⁶ See especially Orsini/Clarysse 2012, 443–74; Nongbri 2018.

Table 3.1: Divining Gospels: manuscripts of John with sortilege material.

A) Manuscripts with original <i>hermêneiai</i> and segmented layout						
Manuscript	Date	Material	Extent⁶⁰	Language	Other Designations	
1 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol.11914	VI	Papyrus	(2 folios)	Greek (Gospel) Greek-Coptic (<i>hermêneiai</i>)	GA ʔ ⁶³ ; van Haelst 438; TM 61661; LDAB 2811	
2 New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, P.CtYBR 4641	V–VII	Parchment	(1 folio)	Coptic	Sa 972; TM/LDAB 369019	
3 P.Montserrat Roca 83	VI	Papyrus	(1 folio)	Greek	GA ʔ ⁶⁰ ; van Haelst 441; P.Monts. Roca 4.51; Barcelona, Fundación San Lucas Evangelista, P. Barc. 83; TM 61645; LDAB 2795	
4 Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, P.Vindob. G 36102	VI	Papyrus	(1 folio)	Greek	GA ʔ ⁷⁶ ; van Haelst 442; TM 61669; LDAB 2820	
5 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol. 21315	VI	Parchment	(1 folio)	Greek (Gospel) Greek-Coptic (<i>hermêneiai</i>)	GA 0302; TM 64981; LDAB 6222	
6 Paris, BnF, Copt. 156	VI	Papyrus	(12 fragments)	Coptic (Gospel) Coptic-Greek (<i>hermêneiai</i>)	van Haelst 1124; TM 63050; LDAB 4246	
7 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Manuscript, Colt Pap. 3.1–4	VI	Papyrus	(14 folios)	Greek	GA ʔ ⁵⁹ ; van Haelst 429; P. Ness. 2,3; TM 61676; LDAB 2827	
8 Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, P.Vindob. G 26214	VII	Papyrus	(1 folio)	Greek	GA ʔ ⁵⁵ ; van Haelst 433; TM 61671; LDAB 2822	
9 Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol. 3607+3623	VII	Parchment	(2 folios)	Greek	GA 0210; van Haelst 443; TM 61674; LDAB 2825	
10 von Soden 1902: XI (lost Damascus fragment) ⁶¹	VII	Parchment	(1 folio)	Greek	GA 0145; van Haelst 445; Damascus, Kubbet el Chazne; TM 61678; LDAB 2829	
11 Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2	IX	Parchment	49 folios	Armenian	palimpsest	
12 Erevan, Matenadaran, 9650	XI	Parchment	60 folios	Armenian		
B) Manuscript with original <i>hermêneiai</i> and integrated layout						
Manuscript	Date	Material	Extent	Language	Other Designations	
13 London, British Library, Add. 17,119	VI–VII	Parchment	83 folios	Syriac	9 (Pusey / Gwilliam 1901)	

⁶⁰ Parentheses indicate fragmentary manuscripts.

⁶¹ The Damascus fragment H.F. von Soden published in 1903 has since been lost (see below).

Table 3.1 (continued)

C) Manuscripts with secondary <i>hermêneiai</i>						
Manuscript	Date	Material	Extent	Language	Other Designations	
14 Paris, BnF, lat. 11553	IX (Gospel) IX (<i>hermêneiai</i>)	Parchment	10 folios	Latin	Codex Sangermanensis 1; Beuron VL 7; g ¹	
15 Cambridge, University Library, Nn.2.41 ⁶²	V (Gospel) VII–IX? (<i>hermêneiai</i>)	Parchment	37 folios	Greek-(Latin) ⁶³	Codex Bezae Cantabrigienses; GA 05; Dd	
D) Manuscripts with uncertain connection to the Divining Gospel tradition						
Manuscript	Date	Material	Extent	Language	Other Designations	
16 Firenze, Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli” PSI XIII 1364	IV–V?	Parchment	(1 folio)	Greek	van Haelst 1177; PSI inv. 2182; TM 64567; LDAB 5797	
17 Oslo, Schøyen 1367	V	Parchment	(1 folio)	Greek	GA 0301; P. Schøyen 1 19; TM 61654; LDAB 2804	
18 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Manuscript, Colt Pap. 4.1–20	VII–VIII	Papyrus	(20 folios)	Greek	GA ϣ ⁶⁰ ; van Haelst 460; P. Ness. 2,4; TM 61677; LDAB 2828	
19 Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, P.Vindob. G 26084	VIII	Parchment	(1 folio)	Greek	GA 0256; van Haelst 446; TM 61686; LDAB 2837	
20 PSI I, p.6 (lost) ⁶⁴	?	Papyrus	(1 folio)	Greek	van Haelst 1172	

3.3.2 Manuscripts with Original Sortilege Material and Segmented Layout

It is likely that the sortilege material used in the Divining Gospel tradition had their origins separately on the basis of originally non-Christian models (see 2.2.4; 2.3 above) and that its *sortes* were applied as a body of annotations to John. Yet many of the extant manuscripts have *sortes* (or *hermêneiai*) that are original to the production of the book. They appear to prefer a page layout in which each page has a separate block of Gospel text with its attached *hermêneia*, even if this results in large blank spaces. This clearly segmented layout occurs in a number of manuscripts.

Manuscript 1. The manuscript Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol. 11914 (GA ϣ⁶³) is a sixth-century Greco-Coptic papyrus fragment with two partial folios (Fig. 3.1).⁶⁵ Among the early fragments, it is actually one of the more well-preserved, providing an important illus-

tration of what may have been the common early format for Divining Gospels, a format shared throughout this category of manuscripts although the other Greek and Coptic examples are less intact. It is part of a codex that opens to about 18.5 × 30 cm (Fig. 3.2), containing portions of the Gospel of John in Greek. One page has Ioh. 4,10, followed by a space, under which the term ερμηνια (*hermēnia*) appears, then an oracle in Greek and Coptic centered below the Gospel text.

The content of the *hermēnia* is basically the same as in four other manuscripts (in Greek, Syriac, Latin, and Armenian). The other three pages are laid out the same way – one with Ioh. 3,14–15, followed by 3,16–18; then another with Ioh. 4,9. The rest of the codex is lost. At the top of each page, a later hand has added numbers (viz. 112, 113, and 122, 123), using letters of the Greek alphabet. Unlike the numbers that we find in many other *hermēnia* manuscripts, those in P.Berol. 11914 do not compare well with its parallels (see *Puššāqē* 35, 36 and 45, 46 in Chapter Five). Perhaps they were added as page numbers,⁶⁶ or perhaps they functioned as part of a distinctive sortilege mechanism, one with discontinuous numbers.

Figure 3.2 reconstructs the basic layout, thereby illustrating a structural format that occurs in many of the

⁶² The *hermêneiai* in Codex Bezae occur with the Gospel of Mark, not John (see below).

⁶³ Although bilingual, Codex Bezae’s *hermêneiai* are strictly in Greek and significantly later than the main Greek and Latin biblical texts.

⁶⁴ The fragment is presumed lost and the place of its former preservation is uncertain.

⁶⁵ Edition in Stegmüller 1953, 15–17. Digital images: <http://berlpap.smb.museum/03394> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁶⁶ See the discussion in Stegmüller 1953, 20–21.

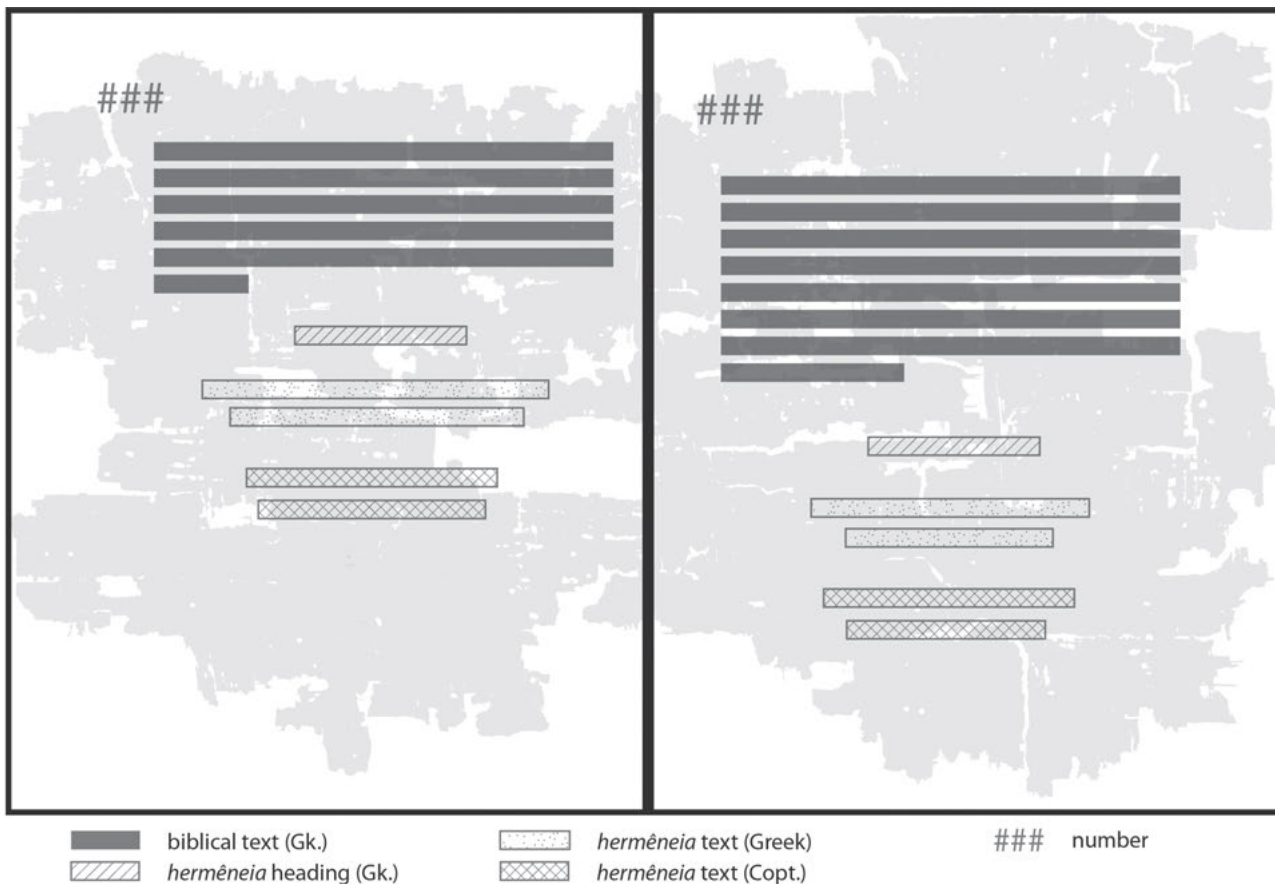


Fig. 3.2: based on P.Berol. 11914.

and the staurographic sign ϥ (see Figs. 3.3 and 3.4). The fragment preserves no numbers. On the recto, the Gospel text ends higher on the page and is lost, and only a small,

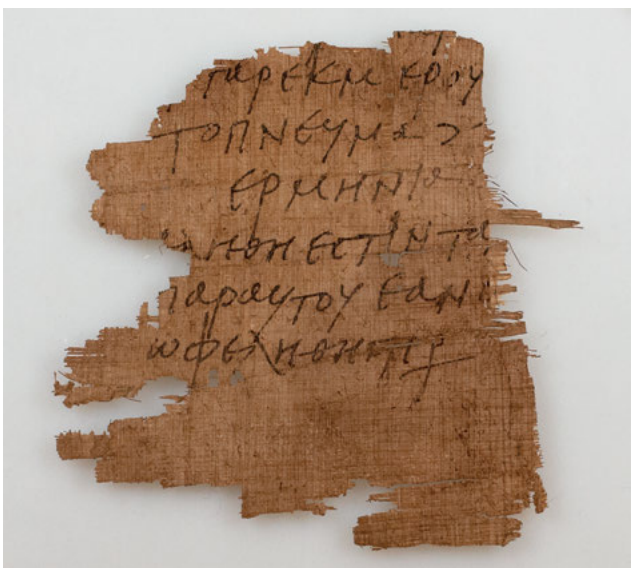


Fig. 3.3: P.Montserrat Roca 83, recto. ©Abadia de Montserrat. Used by permission.

indecipherable amount of the oracle remains, along with the sign ϥ once again. The remnant suggests a folio of about 20 × 18 cm (and taller than wide).

The fact that the scribe placed different amounts of text on each side indicates that the priority was to segment the text at specified points rather than to conserve space. In other words, the scribe prefers to keep the Gospel text block and its *hermêneia* linked together spatially on a single page. Its one well-preserved *hermêneia* does not correlate to the Syriac.⁷¹

Manuscript 4. The sixth-century papyrus fragment Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, G. 36102 (GA ϣ⁷⁶) has the text of Ioh. 4,9 on one side and Ioh. 4,11–12 on the other.⁷² The overall page layout (now 14 × 11 cm) is similar to that of the aforementioned examples. The Greek Gospel text has space beneath it, followed on both sides by the term *ερμηνεία* (*hermêneia*), centered, under which follow fragmentary oracular statements.

⁷¹ See the discussion of this fragment in Wilkinson 2019, 108.

⁷² Hunger 1959, 8–11; Hunger 1970, 71–74; Quecke, 1977, 179–81; Porter 2007, 576–77. Digital images: <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/RZ00002179> (accessed 7 June 2019).

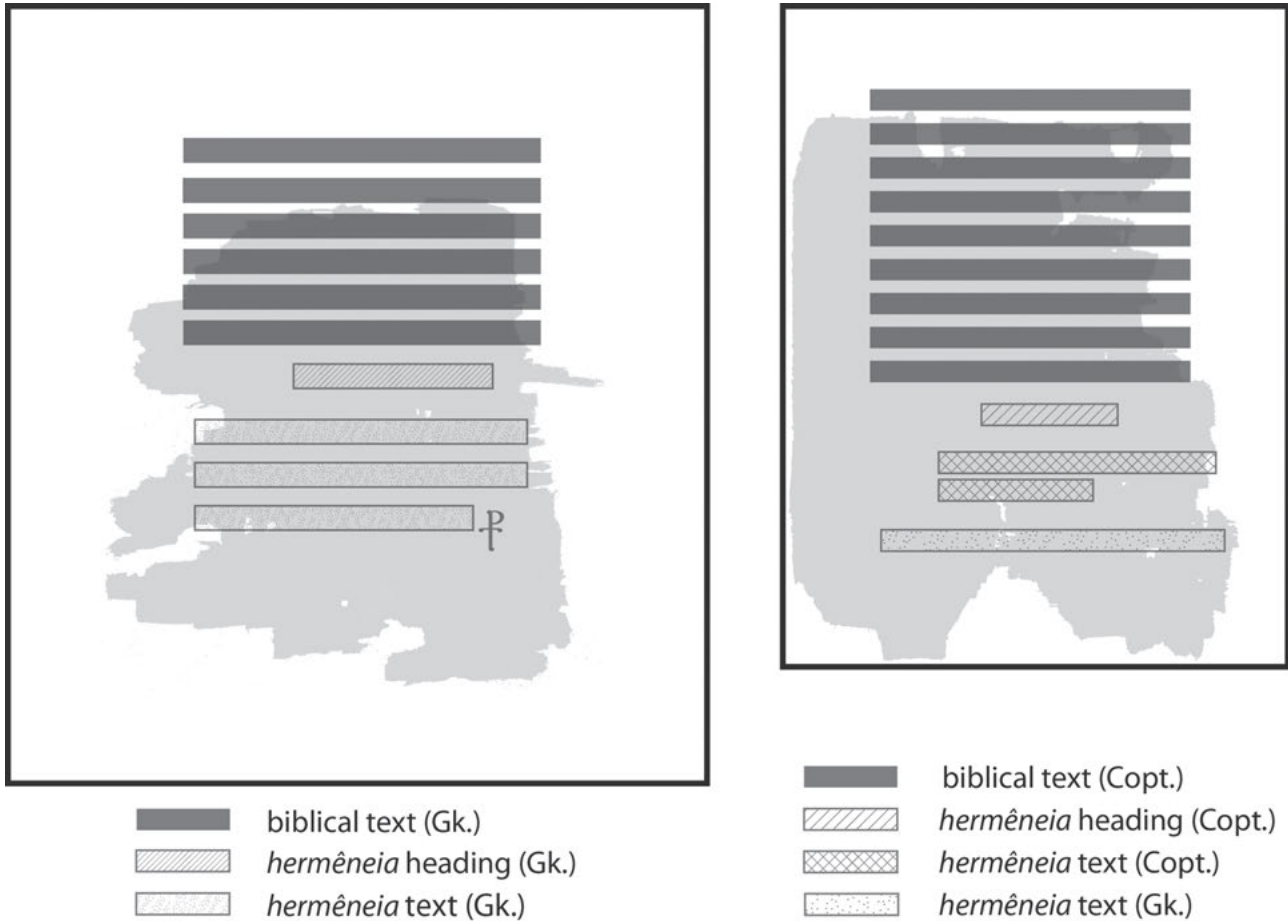


Fig. 3.4: based on P.Montserrat Roca 83 (left) and Paris, BnF, Copt. 156 (right).

Manuscript 5. The sixth-century Berlin parchment fragment, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol. 21315 (GA 0302) has verses from Ioh. 10,29–30.⁷³ After the biblical text follows the typical space, under which is the centered term, ἐρμηνεία (*hermêneia*), followed by the *sors* in Greek and a Coptic translation of the Greek. Though the size is difficult to gauge precisely, Kurt Treu estimates the original page might have been about 16 × 10 cm (now 7.5 high × 3.7 cm wide), with surprisingly large margins and spaces, as we have come to expect.

Manuscript 6. The set of thirteen papyrus fragments preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, BnF, Copt. 156 date from the sixth century and have portions of the Coptic text of John's Gospel, at chapters 3, possibly 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17, 18, and 21.⁷⁴ The pages (originally

about 17 × 13 cm) have the Coptic Gospel text at the top, followed by spaces of varying length, under which is the term ἐρμηνεία (*ermênia*) in Greco-Coptic script, followed by statements first in Coptic and then in Greek (see Fig. 3.4). We detect clear resonances between the *sortes* in this manuscript and those of the Syriac London, BL, Add. 17,119 (Manuscript 13), justifying again our treatment of these materials as participating in the same tradition.

Manuscript 7. The sixth-century papyrus manuscript New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Manuscript, Colt Pap. 3.1–4 (GA Ɔ⁵⁹; P.Ness 2,3) from the H. Dunscombe Colt excavations in 1937 at Nessana in southern Palestine now

⁷³ Treu, 1991, 55–60. Digital images: <http://berlpap.smb.museum/04507> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁷⁴ Crum 1904, 174–78. It appears that G. W. Horner used transcriptions of the fragments partly as source k in his edition; see Horner

1911, 3,344. Crum appears to have known of only twelve fragments, but we find fourteen fragments encased in glass as Copt. 156 in the Bibliothèque nationale de France. One of these fragments does not belong, its handwriting showing it to be from a different manuscript. The other fragment does belong with the others and has a very corrupt remnant of a *hermêneia*. It appears that M. de Ricci, who supplied Crum with a transcription, missed this one but someone at the Bibliothèque later identified it (see Quecke 1974, 413).

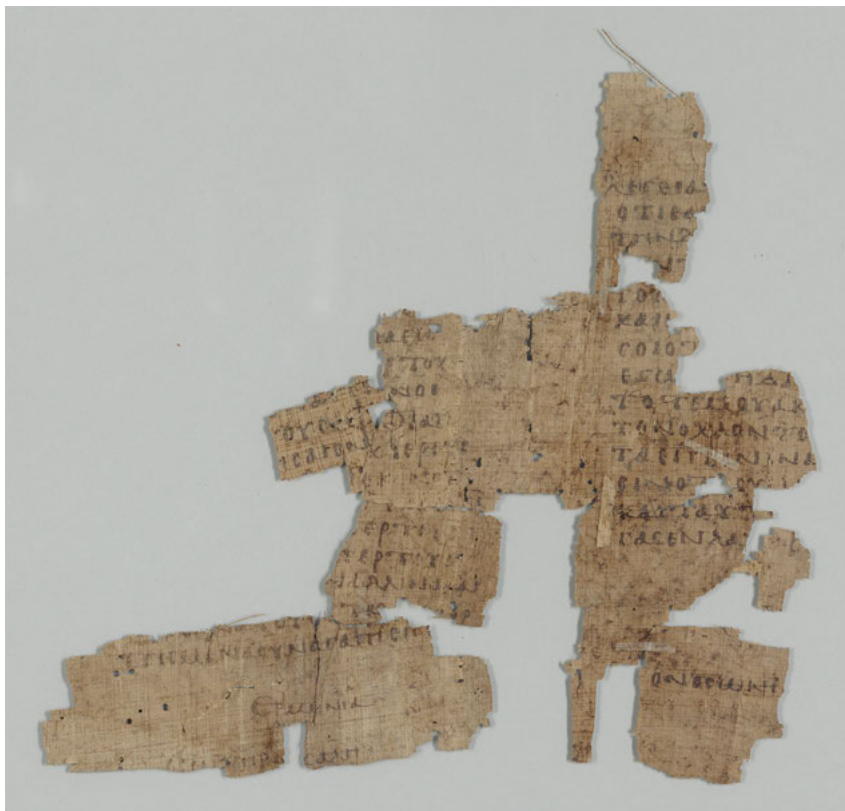


Fig. 3.5: New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Manuscript, Colt Pap. 3.4, verso. Photo: The Morgan Library & Museum, Colt Pap. 3.1-4, Colt Deposit. Used by permission.

consists of a number of small fragments, with portions of Ioh. 1, 2, 11, 12, 17, 18, and 21 in Greek.⁷⁵ The surviving portions are severely damaged and small (see the exceptionally large sample in Fig. 3.5). Whereas in the *editio princeps* Casson and Hettich date the fragment to the end of the seventh or beginning of the eighth century, we follow the revised sixth-century dating of Guglielmo Cavallo.⁷⁶ The original pages (approximately 19.5 × 13 cm in size), had varying amounts of text on them, with generous margins and spaces at the bottom (Fig. 3.6). On several leaves, the term *ερμηνεία* (*hermēnia*) is visible at the bottom, followed by *sortes* in Greek. The unusual arrangement of text led Casson and Hettich to suggest that, “the *ἐρμηνεία* itself determined the amount of text; i.e., on a given page, only that portion was included to which the *ἐρμηνεία* at the bottom referred.”⁷⁷ Casson and Hettich saw strong similarities between this manuscript and Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, P.Vindob. G. 26214 (GA \mathfrak{P}^{55} ;

Manuscript 8), in the number of letters to the line, in page design, and hand, going so far as to suggest the two manuscripts may come from the same city or scriptorium.⁷⁸

Manuscript 8. The seventh-century papyrus fragment Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, P.Vindob. G. 26214 (GA \mathfrak{P}^{55}) has the Greek text of Ioh. 1,31–33 on one side and Ioh. 1,35–38 on the other.⁷⁹ The layout (now 6.5 wide x 12.5 cm high) basically matches that of others in this class. On one side, the characteristic space separates the Gospel text from the term, *ερμηνεία* (*hermēneia*), but none of the oracle itself survives. Although we cannot ascertain any of the original content of the *hermēneiai* in P.Vindob. G. 26214 it is apparent that the manuscript belongs to the Divining Gospel tradition and it serves to reinforce our understanding of the typical structure of early manuscripts of this type.

⁷⁵ Casson/Hettich 1950, 2,79–93. Digital images: <https://www.themorgan.org/papyri/list> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁷⁶ Casson/Hettich 1950, 2,82; Cavallo 2005, 197.

⁷⁷ Casson/Hettich 1950, 2,81.

⁷⁸ Casson/Hettich 1950, 2,81. The editors’ highly tentative suggestion on the basis of a few visible letters that an unidentified fragment apparently belonging to Colt Pap. 3 originally contained part of Act. 6 is unconvincing (cf. Casson/Hettich 1950, 2,92–93).

⁷⁹ Henner/Förster/Horak 1999, 9; Porter 2007, 575–76. Digital images: <http://data.onb.ac.at/rep/10203523> (accessed 7 June 2019).



Fig. 3.6: based on Colt Pap. 3.4r.

Manuscript 9. The seventh-century parchment fragment Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol. 3607+3623 (GA 0210) has portions of the Greek text of Ioh. 5 and 6 on its two remaining leaves of what had originally been a codex.⁸⁰ Connections between the contents of this manuscript with the material in the Syriac, the Latin, and Codex Bezae are evident. The fragment includes two legible numbers 76 and 77, written at the top of the page in what appears to be the original hand. The fragments now measure about 5×6 cm and 7.2×6 cm. The structure of the page is the same as occurs repeatedly in the manuscripts of this type.

Manuscript 10. In 1903, Hermann Freiherr von Soden described a fragment discovered in the Kubbet el Chazne in Damascus, now lost: von Soden 1902: XI (GA 0145).⁸¹

Although the original is lost, von Soden gives a transcription of the fragment and the Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung has a photograph of the verso.⁸² The seventh-century parchment had the Greek text of Ioh. 6,26–27 (recto) and Ioh. 6,28–31 (verso), divided into segmented portions, one on each side, along with Greek *hermêneiai* centered at the bottom of the page, under the centered and rubricated term $\epsilon\rho\mu\eta\nu\epsilon\iota\alpha$ (*hermêneia*). A comparison with other Divining Gospels shows that the statement agrees with those occurring elsewhere (see 3.4 below). The manuscript includes illegible numerals at the top, contained within rectangles, perhaps similar to those in P.Berol. 11914, Manuscript 1 above. Von Soden was astonished at the great waste of space (“mit großer Raumverschwendung”) evident in the book’s construction; his description of the fragment and the surviving photograph

⁸⁰ Edition in Stegmüller 1953, 17–19. Digital images: <http://berlpap.smb.museum/01134> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁸¹ Von Soden 1903, 825–30.

⁸² See Schmid/Elliott/Parker 2007, 23.



Fig. 3.7: Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2, fol. 276, verso; ultraviolet light (rotated), natural light (inset). ©University of Graz. Used by permission.

of the verso⁸³ allow us to confirm a familiar page structure (of about 24.5 × 19 cm) similar to the other manuscripts in this category.

Manuscript 11. The ninth-century Armenian palimpsest Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2 is a remarkable manuscript, preserving a great many more *hermêneiai* than the earlier fragments we have surveyed, albeit in an Armenian version (Fig. 3.7) that has now been published. Whereas in 1898 Hakovbos Tashean (Jacob Dashian) proposed a date of the eighth-ninth century for the underwriting, partly due to the absence of abbreviation word forms, we follow Erich Renhart's conclusion that it belongs to the later end of that period, i.e.

the ninth century.⁸⁴ The manuscript follows the same basic format we have already seen in the Greek, Coptic, and Greco-Coptic fragments, illustrating the typical structure much more fully.⁸⁵ The upper text is that of a tenth-century Georgian liturgical Psalter from Sinai, but the lower writing is an eighth-century Armenian text of the Gospel of John.⁸⁶ As we have already begun to see and I have shown in greater detail elsewhere,⁸⁷ it includes many *sortes* matching those found in other manuscripts (originally 318 *sortes*).

⁸⁴ Renhart 2015, 43, 88.

⁸⁵ Renhart 2009, 215–32; Renhart 2015, 59–80. Digital images: <http://manuscripta.at/?ID=24789> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁸⁶ I am indebted to Erich Renhart at the University library in Graz, who kindly shared with me his research prior to its publication and has granted permission to use the material in this study.

⁸⁷ Childers 2017, 256–58.

⁸³ The digital image (with restricted access) in the New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room: <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de> (accessed 7 June 2019).

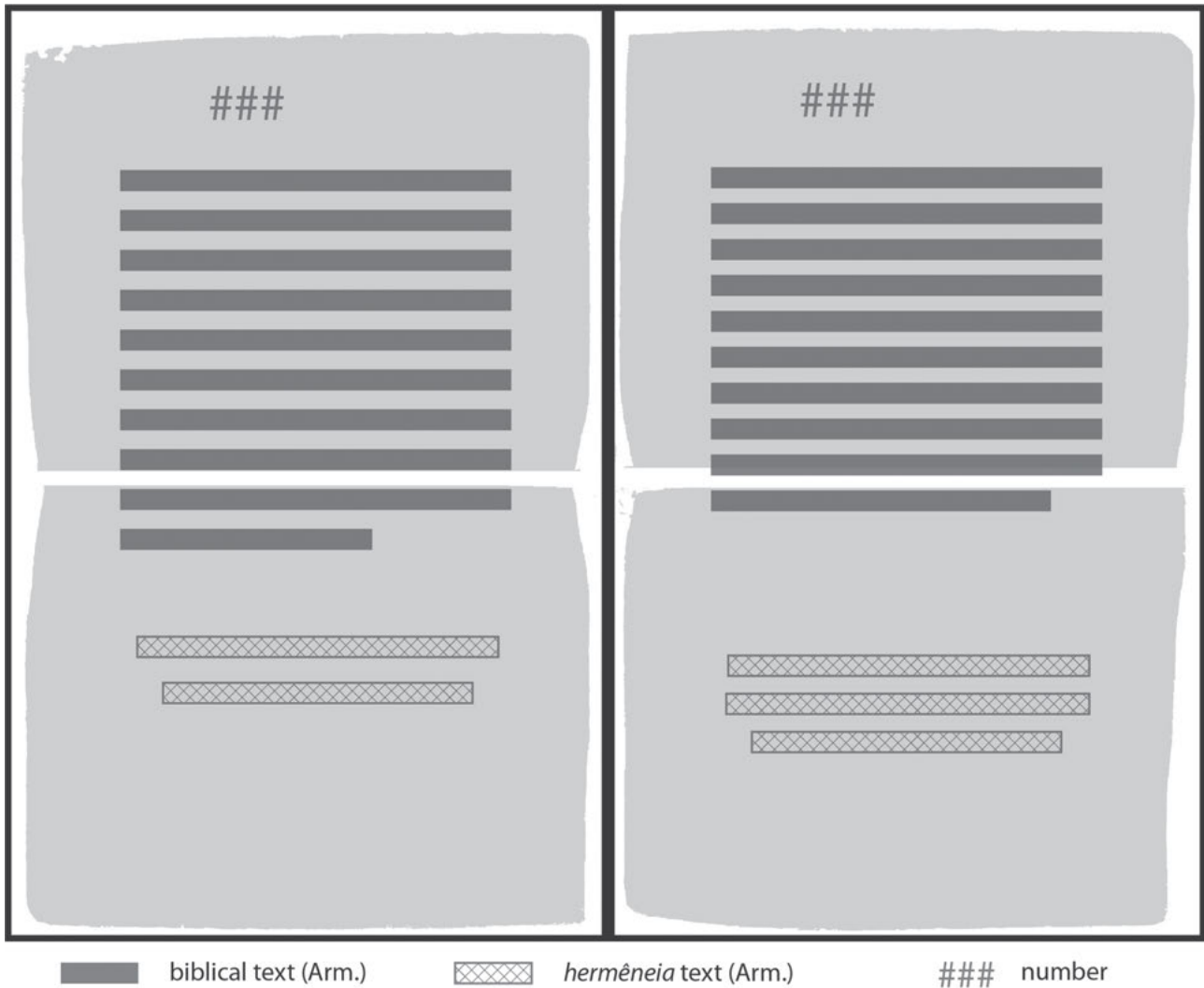


Fig. 3.8: based on Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2.

In order to make way for the Georgian Psalter, the original Armenian writing was erased, the manuscript's leaves were cut in two, rotated, and reassembled in the present order. The Armenian evidence of this manuscript is incomplete and often illegible, but Renhart's painstaking and detailed codicological work help us to see that the palimpsest illustrates major aspects of the original format.⁸⁸ Figure 3.8 illustrates the original structure, presuming an opening reconstituted from four of the present leaves. Numbers occur at the top of the pages. Beneath a portion of biblical text, the *hermêneiai* are regularly set off by blank spaces and centered. The term *hermêneia* does not regularly occur, though the Armenian equivalent թարգմանություն (*t'argmanut'iwn*, "interpretation," i.e.

hermêneia) prefaces each of its first three oracles, beginning with Ioh. 1,1 (fol. 66v) and several of the others.⁸⁹ The reconstructed layout in Fig. 3.8 presents a familiar appearance (original page 13.7/8 × 21.5 cm).⁹⁰

Manuscript 12. The eleventh-century Armenian manuscript Erevan, Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts (Matenadaran), 9650 is a defective copy of John's Gospel with *hermêneiai*. Its coverage of John begins with Ioh. 7,52 (fol. 1) and is quite lacunose. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of its *sortes* match those in Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2 (Manuscript 11) in content and placement. Apart from the fact that portions of this manuscript are lost, it probably had proportionally some ten percent

⁸⁸ See especially Renhart 2015, 49–80.

⁸⁹ See Outtier 1996, 76; Outtier 1993, 182.

⁹⁰ Renhart 2009, 223.



Fig. 3.9: based on Erevan, Matenadaran 9650.

fewer *hermêneiai* in relation to its text, compared to Graz 2058/2. Its highest-numbered *sors* is 238; Renhart estimates it originally had 280–290 *sortes*.⁹¹

As Outtier has shown,⁹² its *hermêneiai* match not only those in the Armenian tradition but also some statements in Codex Bezae and Paris, BnF, lat. 11553. It is now apparent that correspondences also occur with the Syriac London, BL, Add. 17,119 (Manuscripts 13, 14, and 15 below). Like the other manuscripts with a segregated layout, it locates its *sortes* at the bottom of each page, connecting them with specific portions of John's text, as Fig. 3.9 illustrates. However, the scribe is not fully consistent; some pages have two *sortes* and some pages have none. The system of numbers is defective as well. Yet it is very clear that both Armenian manuscripts together draw on an earlier tradition.

⁹¹ See discussion in Renhart 2015, 143–49.

⁹² Outtier 1996, 76.

The twelve manuscripts indisputably belonging to this category show that specialized codices with both the text of John and a complex system of oracular *hermêneiai* may not have been uncommon in times past. They seem to have achieved a relatively standard form no later than about the sixth century, presumably first in Greek, with earliest surviving attestation coming from Egypt. Many of the early manuscripts derive from an Egyptian context, suggesting the possibility that these books originated there or were at least especially popular there (see 2.2.3–4). However, we must remember that a disproportionate number of early manuscripts survive in Egypt due to its climate, a circumstance that cautions us against presuming that the distribution of extant ancient books may be taken as geographically representative of the books' distribution in the ancient world. In the case of the Divining Gospels, we have already seen that they were of sufficient number and distribution to have left significant, albeit often fragmentary traces in different languages; we will observe even greater distribution in our discussion of the remaining manuscripts below.

So far as we can make out, these codices were typically of John alone, without other Gospels or books, and often had specialized page layouts that distinguish them in comparison to other biblical manuscripts. Given the amount of space that scribes appear to waste for the sake of segregating specific portions of the Gospel and their attached *hermêneiai* together, either the book's meaning or its practical use must have dictated page layout, possibly both. As we will see in much greater detail in Chapter Seven, those who constructed these books grouped certain *hermêneiai* with particular portions of John's Gospel text due to thematic or terminological resonances.⁹³

However, it is likely that the practice of sortilege itself also helped determine the pattern that recurs throughout this body of manuscripts, since this layout – including the assigned numbers, in some instances – would facilitate the selection of particular pages as part of the process of divination. Furthermore, grouping the selected portion of biblical text with a specific oracle on a single page could prompt the user to seek interrelatedness of the two – the scripture and its “interpretation.” The Armenian manuscripts echo the “standard” early form evident in the most ancient Greek, Coptic, and Greco-Coptic evidence of this type.

3.3.3 Manuscript with Original *Hermêneiai* and Integrated Layout

Manuscript 13. One extant manuscript is suggestive of a second class of Divining Gospel, in which the book is not so sharply segmented as in the previous type of manuscript but the *sortes* have been fully integrated into the Gospel text. This unique codex is London, BL, Add. 17,119, the primary object of the present study. The Syriac codex contains the Gospel of John on 83 parchment leaves, in a regular *estrangela* hand of the sixth or seventh century.⁹⁴ Among editions of the Divining Gospels it is distinctive because its originally 308 numbered and rubricated *hermêneiai*,⁹⁵ or *puššāqē* in Syriac (ܩܘܨܫܩܐ), are actually integrated into the main Gospel text, in the same hand and script, though in red ink (Fig. 3.10).

We have met this manuscript repeatedly already (see Fig. 1.1, 4.1–3 for images). Many of its *sortes* match those occurring throughout the tradition, in content, placement, order, and number. In the next chapter we will present a

fuller analysis of the manuscript and its history as a book. Here we wish to focus on the manuscript's *mise en page* in relation to the other types of Divining Gospel books surveyed in this chapter. Apart from the fact that this codex contains the most complete and legible set of *hermêneiai* discovered so far, and one of the oldest, one of its most striking features is its unique layout.

What would account for this integrated structure? In comparison with the other codices surveyed above, this editor has reduced blank space and minimized wasted leaves by consolidating the text. The result is a page with multiple *hermêneiai*, but one whose form also contributes to the sense that the *hermêneiai* and the biblical text are tightly connected, basically inseparable. In the previous examples, single bodies of text and *hermêneiai* are separated into distinct pages in ways that must have facilitated their divinatory use. Perhaps the practitioner of the Syriac book could rely on the numbering system alone when seeking *sortes*, without the need for the same segmentation that we see in the examples above. The mechanics of these books' usage remain vague, so that we are left to speculate. We shall take up this topic again in Chapter Six.

Whatever the rationale or circumstances behind the design, the result of the Syriac layout is that this book associates its oracular material very intimately with the Gospel text. What may have started as a kind of annotation⁹⁶ transforming the function of the Gospel quickly developed into a standard part of the structure of special books, as we saw in the previous category; and now, here, the material that was once external to the text and appended to the bottom of the page has actually been fused with the text. We have found no other instances of this particular layout; we cannot presently know whether the same layout occurred in other manuscripts, Syriac or otherwise.

3.3.4 Manuscripts with Secondary *Hermêneiai*

A third major category of Divining Gospel incorporates secondary divinatory material. Two surviving codices are known to fit this classification. Each of them employs *hermêneiai* that are basically parallel in sequence and content to those of the rest of the tradition. However, later annotators have added these materials to the manuscripts. Furthermore, in both instances, the books are not simply copies of John's Gospel but have other New Testament

⁹³ See also Childers 2017, 260–62; Wilkinson 2019, 101–23.

⁹⁴ See Wright 1870, 1,71–72.

⁹⁵ The first six are actually missing due to a defect at the beginning of the manuscript.

⁹⁶ See Wilkinson 2019, 117–18.

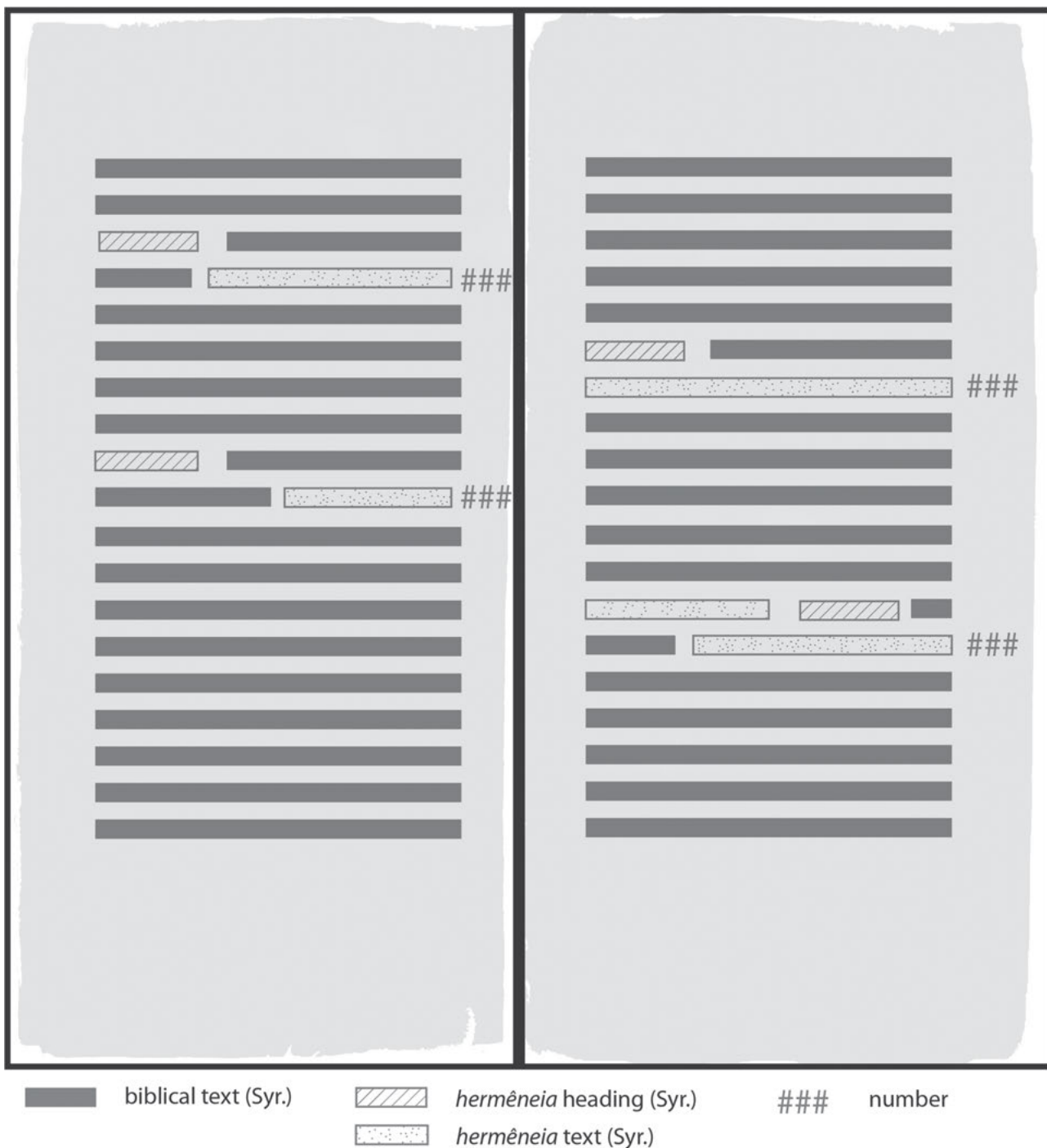


Fig. 3.10: based on London, British Library, Add. 17,119.

material as well. One of them aligns its *sortes* with the Gospel of John but the other one attaches them to the Gospel of Mark.

Manuscript 14. Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 (VL 7; g¹), also known as Sangermanensis, is the second volume of a very large Latin Bible (40 × 33 cm) copied in the celebrated monastery of St-Germain-de-Prés in the early ninth

century (see Fig. 3.11).⁹⁷ It has 185 *hermêneiai*,⁹⁸ numbered in a broken series up to 316. They are not called *hermêneiai*

⁹⁷ See Houghton 2016, 213–14; Gryson 1999, 1.28–30.

⁹⁸ See Harris 1888, 58–63; Harris 1901, 59–74. Digital images: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9065958t> (accessed 7 June 2019).

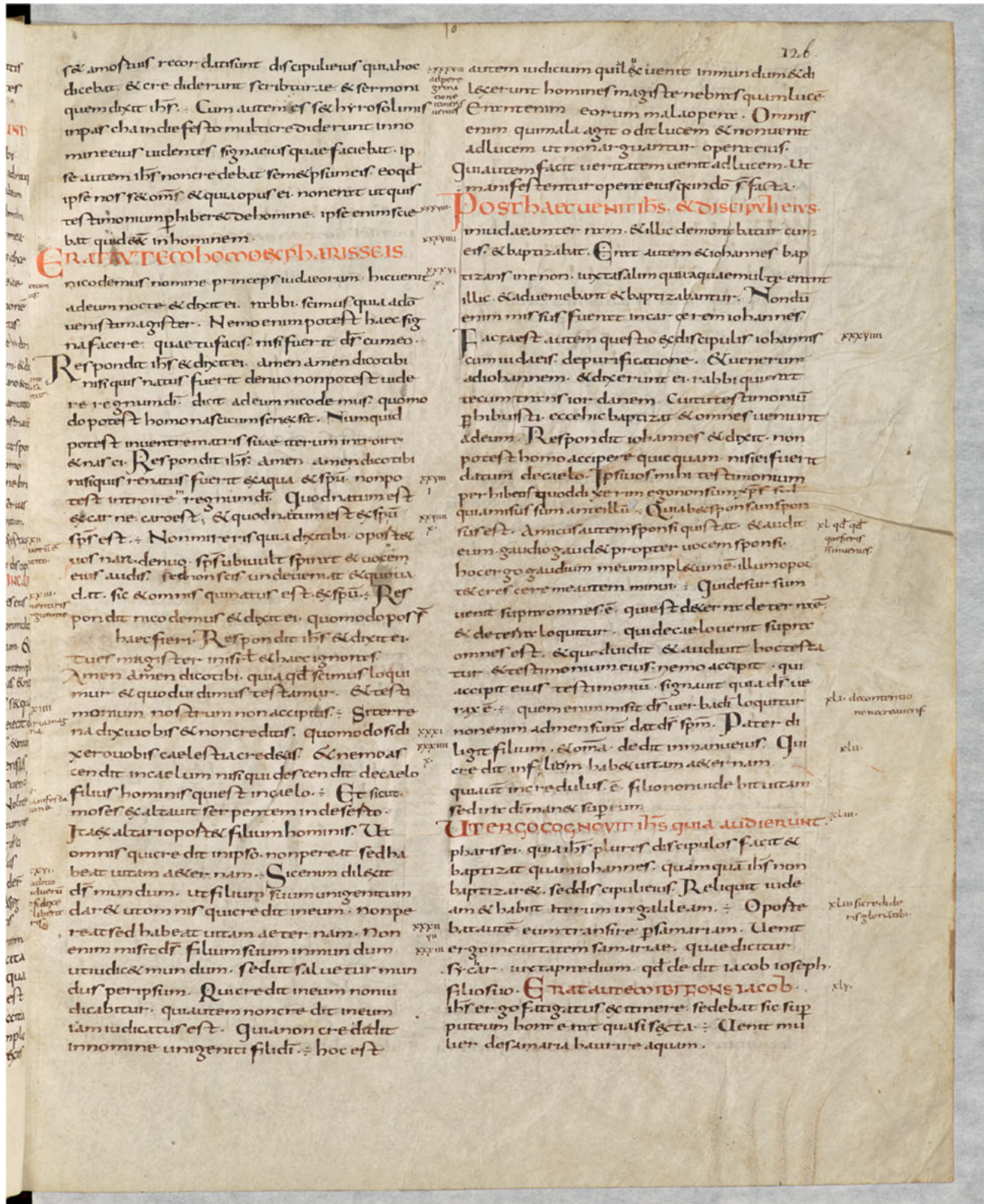


Fig. 3.11: Paris, BnF, lat. 11553, fol. 126, recto. ©Bibliothèque nationale de France. Used with permission.

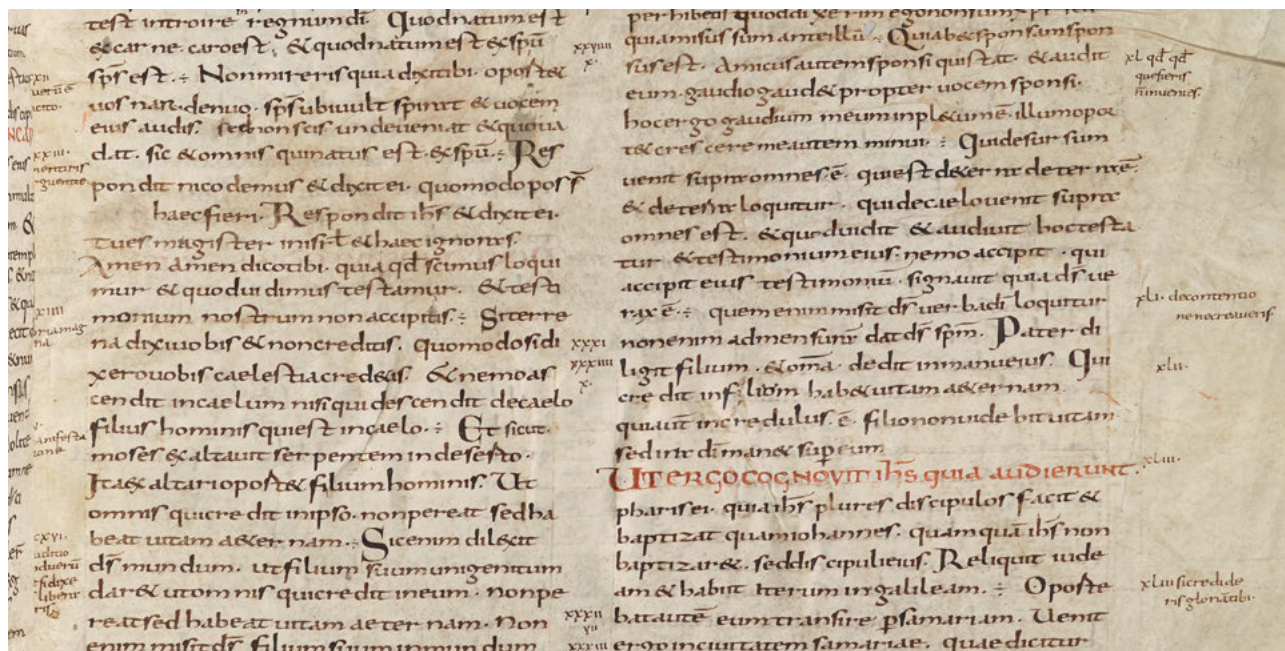


Fig. 3.12: Paris, BnF, lat. 11553, fol. 126, recto (detail). ©Bibliothèque nationale de France. Used with permission.

in the manuscript – with one exception: although the manuscript does not normally use the *hermeneia* formula or headings that we see in many other manuscripts, the statement numbered 247 (fol. 132v) reads, *interpretatio causa tibi immanet* (“Interpretation: The thing is about to happen to you”) in which we take *interpretatio* to correspond to ἐρμηνεία (*hermeneia*). Working from a transcript of the manuscript done by someone else,⁹⁹ Harris gives the term as *interpretati*, proposing the emendation *insperata* (“an unexpected thing...”),¹⁰⁰ but the author’s direct examination of the manuscript shows that Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 actually has *interpretatio*.¹⁰¹ Whereas Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2 retained the term *hermeneia* (in Armenian) in just three verifiable places at the beginning of its series, Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 has it in just one, seemingly arbitrary place. The simplest explanation is that the prefatory term ἐρμηνεία/*interpretatio* that is consistently present in many of the manuscripts was dropped in the course of the translation or transmission history of the divinatory material as we have it in the Latin manuscript – though retained in this one case, probably by accident.

The oracles are in the margins alongside the text of John (fol. 125r–134v) and keyed to sections of that Gospel (Fig. 3.12).¹⁰² Their hand is secondary to that of the main Gospel text, and therefore the *hermeneiai* may be secondary to the original production of the book. Yet the hand may be contemporary or nearly so. The other parts of the Bible in Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 have no *sortes*.¹⁰³

Harris’ treatment of the many connections between this set of Latin *hermeneiai* and the Greek ones in Codex Bezae (see 3.4 below) represents the earliest in-depth scholarly analysis of the sortilege material contained in the Divining Gospels, carried forward into the twentieth century due to the discoveries of parallel *hermeneiai* in the papyri and parchment fragments. A comparison with the manuscripts described above shows that Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 is reliant upon the same system of sortilege. However, rather than having *sortes* at the bottom of the page, the arrangement of this manuscript places them in the margins, normally numbered, with signs in the text to help delineate the sections. Not every numbered section

⁹⁹ Harris 1888, 59–60.

¹⁰⁰ Harris 1901, 68.

¹⁰¹ Wilkinson also corrects this error in Harris’ transcription (Wilkinson 2019, 105, n.9). Harris worked from a transcription provided by someone else. His edition has a number of errors and inconsistencies in method of presentation; a new edition of the Latin *sortes* is a *desideratum*.

¹⁰² A transcription of the Latin text of John (not the *sortes*) in this manuscript (siglum VL 7) was prepared for the *Novum Testamentum Graecum Editio Critica Maior* and is now conveniently available as part of the electronic edition of “Vetus Latina Johannes:” <http://www.iohannes.com/vetuslatina> (accessed 7 June 2019).

¹⁰³ A brief analysis of the Latin *sortes* of Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 occurs in Joseph-Claude Poulin’s survey of the exotic use of margins in medieval manuscripts (Poulin 1979, 121–43).

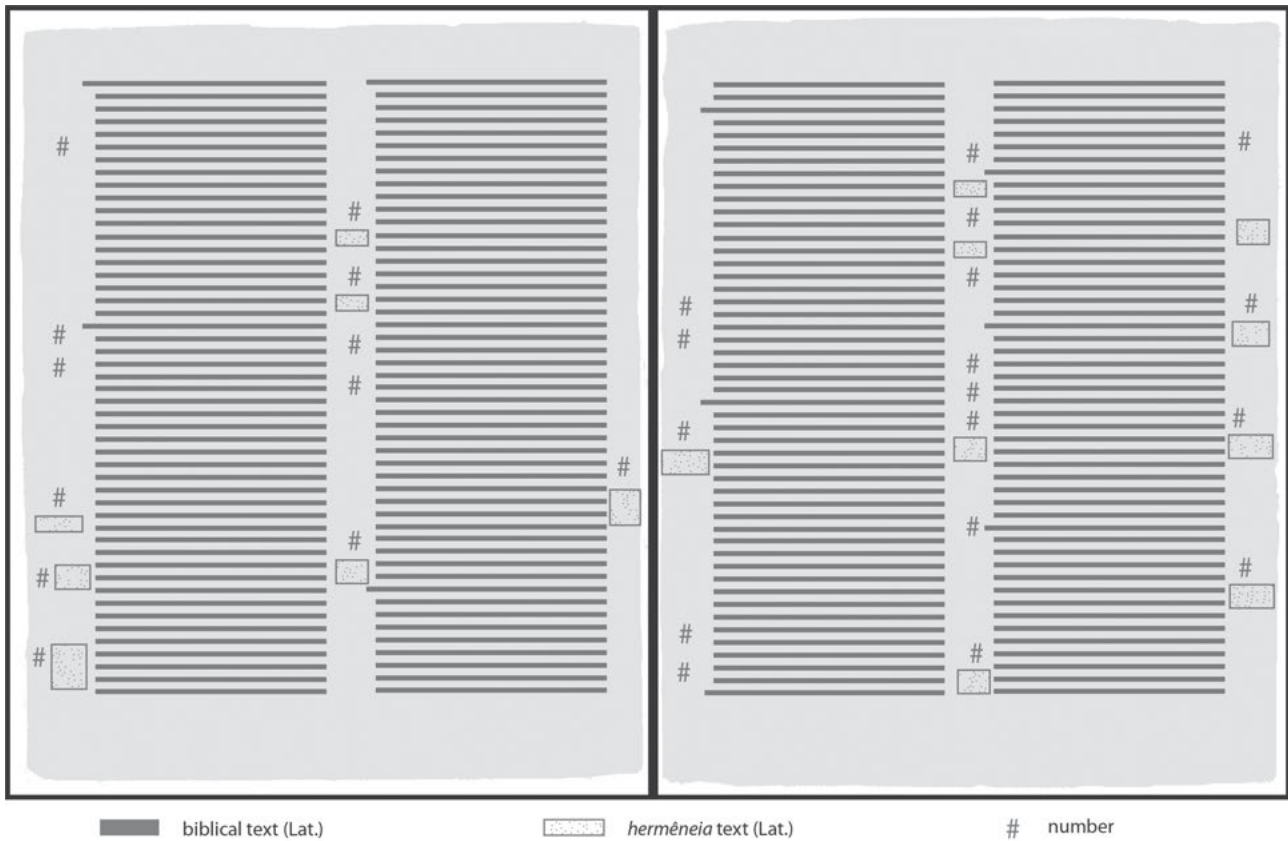


Fig. 3.13: based on Paris, BnF, Lat. 11553.

in John in this manuscript has a *hermêneia*.¹⁰⁴ In the middle of the codex, prior to the manuscript's presentation of the Eusebian Canons, a wheel occurs, divided into eight sections and filled with a broken series of numbers leading up to 316 (fol. 89v). Although this would appear to be a device to help the diviner select the right response,¹⁰⁵ the mechanism of its operation is obscure. We will return to this device later (see 6.4.2). Some of the numbers in the wheel do not correspond to sections in John with *sortes*, though most do. Figure 3.13 illustrates the layout of the text of John with *sortes*.

Manuscript 15. One of the most intriguing manuscripts is the famed Codex Bezae: Cambridge, University Library, Nn.2.41 (GA 05; Dd).¹⁰⁶ Scrivener conducted an early study of this manuscript's *hermêneiai*, editing and commenting

on them, though he did not fathom their purpose.¹⁰⁷ Harris studied the manuscript more closely, and several others have since turned to its peculiar set of sixty-nine surviving *sortes* in order to gain clarity on the nature, origin, and use of this sort of material.¹⁰⁸ As we have already seen, this manuscript contains *hermêneiai* whose contents and sequence relate closely to many of the others.

This Greco-Latin bilingual manuscript of the Gospels and Acts (now 26 × 21.5 cm) was copied in the fifth century, though its set of strictly Greek *hermêneiai* is later. The biblical text is arranged so that the Greek text is on the left facing page of the codex and its parallel Latin text on the right (Fig. 3.14). Though the *hermêneiai* themselves are in Greek, they occur on both Greek and Latin pages in series, not just on the alternating pages with the Greek biblical text. Written in a rough hand in the bottom margins of

¹⁰⁴ For discussion of divisions in the manuscript, see Houghton 2011, 340–43.

¹⁰⁵ See Harris 1888, 60–61.

¹⁰⁶ Digital images: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-NN-00002-00041/1> (accessed 7 June 2019).

¹⁰⁷ Scrivener 1864, xxvii, 451–452.

¹⁰⁸ See Harris 1901, 45–74. Other fairly early students of the *hermêneiai* in Bezae include Stegmüller 1953, 13–22; Metzger 1988b, 165–67; and Outtier 1996, 74–78. Recent proposals regarding the *sortes* in Codex Bezae are also discussed in Chapter Six (see 6.1).

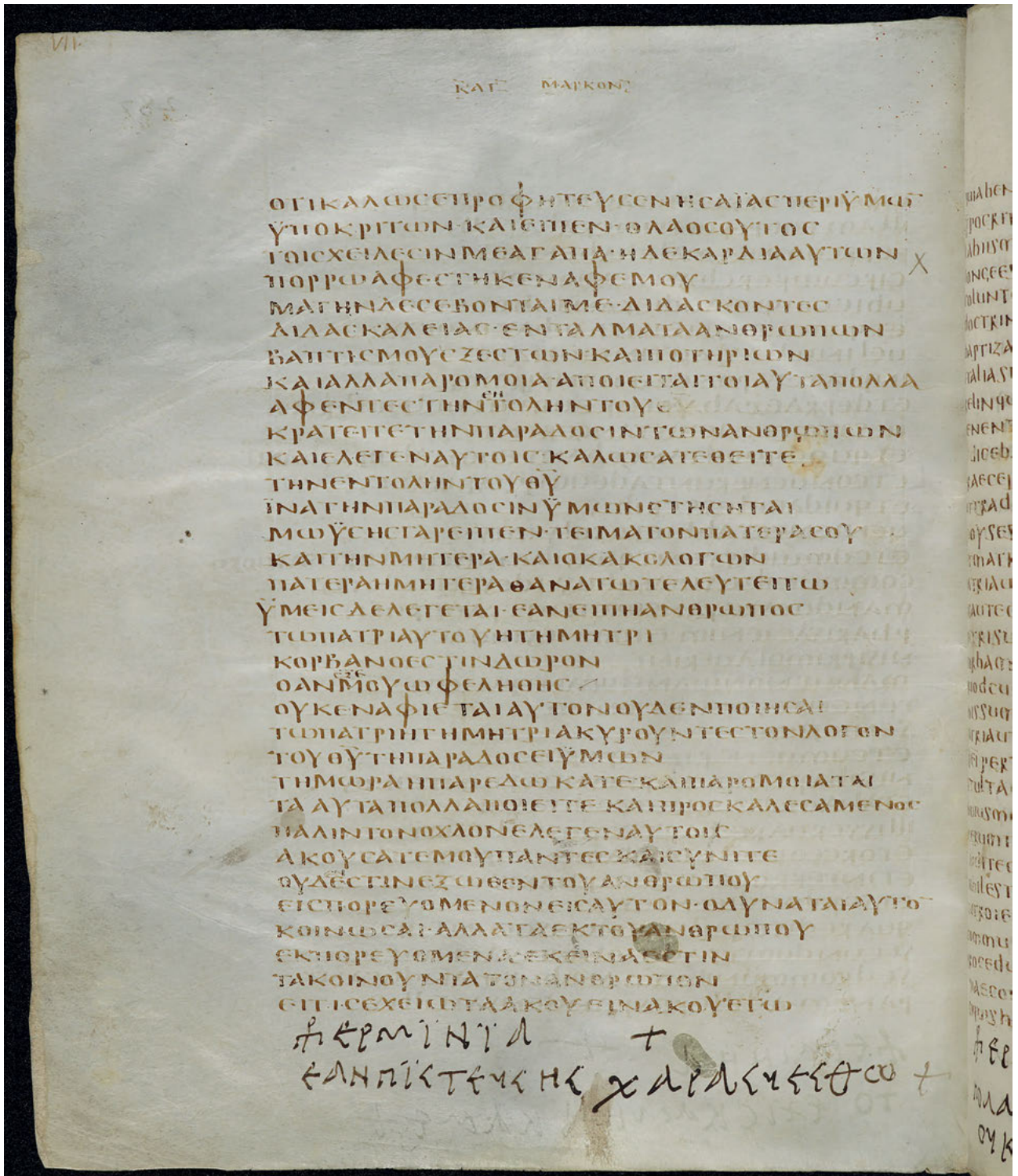


Fig. 3.14: Cambridge, University Library, Nn.2.41, fol. 308, verso. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

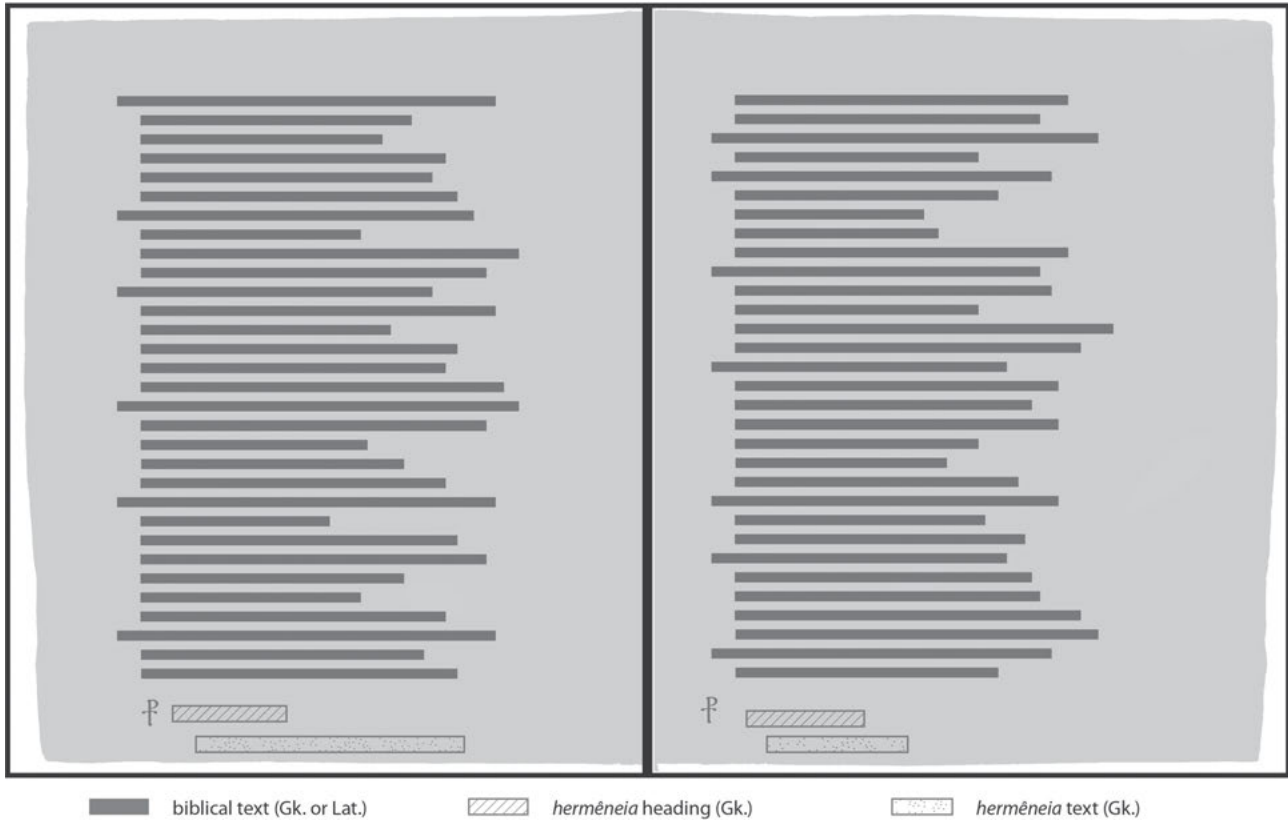


Fig. 3.15: based on Cambridge, University Library, Nn.2.41.

the leaves, these statements have been dated to as early as 550–650 and as late as the ninth or tenth century.¹⁰⁹ The statements are certainly later than the original biblical text, and far less carefully executed. They include the prefatory expression ἐπιῦνῖα (or some orthographical variation thereof) and some distinguishing marks, particularly the cross + along with a staurogram Ϡ that occurs prior to nearly every instance of the term ἐπιῦνῖα (see Fig. 3.14). Regarding the latter, Scrivener took the sign to be an abbreviation for πρὸς and Outtier followed him, thus calling the statements “*prosermēneiai*.” Harris thought that the ornament might signify the notation ἀρχή, commonly used to mark the beginning of a text division or reading.¹¹⁰ But the sign should be understood as a kind of staurogram or christogram that came to accompany the *sortes* in the Divining Gospels, similar to what we find in P.Montserrat Roca 83 (Manuscript 3 above). Whether the symbol was used with *hermēneiai* in order to carry distinctly christological meaning or functioned as more of a

mystical symbol, or both, depending on period and usage, is impossible to say.¹¹¹

The Greek expressions of the *sortes* in Codex Bezae are notoriously corrupt and idiosyncratic – “by a person very little skilled in Greek,” Harris opines.¹¹² However, Harris believed that the Greek statements had been (poorly) translated from (possibly debased) Latin, which seems very unlikely in light of the other early Greek manuscripts we have that more faithfully preserve portions of the *sortes*. The more likely explanation is that Bezae’s *hermēneiai* exhibit transmission corruption along with orthographical instability. The statements are not numbered, though in sequence they often match the sets we find in other manuscripts, as is especially evident when compared to the Syriac, Latin, and Armenian.

Most unusual, the *hermēneiai* of Codex Bezae occur in the bottom margins of the Gospel of Mark, not in John. In this sense, the manuscript scarcely qualifies as a Divining Gospel. However, we should recall that Bezae’s

¹⁰⁹ E.g. Parker prefers the earlier date (Parker 1992, 43, 49), but Metzger dates it to the ninth or tenth century (Metzger 1988b, 165–66).

¹¹⁰ Harris 1901, 41, n.4.

¹¹¹ For the early history of Christograms, see Hurtado 2006, 135–54. Wilkinson also concludes that the symbols is probably “a Christogram” (Wilkinson 2019, 102–103, n.4).

¹¹² Harris 1901, 72.

so-called “Western” order of the Gospels puts Mark in the fourth position (i.e. Matthew-John-Luke-Mark).¹¹³ Furthermore, the layout is strikingly familiar to that of manuscripts with segmented *hermêneiai*, i.e. the first category discussed above (see Fig. 3.15). Like the *hermêneiai* in the Johannine papyri and parchment fragments, Bezae presents only one oracle per page, at the bottom of the page. Perhaps for the editor or copyist who transformed the magisterial and sacred Codex Bezae into a divinatory tool by incorporating these annotations, the important thing was to recreate the familiar layout, replicating a set of *hermêneiai* at the bottom of the pages of the fourth Gospel – despite the fact that this happened to be the Gospel of Mark in this unusual manuscript. Yet considering their rough, unnumbered, and disconnected presentation, it is not unlikely that the *hermêneiai* migrated to the margins of Mark’s Gospel from the margins of a copy of John, or perhaps from a set of the *hermêneiai* circulating independently, albeit in a particular order, one that bears great resemblance to the order we find elsewhere. In any case, it appears certain that the editor or copyist responsible for adding *hermêneiai* to Codex Bezae did so on the basis of a familiar structural model drawn from a more “conventional” Divining Gospel. However, the usage of Bezae’s *sortes* must have been different, since the connection we find in the other Divining Gospels between the sortilege material and the contents of the Gospel text itself has been abandoned.

3.3.5 Manuscripts with Uncertain Connection to the Divining Gospel Tradition

The last category involves manuscripts that do not necessarily qualify as Divining Gospels yet have been the subject of speculation as *hermêneia* manuscripts or may otherwise play a role in helping us understand the tradition. A few of these include Gospel text but no *hermêneiai* – though it is likely that at least one of them once had *hermêneiai* – and one of them has *hermêneiai* but no Gospel text. One of them is lost. Since they could have a connection to the same oracular tradition and most have been the subject of discussion to that effect, we include them for the sake of thoroughness and for comparison.

Manuscript 16. The fourth- or fifth-century¹¹⁴ Firenze, Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli”, PSI XIII 1364 (van Haelst 1177; PSI inv. 2182; TM 64567; LDAB 5797)¹¹⁵ is a striking example of evidence supporting the idea that the *sortes* we find incorporated into Divining Gospels could circulate separately (Fig. 3.16). One side of this single small (7.5 × 10 cm) parchment folio reads, ερμηνια μη παρακουσησ του λογου (“Interpretation: Do not disregard the word”), a statement that resonates with the Syriac *Puṣṣāqā* 17 at Ioh. 1,44, ܠܘ ܠܐܘܕܝܢ ܐܠ ܠܥܘܕܝܢܐ ܠܗܠܘܠܐ ܘܠܗܘܠܐܝܢܐ, “Interpretation: It will not happen and you will not hear the word” (London, BL, Add. 17,119, fol. 5r), and is nearly identical with the statement appearing in the seventeenth position in Codex Bezae: ερμίνηα μὴ παρακουσῖσ του λογου (Cambridge, University Library, Nn.241, fol. 294r). On the other side of the Florentine fragment we have, ερμηνια ακολουθησον και καλως σοι γινεται (“Interpretation: Pursue and it will turn out well for you”), which is nearly the same as Codex Bezae’s next statement, ερμίνιαν ακολουθησον και καλον συ γινετε (fol. 294v), and oracle number 18 in the Syriac manuscript at Ioh. 1,46: ܘܠ ܠܐܘܕܝܢ ܘܠܥܘܕܝܢܐ ܠܗܘܠܐܝܢܐ, “Interpretation: Pursue (and) it will turn out well for you” (fol. 5r). Furthermore, at Ioh. 1,42, *sors* number 18 in the Latin codex Sangermanensis reads, *et bene*, seemingly a vestige of the same statement (Par. lat. 11553, fol. 125v).¹¹⁶

The interrelationships between these *sortes* are clear, since we encounter effectively the same oracles, in the same order, in the same position within the set in at least two or three other manuscripts. PSI XIII 1364 is damaged but fairly intact, with rather even edges and good corners: “The leaf appears complete on all sides, less so on the bottom....”¹¹⁷ However, it contains no portion of the text of John’s Gospel nor any other text, nor any obvious signs that it was once part of a Gospel codex. It includes ornamental elements, such as horizontal dashes, points, and diplai, along with an intriguing drawing beneath the statements that Bastianini describes as a wavy line resembling the hieroglyphic sign of the snake, ending in a small

¹¹⁴ V. Bartoletti and P. Orsini date it to the fourth or fifth century; Bastianini has proposed a later date, fifth or sixth century, though he acknowledges that he has been influenced by the nature of the text’s contents, not paleography alone; see the discussion in Bastianini 2018, 126.

¹¹⁵ See van Haelst 1976, 355, number 1177; Bastianini 2018, 125–38. Digital images: <http://www.psi-online.it/documents/psi;13;1364> (accessed 7 June 2019).

¹¹⁶ Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2 does not have a parallel pair of statements in the same context.

¹¹⁷ “Il foglietto sembra completo su tutti i lati, meno che in basso...” (Bastianini 2018, 126).

¹¹³ Outtier 1993, 181.

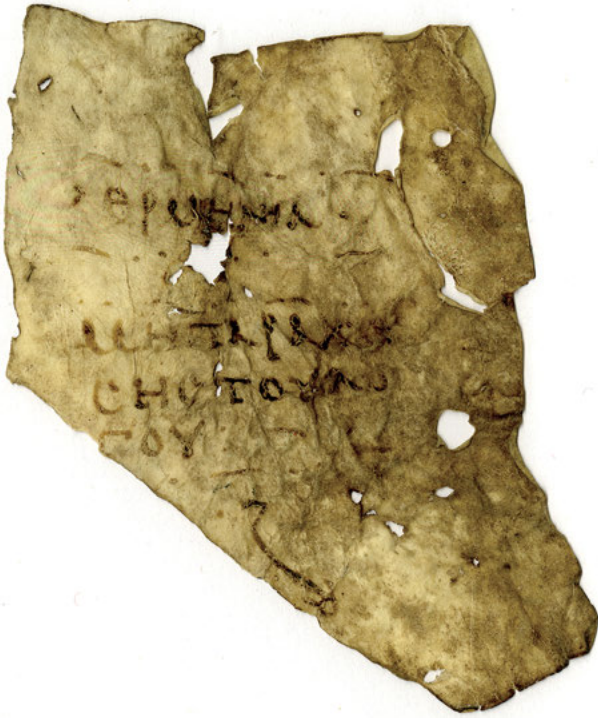


Fig. 3.16: Firenze, Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli”, PSI XIII 1364, verso. Used with permission.

circle with a pair of small horns on either side of the tail (see Fig. 3.16).¹¹⁸

The layout of the page and the ornamental elements suggest that the statements were purposefully segregated into isolated units, one per page, as we might expect in the *hermêneia* genre. Bastianini concluded that the fragment had probably come from a miniature codex.¹¹⁹ Perhaps the fragment was cut from a larger leaf to be used singly – for example a page that contained a portion of the text of John. Yet it could also have been part of a collection of independent oracles, as Bastianini proposes; we cannot be sure. It is certainly related to the same system of sortilege as we see throughout the Divining Gospels, albeit without the Gospel, at least in its present form.

Manuscript 17. The single parchment folio Oslo, Schøyen 1367 (GA 0301) contains a portion of Ioh. 17:1–4 in Greek, about two verses per page. It is small (6.8 x 6.8 cm) and partially damaged, though the outline of the leaf is largely intact, with fairly clean edges and legible margins (see Fig. 3.17). Rosario Pintaudi edited the fragment, suggesting, “it was probably from a ἐρμηνεία-codex of the type, *P.Colt-Nessana* 2.3 (van Haelst 429 [Manuscript

7 above]), where the sequence consists of: Gospel of John, a blank space, the title ἐρμηνεία, biblical oracle.”¹²⁰

However, Pintaudi’s identification is problematic. No part of the term ἐρμηνεία occurs, nor any part of a *sors* or other indications of annotation or marking, despite the fact that the margins are fairly intact and visible, and the composition of the edges is such that we get the impression that we are seeing most of the original page. Furthermore, Pintaudi correctly points out that the original book could not have held the entirety of John’s Gospel, since that would have required a size of at least 500 folios. In short, we have no evidence that this manuscript was part of a Divining Gospel or ever had any divinatory material. Pintaudi’s observation that the rounded lower corners indicates that the artifact sustained popular use not only reinforces the view that we are seeing enough of the original page to determine its layout, i.e. without *hermêneiai*, but also suggests that this leaf may derive from a different sort of specialized copy of scripture intended for popular use, i.e. for prayer and meditation, as an amulet, or some such (see 1.4–5). Though we cannot confidently define the precise nature of the book to which Oslo, Schøyen 1367 originally belonged, it is unlikely that it should be treated as part of the Divining Gospel tradition.

Manuscript 18. The seventh- or eighth-century papyrus manuscript, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Manuscript, Colt Pap. 4.1–20 (GA Ɔ⁶⁰) consists of twenty fragmentary folios of the Greek text of Ioh. 16–19.¹²¹ Since no *hermêneiai* are visible, it may not belong to the *hermêneiai* tradition. However, its characteristics bear a strong comparison with the other *hermêneia* manuscripts, especially Colt Pap 3.1–4 (Manuscript 7 above). Joseph van Haelst had good reason to classify them together, saying about this manuscript that “les pages comportaient des oracles bibliques.”¹²² As with manuscripts in the first category discussed above, a new sentence or thought begins at the top of each page. Each of the diminutive leaves, now about 9 x 8 cm, lacks the bottom portion – perhaps not surprising, since this manuscript emerged from the ground as a mud-caked mass. Only a few short lines of Gospel text occur on each page, with occasional blank spaces beneath the text. In these ways, it is more like Colt Pap. 3.1–4 rather than Schøyen 1367, although like the

¹²⁰ Pintaudi 2005, 63: “probabilmente si trattava di un codice – ἐρμηνεία del tipo *P.Colt-Nessana* 2.3 (van Haelst 429), dove la sequenza è costituita da: Vangelo di Giovanni, spazio bianco, titolo ἐρμηνεία, oracolo biblico.”

¹²¹ Casson/Hettich 1950, 94–111. Digital images: <https://www.themorgan.org/papyri/list> (accessed 7 June 2019).

¹²² Van Haelst 1976, 167.

¹¹⁸ Bastianini 2018, 127.

¹¹⁹ Bastianini 2018, 128, 134–135.



Fig. 3.17: Schøyen 1367, recto and verso; figure based on images supplied by the Schøyen Collection. ©Schøyen Collection. Used by permission.

latter it lacks clear indicators of divinatory material. If, as it appears, Colt Pap. 4.1–20 is a *hermêneia* manuscript that has lost the bottom portion and therefore its oracular material, its original layout would have been similar to those of the first category discussed above, i.e. manuscripts with segmented layout.

Manuscript 19. Van Haelst thought that the eighth-century parchment leaf Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, P.Vindob. G 26084 (GA 0256), “probably included biblical oracles.”¹²³ The fragment is very defective and small (now 4 × 4 cm), containing brief portions of Ioh. 6,32–37. The conjecture that it is a *hermêneia* manuscript is presumably due to its layout and spacing and the fact that the leaf must have originally had a fairly small amount of text on either side. Although it does not manifest characteristics mitigating against its identification as a *hermêneia* manuscript, as is the case with Schøyen 1367, the fact remains that no *hermêneiai* are visible, nor any other indicators of sortilege material, and so little of the text and leaf remains that we may not confidently picture an original layout. It would appear to have come from a diminutive and perhaps specialized volume containing part of John’s Gospel, but we cannot say much more about it.

Manuscript 20. Also worth mentioning is the lost Firenze, Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli”, PSI I, p. 6

¹²³ Van Haelst 1976, 163: “comportait très probablement des oracles bibliques.” See Niederwimmer 1965, 7–11. Digital images: <http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/RZ00002206> (accessed 7 June 2019).

(van Haelst 1172), a papyrus fragment from Oxyrhynchus of unspecified date. Girolamo Vitelli transcribed a *hermêneia* from it: ἑρμηνεία μόχθου καὶ κόπον πολὺ[v] ἀκερδῆν δηλοῖ.¹²⁴ (“Interpretation: It signifies tribulation and much profitless labor”). Apparently the fragment contained this single Greek oracle statement in isolation, promising tribulation and profitless labour, yet having no Gospel text. Although the style and content of the oracle is not dissimilar to some of those in the Divining Gospels described above, it is not a close match to any of them. We know nothing about the page’s scope or condition. Unedited and presumed lost, we can say little about the nature of this fragment, apart from its dismal outlook, though we include it here due to its understandable association with *hermêneiai* manuscripts in scholarly discussion.¹²⁵

3.4 A Shared Tradition

Most of the materials we have surveyed exhibit distinct interconnections. J. Rendel Harris long ago showed the many connections between the *sortes* in Codex Bezae and *Sangermanensis primus* (Paris, BnF, lat. 11553). The two sets, Greek and Latin, repeatedly (though not thoroughly)

¹²⁴ Van Haelst, 1976, 354.

¹²⁵ See also Wilkinson 2019, 122–23, who takes notice of the fragment; and Bastianini 2018, 128–29, who explains the context of its mention and compares its tone and content to PSI XIII 1364.

agree with one another in content and sequence, as the following table illustrates:¹²⁶

Table 3.2: A selection of parallel *hermêneiai* in Codex Bezae and *Sangermanensis*.

Codex Bezae	Paris, BnF, lat. 11553
(14) απο λυπίσ ησ χαραν From grief to joy	<i>xiv</i> <i>gaudium fiet</i> It will become joy ¹²⁸
(15) μετα δεκα ημερασ γίνετε After ten days it will happen	<i>xv</i> <i>est</i> ¹²⁹ <i>dece dies fiet</i> After ten days it will happen
(18) ακολουθησον καί καλον συ γινετε Pursue (it) and it will turn out well for you	<i>xviii</i> <i>et bene</i> And (it will be) well
(22) τεληουμενον παρυμα καλον A good matter will be accomplished	<i>xxii</i> <i>perfectum opus</i> The deed is accomplished
(24) πιστευσον στη το παργμα καλον εστιν Believe that the matter is good	<i>xxii</i> ¹³⁰ <i>credere uia</i> ¹³¹ <i>causa bona e[st]</i> Believe that the matter is good

Irregular orthography and other corruptions notwithstanding, the statements are basically parallel. Several of the Greek *sortes* occurring in Codex Bezae are missing from the sequence in Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 (positions 16–17, 19–21, and 23), but the numbers accompanying the *sortes* present in the Latin manuscript agree with the Greek sequence. As Harris observes, “the two systems are identical as to origin.”¹³¹ We may build on Harris’ comparison by referring to the Syriac version. The following statements from London, BL, Add. 17,119 (fols. 4v, 5r, 6rv) match not only the contents of the previous examples but the assigned Syriac numbers are in agreement as well:

- 14 ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ
From grief to joy
- 15 ¹³²ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ
After ten days the matter will happen

¹²⁶ Harris 1901, 60.

¹²⁷ Harris conjectures an original, *ex tristitia gaudium fiet* (“from grief it will become joy”).

¹²⁸ Read *post* (Harris 1901, 60).

¹²⁹ Read *xxiii* (Harris 1901, 60).

¹³⁰ Read *quia* (Harris 1901, 60).

¹³¹ Harris 1901, 70.

¹³² Read ܩܘܠܘܢ.

- 18 ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ
Pursue (and) it will turn out well for you

- 22 ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ
The deed will be accomplished

- 24 ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ ܩܘܠܘܢ
Be assured that the matter is good

Furthermore, statements missing from this sequence in the Latin but occurring in Codex Bezae are to be found in the same sequence in the Syriac (see the material presented in Chapter Five).

As other manuscripts (such as the Syriac) have come to light, subsequent analysis confirms that the Divining Gospels participate in a shared tradition of sortilege material, a subject of interest for many of the authors we have surveyed. For instance, we have already observed that the statement in Firenze, Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli”, PSI XIII 1364, *ακολουθησον και καλωσ σοι γιγνεται*, agrees precisely with the eighteenth statement in Codex Bezae (and the Syriac) above – although the orthography of PSI XIII 1364 is more regular. The following discussion points to several other examples demonstrating the deep interconnectedness of this material, building on what others have offered and adducing further examples enriching the picture, especially from more recently published materials.

An especially good example builds on one that Stegmüller observes in his study of Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol. 11914 = (GA 9⁶³).¹³³ On the recto (column 4; see Fig. 3.1), the manuscript cites Ioh. 4,9–10 in Greek, concluding with Jesus’ declaration to the Samaritan woman, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water” (NRSV). Beneath that text is a space, then the following Greek and Coptic statements:

ερμηνια
εα[ν πιστευσησ χα
ρα[σοι γ]ιγεται
εκαφανπιστευε ογη
[ογ πα]θηε ναθαπε νακ

hermēnia

If you believe, you will have joy (Greek and Coptic)

¹³³ Stegmüller 1953, 19–21.

The parallel content is obvious. Although the numbers of these particular *sortes* vary, their position in relation to the Gospel text is consistent.

The connections between these materials are striking. However, we must not over-estimate the level of agreement across the different sets of *sortes*. The sets are not identical. Codex Bezae's set is sharply truncated, containing only seventy-one statements (now sixty-nine due to a damaged folio), whereas the Latin (185), Syriac (originally

308), and Armenian (originally 318 and 280–290, respectively) have many more, yet none of them agree precisely in total number. More significantly, we routinely encounter discrepancies between the contents and sequences of the statements, differences that may not be put down to simple textual corruption or mistranslation, as with *απολυτίσις ἡσ χάραν* (Codex Bezae) and *gaudium fiet* (Paris, BnF, lat. 11553), mentioned above. Consider the following series of statements:

Table 3.4: Parallels and disjunctions in Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Armenian *hermêneiai*.

Codex Bezae (Marc. 7,28–9,17; fol. 310v–315r)	BnF lat. 11553 (loh. 4,13–42; fol. 126v)	BL, Add. 17,119 (loh. 4,27–50a; fol. 13r–14v)	Graz 2058/2 (loh. 4,26–51)
(50) μυστηρίον μεγα γιενεταί καί απεκαλυφθη	47 <i>secretu[m] incipit reuelare</i>	50	ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ [ܳܝ] 53 ܣܳܘܳܪܳܗܳܢܳܐ ܣܳܘܳܪܳܗܳܢܳܐ
a great mystery occurs and has been revealed	it begins to reveal the secret	a great mystery will occur	the mystery will be revealed
(51) απροσδοκητον κερδος	48 <i>insperata causa</i>	51	ܘܳܕܳܘܳܠܳܐ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ 54 illegible
unexpected profit	an unexpected matter	profit without measure	illegible
(52) κερως εστίν ἵνα γείνητε ο ζιτις		52	ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ 55 ܫܳܘܳܠܳܬܳܐ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ
it is time for what you seek to happen		it is time for it to happen	It is time for it to be fulfilled
(53) περ πραγματος καλο[v]		53	ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ 56 ܘܳܕܳܘܳܠܳܐ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ
about the matter: it is good		about any matter: it is good	about all matters: benefit from God
(54) εις αναπαυσίν ερχετε ων ζιτις		54	ܘܳܕܳܘܳܠܳܐ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ 57 ܣܳܘܳܪܳܗܳܢܳܐ ܣܳܘܳܪܳܗܳܢܳܐ
what you seek will result in relief		what you seek will result in relief	from unforeseen things you will get profit
(55) απο ξενου ερχετε αλι ¹³⁸ φασις	55 <i>alia[m] causa[m] q[ue]re</i>	55	ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ 58 ܣܳܘܳܪܳܗܳܢܳܐ ܣܳܘܳܪܳܗܳܢܳܐ
from a stranger comes good news	seek another matter	from a stranger (or, foreign country) comes good news	from a stranger (or, foreign country) comes good news
(56) μή απηστίσης τουτο καλον εστιν	55 ¹³⁹ <i>non sis incredulis</i>	(56)	ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ 59 ܘܳܕܳܘܳܠܳܐ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ
do not disbelieve this is good	do not be faithless	do not believe you ought to confirm this, (that) it is good	do not stop [... ...]
(57) αν απελθίς επίτυχανίς		(57)	ܘܳܕܳܘܳܠܳܐ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ ܠܳܘܳܬ 60 ܣܳܘܳܪܳܗܳܢܳܐ ܣܳܘܳܪܳܗܳܢܳܐ
if you go away you will succeed		if you go, you will be successful	in a foreign (land) you will be well received

¹³⁸ Read καλι (Harris 1901, 63, n. 2).

¹³⁹ Probably an error for 56.

Table 3.4 (continued)

Codex Bezae (Marc. 7,28–9,17; fol. 310v–315r)	BnF lat. 11553 (Ioh. 4,13–42; fol. 126v)	BL, Add. 17,119 (Ioh. 4,27–50a; fol. 13r–14v)	Graz 2058/2 (Ioh. 4,26–51)
(58) εαν ακουσι μη δεξι αυτιν if you hear do not accept it	58	ܐܘܢܐܘܟܘܨܐ ܠܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܕܝܟܘܢܐ ܐܘܨܝܢܐ	61 յոյս բարի good hope
(59) αλλο πραγμα ζητισον seek another matter	59	ܠܥܝܢܐ ܐܠܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ through an agreement the matter is yours	62 եթէ երթաս պատահիս if you go you will be successful

Some things are immediately obvious. First, the placements of these sets of *sortes* in relation to the text of John’s Gospel are roughly equivalent – except in Codex Bezae, in which the sequence at least is relatively precise. Second, the Latin set of *sortes* in Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 has large gaps, exhibiting irregularities in numbering and placement, e.g. its statement numbered 55 matches the Greek and Syriac 59.¹⁴⁰ The Syriac set agrees largely with the Greek of Codex Bezae in content and number (eight out of ten times, i.e. excepting 58, 59). The Greek exhibits many orthographical and grammatical peculiarities. The Armenian numbering departs from the Greek and Syriac. Two of the Armenian *sortes* are impossible to make out, but of the rest only numbers 53, 55, and 58 agree with the Greek and Syriac in content and placement. We may detect similarities between the gist of Armenian *sortes* 56, 57 (and 59?) in relation to the Greek and Syriac; perhaps interpretive translation could account for their differences. The Armenian statement 62 actually matches the Syriac and Greek 57, earlier in the series; similarly, the Armenian 57, about unexpected profit, resonates not only with 54 in the Syriac and Greek but also with 51 (48 in the Latin).

Generally speaking, the foregoing comparison confirms the essential interconnectedness of this material. What Harris says of Bezae’s Greek and *Sangermanensis*’ Latin may be extended to include the Syriac and Armenian sets: “the... systems are identical as to origin;” there is no better way to explain the vast parallels in their contents and placement.

However, the *sortes*’ mutual reliance on common source material is complicated by their frequent divergences, reminding us that we are dealing with separate books having distinct identities. This includes statements matching in content but not location: in addition to the examples already noted, we observe that the Armenian 61, յոյս բարի (“Good hope”) matches the Latin 13, *spes bona*

(“Good hope”). The contents agree, but not the locations. Do one (or both) of these represent a dislocation of the *sors* in relation to their common source? It is impossible to say, especially since various statements concerning “hope” occur elsewhere in the oracles, including identical statements, multiplying the possible connections. In the Armenian manuscript statement 178, բարի յոյս (“good hope”) occurs with Ioh. 11,20–22, while the Latin also repeats *spes bona* as number 84 around Ioh. 6,15 and the Syriac has ܐܘܢܐܘܟܘܨܐ ܠܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܕܝܟܘܢܐ ܐܘܨܝܢܐ (“Good hope”) as *sors* 85 with Ioh. 6,32.¹⁴¹ In the Latin statement 227, we find *de peregrino ueniet bonum nuntium* (“From a stranger comes good news”), a statement we might wish were in the place of the problematic Latin number 55 above – though in fact very similar statements about good news coming from strangers also occur as Syriac 221 and the Armenian 243, reminding us that oracle repetition is not unusual and may be intentional. Certainly the oracular responses tend to cluster around a selection of themes, producing similar content (see 6.2 below).

As we will see, deciphering the principles by which the statements are arranged in even one manuscript is a daunting task; further work will be necessary in order to discern the mechanisms – accidental and otherwise – by which parallel statements come to occupy different locations in different manuscripts and language traditions. It must also be recognized that some statements are not simply misaligned or absent, but are unique in that they find no precise parallels in other sets. Nevertheless, our acknowledgment that the systems are not perfectly unanimous in content, sequence, or placement does not negate their strong agreements in each of these areas, agreements sufficient in weight and recurrence to require that we see them as owing to these manuscripts’ participation

¹⁴⁰ Harris notes the disorder in this part of the Latin (Harris 1901, 63).

¹⁴¹ The statement “Good hope” may also derive from a subject heading, adding another wrinkle to our attempt to understand it; see 6.2 below.

in a common tradition. That source is lost to us but it has left unmistakable echoes in our surviving material.

We should not be surprised to find so much variation within the Divining Gospel tradition. Our surviving sources have much in common and we have no difficulty grouping them together and distinguishing this genre of lot divination texts from other genres. Yet within the surviving texts of this genre we also find considerable internal variation and diversity. Whatever the integrity and coherence of this tool's "first edition" may have been, through copying, translation, and perhaps especially through revision due to usage, subsequent editions and versions evolved in different ways to produce quite a range of different books. We can easily see that they belong together as a set and that they share a common ancestry. But what is true of ancient lot texts generally also applies to the Divining Gospels specifically: "[w]hat we encounter in the transmission of *sortes* are fluid texts and free, creative lines of textual transmission so that these different lot texts cannot be squeezed into traditional scholarly manuscript stemmata."¹⁴² We can see that they share a common ancestry and are in many respects very close to each other, but it is not possible to trace in perfect detail the developmental lines linking them together.

3.5 Books Exceptional in Form, Content, and Function

What impressions may we draw from this corpus of evidence? As we have already seen, sortilege involving the biblical text enjoys a long and ancient tradition. The bulk of the materials surveyed here demonstrate that highly specialized divinatory books connected to the Gospel of John seem to have become rather well-known by the sixth century, probably earlier. This type of divinatory tool had actually appeared by the fifth century.¹⁴³ The codicology suggests the practice and earliest tools may have originated in Egypt, as so many "magical" traditions did, from which the phenomenon became more widespread.¹⁴⁴ The fact that the most ancient extant manuscripts happen to come from Egypt does not necessarily mean the phenomenon itself originated there. Nevertheless, the scribal religious tradition of Egypt played a crucial role in synthesizing divination practices and textuality, developing some of the most influential lot

divination texts, so that Egypt remains a likely context in which to situate the original composition of the Divining Gospel (see 2.2.3–4 above).

The broad dissemination of interrelated sources in different languages shows that these tools spread widely and rapidly, whatever the origin of the Divining Gospel tradition. Patristic warnings and repeated canonical proscriptions against the practice of sortition using the biblical text (see 2.4 above) further reinforce our perception that these tools became widespread from a relatively early period. For centuries, there must have been a sustained and lively fortune-telling industry using biblical texts in both the East and the West.

The *sortes* and Divining Gospels were probably Greek at first. Although Harris believed the Greek statements of Codex Bezae were translated from a Latin source on which the margins of Sangermanensis also drew, he admitted, "nothing prohibits the belief, if it should thought otherwise reasonable, than an ancient Greek system is behind all that we have tabulated."¹⁴⁵ The evidence that has come to light since Harris' time underscores the reasonableness of precisely that view. Given the time frame and the general context of Christian Late Antiquity, a Greek origin would not be surprising. But also our earliest sources are mostly Greek (a few having Coptic) and the Syriac version was presumably translated from the Greek (see 5.2–3 below), and that at a fairly early date, given the age of the manuscript. We recall the many similar materials occurring in Greek, such as the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, the Greek Psalters with sortilege materials, and the *Rhiktologia*. Though probably Greek in origin, the Divining Gospels commanded popular interest, leading to the production of bilingual and vernacular translations in Coptic, Syriac, Latin, and Armenian, at least.

Greek was the literary language in late antique Egypt and Coptic was native. But Egypt attracted Christian scholars from far and wide, including who wrote in Syriac and Latin, eventually Armenian, Georgian, and Arabic, along with others. The same was true for neighboring Palestine, a locale that in Late Antiquity was fast becoming home to a number of monastic establishments with their own scholastic activities. Translations into Syriac and Latin could have been done in Egypt or even Palestine, to serve (presumably) monastic communities in those places. Yet the manuscript evidence we have shows that the non-Greek and non-Coptic versions came to be used in places like Syria and Gaul, well beyond the borders of Egypt. Hence, while the translation projects may have

¹⁴² Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 25.

¹⁴³ See Meerson 2006, 392.

¹⁴⁴ See 6.2.1 and 7.5 below.

¹⁴⁵ Harris 1901, 70.

been conducted in Egypt, it is not unlikely that Greek editions found their way to far-off places and were translated there, in such places as Northern Italy or Gaul and to Syria, where translations of Greek Christian texts were being steadily produced.

In any case, by the sixth century an elaborate system of *sortes* had been devised, probably based on existing non-Christian pagan models such as we saw in Chapter Two, but deliberately adapted for use in connection with codices of John that were created specifically for this purpose, i.e. Divining Gospels. The system of *sortes* may have existed separately before they were added to the pages of Gospel codices. The early manuscript PSI XIII 1364 (Manuscript 16 above) could be a vestige of such an independent collection. However, our clearest and most substantial evidence implies a strong connection between the *hermêneiai* and codices of John's Gospel. Many of the *hermêneiai* in these books resonate with the Gospel texts to which they are attached, a matter we will explore more fully in Chapter Seven. Furthermore, a number of the manuscripts we have surveyed here, especially of the first category, were designed to accommodate the *sortes* in a particular way. This in turn suggests particular patterns of usages, a subject to which we shall also return later.

Whether the system originally circulated independently or not, it is not unlikely that the earliest layout for the Divining Gospels as such had the requisite passage of John and its paired *hermêneia* segregated onto a single page, as in the first type of evidence discussed above (Manuscripts 1–12).¹⁴⁶ Presumably this facilitated the book's use in sortilege. In time, however, some book producers chose to compress the material, as in the Syriac manuscript (Manuscript 13), presumably relying solely on a system of numbering in order to use the book, rather than segmenting the *sortes* and page spacing. But others preserved the original segmented layout, as we see in the later Armenian manuscripts. In the celebrated Codex Bezae, the earlier pattern is repeated, in which the *hermêneiai* appear as statements at the bottom of the page, albeit secondary additions to the manuscript. The layouts and numbering we find in most of these manuscripts indicate that the material is meant to be accessed in a particular way, with reference to the numbers provided and in connection with the associated Gospel text segments.

Our analysis of the contents, sequence, and placement of the *sortes* in different manuscripts confirm that they draw on a common tradition. That is, a singular source lay in the background to this material, a source having a particular series of *hermêneiai* linked to segments of John's Gospel. However, that source is lost to us and we should be cautious in attempting to reconstruct it. Doing so would not only involve a great deal of conjecture but it could also distract us from plumbing the depths of the real evidence we actually have before us.

Considerable variation crept into the tradition, probably from an early point in its development, variation that expanded rapidly as the books were subjected to the vicissitudes of copying and their materials were edited and enhanced through innovation along with the adaptation of additional materials. Like other divination books, the texts of these materials appear to have been fluid. As the books became popular and spread, processes of translation transformed them further, creating new editions of the Divining Gospels in different languages that would themselves be subject to new streams of development, carrying clear vestiges of their sources but acquiring potent voices of their own in different contexts of use.

As we have them, the Syriac and Armenian series are more full than the Latin, which is in turn more full than the Greek (and Coptic) of the early fragments and Codex Bezae. Given the degree of variation we find between the versions, we cannot say that a fuller series always fills in for the more lacunose. For instance, we should not presume that Syriac *puššāqē* fill in the lacunae of the much less complete Greek. However, the agreements we see between the series indicate that the original Greek probably was generally like what we find in the more complete and fairly early Syriac, though we remain cautious in presuming similarity in specific instances where the Greek evidence is lacking.

Much remains to be discovered and explained regarding the origins and interrelationships of these books and their *hermêneiai*. Yet we emphasize again that a quest for the origins could prove to be fruitless. In the next chapter we turn our attention fully to the Syriac version, in fact to a single manuscript, focusing on a particular facet of this broad tradition, but one that is remarkably old and exceptionally rich.

¹⁴⁶ See the discussion in 7.2.5 below.

4 “Fearsome and Terrible Word of God:” A Closer Look at the Form and History of The Syriac Codex

4.1 Listening in on the Story of an Old Book

In Chapter One we provided a plausible scenario narrating the scribe Gewargis at work in the production of the Syriac version of the Divining Gospel preserved in a unique British Library manuscript (London, BL, Add. 17,119). The narrative described some features of the manuscript’s codicology and palaeography (see 1.1). In this chapter we will take a closer look at the manuscript itself.¹ The epiphem, “Fearsome and terrible Word of God” derives from a menacing ownership note at the end of the codex, one of several clues that the book offers, pointing us to decisive moments in its history of use.

Our look will entail a description of the codex’s features that will help us better understand the significance of this unique edition of the Divining Gospel. Far from being merely a carrier of the Syriac texts of John’s Gospel and accompanying *hermēneiai* (*puššāqē* in Syriac), the manuscript itself tells a story of its own history. As we will see by attending to the materiality and physical features of the codex, this story unfolds in several parts, each of which offers a fascinating glimpse into its different communities of use. Beginning with its origins in Syria, we will accompany the book from its early accounts of ownership, through episodes of correction, damage, and restoration into its long sojourn in Egypt, until we see it come to rest in modern London, where the book resides today.

The perspective adopted here owes much to the methods and emphases of “New Philology.”² Though many aspects of New Philology (or Material Philology) are not truly new, the term is intended to highlight the field’s capacity to offer correctives and enhancements to the principles and methods of traditional textual criticism. In short, the traditional approach aims at recovering original texts. It tends to treat manuscripts as carriers of texts and variant readings as clues to the text’s genealogy and therefore important sign-posts on the journey to recovering the (lost) original. The editions produced by traditional methods tend either to be eclectic presentations of a reconstructed text or presentations of the “best” available

manuscript, listing emendations and variants from other manuscripts, as needed. These methods work better with some textual traditions than others. Relatively stable traditions may be fairly represented by such editions, whereas traditions characterized by a high degree of fluidity – such as we see in many lot divination texts – are not as well served by the constraints these methods impose. Furthermore, the traditional approach necessarily privileges an original (or initial) text, devaluing or even dismissing real texts that were actually used in concrete settings for the sake of generating a hypothetical text and advancing it as the preferred object of study.

Privileging the original text may also lead scholars to trivialize the materiality of manuscripts. With its emphasis on recovering an original text, traditional textual criticism is concerned to identify the best possible witnesses. Codicology and palaeography can confirm that some manuscripts are older than others, while attention to scribal patterns may vet a particular manuscript as more or less likely to be an accurate copy of its exemplar. These material considerations are of great concern to the project of constructing an original text on the basis of its later witnesses because they help the researcher identify the “best” possible witnesses, i.e. manuscripts believed to have texts closest to that of the initial text. However, the material characteristics of manuscripts offer us much more than instrumental support to the quest for an original text. They provide rich testimony to the actual “lives” of texts and the varied social contexts of their use.³ New Philology draws attention to these neglected voices by emphasizing the materiality of manuscripts and the utter uniqueness of each and every text produced in a manuscript culture.

Prior to the advent of the printing press, the “book culture” of Late Antiquity (see 1.3–4) was actually a manuscript culture. Books contained texts that were copied by hand, no two of which were exactly alike. We must remember not only that the books of Late Antiquity were material objects and had significances as such, but also that the texts within them are characterized by fluidity and variability due to the processes of transmission. Changes to the text came inevitably, some through intentional alteration and others by accident. The result was that every instance of a text was actually unique.⁴ In this sense, variance is the

¹ A preliminary form of some of the material in this chapter was published in Childers 2017, 264–67.

² See the helpful survey in Lundhaug/Lied 2017, 1–12; also Nichols 1990, 1–10.

³ Daganais 1994, xv–xvii.

⁴ See Cerquigliani 1999, 73–78; Driscoll 2010, 90–91.

norm rather than just a symptom of deviation. This is not to say that scribes and producers of books were always careless or had little concern to replicate their exemplars faithfully. Some scribes show great care to copy with exactness, while many late antique and medieval readers are quick to criticize scribes for their errors or to condemn editors for making deliberate changes in a text. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of textual fluidity pervades the manuscripts.

Textual fluidity is due not only to the scribal activity that produces a text but also to the activities of readers, who leave their own traces of use and revision. Indeed, it can be instructive to see scribes as readers rather than neutral channels of textual data.⁵ And even “bad” (i.e. non-original) readings may be items of great interest revealing to us details about the text’s reception in social settings.⁶ The shift in perspective away from the quest for an original text towards understanding the variance and other unique features of a manuscript brings us into an encounter with a book’s actual readers and users.

Even before a book gets into the hands of readers, the features of its material composition, design, and layout may tell us much about the context of its production, the purposes of its intended use, and interactions of its maker/s with the ideas and other cultural property of its social context. For instance, the inclusion of the *hermêneiai* within dedicated copies of the Gospel of John gives strong indications about the ideas and beliefs that users of the sortilege material held regarding that Gospel (see 1.5), whereas the absence of features we expect to see in Syriac Gospel manuscripts shows that our manuscript was not intended for use in liturgy (see 6.1.3 below). The high quality of its materials and the scribal expertise we find in it suggest competent and probably Christian clerical production and use (see 6.3 below). What we can read of the manuscript’s original material features such as those we have just enumerated open a window onto many fascinating aspects of a book’s origins and earliest context.

Yet the manuscripts we study have lives well beyond their moments of origin. Within the fluid environment of a manuscript culture, a book’s users and readers often leave traces of their own interactions with the book. These traces may take many forms, such as corrections to the text, replacement of lost leaves, oil residue due to the fingering of pages, and the deliberate destruction of parts of the book – or even complete erasure of the text, as in the case of the Armenian palimpsest, Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2 (described in Chapter Three). Annotations and

other paratextual features, including ownership notes or marginal comments, may reveal much about a text’s reception by different readers and its significance in various contexts.⁷ Traces such as these also open windows, with vistas onto the changing contexts of a book’s use. In the case of a book such as our Syriac manuscript, one that has seen well over a millennium of history, the life story these features tell may be rich indeed.

The quest to recover a pristine (yet forever lost) original can render *real* books practically invisible. Actual contexts of use may be overlooked for the sake of hypothesizing about conjectured contexts of origin.

Reliance upon principles informed by New Philology in this study does not lead us to reject the principles of traditional textual criticism. The application of the methods of “old philology” is evident throughout this study. Yet we strive to adopt an enlarged perspective, one that is open to the widest range of evidence we have available to us. In this study we wish to complement traditional principles of textual criticism and text editing. We seek to present the best possible text of the Syriac version (Chapter Five); we are indeed concerned with questions of origin and tracing the development of the sortilege material in the *hermêneia* tradition (Chapters Three and Six). Yet we also welcome the insights that we may glean when we attend more closely to the materiality of a manuscript, respect variance and textual fluidity, and acknowledge that every book and each instance of a text is uniquely capable of acquainting us with people from the past who also found our book interesting and valuable, for reasons of their own.

It was the practice of traditional textual criticism that led Pusey and Gwilliam to focus only on the biblical text in our Syriac manuscript, thereby effacing its actual identity as a Divining Gospel. Because they ignored the manuscript’s most striking features we were left with a rather superficial image of the manuscript as an ancient but simple bearer of text, an instrument to be used in the quest for the original Syriac Peshitta, the crucial content of which could be scientifically reduced to the essential data of a textual apparatus. The results of their work with the manuscript were not inaccurate or without value, but left unfortunate gaps in our knowledge of the book itself, gaps that have endured for more than a century. The longevity of these gaps is not the fault of Pusey and Gwilliam. Despite the great age of many Syriac manuscripts, very little scholarly work has been done from the vantage point of book history to advance our knowledge of the artifacts

⁵ See Haines-Eitzen 2000, 21–38; Dagenais 1990, 20–29.

⁶ See Ehrman 2013, 803–30.

⁷ See Lied/Maniaci 2018, 2–7; Driscoll 87–104; also the seminal discussion in Genette 1997.

as such.⁸ It is hoped that the following analysis of London, BL, Add. 17,119 will not only add to our understanding of this extraordinary book but also stimulate studies of this kind in other Syriac manuscripts.

4.2 Origins of a Divining Gospel

We have seen that connecting a body of divinatory material with the Gospel of John in a single, specialized volume was integral to the purpose of the material (see 1.5 above). We will explore this aspect more fully in Chapter Seven. We cannot know as much as we might wish to know about the circumstances of the Syriac manuscript's origins, all its owners, or the precise manner of its use. Yet by analyzing its material features, observing alterations to the codex, and attending to the testimony of the several hands that have marked its pages, it is possible to chronicle in broad outline at least part of the history of this remarkable manuscript.

The first thing to notice about the Syriac codex is that it lacks many features typical of ancient Gospel manuscripts. Our manuscript has no Ammonian/Eusebian sections, showing no sign of the system of segmentation that became common in late antique Gospel editions of all languages. It has no harmony at the bottom of its folios and no *ṣḥāḥē*, the ancient chapter divisions commonly found in Syriac Gospel manuscripts. The text is segmented throughout into 308 sections, the first seven of which are missing. The segments do not correspond to Ammonian sections or other known systems of division, except by coincidence in various places. No liturgical notes appear. The absence of these typical features is striking and differentiates the manuscript as unusual in its production.

Even the fact that it is not part of a *tetrevangelium* – an edition containing all four canonical Gospels – marks it as most unusual. The only other Syriac manuscript known to contain only the Gospel of John is Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Library, Syr. 176, an edition of the Harklean version of John and the Harklean Masora.⁹ The singularity of its Gospel contents distinguish London, BL, Add. 17,119 from other Syriac Gospel manuscripts – yet this is precisely one of the features that place it alongside other versions of the Divining Gospel we have surveyed (see 3.3).

4.2.1 Basic Characteristics of London, BL, Add. 17,119

The manuscript, London, BL, Add. 17,119 was created in the sixth or seventh century. This is apparent from a palaeographical study of its earliest hand.¹⁰ Though much remains to be done in the pursuit of Syriac palaeography,¹¹ the immense wealth of surviving early Syriac manuscripts – including many dated ones – provides us with a strong framework for dating hands such as the one we find on the parchment leaves of this codex (Fig. 4.1).¹² As is typical of most Syriac manuscripts of nearly all periods, this one is constructed mostly of quinions – leaves of parchment folded into bifolia and gathered into groups of five, stitched tightly together for binding.¹³ The original quire signatures, if any, are not visible. The manuscript now consists of eighty-three leaves, with pages measuring approximately 22.2 x 13.3 cm. We may presume that the codex had the usual binding of wooden boards, lined with leather, but we cannot know for certain because the original binding is lost, as are the original opening leaves – at least two – and a few leaves from the middle of the manuscript; i.e. folios 1, 2, 63, and 66 are later additions replacing lost leaves. More on those later.

Apart from water damage in sections of the manuscript (especially folios 3–7, 22; see Fig. 4.1) and some occasional tearing, the last leaf (fol. 83) has extensive damage, disfiguring some of the manuscript's ownership notes (see below). It is most unfortunate that the original opening of the manuscript is missing (folios 1–2) for we would like to assume that this part of the codex once held crucial clues to the book's stated identity and original use that are now lost to us.

The book shows signs of care in its construction. Each page is ruled with lead to create a writing area of about 14.7 x 7.8 cm (see the layout in Fig 3.10), bounded by two vertical lines on either side and one on top. The text is written in a single column, a layout that begins to become conventional in Syriac manuscripts from about the early sixth century, replacing the earlier custom of two or even three columns per page.¹⁴ The text is neatly justified within the writing area. The original pages have between nineteen and twenty-two lines of text each, with twenty lines of text being

⁸ See the discussion and brief survey in Heal 2017, 376–79.

⁹ The manuscript is variously dated 1091/92, 1491/92, or 1591/92. See Goshen-Gottstein 1979, 110–11; Juckel 2006, 107–21. I am indebted to Andreas Juckel for unpublished information on Peshitta and Harklean manuscripts that have been collated for the *Novum Testamentum Graecum Editio Critica Maior*.

¹⁰ Wright 1870, 1,71.

¹¹ See Van Rompay in Hatch 2002, iv–viii; Borbone/Chatonnet/Balicka-Witakowska 2015, 252–66; Van Rompay 2017, 2,291; Kaplan 2015, 307–19.

¹² See Hatch 2002, 3–47.

¹³ Borbone/Chatonnet/Balicka-Witakowska 2015, 255; Wright 1872, 3, xxvi. Some of the quires have fewer than ten leaves.

¹⁴ Hatch 2002, 14–15.



Fig. 4.1: British Library Additional 17,119, fol. 4, verso–5, recto (Ioh. 1,37–48; *Puššāqē* 14–19). ©The British Library Board (Add. 17,119 Syriac). Image used by permission.

typical. The hand is a clear, elegant *estrangelo* of the sixth or seventh century. Punctuation and pointing are sparse and consistent with script from the period. Along with the dot distinguishing *ī* from *ā*, we find *seyāmē* marking plural forms (e.g. ,ܡܳܘܠܳܝܳܐ) and a few disambiguating dots, such as ܘܳܒܳܝܳܐ, ܳܡܳܘܳܠܳܝܳܐ, and ܳܝܳܚܳܝܳܐ/ܳܝܳܚܳܝܳܐ, along with the feminine marker ܳܝܳܚܳܝܳܐ. Punctuation is basically limited to the following:, with dots positioned on, below, and above the line. The marker ✦ occurs ornamentally at the end of the manuscript and with the colophon but not with the text. The text is written in a clear dark ink, now chestnut in color – except for the *puššāqē* (*hermēneiai*). The *puššāqē* stand out, having been written in a rich red ink (see Fig. 4.3). Their handwriting is identical to the rest of the text and they fit perfectly in line with it, indistinguishable from it in letter shape and word spacing but red in color.

Some comment on the sequence of *puššāqē*, as intended by the editor or scribe, is in order. Since the manuscript is defective, lacking its original opening, we cannot know for certain how the book began pairing the statements with particular Gospel texts. Did the opening of Ioh. 1 come first, followed by its *puššāqē*, or vice-versa? The fact that the final portion of Gospel text in the manuscript (Ioh. 21,24–25; fol. 82v) lacks a subsequent *puššāqē* lends some support to seeing the latter as preliminary to their Gospel texts rather than subsequent. On the other hand, the Armenian manuscript (Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2) is similar, placing the last *hermēneia* (number 316) after Ioh. 21,23, i.e. not at the end of the final portion of Gospel text.¹⁵ It remains

¹⁵ In fact, the final Armenian statement merely repeats the preceding one, attached to Ioh. 21,19b–22. The final statement in the Latin

likely that the oracular statements were meant to be read in conjunction with the *preceding* portion of biblical text rather than the text *following* them. This is the pattern we see in our earliest sources. In the early *hermêneia* manuscripts, the interpretive statements are always beneath the Gospel text (see 3.3.2 above), i.e. they follow upon the Gospel reading. Of course, their correlations are much more obvious since each page has only a single pair, one portion of Gospel text and its solitary *hermêneia* (along with translations of the latter, in some instances). The Syriac manuscript compresses the layout instead, eliminating extra spacing without providing any clear delineations between the pairs. Yet ancient users familiar with the early conventions of these materials would certainly have expected the oracular statements to follow their Gospel texts. Furthermore, in the Syriac as in the other early sources, the fact that the statements style themselves as “interpretations” connected to designated Gospel passages commends the logic of arranging them so that the biblical reading comes first, after which the *puššāqā* follows. As we shall see, it is not always the case that we can detect clear and definitive links between each statement and a given biblical text on the basis of distinctive content (see especially the discussions in 7.2–5 below), so that it is not simply a question of identifying each pairing on the basis of parallel wording. Perhaps the generality of content of so many of the statements was such that fluidity of placement did not bother practitioners much (see 7.5–6). This would also help account for the arrangement at the end of the Syriac manuscript (and the Armenian), where no *puššāqā* follows the final portion of Gospel text. The differences we find in the final numbers of the statements (e.g. 308 in the Syriac; 316 in the Latin) and the inconsistencies we encounter in various aspects of *hermêneia* placement caution us not to expect a tidy system of correlations (see 6.4.3; 7.2.5 below). For all these reasons, we shall treat each *puššāqā* as through the scribe intended it to be read with the Gospel text *before* it, while acknowledging that many of them could be read on the page the other way.

In the margins alongside the *puššāqā* the scribe provided numbers, using letters of the Syriac alphabet – from 7 to 308 (ⲗⲏ–ⲛ) in the extant portions.¹⁶ The earliest legible numbers are written in red ink and occur in

the margins adjacent to the portions of text containing oracular statements (see Fig. 4.1, 4.3). The earliest ones appear to be roughly contemporary to the original text, but possibly in a different hand. Many are worn away and have been reinked; a few are now missing altogether. The practice of placing the numbers in the right-hand margins, which appears to have been the earliest practice, created problems on the recto side of pages, since it relegated those numbers to the gutter, where they became obscure or were subjected to additional wear against the facing pages in a tightly bound book. Later scribes “transferred” these numbers to the outer (left-hand) margin on most of these (recto) pages. This occurs especially on leaves with significant tearing to the inner margins (see 4.2.3 below).

The book has very little ornamentation within. At the end of the manuscript patterns of small bubbles, dots, and the marker ✧ occur ornamentally (fol. 82v, 83r).¹⁷ Most striking, however, is the colored cross on the very last page (fol. 83v; see Fig. 4.2), one of the earliest surviving instances of polychromatic decoration in a Syriac manuscript.¹⁸ The aniconic cross is enclosed within a circle-nimbus that appears to have been decorated with a mosaic pattern. The cross, which may have been gilded originally, has what appear to be chains hung from its transverse arms, one on either side. Leroy observes that such chains or ribbons in Syriac manuscripts may be depicted as holding lamps or gems or even the letters α – ω,¹⁹ but no clear image survives to tell us what the chains (or ribbons) in this image were meant to hold.

Faint marks within the space created by the circle indicate that it may have held some text or other ornamentation but they are illegible now. The nimbus and cross dominate the last page, constituting its only contents. Ancient books were more likely to have crosses on the front, sometimes with a parallel image on the back, leading us to wonder whether this manuscript, with its striking back-page picture, had decoration on its front as well. We cannot know, since the front is lost. But much as ancient Christians in Syria marked their homes with crosses, “in order to sanctify them and drive away the

(Paris, BnF, lat. 11553) is attached to Ioh. 21, 23–25, though it is written in the margin alongside rather than before or after, as is conventional in that manuscript.

¹⁶ Small portions of the original manuscript are missing (fol. 1, 2, 63, 66 are later additions).

¹⁷ Similar bubbles and dots adorn the running heading (see Fig. 4.3), though the heading is a later addition.

¹⁸ See Desreumaux 2015, 167.

¹⁹ See the discussion in Leroy 1964, 114, including the plate on p.3 of the album volume. The letters α – ω refer symbolically to the Lord, who declares triumphantly, “I am the Alpha and Omega” (Apoc. 1,8; 22,13).

his *Commentary on John* (*Homiliae in Ioannem*; CPG 4425),²² a series of exegetical homilies on John's Gospel that were immensely popular in Greek and other versions, including a very early Syriac version.²³ The commentary is typically called *Puššāqā* (ܦܘܫܫܐܩܐ) in the Syriac tradition, using the same term that the Syriac uses for the *hermêneiai* or *sortes*. The subscription itself uses the same root (ܦܫܩ) in its reference to Chrysostom's interpreting or commenting on John. No other references to Chrysostom occur anywhere in the manuscript. Furthermore, a thorough comparison with Chrysostom's *Commentary* shows that the *puššāqē* of London, BL, Add. 17,119 have no discernible connection to Chrysostom or the texts of his *Commentary on John*.

It is possible that the composer of the subscription – whether Gewargis or someone earlier in the chain of transmission – connected the book to Chrysostom by mistake, presumably due to the frequent use of the term *puššāqā* in the *sortes* and an awareness of Chrysostom's popular *Puššāqā* or *Commentary*. Yet that would be surprising in view of the fairly obvious yet special nature of the *puššāqē* in this manuscript and their utter lack of reference to or resonance with Chrysostom's homilies. The term ܦܫܩ (*pšq*) and its cognates are common in Syriac, much as ἐρμηνεύειν (*hermêneuein*) and its cognates are common in Greek. We could speculate that the composer sought to disguise the true nature of the divinatory *puššāqē* by referring to Chrysostom's more readily approved *Commentary*. Such fanciful speculations are unnecessary.

The most likely explanation may be that the Chrysostom reference in the subscription is merely incidental. By comparison, some West Syrian Psalters mention Athanasius' popular interpretation on the Psalms, yet no discernable connection exists between Athanasius' *Commentary on the Psalms* and the material of the Psalters in which the notes occur.²⁴ Such references may simply reflect the popularity and use of specific biblical commentators in monastic or ecclesial libraries.²⁵ The attachment of such a subscription to John's Gospel may even predate the attachment of the *puššāqē* to the Gospel text. In other words, the reference to Chrysostom's interpretation in the subscription could be due solely to the Gospel content of the manuscript, making incidental reference to a popular Gospel commentary, having nothing to do with the manuscript's additional qualities as a divinatory tool. In any case, our intriguing subscription does not illuminate the origins or character of the manuscript.

²² See Wright 1870, 1,71.

²³ See Childers 2013a, 323–32; Childers 2013b, 129–51.

²⁴ See Taylor 2006, 377.

²⁵ See discussion in Childers 2013a, 327–32.

Such was the book as originally executed in the sixth or seventh century, to the extent we can interpret its components and reconstruct its original form.

4.3 Correction, Repair, and Loss

4.3.1 Ownership and Early Annotation

The codex's features tell a tale of changing ownership and sustained use, offering occasional hints about significant chapters in its developing history. As for the ownership of the book, fragmentary notes on the last folio, in a hand later than that of the original (of perhaps the eighth or ninth century), show that at some point it came into the possession of the Monastery of Silvanus at Damascus:

ܘܗܘܢܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ
ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ
ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ
ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ

This book belongs to the Monastery of the holy Silvanus of the domain of the city of Damascus. But anyone who removes it by any means, without returning it to the [aforementioned] monastery, transgresses the fearsome and terrible Word of [God]! (fol. 83r)

Ownership notes often include dire threats against any who would steal a valuable book away or damage it by cutting out leaves. This conventional note places the manuscript near Damascus early in its history.²⁶ A second and possibly contemporary note, separated from the first by spacing and ornamentation, goes on to explain that the head of the monastery purchased the book for the benefit of the brothers, as it seems, but the notice has gaps due to tears on the final leaf and is far from clear:

ܘܗܘܢܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ
ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ ܕܘܫܫܐܩܐ

This book was bought [...] the priest and head of the monastery [...] for the profit of his/its brothers and [for.....] that died [in.....] of/that [...]. (fol. 83r)

A copy of John's Gospel could undoubtedly be seen as a source of spiritual "profit" (ܘܫܫܐܩܐ) for the brothers, even a copy lacking the reader's tools that usually accompanies Gospel codices. However, the use of the term in this note echoes its frequent occurrence in the divinatory material, where ܘܫܫܐܩܐ ("profit") occurs no fewer than nine times (*Puššāqē* 44, 51, 77, 154, 191, 221, 249, 301, 302). The word is a common one and certainly should not be seen as

²⁶ See Brock 2015, 368–70.

denoting a clear and definite link to the *puššāqē*. Yet its thematic resonance with the divinatory material may be more than coincidence. The book was surely held to be of great profit not only as a Gospel but also as a special tool for divination, something to which this note appears to hint in the expressed motivation for acquiring it.

The running title ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ: ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ (“Gospel of John”) was added to the manuscript, in a hand perhaps not much later than the original (see Fig. 4.3). This normally occurs at the top of every fifth folio (verso), with some variation in folio placement. The heading is adorned with dotted “bubbles” (•○•), a symbol common to Syriac manuscripts. Twice, the headings have clusters of dots instead (fol. 10v, 54v).

We cannot know how long our manuscript remained at the Monastery of Silvanus. However, it eventually found its way to another monastic library more than 1000 km distant, becoming part of the great collection of old Syriac books preserved at Deir al-Surian, the “Monastery of the Syrians,” in the Wadi al-Natrun region in Egypt northwest of Cairo. The famed Mushe of Nisibis may have been the one to carry it there when he returned to the monastery in 931/2 with some 250 manuscripts he had bought or received as gifts on his travels to and from Baghdad, though we cannot know for certain.²⁷

4.3.2 Guardians of the Gospel

The original scribe had included no liturgical notations, nor did the manuscript acquire such notations or other typical Gospel apparatus over time, as biblical manuscripts often do. This suggests that the book never came into public or liturgical use, although the use and significance of the Gospel text itself is evident throughout the manuscript’s history. Whether in Syria, Egypt, or elsewhere, certain users of the codex noticed that its text of John was defective here and there. At least four different hands are evident in the repair or completion of the Gospel text, writing in the margins or above the lines at locations where they detected errors, or variant readings to be “corrected.” Figures 1.1, 4.3 both show examples of scribal corrections. An early scribe (perhaps even the original hand) has marked a transposition in Ioh. 4,13, using the Syriac convention of placing three dots over the transposed words (ܐܘܪܐܝܠܐ; fol. 11v).

In most cases corrections to the Gospel text fill in gaps that have occurred due to common scribal errors. For

instance, the original scribe omitted most of Ioh. 3,21 (ܐܘܪܐܝܠܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ). The manner of error is a common one, due to ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ occurring at the end of both Ioh. 3,20 and the omitted portion of text (*homoioteleuton*). A later scribe has supplied the missing text in the margin (fol. 9v), with clear indications as to where to insert it. A similar problem occurs at Ioh. 4,13, where the original scribe has omitted most of the verse (ܐܘܪܐܝܠܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ), presumably due to the repetition of ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ... ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ at Ioh. 4,14; a correction supplies the missing text in the margin (fol. 11v). A third correction occurs in the margin at Ioh. 7,8, supplying another missing portion of text (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ; fol. 27r). These three corrections are in the same hand, though difficult to date – probably by the ninth century. A fourth may be the work of the same scribe, who uses the margin to complete an omission in Ioh. 14,7 (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ; fol. 57v).

A somewhat later hand has corrected ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ in the margin at Ioh. 4,42 (fol. 14r). Another correction may also be the work of the same hand, at Ioh. 14,3, where a scribe writes into the margin the portion of the verse the original scribe had omitted (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ; fol. 57r).

Two corrections occur in the top and side margins of fol. 36r as still another scribe provides the missing ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ (Ioh. 9,2) and ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ (Ioh. 9,3). A distinct and still later hand fills in an omission at Ioh. 3,13, supplying the end of the verse (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ; fol. 8v). What may be the same scribe as the last supplies a missing reference to Lazarus’ sisters in Ioh. 11,3 (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ; fol. 43v). Another scribal editor is responsible for corrections in at least four additional places, writing thin letters in dark ink: in Ioh. 8,51 the original text of the manuscript has “will not *taste* death” (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ) but the corrector has written the more usual, “will not *see* death” (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ) beneath the line (fol. 35r); in Ioh. 8,55 the corrector supplies an emphatic pronoun (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ) that the original text omits (fol. 35v); in Ioh. 12,8 the corrector fills in a defective verse (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ; fol. 49v); and in Ioh. 12,36 the corrector scratches out ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ and replaces it with ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ (fol. 52v; see Fig. 1.1). The latter correction changes the intriguing reading, “that you may be *called* children of light” into the standard, “that you may *become* children of light.”²⁸

²⁸ Whereas the standard text has, “believe in the light that you may become children of light,” the original text of our manuscript has, “walk in the light that you may be called children of light” (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ), echoing Eph. 5,8. The corrector changes “called” but does not correct “walk” to the standard reading, “believe” (ܩܘܡܩܘܠܘܨܐ).

²⁷ See Brock 2004, 15–24; Brock 2012, 15–32; Brock/Van Rompay 2014, xiv–xv.



Fig. 4.3: British Library Additional 17,119, f. 35, verso–36, recto (Ioh. 8,55–9,8; *Puššāqē* 136–141). ©The British Library Board (Add. 17,119 Syriac). Image used by permission.

The foregoing is not an exhaustive catalogue of every correction or scribal alteration of our manuscript's biblical text, though it describes most of the legible instances. The purpose for describing them is not for the textual criticism of John's Gospel in Syriac, a task for which Pusey and Gwilliam have already edited the Gospel text of London, BL, Add. 17,119.²⁹ Instead, the pattern of correction informs our understanding of the manuscript's history and use. In each case scribal corrections produce a text matching that of the standard Peshitta text. The corrections show that the text of John's Gospel was very important to many of the book's users over the centuries. John was probably being read on its own terms, so that any problems with the biblical text were seen to be in need of remedy. However,

the fact that we find substantial corrections in several different hands spanning centuries shows that the book was probably never subjected to a systematic program of thorough revision. Instead, different Gospel passages attracted the corrective attentions of different users at various times. Why this should be so is unclear, yet it is not unusual in biblical manuscripts, many of which exhibit layers of correction and revision. One thing that is certain is that the Gospel text is never treated as incidental to the purpose and use of the book.

4.3.3 Missing Leaves and Mixed Priorities

Apart from marginal corrections, at some point in the history of the codex two leaves containing Ioh. 16,15b–25a and Ioh. 17,12b–23a went missing and were replaced. The

²⁹ See Pusey/Gwilliam 1901, 482–606.

two missing leaves (fol. 63, 66) were of the same bifolium, belonging to the quire consisting of fol. 60–69 (marked ⲁ, i.e. 8; fol. 60r). In the early centuries of the manuscript’s history the bifolium was lost. Its pages would originally have contained *Puššāqē* 239–242 and 253–255. Whereas the original leaves are parchment, the replacement leaves are paper, in two similar hands of about the twelfth century,³⁰ that is, two different scribes penned the replacement pages, so it is likely they were not done simultaneously. The writing of the biblical text on these pages is less carefully executed than the original hand. The lines are not straight, the lettering irregular, margins are cramped, and the scribes complete the replacement text with a great deal of space to spare on the verso of the pages.

The replacement leaves supply the Gospel texts to cover the lacunae, reminding us again that the Gospel content is very important to users of this book. However, the replacement pages also include *puššāqē*. Yet the scribe who wrote the replacement Gospel text did not copy *puššāqē* directly into the text as we find throughout the book. Instead, different and still later scribes altogether supplied the replacement *puššāqē*, putting them in the outside margins so that they run perpendicular to the blocks of Gospel text. In the case of folio 63, the thin and rather cramped *estrangelo* text of the replacement *puššāqē* is largely lost and illegible due to severe damage to the edge of the page. We can detect some numbering of the statements that agrees with what we would expect, though some of the numbering appears confused (see below). In the case of folio 66, a bold hand with some *serto* features, likely to be later than that of the replacement *puššāqē* of folio 63, has produced clear statements that remain legible, whose numbers fit into the series.

It is impossible to know where the replacement *puššāqē* came from or whether their content matched the original ones from the missing leaves. What is certain is that users of the codex found it necessary to replace the missing biblical text in fol. 63 and 66 yet did not incorporate *puššāqē* in doing so. However, later users deemed the *puššāqē* important enough to replace them also, in stages, from whatever exemplar was available. Folios 63 and 66 also include a few marginal corrections to the Gospel text, showing once again that the Gospel text itself continued to merit attention by later users.

The continuing importance of the *puššāqē* to the users of the codex is also evident in the correction and re-inking of many of the numbers accompanying them. As numbers wore away from the heavily thumbed margins of the book

and became illegible, correctors supplied replacement numbers throughout the manuscript (see Fig. 4.1, 4.3). Scribes also “moved” numbers from the gutter to the outside margins, a feature to which we have already drawn attention. The users of the book put a premium on the functionality of the numbers accompanying the *puššāqē*, at least during much of its history. We see these numbering revisions especially on leaves with significant tearing to the inner margins (see Fig. 4.3). Indeed, many of these leaves with secondary outer-margin numbers on the recto side had become loose at some point, possibly prior to the numbers’ repositioning (e.g. fol. 3r, 6r, 7r, 9r, 10r, 19r, 32r, 35r, 36r, 43r, 82r, etc.). Some of these leaves were mounted to new page bases in the nineteenth century as part of the manuscript’s conservation. But the fact that loose leaves with damaged interior margins were targeted for number repositioning indicates that after parts of the book had become little more than a loose-leaf shambles, the owners still cared a great deal about the *puššāqē* numbers. Even in a piecemeal state, they were using the codex for divination as they struggled to keep its apparatus functional.

In the bottom margin of folio 3r a hand similar to that of the main hand of the replacement folios 63, 66 has penned a note:

ⲛⲁⲗⲏ ⲉⲃⲉⲗⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ
ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ ⲛⲉⲧⲏ

[O] sinner, arouse prayers that the entire prayer of the Son of God [is] for [you].

Parts of the text are obscure and the precise sense of this prayer formula uncertain. It appears likely though that this statement was added after the manuscript’s original opening leaves had been lost, leaving folio 3r as the first page. The script is similar (but not identical) to what we find in fol. 63, 66 and may be of comparable age. Once folio 3r became the functional beginning of the defective manuscript, this formula greeted the user on its first page as a kind of introductory statement. In the absence of the manuscript’s original first few pages, this statement offers no information about the origins or nature of the book, nor any guidance in its use as a Divining Gospel. However, it marks yet another stage in the book’s history.

Almost certainly prior to the penning of the aforementioned “opening” prayer formula, the first part of the manuscript was lost, as we have noticed. The first (and last) portions of ancient codices often go missing, due to the accidents of history that threaten their outermost leaves.

³⁰ Wright 1870, 1,71.

³¹ Possibly read ⲛⲉⲧⲏⲛⲉⲧⲏ (“for it/him”).

In this case at least two leaves from the beginning are lost, and just as folios 63 and 66 had been replaced, these also were replaced with paper leaves containing Ioh. 1,1–19a (fol. 1, 2). The same hand has provided the simple heading, ܐܘܘܠܘܢ ܘܥܘܠܘܢ (“Gospel of John”) in rubricated text at the top of the first page (now fol. 1r). The replacement text of these two folios is in a bold and regular hand, somewhat later than the hand in the aforementioned replacements (fol. 63, 66), and certainly more elegant, though still judged by Wright to be of the twelfth century. The text includes a few corrections in the same hand, albeit using a smaller script. However, at the ends of several lines we find the scribe starting a word without sufficient space to complete it, before restarting the word on the next line, a habit that suggests haste or even carelessness in copying these pages.

The repair of the codex’s opening leaves underscores once again the importance of the biblical text to its users – yet these replacement leaves do not include *puššāqē*, not even in the margins. Consequently, the extant divination apparatus begins with *Puššāqā* 7 (fol. 3r). Why were the first six *puššāqē* not replaced, as the (apparently) earlier user of the book had done with *Puššāqē* 239–242 and 253–255 when replacing folios 63 and 66? Perhaps there was no exemplar from which to take them. Or perhaps this new user had no interest in the *puššāqē* and cared only about the biblical text. Such a user would have been like the much later readers, Pusey and Gwilliam, who collated the Syriac manuscript for the 1901 edition of the Peshitta Gospels yet made no mention of the *puššāqē*, presumably because they were of no interest to them or their purposes.³² By the time of the twelfth-century replacement of folios 1–2, the manuscript may have been revered only as a venerable copy of scripture, worth restoring and using as such, irrespective of its original divinatory purpose. In any case, the manuscript’s introduction, the first six *puššāqē*, and any initial aids were lost to the codex and never replaced. Nevertheless, the manuscript’s function as a complete copy of the Peshitta text of John’s Gospel was carefully preserved.

4.3.4 Into the Modern Era

In time signatures were added to the gatherings of folios, or perhaps the original signatures, if any, were restored. These appear to be among the latest alterations to the text prior to its coming to London in the nineteenth century. The quires are signed with Syriac letters, ܐ to ܐ, (1–10)

written in the bottom margins and perpendicular to the main text in a hand much later than the original, normally on the first and last pages of each quire (11r, 20r, 30v–31r, 40v–41r, 49v–50r, 60r, 60v–70r, 79v–80r); several of the numbers have worn away. Further signatures numbering the pages of the gatherings are occasionally visible but mostly illegible or worn away – e.g. ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ ܐ (two–six) are visible on the recto of folios 32–36 in gathering ܐ (five); they too are the work of a later hand.

The book had at least one more significant phase of transition in its history. Encouraged by his remarkable discoveries among the more than 300 Syriac manuscripts brought to London from Egypt in the 1930s, the Assistant Keeper of Manuscripts in the British Museum William Cureton sent one Auguste Pacho to the monastery of Deir al-Surian in 1845. He commissioned Pacho to purchase any remaining Syriac manuscripts. Although Pacho did not in fact clean out the monastery’s collection, he was able to purchase over 150 additional manuscripts.

Pacho’s acquisitions on this occasion included London, BL, Add. 17,119, which became the property of the British Museum (now the British Library) in November 1847.³³ Whatever binding it may have had was discarded. A few leaves that had become detached, especially at the beginning and end of the manuscript, were reunited with the codex and restored using new page foundations, a process presumably done by Cureton or under his supervision.³⁴ Each leaf was numbered in pencil and the manuscript bound according to the nineteenth-century conventions of the Library, where it was eventually catalogued by William Wright.³⁵ The title on the current binding now reads succinctly, *Sancti Johannis Evangelium Syriac*.

4.4 Interpreting the Codex as Material Object within a Living Tradition

Modern scholarship has seen the manuscript London, BL, Add. 17,119 as an early witness to the Syriac text of John’s Gospel. It is that and more. Our closer look at the manuscript in Chapter Three within the literary and codicological context of many others of similar type has revealed its remarkable character as a Divining Gospel. As a tool for sortilege it is intrinsically connected to scripture and

³² See Pusey/Gwilliam 1901, ix.

³³ Wright 1872, 3,xiv–xv; Brock/Van Rompay 2014, xvii.

³⁴ See Wright 1872, 3,xxix.

³⁵ Wright 1870, 1,71–72.

reliant upon the sacred aura of the biblical artifact in which it resides.

In this chapter, our analysis of the manuscript as a material object inhabiting a living tradition supplies another crucial perspective, one that sometimes is overlooked in the study of ancient texts and the manuscripts that preserve them. Acquiring knowledge from this perspective has required close attention to such things as the manuscript’s material features and transformations through time. Over the centuries of its life many users have left their marks on the Syriac manuscript, revealing to us certain moments of the dynamic history of this remarkable edition of John’s Gospel. The material characteristics of the codex situate scripture within concrete yet distinct and changing contexts of interpretation and use. As the book was used, repaired, and annotated through several centuries, it came to manifest changing views regarding the significance and perhaps even the validity of its original divinatory content, especially in relation to the sacred text of its primary context, the Gospel of John.

The manuscript has survived many centuries of use and most of its divinatory content never went away. It may be that the book continued to be used for its intended purpose as a Divining Gospel throughout its history, at least until the beginning of its sojourn in London, its

present home. But it was the Gospel text in particular that was especially preserved, even when some of the *puššāqē* had been lost and forgotten. A powerful reverence for an artifact bearing the Gospel text was the main impetus for synthesizing oracles into the codex in the first place, when Divining Gospels were first produced. In the case of our Syriac codex this reverence persevered, ensuring not only that defects in the Gospel portions of the manuscript would be corrected or redressed when encountered, but also that the book itself would be preserved through the centuries. The addition of the running title, ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܝܫܘܥܐ (“Gospel of John”), with its bare emphasis on the Gospel content, reflects the same priorities.

However, before the book’s status as a mere Gospel had eclipsed its divinatory dimension, as it appears to have done in the eyes of some of its users at least, still earlier users were motivated to rescue the *puššāqē* that had become lost from the middle of the book. If, as seems to be the case, the later users of the codex had less interest in its divinatory material, still they did not allow that material to be destroyed and forgotten altogether.

Having established the history of the book, in at least its broad contours, and read as much as we presently can about its use from a codicological perspective, in the next chapter we present its divinatory material in its entirety.

5 “You Will Find What You Seek:” The Divinatory Material of the Syriac Codex

5.1 Presenting the Syriac Text

Here presented for the first time are the complete Syriac text and English translation of the *puššāqē*–*hermêneiai* in the manuscript London, BL, Add. 17,119.

The edition is of the *puššāqē*, not the manuscript as such. The edition does not include the entire Syriac text of John’s Gospel from the manuscript. For the text of John one may turn to quality editions of the Peshitta.¹ Only occasionally does the biblical text of the manuscript depart from the standard Peshitta text, as we described in the preceding chapter; otherwise it presents a text basically synonymous with the standard Peshitta.

More important to our purposes is the segmentation of the Gospel text, particularly in view of the (often overlooked) interactions we find between the *puššāqē* and the Gospel, discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven. Each *puššāqē* follows a particular portion of Syriac Gospel text; these segments are clearly indicated in the presentation below.

Versification of the Gospel text is standard, following that of the Antioch Bible edition (and most other modern versions of the Bible).² However, modern versification does not always match the segmentation of the Divining Gospel. Where a *puššāqē* occurs in the middle of a verse, the presentation here also gives the portion of the Syriac Gospel text occurring *immediately before* the oracle in order to clarify its placement. In such cases it should therefore be understood that the subsequent segment begins with the very next words within the same verse of the Peshitta. We may take *Puššāqē* 7–8 as examples, since *Puššāqē* 7 is set in the middle of Ioh. 1,19. More specifically, the segment of the Gospel with *Puššāqē* 8 begins with ܘܢܗܘ ܥܘܢ ܘܢܗܘܘܢ (‘‘Who are you?’’ Ioh. 1,19c) since the presentation below indicates that the segment with *Puššāqē* 7 ends with the words immediately preceding: ܘܡܘܠܗܘܢ ܢܥܠܘ ܢܥܘܒܘܢ (‘‘... sent to him priests and Levites’’). This method of presentation enables the reader to locate the exact placement of each *puššāqē* in the Gospel in the manuscript, so long as the reader refers to the text of John alongside the material presented here. Most *puššāqē* fall between the standard verse divisions.

¹ See Pusey/Gwilliam 1901, 482–606; Childers/Prather/Kiraz 2014. In the Pusey/Gwilliam edition the Syriac manuscript has the siglum 9 and may also be tracked thereby.
² Childers/Prather/Kiraz 2014.

After citing the portion of John that precedes a particular *puššāqē*, the presentation gives the Syriac number and text of the *puššāqē* as they occur in the manuscript.³ The manuscript text is normally very legible, except in a few passages and especially in two of the replacement leaves. Brackets [] in the Syriac indicate uncertain or reconstructed readings. Out of respect for the text that readers of the manuscript would actually encounter in the manuscript, corrections to the Syriac are few. Editorial corrections are indicated in the notes, where conjectural emendations and discussions about the text also occur. Punctuation and diacritical marks in the Syriac *puššāqē* are sparse to non-existent and are given as they occur in the manuscript, unless indicated otherwise. The *puššāqē* are rubricated and usually end with a simple *pasōqa* (.), i.e. the common Syriac pause or stop, but many do not. The presentation here tacitly normalizes this aspect of punctuation by supplying them in each case.

Manuscript folios are given according to their British Library numbering, recto and verso (e.g. folio 27r).

5.2 The Translation

The English translation of the *puššāqē* and its number is placed under the Syriac text. The translation strives for a fairly literal English that is also clear and readable. Words supplied to clarify the sense may be given in parentheses (). Divinatory statements are notoriously cryptic and by design lend themselves to various readings. For instance, some of the statements presume that a lost object or person is being sought, whereas others denote a matter about which one is inquiring, yet it can often be unclear as to whether the term ܐܘܢ in a statement means ‘‘to seek,’’ ‘‘to ask,’’ or ‘‘to desire’’ – or potentially all these meanings. The translation attempts to capture this indefinite quality when it occurs, since that quality serves the purpose of the oracles by enhancing their flexibility. Alternative plausible readings and discussions of the English translation are also given in the notes. In addition to the cryptic nature of the genre, the statements exhibit corruptions and other oddities, some of which are clearly due to the fact that the

³ On the rationale for seeing *puššāqē* as normally subsequent to portions of gospel text rather than prior to them, see 4.2.1 above.

Syriac is a translation and therefore not always idiomatic, but also due to corruptions in its source text.

As we discussed in Chapter Two, oracular responses in lot divination texts are often cast in the present tense, even though they purport to speak to the future. On the presumption that these *puššāqē* are oracular responses intended to supply insight about the future, the translation tends toward the future tense, not only in translating the Syriac imperfect tense but for participles and other “present tense” constructions as well. The term ܐܘܢ (“to be”) is often taken in the sense, “to occur, to happen, to turn out,” and the expression ܐܘܢ ܕܘܢܐ in its sense whereby its object possesses ability or capacity (e.g. “you have cause to...”).

The term ܪܘܚܢܐ (*su'rānā*) is especially common. Denoting an action, thing, or event, in the *sortes* it appears to designate the matter of inquiry. It refers generally to one or more matters, affairs, or items of business in question. Its specific referent would depend on the situation. The corresponding terms in the other versions are usually: Greek *πράγμα* (*prāgma*; with varied spelling in Codex Bezae), Latin *causa*, Armenian *իր* (*ir*; typically plural), and Coptic *χὼβ* (*hōb*). We translate the term, “matter” because of its technical nature in the *sortes* and to distinguish it from several other expressions by which the *sortes* refer to objects of inquiry, such as ܩܘܡܐ (“thing”), the pronoun ܘܗܐ (“what”), and the relative pronominal use of ܐܘܢ (“that which”). The oracular statements of the Divining Gospel are like those in many lot divination texts that have general answers (see 2.3.5–6). Original users of the material would have treated the term ܪܘܚܢܐ flexibly when representing the statement to a client, adapting them to fit the context of inquiry (see 6.5 below); we render it very regularly here.

Participles abound in the Syriac version as the preferred way to translate the Greek present and even future tenses; the translator or scribe is fond of contracting participles and pronouns together. For example, ܕܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐ occurs routinely for ܕܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐ (“you seek”), and ܕܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐ for ܕܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐ (“you find”). Just as the scribe routinely omits the disambiguating dot from participles in the biblical text (e.g. ܕܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐ), participles with pronouns in the *puššāqē* often lack dots.

One of the more common terms the *puššāqē* use is ܪܘܚܢܐ, corresponding to *δόξα/gloria* (see *Puššāqē* 12, 35, 92, 103, 108, 112, 148, 186, 189, 192, 210, 255, 273, 289, 299). In biblical texts the term is typically used for “glory, magnificence,” especially the radiant splendor of God and things associated with God. The latter sense is common in Greek and Syriac scripture and other Christian texts. In fact, “glory” is a special theme in John’s Gospel; words

based on the stem *δοξ-* occur more than thirty times in the Greek text of John. However, the term is widely used in a less “doxological” sense as well, to mean “fame, acclaim, promotion.” This meaning is more mundane yet also suits the genre of *sortes*, that were often consulted for the sake of getting information about social standing, including advancement in status and the outcomes of legal action that might impact reputation. More generally, the prediction of “glory” could represent many kinds of positive outcomes, including some that have nothing to do with social standing or reputation. Hence, in the *puššāqē* the term ܪܘܚܢܐ should not be confined to a strictly doxological sense. In order to clarify the strong resonance with John’s Gospel, the translation renders the term “glory” consistently, but the reader should keep in mind that a broader conception of “splendor” may be in view than that defined by the doxological vocabulary of Christian devotion.

One vexing problem occurs where we find ܕܘܢܐ and ܕܘܢܐ. The latter involves a *pa'el* participle of ܕܘܢܐ, contracted with the pronoun ܕܘܢܐ, together meaning “you begin.” In some conjugations ܕܘܢܐ can also mean “to resolve, settle,” as in a legal setting. Both senses occur in the *puššāqē*. However, we also encounter a contracted participial form of ܕܘܢܐ, with the basic meaning of being sure or confident. The form ܕܘܢܐ (*mašar*) presumes the *aph'el* conjugation, in its sense of “believing firmly” or “being strongly convinced” of something, yet often used in the *puššāqē* without an object, which is unusual.⁴ The fact that in so many contexts it corresponds to words for belief in the other versions, i.e. forms of *πιστεύω*, *credo*, and *hawātam* (*hawātam*), show that ܕܘܢܐ must be taken as ܕܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐ, meaning, “you have confidence, trust.” Yet in one of the most telling instances, *Puššāqē* 46, the scribe has ܕܘܢܐ (“you begin”), despite the otherwise ubiquitous occurrence of “belief” in the parallel versions, suggesting that the unusual use of ܕܘܢܐ caused some confusion among scribes as well. With this set of terms as with others, the basic editorial method followed here is to present the text as it is in the manuscript, if it makes good sense in the Syriac, with minimal corrections. The priority is on representing the sense of the text that the book’s users would have read, as closely as possible. However, conjectures and proposed corrections are indicated in the notes.

⁴ I am indebted to Sebastian P. Brock for his helpful suggestions about how to understand these forms and their relationship to each other and to the Greek source text.

5.3 Parallel Non-Syriac Sources

A further word about the non-Syriac sources cited is necessary. The following presentation includes selected parallels from other versions of the Divining Gospels, i.e. the Greek, Coptic, Latin, and Armenian sources surveyed in Chapter Three. These are separated from the Syriac entries by a horizontal line.

Although the focus here is the Syriac version, other versions enable useful comparisons that can clarify the sense of the Syriac, highlight the many points of contact between the versions, and illustrate the dissemination of the material. Furthermore, it is hoped that the manner of presenting the Syriac data can assist in the study of *hermêneiai* in other sources. However, the presentation of other sources is not exhaustive; we focus on *sortes* with the most fruitful parallels – not just in content, for content similarities abound, but particularly where alignments in placement and sequence are evident. One exception is in the provision of the first few non-Syriac *sortes* (i.e. the first six *hermêneiai*), where the Syriac has no *puššāqē* due to its missing original opening leaves. Where available, the opening statements in the Greek, Latin, and Armenian series are included here to provide a possible glimpse of how the Syriac series may have started. The final *sortes* of the Latin and Armenian (i.e. *sors* 316 in each) are also provided at the end of the series for the sake of comparison.

In a few places it seems very evident that the Syriac text is based on the Greek but has undergone inner Syriac changes to produce something quite different (e.g. see *Puššāqē* 46, 75, 148). For instance, *Puššāqē* 148 has ܠܘܘܠܐܝܢܐ (“boundless”) where the Greek has ἀπροσδόκητος (“unexpected”). A simple transposition of two letters in the Syriac would change “unexpected” (ܠܘܘܠܐܝܢܐ) to “boundless.” Traditional principles of textual criticism would commend the latter as a corruption of the former and the Greek as original; in this instance we can further conclude that the mistake (or revision) occurred within the Syriac tradition. However, the present edition is neither of the Greek text nor of a proposed Greek source of the Syriac. Furthermore, the Syriac makes perfectly good sense as it is here and the users of the Syriac version would have most probably read and applied “boundless,” not “unexpected,” whatever the prior editions (or source version) of the material may have had. This edition presents the Syriac in such cases, not a proposed correction on the basis of the presumed Greek original. Although we discuss such instances in the notes, for the sake of seeking to clarify relationships between versions and to identify channels of influence on the Syriac, the edition is of the Syriac text.

It will become immediately apparent that the early Greek and Coptic sources and the truncated series of *sortes* in Codex Bezae (D) offer the most striking parallels in content, placement, and sequence with the Syriac. The Latin series in Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 (S) and Armenian series in Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2 (G) also offer many parallels, though they are quite different from each other and often depart from the Syriac. We do not cite them fully and one may find it useful to consult Harris’ and Renhart’s editions in order to maintain a clear view of those sets in their entirety.

Harris and Wilkinson have both observed that the Latin has many idiosyncrasies in the placement of its *sortes*.⁵ For one thing, it has many gaps in its series. We are in need of a thoroughly updated edition and study of the Latin material in Paris, BnF, lat. 11553.⁶ The data cited here is taken directly from the Latin manuscript, where the *sortes* occur with their numbers in the margins, ostensibly coordinated with passages of the Gospel text that are set off by the symbol ÷ (see Fig. 3.11). However, the material is marked by many irregularities. The attempt to correlate each *sors* with specific marked passages encounters problems on nearly every page. At times, it is difficult to determine the column (or even the page) of Gospel text that a *sors* is meant to accompany in the Latin manuscript. Gaps and inconsistencies in the numbering increase the confusion. Hence, the segments of Gospel that are cited here with the Latin should be seen as approximate. The Latin numbers themselves also have many irregularities but are given here, with occasional corrections, for the sake of comparison. Often the placement and numbering of the Latin is close to that of the Syriac, yet they frequently diverge.

The non-Syriac sources are taken from manuscripts, with reference to published editions where available. The latter is especially pertinent in the case of the Armenian *hermêneiai*, for which we are rarely able to improve on Renhart’s reading of the palimpsest.⁷ Folio numbers of manuscripts are provided, along with indications of the segment of John’s Gospel with which a *sors* is associated in each manuscript – except for Codex Bezae, in which the *sortes* occur page by page beneath the text of

⁵ Harris 1901, 59–70; Wilkinson 2019, 111–16.

⁶ On some of the limitations of Harris’ edition, see the discussion in 3.3.4 above.

⁷ Renhart 2015, 119–34. I am indebted to Erich Renhart at the University library in Graz, who kindly shared with me his research prior to its publication and granted permission to use it in this study. Editions of most of the manuscripts and, in many instances, links to digital images online, are given in the notes to Chapter Three.

Mark’s Gospel (see 3.3.4 above). In the presentation of the statements, uncertain letters are marked with underdots (̣). Brackets [] designate reconstructed lost or illegible portions of text. Ellipses within brackets [...] indicate significant but indefinite gaps in the readable or surviving texts. The Latin scribe commonly employs abbreviations, usually marking them with an overline; brackets in the presentation of the Latin denote reconstructions where abbreviations have occurred. Reliance on scholarly reconstructions are indicated in the notes.

The extent of the orthographical variations in the Greek have made it inadvisable to incorporate standard accents and breathings into the edited text presented here. The text preserves idiosyncratic orthography, with explanatory notes or corrections as appropriate. The ligature ϣ in Codex Bezae is rendered και. Presentation of Greek sentences employs the final sigma (ς). The *sortes* in Codex Bezae often use a diacritic diaeresis or trema over the vowel ι, occasionally with η (e.g. ερμῖνῖα). The presentation retains these diacritics. The presentation of the Coptic text also retains the trema where it occurs in the manuscript (e.g. ερει). Coptic scribes divide words in various ways and are also inconsistent in the use of the superlinear stroke. Coptic sentences in the following presentation strive to retain the superlinear strokes as they occur in the manuscripts, where legible. Since text lines of *hermêneiai* can be very brief on the page, producing additional breaks, Coptic word division in the following presentation has been informed by existing editions and editorial judgment. The edited texts do not represent line breaks.

Some manuscripts include ornamentation with the *sortes*. For example, Codex Bezae has a cross + and staurogram Ϡ prior to nearly every instance of the term *hermêneia*. Other manuscripts have staurograms or christograms, along with perhaps lines and other ornaments separating the *sortes* from the biblical text. Manuscript ornamentation is discussed briefly in the manuscript descriptions in Chapter Three. The following presentation of texts does not provide the manuscript ornamentation of the non-Syriac sources. This is not because ornamentation is unimportant – all the aspects of page layout, including line breaks and special signs or symbols, are crucial components of a book’s meaning and should not be casually ignored for the sake of elevating verbal content as privileged content. However, the following is basically a presentation of the Syriac version, which does not include such ornamentation. Whereas the layouts and signs of all the sources deserve careful study and appreciation, in this chapter it is in fact their texts that we cite, in as simple a manner as possible, without signaling line breaks or attempting to represent signs, for the sake of comparison

to the true subject of our presentation: the Syriac version. For ornamentation and precise *mise en page*, one should consult the editions and available digital images, listed in the notes to Chapter Three.

As for the English translations of the non-Syriac sources, the fragmentary nature of the early Greek and Coptic and much of the Armenian can make it difficult to secure the meanings of some of the statements with great confidence. Making sense of the *sortes* in Codex Bezae and the Latin requires a fair amount of latitude in reading the orthography and syntax.⁸ Nevertheless, the basic meaning of the statements is usually clear enough and the translations attempt to convey them plainly, emphasizing similarities in wording.

Table 5.1: *Sigla* and abbreviations used in the edition (for manuscript details, see 3.3 above).

r	<i>recto</i> (left page of opening in Syriac manuscript; right page in Greek, Coptic, Latin, Armenian manuscripts)
v	<i>verso</i> (right page of opening in Syriac manuscript; left page in others)
a, b	columns on multi-column page
Colt Pap. 3.1–4	New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Manuscript, Colt Pap. 3.1–4
Copt. 156	Paris, BnF, Copt. 156 ⁹
D	Codex Bezae
G	Graz, Universitätsbibliothek, 2058/2
P.Berol. 3607	Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol. 3607+3623
P. Berol. 11914	Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol.11914
P. Berol. 21315	Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol.21315
PSI 13.1364	Firenze, Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli” PSI XIII 1364
S	<i>Sangermanensis</i> , i.e. Paris, BnF lat. 11553
von Soden, Damascus	von Soden 1902: XI
Wien G. 36102	Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, P.Vindob. G 36102

⁸ Reference has been made to the online ParaTexBib presentation of D’s *hermêneiai* by (Wallraff/Andrist).

⁹ Fragments are numbered according to their order of presentation in Crum 1904, 174–75, including the additional fragment 13 published in Quecke 1974, 413.

The matter will be finished. 4
 ܫ ܠܫܘܬܘܪܢܘܦܘ ܩܘܠܝܢ ܫܪܦܗ (G 93r; Ioh. 1,12–14) 4
 The matters will come to fulfillment.
 folio 2v (replacement leaf)

Ioh. 1,15b–19a

Syriac puššāqā missing

ερμίνια περί ζωής (D 288r) (5)
 Interpretation: Concerning life.
 վկայութիւն ճշմարիտ (G 21v; Ioh. 1,15) 5
 True testimony.

Syriac puššāqā missing

ερμίνια το υστερον επίτυχανς (D 288v) (6)
 Interpretation: You will succeed later.
 եթէ հաւատաս ինդասցես (G 21r; Ioh. 1,16–17) 6
 If you believe, you will rejoice.¹⁹
 folio 3r (original leaves and original Syriac hand begin)

Ioh. 1,19b

ܘܫܘܠܘܢܘܢ ܠܘܠܘ ܠܘܫܘܢܘܢ
 ... sent to him priests and Levites (Ioh. 1,19b).
 ܘܫܘܠܘܢܘܢ ܠܘܠܘ ܠܘܫܘܢܘܢ ܠܘܠܘ ܠܘܫܘܢܘܢ ܠ
 Interpretation: Do not swear, for if you swear you will be found out. 7

ερμίνια μή ωμοσης εαν ωμοσις φανερωτε (D 289r) (7)
 Interpretation: Do not swear; if you swear you will be disclosed.

Ioh. 1:19c–22a

ܘܫܘܠܘܢܘܢ ܠܘܠܘ ܠܘܫܘܢܘܢ ܘܫ
 ... an answer to those who sent us? (Ioh. 1,22a).
 ܘܫܘܠܘܢܘܢ ܠܘܠܘ ܠܘܫܘܢܘܢ ܠܘܠܘ ܠܘܫܘܢܘܢ ܘܫ
 Interpretation: You have three matters; begin one of them. 8

ερμίνια τρίτον παραυμα εχίς επίχηρίσε (D 289v) (8)
 Interpretation: You have a third matter; undertake[...]²⁰

Ioh. 1:22b–23

ܘܫܘܠܘܢܘܢ ܠܘܠܘ ܠܘܫܘܢܘܢ ܘܫ
 Interpretation: You cannot lie. 9

ερμίνια ου δυνῖ ψευσασθεν²¹ (D 290r) (9)
 Interpretation: You cannot lie.

¹⁹ Cf. *Puššāqā* 46.

²⁰ The remainder of D's reading is missing due to a cut leaf.

²¹ Reading ψεύσασθαι.

Ioh. 1:24–27

folio 3v

.ܟܠܗ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ,

Interpretation: A word of life and good news.²² 10

ερμίνια λωγος ζοης καϊ φασίς καλι (D 290v) (10)

Interpretation: A word of life and good news.

Ioh. 1:28.ܟܘܨܐ ²³ܗܠܝܢ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐInterpretation: Take counsel²⁴ and it (will) happen. 11

ερμίνια ταπίνωσον καϊ γηνετε (D 291r) (11)

Interpretation: Humble yourself and it will happen.

Ioh. 1,29–30

folio 4r

²⁵.ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐInterpretation: He expects²⁶ great glory. 12

ερμινια δυναμίν μεγαλίν προσδοκα (D 291v) (12)

Interpretation: Expect great power.²⁷**Ioh. 1,31–34**

.ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ

Interpretation: You will receive favor.²⁸ 13

ερμενία λαμβανίς τίν χαρίν εκ θυ (D 292r) (13)

Interpretation: You will receive God's favor.

spes bona (S 125va; Ioh. 1,31)²⁹ xiii

Good hope. 14

Ioh. 1,35–38a

folio 4v

.ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ

... “What are you seeking?” (Ioh. 1,38a).

.ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ ܟܘܨܐ [ܟܘܨܐ] ³⁰ ܟܘܨܐ

[Interpretation:] From grief to joy. 14

ερμίνια απο λυτίς ης³¹ χαραν (D 292v) (14)

Interpretation: From grief to joy.

²² Or “good business.”

²³ The Greek ταπεινώω (see Codex Bezae) supports seeing ܗܠܝܢ (“Take counsel”) as the result of a scribal error; the Syriac may originally have had ܗܠܝܢ (“Humble yourself”), a word similar in form.

²⁴ Or “Humble yourself” (see preceding note).

²⁵ Probably an error for an imperatival ܗܠܝܢ (“Expect”) in agreement with the Greek. Cf. *Puššāqē* 162, 181, 291.

²⁶ Or “Expect great glory” (see preceding note).

²⁷ Or “a great miracle.”

²⁸ See *Puššāqā* 142.

²⁹ Cf. identical Latin *sors* under *Puššāqā* 85.

³⁰ ܟܘܨܐ (*puššāqā*; “Interpretation”) is absent.

³¹ I.e. εις.

*gaudium fiet*³² (S 125va; Ioh. 1,35–38a) xiiii
It will become joy. 14

Ioh. 1,39

³³.ܠܘܥܘܟܐ ܠܐܡܢ ܥܘܕܐ ܠܘܥܘܟܐ ܝܘܡܐ ܠܘܥܘܟܐ ܡܘܢܐ
Interpretation: after ten days the matter will happen. 15

ερμίνια μετα δεκα ημερας γίνετε (D 293r) (15)
Interpretation: After ten days it will happen.
*post*³⁴ *dece[m] dies fiet* (S 125va; Ioh. 1,38b–39) xv
After ten days it will happen. 15

Ioh. 1,40–42a

.ܕܘܥܐ ܕܐܠ ܡܫܝܚܐ
... And he brought him to Jesus (Ioh. 1,42a).
.ܕܘܥܘܟܐ ³⁵ܕܘܥܘܟܐ ܠܘܥܘܟܐ ܡܘܢܐ
Interpretation: You will find what you have sought. 16

ερμίνια το ζητῆς εϋρισκετε (D 293v) (16)
Interpretation: You will find what you seek.
ܩܢܝ ܝܘܢܝܩܪܝܘܢ ܦܘܝܓ ܬܦܬ ܩܘܡܐܢܬܘ (G 61r; Ioh. 1,40–42a) 16
What you seek, that only you will find.

Ioh. 42b–44

folio 5r
.ܠܐ ܕܠܘܥܘܟܐ ܠܘܥܘܟܐ ܠܘܥܘܟܐ ܠܘܥܘܟܐ ܡܘܢܐ
Interpretation: It will not happen and you will not hear the word.³⁶ 17

ερμηνια μη παρακουσης του λογου (PSI 13.1364 verso)³⁷
Interpretation: Do not disregard the word.
ερμίνια μὴ³⁸ παρακουσῆς του λογου (D 294r) (17)
Interpretation: Do not disregard the word.
ܘܦܝ ܐܢܝܠܝܦܝ ܝܚܝܦܝ ܘܘܫܘܓܬ ܝܢܒܝܢ ܦܬܩ (G 48v; Ioh. 1,42b–44) 17
Do not be deaf to what was said to you.

Ioh. 1,45–46

.ܘܠ ܠܘܥܘܟܐ ܝܘܥܘܟܐ ܠܘܥܘܟܐ ܡܘܢܐ
Interpretation: Pursue (and) it will turn out well for you. 18

ερμηνια ακολουθησον και καλως σοι γιγνεται (PSI 13.1364 recto)³⁹
Interpretation: Pursue and it will turn out well for you.
ερμίνια ακολουθησον καὶ καλον σου⁴⁰ γίνετε (D 294v) (18)

³² Harris conjectures an original, *ex tristitia gaudium fiet* (“From grief it will become joy;” Harris 1901, 60). Latin *ccxxxi* (231) has *ex tristitia gaudium fiet tibi* (“From grief it will become joy for you;” S 132ra; Ioh. 14,30–15,3); Latin *cclxii* (272) has *ex tristitia in gaudium ueniet tibi* (“From grief it will come to joy for you;” S 132vb; Ioh. 17,21b–23).

³³ Correction; the manuscript has ܠܘܥܘܟܐ by error.

³⁴ Correction; the manuscript has *est* (see Harris 1901, 60).

³⁵ Perhaps to be read, ܕܘܥܘܟܐ (“what you seek”).

³⁶ Or “May it not happen and may you not hear the word.”

³⁷ See Bastianini 2018, 127.

³⁸ I.e. μη.

³⁹ See Bastianini 2018, 127.

⁴⁰ I.e. σοι.

Interpretation: Pursue and it will turn out well for you.⁴¹
et bene (S 125va; Ioh. 1,42c–44) xviii
 And favorably.⁴² 18

Ioh. 1,47

ܘܠܥܘܒܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗ
 Interpretation: No sin⁴³ is found in your matter. 19

ερμινία ουκ εχίς αμαρτιαν ης⁴⁴ τω παρυμα (D 295r) (19)
 Interpretation: You do not have sin in the matter.
 ܟܘܢܘܢܐ ܗܝܟܘܢ ܘܠܐ ܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ 19
 You will find no sin in it.

Ioh. 1, 48–51

folio 5v
ܘܠܥܘܒܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗ
 Interpretation: Great(er) honor and joy will be given to you. 20

ερμινία μιζον προκοπι⁴⁵ και χαρα γηνεταϊ (D 295v) (20)
 Interpretation: Greater success and joy will happen.
 ܘܠܥܘܒܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ 20
 Higher advancement and favor will be given to you.

Ioh. 2,1–3

folio 6r
ܘܠܥܘܒܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗ
 Interpretation: It is your part to find favor. 21

ερμινία δι⁴⁶ σε λανβανιν την χαριν (D 296r) (21)
 Interpretation: You ought to receive favor.

Ioh. 2,4–6

ܘܠܥܘܒܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗ
 Interpretation: The deed will be accomplished. 22

ερμενηαν τεληουμενον παρυμα καλο⁴⁷ (D 296v) (22)
 Interpretation: A good matter will be accomplished.
 perfectu[m] opus (S 125vb; Ioh. 2,6) xxii
 The deed is accomplished. 22

Ioh. 2,7–8

ܘܠܥܘܒܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܡܝܢ ܗܘܢܐ ܗ
 Interpretation: Joy that you did not expect will be yours. 23

41 Or “you will be well,” depending on how one corrects the orthography.

42 Or “and (it will be) well.”

43 Or “error, fault.”

44 I.e. εις.

45 The translation reads προκοπι as προκοπιή.

46 I.e. δει.

47 A corrector has added -v (καλον).

ερμίνια απροσδοκητον παρυμα γηνομενον (D 297r) (23)
 Interpretation: An unexpected matter will happen.
 ܐܢܝܩܠܝܩܠܝܗ ܓܘܗ (G 119v; Ioh. 2,8) 23
 Unexpected profit.

Ioh. 2,9–10

folio 6v

ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܝܥܪܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܝܥܪܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܝܥܪܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ
 Interpretation: Be assured that the matter is good. 24

ερμινίαν πιστεσον⁴⁸ στη το παργμα καλον εστιν (D 297v) (24)
 Interpretation: Believe that the matter is good.
*credere quia*⁵⁰ *causa bona e[st]* (S 125vb; Ioh. 2,7) xxiii⁴⁹
 Believe that the matter is good. 24

Ioh. 2,11

ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܝܥܪܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ
 Interpretation: If you do this, persist (in it).⁵² 25

ερμίνια εαν ποης τουτω το παραμινον και ευξε το θεο⁵³ (D 298r) (25)
 Interpretation: If you do this, persist in it and pray to God.
si facies istut permane (S 125vb; Ioh. 2,8–11) (25)⁵⁴
 If you do this, persist (in it).

Ioh. 2,12–15

folio 7r

ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܝܥܪܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ
 Interpretation: There is division in it.⁵⁵ 26

ερμινία δηαχορισίς⁵⁶ (D 298v) (26)
 Interpretation: Division.

Ioh. 2,16–17

ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܝܥܪܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܘܬܐ
 Interpretation: Leave it and turn. 27

ερμινία αποταξε⁵⁷ και αποστρεψον (D 299r) (27)
 Interpretation: Give it up and turn away.
accede et auerte (S 125vb; Ioh. 2,12–15) xxvii⁵⁸
 Accede⁵⁹ and turn away. 26

48 A corrector has inserted -v- above the line (πιστευσον).

49 Correction; the manuscript has *xxii* (22), a number that has already occurred.

50 Conjecture; the manuscript has *uia* (see Harris 1901, 60).

51 ܠܝܘܬܐ (*puššāqā*; “Interpretation”) is absent.

52 Or “If you do this, persevere/endure.”

53 I.e. ευξαι τω θεω.

54 This *sors* is unnumbered.

55 Cf. *Puššāqā* 245.

56 I.e. διαχωρησις.

57 I.e. αποταξαι.

58 Conjecture; the manuscript has *xxvi* (26); see Harris 1901, 60.

59 Or “approach.” *Accede* may be an error for *excede* (“depart”).

Ioh. 2,18–22

folio 7v

.ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܝܗܘ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ

Interpretation: It will resolve⁶⁰ after three days.

ܘܥ

28

ερμινηα δηαλυσίς μετα τρίς ημερα γίνετε (D 299v) (28)

Interpretation: A solution will happen after three days.

absolueris post tres dies (S 125vb; Ioh. 2,16–18) xxviii⁶¹

You will be released after three days. 28

ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܝܗܘ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ (G 62v; Ioh. 2,19–[22]) 29

Important matters are solved after three days.

Ioh. 2,23–25

.ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܝܗܘ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ

Interpretation: Do not begin anything if you should hear.

ܕ

29

[...]ܘܘܓܬܘ ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܝܗܘ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ (G 62r; Ioh. 2,23–[25]) 30

You [...], if you hear anything.⁶²**Ioh. 3,1–3**

folio 8r

.ܘܕ ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܝܗܘ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ

Interpretation: Entreat God and it will turn out for you.

ܕ

30

ερμινῖα μετανοησον το θεω καῖ γηνετε (D 300r) (29)⁶³

Interpretation: Repent to God and it will turn out.

paenitere d[e]o et fiet (S 125vb; Ioh. 2,21–22) xxviii

Repent to God and it will happen 29

ܘܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܝܗܘ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ (G 81v; Ioh. 3,1–2) 31

Repent to God and it will happen.

Ioh. 3,4–6

.ܕܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܗܠܝܢ ܝܗܘ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܐ

Interpretation: The deed will be accomplished; do not marvel that it is fitting.

ܕ

31

ερμινῖα τελουμενον εργαυ καλο⁶⁴ (D 299v)⁶⁵ (31)Interpretation: The deed will be accomplished well.⁶⁶*p[er]fectum opus* (S 126ra; Ioh. 3,1–2) xxx

The deed is accomplished. 30

⁶⁰ Or “You will be released.”⁶¹ Conjecture; the manuscript has xxvii (27); see Harris 1901, 60.⁶² Or “everything.”⁶³ Codex Bezae repeats this *hermēneia* on the next page (300v), where statement 30 in the series reads, μετανοησον τω θεω και γηνετε (“Repent to God and it will turn out”).⁶⁴ A corrector has added -v (καλον).⁶⁵ Codex Bezae repeats the essence of this *hermēneia* on the next page (301v), where statement 32 in the series reads, τελουμενον παραυγμα (“The matter is accomplished”).⁶⁶ Or “The good deed will be accomplished.”

Ioh. 3,7–8

folio 8v

.ܠܘܟ ܕܡܘܨ ⁶⁷ܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ ܡܘܨ ܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ ܘܠܠܘܟܢ
 Interpretation: The thing you were expecting⁶⁸ will happen. 32

ερμίνια απροσδοκίτον παραυγμα (D 302r) (33)
 Interpretation: An unexpected matter.
insperata causa p[er]ficitur (S 126ra; Ioh. 3,3–6) xxxi
 An unexpected matter will be accomplished. 31
 ܘܠܘܟܢ ܕܡܘܨ ܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ (G 88v; Ioh. 3,7–8) 33
 Unexpected matters will happen.

Ioh. 3,9–11

.ܘܠܘܟ ܠܗܘܒܐ [ܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ]⁶⁹ ܘܠܠܘܟܢ
 [Interpretation:] Speak the truth. 33

q[uo]d ueru[m] e[st] dicito (S 126ra; Ioh. 3,7–8) xxxii
 Speak what is true. 32
 ܕܘܠܘܟܢ ܡܘܨ ܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ (G 88r; Ioh. 3,9–11) 34
 You will learn truly.

Ioh. 3,12–13

.ܘܠܘܟ ܘܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ ܕܡܘܨ ܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ ܘܠܠܘܟܢ
 Interpretation: If you lie they will accuse you. 34

ερμίνια εαν ψυση⁷⁰ ελεγχουσίν σε (D 302v) (34)
 Interpretation: If you lie they will accuse you.
si mentiris arguent te (S 126ra; Ioh. 3,9–11) xxxiii
 If you lie they will expose you. 33

Ioh. 3,14–15

folio 9r

.ܠܘܟܢ ܠܘܟܢ ܠܘܟܢ ܠܘܟܢ ܠܘܟܢ ܠܘܟܢ
 Interpretation: There will be great glory. 35

ερμη[ν]ια δοξα μεγαλη γινεται (P.Berol. 11914 r col. 1; Ioh. 3,14–15)⁷¹ PIB
 Interpretation: There will be great glory. 112⁷²
 ܘܠܘܟܢ ܘܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ ܘܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ ܘܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ ܘܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ
 There will be great glory
 (statement 35 is missing from Codex Bezae due to a torn leaf; 203r)
gloria magna (S 126ra; Ioh. 3,12–13) xxxiiii
 Great glory. 34
 ܘܠܘܟܢ ܘܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ ܘܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ (G 72r; Ioh. 3,14–15) 36
 There will be great glory.

⁶⁷ Perhaps originally, ܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ ܠܘܟܢ (“The thing that you were not expecting”), in light of the parallels.

⁶⁸ Or “not expecting” (see preceding note).

⁶⁹ ܠܡܫܘܒܢܢ (*puššāqā*; “Interpretation”) is absent.

⁷⁰ I.e. ψυση.

⁷¹ See Stegmüller 1953, 16; Wilkinson 2019, 109.

⁷² The numbers of P.Berol. 11914 do not compare easily with the numbers of the other sources. They are secondary and may have been added as page numbers. Alternatively, they may have functioned as part of a distinctive sortilege mechanism, one with discontinuous numbers, such as we find in techniques using multiple dice or knucklebones (see 2.2.2; 2.3.4–6 above; and Stegmüller 1953, 20–21).

ερμίνια το ζητῖς προφθάνι σε (D 305r)	(39)
Interpretation: What you seek goes before you.	
<i>q[uo]d q[uo]d quesieris n[on] inuenies</i> (S 126rb; Ioh. 3,29–30)	xl
You will not find what you seek.	40
qnr ἰνῆρηετῆ nḡ wnhnw (G 28r; Ioh. 3,25–[28])	40
You will not get what you seek.	

Ioh. 3,29–30

.כבס ככלר קו כדלס קו כס [כבס]⁸⁵ כ
 [Interpretation:] This affair⁸⁶ is given by God. 40

ερμίνια τουτο εκ θευ δοτον εστιν (D 305v) (40)
 Interpretation: This is a gift from God.

Ioh. 3,31–34a

folio 10v
 ... speaks the words of God (Ioh. 1,34a).
 Interpretation: Leave it. 41

ερμην[ια] αποτα[σσε] (Copt. 156 1r; Ioh. 3,32–34) ⁸⁷	
Interpreta[tion]: Give it [up.]	
αποταξ[αι]	
Give it [up.]	
ερμίνηα αποταξαι (D 306r)	(41)
Interpretation: Give it up.	
hrwṣwrkw qh nḡ ḏ[...] ḡḡh n[...].kḡḡh[...] (G 87v; Ioh. 3,32–34)	43
Reject it, lest[...]	

Ioh. 3,34b–36

.ככבב כל ככבב אכ ככבב כ
 Interpretation: About contention: do not be contentious. 42

ερμηνια [ετ]βε ογττων ἡπῆρριε (Copt. 156 1v; Ioh. 3,36) ⁸⁸	
Interpretation: [Con]cerning dispute: do not be content[ious.]	
[...]ου μη ερισης	
[...] do not be contentious.	
ερμίνια περη ερίσμου μῖ ερίσσης (D 306v)	(42)
Interpretation: About contention: do not be contentious.	
<i>de contentatione ne creaueris</i> (S 126rb; Ioh. 3,34–36)	xli
About contention: do not produce (it).	41

⁸⁵ ככבב (*puššāqā*; “Interpretation”) is absent.

⁸⁶ Or “item.”

⁸⁷ See Crum 1904, 174; Quecke 1974, 410; Wilkinson 2019, 110.

⁸⁸ See Crum 1904, 174; Quecke 1974, 410. On topical phrases with ετβε- (“concerning...”), see 6.2 below.

	<i>si credideris gloria tibi</i> (S 126rb; Ioh. 4,4–9)	xliii
	If you believe (there will be) glory for you.	43
	ܩܬܗ ܗܘܐܠܡܢܘܘܗ ܗܘܐܠܡܢܘܗ ܗܘܐܠܡܢܘܗ ܗܘܐܠܡܢܘܗ [ܩܘܪܘܢ] ⁹⁸	48
	If you believe, you will have joy.	
Ioh. 4,11–18		
		folio 12r
	ܘܢܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢ ܕܘܢ ܕܘܢ ܕܘܢ ܕܘܢ ܕܘܢ ܕܘܢ [ܩܘܪܘܢ] ⁹⁸	ܘܢ
	Interpretation: You have desired greatly to do it and it was not right.	47
<hr/>		
ερμηνε[ια] πολλας τ[ο] ηθελησ[α]ς ποιησαι κα[ι] ουκ εδ[υ]νηθης (Wien, G.36102 r; Ioh. 4,12) ⁹⁹		
Interpreta[tion:] You [desired] much to do it a[nd] you were [un]able.		
ερμίνηα πολαστον ηθελίσσα επηρησε και ουκ εδυνήθης (D 309r)	(47)	
Interpretation: You desired greatly ¹⁰⁰ to do it and were unable.		
ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܘܢܩܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ (G 112v; Ioh. 4,15–18)	49	
Many times you wanted to have it but could not.		
Ioh. 4,19–22		
		folio 12v
	ܕܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ	ܘܢ
Interpretation: In time what you seek will happen.		48
<hr/>		
ερμίνηα καιρος εστίν ἵνα γηνετε ον ζήτις (D 309v)	(48)	
Interpretation: It is time for what you seek to happen.		
Ioh. 4,23–26		
	ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ	ܘܢ
Interpretation: Straighten (your) path, for your deeds will become known.		49
<hr/>		
ερμηνία ορθίος την ωδον βεβεουτε σου το πραγμα (D 310r)	(49)	
Interpretation: Straighten (your) way, your matter is confirmed. ¹⁰¹		
Ioh. 4,27–29		
		folio 13r
	ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ	ܘܢ
Interpretation: A great mystery will occur.		50
<hr/>		
ερμινηα μυστηρίον μεγα γιενεταϊ καϊ απεκαλυφθη (D 310v)	(50)	
Interpretation: A great mystery occurs and has been revealed.		
<i>secretu[m] incipit reuelare</i> (S 126va; Ioh. 4,10–12)	xlvii	
It begins to reveal the secret.	47	
ܗܘܐܠܡܢܘܗ ܗܘܐܠܡܢܘܗ ܗܘܐܠܡܢܘܗ ܗܘܐܠܡܢܘܗ ܗܘܐܠܡܢܘܗ ܗܘܐܠܡܢܘܗ (G 8v; Ioh. 4,26–29)	53	
The mystery will be revealed.		

⁹⁸ ܩܘܪܘܢܐܘܢ (*puššāqā*; “Interpretation”) is absent.

⁹⁹ See Hunger 1959, 8; Quecke, 1977, 180–81.

¹⁰⁰ Or “often.”

¹⁰¹ The Greek is difficult to interpret. Harris conjectured originally two separate statements: ὀρθίος ἢ ὀδός (“A straight/steep way”) and βεβαιούται σου τὸ πᾶγμα (“Your matter is confirmed”); see Harris 1901, 62. The elements of the entire Greek statement reflect parts of the Syriac statement.

Ioh. 4,30–32

¹⁰².ܘܕܡܫܐ ܠܢ ܠܢܝܗܘܐ ܠܡܥܘܕܐ ܠܢ ܠܢ
 Interpretation: Profit without measure.¹⁰³ 51

ερμίνηα αιπροσδοκητον κερδος (D 311r) (51)
 Interpretation: Unexpected profit.
insperata causa (S 126va; Ioh. 4,15) xlviiii
 An unexpected matter. 48

Ioh. 4,33–36a

folio 13v

.ܠܟܘܢ ܠܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܠܚܝܬܐ
 ... fruit for eternal life (Ioh. 4,36a).
 .ܠܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܐܘܢ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܠܡܥܘܕܐ ܠܢ
 Interpretation: It is time for it to happen. 52

ερμίνηα κερως¹⁰⁴ εστίν ἵνα γείνητε ο ζιτις (D 311v) (52)
 Interpretation: It is time for what you seek to happen.
 ܕܘܠܘܠܝܢܘܠܝ ܬ ܩܗ ܝܓܓܗ (G 7v; Ioh. 4,33–36a) 55
 It is time for it to be fulfilled.

Ioh. 4,36b–37

.ܐܘܢ ܝܥܘܕ ܠܝܗܘܐ ܠܟܘܢ ܠܡܥܘܕܐ ܠܢ
 Interpretation: About any matter: it is good. 53

ερμίνηα περ¹⁰⁵ πραγματος καλο[ν]¹⁰⁶ (D 312r) (53)
 Interpretation: About the matter: (it is) good.
 ܩܠܘܢ ܠܘܠܝܢܘܠܝܢ ܝܗܘܐ ܝܗܘܐ ܠܟܘܢ ܠܡܥܘܕܐ ܠܢ
 (G 7r; Ioh. 4,36b–37) 56
 About all matters: benefit from God.

Ioh. 4,38–39

.ܕܝܚܘܢ ܠܟܘܢ ܠܡܥܘܕܐ ܠܢ
 Interpretation: What you seek will result in relief. 54

ερμίνηα εις αναπαυσίν ερχετε ων ζιτις (D 312v) (54)
 Interpretation: What you seek will result in relief.

Ioh. 4,40–42

folio 14r

.ܝܥܘܕܐ ܠܢ ܠܡܥܘܕܐ ܠܢ
 Interpretation: From a foreign country¹⁰⁷ comes good news.¹⁰⁸ 55

¹⁰² In light of the parallels we may conjecture the Syriac originally had ܠܡܥܘܕܐ ܠܢ (“unexpected”); a small inner Syriac change to ܘܕܡܫܐ ܠܢ (“measured”) would account for the difference. See also ܝܗܘܐ ܝܗܘܐ ܠܟܘܢ ܠܡܥܘܕܐ ܠܢ ܠܢ ܠܢ ܠܢ (“From unforeseen things you will get profit;” number 57; G 100v; Ioh. 4,38–40).

¹⁰³ Or “Unexpected profit” (see preceding note).

¹⁰⁴ I.e. καιρος.

¹⁰⁵ I.e. περι.

¹⁰⁶ Possibly καλο[ν], i.e. “about the good matter.”

¹⁰⁷ Or “From a stranger;” ܠܡܥܘܕܐ may be read as *aksenyā* (“foreign country”) or *aks^enāyā* (“stranger, foreigner”).

¹⁰⁸ Or “good business.”

ερμίνια απο ξενου ερχετε¹⁰⁹ αλι¹¹⁰ φασις (D 313r) (55)
 Interpretation: From a stranger comes good news.
 ܝܘܠܢ[ܘܦܪܢܘ]ܫܒܢܘܬ ܩܘܝ ܦܘܪܝܗ [ܩ]ܦܢܝܓ (G 100r; Ioh. 4,41–42) 58
 From a foreign country¹¹¹ comes good news.

Ioh. 4,23–44

.ܐܣ ܝܥܘܪ ܠܐܠܘܢ ܝܥܕܝ ܠܕܘ ܥܘܡܕܝ ܠܘ [ܠܟܥܘܪܐ]¹¹² [ܘ] [Interpretation:] Do not believe you ought to confirm this, (that) it is good.¹¹³ [56]

ερμίνια μί απηστίσης τουτο καλον εστιν (D 313v) (56)
 Interpretation: Do not disbelieve this is good.
non sis incredulus (S 126vb; Ioh. 4,43–44) lvi¹¹⁴
 Do not be faithless. 48
ne discredas hoc bon[um] e[st] (S 127vb; Ioh. 6,26–31) lxxxviii
 Do not disbelieve this is good. 88

Ioh. 4,45

.ܕܘܟ ܡܥܬܘ ܕܘܟ ܕܘܟ ܕܘܟ ܠܟܥܘܪܐ [ܘ] Interpretation: If you go you will be successful. [57]

ερμίνια αν απελθίς επίτυχανίς (D 314r) (57)
 Interpretation: If you go away you will succeed.
 ܬܦܬܝ ܬܦܦܘܣܘ ܩܘܠܢܘܫܝܗܘ (G 80r; Ioh. 4,48–51) 62
 If you go you will be successful.

Ioh. 4,46–47

folio 14v
 .ܘܘܝܘܕܥܘ ܠܘܝܘܢܐ ܕܠܦܘܟܘܪܐ ܡܘ Interpretation: About help: it will be saved. 58

ερμίνια περί σωτηρίας σωζεται (D 315v) (60)
 Interpretation: About salvation: it will be saved.

Ioh. 4,48–50a

.ܐܣ ܡܘ ܩܘܢܝܘܢ
 ... your son lives (Ioh. 4,50a).
 .ܠܘܝܘܢܐ ܩܘܢܝܘܢ ܡܘܢܘܪܐ ܡܘܢܘܪܐ ܡܘܢܘܪܐ Interpretation: Through an agreement the matter is yours. 59

¹⁰⁹ I.e. ερχεται.

¹¹⁰ Reading καλι.

¹¹¹ Or “From a stranger.”

¹¹² ܠܟܥܘܪܐ (*puššāqā*; “Interpretation”) is absent.

¹¹³ The syntax of the sentence is difficult to interpret as it is. If we omit the point and read ܠܘ (“ought”) as ܠܘܢ (“and not”), the meaning could be, “Do not believe and do not confirm....” It is possible that two statements have been conflated, yet the statement’s resonances with the non-Syriac parallels point to what may have been its original sense.

¹¹⁴ Correction; the manuscript has lv (55), a number that has already occurred. Cf. the parallel Latin *sors* lxxxviii (88) under *Puššāqā* 90; also the Latin *clxxxi* (181), *ne discredas de causa q[uo]n[da]m fiet* (“Do not disbelieve about the matter that it will turn out;” S 130bis rb; Ioh. 11,36–39).

Ioh. 4,50b–53

folio 15r

ܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܠܗܘܢ ܟܘܨܬܐ ܘܥܘܒܐ
 Interpretation: About help.¹¹⁵ 60

de salute (S 126vb; Ioh. 4,51–52) lx¹¹⁶

About salvation. 60

Ioh. 4,54

ܘܗܘܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܐ ܕܠܗܘܢ ܟܘܨܬܐ ܘܥܘܒܐ
 Interpretation: You will be delivered from distress. 61

ερμίνηα απο κίνδυνου σωθησῖ (D 316v) (62)

Interpretation: You will be saved from distress.

Ioh. 5,1–3a

ܘܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܠܗܘܢ ܟܘܨܬܐ ܘܥܘܒܐ
 ... and the lame and the crippled (Ioh. 5,3a).

ܘܗܘܢ ܕܘܢܝܢܐ ܕܠܗܘܢ ܟܘܨܬܐ ܘܥܘܒܐ
 Interpretation: Behold, you are well; do not sin.¹¹⁷ 62

ερμηνῖα ἴδε υγιῆς¹¹⁸ γεγονας μῖκετῖ αμαρτανε ἴνα μῖ τῖ χιρον συ γίνετε (D 318r) (65)

Interpretation: Behold you have become well; sin no longer, so that something worse may not happen to you.

ecce sanus factus es iam noli peccare (S 126vb; Ioh. 4,43–45¹¹⁹) lxii

Behold, you have been made well; sin no longer. 62

Ioh. 5,3b–9

folio 15v

folio 16r

ܘܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܠܗܘܢ ܟܘܨܬܐ ܘܥܘܒܐ
 Interpretation: Do not deny, but confess. 63

ερμίνηα μῖ απαρνῖση αλλ ομολωγῖσον (D 317v) (64)

Interpretation: Do not deny, but confess.

ne abegnes sed profiteris (S 127ra; Ioh. 5,7b–9) lxiii¹²⁰

Do not deny, but confess openly. 62

Ioh. 5,10–15

folio 16v

ܘܠܟܝܢܐ ܕܠܗܘܢ ܟܘܨܬܐ ܘܥܘܒܐ
 Interpretation: It is given by God. 64

ܝܘ[ܫܘܢܘܕܢ]ܝ ܫܘܢܘܘܬܐ ܗܘ ܩܘܕܝܫܐ (G 152r; Ioh. 5,19) 70

It is given you by God.

¹¹⁵ Cf. another *sors* nearby in Codex Bezae: περί σωτηρίας και κερδου (“About salvation and profit;” number 63; D 317r).

¹¹⁶ Correction; the manuscript has the transposition xl (40).

¹¹⁷ Regarding *Puššāqā* 62 and its relation to Ioh. 5,14, see 7.2.2 below.

¹¹⁸ I.e. υγιῆς.

¹¹⁹ Although the Latin *sors* is on fol. 126vb near Ioh. 4,43–45, it stands alone in the margin to the right of the column in the gutter of the page, and may be intended to be related to the segment Ioh. 5,10–15 directly adjacent to it on fol. 127ra.

¹²⁰ Conjecture; the manuscript has lxii (62), repeating the number of the previous *sors*.

Ioh. 5,16–18

.ܪܘܕܝܘܢܐ ܩܘܡܝܢ ܩܘܒܝܢ ܩܪܘܩܒܘܗ

ܡܘܫ

Interpretation: Fitting is the deed that will be accomplished.

65

ερμῖνηα καλον εστῖν το εργον το τελῖοντῖ¹²¹ (D 318v)¹²² (66)

Interpretation: Good is the deed that will be accomplished.

ܘܩܘܒܝܢ ܝܗܦܘ ܝܗܝܝܗܝ ܬܝ ܠܩܘ ܘܣܘܪܝܗܝ (G 151v; Ioh. 5,20–21) 71

The matters are excellent that will be accomplished.

Ioh. 5,19–23

folio 17r

.ܘܠ ܩܘܡ ܕܘܩܒܝܢ ܝܘܒܝܢ ܕܝܘܒܝܢܝܢ ܩܘܩܒܘܗ

ܡܘܫ

Interpretation: Do what you have in mind and it will turn out well for you.

66

ερμῖνηα το ενθυμίμα γῖνετε και καλον συ εστῖν (D 319v) (68)

Interpretation: Let what you have in mind happen and it will be good (for) you.

q[uo]d cupis bonu[m] e[st] (S 127ra; Ioh. 5,16–18) lxv¹²³

What you desire is good. 65

Ioh. 5,24

folio 17v

.ܩܘܕܝܘܒܘܗ ܩܘܩܒܘܗ

ܡܘܫ

Interpretation: A good return.¹²⁴

67

ερμῖνηα μεταβολη καλι (D 320r) (69)

Interpretation: A good change.¹²⁵

conuersio bona (S 127vb; Ioh. 6,24) lxxxiii

A good change.¹²⁶ 84

ܩܘܩܒܝܢܝܢ ܩܘܩܒܝܢܝܢ ܩܘܩܒܝܢܝܢ (G 42v; Ioh. 5,24a) 73

A good change.

Ioh. 5,25–28a

.ܩܘܕܝܘܒܝܢܝܢ ܩܘܩܒܝܢܝܢ

... do not be surprised at this (Ioh. 5,28a).

.ܩܘܩܒܝܢܝܢ ܩܘܩܒܝܢܝܢ

ܡܘܫ

Interpretation: A good report is coming.

68

ερμῖνηα ακωη καλη συνερχετε τω[...] (D 320v)¹²⁷ (70)

Interpretation: A good report is coming [with...].

121 I.e. τελειουντι.

122 The next *sors* in Codex Bezae is very similar, but defective due to a cut leaf: καλον πρα[...] (“good ... matt[er ...]”; number 67; D 319r).

123 Conjecture; the manuscript has *xliv* (45), a number well out of sequence.

124 Or “change.”

125 Or “exchange.”

126 This *sors* occurs later in the series but closely parallels the others here.

127 The *sors* in Codex Bezae is defective due to a cut leaf. The next and final *sors* preserved in Bezae’s series is very defective due to a cut leaf and rather unintelligible as it is: δη (δει) αυθηνερ[...] (number 71; D 321r).

Ioh. 5,28b–30

folio 18r

ܘܟܘܢ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

Interpretation: It has the possibility of beginning, either by letter or through a report. 69

Ioh. 5,31–32

folio 18v

ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

Interpretation: It will happen soon. 70

Ioh. 5,33–35

ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

Interpretation: The matter will turn out clearly and well. 71

Ioh. 5,36–38

folio 19r

ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

Interpretation: Other news¹²⁸ will come. 72

Ioh. 5,39–43

ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

Interpretation: You have to be subjected to a strange message. 73

Ioh. 5,44–47

folio 19v

ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

Interpretation: If you are confident, (there will be) good testimony. 74

[ε]ρημνια [μ]αρτυρια καλη (P.Berol. 3607r; Ioh. 5,44)¹²⁹ 0ς

Interpretation: Good testimony. 76

si credis testimoniu[m] bonu[m] (S 127rb; Ioh. 5,28–29) lxx

If you believe, (there will be) good testimony. 70

ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

Ineffable testimony.

Ioh., 6,1–6

folio 20r

ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

Interpretation: You will have cause to speak¹³¹ much. 75

oportet te mult[um] luctare (S 127rb; Ioh. 5,30) lxxi

It is necessary for you to struggle much. 71

Ioh. 6,7–9

folio 20v

ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ ܘܢܘܩܡ

Interpretation: From something small to a single great good. 76

¹²⁸ Or “Another answer.”

¹²⁹ See Stegmüller 1953, 18.

¹³⁰ The manuscript has ܘܢܘܩܡ (“to speak”), which makes sense, but the parallel *luctare* suggests a Syriac scribe may have transposed two letters from an original, ܘܢܘܩܡ (i.e. “to contend greatly”).

¹³¹ Or “contend” (see preceding note).

Ioh. 6,10–11

.ⲕⲟⲗⲉⲣ ⲉⲧⲁ ⲛⲓⲃⲏⲗⲏⲁ ⲛⲏⲩ ⲕⲉⲙⲉⲣⲉⲃ	ⲛⲁ
Interpretation: Life and profit from God.	77

<i>lucro et uita et¹³² d[e]o</i> (S 127rb; Ioh. 5,36–38)	lxxvi
Profit and life from God. ¹³³	76

Կենդանութիւն եւ շահ [յ]Ա[ստուծոյ] (G 19v; Ioh. 6,10–11)	83
Life and profit [from] G[od].	

Ioh. 6,12–13

.ⲁⲃⲁⲃⲉ ⲛⲁⲃⲁ ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲃⲉⲣⲉⲃ	ⲛⲁ
Interpretation: What is lost will be found.	78

Ioh. 6,14–15

folio 21r

.ⲁⲓ ⲕⲁⲃⲁ ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲃⲉⲣⲉⲃ	ⲛⲁ
Interpretation: The man that is sought (has) fled.	79

Ioh. 6,16–20

.ⲕⲓⲁⲗⲟⲩ ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲃⲉⲣⲉⲃ ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲃⲉⲣⲉⲃ	ⲉⲃ
Interpretation: Do not fear; the matter will be settled. ¹³⁴	80
	folio 21v

Ioh. 6,21–24

.ⲕⲓⲁⲗⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲁ ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲃⲉⲣⲉⲃ ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲃⲉⲣⲉⲃ	ⲕⲉ
Interpretation: You will have cause to be thankful about the matter.	81

<i>oportet te accipere gratia[m]</i> (S 127va; Ioh. 6,7–9)	lxxviii ¹³⁵
It will be necessary for you to receive favor/thanks.	78
պարսս է քէզ գհահալլ զիքսցդ (G 5v; Ioh. 6,21–23) ¹³⁶	87
You ought to be thankful for the matters.	
	folio 22r

Ioh. 6,25

.ⲕⲁⲃⲁⲃⲉ ⲛⲁⲃⲁ ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲃⲉⲣⲉⲃ	ⲛⲁ
Interpretation: The item that you are seeking will be found.	82

Ioh. 6,26–27

.ⲁⲓⲁⲃⲁⲃⲉ ⲛⲁⲃⲁ ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲃⲉⲣⲉⲃ	ⲛⲁ
Interpretation: If you are confident, you will succeed well.	83

εαν πιστευσης καλωσ επιτυχανεις (von Soden, Damascus recto; Ioh. 6,26–27)¹³⁷
 Interpretation: If you believe, you will succeed well.

132 Perhaps to be read *de*, i.e. “from God.”

133 The Latin syntax is difficult to interpret; the translation reads the conjecture in the preceding note.

134 Cf. *hermēneia* ος (77) in P. Berol. 3607, ερμηνια διαλυσις γινε[ται] (“Interpretation: a resolution will happen;” P. Berol. 3607v; Ioh. 6,1–2). Stegmüller offers a comparison to D’s *hermēneia* 28, listed above under *Puššāqā* 28 (Stegmüller 1953, 18).

135 Conjecture; the manuscript has *lxviii* (68); see Harris 1901, 64.

136 The Armenian repeats this *sors* as number 88 on its next page: պարսս է քէզ գհահալլ զիքսցդ (“You ought to be thankful for the matters;” G5r; Ioh. 6,24–25).

137 This reading is known only from von Soden’s transcription; see von Soden 1903, 825–30.

Ioh. 6,41–45		folio 23v
	.ܠܡܢ ܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܕܝܗܘܐ ܘܥܘܒܘܥܐ ܘܥܘܒܘܥܐ	ܘܥܘܒܘܥܐ
Interpretation: You will profit much in this matter.		88
Ioh. 6,46–51		folio 24r
	.ܠܕܘܡܝܢ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ	ܠܠܗܘܐ
Interpretation: It(/you) will be delivered into a care-free life.		89
Ioh. 6,52–56		folio 24v
	.ܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ	ܠܠܗܘܐ
Interpretation: Do not be doubtful; the matter will turn out.		90
<hr/>		
<i>ne discredas hoc bon[um] e[st]</i> (S 127vb; Ioh. 6,26–31)		lxxxviii
Do not disbelieve this is good.		88
ܘܢ ܐܢܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ		98
Interpretation: Do not disbelieve [... ...] the matters.		
Ioh. 6,57–59		folio 25r
	.ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ	ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ
Interpretation: Your matter is certain.		91
	ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ	99
Interpretation: Your matter is certain.		
Ioh. 6,60–62		
	.ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ	ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ
Interpretation: You will get surpassing glory.		92
Ioh. 6,63		
	.ܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ	ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ
Interpretation: Be confident it will turn out.		93
<hr/>		
<i>credis q[uonia]m fiet</i> (S 128ra; Ioh. 6,51b–56) ¹⁴⁴		
Believe that it will turn out.		
ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ		101
Interpretation: Believe that it will turn out.		
Ioh. 6,64–65		folio 25v
	.ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ	ܘܠܘܥܘܒܐ
Interpretation: God will give it to you if you are confident.		94
<hr/>		
<i>ista causa ex d[e]o e[st]</i> (S 128rb; Ioh. 6,59–60a)		lxxxvii
This matter is given by God.		87
<i>ex d[e]o datu[m] est</i> (S 128rb; Ioh. 6,60b–62)		xciii
It is given by God.		94

¹⁴⁴ The number is absent.

Ioh. 6,66–67

.ܚܘܡ ܠܘ ܩܥܘܬܗ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܡ ܥ
 Interpretation: It will change and it will not turn out. 95

auertat non fiet (S 128rb; Ioh. 6,55–56) xciii¹⁴⁵

It turns away, it does not happen. 94

ܫܦܘܨ ܩܘܪܕܝܦ ܫܦܝܢܝ (G 97v; Ioh. 6,67–68) 103

Return to the matters; it will not turn out.

Ioh. 6,68–69

ܚܘܡ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܦܢ ܚܕܝܘܠ ܚܘܡ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܚܘܡ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܡ ܥ
 Interpretation: This matter will result in conflict, but in the end it will turn out well. 96

ܗܘܠܝܘܢ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ (G 97r; Ioh. 6,69–70) 104
 The matters will result in conflict, but will be followed by good progress.

Ioh. 7,1–5

ܚܘܡ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܡ ܥ
 Interpretation: You have another matter; begin it. 97

alia[m] causa[m] inc[h]oas (S 128rb; Ioh. 6,64–65) xcvi¹⁴⁶

Begin another matter. 97

Ioh. 7,6

¹⁴⁷ܚܘܡ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܡ ܥ
 Interpretation: It is not time for him¹⁴⁸ to do that. 98

necdu[m] est causa facienti (S 128rb; Ioh. 6,66) xcvi¹⁴⁹

The matter is not happening yet. 98

ܘܫܝ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ (G 128r; Ioh. 7,28–30) 114

Do not start the matter; it is not the time.

Ioh. 7,7–8

ܚܘܡ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܡ ܥ
 Interpretation: It will turn out in time. 99

Ioh. 7,9–12a

ܚܘܡ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܡ ܥ
 ... among the crowds because of him (Ioh. 7,12a).

ܚܘܡ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ ܡ ܥ
 Interpretation: About the hidden matter: it is going to be revealed.¹⁵¹ 100

¹⁴⁵ The number and placement of this Latin *sors* are difficult to reconcile with the series.

¹⁴⁶ Correction; the manuscript has, *cxvii* (117).

¹⁴⁷ The manuscript has ܕܥܥܘܒܐ (“for him/us to do it”), which makes sense but does not fit the normal pattern of address in the *puššāqē*. Perhaps the Syriac originally had ܕܥܥܘܒܐ (“for you to do that”), in agreement with the pattern we see throughout the *puššāqē*; see *Puššāqē* 122.

¹⁴⁸ Or “us;” or “you” (see preceding note).

¹⁴⁹ Correction; the manuscript has, *cxviii* (118).

¹⁵⁰ The original reading is, ܚܘܡ ܕܥܥܘܒܐ; a scribe’s correction signs indicate reversal of the words.

¹⁵¹ Or “Because of the hidden matter, it is going to be revealed.” The first part of the statement may be a subject heading (see 6.2 below).

p[er] om[ni]a absconsa causa manifestabitur (S 128rb; Ioh. 6,70–71) c
 By all the hidden things the matter will be shown. 100

Ioh. 7,12b–13

folio 27v

.ܠܐܘܢ ܠܚܝܒܐ ܠܕܝܘܒܐ ܠܚܝܒܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ
 Interpretation: (Proceed) with caution, the matter will turn out. 101

Ioh. 7,14–17

.ܠܬܘܒܐ ܠܚܝܒܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ
 Interpretation: A good matter. 102

doctrina bona (S 128rb; Ioh. 7,1–3) ci
 Good instruction. 101

Ioh. 7,18

folio 28r

.ܠܕܝܘܒܐ ܠܕܝܘܒܐ ܠܕܝܘܒܐ ܠܕܝܘܒܐ ܠܕܝܘܒܐ ܠܕܝܘܒܐ
 Interpretation: Sure glory. 103

Ioh. 7,19–20

.ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ
 Interpretation: Watch yourself. 104

ܩܘܪܝܢܐ [...] (G 143v; Ioh. 7,18–[21]) 111
 Watch [...]

Ioh. 7,21–24

folio 28v

.ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ
 Interpretation: Do not fear slander. 105

noli timere (S 128va; Ioh. 7,12b–13) cv
 Do not fear. 105

ܩܘܪܝܢܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ (G 143r; Ioh. 7,22–[24]) 112
 Do not be afraid concerning defeat/failure.

Ioh. 7, 25–27

.ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ
 Interpretation: The hidden matter will be revealed. 106

ܕܐܕܠܝܩܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ (G 128v; Ioh. 7,25–27) 113
 The hidden matters will be revealed.

Ioh. 7,28–30

folio 29r

.ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ ܠܥܘܠܐ
 Interpretation: Do not fear this matter. 107

ne timeas causa (S 128va; Ioh. 7,14–16) cvi
 Do not fear the matter. 106

Ioh. 7,31

.ܚܘܒܪܘܚܢܐ ܕܚܝܘܠܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܡܘܫܘܐ

Interpretation: Great glory. 108

maior gloria (S 128va; Ioh. 7,17) cvii

Greater glory. 107

ܘܒܝܘܩܘܢܝܘܬܐ ܕܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܢܦܪܐ (G 39vv; Ioh. 7,39–40) 119

Greater glory.

Ioh. 7,32–34

folio 29v

ܘܚܝܘܠܐ ܕܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܢܦܪܐ ܡܘܫܘܐ

Interpretation: It is impossible for this to happen. 109

impossibile est hoc fieri (S 128va; Ioh. 7,19–22) cviiiIt is impossible for this to happen.¹⁵² 108

ܘܘܚܝܘܠܐ ܕܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܢܦܪܐ (G 39r; Ioh. 7,41–43) 120

It will not happen.

Ioh. 7,35–36

ܡܘܫܘܐ ܕܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܢܦܪܐ ܡܘܫܘܐ¹⁵³[Interpretation:] If you lose/destroy (it) you will not find (it).¹⁵⁴ 110*si perdidideris q[uo]dlibet non inuenies* (S 128va; Ioh. 7,23–24) cviii

If you destroy (it), by no means will you find (it). 108

ܢܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܢܦܪܐ ܡܘܫܘܐ (G 40v; Ioh. 7,37–38) 118

You cannot find what you seek.

Ioh. 7,37–38

folio 30r

ܡܘܫܘܐ ܕܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܢܦܪܐ ܡܘܫܘܐ

Interpretation: The matter will turn out well for you. 111

ܘܘܫܘܪܐ ܕܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܢܦܪܐ (G 74v; Ioh. 7,44–[49]) 121

The matters will turn out.

Ioh. 7,39

ܡܘܫܘܐ ܕܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܢܦܪܐ ܡܘܫܘܐ

Interpretation: Expect great glory. 112

maiolem gloriam (S 128va; Ioh. 7,25–30) cx

Greater glory. 110

ܘܒܝܘܩܘܢܝܘܬܐ ܕܘܚܘܪܐ ܕܢܦܪܐ (G 39v; Ioh. 7,39–40) 119

Greater glory.

152 A similar statement occurs later in the Latin series; see under *Puššāqā* 121.

153 ܡܘܫܘܐ (*puššāqā*; “Interpretation”) is absent.

154 Or “you will not succeed.”

Ioh. 7,40–42		folio 30v
	.ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ	ܕܘܘܥܘܢ
	Interpretation: Trial ¹⁵⁵ will come to you from people.	113
Ioh. 7,43–45a		
	.ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ	
	... the chief priests and Pharisees (Ioh. 7,45a).	
	.ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ	ܕܘܘܥܘܢ
	Interpretation: The message will not wait. ¹⁵⁶	114
Ioh. 7,45b–49		folio 31r
	.ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ	ܕܘܘܥܘܢ
	Interpretation: You have finished the matter.	115
Ioh. 7,50–51		
	¹⁵⁷ .ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ	ܕܘܘܥܘܢ
	Interpretation: Good testimony will increase.	116
	<i>testimonium ueniet tibi</i> (S 129ra; Ioh. 8,3–11)	cxiii
	Testimony is coming to you.	114
	ܦܘܪܝܗ ܩܠܝܡܘܢܝܗܘܢ ܗܘܢ ܩܠܝܡܘܢܝܗܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ (G 74r; Ioh. 7,50–51)	122
	Good testimony, along with mourning.	
Ioh. 7,52		
	.ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ	[ܕܘܘܥܘܢ]
	Interpretation: Do not give false testimony.	[117]
	<i>falsum testimonium dicis</i> (S 129ra; Ioh. 8,13–15)	cxvi
	You speak false testimony.	116
	ܘܩܠܝܡܘܢܝܗܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ (G 127v; Ioh. 7,52)	123
	Do not give false testimony.	
Ioh. 8,12¹⁵⁸		
	.ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ	ܕܘܘܥܘܢ
	Interpretation: This matter will turn out well.	[11]8
	<i>fiet bene</i> (S 129ra; Ioh. 8,12)	cxiii ¹⁵⁹
	It will turn out well.	114
	ܦܘܪܝܗ ܩܠܝܡܘܢܝܗܘܢ ܕܘܘܥܘܢ (G 144v; Ioh. 8,13–16)	125
	It will turn out well for you.	

155 Or “Temptation.”

156 Or “The word will not endure.”

157 Correction; the manuscript has ܕܘܘܥܘܢ.

158 The Syriac omits Ioh. 7,53–8,11, in agreement with the Peshitta generally; some early Greek manuscripts and other ancient versions also omit the passage.

159 Possibly to be read, cxv (115), since cxiii (114) has already occurred.

Ioh. 8,13–16

folio 31v

ܐܘܨܩܘܣܘܣܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ

Interpretation: The partnership¹⁶⁰ is suitable. 119

bona communio (S 129ra; Ioh. 8,16) cxvii

A good partnership. 117

ܦܘܪܝܗܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܚܘܒܐ (G 127r; Ioh. 8,12) 124

It is a good partnership.

Ioh. 8,17–18

ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ

Interpretation: The thing you are about to do, do. 120

quod incipis facito (S 129ra; Ioh. 8,17–18) cxviii

What you are beginning, do. 118

[ܩܢܪ ܕܘܡܢܐ] ܕܘܡܢܐ ܘܢܐ ܘܢܐ ܘܢܐ ܘܢܐ ܘܢܐ ܘܢܐ ܘܢܐ ܘܢܐ (G 144r; Ioh. 8,17–18) 126

[What you want] to do, do not do it.

Ioh. 8,19

folio 32r

ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ

Interpretation: It is not possible for this to happen. 121

non potest hoc fieri (S 128vb; Ioh. 7,43–49)¹⁶¹ cxix

It is not possible for this to happen. 120

Ioh. 8,20

ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ

Interpretation: It is not time to begin. 122

ܢܘܢ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ (G 111r; Ioh. 8,20) 128

It is not the time to begin.

Ioh. 8,21

ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ

Interpretation: This thing will not be found. 123

ܩܘܨܢܐ ܩܘܨܢܐ ܩܘܨܢܐ ܩܘܨܢܐ ܩܘܨܢܐ ܩܘܨܢܐ ܩܘܨܢܐ ܩܘܨܢܐ (G 134v; Ioh. 8,21) 129

You will find what you seek.

Ioh. 8,22–24

folio 32v

ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ ܕܘܡܢ

Interpretation: Forgo this matter and begin another. 124

ܦܘܪܝܗܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ ܕܘܡܢܐ (G 134r; Ioh. 8,22–[24]) 130

Leave this and undertake another.

¹⁶⁰ Or “The marriage.”

¹⁶¹ Although the *sors* approximates *Puššāqā* 121 in content and number, the placement is different.

Ioh. 10,6–9

folio 40v

.ܠܝܫܐܘܢܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܡܘܢ

Interpretation: The matter is hopeful.¹⁸³ 153

sperata causa (S 129rb; Ioh. 8,57) cxlviii

A hoped-for matter. 148

Ioh. 10,10–16

folio 41r

.ܠܕܝܢܐ ܠܡܘܨܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܡܘܢ

Interpretation: Further profit is coming. 154

Ioh. 10,17–18b

.ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ

... to take it up again (Ioh. 10,18b).

.ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܡܘܢ

Interpretation: With all your soul approach the matter that (comes) from all your heart, and do not doubt it. 155

Ioh. 10,18c–21

folio 41v

.ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܡܘܢ

Interpretation: It cannot happen. 156

possibile est hoc fieri (S 129vb; Ioh. 9,22–23) clii

It is possible¹⁸⁴ for this to happen. 152

Ioh. 10,22–25

folio 42r

.ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܡܘܢ

Interpretation: The matter that is happening is good. 157

ερμηνη[α] καλον πρ[αγμα το] γιγνομ[ενον] (P.Berol. 21315 r¹⁸⁵)

Interpreta[tion]: The matt[er that] is happ[ening] is good.

ογζωβ ε[η]νανογϞ Ϟηααω[ηε]

The matter that will happ[en] is go[od.]

Ioh. 10,26–28

.ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܡܘܢ

Interpretation: You will receive it happily. 158

Ioh. 10,29–30

.ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܡܘܢ

Interpretation: The promise you are about to make is fine. 159

Ioh. 10,31–33

folio 42v

.ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܥܘܢܐ ܡܘܢ

Interpretation: Do not quarrel; you will be delivered in the end. 160

183 Literally, “Expectation of the matter.”

184 Though conveying the opposite sense from the Syriac, only the absence (or presence) of a negative particle makes it so. Also, the *sortes* share a theme in this part of their series in that they both address questions of possibility.

185 The biblical text is missing; the other side of the fragment has Ioh. 10,29–30 and an illegible *hermeneia*; see Treu 1991, 56–57.

Ioh. 10,34–36

.ܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܝܘܡܝܢܐ ܠܡܘܢܐ ܠܡܘܢܐ

Interpretation: A fine start.¹⁸⁶ 161

folio 43r

Ioh. 10,37–38

.ܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܡܠ ܠܐܡܘܢܐ ܠܡܘܢܐ ܠܡܘܢܐ ܠܡܘܢܐ

Interpretation: Wait¹⁸⁷ and the matter will turn out for you. 162**Ioh. 10,39–42**

.ܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܠܐܡܘܢܐ ܕܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܠܡܘܢܐ ܠܡܘܢܐ

Interpretation: Truly the matter will turn out. 163

uere fiet causa tua (S 130ra; Ioh. 10,1–6) clvii

Truly your matter will turn out. 157

ܕܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܡܠ ܠܐܡܘܢܐ ܠܡܘܢܐ ܠܡܘܢܐ (G 155r; Ioh. 10,39–[42]) 172

Truly the matters will turn out.

Ioh. 11,1–4

folio 43v

.ܕܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ

Interpretation: You will get something you are not expecting. 164

quod no[n] speras accipies (S 130ra; Ioh. 10,7–10) clviii

You will get what you are not expecting. 158

ܩܢܝܢܐ ܕܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܕܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ (G 238v; Ioh. 11,1–3) 173

You will get what you expect.

Ioh. 11,4–7

folio 44r

.ܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ

Interpretation: Do not do this matter. [165]

causa[m] hanc n[e] facias (S 130ra; Ioh. 10,11–16) clviii

Do not do this matter. 159

Ioh. 11,8–10

.ܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ

Interpretation: Do not avoid/flee the matter.¹⁸⁸ [166]**Ioh. 11,11–15**

folio 44v

.ܠܝܢܝܘܬܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ

Interpretation: It is hidden.¹⁸⁹ 167¹⁸⁶ Or “The beginning is fine.”¹⁸⁷ Or “Hope/expect.”¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Puššāqā* 187.¹⁸⁹ Cf. *Puššāqā* 152.

Ioh. 11,16–19

folio 45r

.ܠܝܘܥܝܢ ܘܠ ܠܗܘܐ ܡܥܪ ܠܡܥܘܠܐ [ܡܡܘܠ]

Interpretation: Make petition and the matter will turn out for you.¹⁹⁰ [168]

roga et fiet (S 130rb; Ioh. 10,17–18) clxi

Make petition and it will happen. 161

Ioh. 11,20–23

.ܠܠܗܘܐ ܘܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ [ܡܡܘܠ]

Interpretation: Your prayer is heard. [16]9

ora et exaudietur (S 130rb; Ioh. 10,19–20) clxii

Pray and it will be heard. 162

Ioh. 11,24–25

¹⁹¹.ܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ [ܡܡܘܠ]

Interpretation: Wait a few days. [170]

expecta paucos dies (S 130rb; Ioh. 10,31–36) clxv

Wait a few days. 165

դադարեա սակաւ ատրքս (G 218v; Ioh. 11,29–30) 181

Stop for a few days.

Ioh. 11,26–29a

folio 45

.ܘܠܗܘܐ ܘܠܗܘܐ

... and when Mary heard it (Ioh. 11,29a).

.ܠܝܘܥܝܢ ܘܠ ܠܗܘܐ ¹⁹²ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ

Interpretation: Through supplication the matter will turn out for you. 171

Ioh. 11,29b–30

.ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ

Interpretation: Give¹⁹³ the good matter or gift-offering that you promised. 172

վասն բարիոյ գործոյ թե խոստացար արա (G 217v; Ioh. 11,32–35) 183

Concerning the good deed, do as you promised.

Ioh. 11,31–32

folio 46r

.ܠܝܘܥܝܢ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ

Interpretation: Your matter will turn out plainly. 173

Ioh. 11,33–35

folio 46v

.ܠܝܘܥܝܢ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ ܠܠܗܘܐ

Interpretation: You will be heard in this matter. 174

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Armenian 193 listed with *Puššāqā* 183.

¹⁹¹ The *puššāqā* is written over an erased line, a few letters of which near the end are visible: -ܠܗܘܐ; perhaps the previous *puššāqā* was duplicated here and subsequently erased, leaving some of the latter portion visible (ܠܠܗܘܐ; “heard”).

¹⁹² The original has ܠܠܗܘܐ, omitting “through;” a correction in what appears to be the original hand has added -ܠ in red ink (“by, through”).

¹⁹³ Or “Give him.”

Ioh. 11,36–39

folio 47r

.ܠܝܘܢܐ ܠܡܐ ܠܡܐܝܢ ܝܥܪ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܡܥܘ

Interpretation: Be confident that this matter will turn out. 175

confide q[uo]n[ia]m fiet (S 130bis ra;¹⁹³ Ioh. 10,39–42) clxx¹⁹²

Trust that it will turn out. 170

ܩܘܘܡܐ ܠܥܘܒܪܐ ܠܝܘܢܐ ܠܡܐ ܠܡܐܝܢ ܝܥܪ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܡܥܘ

Take courage, and it will turn out.

Ioh. 11,40–43

.ܠܡܐܝܢ ܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܡܥܘܕ ܡܥܘܕ ܡܥܘܕ ܡܥܘܕ

Interpretation: Make petition and it will turn out. 176

roga q[uo]n[ia]m fiet (S 130bis ra; Ioh. 11,5–7) clxxii

Make petition that it will turn out. 172

ܠܡܐܝܢ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ

May your matters be heard.

Ioh. 11,44–46

folio 47v

.ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ

Interpretation: A good salvation. 177

ερμηνια [σ]ωτηρι[α] καλη (Colt Pap. 3.4; Ioh. 11,49–52)¹⁹⁶

Interpretation: A good salvation.

salus bona (S 130bis ra; Ioh. 11,8–10) clxxiii

A good salvation. 173

Ioh. 11,47–48

.ܠܡܐܝܢ ܣܘܪܝܘܢ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ

Interpretation: After a time your matter will turn out by means of a stranger.¹⁹⁵ 178*post tempus et causa tua q[uo]d speres hoc* (S 130bis ra; Ioh. 11,11–15) clxxiiiiAfter time and your matter, this for which you should hope.¹⁹⁸ 174**Ioh. 11,49–52**

folio 48r

.ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ

Interpretation: Do not expect it. 179

ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ

Do not expect it to happen.

¹⁹⁴ Correction; the manuscript has *clxxx* (180).

¹⁹⁵ A second leaf is also numbered 130, designated *bis* to distinguish it from the previous fol. 130.

¹⁹⁶ See Casson/Hettich 1950, 2.87; Wilkinson 2019, 107. Whereas the segmentation in Colt Pap. 3.4 appears to have been like that of the Syriac, of its few surviving *hermēneiai* that are sufficiently well preserved to read, this is the only one whose contents definitely correlate to the Syriac.

¹⁹⁷ Or “will turn out in a foreign country;” ܠܡܥܘܕ ܠܡܥܘܕ may be read as *aksenyā* (“foreign country”) or *aks^enāyā* (“stranger, foreigner”).

¹⁹⁸ The *sors* is difficult to interpret as it is but certain elements correspond to the Syriac.

Ioh. 11,53–54

. ܣܘܦ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ	ܡܦ
Interpretation: You will seek/ask and it will not turn out for you.	180

Ioh. 11,55–56

. ܣܘܦ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ	ܡܦ
Interpretation: Wait and after six days your matter will turn out.	181

ܝܬܘ ܩܠܝܗ ܘܘܚܘܪ ܝܗܘܝܗ (G 167r; Ioh. 12,1–2)	192
It will happen after six days.	

Ioh. 11,57

	folio 49r
. ܣܘܦ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ	ܡܦ
Interpretation: Do not prevent something good.	182

<i>ne p[ro]hibe quod bonu[m]</i> (S 130bis rb; Ioh. 11,24–26)	clxxvii
Do not prevent what is good.	177

Ioh. 12,1–2

. ܣܘܦ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ	ܡܦ
Interpretation: Do not do this.	183

<i>ne facias</i> ¹⁹⁹ <i>ista</i> (S 130bis rb; Ioh. 11,27–28)	clxxviii
Do not do this.	178

Ioh. 12,3

. ܣܘܦ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ	ܡܦ
Interpretation: Remember that this matter will turn out.	184

ܘܢܩܣܝܢ ܝܗܘܝܗ (G 258v; Ioh. 12,3a)	193
Entreat and it will turn out.	

ܝܗܘܝܗ ܩܠܝܗܝܗ (G 195v; Ioh. 11,23–26a) ²⁰⁰	179
Remember that it will turn out.	

Ioh. 12,4–6

	folio 49v
. ܣܘܦ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ	ܡܦ
Interpretation: Many will benefit ²⁰¹ you.	185

Ioh. 12,7–8

. ܣܘܦ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ ܕܘܫܩܐ	ܡܦ
Interpretation: The matter will turn out gloriously for you.	186

¹⁹⁹ Correction; the manuscript has *faces*.
²⁰⁰ The Armenian 179 is properly parallel to *Puššāqā* 183 though it occurs earlier in its series. The Armenian 193 parallels *Puššāqā* 168 in content. Verbs for remembering (e.g. μμνησκω, ܝܚܝܚܝܗ, ܝܗܘܝܗܝܗ) can also be used to mean “making mention,” so it may be that these varied translated statements are tied together in a slightly confused way due to shared conceptions of mentioning and making petition.
²⁰¹ Or “Many (matters) will abound to you.”

Ioh. 12,9–11

folio 50r

.ܠܐܘܬܐ ܠܢܝܚܐ ܗܘ ܡܘܝܬܐ ܠܐ [ܠܡܘܬܐ]²⁰² [ܡܘܬ][“Interpretation:”] Do not avoid/flee the matter.²⁰³ [187]**Ioh. 12,12–13**

folio 50v

.ܡܘܬܐ ܠܢܝܚܐ ܗܘ ܡܘܬܐ ܠܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ

Interpretation: It is a good matter. 188

Ioh. 12,14–16

.ܠܘܬܐ ܠܢܝܚܐ ܗܘ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ

Interpretation: Great glory. 189

ܡܘܬܐ ܩܘܡܩܘܦܐ ܕܗܘܝܢܐ (G 172v; Ioh. 12,12–13) 197

There will be great glory.²⁰⁴**Ioh. 12,17–18**

.ܡܘܬܐ ܠܢܝܚܐ ܗܘ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ

Interpretation: Testifying, many will help. 190

translatio multos testificantes (S 130bis rb; Ioh. 11,36–39) clxxxiiMany testifying (to) the transfer.²⁰⁵ 182**Ioh. 12,19–23**

folio 51r

.ܡܘܬܐ ܠܢܝܚܐ ܗܘ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ

Interpretation: If you do this you will have profit. [191]

[... .. ܢ]ܘܡܘܩܘܦܐ (Copt. 156 4v; Ioh. 12,24–26)²⁰⁶

[... ..] will be [...]

[...] σοι γινετ[αι] ωφελιμ[ος]

[...] it will be benefic[ial] for you.

Ioh. 12,24–26

folio 51v

.ܡܘܬܐ ܠܢܝܚܐ ܗܘ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ ܡܘܬܐ

Interpretation: You will not get glory; it turns.²⁰⁷ 192*non inuenies gloria[m] sed auertitur* (S 130bis va; Ioh. 11,40–43) clxxxiiiYou will not find glory, but it will turn away.²⁰⁸ 183

²⁰² ܠܡܘܬܐ (*puššāqā*; “Interpretation”) is absent.

²⁰³ Cf. *Puššāqā* 166.

²⁰⁴ Cf. the Armenian *sors* listed with *Puššāqā* 192.

²⁰⁵ The Latin is difficult to interpret, though it is similar to the Syriac. Harris conjectured that it was a marginal note signaling a variant reading in the Gospel rather than a *sors*, perhaps originally *alia translatio: multos testificantes* (“Another version (has): ‘many testifying/witnesses’”; Harris 1901, 66, n.3).

²⁰⁶ See Crum 1904, 175.

²⁰⁷ Or “it returns to it(self).”

²⁰⁸ Or “it will be averted;” also in Latin 184.

<i>non accipies gloria[m] sed auertitur</i> (S 130bis va; Ioh. 11,44–46) ²⁰⁹	clxxxiii
You will not get glory, but it will turn away.	184
մեծապէս փառք զանք քելք (G 171r; Ioh. 12,20–23)	200
Great glory will come to you. ²¹⁰	
Ioh. 12,27–30	
	folio 52r
<p style="text-align: right;">. ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ</p>
Interpretation: Something exalted will happen to you.	193
Ioh. 12,31–34	
<p style="text-align: right;">. ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">[ܡܝ ܘ]</p>
Interpretation: Do the matter quickly so that you will not lose it.	[194]
<hr/>	
վաղվաղակի արա զիրսդ (G 257r; Ioh. 12,35–36a)	204
Do the matters quickly.	
Ioh. 12,35–36a	
	folio 52v
<p style="text-align: right;">. ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ</p>	
... that you may be called ²¹¹ children of light (Ioh. 12,36a).	
<p style="text-align: right;">. ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ܡܝ ܘ</p>
Interpretation: Conflict will occur and afterwards you will win.	195
<i>cont[e]ntio fiet et postea vinces</i> (S 130bis va; Ioh. 11,53–55a)	clxxxvii
Conflict will occur and afterwards you will win.	187
<hr/>	
Ioh. 12,36b–38	
<p style="text-align: right;">. ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ܡܝ ܘ</p>
Interpretation: Repent of the matter and it will turn out.	196
<hr/>	
<i>peniteris d[e]o in causa tua</i> (S 130bis va; Ioh. 11,55b–56)	clxxxviii
You will repent to God in your matter.	188
Ioh. 12,39–40	
<p style="text-align: right;">. ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ܡܝ ܘ</p>
Interpretation: You will find favor with people.	197
Ioh. 12,41–43	
	folio 53r
<p style="text-align: right;">. ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ ܡܝ ܘ ܐܘܪܝܢܘܢܐ</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">ܡܝ ܘ</p>
Interpretation: The matter will be saved.	198
<hr/>	

²⁰⁹ Harris gives the following liturgical note as part of the *sors*: *ante sex dies paschae [quam] in die dominica legitur*. However, in the manuscript this note is placed separately in the margin adjacent to Ioh. 11,55 (Harris 1901, 67). Perhaps the mistake occurred in the transcription from which Harris was working.

²¹⁰ A series of similar *sortes* related to glory occur here in the Armenian:
²⁰¹ դու առնուս զփառսդ (“You will get glory;” G 204v; Ioh. 12,24–26)
²⁰² մեծ փառք լինիս (“There will be great glory;” G 204r; Ioh. 12,27–[30])
²⁰³ մեծ փառք լինիս (“There will be great glory;” G 257v; Ioh. 12,31–34)

See also the Armenian *sors* listed with *Puššāqā* 189.

²¹¹ See discussion of textual variant in 4.3.2 above.

loh. 13,12–15		
		folio 55r
	.ܪܫܘܢܝܢ ܪܫܘܢܝܢ ܪܫܘܢܝܢ ܪܫܘܢܝܢ	ܐܝ
	Interpretation: Do not desire a proud word.	204
<hr/>		
<i>ne vellis</i> ²¹⁶	<i>uerbu[m] sup[er]bum</i> (S 130bis vb; loh. 12,14–16)	cxcvi
	Do not wish for a proud word.	196
loh. 13,16–17		
		ܐܝ
	.ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܗܘ ܕܥܝܢܝܢ ܕܥܝܢܝܢ	ܐܝ
	Interpretation: What you expect will happen.	205
<hr/>		
<i>quod speras</i> ²¹⁷	<i>fiet</i> (S 130bis vb; loh. 12,17–18)	cxcvii
	What you expect will happen.	197
loh. 13,18–19		
		folio 55v
	.ܪܫܘܢܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ	ܐܝ
	Interpretation: Do not receive this word insincerely. ²¹⁸	206
<hr/>		
<i>ne accipies</i> ²¹⁹	<i>ista sermone[m] quia duas facies habet</i> (S 130bis vb; loh. 12,20–23)	cxcviii
	Do not receive this statement, because it has two faces.	196
loh. 13,20–21		
		ܐܝ
	.ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ	ܐܝ
	Interpretation: You have cause to be elated in your matter. ²²⁰	207
loh. 13,22–25		
		folio 56r
	.ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ	ܐܝ
	Interpretation: Forgo this, for it is a (big) work.	208
loh. 13,26–27		
		ܐܝ
	.ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ	ܐܝ
	Interpretation: Before you begin, prepare.	209
<hr/>		
<i>praepara ante q[uam]</i> ²²²	<i>incipias</i> (S 131 ra; loh. 12,35–36a)	ccii
	Prepare before you begin.	202
ܩܘܪܝܢܝܢܝܢ ܩܘܪܝܢܝܢܝܢ ܩܘܪܝܢܝܢܝܢ ܩܘܪܝܢܝܢܝܢ	(G 208r; loh. 13,28–29)	218
	You should prepare yourself before you begin.	
loh. 13,28–29		
		ܐܝ
	.ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢ	ܐܝ
	Interpretation: From scarcity, glory.	210
<hr/>		

²¹⁶ I.e. *velis*.

²¹⁷ Correction; the manuscript has *speres*.

²¹⁸ Literally, “because of face.”

²¹⁹ Conjecture; manuscript has *ne a cupias*.

²²⁰ Or “to be elevated by your matter.”

²²¹ Conjecture; the manuscript has ܪܫܘܢܝܢ (“drink”).

²²² Conjecture; the manuscript has *qd*.

<i>ex moerore ad gloria[m] ueniet</i> (S 131 ra; Ioh. 12,31b–34)	cci
From mourning it will come to glory.	201
ի նեղութենէ խնդութիւն լինի քեզ (G 255v; Ioh. 13,30–32)	219
Out of distress joy will come to you.	

Ioh. 13,30–32a

folio 56v

.ժա յո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր	
... God will glorify him in himself (Ioh. 13,32a).	
.ժա ծո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր	հի
Interpretation: There is love in the matter.	211

<i>causa</i> ²²³ <i>amicitia[m] habuit</i> (S 131 ra; Ioh. 12,36b–38)	cciii
The matter had friendship.	203

Ioh. 13,32b–35

.հի յո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր [հի յո՞ր]	հի
[“Interpretation:”] The matter can be settled. ²²⁵	212

Ioh. 13,36–37

folio 57r

.հի յո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր	հի
Interpretation: Do not be distressed by this matter.	213

<i>ne sol[lici]tus [sis de c]ausa</i> ²²⁶ (S 131ra; Ioh. 12,44–47)	ccv
Do not worry about the matter.	205
վի տրտմիք վասն իրացն (G 222r; Ioh. 13,38–14,1) ²²⁷	222
Do not be distressed about these matters.	

Ioh. 13,38–14,1

.հի յո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր	հի
Interpretation: A gift will come, and joy.	214

<i>a d[e]o dabitur gaudium</i> (S 131 rb; Ioh. 12,48–49b)	ccvi
Joy will be given by God. ²²⁸	206
ունիս խնդալ (G 279r; Ioh. 14,5–7a)	224
You will be happy.	

Ioh. 14,2–4

folio 57v

.ժա յո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր յո՞ր	հի
Interpretation: You will be able to speak. ²²⁹	215

²²³ Conjecture; the manuscript has *causam* (“It had a friendship-matter”). Cf. the next Latin *sors*, *cciiii* (204), *amicitia redit causa* (perhaps, “The matter returns friendship”; S130bis va; Ioh. 12,39–40).

²²⁴ *հի* (*puššāqā*; “Interpretation”) is absent.

²²⁵ Cf. the Armenian 221, *պարտ է քեզ բարեկամել* (“It is your duty to reconcile;” G 222v; Ioh. 13,36–37).

²²⁶ A hole in the manuscript has created lacunae in the text; here we follow Harris’ reconstruction (Harris 1901, 67).

²²⁷ The Armenian repeats this *sors* as the next in its series (223): *վի տրտմիք վասն իրացն* (“Do not be distressed about these matters;” G 279v; Ioh. 14,2–4).

²²⁸ Cf. the Latin *ccvii* (207), *bona[m] habebis gratia[m]* (“You will have good favor;” S 131 rb; Ioh 12,49c–50).

²²⁹ Literally, “You will have cause to be (able) and to speak.”

loh. 14,5–7

.ܠܐܡܐ ܩܝܡܐ ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܠܐܝܢܐ ܠܐܝܢܐ
 Interpretation: Correct²³⁰ your matter and it will turn out. 216

amenda causa (S 131 rb; Ioh. 13,1–3) ccviii
 Correct the matter. 208
 ܡܠܩܗܐ ܩܝܦܩܦܐ (G 248v; Ioh. 14,8–12a) 225
 Correct the matters.

loh. 14,8–9

.ܠܒܝܘܬܐ ܕܝܐܘܪܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܠܐܝܢܐ ܠܐܝܢܐ
 Interpretation: Begin and it will be finished. 217

inchoa et complebitur (S 131 rb; Ioh. 13,4–7) ccviii²³¹
 Begin and it will be fulfilled. 209

loh. 14,10–12

folio 58r
 .ܠܐܡܐ ܩܝܡܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ
 Interpretation: Another fine response will occur. 218

loh. 14,13–17

folio 58v
 .ܠܐܝܢܐ ܠܐܝܢܐ ܠܐܝܢܐ ܠܐܝܢܐ ܠܐܝܢܐ ܠܐܝܢܐ
 Interpretation: Do not abandon the matter. 219

loh. 14,18–20

.ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ ܠܐ
 Interpretation: Do not fear, for relief will come to you. 220

loh. 14,21

.ܠܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ
 Interpretation: Good news²³² and profit come from a foreign country.²³³ 221

ueniet bonu[m] nu[n]tiu[m] (S 131 rb; Ioh. 13,16–17) ccxii
 Good news is coming. 212

loh. 14,22–24

folio 59r
 .ܠܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ
 Interpretation: Truth, and it remains.²³⁴ 222

loh. 14,25–27

.ܠܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ
 Interpretation: The matter will produce peace. 223

in pace redit causa (S 131 vb; Ioh. 14,8–9) ccxiii
 The matter will return in peace. 213

²³⁰ Or “Straighten,” or “Direct.”

²³¹ Conjecture; the manuscript has *ccviii* (208), repeating the number of the previous *sors*.

²³² Or “good business.”

²³³ Or “from a stranger;” ܠܡܝܢܐ may be read as *aksenyā* (“foreign country”) or *aksēnāyā* (“stranger, foreigner”).

²³⁴ The meaning of the Syriac is difficult to interpret as it is. Perhaps the text originally read, ܠܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ ܕܡܝܢܐ (“It is sure and will remain”).

loh. 14,28–29

folio 59v

ܐܘܢ ܠܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܠܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

Interpretation: He/it will not condemn you, do not fear. 224

non te laedit nihil metuas (S 131 vb; Ioh. 13,22–25) ccxv

He/it will not hurt you, you should fear nothing. 215

loh. 14,30–31a

ܐܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

... thus I do (Ioh. 14,31a).

ܐܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

Interpretation: It will turn out well and produce fruit. 225

loh. 14,31b–15,4

folio 60r

ܐܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

Interpretation: What you have asked will happen to you. 226

loh. 15,5–7

ܐܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

Interpretation: He has given (it) to you and this very matter will happen. 227

loh. 15,8–12

folio 60v

ܐܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

Interpretation: This matter will turn out happily. 228

loh. 15,13–15

ܐܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

Interpretation: What you seek will happen for you. 229

ܩܢܝܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ (G 280v; Ioh. 15,16) 237

You will find what you seek.

loh. 15,16

folio 61r

ܐܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

Interpretation: If you continue,²³⁸ it will finally turn out. 230

loh. 15,17–19

ܐܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

Interpretation: A right portion will be yours; do not overreach. 231

loh. 15,20–21

ܐܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

Interpretation: About reproof and sin.²³⁹ 232

²³⁵ Perhaps to be read ܕܡܘܬܐ (“what you ask”).

²³⁶ The *puššāqē* do not normally have unspecified third person subjects with transitive verbs (“he”); perhaps the original was ܕܡܘܬܐ (“it is given”); cf. *Puššāqē* 40, 64.

²³⁷ The manuscript adds the feminine pronoun ܐܘܢ, presumably by error; i.e. the original has, ܐܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܐ ܕܐܘܪܝܢܐ.

²³⁸ Or “If you endure,” or “If you wait.”

²³⁹ Or “error, fault.” Cf. *Puššāqē* 36. This *puššāqē* appears to be a topical heading (see 6.2).

Ioh. 15,22–25

folio 61v

.ܪܫܝܢܡܘܢܐ ܕܝܫܘܥ ܐܬܝܢ ܕܘܚܪܝܢܐ ܐܠܝ

Interpretation: You will win if you bring testimony. 233

Ioh. 15,26–16,2a

.ܐܘܬܝܘܢܐ ܥܘܕ

... out of their synagogue (Ioh. 16,2a).

.ܠܡܢ ܠܝܒܝܥܐ ܠܠܗܝܠܐ ܠܠܡܝܢܐ ܐܠܝ

Interpretation: Do not hold back on this matter. 234

ne prohibeas causa fiet (S 131 vb; Ioh. 14,13–17) ccxxvi

Do not hold back, the matter will work out. 226

Ioh. 16,2b–6

folio 62r

.ܠܝܒܝܥܐ ܠܠܗܝܠܐ ܠܠܡܝܢܐ ܥܘܕ ܐܠܝ

Interpretation: From a foreign country²⁴⁰ comes a good matter. 235

de peregrino ueniet bonu[m] nuntiu[m] (S 131 vb; Ioh. 14,18–20) ccxxvii

From a foreign country²⁴¹ comes good news. 227

ܝܘܨܛܘܦܘܦܘܬܝܢܝܬ ܩܘܝ ܦܘܦܝܗ ܩܪܝܝܓ (G 169v; Ioh. 16,1–5) 243

From a foreign country²⁴² comes good news.

Ioh. 16,7–8

folio 62v

.ܠܐܡܢ ܕܘܠܘܟܘܢ ܥܘܕ ܐܠܝ

Interpretation: Believe and it will turn out well. 236

Ioh. 16,9–13a

.ܠܝܝܥ ܡܠܘܥܐ ܐܠܝܥܘܕ ܩܘܡ

... he will lead you into all truth (Ioh. 16,13a).

.ܠܠܘܕܝܢܐ ܠܠܗܝܠܐ ܠܠܡܝܢܐ ܠܠܘܕܝܢܐ ܐܠܝ

Interpretation: The sin²⁴³ will be rescued and the lost thing found. 237

Ioh. 16,13b–14

.ܠܠܝܩܘܢܐ ܕܠܗܝܠܐ ܐܠܝ

Interpretation: The hidden matter will be revealed. 238

Ioh. 16,15–16?²⁴⁴

folio 63r²⁴⁵

Puššāqā 239 is missing

²⁴⁰ Or “From a stranger;” ܠܠܘܕܝܢܐ may be read as *aksenyā* (“foreign country”) or *aks^enāyā* (“stranger, foreigner”).

²⁴¹ Or “From a stranger.”

²⁴² Or “From travel.”

²⁴³ Or “error, fault.”

²⁴⁴ The segment clearly begins with Ioh. 16,15 (fol. 62v) but the end of the segment is unclear.

²⁴⁵ Folios 63 and 66 replace lost original leaves, in hands much later than the original (see 4.3.3). *Puššāqā* and their numbers on folio 63 are written into the margins in a still later hand and are very defective due to damage on the edges of the pages.

Ioh. 16,17–18?²⁴⁶

²⁴⁷[... ..] ܐܘܢ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ
[illegible] 240

Ioh. 16,19–23a?

ܠܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ
... you will not ask me anything (Ioh. 17,23a). folio 63v
²⁴⁸[... ..] ܐܘܢ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ
[illegible] 241

Ioh. 16,23b–25a

ܠܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ
... in parables I have spoken these things to you (Ioh. 16,25a). folio 64r
ܐܘܢ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ
... this matter will be revealed. ²⁴⁹ܐܘܢ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ 242

omnia manifestu[m] fiet (S 132 ra; Ioh. 15,5–7) ccxxxiiii
All things will be made clear. 234
ܐܘܢ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ (G 170r; Ioh. 16,23b–24) 250
It will be revealed to all.

Ioh. 16,25b

ܐܘܢ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ [ܐܘܢܐ]
Interpretation: You have cause to begin a second time. [243]

discesi oportet inchoare (S 132 ra; Ioh. 15,8–12) ccxxxv
... it is necessary to begin.²⁵⁰ 235

Ioh. 16,26–28

ܐܘܢ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ [ܐܘܢܐ]
Interpretation: Speak a true word. [244]

*uerum*²⁵¹ *sermonem dicent quia uera sunt quae testantur*²⁵² (S 132 ra; Ioh. 15,13–15) ccxxxvi
True is the statement that they speak; true are the things that are testified. 236
ܐܘܢ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ ܕܘܢܐܘܢܐ (G 181r; Ioh. 16,27–28) 252
The things said are true.

246 The exact scope of the segment is uncertain though punctuation suggests the break may be intended at Ioh. 16,18.

247 The text is very damaged and cannot be read. The term ܐܘܢܐܘܢܐ (*puššāqā*) is absent from the statements on folio 63.

248 The text is very damaged. *Puššāqā* 241 occurs in the margin in a late hand. Above the line at what appears to be the break point of the segment (Ioh. 16,23a), a still later hand has written ܐܘܢܐ twice; the last letter is ambiguous because it does not have a clear dot. If read as ܐܘܢܐ, it could indicate a “break.” However, the same hand has written ܐܘܢܐ adjacent to the line in the inside margin, presumably showing that the word should be read as ܐܘܢܐ. If so, it would appear to designate the number 174, a conclusion reinforced by the appearance of ܐܘܢܐ in the outside margin at the bottom of the page, i.e. the number 175. These numbers would be well out of sequence with the series generally and with the preceding numbers on folio 63r, though they are in a different hand as well. The layers of annotation on the replacement leaves are difficult to interpret, perhaps due partly to confusion on the part of one or more scribes, confusion that is compounded now by the damage these folios have sustained.

249 The number is written into the margin by a later hand, yet one that is different from the hand(s) that have reinked the numbers elsewhere in the manuscript. This and the absence of the prefatory term ܐܘܢܐ suggest that the *puššāqā* started originally on the lost folio 63v, and therefore the beginning of the statement is uncertain. However, *Puššāqā* 242 makes sense as it is (cf. the non-Syriac parallels).

250 The meaning of *discesi* is unclear. Harris conjectured that it be read, *disces si* (“you should learn whether;” Harris 1901, 68, n.3).

251 Conjecture; the manuscript has *uersi* (“turned, reversed”); see Harris 1901, 68, n.4.

252 Two *sortes* may have been combined into one, though no break or different number occurs.

Ioh. 17,15–21a²⁶⁶

folio 66v

ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ
 ... that they may also be one in us (Ioh. 17,21a).
 ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ²⁶⁷ܘܥܘܢܝܢ
 Interpretation: Exalted glory that will come. 255

gloria (S 132 vb; Ioh. 17,15–16) cclxi
 Glory. 261
 ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ (G 213v; Ioh. 17,18–21a) 263
 Greater glory will come.

Ioh. 17,21b–23²⁶⁸

folio 67r

ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ
 ... just as you also loved me, Father (Ioh. 17,23).
 ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ
 Interpretation: You have someone from whom to inherit. 256

ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ (G 188v; Ioh. 17,24–26) 265
 Inherit²⁶⁹ from someone.

Ioh. 17,24–26

ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ
 Interpretation: There is ridicule and shame in it. 257

Ioh. 17,27–18,3

folio 67v

ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ
 Interpretation: That which is lost will be found. 258

ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ (G 188r; Ioh. 18,1–3) 266
 The matters will come to light.

Ioh. 18,4–6

folio 68r

ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ
 Interpretation: This word²⁷⁰ that is heard will pass. 259

Ioh. 18,7–10

ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ ܘܥܘܢܝܢ
 Interpretation: This matter will not turn out for you. 260

²⁶⁶ The scope of the segment is uncertain but punctuation suggests Ioh. 17,21a may end the segment.

²⁶⁷ The original appears to have been ܘܥܘܢܝܢ, a mistake corrected by a later hand to ܘܥܘܢܝܢ.

²⁶⁸ The beginning of the segment is uncertain. The ending is clearly marked but presumes that ܐܒܝ (‘‘Father’’) belongs to what precedes (i.e. ‘‘just as you also loved me, Father;’’ Ioh. 17,23), in agreement with some Peshitta manuscripts, whereas in other manuscripts and in much modern versification, the term is taken to begin the next sentence and verse (i.e. ‘‘Father, I want those you have given me...’’ (Ioh. 17,24).

²⁶⁹ The verb is imperatival.

²⁷⁰ Or ‘‘accusation.’’

Ioh. 18,11

folio 68v

.ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܡܐ ܕܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܕܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܕܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ

Interpretation: The matter that is happening will be saved. 261

causa haec saluabitur (S 133 ra; Ioh. 18,10) cclxvii

This matter will be saved. 267

Ioh. 18,12–14

.ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ

Interpretation: The matter is bad. 262

Ioh. 18,15–18

folio 69r

.ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܕܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܕܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܕܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ

Interpretation: The matter will come to trial. 263

in iudicio ueniet causa dicet (S 133 ra; Ioh. 18,15–18) cclxxThe matter will come to trial, it will say.²⁷¹ 270

ի դատաստան զայ (G 265v; Ioh. 18,19–22) 271

It will come to trial.

Ioh. 18,19–22

folio 69v

.ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ

Interpretation: It will not come into the open; it cannot be settled. 264

manifeste non fiet (S 133 ra; Ioh. 18,19–22) cclxxi²⁷²

It will not be made clear. 270

նչ յայտնի լինի (G 198r; Ioh. 18,15–18) 270²⁷³

It will not be revealed.

Ioh. 18,23–25

folio 70r

.ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ

Interpretation: This matter can be denied. [ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ] [265]

ուրանալ ունիս ցիրսդ (G 226v; Ioh. 18,26–27) 273

You can deny the matters.

Ioh. 18,26–27

.ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ

Interpretation: You have cause to be judged²⁷⁴ twice. [ܘܘܕܘܪܘܢܐ] [266]

երկիցս ունիս դատել (G 226r; Ioh. 18,28–30) 274

You have to be judged twice.

²⁷¹ Two *sortes* may have been combined.

²⁷² Conjecture; the manuscript has *cclxx* (270), repeating that of the previous *sors* in the series. Many of the subsequent Latin *sortes* do not correspond to the Syriac.

²⁷³ The Armenian *sors* 272 is very similar: յայտնի լինի (“It will be revealed;” G265r; Ioh. 18,23–25).

²⁷⁴ Or “put on trial.”

Ioh. 18,28–30

folio 70v

.ܡܦܝܬܘܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܘܐܝܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ
Interpretation: Your case²⁷⁵ is not finished.²⁷⁶ 267

ερμηνία [Γ]ΕΙΔΙΚΗ ΝΑΩC̄Κ ΕΧΩΚ ΕΒΟΛ (Copt. 156 7v; Ioh. 18,31)²⁷⁷

Interpretation: This judgment will delay being finished.
[Ε]ΚΤΕΛΙ²⁷⁸ η δικη σου χρονίζει
Your judgment will delay [being finished].

Ioh. 18,31

.ܕܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ
Interpretation: You will be accused twice and you will win. 268

Ioh. 18,32–33

.ܕܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ
Interpretation: Another will testify concerning your case (and) it will turn out. 269

ܘܢܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ (G 232v; Ioh. 18,34–35) 277
There is another who will testify concerning you.

Ioh. 18,34–37a

folio 71r

.ܕܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ
... then you are a king? (Ioh. 18,37a).
.ܕܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ
Interpretation: No one will defeat your case.²⁷⁹ 270

ܘܢܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ (G 231v; Ioh. 18,37b–38) 279
No one will defeat you in court.

Ioh. 18,37b–38

folio 71v

.ܕܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ
Interpretation: You will be subjected to slander but you will triumph. 271

ܩܪܘܦܐܪܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ (G 231v; Ioh. 18,39–19,1) 280
You will be subjected to slander but you will triumph.

Ioh. 18,39–19,1

.ܕܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ
Interpretation: The young (man) will laugh. 272

Ioh. 19,2–4

folio 72r

.ܕܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ
Interpretation: At the last it will be glorious. 273

275 Or “judgment, trial.”

276 Or “will not be finished.”

277 See Crum 1904, 175.

278 Possibly for ἐκτελεῖν (see Quecke 1974, 412).

279 Or “judgment.”

280 Conjecture; Renhart reads, ܩܪܘܦܐܪܘܢܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ ܕܡܘܠܐ (Renhart 2015, 133).

Ioh. 19,23–24c

.ܘܠܘܠܘܢ ܘܥܘܕܘܢ ܘܥܘܕܘܢ

... and cast a lot for my garment (Ioh. 19,24c).

folio 74v

.ܘܠ ܟܘܡܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ

Interpretation: You have cause to do well in a foreign country.²⁸⁶

ܐܝ

280

oportet te peregrinari et postea bene tibi²⁸⁷ fiet (S 133 vb; Ioh. 19,23–24) cclxxxvii

It is necessary for you to travel abroad and afterwards it will turn out well for you. 287

ܘܥܘܕܘܢ ܬ ܦܠܩ ܘܠܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ (G 264v; Ioh. 19,24b–27) 289

It is necessary for you to become a foreigner.

Ioh. 19,24d–27

.ܘܦܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ

Interpretation: Your matter will be finished.

ܦܐܝ

281

ܠܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ (G 264r; Ioh. 19,28–31a) 290

The matters will be completed.

Ioh. 19,28–30

folio 75r

.ܘܠܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ

Interpretation: The good matter will be fulfilled.²⁸⁸

ܐܝܦ

282

bona causa e[st] complebitur (S 133 vb; Ioh. 19,25–27) cclxxxviii

The good matter will be fulfilled. 288

Ioh. 19,31–35

folio 75v

.ܘܠ ܟܘܡܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ

Interpretation: Something you do not expect will happen to you.²⁸⁹

ܦܐܝ

283

insperata causa (S 133 vb; Ioh. 19,28–34) ccxc

An unexpected matter. 290

ܘܠܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ (G 275r; Ioh. 19,35–38) 292

Unexpected matters.

Ioh. 19,36–38b

.ܘܠܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ

... from fear of the Jews) and take his body (Ioh. 19,38b).

.ܘܠܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ

Interpretation: You will have cause for it to be said that you rejoice.

ܦܐܝ

284

in sermone uenies et habes gaudiu[m] (S 133 vb; Ioh. 19,35) ccxc

You will happen to speak and have joy. 291

ܠܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ (G 186v; Ioh. 19,39–40) 293

You will have cause to speak and to rejoice.

folio 76r

²⁸⁶ Literally, “It is yours that in a foreign country it will turn out well for you.”²⁸⁷ Conjecture; the manuscript has *ibi*.²⁸⁸ Cf. Armenian 291, the next in the series, ܘܦܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ ܕܘܠܘܢ (“The matters are certain;” G 275v; Ioh. 19,31b–34).²⁸⁹ Or “will be yours.”

loh. 19,38c–40	.ܪܘܢܘܠܝܠܘܢ ܡܠ ܕܝܗܘ ܪܥܘܢܐ	ܡܦܝ
Interpretation: You will gain it ²⁹⁰ for commendation. ²⁹¹		285
<hr/>		
<i>lucrabitur in commendato haec</i> (S 133 vb; Ioh. 19,35–40)		ccxcii
This will be gained in commendation.		292
loh. 19,41–20,1		folio 76v
	.ܕܘܪ ܕܝܘܕܝܘܢܐ ܩܠ ܦܥܘܪ ܪܝܘܠܝܠܘܢ ܕܦܠܘܪ ܪܥܘܢܐ	ܢܦܝ
Interpretation: They will accuse you regarding theft and you will be saved. ²⁹²		286
loh. 20,2–5		
	.ܕܘܪ ܕܝܘܕܝܘܢܐ ܪܝܘܠܝܠܘܢ ܪܥܘܢܐ	ܢܦܝ
Interpretation: You will find the matter that you seek.		287
<hr/>		
	ܩܘܢܘܢܝܗ ܩܢܪ ܝܘܢܩܪܝܬܘܢ (G 185r; Ioh. 20,6–7)	296
You will find what you seek.		
loh. 20,6–7		folio 77r
	.ܕܝܘܕܝܘܢܐ ܪܝܘܠܝܠܘܢ ܦܥܘܪ ܪܥܘܢܐ	ܢܦܝ
Interpretation: From scarcity there will be recovery. ²⁹³		288
loh. 20,8–10		
	.ܕܘܪ ܕܝܘܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܠܝܠܝܘܢ ܕܝܠܝܠܝܘܢ ܕܝܠܝܠܝܘܢ ܪܥܘܢܐ	ܦܦܝ
Interpretation: You will receive three acclamations. ²⁹⁴		289
<hr/>		
<i>gloria[m] accipies de causa[m] tua[m] expectas</i> (S 134 ra; Ioh. 20,5–7)		ccxcvi
You will receive praise/glor[y] about your matter, you expect. ²⁹⁵		296
loh. 20,11–14		folio 77v
	.ܕܘܪ ܕܝܘܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܠܝܠܝܘܢ ܕܝܠܝܠܝܘܢ ܪܥܘܢܐ	ܦܦܝ
Interpretation: Do not approach this matter.		290
<hr/>		
<i>ne adp[ro]pinques causam</i> (S 134 ra; Ioh. 20,8–10)		ccxcvii ²⁹⁶
Do not approach the matter.		297
loh. 20,15–17		folio 78r
	.ܩܠ ܕܝܘܕܝܘܢܐ ܕܝܠܝܠܝܘܢ ܕܝܠܝܠܝܘܢ ܪܥܘܢܐ	ܦܦܝ
Interpretation: Expect joy and it will happen for you.		291
<hr/>		
<i>spera gratia[m] a d[e]o bene tibi erit in causa haec</i> (S 134 ra; Ioh. 20,11–14)		ccxcviii
Expect favor from God (and) it will happen nicely for you in this matter.		298

²⁹⁰ Reading ܕܝܘܢܐ as a contraction of ܕܘܪ ܝܘܢܐ; it may also be read as, “You have gained it.”

²⁹¹ Or, “for a deposit, for consignment.”

²⁹² Or “About theft: they will accuse you and you will be saved,” in which case “about theft” is actually a subject heading (see 6.2).

²⁹³ Literally, “it will be saved.”

²⁹⁴ Or “three glories.”

²⁹⁵ *expectas* (“you expect”) does not fit the statement; perhaps to be read, *expectatam* (i.e. “your expected matter”)?

²⁹⁶ Correction; the manuscript has *ccxcviii* (298).

[ερ]μηνια [ζαρ]εε επειμγστηρ[ιον] (Copt. 156 8r; Ioh. 21,17)³⁰⁹
 [In]terpretation: [Gua]rd this myster[y].
 [φ]υλαξον το μυστ[ηριον]
 [G]uard the myst[ery.]

Ioh. 21,18–19a

.ܟܡܠܠ ܡܘܬܝ ܡܢ ܗܘܐ ܟܕܝܢ ܟܡܠܝܢ
 ... the manner of death by which he was going to glorify God (Ioh. 21,19a).

folio 82r

.ܟܕܝܢ ܟܡܠܠ ܟܝܢܝܢ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܬܝܢ

Interpretation: In a foreign country you will have cause to praise God in the end.

ܐܘ
306

ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ (G 190r; Ioh. 21,18–19a)
 You will have to become a foreigner.

314

Ioh. 21,19b–22

.ܟܝܢܝܢ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ

Interpretation: Put confidence in God and do not listen to a (human) person and you will have cause to rejoice.

[ܘܘ]
[307]

Ioh. 21,23

.ܟܡܠܘܬܐ ܗܘܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܐ

Interpretation: A good return³¹⁰ will come to you in the end.

folio 82v

ܐܘ
308

ܩܝܘܢܐ ܕܩܝܘܢܐ ܕܩܝܘܢܐ ܕܩܝܘܢܐ (G 173v; Ioh. 21,19b–22)
 A good change.

315

Ioh. 21,24–25³¹¹

et aliud misteriu[m] reuelabit[ur] tibi aliud gaudiu[m] (S 134 va; Ioh. 21,23–25)

cccxvi³¹²

And another mystery will be revealed to you, another joy.

316

ܩܝܘܢܐ ܕܩܝܘܢܐ ܕܩܝܘܢܐ ܕܩܝܘܢܐ (G 173r; Ioh. 21,23)

316

A good change.

³⁰⁹ See Crum 1904, 175.

³¹⁰ Or “change.”

³¹¹ *Puššāqā* 308 is the final *sors* in the Syriac series; the final Latin and Armenian *sortes* are given here to demonstrate how those two substantial parallel series end in comparison to the Syriac. The Latin series ends with 316. Armenian 316 is the last extant Armenian *sors* in the manuscript; the final two (317, 318) are not recoverable.

³¹² Correction; the manuscript has *ccxvi* (216).

6 Interpreting *Hermeneia*: The Use and Function of the Divining Gospel

6.1 The Character of the *Puššāqē*

Although the presentation in Chapter Five focuses on the material of the Syriac manuscript, it includes comparanda drawn from other manuscripts in several languages. The present chapter and the next also center on the data of the Syriac manuscript, but in order to contextualize the Syriac evidence it is necessary for us to consider it amongst its peers in the larger tradition of *hermēneiai* manuscripts that we described in Chapter Three. Each of the various versions informs our understanding of the others. Looking at them alongside one another is helpful, since so much of our evidence is fragmentary or otherwise incomplete.

We wish to respect the books as they are, rather than attempting to synthesize an awkward amalgam out of bits and pieces. But our exploration of the nature and use of the Syriac version, as well as the origin and purposes of the Divining Gospels generally, will benefit from taking into account the full range of evidence. Inasmuch as the fuller data of the Syriac version can help clarify the divinatory nature of the early Greek sources, the page format of the latter can suggest to us some things about how these lot divination books were used, including the Syriac version. An intriguing circular chart in the Latin manuscript may offer a glimpse into the technique by which oracles were selected and applied in at least some of our sources as well, including the Syriac.

We begin with an analysis of the Syriac material in order to define its basic character.

6.1.1 Basic Features of the Syriac Oracles

The presentation of the Syriac version of the Divining Gospel material in Chapter Five reveals the character of the material. The following set of examples, drawn more or less at random from the *puššāqē* of Chapter Five will help us draw a profile of the material:

- 27 “Leave it and turn” (ܘܥܘܕܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 49 “Straighten your path, for your deeds will become known” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 61 “You will be delivered from distress” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 85 “Good hope” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 97 “You have another matter; begin it” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)

- 112 “Expect great glory” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 117 “Do not give false testimony” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 159 “The promise you are about to make is fine” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 165 “Do not do this matter” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 170 “Wait a few days” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 191 “If you do this, you will have profit” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 199 “The matter is suitable; start on it and it will turn out” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 205 “What you expect will happen” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 221 “Good news and profit come from a foreign country” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 231 “A right portion will be yours; do not overreach” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 258 “That which is lost will be found” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 268 “You will be accused twice and you will win” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 276 “After three days your matter will turn out” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 283 “Something you do not expect will happen to you” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)
- 293 “The hidden matter will be revealed” (ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ ܘܩܘܪܘܗܘܢ)

All the statements are brief. Some of them offer indirect descriptions of a subject (e.g. “Good hope”) but many of them use the second-person singular (masculine), directly addressing the reader – and through the reader the user’s client, we may presume. Many of them refer obliquely to a particular matter or object or perhaps even a person of inquiry, leaving the specifics open.

The responses are proportionally more positive. That is, while a small proportion of the statements give warnings or make foreboding predictions, the majority offer promise of positive resolution, imminent fame or glory, the hope of gaining some profit, and so forth. Some of them make no promises about outcomes but offer the inquirer something that he or she can positively do in the situation. The tone of the oracles is largely favorable, as we see elsewhere in ancient lot divination literature (see 2.2.2, 2.3.5 above).

The *puššāqē* are not religious – or at least any distinctly religious qualities they have are scarce and indefinite. God is mentioned in several of them but nearly always as the

source of benefit or the resolution of a problem. With one or two exceptions, they do not cite scripture (see 7.2.2 below). Exhortations to faith are not aimed at doctrine but at the declarations of the *sortes* themselves – that is, the inquirer is asked to trust the answer or perhaps more generally to maintain confidence in right outcomes. Appeals to believe and to trust are not at all uncommon in sortilege material.¹

Never do the *puššāqē* mention Jesus Christ, the Church, clergy, or anything liturgical. The language of “mystery” occurs in several instances, but Christian sacraments are not in view; instead, they might promise that a quandary will soon become intelligible or they perhaps forestall giving a direct answer by maintaining that the matter remains mysteriously hidden from the diviner’s knowledge. The language of salvation appears to carry no specifically Christian freight, applying equally well to a person’s being rescued from a threatening life situation or from slanderous accusations at court. Indeed, the topic of judgment comes up frequently, but usually presumes something like a civil trial or impending decision and never definitely points to the final judgment in Christian theology. Frequent offers of profit do not insist on spiritual benefit but may easily be understood in a broad sense, to include yields from business or travel. Scarce references to prayer may connote nothing more than a person’s entreaty regarding a subject of inquiry, while exhortations to repentance may simply counsel changing one’s course, not necessarily in a moral or religious sense. Sin is a moral and legal category, not just a religious one.

If a distinctly Christian theological or religious consciousness is missing from the *puššāqē*, neither do we find distinctly non-Christian (i.e. “pagan”) motifs or references. As we will see in Chapter Seven, resonances between the language of the *puššāqē* and the Gospel text are clear and important, but they do not make the statements themselves essentially theological or spiritual.

In all these features, the reader may notice typical characteristics to be found in other lot divination texts of which we have knowledge, especially those that provide general answers. These observations require us to revisit the bases for seeing the material as divinatory in nature.

6.1.2 Divinatory Function of the *Hermêneiai*

Our survey of scholarship on the *hermêneiai* (see 3.2) showed that some early scholars of this material were quick to presume the statements functioned as biblical

interpretations, due largely to the recurring heading, *hermêneia*. Others developed what became the common view: the statements are *sortes*, for use in the practice of lot divination, with no meaningful connection to the biblical text. The common view was based mainly on analysis of the highly fragmentary early Greek and Coptic materials, the idiosyncratic and dislocated material of Codex Bezae, and the often rather puzzling connections between Bezae and the Latin manuscript.

Recently Porter has argued for a return to the understanding of *hermêneiai* as more interpretive than oracular – though without necessarily rejecting an oracular function for them in at least some of their extant states (i.e. Bezae and Sangermanensis). His understanding of the material emphasizes its hermeneutical nature and casts some doubt on seeing them as having an originally divinatory purpose. However, the component of the common view that seems to bother Porter most is that the statements bear no relation to the biblical text. He acknowledges that the *hermêneiai* have some characteristics of other ancient divinatory materials, but “their appearance as integral to the Johannine manuscripts argues against a capricious attachment of apophthegms to the manuscript, which is certainly closer to what is found in Codex Bezae.”² He rejects seeing the *sortes* as “unattached oracular pronouncements” but he does not construct a sustained and pointed argument against their having been influenced by ancient divinatory materials.

Our fuller presentation of the Syriac and other *hermêneiai* enables a more authoritative discussion of their nature. Porter points to connections between the *sortes* and the Gospel text, something that Wilkinson pursues further and will in fact be the main subject of Chapter Seven. Here we simply wish to reinforce the understanding that the material is essentially and originally oracular in nature. It may also be interpretive – that is, it is not merely arbitrary and its content and placement is shaped significantly by the Gospel text – but it is certainly divinatory. The *hermêneiai* are the defining components of a specific genre of lot divination texts.

We have not yet discovered any ancient references or descriptions of use that can definitely be said to explicate the origins or function of the Divining Gospels as books containing John and a divinatory apparatus. Unfortunately, our damaged and fragmentary sources do not provide the sort of origin myth we find associated with a Book of Fate like *Sortes Astrampsychi*, nor any instructions such as we find in the latter or with some *Rhiktologia* and

¹ Luijendijk 2019, 309–29.

² Porter 2007, 579.

the Psalms *hermêneiai*. Whether the Divining Gospels ever included an origin tale or a “user’s manual” is uncertain. However, we have ancient evidence for lot divination among Christians and a legacy of material on which they could draw, ample evidence for the early reverence of both the contents and codices of John’s Gospel as loci of supernatural power, and the evidence of ecclesial proscriptions against the use of Gospels in lot divination (see 2.3–4). The proscriptions say nothing about the techniques and little about the tools, except that Gospels were being used, and we may presume the practice was common enough that such proscriptions were warranted.

When we turn to the Divining Gospels themselves, especially in view of the much fuller Syriac and other versional sources, a Christian practice of lot divination provides the necessary interpretive key for contextualizing the material. Simply put, the *hermêneiai* are best seen as oracles for use in lot divination. Many of the statements are couched as responses to an inquirer’s questions. Many of them are directive, instructing or referring to a singular person, “you,” a feature that pervades other sortilege

materials. A large proportion of the statements refer very generally to the “matter” for which a person wants guidance, a “thing” about which they are asking, or an end that they seek. The significant thematic and verbal connections between the *sortes* and the contents of John’s Gospel are not so rich or particular that the statements are heavily dependent on knowing the biblical text in order to find meaning in the statements. Indeed, the connections are normally so oblique and generic that it is easy to understand why scholars have had difficulty even detecting them (see 7.2 below). As a corpus the statements exude a sense of randomness, at least on the surface, as we see in other bodies of *sortes*.

These are the kinds of features that led many scholars to recognize the *hermêneiai* as divinatory, particularly alongside other ancient and medieval sortilege tools. The *sortes* of the Divining Gospel share much in common with the other ancient materials for lot divination of which we have knowledge and have described in Chapter Two. Similarities in tone, vocabulary, and themes are striking. We offer just a few examples in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Parallel *sortes* in other divinatory sources.

Lot collection	Illustrative <i>Sortes</i>		Similar statements in the Syriac <i>puššāqē</i>
Anatolian dice oracle	XXXIII (6-6-1-3-3)	πρᾶξιν ἦν πράσσεις μὴ πράσσει-οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον ³	131 ܩܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܘܨ ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ ܩܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܕܝܢܐ
		Do not do the business you are about to do, for it will not turn out well	128 ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܘܨ ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܕܝܢܐ
			Do not do this matter
<i>Sortes Astrampsychi</i>	9,7	κερδανεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ πράγματος ⁴	88 ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܘܨ ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܕܝܢܐ
		You will profit from the matter	You will profit much in this matter
		17,9	νικᾷς. ἀγωνίζου ἕως τέλους ⁵
	You will win; fight until the end	Conflict will occur and afterwards you will win	
	29,1	ἀπαρτίξεις ὃ ἐπιβάλλῃ ⁶	217 ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܘܨ ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܕܝܢܐ
	You will finish what you undertake	Begin and it will be finished	
<i>Sortes Sangallenses</i>	II,12	<i>cum gaudio optinebis, quod desideras</i> ⁷	248 ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܘܨ ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܕܝܢܐ
		You will joyfully obtain what you desire	What you desire will be yours
			158 ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܘܨ ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܕܝܢܐ
	You will receive it happily		
	XXII,9	<i>noli timere calumniam, q[ua]m pateris</i> ⁸	105 ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܘܨ ܕܘܕܝܢܐ ܕܩܘܕܝܢܐ
	Do not fear the false accusation you endure	Do not fear slander	

³ Quoted in Graf 2005, 67.

⁴ Also 66,5; 67,6; 85,2; 87,3 (Browne 1983, 9, 27, 34, 35).

⁵ Stewart 2001, 27.

⁶ Browne 1983, 14.

⁷ Dold 1948, 21, 74; see Klingshirn 2005, 119.

⁸ Dold 1948, 40, 92.

Table 6.1 (continued)

Lot collection	Illustrative <i>Sortes</i>		Similar statements in the Syriac <i>puššāqē</i>
<i>Sortes Sanctorum</i> (<i>Post solem surgunt stellae</i>)	C.C. ⁹	<i>Quod postulas nunc ita veniet cum magno gaudio, securus esto, Deum roga, et noli timere</i> ¹⁰ What you are seeking will come to you with great joy; be unconcerned; entreat God, and do not fear	See <i>Puššāqē</i> 14, 23, 85, 195, 214, 233, 246, 250, 268, 271, 275
<i>Rhiktologion</i>	12	Ἑρμηνεία. Μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος, ἀλλὰ πιστός. φανερόν γίνεται τὸ παρὸν πρᾶγμα σου. εἰς χαρὰν καὶ εἰς τιμὴν ἔρχεταιί σοι τοῦτο, ὦ ἄνθρωπε ¹¹ Interpretation: Do not be disbelieving, but believing. Your present matter will become plain. This will result in joy and honor for you, O man.	See <i>Puššāqē</i> 20, 24, 46, 56, 71, 83, 90, 93, 144, 173, 214, 236, 242, 275, 284, 291, 293
Psalms <i>hermēneiai</i>	30; 106; 128	Ἀπὸ θλίψεως εἰς χαρὰν ἔρχεται ¹² From tribulation it comes to joy	14 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܘܒܪܐ
	57; 89	Κρυπτόν πρᾶγμα φανεροῦται The hidden matter will be revealed	106 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܥܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܘܒܪܐ ܕܥܘܒܪܐ
	53	Μετ’ ὀλίγας ἡμέρας γίνεται It will happen after a few days	See <i>Puššāqē</i> 15, 28, 147, 170, 181, 284

“That the *hermēneiai* are oracles is self-evident,” Wilkinon insists.¹³ It is hoped that our treatment of them as such throughout this study reinforces his conclusion, highlighting what is self-evident in them and going beyond that to present corroborating evidence. We find in this material all the features that are most characteristic of lot divination texts as a genre: the focus on an inquirer’s issues; the narrative aspect, addressing the client in the second person singular and in the present tense; the frequent use of the imperative; the assumption and assurance of divine knowledge; frequent time references lending a sense of urgency or appealing to patience; and “a binary worldview,” distinguishing between starkly good and bad outcomes (see 2.2.2, 2.3.5 above).¹⁴ It is perfectly clear that the *hermēneiai* are intended to function as tools for divination.

Ancient clients consulted diviners or divinatory tools in order to get answers to their questions and address the concerns that beset them day by day – questions about different courses of action or uncertain outcomes. Such is the context

of use that helps us make sense of the material. The *sortes* of the Divining Gospel are not only well suited to function as responses to such questions and concerns; their unmistakably closest parallels are other ancient sortilege tools. The Divining Gospels’ special apparatus of statements is best explained as divinatory in nature, even if they turn out to have other functions or nuances of meaning as well.

6.1.3 Divination and Liturgy

One specific recent hypothesis rejecting the divinatory nature of the *hermēneiai* needs to be addressed in further detail. We have already laid out Cirafesi’s proposal that the *hermēneiai* should be understood as “translations” for use in Christian liturgical settings, in a manner somewhat reminiscent of *targumim* in Aramaic speaking contexts (see 3.2). In this case, it is the Greco-Coptic context of Egypt. Egypt does provide the most likely setting for the development and promulgation of the Divining Gospel, for reasons we have already laid out (see 2.2.3–4). However, the Syriac, Armenian, and even some of the Greek evidence overturns Cirafesi’s claim that “all of the manuscripts in which the ἑρμηνεῖαι occur are either bilingual or evince the influence of a bilingual context.”¹⁵ The limited perspective inherent in that claim is understandable due

⁹ C in some manuscripts of the *Sortes Sanctorum* is probably the result of misreading the ligature of V and I (Klingshirn 2002, 95), so that C.C.I originally corresponded to 6-6-1, i.e. a dice roll of two sixes and one one.

¹⁰ Quoted in Graf 2005, 79 (also Harris 1901, 119; Cartelle/Guardo 2004, 72).

¹¹ Drexl 1941, 314.

¹² Psalms *hermēneiai* texts from Parpulov 2014, 311–14.

¹³ Wilkinson 2019, 106, n.12.

¹⁴ See the description in Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 22–24.

¹⁵ Cirafesi 2014, 46.

to a lack of awareness of the sources beyond the Greek, Coptic, and Latin. But a larger concern has to do with the tone, vocabulary, and nature of the statements, which are decidedly non-liturgical.

Bilingualism is a fascinating feature of certain *hermêneiai* manuscripts. Some of the predominantly Greek sources have Coptic translations of their *sortes*,¹⁶ whereas Paris, BnF, Copt. 156 has Greek translations of its Coptic ones. It is unclear how the bilingualism of Codex Bezae and the presumed bilingual context of the medieval Bible, Paris, BnF Lat. 11553 is relevant to the Greek *sortes* of the former and the Latin ones of the latter.¹⁷ Yet we should acknowledge that the bilingualism – especially as we find it in the early Greek and Coptic sources – is a fascinating feature of some editions of the Divining Gospels, a feature deserving greater attention.

One gets the impression that the user of these tools in an Egyptian context found it helpful to be able to deliver oracles in either or both languages, Greek and Coptic. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given the Greco-Coptic Christian culture of late antique Egypt, where one might commonly encounter speakers of either languages within a single community, town, or region.¹⁸ However, acknowledging bilingualism as a feature in some editions of the Divining Gospels does not require that we understand the *hermêneiai* to be primarily translational. Despite thematic and terminological connections to the Gospel text we have already noted, the statements do not function well as a coherent series of translated summaries of Gospel passages. This is evident even from a partial reading of the *hermêneiai* but stands out when one analyzes the statements as a larger set, such as we are more easily able to do when we consult the Syriac and Armenian.

As for the *hermêneiai* having a liturgical function, the observation that some marginal annotations in Codex Bezae and in Sangermanensis are liturgical lends no support to the suggestion that the *hermêneiai* themselves are liturgical annotations.¹⁹ Both manuscripts have layers

of scribal annotation,²⁰ including liturgical notes. Yet Harris believed that lectionary notes had found their way into the actual *sortes* of Paris, BnF, lat. 11553. He draws attention to the following, in which we highlight the allegedly liturgical portion of each:

- clxxxiii non accipies gloria[m] sed auertitur ante sex dies paschae q[uam] in die dominica legitur* (S 130va)
clxxxviii homines lacereuis in autentica ely domadu (ebdomadu) (S 130va)
cxxii ne consideres illut lect in pentecostem item alia infra (S 131vab)

The liturgical nature of the highlighted portions is obvious. Yet Harris worked from a transcription.²¹ Upon direct examination of the manuscript it turns out that in each of these cases the liturgical portions are actually completely distinct notes in the margins, with no apparent connection (or even close physical proximity, in two cases) to the *sortes* with which Harris lists them in his edition. The last one occurs even in a different margin on the page. The highlighted portions of the notes listed above may have had a liturgical function but they are not actually associated with the manuscript's *sortes*. So some errors in transcription have affected Harris' understanding of the material, leading him to include spurious liturgical notes in the *sortes*. In fact we find no distinctly liturgical notes in the *hermêneiai* in any of our sources.

Cirafesi does not actually refer to Harris' (mistaken) identification of liturgical interference. But in his own exploratory study he offers little evidence to support his reading of specific *hermêneiai* in the papyri as liturgical in content or function. For instance, he suggests that the encouragement to faith, ἐὰν πιστεύσης... (“if you believe...”; cf. *Puššāqā* 46) would make a useful pastoral exhortation; that δόξα μεγάλη (“great glory”; cf. *Puššāqā* 35) in the same fragment could herald the monastic visit of a dignitary worthy of liturgical observance; and that the note, μαρτυρία καλή (“excellent witness”; cf. *Puššāqā* 74) may signal the commemoration of a saint in the calendar. However, assenting to the plausibility of such readings is not the same as commending them as the best possible readings. He seems to be aware of this limitation in his proposal, offering the modest conclusion about the *hermêneiai* manuscripts, “there is

¹⁶ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrusammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol.11914 and P.Berol. 21315.

¹⁷ For discussion of bilingualism in relation to these manuscripts as Bibles, see Parker 1992, 50–70, 181–258. Cirafesi draws attention to Harris' belief that the Greek series in Codex Bezae go back to a (lost) translation of Latin statements underlying those in Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 (Cirafesi 2014, 65–66). Harris says, “the list in D may be seen to be a translation of the Latin, by a frequently prefixed word ἐρμηνεία: as if the sentences had originally stood in two languages in some bilingual codex” (Harris 1891, 9).

¹⁸ See Fournet 2011, 418–52.

¹⁹ Cf. Cirafesi 2014, 65–66.

²⁰ On Bezae's hands see Harris 1901, 5–17; Parker 1992, 41–44.

²¹ Harris 1901, 59, 67, 68. At some point Harris did consult the manuscript directly, however (see Harris 1888, 60).

nothing that prohibits us from seeing them as liturgical tools used within a bilingual setting.”²²

In view of the much larger body of evidence we have before us now, the *hermêneiai* statements (including the ones Cirafesi highlights, listed above) are better understood as oracular and divinatory rather than liturgical. This is not to say that the use of the Divining Gospels did not incorporate ritual elements, a topic to which we shall return at the end of the chapter. But that is different from seeing the statements as derived from or having some role in Christian liturgy. The liturgical explanation of certain statements remain unconvincing. We should be hard pressed to explain each instance of the recurring promise of “glory” or “fame” (δόξα/εσογ/Ⲅⲃⲁⲗ/*gloria*/ψαυη) as signaling the liturgical celebration of visiting dignitaries. The topic of testimony (μαρτυρία) is also recurrent in the *hermêneiai*, yet nowhere do we find further clues prompting us to see μαρτυρία as marking a martyr’s commemoration. Finally, faith and confidence may be put to many uses (ἐὰν πιστεύσης...), as we see in the diverse range of *puššāqē* exhorting the client to trust. Exhortations to trust are commonplace in lot divination texts.

It is worth noting that Cirafesi’s liturgical proposal has been influenced by some remarks Crum makes about the ἐρμηνεία in the Sahidic papyrus from Antinoë (Manuscript 6 in Chapter Three). Crum connects that material with scriptural anaphora using the Psalms.²³ Crum offers little analysis but finds the coincidence of the term *hermêneia* to be suggestive of some connection between the *hermêneia* with John that he edits and those of the liturgical materials, a connection for which he appears able to offer no explanation. Cirafesi mentions and to some extent follows Crum’s suggestions.²⁴

Much remains to be done to illuminate the contours of ancient Coptic liturgy and to decipher the meanings and functions of the specialized vocabulary in the extant manuscripts. One puzzling feature is the recurrence of Sahidic Psalm verses in the directories of certain liturgical manuscripts.²⁵ They are labeled *hermên[eia]* (ⲄⲈⲠⲠⲏⲏ, often abbreviated further, ⲄⲈⲠ or ⲄⲈⲠⲏ) and accompanied by “the response” (ⲠⲠⲠⲠ). Crum takes the latter to represent ⲠⲠⲠⲠ (“the answer, interpretation”), presuming

that the Coptic and Greek *hermêneiai* in the fragments that he edited bear some connection to what he encountered in the liturgical directories.

The origins and precise function of these Coptic liturgical materials are unclear. Discussing the psalm verses designated *hermêneiai* in the Sahidic directories, Atanassova remarks that they are “one of the puzzling *termini technici* that characterises Coptic liturgical manuscripts.”²⁶ They have not been adequately explained. We know that these *hermêneiai* are psalm verses that were chanted during the performance of the divine service, along with their antiphons, but we do not know why they are called *hermêneiai*, i.e. “interpretations.” Their use seems to have been most prevalent in the liturgical practices of Upper Egypt though we have evidence of a similar phenomenon in some Bohairic manuscripts also.²⁷

The Sahidic liturgical manuscripts often include Greek hymns and therefore participate in the bilingual Greco-Coptic tradition that characterizes ancient Egyptian Christianity. Furthermore, as we have already seen, some Psalters in various languages have divinatory *hermêneiai* accompanying the Psalms. Yet the latter “interpretations” are not verses from the Psalms but oracles (see 2.3.6.2 and Table 6.1). The *hermêneiai* in Coptic liturgical manuscripts are quite different from the statements we find in the Divining Gospels, since the former are verses drawn from the Sahidic Psalms. Nor have we found any evidence connecting the content or functions of the Coptic liturgical *hermêneiai* with what we see in the Byzantine Psalters that pair an oracle with each Psalm.

Although the liturgical *hermêneiai* of the Coptic directories invite further study and have not yet yielded all their secrets, they do not help us understand the *hermêneiai* of the Divining Gospels. The coincidence of terminology surrounding the Greek term ἐρμηνεία is striking and significant, but in light of our evidence it cannot carry the burden of proving the Divining Gospels should be seen as liturgical tools.

Cirafesi’s proposal is helpful because it draws attention to the integrity of the material, reminding us that the *sortes* relate somehow to the Gospel of John. As Cirafesi, Porter, and Wilkinson insist, we must make sense of the material as *hermêneiai/puššāqē* – they are “interpretations” of some sort. However, the *hermêneiai* are neither *targum*-like translation-summaries of biblical text or liturgical notations. There is a distinct absence of liturgical details, sacred topics, or festal themes.

²² Cirafesi 2014, 62–63.

²³ See Crum 1904, 175–76.

²⁴ Cf. Quecke’s negative assessment of Crum’s suggestion: “Crum suchte dann, von den ‘Hermeneiai’ der koptischen Liturgie ausgehend, unsere ‘Hermeneiai’ in denselben Zusammenhang zu stellen, was aber gleichfalls ein Irrweg war” (Quecke 1974, 408, n.4).

²⁵ See Quecke 1978, 215–19; Quecke 1983, 194–206; for examples see Pleyte/Boeser 1897, 145–48, 150–52, 164–68; Crum 1905, 30–31, 33–34.

²⁶ Atanassova 2014, 50; see also the discussions on 50–51, 77–78.

²⁷ Zanetti 1995, 90.

Table 6.2: Prominent themes within the *puššāqē*.

Theme	<i>Puššāqē</i>
beginning, undertaking	8, 29, 46, 69, 97, 120, 122, 124, 127, 161, 199, 209, 217, 243, 295, 296
confidence, trust, doubt	24, 31, 46, 56, 74, 83, 90, 93, 94, 155, 175, 236, 295, 307
expectation, waiting	12, 23, 32, 112, 162, 164, 170, 179, 181, 205, 283, 291, 292
fame/glory	12, 35, 92, 103, 108, 112, 148, 186, 189, 192, 210, 255, 273, 289, 299
finding, being successful, seeking, losing	16, 21, 39, 57, 78, 82, 83, 110, 123, 140, 143, 151, 197, 229, 237, 258, 287, 297
fulfillment, completion, finishing	22, 31, 65, 115, 217, 267, 281, 282, 292
God	30, 40, 64, 77, 94, 250, 306, 307
joy, rejoicing	14, 20, 23, 46, 146, 214, 275, 284, 291, 307
judgment, legal conflict, accusation (see testimony)	7, 34, 37, 43, 63, 96, 105, 195, 246, 263, 264, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 286
mystery, secrets, hidden things, revelation	50, 71, 100, 106, 136, 141, 151, 152, 167, 203, 238, 234, 242, 247, 270, 293, 305
news, reports	10, 55, 68, 69, 72, 132, 221
prayer, entreaty	30, 169, 184
profit, gain, inheritance	44, 51, 77, 88, 154, 191, 221, 231, 249, 256, 279, 301, 302
repentance	30, 196
salvation, life, redemption, rescue	10, 60, 77, 84, 139, 140, 177, 198, 261, 286, 288, 296
sin, error, wrongdoing	19, 62, 232, 237
testimony	74, 116, 117, 190, 233, 269, 277, 294, 301, 302
timing	15, 28, 48, 52, 98, 99, 122, 147, 170, 178, 181, 276, 298
travel, foreign lands	38, 55, 178, 221, 235, 280, 306

What then are the predominant themes, if not those that would be appropriate for corporate worship? We turn now to consider the assortment of themes we find in the Syriac *puššāqē* and what they can tell us about the nature of the material and even its transmission and use.

6.2 Themes and Topics

In the following discussion of characteristic themes the reader may refer to Table 6.2, where a number of *puššāqē* are grouped according to some of the most common themes we find in them.

The *puššāqē* offer a remarkably open range of responses to a client's questions. Many of them provide answers that could be applied equally well to many different situations. For instance, statements promising salvation could be seen to address questions regarding health, the risks of foreign travel, or the threat of legal dangers. In this, the Divining Gospels exhibit less specificity in aiming their responses at the client's questions than we see in some tools, such as the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, whose responses are carefully organized according to well-defined topics (see 2.3.4 above). The latter's response, "You will be caught

as an adulterer very soon" (καταλαμβάνη ἐπὶ μοιχείᾳ νῦν; 20,5)²⁸ presumes a more specific topic than does *Puššāqā* 200, "Forgo this matter" (ܠܝܫܐ ܠܡܢ ܩܢ ܕܠܚܘܪܐ). Whereas the Syriac oracle would be a suitable response to a question about one's adultery, it could address many other topics as well.

Books of Fate also contain some responses that are fairly open. One of the more open responses in *Sortes Astrampsychi* is, "You will profit from the matter" (κερδανεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ πράγματος; 9,7), a statement that occurs repeatedly and is similar in focus and vocabulary to several *puššāqē* (see Table 6.1). Yet even the more general responses in *Astrampsychi* are carefully organized into sets of answers to particular questions – in this case, "Will I profit from the matter?" (εἰ κερδαίνω ἀπὸ τοῦ πράγματος).²⁹ The general term πρᾶγμα ("matter, affair, undertaking") shows up a number of times in *Astrampsychi*, as it does in a number of other lot divination texts, but it is not ubiquitous there as we find it to be in the *hermēneiai* and in *sortes* with more general answers (see 2.3.5–6).³⁰ Unlike

²⁸ Stewart 2001, 28.

²⁹ Browne 1983, 2; Stewart 2001, 12.

³⁰ See Graf 2005, 70.

the Books of Fate, that match specific short answers with lists of concrete questions, the apparatus in the Syriac Divining Gospel offers many responses that belong to the type of *sortes* having general answers.³¹

However, although the oracles of the Divining Gospel tend towards generality and could be applied widely to many different questions, a significant number of them presume greater focus in topic. In Table 6.2 we group a number of the oracles by theme. Many of the identified themes are generally applicable, such as the exhortations to hope and trust or the counsel to wait in expectation; they would apply to a large range of subjects. But several of the themes are more specific. For instance, some oracles pertain to items or persons who are lost; others relate to matters of travel or relationships to foreigners or strangers. A few oracles appear to presume that the querent is asking about whether to undertake or begin something. Many focus on judgment, the prospect of civil conflict, and the outcomes of trials.

The prominent themes listed in Table 6.2 are not of a kind. Whereas statements dealing with beginning an undertaking might be seen to offer responses to a particular sort of question, statements promising joy or glory offer general responses to a host of different questions. In other words, the list of themes in Table 6.2 does not correlate precisely to a proposed list of questions or their topics. The list merely highlights the most prominent of the statements' recurring themes. However, it also demonstrates that many of the statements may be differentiated by topic, and that significant numbers of the statements cluster together by subject or area of inquiry.

Harris noticed the presence of particular themes in the *hermêneiai* more than a century ago. He also observed that the Greek *sortes* in Codex Bezae and the Latin ones in Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 had a few statements that appeared to be subject headings rather than oracles, e.g. *περι σωτηρίας – de salute*; *περι δικης – de iudicio*; *περι ερισμου – de contentatione*. In his reading, these were vestiges of an earlier format of the *sortes*, in which the responses were grouped under headings that corresponded to the questions or topics proposed, e.g. “About judgment,” or “About contention,” and so forth.

By comparison, the fragmentary Vatican Coptic lot book P.Vat.Copt. 1, of the seventh or eighth century, also has what appear to be subject headings listed as numbered *sortes* in its series.³² In each of the following instances, the expression *ετβε-* (“concerning”) introduces the topic:

πμϛ	ετβεουχι[χδπ μν ου]μντμντ[ρε]	(fol. 8r)
153	Concerning judg[ment and tes]timo[ny]	
ρπα	ετβεουχδβ ς[...]	(fol. 10r)
181	Concerning a matter [...]	
[σβ	ετβεουω]νε μνωγ [ουχ]αι	(fol. 11v)
[202	Concern]ing life and [h]ealth	
[σθ	ετβεο[γ...] λη ριτμχδ[...]	(fol. 12r)
[209]	Concerning [...]	
[σιζ	ετ]βεουτοχχο εβολ [μν]ουσυντε εναμους	(fol. 12v)
[217	Con]cerning safety [and] a good foundation	

These statements in the Vatican Coptic lot book, though arranged and numbered as though they were *sortes*, do not function well as oracles but would appear to have been subject headings that got incorporated into the series, in much the same way that Harris proposed had happened with certain statements in Codex Bezae and Sangermanensis (see also the Coptic *hermêneia* listed under *Puššāqē* 36, 42 in Chapter Five). This feature of the lacunose Sahidic manuscript lends support to the conclusion that oracle collections such as these had subject headings that found their way into the series of oracles, despite subsequent problems in the sequence, numbering, and the interpretation of such dislocated headings.

Such a manner of grouping the answers is reminiscent of the systems we find in the Books of Fate, with their special arrangements of oracles in relation to specific topics, such as the *Sortes Astrampsychi* and *Sortes Sangallenses*. Indeed, Harris has the latter two books in mind throughout his discussion.³³ Questions in *Astrampsychi* such as “29. If I will be saved from prosecution” (κθ εἰ σώζομαι τῆς κατηγορίας), and “93. If I will finish and fulfill what I undertake” (ογ εἰ ὁ ἐπιβάλλομαι ἀπαρτίζω καὶ πληρῶ),³⁴ determine the sets of answers, or oracular responses, topic by topic, to which the diviner will refer when addressing the question posed by the querent. It is not hard to imagine that the Divining Gospels draw on one or more collections of *sortes* that were organized topically and labelled with subject headings, if not specific questions.

The proposed earlier system may not even have been connected to a sacred book originally. But at some point in the transmission history of the material, the answers of the earlier system would have been copied into the pages

³¹ For a discussion of different types of ancient lot divination and lists of examples texts, see Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 27–58.

³² Digital images: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Pap.Vat.copt.1 (accessed 7 June 2019). I have also relied on Lantschoot for plausible re-

constructions of missing text (Lantschoot 1956, 46, 48, 50, 51). Translation of the oracles in Meyer/Smith 1999, 251–56 (text 126).

³³ Harris 1901, 70–71.

³⁴ Browne 1983, 1, 3; also Stewart 2001, 9, 12.

of John and correlated with particular segments of the biblical text, at which point some of the headings would have been carried over, presumably by accident, and incorporated into the answer. In a few cases, the heading itself was copied as if it were the answer. Harris noted that the presence of clearly definable themes and vestigial subject headings in the *sortes* amount to “distinct traces of grouping of the questions as in the system of Astrampsychus and elsewhere. But the traces are not sufficient to restore the system with confidence.”³⁵

Many of the same headings we find in the Greek and Latin sources that Harris studied also occur in the Syriac *puššāqē*, along with some others that are specific to the Syriac:

- 36 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “Concerning rebuke”³⁶
 38 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About a journey”³⁷
 42 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About contention”
 44 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About relief and profit”
 53 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About any matter”
 58 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About help”
 60 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About help”
 84 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About life and redemption”
 100 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About a hidden matter”
 127 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About beginning”³⁸
 201 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “Purity and chastity”³⁹
 232 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About reproof and sin”
 286 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ — “About theft”⁴⁰

In a few of these instances one could plausibly read the phrase as part of an oracular response rather than a vestigial heading, as in *Puššāqā* 42: ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ (“Regarding contention, do not be contentious”). However, some make no immediate sense as independent answers, as with *Puššāqē* 60 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ (“About help”), and 232 ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ (“About reproof and sin”). It is not immediately obvious how statements like those, as such, would be helpful as responses to a querent’s concern. They make more sense as subject headings, not the answers themselves. Their intrusion into the *puššāqē* through mishaps in copying or inefficient editing has caused confusion in the material. The repetition of ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܕܩܘܪܒܢܐ (“About help;” *Puššāqē* 58, 60) further

shows the degree to which confusion has distorted the original apparatus. In a few instances (e.g. *Puššāqē* 38, 127, 201), one gets the impression that an editor has modified a statement that incorporated a heading in order to make better sense of it as an oracle.

Not every statement, ... ܩܘܪܒܢܐ (“about...”) that we list here must be accepted as a subject heading, nor are we suggesting that we have anything like an original and complete list of topics or questions. Yet on the whole the Syriac evidence supports Harris’ view that some of the statements in the *sortes* of the Divining Gospels incorporate vestigial headings. This feature offers clues about the background of the material. Furthermore, it appears in multiple sources of the tradition. For instance, the heading with *Puššāqā* 42 occurs in Greek, Coptic, Syriac, and Latin sources. It appears that headings had been incorporated into the Greek source material at a very early stage before finding their way into the other versions.

6.3 Origins of the Apparatus

The occurrence of topical headings in the material throughout the tradition suggests two important details about the *hermēneiai*. First, since such headings would serve little purpose disconnected from the bodies of statements that they govern, we must conclude with Harris that the material derives from a format probably much different than what we encounter now. In the extant Divining Gospels, statements are attached to the Gospel of John and are placed singly at the bottoms of pages, in the margins, or within the body of the biblical text. They are dispersed and disconnected from each other. Yet the series of headings that we encounter, however broken and incomplete now, suggests that the statements had once been organized into discrete blocks of material, by topic, or were at least clearly coordinated with such topics in some fashion. We find this kind of organization in Books of Fate and in bodies of inscribed dice oracles. The *Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum* provides a good example, in which a host of different responses, many of which are fairly general in focus, are organized into twelve general topics by means of a discrete set of questions (see 2.2.5). The *sortes* in the Divining Gospels were probably once organized somehow by subject, with each set corresponding to a certain kind of question, some of which were fairly specific and others more general.

It is likely that editors borrowed and adapted material from a distinct source containing an early corpus of *sortes* that were grouped according to topic or question, with the

³⁵ Harris, 1901, 71.

³⁶ See the note on *Puššāqā* 36 in Chapter Five.

³⁷ The text is uncertain; see the note on *Puššāqā* 38 in Chapter Five.

³⁸ See the note on *Puššāqā* 127 in Chapter Five.

³⁹ Possibly not a heading; see the Latin parallel with *Puššāqā* 201 in Chapter Five.

⁴⁰ See the note on *Puššāqā* 286 in Chapter Five.

subjects written as the group's headings. This tool may have circulated at first with the Gospel of John, perhaps as a sort of separate appendix, or it may even have had a life of its own before it became affiliated with John.⁴¹ Only *Puššāqā* 62 (and its parallels) requires John as the source of its wording. The commonality in language and content between the *sortes* in the Divining Gospels and material we find in other lot divination sources, such as the *Sortes Sangallenses*, indicates that extensive borrowing has taken place in the composition of the thematically organized corpus on which the Divining Gospels draw.

Eventually *sortes* were transferred directly to pages containing the Gospel text, probably producing a format like that we see in the early Greek and Coptic sources (and the Armenian) at first, with segments of Gospel text on the page, under which the corresponding *sors* was placed. The first type of manuscript we surveyed in Chapter Three has this structure (see 3.3.3). But it is possible that the early synthesis put *hermēneiai* into the margins instead (see 7.2.5 below). At some point in the process of transfer or transmission, subject headings were taken over and became functional *sortes* in the series. Considering their occurrence in different versions, this must have happened at a very early point in the development of the material.

It is presently impossible to say where and how that original corpus of topically organized sortilege material was created. Given the early *hermēneiai* testimony from Egypt and that land's long associations with the arcane and mysterious, Egypt is a good guess, but it remains a guess, and not a very specific one at that (see 2.2.3–4 above). In Late Antiquity Egypt saw the growth of practices of divination at Christian places of worship, where oracular questions were addressed to saints at their shrines, as they had previously been addressed to the gods. We have many Greek and Coptic papyri attesting to these ticket oracles. The Christianization of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, almost certainly accomplished in Egypt, joins the chorus of evidence, including the early Vatican Coptic lot book (P.Vat.Copt. 1) – all pointing to Egypt as fertile ground for the production of oracular materials and the likely place of origin for the *hermēneiai*. We recall that our main early evidence for the Divining Gospels is from Egypt and that Coptic is an important feature in several of the early sources. The bilingual sources have Coptic as well as Greek, while one manuscript is just Coptic (Manuscript 2 in Chapter Three; see 3.3.2).

Commenting on the profuse body of lot divination texts associated with Egypt and the circumstances of their use, Frankfurter observes, “[they] would have required scribes accustomed to translating clients’ concerns into a form that could be ritually resolved by an oracular procedure.”⁴² In Egypt were Christian scribes adept at crafting sortilege materials and clerics who knew how to attract clients seeking divination. Producing and using the Divining Gospels would require these very skills. Though we cannot be certain, we may comfortably hypothesize that the *hermēneiai* originated in Egypt as part of an enterprise adapting the venerable Egyptian lot divination tradition into a Christian idiom.

The Christian scribes and sortilege practitioners of Egypt inherited tricks of the trade from their non-Christian forebears. Certainly the *sortes* in our *hermēneiai* owe much to the earlier heritage of non-Christian sortilege material, as do other late antique and medieval Christian tools for lot divination. But whether that original corpus was crafted by and for Christians, in some form prior to its incorporation into books of the Gospel of John, we cannot say. Nor can we know the extent to which the original material was changed through the process. Apart from differences due to the transformations of translation processes and the accidents of scribal transmission, we find considerable variety of content and placement of the *sortes*. Changes large and small have taken place over the centuries. Much of this is undoubtedly rather local and due to the processes that are internal to a given tradition, e.g. inner Syriac developments. But the surviving material in various languages proves that one of the more significant changes – the infiltration of headings into the *sortes* – happened very early, prior to translation from Greek, highlighting the distance between extant forms of the *hermēneiai* and their origins.

The presence of the headings points to a second important detail – or rather, the headings focus in a particular way our questions about the organization and use of the *sortes*. If the material has been shaped according to specific questions or topics, what part do the topics play in the application of the material? In Chapter Seven we will explore the many connections that occur between the contents of the *sortes* and the Gospel text, connections that undoubtedly played a role in the application of the material. Yet it is not the case that *sortes* are grouped neatly together in the series, topic by topic. Statements belonging to a particular topic are distributed throughout the series in no discernible pattern, alongside many

⁴¹ As we will see in the next chapter, the placement and aspects of the *sortes*' content presume a connection to the Gospel.

⁴² Frankfurter 1998, 195.

statements so general that they defy definite topical characterization. How would the user draw from lots pertinent to a given topic?

To understand the most likely mechanisms by which practitioners put the Divining Gospels to use, we need to revisit what we know about mechanisms of sortilege in late antiquity.

6.4 The Divining Gospel in Practice

6.4.1 Mechanisms of Sortilege in Late Antiquity and the *Hermêneiai*

In Chapter Two we caught a glimpse of the pervasiveness and variety of divinatory practice in the ancient world and in Late Antiquity. Divination using sacred books and texts was one common practice. Sometimes that amounted to consulting a text at random in order to get a divine message from the page to which a book opened or a passage to which one's finger pointed, whether in the *Aeneid* or the Bible.⁴³ The querent would then need to interpret the passage in relation to his or her query, perhaps with assistance from a diviner.

The method prescribed in the instructions for the *hermêneiai* in Byzantine Psalters combines chance and basic arithmetic.⁴⁴ The Psalter contained 150 Psalms with 150 accompanying oracular statements. As we have described above (see 2.3.6.2), the user would open the Psalter at random, observe the number of the Psalm to which they had turned, modify the number by six in order to round out the sum to a seemingly seven, and finally read the statement with that “seventh” Psalm as a trustworthy oracle. For instance, the person who opened to Psalm 47 (48) could add six and read the *hermêneia* with Psalm 53 (54) : Μετ’ ὀλίγας ἡμέρας γίνεται (“After a few days it will happen”).⁴⁵ As one might expect in view of such a random procedure, the statements accompanying the Psalms are general rather than specific.

Another method of lot divination using sacred texts involved the preparation of specially made tools, such as the *Homeromanteion* described in Chapter Two (see 2.2.2), with its 216 answers drawn from passages of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. By rolling a die three times, the user would hit on the appropriate answer, which was in fact a quotation from one of the venerated texts, not an indepen-

dent oracular statement such as we have in the Divining Gospels.⁴⁶ Since they are quotations from epic poems, many of the *Homeromanteion*'s statements are vague or non-committal, begging interpretation in order to discern their oracular meaning for the querent. In this, as well as in its use of sacred text, the *Homeromanteion* contrasts with Books of Fate that bring specific definite answers to specific questions, without the interference of other literary references. Yet even in the *Homeromanteion* we find a number of responses that presume more specific topics, such as marriage or journeys.⁴⁷ In contrast to the precise mechanism by which a user of *Sortes Astrampsychi* got to the proper set of answers responding to a given question, the mechanism by which one narrowed a search down to an appropriate sub-set of oracles in the *Homeromanteion* is unclear. Something additional to the utterly random toss of three dice would be required in order to narrow down the range of choices.

The instructions accompanying the *Sortes Astrampsychi* are complex yet clear, and the *Sortes Sanctorum* were accessed through a prescribed system of casting cubical dice (κύβοι) or knucklebones (ἀστράγαλοι). The biblical manuscripts of the Divining Gospels include no such instructions. We lament once again the loss of the first pages of London, BL, Add. 17,119, wherein we imagine early instructions or other clues may have been included that would enlighten us as to the book's proper method of use.

The technique of merely opening the book at random would not work well with the Divining Gospels. Many of the *puššāqē* are too specific. Having a client or diviner open the codex to a random place is a very practicable method, though rather unceremonious and simple. A degree of ritual, perhaps a prefatory prayer, could supply sufficient solemnity for such a simple technique. Yet lack of pretentiousness and performative mystery is not the problem. Landing on an answer to do with trials and judgment when inquiring about beginning some undertaking would be unsatisfactory. Although many of the statements are general enough that they would apply to nearly anything, too many of them are not so vague. On the other hand, requiring that the querent stick to only very general questions would eliminate a great many of the *puššāqē* from consideration. Furthermore, the use of numbers in most of our sources begs explanation. Why enumerate the statements, unless the numbers have some significance

⁴³ Van der Horst 2016, 143–73.

⁴⁴ See Canart 2011, 3.

⁴⁵ Parpulov 2014, 312.

⁴⁶ Meerson 2019, 138–53.

⁴⁷ Meerson 2019, 141–42.

for organization or in the process of selection, as they do in other tools for lot divination?

The similar view that the user would select a specific passage from John's Gospel, not necessarily at random but on the basis of its content, and thereby land on its accompanying oracle meets the same problem. Let us imagine a particular case. "The woman at the well," someone might offer. It would presumably then be up to the practitioner to choose which of the seven *puššāqē* (*Puššāqē* 43–49) embedded in Ioh 4,1–26 to apply – or which of the eleven or thirteen, depending on how one delineates the passage. If we were to presume that the querent was being selective on the basis of his or knowledge of the content or themes of a given passage, we would be claiming that the querents could only be people who held a high degree of biblical knowledge. That is possible. But also, we would expect that the Syriac book should show signs of exceptional wear particularly in passages that were especially well-known or could be hoped to yield popular answers, though we do not see evidence of disproportionately selective high-traffic usage (e.g. leaves saturated with greater amounts of oil due to excessive thumbing). But most of all, this view is left to answer the same difficulty facing the technique of randomly opening the book: although some Gospel passages exhibit thematic connections with their accompanying *sortes* (see 7.2.1 below), in many places the connections are so thin – or even seemingly non-existent – to render impractical any technique that does not account for the topics of the *sortes* themselves. Furthermore, we are still left to wonder what purpose the *puššāqē* numbers serve.

The *Homeromanteion* and many other ancient sortilege tools require the use of dice; others use knucklebones. Diviners could use the numbers they got from one or more rolls of dice in a variety of ways to determine the correct oracle. For instance, when consulting the *Homeromanteion* a triple-throw of six-sided dice could yield a series of numbers such as 1-1-1, 4-2-1, or 6-4-2, up to 216 possibilities. The *Homeromanteion* has 216 answers, listed by number but also by die roll, e.g. statement 150 addresses marriage prospects: "150:5-1-6: So there's nothing else as horrible and vile as a woman (*Od.* 11.427)."⁴⁸ Similarly, knucklebones have values of 1, 3, 4, and 6. Rolling five knucklebones yields fifty-six different possibilities (such as 1-1-4-6-4) – happening to match the number of statements in the Anatolian dice oracles and in the *Sortes Sanctorum*, for instance. Yet the organization of these materials conforms to the possibilities inherent in the limited number

of combinations one may get from the toss. For instance, in the *Homeromanteion* each of the three numbers in a listing ranks from one to six. The continuous numbering of the oracles (1–216) is indexed to the numbers rolled with each die.

The numbering of the *hermēneiai* is continuous, from one to 308 in the Syriac, 318 in the Armenian, and 316 in the Latin (though the Latin omits a great many from its series). The Greek and Coptic sources are so fragmentary they often lack numbers and even where numbers survive we can only guess what their total numbers would have been, but on the basis of what we have we may surmise that both their numbering and their total numbers of *sortes* were similar to what we find in the extant Syriac,⁴⁹ slightly less so in the Armenian. The original quantity and enumeration are unknown. Given the existing numbers, the length of John's Gospel, and the pattern of segmenting the text into portions of 1–5 verses, something within the range of 308–318 is likely.

How does the system of numbers connect with a method of selection? No obvious answer presents itself. If a written key once existed that assigned dice rolls to each of the *sortes* in the *hermēneiai*, no vestige of it survives. Furthermore, the total number of around 308–318 does not naturally fit anything close to the possibilities we might expect. Three dice yield 216 possibilities, a number too low to be of use in selecting from over 300 *sortes*, at least not without rendering a very large proportion of them pointless as oracles, since they could never be drawn according to the system. Some sets of *sortes* included dummy answers in order for their randomizing mechanisms to work convincingly,⁵⁰ answers that could never be drawn, yet among *Sortes Astrampsychi's* 1030 responses and the 1752 or more responses in *Sortes Saggallenses*, a modest quantity of fake answers do not dilute the sets much. This is not the case with the *hermēneiai*, where a three-dice range of 216 possibilities would suggest that a third or more of the statements could be fake, an unlikely arrangement. Adding a fourth die increases the possibilities drastically, giving us 1296. So if dice or knucklebones played a role in selecting particular oracles in the

⁴⁹ The early papyrus fragment Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Inv. No. P.Berol. 11914 represents an important exception. See *Puššāqē* 35, 36 and 45, 46 in Chapter Five (including n. 70). P.Berol 11914's numbers are secondary but rather high (112, 113 and 122, 123) for the Gospel text and *sortes* they accompany. They are sequential and may have been added as page numbers. But if not, it is inviting to speculate that they reflect a more elaborate selection system, perhaps one in which the first number at least (e.g. 1-) corresponds to a particular category or dice throw.
⁵⁰ See Klingshirn 2005, 118–20.

the Byzantine *Rhiktologia* and the “Circle of the Psalter” described in Chapter Two (2.3.6.1), though we can only speculate as to how the numbers in those tools were chosen.

Given the ostensibly random nature of the finger-pointing selection process, we are not surprised to see that both sets of oracles in London, BL Or. 4434 tend to be general in nature rather than responding to specific questions. They presume a backdrop of anxious concern about some uncertainty or looming threat, but it is not hard to see how this would be a suitable assumption to make regarding anyone seeking to divine the future regarding some matter. They also tend to be positive in outlook, i.e. leaning into the profession that “Jesus Messiah appeared for salvation,” according to the statement we mentioned above that provides a selection rubric for the first set of oracles.

The methods prescribed in this modern collection of mantic texts from the Middle East illustrate one possible technique users could have employed with the Divining Gospels in Late Antiquity. We do not know whether users of the Divining Gospels had similar tables or used simple finger-pointing as part of the selection process. The present illustrations come from a much later period and, though Syriac, were translated from Arabic.⁵⁵ Also, the Divining Gospels exhibit a need to be more discriminating in the selection of statements corresponding to topics that, albeit broad, are distinct. However, these illustrative examples remind us of a device accompanying the *sortes* in our Latin source that requires closer examination.

6.4.2 The Wheel of Codex Sangermanensis

Despite the many corruptions and difficulties in its sortilege material, the Latin manuscript Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 may provide further insight into the mechanism by which Divining Gospels worked.

In one of his studies of Codex Sangermanensis, Harris drew attention to a device occurring near that Bible’s presentation of the Eusebian Canons: a wheel, divided into eight sections and filled with a broken series of numbers leading up to 316 (fol. 89va; see Fig. 6.1).⁵⁶ The wheel fits into a quarter-page space left after the end of Jerome’s letter to Damasus prefacing the Gospels and explaining the canons (*Praefatio in quatuor Evangelia*) and just before the canons themselves. Wordsworth speculated that the wheel and its numbers had something to do with

the Eusebeian Canons that begin in the next column and continue a few more pages (fol. 89v–91v).⁵⁷ But Harris correctly observes that the wheel has no connection to the canons and must be related to the *sortes* in the margins of John’s Gospel instead (fol. 125rb–134va). For one thing, the numbers in the wheel culminate in *cccxvi* (316), just like the *sortes* (erroneously given as *ccxvi* on fol. 134va). Secondly, a great many of the numbers in the wheel correspond to numbered statements in the margins of John, i.e. they correlate to the *sortes*.

The wheel’s characteristics indicate that it was intended as a tool for organizing the *sortes*, though for what specific purpose it does not say. Very likely it would have been a device to help the diviner select the right response. Harris thought so, opining, “in some way or other its compartments are meant to facilitate the problem of determining one’s destiny.”⁵⁸ Metzger agrees, stating, “[o]bviously the diagram was to be used in some way with the numbered sentences accompanying the sections of John’s Gospel. This equipment must have been used for the purpose for divination....”⁵⁹ Medieval sortilege lot books are known to have included tables and to aid lot selection, sometimes involving ornate charts or spiral patterns, as we have already seen, in the charts and spirals accompanying some *Rhiktologia* and the “Circle of the Psalter.”

Given the distribution of topics in the *sortes*, it would make sense to see each of the eight sectors as corresponding to a particular subject or area of inquiry. The variety of statements we find in the *puššāqē*, for instance, might reasonably be arranged into eight or so broad topics, (though we could also divide the statements into more detailed categories, if we wished). The *Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum* organize its responses into twelve categories. Wilkinson agrees with the basic premise, suggesting, “each segment of such a wheel would have corresponded to a general topic (health, travel, legal affairs, etc.) and each number within it would have corresponded to a relevant fortune.”⁶⁰ After posing a question or choosing the subject, thereby selecting a field of inquiry on the page, quite literally, a person could then toss a small object into the appropriate sector – or even point a finger into one

⁵⁵ See Furlani 1919–20, 89; Furlani 1923, 363.

⁵⁶ Harris 1888, 58–63.

⁵⁷ Wordsworth 1883, ix–x.

⁵⁸ Harris 1888, 60. Stegmüller also mentions the wheel as part of the sortilege system (Stegmüller 1953, 20–21); see also Poulin 1979, 133–34.

⁵⁹ Metzger 1988b, 166.

⁶⁰ Wilkinson 2019, 119–20. For the intriguing suggestion that the wheel may go back to an early instance of a *volvelle*, a type of medieval sliding paper chart with rotating parts, see Wilkinson 2019, 120–21.

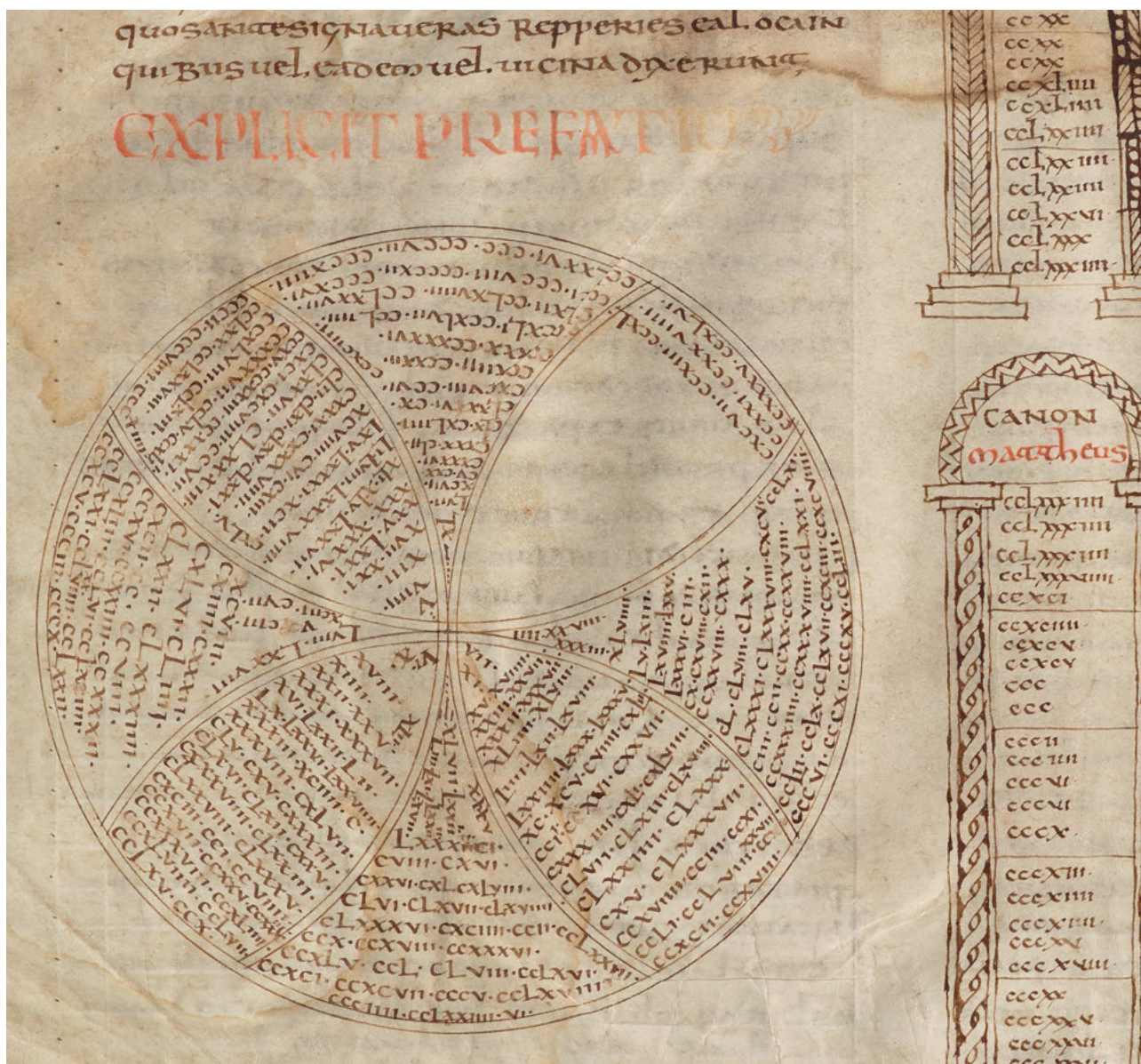


Fig. 6.1: Paris, BnF, lat. 11553, fol. 89, verso (detail). ©Bibliothèque nationale de France. Used with permission.

the sectors, as we saw prescribed in London, BL Or. 4434 – landing on the number that corresponded to the correct response.

One could propose other principles of selection for which one might use such a wheel design, e.g. differentiating seasons, lucky days, or times of day, all of which are explicit factors in some sortilege mechanisms. Or we could imagine that the client had some random way of choosing one of the eight sectors, rather than selecting it deliberately. Yet none of these hypotheses enables the user to differentiate the answers by topic, which seems essential to the effective use of the *hermêneiai* as we have them. The best answer, albeit very tentative, is that some

sort of topical arrangement was in play. The sectioned wheel filled with numbers fits the bill, at least in principle. The wheel in Codex Sangermanensis points us to a plausible sortilege mechanism: a graphic arrangement of *sortes* by topic that one could use in order to select a response at random, yet within a determined subject area, i.e. in response to a particular question. Presumably a Divining Gospel would include this tool or something similar, designed to facilitate the sortilege process and ensure that the practitioner would be able to deliver oracles that were appropriate to the seekers' concerns.

A simple test of this hypothesis would be afforded by analyzing the *sortes* listed in the wheel, sector by sector,

to see whether they hold together by topic and, if so, what the specific topics are. This is where we find ourselves frustrated again, both by the defectiveness of the other manuscripts, in which no such wheel survives, and by the defects of the sortilege material in the Sangermanensis manuscript, the only source to preserve the wheel. Although it seems certain that the wheel relates to the Latin *sortes*, the numbers within the partitioned wheel exhibit difficulties that thwart our attempts to decode them. These difficulties are probably due to various layers of corruption rather than a deliberate attempt to camouflage the mechanism, as we sometimes find in lot divination.

Harris called attention to the many problems with Sangermanensis' numbering. We will enumerate the main difficulties as we see them. First, as we have seen in the presentation of the divinatory material in Chapter Five, the numbers accompanying the Latin *sortes* in the margins of John's Gospel are often wrong. Scribal errors abound, numbers often occur out of sequence, and they get repeated or omitted. These problems have undoubtedly cascaded to produce further dislocations and additional incorrect enumeration within the material. At least thirty-four of the numbered statements do not have matching numbers in the wheel, whereas up to a third of the numbers in the wheels do not have matching numbered statements in the margins of John. The wheel has about 260 distinct numbers,⁶¹ significantly more than the quantity of numbered statements in the margins of Sangermanensis' John – yet significantly less than the more than 300 statements we find in the fuller sets, such as the Syriac. At least nine numbers are repeated in more than one sector of the wheel, although that may be by design, since many of the *sortes* would easily fit under more than one subject heading.

It remains true that the numbers in the wheel largely match numbered statements in the *sortes*, yet the difficulties attaching to the numbers raise doubts about our ability to get full clarity on the workings of the mechanism. Major disconnects occur between the wheel's numbers and the statements to which we presume they were meant to point. These problems also help explain the larger problem of categorizing the sectors by subject.

When we turn to study each sector in an effort to discern a pattern of topical arrangement, we encounter a

great deal of confusion. We take one sector as an example, the sector that sits on the “due east” pole of the wheel, if we think of it as a compass; or at three o'clock, if we think of it as a clock face (see Fig. 6.1). The sectors themselves are not numbered or otherwise labeled. The “due east” sector includes thirty-eight distinct numbers, separated by dots, most of them written in lines running parallel to the outer diameter line of the circle, with a few crammed into the space at the peak of the sector near the center of the wheel. Sixteen of them do not have corresponding numbered statements in the margins of John, a higher proportion of unattached numbers than we see in most of the sectors. Two of its numbers are repeated in other sectors. Several of the numbers correspond to matters that could be considered very general, e.g. *clviii* (158), corresponding to the promise (or warning), *quod non speras accipies* (“You will get what you do are not expecting”); or *cclxi* (261), *gloria* (“Glory”). Such general answers do not help us define a subject, since they may respond to any number of questions.

However, a few responses that are more specific are reflected in the numbers of this sector. These include the subject of beginning an undertaking (e.g. *cxviii*, *cxxviii* [corrected from *ccxxviii*], *ccii*, *cclx*). However, some of the corresponding statements pertain to legal matters, e.g. *xxxiii* (33), *si mentiris arguent te* (“If you lie they will expose you”). If we see the sector as one devoted to legal matters, then several of the other, more vague statements are seen to cohere well with this subject, e.g. *cxxx* (130), *ne timeas causa isti* (“Do not fear this matter”), and *clxxxviii* (188), *peniteris d[e]o in causa tua* (“You will repent to God in your matter”).

Furthermore, when we expand the analysis to include the numbered Syriac *puššāqē*, the same theme recurs for at least several of them. For instance, the numbers *xlviii* and *lxiii* occur in the sector yet have no corresponding Latin statement in the manuscript. Yet *Puššāqā* 49 reads, ܣܘܒܗܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢܗܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢܗܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢܗܘܢ (“Straighten [your] path, for your deeds will become known”), while *Puššāqā* 63 has, ܕܥܡܪܘܢܗܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢܗܘܢ ܕܥܡܪܘܢܗܘܢ (“Do not deny, but confess”), both of which fit well the subject of legal matters. In fact, the latter corresponds to a statement numbered *lxii* (62) in the Latin, *ne abegnes sed profiteris* (“Do not deny, but confess openly”), signaling a disconnect between the number of the statement and the wheel. Since two *sortes* numbered *lxii* (62) occur one after the other in the margins of Sangermanensis, we may conclude that the second one should have been numbered *lxiii* (63), a correction that would better align the Latin and Syriac as well as resolving the disconnect between the *sors* and the wheel, in this one instance at least.

⁶¹ Precise differentiation of numbers is difficult. For instance, some of the numbers in the wheel have been edited or corrected by scribes so that it can be difficult to determine what its number should be. As for the Latin statements, a few of them lack explicit numbers whereas a few others seem to consist of a combination of statements, each of which probably originally had its own number.

We might therefore hypothesize that the sector in question was originally devoted to the subject of legal matters, especially if we may be allowed to fill out some of its unattached numbers with reference to the parallel sets of *sortes* in Divining Gospels (e.g. the Syriac). However, the sector is not especially functional in its current state and would certainly frustrate the user. Apart from the numerous missing statements, the sector includes statements that would not make suitable responses to legal queries; furthermore, we find numbers corresponding to statements that best fit the subject of legal matters are not confined to this sector; they occur in nearly all the other sectors of the wheel. As with the sector we have analyzed, the others have their own blends of incompatible subjects, alongside many general statements that could fit nearly anywhere. One sector stands out as having only seven numbers in it (north-east on the compass dial, or one o'clock), some of which are unattached while the remainder are either too general to classify or pertain to at least two different subjects: conflict, and beginning an undertaking.

Harris did not analyze the sectors themselves closely, so far as we know, but he quickly detected some of the problems coordinating the numbered *sortes* and the numbers in the wheel, concluding,

“there is a number of cases in which the two series will not agree, and the suggestion arises in one’s mind that perhaps the wheel of numbers was not made directly from the margins of the Codex, but that both it and the series may be derived from some earlier and more complete series.”⁶²

Harris finds evidence for an “earlier and more complete series” in the parallel *sortes* of Codex Bezae, to which we may add the numerous other Divining Gospel sources considered in this book. Certainly the Latin derives from a more complete – and presumably more numerically accurate and consistent – apparatus, even if that ancestor is forever lost to us, as seems to be the case.

If the wheel represents a selection tool, one that was once more intact and accurate, it would have been subject to the forces of transmission too, just as the numbered *sortes* in the margins of John were, exacerbating the disconnect between the two. When we remember that the original apparatus was probably Greek and that the original wheel or similar organizing and selection tool would have had Greek numbers, we must allow for a translational stage of alteration as well.

We know nothing about the exemplar on which the scribe based the wheel we find in Codex Sangermanensis

On the supposition that the wheel was originally a selection tool circulating with a Divining Gospel, i.e. a copy of John’s Gospel with *hermêneiai*, we imagine that it would have been placed at the beginning or end of the Gospel in such a codex, perhaps with instructions. No such material survives in any of our source, except for the wheel in Codex Sangermanensis. The manuscript is actually the final part of a massive two-volume Latin Bible. As a codex it is not just a Divining Gospel. Its *sortes* and their numbers have been copied into the margins of John and are secondary to the Gospel text, though possibly contemporary or nearly so.

We are not surprised that the wheel does not occur at the end of John in this manuscript (fol. 134va), since after brief subscription material, we immediately get the *capitula* (chapter titles) for the Acts of the Apostles that begin the section of the codex devoted to Acts and the Catholic Epistles. Nor would we necessarily expect the wheel to have been inserted at the beginning of John (fol. 125ra), since John follows directly upon Luke. The Gospel portion of the codex is effectively a *tetraeuangelium*, a coherent four-Gospel unit with the usual Eusebeian apparatus and *capitula* prefaced to it, just before the beginning of Matthew (fol. 94vb). It is amidst this material that we meet the wheel, in the prefatory material at the beginning of the Gospel unit. It is a logical place for a scribe or editor to put an organizational tool drawn from a separate manuscript of John (i.e. a Divining Gospel).

Sangermanensis is a complex codex and, as Harris pointed out, even its annotations deserve intensive study. The wheel was seen to be an important inclusion by someone. Its design was executed with precision and the numbers in the wheel show signs of correction, suggesting that they were used and edited, or at least that a degree of conscientious proofing took place after they had been copied. We do not know the circumstances of the wheel’s inclusion, however. The hand of the numbers in the wheel is not the same as that of the numbers with the *sortes* in the margins of John (compare Fig. 3.12 and Fig. 6.1). Its hand is closer to that of the numbers in the nearby Eusebeian apparatus – yet not identical. In particular, the lower part of the second stroke of the number *x* tends to extend significantly lower in the canons than in the wheel; the upper part of the number *L* rises higher; and the serifs in the canons are more pronounced than we find in the wheel. Some of these features could be due to the cramped space of the wheel’s sectors but they probably indicate distinct scribes. Perhaps the wheel was added into the page’s blank space after the original execution of the page, yet not by the same person who added the *sortes* themselves.

⁶² Harris 1888, 61.

The wheel of Codex Sangermanensis presents us with many mysteries. We cannot presume to have explained all its idiosyncratic features and inconsistencies. Yet the most likely explanation of it remains that which Harris suggested more than a century ago: it was intended to accompany the *sortes* with which the Gospel of John was annotated. In its current state in our Latin manuscript, it retains only very imperfect vestiges of its original design and purpose: to organize the *hermêneiai*, probably by subject, and to provide a mechanism that practitioners could use to select from among the appropriate *sortes* in order to address a seeker's question.

6.4.3 Flawed but Functional Tools

Perhaps the most pervasive quality of the sortilege material in all our Divining Gospel sources is its defective nature. The early Greek and Coptic sources are highly fragmentary and it is impossible at this point to say much about their original coherence. One would like to believe that there was once a tightly coherent apparatus, the organization and use of which was clear, at least to the initiated who had been read in on its use. We would expect plain statements – or at least cryptic statements amenable to interpretation; this sort of material invites a degree of enigma and mystery, yet is meant to be applicable to concrete circumstances. We would expect the numbering system and selection mechanism to have been consistent and accurate. In other words, we imagine that the original apparatus must have been entirely – or at the very least largely – functional. The vastly more elaborate systems of *Sortes Astrampsychi* and *Sortes Sangallenses* show us the capacity of ancient designers to construct competent systems, and we expect that the original Divining Gospels exhibited similar degrees of competence.

When we consider all the defects we find in so much of our surviving material, we are left wondering about its functionality. The intrusions of subject headings into the *sortes* must have happened early in the tradition, rendering some statements seemingly inscrutable and apparently unusable, yet translators pushed the material into other languages and it got disseminated widely. How would a practitioner interpret *Puššāqā* 232, ⲙⲉⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲛⲓⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲛⲓⲛⲓ (“About reproof and sin”) as the response to an inquiry about one's future?

The Greek *sortes* in Codex Bezae are idiosyncratic in many ways, even in the company of so many other peculiar sources, yet practitioners considered the material worth inserting into the codex and presumably found it useful. In the Latin we encounter statements that must originally

have been separate combined into rather baffling composites, while statements in the Armenian and Syriac get duplicated in ways that suggest errors have occurred in the transmission of material. Whereas Bezae omits *sortes* by simply cutting off at a certain point, the Latin selectively omits a great many *sortes* out of the middle of its series. Perhaps its omissions go back to a decision to exclude *sortes* belonging to one or more subjects, culling specific statements that would have been distributed throughout the corpus. Yet a study of the Syriac statements listed in Chapter Five that lack parallels in the Latin does not show them to share specific topics that we could speculate had been targeted for omission from the Latin or its ancestor.

In part, many of these discrepancies merely remind us that we are actually dealing with multiple Divining Gospel traditions, not just one. Differences between the Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Latin, and Armenian are to be expected. We may define some of these differences as the result of error, but many are the result of translation decisions or intentional editing and would only be considered “corrupt” if we privilege some allegedly pristine *Urtext*, a presumption ill-suited to this study. Yet many of the problems that we find both within a tradition and between the traditions raise questions about the coherence and usefulness of the material to users once “defects” have set in.

For instance, low numerical consistency characterizes many parts of the tradition. We find the greatest degree of numerical consistency within and between the Syriac, some of the early Greek and Coptic sources, and the truncated series in Codex Bezae. If the *hermêneiai* were originally grouped into subjects by number as we suppose, issues with numerical consistency would be problematic. The practitioner needs to be able to rely on the mechanism by which oracles are selected, in order to ensure they offer an appropriate response to the client's query. Errors and inconsistencies in the numbers would break the selection mechanism unless the system is carefully revised to compensate for changes in numbering. Also, shifts in sequence cause dislocations in placement and therefore in a statement's biblical context, a matter that we will discuss more fully in the next chapter. Attempting to sift through the numerical muddle of Sangermanensis' *sortes* and wheel has shown us how confused and practically unusable such a system can become in time.

Unless we have utterly missed some arcane key by which to reconcile the numerical inconsistencies, we are left with the most likely explanation being that the numbers, sequences, and contents of the *hermêneiai* have changed significantly and are therefore marred by errors that could complicate or even thwart the efficient use of a coherent sortilege mechanism. Whereas editors could accommodate changes

by revising the mechanism, we have little evidence to indicate that has happened. Perhaps the reduced quantity of numbers in Sangermanensis' wheel is the result of such revision, in view of the lower quantity of Latin *sortes* in the book. Yet in that source we are left with a dysfunctional device and many broken links between the wheel and the *sortes*.

However – and more to the point – whatever their flaws and dysfunctions, the Divining Gospels continued to be copied, disseminated, adapted, and used, within and across disparate traditions. If parts of them did not work properly or were impossibly difficult to apply, this did not dissuade users from continuing to use them. Our codicological survey of the Syriac manuscript in Chapter Four tells the tale of a book that survived the centuries, finding sustained use as a divinatory tool, undergoing repair to its *puššāqē* when certain leaves went missing or were destroyed. We do not know precisely how its users selected from certain groups of *puššāqē* in order to address the client's presenting concerns, nor how frustrating a user found some of the more indecipherable statements and mechanical problems to be. What we do know is that practitioners appraised the book and its apparatus to be usable and beneficial, whatever the book's flaws.

In comparison with the Syriac, it is even more difficult to see how the apparatus in the Latin manuscript, Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 (Sangermanensis) would have been used to select from specific groups of Latin *sortes*, given the many problems with its numbers, its sequencing, and the exceptionally confusing content of some of its statements. The wheel gives us a plausible selection mechanism, but one that in its current state must have been frustrating to use, to say the least. Presumably the *sortes* and wheel in Sangermanensis provide just an echo of a previously more functional tool; perhaps they had already become defunct by the time they were copied into the Latin Bible as we have it today. Yet the corrections we encounter in the wheel and throughout the Latin *sortes* suggest otherwise – that practitioners continued using the Latin material, even in its damaged state.

6.5 Picturing the Use of a Divining Gospel

The Syriac version of the Divining Gospel offers us an invaluable glimpse into the use of this particular category of lot divination text. Unfortunately, the precise details of the sortilege process are unclear. We know that the *sortes* resided in a book and were integral to it but not precisely how one would go about choosing a particular *puššāqē*

within the book to address an inquirer's question. Neither the Syriac nor our other surviving sources have preserved instructions such as we find in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* or some editions of the Psalms *hermēneiai*.

We know that many of the statements are general in focus, yet a significant proportion of them address themselves to more specific concerns. The specificity of themes and topics is a prominent dimension of the material. We even have vestigial subject headings that point to an earlier, more clearly structured form of the material.

We know that the statements were numbered in a continuous series but the materials have not yielded sufficient clues as to a numerical mechanism, if any, that would enable us to reconstruct a selection device, such as we can confidently ascribe to the *Sortes Sangallenses*, despite the loss of its instructions.⁶³ It is possible that we have lost the key by which a randomizing element such as dice-throws would have yielded particular contributions to the process of sortilege. Such a key would presumably have indexed the *puššāqē* numbers with particular rolls of the dice, and may have included other features of organization.

What we do have is a rather faulty but strongly suggestive wheel device in the Latin manuscript, inviting us to consider that the *sortes* were organized into categories, probably by subject area or question, and that the user could employ these categories somehow in order to choose a fitting response. A similar device may have complemented the Syriac *puššāqē*, i.e. a chart or table grouping the statements by topic.

The fact that the *puššāqē* manifest a range of fairly specific topics, alongside more general ones, and that these are disseminated through the book in a seemingly haphazard fashion eliminates the method of randomly selecting a page from the entire book or a number from the entire set. Some further organizational principles, such as the wheel suggests to us, would be necessary. Similarly, the technique of simply choosing a passage from John's Gospel first, and thereby selecting an accompanying oracle, does not account for the need to provide greater control with respect to the topic of the statement.

Given what we know at this point – and respecting the great deal that we do not know, including the near certainty that manner of use would have changed over time – we may picture the use of a Divining Gospel such as the Syriac book as follows:

A querent would consult the practitioner, bringing forward a question or problem for which he or she is

⁶³ On reconstructing *Sortes Sangallenses*' selection procedure, see Klingshirn 2005, 117–26.

seeking special guidance or assurances. The practitioner could be the owner of the book, but in case of communal ownership, e.g. in a monastic library, the practitioner might simply be a designated expert user and not the actual owner. The user could be female, such as an ascetic in a convent, or the client could be female. Like the oracular statements in dice oracles and Books of Fate, the formulaic *puššāqē* are masculine in gender, yet we may presume that some inquirers or users could be female. In representing the statement to a female client, the practitioner could adjust the response accordingly, e.g. by altering grammatical gender. Or perhaps the female client would simply have to adapt her hearing of the *puššāqā*, since she would be accustomed to accommodating the masculine language that predominates in ancient texts and oral pronouncements. The grammar and rhetoric of the Divining Gospels do not help us know whether and to what extent females would have been users or clients.

We would expect some ritual to be involved when consulting the Divining Gospel. From other sources we know something of the rituals that ancient divination could entail. For instance, the person seeking wisdom at a god's shrine was told to pray before the statue of the god prior to throwing knucklebones and consulting the nearby tables of oracular inscriptions. The medieval *Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum* instructs a person to keep vigil, fast, and pray for two days and a night before using its *sortes*. Prior to asking one of the prescribed questions and throwing dice (at the site of the nearest burial ground), the prefatory ritual included holy water and the recitation of the Our Father along with the Creed. Consulting the Psalms *hermeneiai* involved a more modest yet solemn ritual: "while fasting, open up the Psalter and recite the Trisagion." Christianized forms of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* instructed practitioners to have their clients recite a prayer.⁶⁴

In a striking use of the seemingly inevitable opening to John's Gospel (*In principio*), a nineteenth-century Greek *Rhiktologion* manuscript instructs the user to pick up a grain of wheat (πιάνει[ς] ἓνα κόκκον σιταρίου) after rehearsing a host of liturgical prayers. The user makes the sign of the cross three times over the lot selection table provided while reciting the opening words of John, after which they cast the wheat onto the chart (ρίχθεις τὸ σιτάρι...) in order to discern which one of its fifty-eight oracular statements was indicated, presumably by divine

help.⁶⁵ The last example in particular is perhaps rather too late to provide a definite example, but as an analogy it is suggestive. We may expect that consulting a Divining Gospel even in Late Antiquity also entailed a measure of ritual, perhaps nothing more than a simple prayer the practitioner would recite or have the client recite. The ritual may have been up to the practitioner. Indeed, prayers and rituals probably changed over time, especially if we are to assume that people kept using the Syriac codex as a Divining Gospel even after it lost its accompanying instructions (if it ever had any).

Once the prayer and other accompanying ritual had been completed, armed with the querent's question or concern, the practitioner would use a selection device to generate an appropriate *puššāqā* number. For instance, based on the presenting question, he could choose one of the major topics, something that fit the client's concern. If the client were seeking news about a loved one abroad (a typical topic in lot divination texts), a large range of possible *puššāqā* numbers could be seen to fit that query – several *puššāqē* explicitly mention news (ܪܘܣܘܬܐ) while many others offer fitting answers of a more general type. The choice of topic would lead the practitioner to a particular segment of the wheel or section of a chart, filled with the appropriate numbers. We may imagine that the lost opening pages of our Syriac manuscript held such a device, but that is sheer speculation. Spreading the page out flat between them, he could invite the client to toss some small object into that sector, taking whatever number the piece landed on. Having the client point to a number on that page would be even simpler.

Finally, the practitioner would turn to the chosen *puššāqā* in the book and read (or otherwise represent) the statement. (In the case of the bilingual Greek and Coptic versions, the practitioner could choose to read whichever version of the oracle suited the client best – or both, if reading the Greek was seen to enhance the mystique of the statement before reciting the more accessible and mundane vernacular version.) It is not unlikely that the practitioner would also refer to or actually read the accompanying biblical passage at the same time, just as we see prescribed in the Gospel oracles of London, BL Or. 4434. The Gospel segments in the Syriac manuscript tend to be brief and therefore rapidly read aloud, and we may expect that the message and authority of the biblical text constituted part of the oracle. The recitation of Gospel text and the attached *puššāqā* would form the composite answer to the client's concern – or at least the basis and governing

⁶⁴ Rituals for the different sources cited here are in Klingshirn 2002, 96; Meerson 2006, 393, n.18; Parpulov 2014, 310; see also Luijendijk 2014, 58–62.

⁶⁵ Megas, 1958–59, 210.

framework of the answer, for there may have been a great deal more to the practitioner's role than simply mediating the verbal content of the correct oracle, as we will explore in the next chapter.

How the practitioner might correct, excuse, or compensate for the book's inconsistencies and other problems is unclear. A defective sortilege apparatus could cause serious complications for the use of the material. The so-called first *ekdosis* of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* is actually the product of an attempt to make functional a set of the *sortes* that has lost its table of correspondences. The *Sortes Barberiniana*e derive from the *Sortes Astrampsychi* but through the adventures of transmission and revision acquired so many defects that the tool became practically inoperative and was ultimately abandoned.⁶⁶ As we have seen in this chapter, the surviving sources for the Divining Gospels, including the Syriac version, manifest many defects and problems. Yet they are not broken to the extent the muddled *Sortes Barberiniana*e appear to be. In any case, the continued transmission and use of *hermêneiai* books in various languages show that these problems were not insuperable – not for the resourceful practitioner.

Given the difficulties we have enumerated in the structures and contents of the Divining Gospels as they have come down to us, difficulties that must have complicated their use, we must conclude that the crucial key to

their sustained functioning is not to be found in the precision of their mechanisms or even the clarity of their statements. The crucial key was the practitioner. The middle term between the material of the Divining Gospel, including both its *puššāqē* and its Gospel texts, was the practitioner. The Divining Gospel required someone not only to work its mechanism but also to interpret its results, doing so with the concrete questions of a living soul in view.

The foregoing description of the use of the Syriac Divining Gospel is hypothetical but plausible. It makes sense of the data we have in our sources and fits what we know about ancient and late antique sortilege practices. Referring to the non-Syriac versions has produced for us some of the possible techniques for using the Syriac book. This portrait of use helps us contextualize the Divining Gospels but also raises further questions, especially about the role of the practitioner as interpreter and his or her relationship to the client. Those questions in turn remind us of lingering questions about the most basic components of the tool our practitioner uses to access God's divine wisdom and pass it along: a series of "interpretations," adjoined to the text of John, within the context of a sacred book. Those are the three fundamental components of a Divining Gospel, though in practice they must be considered in relation to two other components: the practitioner and the client. Understanding the nature of the synthesis of these five components is the subject of the next chapter.

⁶⁶ Stewart 1995, 135–47; Stewart 2019, 173–74. Despite its defects the *Sortes Barberiniana*e were copied (and thereby preserved) in a state already beyond use, indicating that the book still held some value, even as irreparably damaged goods.

7 Oracles of Biblical Interpretation: Examining the Relationship between Divination, John's Gospel, and the User

7.1 *Puššāqā* as Interpretation

7.1.1 The Vocabulary of Lot Divination

Whatever we make of the oracular statements characterizing the Divining Gospels, we must remember that the ancient sources consistently call them “interpretations.” In Greek, *hermēneia* (ἑρμηνεία), in Syriac *puššāqā* (ܦܘܫܫܩܐ), in Greco-Coptic *ermēnia* (ερμηνία), in Armenian *t'argmanout'iwn* (թարգմանութիւն) and, if our reading of the Latin *sors* 246 is correct, *interpretatio* in Latin.¹

On the one hand, in each instance we have a term that basically means, “interpretation, comment, commentary,” or perhaps, “translation.” On the other hand, it is evident that in the context of these materials the terms are being used in an unusual way, especially when we consider how “interpretation” is typically applied to biblical texts in ancient Christianity. The term clearly has a technical sense in our sources and we would expect it to have held a distinct meaning to the ancient composers and users of the material.

We may presume that the translators chose terms in their respective target languages that they thought would render the Greek word *ἑρμηνεία* (*hermēneia*) appropriately, given the context; in so doing they selected obvious parallels in the various languages – always words meaning “interpretation.” They undoubtedly had respect for the wording of the original oracles and so we are not surprised to find fairly literal renderings in the translations. Yet the translators were not interested only in formal meaning. They also sought to convey verbal content, undoubtedly believing the terms they chose should adequately communicate the sense of the source text. What is the significance of their identifying the oracular statements as “interpretations?”

Other terms were readily available. Although oracles themselves could be very cryptic, the language of ancient lot divination tends to draw on a simple and unexceptional vocabulary. For instance, the term *κλήρος* (*klēros*; “lot”) referred to the practice of seeking special knowledge by casting or drawing lots, or to the outcome of such a practice, i.e. the oracular response, or “lot” itself. The stem *κλήρ-* was productive, lending itself to any number of related

and commonly used Greek word formations, many of which have been borrowed into other languages (including English, e.g. cleromancy). In Latin *sors* is a term basically synonymous with *κλήρος*, also meaning “lot.” It occurs frequently in contexts involving divination, referring both to the drawing of lots as a practice as well as the oracular responses themselves. The plural *sortes* occurs frequently.

Although these terms appear in many non-Christian texts and contexts, they routinely occur in Christian ones as well, including the Bible, where the casting of lots is viewed positively in some contexts. As we saw in Chapter Two, although Christian scripture does not emphatically sanction divination, lot divination does occur among the faithful and is characterized positively in a number of instances. For example, we find the aforementioned vocabulary in the description of Samuel's determination of David as king (1 Regn. 10,20), where LXX uses a form of *κληρώ* (*κατακληροῦται*) and the Vulgate has *sors* (*cecidit sors*). The casting of lots to select Judas Iscariot's replacement among the Apostles was received by some Christians as an important precedent for the practice of sacred divination and part of the rationale for the use of what is called *Sortes Apostolorum*.² The Greek text the passage has *κλήρος* and the Vulgate has *sors* (Act. 1,26). We consider terms such as *κλήρος* and *sors* to be suitable candidates for use in the Divining Gospels, yet these are not the expressions we find in their Greek and Latin sources.

In Syriac, the term *ܦܫܫܩܐ* (*pešā*) and the related *ܦܫܫܩܐ* (*pesā*) denote a portion or piece, therefore also a lot, such as in the game Roman soldiers played when dividing Jesus' garments at the crucifixion or, more positively, in the Apostles' selection of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot (Act. 1,26; Matt. 27,35). A less positively received term is the noun *ܗܠܩܐ* (*helqā*), deriving from the stem *ܗܠܩ* (*hlaq*), meaning to allot or destine and typically involving the idea of fate. The term occurs in numerous contexts where divination is in view; in the plural it typically indicates lots or oracles.³ In Christian texts, words derived from *ܗܠܩ* are typically used of unapproved non-Christian practices such as astrology, yet *ܦܫܫܩܐ* and *ܦܫܫܩܐ*, like *κλήρος* and

1 See under *Puššāqā* 248 in Chapter Five.

2 See Klingshirn 2002, 92, 100.

3 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1.1294; 2.3183, 3206.

sors, are more neutral, for they also receive sympathetic use in Christian contexts, depending on the context and circumstance of the use the text is describing. Their occurrence in scripture and elsewhere commend them as suitable terms for use in Christian divinatory materials such as we find in the Divining Gospels, yet these are not the terms we find in the Syriac version. The first of two lot divination texts in the Syriac manuscript London, BL Or. 4434 (see 6.4.1) uses the term *peṣā* (ܩܦܫܐ) in the title, calling itself *ḥḥāqā d-ḥāliqā d-ḥāliqā* (“The Lots of the Holy Apostles”). The manuscript was copied in the nineteenth century. Though this usage is late it demonstrates the viability of the term in a modern Syriac Christian context.

The composers and translators of these sortilege tools had available to them perfectly suitable terms, expressions that would connote more directly and in a more familiar way the divinatory nature of the material. Of course, we do not know what the vocabulary of any prefatory or instructional material to the Divining Gospel might have been, since none survives in our manuscripts. Perhaps the imagined instruction manual originally used the term *klēros* (or *ḥḥāqā*) in its description, but this seems unlikely in view of the persistent use of *hermēneia* (*hermēneia*) and literal renderings such as *puššāqā* (ܩܦܫܐܩܐ) in the *apparati* we actually have. It is unremarkable that a Syriac translator would choose to render the Greek *hermēneiai* as *puššāqā*, but why would someone prefer to call these statements *hermēneiai* in the first place?

We should recall that the Divining Gospels are not the only Christian lot divination texts that use the term this way. Calling oracular statements that accompany passages of scripture *hermēneiai* becomes something of a convention. We encounter the same vocabulary in the *Rhiktologia* and some Psalms manuscripts, both of which have oracular statements called *hermēneiai* that are connected to portions of scripture (see 2.3.6). In the Psalms manuscripts, each psalm has an accompanying “interpretation;” our earliest extant examples are in manuscripts dated to the eleventh century.⁴ The Greek *Rhiktologia* tradition boasts multiple recensions, portions of which go back at least to the fifth century.⁵ The *Rhiktologia* dub their Gospel excerpts *kephalaia* (i.e. “chapters”) and some editions use the term *hermēneia* (*hermēneia*) to describe the oracle accompanying a particular Gospel excerpt. However, the editions that do this are in late manuscripts, not in the earliest evidence.⁶ The fifth-century Greek papyrus fragment,

Firenze, Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli” PSI Congr.XVII 5 that we described in Chapter Two (see 2.3.6.1) uses the formula, *δηλοῖ τὸ κεφάλαιον* (“the *kephalaion* signifies...”) rather than *ἐρμηνεία* (*hermēneia*) to introduce its oracles.

In Syriac, the similar yet untitled second lot collection in London, BL Or. 4434 calls its oracular statements *puššāqā* (fol. 58v–78r), as we find in the Syriac version of the Divining Gospel; yet the manuscript is also a modern production (see 6.4.1 above).

These oracular tools that have Gospel excerpts or the Psalms attest to the continuing designation of their *sortes* as “interpretations” but due to their late occurrence they do not help us understand the reasons for the early use of the term in this way, especially in the Divining Gospels as such. In fact, in the Divining Gospels we appear to be encountering the early use of the expression “interpretation” to designate this type of oracular statement, and it is that usage that helped establish the convention on which the later lot divination texts draw when they call their statements “interpretations” (see 2.3.6.2 above).

7.1.2 Divining as Interpretation

We could speculate that the original drafters of the material chose the term *ἐρμηνεία* in order to cloak the oracular purpose of the statements or at least to create some distance between the sortilege apparatus and well-known non-Christian contemporary alternatives. However, the positive use of terms like *κλήρος* and *ܩܦܫܐ* in Christian sources, including scripture, lead us to question whether the composer would feel the need to misdirect users about the nature of the material. The proliferation of other Christian or christianized late antique and medieval sortilege materials openly transmitted as *κλήροι* or *sortes* reinforces these doubts (though we recognize that sortilege was not universally approved in Christian contexts; see 2.4). In the opening of the Coptic *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* we are not surprised to find the borrowed *κλήρος* (*klēros*) referring to the book’s lots.⁷ Furthermore, calling the statements *hermēneiai* provides only a very thin disguise, since any reading or use of the material would make its divinatory nature quickly evident.

It is more likely that composers chose the term *hermēneia* for positive reasons, i.e. they saw the statements functioning as a kind of interpretation and sought to convey that sense about their meaning and import, for both practitioners and clients. In particular, the term evokes a strong

⁴ Parpulov 2014, 56, 75; Canart 2011, 15.

⁵ Naldini 1983, 12–15; Luijendijk/Klingshirn 2019, 46–47.

⁶ Canart/Rintaudi 1984, 87; Drexel 1941, 311–18.

⁷ Luijendijk 2014, 99.

sense of connection to the biblical text and the statements are called *hermēneiai* precisely to evoke that connection.

As a rule, oracles rely upon or derive from a recognized authority. In addition to the exceptionally famous oracle sites such as that of Apollo at Delphi, in antiquity it was common for seekers to visit shrines devoted to particular deities in order to consult the god or the god's messenger for wisdom or prophetic direction. Ostraca recovered from a shrine at the *praesidium* at Dios mention such names as Apollo, Kronos, and Leto.

Reverence for deities came to be applied to Christian saints as well, some of whom were consulted as oracles in a manner similar to the ways people had previously consulted the gods, especially in Egypt. At the pilgrimage shrine of the martyred St. Colluthus in Antinoë, oracle procedures developed that utilized methods from traditional Egyptian ticket oracles. Visitors to the shrine would write their questions for Colluthus in both positive and negative forms, receiving back from the attendant the answer the saint approved. The popular Books of Fate also offered their guidance in association with revered divine agents, assuming particular "mantles of authority...: Mediterranean gods in one late antique version, biblical patriarchs in a medieval version, and the Christian saints in the *Sortes Sanctorum*."⁸ The *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* claim Mary and the angelic herald Gabriel as its authority.

By using the term "interpretation," the Divining Gospels evoke a particular kind of authority for their oracles. Diviners were held to be interpreters of the gods.⁹ In Christian contexts, scripture itself could be seen as an interpretation of God's mind, yet its long and complicated texts invited further interpretation. Christian practitioners and users of the Divining Gospels were familiar with interpretations of scripture such as one might find in Christian preaching or in the literature of biblical commentaries. To interpret scripture was to explicate its meaning, with implications for one's beliefs, decisions, and life. Christian homilists and theologians did so because of their respect for the authority of the biblical message. They believed that the Word of God spoke through the scripture and that scripture's authority derived ultimately from the authority of God. Interpretations of scripture were intended to represent that testimony, explicating the divine message and unpacking its implications for the readers or hearers.

Techniques of *Sortes biblicae* by which a user referred randomly to passages of scripture presumed that those

passages could convey a divine message responding to the inquirer's concern. Yet the significance of the selected text for one's concerns was not always obvious. It required interpretation. The means by which one would derive meaning from a random biblical passage to address the seeker's inquiry is a form of *hermēneia*, whether conducted by the seeker or an intermediate practitioner. Augustine's seemingly random selection of Rom. 13,13–14 required his pondering its import for him in that moment in order to yield a meaningful result (*Confessiones* 8,29; see 2.1 above). Divine messages of all sorts required interpretation.

It is easy to see how one might wish to characterize the oracles of the Divining Gospels as "interpretations," for that is what they were, if we remember their deliberate connection to portions of scripture. Of course, any attempt to make sense of a text, biblical or otherwise, is an act of interpretation. But by designating oracular statements connected with biblical passages as "interpretations," the composer of the apparatus evokes a strong sense of the material's connectedness to scripture, making particular claims about their source and the authority on which they rely. In the language of early Christian writers like Origen, going back to Philo, scripture consists of "divine oracles" and "sacred oracles" (θεία λόγια, ἱεροὶ χρησμοί), i.e. declarations from God that convey knowledge and truth to people.¹⁰ The "divine oracles" in scripture beg interpretation, but the entire enterprise of reading and interpreting the oracles of scripture rests upon the authority of God as source and arbiter of true knowledge.

Calling the *sortes* "interpretations" grounds their authority in scripture and therefore in God. The *hermēneiai* offer themselves as divine messages, ultimately deriving from God, at least in their import, but also effectively letting Christian scripture stand in the place of God as the source of the message that the *hermēneiai* explicate. This does not necessarily eliminate the need for a living human interpreter, for at whatever point one intersects the message – whether the text of scripture, the text of the *hermēneia* or both together – the verbal message still requires interpretation. We will return to that later. For now we simply wish to notice that by calling the oracles "interpretations" the composer or editor is evoking scripture as the channel of their authority, just as by incorporating the *hermēneiai* into a special edition of John the creators of the Divining Gospel are evoking the powerful mystery of that book as sacred object.

⁸ Frankfurter, in the introduction to Papini 1998, 394; see illustrative texts and discussion in Frankfurter 2000, 469–71.

⁹ See Frankfurter 2007, 119–20.

¹⁰ Sheridan 2015, 40, 221–23.

Essentially, the seeker comes to scripture for the answer to his or her query, receiving a passage of scripture and its “interpretation” as a response, confident that the resulting course of action (or inaction) is effectively an application of scripture. By calling the oracular statements *hermêneiai/puššāqē*, the Divining Gospels construct the oracular message from God as a mediated thing, not linked to geographic place as with some oracles, nor by means of particular saints like Philoxenus or Colluthus, but mediated through Christian scripture – or at least through the canonical Gospel of John. Yet even the reliance on John is not so explicit as we see in some lot divination practices, like the direct appeal to Philoxenus at his shrine, or the name-dropping we encounter in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* or the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary*. The reliance on John is both pronounced and understated.

Nothing about the material in the Divining Gospels draws our attention to John the Apostle as a source of knowledge or intercessor. It is the authority of the canonical Gospel itself (and possibly of the codex carrying it) that is in play here, not the Apostle personally. John the Apostle is nowhere pictured as the source of the material. No evidence we have suggests that anyone conceived of the *puššāqē* as secret messages from the Apostle or even that the Apostle played any role in composing them or placing them in his Gospel.¹¹ Instead, the oracular material stands at a slight distance from the Gospel text; it offers “interpretations” of the authoritative text of the Apostle, ostensibly derived from and dependent on the text, but also separate from it. And yet the material is embedded directly in the Gospel at the same time.

This sense of the *sortes* functioning as “interpretations” applies irrespective of any verbal or thematic correspondences between the statements and the Gospel text. When Heraclius consulted the Gospel and “found a passage instructing him to winter in Albania” (see 3.1 above) we may be sure that some degree of interpretation was involved in order to divine that message from the selected text, whether on his part or that of his religious advisors. We know next to nothing about the mechanism by which Heraclius made use of the Gospel text to find his answer, but we should be hard pressed to locate any

Gospel passages in scripture with clear and direct information about wintering an army in Albania. Perhaps Heraclius posed a very simple binary question, requiring a yes-or-no answer. Whatever the wording of the question or mechanism of sortilege, we must acknowledge at least some degree of distance in the correlation between the content of Heraclius’ query and the content of the supposed answer as mediated by the Gospel text. Yet we may still consider the answer that the chronicler Theophanes Confessor reports for us to be an *interpretation* of the biblical text, a specific explication of the text’s meaning. An act of interpretation closes that distance.

The *puššāqē* may be properly considered “interpretations” merely by being correlated with passages of biblical text with the expectation that they will be read as such, even if no other substantial connections between them and the associated passages are apparent. The *puššāqē* interpret the Gospel text; in turn, the client’s resulting action may be considered an interpretation of the *puššāqē* as well. However, in the case of the Divining Gospels, the connections between the oracular statements and their associated segments of scripture are more substantial and not entirely arbitrary. Long contested, the nature of the statements as essentially hermeneutical as well as divinatory is clearly evident due to the breadth of material we now have available to us.

7.2 Interpreting the Gospel of John

We have already observed that once modern scholars recognized that the *hermêneiai* were not interpretations in the merely usual sense – e.g. excerpts from patristic commentary on John – the consensus was established quickly that the statements really have nothing to do with the contents of John’s Gospel (see 3.2). Although in 1988 Metzger declared, “the *opinio communis* seems to be that such ἐρμηνεῖαι are a kind of rudimentary commentary on the sacred text”¹² – an *opinio* he quickly refutes in favor of seeing them as a “means of telling fortunes” – it is difficult to find many scholars after Stegmüller supporting the view that they are simply interpretive. Quecke insists, “they are oracular responses that have nothing to do with the Bible text they accompany.”¹³

Numerous factors militate against viewing the statements as interpretive in the usual sense. A comparison with any patristic commentary on scripture reveals immediately

¹¹ We must allow the possibility that one or more origin narratives circulated with the Divining Gospel material (whether written or oral) such as we find with the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, perhaps involving the Apostle or other persons in the tale, but we have no evidence of such a narrative in any of our manuscripts or other accounts. Even a fairly brief title could convey some sense of connection to the Apostle, similar to what we see in the incipit to the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary*. Unfortunately, our sources of the Divining Gospels preserve no such titles.

¹² Metzger 1988b, 162.

¹³ Quecke 1977, 179: “Orakelantworten sind, die mit dem Bibeltext, den sie begleiten, nichts zu tun haben.”

that in the *hermêneiai* of the Divining Gospels we are dealing with something else. The statements do not cite scripture (barring an important exception discussed below), barely even alluding to it. They lack clear and explicit references to details in the biblical text. They do not name any of the characters in John's Gospel or any part of the Bible. They contain few religious or distinctly theological expressions. They have no liturgical content. By contrast, their stylistic and thematic resonances with oracular material in many other lot divination texts is well documented. Outtier reflects what became the actual consensus when he characterizes the *hermêneiai*: "despite this title, they are in no way biblical commentaries, but rather oracular responses."¹⁴

A dichotomous approach to the material has classified it either as interpretive or, more commonly and in keeping with the established consensus, as divinatory. Long ago Harris expressed what has probably been the view of many since, when he concludes that the sortilege material was incorporated into Gospel codices mainly to purloin an air of sanctified authority or religious sanction, not because of any integral relationship with the Gospel contents. Regarding the *sortes* in Codex Bezae and Codex Sangermanensis, Harris wryly remarks, "the sentences are placed in the margins of the Gospel and by this means acquire the religious character which they certainly are not otherwise overburdened with."¹⁵

In Chapter Six we reaffirmed the essentially divinatory nature of the material, reinforcing that aspect of the consensus (see 6.1). However, we also saw that some scholars have good reason to express their reluctance at dismissing entirely an interpretive function for the statements – not just in the broadly hermeneutical sense we discussed in the previous section, but in a way that ties the statements more directly to the contents of the Gospel. The presentation of a larger and more complete body of material than has been available before (Chapter Five) provides us with the opportunity to examine more closely several types of connection with the Gospel that deepen our appreciation of the *puššāqē* as interpretations.

7.2.1 Thematic Resonances with the Gospel of John

Porter advocates a view that sees *hermêneia* manuscripts as evidence of "the robust theologically interpretive envi-

ronment of the early Church," emphasizing what he sees as the interpretive nature of the statements. He is convinced that "the statements are neither strictly commentary nor simply unattached oracular pronouncements nor part of an oracular book, but biblically motivated and connected reflections on the Johannine text, utilizing similar appropriate language."¹⁶ Porter does not definitively deny that the statements have oracular stylistic *qualities*, even if he is skeptical about allowing them an originally oracular *function*. He challenges the divinatory explanations as unproven and deserving of closer examination. More direct than his criticism of the divinatory explanations of the material is his insistence that the material was originally intended to be interpretive.

Porter focuses mainly on the papyri sources, pointing out that the statements in Codex Bezae have the potential to mislead us, if we allow their late and disconnected inclusion in the bottom margins of Mark's Gospel to define the nature of the statements as "unattached oracular pronouncements." As late secondary additions to Bezae's margins, they may be intended to function somehow as oracles, but the manner of their occurrence in Bezae does not necessarily reflect the original purpose of the material. For that, we should look to the earlier sources. In view of the papyri evidence we have and seen in their early context as a component of books having the Gospel of John (including Codex Sangermanensis), the statements invite fresh scrutiny for the purpose of more accurately determining their original function.

Porter's own investigation of the material along these lines is preliminary and merely suggestive. Apart from the early codicological evidence that repeatedly places the statements in manuscripts of John's Gospel, his analysis amounts to little more than some observations about a few shared themes and some common vocabulary. For instance, the *hermêneiai* often mention "faith," a pervasive concept in John's Gospel. "Truth," "salvation," and "glory" are also recurring themes in both John and the statements.¹⁷ To the rather limited corpus of statements at Porter's disposal we may add the fuller set that we find in the Syriac version. We cannot take the Syriac to give a precise accounting of the original Greek apparatus, but as we have seen, the Syriac appears to be largely reflective of what the early *hermêneia* books had, and therefore probably provides a fair glimpse of its characteristic themes. As illustrated in Table 7.1, What we find in the *puššāqē* are

¹⁴ Outtier 1993, 181: "malgré ce titre, ne sont aucunement des commentaires bibliques, mais bien des réponses oraculaires."

¹⁵ Harris 1901, 45–46.

¹⁶ Porter 2013, 63.

¹⁷ Porter 2007, 579; Porter 2013, 63; see also the recent treatment of major Johannine themes in Bauckham 2015, 21–130.

recurring resonances with themes that may be considered Johannine due to their prominence in the Gospel:

Table 7.1: Johannine themes reflected in the *puššāqē*.¹⁸

faith, belief	<i>Puššāqē</i> 24, 31, 46, 56, 74, 83, 90, 93, 94, 155, 175, 236, 295, 307
truth, assurance	<i>Puššāqē</i> 33, 37, 108, 222, 244, 251
salvation, life	<i>Puššāqē</i> 10, 60, 77, 84, 139, 140, 177, 198, 261, 286, 288, 296
glory	<i>Puššāqē</i> 12, 35, 92, 103, 108, 112, 148, 186, 189, 192, 210, 255, 273, 289, 299
testimony, witness	<i>Puššāqē</i> 74, 116, 117, 190, 233, 269, 277, 294, 301, 302
revelation	<i>Puššāqē</i> 50, 71, 100, 106, 136, 141, 151, 152, 167, 203, 238, 242, 234, 247, 270, 293, 305

Porter did not have access to the range of statements we have before us now but his sampling was sufficient to reveal what we also detect here: a quality within many statements, that Porter calls their “Johannine flavour.” However, these thematic resonances with John do not necessarily point to John as the inspiration or origin of the content of the statements. For one thing, these themes show up in other divinatory material as well, in sources that have no connection to John, such as the Psalms *hermêneiai* or even the *Sortes Astrampsychi*. We should also notice that a number of other prominent Johannine themes are basically missing from or at least dimly represented in the *puššāqē*, such as light, darkness, love, death, knowledge, friendship, oneness and unity, and especially the more distinctly Christian ones, such as Jesus Christ, Lamb of God, Son of God, Son of Man, and so forth. Although many of the *hermêneiai* resonate with Johannine themes and vocabulary, they do so in a selective way that appears to be governed at least partly by something outside the prevalent patterns of John's narrative.

Porter acknowledges that the statements are not directly biblical. He seems to recognize that their qualities distinguish them from the usual sorts of interpretation we find in patristic commentary and other early texts explicating scripture. In his words, “it is easy to see a conceptual, if not a verbal, link between the biblical passage and the ἐμπνεῖα statement.”¹⁹ Porter proposes that we see the statements as brief summaries of portions of John's Gospel, the stylized idiom of which is an “oracular biblical language” inspired by the elevated supernatural elements of

John's Gospel. In short, Porter suggests that scholars have made too much of the statements' oracular style, since they were probably not originally meant to function as oracles, and too little of their interpretive function, since their vocabulary and themes often resonate with those of John.

However, we would suggest that for the sake of drawing attention to their interpretive features Porter has made too little of the statements' divinatory qualities. Perhaps this is because his study takes little account of the parallels in ancient lot divination literature, since they too reflect the very same themes occurring in the *hermêneiai*, as we saw in Chapter Six (see 6.1–2). The oracular tone of the *hermêneiai* derives from the long-standing conventions of lot divination texts rather than from John's mystical style as such. The tone and a number of the themes are indeed compatible with the Gospel of John, a Gospel that lends itself to mystical speculation and supernatural use, as we have seen (see 1.5). As we shall explore further, the contents and even structure of John have surely impacted the selection, content, and placement of the *hermêneiai*, but that does not negate the convincing evidence we have already presented for seeing the statements and the books in which they appear as having an essentially divinatory function. From the beginning of the statements' attachment to segments of John we have “Divining Gospels” rather than just running commentary on the Gospel text.²⁰ In this regard, they are similar to the Psalms *hermêneiai* and the *Rhiktologia*, in which we find oracles that appear to correlate in theme or tone with the biblical text to which they are attached (see 2.3.6). Or perhaps we should say that the Psalms *hermêneiai* and the *Rhiktologia* are like the Divining Gospel, since the former are later and possibly drew the inspiration for their structures and function from the latter.

Although Porter makes too little of the oracular function of the *hermêneiai*, his emphasis on their interpretive qualities is very helpful and allows us to remedy the long-standing neglect of the statements' connections to the Gospel text. Taken together, the statements do not carry a comprehensive repertoire of Johannine themes. They are not directly biblical in content (barring an exception, discussed below). The statements borrow extensively from the idiom of lot divination texts. Yet strong hints of thematic resonances and terminological associations, in addition to the plain fact that the material repeatedly occurs with copies of John, force us to explore more fully the connections between the *hermêneiai* and the text of John's Gospel.

¹⁸ See Table 6.2 for a broader thematic survey of the *puššāqē*.

¹⁹ Porter 2007, 579.

²⁰ Codex Bezae's use of the *hermêneiai* neglects their original connection to John but recognizes their original role as oracles.

7.2.2 Direct Quotation from John's Gospel

We have repeatedly rehearsed the conclusions of others that the statements are not biblical, i.e. they do not quote scripture. We should, however, notice that a few *puššāqē* use language that is at least reminiscent of scripture, beyond thematic resonances that we have detected between many of them and John's Gospel. Near the very end of the series, *Puššāqā* 307 reads, "Put confidence in God and do not listen to a (human) person and you will have cause to rejoice," expressing an idea one may find reflected in any of several biblical passages about trusting in God rather than humans. *Puššāqā* 304 reads, "Guard your word that you have in your heart," seemingly echoing Ps. 118,11 (119,11): "I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you" (NRSV). Whereas the Psalm is distinctly theological and refers to God's word (typically understood by ancient Christian interpreters to be scripture), the *puššāqā* speaks only of a general "word," perhaps referring to the statement of the oracle. Yet ܩܠܡܐ could also be construed in the sense of a subject or matter. One striking adaptation of scripture occurs in *Puššāqā* 277: "By the testimony of two or three it is able to stand." This oracle deliberately recalls the use in Matt. 18,16 and 2 Cor. 13,1 of Deut. 19,15: "Only on the evidence of two or three witnesses shall a charge be sustained" (NRSV). Due to its juridical tenor, the biblical passage was easily adapted into the *puššāqē*, which often have legal judgments in view.

Understanding and applying the aforementioned oracles requires no knowledge of scripture, but the statements might acquire richer significance or even authority for those who knew the non-Johannine biblical contexts they echoed. Or perhaps the composers or editors of these materials were simply being affected by the familiar idiom of scripture as they worked. It is surprising that more of the statements do not exhibit these sorts of adaptations. Although it is common for the *puššāqē* to display thematic resonances with John's Gospel, this manner of echoing distinct biblical contexts is actually rare in the *puššāqē*.

However, one statement stands out in this regard, for it quotes Ioh. 5,14 directly. Harris drew attention to this *sors*, finding in it conclusive evidence that the "archetypal system" on which Codex Bezae and Codex Sangermanensis (Paris, BnF, Lat. 11553) ultimately draw must have been copied into the margins of John's Gospel (despite Bezae's use of the Markan margins instead).²¹ Numbered sixty-two

in the Latin, the statement occurs in the sixty-fifth position of Bezae's series:

Codex Bezae (fol. 318r)

ερμηνία ἴδε υἱὸς γεγονας μίκετι ἀμαρτανε ἴνα μὴ τῷ χίρον σου γίνετε

(65) Interpretation: Behold you have become well; sin no longer, so that something worse may not happen to you.

Codex Sangermanensis (fol. 126vb)

lxii ecce sanus factus es iam noli peccare

62 Behold, you have been made well; sin no longer.

When we compare the Greek text of John or its counterpart from the Latin Vulgate the parallels are unmistakable:

Ioh. 5,14

ἴδε υἱὸς γεγονας, μηκέτι ἀμαρτανε, ἴνα μὴ χεῖρόν σοι τι γένηται.²²

Behold you have become well; sin no longer, so that something worse may not happen to you.

*Ecce sanus factus es; iam noli peccare, ne deterius tibi aliquid contingat.*²³

Behold, you have been made well; sin no longer, so that something worse may not befall you.

Nowhere else in the *hermêneiai* do we find such a direct biblical quotation.

In Harris' view the statement has "crept into" the *sortes* from the Gospel text itself, due to a scribal error. Although in Codex Sangermanensis the statement adjoins Ioh. 4,43–45, it stands in the gutter of the page (fol. 126vb), where no other *sortes* are, and it is possible that in an exemplar it had been located close to the text directly opposite, on folio 127ra where we find Ioh. 5,10, a passage much closer to the verse from which the quotation certainly derives. Harris thought that in the process of copying *sortes* into the margins alongside the biblical text, a scribe had inadvertently copied this part of the Gospel into the margin, thereby accidentally inserting it into the series of *sortes*, after which it got passed along as an oracle. Due to the infelicities and irregularities of placement and sequence that constantly beset the sortilege material in Sangermanensis, the *sors* ended up in a peculiar place in the manuscript. As for the Greek series

Wilkinson), only Porter mentions this *hermêneia* in particular, basically reiterating Harris (Porter 2007, 578).

²² Text from NA²⁸.

²³ Text from Stuttgart Vulgate (Fischer/Weber/Gryson 2007).

²¹ Harris 1901, 70, 64, n.1. Of those who focus on the integral connections between the *hermêneiai* and John's Gospel (Porter, Cirafesi,

that Harris knew in Codex Bezae, they are completely detached from their original Johannine locale to be incorporated into the lower margins of pages containing Mark’s Gospel instead. Though useful for understanding the statements’ early *sequence*, Codex Bezae provides no help in determining original *locations*.

If Harris is right about the statement’s accidental origins among the *hermêneiai*, we can explain the retention and perpetuation of the error on the basis of the fact that the statement works well as an oracle. Like many *sortes*, it offers counsel in the second person singular. Although the *hermêneiai* do not discuss healing as such – a topic not uncommon in other lot divination texts – this statement may be seen as evoking themes of salvation or well-being, which are common themes in the *hermêneiai*. It also warns against wrong-doing (“sin”), involving another recurring topic in the *hermêneiai*. Like many oracles, the statement presumes that something bad has happened or is threatening the addressee (“something worse...”) and that something else may or may not be going to happen to the person. The exclamation, “Behold!” stands out as uncharacteristic, for it is not typical of lot divination texts and occurs nowhere else in our material, but the rest of the statement, albeit scripture, echoes what we find elsewhere in the *hermêneiai*. The Latin *sors* is abbreviated so that it omits the ominous warning about “something worse.”²⁴

As Harris points out, the occurrence of this statement at a similar point in both the Greek and Latin series shows that we are dealing with something that has become part of the tradition on which both draw. Whether accidental in origin or not, the statement has become a *hermêneia* in the series alongside the others. The Syriac version reinforces this conclusion, having its own form of the statement in a place and form like that of the others, but especially the Latin:

ܘܒܗܘܢ ܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ.

62 Interpretation: Behold, you are well; do not sin.

Puššāqā 62 occurs with Ioh. 5,1–3a in the Syriac version. In form it is nearly identical to the Peshitta text of the relevant part of the nearby Ioh. 5,14:

²⁵ ܘܒܗܘܢ ܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ.
Behold, you are well; sin no longer.

Nearly identical, but not exactly. It is worth noticing that the Syriac *puššāqā* omits ܘܢܘܢ (“longer, again”), thereby making the statement less like the biblical text as we find it throughout the Peshitta tradition (including the text of Ioh. 5,14 as it appears on folio 16r in London, BL, Add. 17,119) and more like other *puššāqā* in form. The *hermêneiai* offer counsel and predictions but do not normally bring the sort of moral judgment on past action that the inclusion of ܘܢܘܢ, “no longer” (or μηκέτι or *iam*) implies. The Greek form as we have it in Codex Bezae is most like scripture and least like *hermêneiai*; the abbreviated form in the Latin and Syriac read more like a typical succinct *hermêneia*, but the Syriac particularly so, due to its straightforward instruction and absence of ܘܢܘܢ (“longer, again”).

Although our information is so sketchy that any conclusions remain tentative, in comparison to the other statements the Syriac form of the statement commends itself as closest to the original form. Not only is it earlier in date, but it is the harder and shorter reading, easily ranking as the reading that best explains the others. It is not hard to see how that an abbreviated form of the biblical text used as a *hermêneia*, e.g. ἴδε ὑγιῆς γέγονας, μη ἁμάρτανε (“Behold, you have become well; do not sin”), could in the process of transmission have been subjected to expansion and revision that made it harmonize better with the familiar passage in the nearby context, producing what we have in Codex Bezae – a reading practically synonymous with the Greek Gospel text.

The Latin corroborates the short form as well, though perhaps its Greek source had already changed μὴ to μηκέτι before the Latin was produced, or a Latin scribe later added *iam* to the statement at some point, so that it would harmonize with scripture. In any case, it is harder to explain the short and revised version we find in the Syriac on the basis of the longer and more biblically consonant forms. It is perhaps just plausible that an editor shortened the longer form, revising it in order to make it conform better to the style of the rest of the *hermêneiai*, but this would not be the simplest explanation. Confining ourselves to the evidence we have, the most plausible (yet far from certain) explanation is that the Syriac represents

²⁴ The Latin *sors* agrees precisely with the biblical text of Ioh. 5,14 in the Latin manuscript as well (Paris, BnF, lat. 11553; fol. 127rb); its agreement with the Vulgate has already been noted.

²⁵ In the Peshitta the full passage reads, ܘܒܗܘܢ ܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ. ܘܒܗܘܢ ܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ ܕܘܢܘܢ. (“Behold, you are well; sin no longer, so that something worse than before will not happen to you”). Text from Pusey/Gwilliam 1901.

(*hermêneia*) of the scripture in the form of an oracle counselling the person to desist from their sins and from the action under consideration. The set offers two more oracles as well – one from a series affiliated with Daniel and the other from that of the Apostles, both offering foreboding counsel.

It is evident from the example that the oracles of this source are different from those of the Divining Gospels. In particular, as we see elsewhere in the *Rhiktologia* tradition, the *puššāqē* of London, BL Or. 4434 are longer and more elaborate, though their basic function and messages are similar to what we find in the Divining Gospels. As we have already noted, the manuscript in question is modern, probably based on an Arabic original. We certainly do not see a direct link between *Puššāqā* 27 of London, BL Or. 4434 and *Puššāqā* 62 and its parallels in the Divining Gospels. Yet the former demonstrates the interest that Ioh. 5,17 could provoke for use in lot divination, even outside the Divining Gospel tradition. This further reinforces the possibility that the statement, especially as it occurs in the Syriac version of *Puššāqā* 62, was originally intended to be an oracle and is not a mistake that inadvertently crept into the series.

Whether the statement betrays an editorial mishap or was intentional, we must admit that it stands apart from other *hermêneiai* in the Divining Gospels due to its strongly biblical phrasing. The suggestion that it was intentional does not solve the mystery as to why this passage was chosen for such adaptation and others were not. However, whether the result of accident or intentional as we propose here, *Puššāqā* 62 further highlights the integral connections binding the sortilege material to the contents of John's Gospel.

7.2.3 Oracles at Home in John's Gospel

The adaptation of Ioh. 5,14 into the *hermêneiai* points to the integral link between John and the divinatory apparatus. Due to its special character, the Gospel of John provides an exceptionally good home for lot divination materials, in much the way that the same Gospel provides exceptionally good verbal material for charms and amulets (see 1.5 above). A certain reverence for this Gospel's mysteries commended the extraordinary ritual use of both its texts and the material codices bearing those texts.

The *puššāqē* were meant to draw upon the aura of John's potency for their own effectiveness. Yet this type of relationship between the *sortes* and the Gospel of John need not presume much beyond shared locations on a page or within a book. As oracular statements of divine

wisdom, the *puššāqē* derive special authority simply by being associated with the Gospel of John and inhabiting the same codex. This aspect of the relationship does not require that we see more sophisticated connections between the content of the statements and the content of the Gospel text, as the term *puššāqā/hermêneia* would seem to imply.

Harris (rightly) convinced that the *hermêneiai* he studied in Codex Bezae and Codex Sangermanensis had ancestral ties to ancient copies of John's Gospel. However, apart from acknowledging one or two accidental incursions of John's text into the *sortes* (e.g. Ioh. 5,14) he does not perceive a deeper connection between the Gospel and the *hermêneiai*.

As we have seen, many researchers have denied any such relationship, maintaining that the oracles' relationship to the Gospel text is best described as merely arbitrary. Metzger represents these views and the essence of their reasoning: "[t]hat they are not intended as exegetical comments on the Scripture text given above on the page will be obvious to anyone who compares any *hermeneia* with the content of the passage from John given on that page."²⁹ Given what scholars of late antique Christianity had come to expect from texts having overt biblical interpretation, this is an understandable viewpoint. Yet it is ultimately unsatisfying, especially in view of the much more complete evidence now available to us.

Convinced that the label *hermêneia* must imply some sort of interpretive action, Porter detects thematic resonances between the statements and the Gospel text on the basis of a few pieces of evocative vocabulary. His rejection of the statements' divinatory function is faulty, but his insistence that we look closely for deep connections between John and the *hermêneiai* is sound, even if he does not actually conduct such a search himself.

Views of the *hermêneiai* have nearly always been presented in binary terms: either they are oracles for use in lot divination or they have integral connection to the Gospel text and are therefore a form of running commentary, exegetical or liturgical.³⁰ But we need not choose between the two. What if the statements were oracular *and* interpretive – not just in the broadly hermeneutical sense we discussed above (see 7.1.2) but in ways that rely specifically on the contents of John's Gospel? Certain features of the oracles' content and placement indicate that is in fact the

²⁹ Metzger 1988b, 166–67.

³⁰ See Naether 2010, 309–10.

- Ioh. 11,16–19
 .ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ [መዘ] [168] Interpretation: Make petition and the matter will turn out for you.
- Ioh. 11,20–23
 .ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ [መዘ] [169] Interpretation: Your prayer is heard.
- Ioh. 11,24–25
 .ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ [መዘ] [170] Interpretation: Wait a few days.
- Ioh. 11,26–29a
 .ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ [መዘ] 171 Interpretation: Through supplication the matter will turn out for you.
- Ioh. 11,29b–30
 .ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ [መዘ] 172 Interpretation: Give the good matter or gift-offering that you promised.
- Ioh. 11,31–32
 .ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ [መዘ] 173 Interpretation: Your matter will turn out plainly.
- Ioh. 11,33–35
 .ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ [መዘ] 174 Interpretation: You will be heard in this matter.
- Ioh. 11,36–39
 .ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ [መዘ] 175 Interpretation: Be confident that this matter will turn out.
- Ioh. 11,40–43
 .ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ [መዘ] 176 Interpretation: Make petition and it will turn out.
- Ioh. 11,44–46
 .ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ ገገሰገሰ [መዘ] 177 Interpretation: A good salvation.

It is not the case that *puššāqē* of similar content or outlook always congregate together in a passage. They tend to be more distributed. Yet nearly every statement in this series offers the client hope of a good resolution or salvation. In that sense, Ioh. 11 makes a very comfortable home for this series of oracles. Even the instruction to “wait a few days” (*Puššāqā* 170) implies things will go well if the client is patient. Several *puššāqē* focus specifically on the matter of being heard, with the assurance that prayerful petitions will find their mark so that things will turn out in accordance with the client’s

request (*Puššāqē* 168–69, 171, 174, 176). These statements resonate with the supplicatory posture we experience in the narrative, expressed towards Jesus on the part of Lazarus’ grieving sisters, Martha and Mary. The sisters see Jesus as a source of help and an object of faith. The subject of confidence or faith is important in *Puššāqā* 175, echoing the emphasis on faith we see in the narrative (Ioh. 11,15.26–27.40–42.45).

Now it is not the case that every statement of this series ties in explicitly to the details of the portion of text to which it is attached in the manuscript – but they nearly all resonate well with the content and tone of the surrounding narrative. *Puššāqā* 170 surely fits better with Ioh. 11,6, where Jesus “waits” some days prior to setting out for Bethany. On the other hand, *Puššāqā* 165 accompanies that passage (Ioh. 11,4–7), counseling, ሰገሰገሰ ላይ ሰገሰገሰ (“Do not do this matter”), a statement that could be seen to reflect Jesus’ reluctance to set out immediately for Bethany. Still, we might expect *Puššāqā* 170 to be in that position instead. It is virtually certain that some *puššāqē* have become dislocated from their original passages. Although the passage attached to the *puššāqā* about faith (175; see Ioh. 11,36–39) does not mention faith, the subject of faith is explicit in the verse following it, i.e. Ioh. 11,40. A slight dislocation that crept in through processes of copying and editing could account for the disconnect. On the other hand, perhaps some *puššāqē* never tied in strongly with their specific passages, or tied in only to the surrounding context in a more general way. It is difficult to see how *Puššāqā* 172 fits with anything in the surrounding Gospel context (“Give the good matter or gift-offering that you promised”). It is distinguished by its reference to ritual action (ሰገሰገሰ). It is not unusual for oracles to prescribe votive offerings but this statement attracts interest because it stands out among the *puššāqē* in the Divining Gospel for doing so.

Despite the recurrence of statements that do not fit as well, we are struck by the resonances that routinely reverberate through the material. In the context of Ioh. 7, where Jesus is being falsely accused by “the Jews,” he rehearses the reasons to receive his testimony reliably, at one point declaring, “Do not judge by appearances, but make a just judgment” (Ioh. 7,24). *Puššāqā* 105 follows immediately, with the encouragement, “Do not fear slander” (Ioh. 7,21–24). Adjacent to the point where Jesus encourages his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (Ioh. 14,1), *Puššāqā* 213 has, “Do not be distressed by this matter.” Just before Jesus warns his disciples that they will have the light only a little longer (Ioh. 12,35), *Puššāqā* 194 urges, “Do the matter quickly so that you will not lose it.” Before Ioh. 16,33, where Jesus encourages his disciples,

“Take heart! I have overcome the world,” *Puššāqā* 246 also sounds a victorious note, “You will triumph in judgment.”

Oracles regarding court decisions and judgments seem especially frequent in the scenes of Jesus’ trials in Ioh. 18. Several of the *puššāqē* in the context of that chapter speak explicitly of cases and judgments (*Puššāqē* 263, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270), whereas three of them probably have such concerns in view, though their language is more vague and they could apply to other matters as well (*Puššāqē* 264, 265, 271). An oracle about laughter and ridicule (*Puššāqā* 272) is keyed to the opening of Ioh. 19, where soldiers taunt Jesus in a context of judgment and punishment.

Ioh. 19 describes the death of Jesus on the cross, a culminating event in the Gospel narrative. Twice in the chapter the term *כָּלַל* (“complete”) occurs, speaking of Jesus’ completing and fulfilling his work on the cross (Ioh. 19,28,30). The same verb occurs also in two oracles in the same context, each speaking about matters being fulfilled or finished: *Puššāqā* 281, “Your matter will be finished” (Ioh. 19,24d–27); and *Puššāqā* 282, “The good matter will be fulfilled” (Ioh. 19,28–30). The use of the same terminology in *puššāqē* attached to these passages cannot be coincidental. The oracles’ promises of fulfillment is intended to borrow from the Gospel narrative’s statements of fulfillment. In a sense, for the user of the Divining Gospel, the fulfillment of Jesus’ deeds supports the completion of the matter about which the client seeks knowledge.

We find similar resonances throughout the material. Oracles of salvation and escape (*Puššāqē* 58, 139) appear alongside narratives of healing (Ioh. 4,46–47) and Jesus’ eluding danger (Ioh. 8,59). At Ioh. 11,4–7, just before Jesus’ disciples question his decision to return to Judea and face danger there, *Puššāqā* 165 forbids, “Do not do this matter.” In Ioh. 5, where the healed paralytic is challenged by the Jews to confess who was responsible for performing a healing on the Sabbath, *Puššāqā* 63 exhorts, “Do not deny but confess” (Ioh. 5,3b–9). Where Jesus bequeaths peace (Ioh. 14,25–27), *Puššāqā* 223 promises, “The matter will produce peace.” Just before Mary of Bethany lavishes perfume on Jesus’ feet in Ioh. 12, an act that Judas condemns, *Puššāqā* 182 has, “Do not prevent something good.” In the context alluding to Peter’s martyrdom (Ioh. 21,18–19a), *Puššāqā* 306 promises, “In a foreign country you will have cause to praise God in the end.” Both the reference to “the end” (*כֵּן*) and the foreign country put one in mind of the legends of Peter’s martyrdom in distant Rome. Yet the oracle itself, like so many oracles we find in lot divination texts, seems to be speaking of the outcome of travel or even foreign business.

The inquirer happy enough to get the response of *Puššāqā* 23, “Joy that you did not expect will be yours”

(Ioh. 2,7–8) would benefit from noticing that the promise occurs within the narrative where the head of the marriage feast is surprised by unexpectedly fine wine due to Jesus’ miracle at Cana (Ioh. 2,9). After the disciple Andrew remarks that five loaves and two fish will not go far, *Puššāqā* 76 has, “From something small to a single great good” (Ioh. 6,7–9). In two different contexts where it is remarked that Jesus’ time had not yet come, *Puššāqē* caution that the time is not right for a particular venture or that it will turn out in time (*Puššāqē* 98, 99, 122). In Ioh. 2,12 we read of Jesus and his disciples going to Capernaum, where they “remained” for two days. The adjacent *Puššāqā* 25 (Ioh. 2,12) insists, “If you do this, persist (in it),” i.e. continue or “remain.” As with some other statements, this one seems to apply best to a segment of John just one or two removed from its location.

Some statements involve numbers. *Puššāqā* 28 is one such statement, promising that a thing will resolve “after three days.” The Gospel passage to which it is attached tells of Jesus’ cryptic promise to the Jews, “Pull down this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (Ioh. 2,18–22). The correlation is remarkable.

Like so many others we have discussed, *Puššāqā* 28 points not so much to an explication of the biblical text for theological or even moral reasons, but rather to a perceived resonance between some detail in the text and a feature of the oracle. The oracular statement is not really about resurrection, as such, and certainly not about Jesus’ resurrection in particular. It simply predicts that a matter of concern will be resolved after a certain time. In many ways the statement is like others we see in divinatory texts, Christian and non-Christian. Its form and content are not especially unique, nor does it require us to see the Gospel text as its exclusive source or even fundamental inspiration.

Instead, one gets the impression that certain statements have been chosen from a repertoire of suitable stock sortilege material, to be edited somewhat and arranged in such a way that they seem to interact with the biblical text. Some correlate to specific topics or terminology, others to aspects of the drama or mood of the narrative. Often they seem to do both, as we see here with *Puššāqā* 28; the statement echoes an interval of three days, capitalizes on belief in the hope of Jesus’ resurrection, and does so in a way that lends support to the (preferably positive) resolution of the client’s concern. Furthermore, in this instance the statement breathes in the atmosphere of Jesus’ mysterious proclamation, and one that so confounded his opponents. Taken together, the Gospel passage and its *puššāqā* offer a powerful confirmation of a prompt resolution to the seeker’s concerns.

7.2.4 Displaced Oracles: A Tense Hermeneutic

The pattern of correlation that we find between many *puššāqē* and the Gospel text is far from thoroughgoing. As we have already seen, some *puššāqē* resonate with passages nearby but not as much with their own Gospel segments. Some thematically similar *puššāqē* are grouped together in a single context, such as we see in Ioh. 11 and 18, but such grouping is more exceptional than normal. In many instances we can find no obvious connection between the language of an oracle and that of its biblical context. Furthermore, the Gospel of John presents more opportunities than the statements exploit. For instance, we may wonder why the context of Ioh. 5, with its lengthy discussions of testimony, did not attract more *puššāqē* regarding testimony. Of thirteen *puššāqē* in Ioh. 5 only *Puššāqē* 62 (Ioh. 5,3b–9) and 74 (Ioh. 5,44–47) involve the subject of testimony and confession (ܩܘܪܒܢܐܘܬܐ and ܩܘܪܒܐ); the remaining deal with various other subjects, whereas we find a number of *puššāqē* that mention testimony elsewhere in the Gospel (see Table 6.2). Some of those passages have episodes or language involving testimony but others do not.

Some of the irregularity we encounter is undoubtedly due to dislocation of statements from their original locations and disruptions in sequence. The recurring phenomenon of statements that appear to be just one or two Gospel segments removed from their ideal thematic location (e.g. *Puššāqē* 25, 165, 194, and 213 cited above) highlights the peculiarity of this “slippage.”³³

Wilkinson addresses this problem in his study of the *hermēneiai*. Of three scholars who have recently called for a fresh examination of the oracles' possible connections to the Gospel text (Porter, Cirafesi, Wilkinson), only Wilkinson has done a close study of *hermēneiai* in order to clarify their relationship to the Gospel, albeit using a smaller sampling than we have in this study. After briefly surveying the scholarship on the question, Wilkinson draws attention to a number of resonances between oracles in the parchment and papyrus *hermēneia* fragments (Greek

and Coptic) and John's Gospel. Yet he acknowledges that the connections in some sources are “less certain,” and that our sources often lead us into “murky waters.” The study of these chronically inconsistent materials yields what he calls “a complicated verdict:”

On several occasions, the *hermēneiai* are intimately connected with their Gospel passages through subject matter and/or vocabulary, in effect translating them into a more recognizably oracular idiom. On other occasions, the connections are less obvious but not impossible. On still other occasions, the *hermēneiai* seem to bear no relationship at all to the biblical text they accompany.³⁴

Wilkinson does not study the Syriac (or Armenian) version, yet the characterization he makes here applies to the Syriac as well. Indeed, in several instances Wilkinson examines the very statements (in Greek and/or Coptic) that we find illustrative in the Syriac version also.³⁵ Wilkinson hypothesizes that the “archetype of this system” had statements that originally tied in closely with their associated segments of John's Gospel but that “corruption and dislocation had crept into the manuscript tradition by the sixth or seventh century.”³⁶ Hence, we have no extant sources that do not exhibit some degree of corruption, frustrating our efforts at reconstructing an archetype that could help us understand the original nuances of the design and purpose of the apparatus.

Wilkinson bases his hypothesis on the early Greek and Coptic materials, following the presumption that they should be less corrupt than later sources. Yet he turns to the latter for corroboration, bringing the *sortes* of Codex Bezae and Codex Sangermanensis into his study as well. Because their series are more extensive, they offer us the ability to test the hypothesis in certain ways. One may analyze the sequence of one or more longer series, in order to see where and how they might fit a parallel sequence of Gospel passages. Wilkinson adduces several examples from these two sources, enlisting their aid in support of his proposal that the *hermēneiai* often correlate to the content of the passages to which they are attached. Some of his examples are the Greek and Latin versions of statements corresponding to *puššāqē* we have listed above.

In one especially illuminating analysis, Wilkinson studies a series of *hermēneiai* that he associates with

³³ Wilkinson advances three persuasive reasons not to see the dislocations in the *hermēneiai* as intentional, the result of a desire to hide the *sortes*' organization and enhance their mystery, such as we find in versions of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*. First, the displacements are unpredictable, not formulaic like in the latter; second, the displacements differ in the different sources; and third, the early sources exhibit strong correlations with the Gospel content, not patterns of seemingly random placement. The evidence of the more extensive sets available to us in the Syriac and Armenian only strengthen Wilkinson's conclusion that we are not dealing with intentional obfuscation.

³⁴ Wilkinson 2019, 110–11.

³⁵ Not all the *hermēneiai* in the Greek, Coptic, and Latin sources find Syriac parallels. Wilkinson discusses a few oracles in non-Syriac sources that have not been presented in Chapter Five and are not a part of the present study.

³⁶ Wilkinson 2019, 111.

Ioh. 2.³⁷ This series roughly corresponds to *Puššāqē* 22–28 (numbers 22–28 in Codex Bezae; *Sortes* 22, 24–28 in Codex Sangermanensis). He shows that the Greek and Latin statements of this series echo the language or content of a sequence of Gospel passages, some more directly and some less so. The parallel Syriac *Puššāqē* 22–28, located in nearly the same places with reference to John’s text as those of Sangermanensis, supports Wilkinson’s hypothesis, helping to confirm the conclusion shared by this study about the nature of the oracles and their relationship to the biblical text: “Despite the very significant imperfections in these manuscripts, vestiges of an original logic remain. The *hermēneiai* were indeed a running commentary on the Gospel of John, but a commentary designed to aid the bibliomancer in extracting divinatory wisdom from the biblical text.”³⁸

In Wilkinson’s view, the *sortes* of the original system were thoroughly very well integrated into the Gospel text; i.e. in the archetype, each *hermēneia* would have exhibited clear and intentional correspondence with the segment of biblical text to which it was attached. That makes sense and may have been the case, but no extant sources exhibit anything approximating that degree of thorough correlation.

7.2.5 Synthesizing Oracles and Scripture

The phenomenon of dislocation we have noticed may provide clues about the process by which the sortilege material came to be joined to the Gospel text. In the early manuscripts, each page of text has one segment of John’s Gospel with a single *hermēneia* given beneath the text. These fit the first class of *hermēneia* manuscripts we describe in Chapter Three (see 3.3.2). As Wilkinson observes, this *mise en page* would tend to keep segments and *hermēneiai* in their places, on separate pages. It would take some editorial effort to move blocks of material, i.e. to relocate several *hermēneiai* onto a series of different pages, attaching them to different segments of the Gospel.³⁹ It is especially difficult to see how that would happen by accident, at least on any significant scale.

By contrast, if we imagine that the oracles had originally been compiled as a list in a separate appendix that circulated with the Gospel text, it is not hard to see how accidents transcribing the list could create omissions or duplications that would disrupt the original logic of the

sequence. Such an archetype could account for the widespread “corruption” that we encounter, even in the early sources of the tradition. Deliberate reordering of the material would also be easier to accomplish if the *hermēneiai* were listed separately. Perhaps the appendix contained a series of numbers keyed to segments of the Gospel text, such as we find now in several of the manuscripts and in other lot divination texts, including the Syriac version of the Divining Gospel.

Alternatively, the archetype may have had its statements written into the margins alongside the Gospel text. Again, we can easily see how statements written in the margins could become dislocated from their original segments, whether by accident or deliberately. Wilkinson proposes that either an original separate appendix or an original set of marginal *sortes* provides the best account of the dislocation phenomenon we find in the Greek, Coptic, and Latin sources.

It is not at all unlikely that the very first set of *hermēneiai* was compiled as a separate list before it was somehow incorporated into a Gospel codex. We recall once again the remarkable parchment Firenze, Istituto Papirologico “G. Vitelli”, PSI XIII 1364, that has two *hermēneiai* matching the content and sequence of statements in our other sources but without any apparent connection to a segment of Gospel text or manuscript (see 3.3.5). The statements in that manuscript do not appear to have been part of a simple list, but they remind us that that the oracles could circulate independently.

Given the similarities between the *hermēneiai* and *sortes* from other types of sources, it is clear that the composers or compilers of the original material borrowed oracles from a conventional repertoire. They undoubtedly revised and adapted the wording of the statements, though not heavily, as we find in some other Christianized oracles. It may be that their principal creative act was in ordering the statements and joining the oracles to particular segments of the Gospel. The occasional occurrence of what appear to be subject headings as *hermēneiai* support the view that our extant statements derive from an ancestral apparatus that once included features we no longer see in our sources, save vestigially (see 6.2.1 above).

Wilkinson readily admits that his proposal is speculative. He may be right that the archetype was originally a separate appendix or a manuscript of John with *hermēneiai* copied in the margins, such as we have in Codex Sangermanensis. Either of these is a plausible speculation and could help us make sense of the rapidity with which dislocations seem to have set in, very early in the tradition.

However, several factors compel us to be cautious about any proposals regarding the original format of the

³⁷ Wilkinson 2019, 113–15.

³⁸ Wilkinson 2019, 116.

³⁹ Wilkinson 2019, 117–18.

material. First of all, as we have already noticed, it may be impossible to speak of an absolute starting point for the material as such, since the oracles show signs of having been borrowed from a larger oracle tradition, to some extent. The origins of some of the oracular material, just like the origins of the Gospel text itself, predate the beginning of the synthesis that we call the Divining Gospel (i.e. a copy of John's Gospel with an apparatus of sortilege material). We may speak of an origin for that synthesis, but by definition the synthesis entails an integration of the sortilege and Gospel materials. That synthesis may have taken the format of a Gospel with separate appendix or marginal notes. Yet the fact remains that no such format exists in all our evidence.

The earliest manuscripts put the segment of Gospel with its *hermêneia* together on a single page. Later manuscripts such as the Armenian manuscripts have the same format. The scribe who added *hermêneiai* to the pages of Codex Bezae appears to have known only that format, for he imitates the same layout, albeit in a rather bizarre way, since the statements there are attached to pages as such rather than to discrete segments of text (Mark's Gospel, in that case). The Syriac manuscript integrates its statements directly into the columns of Gospel text, a layout that makes the most sense as a deliberate compression of the segmented single-page layout of the earlier manuscripts.

As for Codex Sangermanensis – although its statements are marginal annotations, this is not precisely what is being envisioned for the proposed archetype with marginal *hermêneiai*. Unlike the earlier books that are dedicated solely to John's Gospel, in Codex Sangermanensis John is part of a larger Bible and not exactly a Divining Gospel. Its marginal notes are secondary to the original execution of the Gospel text. We cannot say definitely that its exemplar had marginal *hermêneiai* with John. As secondary annotations, its oracles could easily have been copied from a Divining Gospel with one of the other formats. This does not eliminate from possibility an archetype with marginal *hermêneiai*, but it does reinforce the observation that we have no concrete evidence for such a format in the early part of the tradition, whereas Sangermanensis' format may in fact have been an innovation. Again, the format we find in Bezae indicates the early influence of the segmented technique.

As the earliest known format, and in the absence of concrete evidence of a different early format, the segmented one retains the best claim to have been the original form of the synthesis. It is true that the tradition displays a great deal of variety in placement of the *sortes*. Whereas this could be due partly to an early format that was especially susceptible to "corruption" (such as a sep-

arate appendix or marginal notes), we also observe with Wilkinson that "oracular literature... is disjointed by its very nature and almost invites the copyist to make changes or substitutions according to whim."⁴⁰ The text is highly fluid. Our evidence of lot divination texts shows that the use of such material inevitably leads to revision and alterations as the material is transmitted and applied. Processes of translation open further possibilities for change. We see so much variation throughout the *hermêneia* tradition, we have no need to posit special vulnerabilities such as an original list format in order to account for dislocations and alleged "corruptions." Indeed, even if the segmented format we now find were not the original format of the synthesis, long after it had become the standard form, we see many changes continuing to occur within and between the various branches of the *hermêneia* tradition. Hence, the phenomenon of rampant dislocation does not call for explanations such as an originally separate appendix or the format of marginal *hermêneiai*; profuse dislocation is explicable on the basis of the formats we have.

The variations include content as well. The differences go beyond divergences in sequence and specific pairings with Gospel segments; many involve substantial differences in content. As we have seen, sufficient identifications of content, along with location and sequence, exist to confirm that our *hermêneia* sources are drawing on a common tradition. However, we must not underestimate the differences between them, including differences of content. We see this even among the early Greek and Coptic sources, despite the brevity of the material they preserve, but it is especially apparent now that we are able to compare the larger sets of the Syriac, Latin, and Armenian *hermêneiai* alongside the earlier fragments. Not only do the oracles move around; their messages can vary considerably. Once again, this dynamic variability is a feature of the earliest materials we have.

Wilkinson suggests that in the original edition the *hermêneiai* were thoroughly consistent in their connection to particular segments of text. That may indeed have been the case, but if so, the aspects of location, sequence, and contents that would manifest such a thoroughgoing relationship between *hermêneiai* and Gospel are long lost. We are able to find many correlations between the *hermêneiai* and their Gospel segments, or segments nearby. Yet too many sequential inconsistencies and discontinuities of content exist in even the earliest surviving materials for us to have confidence to reconstruct a pristine original, one that manifested clear deliberation at every point. As the

⁴⁰ Wilkinson 2019, 117–18.

materials were copied and translated and copied again, a host of revisions (or errors) impacted the materials deeply in their different versions and editions, moving it even further away from such a hypothetical archetype.

Perhaps such a “pristine” edition never existed. It is not necessarily the case that each *hermêneia* originally exhibited an essential and distinct link to its Gospel segment. Many of the *sortes* are so general in nature that they are suited to a number of different biblical contexts. This means that even in the archetype we might find *hermêneiai* capable of defying our clear perception of definite links in content between them and their Gospel segments. To the original compilers and users, we must assume these would still be perfectly suitable as oracles, and that their Gospel contexts supply at least some of their potency as oracles, even if we are not always clear on how that worked.

We see a pattern of deliberation in the composition and placement of many oracles, but perhaps not every oracle was originally infused with the same deliberation. This need not have damaged their logic and undermined their usefulness. As we saw in Chapter Six, the Divining Gospels continued to be valued and to find use in their altered states, apparently without great concern that each oracle show clear correlation to a Gospel passage (see 6.3.3). Perhaps the *hermêneiai* were never extremely precise or totally deliberate in their contents, locations, and sequences. What would appear to us as gaps or discontinuities in such areas seem not to have discouraged the dissemination and continued use of these “flawed but functional” materials. Once again, we are reminded that an essential element in the use of the Divining Gospels was the human practitioner – the bibliomancer who made it all work.

7.3 Finding Meaning in the Text: An Enhanced Picture of Use

At the end of Chapter Six we pictured what it might look like for the owner of the Syriac version of the Divining Gospel to use it in addressing the queries of those who came seeking knowledge (6.5). Our picture was based on our knowledge about practices of ancient lot divination as well as some of the structures we find in the material and other mechanisms, including the segmented wheel in Codex Sangermanensis. In this chapter, our study of the material’s hermeneutical qualities allows us to enhance that picture.

The oracles not only inhabit a codex of John’s Gospel, drawing a sense of divine agency and mysterious potency from their residence in the sacred book. They also interact

with the specific language and narratives of the biblical text, at least much of the time. This interaction creates a sort of dialogue between the *hermêneiai* and parts of scripture, but one that requires or at least greatly benefits from the practitioner’s involvement in the process not merely as arbiter of verbal formulae but also as an interpreter.

One of the most productive ways of studying divination across cultures and through history comes by seeing it as “situated dialogue.”⁴¹ Luijendijk speaks of a “three-way conversation” between book, diviner, and client.⁴² We must attend to each participant in order to understand the nature of the unique and living conversation that happens when the three come together in a divinatory consultation. In the case of the Divining Gospel, we should probably recognize a fourth voice, since the book the practitioner uses actually speaks in two voices – that of the biblical passage and the voice of its *hermêneiai*.⁴³ These are sufficiently distinct to warrant differentiating them, especially since, as we will seek to illustrate, a kind of dialogue can be seen to occur between the Gospel segment and its *hermêneia*, one that is shaped by and shapes the conversation with the other participants. Since the only concrete participant we have available to us now is the book, with its two voices, we will have to extrapolate what we know about the other participants – the users and their clients – from divination encounters and from late antique Christian culture in order to fill in our picture of this conversation.⁴⁴

The Syriac manuscript of the Divining Gospel is our starting point for drawing this richer picture. We still do not know much about the oracle selection process. We have established previously that it probably contained a random element, due to the distribution of themes throughout the material, yet also that it must have been responsive to the clients’ particular inquiries, offering some way of narrowing the range of possible *puššāqē* according to a predetermined list of topics into which *puššāqē* were grouped. General answers abound, that would all be applicable in many different circumstances. Yet many of the statements are too pointed to function well as general responses to just any question. Others

⁴¹ Zeitlyn 1995, 197–98.

⁴² Luijendijk 2014, 57.

⁴³ As we noted in the last chapter (see 6.5), we may also speak of another component of the Divining Gospel’s potency: the book’s status as a sacred object. Though highly significant, this “fifth” component does not have a conversational “voice” in the same way that the verbal components do, i.e. the texts and human participants. Nevertheless, it is important to keep all five factors in view as we consider the use of the Divining Gospel.

⁴⁴ See the informed depiction in Luijendijk 2014, 58–78, and the discussion in 2.2.3 above.

would require some coercion in order to convey a meaningful response to any likely topic, due to confusion in the material and the incursion of topical headings; they would not be easy to apply. Many of the statements exhibit clear connections to their Gospel segments but others defy easy association.

Some parts of the imaginary scene we narrate here will be basically familiar from our discussion at the end of Chapter Six. Yet our exploration of the *puššāqē*'s connections to John in this chapter enable us to enhance our picture of the book's use considerably. Let us imagine that our scribe Gewargis is an early user of the book. Gewargis is an educated and accomplished Christian scribe, possibly a monk or even clergy, just the sort of person we would expect to be the typical user of a Divining Gospel, as we shall see. A person would come to Gewargis with his or her question: "Should I enter a business partnership with Joseph?" or, "Will my son get well?" Perhaps she is religious and has a different sort of question: "Will I become head of the convent?" These are similar to questions we find in other lot divination texts, such as the Christianized *Sortes Astrampsychi*, or in ticket oracles. Any of these three hypothetical questions could be seen as belonging to specific topics, such as 1) commerce and partnerships, 2) health, and 3) promotion or success. But like so many queries, they also fit into the rather broad category of the general question, for which a binary set of responses would be suitable, i.e. positive or negative. In view of the Divining Gospel's tendencies towards general answers, it is easy to imagine our practitioner choosing to handle the question as a general matter; a great many of the *puššāqē* are general in focus.⁴⁵

After some manner of ritual along the lines of what we have described in the last chapter (6.4–5), Gewargis refers to the appropriate category of *puššāqā*. We have speculated that the category could have been linked to a sector in a wheel or table drawn at the beginning of the Syriac manuscript, such as we find in Codex Sangermanensis, one that is packed with numbers that correspond to the many general responses we find among the *puššāqē* that Gewargis would deem appropriate to the question.

Using some means of randomizing the precise selection, such as having his client point a finger or toss a marker or grain of wheat into the appropriate sector, let us

⁴⁵ Perhaps general responses, with their typically yes/no or good/bad messages, were segregated into their own category in the selection mechanism, or perhaps they were distributed across multiple categories, wherever they were supposed to fit – or perhaps some combination of both policies operated to govern the organization of the *puššāqē*.

say they land on the number 94. Gewargis is very familiar with the book and turns to *Puššāqā* 94 quickly (fol. 25v). Before saying anything, he glances at the oracle and the portion of scripture attached to it – Ioh. 6,64–65 – in order to get the gist of their contents and consider how they might address his client's concern. After briefly collecting his thoughts, he venerates the scripture verbally, uttering something like, "the Word of the Lord," and reads the Peshitta text aloud:

"Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first which of them would not believe and who would betray him. And he said to them, "This is why I told you, 'No one can come to me unless it is given him by my Father.'" (Ioh. 6,64–65)

Gewargis pauses a moment to let the text sink in. Then he continues, reading the *puššāqā* itself:

"The interpretation is this: God will give it to you if you are confident."

As a general sort of answer, this would be an appropriate (and presumably welcome) response to any of the three hypothetical questions we listed above.

The *puššāqā* may not need much explanation. It seems to promise that the client will get what he or she seeks, depending on the person's faith. However, as a person seen to have authority and expertise who is speaking from within the context of a specific Gospel narrative and as part of an act of consultation, our practitioner has an extraordinary opportunity to facilitate a more penetrating hermeneutic and conduct the encounter into a deeper exploration of meaning. Doing so will enrich the experience and potentially be of great benefit to the person seeking knowledge and meaning amidst the anxious vicissitudes of life. A richer exchange might help the client sense more deeply God's involvement in his life, giving him a greater respect for scripture and drawing him into a deeper reliance upon the practitioner and the institutions he represents.

As we saw in Chapter Two, diviners are interpreters, and even ostensibly "do-it-yourself" sortilege tools were often accompanied by richer interpretive activities than the bare bones of the mechanism disclose (2.2.3). In view of the many challenges we foresee in the interpretation and application of many of the *puššāqē*, we would expect our practitioner often to feel compelled to offer his own words of explanation or guidance in interpreting the *puššāqā* for his client. Yet people are meaning-makers, and even when a *puššāqā* is not inscrutable, we imagine users would want to exploit the opportunity afforded by sortilege with a Divining Gospel to construct meaning that

is rich and compelling. As for the client – he approached the practitioner for help and so we imagine the consultant is under some pressure to deliver answers the client can appreciate and actually use.

Hence, we imagine Gewargis helping the client understand better what the scripture and its *puššāqā* might mean for the presenting problem. As someone with expertise in the biblical narrative, he might expound on what Jesus says, “unless it is given by the Father,” reassuring the client that not only the answer comes from God, but the object of the client’s query is given by God as well. The shared language of giving (ܐܘܢܐ) connects Gospel and *puššāqā* clearly, as does the emphasis on God the Father as giver. Surely there is more to say about the role of “confidence” in guaranteeing the looked-for outcome – with perhaps some caveats about non-fulfillment, and how that if the person does not get what she wants, it may be because she lacks faith and should therefore attend to that impediment before seeking to be head of a convent.

Even relatively straightforward answers invite elaboration and application to specific cases. Yet not every answer is so straightforward. If we can imagine that the client had chosen number 44 instead, that choice would have produced quite a different passage and *puššāqā* – equally positive, perhaps, but more cryptic. *Puššāqā* 44 reads, “About relief and profit” (ܐܘܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ). This is one of those troublesome statements that may have derived from a topical heading in some earlier form of the material (see 6.2). Yet it is tied to Ioh. 4,5–8 in our Syriac manuscript, a passage narrating the first part of Jesus’ encounter with a Samaritan woman at a well near Sychar, where he asks her to give him water to drink, since the disciples had gone into town for provisions, as the text explains.

If we are right that we have in *Puššāqā* 44 a topical heading from an early form of the material that has crept into the *puššāqē* (Codex Bezae has the same *hermēneia* in Greek), it is not hard to see how a statement originally under that heading, related to relief and refreshment, got associated with a passage where Jesus seeks liquid relief from the woman, the disciples seek refreshment from the town, and Jesus offers the woman ultimate relief in the form of “living water,” i.e. himself (Ioh. 4,10). However, the form of the *puššāqā* as Gewargis has it does not sound like much of an answer: “About relief and profit.” If this statement is a “corruption” of the original, we might wish that we had the original intact statement instead – surely something that would have expressed a more suitable answer. Gewargis would probably wish the same. But he, like we, must work with what is actually in the man-

uscript, not a hypothetical, pristine apparatus. Can we plausibly imagine that he is convincingly able to do so?

Let us remember that we have no reason to believe the *hermēneiai* of the Divining Gospels included dummy answers, such as we find in *Sortes Sangallenses*. There is no need for such dummies in the sequentially numbered *puššāqē* as we encounter especially in the elaborate Books of Fate. We must assume that someone like Gewargis could have landed on *Puššāqā* 44 in the real use of his book, in the context of Ioh. 4,5–8, finding himself faced with the need to interpret this as a response to the client’s query. Perhaps he would feel frustrated by such *puššāqē* and, hiding the real answer from his client, declare a null-answer or a try-again response – both of which we see in the use of ancient lot divination materials. But this is cheating, not a fair use of the material as we actually have it. And we would expect that Gewargis would be reluctant to share any frustration with the client, for doing so would surely undermine confidence in the Divining Gospel and the practitioner. Instead, we should presume that he would want to make sense of the material before him. Indeed, if he truly believed in the process that he has inherited and is passing down, which is likely, he would probably feel compelled to make sense of it rather than cheat or dismiss the answer, presuming that any problem understanding its meaning was his problem, not the fault of the Gospel.

Faced with such a situation, it is conceivable that our practitioner may be content to let the mystery lie. Oracles can be notoriously cryptic, after all, and it might be the case that Gewargis would simply read the passage and its *puššāqā*, leaving the client to make whatever sense of it he or she can make. Perhaps he encourages the person to ask God for greater insight about it, sending the person on his or her way. Or he invites the person to consult the Gospel for a follow-up answer another time. Not every consultation of an oracle provides clear and obvious help. Yet we should not let a few famous stories of oracular obfuscation or the polemical accusations of ancient critics about diviners’ proclivities towards the conveniently obscure confuse us regarding the typical workings of an extremely common and popular practice. As scholars of contemporary divination have shown, the credibility of diviners and their practices is closely tied to the efficacy of their work.⁴⁶ Puzzles have a certain charm, and tales of their working out heightens the drama of the plot. But in the real world, enigmatic signs require some interpretation, often on the part of the diviners, with knowledge of the clients and their situations in mind. David Zeitlyn draws

⁴⁶ See Zeitlyn 1995, 189–205; Zeitlyn 2001, 225–40.

attention to the ways that diviners use results that appear contradictory and obscure as opportunities to pursue the dialogue even more deeply.⁴⁷ Far from undermining the diviners' credibility, contradictions and other difficulties of interpretation may enable a deeper and more effective consultation between the seer and his or her client.

Hence, though we must allow Gewargis the option of leaving a mysterious statement vague, we must also allow that he might tend instead towards offering some further interpretation of the *puššāqā*. Generally speaking, the Christian scholars and clergy of Gewargis's day did not shy away from exposition, explanation, and commentary. As the history of spiritual and theological writing shows us, even those who commend the ineffability of the great mysteries and extol the silent embrace of the divine do so using many words and with great elaboration. For Gewargis as for most expert users of the Divining Gospels, surely talking about God's message comes naturally. Furthermore, practitioners undoubtedly desired repeat clients, and repeat clients begin as satisfied first-time clients.

So for the many reasons we have given, we can easily imagine that Gewargis might want to expound on the *puššāqā*, "About relief and profit," perhaps explaining to his client that the statement was promising assuagement in the face of difficulty, if the client were facing difficulty; or that it offered the hope of some gain, if that fit the client's query best. What sort of gain that might be could depend on the sort of question the client had posed. Gewargis might then connect the response to the biblical passage, highlighting the way that relief and help were being sought and gained in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in the Gospel narrative. The story bolsters the client's hope that relief is coming her way also.

Obviously, much of this picture is speculative, but it seeks to make plausible sense of the evidence we have, in terms of what we know or can reasonably guess about the Divining Gospels' contexts of use and what it was that people expected to get from them. Furthermore, our picture helps us to see how that a book like our Syriac manuscript could be "flawed but functional," in the hands of an able user. Although it is useful to hypothesize a pristine and ideal form of the material that would not pose all the problems our manuscripts have (or that we presume them to have as we view them from a modern, demystified perspective), we should try to make sense of the tools as they are, just as their users were doing for many centuries.

To take one more example: if a client were to pose a question about what to do in a certain situation, and

Gewargis were to assist the client in choosing *Puššāqā* 181 as the response, he would find the answer, "Wait and after six days your matter will turn out" (ܠܘܬܐ ܝܬܘܒܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ ܘܝܬܘܒܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ ܕܘܚܪܐ). This *puššāqā* could be understood as promising that a situation will actually be resolved in six days (hooray!) or, more modestly, that within six days the client will at least have an answer or some sign. *Puššāqā* 181 is tied to Ioh. 11,55–56, a passage that does not help us understand the significance of the number six – a very specific item. Instead, these two verses speak of many Jews coming to Jerusalem for Passover, looking intently for Jesus to show himself at the festival. Perhaps our practitioner, on reading the verses, would emphasize the searching activity of the people, identifying that part of the narrative with the client's own search for a solution or outcome, with assurances that, just as the people eventually find Jesus, so would the client find his answer. But why six days?

If he knows the text well, Gewargis might remember what comes next: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany..." (Ioh. 12,1). Indeed, if he had known it, he might have wished that he were working with the Armenian version of the Divining Gospel instead, for it has essentially the same *hermēneia*, "It will happen after six days," but attached more logically to Ioh. 12,1–2. From our standpoint, we can read this evidence as indicating that the Armenian probably preserves an earlier text, one that places an oracle mentioning "six days" in correlation with a passage that not only has the very same expression, but also mentions it as fulfillment of expectation (i.e. of Jesus' coming to Jerusalem). Somehow, we suppose, the *hermēneia* got dislocated in the Syriac version or its ancestor and ended up two segments earlier in the Gospel. We can easily reconstruct the original and posit an instance of dislocation as the cause of corruption and confusion. This application of textual and source criticism is instructive, but we should not let this example delude us into thinking that we could march through our sources and simply reconstruct the original system. The degree of variance in these materials is so great, their fluidity through time so dynamic, and the oracular statements so widely open to different readings, any attempt at reconstructing the "original" system faces enormous difficulties – "perhaps a fool's errand in any case," as Wilkinson exclaims.⁴⁸ Still, using all the manuscripts and versions we have in order to delve into the material's background and thereby construct glimpses of ancestral iterations of it can yield

⁴⁷ Zeitlyn 1995, 201–02.

⁴⁸ Wilkinson 2019, 116.

insights about the development of the material and strengthen our conjectures about its use.

However, Gewargis and other users of these materials have the more demanding task of applying the real books in concrete situations. It is instructive for us to imagine the use of the actual book by real users, rather than confining ourselves to the task of attempting to reconstruct the hypothetical book and its presumed users. If the books were useful at all as fortune-telling aids, their usefulness was due to the creative mediation of competent practitioners who facilitated satisfying syntheses. In this case, someone like Gewargis may have done as we previously described, connecting the narrative of Ioh. 11,55–56 with the *puššāqā* in ways that reinforced the oracle or nuanced it in some clarifying way. Or he might look ahead to Ioh. 12,1, with its mention of “six days,” dipping into a different but neighboring segment of the Gospel for help in explaining or enriching the *puššāqā* for his client’s consumption. It is not hard to imagine Gewargis doing so, and in this way we can understand better how users of the Divining Gospels could overcome the dislocations, discontinuities, and other apparent impediments to the effective use of these books. Indeed, the structure of the Syriac version, with multiple statements on each page, could help the user attend to the larger contexts of both the Gospel and nearby *puššāqē* in the interpretive task. The important thing to note is that this understanding of how these tools worked requires that we give the users their due – not as mere manipulators of a mathematical selection process and relayers of plain verbal content, but as interpreters helping their clients discover meaning within the interaction of the connected facets of the entire process, such as we see in the practice of traditional text-based divination today.⁴⁹ They are facilitators of a conversation between the three (or four) participants of diviner, client, and book – the latter in two parts: scripture and *puššāqā*.

In order to be most effective, the practitioner of the Divining Gospel would need to engage all these facets interpretively: the client with his or her question and related situation, the *puššāqā* disclosed by the selection process, and a portion of the Gospel text. Within the conversation constructed through the practitioner’s engagement with those things, a kind of interpretation can emerge. It is the aptness of that synthetic process that would have commended these books as tools useful enough to be transmitted through the centuries and translated across different cultures and Christian religious traditions. And it

is the practitioner’s effectiveness as interpreter that would ensure a steady stream of clients seeking knowledge in the manner for which the Divining Gospel was designed.

7.4 Practitioners and Patrons: Picturing the Users of a Divining Gospel

Although we began this chapter with a consideration of the relationship between the *puššāqē* and the Gospel text, this has necessarily led to a consideration of what – or who – would be required to navigate the channels between them. We have presumed or speculated on many things about the user of a Divining Gospel and his or her clients. What can we really know about them?

The codices themselves offer little direct evidence about their owners or users and nothing specific about their contexts of use, including the identities of possible clients or the nature of the relationship between users and clients. Also, we have no clear accounts describing the use of the Divining Gospels as such.

However, as we saw in Chapter Two – and in addition to the considerable body of information we have about ancient divination practices generally – we have many accounts of Christians utilizing sortilege, including the use of Gospel texts and codices. We also have a great many different types of text-based divination tools that have survived from within Christian contexts. Many are from Egypt but some are from elsewhere. We know that Christian institutional resources, such as Bibles, clergy, martyrs’ shrines, and holy men and women were consulted for divinatory insight by late antique Christians. Egypt in particular is known to be a place where priests and monks performed divination at Christian shrines for clients or worshippers,⁵⁰ yet the practices and tools developed there soon got a ready reception in other parts of the late antique Christian world. What Luijendijk says of the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* would also apply to the Syriac manuscript of the Divining Gospel: “From the wider Mediterranean, we know two kinds of ritual specialists that would find our codex a useful instrument: an itinerant diviner or an expert at a shrine.”⁵¹ In the case of the Divining Gospel, the location (“shrine”) could be the church or monastery at which the expert owner and user of the

⁴⁹ Zeitlyn 2001, 225–27; Peek 1991, 194–96.

⁵⁰ See Frankfurter’s studies of these ritual experts, Frankfurter 1995, 115–35; Frankfurter 2019, 211–31.

⁵¹ Luijendijk 2014, 67.

book lived and worked. Yet the roaming *sortilegus* is also a factor in Late Antiquity, particularly in the Roman world, where independent lot diviners could be accessed in many localities.⁵² All of this helps us conceive of the framework in which Divining Gospels would have been used, and therefore some things about the users, at least most of whom were surely clerical or monastic, perhaps both located and itinerant.

We should perhaps not make too much of the fact that the etymology of the term “cleric” involves both divination and recognized ecclesial office.⁵³ The Greek *klērikos* is an adjective describing something that pertains to *klēros* (κλήρος) or “lot,” including anything assigned or apportioned. In second-century Christian Greek usage, the term came to be associated with the Christian ministry. This is largely due to the use of *klēros* in biblical passages like Deut. 18,2 where it is applied to the Levitical priesthood (“the Lord is their *klēros*,” LXX), and Act. 1,17,25, where the phrase “the *klēros* of this ministry” describes the apostolic office. In the process of drawing lots (κλήρους), the *klēros* falls on Matthias as Judas’ replacement in this ministry (Act. 1,26). The application of the term *klērikos* to Christian ministry suggests that the sacerdotal office was seen as a chosen role, participating in a sacred inheritance, tasked with shepherding those who have been “allotted” to the priest’s care (1 Petr. 5,3). In Christian contexts the term rapidly became technical, referring simply to the clergy, and it is this sense that moves from Greek into Latin (*clericus*), and thence into English.⁵⁴

Despite this interesting etymology, clergy were not seen principally as diviners. Divination is not one of the conventional tasks we normally associate with late antique Christian leaders. But the picture of what is considered normal needs retouching. As we have noted repeatedly, some clergy were diviners in fact and some Christian shrines in Egypt were especially known for divination. Their clergy at least were certainly understood to have sortilege as a major ritual practice.

Considering the nature of the books, it may appear obvious that the composers, translators, and users of the Divining Gospels would have been Christian and probably clerical or monastic. Yet it is worth surveying the major reasons for characterizing them so. We should remember that some ecclesial and monastic canons express ambiv-

alence about clergy practicing divination (see 2.4 above). Furthermore, evidence for the Divining Gospels has barely survived. Although its vestiges speak of a once widespread and popular tradition, they are mere vestiges, scarce and muted enough that they have been rarely studied and their purpose often misconstrued. The meagerness of the surviving testimony and the absence of clear references to their use in other accounts indicate they may not have been part of mainstream ecclesial or monastic operations.

Yet we have good reason to believe that the early producers and users of the Divining Gospels were Christian clergy or monastics. Christian leaders and many ascetics had ready access to Gospel books in Late Antiquity. Many had available to them the resources and processes necessary for book production.⁵⁵ The original production of the Divining Gospel in particular presumes a scribal culture skilled at adapting sortilege material, such as we find in late antique Christian Egypt (see 2.2.3–4; 3.5, 6.2.1 above). Most of our early sources, including the Syriac manuscript, exhibit skilled handwriting and a high degree of scribal expertise. These books were not thrown together but constructed carefully by those who knew how to do it well.

Competent versions in Coptic, Syriac, Latin, and Armenian would require the sorts of translation enterprises we associate with significant centers of Christian scholarship. Indeed, the dissemination of the system into such a wide variety of languages, representing communities spanning much of the Christian world of Late Antiquity, indicates not only that the books enjoyed considerable popularity as effective tools, at least for a long time, but also suggests that their circulation benefitted from a sizable network of interrelated ecclesial institutions. This aspect of our sources deserves closer study than we can give it here.

The creation and use of the Divining Gospel also show a deep respect for the Gospel text, not merely for a handful of especially potent passages such as we find inscribed on many amulets, but for the entire narrative of John. Creating such a book – especially in a format that “wastes” parchment space so extravagantly as many of our surviving sources do – would be fairly expensive. The investment of capital and heavy use of scripture reveal an appreciation for the canonical Gospel such as we might expect to see in clergy and Christian institutions.

Obviously, the capable user would be literate and familiar especially with sacred texts such as the Gospel. They would be heirs to the tradition of the book’s use.

⁵² Klingshirn 2006, 137–61.

⁵³ See the evidence for early Christian usage in Lienhard 1998, 265–66; di Berardino 2014, 554–55.

⁵⁴ See “cleric, adj. and n.”. OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/34194?redirectedFrom=cleric> (accessed 7 June 2019).

⁵⁵ See Bagnall 2009, 60–65.

In order to be effective, they would be people who commanded a degree of religious respect and ritual authority in their social contexts. The sophisticated interpretive task we described in the previous section helps us contextualize the use of the Divining Gospels, but it is a use that presumes the capacities we expect to find in late antique Christian clergy. We would expect that competent users owed a great deal to more experienced users, seasoned practitioners who had coached them in the proficient use of the book, modeling the best practices of successful consultations. In the absence of extant written instructions regarding the use of the Divining Gospel, perhaps we should look to the human relationships in the ecclesial networks and monastic communities that would provide ideal settings for handing down the craft.

Canons seeking to regulate lot divination using the Bible are aimed at monks and clergy, in both Gaul and Syria. We surveyed some of these in Chapter Two (see 2.4). These regulations are not aimed specifically at Divining Gospels, but the rules could be seen to cover such tools. The fifth-century council of Vannes condemns “some clergy” (*aliquanti clerici*) who practice various forms of divination, including the practice of “looking into any kind of writings whatever” to “predict future events.”⁵⁶ The Syriac *Admonitions for Monks* 19, attributed to the bishop Rabbula of Edessa (411–35) forbids monks from taking “an answer out of a book for anyone.” The rules attributed to Jacob of Edessa (†708) similarly forbid a monk from taking “an answer from the Gospel, or from David, or from the lots (ܩܘܠܘܢ) that are called, ‘of the Apostles.’” In 789 Charlemagne prohibits anyone from “casting lots in the Psalter or in the Gospel or in other things, or performing any divinations.” Prohibitions from the eighth century and later do not indicate an ecclesial ban on the use of Divining Gospels in Late Antiquity, but they show ambivalence about the use of such books, as well as a continuing concern to regulate their use among clergy and monks, who would likely have been among their primary users in earlier periods as well. Clergy are specifically mentioned in the much earlier canons of Vannes.

The *Admonitions for Monks* also come from that earlier period. Canon 19 forbids taking an oracle from “a book” (ܩܘܠܘܢ), without mentioning a specific book such as the Gospel or David (i.e. Psalms). Perhaps it has any form of lot divination text in view. But as Klingshirn has pointed out, the context of Canon 19 suggests that it may be concerned as much with regulating monks’ participa-

tion in secular activities – such as the potentially lucrative business of conducting lot divination for clients – as with sortition itself.⁵⁷ In any case, all these regulations grow out of ecclesial conversations and are aimed at monks and clergy.

It is certainly possible that some early users of the Divining Gospel were neither clergy nor monastic, but the factors we have just enumerated support the view that most users were. Even the users of the late and very fractured forms of the *hermēneiai* we find in Codex Bezae and Codex Sangermanensis were surely monastic or clerical, considering the contexts in which those books were annotated with *sortes*, kept, and handled. For instance, we would expect that the primary users of the sortilege apparatus in the Latin Paris, BnF, lat. 11553 were medieval monks and clergy in the Benedictine Abbey of St.-Germain-des-Prés.

We know that individuals could have private libraries with Christian books, sometimes owning impressive collections. But there were many more church and monastic libraries than substantial private ones in Late Antiquity.⁵⁸ Although copies of the Divining Gospel could have been held privately, their dissemination and rampant translation are surely due to corporate ownership of these books in churches and monasteries. Our Syriac manuscript provides a good early example of this. Copied by an individual (Gewargis), for an unknown original owner, it soon comes to be the possession of a Christian community, the Monastery of Silvanus near Damascus (see 4.3.1). A roughly contemporary ownership note explains that it was purchased by the head of the monastery (a priest) for the benefit of the brothers. So the book was a corporate possession, with monastic and clerical fingerprints all over it. Although we cannot say for certain just how they were using the book, the monks’ diligence in replacing lost *puššāqē* leads us to believe they continued practicing divination with it for centuries (see 4.3.3).

But who among them would have been designated the practitioner? Was the afore-mentioned priest and head of the monastery the main user of the book, the person one would have to consult in order to get the answers one needed? And would they have used it only among themselves, i.e. to address queries of other religious persons, or would they have been open to secular clients as well? Surely patterns of use varied from place to place and changed over time. Perhaps by the twelfth century our Syriac manuscript was being put to use only among the

⁵⁶ Quoted in Klingshirn 2002, 84–85. For references to texts discussed in this paragraph, see 2.4 above.

⁵⁷ Klingshirn 2002, 126–27.

⁵⁸ Gamble 1995, 174–76; Bagnall 2009, 64–66.

ascetics in the environs of the Wadi al-Natrun where it was held after it came there from its original Syrian home. We cannot know. But the contents of the Divining Gospel indicate that it was originally intended to address the concerns of secular clients as well.

Of course, most of the *puššāqē* would fit any class of querent, including the clerical and monastic. In most of the statements, nothing requires that we see the client as either religious or secular. However, a number of the *puššāqē* presume conflicts in court settings, surely a concern that mostly secular people would have, and especially the propertied classes. Some *puššāqē* presume travel or business activities that fit secular clients more easily than religious ones. Yet we must grant the qualification that in the Divining Gospels statements are rarely very specific. We would not wish to define the social locations or identities of clients too narrowly. Clergy travel too, while monks experience conflict and face judgments, even if the *puššāqē* about trials seem more suited to secular people. Whereas the oracle of *Puššāqā* 119, “The partnership is suitable” (ⲛⲁⲟⲩⲁⲛⲁⲛ ⲛⲁⲛⲁ) is a highly appropriate response to questions about marriage or a business venture, it could conceivably apply to some other kind of association that would fit a clerical or monastic client. Nevertheless, so many of the *puššāqē* presume the sorts of alterations in life situations, albeit generic in type, that are best suited to secular clients rather than to the more rigidly prescribed life situations of clergy and monks.

In addition to the tenor of the *puššāqē* themselves, we have corroborating tales of laypersons consulting ascetics and clergy for purposes of divination, along with those canons regulating monks' money-making prospects as diviners. These data further support the view that the intended clientele of the Divining Gospels included laypersons, although we see no reason not to allow religious clients as well. If certain sets of *hermēneiai* were deemed applicable to one sort of client or the other, the practitioner could easily factor that into the selection process, if we remember that some sort of topical organizing principal must have been in play.

Based on the patterns of query and response in the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, Naether draws a portrait of the typical client assumed by that material. “The average petitioner,” she says, “was male, middle-aged, well-situated, married, middle-class, often travelling, who held a position of status.”⁵⁹ A glance at the *Sortes Astrampsychi* shows that its

questions and answers are much more specific than most of what we find in the *puššāqē* of the Divining Gospel. But also, such a portrait as Naether paints is actually an amalgam composed of brief glimpses of many individual clients asking a variety of specific questions, as reflected in the varied contents of the *Sortes*. As Naether acknowledges, the “average petitioner” was not necessarily any particular client. In the case of the Divining Gospels, with their preponderance of general *puššāqē*, it is even more difficult to get a clear picture of the “average” client. The Divining Gospels are fairly non-discriminatory, marketing their knowledge to the wide range of social situations we see in Late Antiquity – lay and religious, rich and poor, perhaps even slave and free.

The books themselves and the realities of their historical contexts show that the practitioners were almost certainly religious persons, however. Further, we might expect that secular clients (and perhaps religious ones as well) would pay these practitioners for the privilege of a consultation, whether in private fees or votive offerings and contributions to the church or monastery. The possibility of the “ritual expert” charging privately for such services would help explain some of the ecclesial and monastic regulations on these activities.⁶⁰ We cannot say whether the use of Divining Gospels was ever “mainstreamed” in Christian Late Antiquity, but it is apparent that their users offered a valued service, wherever they were able to practice. If the use of this tool was pioneered in Egypt, as we suspect, it was quickly taken up into use in varied (probably Christian) communities, speaking different languages, across a large area.

7.5 Interpretive Tools of Pastoral Care

Bruce Metzger was certainly correct in his observation that the *hermēneiai* are “not intended as exegetical comments on the Scripture text”⁶¹ – that is, they do not function as interpretations of the text in the sense that contemporary exegetes normally mean interpretation. They do not gloss the biblical text, are not drawn from it (save *Puššāqā* 62; see 7.2.2), and their ancestry is ultimately traceable to non-Christian sources disconnected from the Bible. It is tempting to follow the conventional viewpoint that

⁵⁹ “Der durchschnittliche Petent war männlich, mittleren Alters, gut situiert, verheiratet, Mittelständler, oft auf Reisen und hatte ein Ehrenamt inne” (Naether 2010, 276).

⁶⁰ On the likelihood that Egyptian monks and scribes used their skills in these ways to supplement their income, see Frankfurter 1997, 128–29.

⁶¹ Metzger 1988b, 166–67.

the *sortes* are bound to the text of John only because of its potent and often mysterious language, not due to any meaningful connections with the narrative itself.

However, while it is true that the statements are not instances of ἐξήγησις (*exêgêsis*), they are certainly intended to facilitate acts of ἐρμηνεία (*hermêneia*) – “interpretation.” Given the fragmentary nature of so much of the material available before now, it is easy to see why so many scholars have failed to notice the correlations between the *hermêneiai* and the biblical text. But a close analysis of a much larger sample of data confirms correlations that are unmistakable and pervasive. When the *sortes* were adapted out of their original contexts and wedded to the text of a Gospel codex, the structure and language of the biblical narrative influenced the placement of at least many of them, shaping their language as well. This took place by the fifth century, probably in Egypt, where late antique scribal experts were busy about the task of adapting the sortilege materials of the Egyptian traditions into the idioms of Christian worship and the textual culture of Christian institutions.

It has not been within the scope of this study to examine each *puššāqā* in order to determine the precise nature of its correlation to a portion of Gospel text, nor to attempt a reconstruction of the original sequence of the material and define its intended pairings with biblical segments. For one thing, that would be an exploration of largely hypothetical territory, whereas this study is concerned with the manuscripts as they are and what those material features can tell us about their use, the Syriac in particular. But also, our survey of selected examples has been sufficient to establish the essential and deliberate connections between the *hermêneiai* and the Gospel of John.

For their potency, the *hermêneiai* draw not only on the authority of the sacred codex and the aura of mystery and power that John’s Gospel enjoyed, but even on very specific elements of the narrative itself, sometimes in sophisticated ways. To the users and their clients, the *puššāqē/ hermêneiai* were “interpretations.” Their hermeneutic and underlying epistemology are distinctive, especially in comparison to the hermeneutical assumptions of the modern exegete. Yet they stand apart from the typical patristic exegesis of Late Antiquity also. The *puššāqē* show us a different mode of interpretation by which to bring the divine authority of the biblical text to bear on the seeker’s questions than we typically see in patristic and medieval commentaries, but a hermeneutic nonetheless; perhaps not always welcome in official ecclesial circles, but popular, and executed with care by learned clergy.

A consideration of the true nature of the *puššāqē*’s connections to John’s Gospel has led naturally to an expli-

cation of the relationship between the agent tasked with navigating those connections (the practitioner) and the ones who would ultimately find the interpretations persuasive and helpful (the clients). The Divining Gospels are suited to a wide variety of clientele – secular or religious, and persons occupying different stations in society. But we can be more specific in describing the practitioners. Competent users of these books would normally be clerical or monastic agents of the church. The Divining Gospels add considerably to the evidence proving that “oracles were no ‘behind-the-scenes’ favor but rather a common service to the community that was offered by certain churches or monasteries.”⁶² The complex and widespread distribution of the Divining Gospels shows us that we are dealing with what once was a major phenomenon in some circles of Christian practice, where people sought this particular brand of ritual expertise in order to gain assurances amidst difficult circumstances or help in discerning their way forward. The agents of this activity functioned as crucial interpreters, who hoped to facilitate a productive interaction between the client and his or her situation, the biblical text, and the *puššāqā* that the sortilege process had disclosed.

From the book itself we cannot know all we would like to know about these encounters, including whether they occurred in prescribed sacred locations or simply wherever the practitioner happened to be. But we can infer a great deal about the role the book played in establishing dialogue and a meaningful transfer of knowledge between the pastoral practitioner and the client. Even the gaps, dislocations, and inconsistencies we find in our manuscripts tell us something we should be able to guess otherwise: the human element in the divining procedure was huge. The role of the practitioner as interpreter and pastoral agent was indispensable to the effective use of the Divining Gospel.

In his treatment of religious transformation in Roman Egypt, Frankfurter discusses the place of lot divination texts such as the Christianized *Sortes Astrampsychi* and the *Sortes Sanctorum*, describing a complex social matrix that can also help us contextualize the Syriac version of the Divining Gospel:

[T]he Christian oracular books suggest a life-world of monks or other types of literate ecclesiastical personnel offering the kind of religious service that historically had located a cult within the matrix of social relations, aspirations, and crises that defined a community’s religious needs. Where the “ticket” oracles might have been exchanged on a particular feast day, as in the festal

⁶² Frankfurter 1998, 194.

processions of the god or indigenous oracle rites, the oracular books seem to point to private consultations with a “master” of divination and other ritual texts who himself held some authority of the Christian hierarchy.⁶³

The use of the Divining Gospel may have been more mainstream than previously assumed, at least in some places. Furthermore, in its portability and its detachment from specific shrines or certain sacred days, the Divining Gospel, like other “Christian oracular books,” draws the seeker into relationship with a person – the clerical practitioner, who also happens to be an expert in other areas of life management and social engagement. Klingshirn’s characterization of clerical diviners underscores the potential fruitfulness of these sessions:

One can imagine how, with their training in Christian ethics, fund of local knowledge, and access to powerful modes of protection and healing (amulets, blessed oil, relics, the eucharist), clerics might have made very successful diviners, able to counsel their clients about a full range of problems and to offer specific remedies and practical strategies.⁶⁴

In the hands of a capable practitioner and against the backdrop of the social and religious settings we have depicted, the Divining Gospels are perhaps best understood as a pastoral aid, one of the tools of pastoral care a ministerial user could employ.

We wonder – what became of these books, that were once so widely used? A brief consideration of that question will bring our study to a close in the final chapter.

⁶³ Frankfurter 1998, 195.

⁶⁴ Klingshirn 2005, 114.

8 The Demise of the Divining Gospel

8.1 Oracles Overwritten

The fifth-century chronicler Philostorgius reports a famous legend about the emperor Julian (†363). Grippled by the desire to obstruct ascendant Christianity and restore paganism, the Apostate sent an emissary to the venerable oracle at Delphi. The messenger was commissioned with the task of rebuilding Apollo's temple and seeking a hopeful word from the god. The oracle returned the following message to the emperor:

Tell the emperor that the Daidalic hall has fallen.
No longer does Phoebus have his chamber, nor mantic laurel,
nor prophetic spring; and the speaking water has been silenced.¹

Often cited as the “last oracle” of Delphi, these hexameter verses mark the passing of the old order of things. Whether the statement was intended as an appeal for the emperor's help or we should read it as the pious declaration of Christianity's triumph, put into the oracle's mouth *post facto* by those who reveled in the defeat of Julian's campaign against the Galileans, the message strikes a sad tone: the old ways are over, they are not coming back; the oracle has fallen silent.

Christian apologists frequently spoke of the silencing of “pagan” oracles in the face of Christ's advent. They sometimes represent the oracles as having one last message to convey – the announcement of their own demise and a word of testimony, certifying the status of Christ as God's Son and Lord of the cosmos. A recurring motif in ancient Christian apologetic is the inferiority and humiliation of the traditional oracles, making way for Jesus Christ as the true messenger of the divine Word.

The demise of the ancient oracles did not reduce the human desire for divine knowledge and direction. People still longed for access to the divine. The uncertainties of life continued to pose challenges and a world charged with signs begged to be read. Christian leaders and authors constructed various ways of dealing with these needs, seeking to address them from within a distinctly Christian framework of belief and practice. Catechesis, prayers, sermons, spiritual supervision, mystagogical instruction, and the liturgy itself provided some of the most common means by which late antique leaders could redirect the imaginations and the practices of believ-

ers towards new ways of accessing the divine and purportedly higher motives for doing so. Ecclesial canons expressed the church's intent to form its clergy as exemplars and facilitators of the conversion. Staying away from the habits and institutions of the old paganism was a key part of the program.

Yet for some Christians, the new orientation did not preclude adapting established tools and techniques of lot divination into a Christian idiom. The oracles had not in fact fallen silent – they had been supplanted by the Word of God. Inquirers could still seek to know God's mind and discern his intent. One avenue for doing so relied on lot divination. The tools and techniques that had once put people in touch with the gods could, with some alteration, be used to coordinate communication between the God of the Christians and the faithful seeker. For some at least, the mechanisms of this “neutral technology” mattered little, so long as they were effective. What mattered was the holiness of the source to which one turned for help – the Almighty God – and the faithful intent of the seeker. So in Late Antiquity a host of christianized lot divination texts were produced, distributed, translated, and put to use. Their extensive borrowing from non-Christian materials and techniques undoubtedly enhanced their popularity with those for whom the familiarity of these conventions were welcome. It also undoubtedly intensified the hostility that some ecclesial leaders felt towards these hybridized resources and their compromising practitioners.

Different methods of lot divination came into Christian use. But for those seeking knowledge and guidance from God, surely the most sound approaches were those that relied on sacred scripture. Scripture consisted of “divine oracles,” bearing the messages of God for people. The Bible itself told stories about drawing lots, a practice that enjoyed apostolic authorization. For centuries, the *Sortes biblicae* offered a sortilege technique that was practically beyond criticism. Whereas the motives for using it would always invite scrutiny, the act of turning to scripture through the guileless technique of making a random selection, in the hope that God would speak to the believer through it, has always been difficult to fault. Respect for scripture as the ever-timely channel of God's messages combined with reverence for the scriptural book as a sacred object secured the Bible's lasting place in practices of lot divination.

The producers of the Divining Gospel exploited this reverence for text and for book, synthesizing the tradi-

¹ Gregory 1983, 356.

tions of lot divination texts with one of the most highly esteemed books of the Bible: the Gospel of John, famous for its declarations of power and its profession of great mysteries, especially the Incarnation. John's Gospel was a weapon of choice on the battlefield of contested orthodoxies and in the christological struggles of Late Antiquity. But it also became a veteran of action in more exotic forms of spiritual combat. Appreciated for its ready supply of curative remedies and apotropaic defenses, John was regularly deployed against the demonic and used to catalyze healing among the sick. Somewhere within the matrix of the religious scribal activity responsible for producing new types of lot divination texts for Christian use, the first editions of the Divining Gospel came into being. They used John specifically, in dedicated codex format, but they also borrowed material and techniques from the lot divination tradition. The new genre of the Divining Gospel invited its users to facilitate dynamic four-way conversations, between the expert practitioner, the seeker, and the book's two inherent voices: that of divine scripture and its *hermêneiai*, all within the charged atmosphere generated by a fifth component: the book as a sacred material object.

We hear strong testimony to the book's effectiveness and popularity in the variety and distribution of its editions. Almost certainly created in Greek and in Egypt, the book quickly spawned versions in Coptic, Syriac, and Latin, with Armenian not long after, including editions with bilingual features. The ambitious impetus to produce different editions of the book was met with voracious consumption. It traveled from the scribal centers of late antique Egypt to its desert corners, and to places much farther away, such as Gaul and Syria. Within a fairly short time, the Divining Gospel had become a very popular book, used far and wide for the purpose of facilitating a special kind of communication between God and people on a range of topics. The Divining Gospel was one of numerous devices being developed in Late Antiquity by which the oracles of old were being overwritten.

Further testimony to its impact is to be found in the later books that adopted some of the same conventions, combining parts of scripture with an apparatus of oracular statements called *hermêneiai*. These Byzantine *Rhiktoplogia* and Psalms *hermêneiai* became popular in their own right, especially in the East, where editors drafted multiple recensions and translators turned Greek texts into Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic, Arabic, and Syriac. These books have the Divining Gospel in their ancestry, attesting to its continued impact on the conventions and expectations of the use of scripture in sortilege.

8.2 Forbidden Oracles, New Editions: The Demise of the Divining Gospel

Given the wide dissemination and long-term impact of the Divining Gospel, how do we account for its demise?

It may seem strange to talk about the demise of the Divining Gospel. This study has focused on the Syriac manuscript that is in many ways the best example we have of a Divining Gospel. It is an early copy and nearly intact, remaining marvelously well preserved under the care of the monks at Deir al-Surian and the staff of the British Library (London, BL, Add. 17,119). Its very existence attests to the survival of the Divining Gospel. Yet as we have seen, the Syriac manuscript also appears to embody a tale of decline (see 4.3), bearing in itself the marks of a story that we find writ large in the manuscript tradition of the Divining Gospel – a story that begins with a great flourishing of carefully executed editions and versions but ends in scattered fragments, makeshift adaptations, wholesale erasure, and broken mechanisms. Inasmuch as the widespread and diverse surviving evidence for the Divining Gospel hints at a once-vital tradition, the scarcity and damaged nature of those same manuscripts attest to the fading of that tradition.

By speaking of the Divining Gospel's demise we do not wish to misrepresent a living religious tradition that employs expert lot divination as a communal means of gaining wisdom. The Syriac manuscript remains the most complete and well-preserved edition of the Divining Gospel, one that is still mostly functional, at least potentially. But once again, certain features indicate that the book may not have been used for sortilege after a point. To be truthful, we cannot know how it was being used in the centuries after the last repairs to its sortilege material, before it came to the British Library. We suspect that during the final stages of its time at Deir al-Surian it sat in a shambles in the library, but we cannot know. It may have been used continuously by the monks, for sacred reading and perhaps even for divination. To them, perhaps, the book never went out of style.

More to the point, we have modern manuscripts that demonstrate the continued interest in lot divination and related kinds of ritual activities in communities in direct lineage to those that used and preserved the Divining Gospel. The Syriac book, London, BL Or. 4434, with its multiple lot divination texts, its guides for interpreting dreams, and its curative recipes, is a nineteenth-century manuscript. The so-called Syriac "Book of Protection" contains a host of prayers and associated rituals for such

things as alleviating sicknesses, shielding crops from fire and milk from spoiling, silencing dogs, and anathematizing bullets in the guns of one's enemies.² Its manuscripts are eighteenth- and nineteenth-century productions. These resources show the vitality of practices like apotropaic ritual and lot divination in Syriac-speaking religious communities of the Middle East in the recent past. Even today, tales are told of clergy and monks in the Middle East who presently engage in similar kinds of ritual practices on behalf of people who come to them for help. We acknowledge and respect that some very ancient customs continue to be a part of the shared life of these living religious communities, including forms of divination. Nevertheless, the Divining Gospel itself is not in circulation nor in use, not in Syriac communities or elsewhere, so far as we know.

Instead, our surviving evidence indicates that Divining Gospels enjoyed considerable popularity from Late Antiquity and into the medieval and early Byzantine periods but then passed out of common use. We must admit that the evidence for this generalization survives in different versions, representing different communities, each with their own trajectories of use and eventual abandonment. Ideally, we would treat each trajectory distinctly, since the Divining Gospels undoubtedly faced different circumstances within different traditions and at different times. Differences between the medieval West and the early Byzantine East are especially pronounced. For instance, the eleventh-century Armenian fragment (Erevan, Matenadaran, 9650) causes us to wonder what circumstances prompted the production of that book, when we see no other evidence for Divining Gospel production in the other traditions at that time. We may speculate that the Divining Gospel enjoyed greater longevity of use within one or more Armenian contexts, but we cannot offer any explanations for why that might be the case. The survival of Armenian Psalms *hermêneiai* manuscripts from the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries reinforces our impression that books of this kind enjoyed sustained currency in Armenian contexts, for reasons that may not apply in other settings. So it is easy to see why it would be valuable to address the trajectory of each tradition separately. Yet doing so lies outside the scope of this study, in which our intent is to understand and contextualize the Syriac manuscript in particular. Consequently, we offer here only a general characterization of the larger tradition, aware that the picture may look different by individual cases.

Generally speaking, the Divining Gospels made a sizable impact in the fifth–seventh centuries, but the evidence for them declines significantly in the eighth–ninth centuries (see Table 3.1), after which it falls off dramatically. The latest copies we have are from the ninth century, in the Latin Sangermanensis and the Armenian palimpsest, and the eleventh century, in the isolated Armenian fragments we have just mentioned. The Greek additions to Codex Bezae may be from as late as the ninth century as well. After the ninth century, Divining Gospels do not disappear, but they become much more scarce, whereas a great deal of the surviving evidence of even the earlier books comes only in fragmentary form, pointing to significant disruptions in the transmission of these books.

The picture we get from the surviving evidence we could put down to accidents of history. Many ancient books that were once widely distributed and frequently read no longer survive, or survive only in translation or the odd quotation. It need not be the case that such books were lost because they were not sufficiently popular, much less that they were being suppressed or systematically destroyed. It is true that the more popular books were copied more frequently and were probably singled out for preservation in the collections of those who had the means to conserve them and keep them safe. But even so, accidents of fire and flood and war and theft, to say nothing of the relentless corrosion of time itself, have reduced the vast majority of ancient books to dust. That we have any manuscripts at all of the Divining Gospels may be considered remarkable. So we must allow that the state of our manuscript evidence may require no special explanation. Yet the pattern we see of an early flourishing, followed by fairly rapid demise, prompts us to look for some explanation beyond the accidental, if we have evidence to support it.

We could speculate that Divining Gospels became unpopular and were abandoned because they were seen to be ineffectual. That is, once clients or practitioners deduced that the answers were not always trustworthy and the mechanism was flawed, they stopped relying on them for sortilege. This sort of explanation may owe too much to the influence of modern bias, by which we presume that a “rational” population will progressively see through clever tricks and steadily move away from “superstitious” practices. The fact that books and practices akin to the Divining Gospel continue to find enthusiastic expression well into the modern period argues against the presumptions of this explanation. Also, the capacity people have to continue believing in and relying on ritual practices as meaningful and salutary for dealing with certain kinds of problems, even in the face of contradictions or glitches in

² Gollancz 1912, x–xii, xxxi, xxxv, xxxix, xliii, li.

the system, is well-established.³ Seeking to explain the persistence of these practices, Betz remarks, “[a]fter all, magic is nothing but the art of making people believe that something is being done about those things in life about which we all know that we ourselves can do nothing.”⁴

Divination is not magic, yet Betz’s insight holds: people embrace practices that help them deal with life’s anxieties and they develop ways to cope with any cognitive dissonance that may arise when some part of their approach does not deliver as promised, like when a prophecy fails, for instance. In the case of the Divining Gospels, we are not dealing with a soulless mechanism. As we have seen, the use of the Divining Gospels would entail conversation between people who are focused together on a matter of concern. In the hands of a capable practitioner, the consultation does not end with a mere declaration of some bald prophecy that will turn out either to be true or false. As we have argued, there are strong reasons to believe that the consultations would normally entail robust encounters, in which the participants engage real life situations and address complex problems with some nuance. We would expect that in most situations, the competent practitioner-pastor would work to build something constructive for the client as a result of the consultation. The efficacy of the consult would have more to do with the practitioner’s aptitude for constructive engagement than with the mechanical precision of the apparatus or simplistic skepticism about the oracles. Hence, we have no reason to believe that the demise of the Divining Gospel after the ninth century was due to a loss of confidence in divination or its effectiveness.

If ecclesial authorities suppressed these book as forbidden oracles, that could account for marked decline in production and use. We have ample evidence of ecclesial efforts to restrict or regulate divination, including the text-based variety (see 2.4). However, no known late antique or medieval sources definitely mention the Divining Gospel, i.e. copies of John’s Gospel that incorporate a sortilege apparatus. Nor have we encountered references that even mention the specific use of John in lot divination. Yet it is obvious that John was so used and that the Divining Gospel was a relatively widespread edition for some time.

It is likely that what we are calling the Divining Gospel would fall under the category of forbidden oracles covered by such proscriptions as we find in Charlemagne’s capitulary and Jacob of Edessa’s rules, where drawing lots from

the Gospels were specifically forbidden (see 2.4). The *Admonitions* of Rabbula that proscribe taking answers “from a book” could also be taken as prohibiting the use of the Divining Gospel. Whether and to what extent the Divining Gospel would be targeted under the enforcement of rules like these is uncertain and would likely vary by locality. However, the criticisms we find in some authors and the regulations in multiple canon collections suggest the likelihood that the Divining Gospel existed under a cloud of ecclesial or monastic suspicion, in at least some places. If so, ecclesial proscription would then bear a large share of the blame for the decline in Divining Gospel production and use. That is, it would appear that in many quarters of the late antique and early medieval church, we could find ecclesial representatives who would be likely to discourage the use of tools like the Divining Gospel. They would probably also be quick to warn people away from independent practitioners, who operated outside formal ecclesial structures. This would surely have a corrosive effect on the production and transmission of these books and undermine their use.

Even in the absence of a definite ban on the Divining Gospel, ecclesial authors and canons express sufficient antipathy towards lot divination practices involving scripture to account for an atmosphere of partial repression. The impact of these negative attitudes would be uneven, varying by location and circumstance. But since in most locales text-based divination was not among the practices being positively emphasized and promoted as constituent of essential clerical or monastic activities, we would expect to find the practice – and its practitioners – moving increasingly into the margins, even where they were not being deliberately repressed.

Hence, negative attitudes and repressive measures could help account for the decline in production and use of the Divining Gospel. However, those same attitudes and measures would negatively impact other lot divination texts and similar practices, like the *Sortes biblicae*, as well. We have already described medieval restrictions against *Sortes biblicae* and the repeated attempts to ban certain divination texts, like the *Sortes Sanctorum* (see 2.4 above), signaling both the persistence of these things and the relentlessness of those seeking to control or defeat them. Here we wish to observe that, whereas the Divining Gospel appears to have fallen out of general use, the Byzantine *Rhiktologia* and the Psalms *hermêneiai* continued to find use for many centuries. The *Rhiktologia* are quite different from the Divining Gospel; they use scripture but they are not Bibles, and their limited quantities of *sortes* are more elaborate in style and general in focus. By comparison, the Psalms *hermêneiai* more closely resemble a

³ The discussion in Thomas’ study of the decline of magic is helpful on this point (Thomas 1971, 641–48).

⁴ Betz 1992, xlviii.

Divining Gospel: they are biblical codices, they have brief and simple statements that are fairly general yet more pointed than those in the *Rhiktologia*, and each statement is tied to a particular segment of text, i.e. a single Psalm. Furthermore, we see that the Psalms, like the Gospels, are mentioned explicitly in several of the canons seeking to regulate their use in divination. Why then would the Psalters continue to find sustained use, long after the Divining Gospel appears to have gone dormant?

A partial answer may have to do with the fact that the Psalms were the most commonly read and well-known portion of scripture, especially in monasteries. We would expect that every popular use of the Psalter would leave deeper impressions on the tradition and enjoy greater longevity. As for regulations we find in both East and West that target the clergy's use of Psalters in lot divination, these rules would not have been universally enforced. However, as we also argued in the case of the Divining Gospel, we expect the injunctions would cast shadows of suspicion on using the Psalms this way, whether through the ever-present *Sortes biblicae* or the use of specialized Psalms *hermêneiai*. It may be the case that the Psalms *hermêneiai* eventually came to be used mainly in monasteries, with monks as practitioners and other monks or clergy as the main clients, the tools thereby surviving due to their carefully supervised use in those restrictive contexts. However, we should not presume that these tools came to be relegated to monastic use in the medieval and early modern periods simply because they have tended to survive in monastic libraries. The Syriac "Book of Protection", to take one modern example, has lay clientele in view as well as clergy.

Probably the most noteworthy consideration in favor of the Psalms *hermêneiai* survival over the Divining Gospel is that the former were easier to use and more reliable. The segments of the Psalms *hermêneiai* are very well defined – one Psalm equals one segment, and it has a single oracular statement attached to it. This structure is not prone to the slippage we see happening in the Divining Gospel tradition. Furthermore, the interpretive connections between segment and *hermêneia* are much easier to deduce. In most instances, the practitioner should have little trouble connecting a Psalm's *hermêneia* with a theme or mood espoused in the poetic declarations of the Psalm. By comparison, as we have discussed, discerning and exploiting a constructive connection between a segment of Gospel narrative or teaching with an attached *hermêneia* could be a daunting task. This is due not only to the problems of slippage or disjunction between statements and their intended segments, but to the inherent complexities of the Gospel material.

Even if we were to presume, with Klingshirn, that the original edition of the Divining Gospel tied each and every one of the hundreds of *hermêneiai* to a prescribed Gospel segment with great intentionality, nowhere do we find a key to the editor's intentions. Nor was there ever likely to have been one, since such a key would have amounted to a full-scale commentary on the book. Instead, the *hermêneiai* are left to speak for themselves. It would have been up to the users to perceive the intended interpretive connections, or failing that, to fashion their own. This process of creative interpretation could be highly constructive, as we have tried to show (see 7.3–5), but it would not always be easy. The Gospel's blocks of teaching and narrative, interwoven with recurring themes and embellished with the moods of characters and the subtleties of narrational tone present the interpreter with a multitude of threads (see 7.2). Discerning which threads to pull in relation to the declaration of a particular oracular statement involves interpretive work that could be richly rewarding as part of a consultation. But it is also more difficult. Although the user of the Psalms *hermêneiai* would also be faced with the challenge of discerning or creating interpretive connections, it is a simpler task due to the contents of the Psalms themselves.

We have characterized the Divining Gospels as "flawed but functional" books (see 6.4.3; 7.3). Significant flaws are present in early forms of the material and get disseminated widely. Even so, for a lengthy period at least, people found these books useful. By positing a competent interpretive practitioner, who would presumably have been coached by others in best practices, we can envision how the Divining Gospel would be effective, despite its problems. However, arguing for the basic functionality of a flawed book does not mean that some users would not choose an improved version, given the opportunity. It may be that the Psalms *hermêneiai* were received as just that – a simpler tool that accomplished nearly the same thing, but in a more efficient and possibly more satisfying way. Not only are the Psalter's segments cleaner and the interpretive challenges less complex, but the *hermêneiai* attached to the Psalms are more general in focus and therefore more readily applicable. In our judgment, the *hermêneiai* in the Greek Psalters, for instance, constitute a model example of a lot divination text with general answers.⁵ Hence, the statements do not require organization into particular categories nor a complex selection mechanism. By comparison, the specificity of many of the *puššāqē* in the Syriac

⁵ See the statements in Parpulov 2014, 310–15; three examples in Table 6.1 above.

Divining Gospel presumes some manner of topical organization, as we have shown. This complicates the use of the apparatus – and also potentially deepens the sense of frustration the user will feel if the categories are broken due to numerical inconsistencies or if the organizing table is lost. None of our examples of the Divining Gospel have such a table or list, except perhaps the severely defective wheel chart in Codex Sangermanensis.

We are not suggesting that the appearance of the Psalms *hermêneiai* spelled the end of the Divining Gospel. But we seek to explain its apparent demise in view of the continued production and use of other *hermêneiai* in the same or related historical contexts. In the absence of more definite evidence illuminating the reception history of the Divining Gospel, we can only speculate. But it is plausible that the Divining Gospel was eventually superseded by lot divination texts that were simpler to make and easier to use, like the *Rhiktologia* and especially the Psalms *hermêneiai*. This could be true particularly in the East, where the latter books assumed special prominence. Though different, those two genres of lot divination texts owed much to the Divining Gospel, having inherited from it their basic conventions as divinatory *hermêneiai*, yet without all its complications.

Of course, any of the lot divination texts would be susceptible to the criticisms and possible restrictions being leveled against such tools by skeptical leaders. Ecclesial pressures against forbidden oracles and suspect practices – to say nothing of the concern to regulate or ban practitioners who operated outside the bounds of the ecclesial establishment – probably also eroded the use of the Divining Gospel. This could be true especially in the West, where we find a steady stream of proscriptive statements, going back to Augustine at least, but recurring in one form or another in a variety of medieval texts (see 2.4).

In short, lack of clear positive sanction and the shadow of perennial suspicion weakened the status of all the christianized lot divination texts, pushing them into the margins so that we are typically left with just the scarce and fragmentary traces of their once considerable impact. In their diminished state, long after their heyday in Late Antiquity, the Divining Gospels gave way to the improved efficiencies of the other *hermêneia* books that had become available. The use of scripture in divination never declined however. The Psalms *hermêneiai* and the *Rhiktologia* brought scripture and lot divination together on every page. But the Divining Gospel, the unique book that invited its user to discover select oracular interpretations within each and every passage of John's remarkable narrative, became very rare and nearly impossible to find. The Divining Gospel effectively fell out of use. A seeker

who wished to divine the mind of God by means of a true Gospel codex was left to resort to the very simple practice of the *Sortes biblicae*, the technique of lot divination using scripture that had always been available to Christians and seemed never to wane in its popularity.

8.3 Relics of a Distinct Hermeneutic

We should not let our discussion of possible explanations for the demise in the production and use of the Divining Gospel distract us from our appreciation of these extraordinary books and their contributions to our knowledge of late antique Christian practice. They attest to a monumental enterprise of adapting ancient lot divination materials into Christian usage, one that was met with considerable enthusiasm in many places. They also manifest a distinctive approach to biblical interpretation, one that has built into it a special consideration of a person's life situation. These books prompt the reader to interpret and apply scripture for the sake of addressing the problems and questions of everyday life, while using a hermeneutic that was markedly different from what one found in the preachers, theologians, and commentators of the day. Biblical texts have functioned in many different ways within the various communities that receive them as holy and authoritative; the Divining Gospel requires us to acknowledge even greater diversity than has often been assumed.

The Syriac manuscript of the Divining Gospel is an early edition of this remarkable book. Our study of it has reminded us that even fairly common practices may leave surprisingly sparse traces in surviving artifacts. If there were a demise of the Divining Gospel, whether by accident, through ecclesial suppression, due to being outmoded by other books, or some combination thereof, before its demise it enjoyed widespread use and popular reception. The many surviving fragments and variety of ancient versions prove this. Later books of *hermêneiai* further attest to its legacy. The Syriac version gives us a better sense of the content and overall framework of the *hermêneiai* in their early form than we get anywhere else, helping us to confirm their divinatory nature and to situate the apparatus within the tradition of lot divination texts. The material features of the Syriac manuscript chronicle much of its own history and the story of its use.

The breadth and integrity of the Syriac apparatus also advance our understanding of how the books of this genre could be used. The divinatory nature of the *puššāqē* is clear,

yet their interpretive qualities are also strong. The oracular material, by which the book's users could gain mystical guidance in response to their questions, draws much of its potency from its residence in the Gospel codex as a sacred object. Yet the interactions that we overhear between the *puššāqē* and their assigned portions of the Gospel text disclose another kind of authority at work, the authority of scripture's verbal content. The *puššāqē* draw on specific elements of the biblical text, so that the user can practice the distinctive hermeneutic that we mentioned, one that brings scripture to bear on the pressing questions and daily lives of people, yet in ways that do not fit the norms of conventional liturgy or preaching.

In this hermeneutic, historical and literary context do not provide the primary matrices in which the interpreting priest or monk determines the significance of the text for a person's life; neither does dogmatic framing nor liturgical celebration. Instead, in addition to the mere fact of a statement's locatedness in the sacred book, its connection to a particular segment of the Gospel suggests a specific field of interpretation. The text of scripture and the declaration of its *puššāqā* are laid alongside each other, conjuring a sort of dialogue into which the human participants in the consultation may enter. Even the process of selection, with its presumed conversational and deliberative elements along with its random elements, shape the conversation and enrich the text's

interpretation. The practitioners, whether using the book for their own benefit or for the sake of others, represent the decisive influence in shaping the conversation and its outcome.

The medieval penitentials, when seen as texts in isolation from human use within religious communities, seem like little more than catalogues of statutes and ordinances, a rather harsh assortment of transactional propositions and mechanical prescriptions. But reading between and behind the lines not only exposes the penitentials as rich repositories of evidence illuminating the social background, but also reveals their potential as pastoral manuals in the hands of sensitive spiritual directors. In the same way, the manuscripts of the Divining Gospel preserve for us only the skeletal framework of what was once experienced as a rich human encounter with the divine, facilitated by the capable practitioner-pastor who could also help guarantee the aptness of the experience and effectiveness of its results.

We are fortunate to get the long look into the Divining Gospel that our unique Syriac manuscript provides. Many questions about the origins, interrelationships, and use of these books remain. As we learn more about the history and application of these unusual materials, we will also come to understand better the diverse functions that the text of scripture and the books containing it have had amongst those who held them both sacred.

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Appendix: Syriac Words in the *Puššāqē*

As is the case with other lot divination texts, the *puššāqē* do not exhibit extensive vocabulary and many words repeat. The following index lists Syriac words according to the numbers of the *puššāqē* in which they occur.

For ease of reference, words are listed by the lexical forms occurring in many dictionaries, e.g. Sebastian P. Brock and George A. Kiraz, *Gorgias Concise Syriac-English, English-Syriac Dictionary* (Piscataway, NJ, 2015).

The index does not list occurrences of the term ܦܘܫܫܐܩܐ (*puššāqā*) since that heading occurs in nearly every case. The index does not list prepositions (e.g. ܕ-, ܗ-, ܘܟܘܢ), particles (e.g. ܕܘܪ ,ܠܐ ,ܐܘܪ), or pronouns (e.g. ܐܢܝܢ ,ܗܘܢܐ ,ܗܘܢܐ).

Numbers in parentheses indicate a conjectured or corrected form; see notes accompanying the *puššāqā* in question for details.

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