

## Divination 1

Jessica A. Olson  
ADF Member no. 2934  
Clergy Training Program; Generalist Study Program

***Question 1: Name and briefly describe one method of divination or seership technique common to three paleo-pagan Indo-European cultures. (minimum 100 words each)***

Scrying was not uncommon among the Pagan Indo-Europeans. While we tend to not use this technique often in public ADF rites because it is a projective technique that cannot be verified by a third party through an established group of common symbols, it is a completely valid method of divination for personal practice.

*Avestan culture* -Scrying by fire, and perhaps by water as well, in Persian culture is attested in various sources. In *Crystal Gazing: Its History and Practice, with a Discussion of the Evidence for Telepathic Scrying*, Thomas recounts that various Persian authors spoke of a cup, the Cup of Jamshid (The Cup of Djemsheed), variously also a globe or mirror, in which the rulers of ancient Persia could see the whole universe.<sup>1</sup> Agathias makes a reference to Zoroastrian priests who foretold the future by looking into flames. When referring to the second King of Rome, Numa Pompilius', use of hydromancy, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim says that this was a form of divination was introduced by the Persians.<sup>2</sup>

*Hellenic culture* - Apparently, scrying was also not uncommon in Greek culture. Pausanias tells us that the temple of Demeter at Patraae on the coast of Achaia was famous for the accuracy of its oracles.<sup>3</sup> This temple was almost always used to divine the future of the ill. A mirror was lowered into a fountain until the bottom edge touched the water. The oracle then read the images she saw there and told the patients of their chances of survival.<sup>4</sup> Essentially, scrying is a form of trance, an altered state in which the diviner may see visions or images, which is well attested in ancient resources.

*Roman culture* - Augustine also says that Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, practiced hydromancy and that he would consult with the images of the gods (who may have actually been demons) who would tell him which rites to perform.<sup>5, 6</sup> Agrippa gives an account of how a Roman boy saw in the water "effigies" of the gods which foretold for him the all the events of

---

<sup>1</sup>Bonomi, p. 266 qtd in Thomas, Northcote W. "Crystal Gazing: Its History and Practice, with a Discussion of the Evidence for Telepathic Scrying." New York: Dodge Publishing Company. 1905. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Agrippa, Heinrich Cornelius. "Three Books of Occult Philosophy." Donald Tyson, James Freake. Woodbury : Llewellyn Publications. 1992. 178.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, Northcote W. "Crystal Gazing: Its History and Practice, with a Discussion of the Evidence for Telepathic Scrying." New York: Dodge Publishing Company. 1905. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, R. W. Dyson. "The City of God Against the Pagans." R.W Dyson, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998. 310.

the Mithridatic Wars, this method is described as a divination method of the Persians. Further, a scene depicted in the frescoes in the Villa of Mysteries, in Pompeii, seems to clearly show a young person scrying with a bowl (pictured right).<sup>7</sup>

**Question 2:** *Within the context of a single paleo-pagan Indo-European culture, discuss three different forms of divination or seership, and give an example of each.* (minimum 100 words each)

While the Magi of the Iranians are described as powerful magicians by a number of sources, most of the evidence for the practice of divination comes from second or third-hand sources. Ebn al-Nadim, an Arab historian of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, refers to several Persian texts on divination. They seem to have been translated into Arabic from Persian or Phalavi at some point, as Abu Ali Bala'mi, the minister of Mansur Ibn Nuh in 931 AD, also reported that the Persians had a book of divination which listed all the forms of divination that had been employed during the Persian's dominance.

*Scrying* – Scrying is a means of divination by gazing into reflective or luminous substances such as crystals, mirrors, water, or fire. Agathias discusses Zoroastrian priests who gazed into the flames to divine the future. There is also a section in the *Wizidagiha Zadsparamin* in which Zarathustra divines the future by looking into the sky and then into the earth (WZ 17:1-6) He travels, via a form of soul travel and battles evil sorcerers and wizards (WZ 14-20). There is also a myth of a magical cup, the Cup of Jamshid (The Cup of Djemsheed), in which the rulers of ancient Persia could see the whole universe.<sup>8</sup>

*Dream interpretation* – Herodotus mentions the *Magians* as interpreters of dreams (1.107<sup>9</sup>, 1.108<sup>10</sup>, 1.120<sup>11</sup>, 1.128<sup>12</sup> & 7.19<sup>13</sup>). He describes one dream in particular of the



<sup>7</sup> Jackson, James W. *Scene 4, Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii*. Retrieved 01 September 2008. <<http://www.art-and-archaeology.com/timelines/rome/empire/vm/villaofthemysteries.html>>.

<sup>8</sup> Bonomi, p. 266 qtd in Thomas, Northcote W. "Crystal Gazing: Its History and Practice, with a Discussion of the Evidence for Telepathic Scrying." New York: Dodge Publishing Company. 1905. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Herodotus. "The History of Herodotus." George Rawlinson, Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, & John Gardner Wilkinson, eds. New York: D. Appleton and Company. 192.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 193.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 199.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 205.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 129.

Persian ruler Astyages who dreams that a vine grew from the womb of his daughter, Mandane, who was recently pregnant. He called for his Magi and it was interpreted that his daughter's child would one day overthrow the ruler. The ruler then sent for the daughter and kept watch over her so that he could destroy the child when it was born.<sup>14</sup> An earlier entry by Herodotus describes another dream by the same ruler, in which his new-born daughter urinates so much that she drowns the entire county. The Magi interpret this to mean that her offspring will one day take over his country. It is confusing why these dreams would disturb Astyages so much, after all the children of his daughter should eventually take over for him if he has no sons and if succession works in the same way as most kingdoms.

*Diving by lots* – In *Nicandri Theriaca* the Magi are described as using rods or twigs of the tamarisk<sup>15</sup> for divination when the author says that “the Median diviners also divine with rods (*Scholia in Nicandri Theriaca* 613).”<sup>16</sup> This may simply be a misidentification of the *barsom*, a bundle of rods used in ritual to symbolize the vegetable kingdom which is often praised for its bounty while performing rites, for divination rods. It could also be a reference to an ancient, but lost, practice of divination similar to one that may have been used by the Druids of Ireland. A story told by Ebn Qotayba suggests that the Persians wrote names or words on the shafts of their arrows. When the arrow was pulled out to shoot an enemy, the inscribed words were interpreted as an omen.<sup>17</sup>

***Question 3: Discuss both the role of seers within at least one Indo-European culture and the relationship of seers to other members of the society, including in that discussion how seers or visionaries would have supported themselves or how they would have been supported by their people. (minimum two paragraphs)***

Seers in the Persian culture were often of the priestly class. It is likely that they would have been supported by the people they served as well as the institution of their respective order. Though there are some references to wandering Magi, it is not clear if these are poor Magi who roam from town to town doing work in exchange for hospitality or if, at least, some Magi were required to travel as part of their duties to the people.

They certainly would have been capable of taking care of themselves if they were from a wealthy upper-class, as many seem to have been. Even if they were not it seems likely that through their vast knowledge and art they could have earned at least a comfortable living by healing, divining, entertaining, or otherwise serving the people.

***Question 4: Identify and describe one method of divination to which you find yourself attracted, and discuss its relationship to paleo-pagan divination. (minimum 300 words)***

---

<sup>14</sup> Herodotus. “The History of Herodotus.” Trans. George Campbell Macaulay. Vol. 1. New York.: MacMillan and Co., 1904. 55.

<sup>15</sup> Jong, Albert De. “Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature.” New York: Brill Academic Publishers. 1998. 398.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Mahmoud Omidasalar. *Iranica: Divine*. University of California, Los Angeles. Retrieved 09 July 2008. <[http://www.iranian.com/Sep96/Iranica/IranicaDivine/Iranica Divine.html](http://www.iranian.com/Sep96/Iranica/IranicaDivine/Iranica%20Divine.html)>.

First, I must say that I am not a seer. I do not do the divinations for my Protogrove. I am a skeptic and feel that my biases will affect the outcome of the divinations and I therefore allow a believer to do the divinations for our rituals. When I am required to do divination myself, I use ogham. I find ogham more comfortable than any other divinatory system I have tried, primarily because I believe that the divination system of the seer's hearth culture or the hearth culture of the rite is going to be more effective than a foreign one like Tarot. I believe that if the kindred are going to communicate to us or through us then they will be more likely to give us a clear message if they are familiar with the medium being used.

There is some evidence for the use of ogham as a divination tool in the ancient world. However, most of this evidence comes from accounts written down by monks from stories previously transmitted orally for hundreds, or even thousands of years. It is possible that these accounts were later additions of the monks or that they were added by storytellers before the monks wrote them down. It is also possible that they were used for divination, and that the orally transmitted stories were actual accounts of the original events.

Whether the ogham were used in the ancient world as a form of divination or not, they are currently used that way in Neopaganism. Perhaps it is just because I feel affinity for them but I have found them to be quite effective, more so than other methods. I have also had my clients, on those rare occasions that I do divinations for people other than myself, say that they felt the divination was more accurate with the oghams. Again, this could just be because I am more confident with them and am more likely to convey a more convincing reading. This could result in a stronger subconscious effect which manifests itself in the client's life more visibly.

**Question 5:** *Briefly describe the symbology of your chosen method of divination, and include a method of application for that system.* (minimum 100 words overall description plus at least one sentence or line per symbol)

Ogham is a system invented in Ireland which consists primarily of slash marks made across the corner of a rod or stone. Although it is not uncommon in modern ogham sets to see the slash marks made across a straight line that runs vertical on a stone or tile. The ogham are divided into five groups called *aicmes*, though I only use the first four. The fifth is used on manuscripts and often includes marks with spirals and curved lines (which were difficult to carve into stone and wood and are not often used in divination). They are commonly referred to as the tree alphabet although the tree ogham is only one of over 100 types of ogham that are outlined in the "The Ogham Tract." It seems more likely that the trees were used as mnemonic devices to help people remember the letter and sound that the symbols represented, like the way young English speakers learn that 'A' is for Apple and 'B' is for Boy.

Since there are about as many different interpretations for this divination method as there are authors, I will provide what I believe the best interpretations of these oghams is, based on my personal experience with them. I do not use the fifth *aicme* in divination; many seers do not, so I will not include it here.



*Beith* (Birch) - Commonly interpreted as *new beginnings*.



*Luis* (Rowan) - Often taken to mean *protection*.



*Fern* (Alder) – Usually interpreted as meaning *guidance*.



*Sail* (Willow) – This is often interpreted to mean *maintaining balance* or *stability*.



*Nion* (Ash) – Many seers interpret this to mean *boundaries* or *obstacles*.



*Uath* (Hawthorn) – This is usually interpreted as *temporary limitations*.



*Dair* (Oak) – Dair usually is understood to mean *wisdom* or strength.



*Tinne* (Holly) – Tinne is seen as *justice*, *courage*, or *unity*.



*Coll* (Hazel) – *Creativity* is the most common interpretation for this ogham.



*Ceirt* (Apple) – This is interpreted as an upcoming *choice*.



*Muin* (Vine) – Muin can be taken to mean *spiritual growth*.



*Gort* (Ivy) – *Caution* is encouraged when gort is drawn.



*nGeadal* (Broom) – This ogham usually means *surprises* or *disruption* should be expected.



*Straif* (Blackthorn) – *Strife* or *misunderstanding* are common interpretations for this ogham.



*Ruis* (Elder) – Many seers believe that Ruis foretells *endings*.



*Ailm* (Elm) – Seers often construe Ailm to mean *foresight*.



*Onn* (Furze) – Many seers will take this ogham to mean *discovery* and *goals accomplished*.



*Ur* (Heather) – This ogham may be interpreted as a need for or coming of *rest* and *hibernation*.



*Eadhadh* (White Poplar) – *Communication* or the need for it may be interpreted when reading this ogham.



*Iodhadh* (Yew) – This ogham may be construed as *maturation, ripening, or settling*.

**Question 6: Describe the results of three divinations performed by you. These divinations may be text assisted.** (minimum 100 words each)

After I discovered a member of our Protogrove was being antagonistic to other members of the Protogrove and that several members had decided to leave on account of her poor behavior I decided to do a divination for direction. During the divination I pulled *Gort* (caution) from the Nature Spirits, *Uath* (temporary limitations) from the Ancestors, and *Muin* (spiritual growth) from the Shining Ones. I interpreted this to mean that I should be cautious in dealing with her but that her behavior was a temporary setback and that if I managed it right the spiritual growth of the Grove would be improved. I resolved to help her find a way to quit the Protogrove by helping her figure out that ADF was not really right for her, using motivational interviewing techniques. After she left several new members joined, they had previously avoided our Protogrove because of her participation.

My father attempted suicide while I was attending Starwood and I did not learn about it until I returned. When I came back I felt that I needed to do a divination for some guidance. I pulled *Nion* (boundaries or obstacles) from the Nature Spirits, *Eadhadh* (communication) from the Ancestors, and from *Beith* (new beginnings) the Shining Ones. I interpreted this to mean that there would be obstacles to his recovery but that with a willingness to communicate (on his part as well as others) he will find a new beginning for his life. Since his attempted suicide followed only hours after my mother left him, this seems like an adequate assessment of the situation.

When Craig was searching for work for almost four months I grew concerned about how I would support our household on only 10,000 a year. With the increased cost of my travel for ADF Regalia and the festival season approaching quickly I grew even more concerned and resolved to help him by getting some direction. For the Nature Spirits I got *Eadhadh* (communication), the Ancestors gave me *Coll* (creativity), and the Gods gave me *Onn* (goals accomplished). I took this to mean that through good communication we could come up with a creative solution and he would find employment. I was wrong, while he did find a job through communication and creative planning; I later realized through conversation with Craig, that he was no longer happy in his chosen career field and that he would really like to be an artist. He had dreamt of being a potter and jewelry designer and would like to return to school to learn those trades. Now he is looking at going back to school next semester to start taking classes in pottery and jewelry design.

**Question 7: Discuss your view of the purpose of divination.** (minimum 100 words)

I think divination can be used as a starting point for a person who doesn't know which way to go when trying to make a decision. For example, a person who cannot decide whether to

continue working in their current field or to go back to school and learn a new trade may find the results of a divination helpful in making their decision.

It can also be used to alleviate anxiety over the future in relation to something a person is concerned about in his life. In this case a good example may be when a man is concerned about whether his mother will fare well after an operation, he may be comforted by the results of a divination even if the divination is not favorable, sometimes fear of the unknown is more anxiety producing than a known negative outcome.

**Question 8:** *Discuss the relative importance and effect of divination within your personal spiritual practice.* (minimum 100 words)

To date I have had no personal divinations done for me that were accurate. This does not mean that divination is not effective; I just have limited experience in receiving divinations because I do not feel there is a need in my life for them. I am a counselor by trade and have found other ways to make decisions in my life and other ways to alleviate my anxiety about the future.

I have found some divinations made in my Protogrove to be effective and accurate but the vagueness of the divination could have been interpreted so many different ways that it would be next to impossible for them to not be accurate.

We did have a divination at midsummer that implied we would experience destruction and rebirth. At the time it was believed that this would mean a drop in membership or something along those lines, followed by a burst of regrowth. However, we later learned that over 800 fires had been started in northern California that weekend by a thunder storm and that our nemeton was in peril. I later learned that the fires burned about 75% of the land but that the nemeton and the buildings were unaffected.

I remain skeptical even after this experience; we have had similar divinations before and had no such experience, often having the opposite of the predicted outcome come to pass.

**Question 9:** *Discuss your view and understanding of the function of the Seer.* (minimum 100 words)

Some people in ADF would have us say that the seer can function as a counselor. I do not agree with this statement. A seer is not trained in human behavior or therapy and typically does not have the skill, knowledge or training to conduct ethical counseling with a client. Without intense professional training a seer may inadvertently impose her own will or bias upon a client. This is often unintentional but can do a great deal of harm without the normal checks and balances that are found in professional counseling.

Some people believe that the best seers are naturally intuitive and empathic and that they do not need counseling training to give counseling. However, in many states a seer can get in trouble with the law for counseling without a license. So I caution anyone who might think this is an appropriate way to conduct their seership. Behavioral health boards are set up to prevent unethical counseling practices and to protect clients from inappropriate use of power in the counseling relationship there are no such safety measures in place in seership.

I believe that the current function of a seer can be more as a medium for self-exploration. The seer may be able to reflect the client's concerns and help them explore their own concerns from a different perspective. The symbol sets used may give more solidity to thoughts or concerns that were previously nebulous and intangible.

***Question 10: Discuss the importance and value of divination as it relates to ADF.*** (minimum 100 words)

In ADF divination is used to reveal the gifts of the Kindred. When we make sacrifice to them in ritual they are asked to give us gifts in return but without some type of divination these gifts may be difficult to decipher. If we are unaware of the gifts we should be expecting we cannot properly thank the Kindred when they manifest. It is a way for the people in a ritual to focus their desires and visualize a single purpose. In magical practice it is believed that this can increase the chances that the outcome desired will come to pass.