

ANNEMARIE LUIJENDIJK

Forbidden Oracles?

*Studien und Texte zu
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89

Mohr Siebeck

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AnneMarie Luijendijk

Forbidden Oracles?

The Gospel of the Lots of Mary

Mohr Siebeck

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Dedicated to my children
Kees, Erik, Rosemarie and Annabel with love.

Preface

This book centers on *The Gospel of the Lots of Mary*, a previously unknown text preserved in a fifth- or sixth-century Coptic miniature codex. It presents the first critical edition and translation of this new text. My book is also a project about religious praxis and authority, as I situate the manuscript within the context of practices of and debates around divination in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Over the past few years, this small ancient codex with its biblical language and optimistic worldview has been my daily companion. I have relished getting to know it as a text and artifact. Yet the joy I have gleaned from researching and writing this book has been due not only to this fascinating Coptic manuscript, but also to the counsel of colleagues and friends, and generous institutional support. As I now send the codex and its text out into the world, it is a pleasant duty to acknowledge those who have helped me in completing this book. In the pages of this preface it is impossible to thank them adequately, and words are insufficient to express my gratitude. I alone am responsible for any shortcomings and mistakes.

My deep thanks go to Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre and Laura Nasrallah, who read multiple, even rough drafts. Through conversations with them this book was improved and took on shape. At the moments when it mattered most, they helped me with their sharp insight and quick feedback. David Frankfurter and William Kling-shirn both read through the entire manuscript and offered constructive criticism, for which I am very grateful. It will be clear from the following pages and footnotes that I have also benefitted tremendously from their written work. I owe much thanks to Janet Timbie for her invaluable help with the translation and interpretation of the Coptic text. Peter Brown gave me helpful feedback on the chapters that I sent him; I am honored to be his colleague.

It has been a privilege for me to present my research at Harvard Divinity School (with the codex present!), the University of Cincinnati, the University of Manchester, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University, and multiple times at the Catholic University of America as Affiliate Scholar of the Center for the Study of Early Christianity. Special thanks go to Karen King and Laura Nasrallah, Peter van Minnen, Kate Cooper, Philip Rousseau, Robert Ousterhout, and Roger Bagnall for inviting and hosting me. I have also presented my work at the International Congress of Coptic Studies in Rome, at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, and at Princeton University. I am very grateful for the feedback from and conversations with colleagues along the way.

In working on this book, I have benefitted greatly from the help of my research assistants. Heidi Wendt and Teresa Early assisted me in the early phases of my re-

search. I am much indebted to Lance Jenott, who proved a great conversation partner in translating a deliberately vague text. He also formatted the Coptic text. My warm thanks go to Flora Thomson-DeVeaux for creating the bibliography, and especially for being the best editor possible. In the final stages of preparing the manuscript for publication, I benefitted from the expertise of Joel Estes and Philip Forness. Special thanks to Phil for spotting several additional biblical allusions in the text. Finally, I am grateful to Bryan Kraemer for his meticulous work in compiling the indices.

These past years, Princeton has been a stimulating place for me to research and teach. It has been a pleasure to be a part of the vibrant intellectual community of the Religion Department and the wider university, and I acknowledge here gratefully the support and encouragement I have received at Princeton. I especially thank my colleagues in the Department of Religion: John Gager, Martha Himmelfarb, Naph-tali Meshel, Elaine Pagels, Peter Schäfer, Moulie Vidas and also Buzzy Teiser. I can fondly recall many lunch conversations about our research with Judith Weisenfeld. I am grateful to Leora Batnitzky for being a wonderful chair of the department. I am pleased to thank Dimitri Gondicas, Director of the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies, for his support and collaboration in innumerable ways. It has been an honor to be a faculty member of the Princeton Society of Fellows over the past years and I thank all the fellows for the engaging weekly meetings, especially Molly Green, Mary Harper, and Susan Stewart. For their assistance and professionalism, I thank the incomparable Religion Department staff: our department manager Lorraine Fuhrmann, Mary Kay Bodnar, Patricia Bogdziewicz, Jeffrey Guest, and Kerry Smith. I also greatly value the help of the Princeton University librarians and Article Express.

Precious time to conduct research and write this book was made possible through the generous support from the Melancthon W. Jacobus University Preceptorship in Religion, a Stanley J. Seeger Sabbatical Research Grant with support from the Group for the Study of Late Antiquity, and an American Fellowship from the American Association of University Women.

I have been fortunate to explore this text with students. When teaching Elementary Coptic I at Harvard Divinity School, I enjoyed reading passages of the text with Benjamin Dunning, Carly Daniel-Hughes, Anna Miller and Taylor Petrey. At Princeton University, I had the pleasure of discussing this text and other divinatory matters in the Religion Department Junior Colloquium (Fall 2009 and 2011). My warm thanks go to Michael Flower, with whom I co-taught a Program in the Ancient World graduate seminar on Prophecy, Oracles and Divination.

As I moved beyond my dissertation and first book, my Doktermutter Karen King and Roger Bagnall remained important conversation partners, whose scholarly erudition I deeply admire and whose advice I treasure. When I presented my initial deciphering of this text in the New Testament Upper Seminar at HDS, François Bovon was the respondent. I miss him and am sad that he could not see the final product.

Since I began working on this manuscript, multiple similar texts have come to light and I thank colleagues who have generously shared their work with me, especially Wolf Peter Funk, Alex Kocar, and Kevin Wilkinson. I acknowledge Guido

Bastianini and Rosario Pintaudi for sending me images of sortes manuscripts in their collections.

Ioli Kalavrezou and Alicia Walker discovered this object in the Sackler collection at Harvard University for the 2002 exhibition “Byzantine Women and Their World.” I am obviously very grateful to them. It was Amy Bauer of the Sackler Museum who first reached out to me about this codex; I have greatly appreciated her help in making it accessible to me, and the excitement of that early encounter with the codex has stayed with me. My thanks go also to Annewies van den Hoek, in this context for lending me her digital camera and tripod, but much more for support and conversation over the years. Isabella Donadio from the Digital Resources at Harvard Art Museums has been both kind and patient with me in the process of photographing the codex, for which I thank her.

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It has been a pleasure to publish this book with Mohr Siebeck. I thank Henning Ziebritzki and editors Christoph Marksches, Martin Wallraff and Christian Wildberg for accepting my book in this series. I am also indebted to Bettina Gade and Katharina Stichling for their professionalism and Gründlichkeit, and for their patience with me.

I am grateful to my parents Ary and Gerie Luijendijk-Hordijk for their unfailing support of me throughout my life. I dedicate this book to my beloved children Kees, Erik, Rosemarie and Annabel, and thank them for the joy they bring. I hope that they, too, may find the love of learning. Last but not least, I am glad to thank my husband, Jan Willem van der Werff, for all his support over the years. I am so happy to share my life with him.

Easter 2014

AnneMarie Luijendijk

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Introduction

A few days before Christmas several years ago, I received an email from Amy Bauer, curator of Harvard University's Sackler Museum, asking me if I could take a look at a Coptic book. At the time, I was a doctoral student working on a dissertation about Christians in papyrus documents from the ancient Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus, and about to teach a graduate course in Coptic in the spring semester. Assuming that this Coptic book was a 19th century printed text, I replied that I would take a look at it and inquired what kind of book it was. Bauer responded: "A sixth-century manuscript".¹ The very next day, I went over to the Sackler Museum, outfitted with a notebook, digital camera, a tripod, and a good deal of curiosity.

When Bauer brought the object out of the magazine and unwrapped for me a stack of tiny pages enveloped in brown leather covers, I was immediately struck by its size – the codex was only as large as my palm. I deciphered the words on the first page: *The Gospel of the Lots of Mary, the Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ*, and wondered: What kind of gospel is this? What is the text about? Who owned and used this codex? And why is it so small? Here I tell the story of that Coptic book – rather, that Coptic booklet.

Over the past century or so, manuscript finds have greatly enlarged the library of ancient Christian texts and have added multiple long lost gospels to the inventory. From the *Gospels of Mary* and *Thomas* to the recently published *Gospel of Judas*, these newly discovered writings have deeply enriched our understanding of early Christianity. It is interesting to open here another new gospel, one that turns out to be very different in content and contribution.

In my research, I quickly discovered that our new gospel was not a story about Jesus, but a previously unknown text of Christian oracular answers that would be received in a divinatory session. Despite its designation as *gospel*, this book has no narrative or plot, nor does it contain sayings of Jesus. As a matter of fact, Jesus appears only sporadically. Rather, this book contains a series of oracles. These were not intended to be read in progression or even in order, but individually, after retrieving them through a divinatory procedure ascribed to lot. With the two facing pages of the opened book featuring one oracle, the book is laid out to display only one oracle at a time. People who faced difficult decisions or needed insight into the future would consult a diviner, who performed a ritual to locate an oracle in the codex and then interpreted the divinatory text. In Egypt and the wider Mediterranean world, this practice – sortilege – was both common and controversial.

¹ The manuscript was displayed at the exhibition "Byzantine Women and their World", see my description in the catalogue, Luijendijk, "Miniature Codex".

Sortilege

While sortilege remains a relatively understudied or isolated topic in scholarship on religion of antiquity, this does not mean that it was a fringe phenomenon in ancient society.² On the contrary, lot divination was widely practiced in antiquity, just as it is in many present cultures. Its prevalence in the ancient world is attested by biblical traditions. Although not all biblical authors approve of divination, both the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament abound with instances where casting lots determines someone's fate. The sentiment expressed in Proverbs 16:33 conveys the concept of many lot decisions: "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is the Lord's alone." The divine will determines how the dice fall.³ This is, indeed, what happened to Jonah. In the book of Jonah, the sailors, about to suffer shipwreck in a terrible storm, cast lots in order to find out who had imperiled their voyage. The lot (as the reader already expects) reveals Jonah as the culprit, who had rebelled against God's specific command to preach to Nineveh. When his shipmates reluctantly throw him overboard, the storm subsides.⁴

Likewise, the authors of writings in the New Testament interpret the outcome of lot divination as a divine decision. In a matter as weighty as deciding Judas's replacement and thus Jesus' twelfth disciple, the remaining eleven apostles turn to sortilege. First, the disciples pray to the Lord – an important aspect of divination, which is also prescribed in later books with lot oracles. Then, as the text reports rather matter-of-factly: "They cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:20b–26). Because the practice of casting lots is treated positively in the stories of Jonah and Matthias, later Christian lot books repeatedly refer to them in order to legitimize controversial oracular practices.⁵

² Recently, studies by Evelyn Burkhardt, David Frankfurter, Fritz Graf, Pieter van der Horst, Sarah Iles Johnston, William Klingshirn, Franziska Naether, and Johannes Nollé have begun to address the place and significance of lot books. Burkhardt („Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften“, 95) notes rightly that although Hebrew *goralot* were clearly a very popular genre among the magical and divinatory manuscripts of Judaism, they have been treated rather „stiefmütterlich“ in scholarship. This is true for all traditions of sortilege.

³ Our text has a similar statement: "The matter is appointed for you by God" (Oracle 32). Johnston ("Introduction", 15) remarks: "All means of sortition ... rely on what scholars of divination call 'randomization'. That is, participants ensure that the lots or the dice are allowed to move freely, randomly, up to the moment that they give their answer by emerging from the jar that holds them (*sortes*) or coming to a stop on the table across which they roll (dice). Those who use such randomizing methods understand them to guarantee that no unscrupulous human can predetermine the outcome ..., that superhuman agencies can intervene and guide the objects, or both."

⁴ Jon. 1:4–16, esp. verse 7: "The sailors said to one another, 'Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us.' So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah." See other examples of the use of lots in, e. g., Lev. 16:8–10; Num. 26:56; Josh. 7:16–18 and 1 Sam. 14:40–42.

⁵ Augustine approves of the instance in Acts, writing: "Now there are many ways in which God speaks with us. ... He speaks through a lot (*per sortem*), just as he spoke concerning the choice of Matthias in place of Judas" (trans. Klingshirn, "Divination and the Disciplines of Knowledge, 114). However, Jerome (*Commentaire sur Jonas* I, 7, ed. Duval, 194, 196) considered the Jonah story just as the one of Matthias a privilege for certain individuals, not a precedent for the community (nec sta-

In antiquity, divinatory practices permeated all levels of society. For many people today, the word “oracle” evokes the mysterious Pythia at Delphi, delivering war strategies to kings in opaque hexameters.⁶ Or perhaps for others, the term calls to mind the story of Alexander the Great, who undertook an arduous journey through the Egyptian desert to inquire at the Siwa oracle whether he was indeed the Son of God. Yet the practice of seeking oracles to obtain divinely-inspired answers was not exclusively the purview of the elite.⁷ Enslaved people consulted lot oracles about gaining freedom, pregnant women asked about giving birth, merchants wanted to know about success in business, travelers inquired about their voyage home, and emperors sought insight about the outcomes of battles. From impressive, inscribed monuments erected on public places in Asia Minor to small strips of papyrus folded into tiny sealed packages from an Egyptian martyr shrine, as well as to our new text, epigraphic and manuscript evidence show that sortilege was ubiquitous in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Where could one consult an oracle in antiquity? The possibilities extend from grand sites like Delphi to a diviner with a book visiting the inquirer at home. Some people traveled far to visit the oracles of Delphi, Didyma, or Claros – sites that, as we know from inscriptions, welcomed visitors from all over the region.⁸ Rich people could send slaves to submit questions in their stead. But there were also opportunities for people to consult the divine without having to travel to an oracular site. Book oracles, called *sortes* (from the Latin *sors* = lot, indicating that one would obtain the answers by casting lots), allowed for consultation on the spot; the oracle could even come to the petitioner! Pieter van der Horst refers to *sortes* as “instant oracles”,⁹ and Fritz Graf describes them as “oracles that preceded the event, where a preexistent answer was waiting for the question to come.”¹⁰ Our codex is one such form of a mobile and ready-made tool for divination.

tim debemus sub hoc exemplo sortibus credere, uel illud de Actibus Apostolorum huic testimonio copulare ubi sorte in apostolatam Matthias eligitur, cum priuilegia singulorum non possint legem facere communem). See also Van der Horst, “*Sortes*”, 154 n. 40.

⁶ So also Björck, “Heidnische und christliche Orakel”, 86: „Mit dem Begriff Orakel verbinden wir Moderne vielleicht allzu schnell die Vorstellung von außerordentlichen Geschehnissen, die in Sage und Geschichte erzählt sind; wir denken an die Pythia, wie sie in dunklen Sprüchen die Schicksals von Völkern und Helden verkündet.“

⁷ Van der Horst, “*Sortes*”, 143.

⁸ Fox (*Pagans and Christians*, 174) provides a map indicating from where people traveled to Claros (“Client cities of the oracle at Claros, attested in the Greek during the Imperial period”).

⁹ As Van der Horst (“*Sortes*”, 143) states: “The range of possibilities that the art of prognostication offered to persons who wanted to know what the gods had in store for them, or demanded from them, was immense.”

¹⁰ Graf, “Rolling the Dice”, 52.

The *Sortes* Family

Our codex belongs to a large Mediterranean family of lot books and adds a new, previously unpublished, member to the *sortes* clan. The family consists of inscriptions, papyri, and parchment manuscripts, written in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Syriac, Provençal, and Coptic. In the chapters that follow, the textual relatives introduced here will situate our codex, helping us to trace the transmission of texts, formulate ideas about its use and divinatory method, and imagine an archaeological provenance.

The *sortes* family shares several notable characteristics that allow scholars to study them as a subgenre of oracles. For one, *sortes* provide a way of “prognostication, or rather problem-solving, by means of the drawing of lots (*sortilegium*) or the casting of dice (astragalomancy), or other randomizing practices”.¹¹ Additionally, *sortes* directly address a person in the second person singular. Moreover, they present the answers not in poetic hexameters as oracles do, but in prose.¹² Furthermore, *sortes* share a binary worldview with stark contrasts between good and bad events. Theirs is a world populated with adversaries and enemies, the lives of the inquirers shadowed by the threat of danger, illness, and death. Yet *sortes* also have their rosy side, promising happiness, a good life, abundant harvest, and prosperity.

In spite of their shared characteristics, the *sortes* family also displays considerable diversity. Lot books differ in their method of consultation: some present clients with preformulated questions, while others provide answers to questions clients formulate themselves. In the first of these systems, the lot book contains a series of questions with short, matching answers. Have you ever wondered: “Am I to become successful?”, “Will the one who is sick survive?”, “Am I to escape from slander?”, “Will I have an inheritance from someone?”, “Will I be a teacher?”, or “Have I been poisoned?”¹³ People who pondered such general problems could consult a lot system written in Greek called the *Sortes Astrampsychi*.¹⁴ This collection consisted of 92 questions and 103 answers.¹⁵ The inquiry, “Am I to become successful”, could, for instance, yield the response: “You’ll soon succeed for the better.”¹⁶ Similarly, a person with a pressing problem about poison could receive the sage advice: “You’ve indeed been poisoned. Treat yourself.”¹⁷

As is clear from the many copies preserved in the papyrological record, the *Sortes Astrampsychi* were hugely popular in Late Antiquity. They also enjoyed a long afterlife in different guises. For instance, a manuscript from Gaul copied around the year

¹¹ Van der Horst, “*Sortes*”, 143–4.

¹² As Klingshirn (“Christian Divination”, 107–8) observes, the fact that *sortes* are in prose and not in hexameters indicates that “they were not represented as deriving directly from Greek shrines”.

¹³ See the translation and accompanying notes to Pseudo-Astrampsychus, *The Oracles of Astrampsychus* by Stewart and Morrell (“Popular Handbook”, 283–324).

¹⁴ For a detailed study of this book, see Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*.

¹⁵ A longer, later edition of the text was also in circulation.

¹⁶ 19 (number of the question) + 10 (my chosen number) = 29; the chart refers to section 79, where it then is answer 10.

¹⁷ 91 + 5 (I picked 5 this time) = 96; the answer is in section 89, 5.

600 called the *Sortes Sangallenses* is a Latin adaptation of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* (or similar lot text).¹⁸

Ticket oracles are a related divinatory system yielding specific answers. Here a client submits two almost identical, sealed tickets to a shrine: one with a query phrased positively, the other negatively. The priests hand back the ticket with the correct formulation as the divine answer. We have such tickets in Demotic, Coptic and Greek.¹⁹ In rare instances, both tickets have been preserved. A Greek example, submitted to the shrine of Saint Philoxenus in Oxyrhynchus in the sixth century, reads:

O my Lord God Almighty and St. Philoxenus my patron, I beseech you by the great name of the Lord God, if it is your will and you are helping me to take the banking-business, I beseech you to bid me learn this, and speak.

Its negatively-formulated twin reads:

O my Lord God Almighty and St. Philoxenus my patron, I beseech you by the great name of the Lord God, if it is not your will that I speak either about the bank or about the weighing-office, to bid me learn this, in order that I may not speak.²⁰

We will probably never know if the inquirer became a banker. But when he received back one of the tickets, he at least knew what to do.

Our text belongs to the second type of lot system, where a client could pose any question and would receive a general answer, or, as satirist Lucian of Samosata put it more bluntly, an “obscure and ambiguous” answer.²¹ This vagueness was not the mistake of careless or ignorant composers, but was deliberate. Ethnographic research into divinatory practices in Africa has shown that the ambiguity of oracular answers serves a clear purpose: it allows openings in the dialogue between the di-

¹⁸ See Klingshirn (“Christian Divination”, 102–5) on the manuscript. On the relation with the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, see *ibid.* 105. Naether (*Sortes Astrampsychi*, 284) observes: „Da ... weitere Orakelbücher dieser Gattung bekannt sind, ist es nicht statthaft, alle auf *einen* Archetypus zurückzuführen. Sie entstammen ähnlichen Traditionen, die es zu untersuchen gibt.“ (She discusses those traditions in chapter 5 of her book). Naether (*ibid.*) states: „Allerdings bestehen zwischen *Sortes Sangallenses* und *Sortes Astrampsychi* frappierende Ähnlichkeiten in den abgefragten Themen, Antwortzusätzen und der inhaltlichen Struktur, so dass von einer zumindest einseitigen Beeinflussung ausgegangen werden muss.“ More generally on the afterlife of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, see Stewart, “Popular Handbook” 289: “The work quickly became a folkbook. Its true author was unknown or forgotten, its popularity continued, and the text was reworked in smaller and larger ways in the passage of time.” Stewart (*Sortes Astrampsychi*, xiv–v) details the changes from the list of questions in *Astrampsychus* to the Christian inquiries (“Hae sunt quaestiones pristinae earumque mutatae per interpolationem formae”), finding nine instances.

¹⁹ In fact, as Papaconstantinou (“Oracles chrétiens”, 281–6, esp. 281) has demonstrated, the system is known already from Pharaonic times.

²⁰ P.Harris 54 and P.Oxy. XVI 1926. Translations from Youtie, “Question to a Christian Oracle”, 253–4. See also Clarysse, “Coptic Martyr Cult”, 389.

²¹ Characterizing the oracular responses by Alexander of Abonoteichus, second-century satirist Lucian of Samosata (*Alexander the False Prophet* 22, trans. Harmon, 205) writes that Alexander “gave responses that were sometimes obscure and ambiguous, sometimes downright unintelligible, for this seemed to him in the oracular manner”.

viner and the client. Oracles require interpretation. The general and deliberately ambiguous wording of the *sortes*, like those in a newspaper horoscope or fortune cookie today, made them adaptable to any situation. But they also thereby exacerbated the hermeneutical vulnerability that Lucian exploits in his satire.

Some of the divinatory books spring from sacred texts, such as the Greek *Sortes Homericæ* and the Latin *Sortes Virgilianæ*, consisting of abstracts and selected sentences from Homer and Virgil respectively.²² In Jewish, and later in Christian, circles the system was also applied to the Bible, hence the *Sortes Biblicæ* (in Greek). This category also includes the so-called *hermeneiai*-manuscripts, in which short divinatory phrases preceded by the Greek word *hermeneia* (explanation) are penned in the margins of biblical books, most often in the Gospel of John. These exist in Greek and/or Coptic.²³

Another branch of these *sortes* are the so-called dice-oracles. These are Greek texts, incised on large monuments and prominently displayed on the market places of cities and towns in southwestern Anatolia.²⁴ In his study of these inscriptions, Fritz Graf showed how their placement in the public square reveals their broader function in ancient society, as these texts gave divinely-inspired advice in such matters as commerce, travel, family life, and health.

With regard to language: the entire *sortes* family has only a few Coptic members, or more accurately, few manuscripts have been published.²⁵ Besides our new Coptic text, the longest Coptic *sortes* text is a seventh- or eighth-century Coptic papyrus codex of unknown provenance, now at the Vatican library, edited by the Belgian scholar Arnold Van Lantschoot in 1956.²⁶ Although both texts share verbal similarities, the Vatican manuscript has short, numbered answers and therein differs substantially from our codex, which gives longer, more general answers.

²² For *Homeromanteia*, see, for instance: P.Lond. I 121, Suppl. Mag. II 77, SB XX 14231, 14232 and P.Oxy. LVI 3831. The latter contains the instruction on using the oracle: on what days and at what times, and what one should do to prepare.

²³ On these *hermeneiai*, see Quecke, „Zu den Joh-Fragmenten mit ‚Hermeneiai‘“, and idem, „Zu den Joh-Fragmenten mit ‚Hermeneiai‘ (Nachtrag)“, Metzger, “Greek Manuscripts of John’s Gospel with *hermeneiai*”, Parker, “Manuscripts of John’s Gospel with *Hermeneiai*”, and Porter, “Use of *Hermeneia* and Johannine Papyrus Manuscripts.”

²⁴ Graf, “Rolling the Dice”, 54. Seventeen inscriptions are known; Graf (*ibid.*, 58) divides them in three different groups. See also the indepth study of Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*.

²⁵ Several scholars are preparing editions of new Coptic texts: for instance, Delattre on texts from Antinoë, Funk on a Middle Egyptian quire, and Kocar on fragments from Oxyrhynchus.

²⁶ P.Vat.Copt. 1, see Van Lantschoot, “Collection sahidique”, 36–52 and the English translation by Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 251–6, no. 126 “Collection of oracles”. This codex presents 114 short answers on 12 fragmentary folia. The answers are numbered. With small gaps, numbers 21–72 and 153–219 are preserved. This enumeration indicates that substantial parts of the codex have been lost; in Van Lantschoot’s estimation (“Collection sahidique”, 2–3) at least 10 folia are missing. At several places in this manuscript, subject headings, alas only fragmentarily preserved, subdivide the answers. On the top of folio 8 of the papyrus it reads: “153. Regarding [trial?] and testimony” (*ibid.*, 46). Van Lantschoot (*ibid.*, 50) reconstructed another heading as: “[Regarding] life and [safety].” A word of caution on the edition is in place. In multiple cases, Van Lantschoot supplied readings, but they are not certain and it is not clear to me how he achieved them. Nor did he specify how he made his edition.

The most important other Coptic *sortes* manuscript for our booklet is its text's closest relative: an early seventh-century manuscript consisting of two palimpsest fragments from a parchment codex, found at the church of St. Colluthus in Antinoë, published by Lucia Papini in 1998.²⁷ On the broken bifolium, only four answers remain of what was presumably a larger codex. Two of those answers are almost verbatim parallel with our codex's text (Oracles 12 and 31); the other two share sentences with our text, but in a different order. I explore this text further throughout the book.

Sortes and Social History

With their focus on solving everyday problems, lot books provide rich material for social historians. Polymnia Athanasiadi has remarked:

Oracles were the psychiatrists of the ancient world and much more. When in distress, the individual had recourse to Apollo ... and usually went away with renewed confidence in the future. Throughout antiquity ... consultation on private matters remained a normal oracular function.²⁸

Through these texts we enter a world both radically different from ours and yet also strikingly similar. Lot texts give us glimpses into everyday anxieties. A sense of real physical vulnerability about health, travel, love, and professional success is still very recognizable, even if mediated by texts.

In order to appreciate these texts as artifacts of the ancient past, we must understand the role and function of *sortes* and other divinatory texts in antiquity as tools for religious consultation about large and small concerns. In the past, some scholars looked down on sortilege. For instance, Otto Stegmüller missed the point when he disparagingly states about a papyrus with *hermeneia* marginalia that “as regards their content, these oracles are obviously worthless”.²⁹ But those who engaged in divination took it seriously, even if others marginalized it and we moderns may be uneasy with it. While some ancient authors such as Cicero and Lucian of Samosata pointed to the potential for corruption and manipulation, we should presuppose the religious and thus practical significance of divination in the everyday lives of people.³⁰ Insights of ethnographers such as David Zeitlyn have helped to grasp this more fully. Zeitlyn observes:

²⁷ Inscribed on both sides, the page came from a codex. However, the layout of the codex differs from that of our codex. According to Papini (“Fragments of the *Sortes Sanctorum*”, 396): “Of the former text (in Coptic) we can see only feeble traces of letters in a capital style, which were written in the opposite direction in respect of the following text, and, on the flesh side, the lines which were necessary to arrange the writing.” The first text was written in a very neat uncial hand. The original rulings of the first manuscript are still visible.

²⁸ Athanasiadi, “Philosophers and Oracles”, 45. Also Graf (“Rolling the Dice”, 69) credits the oracle he is discussing, the dice oracles from Asia Minor, with “psychological insight”: “The implied speaker is not only gifted with superhuman knowledge, but with sound psychological insight.”

²⁹ Stegmüller, „Zu den Bibelorakeln“, 15 („Inhaltlich sind die Orakel natürlich wertlos“).

³⁰ In his *De divinatione* Cicero lays out arguments for and against the validity of divination in two books, narratively framed as a discussion between his brother Quintus and himself. Cicero (*De*

It is possible to do divination as a game, as a procedure without any cognitive or emotional load being carried. However, such cases (which occur both in Europe and elsewhere) are aberrant. They point to the usual perceived purpose of divination: to find answers to questions. Generally, divination is used as a means of resolving problems.³¹

Many currently working on the topic recognize full well that these practices were an important means of decision-making in antiquity.³²

Thus divination is also intensely related to power and authority, group formation, and group identity. That divination was ubiquitous and taken seriously by its ancient practitioners is clear from the ways in which it was contested by secular laws and church canons that prohibit these divinatory practices in no uncertain terms, deeming them inappropriate and dangerous.³³ Government officials and emperors issued decrees against divination. For instance, in 199 CE, the Egyptian prefect sent out a circular that was to be posted in public, stipulating that all who were found to engage in divination or magic would be put to death.³⁴ Similarly, the historian Ammianus Marcellinus reports the forced closing of the Bes ticket oracle in Abydos, Fayum, at the orders of emperor Constantius in the year 359.³⁵

Church leaders also condemned Christian divination, naming it among a series of crimes that Christians should not commit and forbidding it repeatedly at church councils. Although earlier we observed instances where lot divination was practiced in biblical writings, church leaders could also fall back on biblical prohibitions of such practices. One law prescribed:

divinatione I.1, trans. Falconer 222–3) defines divination – he refers here to the Greek word *μαντική* – as “the foresight and knowledge of future matters” (*praesensionem et scientiam rerum futurarum*). In Book II, Cicero (*ibid.*, II.9, 378–9) disproves his brothers positive stance on divination with an emphasis on science, stating: “Now you must admit that divination is not applicable in any case where knowledge is gained through the senses” (*Ad nullam igitur earum rerum, quae sensu accipiuntur, divination adhibetur*). See also Denyer, “The case against divination”. Lucian (*Alexander the False Prophet* 8, trans. Harmon, 185) describes how Alexander “the false prophet” was acutely aware that “both to the one who fears and to the one who hopes, foreknowledge (*πρόγνωσις*) is very essential and very keenly coveted ...”

³¹ Zeitlyn, “Divination as Dialogue”, 189. Bolte (*Zur Geschichte der Punktier- und Losbücher*) has shown that people begin to play lighthearted games of divination by the end of the fifteenth century. He (*ibid.*, 198) bases this on „scherzhafte Losbücher, die oft ausdrücklich versichern, daß sie keinen Glauben beanspruchen“.

³² The composer of Proverbs phrases it so well: “Casting the lot puts an end to disputes and decides between powerful contenders” (Prov. 18.18). On taking lot divination seriously and out of a negative, denigrating point of view, see Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt* (and throughout much of his scholarship), Klingshirn, “Christian Divination”, 102, Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*. Burkhardt („Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften“, 142) observes: „Die ernsthafte Einstellung der hebräischen Losbücher ist ein weiterer Ausdruck für das Grundanliegen, sie in den Kontext gottesfürchtiger Religiosität zu stellen.“

³³ On the topic, see Kippenberg, “Magic in Roman Civil Discourse”.

³⁴ A copy of the letter has turned up in the papyrological record: SB XIV 12144 (P.Coll.Youtie I 30), see Parassoglou, “Circular from A Prefect”, and revised edition by Rea, “New Version of P. Yale Inv. 299.” See further discussion of this papyrus in chapter 4.

³⁵ Ammianus, *History* XIX 12 (trans. Rolfe, 534–45). See discussion in chapter 4.

When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. . . . Although these nations that you are about to dispossess do give heed to soothsayers and diviners, as for you, the Lord your God does not permit you to do so (Deut. 18:9–14).³⁶

Augustine of Hippo even labeled people that consult *sortes* “foes of God” (*inimici Dei, omnes consultores sortilegorum*).³⁷ William Klingshirn has examined the extent to which lot divination encountered ecclesiastical resistance in the West, especially Gaul. The strict prohibitions not only give an indication of early church leaders’ anxieties, they also show that lot divination was practiced widely in that region and even conducted by clergy themselves.³⁸

What makes divination so contentious, so dangerous to the leadership? In order to grasp what is at stake, I argue, building on Laura Nasrallah’s work in her book *An Ecstasy of Folly*, that this is an epistemological concern.³⁹ At stake in the discourse on divination is access to knowledge: knowledge about political developments such as the life and especially death of emperors, knowledge about everyday concerns, and knowledge of (or access to) God.

The Gospel of the Lots of Mary

There is much we do not know about our text. Unlike other ancient texts, the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* does not mention an author, not even under a pseudonym. We also do not learn of specific addressees. The place and date of its composition remain unknown. Some of these features our text shares with other Gospels. But unlike other Gospels, which have a long history of scholarship, beginning already in antiquity, no ancient writer referred explicitly to our text, whether approvingly or disapprovingly. Thus, we are left to piece together what we can from the text itself.

This book presents the first critical edition and English translation of a new text. It also places this text and the miniature codex within the broader framework of the social history and religious practice in Late Antiquity, with a focus on divination. Precisely because texts such as these were often condemned or considered marginal, the interpretation of this text represents a form of Christianity that is less widely known – one that focuses on non-elites.

³⁶ See also 2Kings 17:17–8.

³⁷ “Ergo inimici Dei omnes amatores mundi, omnes inquisitors nugarum, omnes consultores sortilegorum, mathematicorum, pythorum” (*Enarr. in Ps. XCI* 10, quoted from Weiland, *Oordeel der Kerkvaders*, 10 n. 1). In *Enarr. in Ps. CXL*. 18 (ibid. 10 n. 2) the word *sortilegos* is mentioned again. On Augustine’s attitude towards divination and divine communication, see Klingshirn, “Divination and the Disciplines of Knowledge”.

³⁸ Klingshirn, “Christian Divination”.

³⁹ See Nasrallah, *Ecstasy of Folly*.

The book consists of two parts. The edition of the Coptic text, my translation and a textual commentary, and images of the manuscript make up Part II. In the first chapter of Part I, I open the codex and begin to read its text. I consider why the book is called a gospel, given that it is so different in content from our expectations of Christian books. I will also examine the appearances of the text's characters: Mary, the archangels Gabriel and Michael, God and Jesus, and, generically, "enemies". Then I discuss the text's striking theology, showing that we have entered a world that is both familiarly Christian and at the same time strange and unknown. This everyday text provides fascinating glimpses into a milieu that is otherwise difficult to see: it is thoroughly Christianized, yet not Christo-centric; larded with biblical allusions, yet Jesus Christ plays a marginal role. Finally, I examine the text's exclusive focus on the client.

The second chapter takes a closer look at the codex as artifact. This entails an examination of codicology and palaeography, since both help to establish a date for the codex. I also investigate the possible provenance and context of this book and discuss possible reasons for its miniature format.

In the third chapter we encounter the book's users: diviner and client. Here I explore the way the book functioned for each by examining its material format, the layout of the pages, and the instructions provided in various other divinatory texts.

Finally, in the fourth chapter I contextualize our codex within the wide-ranging ancient discourse on divination. Those advocating the prohibition of divination had strong voices. Conversely, the other side in this debate has been largely silent (or silenced), yet also resilient. The people who composed our text, or those who practiced divination with this codex, have left no musings about what they thought about and did with lot texts. We can, of course, read the church canons and other prohibitions against the grain to reconstruct the positions they forbid. With this little codex, we have a well-preserved voice in defense of divination. Thus I view this book in its entirety, as text *and* artifact, as a participant in the larger debate on divination and access to divine foreknowledge in antiquity. As such, this miniature codex, which asserts its own trustworthiness and reliability, preserves an oft-neglected perspective in the controversy about access to God. We hear that voice in multiple resonances through its text: in its title, proudly claiming to be a gospel, its answers full of biblical allusions, the exhortations to trust it, and also through its materiality: in its probable archaeological provenance and connection with church spaces and Christian clergy. Indeed, this little codex has a much larger story to tell.

Part I

Chapter 1

The Gospel of the Lots of Mary

When I find myself in times of trouble
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.
And in my hour of darkness
She is standing right in front of me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.
...
There will be an answer, let it be.¹

Since this is a new text, I begin by leafing through the codex to discover what the book is about. Our tiny codex raises a host of questions. What kind of text is this? Why is it called a Gospel? Who are the main characters? Why is the text attributed to Mary? Why does Jesus have such a seemingly insignificant role? Finally, what kind of worldview do we find here? Reading the text with such questions, we are using the book differently than was originally intended. If we were to consult this text as a client, we would obtain one oracular answer at a time and ponder with the diviner what each meant for us personally. A diviner, when not performing a session, could, of course, browse through the codex – but always reading with a professional eye, thinking about potential interpretations.

In addition to this codex, I know of three other fragments of this text.² Ours is the only manuscript that preserves a complete text. These four manuscripts have overlapping answers and in addition share the miniature format. But with both significant textual agreements and divergences, their relation is complex. On the one hand, these manuscripts have almost verbatim answers with only minor differences on the level of wording or grammar³ and share multiple phrases and key vocabu-

¹ Lennon and McCartney, “Let It Be”.

² The fragments are all from different manuscripts. Only one other fragment of this text is currently published: Papini, “Fragments of the *Sortes Sanctorum*.” Publication of two other fragments from Oxyrhynchus, P.Oxy.Coptic Inv. 67 and 68, is forthcoming by Kocar, “Sortilege in Late Antique Egypt”.

³ For instance, Oracle 12 and Papini, “Fragments of the *Sortes Sanctorum*”, A1 are almost verbatim the same, but the former reads: $\text{ϥ}\text{ⲛ}\text{ⲁ}\text{ⲣ}\text{ⲉ}\text{ⲙ}\text{ⲙ}\text{ⲉ} <\text{ⲛ}>\text{ⲙ}\text{ⲟ}\text{ⲕ}$ and the latter $\text{ⲗ}\text{ⲩ}\text{ⲱ} \text{ⲛ}\text{ⲧ}\text{ⲟ}\text{ⲩ} \text{ⲛ}\text{ⲉ}\text{ⲧ}\text{ⲛ}\text{ⲁ}\text{ⲣ}\text{ⲉ}\text{ⲙ}\text{ⲙ}\text{ⲉ} \text{ⲙ}\text{ⲙ}\text{ⲟ}\text{ⲕ}$. Oracle 31 overlaps with Papini, *ibid.*, B1, but has one additional sentence. Kocar (“Sortilege in Late Antique Egypt”) shows that P.Oxy.Coptic Inv. 67 (a) resembles Oracle 4 and Inv. 68↓ matches Oracle 8.

lary.⁴ On the other hand, several answers present in the fragments do not have a parallel in our manuscript.⁵ The differences in grammar may result from independent translations of a Greek Vorlage.⁶ Other differences probably have to do with the transmission of the text. The people that copied these *sortes* did not reproduce their texts slavishly. They took the liberty to make changes – to adapt, to add to or omit answers. Such open, creative transmission of traditions and fluid texts are not unique to *sortes* literature, but common also to other so-called Gebrauchstexte or living texts.⁷ In the case of the *sortes*, this free transmission ensures the continued relevance of the text and its applicability to the present circumstances. Thus, in the course of the centuries, the *Sortes Astrampsychi* became Christianized.⁸ Indeed, as Klingshirn argues, when such texts lose this freshness, they get out of fashion and out of use.⁹

The actual author and addressees of our text are unknown. However, the text's language gives us the first hints about its ideal author and audience. Most likely originally written in Greek, our text was translated into Sahidic (a considerable part of Coptic literature, after all, consists of works translated from Greek into Egyptian).¹⁰

⁴ Between our manuscript and the fragments edited by Papini ("Fragments of the *Sortes Sanctorum*"), shared phrases are as follows: "You know" in Oracle 1 and 7 and Papini, *ibid.*, AII; "And God saved you from everything", in Oracle 3 and Papini, *ibid.*, AII; $\chi\upsilon\tau\eta\iota$ in Oracle 5 and 30 and Papini, *ibid.*, AII; "your request", in Oracle 6 and Papini, *ibid.*, BII; "Go immediately", in Oracle 9 and Papini, *ibid.*, BI; "disobedient", in Oracle 10, 22 and Papini, *ibid.*, AII; "do not doubt", in Oracle 15 (et al.) and Papini, *ibid.*, AI; "God fights for you", in Oracle 18 and Papini, *ibid.*, BI and BII; "Go", in Oracle 25 and Papini, *ibid.*, BII; $\kappa\alpha\rho\iota\zeta\epsilon$ $\eta\alpha\kappa$ in Oracle 37 and Papini, *ibid.*, AII.

⁵ For instance, although Papini, *ibid.*, AII and BII have shared phrases with the oracles in our manuscript, they are different answers. Given the fragmentary state of these other witnesses, we cannot examine this the other way around.

⁶ See the overlaps between Oracle 12 and Papini, *ibid.*, A1; and between Oracle 4 and Kocar, "Sortilege in Late Antique Egypt", P.Oxy.Coptic Inv. 67 (a).

⁷ In thinking about the transmission of the *sortes*, I found helpful models in scholarship on New Testament textual criticism and on rabbinic texts. See, especially Parker, *Living Text of the Gospels*; Schäfer, "Research into Rabbinic Literature", and *idem*, "Once Again the Status Quaestionis". Additionally, the insights of French structuralist Paul Zumthor in his *Essai de poétique médiévale*, on manuscripts of medieval French poetry also help to understand the free transmission of *sortes*. Zumthor calls the textual mobility, rewriting and adaptation of anonymous texts "mouvance" and assumes an oral element in the transmission.

⁸ See Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 115–20, with examples on 118–9. For instance, in earlier manuscripts (see *ibid.*, 118), question 41 is: "Shall I become a sophist?" In the Christianized version it reads: "Shall I make a pilgrimage to the sacred places?"

⁹ Klingshirn, "Christian Divination", 16–7.

¹⁰ As of yet, no Greek manuscript of our *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* has surfaced. Our manuscript has noticeable parallels with Greek texts that are called *rhiktologia*, see for instance the agreements between Oracles 18 and 19 and PSI XVII Congr. 5, 71 and 72 (edition: Canart and Pintaudi). Another indication of a Greek Vorlage is that at several instances the translator apparently did not recognize a biblical allusion that thus became "lost in translation." An example is in Oracle 27, alluding to Ps. 90 (91). Our text has the Greek idiom $\epsilon\pi\eta\kappa\alpha\lambda\iota$ ($\epsilon\pi\eta\kappa\alpha\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu$, "call upon"), the verb used in the Greek (LXX) of the Psalm. The Sahidic translation of the Psalter has the Egyptian-Coptic equivalent $\omega\omega$ $\epsilon\pi\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ ("cry, announce, sound"). This retaining of the Greek verb in our text suggests that our Coptic *sortes* text is a translation of a Greek Vorlage. Another example is in Oracles 11 and 30, with a further allusion to the ninetieth Psalm, resonating its assurance that "no evil shall befall you" (Psalm 90 [91]:10). Presuming that the Greek Vorlage of our *sortes* text alluded to Ps. 90

The main dialect of Coptic in the pre-Islamic period, Sahidic in all likelihood arose in the southern Nile Valley, in the vicinity of Hermopolis.¹¹ The choice for Sahidic may thus indicate that the book hailed from the southern Nile Valley. But more importantly, the language suggests that it was aimed at a wide Egyptian speaking audience.¹² The Sahidic translation betrays no obvious peculiarities from other dialects. Unlike Bible translations crafted in regional Egyptian dialects, this book's reach was not limited to a parochial audience, but was intended to counsel clients from all over Egypt.

On every two facing pages of the book there is one oracular answer that consists of a string of short, straightforward sentences. The text does not have a narrative progression or otherwise recognizable method of organization.¹³ The word $\Sigma\Omega\mathfrak{C}$, “matter” or “thing”, appears throughout the text and stands for the issue that the client needs to solve.¹⁴ In order to establish intimacy between the client and the text, each oracle is rendered in a personalized way. Most are presented in the second person singular, directly addressing “you”, that is, the client.¹⁵ Positive and negative imperatives abound in the answers.¹⁶ In seven answers, our text calls out to the client with

(91):10, the translator chose to render the Greek verb $\pi\rho\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\rho\chi\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ with the Coptic $\tau\lambda\mathfrak{Z}\mathfrak{O}$, whereas the translator of the Coptic Psalter picked the verb $\Sigma\Omega\mathfrak{H}$ (Cf. *Pistis Sophia* 91: $\mathfrak{M}\mathfrak{A}\mathfrak{P}\mathfrak{E}\mathfrak{O}\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{K}\mathfrak{A}\mathfrak{K}\mathfrak{E}$ $\tau\lambda\mathfrak{Z}\mathfrak{O}\mathfrak{O}\mathfrak{Y}$). Thus, again, a translator of the Greek Vorlage of our text rendered this in Coptic, missing the biblical allusion. The Sahidic Psalter (ed. Budge) has rendered the verb $\pi\rho\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\rho\chi\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ (“come to, go to, also: approach, draw nigh”) with Coptic $\Sigma\Omega\mathfrak{H}$, as if it read $\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\gamma\acute{\iota}\omega$ (“bring near, bring up to”) as it does in the parallel bicolon. $\pi\rho\sigma\acute{\epsilon}\rho\chi\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ is not normally translated with $\tau\lambda\mathfrak{Z}\mathfrak{O}$ (see Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, s. v. and Lefort, *Concordance du Nouveau Testament sahidique*). $\tau\lambda\mathfrak{Z}\mathfrak{O}$ is a favorite verb for the translator of our *sortes*; it occurs 10 times in these *sortes*, the verb $\Sigma\Omega\mathfrak{H}$ once. We encounter thereby a translator who may not have noticed this biblical allusion, or at least did not render it according to the common translation of the Psalter.

¹¹ Layton, *Coptic Grammar*, 2.

¹² As Layton (ibid.) notes, since “Sahidic is the dialect that has the most features in common with the other dialects of Coptic”, people could understand it in the Nile Valley, and later also to a certain extent in the Delta. It was the preferred dialect for native Coptic authors.

¹³ Several oracles may be connected by a Stichwort: For instance, $\mathfrak{P}\mathfrak{A}\mathfrak{R}\mathfrak{A}\mathfrak{K}\mathfrak{E}\mathfrak{K}\mathfrak{O}\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{I}$ in Oracles 2 and 3, $\Sigma\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{O}\mathfrak{M}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{E}$ in 4 and 5, $\mathfrak{X}\mathfrak{I}$ $\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{O}\mathfrak{E}\mathfrak{X}\mathfrak{H}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{C}$ $\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{K}\mathfrak{E}\mathfrak{K}\mathfrak{O}\mathfrak{Y}\mathfrak{X}\mathfrak{A}\mathfrak{I}$ in 19 and 20, $\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{I}\mathfrak{T}\mathfrak{M}\mathfrak{P}\mathfrak{Z}\mathfrak{H}\mathfrak{T}$ $\mathfrak{C}\mathfrak{H}\mathfrak{A}\mathfrak{Y}$ in 24 and 25. Another way to explain this is as repetition during the composition.

¹⁴ This is a divinatory idiom, purposefully vague, that is frequently encountered in other divinatory texts. Cuvigny (“Shrine in the praesidium of Dios”, 269–70) comments: “The words $\pi\rho\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$ (‘doing, action, business’) and $\pi\rho\acute{\alpha}\sigma\sigma\epsilon\iota\nu$ are recurrent because they can apply to any project.” Kling-shirn (“Inventing the *Sortilegus*”, 151 n. 60) notes: “For the use of *res* in divinatory contexts to mean ‘the problem at hand’ or ‘the substance of the divinatory inquiry’ see Cic. *Div.* 1.34, speaking of *sortes*: *quae tamen ductae ut in rem apte cadant*, and Apul. *Met.* IX.8.” See also Harris, *Annotators*, 72: “The extraordinary recurrence of $\pi\rho\acute{\alpha}\gamma\mu\alpha$ is due to the Romance element in the Latin dialect of the writer, where *causa* which it translates is simply the French *chose* or the Italian *cosa*.”

¹⁵ See also Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, „Perspektive: Die Anrede des Petenten und wer die Orakel spricht“, 145–7.

¹⁶ These are shared features among *sortes* texts. For instance, the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, the Dice Oracles from Asia Minor, and the *Sortes Sangallenses*. See also Kling-shirn (“Christian Divination”, 106): “Narratologically, it is important to note that the text of the *Sortes Sangallenses* speaks in the first person to a client in the second person, at a narrative instant in the present. Although it sometimes speaks grammatically in the first person ... it more often speaks in a present or future imperative ...”

the vocative, “O human” (ὦ ἄνθρωπε). Even the text’s ambiguity allows for each answer to be interpreted as addressing the client’s personal situation. This effect is amplified by the repeated phrase, “You know that . . .”, which simultaneously draws in the inquirer and lends the oracle an air of omniscience; the oracle already knows that the inquirer is aware of a situation. As Graf observes about the dice oracles from Asia Minor, “The oracular voice knows more than humans would.”¹⁷ So, while this is not high literature with complex grammatical constructions, the text is rhetorically effective for its divinatory purpose.

Who speaks in the imperative? In other words, who or what claims the voice of authority in this text? Writing about the dice oracles from Asia Minor, Graf captures a feature that is more widely applicable to *sortes*: “The implied narrator of our oracles speaks in the first person singular, and addresses a reader whom he sees as interacting with him.”¹⁸ At one point the text speaks in the first person singular, stating, “I marvel at you, O human, because it is not (in) your power” (Oracle 23). It also announces, “You will understand my words” (Oracle 16). This “I” is not the anonymous author of the text. Nor does the authority of this text lie with God. Unlike biblical prophetic texts, where God speaks through the voice of the prophet, the “I” here is not God. Our text refers to God throughout in the third person singular, exhorting the client to “believe in God with your whole heart” (Oracle 29), or assuring that “it is God who fights for you” (Oracle 31). Nor is the “I” the diviner or oracle-performer. Here, as in other *sortes*, the first person is the voice of the lot itself. As Klingshirn states about the *Sortes Sangallenses*: “Although this knowledge is ultimately divine, the *sors* does not itself speak in a divine voice. Rather, it defers to the divine, directing the inquirer to pray to God or to the Lord . . . and to rely on divine assistance.”¹⁹ The lot’s authority is thus as a mediator between the human and the divine, the present and future.

Our text draws heavily on two distinct traditions: The first one comprises the Christian scriptures of both the Old and New Testament (broadly understood), the second one traditional divinatory materials. I have indicated as much as I could such instances for each answer in the apparatus below the edition in Part II of this book. The way the lot text weaves together scriptural and divinatory phrases creates a distinctly biblical feel. The text contains allusions to multiple biblical books. It is especially rich with allusions to the Psalms, but also draws on other texts, such as Job, Proverbs, the Gospel of Matthew, the Epistle of James, and also 4 Maccabees, 1 Enoch, and the Shepherd of Hermas.²⁰

¹⁷ Graf, “Rolling the dice”, 68.

¹⁸ Ibid., 66.

¹⁹ On the first person singular for the lot, see also Klingshirn, “Christian Divination”, 107. The oracular inscription Klingshirn refers to is *ILLRP*, no. 1083 (Degrassi [1963], 292). It reads: *non sum mendacis quas | dixi: consulis stulte*. Degrassi (ibid.) mentions in the accompanying note how he understands the inscription: “Sic equidem intellego: *non sum (earum sortium), quas dixisti mendacis.*” He lists other examples of self-referential *sortes*.

²⁰ See the textual commentary in Part II of this book.

The text's heavy dependence on the Psalms corresponds to the central place the Psalter occupies in Egyptian Christianity.²¹ For instance, the phrase "You have God as helper" in Oracle 12 echoes psalmic language (e. g. Ps. 17:3).²² Oracle 27 alludes to Psalm 90 (91): "Trust in *the help of the most high* and *call upon* his name with your whole heart." A further allusion to this Psalm occurs in two answers (Oracles 11 and 30), resonating its assurance that "no evil shall befall you" (Psalm 90 [91]:10).²³ Clearly, the Psalm's reassuring content fits well in a divinatory context. No doubt for that same reason, Psalm 90 also happens to be a favorite choice for amulets.²⁴ The final oracle alludes to Psalm 117 (118):24, a verse that has been adopted into many Christian liturgical traditions. The answer reads, "This is the day that God has prepared for peace and joy." Other answers also have a liturgical flavor. Oracle 10 assures: "The peace of God will be with you."²⁵ Still a common salutation in the Eastern Mediterranean today, "Peace be with you" is how the resurrected Jesus greets the disciples in the gospels (εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, Luke 24:36, Joh. 20:19, 21).²⁶

²¹ On the Psalter in Egypt, see Richter, „Verwendung“, 286. While popular in Jewish and Christian circles, the Psalter occupied an emphatically central place in Egyptian Christianity. As Quecke (quoted by Richter, *ibid.*) phrases it, that „die koptische Liturgie ‚von Psalmen und Psalmabschnitten in einem Maße Gebrauch‘ mache, ‚wie es im christlichen Osten wohl einmalig‘ sei“.

²² P.Vat.Copt. 1, the Coptic *sortes* papyrus at the Vatican (Van Lantschoot, "Collection sahidique", 43, no. 53) has a parallel: ⲧⲏⲥ ⲉⲧⲁⲙⲏⲕⲁⲛⲓⲧ ⲙⲓⲡⲕⲁⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲟⲩⲛⲓⲧⲁⲕ ⲙⲙⲁⲗⲩⲛⲟⲩⲃⲟⲥ (without the word ⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ, God); "The faith that is in your heart, do not forsake it; it is a help to you." See also Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 253.

²³ Again, the translation diverges here from the one in the Budge Psalter, suggesting that our text at some point in its circulation was rendered from Greek into Sahidic.

²⁴ As Kraus ("He that Dwelleth", 139) notes, "this psalm was outstandingly popular with early Christians". The Christian preference for the psalm was inherited from "the specific function it had in Judaism". Scholars have documented a large corpus of apotropaic objects inscribed with the words of this psalm, from bracelets to amulets and doors. See especially Kraus, "He that Dwelleth in the Help of the Highest", *idem*, "Septuaginta-Psalm 90 in apotropäischer Verwendung", *idem*, "Ein byzantinisches Amulett-Armband im *British Museum*", and *idem*, "Βουϛ, Βαυχϝοϝχ und Septuaginta-Psalm 90?" Pachomius (*Instructions* 1:35, trans. Vielleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* III, 29) stipulates: "Do not run after any flesh, because if stone falls upon steel, flame blazes up and consumes many a substance. Run at all times to the Lord, sit in his shadow; for *he who dwells* in the protection of the Most-High will dwell in the shadow of the God of heaven (Ps. 90 [91]:1), and *will not waver for ever* (Ps. 124 [125]:1)."

²⁵ ⲫⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲙⲓⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲙⲁⲕ. Oracle 17 has a slightly longer version: "The peace of God will be with you in all your days" (ⲫⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲙⲓⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲙⲁⲕ ⲛⲓ ⲛⲉⲕⲣⲟⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ). Our manuscript features the word "peace" (ⲉⲓⲣⲏⲏⲏ) four times: Besides these two greetings above, we encounter an angel of peace in Oracle 21: "And he will send the angel of peace" (ⲁⲓⲱⲱ ⲕⲏⲁⲕⲣⲟⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲙⲓⲡⲁⲧⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲫⲣⲏⲏⲏ). The closing answer, Oracle 37, reads: "This is the day that God has prepared that peace and joy be in it" (ⲛⲁⲓ ⲛⲉ ⲛⲉⲣⲟⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲛⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲱⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲏⲧⲏⲧⲏ ⲙⲓ ⲟⲩⲱⲕⲱⲉ, another liturgical allusion borrowed from Psalm 117 (118)).

²⁶ This phrase is also used in epistolary contexts, both in the Pauline corpus. In the Pauline epistles the expression is slightly different: Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:3, Gal. 1:3, Phil. 1:2, Col. 1:2, 2 Thess 1:2, 1 Tim. 1:2, 2 Tim. 1:2, Phlm. 3; 2 Jn. 1:3: "Grace to you and peace from God the father" etc. (in Coptic: ... ⲫⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲓⲧⲁⲙ ⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ...); Tit. 1:4 has ⲫⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲛⲧⲓ ⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ. The greeting also occurs in documentary letters, see Förster, *Wörterbuch*, 231–3. Förster lists multiple occurrences in Coptic documents for the phrase "the peace of God", especially in letters, e. g., ⲧⲏⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲥⲁⲛ (BKU III, 411, 3); ⲧⲏⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲕ (P.Fay.Copt. 26, 3); ⲧⲏⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲙⲓⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲏⲕ (P.Mich.Copt. 12,2), and ⲟⲩⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲙⲉ (P.MoscowCopt. 22, 16).

In turn, these words have become a common liturgical greeting, as the *Apostolic Constitutions* prescribe. The bishop greets the people, saying: “The peace of God be with you all.” And the congregation responds: “And with your spirit.”²⁷

Did the composer acquire this scriptural literacy through diligent Bible study, as we know happened in Egyptian monasteries?²⁸ Or is this a working knowledge of biblical catchphrases and scriptural expressions obtained through faithful participation in church liturgy and prayers? In any case, the author applied a thorough familiarity with scripture to address an audience that supposedly would recognize this language through everyday religious activities.

Not only does our text lavishly employ biblical language, its composition also relies on divinatory traditions. Since these lack standardization, the use of divinatory language is more difficult to discern. Still, expressions such as “wait a little while”, “endure”, “go immediately”, the address of “o human”, promises of joy and a good harvest, and warnings of danger and enemies, make up a shared divinatory vocabulary of texts not just from Egypt and around the Mediterranean, but also, as Michael Strickmann has ably demonstrated, into East Asia.²⁹ Our text thus originates from a cultural milieu that is familiar with both the Christian scriptures and liturgy, and traditional divinatory texts.³⁰

The Gospel

Upon opening the codex, we read:

The gospel of the lots of Mary,
the mother of the Lord Jesus the Christ,
she to whom Gabriel the archangel
brought the good news.
The one who will go forward (or: seek)
with his whole heart

ΠΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΠΗΕΚΛΗΡΟΣ ΜΑΡΙΑ
ΤΜΑΛΥ ΜΠΙΧΟΙΣ ΙΣ ΠΕΧΕ
ΤΕΝΤΑ ΓΑΒΡΙΗΛ ΠΑΡΧΗΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ
ΕΙΝΕ ΗΑΣ ΜΠΘΕΝΟΥΓΕ.
ΠΕΤΗΛ- ΠΕΘΟΥΟΙ
ΣΗ ΠΕΘΗΝΤ ΤΗΡΑ

²⁷ *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.11.8 (ed. Metzger, 174): Ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν. Καὶ ὁ λαὸς ἀποκρινάσθω· Καὶ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματός σου. A slight difference: our manuscript has a verb in the future tense. We find the same in the Greek correspondence of the monk Barsanuphius (Letter 92, *Correspondance* 1.2, 392), who hailed from Egypt: “The peace of God will be with you” (Ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ ἔσται μεθ’ ὑμῶν).

²⁸ The text’s emphasis on the Psalms suggests this. The Greek *Life of Pachomius* 24 (trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* I, 312) encourages scriptural memorization: “he set them entirely free from care, saying: ‘Strive, brothers, to attain to that to which you have been called: to recite psalms and teachings from other parts of the Scriptures, especially the Gospel.’” About memorization of scripture, see also Pachomian Rule 140 (Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* II, 166). Additionally, the side rooms at the shrine of Saint Colluthus, where we know this kind of divination was practiced, functioned as a monastery. See Grossmann, „Antinoopolis. Zur Area der Kolluthoskirche“. For this shrine and its relation to our text, see chapter 3.

²⁹ Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*. See also earlier work by Bolte, „Zur Geschichte der Punktier- und Losbücher“.

³⁰ See Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, chapter 4: “Mutations of the Egyptian Oracle”, 145–97, and idem, “Ritual Expertise”. See also Mirecki, “Evangelion-Incipients Amulets”.

will obtain what he seeks.
Only do not be of two minds.

ϸΗΛΑΜΑΤΕ ΝΗΠΕΤΩΘΗΕ ΝΣΩΦ.
ΟΥ ΜΟΝΟΝ ΝΨΤΜΡΖΗΤ ΣΗΛΥ

When consulted for advice by a client, the diviner probably began by displaying these opening pages with their powerful combination of the word “gospel” and the name Mary, Jesus’ mother. The *incipit* is strictly speaking not an answer, but rather, an introductory statement. With the mention of the word gospel, the guarantee that one shall find what is sought, and the admonition not to doubt, the opening words are programmatic for the entire book. The clause about Gabriel functions to describe Mary’s access to the divine and thus to authorize the book’s insights and to establish its efficacy. These introductory pages would also lend the diviner and the divinatory session the legitimacy of an established Christian authority.

The *incipit*, however, evokes the question: Why is the book called a “gospel”, when it is clearly a lot text? When I first began deciphering the manuscript and encountered the word “gospel” (ΠΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ) in the opening line, I expected to read a narrative about the life and death of Jesus as the canonical gospels present, or a collection of sayings similar to the Gospel of Thomas. But soon I discovered that this codex does not contain a gospel in that sense of the genre. With only three appearances in the text, Jesus Christ plays a rather marginal role. Indeed, the text contains neither words directly attributed to Jesus nor biographical information about him. A single reference to “death” assumes that the inquirer had come close to dying: “Remember that you were close to death another time ... (Oracle 16)”, but notably Jesus’ death on the cross and subsequent resurrection – the core of Christian theology and preaching – is entirely absent.

The fact that this text is not a gospel in the traditional sense gives ample reason to inquire about the reception and use of the term “gospel” in Late Antiquity. In order to do this, I begin with a general review of the term’s usage among believers of Jesus several centuries earlier, since our text plays off the meaning of their writings.

A substantial body of scholarly literature deals with the question of what constitutes a gospel, especially what makes it (or whether it even is) a distinct literary style.³¹ To mention just a few of the issues at play: Do early Christian gospels relate to ancient Greek biographies or to Jewish writings? Which texts can legitimately be called gospels, and which belong in other categories?³² What are the requisite “ingredients” of a gospel? Does a text require a passion narrative in order to qualify as a gospel?³³ Rather than attempting to delineate what is and is not a gospel, I propose we take our text at its word. If a text calls itself a gospel, why should it not be one?

³¹ The best treatment of early Christian gospels is Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*. On the genre, see Heil, „Evangelium als Gattung“, with also an overview of the scholarship to date.

³² Most scholars, for instance, agree that the *Evangelium Veritatis*, or *Gospel of Truth*, does not qualify as a gospel. As Heil („Evangelium als Gattung“, 94) states: „Evangelien müssen sich nicht notwendig selbst als ‚Evangelium‘ bezeichnen; umgekehrt gibt es Texte, die sich zwar ‚Evangelium‘ nennen, die Gattungskriterien jedoch nicht erfüllen. Das *Evangelium Veritatis* aus Nag Hammadi z. B. wäre also nach unseren Kriterien *kein* Evangelium.“ See also Poirier, “Titres et sous-titres”, 343.

³³ Heil, „Evangelium als Gattung“, provides a useful survey of the scholarship.

Instead of trying to fit it into a predetermined literary category or deny its authenticity, I am interested in questions such as: What function does the title have in the text? What may have motivated the author to employ this term? What associations could a Late Antique reader/hearer have upon seeing this title in a manuscript or hearing it read? I find that in applying the word gospel to this ritual lot book, the author made a move that was both bold and ingenious.

In the early days of the Jesus movement, the word “gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον) and the related verb to “preach the good news” (εὐαγγελίζομαι) denoted a concept, not a text or genre.³⁴ This is evident in what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν), which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved . . . that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures . . . (1 Cor. 15:1–4).³⁵

Thus for Paul, the gospel signifies the orally transmitted message of Jesus’ death and resurrection that happened according to scripture.³⁶

While our author titled this text as a “gospel”, the composers of the earliest Christian gospels did not. As Helmut Koester remarks, “There is no indication whatsoever that either Mark or any of the authors of the Gospels of the New Testament thought that ‘gospel’ would be an appropriate title for the literature they produced.”³⁷ At first, the gospels contained in the New Testament circulated without a title.³⁸ Texts now deemed canonical or apocryphal have in common that they did not receive their

³⁴ Ibid., 62–3. Although both ancient authors and modern scholars confuse the two, Heil (ibid., 62) notes, we have to differentiate between the concept Gospel and the literary genre of Gospel: „Ganz am Beginn unserer Überlegungen muss die wichtige Unterscheidung von kerygmatischem Begriff und literarischer Gattung ‚Evangelium‘ stehen. . . . Paulus verwendet das Wort εὐαγγέλιον nicht als Bezeichnung für eine bestimmte literarische Gattung, sondern für die Heilsbotschaft selbst, die Verkündigung von Jesus . . . ; der Apostel bezeichnet mit εὐαγγέλιον das mündliche, nur äußerst spärlich narrativ strukturierte ‚Kerygma‘ von Kreuztod und Auferstehung Jesu.“

³⁵ See also Gal. 1:11 and Rom 1:1. For Paul’s message as the salvation of the gentiles, see Gager, *Reinventing Paul*.

³⁶ This continued into the early second century, as Koester (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, 8) points out regarding bishop Ignatius of Antioch: “the term ‘gospel’ does not designate a fixed formula and it certainly does not refer to any written text enumerating the basic topics of Jesus’ appearance. It is rather the message of salvation in general of which the center is Christ’s death and resurrection.”

³⁷ Ibid., 14.

³⁸ On the titles of the books in the New Testament, Metzger (*Canon of the New Testament*, 302) states: “originally none of the documents now included in the New Testament had the title to which we have become accustomed in the headings of the different books in traditional English versions.” However, according to Hengel (*Evangelienüberschriften*. 50–2), the gospel titles are not late witnesses of the second century, but very old, having to do with the exchange of writings, possession of multiple works in one congregation for public reading. He even thinks it likely that they came into existence very closely after their being written in the years between 69–100 („Sie können mit einiger Wahrscheinlichkeit auf die Zeit der Entstehung der vier Evangelien zwischen 69 und 100 n. Chr. zurückgeführt werden und hängen mit der gezielten Verbreitung derselben in den Gemeinden und dem damit verbundenen Gebrauch im Gottesdienst zusammen“ [ibid., 51]). For a different view, see Petersen, „Evangelienüberschriften und die Entstehung des neutestamentlichen Kanons“.

designations as “gospel” until the second century.³⁹ The author of our text draws on those later titles and on the status of those writings as sacred texts.

In the writings of Eusebius, the fourth-century bishop of Caesarea, we catch a useful glimpse into what the word “gospel” might evoke for ancient readers. They probably did not think of the orally-transmitted message of salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection, as we read above in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. Rather, they conceived of it as a text (or, as we will see shortly, a book). Eusebius reports a tradition that when the apostle Paul mentioned the word gospel in his letters, he referred to the Gospel according to Luke: “And they say that Paul was actually accustomed to quote from Luke’s Gospel since when writing of some Gospel as his own he used to say, ‘According to my Gospel.’”⁴⁰ Eusebius’s anonymous source took the gospel as a text, thus confusing Paul’s original gospel-as-message with a later gospel-as-text.⁴¹ The examples we will encounter next confirm that ancient readers considered the Gospel to be a sacred book.

The word “gospel” probably reminded Late Antique Christians⁴² of one book in particular: a Four-Gospel codex.⁴³ In this mindset, “gospel” transports us to a dimly lit church, into which a clergyman slowly processes, veiled in a cloud of incense and carrying a sacred book. Around the year 380, the Christian pilgrim Egeria reports in her travelogue that in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem she had witnessed the bishop processing with the gospel book. She writes: “Then the bishop, standing in the sanctuary, takes the Gospel book and goes to the door, where he himself reads the account of the Lord’s resurrection.”⁴⁴ This moment in Christian liturgy, when the clergy celebrating the liturgy appear in a procession with the gospel book, is known as the “(little) entrance.”⁴⁵ After the entrance, when the Gospel is about to be read, a deacon exhorts the congregation to rise as a sign of respect for its holiness, in one version exclaiming: “Stand up with fear of God.”⁴⁶

³⁹ Heil, „Evangelium als Gattung“, 73. Heil points out that at least until the middle of the second century, there was no monopoly claim to the genre „Gospel“.

⁴⁰ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III 4.7 (trans. Lake, 196–7): φασὶν δ’ ὡς ἅρα τοῦ κατ’ αὐτὸν εὐαγγελίου μνημονεύειν ὁ Παῦλος εἶπεν, ὅτινῃκα ὡς περὶ ἰδίου τινὸς εὐαγγελίου γράφων ἔλεγεν· «κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου».

⁴¹ See also Heil, „Evangelium als Gattung“, 62–3. Heil (ibid., 62) however, ascribes this point of view to Eusebius („Schon Eusebius verwechselt die beiden Ebenen ...“), where Eusebius clearly attributes it to others (φασίιν).

⁴² As Schäfer (*Jesus in the Talmud*, 8–9, 124–9) has shown, Jews in Late Antiquity also knew Christian gospels: the Diatessaron, the Peshitta, and especially the Gospel of John.

⁴³ As such it occurs predominantly in Coptic documentary texts, see Förster, *Wörterbuch*, s.v., 301–2.

⁴⁴ Egeria, *Itinerary* 24.10 (Maraval, *Égerie*, 245, trans. Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 144).

⁴⁵ Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia* 1:344: „Kleinen Einzug: Der die Liturgie feiernde Klerus formt sich im Altarraum zum Zuge, der sich durch eine seitliche Tür wieder zurück in den Altarraum bewegt. Es ist der Einzug mit dem Evangelienbuch.“ As Cuming (*Liturgy of St Mark*, 93) explains, “little entrance” indicates a later development in the liturgy; the expression first occurs in a fourteenth-century manuscript. Before that, texts mention just the entrance (ἡ εἰσοδος), this is “the entrance of the Gospel”.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 13 (Στάθητε). Cuming (ibid., 97) comments that in the Coptic Liturgy of Mark “the bidding before the Gospel is given in Greek: Στάθητε μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ”.

Befitting their exalted status as sacred scripture, some gospel codices were richly decorated books.⁴⁷ The beautifully painted wooden covers of a seventh-century Egyptian gospel codex, the so-called Freer Gospel Codex, allow us to imagine the gospel, as it were, through the eyes of ancient churchgoers during the moment that the gospel was brought into the church.⁴⁸ On the painted covers, we behold the four evangelists, clad in colorful cloaks, each holding a lavishly bejeweled codex. Remarkably, they do not hold the books with their bare hands, but rather they have covered their hands with their cloaks, a gesture of veneration called *super planetam*.⁴⁹ According to John Lowden, “The covered hands with which the figures support the books are an indication of reverence, and also perhaps a reminder of how the Freer Gospels themselves would have been carried.”⁵⁰ Ancient viewers of the codex would recognize the gesture of the evangelists from the way in which deacons handled gospel books in church. Unlike our divinatory booklet, such a Four-Gospel book was intended for public recitation in the liturgy and its text for interpretation in a sermon or homily.

As Wolfgang Speyer has observed, “Wherever in antiquity there is talk of Sacred Scriptures, the book counted as a carrier of magic-religious power.”⁵¹ Late Antique gospel texts also circulated outside of church, albeit in a much smaller, shorter format, that is, as amulets. From the late fourth century onward, Greek and Coptic “Evangelion-Incipients-amulets”, as Paul Mirecki has labeled them, as well as other amulets referencing the gospels, were in vogue to protect their wearers from illness and other evils.⁵² Building on the power of the text of the gospels, such amulets, written on tiny pieces of papyrus or parchment to be rolled up and worn around the neck, list the opening lines of each of the four canonical gospels among other invocations and biblical quotations.⁵³ Therefore, besides conjuring up images of magnificent gospel codices displayed at and recited from in high liturgy, upon hearing the word “gospel” an inquirer may have reached instinctively for the amulet hanging around her or his neck. Such amulets may have drawn as much or more attention in everyday practice. Indeed, a sixth-century Christian amulet, written in the form of a cross with a person in the middle, begins as follows: “Curative Gospel according to

⁴⁷ On such codices, see Lowden, “Word Made Visible”, with images of richly adorned books.

⁴⁸ Brown, *In the Beginning*, “28 Painted covers from the Freer Gospels”, 268–9. See also Lowden, “Word Made Visible”, 21–3.

⁴⁹ See Jungmann, *Missarum sollemnia*, 1:575: „Wenn das Evangelium zu Ende war, erhielt das Buch im römischen Stationsgottesdienst ein Subdiakon, der es aber nicht mit bloßer Hand, sondern *super planetam* entgegennahm und der es dann dem anwesenden Klerus der Reihe nach zum Kusse reichte, bevor es wieder in die Kassetten gelegt, versiegelt und an seinen Verwahrungsort zurückgebracht wurde.“

⁵⁰ Lowden, “Word Made Visible”, 22.

⁵¹ „Überall, wo im Altertum von Heiligen Schriften ... die Rede ist, galt das Buch als magisch-religiöser Kraftträger“ (Speyer, „Das Buch als magisch-religiöser Kraftträger“, 39).

⁵² Mirecki, “Evangelion-Incipients Amulets”, 143. As Mirecki (*ibid.*, 144) states, the function of these evangelion-incipients amulets is “inspirational or apotropaic”. For a list of all Christian amulets, see De Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets and Formularies”.

⁵³ As Mirecki (“Evangelion-Incipients Amulets”, 143) describes them: “the defining feature is the *seriatim* listing of the titles and/or opening phrases of the four canonical gospels.”

Matthew.”⁵⁴ In this context, these words do not refer to a literary genre, but rather appeal to the healing power of the gospel.

The miraculous efficacy of amulets resides in their texts.⁵⁵ An amulet from the mid-seventh century encapsulates an anthology of (chiefly) opening sentences from the four Gospels and several Psalms.⁵⁶ Among them is Psalm 90 (LXX), a Psalm to which our little codex also alludes, as we noticed above. Every new sentence begins with a staurogram, or sign of the cross, a powerful ritual symbol of the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁵⁷ The amulet reads:

- + In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
 - + One who dwells in the help of the most high <will> abide in the shelter of the lord of heaven.
 - + In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with <God>, and the Word was God. This was in the beginning with God.
 - + Book of the generation of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham.
 - + Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, son of God.
 - + Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative.
 - + The lord is my helper, and I shall not fear. What will humankind do to me?
 - + The lord is my helper, and I shall look upon my enemies.
 - + The lord is my foundation, and my refuge, and my deliverer.
 - + The lord Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity.
 - + The body and the blood of Christ spare your servant who wears this amulet.
- Amen, Alleluia + (alpha) + (omega) +

In light of our earlier discussion about the circulation of the gospel texts without titles, it is significant that we here have the incipit-sentences, not the titles of the gospels (“The Gospel according to Matthew”, etc.). Indeed, in antiquity writings were often referenced by their first line.⁵⁸ This means that the authors of these amulets, as educated writers, followed the common practice of citing a text by its opening line, rather than by attribution to an evangelist.

⁵⁴ P.Oxy. VIII 1077. The entire amulet reads in translation: “Curative Gospel according to Matthew. And Jesus went about all of Galilee, teaching and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every disease and every infirmity among the people. And his fame spread into all of Syria, and they brought him those who were ill, and Jesus healed them” (Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 33). See also De Bruyn, “Appeals to Jesus”, 66.

⁵⁵ Krebs, „Altchristliche Texte im Berliner Museum“, 119: „Die Wunderkraft des Textes beruht auf seiner Zusammensetzung aus Stellen der Psalmen und Evangelien.“

⁵⁶ P.Berol. 6096 (trans: Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 34–5). The scriptural passages cited are, respectively: Ps. 90:1, John 1:1, Matt. 1:1, Mark 1:1, Luke 1:1, Ps. 97:6–7, Ps. 17:2, Matt. 4:23. For the edition, see Krebs, „Altchristliche Texte im Berliner Museum“, no. IV; Schmidt and Schubart, BKT VI: *Altchristliche Texte*, 129–30, no. VII 1; Wessely, *Plus anciens monuments du Christianisme* vol. 2, 412–3. On the date, see Limongi, “Diffusione dei Vangeli in Egitto”, 57 n. 49.

⁵⁷ The cross signifies the death and resurrection of Jesus. According to Athanasius of Alexandria (*Contra gentes* 1:27–9; ed. Thomson) upon making the sign of the cross, “every apparition of demons is expelled” (εἰ γὰρ τοῦ σταυροῦ γενομένου, πάντα μὲν εἰδωλολατρεῖα καθήρεθη, πάντα δὲ δαιμόνων φαντασία τῷ σημείῳ τούτῳ ἀπελαύνεται).

⁵⁸ For instance, Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World*, 16: “the Greek practice of citing works by their first line.”

By indexing only beginning sentences of the gospels (and psalms), gospel amulets such as these contain the Gospels reduced to their powerful essence, just as a small bouillon cube contains a whole pan of broth in concentrated form. According to Claudia Rapp, “We see the use of extracts from scripture, *pars pro toto*, to evoke the power of the *entire* Word of God.”⁵⁹ Thus, by citing the gospel openings in “Evangelion-Incipient” amulets, their writers intended to capture the entire message of the gospel and capitalize on the awe that it provoked.⁶⁰ While the high cost of books in antiquity prevented most people from possessing a Four-Gospel codex,⁶¹ the gospel message condensed in amulets such as these allowed them to bring the gospel home; moreover, they made the gospel tangible. A closer look at the amulet just discussed makes this point well as it brings us uncomfortably close to the amulet’s sweaty bearer. As Fritz Krebs, the text’s editor, explains, perspiration – yes, sweat – has caused the humidity damage that rendered the text, badly written to begin with, even less legible.⁶²

Given how freighted with significance the word “gospel” is, the opening words of our book cannot have been an accident. The author deliberately applied this title to the text. Indeed, most ancient authors, just like their modern counterparts, put considerable thought into naming their texts.⁶³ In the preface to his *Attic Nights*, second-century Roman author Aulus Gellius muses with rhetorical modesty on how he chose a plain title for his compilation, in contrast to what he considered the clever titles of his colleagues.⁶⁴ Gellius assumes a reflective moment in picking a title for one’s work. In commencing with the word Gospel, the author of our divinatory text intentionally tapped both into the ritual connotation of the term gospel and its status as sacred book.

Our author’s labeling this lot book as a gospel likely also has a tactical or even polemic angle. Given the contentiousness of divination, a larger debate I shall ana-

⁵⁹ Rapp, “Holy Texts”, 202.

⁶⁰ See also Luijendijk, “Gospel Amulet”.

⁶¹ On the costs of books, see Bagnall, *Early Christian Books*, chapter III “The Economics of Book Production”, 50–69.

⁶² Krebs, „Altchristliche Texte im Berliner Museum“, 119: „Seiner Bestimmung hat dies φυλακτήριον redlich gedient; denn der Schweiß seines Trägers hat es völlig durchtränkt und die schon ohnehin schlechte und undeutliche Schrift an manchen Stellen derart verschwimmen lassen, daß eine sichere Lesung nicht mehr möglich ist.“ While Krebs’ imagination is to be appreciated, other forms of humidity cannot be excluded as the culprit.

⁶³ I note here that, according to Metzger (*Canon of the New Testament*, 301), “In antiquity the title of a book was not considered such an essential and unalterable part of the book as in later times ...” While that may be true in certain cases, here I draw on material that gives a different impression.

⁶⁴ “I have ... given them [his books] the title of *Attic Nights*, making no attempt to imitate the witty captions which many other writers of both languages have devised for works of the kind. For since they had laboriously gathered varied, manifold and as it were indiscriminate learning, they therefore invented ingenious titles also, to correspond with that idea ...” (*Attic Nights*, Preface 4–5; trans. Rolfe, xxvi–xxix). Further, he continues (*ibid.*, Preface 10, xxviii–xxx) with typical exaggerated humility: “But I, bearing in mind my limitations, gave my work off-hand, without premeditation, and indeed almost in rustic fashion, the caption of *Attic Nights*, derived merely from the time and place of my winter’s virgils; I thus fall as far short of all other writers in the dignity too even of my title, as I do in care and in elegance of style.”

lyze more thoroughly in chapter 4, it was advantageous for an oracle-performer to display to the client a divinatory manuscript that identified itself as a gospel. The word “gospel” immediately legitimized the use of the text and method of divination, while the presence of Mary, Jesus Christ and Gabriel created an atmosphere of awe and trustworthiness.

A Sacred Divinatory Book of Isis and Hermes “Evangelus”

If we consider the Gospel as a sacred ritual book, then we might consider other sacred books that functioned similarly. Indeed, an earlier, non-Christian document presents a glimpse into the use of sacred books for divination that shares several elements with our codex. It is a third- or fourth-century papyrus text (P.Oxy. VI 886), that reads as follows in translation. I have underlined the words that resonate with our text.

Great Isis the Lady (μεγάλη Ἰσις ἡ κυρία). Copy of a sacred book (ἀντίγραφον ἱερᾶς βίβλου) found in the archives of Hermes.

The method is the odd number of letters {i.e. 29}, through which Hermes <received omens> and Isis, searching, <found> her own brother and husband Osiris.

<Say:> ‘I invoke the sun and all the gods in the deep’ – about whatever you wish to receive an omen. Taking 29 leaves of a male palm, write on each of the leaves <one of> the names of the gods and, when you have said a prayer pick them up two by two. Read the last remaining leaf, and you will find wherein your omen consists, and you will receive an omen lucidly.⁶⁵

This text has noteworthy parallels with our manuscript. First, both are divinatory texts involving sacred books, whether a gospel or a general “sacred book”.⁶⁶ Secondly, we observe the parallel roles of Isis, the Egyptian deity, and Mary, the mother of Jesus.⁶⁷ Thirdly, both texts connect these powerful female figures with a divine messenger, respectively Hermes and Gabriel. One might also see an analogy between Osiris and Jesus Christ, as deities resurrected from death. While I would not explain the parallels between these two texts as the result of any direct relation, they are significant enough to beg explanation. In his “Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt”, David Frankfurter paints a “demographic continuity” of ritual practices in Roman Egypt with Egyptian priests converting to Christianity, bringing along “the ritual

⁶⁵ Translation: Jordan, “Two Papyri, 28. Oxyrhynchus, 3rd–4th cent., ed. princ. Grenfell and Hunt, P. Oxy. VI 886. See also Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, 264, no. PGM 24a, and Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 345–6.

⁶⁶ See „Zur ‚Kanonisierung‘ heiliger Bücher. Ein hermeneutischer Ansatz“, in Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 121–6. Naether classifies the *Sortes Astrampsychi* as a sacred text (a „mit göttlicher Macht beladene Schrift“, *ibid.*, 122; and „ein sakralisiertes Buch“, 267 n. 597). She argues (*ibid.* 126) that “all *sortes* are sacred texts”, although they “exhibit a different measure of holiness than for instance revelations.”

⁶⁷ See also Langener, *Isis lactans/Maria lactans*.

idiom and traditions”.⁶⁸ Do the parallels between the papyrus and the Christian lot book reflect a trajectory of sacred Egyptian oracular books attributed to Isis, adapted into sacred Christian books transmitted under Mary’s name?⁶⁹

The presence of Hermes in this papyrus document leads to a further notable connection. Not merely the god of travel in the Greek pantheon, Hermes is also an oracular god,⁷⁰ albeit, as Graf notes, “a rather unusual” one. According to Graf, “this function is due more to his association with chance and luck than to any intrinsic divinatory power”.⁷¹ With Hermes we turn to the *sortes* again, as the deity figures prominently in the oracle inscriptions from Asia Minor. According to Johannes Nollé, Hermes is the lord of dice oracles. Hence, Nollé observes, “It is no coincidence that all answers [from the dice oracle] in which Hermes appears are largely favorable.” Nollé associates these positive oracles to Hermes’s epithet of “*evangelus*”, that is “bringer of good news”.⁷² Indeed, the fifth- or sixth-century Greek lexicographer Hesychius has an entry that reads: “Bringer of good news: Hermes” (Εὐάγγελος· ὁ Ἑρμῆς).⁷³ In this capacity, the god Hermes leads us to another important association an ancient reader may have had with the term gospel: good news.

Gospel as Good News

A colleague once told me that she had written to the astrologer of a newspaper, complaining that her horoscopes had been too negative for too long (she did not receive a reply). While this seems an amusing anecdote, ancient *sortes* indeed tried to avoid

⁶⁸ Frankfurter, “Ritual Expertise”, 129–30, with the evidence for such converted priests at 130 n. 41.

⁶⁹ Isis-Mary continuity is not undisputed among scholars, see, for instance, McGuckin, “Early Cult of Mary. McGuckin (ibid., 12) argues for the biblical Mary: “The conclusion is inescapable, to all who have any care for balance in the matter: the Marian cult uses incidental motifs from the iconography of the Isis cult, but the substantial connections are simply not there. The Marian iconography is driven exclusively by biblical symbols, and coloured by Byzantine imperial theory.” He (ibid.) also notes: “intercession, which was the stock in trade, from their devotee’s point of view, of the Basilissa as well as the Virgin Theotokos, was not the *modus operandi* of Isis.”

⁷⁰ In the ancient “Homeric Hymn to Hermes”, Apollo delegates to Hermes a kind of divinatory power with bees, adding: “I give them to you for the future; question them accurately for your own pleasure, and if you teach (?) a mortal, he will often hearken to your utterance, with luck” (Homeric Hymn to Hermes, 554–66, in *Homeric Hymns*, trans. West, 156–9). This is the youngest of the Homeric Hymns, probably dating to the fifth century BCE (ibid., 14). The mythologist (Pseudo-)Apollodorus (*Apollodorus II* 10.2, trans. Frazer, 10–11) relates how Hermes “learned the art of divining by pebbles” (διδάσκεται τὴν διὰ τῶν ψήφων μαντικὴν) from Apollo in exchange for his shepherd’s pipe.

⁷¹ Graf, “Rolling the Dice”, 74.

⁷² Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 125: „Es ist natürlich kein Zufall, daß Hermes, der der Herr der Astragalorakel ist, bereits im ersten Spruch dieser Chresmologie erwähnt wird. Alle Sprüche, in denen Hermes erscheint, fallen weitgehend günstig aus. Das hängt offensichtlich damit zusammen, daß dieser Gott, der den Beinamen εὐάγγελος führte, als ‚guter Engel‘ galt, also als Verkünder einer ‚frohen Botschaft‘, d. h. eines ‚Evangelium‘, angesprochen werden konnte.“

⁷³ Our text, the Gospel of the Lots of Mary, features an answer about God sending his good angel (Oracle 27), see below.

such unsatisfied customers by offering more positive than negative oracular answers. Throughout our codex, the text refers to hardships, suffering, and violence, and occasionally one finds a threat. On the whole, however, a positive outlook prevails. Therefore, in addition to connecting the term gospel with gospel books and the apotropaic power of the gospel written on amulets, ancient inquirers may also have interpreted the term “gospel” literally, namely as “good news” and therefore as an indication that their query had received a positive answer. The noun “gospel” and the verb “to bring good news” (εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζομαι) could refer to such a happy occasion as a wedding. We encounter the verb in this sense in a second-century papyrus letter, addressed to a certain Dionysia, probably the mother of the groom:⁷⁴

Apollonius and Sarapias to Dionysia, greetings. You filled us with joy by announcing the good news (εὐαγγελισμένη) of the wedding of the excellent Sarapion and we would have come immediately to serve him on a day greatly longed for by us and to share his joy, but because of the circuit sessions and because we are recovering from illness we could not come.⁷⁵

This epistle conveys that its senders, Apollonius and Sarapias, had reacted with great joy to the good news of the wedding announcement. This literal use of the term persists, even when its Christian connotation becomes more pronounced. Thus a sixth-century papyrus reports on the inundation of the Nile, good news for the agricultural economy. It begins as follows: “+ To the most honorable Calus, secretary of the illustrious house. I again bring the good news (εὐαγγελίζομαι) to your honor that the blessed fertilizing river of Egypt has risen by the power of Christ.”⁷⁶ The letter belongs in a Christian milieu, and assumes that, as B. Rees comments, “even the Nile, a god of great antiquity and potency, succumbed to the power of Christ.”⁷⁷ Yet the message of good news does not refer to Christ, but to the fertilizing flooding of the Nile. Thus, for Christians in Late Antiquity this term and verb would still apply to any positive news, not specifically news about Jesus Christ.

For our text and its users, we should not underestimate the power of this literal meaning of the word gospel. A divinatory text can by nature contain only a certain amount of “bad” news or negative answers. While exclusively positive answers would cast the system’s credibility in question, the mix of answers must tilt towards the positive for the diviner to stay in business: no one wants to pay good money to hear only bad news!⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Rea, P.Oxy. XLVI 3313, 100.

⁷⁵ P.Oxy. XLVI 3313, Oxyrhynchus, 2nd cent. Trans. Head, “Named Letter-Carriers”, 293. On the date, see Harrauer, *Paläographie*, 341 f., no. 153.

⁷⁶ P.Oxy. XVI 1830, Oxyrhynchus, 6th cent., probably from the Apion archive. τῷ εὐδοκίμῳ [ωτάτῳ] Κάλῳ χαρτουλαρίῳ τοῦ [ἐν]δόξ(ου) οἴκ(ου). εὐαγγελίζομαι καὶ γῆν τῇ ὑμετέρα εὐδοκιμήσει τὸν εὐλογημένον γόνυ(ον) τῆς Αἰγύπτου ποταμὸν προβεβηκ(έναι) τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ Χριστοῦ. The continuation of the letter specifies the daily rise of the water in finger-breaths.

⁷⁷ Rees, “Popular Religion in Graeco-Roman Egypt,” 98.

⁷⁸ The mixture of positive news on the one hand, and negative news or cautionary admonitions on the other differs in each divinatory system. Naether (*Sortes Astrampsychi*, 204), for instance,

Our author must thus have intended a *double entendre* between “gospel” as sacred book and “gospel” as good news in the literal sense. Displaying a book called a “Gospel”, therefore, had added marketing value as a very powerful apotropaic sacred book and as container of good news for its users.

Mary the Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ

The incipit relates the lots to Mary as mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, delivered through the archangel Gabriel. The lots are thus associated with the good news that Gabriel delivered to Mary at the annunciation of Christ’s birth, narrated in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. In attributing the divinatory good news to the exchange between Gabriel and Mary, each individual consultation of the oracular answers in the codex becomes an imitation, a reenactment of that divine communication. While Mary does not figure in any of the text’s answers, the diviner would probably have displayed and read this section to each client in order to underscore the text’s authenticity and authority.

Popular narratives, homilies, hymns, and images suggest that the annunciation narrative greatly inspired ancient Christians. As Nicolas Conostas observes: “the Annunciation narrative in Luke 1.26–38, with its peculiar account of impregnation without physical intercourse, raised more questions than it answered. The Gospel of Luke subsequently became the site of massive literary and theological excavations, and none of its lexical or conceptual stones was left unturned”.⁷⁹ The biblical annunciation story resonates in multiple ways with our text’s opening words. In relation to our earlier investigation into the word “gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον), the association may already be felt implicitly since the annunciation was (and is) commonly known as the “*evangelismos*”.⁸⁰

Yet the connection our text makes with the Lukan narrative goes deeper. The allusion to the scene in the Gospel of Luke reflects the reaction a client might have when receiving an oracular response to a troubling question: confusion and need for explanation. In the Lukan text, Gabriel approaches Mary with the famous words:

characterizes the “mood” of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* as „konstatierend und fatalistisch-ironisch, ja sogar sarkastisch“, and that of the *Sortes Sangallenses* as „freundlich-aufmunternd“. Stewart (“Popular Handbook”, 288) finds “a balance between positive and negative responses” in the *Sortes Astrampsychi*. Klingshirn (“Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*”, 95) describes the *Sortes Sanctorum* as “cautiously optimistic, counseling the virtues of steadiness in adversity, wariness of one’s neighbor, and above all trust in God. The contents are thoroughly christianized: there is no sign of anything demonic or heterodox; the responses merely aim to be helpful”.

⁷⁹ Conostas, *Proclus of Constantinople*, 275. More generally on Mary worship, Shoemaker (“Marian Liturgies”, 130) summarizes: “Testimony from a variety of different sources, including early liturgical manuals, homiletics, archaeology, hagiography, papyrology, and especially the early Dormition apocrypha, witnesses to a thriving cult of the Virgin in the east Roman provinces already at the end of the fourth century.” On the iconography of this scene, see Al-Rawi-Kövari, „Verkündigungsszene in der frühbyzantinischen Kunst“.

⁸⁰ εὐαγγελισμός, Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 559, sub 2 “annunciation”. The TLG gives as the earliest occurrence Origen of Alexandria, *Homiliae in Lucam*.

“Greetings, favored one. The Lord is with you.” According to the evangelist, this confused Mary: “But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be” (Luke 1:28–9). The canonical text continues: “The angel said to her: ‘Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God’” (Luke 1:30). This resembles responses in our text telling the client not to fear and offering assurance of God’s favor. One oracle reads:

They will trust you and you will be victorious in this matter. Strengthen your heart. This matter is from God. *Fear not*. As for you, every thing you will do, *God is with you* (Oracle 14).

In addition to the association with the annunciation story, lots are a part of Mary’s non-canonical life in the *Protevangeliium Jacobi*, where Joseph is selected as her husband through sortilege.⁸¹ But that is not the larger context of our codex. For that, we have to look at mariolatry, especially Mary as hearer of prayers.

A cult for Mary is attested in Egypt (and elsewhere) at least by the late fourth century, perhaps even earlier.⁸² In his *Epistle to Epictetus*, Athanasius mentions a “commemoration of Mary”,⁸³ which, according to Jaroslav Pelikan probably refers to a “Mariological festival”.⁸⁴ In his study on the development of the cult of Mary, Stephen Shoemaker concludes:

It was in the later fourth century ... that Marian veneration first developed within the “orthodox” Christian communities of the Eastern empire, emerging against the larger backdrop of the rise of the cult of the saints at this time. This, of course, is well before the Council of Ephesus’s vindication of Mary as *Theotokos* in 431 and, consequently, the origins of Marian piety should not be linked too tightly with the council’s outcome. Admittedly, the Council of Ephesus contributed dramatically to the spread of Marian piety in the middle of the fifth century, and following the council, expressions of Marian devotion proliferated throughout the Roman Empire. Yet it would be a mistake to see Ephesus as the primary catalyst behind the veneration of Mary, as is often popularly maintained.⁸⁵

⁸¹ “And Joseph, throwing away his axe, went out to meet them; and when they had assembled, they went away to the high priest, taking with them their rods. And he, taking the rods of all of them, entered into the temple, and prayed; and having ended his prayer, he took the rods and came out, and gave them to them: but there was no sign in them, and Joseph took his rod last; and, behold, a dove came out of the rod, and flew upon Joseph’s head. And the priest said to Joseph, *Thou hast been chosen by lot* to take into thy keeping the virgin of the Lord” (*ANF* 8, eds. Roberts and Donaldson, 363, emphasis mine).

⁸² For a detailed, century-by-century presentation and discussion of mariological materials from Egypt, see Giamberardini, *Culto Mariano in Egitto*. For our period, see especially volume 1: *Sec. I–VI* (1975). Also Muyser, *Maria’s Heerlijkheid in Egypte*, with a focus on liturgical texts.

⁸³ Athanasius, *Ad Epictetum* 4: πάσης γὰρ αἰρέσεως πλέον εἰς ἀσέβειαν ἐξεκλίνατε· εἰ γὰρ ὁμοούσιος ὁ λόγος τῷ σώματι, περιττὴ τῆς Μαρίας ἡ μνήμη καὶ ἡ χρεία (“For you have gone further in impiety than any heresy. For if the Word is coessential with the Body, the commemoration and the work of Mary are superfluous” (trans. Robertson, *NPNF* II.4, 571). Athanasius in his *First Letter to the Virgins* holds up Mary as an example that women should imitate. See literature and references in Davis, “Pilgrimage and the Cult of Saint Thecla”, 312 and 312 n. 38.

⁸⁴ Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, 60–1, and chapter 4: “The Theotokos, the Mother of God”, 55–65.

⁸⁵ Shoemaker, “Marian Liturgies”, 141–2.

Indeed, Mary becomes so ubiquitous in Egyptian Christian piety that we would probably have been surprised if she had not somehow been part of this text.

The ascription of our divinatory text to Mary should be understood especially in the context of her role as intercessor. Christians evoke Mary for help from relatively early on. We have evidence that she was invoked in prayer in the late fourth century.⁸⁶ Our text shares significant features with an early version of the well-known Marian prayer “*Sub tuum praesidium*”, preserved on a late-fourth-century papyrus. The prayer goes:

We take refuge in your mercy, Theotokos. Do not disregard our prayers in troubling times, but deliver us from danger, O only pure one, only blessed one.⁸⁷

This prayer for help in difficult and perilous times reverberates with our Marian *sortes*, where we find multiple references to trouble and danger.

We also encounter Mary in another Christian divinatory text, a sixth-century oracle ticket, no doubt submitted by a man who wondered whether he should enter the monastery.⁸⁸ He asked:

+ God of the theotokos Mary, grant what is useful, grant that I be called brother tomorrow, bring what is useful for me out.⁸⁹

The ticket’s provenance is the city of Antinoë, where in Late Antiquity a large Christian oracle cult flourished at the shrine of Saint Colluthus. As we shall discover in the following chapters, our booklet has important ties to that shrine.

⁸⁶ See Gregory Nazianzus, Oration 24 (from the year 379), about a virgin Justina’s intercessory prayer to the Virgin Mary. Stegmüller (“*Sub tuum praesidium*”, 78–9) concludes that this oration proves that the pious populace called upon the Theotokos for help in the fourth century. He states (ibid., 79): „Das ... Zeugnis des hl. Gregor von Nazianz beweist uns zur Genüge, daß das gläubige Volk im 4. Jahrhundert die Gottesmutter um ihre Hilfe angerufen hat.“ Shoemaker (“*Marian Liturgies*”, 131) similarly comments: “Whether or not a virgin named Justina actually sought the Virgin’s assistance and protection through prayer in the early fourth century, as the legend suggests, is really beside the point: the primary significance of this passage lies in its witness to the practice of intercessory prayer to the Virgin among the Nicene Christians of Constantinople by 379.”

⁸⁷ P.Ryl. Gr. III 470 (ed. Roberts). See the description and image, at <http://enriqueta.man.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ManchesterDev~93~3~22419~100285:Christian-Prayer>. The best edition is Stegmüller, “*Sub tuum praesidium*”. The date of the papyrus is disputed. Stegmüller (ibid., esp. at 82) places it at the end of the fourth century. Förster proposes a much later date in several publications: „Zur ältesten Überlieferung“, idem, „Früheste Zeugnisse der Marienfrömmigkeit“, and idem, „Die älteste marianische Antiphon“. Römer („*Christliche Texte*“, 138) deems Förster’s arguments “not convincing” („für mich nicht überzeugend“). For a list of hymns and prayers to Mary from the papyrological record, see *NewDocs*. 2 (1982), 145–6, no. 92; and most recently POxy. LXXV 5023, with a hymn to the Virgin Mary, featuring also Gabriel and the good news.

⁸⁸ For the monastic connection, see Papaconstantinou, “*Oracles chrétiens*”, 283.

⁸⁹ ⲭ ⲟ ⲑⲉⲟⲥ ⲧⲏⲓⲥ ⲑⲉⲟⲓⲃⲟⲕⲟⲥ ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ | ⲉⲓⲃⲟⲓ ⲧⲟ ⲥⲙⲓⲛⲉⲣⲟⲛ ⲉⲓⲃⲟⲓ | ⲁⲃⲉⲗⲑⲓⲥⲁⲥⲓⲑⲁⲓ ⲁⲩⲣⲓⲟⲛ | ⲑⲉⲣⲉ ⲧⲟ ⲥⲙⲓⲛⲉⲣⲟⲛⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ ⲙⲟⲓ ⲉⲗⲟⲩ | ⲭ ⲭ ⲭ ⲭ. PSI Congr. XVII 21, ed. Papini, “*Due biglietti*”, 69–70; Antinoë, 6th cent. Delattre (“*Nouveaux textes coptes*”, 173) notes that oracle tickets with the word ⲥⲙⲓⲛⲉⲣⲟⲛ, “useful” contain the positive answer, “yes”. The appeal to Mary is, so far, unique, or as Papaconstantinou (“*Oracles chrétiens*”, 284) puts it, “un peu étonnante”. Other oracle tickets from the same site appeal to the “God of Saint Colluthus”, or, once, to “Colluthus, Christian martyr” (PSI Congr. XVII 20, ed. Papini, “*Due biglietti*”).

Against this larger background of Mary veneration, our text displays a noticeable difference. In comparison with other references to Mary, here she is *not* called by her familiar epithets “virgin” or “bearer of God” (*theotokos*).⁹⁰ When Epiphanius considered himself inadequate to speak about Mary, the mother of the Lord, he added an eloquent string of adjectives: “My tongue is not worthy to speak the very great things. For I am too weak-voiced, slow of tongue, and inelegant to thus speak about the great-named, holy, unwedded and *theotokos* Mary, mother of the Lord.”⁹¹ The lack of such epithets in our text is uncommon.⁹² Even emperor Julian, nicknamed the Apostate, knew of the popularity of the appellation “*theotokos*”. In his *Against the Galileans*, a treatise against Christians, Julian upbraids Christians because they “do not stop calling Mary *theotokos*”.⁹³ Yet regarding her maternity, in our text Mary simply is “the Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ”, not *theotokos*.

What, if anything, might the lack of such epithets in our text mean? Does it suggest an early date? Does it indicate the text’s theology? In other words, does this phrasing of Mary’s title have doctrinal, sectarian implications? Or is it a non-issue and is the divine maternity simply implied by the word “mother”? With such a short phrase and no accompanying narrative to elaborate on it, this is difficult to establish and we should be careful not to over-speculate. But given the magnitude of the Mariological debates and the deeply felt piety for Mary in these centuries, I shall at least briefly lay out several options.

On the one hand, we may view the short description of Mary as mother in our codex against the intensive debates about Mary’s status that the fourth through sixth centuries witnessed. In the fourth century the tendency to deify Mary was considered dangerous.⁹⁴ Theologians debated: Did Mary give birth to Christ (making her *christo-tokos*), or, since Jesus was thought to be equally human and divine, to God (and was she therefore *theo-tokos*).⁹⁵ In 431, the church leaders gathered in the large basilica dedicated to Mary at Ephesus enthusiastically endorsed the second position: Mary was “*theotokos*”.⁹⁶ Is the lack of this and other titles in our manuscript there-

⁹⁰ See Giamberardini, “Il ‘sub tuum praesidium’ e il titolo Theotokos” and P.Oxy. VIII 1151, a Christian amulet, with reference to “our lady the mother of God (*theotokos*) and the glorious archangels”, see Luijendijk, “Gospel Amulet”.

⁹¹ Epiphanius, *Homilia in laudes Mariae deiparae* (PG 43, 488): Οὐκ ἔχω γλῶτταν ἀξίως εἰπεῖν τὰ λίαν μεγάλα. Ἰσχνόφωνος γάρ καὶ βραδύγλωσσος, καὶ οὐκ εὐλάλος ὑπάρχω, ἵν’ οὕτως εἴπω, περὶ τῆς μεγαλυνόμενου καὶ ὁσίας καὶ ἀπειρογάμου καὶ θεοτόκου Μαρίας, μητρὸς τοῦ Κυρίου.

⁹² With searches on the TLG, this is easier to ascertain for Greek texts. For Coptic texts, we still lack such search engines and one needs to work the old fashioned way of checking editions and indices.

⁹³ “You do not stop calling Mary *theotokos*” (θεοτόκον δὲ ὑμεῖς οὐ παύεσθε Μαρίαν καλοῦντες), Julian, *Contra Christianos*, ed. Neumann, 214.

⁹⁴ See, for instance, Stegmüller, “Sub tuum praesidium”, 79.

⁹⁵ With its troubling consequences of reducing women exclusively to motherhood (and virgins at that).

⁹⁶ Cyril of Alexandria (in office 412–44) was a big proponent of Mary as Theotokos, see, for instance, Atanassova, “Cyril of Alexandria and His Contribution to Mariology”, eadem, “Did Cyril of Alexandria invent Mariology?” Cyril’s commentary on the section with the Annunciation in the Gospel of Luke, in Syriac translation, is not preserved (edition: Robert Payne Smith, 1858).

fore an indication of a date – before the mid-fifth, or even, given Julian’s comment, before the mid-fourth century? Or, by not addressing Mary as the Mother of God, is the text taking a doctrinal stance?

On the other hand, the image of Mary as mother, both in the written word and in the iconography⁹⁷ is intimately familiar. In a homily attributed to Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria, the preacher repeats four times that Jesus called Mary “my mother”.⁹⁸ While the rhetoric and atmosphere of this sermon, describing Mary breastfeeding Jesus and teaching him to walk, differ substantially from our lot book, it shows that Christians heard such phrases: “Come ye and behold God calling Mary ‘My mother’ and kissing her mouth. And as she kissed his mouth she called him always ‘My Lord and my son’.”⁹⁹ The phrase “Mary, mother of the Lord Jesus Christ” may therefore also imply her status as “theotokos”. In the end, I remain agnostic about the exact meaning of the Marian titlature here.

Angels

From Mary, we turn to her conversation partner Gabriel, that popular and powerful archangel. German scholar Detlef Müller has noted that “everyone who somehow has the opportunity to look at Coptic texts will soon be confronted with references to angels”.¹⁰⁰ Müller finds no systematic, dogmatic angelology but rather characterized the omnipresence of angels as deeply Egyptian.¹⁰¹ Gabriel first appears in the book of Daniel, as an interpreter of Daniel’s visions (Dan. 8:16 and 9:21). His function as *angelus interpres* suits him well in a divinatory milieu. The direct context for his appearance here is, as we have seen, the annunciation story.

The dialogue between Gabriel and Mary stimulated the imagination of ancient Christians, and Christian authors described the encounter between the two in vivid detail. I quote here from two sermons, originally delivered in Greek, but preserved in Sahidic translation; the translation in itself exemplifies their appeal. According to third-century bishop Demetrius of Antioch, Jesus commanded the archangel to visit Mary and “inform her that I will dwell in her”. Jesus also stipulates that the archangel should not frighten Mary.¹⁰² Demetrius thus puts Jesus in charge of his own birth announcement.

Cyril of Alexandria envisioned the encounter between angel and virgin very differently, reporting Mary as saying:

⁹⁷ See Bergman, “Eleousa”.

⁹⁸ Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 718, 721, 723, 724, cf. 723: “Hail, mother of the Lord”.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 718.

¹⁰⁰ „Jeder, der irgendwie Gelegenheit hat, Einblick in koptische Texte zu gewinnen ... wird sich bald Hinweisen auf Engel gegenüber finden“ (Müller, *Engellehre der koptischen Kirche*, 3).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 661 and further (praises on 662–5).

When he (Gabriel) saluted me he trembled, but I was filled with joy. He came ... he opened my mouth, he went down into my womb. And the holy Archangel clave to me, he directed me, and he ministered unto that which was inside my innermost part. When I used to sing a hymn at eventide angels sang with me.¹⁰³

Here Mary is cheerful, Gabriel frightened. By imagining the impregnation of Mary taking place through her mouth (oral conception), Cyril, in a remarkable way, takes Gabriel's delivery of the Good News to an entirely different level. As Conostas has noted: "Conception through oral sensation is perhaps derived from the theology of the eucharist, but also prompted by Ps. 118:131: 'I will open my mouth and it shall be filled with the Spirit', a verse which serves as the first line of the canon for the Byzantine feast of the Annunciation."¹⁰⁴ A ritual text describes Gabriel as the first word that came from the mouth of the Father.¹⁰⁵ Gabriel's powerful role around Jesus' conception explains not only his appearance in our text, but also in another divinatory text, the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, where he heads the list of the "capita interrogationis", the biblical figures one should ask for oracular answers.¹⁰⁶

In addition to Gabriel, our text also refers to the angel Michael. In one answer, Michael, sent by God, fights on the client's behalf and humbles her or his enemies:

Be brave in every thing, because your concern is over nothing. The lord will help you with his right hand. He will send Michael, his angel, and he will help you. And you will conquer those who fight with you, and he will humble your enemies before you (Oracle 28).

Like Gabriel, Michael has a biblical pedigree that begins in the book of Daniel. Thomas Kraus summarizes Michael's leading role in Jewish and Christian texts as follows:

Michael is the most prominent among all the angels as far as his mention in Jewish and Christian texts is concerned. He is the patron angel who speaks up for Israel ..., he functions as one of the archangels ... and thus is a "member of the higher ranks in the celestial hierarchy" in front of the throne of God. As the leader of the angels he leads the battle against Satan.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Gabriel solves this by appearing not as a man and not in his full glory. The archangel bursts out in a lengthy poem praising the virgin. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Virgin Mary*, in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 719. See also Pseudo-Epiphanius, *On the Holy Virgin Mary Theotokos*, in *ibid.*, 712.

¹⁰⁴ Conostas, *Proclus of Constantinople*, 278 n. 18.

¹⁰⁵ Kropp, *Koptische Zaubertexte*, 3:43.

¹⁰⁶ See Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi* II, 14, and *idem*, "Popular Handbook", 289: "And to the table of correspondences in some manuscripts there was added after each correspondence the instruction 'Ask (a particular biblical figure)', such as 'Ask Noah' or 'Ask Gabriel'; and the names of different biblical figures (replacing, it seems, the names of pagan deities) were placed at the head of the decades of answers, as though the responses in the decades were provided by the figures". The Christian edition also gives instructions for a prayer featuring God's "holy angels Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael". See Stuart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 6, lines 55–6 for the order Gabriel, Raphael and Michael; and *ibid.*, 2, lines 54–5 for the order Michael, Gabriel, Raphael.

¹⁰⁷ Kraus, "Angels in the magical papyri", 614. Michael also accompanied Baruch and Abraham on tours to heaven. As Müller (*Engellehre der koptischen Kirche*, 8) found, Michael is always archangel (Ἀρχιἄγγελος), top of the archangelic hierarchy. Michael occurs prominently in Coptic liturgical texts, standing before God's throne (*ibid.*, 9), and as luminary (*ibid.*, 10). He granted the

It is especially his performance in the book of Revelation that made him an enduring power in later Christian piety and that explains also his role in this answer. The passage reads:

And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan (Rev. 12:7–9).¹⁰⁸

Michael is an angel of action, chief commander in the fight against evil.¹⁰⁹ He is good to have on your side.

The third angel we encounter is a “good angel”.¹¹⁰ The “good angel” may allude to Judas Maccabaeus’s prayer for victory in battle: “So now, O Sovereign of the heavens, send a good angel to spread terror and trembling before us” (2 Macc. 15:23).¹¹¹ As David Brakke has observed, the concept that every human being has both a good and a bad angel is an older idea, one which Christian authors as Hermas and Origen adopted in their anthropology.¹¹² The duo appears in the *Shepherd of Hermas* as moral choice: “There are two angels with a person, one that is right and one that is evil” (Mand. 6.2).¹¹³

Christian martyrs perseverance („Den Märtyrern verlieh er [Michael] Standhaftigkeit, bis sie ihre Krone empfangen“ (ibid., 11). Michael supported anachoretes and ascetics (ibid.). He is the herald (κυρικῶν) of the resurrection (ibid.). Every 12th day of the month is dedicated to Michael in the calendar (ibid., 12). His main task (ibid., 17) is as advocate and messenger of the human race before God („Als Fürsprecher und Gesandter [πρεσβυτέρης] des Menschengeschlechts vor Gott behält er nach wie vor seine Hauptaufgabe“).

¹⁰⁸ See also Jude 9, “But when the archangel Michael contended with the devil and disputed about the body of Moses, he did not dare to bring a condemnation of slander against him, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you’”.

¹⁰⁹ Michael is so omnipresent in Egyptian Christianity that it is impossible to list here all the texts and art works that feature him. See, for example, “The Praise of Michael the Archangel” (Heidelberger Kopt. 686), in Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 326–41.

¹¹⁰ “And he will send his good angel and he will lead you” (Oracle 27). In light of our earlier encounter with Hermes, “bringer of good news”, here the Greek Vorlage was not εὐαγγέλιος, for the Coptic probably retained the Greek ἀγαθός: ἁγῶ ἀπαλοοῦ ἡπείαγγελος παλαῶς ἡνχιμοῖτ ζητῆ.

¹¹¹ 2 Macc. 15:23: καὶ νῦν, δυνάστα τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἀποστείλον ἄγγελον ἀγαθὸν ἔμπροσθεν ἡμῶν εἰς δέος καὶ τρόμον. Judas refers to the defeat of Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:13–19, Isa. 36–37). See also the prayer in 1 Macc. 7:41–42, referring to an angel without the qualifier “good”.

¹¹² “[B]oth the *Shepherd of Hermas* and Origen had taught that two angels – one good, one evil – accompanied every person and suggested virtuous or sinful thoughts; the idea was a Christian variant on a well-attested but minority view in antiquity that a person had not one, but two *daimones*” (Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 230). See also Brown’s discussion of such “guardian angels” in *The Making of Late Antiquity*, 68–72.

¹¹³ Trans. Osiek, *Commentary*, 122. Origen (*De principiis* III 2.4) refers to Hermas: “That certain thoughts are suggested to men’s hearts either by good or evil angels, is shown both by the angel that accompanied Tobias, and by the language of the prophet, where he says, ‘And the angel who spoke in me answered’. The book of the Shepherd declares the same, saying that each individual is attended by two angels; that whenever good thoughts arise in our hearts, they are suggested by the good angel; but when of a contrary kind, they are the instigation of the evil angel. The same is declared by Barnabas in his Epistle, where he says there are two ways, one of light and one of darkness, over which he asserts that certain angels are placed – the angels of God over the way of light, the angels of Satan over the way of darkness” (emphasis mine). See also Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 3.5.3–5.

God, Lord, and Jesus Christ

God plays the lead role in the text; the word God (πιογρε) occurs thirty-seven times. Answers ascribe action to God: God is a helper, God fights, takes pity, hears requests, and does not test. Or they proscribe actions due to God such as trust, prayer, and glorification. One answer gives God's self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush in Ex. 3:6: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."¹¹⁴ The answer (Oracle 7) promises prosperity or utility through the God of the three patriarchs.¹¹⁵ This is a broad description of God, and even the emperor Julian, the Apostate, acknowledged that he continuously worshiped the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,¹¹⁶ whom he considered theurgists.¹¹⁷

The lord (πχοειс) is featured five times. As a designation, "'Lord' is an amorphous title and depends on use and context for meaning".¹¹⁸ Its ambiguity makes it useful in divination, but here it does not likely have the everyday meaning of "sir" or "mister" that is the common use in, for instance, documentary papyri.¹¹⁹ In our text

¹¹⁴ In Greek: Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρὸς σου, θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ θεὸς Ἰακώβ. This description is also cited, in the shorter form resembling our quotation in Stephen's speech, in Acts 7:32: "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob" (Ἐγὼ ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων σου, ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ). A closely matching expression including "our fathers" occurs in 1 Chron. 29:18. Again the context is significant: this description occurs in David's prayer and dedication of the people's gifts to God: "O Lord, the God of Abraham, and Isaac and Israel (i. e. Jacob), our fathers (in Greek: κύριε ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰσραὴλ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν). The shorter phrase also is reminiscent of Ex. 2:24, God's covenant with the patriarchs and John 5:29: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob", etc. Another divinatory text, P.Vat.Copt. 1 (Van Lantschoot, "Collection sahidique", 42, no. [47]) also refers to God thusly: "The God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will guide you" (πιογρε πηκωτε [αβραζαμ πησαακ [μη]ακω]ε ηλαχιμο[ε]τ ζητκ]). In magical texts, see Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 43, no. 19: "Excellent spell for driving out demons: Formula to be spoken over his head: Place olive branches before him and stand behind him and say, 'Greetings, god of Abraham, greetings; god of Isaac; greetings, god of Jacob; Jesus the upright etc.'"

¹¹⁵ "You know, o human, that you did your utmost again. You did not gain anything but loss, dispute, and fighting. But if you are patient a little, the matter will prosper through the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

¹¹⁶ The trio of the patriarchs themselves occurs frequently in literature, funerary liturgy, epitaphs, and ritual texts. For instance, Matt. 8:11: "I will tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." They are featured in amulets: e. g., a fever amulet (P. Princ. III 159) and Kotansky, "Two amulets in the Getty Museum." In liturgy: e. g. the burial prayers of the *Prayers of Sarapion* (Johnson, *Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis*, 163 ff. and 68–9, no. 18) mentions placing in the bosom of the patriarchs as an image for eternal life. Johnson (ibid., 148) dates these prayers to the mid-fourth century. An epitaph from 409 C. E. mentions Michael and then the bosom of the holy fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, see Rowlandson, *Women and Society*, 83, no. 68: "Tombstone for Zoneene". For the iconography, Bovon ("Soul's Comeback") displays an image from Mount Athos, depicting the three patriarchs with the souls in their bosoms.

¹¹⁷ "I venerate without hesitation the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, <for they were> members of a sacred race, the Chaldeans, learned in the arts of divination ..." (ἀεὶ <δὲ> προσκυνῶν τὸν θεὸν Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ, οἱ ὄντες αὐτοὶ Χαλδαῖοι, γένους ἱεροῦ καὶ θεουργικοῦ; Neumann, *Contra Christianos*, 230, trans. Hoffmann, *Against the Galileans*, 139).

¹¹⁸ Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 186.

¹¹⁹ This is both true for the Greek κύριος as for Coptic χοειс.

“Lord” occurs once used as epithet of God (Oracle 6), twice as epithet of Jesus (*incipit* and Oracle 30).¹²⁰ In another instance, the Lord as mediator (Oracle 20) evokes a court setting.¹²¹ Finally, we encounter “the angel of the Lord”. The answer reads:

The peace of God will be with you in all your days. And you will rejoice and a large harvest will be yours in the year. And you will rejoice in the works of your hands, because the angel of the Lord will walk before you (Oracle 17).

With its promise of God’s enduring peace, coupled with joy and prosperity, this is one of the most positive answers in the book. It guarantees success with the presence of the angel of the Lord. The angel of the Lord is a biblical allusion and probably suggests a theophany. In the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint, the angel of the Lord occurs frequently, appearing, for instance, to Hagar (Gen. 16), Abraham (Gen. 22), Jacob (Gen. 31), Moses (Ex. 3), Balaam (Num. 22), and Gideon (Judg. 6). Often, an encounter with the angel of the Lord reveals the divine, as in Gen. 31:11–3, where the angel of the Lord identifies himself as God.¹²² Turning to the New Testament, in the Gospel of Matthew, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in dreams (Matt. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19); for instance, in Luke a nameless angel (possibly Gabriel) appeared to Zechariah and the shepherds (Luke 1:11; 2:9).¹²³

We encounter Jesus just three times in this text. In the *incipit*, as we have seen, he is mentioned in relation to his mother: “Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The other two instances are remarkably worldly, promising happiness or prosperity: “the Lord Jesus fights on your behalf. You will find joy and be happy even in your short lifespan” (Oracle 30). And, the final answer in the book: “Christ Jesus will give you a good fruit (or harvest) and a prosperous life” (Oracle 37). I will address Jesus’ role (or lack thereof) in this text in two stages: first, by reflecting on how meager a part he plays, and second, by examining the text’s this-worldly outlook.

What are we to make of Jesus’ scant appearances here, whereas in so many contemporary texts, he occupies centerstage? Christian authors of the fourth through sixth centuries are deeply concerned with the constellation of the trinity, and the nature of Christ, measuring and understanding the difficult issue of how exactly Jesus truly was both human and divine. At church councils, bishops and other clergy debated these matters ardently. Opponents were excommunicated.¹²⁴ Similarly, in

¹²⁰ On Lord as title in New Testament writings, see, for instance, Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*, 186–8, Fitzmyer, “Kyrios”, and Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology*.

¹²¹ See Gal. 3:19–20; 1 Tim. 2:5 (Jesus Christ as mediator between God and humans), Heb. 8:6 (Christ as mediator of the new covenant).

¹²² “Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob’, and I said, ‘Here I am!’ And he said, ‘Look up and see that all the goats that leap on the flock are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and return to the land of your birth’.” On this topic, see Hirth, *Gottes Boten im Alten Testament*, 13–23.

¹²³ For the suggestion that this is Gabriel, see Bovon, *Commentary on Luke 1*, 87 (“he should probably be equated with Gabriel”).

¹²⁴ See MacMullen, *Voting about God*.

other Christian exegetical works, Jesus is the central figure.¹²⁵ While much of what we know about these centuries is colored by these perspectives on Jesus, our text seems uninterested in Christological debates.

Seen against this backdrop of the christological debates and typological readings of the “Old” Testament, our text is not christocentric but strikingly theocentric.¹²⁶ This is not because it is a Jewish text. The New Testament allusions rule that out, or make it at least highly unlikely. But if we compare our text to its fellow gospels, remarkable differences come into view: here we find no teaching in parables, no Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God, no beatitudes, no promises of eternal life – none of Jesus’ core teachings. Here Jesus fights for you, but the text does not bring up miracles, healings, or exorcisms. No Eucharist or Lord’s Prayer. Jesus’ cross, death and resurrection, his life-giving self-sacrifice for the sins of humanity, heaven and after-life, they all are entirely absent.¹²⁷ The litany of missing parts continues: Apostles and martyrs, so ubiquitous elsewhere in Egyptian Christianity, are nowhere to be seen here. Neither are core values of care for the poor or community building. It is unlikely that our author was completely unaware of these rather significant themes and events; the biblical allusions presuppose at least a basic familiarity with these writings. We have here a variant of a phenomenon that we also find in other Christian texts. As Pieter van der Horst notes in a different context (namely the provenance of the Old Testament pseudepigrapha), “In antiquity there were ... texts of which we know for sure that they were written by Christian authors but which do not show any traces of Christian belief even though they sound very biblical.”¹²⁸ While our text with Jesus, Mary, and New Testament allusions does not entirely belong in that category, with its more theocentric view it stands in a larger Christian context. In this case, the author has opted for God as most powerful agent. Indeed, why settle for Jesus if you can have God?

¹²⁵ Take, for instance, Evagrius of Pontus. According to Dysinger (*Psalmody*, 152, see also 154): “The theme encountered most frequently in Evagrius’s *Scholia on Psalms* is Jesus Christ, whom Evagrius explicitly mentions at least once in 107 of the 149 psalms on which he comments in the *Scholia on Psalms*.”

¹²⁶ “Jesus” appears three times in the text: in the incipit, and Oracles 30 and 37. Osiek (*Commentary*, 34) observes: “The name Jesus never occurs in *Hermas*, and the title Christ appears only three times in very dubious manuscript variants, though there are a number of references to ‘the name’, either of God or of the Son. The omission of the personal name or title is puzzling, and it may occur because of reverential avoidance.” I do not think that we should attribute Jesus’ absence to such “reverential avoidance”.

¹²⁷ This is not a shared characteristic of all ritual (“magical”) books. The Coptic ritual book of the “Praise of Archangels Michael” draws on the cross and resurrection: Meyer (*Ancient Christian Magic*, 336). “I adjure you today by the image of the cross upon which you were lifted up for the salvation of the whole race of humankind, which is what has obliterated all the power of the devil and all demons who attack the children of humankind” (it continues, with tears of the father etc.).

¹²⁸ Van der Horst, “Provenance of 2 Enoch 69–73”, 99. He draws here on Davila, *Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, chapter 2: “Empirical Models for the Christian Composition of Old Testament Pseudepigrapha”, 74–119, on texts by Christian authors that sound biblical yet have no Christian components.

This brings me to my second point. Taking a broader look and examining the text's worldview, we see that this Gospel book is both replete with biblical language and at the same time may strike us as not very religious. It is hardly other-worldly. Indeed, it is quite the opposite. Yet, our text is not alone in its "this-worldly" outlook. The roughly contemporary Latin *Sortes Sangallenses*, a Christian text circulating in Gaul, projects a similar worldview. Klingshirn observes that the text "promote[s] a basic decency towards others", but that Christian topics such as "forgiveness, bodily pleasures, or material prosperity" do not really play a role.¹²⁹ In Klingshirn's analysis of that collection: "Fittingly from a Christian point of view, the text ... assures the client of God's omnipotence and help in time of need."¹³⁰ However,

alongside these and other recurrent Christian themes, one also sees in the *Sortes Sangallenses* a parallel world seemingly unaffected by church teaching. Clients are never told to attend Mass, donate to a church, visit a saint's tomb or (apart from personal prayer) perform any overtly Christian act. Although the text mentions judges ..., a banker ..., and a physician ... as well as various types of government officials, it never mentions a bishop or any other church figure.¹³¹

Sortes share what Johannes Nollé characterizes as a materialistic outlook: "Lot oracles wanted to focus people's efforts and attempts on earthly matters and should help them in the solution of their everyday problems. Thereby they stand fully in the materialist trend of this time. We do not encounter promises for a different and better world."¹³²

How should we explain this attitude? In his study on the Chinese oracles, Michel Strickmann makes a valuable argument that, *mutatis mutandis*, also applies here:

Many oracles voice the conventional morality that formed part of ordinary Chinese official doctrine and education ... Generally speaking, though found in temples, the oracles are not at all 'religious' in tone. ... the 'secular' nature of most oracle texts may seem grotesquely at odds with their 'sacred' setting. But this tells us more about our own hackneyed categories than about oracles. Religion in traditional societies is no less (or more) a matter of table, bed, or toilet than of temple. The alleged dichotomy of Sacred and Secular is a romantic academic invention; the Idea of the Holy is a modern German myth.¹³³

Our everyday text thus allows glimpses into a milieu that is otherwise difficult to see: thoroughly Christian, yet not Christo-centric; religious, but not otherworldly. Thus this text caters to an audience that may not only be interested in going to heaven but rather is invested in the here and now. Those who were curious or anxious about the next life would have to consult another book.

¹²⁹ Klingshirn, "Christian Divination", 112.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid. "By contrast, Christian versions of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* mention monks, priests, bishops, and withdrawal to holy places" (ibid.).

¹³² See Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 292: "Die Losorakel wollten das Streben und Trachten der Menschen auf die irdischen Dinge richten und sollten ihnen bei der Lösung ihrer Alltagsprobleme helfen. Sie stehen damit ganz und gar in dem materialistischen Trend dieser Zeit. Heilsversprechungen für eine andere und bessere Welt kommen in ihnen nicht vor."

¹³³ Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*, xxvi–xxvii.

As students of ancient Christianity and Late Antiquity more generally, we are often used to reading heresiologists or prescriptive Christian texts – sermons, treatises, and canons of church councils – specifying who is wrong or what needs to be done. So it is refreshing, and perhaps a bit surprising, to find here an entirely different rhetoric. The rhetoric of this text is not polemic. It casts its net wide. Unlike contemporary Christian writings, the purpose of this text is not to point out heretics, and exclude others, but to appeal to as many clients as possible.

Having leafed through the contents of the book, in the next chapter, we will examine the codex as a material object.

Chapter 2

Encountering a Miniature Divination Codex

“A ‘one-hand’ book is an intimate object which invites attention to every detail.”¹

When people came to consult the diviner who owned this codex to find an answer to life’s pressing questions in its pages their first impression would be formed by the physical manuscript itself. The most striking feature of this codex is its miniature format. In this section, I discuss the sociology of reading miniature books. I will argue that the book’s small size has significant ramifications for its usage. An inquiry into the production and preservation of the codex gives valuable insights into oracular practices in a Christian community and about connections among oracular book traditions. Today, if someone handed us a small, fairly thin book, and we saw at a glance short lines and wide margins, we would instantly assume from the format and *mise-en-page* that it was a book of poetry and not, say, a novel. What associations might antique readers have had with a book like ours, and what sort of text did they expect to find in such a small book? Who owned miniature books? In what contexts would one encounter them? What did one do with them, besides reading? By examining a range of different texts and situations, we will discover an interwoven set of practical, economic, ritual, and conceptual issues that will help elucidate and contextualize the book’s remarkable format.²

Codicology

Compared to its sister disciplines of the codicology and palaeography of Greek and Latin manuscripts, Coptic manuscript studies is only just beginning to gain traction. In his 1987 *A Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts in the British Library Acquired Since the Year 1906*, leading Coptologist Bentley Layton notes: “The science of Coptic palaeography and codicology is still in its infancy, and in consequence it remains difficult to deduce the date and provenance of a Coptic manuscript with any

¹ Bromer, *Miniature Books*, 11.

² In doing so, I am standing in a larger scholarly endeavor of the archaeology and history of the book. See, for instance, the scholarship of Bart Ehrman, Eldon Epp, Kim Haines-Eitzen, Thomas Kraus, and Michael Penn. Beyond the field of Early Christian studies, see especially the work of Roger Chartier and Anthony Grafton.

certainty from physical and stylistic traits alone.”³ Layton proposed a method of describing Coptic manuscripts, exhorting scholars to collect codicological and palaeographical data on manuscripts systematically. The goal is clear: “The accumulation of such data in large quantities will some day permit the elaboration of a dated archaeological typology, as it were, of Coptic manuscripts to accompany the study of their scripts.”⁴ In the years since Layton wrote this, several studies have pushed the field further⁵ – Leo Depuydt’s work on the codices from the St. Michael’s monastery in Hamuli, Fayum Oasis, and Stephen Emmel’s reconstruction of the library of the White Monastery with Shenoute of Atribe’s writings, to name just two.⁶ I have based the codicological and palaeographical analysis of our manuscript on Layton’s criteria for description.

Our codex is stored in Harvard University’s Sackler Art Museum under inventory number 1984.669. The manuscript does not contain a colophon; therefore we have no explicit information about who copied the text, when and where it was composed, or who commissioned it. A close examination of codicology and palaeography, however, provides glimpses into its milieu and time of production.

Examining the exterior of the manuscript, we notice that it still has the original fortified leather coverings.⁷ The front cover has a small decoration at the right edge.⁸ Damage to the back cover suggests that a leather flap had been attached there that could be wrapped around the manuscript and tied for an envelope closing.⁹ In order to stiffen the covers, the leaves of the first and last quire are glued to the front and back respectively.¹⁰ While in the case of other codices, discarded papyri have sometimes been reused to strengthen covers, as far as I could ascertain that was not the case here.¹¹

³ Layton, *Catalogue*, xxiv. See also idem, “Towards a New Coptic Palaeography”.

⁴ Layton, *Catalogue*, xxiv.

⁵ For discussions and bibliographies see: Emmel, “Recent Progress (1988–1992)”, and idem, “Recent Progress (1992–1996)”, Boud’hors, “Paléographie et codicologie coptes”, and Torallas Tovar, “Coptic Codicology and Palaeography”.

⁶ Depuydt, *Catalogue*; Emmel, *Shenoute’s Literary Corpus*. Of course, many others have contributed greatly.

⁷ As Lowden (“Word Made Visible”, 17) remarks, leather was “the usual covering material for a book throughout the entire manuscript era”.

⁸ The cover of our codex is simple compared to more elaborately decorated ones such as the Berlin Gnostic codex or the Hamuli covers (see Depuydt, *Catalogue*). See also more generally, Robinson, *Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, “Covers”, 71–86.

⁹ On such covers, see Robinson, “Covers”, 78–9.

¹⁰ For a similar system, see Van Minnen, “Greek *Apocalypse of Peter*”, 22: “The last leaf of the codex was glued to the inside of the cover. That is at least what the first editor claims. Perhaps the leaf merely stuck to the inside.” For the Nag Hammadi codices, “clean end papers of papyrus are pasted down over the folded-in leather edges and cartonnage” (Robinson, “Covers”, 79).

¹¹ This happened frequently in the production of book covers, and the papyri usually yield important information for the date *post quem* and Sitz-im-Leben. For instance, “The covers were formed of fragments of discarded papyrus documents, stuck together with gum, and covered over with a layer of thin kid-skin varnished ... The covers were taken to pieces, and the fragments of inscribed papyrus of which they were formed supply valuable indications as to the age of the codex” (Budge, *Coptic Biblical Texts*, xi). See also the cartonnage of the Nag Hammadi codices: Barns, Browne and Shelton, *Nag Hammadi Codices Cartonnage*.

Upon opening the codex, we notice that its leaves are of a high quality parchment, so delicate and thin that it is almost translucent.¹² Laboratory analysis of microsamples of the material showed it to be sheepskin.¹³ In the preparation of the animal skin, stretching and scraping have resulted in several small holes.¹⁴ Still, the little book has survived remarkably well. On the whole, the pages are preserved in their entirety with margins still intact. The binding has broken, and a few pages have suffered moderate water damage;¹⁵ we spot an occasional wormhole or small chip on several pages. The lower parts of the outer margins are dirty, but the text is legible throughout. It is written in iron gall (ferro gallic) ink, that has retained its dark color on some pages while chipping off or turning brown on others – a telltale feature of this kind of ink.¹⁶

The leaves¹⁷ measure 75 (height) × 68.7 (width) mm. The codex has 80 leaves total, gathered in six quires: 76 leaves are inscribed, four are empty flyleaves – two each at the front and back (*i*, *ii*, 0–75, 76, 77). The quires ($\bar{\alpha}^8$, $\bar{\beta}^8$, $\bar{\gamma}^4$, $\bar{\delta}^8$, $\bar{\epsilon}^8$, $\bar{\zeta}^8$) differ slightly in their number of leaves: five of the six have eight leaves, but one, quire *gamma*, has four leaves. The continuous page numbering shows that this quire is complete in its shorter form and that no leaves are missing.¹⁸ Such variation in quire size occurs commonly in ancient manuscripts.¹⁹ Most of the quires are relatively intact; only the binding has broken.²⁰ The hemp cord used to tie the book together remains in the middle sections of multiple quires.²¹

¹² On writing material, see Buzi, “Beyond the Papyrus”. Parker (*Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts*) discusses the technological advancement of this kind of parchment production. On parchment, see Rück, *Pergament*.

¹³ The analysis involved “MALDI protein mass fingerprinting (MALDI-PMF)”. Memo from Kirby “Analysis of parchment in HUAM 1984.669”.

¹⁴ See, e. g. pages 59–60. The scribe left the rest of the line open after the hole on 59.6 On holes in high-quality parchment codices, Pattie (“Creation of the Great Codices”, 64) remarks: “an average book has many flaws in the parchment when wounds in the skin have expanded when the skin was stretched. Even a fine manuscript like Vaticanus has many flaws of this nature, including a significant number in the text area, that force the scribe to write around the holes. Sinaiticus has many fewer flaws and most were repaired before the text was inscribed”. See also Arzt-Grabner and Ernst, “PS., 43, 21–24.27”, 79.

¹⁵ E. g. page 34.

¹⁶ On ancient ink, see Bülow-Jacobsen, “Writing Materials in the Ancient World”, 18. Iron gall ink is a “mordant metallic” ink, “made from powdered gall nuts, a metallic salt (iron or copper), gum arabic, and water” (ibid.). Implications for the date of the manuscript are minimal: iron gall ink becomes in vogue especially from the third century CE onward (ibid.). See also Delange, “Apparition de l’encre métallogallique”.

¹⁷ A note on terminology: “A ‘leaf’ (also called ‘folio’) is equivalent to half of a bifolium; 1 leaf = 2 pages, namely recto and verso.” Layton, *Catalogue*, lv n. 2.

¹⁸ As follows: quire *beta* ($\bar{\beta}$) ends with <26>, quire *gamma* ($\bar{\gamma}$) starts with 27 ($\kappa\zeta$), and quire *delta* ($\bar{\delta}$) continues with 35 ($\lambda\epsilon$).

¹⁹ For instance: the Bodmer Sahidic Exodus codex, see Kasser, *Papyrus Bodmer XVI*, 7: “Le P. Bodmer XVI ... est composé de 4 feuilles (soit 16 pages), et d’un cahier de 3 feuilles (soit 12 pages)”. For the biblical papyrus codex at the British Library (no. 7594), see Budge, *Coptic Biblical Texts*, xi: “The quires usually contained eight leaves, i. e. four sheets of papyrus measuring about 12 ½ in. in height and 13 in. in width ... but some contained six leaves and some only four.” See also the Kasr el-Wizz codex with Coptic apocrypha from Nubia, that also features irregular sized quires, see Hubai, *Koptische Apokryphen*, 22–3.

²⁰ In quire *gamma* ($\bar{\gamma}$), the bifolium forming the first and last page of the quire has broken, resulting in two loose leaves.

The scribe who wrote the main text also added pagination in the upper right corner of the leaf, but only on odd-numbered pages (that is, the right leaves, or recto), beginning with λ (1). Even (or verso) pages do not have numbers, although the scribe calculated them in the total.²² Our text begins on the left page, which is uncommon in ancient books; just like modern ones, they usually began on the right. Some ancient manuscripts list the title on the left page. Our text also has a title beginning on the left page, *The Gospel of the Lots of Mary*, but the *incipit* section continues on the right.²³ When inserting page numbers, the copyist skipped the first written (left-hand) page, leaving us a “page zero”. The pagination stops after page 35 (λϵ) for unknown reasons. Did the scribe work inconsistently?²⁴ Or have the pages been trimmed, resulting in the removal of pagination? That happened at the beginning of the second quire (Ϟ), where only the bottom half of page number 11 (ια) remains. When or why this page was truncated is not known, just as it remains unclear whether this is the reason for the lack of pagination in the later part of the manuscript. *Quire numbers* are indicated consistently on the first and last page of each fascicule in the top inner margin, the common notation for signatures.

The scribe achieved a professional-looking page design. Although the important, large monastic manuscripts are marked by distinct and elaborate page and line patterns, our pages were not prepared with such rulings. As a result, the number of lines per page varies slightly.²⁵ Nevertheless, even without rulings, the scribe worked to maintain a justified right margin with a variety of means, creating, for instance, a deliberately tall *tau* (τ), so as not to have it project into the right margin,²⁶ suspending the letter *nu* (ν) at the end of the line,²⁷ combining letters into a ligature,²⁸ and shortening the word πλῶνεις to πλῶνις.²⁹

²¹ λ, Ϟ, ϛ, λ̄.

²² An exception forms page 10 (i) at the end of the first quire, that has a page number in the outer upper margin and a quire number on the other side.

²³ Buzi discusses longer titles in her “Titles in the Coptic Manuscript Tradition”.

²⁴ In the early section of the codex, pagination lacks for page 3 (τ). On irregularities in pagination in other codices, see, for instance, Lefort, “Homélie de S. Athanase”, on the mutilated and dispersed leaves of a codex. He writes (ibid., 7): “il est notoire que les manuscrits coptes présentent de fréquentes erreurs de pagination; dans le cas présent von Lemm avait son feuillet n° 41 paginé 81 au recto et 90 au verso, et on verra tantôt que pareille anomalie apparaît encore quatre fois ailleurs.” Other examples with mistakes in pagination are the Chester Beatty Acts and Gospel of John codex and the Psalter from the Apa Jeremias monastery. For the former, see Thompson, *Coptic Version*; for the latter, see Schüssler, *Biblia coptica* I.3, 78–9 (sa 80).

²⁵ Left hand pages have most often 10 lines (22, 24, 36, 40, 46, 70, 74 have 9 lines; 8, 16, 18, 44, 50, 52 have 11 lines; 58, 66 have 12). The right hand can have a little as 3 lines (e. g., 45).

²⁶ See 43.2, 45.2, 47.3, 61.6.

²⁷ E. g. 26.6, 63.3.

²⁸ The *nu* and *eta* of the word τῆριον at 43.6 share a vertical bar.

²⁹ See 0.5. Leaving out the *epsilon* in the word πλῶνεις to make it fit in the line is, as the other examples mentioned above, a common scribal habit, see also Worrell, *Coptic Manuscripts*, xix.

Palaeography³⁰

Given the book's small size, the handwriting is surprisingly legible and quite elegant. Indeed, it is a feature of miniature books present and past that they "can be read without a magnifying glass".³¹ The overall impression of the handwriting is that the scribe tried to write in a biblical uncial book hand. The text is written in one hand.³² Our scribe wrote regularly formed, upright, slightly left-sloping letters. μ is written with three strokes, ϵ , o and c are wide and round. p and q extend below the base line, while γ is short. The words for Jesus and Christ are contracted as *nomina sacra*, but not Lord ($\alpha\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma$).³³ Thinly written *superlineation* stands over single letters. *Serifs* are used throughout (see plates). *Tremas* (diaeresis) are placed over iota.³⁴ The handwriting tends towards what Layton calls "*thick-and-thin style*, in which vertical strokes are thick and horizontal strokes are thin. The style is common especially in scripts with wide ϵ o c , and is a characteristic of e.g. the great Biblical uncial style".³⁵ Our gospel codex was penned to mimic this biblical style.

A remark is due here about the text's layout. I mentioned before that each set of facing pages contains one oracular answer. The scribe has emphasized this feature by using punctuation marks. Each answer consistently begins on the left page with a simple "zeta-shaped" paragraph (also called *coronis*) and ends with a series of dashes (*obeloi*) on the right page.³⁶ Based on Theodore Petersen's overview of punctuation marks in Coptic codices, our scribe's elegant but rather simple paragraphs resemble forms found in manuscripts from the late fourth until the seventh/eighth centuries.³⁷ Our codex probably belongs among the earlier examples, since some of these manuscripts have, in addition to the plain paragraph, features that our codex lacks, such as elaborately decorative paragraphs and polychrome ink.³⁸

³⁰ For categories, see Layton, *Catalogue*, "X. Script", lxiii–lxiv.

³¹ Bromer, *Miniature Books*, 11.

³² In three instances missing letters are added with a thinner pen, perhaps by a second hand. See 52.9, 56.11 and 70.3.

³³ 0.1 $\overline{\iota\epsilon}$ $\overline{\mu\epsilon\chi\epsilon}$; 60.6–7 $\overline{\mu\alpha\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma}$ $\overline{\iota\epsilon}$; 74.9–75.1 $\overline{\mu\epsilon\chi\epsilon}$ $\overline{\iota\epsilon}$. The word $\alpha\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ (Lord) occurs elsewhere as *nomen sacrum*, see Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 787b; $\mu\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon$ (God) only in Fayumic and Bohairic (ibid., 230b). As of yet, there is no systematic study of Coptic *nomina sacra*. A Coptic schoolbook in the collection of Princeton University has a section on these scribal contractions. See: Bucking, "Sahidic Coptic Manuscript", 59–60.

³⁴ E.g., 6.2, 6, 8.11 etc. As Layton (*Grammar*, 16, § 12) notes: "*Trema* ... is written (rarely) in some manuscripts over the letter ι or (more rarely) over γ . Its function is obscure."

³⁵ Layton, *Catalogue*, LXIV, ibid., 44, no. 41 and ibid., 53, no. 48. See also Orsini, "Maiuscola biblica copta".

³⁶ On these features, see Layton, *Catalogue*, LXV. In the edition, I have indicated the *coronis* with γ . The scribe wrote this sign with varying degrees of neatness, from a carefully formed curvy one on the opening page to rather quick, sloppy, almost straight paragraphs in many other instances (e.g. page 20, 27 etc.). The *obeloi* underneath each answer vary in number. Apart from that they functioned as page fillers, I could not detect any system in them, and therefore I have not attempted to replicate their number in the edition in Part II of this book. They are best observed in the images of the manuscript. Pages 11 (at Oracle 5) and 27 (at Oracle 13) lack *obeloi*.

³⁷ Petersen, "Paragraph Mark", 297.

³⁸ See ibid., 298–300, examples no. 3 (Beatty Mani Psalter, 2nd half 4th or 5th cent.), no. 5 (Freer Coptic Fragments, 5th cent.), and no. 7 (Freer Coptic Psalter, 5th–6th cent.), no. 9(a) (Chester Beatty

The format and style of handwriting in our codex match several miniature codices from the fifth or sixth century. In letterforms and general appearance, our manuscript closely resembles the codex with the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of John in Sahidic now in the Chester Beatty collection, dating to the first half of the sixth century.³⁹ Compared to the orthographic issues Karlheinz Schüssler analyzed in the Chester Beatty codex, our codex's sparse use of monograms and its Greek orthography suggest perhaps even an earlier date than the biblical codex.⁴⁰ Also in overall appearance and handwriting, our codex is similar to a miniature parchment codex from Antinoë containing 4 Maccabees, edited by Alain Delattre.⁴¹ This codex has approximately the same measurements as ours: 80 × 65 mm, but our divinatory codex has fewer lines per page. For the Antinoë manuscript, Delattre proposed a date in the fifth century based on its palaeography and small format.⁴² Our codex also resembles in handwriting and format to the so-called Freer Psalter. This is another parchment miniature manuscript, measuring 80 × 70 mm. Its editor, William H. Worrell, distinguished three different styles of handwriting in the codex, possibly written by one and the same scribe. The hand of our codex is very similar to that of the rounder hand in this Psalter. Worrell dated the manuscript to the fifth to seventh century.⁴³ Another

Coptic, Pauline Epistles and Gospel of John, 6th cent.), no. 13 (Morgan Ms. 665, Gospel of John, 6th cent.), no. 16 (Morgan Ms. M. 662 A, from Djeme, 7th–8th cent.), no. 17 (Morgan Ms. M. 660, Pauline Epistles, ca. 600), and no. 20 (Ms Borgia 6, Pentateuch codex from the White Monastery, 6th or 7th cent.).

³⁹ This manuscript, together with four other codices, was allegedly discovered in a jar near the Gizah pyramids, together with several coins: seven from the reign of Justinian (527–65), one of Justin (568–78) and perhaps one from Maurice Tiberius (582–602). The coins provide the date *ante quem* for the burial of the codices. Moreover, the colophon in one of the codices traces them to the monastery of Apa Jeremias in Saqqara. See Thompson, *Coptic Version*, ix–x. I follow here the date of Coptic palaeographer Pasquale Orsini (“Maiuscola biblica copta”, 138), who assigns the codex to the first half of the sixth century (“la prima metà del VI secolo”). An image of the manuscript can be found online at http://www.biblical-data.org/coptic/Thompson_2.jpg.

⁴⁰ See Schüssler, “Peculiarities of the Coptic Translations”, 49. For instance, four times in our codex we find ⲡⲉⲱⲛ (13.8, 22.7 and 64.7, 67.2), and twice ⲫⲱⲛ with the monogram (15.3 and 59.1), whereas the Chester Beatty John, apud Schüssler (*ibid.*), has a “preference for monograms”. Our scribe consistently wrote ⲡⲁⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁ for Greek παρρησία (9.3; 13.2–3; 42.10–43.1); in the Chester Beatty John it is written ⲡⲁⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁ with *hori*.

⁴¹ Delattre, “Textes coptes et grecs”, 133. He describes the handwriting as follows (*ibid.*, 134): “L’écriture est une onciale droite de petit format (lettres d’environ 2 mm de haut). Les ⲙ ont quatre traits, les ⲉ, ⲟ, et ⲥ sont larges, les γ longs. La surligne est fine et de taille variable (pour les ⲛⲏ, elle est placée au-dessus des deux lettres); les pointes sont situés à la hauteur du milieu des lettres ...” The shape of the ⲙ differs: in this manuscript written with four strokes, in ours with three.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 134. On the importance of the format for dating, see Boud’hors “Introduction aux manuscrits coptes”, 8: “Entre le IV^e et le X^e siècle environ, la dimension des feuillets de parchemin est importante pour aider à la datation des manuscrits: les codices de petit format sont souvent caractéristiques d’une époque assez ancienne (IV^e–VI^e siècle).”

⁴³ Worrell, *Coptic Psalter*. To Worrell (*ibid.*, xv–xvi) it first seemed that the manuscript was penned by three different hands, but upon closer examination, he decided it was one person applying three different writing styles. Brown (*In the Beginning*, 262) describes the codex as follows: “The Freer Psalter is not a deluxe manuscript. The linear arrangement of the text varies from page to page and ornament consists of simple paragraph marks. At times as many as three different scribal hands have been distinguished in the manuscript. Parchment shrinkage and the resulting distortion of individual letters may be partially responsible for this perception.” For images, see also *ibid.*, 136 (color image), and 262, and Schüssler, *Biblia Coptica* I.4, plate 6.

manuscript that compares to ours is the miniature bifolium of Acts (60 × 70 mm) in the Schøyen collection from around the year 500.⁴⁴ All these elements considered together, this codex seems to have been copied in the fifth or sixth century.

Both palaeography and orthography indicate an educated copyist. Despite the multivalent divinatory language, our scribe penned grammatically correct sentences.⁴⁵ The layout of the text displays an awareness of sense units and word division. This greatly facilitates reading and is thus an indication that the text was meant to be read out loud.⁴⁶ The spelling of both the Egyptian Coptic and Graeco Coptic vocabulary is proficient.⁴⁷ With few exceptions, our text does not have corrections or marginalia, signs that mark intensive use in other kinds of manuscripts.⁴⁸ The text's users are therefore not scholars, who pen comments in the margins as they work with the text, but a different kind of textual practitioners. Perhaps the diviners working with this booklet were literate but not able to write notes? Or, more plausibly, as we shall see in the next chapter, their *métier* had a strong oral component: each answer needed explanations, but those were given orally, not recorded. Indeed, any additional information would make the text less porous and therefore less useful for divination.

What does the material execution of our codex reveal about a milieu of production? In his article on “The Problem of the Category ‘Magician’”, Frankfurter makes an observation on the sociology of reading and writing that seems apropos. He wonders, “What evidence can be adduced for this general consolidation of ritual expertise in the Coptic ecclesiastical-monastic establishment? First of all, the demographics of Coptic literacy itself suggest it. The hands and the grammar may not equal the beautiful Coptic gospels ... that were being produced at the same time, but Coptic in the era of these texts was for the most part a monastic writing system.”⁴⁹ Our codex,

⁴⁴ This is Schøyen Ms. 1365, edition: Bethge, „Neue Bibeltexte“. An image is available at <http://www.schoyencollection.com/bibleCoptic.html#1365>.

⁴⁵ There are several omissions, for instance, on 24.9, one *mu* is missing; and on 58.1 the verb lacks. 52 is particularly interesting, with one lacking letter in $\kappa<2>\mu\omicron\omicron\varsigma$ (52.6) and an incomplete word later corrected by adding $\imath\mu\epsilon$ to read $\epsilon\mu\mu\kappa\imath\mu\epsilon$ (52.9); did the scribe get tired or distracted here?

⁴⁶ The scribe often fits words or phrases on a line, at times several lines in a row have just one word or phrase. See, for instance, on 58.8–12 (Oracle 28) (I reproduce here the sentence length of the manuscript):

$\overline{\pi}\epsilon\lambda\alpha\upsilon\gamma\eta\tau$
 $\overline{\pi}\kappa\epsilon\kappa\omicron\gamma\imath$
 $\overline{\pi}\omicron\gamma\omicron\epsilon\imath\omega$
 $\phi\alpha\eta\tau\epsilon$
 $\overline{\pi}\eta\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon$

⁴⁷ Examples of variation in the Graeco-Coptic are: $\kappa\acute{\iota}\nu\delta\upsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ (danger), written $\kappa\eta\lambda\lambda\gamma\eta\omicron\varsigma$ on 53.1, and $\kappa\imath\mu\lambda\gamma\eta\omicron\varsigma$ with *mu* on 5.7; $\delta\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ (doubt), written $\overline{\eta}\overline{\pi}\overline{\tau}\overline{\alpha}\iota\varsigma\lambda\lambda\alpha\varsigma\epsilon$ (“do not doubt”) on 25.4–5, and $\overline{\eta}\overline{\pi}\overline{\tau}\overline{\iota}\varsigma\lambda\lambda\alpha\varsigma\epsilon$ with *tau* on 31.1–2. Change between *delta* and *tau* is common in Coptic, most strikingly in the title at the end of the book Deuteronomy in the Sahidic biblical codex at the British Museum: $\overline{\pi}\overline{\tau}\overline{\epsilon}\overline{\gamma}\overline{\tau}\overline{\epsilon}\overline{\rho}\overline{\omicron}\overline{\nu}\overline{\omicron}\overline{\mu}\overline{\iota}\overline{\omicron}\overline{\nu}$ (Budge, *Coptic Biblical Texts*, 113). Examples of iotacism are $\kappa\alpha\tau\omicron\iota\gamma\omicron\upsilon\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ for $\kappa\alpha\tau\eta\gamma\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\omega$ on 18.11–19.1 and $\chi\eta\lambda\lambda\alpha$ for $\varsigma\upsilon\lambda\acute{\alpha}\omega$ on 44.6. This is exceedingly common.

⁴⁸ See n. 32 above.

⁴⁹ Frankfurter, “Ritual Expertise”, 128. “The multiple hands involved in copying one particular Coptic grimoire ... must reflect a scribal milieu at least comparable to that of a monastery” (ibid.). See also his *Religion in Roman Egypt*, chapter 4: “Mutations of the Egyptian Oracle”, 145–97.

in its codicological and palaeographic execution, shares these characteristics. On the one hand, compared to the large Coptic monastic codices, our book is relatively plain. It lacks such features as an elaborate headpiece on the frontispiece, decorated initials, and ruling. This was not an official production. On the other hand, with its gospel title, deluxe parchment pages, good orthography and grammar, and biblical uncial handwriting, it presented itself as a sacred and authoritative text.

Piecing together a Provenance

Knowing the archaeological context of an ancient artifact enriches our interpretation of its possible uses. The only known provenance for this manuscript, however, is an art dealership in New York City. In 1984, Beatrice Kelekian donated the codex to the Harvard University Art Museums in memory of her husband, Charles Dikran Kelekian. His father, Dikran Kelekian (1868–1951), was an influential trader of Coptic antiquities, deemed “the ‘dean of antiquities’ among New York art dealers.”⁵⁰ The Kelekian family archive records no further information about when and where our codex was found, or when the dealership acquired this piece.⁵¹

A known archaeological provenance would have greatly helped to situate and date this manuscript. Nevertheless, despite the lack of an archaeological provenance, we can cobble together at least cursory information about the context of its production and ancient use by first taking into account such factors as its state of preservation, language, and, then, most significantly, the find circumstances of a fragmentary text that is very similar to ours. For our codex, several roads led me to the Shrine of Saint Colluthus in Antinoë. This allows us to imagine intriguing scenarios about our codex’s likely owners and its milieu of use.

We can rule out Lower Egypt as the provenance for our codex; the Delta is too humid for the preservation of organic materials such as manuscripts.⁵² That leaves Middle and Upper Egypt as potential sites. Written in Sahidic, the codex may come from the southern Nile Valley, but, as noted in chapter 1, the choice for Sahidic prob-

⁵⁰ See “Dikran Kelekian”: “Considered the ‘dean of antiquities’ among New York art dealers, Dikran Kelekian was largely responsible for forming the Coptic, Early Christian, and Classical collections of Henry Walters (later founder of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore) and the Gothic collection of financier and Metropolitan Museum of Art president George Blumenthal. ... Born in modern-day Turkey, Kelekian began his career in Constantinople, opened a gallery in Paris in 1891, and moved to New York shortly after the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair.”

⁵¹ The archive is stored in the Onassis Library at the Classics Department of the Metropolitan Museum, New York City. I thank Mark Santangelo of the MET for his help. In his *Important Documents of Coptic Art*, [7], a 1929 catalogue of Coptic architectural pieces and textiles, the antiquities dealer gives glimpses into the provenance of his collection at that time: “The carved limestones of my collection come from two monasteries, one in Sohag near Akhmim in Upper Egypt and the other in the Fayum, Middle Egypt.” Kelekian (*ibid.*, [8]) notes further that the “Coptic textiles were found in tombs near Saqqarah, Akhmim, Antinoe and other places”. The author gives the same indication of provenance of textiles, again very general, in *idem*, *Additional Documents of Coptic Art*, [4]: “Most familiar to us [regarding Egyptian Christians] ... are the tapestry strips which decorated their tunics and burial wrappings found in tombs at Saqqarah, Akhmim, Antinoe, and elsewhere.”

⁵² See also Kasser, *Papyrus Bodmer XXIV*, 7.

ably was intended to reach a broad Egyptian-speaking audience. A more telling feature is that, unlike many fragmentary texts, including other works of divination, this manuscript has survived in an excellent state of preservation.⁵³ It was not torn up and discarded in antiquity and later retrieved from an ancient garbage heap, as occurred, for example, with the Oxyrhynchus papyri.⁵⁴ Other well-preserved specimens that do have a confirmed archaeological provenance have been discovered either in a grave or in a collapsed and/or deserted building, sites which we will explore briefly as they yield important historical analogies that allow us to imagine not only the provenance but also the milieu of our codex.

Our oracle codex may have accompanied its deceased owner, a diviner, to the grave. The practice of giving books as grave goods stands in a long Egyptian tradition of equipping the dead with texts for the afterlife.⁵⁵ Archaeologists have found many complete or fairly intact manuscripts in ancient gravesites, offered as funerary gifts to the deceased person. At Al-Mudil, a teenage girl was buried with a Psalter book near her head.⁵⁶ The so-called Theban Magical Library perhaps came from the grave of a ritual expert.⁵⁷ Alternatively, since, as we will see in chapter 4, church leaders did not approve of divination, the owner of this small book may have hidden it in antiquity and thus preserved it until the present day. Books were buried by themselves, whether out of reverence for a worn-out copy or to hide them because of their controversial content. This latter scenario seems to apply to the Nag Hammadi codices, and may apply to our little codex as well.⁵⁸

Or could our codex have been left behind in a dilapidated building? Ruins have yielded many intact manuscripts. G. Maspero took the Coptic codices of the famous White Monastery from a storage room with old books.⁵⁹ A large group of Coptic

⁵³ Our text's most significant divinatory relatives, the Antinoë parchment (Papini, "Fragments of the *Sortes Sanctorum*"), the Oxyrhynchus manuscripts (Kocar, "Sortilege"), and the Vatican papyrus, P.Vat.Copt. 1 (Van Lantschoot, "Collection sahidique") are fragmentary manuscripts.

⁵⁴ On discarded biblical manuscripts, see Luijendijk, "Sacred Scriptures as Trash".

⁵⁵ Richter („Verwendung“, 284), for instance, observes: „Da bei vielen auf uns zugekommenen biblischen Texten der Fundort nicht bekannt ist, ergibt sich durch die in situ gefundenen Stücke natürlich die Möglichkeit, daß auch andere Bücher als Grabbeigabe dienten.“ Richter (ibid.) notes that such books have an apotropaic function: „Als Beilage im Grab wurde dem Codex wahrscheinlich eine Schutzfunktion für ein Weiterleben oder ähnliche Eigenschaften zugeschrieben.“

⁵⁶ The fourth- or fifth-century copy of the Psalter found at the Coptic cemetery of Al-Mudil reportedly lay by the head of a teenage girl's body, see Gabra, *Psalter*, 23: „Das Pergamentbuch ... wurde neben dem Kopf eines jungen Mädchens in einem der Gräber gefunden, die aus der frühen koptischen Zeit (5. oder 6. Jahrhundert) stammen.“ Gabra (ibid.) is respectfully skeptical about the "excavations" („Ausgrabungen“, his brackets). The archaeologists did not preserve bones, human remains, or organic material from the grave – he complains – nor were pictures taken during the excavations (ibid.). „Während der Großteil der Leichen mit dem Kopf nach Westen auf dem Rücken lag, lag der Kopf des etwa 13-jährigen Kindes auf dem Psalmbuch Richtung Osten mit den Füßen nach Westen ... Das Grab enthielt keine weiteren Beigaben.“ Gabra (ibid., 24) remarks that in the Beni-Suef area and the Fayum many illegal excavations took place in the 1970s.

⁵⁷ The actual provenance of the collection is unknown, see Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites*, 12 and 40.

⁵⁸ See Goehring, "Provenance of the Nag Hammadi Codices".

⁵⁹ See Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, 1:22–3; and idem and Römer, "Library of the White Monastery", 8.

codices now in the Pierpont Morgan library came from the Monastery of St. Michael in Hamuli, the Fayum Oasis.⁶⁰ For our quest into the provenance of a divinatory manuscript, it is of interest that the latter monastery's library also contained three codices with biblical cleromancy, so-called *hermeneiai*.⁶¹ Divinatory texts have also been discovered among the ruins of other ecclesiastical settings: at the Monastery of Apa Thomas in Wadi Sarga⁶² and in the storage rooms of the remains of a church at Nessana (modern Auja el-Hafir) in the Negev desert.⁶³

Most importantly for the question of the possible provenance of our booklet is the fact that multiple oracular texts have come from the church complex of Saint Colluthus in Antinoë.⁶⁴ These texts include two fragments with the same format as our codex; the fragments also match our text verbatim in certain passages. Therefore, we have a divinatory text of the same type with a detailed archaeological provenance. Even if the codex were not found there, this would still be a place where a codex like this would be at home. Therefore, we pay a visit to the Shrine of Saint Colluthus.

The Shrine of Saint Colluthus

The fragments from Antinoë provide a *Sitz-im-Leben* for the practice of this kind of divination in a Christian site of pilgrimage and healing. According to legend, Saint Colluthus was a physician, martyred in the Diocletian persecution in the early fourth century. From the fifth century on, his shrine in the northern necropolis at Antinoë became a famous pilgrimage place. Archaeologists with the Italian Istituto Papirologico "G. Vitelli" have been excavating the site of the ancient Egyptian city of Antinoë since 1935–36.⁶⁵ Manfredo Manfredi found the remains of the church of Saint Colluthus in 1965–66.⁶⁶ The archaeologists discovered the church building and baths and also multiple texts, ranging from biblical fragments to over 200 oracular tickets.⁶⁷ Among the services offered to visitors of the shrine were dream incubation,

⁶⁰ See Depuydt, *Catalogue*, vol. 1: LVIII–LXIX. See also the picture of their finding spot in Depuydt, *Catalogue*, vol. 2, plate 5. They were apparently found in a "stone vat 'as if they had been disposed there by the Coptic fathers in anticipation of a raid'" (ibid., vol. 1, LXI, with citation of Hyvernat).

⁶¹ Depuydt, *Catalogue*, no. 58, 59, 279. According to Depuydt (ibid., 113) "their exact function is uncertain". It seems to me, however, that these are biblical phrases used for divination. One manuscript, no. 59 (ibid., 113), a "Book of Holy Hermeneiai", ⲭⲟⲩⲙⲉ ⲡⲏⲉⲣⲙⲉⲛⲏⲏⲓ ⲉⲩⲟⲩⲁⲗⲗⲉ, has 39 numbered sections.

⁶² Crum and Bell, *Wadi Sarga*.

⁶³ Johannine hermeneia were found in the church storage room at Nessana: P. Ness. II 3 and probably also 4 (see ibid., 94–5).

⁶⁴ See Papini, "Fragments of *Sortes Sanctorum*", and Delattre, "Nouveaux textes coptes".

⁶⁵ Pintaudi, "Scavi dell'Istituto Papirologico", and Delattre, "Nouveaux textes coptes", 171.

⁶⁶ The findings have now been published by Grossmann, "Antinoopolis. Zur *Area* der Kolluthoskirche", and idem, "Kirche und mutmassliches Bischofshaus". Grossmann („Phoibammon von Panopolis“, 22 n. 20) refers to a large basilica found in Spring 2010 in Antinoë. See also Fournet, "I papiri di Antinoopolis", 129 on the papyri from the Colluthus sanctuary.

⁶⁷ Delattre, "Nouveaux textes coptes", 172: "Le nombre de billets avoisine à présent les 200 exemplaires." These texts will form part of a special volume on Colluthus, including archaeological

ritual bathing, and both book and ticket divination.⁶⁸ Based on the divinatory texts found at the shrine, Lucia Papini suggests “that devotees of St. Colluthus came on a pilgrimage to this shrine to pray to the saint and obtain his intercession towards God. Here pilgrims would find priests who would write oracular questions for them”.⁶⁹ Most tickets implore “The God of Saint Colluthus”, but an oracle from this site also addresses “The God of the Theotokos Mary”.⁷⁰ According to Alain Delattre, who is preparing their publication, many tickets involve questions for healing (understandably so, for Colluthus was a physician).⁷¹ As noted above, our codex also resembles – in handwriting and format – a fragment of a miniature codex from this site, containing 4 Maccabees.

The Shrine of Saint Colluthus at Antinoë is among the known Christian oracular sites in Egypt. In her study of Christian oracles, Arietta Papaconstantinou identified six different Christian oracular sites where ticket divination was practiced. In addition to the Shrine of Saint Colluthus, there was a shrine of Saint Philoxenus at Oxyrhynchus,⁷² sites in Lycopolis and Krokodilopolis, and two other shrines of unknown location, one dedicated to Saint Leontius and the other to Saints Cosmas and Damian.⁷³ In addition to these, other Christian divinatory manuscripts have been found at the monasteries of Apa Thomas in Wadi Sarga, and of Saint Michael in Hamuli, and at the church of Nessana, as mentioned above. Of all these sites, our codex has the most connections to the Shrine of Colluthus.

The provenance and possible milieu of use of our codex has larger ramifications than simply locating the spot where it was likely found. As David Frankfurter rightly notes, “The tracks seem to lead repeatedly to the doors of the monastery or the ecclesiastical apparatus of the shrine. Thus once again, ‘magician’ would be derived from established indigenous roles, local religious authorities”.⁷⁴ In at least nine instances,

and architectural aspects, as well as study of the hagiographical texts (ibid., 172 n. 8). According to Delattre (ibid., 172–3), most oracular texts are written in Coptic and date to the 6th–8th centuries. They are written in scripts ranging from bookhand to rapid cursive (ibid., 173).

⁶⁸ See Delattre, “Nouveaux textes coptes”. Many oracle tickets mention a bath, asking whether the client should wash in the bath for healing. 20 meters from the church, basins are found, perhaps these are the baths of Colluthus (ibid., 174). Delattre (ibid.) concludes: “Les billets oraculaires découvertes à Antinoë et les résultats archéologiques des fouilles, joints aux éléments contenus dans les textes hagiographiques, jettent donc un peu de lumière sur cet intéressant complexe médico-religieux et permettent de mieux comprendre la destination des bâtiments qui s’entendaient autour de l’église de Kolloutos et de les mettre en rapport avec le culte du saint médecin et les pratiques oraculaires”.

⁶⁹ Papini, “Fragments of *Sortes Sanctorum*”, 396.

⁷⁰ On the typology, see Papini, “Struttura e prassi”.

⁷¹ Delattre, “Nouveaux textes coptes”, 173, adding: “le consultant veut dans ce cas savoir si le traitement envisagé sera efficace.” Delattre (ibid., 174) also draws attention to evidence for incubation, mentioned also in the miracles of Saint Colluthus and evidenced by a large number of *ex-vota* found at the site, especially of breasts. This constitutes important evidence of women visiting the site and women’s religion.

⁷² It took the place of the Greco-Roman oracles addressed to Sarapis, so Papaconstantinou, “Oracles chrétiens”, 282.

⁷³ Ibid., 282–4. See also eadem, *Culte des saints*, 336–9.

⁷⁴ Frankfurter, “Ritual Expertise”, 128. See also his remark in *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 194–5: “The extent of this corpus of Christian oracle tickets, and especially such formal oracle requests as

Christian lot oracle texts come from shrines, churches, and monasteries – *bona fide* Christian institutions. This situates sortilege within church practice. The fact that oracular texts were discovered at churches thus provides revealing insights into the function of divination in society, a topic to which we will return in the next chapter.

Miniature Codex

With its dimensions of 75 mm (height) $\times$ 68.7 mm (width), our codex belongs in the scholarly category of miniature codices. The way I usually indicate its size is by holding out the palm of my hand. Modern mini-bibliophiles and scholars of the history of the book define miniature books as smaller than 76 mm (or 3 inches) in height and width;⁷⁵ some also permit a slightly more generous limit of 101.6 mm (or 4 inches).⁷⁶ In her *Miniature Books: 4,000 Years of Tiny Treasures*, Anne Bromer refers to such books as “one-hand books”,⁷⁷ which I still find the best definition for what ancient authors simply called a “booklet” (βιβλαρίδιον or βιβλίδιον). Small codices such as ours stand out in the manuscript record not only visually, but also numerically, as they are relatively rare.⁷⁸ Their unique format thus merits, and I think, asks for, special attention.⁷⁹

Thomas Kraus has catalogued Greek miniatures in six groups: Classical, Old Testament, New Testament, Other Christian Texts, Other, and manuscripts not yet inte-

the above, suggests that oracles were no ‘behind-the-scenes’ favor but rather a common service to the community that was offered by certain churches or monasteries. The archives of an oracle of Saint Colluthos in Antinoë, consisting of seventy-one oracle tickets from about the fifth century, demonstrates the prominence of this form of divination as a normative extension of a martyrial cult. Most important, all such cases ... would have required scribes accustomed to translating clients’ concerns into a form that could be ritually resolved by an oracular procedure.”

⁷⁵ Bondy, *Miniature Books*, 1; Bromer, *Miniature Books*, 11.

⁷⁶ See Kraus, „Miniaturbücher“, 80–1, with reference to the Library of Congress. In the definition of Eric Turner, *Typology*, 25, this category consists of “codices which are less than 10 cm. broad, using that breadth as a conventional upper limit”.

⁷⁷ Bromer, *Miniature Books*, 11. Kraus, „Miniaturbücher“, 107 expresses a similar sentiment.

⁷⁸ The classic treatment of miniature manuscripts is Turner, *Typology*. Kraus („Miniaturbücher“, esp. 90) gives the best overview of miniature books, with data for 90 Greek miniatures. The *Leuven Database of Ancient Books* lists 204 miniature codices (bookform = miniature and codex, 06/24/2013). It does, however, not provide the actual dimensions of manuscripts and lists also books that exceed Turner’s and Bromer’s definitions: e. g., the Al-Mudil Psalter measures 130 $\times$ 170 mm; the Glazier codex is 116–119.5 (height) $\times$ 107–112.5 mm (width). See also Kraus, „Miniaturbücher“, 86–7. Miniature codices exist in many languages; for instance, 95 are written in Greek, 85 (on the database, but see below) in Coptic, 16 in Latin, 6 are bilingual Greek/Coptic, 1 in Syriac. Of these miniature codices, the vast majority, or 162, are written on parchment. Other writing material is papyrus (39), and wood (2). Of these miniature manuscripts, 26 fall into what the LDAB calls “classical” religion. Most of them, 170, are Christian texts, varying from the Gospel of John and sections of Psalms to texts not known otherwise. Kraus concludes that contrary to earlier analyses, a substantial part of the miniature library in Greek consists of classical authors (27 of 90 Greek miniature codices). They are therefore not, as Roberts (*Manuscript, Society, and Belief*, 10–12) had proposed, a primarily Christian invention.

⁷⁹ Bromer (*Miniature Books*, 11) confesses that “minibibliomania is infectious and highly contagious!” I concur with her, so the reader is warned.

grated in the list.⁸⁰ Malcolm Choat categorizes 57 Coptic miniature codices into six groups. The largest group Choat identifies is “Sacred Text” (with 31 codices). These codices are, with three exceptions, written on parchment, and range in date from the fourth to the eighth century. Most of them are Psalm Books; the Gospel of Matthew stands in the second place. Other categories Choat gives that are relevant for our codex are “Prayer/Ritual” and “Liturgy” (with each two codices).⁸¹ Looking at both Greek and Coptic miniature codices, I add a small group of nine Greek and Coptic divinatory miniature books.⁸² While many of the conclusions I will reach here apply to miniature books in general, I believe that several aspects apply to the divinatory miniature manuscripts more specifically. The choice for the miniature in the case of divinatory manuscripts may contain an element of imitation, or fashion, and may cater to expectations of clients.

The preferred format for textual transmission of *sortes* differed from region to region around the Mediterranean. In the cities of Asia Minor, *sortes* inscriptions were prominently displayed on large marble blocks in the city center.⁸³ Fritz Graf found that the *agoranomoi* had erected *sortes* inscriptions in such public spaces as market places, city gates, and temples, where merchants could consult them.⁸⁴ He proposes that leading urban families emulated each other in setting up these inscriptions:

⁸⁰ Kraus, „Miniaturbücher“, 94–5.

⁸¹ Choat, “Miniature Codices in Coptic”. The other categories he gives are “Other Literature” (9 codices); “Handbooks” (1), and “Education” (12, many of these are quite young, sixth through twelfth century). Since Choat presented this research in 2007, several other miniature codices written in Coptic have surfaced, some of them are not yet published, for instance, the oracular ones in the footnote below and the bilingual Greek-Coptic codex auctioned at Bonham on December 5, 2012.

⁸² These nine divinatory miniature codices are as follows:

1. *Περὶ Παλμών Μαντική*, ed. Hunt, P.Ryl. I 28, 56–65. 75 × 66 mm; Greek, 4th cent. It is a “well-preserved quire of eight papyrus leaves” (P.Ryl. I 28, 56). The handwriting resembles a biblical uncial. It contains Pseudo-Melampous’s treatise on *palmomancy*, a form of divination that takes its clues from involuntary body movements. For instance, “If the left thigh quiver, it denotes happiness and gain from a female”. Or: “If the left leg bone quiver, the person so affected will go on a long and unexpected journey in which he will have pain.”
2. Christian *sortes*, ed. Papini, “Fragments of *Sortes Sanctorum*”. 72.5 × 80 mm, parchment, early 7th cent., Antinoë, Coptic.
3. Hermeneiai, ed. Stegmüller, “Bibelorakeln”. 85 × 60, parchment, 7th cent. Arsinoites, Greek.
4. Christian *sortes*, ed. Canart and Pintaudi, “PSI XVII Congr. 5”. 85 × 76.5 mm, papyrus, 5th cent., unknown provenance, Greek.
5. Christian *sortes*, to be published by Wilkinson, PCtYBR 4640. 77 × 76 mm, papyrus, 4th cent., unknown provenance, Greek.
- 6.–8. Fragments of three different miniature manuscripts with Christian *sortes* in Coptic from Oxyrhynchus, two of them will be published by Kocar, “Sortilege in Late Antique Egypt”.
9. A quire of a Coptic oracle manuscript in a formal literary hand, in the Hoskyns collection, to be published by Wolf-Peter Funk.

⁸³ Graf, “Rolling the Dice”, 71–8 (“IV. Placing the Monuments”).

⁸⁴ Ibid., 76: “we are confronted with an almost homogeneous series of oracular texts from one given region and one given epoch, all with a similar function: whether inscribed on the pillars or, rarely, on walls, monuments, doorposts, they served as the reference *pinax* of an *astragalos* oracle, and their main clients were the traders and merchants who used the agora and travelled out through the city gate: during a lull in business or before going further with a deal or a journey abroad, you check with Hermes and Apollo.”

“once the inventive *agoranomos* of one particular town ... had set up such a gadget on its agora and the users liked it, all the major neighboring cities took up the idea, and it became something you just had to have.”⁸⁵ We witness a similar pattern in Egypt, albeit in miniature format.⁸⁶ Some Egyptian lot diviners likely favored small manuscripts, the visually distinctive nature of the divinatory books being instantly recognizable and highly useable.

Harry Gamble characterizes miniature codices as “pocket books clearly produced for private reading.”⁸⁷ Indeed, this petite book was not intended for public readings from the church ambo. Its script is too small to negotiate in a dimly lit sanctuary.⁸⁸ A booklet of this size fits better in an intimate setting, whether in one of the side rooms within a church complex, such as at the shrine of Saint Colluthus, or in the house of a diviner or client. As we imagine how the diviner and client must gather closely around the booklet to retrieve an answer to a personal question, the smallness of the object lent the divinatory session a heightened intimacy and mysterious atmosphere.

A pocket book like this was convenient to bring along when traveling. This is also clear from scattered references to small books in ancient literature.⁸⁹ For instance, the fourth-century rhetorician Libanius reveled in the portability of his copy of Thucydides, written in small letters.⁹⁰ He found it so convenient that instead of having his slave carry it he carried the precious book himself. We also encounter traveling monks with small books in their possession. The *Regula Magistri*, an anonymous early-sixth-century monastic rule from Italy, prescribes that monks embarking on longer trips bring along “a modest little codex” (*codicillum modicum*).⁹¹ Stories abound that depict a monk pulling a small book from his pocket or travel bag at a crucial moment.⁹² In his *Historia Lausiaca*, Palladius makes us voyeurs on the wedding night of a certain Amoun. Palladius takes the reader right into the bedroom of the newly wed couple, where the focus is not on the bed but on a book. Instead of

⁸⁵ Granted, in Asia Minor inscriptions are the only literary remains; we simply do not know whether these mercantile *sortes* also circulated on papyrus or parchment. Nevertheless, in Egypt we do not find these *sortes* inscriptions.

⁸⁶ In our codex, as noted above, every two facing pages contain one oracular answer. Was the codex produced just large enough to fit the length of the answers, or *vice versa*? In any case, instead of having a narrow, oblong manuscript, the copyist/diviner chose a small, square one. As we will see in the next chapter, this layout has implications for the divinatory method.

⁸⁷ Gamble (*Books and Readers*, 235), among others, associated the small format in the first place with private reading: “There is a special category of ancient manuscripts that consists of miniature codices, roughly analogous to modern pocket books, and clearly produced for private reading.”

⁸⁸ So also Roberts, *Manuscript, Society, and Belief*, 10–11: “they are far too small for public use, in some cases the number of lines to a page is as few as ten.”

⁸⁹ For the next section, I benefitted from Rapp, “Holy Texts”.

⁹⁰ Libanius, *Oratio* 1.148 (ed. Foerster). Rapp (“Holy Texts”, 204 n. 43) takes this as a reference to a “small codex”. According to Marchant (*Thucydides* III, xi), this indicates “an edition written, with contractions, in minuscules”.

⁹¹ *Regula magistri* 57.4 (ed. de Vogüé, 268).

⁹² Moschus, *Pratum spirituale* 31 (trans. Wortley, 22–3). See also the discussion of small codices in the possession of monks in Rapp, “Holy Texts”, 204.

consummating their marriage that night, the groom pulls a small book from his pocket and reads to his illiterate bride about asceticism.⁹³

As travel-sized book, a small divinatory codex may have belonged among the ritual equipment of a diviner who made house calls. We catch glimpses of such traveling diviners in canon 24 of the Council of Ancyra, held in the year 314. The canon states:

They who practice divination, and follow the customs of the heathen, or who take men to their houses for the invention of sorceries, or for lustrations, fall under the canon of five years' [penance], according to the prescribed degrees.⁹⁴

The bishops forbade prognostication sessions in client's homes – what ethnographers call “domestic divination”.⁹⁵ As a matter of fact, a petite book like this oracular text finds itself in good company with other miniature cult objects, such as tiny altars and undersized cult statues – objects produced specifically for rituals performed at home, and fitting with Egyptian religious practices in which miniaturization plays an important role.⁹⁶ The bishops at the council condemned such practices, punishing them with a five-year punishment. Their controversial nature, then, offers one more explanation for their miniature format: concealment.

Given the resistance to lot divination among the church leadership, the petite format of our codex provided the additional benefit of being easy to conceal.⁹⁷ One can even hide a miniature manuscript in one's armpit, as John Moschus in his *Pratum spirituale* recounts about a young book-thief, who “throws out from his own arm-pit a small book”, that he then confesses to have stolen.⁹⁸ Moschus does not further specify the booklet's content, although it is so powerful that its appearance, combined with the admission of thievery, expels a demon from a girl.⁹⁹

⁹³ *Historia Lausiaca* 8:1–2 (trans. Meyer, 42): “After they had all put the couple on the couch in the bridal chamber and departed, Amoun got up and closed the door. Then, sitting down, he called his saintly companion to him and said: ‘Come here, my lady, and I will explain this matter to you. The marriage which we have just gone through is not efficacious. We will do well if henceforth each of us sleeps alone so that we may please God by keeping our virginity intact.’ And he drew a small book from a fold in his cloak and read to her from the Apostle, from the Saviour Himself as it were, for she could not read.”

⁹⁴ *Canons of the Council of Ancyra*, trans. Percival, 74.

⁹⁵ E. g., Richard P. Werbner, “Superabundance of Understanding”.

⁹⁶ Quack, „Miniaturisierung“. See also Moyer and Dieleman, “Miniaturization”, and Smith, “The Temple and the Magician”. In his article, Quack argues, against Smith, that miniaturization is not a new phenomenon of Roman Egypt, but rather an old part of Egyptian religion. Quack („Miniaturisierung“, 363) claims that private houses also offer a quiet, undisturbed context for rituals such as visions. That seems, however, a rather modern interpretation of the home. In antiquity, domestic spaces offered little privacy. A ritual expert may have also owned medical booklets. Another small codex is Erichsen, “Aus einem koptischen Arzneibuch”, with pages of ca. 90–95 (height) × 80–85 mm (width).

⁹⁷ Amundsen (“Christian Papyri from the Oslo Collection”, 128) comments: “such a tiny volume was a handy thing to carry along in one's pocket, and also easy to conceal if necessary (cf. the *μαντική* and the amulet!).”

⁹⁸ ἐκβάλλει ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδίας μασχάλης μικρὸν βιβλίον (Mioni, “Pratum Spirituale”, 91; trans. Wortley, 224, “Supplementary Tale 239. Mioni 8”).

⁹⁹ See also Rapp, “Holy Texts”, 199. Rapp (*ibid.*) takes it to be a “small book [of the Gospels]”.

Several early Christian authors associated little books with amulets worn by women (and children).¹⁰⁰ These passages are often interpreted to mean that the women had miniature gospel books tied around their necks. But it seems more plausible that, in imitation of Jewish *phylacteria*, they carried with them important gospel phrases that symbolized the entire gospel, penned on a small sheet.¹⁰¹ Such Gospel-incipit-amulets have turned up among the papyri from Egypt.¹⁰² So while Chrysostom's little gospels did not concern miniature books, other references in ancient literature do. Several authors even associate them with divine messages.

Early Jewish and Christian authors considered the small books vehicles for revelation. The Book of Revelation contains a fascinating passage of the seer John eating a booklet (Rev. 10:10–11, a scene modeled after the bibliophagy of the prophet Ezekiel).¹⁰³ With the booklet, John digests a divine message.¹⁰⁴ The writings of Hermas also feature several small books in the context of divine disclosure. In the Second Vision, an old woman reading from a little book appears to Hermas as he is on his way to Cumae.¹⁰⁵ For ancient readers, this would have evoked the cave in

¹⁰⁰ In two of his homilies, John Chrysostom makes disapproving references to women and children that carry little Gospel books around their necks as amulets. Chrysostom (*Stat.* 19.14, NPNE, 9:470, trans. Stephens, modified) appealed to his congregation: “Do you not see how women and little children suspend Gospels from their necks as powerful amulets, and carry them about in all places wherever they go?” And at another time (*Hom. Matt.* 72, PG 58, 669), he preached: “And what are these amulets and borders? Since they were continually forgetting God’s benefits, he commanded that his wonders be inscribed on little books and that these should be suspended from their hands ... which they call phylacteries, as now many of our women have Gospels hanging from their necks” (Καὶ τίνα ταῦτά ἐστὶ τὰ φυλακτήρια καὶ τὰ κράσπεδα; Ἐπειδὴ συνεχῶς ἐπελανθάνοντο τῶν εὐεργεσιῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐκέλευσεν ἐγγραφεῖναι βιβλίοις μικροῖς τὰ θαύματα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐξηρητῆσθαι αὐτὰ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν. (διὸ καὶ ἔλεγεν· Ἔσται ἀσάλευτα ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς σου·) ἡ φυλακτήρια ἐκάλουν ὡς πολλὰ νῦν τῶν γυναικῶν Εὐαγγέλια τῶν τραχίλων ἐξαρτῶσαι ἔχουσι). See also the Acts of Andrew.

¹⁰¹ As Rapp (“Holy Texts”, 202) concludes: “we see the use of extracts from scripture, *pars pro toto*, to evoke the power of the entire Word of God.” See also Luijendijk, “Gospel Amulet”, and Haines-Eitzen, *Gendered Palimpsest*, 61–2.

¹⁰² See, for instance, Mirecki, “Evangelion-Incipients Amulets”.

¹⁰³ The passage in Revelation reads: “I took the booklet (βιβλαρίδιον) from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. Then they said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings’.” The allusion is to Ez. 2:8–3:3. In the LXX of Ezekiel, the word is κεφαλὴς βιβλίου (Ex. 2:9).

¹⁰⁴ For other examples of papyrophagy, see Wöhrle, “Papyrophagie”. In this context I should mention that two miniature copies of Revelation exist, both parchment fragments of the fourth century: P.Oxy. VIII 1080 and P.Oxy. LXVI 4500. Also fragments of the Apocalypse of Peter (P.Vindob.Gr. 39756 and Bodl. Ms. Gr. Th.f 4) are from a miniature format codex.

¹⁰⁵ The passage (Hermas, Vision 2, 5 [II.1.3–4], trans. Ehrman, 184–8) reads as follows: “When I arose from prayer I saw across from me the elderly woman I had seen the year before, walking and reading a little book (βιβλαρίδιον). And she said to me: ‘Can you announce these things to the ones chosen by God?’ I said to her: ‘Lady, I cannot remember so many things. Give me the book (τὸ βιβλαρίδιον) to make a copy.’ ‘Take it’, she said, ‘and then return it to me.’ I took it and went away to another part of the field, where I copied the whole things, letter by letter, for I could not distinguish between the syllables. And then, when I completed the letters of the book, it was suddenly seized from my hand; but I did not see by whom.” Cf. *ibid.*, 8 [II.4] (trans. Ehrman, 190–3): Hermas must write two other little books (δύο βιβλαρίδια). See also Barnabas 12:9 (trans. Ehrman, 58–9): “And

Cumae, where the sibyl, often portrayed as an old woman, gave oracles.¹⁰⁶ The obvious association with Cumae and the sibyl intimates that the content of the old woman's booklets is oracular prophecy.¹⁰⁷

Finally, the reason for our codex's small size may simply rest in the economics of production. That brings me to a rather sheepish argument for the size of this book, namely relating to the amount of parchment used.¹⁰⁸ Sheepish in the literal sense: a book the size of our codex could easily be cut from the skin of one sheep.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps this down-to-earth, prosaic argument can at least partly explain the popularity of the miniature format in Late Antiquity, not just for divinatory codices, but also for the other ones. So while I quoted above Anne Bromer's definition of miniature manuscripts as "one-hand" books, in the end, they are also "one-sheep" books.¹¹⁰

These explorations of the codex as object have begun to bring us into contact with the possible diviners, those who handled this booklet. We will make their acquaintance more extensively in the next chapter.

so, after Moses gave Jesus the son of Naue this name, he sent him as a reconnaissance scout over the land and said: 'Take a small book (βιβλίον) in your hands and record what the Lord says, that in the last days the Son of God will chop down the entire house of Amalek at its roots'."

¹⁰⁶ As a matter of fact, when in another revelation "a very beautiful young man" asks Hermas: "Who do you think that the ancient lady was from whom you received the little book?" Hermas himself identifies the old woman with the sibylla (Vision 2, 8 [II.4.1], trans. Ehrman, 190–1). Wrongly so, for Hermas is corrected that she stands for the church, that means: The church has taken over the role of transmitting divine revelation from the sibyl, see O'Brien, "Cumae Sibyl".

¹⁰⁷ As O'Brien ("Cumae Sibyl", 473–4) notes: "It is generally conceded that even though the appellation 'Sibyl' is used only once, there are several allusions to the Cumae Sibyl in the preceding passages." He (ibid., 474 n. 3) refers to "the explicit references to Cumae ... the old age of the woman ... the fact that the old woman bears a message from God in writing ... which needed the services of an interpreter (augur?) ... and other possible allusions to Aeneas' encounter with the Cumae Sibyl as depicted in Virgil's Aeneid, chapter 6".

¹⁰⁸ A single sheepskin, for instance, sufficed to produce the small codex from Kasr el-Wizz, as its editor, Peter Hubai, calculated. He (*Koptische Apokryphen*, 22) proposes: „Für einen Kodex diesen Ausmaßes [nl. 17 sheets, 34 pages of 10 × 16.7 cm], sogar für 25–30 Blätter, reicht die Haut eines Schafes.“ Hubai (ibid., 22 n. 49) speculates that such an animal may have been a votive gift to the monastery („Das Tier mag dem Kloster als Votivgabe gegeben worden sein“). On the other side of the skin-spectrum is Codex Sinaiticus, one of the very large pandect bibles, comprising of 730 folios of 380 × 340 mm (before trimming 400 × 360 mm). According to Pattie ("Creation of the Great Codices", 65), the entire codex would have "require[d] the perfect skins of 365 sheep or goats".

¹⁰⁹ The amount of skin used is as follows: 22 bifolia of 75 × 137.5 mm = 0.227 m². Probably half a sheepskin or a lambskin would have sufficed already. For comparison, one bifolium of the Codex Sinaiticus measures 380 × 680 mm thus taking 0.258 m² of skin. Our entire codex could thus have been cut out of just one bifolium of the Sinaiticus!

¹¹⁰ For a different economics of production: small format codices could be produced from left-over material ("trimmings") used for bigger codices. This is what Worrell (*Coptic Manuscripts*, xi) suggests for the Freer Psalter. Such pieces were sometimes also used to write letters and documents, see Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 147–9.

Chapter 3

A Three-Way Conversation: Book, Diviner, and Client

Searching for the users of our codex, we arrive at a shrine in Egypt. The place is bustling with visitors from near and far. Some have come with medical troubles, others with different kinds of concerns. To one side, we notice two people hunched over a small object: our codex. The first is what scholars call a client – somebody who needs help making a decision – and the second is a diviner, or ritual specialist. On the opened pages of the codex we notice the imprints of its use. These grimy margins, which I discussed in the previous chapter, bear the marks of the diviner's dirty fingers. We also observed above how in the early church official gospel manuscripts were carried *super planetam*, with covered hands. Behind those ritually wrapped hands, we detect an inherently practical issue, one that our little codex exposes with its margins: hands get dirty. But the soiled margins also suggest something historically more significant: this book was handled frequently.

Pieter van der Horst has observed that *sortes* were popular in large part because of the ease with which they could be consulted. “There were various forms of lot oracles”, he notes, “and because they were so simple to operate, they became one of the most important kinds of prognostication available in the ancient world”.¹ How were these oracles used? Many *sortes* manuscripts have prefaces with elaborate instructions for the way the text ought to be consulted. Such introductions in other books function not only as instruction manuals for the act of divination, but also anchor these texts in their religious and cultural contexts.²

In lieu of a detailed preface elucidating how the codex is to be used for divination, our text has only the terse phrase: “Gospel of the Lots of Mary”. At first glance, this brief preface seems to provide little guidance about the divinatory method one should employ to consult the codex and the process of randomization. Yet, upon closer inspection, embedded within this phrase are important clues. The term

¹ Van der Horst, “*Sortes*”, 144.

² Burkhardt („Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften“, 143) summarizes the main functions of the introductions of the Hebrew lot books as follows: „Zum einen dienen sie dem Klienten als Bedienungsanleitung für den Losmechanismus, zum anderen stellen sie die Bücher in einen breiteren jüdischen Kontext. Die traditionellen Losbücher suchen diesen Rahmen in der Verankerung im Tempelkult und späteren aggadischen und liturgischen Traditionen. Sie bedienen sich dabei verschiedener Gebete, Bibelverse, Mahnungen zur Gottesfurcht und der Traditionsketten. Im Gegensatz zu anderen magisch-mantischen Handbüchern und auch zu den *Goralot Hayyim Vital* scheinen hier Bestrebungen, der Schrift einen esoterischen Charakter zu geben, eine eher untergeordnete Rolle zu spielen.“

“gospel” indicates how the good news was accessed by locating our book in a larger context of ritual practices that rely on the Bible, notably the Gospels, for decision-making. The word “lots” (ἑκκληριος) in the *incipit* suggests that our book consists of oracular answers to be obtained by lot. But, how did this work? What was the selection technique? The second sentence of the *incipit* is too general to be helpful: “He who will go forward with his whole heart will obtain what he seeks.”³ Identifying the lot method for our book is important, because within the ritual of consultation, as Evelyn Burkhardt reminds us, randomization only enters the process in one particular moment. This is a moment attributed to God.⁴

In order to discover how our lot book might have worked, we can turn to *comparanda*, illustrations of lot systems practiced in antiquity and the Middle Ages, in other lot books. Studying these instructions is no chore, moreover, for they provide fascinating glimpses of the intended format of the divinatory session and actually make good reading, as we will see now.

Instructions for Other Lot Texts

The *Sortes Astrampsychi* is, as noted before, a Greek text that, although composed earlier, still circulated in Egypt at the same time as our text. Its preface, composed as an epistle, introduces a dazzling company of royalty and scientists: the legendary magician Astrampsychus (“Star-soul”), the Egyptian King Ptolemy Soter I, the Greek mathematician Pythagoras, and the world-conqueror Alexander the Great.⁵ Similarly, our codex leads off with a cast of Christian superstars – Mary, Jesus Christ, and the archangel Gabriel. In his letter, (Pseudo-)Astrampsychus presents to King Ptolemy a book that is “an invention of Pythagoras the philosopher”. In closing, he assures the reader that “Alexander the Great ruled the world by using this method of deciding matters. And you also will have unwavering renown among all people if you use it”.⁶ This is quite an opener.⁷

(Pseudo-)Astrampsychus’s letter also contains plain instructions on how to operate the text. Diviner and client must first select from a list of pre-formulated, numbered questions, then the inquirer chooses a number between one and ten, “which-

³ The phrase is similar to one in the Prologue of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*: “and you will find what you were looking for” (καὶ εὐρίσκεις ὅπερ ἐζητήσας), see Stuart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. II, 8.

⁴ Burkhardt, „Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften“, 132–3: „Der Losvorgang ist innerhalb des feststehenden Gefüges von Fragen und Antworten der einzige Punkt, an dem das Moment des Zufalls von Bedeutung ist. Es wurde zwar von der Hand des Klienten ausgeführt, stellte aber eine der Manifestationsformen dar, durch deren Vermittlung der Wille und die Pläne Gottes für irdische Verhältnisse sichtbar gemacht werden konnten.“

⁵ On these characters, especially on Astrampsychus, see Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 63–9.

⁶ “Oracles of Astrampsychus”, trans. Stewart and Morrell, 291–2.

⁷ According to Naether (*Sortes Astrampsychi*, 98), the prologue is not for the client but only for the diviner. It seems to me, however, that reading the letter to the client before the session would both explain how the book worked and also present the client with evidence for the book’s awe-inspiring pedigree.

ever he wants and god gives him at the moment he opens his mouth”.⁸ Adding the number of the question to one chosen by the client leads to the number of the answer – an elegantly simple system, to be sure.⁹ But this was surely not the way our codex worked, for it has no list of questions nor a consistent numbering system, and it has longer, very general answers. It is conceivable, however, that a client submitted a divinely given number that the diviner then counted out in the pages of our book, thereby arriving at an answer.

Another lot text, the Medieval Latin *Sortes Sanctorum*, prescribes a three-day period of fasting on water and bread and extensive prayer before a client could approach the oracle.¹⁰

The practice in the order of the *sortes* is, that if someone wants to ask them, let him/her fast for three days on bread and water, and on the third day let him/her sing the whole office of the Holy Trinity and when the mass is finished with great humility praying and weeping let him/her ask from the lots whatever has been necessary. Our Father.

A prefaced narrative places the oracle in a biblical context, referring to the lot that fell on Jonah and on Matthias.¹¹ With its description of fasting, humble praying, and weeping, this introduction evokes a dramatic scene. Depictions of similar preparations for ritual by those about to access the divine abound. Judas Maccabaeus and his forces prepare before a bibliomantic session by fasting for a day and wearing sackcloth and ashes (1 Macc. 3:47, see below). According to Iamblichus in his *De Mysteriis*, the prophetess at the oracle shrine of Didyma readied herself by bathing and fasting for three days in the innermost sanctuary.¹² Such instructions in a divinatory manual therefore signal to the reader that their session involves special access to divine knowledge.

⁸ “Oracles of Astrampsychus”, trans. Stewart and Morrell, 291–2.

⁹ See also Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 318–22. Naether mentions also rolling a dice. She (ibid., 322) observes that the system of a client thinking of a number spontaneously worked under the assumption that the deity already exerted influence in this stage: „Die antike Sichtweise ist, dass bereits an dieser Stelle der Befragung Gottheiten einen Einfluss ausüben, da sie dem Petenten just in diesem Moment eine bestimmte Zahl ‚implantieren‘.“

¹⁰ Montero Cartelle, ‘*Libros de Suertes*’, 43 (see also Harris, *Annotators of the Codex Bezae*, 117): In ordine sortium est consuetudo, quod si illas aliquis interrogare voluerit, triduo ieiunet cum pane et aqua, et tertia die omne officium Sanctae Trinitatis psallat, et expleta missa, cum magna humilitate orando et lachrymando a sortibus petat quidque necesse fuerit. Pater Noster. The *Sortes Sanctorum* are also known as *Sortes of Pithoeus*, after their first editor, Pierre Pithou. This section occurs in the twelfth-century Ms. “P” (now in Berlin).

¹¹ A second prayer makes reference to the creator God, several biblical figures (Abraham, Moses, Susanna, Tobias, Jonah, and Peter) and, repeatedly, to the trinity. See Cartelle Montero, ‘*Libros de Suertes*’, 43 (see also Harris, *Annotators of the Codex Bezae*, 117).

¹² Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 3.11, trans. Clarke et al., 127. The larger context of the passage is a discussion of inspired oracles. Iamblichus (ibid., 149) writes about the preparations of the prophetess before she “partakes of the god”, as follows: “This is what is shown by the abundance of sacrifices, the established custom of the whole ritual, and everything that is performed with due piety prior to divination: also the baths of the prophetess, her fasting for three whole days, abiding in the innermost sanctuaries, already possessed by light, and rejoicing in it for a long time. For all these things show that the god has been invoked and that his arrival comes from without, a marvellous inspiration even before coming to his accustomed place . . .” See also Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 173.

For a fourteenth-century Greek lot book, a grid numbered 1 to 38 and a succinct introduction sufficed.¹³ The instructions read: “These things, that you are about to know, most knowledge-loving one, are about everything that you would like to examine, whether good or bad, from the chapters of the Holy Gospel.”¹⁴ With such a brief description, the method of access was apparently considered more or less self-explanatory. Did the clients place a finger on the chart with closed eyes? Or did they drop a grain of wheat or a pellet on it?¹⁵ We may assume that diviners had experience with similar texts. Also, it seems likely that diviners passed down their methods orally, as ritual expertise was often kept in the family.¹⁶ In the operating instructions for another *rhiktologion*, preserved in a nineteenth-century Greek manuscript from the Cycladic Island of Amorgos, a chart with numbers from 1 to 58 precedes the text. The text itself begins with directions for chanting multiple liturgical prayers, including the Trisagion (or Prayer for the Dead), the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, and the Lord’s Prayer. The actual divination happens with a grain of wheat (Megas labels it *κοκκομαντεία*, grain divination).¹⁷ The inquirer makes the sign of the cross three times above the number chart while reciting the *incipit* of the Gospel of John, and then casts the grain on the chart. The slot where it falls gives the number of the answer to be looked up.¹⁸ While there are no indications that our text also operated by casting a grain of wheat, one may wonder whether the manuscript with its empty first pages was left incomplete, and needed a chart with numbers.

¹³ Drexl’s edition („Griechisches Losbuch“) is based on two manuscripts currently in Paris: 2243, copied in 1339 by Kosmas Kamelos and 2149, a 16th-century manuscript copied in large part from 2243. The grid is printed on *ibid.*, 312.

¹⁴ Ταῦτά εἰσιν, ὅπερ μέλλεις γνῶναι, φιλομαθέστατε, περὶ παντὸς πράγματος, οὗ ἂν βουλήθῃς σκέψασθαι, εἴτε ἀγαθοῦ εἴτε φαύλου, ἐκ τῶν τοῦ ἁγίου εὐαγγελίου κεφαλαίων (*ibid.*, 312). The claim that these answers come from the gospel is incorrect, as Drexl also realizes. He (*ibid.*, 311–2) comments: „Die Schriftstellen, die jener Deutung vorangehen, sind nicht, wie man aus der Überschrift ... schließen möchte, durchaus den Evangelien entnommen. Einige sind anderer Herkunft. Ich habe mich bisher vergeblich bemüht, sie (z. B. aus den Apokryphen) festzustellen. Etliche ... machen selbst schon den Eindruck von Deutungen.“ Could this be a case where a compiler excerpted a gospel manuscript with *hermeneiae*?

¹⁵ According to Drexl (*ibid.*, 311): „Durch ein daraufgeworfenes Kügelchen oder auch durch bloßes Drauftippen mit dem Finger bei geschlossenen Augen erloste man eine Zahl und schlug dann die dazu gehörige Schriftstelle und Deutung auf.“

¹⁶ For Egypt, see Frankfurter, “Ritual Expertise”, 129–30, and 130 n.41. An example is the fourth-century Canons of Pseudo-Athanasius of Alexandria. Canon 71 (Crum, *Canons of Athanasius*, 108 Coptic, 135 trans.) excommunicates the sons of priest who studied magical books, reading: “If they shall find [one of the sons] of the clergy concerned with books of magic, he shall be estranged from the fellowship of Christ” (εὐχαριστοῦντα [ἐπὶ τῷ] ἡνεκαὶ [ἡ] κοινῇ [ἐκ] τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐξέειπε). The Arabic translation (*ibid.*, 47) confirms the reading “sons”.

¹⁷ Megas, “Rhiktologion”, 209.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 208–9. For our quest into the operation of our book, the prominent position of Mary in this text is significant, although it is questionable how much weight we should place on that, given her overall exalted status and ubiquitous devotion. The text itself contains multiple quotations from the gospels and other biblical books. Indeed, an earlier text in the same divinatory family with 38 parts is called “Rhiktologion from the chapters of the Holy Gospel”.

Finally, a look at the medieval Jewish “Books of Destiny” (so-called *Goralot*) is instructive. Burkhardt distinguishes three elements in these books’ introductions, that also apply more broadly: 1) instructions about the practical use of the book, including an explanation of the divinatory method and a hemerology, that is, a catalogue of good and bad days for consulting the lot, plus a warning against the abuse of the book; 2) a legend of the tradition of the lot book and further elements that legitimate the book historically; and 3) a prayer, mostly consisting of biblical verses.¹⁹ The consultation methods Burkhardt found most often in Hebrew lot books are pricking numbers, randomly opening the Bible, drawing lots, and casting dice or numbered stones.²⁰

Despite the (seeming) specificity of these instructions in other lot books, they too leave open significant questions regarding their operation. For instance, none of them identifies the location where these practices ought to take place.²¹ For the medieval Jewish books, Burkhardt remarks that these lot methods are partly profane and therefore can be executed at any desired place. That may also be true for Christian oracles in general. Yet, we have already encountered several signs of a close connection between Christian shrines and divinatory texts. The kinds of prayers prescribed in these prefaces suggest close familiarity with Christian liturgy and fit well in such a religious context.

Having surveyed these various instructions, we return to our manuscript and take stock of what we can deduce comparatively for the operation of our book. While these other books have not led to a straight methodological match for our text, they have opened the way for imagining methods that might have been used before and during consultation. We have seen that timing and ritual preparation mattered for many lot consultations. And most systems called for prayer, even multiple familiar liturgical prayers, such as (in Christian *sortes*), the “Our Father”. Therefore, although not explicitly outlined in our book, we may reasonably assume that diviner and client gathered at an appropriate day and recited one or more prayers before the consultation.²²

How did they proceed? What practices provided randomization? Was it throwing a dice? Receiving a number in one’s mouth from God? Pricking a number or dropping a grain of wheat on an appended but now lost chart? These are not mutually exclusive methods; in fact, the answers in our codex may have been accessed in multiple ways. Burkhardt, for instance, notes for the *Goralot* that their consultation was not restricted to only one method of randomization,²³ but that instructions would of-

¹⁹ Burkhardt, „Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften“, 130.

²⁰ Ibid., 131: „das Zahlenstechen, das Punktieren, zufälliges Aufschlagen der Bibel, Losen mit den Fingern, Würfeln und Zahlsteine.“

²¹ Ibid., 133.

²² The only instance where the text contains an exhortation to pray is in the concluding sentence of Oracle 26: “But go and pray to God immediately.”

²³ „Die Möglichkeiten, dem Zufall beim Finden einer Antwort Raum zu bieten, sind vielfältig. In einigen Fällen ist das Losinstrument fester Bestandteil des Losbuches ... in anderen ist seine Wahl beliebig“ (ibid., 130–1).

ten suggest multiple methods of operation.²⁴ Conceivably, instructions for use were conveyed orally between diviners when they transmitted the text.

In the end, we cannot determine the exact method of randomization ancient diviners applied to locate an answer. However, the book's thumbled-through pages assure us that this was not a challenge for those diviners and that the book enjoyed a productive life. And even though our codex does not contain explicit instructions for use, as we will see, the term "gospel" hints at the method of consultation.

Bibliomancy²⁵

One way that a diviner may have operated our gospel codex is by a bibliomantic method such as opening it at random. Bibliomancy, the practice of randomly opening a biblical book, or hearing a passage by chance, and taking it as directive for one's life, accounts for many life-changing experiences in the ancient church and beyond.²⁶ In the *Life of Antony*, fourth-century bishop Athanasius of Alexandria attributes the key moment in Antony's calling to bibliomancy.²⁷ Thus, as Van der Horst has noted, "The first unambiguous Christian evidence for *sortilegium* dates from the third quarter of the 4th century".²⁸

Athanasius narrates that Antony, one day shortly after the death of his affluent parents, was on his way to church, pondering the biblical story about the apostles selling their possessions (Acts 4:35–37). Upon entering the building, Antony was immediately struck by what he heard. Athanasius narrates, "It just then happened that the Gospel was being read, and he heard the Lord saying to the rich man, *If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven*". According to Athanasius, what Antony heard was a reading from the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 19:21).²⁹ The bishop interprets this event as a bibliomantic moment,

²⁴ „Entgegen der Beobachtung ..., es gehöre 'fast zu den Stereotypen der Losbuchliteratur, daß jeweils nur eine Losmethode bzw. ein Losinstrument verwendet werden kann', werden in der Anleitung zur praktischen Handhabung hebräischer Losbücher oft mehrere Losmethoden als Alternativen angegeben. Insbesondere für die meisten Handschriften der *Goralot Ibn Ezra* ist die gleichberechtigte Erwähnung von drei Losmethoden (Punktieren, Würfeln und Losen mit den Fingern) typisch“ (ibid. 131 and 131n89, quoting Lutz, „Das Buch Alfadol“, 103).

²⁵ On methods for consulting sacred books, Boehm („Los, losen“, 1355) mentions „Stichomantie, Rhapsodomantie, Bibliomantie, Stoicheiomantie“. About random opening of the bible, Burkhardt („Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften“, 131–2 n. 92) writes: „Diese Methode ist eine Art der Bibliomantie, bei der meistens ein Pentateuch an einer zufälligen Stelle aufgeschlagen wird. Ein durch die Anleitung näher bestimmter Buchstabe ... bildet die Grundlage für weitere Berechnungen ... Diese Praktik reduziert die eigentliche Bibliomantie auf ein Minimum. Die Schrift dient hier nicht als Orakel in dem Sinne, daß sie Verse enthält ...“

²⁶ See especially Van der Horst, „Sortes“, 151–7.

²⁷ Or, strictly speaking, as Van der Horst (ibid., 151) notices, in the *Life of Antony* "the *sors* is received not by drawing it literally but in a cledonomantic fashion by attributing divine significance to a biblical verse heard by chance".

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 2.3 (ed. Bartelink, 132; trans. Gregg, 31): Ταῦτα δὲ ἐνθυμούμενος εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ συνέβη τότε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἀναγινώσκεισθαι καὶ ἤκουσε τοῦ Κυρίου

writing: “It was as if by God’s design he held the saints in his recollection, and as if the passage were read on his account.”³⁰ Antony then reportedly sold off most of his inheritance. Once again entering church, he heard another passage from the Gospel of Matthew: “Do not be anxious about tomorrow . . .” (Matt. 6:34), which prompted him to distribute the remainder of his possessions to the poor.³¹ According to Bartelink, the recurrence of the bibliomantic event confirmed its veracity.³² Antony’s conversion thus came about through gospel passages that he heard by chance, and it became a model for the conversion of many others, perhaps most famously Augustine of Hippo.

Some four decades after Athanasius had published the *Life of Antony*, a young African by the name of Augustine, residing at the time in Milan, heard of Antony and his *Life* from a certain Ponticianus. Augustine was deeply impressed by the narrative and devoted a chapter to it in his memoir (*Confessions* VIII 6). Later he narrates how a bibliomantic experience also led to his conversion. Once, feeling utterly distressed, Augustine sat weeping under a fig tree, when, he tells,

... suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl (I do not know which), saying and repeating over and over again ‘Pick up and read, pick up and read’. At once my countenance changed, and I began to think intently whether there might be some sort of children’s game in which such a chant is used. But I could not remember having heard of one. I checked the flood of tears and stood up. I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find. For I had heard how Antony happened to be present at the gospel reading, and took it as an admonition addressed to himself . . .³³

Upon randomly opening a codex with the Pauline epistles, Augustine’s eyes lighted upon the advice of Romans 13:13–14: “Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts.”³⁴ According to Augustine, the experience brought about a powerful and complete change in his mood and his life. Augustine describes it as follows: “At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.”³⁵ Similar stories abound in the ancient church.³⁶

λέγοντος τῷ πλουσίῳ· «Εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι, ὕπαγε, πώλησον πάντα τὰ ὑπάρχοντά σου, καὶ δὸς πτωχοῖς, καὶ δεῦρο ἀκολούθει μοι, καὶ ἔξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανοῖς»).

³⁰ Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 2.4 (ibid.): ὥσπερ θεόθεν ἐσχηκώς τὴν τῶν ἁγίων μνήμην καὶ ὡς δι’ αὐτὸν γενομένου τοῦ ἀναγνώσματος. See also Bartelink, *Vie d’Antoine*, 133 n.2: “La lecture de l’Évangile est ainsi considérée par Antoine comme un oracle personnel.”

³¹ Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 3.1 (ed. Bartelink, 134; trans. Gregg, 31): Ὡς δέ, πάλιν εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὸ κυριακόν, ἤκουσεν ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Κυρίου λέγοντος· «Μὴ μερμηρίσσετε περὶ τῆς αὔριου», οὐκ ἀνασχόμενος ἔτι μένειν, ἐξελθὼν διέδωκε κάκεῖνα τοῖς μετριοῖς.

³² Bartelink (*Vie d’Antoine*, 135 n. 3) comments: “De nouveau Antoine s’applique à lui même un texte biblique, entendu fortuitement. Dans les oracles comme dans les rêves, répétition signifie confirmation.”

³³ Augustine, *Confessions* VIII 12:29 (trans. Chadwick, *Saint Augustine*, 152–3).

³⁴ Ibid., 153.

³⁵ Ibid. Much has been written about this passage, see, for instance, O’Connell, *Images of Conversion*; Van der Horst, “Sortes”, 152–5.

³⁶ E. g., Cyriacus of Scythopolis, Theodore of Petra. See also Van der Horst, “Sortes”, 155–7.

These bibliomantic narratives of Antony and Augustine make sense in a larger context of ritual consultation of sacred texts around the Mediterranean. The procedure springs from consulting the writings of Homer and Virgil. It was also practiced by Jews and Christians, and was tightly connected to the status of books as sacred texts.³⁷ In the Second Temple period, Jews consulted their sacred scriptures in this way.³⁸ 1 Maccabees 3 preserves a telling example. Faced with a difficult battle, Judas Maccabaeus and his forces met at a sacred place to consult a Torah scroll. “Then they fasted that day, put on sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on their heads, and tore their clothes. And they opened the book of the Law to inquire into those matters about which the Gentiles consulted the likenesses of their gods” (1 Macc. 3:47–48).³⁹ Regarding this passage, Van der Horst observes, “What in former times had been the role of a prophet was now taken over by the Law scroll. Whatever the historicity of the story, at any rate it is clear that in the final quarter of the second century BCE a Jewish author presented the Torah scroll as a book that could be consulted as an oracle by opening it at random”.⁴⁰ In the end, the reader of 1 Maccabees never finds out what passage Judas and his men chanced upon. Its author deemed the momentous outcome of the battle to be more important: Judas and his men were victorious; the divination method had worked.

These examples show that randomly encountered biblical passages were often understood as directive for important life decisions. This is also the guiding principle behind lot divination: the application of randomly accessed answers in decision-making. In the Christian sources, the Gospels in particular expose such truths. This brings us back to our book with its lack of explicit operating instructions. The popularity of bibliomancy, along with the fact that the text is titled “Gospel”, suggests that we should consider this method as a viable operating system for our book: that either diviner or client opened the little codex at random and took the page where it opened as containing the answer to the question. The book’s layout, with two-facing pages deliberately opening up to one answer, makes this a very plausible hypothesis.⁴¹

Upon locating an answer in our book, the next phase in the divinatory session was the interpretation of the answer for the client’s personal situation. This would have been a “three-way conversation, with the diviner mediating between the client and

³⁷ Bibliomancy differs from other divinatory practices, where the deity, not the text, provides the answer. As Frankfurter (Papini, “Fragments of the *Sortes Sanctorum*,” 394) remarks regarding the Antinoë fragments: “In a rite reminiscent of divinatory uses of Homer and Christian scripture, the sacred book itself, rather than the god in its shrine, could produce oracular pronouncements on pragmatic issues.”

³⁸ Bibliomancy is mentioned in 1 Macc. 3:48 and 2 Macc. 8:23. See also Van der Horst, “*Sortes*,” 146–7; Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 340.

³⁹ Schwartz (*Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 59) mentions this passage as indicative of the increased centrality of the physical Torah, what he calls the “symbolic potency of the Torah scroll”.

⁴⁰ Van der Horst, “*Sortes*,” 147. It is furthermore noteworthy that the author explicitly associates the Jewish consultation of their scriptures with gentile practices.

⁴¹ Instead of flipping through the book, one could also randomly stick a piece of wood between the pages of a closed codex, as Boehm („Los, Losen“, 1375) describes certain Greek Christians did: „diese stachen ohne weitere Förmlichkeiten mit einem Hölzchen in den geschlossenen Kodex und bestimmten auf diese Weise die Seite, die den prophetischen Spruch enthielt.“

the authoritative book”, as Susan Whyte describes book divination among the Nyole in Eastern Uganda.⁴² None of the ancient lot books specify this interpretive phase, but the vagueness of their answers begs for concrete application. In his study on book divination, David Zeitlyn observes:

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.⁴³

Without claiming complete analogy, ethnographic studies such as Whyte’s and Zeitlyn’s provide examples that allow us to imagine the operation of our book more fully.⁴⁴ It is conceivable that, upon locating an answer, our codex’s owner would read the answer to the client and subsequently interpret the answer, making it relevant to the client’s individual circumstances.

The Diviner

In addition to convincing interpretative skills,⁴⁵ the only credential needed for operating this book was basic literacy in Coptic.⁴⁶ This already limits the pool of

⁴² Whyte, *Questioning Misfortune*, 65. Whyte writes this about divination among the Nyole in Uganda. She (ibid.) concludes: “Book diviners proceeded by looking up appropriate passages and reading phrases aloud in Arabic. But since their clients did not understand, they have to translate for them and explain the relevance of the passage to the clients’ problem. As the client comments and conveys more information, the *lamuli* may refer to other passages in his books.”

⁴³ Zeitlyn, “Finding Meaning”, 227. Zeitlyn (ibid., 228) observes: “Meaning is negotiated through interaction as the divinatory process unfolds. Divination is not monolithic, so different types of divination exhibit different types of negotiation.”

⁴⁴ See also Klingshirn, “Christian Divination”, for the methodology of using ethnographic research in understanding the function of an ancient lot text. A methodological *caveat* about how I as a historian use anthropological and ethnographical studies: I do not imply a direct link between modern ethnographic studies and historical subjects. Rather, I use these studies to stimulate historical questions. In other words, if all our questions about the past are anachronistic and motivated by our interest, then the use of these present day studies can function to aid in our historical imagination.

⁴⁵ As Klingshirn (“Inventing the *Sortilegus*”, 158) notes about exegetical skills of Latin lot diviners, “in the end what mattered most to clients was the satisfactorily resolution of a problem or question.” Not all scholars think divinatory books require expert diviners. Clarysse (“Doe-het-zelf orakels”), for instance, calls the *Sortes Astrampsychi* a “Do-it-yourself-oracle”. We know that some oracles were consulted thusly, for instance, in the grotto at Bura, that Pausanias (*Description of Greece*, VII.XXV.10, trans. Jones, 326–7) describes: “You come to ... a small Heracles in a cave ... surnamed Buraïcus, and here one can divine by means of a tablet and dice.” It is unlikely that book oracles such as the *Sortes Astrampsychi* and our codex operated that way, because of high levels of illiteracy among the population. The ethnographic evidence of book oracles in Eastern Uganda is instructive in this regard: the diviner, a *lamuli*, reads from an Arabic book that the clients do not understand and then interprets the answers for them, see Whyte, *Questioning misfortune*, 64–6. Also Naether (*Sortes Astrampsychi*, 38, see also 96) argues for a professional mantis: „eine ‚private‘ Nutzung (of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* and ticket oracles, AML) ohne Mediator ist nicht vorstellbar.“ See also Beard, “Function of the Written Word”, 52.

possible diviners significantly, for few people in antiquity were able to read and write.⁴⁷

The evidence of literacy in Coptic comes predominantly from a male monastic milieu.⁴⁸ Indeed, whether our book had a female or male owner hinges on levels of literacy;⁴⁹ both ancient sources and ethnographic studies attest to female diviners, but most often these women, such as the Pythia at Delphi, practiced inspired forms of divination and not text-based divination.⁵⁰ According to Eunapius, the words of the erudite philosopher Sosipatra, for instance, “had the same force as an immutable oracle, so absolutely did it come to pass and transpire as had been foretold by her”.⁵¹ And in his *Historia Lausiaca*, Palladius narrates how Piamoun, a virgin and “deemed worthy of the gift of prophecy”, received a revelation from an angel that allowed her to intercede in a conflict between two villages.⁵² One could turn to female ritual specialists for amulets or healing. Athanasius disparagingly mentions an “old woman” who “pours a flood of words over you for 20 obol, or, for a quarter of wine, a snake’s invocation”.⁵³ But, as far as we know, these women did not actually write. A female

⁴⁶ See Frankfurter (*Religion in Roman Egypt*, 182) on the *Sortes Astrampsychi*: “it is the text itself ... that produces the oracle; and one might well imagine the respect a nonliterate client would accord the *Sortes* as itself the negotiator of often quite vital crises. ... this text would have required little training on the part of the owner beyond literacy itself, and it would not have conveyed charisma or authority to one who was able to use it beyond the authority incumbent upon any owner of sacred texts in antiquity.” On the importance of writing for the status of the *sortilegus*, see Kling-shirn, “Inventing the *Sortilegus*”, 157–8.

⁴⁷ The classical study is Harris, *Ancient Literacy*. See also Johnson and Parker, *Ancient Literacies*. Bagnall (*Everyday Writing*), nuances Harris’s thesis. As Bagnall (*ibid.*, 142) has shown “writing was far more pervasive and important ..., it was used all the time for private, informal, spontaneous, and ephemeral communications, writing for which one would not wish to spend the time and money to go to a professional scribe”. And these more spontaneous writings also presuppose an audience, a readership.

⁴⁸ See Frankfurter, “Ritual Expertise”, 128: “Coptic in the era of these texts was for the most part a monastic writing system.” The *Rules of Saint Pachomius* (Rule 140, trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* II, 166) stipulate: “There shall be no one whatever in the monastery who does not learn to read and does not memorize something of the Scriptures” (See also rule 139). Monks were thus at least expected to have a basic level of literacy; illiterate novices had to learn how to read the Bible. For Coptic documentary texts, see also the BCD.

⁴⁹ On women’s literacy, Bagnall and Cribiore (*Women’s Letters*, 6) comment: “women were still less likely to be literate than were men.” Regarding Coptic letters and women’s predilection for Coptic over Greek, see *ibid.*, 18–22, esp. 21: “Women’s preference for Coptic may be rooted in the fact that men operated extensively in the public world, where Greek was in late antiquity still the language of administration, power, commerce, and the world at larger. Women’s lives were, though by no means confined to the home, much more defined by the domestic world, where Egyptian was at least on par with Greek and perhaps dominant.”

⁵⁰ For archaic and classical Greece, see Flower, *Seer in Ancient Greece*, chapter 8: “Not just a Man’s Profession. The Female Seer”, 211–39. See also Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 44 n. 180 and 129.

⁵¹ Eunapius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, trans. Wright, 411. See also Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 185.

⁵² Palladius, *Lausiaca History* 31, trans. Meyer, 90–1.

⁵³ Athanasius, *De amuletis* (PG 26, 1320): Καταντλεί γάρ σοι γραῦς διὰ κ’ ὀβολοῦς, ἢ τετάρτην οἶνον ἐπασιδὴν τοῦ ὄρεως. On the highly rhetorical nature of this passage, see Luijendijk, “Gospel Amulet”. John Chrysostom, *Ad Colossenes* VIII 5 (PG 62, 558) refers to a female Christian ritual expert who provided amulets (καὶ Χριστιανὴ ἐστὶν ἡ γραῦς καὶ πιστὴ).

lot diviner (*sortilega*) called Veneria is commemorated on an early-third-century funerary inscription from Numidia.⁵⁴ However, given the absence of evidence for female book diviners in Egypt, it is less likely that a woman owned our codex, although the records' silence on this front, of course, cannot rule out the possibility.

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.⁵⁵ The owner may have been an independent freelancer.⁵⁶ As Mary Beard states, "Oracular books in the hands of private diviners could circulate widely, reaching where the spoken word of god was rarely or never heard."⁵⁷ Such a specialist would travel from town to town, stopping at market places and attending religious festivals with their gathering of travelers, carrying the little codex in a pouch.⁵⁸ An itinerant *sortilegus* could not rely on a temple and its elaborate rituals, but they would

employ the same ritual equipment and personnel as would have been used in shrines, although necessarily on a smaller and more portable scale. ... lot diviners may also have had to pay more attention to the aesthetic and artistic qualities of the objects they handled. In this way they might try to compensate for the loss of beauty and power on a larger scale.⁵⁹

This is an entirely plausible image of our book and its diviner.

The Egyptian context, however, with its ancient tradition of divination practiced at temples, makes it more likely that the expert stayed at the shrine and that the clients traveled.⁶⁰ David Frankfurter has argued in several different studies that

⁵⁴ This is *CIL* VIII.6181, see Klingshirn, "Inventing the *Sortilegus*", 139 and especially 160.

⁵⁵ See also Frankfurter, "Dynamics". Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 357, states: „Im Allgemeinen ist für den Orakelprozess mit Losbücher ein mantischer Spezialist als Vermittler erforderlich gewesen. Ob dieser als 'freelancer' oder an einen Tempel gebunden agierte, war lokal unterschiedlich.“

⁵⁶ See also *ibid.* 35–7, 129, and 357.

⁵⁷ Beard, "Function of the Written Word", 53; cf. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 183: "The 'ritual' of consulting such a text through the mediation of a lone professional would have been quite distinct from the pilgrimage – personal or epistolary – to an oracle shrine. The essential change that the *Sortes* signal is the mobility of hitherto locative points of sacred communication, their accessibility through the mediation and ritual expertise of solitary *literati* ... , and thus, it seems, an increased sense of competition among the various human and architectural points in a sacred topography – what Peter Brown has described as a shift and ensuing crisis in the locus of the holy in late antiquity."

⁵⁸ Klingshirn brought to the fore such diviners, *sortilegi*, in Roman Italy. He ("Inventing the *Sortilegus*", 137–8) argues that the rise of the *sortilegus* as professional diviner in the Roman empire: related to two trends: (1) "a shift from shrine-based ritual ... to diviner-based ritual, in which the sacredness of the written responses and the diviner's skill of interpretation mattered above all" and (2) "the process of cultural redefinition" that led to "increased cultural specialization." Klingshirn (*ibid.*, 139) sees this as a process similar to the rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity à la Peter Brown.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁶⁰ As Frankfurter ("Ritual Expertise", 120–1) concludes: "the difference that Egypt seems to pose is the depth of the temple-culture's establishment in the local religion and the popular importance of 'official' ritual, insofar as official ritual employed *writing* as a dominant means of transmitting efficacious power. As in contemporary Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia the ritual expert in Greco-Roman Egypt was necessarily the master of the written word." Naether (*Sortes Astrampsychi*, 357)

priests and monks provided oracles at Christian shrines in Egypt.⁶¹ He notes, “The 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”.⁶² Frankfurter has shown that the religious specialists performing oracles were typically clergymen who worked at shrines and earned money on the side.⁶³ Clergy professionally practicing divination with lot texts are also attested in church canons from Gaul.⁶⁴

We have encountered several indications that the fingerprints on our codex belonged to a monk or priest. First, the reading skills necessary to operate the book hint at a monastic milieu. Secondly, our book’s biblical and liturgical textual components, together with its execution in practiced handwriting (biblical uncial script, *nomina sacra*, and paragraphs), evoke the specialties of a monastic scriptorium.⁶⁵ Thirdly, the archaeological provenance of the fragments from Antinoë that overlap with our text makes it probable that such *sortes* were practiced at the shrine of Saint Colluthus. Indeed, a shrine would draw the necessary clientele: locals and pilgrims, perhaps with health issues, or a longing for divine intervention in their problems.⁶⁶

notes: „In Ägypten sind diese Praktiken nach unseren bisherigen Kenntnisstand fast alle institutionell dem Lebenshaus oder *scriptorium* eines Heiligtums zugeordnet.“ See also *ibid.*, 128: „Leider sind wir für das Niltal kaum über fahrende Seher wie die griechischen χρησμολόγοι oder lateinischen *sortilegi* informiert ...“

⁶¹ Especially Frankfurter, “Ritual Expertise”, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, and “Dynamics”.

⁶² Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 195.

⁶³ Frankfurter (“Ritual Expertise”, 129) observes that as Egyptian priests did earlier, “in Coptic Egypt monks and priests could apply their scribal learning, their training in efficacious words and chants, their memorized prayers to folk life” to supplement their income. Church canons from the wider Mediterranean region, if we read them against the grain, lead us to monks and priests. So Klingshirn (“Christian Divination”, 114) states regarding the late antique church canons prohibiting divination: “we can see ... how Christian leaders rejected the opportunity to consolidate divination in church hands by allowing local clerics under their control to practice as diviners. Clearly this was the role that some clergy were already playing, especially with explicitly Christian texts like the Bible and the *Sortes Sanctorum*. 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 See the Council of Vannes, canon 16, held between 462 and 468, discussed in chapter 4. As Klingshirn (“Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*”, 85) points out, the canon did not intend to prohibit divination, “but only the involvement of clergymen in it”. He (*ibid.*) observes: “The general offense against which canon 16 legislated was clerical devotion to ‘auguries’, that is to divination by signs. Offenders were divided into two groups on the basis of the means they employed.” Thus, Klingshirn (*ibid.*) shows that these clergymen acted as “professional diviners”, given that they describe them “in the technical language used by Cicero and others”.

⁶⁵ In the material execution of the papyri of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, Strobel („Soziale Wirklichkeit“, 131) recognizes clues to their owners; an expensive papyrus codex belonged to more official oracle givers, while a reused roll conjures up for him “einfache Straßenwahrsager” (“simple street diviners”, re P.Oxy XII 1477).

⁶⁶ Frankfurter (“Ritual Expertise”, 127) notes: “Of course, in the fourth century the position of ritual expert in Egyptian local religion is also occupied at the regional level by the Christian holy man. Figures like Paul of Thebes, Antony, Apollo, and John of Lycopolis are recorded in Christian

In this environment, a diviner with authority and local knowledge would have been especially attractive. Instead of the large international oracular sites, people could find answers much closer to home, locally or regionally. Peter Brown has poignantly observed that the holy man has taken over the place of the oracle.⁶⁷ The expert may have counseled the visitors at the shrine, where the book's mysterious small size would have garnered attention and evoked visual associations with revelatory books. As Frankfurter suggests, "the oracular books seem to point to private consultations with a 'master' of divination and other ritual texts who himself held some authority in the Christian hierarchy. The 'message' of such texts, that the 'saints' or the gospels were the ultimate appeal in matters of divination, was fully consonant with the domestic orthodoxy of popular Coptic Christianity".⁶⁸ Upon request, such an expert might also visit people at home.⁶⁹

The Clientele

If this text was successful – and its thumbbed-through pages suggested that at least it was consulted frequently – then the answers must have resonated with its audience. Like many *sortes* texts, our book addresses an individual. As Michel Strickmann has noted in relation to Chinese divinatory texts, this lends the text "a voice of quite peculiar intimacy, for the querent goes to it for counsel and it speaks to him or her directly".⁷⁰ Our Egyptian text achieves this effect by the use of verbs in the second person masculine singular and second person masculine pronouns and possessives. Grammatically, it presupposes a single, male client. However, this does not mean that these lots were consulted exclusively by men. While grammatically our text leaves out women, I agree with Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre that our "historiographies all require ... looking around and away, in order to identify what has been rendered visible and invisible".⁷¹ If we look around within the text, we see that beyond the grammar, the text has no clear indication as to clients' gender.⁷² The second person masculine singular was a generic address for the second person singular (in

literature as ministering predominantly to people's needs in domains of health and safety. Their 'cults', as it were, differed from the local ritual specialists in exerting attraction and influence over broad areas, requiring pilgrimage rather than the negotiation of normal intra-village consultation."

⁶⁷ Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 134. See also *ibid.*, 150.

⁶⁸ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 195.

⁶⁹ The hermit Posidonius, for example, made such a "house call" when asked to expel a demon, see Palladius, *Lausiac History* 36.4–5. Also Frankfurter, "Syncretism", 359. Brown (*Society and the Holy*, 134) notes that some ascetics had reception rooms in their kellia, so perhaps a hermit would also consult from a book at this cell.

⁷⁰ Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*, 141.

⁷¹ See Johnson-DeBaufre, "'Gazing upon the Invisible'", 103. She (*ibid.*, 74) discusses "tensions between material visibility and discursive invisibility" especially regarding 1 Thessalonians, but her method and insights are more widely applicable in historiography.

⁷² Naether (*Sortes Astrampsychi*, 94–6) regarding the *Sortes Astrampsychi* and „Frauen als Pentinnen?“ concluded that it would be more problematic to deny female clients than to support it.

Egyptian, one had to choose).⁷³ When the answer was read, women either would have had to comprehend masculine language as applying also to them, or perhaps the diviner could have adjusted the grammar of the text to reflect feminine forms.⁷⁴

In a text that is carefully crafted in the second person singular, it is a surprise to find two conjugations in the second person plural: “It is the king of heaven and earth and the God of all flesh who fights for you (pl.)” (Oracle 18), and “Do not fear those who will kill your bodies without having more than this to do to you (pl.)” (Oracle 27).⁷⁵ This use of the plural draws us into the realities of social life in antiquity, where one would rarely travel alone. As Naether has noted, the average visitor at the Bes Oracle in Abydos did not come alone, but with relatives and/or slaves.⁷⁶ So while we should imagine the intimacy of a divinatory session with diviner and client bowed closely over this small manuscript, the casual use of the plural “you all” may indicate that others were present at the session.

The general answers in our book make it difficult to discern a distinct setting for its use. Our codex’s most prominent textual feature is the abundance of biblical allusions. This, in combination with the *incipit*, “Gospel of the Lots of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ”, demonstrates that Christians were the intended audience of this text.⁷⁷ Such clients would be familiar with simple biblical phrases as “the hand of God”, “the work of your hands”, “He will send his angel”, or “trust in the help of the Most High”, and with liturgical expressions, such as “the peace of God will be with you”. One does not need to know the Bible by heart or have perfect church attendance to recognize the language. There may be indications, however, as Papaconstantinou has suggested, that devotees of other gods also consulted at Christian shrines.⁷⁸

Consulting an oracle was to a certain extent an issue of class: the very poor would not have had the means to afford a consultation, although there are suggestions that

⁷³ In five instances, the address becomes even more direct, if possible, addressing the individual as “o human being” (ὦ ἄνθρωπε). The word (its Greek equivalent is ὁ ἄνθρωπος) is gender neutral.

⁷⁴ Hoogendijk and Clarysse (“Sortes van Astrampsychus”, 57) propose this for the operation of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* in their wonderful publication of its text aimed at highschool students of Greek: “Het zal je opvallen dat de meeste vragen zijn gemaakt voor mannen. Dat komt niet doordat alleen mannen vragen mochten stellen. Je moet je voorstellen dat de vraagstellers de methode helemaal niet kenden, en dat één persoon ... bereid was om tegen betaling voor elke belangstellende de toekomst de (sic, lege te) voorspellen ... Hij zal dan de vraag én het antoord vast wel een beetje hebben aangepast aan zijn kant.”

⁷⁵ ΠΡΟ ΤΕΠΕ ΜΗ ΠΚΑΣ ΛΥΘ ΠΡΟΥΓΕ ΠΣΑΡΧ ΝΙΜ ΠΕ ΜΙΦΕ ΕΞΑΪ ΕΧΝΤΗΥΤΗ (Oracle 18) and ΜΠΡΖΟΤΕ ΖΗΤΟΥ ΠΙΕΤΗΜΟΛΟΥΓΤ ΠΙΕΤΗΣΩΜΑ ΕΜΠΤΟΥ ΖΟΥΟ ΠΑΙ ΕΛΛΗ (Oracle 27). The phrase in Oracle 27 is a quote from Matt. 10:28. Such switches between second person singular and plural also occur in other literature. See, e. g., Driscoll, *Evagrius, Ad monachos*, 69: The first proverb “is addressed directly to the readers of the text (in the second person plural) and is an invitation to listen”.

⁷⁶ Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 416.

⁷⁷ It is Mary and Jesus Christ that give the text its Christian instead of Jewish flavor. But, as noted in chapter 1, the text is not Christocentric.

⁷⁸ Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 339. One of them is an oracle ticket from Antinoë, addressed to “Colluthus, Christian martyr”, the other is a ticket addressed to the “god of the Christians”. The presupposition is that a Christian would not add the epithet.

slaves inquired about gaining freedom.⁷⁹ However, the *sortes*-inscriptions in the market places in Asia Minor cater to a clientele of merchants, travelers, and farmers. As Graf puts it, “Their main clients were the traders and merchants who used the agora and travelled out through the city gate: during a lull in business or before going further with a deal or a journey abroad, you checked with Hermes and Apollo”.⁸⁰ The typical client of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, as Naether constructs him, was a middle-class, married businessman, often on the road, and concerned about his career and family matters.⁸¹ With their late-Latin-vulgar influence, the *Sortes Sangallenses* targeted, according to Karl Strobel, “the more simple layers of the population, such as farmers, craftsmen, business people, or slaves”. Higher social classes are only referred to obliquely, and the protection of *patroni* is particularly valued.⁸² The Coptic *sortes*-manuscript at the Vatican library has a fragmentary heading “concerning [trial and] testimony”.⁸³ This presupposes a court setting, and therefore the propertied class.⁸⁴ We should, however, realize that these are inscribed audiences. The high offices mentioned in these texts may have been intended to flatter clients of a different status rather than to reflect their actual socio-economic location.

It seems to me that if we try to define the text’s clientele and social situation too narrowly, we are missing the point. Rather, *sortes* aim to be inclusive in their audience. As Karl Strobel has observed, the questions in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* are deliberately phrased so as to address the widest clientele possible, from members of the curial class to slaves.⁸⁵ While our text lacks the vividness of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, I argue that it nevertheless discloses its intended audience. Our text achieves the same inclusive result not by specifically mentioning all possible classes but, conversely, by being extremely vague and unspecific and thereby leaving the clientele very much open to everyone.

⁷⁹ About slaves, see, for instance: Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 266f. § 13: „Freilassung: Sklaven und ihre Herren, Geflohenen und ihre Verfolger.“ The ticket oracles from 4th century B.C.E. Dodona have slaves among them. See also Kudlien, *Sklaven-Mentalitaet*, and McKeown, *Invention of Ancient Slavery?*

⁸⁰ Graf, “Rolling, the Dice”, 76. Nollé (*Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 282) remarks that the inscriptions „versprechen immer wieder die Hilfe menschenfreundlicher Götter in schwierigen Lebenssituationen, insbesondere bei Krankheit und Reise. Nicht wenige Verse beziehen sich auf die wichtigsten Beschäftigungsfelder der Klientel, in den Astragalorakeln auf den Handel und in den Alphabetorakeln auf die Landwirtschaft“.

⁸¹ Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 276: „Der durchschnittliche Petent war männlich, mittleren Alters, gut situiert, verheiratet, Mittelständler, oft auf Reisen und hatte ein Ehrenamt inne. Damit gehörte er untrüglich zu der Schicht, die man gemeinhin als die ‚Elite‘ des Römischen Reichs bezeichnet.“ Assurance of success in business does not necessarily apply to men only, as also Naether recognizes. Women also had business and financial dealings and, as mentioned above, were part of the audience.

⁸² Strobel, „Soziale Wirklichkeit“, 135.

⁸³ P.Vat.Copt. 1, Van Lantschoot, “Collection sahidique”, 46, no. 153: ⲉⲧⲉⲟⲩⲱⲛⲓⲛⲁⲛ ⲙⲙ ⲟⲩⲓⲛⲧⲏⲛⲓⲧⲓⲣⲉⲓ.

⁸⁴ See Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 64.

⁸⁵ Strobel, „Soziale Wirklichkeit“, 132: „Die Fragen des Orakelbuches sind bewußt so zusammengestellt, daß der mögliche Kundenkreis umfassend angesprochen werden konnte, und zwar vom Angehörigen des Curialenstandes bis zum Sklaven, von den Fragen nach *honores* bis zur Frage nach dem Drohen von Anachoresis ... oder nach dem Verkauftwerden eines Sklaven.“

Our text's association with Mary may hint that it had a special appeal to women. As mentioned above, Mary is often associated not only with intercession but also with healing, and in Late Antiquity a cult of Mary among women was thriving.⁸⁶ According to the "Six Books" apocryphon (from the late fourth-century), "women travelled from all over the Christian world [to Bethlehem] seeking Mary's miraculous assistance ... they brought honors and offerings, and they came and adored the Lady Mary. And whosoever had an affliction, she healed it."⁸⁷ These aspects – intercession, the healing especially of women, and pilgrimage – would give a plausible social context for the divinatory practices in our codex. If we take a look again at Antinoë, where a text very similar to ours was found, we discover not only the ticket oracle addressed to Mary but also a large number of *ex-vota* that archaeologists have unearthed at the site, especially of breasts. This provides ample evidence that women visited the site for health reasons.⁸⁸

In our codex, one oracle in particular may have resonated with women inquiring about pregnancy. Oracle 12 exhorts the client: "At all events, do not doubt because nothing is impossible for God", with an allusion to Gen. 18:14 and/or Luke 1:39. In both biblical passages, the exhortation "nothing is impossible for God", is used in the context of a woman (Sarah and Elizabeth respectively) unexpectedly receiving a child. While the phrase is, of course, deliberately vague, a biblically literate diviner could have connected it to issues surrounding conception.

Most of the oracle tickets found at the shrine of Colluthus deal with medical problems, asking whether the intended treatment will be effective.⁸⁹ For instance, a visitor called Rufus asked, "God of my lord Saint Colluthus, the true physician, if you order that your slave Rufus washes today in the healing bath, bring me the favorable ticket". When this ticket was found, it was still rolled up and tied with string.⁹⁰ Was this the discarded ticket? Perhaps it was not the right day for Rufus to

⁸⁶ On a cult of Mary among women: Epiphanius of Salamis mentions a group he calls Kollyridians, women priests in Thrace, Scythia and Arabia who worship the Virgin Mary and have a ceremony with bread. Shoemaker ("Marian Liturgies", 132–3) does not think Epiphanius invented them, but rather that he portrays them negatively because he is against worship of Mary, against all veneration of saints. His polemics, so Shoemaker (*ibid.*, 134) concludes, indicate that by the time of his writing, 377, a Marian cult was established.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 136. At a church called Anastasia in Constantinople, Mary appears in "waking visions and dreams, often for the relief of many diseases and for those afflicted by some sudden transmutation in their affairs" (*ibid.*, 132, quoting 5th cent. church historian Sozomen).

⁸⁸ Delattre, "Nouveaux textes coptes", 174. See also the miracles of Saint Colluthus, where the saint, for instance, cures a woman possessed by a demon and a woman suffering from hydropsy, see Devos, "Autres miracles coptes", 287–9 and 293–4 (Coptic), 295 and 296–7 (translation).

⁸⁹ Delattre, "Nouveaux textes coptes", 173. See also Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 338: "Sans être la seule raison des consultations, la santé prend la plus grande place dans les préoccupations des fidèles qui visitent les oracles. Cette constatation confirme les indications fournies par les textes hagiographiques, qui présentent toutefois ce thème à travers un motif absent de notre corpus: celui de la guérison miraculeuse."

⁹⁰ † ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΠΠΑΧΘΕΙΣ ΠΖΑΠΙΟΣ ΚΟΛΛΟΥΘΟΣ ΠΣΑΕΙΗ ΕΜΕ ΕΦΩΠΕ ΚΕΛΕΥΕ ΤΕ ΠΚΖΜΖΛΛ ΡΟΥΦΟΣ ΧΘΚΗ ΕΠΟΟΥ ΖΙ ΤΣΙΟΥΕΝ ΚΑΗ ΠΣΥΜΦΥΡΟΗ ΝΑΙ ΕΚΟΛ †. Delattre, "Textes coptes et grecs", 152–3, see also 162 (plate viii, 9).

take the ritual bath?⁹¹ Just as at other healing sites in antiquity, it was not uncommon for people to stay at a shrine for extended periods of time. Apparently, Rufus remained at the site long enough to submit several questions. Another ticket also bearing his name, this one written in Greek and unfortunately very fragmentary, asks about either marriage or illness.⁹² If Rufus submitted several questions to the priests about his medical treatment, he may have also taken the opportunity to inquire about such matters in a session with a diviner and a lot book. In the following sections, we delve further into the possible social situation of our book's clientele.

Far from Home

With admittedly multivalent phrases such as “you were far away from home”, reference to a harbor,⁹³ and verbs of moving (“get up and go immediately”), our text has the hermeneutical openness to cater to traveling clients. “Promises for a safe return home are made multiple times in the oracular tradition”, as Johannes Nollé has remarked.⁹⁴ In her study on the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, Naether was struck by the large percentage of answers in the category of travel,⁹⁵ making it likely that this edition of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* was used by traveling merchants.⁹⁶ But she also suggests that those who stayed home could inquire about the fate and well-being of their traveling loved ones.⁹⁷ Indeed, travel is an important topic in oracular inquiries and many *sortes* texts and questions submitted to ticket oracles involve going on a journey.⁹⁸ On the one hand, as Nollé has argued, this has to do with difficult travel conditions. He notes, “The fear of not returning home from a far away journey was incomparably larger in antiquity than it is today. Many religious customs, practiced by

⁹¹ Archaeologists have found such baths at the site, see Grossmann, „Antinoopolis. Zur *Area* der Kolluthoskirche“, 52: „Eine Art Waschplatz mit mindestens zwei größeren quadratischen Becken wurde in der Nordwestecke der erweiterten *area* C₂ eingerichtet. Es ist nicht ausgeschlossen, dass es sich hierbei um das in den Papyri mehrfach erwähnte Bad des Kolluthos handelt.“

⁹² Papini, “Due biglietti”, 68–9, no. 20. See also Papaconstantinou, “Oracles chrétiens”, 283 and 283 n. 16: “l’expression ἀνύσω ζῶντιν pourrait indiquer un mariage ou une maladie.” If the new ticket edited by Delattre is indeed from the same Rufus, the latter option seems the best.

⁹³ See the textual commentary in Part II of this book on the word λιμὴν at Oracle 34.

⁹⁴ Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 135 („Derartige Heimkehrversprechen werden in dieser Orakeltradition mehrfach gemacht“).

⁹⁵ Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 253–6, and the pie charts on *ibid.*, 255.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 218: „Der erhöhte Anteil von beruflichen Fragen ... läßt bei mir die Vermutung aufkommen, dass die nachfragende Klientel vor allem im Handel und als Geschäftsleute tätig gewesen ist. Sie war mobil, an einer Vermehrung des Besitzes wohl stärker interessiert als reiche Personen, und erkundigte sich nach Menschen, die nicht vor Ort waren. Dies alles deutet meiner Auffassung nach auf eine städtische, kaufmännische Mittelschicht hin.“

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁹⁸ See Graf, “Rolling the Dice”, 70–1, 76, and Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 135 for the inscriptions set up on the agoras of the towns in Asia Minor; Naether (*Sortes Astrampsychi*, 253–6) for the longer edition of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*. For the ticket oracles, see Papaconstantinou, “Oracles chrétiens”, 282, 284.

both private persons and rulers when departing on a journey and at the happy return home, remind of that”.⁹⁹ On the other hand, we also find so many questions about journeys because people would often encounter opportunities for asking such questions when they were on the road. Travelers would come across oracle inscriptions in agoras in Asia Minor, and pilgrims arriving at a Christian shrine would meet priests prepared to pen down an oracle question or consult a divinatory booklet with them.

Vocabulary of Violence

To read the *sortes* is to enter a world of fear. One is surrounded by wicked people, and plagued by danger, great suffering, war, fighting, and insecurity.¹⁰⁰ Your enemies are plotting against you. In divinatory texts the word “danger” is a common idiom, and it occurs twice in our codex: “Because it was only a little while ago that you were far from home, then you suffered loss and were in disgrace and danger” (Oracle 2), and “Do not think that you will avoid the danger that is upon you. But go and pray to God immediately” (Oracle 26).¹⁰¹ In a divinatory context, “danger” is a useful word because it has many connotations and captures the desperation of dealing with negative forces. Revelations of impending danger make a divinatory session urgent. Repeated references to danger evoke – even exploit – human vulnerability, as well as the real threat of physical harm present in ancient society.¹⁰² In this respect, it is sobering to find that in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* danger is associated, in five of the seven instances in which it appears, with women in childbirth.¹⁰³

In addition to danger, enemies loom large in our text. One gets the feeling that evil lurks around the corner and can only just be averted:

Fight for yourself in what has happened to you, because it is a human evil. Your enemies are not far from you. They have plotted against you again due to the evil that is in their hearts. But trust in God and walk in his commandments forever (Oracle 8).

⁹⁹ Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 135, with more information in notes 577 and 578 („Die Angst, von einer weiten Reise nicht mehr heimzukehren, war in der Antike ungleich größer als heute. Viele religiöse Bräuche, die beim Aufbruch zu einer Reise und bei der glücklichen Heimkehr von Privatleuten wie auch Herrschern praktiziert wurden, erinnern daran.“

¹⁰⁰ This is not exclusive for *sortes*; as Brown (*Society and the Holy*, 124) remarks: “violence was a constant problem in late Roman society.”

¹⁰¹ In the Vatican Coptic *sortes* papyrus, P.Vat.Copt. 1 (Van Lantschoot, “Collection sahidique”, 40, no. 31, and 43, no. 52), we encounter twice an identical, brief phrase warning about danger: οὐνοῦ γινος ἡ κινηλ γινος ἐπιειρω[ε]ς, “There is great danger in this matter”.

¹⁰² The *Sortes Sangalleges* have a section labeled *de re periculosa*; its answers are surprisingly positive, see Strobel, „Soziale Wirklichkeit“, 136.

¹⁰³ 1.10 ἐκτρώσει μετὰ κινδύνου, πλὴν σωθήσεται, “She will miscarry with danger, but she will be safe”; 34:8 τέξεται μετὰ κινδύνου κόρην, “She will give birth to a girl with danger”; 37:4 τέξεται μετὰ κινδύνου ἄρρεν, “She will give birth to a boy with danger”; 52:8 ὁ ἀσθενὼν μετὰ κινδύνου σωθήσεται, “The sick person will be saved with danger”; 56:5 τέξεται μετὰ κινδύνου πολλοῦ, “She will give birth with much danger”; 71:1 τέξεται μετὰ κινδύνου, “She will give birth with danger”; 91:6 πλεύσεις μετὰ κινδύνου, ἀλλὰ θάρρει, “You will sail with danger, but take courage”. See also Stewart and Morrell, “Oracles of Astrampsychus”.

Five answers in our codex feature enemies, in each instance personalized as “your (sgl.) enemies”.¹⁰⁴ This perception of immanent violence lends the oracle a sense of urgency. The ubiquity of enemies is a feature that our text shares with other lot texts. For instance, regarding the contemporary *Sortes Sangallenses*, Klingshirn suggests: “Let us suppose that a client arrived with concerns about a rival or enemy. ... it was important to distinguish legal opponents (*adversarii*) from personal enemies (*inimici*) since different questions dealt with each type ...”¹⁰⁵ But who are these enemies and why do they figure so prominently? Assuming that the users of our book considered its answers relevant, key terms and concepts may give us a grasp of the life situation of the clients to whom the text appeals.

In our biblically-saturated text, the word “enemy” is first a scriptural idiom. It is prevalent in the Septuagint, where it occurs 104 times in the Psalms alone; the reader of the New Testament encounters the word 32 times.¹⁰⁶ The ideal in our codex, however, is not Jesus’ command to “love your enemies”, but rather to humiliate them. This belongs to a larger worldview that Hans Martin Schenke has summarized well:

Every one has enemies ... It is necessary for one’s happiness that one’s enemies are put to shame, not that we are put to shame by our enemies, but our enemies by us. And if one wishes someone a happy long life, then one also wishes him – in addition to grandchildren – victory over possible enemies.¹⁰⁷

Schenke’s reflections were prompted by a Coptic letter from the late fourth or first half of the fifth century, roughly contemporary with our codex. The epistle’s language resembles that of our text and gives insight into the everyday concerns that also occur in our *sortes*.¹⁰⁸ It is a private letter from a man to a woman, probably his wife.¹⁰⁹ After the epistolary prescript, the author states the reason for writing:

I have heard about a matter that happened a few days ago. I rejoiced [greatly] that the merciful God [extended] his right hand, filled with ... to make it as shade above you, until you return again in good health, so that you will see your children’s children and the seed of your enemy.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Oracles 8, 16, 18, 28, 31.

¹⁰⁵ Klingshirn, “Christian Divination”, 108 and discussion on 108–9. About wishing one’s enemy dead, see Strobel, „Soziale Wirklichkeit“, 138, commenting on *Sortes Sangallenses* 27: „Im Bereich persönlicher Feindschaft fällt die Härte bis hin zu Ruin und Tod ins Auge“.

¹⁰⁶ The word ἐχθρός occurs 438 times in the LXX.

¹⁰⁷ Schenke, „Mittelägyptische ‚Nachlese‘“, 54 („... die Nennung der Feinde sozusagen als rein rhetorisches Motiv aus der Sprache der Psalmen verstehen: Feinde hat jeder. Zum eigenen Glück gehört dann eben das Zuschandenwerden der Feinde, daß nicht wir durch die Feinde, sondern die Feinde durch uns zuschanden werden. Und wenn man einem ein *glückliches* langes Leben wünscht, wünscht man ihm eben außer den Enkeln auch noch das Obsiegen über mögliche Feinde“).

¹⁰⁸ The letter is written in the Middle Egyptian dialect. Schenke’s interest in the letter was from a linguistic point of view, mine from a social historical (ibid., 44: „Die Bedeutung dieses Briefes liegt ... so gut wie ausschließlich auf dem Felde der koptischen Linguistik.“)

¹⁰⁹ So ibid.: „es will mir jetzt eigentlich so scheinen, als könne der Absender nur so schreiben, wie er schreibt, wenn die Adressatin – trotz der merkwürdigen Trennung, die der Brief voraussetzt – seine eigene, geliebte Frau ist.“

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 47.

Although the precise situation that prompted the man to contact his wife remains unclear, the mention of “your enemies” in the text (l. 15) is striking. Schenke reconstructed this sentence: “You will see, that your children will have children themselves, and how your descendants will shame your enemies.”¹¹¹ He understood the mention of enemies here not in a general sense, but rather as referring to a concrete situation.¹¹² This letter shows that people dealt with enemies in their daily lives.¹¹³ Enemies in our text may relate to all kinds of violence, from burglary to domestic violence.¹¹⁴

Enemies do not necessarily need to be physical foes; there are also the spiritual afflictions. The *Life of Antony*, for instance, warns the reader of spiritual, demonic enemies:

And let this too be a sign to you: When the soul remains in fear, that is due to the presence of the enemies. For the demons do not remove the fear caused by such appearances, as the great Archangel Gabriel did for Mary and for Zacharias, and the angel who appeared at the tomb did for the women.¹¹⁵

Spiritual enemies, naturally, are frightening. In this sense, it is noteworthy that Gabriel occupies such an important place as bringer of Good News in our text; the text itself also exhorts the client: “Fear not” (Oracle 14).

Beyond possible parallels of physical or spiritual enemies in people’s lives, there is another explanation of the prevalence of enemies in these texts. As ethnographer David Zeitlyn states, “Divination provides a means of asking questions. The questions are usually those which cannot be answered by other means available.”¹¹⁶ Thus enemies may also represent those kinds of issues and problems that have become too large to handle. Naether put it as follows:

¹¹¹ „du wirst noch sehen, wie deine Kinder selbst Kinder bekommen, und du wirst noch sehen, wie diese deine Nachkommenschaft deine Feinde beschämt“ (ibid., 54).

¹¹² Schenke (ibid.) on the enemies: „... ich glaube nun durchaus, daß man die Anspielung unseres Briefes auf die Feinde zur Not so erklären kann (AML: in that earlier quoted general sense). Aber besser verständlich wäre das Feindes-Motiv schon, wenn man dafür einen Anknüpfungspunkt in der wirklichen Situation der Adressatin voraussetzen dürfte, daß also etwa ihre schmerzliche Trennung vom Absender, vielleicht sogar ihre fast tödliche Krankheit und möglicherweise auch noch manches, was der konkrete Teil des Briefes voraussetzt, ohne daß wir es verstehen, – wie direkt oder indirekt auch immer – mit einer konkreten gegen sie und ihre Familie gerichteten Aktivität bestimmter anderer Menschen zusammenhängen.“

¹¹³ The text has several overlaps with our *sortes*: *καρχηογ* – enemy (l. 15); God’s right hand (l. 9–10); *τιναλγη* – we are sad (l. 15) (Schenke, ibid., 53 n. 35).

¹¹⁴ These are all topics that one can find either in divinatory texts or in other ritual texts. See, for instance, the “Praise of Michael the Archangel” in Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 339–41. After liturgical sections and adjurations, the text mentions 21 cases: about demons, a sexually impotent man, favors, women suffering from domestic violence, restlessness, the flooding of a workplace, and a woman whose children have died.

¹¹⁵ Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 37.1 (trans. Gregg, 59): *Καὶ γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο γνῶρισμα ὑμῖν ἔστω· ὅταν τινῶν ἐπιμένῃ δειλιῶσα ψυχὴ, παρουσία τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἐστίν. Οὐ γὰρ ἀφαιροῦνται τὴν δειλίαν ἀπὸ τῶν τοιούτων οἱ δαίμονες, ὥσπερ πεποίηκεν ὁ μέγας ἀρχάγγελος τῇ Μαρτίᾳ καὶ τῷ Ζαχαρίᾳ, καὶ ὁ φανείς ἐν τῷ μνημείῳ ταῖς γυναιξίν.* For an analysis of the role of demons in Egyptian monasticism, see Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*.

¹¹⁶ Zeitlyn, “Divination as Dialogue”, 189.

When people maintain good relations with each other, there is a positive situation. If that changes, conflicts arise. Here the oracle appears on the scene in order to help make a decision. When everything remains the way it is and should be, there is most often no reason for inquiry. But if there is doubt about the action of others or if it even comes to hostile acts, then a person comes in a situation, that makes her/him a potential querent.¹¹⁷

The recurrence of enemies in our codex indicates not war, but aggravated problems that cannot be solved alone – ones that make you turn to an outsider, an oracle, for a solution. As a counterweight to all this doom and hopelessness, several answers offer the hope of salvation, and a God who will send his archangel Michael, or even fight on your behalf himself.¹¹⁸

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

Do Not Doubt

Frequent exhortations against doubting in our text reveal the expected attitudes of clients and indicate our text's awareness of larger debates in antiquity.¹¹⁹ Already the *incipit* concludes: "only he must not be of two minds" (ΟΥ ΜΟΝΟΝ ΝΕΤΜΡΕΗΤ ΧΗΛΥ). Although the text admonishes the reader not to doubt, doubt actually forms a constitutive part of divination and is operative at multiple levels in its practice. First, it is an ambiguous life situation – doubt about the future or a decision – that prompts someone to consult a diviner. When you are very certain about your life, you do not need to consult an oracle. Secondly, after a divinatory session, the client may distrust the outcome. At least, the admonition not to doubt seems to indicate that the composer of this divinatory system expected some skepticism from those consulting

¹¹⁷ On enemies, Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, „3. Freund/Feind“, 239–40. She concludes (ibid., 240): „Wenn Menschen eine gute Beziehung zueinander pflegen, ist eine positive Situation vorhanden. Ändert sich das, entstehen Konflikte. Hier tritt nun das Orakel auf den Plan, um zu einer Entscheidung zu verhelfen. Wenn alles so bleibt wie es ist und sein soll, gibt es meist keinen Grund zur Nachfrage. Bestehen allerdings Zweifel am Tun anderer oder kommt es sogar zu ‚feindlichen‘ Handlungen, kommt eine Person in eine Lage, die sie zum potentiellen Petenten macht.“

¹¹⁸ The phrase about God who fights for you echoes biblical passages such as Ex. 14:13 and Deut. 1:30. The *Martyrdom of SS. Paese and Thecla*, 67 R i 20–3 (Reymond and Barns, *Four Coptic Martyrdoms*, 55) cites this phrase in a context of martyrdom: The governor's wife says with a biblical allusion to her husband, who has fallen ill, about the soon to be martyred Christians "for it is their God who fights for them" (ΠΕΥΝΟΥΤΕ ΓΑΡ ΠΕΤΜΩΕ ΕΧΘΟΥ).

¹¹⁹ The vocabulary of doubt and double-mindedness in this text is as follows: double-mindedness and to be double-minded with the Coptic ΖΗΤ ΧΗΛΥ and Ε-ΖΗΤ ΧΗΛΥ, rendering presumably the Greek concept of διψυχία. For "doubt", our text has the Greek loan word ΛΙΓΑΛΑΖΕ/ΤΙΓΑΛΑΖΕ (δισταζω) (Oracles 12 and 15). The concepts of doubt used in the text show that this is a specifically Christian modification, rooted in and developed from its Jewish heritage: there is a trajectory of the use of the term "double-minded" from the Epistle of James to the Shepherd of Hermas and Egyptian writers as Origen. See Luijendijk, "Only Do Not Be of Two Minds".

it.¹²⁰ We find here an implicit admission that the discourse on the validity of divination was not just an abstract, elite scholarly debate, but also took place among the very people that consulted a divinatory text. On a larger playing field, this means that our text participates in the discourse on the validity of oracles, a vivid debate in antiquity and beyond.¹²¹

Of course, taken literally, the admonition not to doubt the answer assures the client of the reliability of the outcome. In the case of a positive answer, it is reassuring to hear that you should not doubt it. Doubt also relates to the position of the diviner.¹²² It is indeed the function of a diviner to “impose certainty on a situation characterized by doubts”.¹²³ Admonitions not to doubt and exhortations to trust the oracle function as warranty, a built-in safeguard for the diviner, guaranteeing the success of the session. If a client should complain that the answer was not applicable to her or his situation, then the diviner can retort that they must have doubted the oracle, that the client was not sincere. If the oracle can never be mistaken, then our book is always right.¹²⁴ Not everyone agreed with such a proposition. This is the topic of the next chapter.

¹²⁰ Lucian of Samosata displayed his skeptical attitude towards divination, describing how he tested Alexander of Abonoteichus by asking him different questions in person than he had written on his scrolls and thus received answers to the former, not the latter. See Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* (trans. Harmon), 243.

¹²¹ This is exemplified for the Roman thought in Cicero’s *De divinatione*, and picked up and continued by such authors as Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*.

¹²² Swiss ethnographer Marc-Antoine Berthod (*Doutes, croyances et divination*) found that modern diviners are hesitant about their own instincts, but for their ancient colleagues we have no indications about such feelings.

¹²³ Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth*, 154, quoted by Frankfurter, “Syncretism”, 383 and 384 n. 128.

¹²⁴ Moreover, since this text presents itself as a Gospel, the doubting concerns not just the outcome of the situation, or the authenticity and authority of the diviner, but even the relationship between the client and God.

Chapter 4

A New Voice in the Discourse on Divination

The fifth century witnessed a veritable explosion of gospel divination. Creative diviners adapted and modified existing *sortes* traditions to fit the situations of the time. The *Sortes Astrampsychi* were reworked for a Christian clientele¹ and the Gospel of John was copied with divinatory phrases called *hermeneiai* in the margins. At this time, the biblically resonant *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* joined the chorus of voices in Christian divination. The authors and adaptors of these and similar texts took advantage of the power of Christian sacred scriptures in order to appeal to a broad, mostly Christian audience. It is perhaps ironic, then, that these Christian divinatory practices encountered resistance within ecclesiastic circles. Various sources indicate that practicing divination was, or rather remained, highly contested in Late Antiquity. Church fathers and church councils condemned Christian oracular practices on multiple occasions, often listing them among a series of crimes that Christians should not commit.² The fact that ecclesiastic leaders forbade these oracular practices has probably contributed to relatively little attention scholars have traditionally paid to this genre, as it still remains an understudied topic. However, the abundant evidence of church fathers commenting negatively on oracles and divination suggests that – in contrast to scholarly interest – Christians were quite interested, consulting them frequently. Indeed, manuscript finds, especially over the last century, confirm that this practice was widespread.

In this chapter I discuss the Christian discourse on divination widely conceived, and the place our codex occupies as text and artifact in this debate. Whereas the previous chapter focused on the practice of divination, providing glimpses of the dangers and anxieties people faced in their daily lives, situating this codex within the context of a broader discourse on divination lays bare the communal anxieties around rhetorical boundary formation and claims of authority within and among social groups. It also reveals porous borders and messy practices. This chapter locates our little book as a partner in wide-ranging debates about divination. Our book's discussion partners, the writings of church fathers and canons of church councils, are

¹ Naether (*Sortes Astrampsychi*, 117) speaks of the *process* of the christianization of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*. She writes: „nicht in einem Papyrus oder einer Handschrift sind alle paganen bzw. alle christlichen Varianten anzutreffen.“ She (*ibid.*, 402) also remarks that only a small part of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* was modified by a Christian editor and that each manuscript contains a hybrid version of the text: „Insgesamt neun Fragen wurden christlich interpoliert – also weniger als ein Zehntel der gesamten Liste. Hinzu kommt, dass kein Textträger alle christlichen oder alle paganen Varianten enthält – jede Version spiegelt eine hybride Fassung wider.“

² Weiland, *Oordeel*, 8: “Op zeer veel plaatsen noemen de Kerkvaders de mantiek te midden van een reeks misdaden, waarvan de Christen zich dient te onthouden.”

prescriptive or normative sources and not objective descriptions of social situations. Their authors actively engaged in regulating and influencing Christian life. However, this codex also shaped Christian life – indeed, it and materials like it, were influential enough to provoke efforts to control and limit them.

The Threat of Knowledge to Authority

All forms of divination as practice to obtain knowledge are contentious particularly because divination is intensely related to power and authority. As we shall see, this plays out in two *loci* of authority: the written word – the textuality of oracles – and the position of religious experts, those who claim to have or are thought to have access to supernatural knowledge. According to Laura Nasrallah, “Arguments about the phenomenon that encompasses divination, prophecy, dreams, visions, and ecstasy ... are launched in contexts of struggle and debate”. Nasrallah contends that “these struggles are especially concerned ... with what can and cannot be known, and with the authority gained and religious identity constructed from claims to perceive the communication and intervention of the divine in the present day”.³ I believe this also pertains to book oracles. Divination is thus contested because it is believed or perceived to give access to divine knowledge and thereby to authority in one’s community.

These same claims against dangerous knowledge and authority were part of a debate in antiquity well beyond Christianity. For instance, in the year 199 C.E., a government official, probably the prefect of Egypt himself, sent out a document that was to be displayed publicly in towns and villages all over the country. This is no small bureaucratic effort, which alone indicates the seriousness of the matter. The document attests government officials denigrating divination as deceptive and dangerous precisely because of its claims to knowledge – so dangerous, in fact, that those who practice it are liable to capital punishment. The edict specifies:

Encountering many who believed themselves to be deceived by the practice of divination I quickly considered it necessary, in order that no danger should ensue upon their foolishness, clearly herein to enjoin all people to abstain from this *hazardous inquisitiveness*. Therefore, let no man through oracles, that is, by means of *written documents* supposedly granted under divine influence, nor by means of the parade of images or suchlike charlatanry, pretend to *know things beyond human ken* and profess (to *know*) *the obscurity of things to come*, neither let any man put himself at the disposal of those who enquire about this or answer in any way whatsoever. If any person is detected adhering to this profession, let him be persuaded that he will be handed over to the extreme penalty.⁴

³ Nasrallah, *Ecstasy of Folly*, 2. See also *ibid.*, 26: “while making claims about prophecy and ecstasy, these authors are also formulating identity, constructing epistemic boundaries, and shoring up their own authority. It is my thesis that these three categories – group boundaries or community identity, the control of knowledge, and the establishment of authority – are nodes within the large debate over prophecy in antiquity.”

⁴ SB XIV 12144 (P.Youtie I 30), translation Rea, “New Version of P.Yale Inv. 299”, 153. Emphasis mine. See also Ripat, “Language of Oracular Inquiry”, 306 and Ritner, “Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire”, *ANWR* II 18.5, 3355.

For our discussion, it is striking that language of knowledge permeates the document, from protecting gullible people against “hazardous inquisitiveness”, to accusations that oracles feign supernatural knowledge. Such *topoi* also appear in our Christian sources.

A second instance where the connection between knowledge and authority comes into sharp focus brings us to Egypt in the mid-fourth century. Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 330/335–after 391) relates an event that took place in the year 359.⁵ In this case, divinatory inquiries to obtain political foreknowledge led to brutal violence, even death by torture. The divinatory system involved was a ticket oracle. According to Ammianus, oracle tickets that were left behind at Abydos, an ancient oracular site in Egypt, “were with malicious intent sent to the emperor” Constantius, leading to accusations of high treason (*Crimina maiestatis*, XIX 12.1). Reportedly, people “had ... inquired about gaining imperial power”.⁶ The emperor, upon receiving the inflammatory tickets, dispatched to the region his notary Paulus, appropriately nicknamed Tartareus, “the Infernal”.⁷ Paulus executed violent retribution; while he spared some lives, others “died from the mangling of their bodies, others were condemned to further punishment and had their goods seized”.⁸ This incident stands in a long tradition of Roman emperors being terrified about divination used against them, as Hans Kippenberg has shown.⁹ These examples accent the high

⁵ Ammianus, *History* XIX 12 (trans. Rolfe, 534–45). On this incident, see Chuvin, *Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, Frankfurter, “Zenith and Destruction”, Funke, „Majestäts- und Magieprozesse bei Ammianus Marcellinus“, Hunt, “Christians and Christianity in Ammianus Marcellinus”, Kippenberg, “Magic in Roman Civil Discourse”, Maurice, “Terreur de la magie au IV^e siècle”, and Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, chapter 7: „Orakelverbote“, 411–26.

⁶ Ammianus, *History* XIX 12.9 (trans. Rolfe, 538–9). Another, Parnasius, “had dreamt that many shadowy figures in tragic garb escorted him” (ibid., XIX 12.10 [trans. Rolfe, 538–9]).

⁷ See De Jonge, *Philological and Historical Commentary*, 240.

⁸ Ammianus, *History* XIX 12.13 (trans. Rolfe, 540–1). This also goes for people wearing amulets or suspected of magic around graves (ibid., XIX 12.15). “In fact, the matter was handled exactly as if many men had importuned Claros, the oaks of Dodona, and the once famous oracles of Delphi with regard to the death of the emperor” (ibid., XIX 12.15, trans. Rolfe, 540–3). The oracle of Bes is hereby placed at the same level as the sites of Claros, Dodona and Delphi. As De Jonge (*Philological and Historical Commentary*, 239) puts it: “It makes for depressing reading, although *Amm(ianus)* describes it with verve and in detail, and that for 2 reasons: 1° in order to expose these abuses (to put it mildly). 2° because he delights in their description. It attracts him as an artist (just as he is not at all averse to the most dramatic descriptions of battles).”

⁹ Kippenberg, “Magic in Roman Civil Discourse”. Kippenberg (ibid., 140) notes: “The fear of the Christian emperors of the fourth century was different from that of their pagan predecessors. They were terrified by the power of magicians and persecuted them, even if they were not rivals in a power struggle and of low social status.” He (ibid., 154) also comments: “In 19 CE Tiberius issued a similar edict: ‘He forbade anyone to consult diviners secretly and without witnesses’ (Suetonius, *Tiberius* 63). Divination was illegal except in the presence of an audience. It was this principle that impelled the rejection of secret rituals. Centuries later the principle was still valid. The first Christian emperor, Constantine, argued likewise: ‘We prohibit diviner (*haruspex*) and priests (sic) (*sacerdos*) ... to approach a private home (*privata domus*) ... We have provided punishment against them if they should disregard this statute (*lex*). But you who think that this art is advantageous to you, go to the public altars (*ara publica*) and shrines (*delubra*) and celebrate the rites of your custom (*consuetudo vestra*). We do not prohibit the ceremonies of a bygone perversion (*officia libera praeteritae usurpationis*) to be conducted openly (*luce tractari*)’ (CTh 9, 16, 2; CE 319). Only if diviners performed their activities in public were they allowed to carry on their profession.”

stakes of practicing divination as deeply rooted in debates on knowledge and authority. As we shall see next, these topics come up again in our Christian sources.

The Christian discourse on divination arises within two strategies of identity formation, both of which aim to establish boundaries between “us” and “the others”: on the one hand, the construction of boundaries between Christians and pagans (or religious outsiders), and, on the other hand, between groups that are conceived of as orthodox and heretical.¹⁰ I present these debates around divination thematically, beginning with an example of how and where divination functions in Christian identity formation against so-called pagans.

Athanasius of Alexandria: The Triumph of the Incarnate Word and the Holy Man

The writings of the Alexandrian bishop Athanasius mark an important moment in the discourse on Christian divination in Egypt. Through the prism of his writings, we get a view of what is at stake in the debates on divination and authoritative sacred texts. Athanasius’s works attest to power struggles involving divination that evoke questions about the production and use of our codex. From his writings, it is clear that the contention surrounding access to divinatory or divine knowledge may challenge ecclesial power. Like most of his Christian colleagues, Athanasius does not deny the possibility of divine revelation.¹¹ Rather, what concerns him is who has access to it.¹² Interestingly, Athanasius claims Christian divination as evidence of the demise of paganism, and, as we shall see later, he also attempts to control it in heresiological debates.

On several occasions Athanasius boasts triumphantly that the Greek and Egyptian oracles have gone out of operation because of the message of Christ. In his *On the Incarnation of the Word*, he states: “Since Christ has been proclaimed everywhere, their madness too has ceased, and there is no one left among them to give oracles at all.”¹³

¹⁰ For an analysis of the discussion of early Christian diversity, see King, *What is Gnosticism?* and eadem, “Which Early Christianity?”

¹¹ See, for instance, Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 31 (trans. Gregg, 54–5): “should [the demons] pretend to prophesy, let no one be won over. It frequently happens that they tell us days in advance about brothers who are to travel our way some days later – and these people do arrive. The demons do this not out of any concern for their hearers, but in order to persuade them to trust them ...” According to Athanasius, the demons have different bodies and run ahead, so that they know. About oracles, he says (*ibid.*, 33; Gregg, 56): “So it was that the oracles of the Greeks arose and they were led astray in former times by the demons. ... For [the demons] know nothing by their own power ... and they are more nearly speculators than prognosticators. If, therefore, they sometimes speak the truth, do not let anyone marvel at them for this.” See also Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 188: “Athanasius never actually rejects oracles’ supernatural credibility.”

¹² As Brakke (“Athanasius of Alexandria”, 13) states clearly: “Common to all these letters [i. e. festal letters, AML] is Athanasius’s effort to restrict all Christian revelation to that which came from the incarnate Word and all Christian authority to the parish-based episcopate that he led.”

¹³ Athanasius plays on the words *μανία* (madness, frenzy) and *μαντεία* (divination). The sentences preceding the passage quoted above read in translation: “in former times every place was full

In the *Life of Antony*, he makes Antony exclaim the famous words: “Tell us, then, where are your oracles now? Where are the incantations of the Egyptians? Where are the magicians’ phantasms? When, except at the time the cross of Christ came, did all these things come to an end and lose their strength?”¹⁴ In his set of rhetorical questions, Antony strings together oracles, incantations, and magical illusions as evidence of traditional Egyptian religion, asserting that they are nowhere to be found. However, as David Frankfurter has argued, Athanasius’s polemical stance against oracles does not prove that they were in decline but rather that they were quite alive and that hermits such as Antony were in religious competition with other oracular *loci*.¹⁵ Indeed, in this period a large number of written oracles were created by traditional Egyptian religious experts and also by Christian ones, although oracular activity was not restricted exclusively to what was written.¹⁶

The issue for Athanasius is authority. As Frankfurter concludes, “It is evidently the hermit Antony himself who represents the *legitimate* center for oracular functions”.¹⁷ Athanasius’s polemic against oracles in the *Life of Antony* suggests that Athanasius wanted to position Antony as the source of divine revelation and downplay other (“pagan”) sites of revelation. These are rhetorically assertive texts, aiming to convince their readers that the Greek and Egyptian oracles had been silenced through the word of Christ. Within the larger arc of history, as Peter Brown has famously sketched it, Athanasius is an instrumental player in the shift that took place in Late Antiquity, where “‘the god-bearing’ hermit usurped the position of the oracle”.¹⁸ According to Brown, “The rise of the holy man has something to do with the silence of the oracles. . . . Oracles remained active into the late classical period; but they had already become too like their future rival. The holy man merely trumped the oracle, by being both objective and trenchant in an idiom that was more consonant with the habits and expectations of a new, more intensely personal style of soci-

of the fraud of the oracles, and the utterances of those at Delphi and Dodona and in Boeotia and Lycia and Libya and Egypt and those of the Kabiri and the Pythoness were considered marvelous by the minds of men.” See Athanasius, *Incarnation* (ed. Kannengiesser, 436, § 47. 1): Καὶ πάλοι μὲν τὰ πανταχοῦ τῆς ἀπάτης τῶν μαντείων ἐπεπλήρωτο, καὶ τὰ ἐν Δελφοῖς καὶ Δωδώνῃ καὶ Βοιωτίᾳ καὶ Λυκίᾳ καὶ Λιβύῃ καὶ Αἰγύπτῳ καὶ Καβίροις μαντεύματα καὶ ἡ Πυθία ἐθαυμάζοντο τῇ φαντασίᾳ παρὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων· νῦν δὲ ἀφ’ οὗ Χριστὸς καταγγέλλεται πανταχοῦ, πέπναιται καὶ τούτων ἡ μανία, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι λοιπὸν ἐν αὐτοῖς ὁ μαντευόμενος.

¹⁴ Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, 79.1–2 (ed. Bartelink, 334, 336; trans. Gregg, 68): Εἴπατε γοῦν, ποῦ νῦν ὑμῶν ἐστὶ τὰ μαντεῖα; ποῦ αἱ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἐπαοιδαί; Ποῦ τῶν μάγων αἱ φαντασίαι; Πότε ταῦτα πάντα πέπναιται καὶ ἡσθένησεν, εἰ μὴ ὅτε ὁ τοῦ Χριστοῦ σταυρὸς γέγονεν;

¹⁵ Frankfurter (*Religion in Roman Egypt*, 188) states: “Athanasius’s *Life of Antony* wages such a sustained polemic *against* the oracle that one infers the continuing importance of oracles as the hermits’ major rivals in fourth-century Egypt.”

¹⁶ Frankfurter (ibid., 189) sees a certain “‘bibliocentrism’ that seems to arise from the multiplication of written religious materials like the *Sortes*. A popular Greco-Roman fascination with the written word, fueled by priestly translations and innovations of the Roman period, certainly contributes to the historical context in which the proliferation of *Sortes* books arose, but would not have characterized all of Egypt”.

¹⁷ Ibid., 188.

¹⁸ Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 134.

ety".¹⁹ This is exactly where our book might fit in, as a text intended for consultation in matters of individual decision-making.

Church Regulations Rejecting Diviners

In several Egyptian church canons, we find stipulations against consulting traditional Egyptian ritual experts. The sixth-century *Canons of* (Pseudo-)Athanasius specifies that church members are not allowed to visit those whom Frankfurter characterizes as "local ritual specialists".²⁰

No one that is reckoned of the church shall go to the astrologers nor enchanters nor diviners nor magicians. But if he shall [be found] to have gone [and he be] testified against of three witnesses, he shall be put forth and shall not be communicated three years, while he stay (?) doing penance bitterly for what he has done. Thereafter he shall be brought (again) into his order, according to the measure of his penance. But if he do not penance, he shall die without the congregation.²¹

In this canon, the church hierarchy limits access to religious professionals by threatening to punish church members that consult outside experts. If not found sufficiently repentant, these people are to be excommunicated for life. This means not only being cut off from salvific sacraments, but also from the social group itself. This canon is one of the instances in the discourse on Christian divination where the boundaries are drawn around religious experts, as it makes distinctions between outsider and insider practitioners.

Things become more complicated when we consider the restrictions on church membership for diviners themselves in Egyptian church orders from the late fourth or early fifth century *Apostolic Tradition*.²² The church order has a section about problematic professions for those applying for the catechumenate. Diviners are grouped together not only, as in the *Canons of Athanasius*, with ritual specialists such as astrologers and dream interpreters, but also with such varied professions as pimps, prostitutes, actors, teachers, gladiators, and soldiers.²³ The *Canons of Hippolytus*²⁴ prescribes that such persons may only be admitted as members if it is very clear that they have relinquished their objectionable practices:

¹⁹ Ibid., 150.

²⁰ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 216.

²¹ (Pseudo-)Athanasius, *Canons*, canon 41 (ed. and trans. Crum 88, 118): ⲛⲁⲛⲁⲗⲁⲩⲱⲥ ⲉⲛⲁⲛⲓ ⲉⲧⲉⲕⲕⲁⲛⲥⲓⲁ ⲃⲟⲕ ⲉⲣⲁⲧⲟⲩ ⲛⲓⲣⲉⲕⲕⲁⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ ⲟⲩⲗⲁⲉ ⲣⲉⲛⲓⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲗⲁⲉ ⲛⲣⲉⲩⲱⲛⲉ ⲟⲩⲗⲁⲉ ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ. For the date of the canon, see *ibid.*, x.

²² The transmission history of these church orders is intricately complicated, see Marksches, „Wer schrieb“, and Bradshaw et al., *Apostolic Tradition*, „Introduction“, 1–17. The Greek Grund-schrift may date to the mid-fourth century, the Sahidic translation to the fifth century, see Marksches, „Wer schrieb“, 11, Bradshaw, *Apostolic Tradition*, 8–11.

²³ Hippolytus, *Kirchenordnung* (ed. and trans. Till and Leipoldt, 12). The Sahidic uses the term ⲛⲣⲉⲩⲱⲛⲉ, diviner (that Coptic word renders the Greek μάντις, see Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 570a).

²⁴ These are an Arabic translation going back to an earlier Coptic version, see Bradshaw, et al., *Apostolic Tradition*, 10–1.

Do not catechize them and baptize them, until they have renounced all occupations of this sort, and three witnesses have testified for them that they really have renounced all these vices, because often a man remains in his passions until his old age, unless he is enabled by a great power. If they are found after baptism in vices of this sort, they are to be excluded from the church until they repent with tears, fasting, and alms.²⁵

These people, with what are considered disreputable professions, have to make life changes before they are allowed among the church membership. The imperative for admittance is to “cease or be cast out”.²⁶ The recognition that some may find it difficult to abandon these practices (“often a man remains in his passions until his old age”) may rather have an economic aspect, related to the fact that certain professions run in families (as noted about ritual experts in the previous chapter), and retraining for other professions was difficult.²⁷ More importantly, we see here clearly the concerns that church leaders felt about a range of practices that are associated with outsiders. This section about membership – that is, admittance to the community – also shows how they actively erected boundaries against such groups of people. Already in the *Canons of Athanasius*, we noticed how local religious experts were singled out, and that also happens here. Moreover, teachers and actors are also excluded, that is, professions that center on classical (“pagan”) literature and take these writings as authoritative. For the authors of the church orders, such professions imply that one observes the attendant religious practices,²⁸ and thus these teachers constitute threats of intellectual contamination and religious competition. Here again, we observe the issue of textuality and the danger of reading the wrong texts. Finally, by clustering these diverse professional groups in one section that also includes pimps and prostitutes, the text associates the former with the sexual immorality of the latter, a stock accusation against outsiders, thereby drawing the boundaries even tighter.²⁹

The church order had a lasting influence, for in the year 692 the bishops at the Council of Trullo (also known as the Quinisext Council) rework its text into their canons. Canon 61 reads:

Those who have recourse to diviners (μάντεσιν), or to so-called ‘centurions’, or to any such persons, in order to learn from them whatever it is they want to discover, shall be subject to the canonical penalty of six years, in accordance with the decrees made by the Fathers not long ago in such matters. The same penalty ought to be inflicted on those who keep bears in tow and other such animals in order to deceive and cause mischief to the more simple-minded, haranguing the throng with fortune and fate and genealogy and other such words

²⁵ *Canons of Hippolytus* 15: Bradshaw et al., *Apostolic Tradition*, 91. See also *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.32.7–13.

²⁶ These words are, as Bradshaw et al. (*Apostolic Tradition*, 93) observe, a “recurring literary refrain” in the sections about prohibited professions.

²⁷ In this respect, it is interesting to note that the Sahidic canons concede this to teachers: “If he teaches young children, it is good indeed for him to cease. If he has no trade, then let him be forgiven” (trans. *ibid.*, 88).

²⁸ Bradshaw (*ibid.*, 94) remarks: “A prohibition against Christians being teachers of classical literature is particularly strong in Tertullian (*De idol.* 10) on the grounds that it would be necessary for them to teach about pagan gods and observe their festivals.”

²⁹ See, for instance, Knust, *Abandoned to Lust*.

used in the trumpery of imposture, as well as the so-called cloud-chasers, sorcerers, purveyors of amulets, and diviners (μάντεις). If they persist in these things and do not renounce and flee *these deadly pagan practices* (τὰ ὀλέθρια ταῦτα καὶ ἑλληνικὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα), we decree that they should be cast out altogether from the Church, even as the sacred canons declare.³⁰

The adoption of the earlier church order into the Trullan canon shows that the eastern bishops still consider these prohibitions relevant. While they recognize divination as a form of obtaining knowledge (“learn ... whatever it is they want to discover”), they disapprove of the specialists. At the end of the canon, the bishops refer to the varied illicit practices collectively as “deadly pagan practices”, thereby framing divinatory and other practices as a Christian-pagan discourse. Whereas in the *Canons of Hippolytus* the boundaries were less clear, here the debate is thus clearly marked as Christian versus “pagan”.

Anastasius of Sinai Embraces Christian Divination

That the debate on divination persisted throughout Late Antiquity is clear in a question addressed to the monk-priest Anastasius of Sinai (ca. 630–after 700).³¹ Anastasius was much sought after for advice in all kinds of matters pertaining to everyday life. He would receive questions, possibly from people in Alexandria, to which he responded in writing.³² He dealt with such wide-ranging topics as marriage and sexuality, almsgiving, communion, the devil, hell, prayer, as well as politics and matters relating to the recent Arab conquest.³³ Either he himself in old age or his disciples compiled his correspondence into a collection of more than one hundred ques-

³⁰ Edition: Alberigo, *Conciliorum oecumenicorum generaliumque decreta* 1, 269–70. See also “The Canons of the Council in Trullo”, in Nedungatt and Featherstone, *Council in Trullo*, 140–2.

³¹ We know very little about this figure. According to Munitiz (Anastasios, *Questions*, 9), Anastasius was a “monk-priest” at what is now the Saint Catherine Monastery in the Sinai. Munitiz characterizes him as a “polemical yet kindly figure”. Haldon (“Works of Anastasius of Sinai”, 114), however, considers Alexandria “the most likely base from which Anastasius conducted much of his business”. Adding (ibid.): “there is ... little real evidence to connect him with Sinai.” See also Uthemann, “Anastasius the Sinaite”.

³² As Munitiz (Anastasios, *Questions*, 12) narrates about Anastasius: “At regular intervals he had been sent questions, probably by interested church-goers who were active in Alexandria ... It is quite likely that over the years Anastasios found himself with various written answers sent out in reply to questions put to him, or that his disciples considered it worthwhile to collect them and make them more generally available.” According to Munitiz (ibid., 16) “all his teaching is being given in the form of answers to questions that have been sent by persons troubled by the sort of problems that ever continue to arise. The presupposition is that it is quite normal for such questions to be raised; they are expected”. Munitiz (ibid.) thinks that the questions are actual inquiries from people. Whether they are, or whether Anastasius considers these topics useful for instruction, does not matter here. The genre supposes that the topics were relevant for an audience. In the letters of Barsanuphius and John we also have examples of monastics engaged in answering pastoral questions, and relying in their answers on scripture.

³³ For an overview of these and other topics, see ibid., 18–9.

tions and answers.³⁴ Anastasius's work belongs to the literary genre of *erotapokrisis*, a well-known body of didactic literature.³⁵ The questions and answers give us glimpses into concerns at the time and teach about what Anastasius and his community considered appropriate Christian behavior. That is, the book's purpose is actively to shape a normative Christian identity.

This becomes clear in the exchange on divination. Anastasius received an inquiry directly relevant to our topic: "Is it right for a Christian to open for sortilege (*lachmeterion*)?"³⁶ Scholars have generally interpreted the question as referring to bibliomancy, reading: "is it permitted to open <the Bible> for bibliomancy?"³⁷ While this is a plausible interpretation, I should note that at this point in the history of book production, only very few Christians had access to "the Bible" as we know it, a pandect volume containing the entire "Old" and "New Testament".³⁸ Rather, they would have opened a smaller set of biblical books, whether the book of Psalms, a Four Gospel codex, or a Pauline codex, as we noted earlier with Augustine. But, the question need not refer to bibliomancy performed on biblical books. Several later lot manuscripts are called *Lachmeterion of the Holy Apostles* (λαχμητήριον τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων).³⁹ The evidence of such manuscripts opens the possibility that the matter Anastasius discusses is divination with a lot book. Regardless, whether the inquiry involved the opening of a Bible book or a divinatory codex, Anastasius's apologetic answer reveals Christian anxiety about traditional religious experts:

We find no encouragement anywhere to do this, but the Fathers, to prevent the faithful going to sorcerers and diviners, thought up *lachmeterion*. Therefore anyone who wishes to open <a book> should first supplicate God with prayer and then, after prayer, open <a 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.⁴⁰

³⁴ On the date of Anastasius, see *ibid.*, 11. Haldon ("Works of Anastasius", 120) dates the collection "some time in the second half of the seventh century, perhaps around the year 700".

³⁵ See Haldon, "Works of Anastasius", 116–8.

³⁶ Anastasius, Question 57 (ed. Richard and Munitiz, *Quaestiones*, 108): Πρέπει ἄρα τῷ Χριστιανῷ ἀνοίγειν ἐν λαχμητηρίῳ.

³⁷ Munitiz, *Questions*, 222, renders the question as "Is it right for a Christian to open <the Bible> for *lachmeterion* [in search of an omen text]?" The word λαχμητήριον (also written as λαχνιστήριον) occurs only very rarely in Greek literature. Lampe (*Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 794) defines it as: λαχνιστήριον "*casting of lots, sortilegium* (by opening Bible)." It is generally taken to refer to the practice of bibliomancy, so Munitiz in his translation and Haldon, "Works of Anastasius", 140.

³⁸ While we may think of thumbing through our bibles, that was not a realistic option in antiquity. As Parker (*Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts*, 70–4) notes, out of thousands of Greek New Testament manuscripts, only sixty-one contain the entire New Testament. Parker describes them as luxury copies that went out of production when high quality, thin parchment became unavailable.

³⁹ For instance, a text preserved in a codex dating to ca. 1490 at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, Ms. 4644, fols 83v–92v (de Andrés, *Catálogo*, 186–9, quote from 188): "Lachmeterion seu methodus diuinationis ex euangeliiis excerpta, constans 87 sectionibus." See also Klingshirm, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*", 162.

⁴⁰ Anastasius, *Questions* (trans. adapted from Munitiz, *Questions*, 170–1, ed. Richard and Munitiz, *Anastasii Sinaitae*, 108–9): Οὐδαμοῦ εὐρίσκομεν ἐπιτροπὴν τοῦτο ποιεῖν, ἀλλ' οἱ πατέρες, διὰ τὸ μὴ πορεύεσθαι τοὺς πιστοὺς εἰς φαρμακοὺς καὶ μάντας, ἐπενόησαν τὸ λαχμητήριον. 2. Ὁ γοῦν

Anastasius prefers bibliomancy over consulting sorcerers and diviners; not the practice of sortilege itself, but the practitioner, the outsider-diviner, should be avoided. In the answer we sense his uneasiness about the matter, as he apologetically mentions “the Fathers”, although it is unclear to what Christian authors or texts he refers.⁴¹ Anastasius pits the Fathers against these religious experts in a context of competing religious authority and gives a rationale for the invention of Christian sortilege. The question addressed to Anastasius therefore suggests uncertainty about divinatory practices, and the entire exchange indicates that book divination is a matter of continuing anxiety and debate.⁴² We note that the monk takes a different approach than the texts discussed above, which outright rejected and ejected the problems with divination and diviners. Anastasius embraces the practice and claims a form of it as legitimately Christian.⁴³ In this sense he shows that the patristic fight against divination was lost.

Divination and Intramural Christian Debate: Athanasius Again

The second main discourse that exemplifies the role of arguments on divination in Christian identity formation is an inner Christian debate that centers on questions of what constitutes right Christian practice, who are its authoritative spokesmen, and what kind of texts they can use.

With the first example we revisit Athanasius of Alexandria, who himself throughout his career was a site of struggle for ecclesiastical authority.⁴⁴ According to custom, the Alexandrian bishop sent out festal epistles each year.⁴⁵ The immediate purpose of these letters was to inform Christian communities of the festal calendar (for example, when Lent would begin and on what day Easter fell). Their wide circulation made these epistles useful instruments for influencing other issues as well. In a fierce polemic played out in several of his festal letters during the end of his episcopate, Athanasius attacks multiple Christian groups, among them the “wretched Meli-

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, ἄνοιξον· εἰ δὲ ἀποτρέψῃ σε, μὴ ἀνοίξῃς.

⁴¹ There is no evidence in our sources of the “Fathers” thinking up *lachmeterion*, as Munitiz (*Anastasios, Questions*, 171 n. a) also remarks dryly in his note at the mention of the “Fathers”: “None are mentioned in G. W. H. Lampe ...” See also Haldon, “Works of Anastasius”, 140.

⁴² See also Weiland, *Oordeel*, 11: “In den tijd van Anastasius Sinaita schijnt het ook nog een kwestieus punt te zijn geweest, want onder zijn Questiones treffen we de vraag aan (CVIII) ... met het antwoord, dat de Kerkvaders dit nergens toestaan; maar wie de loten wil trekken, roepe eerst God aan en staat hij dit toe, laat hij dan zijn gang gaan, maar anders zich onthouden.”

⁴³ Haldon (“Works of Anastasius”, 141) comments: “Here we have once again recourse to methods of which the Church undoubtedly disapproved, at least at the formal level; witness the relevant canons of the Quinisext condemning and prohibiting a variety of methods of prediction and soothsaying. But Anastasius’ value as a reflection of ordinary people’s belief and attitudes and of the practices of day-to-day life is borne out by later hagiography ... and provides an important check on the weight often given to formal and official sources, such as the canons.”

⁴⁴ See, for instance, Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantine*.

⁴⁵ See Camplani, *Lettere festali* and idem, ed. and trans., *Atanasio di Alessandria*.

tians”, as he steadfastly calls his opponents. These are a group of Christians, followers of Melitius, the bishop of Lycopolis in Upper Egypt during the so-called Great Persecution in the first decade of the fourth century. In several of the Easter letters, Athanasius brings up the topic of the correct, authoritative body of Christian texts (the canon) and true revelation in relation to the Melitians. What is at stake in these letters is nothing less than access to the divine. Athanasius fulminates against Melitians whom he accuses of practicing divination at martyr shrines and of fabricating books that falsely claim to be ancient and thereby mislead gullible people.⁴⁶ In his famous Easter Epistle 39 for the year 367, Athanasius writes:

Therefore, it is fitting for us to decline such books. For even if a useful word is found in them, it is still not good to trust them. For this is work of the wickedness of those who have conceived of *mixing one or two inspired texts*, so that, through such deception, they might somehow cover up the evil teachings that they have clearly created.⁴⁷

From Athanasius’s subsequent epistles (41 and 42), we glean that the Melitians had established shrines with bodies of martyrs, where they claimed that the martyrs had healed numerous people possessed with unclean spirits and that those demons “were the prophets of the martyrs”.⁴⁸ In other words, exorcisms and oracular events took place at these sites. According to Brakke, “The rhetoric about Melitians and apocryphal books ... indicates that Athanasius’s promulgation of a closed canon was part of a conflict over proper forms of Christian divination ... the martyr enthusiasts developed a system of divination focused on the corpses of martyrs, in which a possessed person delivered supernatural information as the mouthpiece for demons or martyrs”.⁴⁹ To be clear, Athanasius does not prohibit the use of lot books – neither here nor elsewhere. Nevertheless, the passages in these epistles are evocative glimpses of the debates about divination, often involving competitors and their books being branded as heretical and non-canonical. Athanasius’s rant against the divinatory practices at the martyr’s tombs is thus not fundamentally a theological argument, rather it reveals his heresiological agenda, perhaps even based in financial concerns.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Athanasius, Epistle 39 (ed. Joannou, 75–6, trans. Brakke, “New Fragment”, 61): “[the category of apocrypha] is an invention of heretics, who write these books whenever they want and then generously add time to them, so that, by publishing them as if they were ancient, they might have a pretext for deceiving the simple folk” (οὐδαμοῦ τῶν ἀποκρύφων μνήμη, ἀλλὰ αἰρετικῶν ἐστὶν ἐπίνοια, γραφόντων μὲν ὅτε θέλουσιν αὐτὰ, χαρίζομένων δὲ καὶ προστιθέντων αὐτοῖς χρόνους, ἵνα ὡς παλαιὰ προφέροντες, πρόσιν ἔχωσιν ἀπατᾶν ἐκ τούτου τοῦς ἀκεραίους). The passage continues: “Who has made the simple folk believe that those books belong to Enoch even though no Scripture existed before Moses? On what basis will they say that there is an apocryphal book of Isaiah? He preaches openly on the high mountain and says, ‘I did not speak in secret or in a dark land’. How could Moses have an apocryphal book? He is the one who published Deuteronomy with heaven and earth as witnesses.”

⁴⁷ Translation Brakke, “New Fragment”, 62.

⁴⁸ Athanasius, Epistle 42 (ed. Lefort, *Lettres festales*, vol. 19, 65): ΕΥΜΕΓΕΓΕ ΕΠΙΛΑΙΜΩΝΗΟΗ ΧΕΝΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣΝΕ ΠΗΜΑΡΤΥΡΟΣ. See also Brakke, “Canon Formation and Social Conflict”, 414.

⁴⁹ Brakke, “Canon Formation and Social Conflict”, 415–6.

⁵⁰ Brakke (“Cult of the Holy Dead”, 16) remarks: “It would appear that the martyr cult undermined [the] economic patronage by the bishop.” Jenott and Pagels (“Antony’s Letters”, 566–9) an-

It is intriguing to consider our little codex in the context of the alleged activities of the Melitians. Athanasius's descriptions bear some resemblances to our text: a book composed of a mixture of scriptural texts that, with its title Gospel, pretends to be ancient. Moreover, it was conceivably also used at a martyr's shrine.⁵¹

The *Sortes Sanctorum*: A Prohibited Divinatory Text

Another example of divination as a site of intra-Christian struggle takes us from Egypt to Gaul. From the mid-fifth century on, bishops at church councils in Late Antique Gaul repeatedly spoke out against the practice of lot divination, inadvertently indicating to us that this was a persistent challenge in their regions. In their pronouncements we catch glimpses of the ubiquity of Christian lot divination, with even clergy practicing it.

We should not perhaps appear to have omitted something that especially injures belief in the catholic religion. Some clergy are devoted to auguries and under the label of what pretends to be religion – what they call saints' lots – they profess a knowledge of divination, or by looking into any kind of writings whatever predict future events. Any cleric found either to have been a client or a practitioner of this should be considered estranged from the church.⁵²

The strict prohibitions not only give an indication of the church leaders' anxieties about specific forms of lot divination, they also show first and foremost that lot divination was practiced widely in Gaul and conducted by clergy. The bishops make a distinction between true "catholic religion" and what they consider to be harmful "pretend religion". Two aspects of this text draw our attention. The first is the role of the religious specialists. The bishops at the council actively worked to shape the religious identity of the lower, local clergy. They threaten to excommunicate such clergy that engaged in divinatory practices, whether they were on the giving or on the receiving end of the knowledge. With Christian priests being the addressees of the canon, this is an inner Christian debate, but it is not framed in heresiological language. The second issue is the role of texts. In previous scholarship, these canons from Gaul were taken to mean that they prohibited all kinds of divination, including

alyze another noteworthy incident involving clairvoyance: Pachomius claims to have revelations telling him to build churches. They interpret Athanasius's criticism of Pachomius's clairvoyance as political; behind Athanasius's opposition is that he himself wants the money for the churches.

⁵¹ The Melitians did not compose the apocrypha alluded to in Athanasius's 39th epistle (Enoch, Ascension of Isaiah, Testament of Moses), as Athanasius himself also is quick to assert. See also Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict", 412. I am not suggesting that they would have produced our text.

⁵² Council of Vannes, Canon 16 (Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*", 85) reads: *Ac ne id fortasse uideatur omisum quod maxime fidem catholicae religionis infestat, quod aliquanti clerici student auguries et sub nomine confictae religionis quas sanctorum sortes uocant, diuinationis scientiam profitentur aut quarumcumque scripturarum inspectione futura promittunt hoc quicumque clericus detectus fuerit uel consulere docere ab ecclesia habeatur extraneus.* The council took place between 462 and 468.

bibliomancy. However, William Klingshirn has shown that the bishops singled out one particular form of lot divination, a known text called the *Sortes Sanctorum*, that they forbade priests from using.⁵³ Bibliomancy, therefore, presumably was considered acceptable.⁵⁴ The *Sortes Sanctorum*, a Christian lot book that we have encountered multiple times already in this study, reminds us of our codex. However, for the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary*, we do not have an explicit prohibition. No references to it, whether negative or positive, appear in the literature. How, then, is it a partner in the Christian discourse on divination?

Conclusions

Our codex with its thumbled pages offers important if also humble historical evidence in the debate on divination. It constitutes tangible, everyday evidence of divinatory practice, yet it does so in a different way than we can reconstruct from prescriptive texts. In the latter case, we can only imagine the practice through mirror reading: if the text forbids it, it must happen. The *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* gives texture and depth to this possibility. As we have seen throughout this book, *The Gospel of the Lots of Mary* can be situated and analyzed on its own terms as a religious text and artifact. In its textuality and materiality, our miniature codex is part of the broader discourse on divination, the very sort of object that inspired the prescriptive writings that we have just investigated in church canons and festal epistles. Indeed, our book is not only evidence of the persistence of controversial or forbidden practices, it is also a small but no less legitimate voice in late ancient debates over knowledge and authority, betraying some of the same anxieties that we observed in the writings discussed above.

First, the religious expert behind our codex, the person who owned and operated it, remains a shadowy figure, although, as concluded in the previous chapter, he was most likely a priest active at a martyr shrine. This reverberates with the church canons from Gaul and also with restrictions imposed on the activities of the local clergy by the Egyptian canons, as these texts supply evidence for Christian clergy practicing divination.

Our codex also reminds us that textuality is a theme in the prescriptive texts against divination that we have encountered. The *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* is an active voice in the debate around the gospel, claiming to be one in order to appropriate the authority of *evangelion* as powerful, sacred text. Moreover, by putting on the guise of a gospel, the text cloaks itself not only in the gospel's power, but also in its

⁵³ Klingshirn ("Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*", 81) shows that "between 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".

⁵⁴ Ibid., 124: "While they [i. e. church canons] certainly show church authorities condemning lot diviners, such passages do not link these figures with biblical divination."

antiquity, which serves to increase the codex's authority, or, as Athanasius would object, it pretends to be ancient. Anastasius makes a similar authorizing move by saying that the fathers of the past invented Christian sortilege. The importance of textuality and canon is also clear in the way our text is composed of biblical (even canonical) phrases and allusions, purposefully emanating a biblical aura.

In remaining basically within the biblical canon, it almost seems as if our text is careful to avoid a heresiological debate. The *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* both borrows from scriptural language and hints at the anxiety surrounding the divinatory practices it sanctions by its attempt to control doubt. Moreover, in mixing scriptural sentences with traditional divinatory language – or is it masking the traditional language with scriptural quotes? – our text stands on the border between Christian and “pagan”.

The materiality of our booklet gives evidence of its frequent use, and thus also of frequent divinatory practices. And its small format teaches us something else. When I began my research, I presumed that the miniature size of the codex was intended to facilitate hiding a forbidden text. This remains a strong possibility, as we have discovered many examples indicating how contentious divination was. Yet we must also consider that the codex's small size could be intended to conform to the format of other biblical and liturgical miniature books. Either way, in the discourse about access to divine knowledge, the format itself has an apologetic function, whether the book is meant to be easily hidden or whether it imitates portable, miniature “legitimate” gospels.

Our book constructs a Christian identity in ways that are subtler than the ecclesiastical writings, and perhaps also more effective. The *Gospel of the Lots of Mary* presents a different, yet confident religious authority while simultaneously betraying that its audience has anxieties about such knowledge. Through its format, it offers easy access for everyday practices. Against all adversity and in all anxiety, this little participant in the divinatory discourse nevertheless grandly claims to grant access to divine knowledge, mediated by Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ through the intervention of the *angelus interpres* Gabriel, and promises to deliver Good News. Our book is not hermeneutically simple; it does not attempt to control in the same way as the bishops in church canons and festal epistles do. Our text works to control doubt by its almost excessive emphasis on both trust and admonitions not to doubt or not to be of two minds. Thus it participates in the widespread ancient debates about knowledge and authority, reassuring some Christians through words and practice that true knowledge, Good News, was indeed available to them.

Part II

Text and Translation

About the Translation

I have translated as literally as possible, while still rendering the text in idiomatic English. Of course, every translation has its difficulties, as the saying goes: *tradere trahere*. But a divinatory text like this confronts a translator with additional challenges, for how does one translate a text that is meant to be open for multiple interpretations, a text consciously crafted to be taken allegorically and literally? Moreover, these *sortes* lack an explicit narrative context, for it is a given of the genre that the context changes constantly: it is the querent who contributes the context, hence it always will remain unknown to us.

In the edition, I use the *sigla* from the so-called Leiden system:*

[]	lacuna in the papyrus
< >	omission in the original
[[]]	deletion in the original
()	resolution of a symbol or abbreviation
vac.	<i>vacat</i> : empty space

A single vertical stroke (|) designates a line break, a double vertical stroke (||) a page break.

In addition to sources indicated specifically, the following editions are referred to in the textual commentary.

Bible

Since these *sortes* do not give literal biblical quotations but allusions, I have provided in the apparatus the biblical reference both in Greek (because the text was most likely translated from Greek) and in Coptic.

* Adapted from Pestman, *New Papyrological Primer*, 319, see also 14–5.

- Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta. Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935 [1982]). English translation: *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
- E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Earliest Known Coptic Psalter ...* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1898).
- Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA²⁷), ed. Barbara Aland and Kurt Aland [et al.] (Stuttgart : Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001).
- George William Horner, ed., *The Coptic version of the New Testament in the Southern dialect, otherwise called Sahidic and Thebaic, with critical apparatus, literal English translation, register of fragments and estimate of the version*, 7 vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1911–1924).

Sortes

For the *sortes*, I have noted allusions and shared phraseology from the following editions, using these short titles:

- Fragments (Papini) = Lucia Papini, with an introduction by David Frankfurter, “Fragments of *Sortes Sanctorum* from the Shrine of St. Colluthus”, in David Frankfurter, ed. *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 134; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 393–401.
- Griechisches Losbuch = F. Drexl, “Ein griechisches Losbuch”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 41 (1941): 311–8.
- Hoskyns Fragment = Wolf-Peter Funk, Memo: “Hoskyns Fragment in Dialect M (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 541 no. 78)”, translation (11-11-2011) and edition (08-10-2011). Reference is to the page of the manuscript.
- Kleinasiatische Losorakel* = Johannes Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel. Astragal- und Alpha-betchresmologien der hochkaiserzeitlichen Orakelrenaissance* (Vestigia 57; München: Beck, 2007).
- P.Oxy.Coptic inv. 67 and inv. 68 = Alex G Kocar, “Sortilege in Late Antique Egypt: Two Unpublished Coptic *Sortes* from Oxyrhynchus.” In *My Lots are in Thine Hands*, edited by William Klingshirn and AnneMarie Luijendijk, forthcoming.
- P.Oxy. LXXV 5065 = P.Oxy. LXXV 5065, “Oracular Response (?) (fourth century)” (ed. C. Pernigotti).
- PSI XVII Congr. 5 = Paul Canart, Rosario Pinaudi, “PSI XVII Congr. 5: Un système d’oracles chrétiens (‘Sortes sanctorum’)”, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 57 (1984): 85–90.
- P.Vat.Copt. 1 = Arnold van Lantschoot, “Une collection sahidique de «sortes sanctorum» (Papyrus Vatican copte 1)”, *Le Muséon* 69 (1956): 36–52. English translation (sometimes slightly changed): Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, eds., *Ancient Christian Magic. Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 251–6, no. 126. “Collection of oracles.”
- Rhiktologion = Georgios Megas, “ΠΙΚΤΟΛΟΓΙΟΝ ΕΞ ΑΜΟΡΓΟΥ”, *ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΗ ΕΠΙΕΤΗΡΙΣ* 8 (1959): 207–16.
- Sortes Astrampsychi* (Naether) = Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi. Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten* (ORA 3; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).
- Sortes Astrampsychi* (Stuart) = Randall Stuart, ed., *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. II: *Ecdosis altera* (Bibliotheca Teubneriana; Leipzig: Saur, 2001). Translations (modified) from Randall Stewart and Kenneth Morrell, “10. Fortune-Telling. Anonymous, The Oracles of Astram-

psychus”, in William Hansen, ed., *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 285–324.

Sortes Sanctorum = James Rendel Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae: With Some Notes on Sortes Sanctorum* (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1901). See also Enrique Montero Cartelle and Alberto Alonso Guardo, *Los “libros de suertes” medievales: Las Sortes Sanctorum y los Prenostica Socratis Basilei* (Nueva Roma 21; Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004).

In addition, I refer to:

Crum = Walter E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939).

Wörterbuch (Förster) = Hans Förster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (TU 148; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002).

Incipit

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The Gospel of the lots of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, she to whom Gabriel the archangel brought the good news. He who will go forward (or: will seek) with his whole heart will obtain what he seeks. Only do not be of two minds.

good news (ⲱⲉⲛⲟϥⲉ): Egyptian equivalent of ⲉϥⲁⲓⲛⲉⲗⲓⲟⲛ/ⲉὐαγγελιον from ⲱⲓⲛⲉ + ⲛⲁⲛⲟϥ, see Crum, 570a (ⲱⲙⲛⲟϥⲉ; spelling ⲱⲉⲛⲟϥⲉ not in Crum).

He who will go forward with his whole heart (ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁⲗⲓ ⲡⲉⲣⲟϥⲟⲓ ⲛⲙ ⲡⲉⲣⲓⲛⲧⲧⲏⲣⲁ): the sense is ambivalent here. ⲗⲓⲡⲟϥⲟϥⲟⲓ, ⲡⲉⲕⲟϥⲟⲓ means ‘go forward’, Greek ἔρχομαι, προσέρχομαι (Crum 472a). ⲗⲓⲟϥⲟ(ⲉ)ⲓ means ‘go about seeking, seek’ (ζητεῖν). This expression also occurs in Oracles 32 and 34, but in the second person singular (ⲗⲓⲡⲉⲕⲟϥⲟⲓ).

“Go forward with one’s whole heart”: Barsanuphius and John, Letter 196, lines 41–2 (*Correspondance* I.2): Προσέλθωμεν ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ, ἵνα προσδεχθώμεν, “Let us go forward with [our] whole heart so that we may be received”; Athanasius, *Expositio in Psalmos* 27. 161: Οὗτος γὰρ ἀληθῶς μακάριος, ὁ ὅλη καρδίᾳ προσερχόμενος τῷ ἁγίῳ Βαπτίσματι.

“Seek with whole heart”: Ps. 118 (119):2 (LXX): ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ ἐκζητήσουσιν αὐτόν; ⲉⲧⲱⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲥⲱⲣ ⲛⲙ ⲡⲉϥⲓⲛⲧⲧⲏⲣⲁ, “who seek him with their whole heart”, see also 118:10; in both instances, the Coptic verb is ⲱⲓⲛⲉ. See also Jer. 36:13: καὶ ἐκζητήσατέ με, καὶ εὕρήσετέ με, ὅτι ζητήσετέ με ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν, “Search for me and you will find me, for you will search for me with your whole heart”.

“Seeking”: P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 68: ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁⲣⲟϥⲉⲓⲛⲉⲓ ⲙⲡⲣⲱⲓⲛⲉ [ⲛⲥⲱⲣ ⲭⲉⲛ] ⲛⲓⲧⲗⲟⲥⲉ [ⲉⲧⲱⲓⲛⲧⲁ]; *ibid.*, 45, no. 64: ⲉⲧⲓ ⲕⲉⲕⲟϥⲓⲛⲉ ⲛⲓⲧⲙⲁⲧⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲧⲕⲱⲓⲛⲉ [ⲛⲥⲱⲣ], “Yet in a little while you will obtain what you seek”.

See also in the Prologue of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* (Stuart, 8): καὶ εὕρίσκεῖς ὅπερ ἐζήτησας “and you will find what you were looking for”.

two minds (ⲡⲣⲓⲛⲧⲧⲏⲣⲁⲗⲓ): “be double-minded, be of two minds, doubt” (Crum 347a, 714b), Greek διψυχία: Jac. 1:8, 4:8. Hermas used the word so frequently, that Hauck, *Brief des Jakobus*, 49 n. 47) considered it his favorite term (“Lieblingwort”).

Oracle 1

Pages <2–3>

Ζ Ω ΠΡΩΜΕ· | ΕΥΜΕ ΝΜΟΚ | ΕΜΑΤΕ ΖΜ | ΠΕΥΛΑΣ ΠΕΥΖΗΤ ΔΕ ΟΥΗΥ ΝΣΑΒΟΛ |
ΜΜΟΚ· | ΛΥΩ ΚΣΟΟΥ(Η) | ΝΝΕΝΤΛΥ|ΩΩΠΕ Μ||ΜΟΚ ΖΛΘΗ | ΜΠΟΟΥ· ΞΕ |
ΠΑΡΑΚΕΚΟΥΪ | ΝΓ·|ΟΣΕ Ν|ΤΕΚΥ·ΥΧΗ | ΠΛΗΗ ΣΕΘΟ|ΡΩ ΕΡΟΚ Ε|ΜΑΤΕ –

O human, with their tongues they love you greatly, but their heart is far from you. And you know what happened to you before today, that you almost lost your life. In any case they certainly lie in wait for you.

O human (Ω ΠΡΩΜΕ): see Layton, *Grammar*, § 137, § 238. See also Hoskyns Fragment, 4: [ΠΡ]ΟΜΕ, “Human”. For this address in other *sortes*, see *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 256, no. 1.6: Ζωῆς εἰςὶ χρόνοι. τί μάτην, ἄνθρωπε, μεριμν[ᾷς]; common in *Griechisches Losbuch*, see 313, no. 5 et passim; *Rhiktologion*, 211, no. 11: ὦ ἄνθρωπε, θαρρεῖς.

ΠΑΡΑΚΕΚΟΥΪ with conjunctive: see Layton, *Grammar*, § 354c.

With their tongues they love you greatly, but their heart is far from you (ΕΥΜΕ ΝΜΟΚ ΕΜΑΤΕ ΖΜ ΠΕΥΛΑΣ ΠΕΥΖΗΤ ΔΕ ΟΥΗΥ ΝΣΑΒΟΛ ΜΜΟΚ): an allusion to Matt. 15:8 (cf. Isa. 29:13; Mark 7:6): Ὁ λαὸς οὗτος τοῖς χεῖλεσὶν με τιμᾷ, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν πόρρω ἀπέχει ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ; πειλαὸς ἐσταῖο μμοῖ ζμ πεγςποτοῦ. πεγζητ δε ουηυ ησαβολ μμοι, “This people is honoring me with their lips, but their heart is far from me”.

See also 1 John 3:18: Τεκνία, μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν λόγῳ μὴδὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ ἀλλὰ ἐν ἔργῳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, “Little children, let us love not in word or speech (lit. ‘tongue’), but in truth and action”; ΠΑΩΗΡΕ, ΜΠΡΤΡΕΗΜΕ ΖΜ ΠΩΛΧΕ ΟΥΔΕ ΖΜ ΠΛΑΣ. ΑΛΛΑ ΖΜ ΠΖΩΕ ΜΠ ΤΜΕ, “My children, let us not love in the word nor in the tongue, but in the work and the truth ...”; and Ps. 51 (52):6 ἠγάπησας πάντα τὰ ῥήματα καταποντισμοῦ, γλώσσαν δολίαν, “you loved all words for drowning, a deceitful tongue”.

And you know what happened to you before today (ΛΥΩ ΚΣΟΟΥΗ ΝΝΕΝΤΛΥΩΩΠΕ ΜΜΟΚ ΖΛΘΗ ΜΠΟΟΥ): see Fragments (Papini), 399, A Π: ΛΥΩ ΚΣΟΟΥΗ ΕΤΩΟΡΠ ΠΛΥΠΗ ΠΤΑΣΤΑΣΟΚ, “and you know the first pain that strikes you ...” See also *Griechisches Losbuch*, 318, no. 35: Γίνωσκε, ὦ ἄνθρωπε, “Know, o human ...”

that you almost lost your life (ΞΕ ΠΑΡΑΚΕΚΟΥΪ ΝΓ·|ΟΣΕ ΝΤΕΚΥ·ΥΧΗ): the expression “you will loose your life” may have a richer connotation. It could be an allusion to a saying of Jesus about losing one’s life (see Matt. 16:25 and 10:39). These two verses in the Gospel of Matthew stand in a context of losing and finding, making the allusion fitting in a divinatory context.

Oracle 2

Pages <4>–5

upper right corner of the right page: ē

ⲭ ϣⲱⲉ ⲛⲓⲧⲉ|ⲗⲏⲗ ⲛⲓⲉϥ|ⲫⲣⲏⲉ ⲛⲓⲧⲓⲥⲟⲟϥ ⲙⲓⲛⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲉ|ⲭⲙ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁⲣ| ⲱⲱⲡⲉ
ⲙⲓⲙⲟⲕ ⲭⲉ ⲛⲉ | ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲕⲉⲕⲟϥⲓ | ⲛⲓⲟϥⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ || ⲙⲓⲉⲕⲙⲁ ⲛⲓⲱⲱⲡⲉⲃⲃⲃ | ⲙⲛⲛⲥⲱⲥ |
ⲛⲓⲧⲓⲥⲉ | ⲛⲓⲱⲱⲡⲉ | ⲛⲁⲛⲟⲥⲏⲉⲥ | ⲙⲛ ⲟϥⲕⲓⲙⲓⲗⲏⲛⲟⲥⲃⲃⲃ ⲗⲗⲗⲗ ⲗⲓⲛⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ | ⲱⲛⲛⲛⲧⲏⲛⲉ
ⲛⲗⲓⲣⲟⲕⲃ —

Be happy, rejoice, be glad and glorify God for what has happened to you. Because it was only a little while ago that you were far from home, then you suffered loss and were in disgrace and danger. But God took pity on you.

Be happy, rejoice, be glad, and glorify God (ⲭⲱⲉ ⲛⲓⲧⲉⲗⲏⲗ ⲛⲓⲉϥⲫⲣⲏⲉ ⲛⲓⲧⲓⲥⲟⲟϥ ⲙⲓⲛⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ): the sentence alludes to Rev. 19:7: χαίρωμεν καὶ ἀγαλλιῶμεν, καὶ δώσωμεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῷ “Let us be happy and rejoice and give glory to him”.

Double exhortations to rejoice with different combinations of verbs are frequent in the Septuagint and the New Testament. The triple exhortation has a Greek parallel in Evagrius, *Rerum monachalium rationes* 40 (1261, line 41): χαίρε καὶ ἀγαλλία καὶ εὐφράινου: This may be a liturgical expression, or perhaps the *sortes* author knew Evagrius’s writings?

References to joy appear in other *sortes*: see P.Oxy.Coptic inv. 67 (a): ⲕⲏⲗⲭⲓ ⲛⲟϥⲣⲱⲉ ⲛⲙⲉⲗⲥ, “you will receive joy in Christ”; P.Vat.Copt. 1, 40, no. 29: ⲟϥⲛⲟϥⲣⲱⲉ ⲛⲗⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲛⲧⲉϥⲛⲟϥ, “There will be [joy] for you [at once]”; *ibid.*, 44, no. 61: ⲗⲣⲏⲗⲓ ⲛⲛⲟϥⲣⲱⲉ, “Do this joyfully”; Rhiktologion, 211, no. 7: θὰ βρῆς ἀνάπαυσιν καὶ χαράν, “you will find rest and joy”.

glorify to God: biblical idiom, see for instance 1 Cor. 6:20. See also P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 65: ⲛⲓⲧⲓⲥⲟⲟϥ ⲙⲓⲛⲛⲓⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲉⲭⲙⲛⲓⲗⲓ, “and give glory/glorify God because of this”. Cf. *ibid.*, 1, 47, no. 168: ⲟϥⲛⲟⲥ ⲛⲉⲟⲟϥ ⲓⲛⲗⲓⲙⲓⲛⲧⲉ ⲛⲗⲣⲟⲥ ⲉϥⲥⲉⲛⲉⲗⲉⲥ, “Great glory [will] bear witness on account of it ...”; Griechisches Losbuch, 316, no. 23: καὶ σὺ δοξάζσεις τὸν θεὸν διὰ τῆς πίστεώς σου and *ibid.*, 317, no. 28: οὕτως δοξάζεις τὸν θεόν.

you were far from home (ⲛⲓⲟϥⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙⲓⲉⲕⲙⲁ ⲛⲱⲱⲡⲉ): the topic of returning to one’s home occurs frequently in *sortes*: e. g. *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 134–5, no. 8.4: καὶ τὸν ἐν ἄλλῳ δήμῳ ἐόντ᾽ ἥξειν θεὸς αὐδᾶ, “and the one who is in another demos will return, God proclaims”; *ibid.* 136, no. 9.4: τὸν τ’ ἀπόδημον ἐόντα θεοὶ σώσουσιν ἐς οἶκον, “the one who is abroad, him the Gods will save home”; *ibid.*, 138, no. 11.2; cf. Graf, “Rolling”, 57 n. 29: στέλλε, ὅπου χρήξεις· χαίρων σὺ γὰρ οἴκαδ’ ἀφίξει, “Set forth to where you want. For you will arrive home rejoicing”; *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 147, no. 20.4: καὶ τὸν ἐν ἄλλῃ χώρᾳ ἐόντ᾽ ἥξειν θεὸς αὐδᾶ, “And the one who is in another land will return, God proclaims”; *ibid.*, 167,

no.43.4: καὶ τὸν ἀλώμενον ἐν ξενίῃ ἥξειν θεὸς αὐδᾶ, “And the one roaming in a foreign country will return, God proclaims”; *ibid.*, 172, no. 48.2: στέλλε, ὅπου σοι θυμὸς <ἄνωγε>· πάλιν δόμον ἥξεις, “Set forth to where your spirit prompts you. You will come home again”.

Because it was only a little while ago (ⲭⲉ ⲡⲉⲡⲁⲣⲁⲕⲉⲕⲟⲩ): see P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 64: ⲉⲧⲓ ⲕⲉⲕⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲡⲓⲙⲓⲁⲧⲉ ⲡⲓⲡⲉⲧⲕⲱⲛⲉ [ⲛⲥ]ⲱⲣ, “Yet in a little while you will obtain what you seek”; cf. *ibid.*, 44, no. 58; 46, no. 156; 51, no. 215; P.Oxy. LXXV 5065: μᾶλλον χαρήσῃ βραχὺν ἐπιμείνας, “You will enjoy more if you wait for a short while”.

then you suffered loss (ⲙⲓⲡⲓⲥⲱⲥ ⲡⲓⲧⲱⲥⲉ): see “Hoskyns Fragment”, 5: ⲉⲕⲧⲱⲥⲉ, “(you) suffering loss”; and P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 68: ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁⲥⲱⲩⲉ [ⲛⲥ]ⲱⲣ ⲙⲓⲡⲱⲛⲉ [ⲛⲥ]ⲱⲣ ⲭⲉⲛⲓ ⲡⲓⲧⲱⲥⲉ [ⲉⲧⲱⲛⲓⲧⲱ], “Do not seek what has passed [by, or] you might suffer [because of it]”.

danger (ⲕⲓⲛⲁⲩⲛⲟⲥ): here with *mu*, but on page 53 spelled in standard Greek as ⲕⲓⲛⲁⲩⲛⲟⲥ (κίνδυνος). This word occurs frequently in divinatory texts, see “Hoskyns Fragment”, 7: ⲡⲓⲛⲁⲩⲛⲟⲥ, “the danger”; P.Vat.Copt. 1, 40, no. 31 and 43, no. 52: ⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩⲛⲟⲥ ⲡⲓⲕⲓⲛⲁⲩⲛⲟⲥ ⲁⲡⲓⲡⲉⲓⲱⲛⲓ, “There is great danger in this matter.” In the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, the expression is always μετὰ κινδύνου, ‘with danger’: so in 1.10: ἔκτρώσει μετὰ κινδύνου, πλὴν σωθήσεται, “She will miscarry with peril, but she will be safe”; 34.8: τέξεται μετὰ κινδύνου κόρη, “She will give birth to a girl with peril”; 37.4: τέξεται μετὰ κινδύνου ἄρρεν, “She will give birth to a boy with peril”; 52.8: ὁ ἀσθενὼν μετὰ κινδύνου σωθήσεται, “The sick person will be saved with peril”; 56.5: τέξεται μετὰ κινδύνου πολλοῦ, “She will give birth with much peril”; 71.1: τέξεται μετὰ κινδύνου, “She will give birth with peril”; 91.6: πλεύσεις μετὰ κινδύνου, ἀλλὰ θάρρει, “You will sail with peril, but take courage”; *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 155, no. 29.3: ὁ κίνδυνος παράκειται, “danger is at hand”.

Oracle 3

Pages <6>–7

upper right corner of the right page: $\bar{z}$

ⲉⲓϥⲥⲏⲏⲧⲉ | ⲁⲕⲟϥⲭⲁⲓ | ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲟⲧⲕ | ⲉⲣⲛⲟⲃⲉ ⲭⲉ | ⲛⲛⲉⲓ ⲡⲓⲉⲃⲟⲟϥ ⲉⲡⲁⲓ | ⲱⲱⲡⲉ
ⲙⲓⲙⲟⲕⲁⲥ ⲙⲏ | ⲛⲓⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲁⲛ ⲙⲓⲡⲙⲉⲉϥⲉ ⲛⲓⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲗⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ ⲁⲗⲟⲛ ⲙⲡⲟⲟϥ | ⲁⲗⲱ
ⲁⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲧⲟϥⲭⲟⲕ | ⲛⲥⲏⲧⲟϥ | ⲧⲏⲣⲟϥⲁⲥ ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲟⲧⲕ ⲉⲡⲉⲓⲱⲃⲥ –

Behold, you have been saved, do not (re)turn to commit sin, so that even worse matters do not happen to you. Do you not remember what has happened to you before today? And God saved you from everything. Do not (re)turn to this matter.

You have been saved (ⲁⲕⲟϥⲭⲁⲓ): cf. Eph. 2:8: ἔστε σεσωσμένοι (in the plural). See also P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 66: ⲥⲱⲡⲟⲙⲓⲛⲉ ⲉⲙⲓⲗⲧⲉⲓ ⲡⲣⲟⲥⲧⲉϥⲛⲟϥ [ⲙⲏⲛⲓ]ϥⲱⲥ ⲡⲟϥⲭⲁⲓ ⲛⲁⲗⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲁⲡⲟϥⲱⲱⲧⲓⲣⲟⲧⲓ, “Wait [very] patiently for now; [after] this, salvation will come to you with gladness”; ibid., 45, no. 67: ⲥⲱⲡⲟⲙⲓⲛⲉ ⲉⲡⲓⲭⲟⲓⲉⲓϥ ⲛⲉⲧⲟϥⲭⲟⲕⲓ, “What patiently for the Lord and he will save [you]”; cf. ibid., 39, no. 22 and 42, no. 45.

do not (re)turn to commit sin, so that even worse matters do not happen to you (ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲟⲧⲕ ⲉⲣⲛⲟⲃⲉ ⲭⲉ ⲛⲛⲉⲓ ⲡⲓⲉⲃⲟⲟϥ ⲉⲡⲁⲓ ⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ): see John 5:14: ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲟⲧⲕ ⲉⲣⲛⲟⲃⲉ. ⲭⲉⲕⲁⲥ ⲛⲏⲉ ⲡⲉⲃⲟⲟϥ ⲉⲡⲁⲓ ⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ, “do not return to commit sin, so that the worse than this should not happen to you”.

Do you not remember (ⲛⲓⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲁⲛ ⲙⲓⲡⲙⲉⲉϥⲉ): P.Vat.Copt. 1, 47, no. 164: ⲁⲣⲓⲡⲙⲉⲉϥⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲉⲣⲏⲧⲧ ⲛⲓⲧⲁⲗⲁⲥ, “Remember your promise and keep it” or “do it”.

Do not (re)turn to this matter (ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲟⲧⲕ ⲉⲡⲉⲓⲱⲃⲥ): cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 41, no. 37: [ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲟⲧⲕ] ⲉⲣⲛⲉⲓⲱⲃⲥ = ibid., 41, no. 38: ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲟⲧⲕ ⲉⲣⲛⲓⲉⲓⲱⲃⲥ, “Do not do this matter again”.

And God saved you from everything (ⲁⲗⲱ ⲁⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲧⲟϥⲭⲟⲕ ⲛⲥⲏⲧⲟϥ ⲧⲏⲣⲟϥ): see also Fragments (Papini), 399, A II: ⲁⲗⲱ ⲁⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲧⲟϥⲭⲟⲕ ⲛⲥⲏⲧⲓⲣⲟϥ ⲧⲏⲣⲟϥ].¹

¹ See lines 6–7: for ⲛⲥⲏ, Papini reads ⲛⲥⲉ, with reference to Rom. 8:32: ⲛⲥⲉ ⲛⲉⲛⲁⲭⲁⲣⲓⲥⲉ. Our text now suggests a different reconstruction: ⲡⲏⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲧⲟϥⲭⲟⲕ ⲛⲥⲏⲧⲓⲣⲟϥ ⲧⲏⲣⲟϥ].

Oracle 4

Pages <8>-9

upper right corner of the right page: $\bar{\theta}$

ⲓ ⲛⲧⲟⲕ ⲙⲁϣ|ⲗⲁⲕ ⲡⲉⲧⲥⲱⲕ ⲉϫⲱⲕ | ⲛⲟϥⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉ|ⲧⲛⲱ ⲛⲉⲓⲥⲉ | ⲛⲉⲓⲱⲩ ⲉⲕⲟϥ|ⲱⲱ
ⲉⲗⲗⲁ ⲙ|ⲡⲁⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲃ|ⲟϥⲉ <ⲉ>ⲓ· ϩϣ|ⲡⲟⲙⲓⲛⲉ ⲛ|ⲕⲟϥⲓ ⲛⲟϥ||ⲉⲓⲱ· ⲗϣⲱ | ⲕⲏⲏⲁⲛⲁϣ·
ⲉⲧ|ⲡⲁⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲙ|ⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ | ⲉⲧⲏⲁⲧⲁ|ⲑⲟⲕ· —

It is you alone who brings upon yourself a great, difficult burden. This matter you want to do, its time has not yet come. Endure a short time/a little longer and you will see the confidence in God that will reach you.

It is you alone (ΠΤΟΚ ΜΑΥΛΑΛ): see P.Vat.Copt. 1, 50, no. 204: [Π]ΤΟΚ ΜΑΥΛΑΛ ΕΤ[Ω]ΤΟΡΤΡ ΜΜΟΚ, “It is you alone who troubles yourself.”

brings upon yourself (σὸν ἐξῶκ): see P.Vat.Copt. 1, 46, no. 72: $\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{c}}\overline{\text{o}}\overline{\text{k}} \text{ ἐξῶκ } \overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{y}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{k}}$ $\overline{\text{no}}\overline{\text{u}}\overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{e}}\overline{\text{r}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{s}}\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{o}}\overline{\text{s}}$ $\overline{\text{x}}\overline{\text{e}} \overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{e}}\overline{\text{m}} \overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{o}}\overline{\text{k}}$ $\overline{\text{e}}\overline{\text{c}}\overline{\text{i}}$ $\overline{\text{z}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{r}}\overline{\text{o}}\overline{\text{c}}$, “Do not bring a temptation upon yourself alone, for you cannot bear it”.

P.Oxy.Coptic inv. 67(a) resembles the first part of this answer.

this matter you want to do (πισως εκουωω ελλα): see P.Oxy.Coptic inv. 67(a): εκουωω εκεκ ουως, “While you want to complete a matter”; Rhikologion, 211, no. 5: τὸ πρᾶγμα ὁποῦ μελετᾷς νὰ κάμῃς μέγα ἐστίν, “The matter that you plan to do, is great”.

Endure (ζυπομῖνε, ὑπομένειν): ‘remain, stay, wait for’, see also Oracles 5, 19, and 20. This verb is a good divinatory term because it is vague and multivariant. It renders the answers rather passive. Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 66: ζυπομῖνε ἐμ[ατε] πρὸς τευνοῦ [μην] ὥς ποῦλαι ἡ[α]φω[ι]ε νακ ἡπογογ[ροτ], “Wait [very] patiently for now; [after] this, salvation will come to you with gladness”; P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 67: ζυπομῖνε ἐπ[χο]εῖς ἡτρογχο[κ], “Wait patiently for the Lord and he will save [you].” The verb also occurs in Coptic documentary texts: Förster (*Wörterbuch* 839–40) lists 7 occurrences in letters; some texts specify how long one should wait. See also P.Oxy.Coptic inv. 67(a): ἐκωανηζαρῳζητ, “if you are patient”.

a short time (ἡκοῦν ποῦρεῖα): see also Oracles 20 and 29 (and Oracle 2: $\chi\epsilon$ $\eta\epsilon\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\kappa\epsilon\gamma\omicron\upsilon\iota$). This is a common time indicator for *sortes*. Cf. P.Oxy.Coptic inv. 67(a): ἡκοῦν; P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 64: $\epsilon\tau\iota$ $\kappa\epsilon\kappa\omicron\upsilon\iota$ $\pi\epsilon$ $\eta\eta\mu\alpha\tau\epsilon$ $\eta\pi\epsilon\tau\kappa\omega\eta\epsilon$ $[\eta]\sigma\omega\chi$, “A little longer and you will obtain what you seek”; P.Vat.Copt. 1, 46, no. 156: $\chi\iota$ $\epsilon\rho\kappa$ $\rho\omicron\upsilon\kappa\omicron\upsilon\iota$ $[\eta]$ $\rho\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\iota\alpha$, “endure a little

while”; P.Vat.Copt. 1, 51, no. 215: ⲱⲱⲓⲉ ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲕⲁⲛⲉⲭⲉ [ⲛⲟⲩ]ⲕⲟⲩⲓ ⲛⲟⲩⲟⲩⲓⲱ, “[It is] appropriate for you to bear up for [a] little while”. For indications of short time, the *Sortes Astram-psychi* (Naether, 171) have ὀλίγον, πρὸς ὀλίγον.

you will see the confidence in God (ⲕⲏⲁⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲧⲡⲁⲣⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲙⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ): ⲙⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ is an objective genitive. See also P.Vat.Copt. 1, 40, no. 32: ⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩⲛⲟⲥ ⲡⲕⲁⲓⲣⲟⲥ ⲛⲁⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲙⲓⲡⲟⲟⲩⲓ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲕⲏⲁⲭⲓ ⲛⲟⲩⲙⲧⲓⲟⲩⲓ ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲧⲓ ⲛⲓⲧⲡⲁⲣⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁⲩⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ ⲛⲧⲓⲣⲏⲓⲛⲏⲓ ⲙⲡⲓⲭⲥⲓ,² “There will be a great opportunity for you today and you will get rest in it and you will be confident in the peace of [Christ]”.

For ⲡⲁⲣⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁ/ⲡⲁⲣⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁ see Philodemos, *De libertate dicendi*; Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, and Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, 264–5.

² The reconstruction ⲛⲓⲭⲥⲓ, ‘Christ’, is not convincing, since Christ hardly ever occurs in these Christian sortes and also would require a plene article. Read instead ⲙⲡⲓⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ, ‘God’, or ⲙⲡⲓⲭⲥⲓ, ‘Lord’.

Oracle 5

Pages 10–11, end of quire 1, begin of quire 2.

upper left corner of the left page: i; upper right corner of the left page: $\bar{\alpha}$

upper left corner of the right page: $\bar{\epsilon}$; upper right corner of the right page: $\bar{\iota}\bar{\alpha}$

✓ $\zeta\epsilon\eta\alpha\tau\alpha\eta|\zeta\omicron\gamma\tau\kappa\ \bar{\zeta}\bar{\mu}\ |\ \pi\epsilon\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega\bar{\varsigma}\ |\ \theta\alpha\rho\iota\ \eta\alpha\kappa\ \eta\bar{\iota}\bar{\iota}|\zeta\gamma\pi\omicron\mu\iota\eta\epsilon\ |\ \chi\epsilon\ \pi\epsilon\omicron\gamma\omicron|\epsilon\iota\omega\ \pi\eta\tau\prime$
 $\epsilon|\rho\omicron\kappa\prime\ \bar{\mu}\pi\bar{\rho}|\theta\lambda\iota\beta\epsilon\ \eta\bar{\iota}\bar{\iota}|\kappa\alpha\tau\omicron\omicron\tau\kappa\ ||\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ \textit{vacat}\ |\ \omicron\gamma\lambda\epsilon\ \bar{\mu}\pi\bar{\rho}|\lambda\gamma\pi\eta\ \chi\epsilon\ \omicron\gamma(\eta)|\tau\alpha\kappa$
 $\bar{\mu}\mu\lambda\gamma\ |\ \bar{\pi}\omicron\gamma\zeta\epsilon\lambda\pi\iota\varsigma\ |\ \epsilon\varsigma\tau\alpha\chi\rho\eta\gamma\ |\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ \bar{\zeta}\bar{\iota}\bar{\tau}\bar{\mu}\ |\ \pi\eta\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon\prime$

They will trust you in this matter. Be brave and endure, for the time is hastening for you. Do not be distressed nor despair nor grieve, because you have a strong hope through God.

There are no *obeloi* at the end of the text at this oracle.

Be brave ($\theta\alpha\rho\iota\ \eta\alpha\kappa$): the expression $\theta\alpha\rho\iota$ ($\theta\acute{\alpha}\rho\rho\epsilon\iota$) occurs five times in our text, see also Oracles 21, 24, 28, and 35. Cf. *Sortes Astrampsychi* (Naether), 184, and *Rhiktologion*, 211, no. 11.

Endure ($\zeta\gamma\pi\omicron\mu\iota\eta\epsilon$): see at Oracle 4. There is an interesting contrast with the previous oracle: whereas there you have to endure a short time, here the matter is more pressing.

do not grieve ($\bar{\mu}\pi\bar{\rho}\lambda\gamma\pi\eta$): cf. Fragments (Papini), 399, A II: $\lambda\gamma\omega\ \kappa\omicron\omicron\omicron\gamma\eta\ \epsilon\tau\omega\omicron\rho\eta\ \bar{\pi}\lambda\gamma\pi\eta\ \bar{\eta}\tau\alpha\varsigma\tau\alpha\zeta\omicron\kappa$, “and you know the first pain that strikes you”.

you have a strong hope through God ($\omicron\gamma(\eta)\tau\alpha\kappa\ \bar{\mu}\mu\lambda\gamma\ \bar{\pi}\omicron\gamma\zeta\epsilon\lambda\pi\iota\varsigma\ \epsilon\varsigma\tau\alpha\chi\rho\eta\gamma\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ \bar{\zeta}\bar{\iota}\bar{\tau}\bar{\mu}\ \pi\eta\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon$): cf. “Hoskyns Fragment”, 3: $\bar{\pi}\bar{\iota}\bar{\iota}\bar{\iota}\ \pi\epsilon\tau\bar{\iota}\bar{\iota}\bar{\iota}|\bar{\eta}|\epsilon\kappa\ |\acute{\eta}\theta\epsilon\lambda\pi\iota\varsigma$, “It is God who gives you hope”; and 7: $\zeta\epsilon\lambda\pi\iota\varsigma$, “hope”.

Oracle 6

Pages <12>-13

upper right corner of the right page: $\bar{i}\bar{r}$

Ζ ΑΠΧΘΕΙΣ | ΠΝΟΥΤΕ | ΣΩΤΗΡ | ΕΠΕΚΑΤΗ|ΜΑ ΛΥΘ | ΧΝΑΧΘΟΥ | ΜΠΕΘΑΓΓΕ|ΛΟΣ |
 ΝΨΜΟ|ΟΦΕ 2Λ *vacat* | ΤΕΚ2Η· ΛΥΘ || ΚΝΑΝΛΥ | ΕΤΠΑΡΗ|ΣΙΑ ΜΠΝΟΥ|ΤΕ ΕΤΝΑΤ'Α|2ΟΚ·
 ΠΛΗΝ | ΜΠΡΩΠΠΕ | ΝΑΜΕΛΗC· | ΧΕ Π2ΩΒ ΝΑ|ΩΠΠΕ ΛΗ CΕ | ΧΝΑΩΠΠΕ –

The Lord God has heard your request and he will send his angel and he will walk before you. And you will see the confidence in God that will reach you. Only do not become careless, (saying) “this matter will not happen”. Yes, it will happen.

The Lord God has heard your request (ἀνχοῖς προύγτε σωτῆρ ἐνεκαίτημα): cf. Ps. 6:10: εἰσήκουσεν κύριος τῆς δεήσεώς μου, “the Lord has heard my entreaty”; 1 Sam. 1:27 καὶ ἔδωκέν μοι κύριος τὸ αἷτημά μου, “and the Lord has granted to me my request”.

See also Fragments (Papini), 400, B II: $\lambda\gamma\omega$ $\phi\eta\alpha\tau\omega\phi\alpha\epsilon$ $\eta[\alpha\kappa]$ $\mu\pi\epsilon\kappa\alpha\iota\tau\eta\mu\alpha$ $\varepsilon\pi\omicron\upsilon\gamma\text{---}$
 $\varsigma\omicron\omicron\upsilon\gamma\text{---}\tau\bar{\iota}$, “and he (God) will grant you your request immediately”, an allusion to Ps. 19:5(6):
 $\epsilon\pi\epsilon$ $\pi\chi\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ $\chi\omega\kappa$ $\epsilon\upsilon\omicron\lambda\alpha$ $\pi\bar{\iota}\eta\kappa\alpha\iota\tau\eta\mu\alpha$ $\tau\eta\theta\omicron\upsilon$, Greek 19:6: $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omega\varsigma\alpha\iota$ $\kappa\acute{\upsilon}\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$ $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\alpha\iota\tau\eta\text{---}$
 $\mu\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\varsigma\omicron\upsilon$, “May the Lord fulfill all your requests”.

and he will send his angel (αὐτὸς ἀποστέλει τὸν ἄγγελόν του): see also Oracle 21: “he will send the angel of peace”, and Oracle 27: “he will send his good angel.” See Gen. 24:7: αὐτὸς ἀποστέλει τὸν ἄγγελόν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου, “He will send his angel before you”; cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 42, no. 39: πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελόν του ἀποστέλει, “God will send his angel”; *ibid.*, 44, no. 61: ἡ ἀγγελία μου καὶ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλω, “I will send my angel and he will guide you and he will make straight your path before you”.

and he will walk before you (ἡΐμοσσε γατεκεζη): see also Oracle 17, “the angel of the Lord will walk before you”. For the expression, see Gen. 24:40, Ex. 23:20: Καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ἵνα φυλάξῃ σε ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, ὅπως εἰσαγάγῃ σε εἰς τὴν γῆν; Ex. 23:23, 32:34, 33:2, Matt. 11:10 (and parallels): οὗτός ἐστιν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται, Ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, εἰς ζητῆ ἀνοκ .†ηταῖτηθοοϋ μπηαλγελοσ γατεκεζη, “Behold, I shall send my angel/messenger before you”.

the confidence in God (ΤΡΑΡΗΣΙΑ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ): see Oracle 4.

do not become careless (ἡπράωπε ἡμέλεις): see also ἡπᾶμελι in Oracle 11. Admonitions against being careless abound; see, for instance, Wisd. of Sol. 3:10: Οἱ δὲ ἄσβεῖς καθὰ ἐλογί-

σαντο ἔξουσιν ἐπιτιμίαν οἱ ἀμελήσαντες τοῦ δικαίου καὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἀποστάντες; Matt. 22:5 οἱ δὲ ἀμελήσαντες ἀπῆλθον ...; Heb. 2:3 πῶς ἡμεῖς ἐκφενζόμεθα τηλικαύτης ἀμελήσαντες σωτηρίας; Rhiktologion, 213, no. 30: καὶ σὺ μὴν ἀμηλῆς περὶ τοῦτο, “and you, do not be careless about this”. Both the adjective and the verb occur in documentary Coptic texts, as catalogued by Förster (*Wörterbuch*, s.v.): the adjective $\lambda\mu\epsilon\lambda\eta\varsigma$ shows up in 3 letters (O.CrumVC 99, 4; P.Mon.Epiph. 140, 35 and O.Crum 355, 9) and once as substantive ($\mu\eta\tau\alpha\mu\epsilon\lambda\eta\varsigma$) (O.Brit-Mus.Copt. I, LIII, 2, 3).

Yes, it will happen (ⲥⲉ ⲕⲏⲗⲟⲩⲱⲛⲉ): this phrase occurs also in Oracle 24.

Oracle 7

Pages <14>–15

upper right corner of the right page: iē

ⲭ ⲕⲥⲟⲟϥⲛ | ⲱ ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ | ⲭⲉ ⲁⲕⲣ̅ⲧⲉⲕ | ⲉⲟⲙ ⲧⲏⲣ̅ⲥ ⲛ̅ | ⲕⲉⲥⲟⲡ̅ⲧ̅ ⲙ̅ | ⲡⲕ̅ⲧ̅ⲥⲏϥ̅ ⲛ̅ | ⲕⲁⲕⲱ ⲛ̅ⲥⲁ |
ⲟⲥⲉ ⲑⲓ ⲧ̅ⲧⲱ(ⲏ) | ⲑⲓ ⲡⲟⲕⲉⲙⲟⲥ | ⲡⲁⲛⲏ ⲉⲕ | ⲱⲁⲛⲏⲑⲣⲱ | ⲛⲟϥⲕⲟϥ̅ⲓ | ⲫⲱⲃ ⲛⲁⲣ̅ | ⲱⲕⲱ
ⲉⲃⲟⲕ | ⲑⲓⲧ̅ⲙ̅ ⲡⲏⲟϥ̅ⲧⲉ ⲛ̅ⲁⲃⲣⲁ | ⲑⲁⲙ ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ ⲓⲥⲁ | ⲁⲕ ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ ⲓⲁ | ⲕⲱⲃ̅ⲧ̅ –

You know, o human, that you did your utmost again. You did not gain anything but loss, dispute, and war. But if you are patient a little, the matter will prosper through the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

You know (ⲕⲥⲟⲟϥⲛ): see also Fragments (Papini), 399 A II.

You did not gain anything (ⲛ̅ⲡⲕ̅ⲧ̅ⲥⲏϥ̅ ⲛ̅ⲕⲁⲕⲱ): see “Hoskyns Fragment”, 5: ⲏⲕⲧ̅ⲙ̅ⲧ̅ⲥⲏϥ̅ ⲓⲛ̅ⲓⲛ̅,
“you will gain nothing”.

if you are patient (ⲉⲕⲱⲁⲛⲏⲑⲣⲱ): see also Oracles 9 and 31 and P.Oxy.Coptic inv. 67 (a):
ⲉⲕⲱⲁⲛⲏⲑⲣⲱⲑⲏⲧ̅ⲧ̅ ⲛ̅ⲕⲟϥ̅ⲓ, “if you are patient a little”.

dispute (ⲧ̅ⲧⲱ(ⲏ)): see P.Vat.Copt. 1, 48, no. 175: ⲟϥ̅ⲓⲛ̅ ⲟϥ̅ⲧ̅ⲧⲱⲏ ⲛⲁⲱⲱⲛⲉ | ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲏⲥⲱⲥ
ⲕⲏⲕⲁⲣⲟ, “There will be a dispute, after that you will win”.

war (ⲡⲟⲕⲉⲙⲟⲥ): ⲡόλεμος, “war, battle, fight”. Cf. “Hoskyns Fragment”, 7: ⲟϥ̅ⲓⲛⲁⲟ̅
ⲙ̅ⲡⲟⲓⲁⲉⲓⲙⲟⲥ, “a great war”.

the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (ⲡⲏⲟϥ̅ⲧⲉ ⲛ̅ⲁⲃⲣⲁⲑⲁⲙ ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ ⲓⲥⲁⲕ ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ ⲓⲁⲕⲱⲃ̅ⲧ̅): see Ex. 3:6:
“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob”
(Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρὸς σου, θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ θεὸς Ἰακώβ); Acts 7:32:
“I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob” (Ἐγὼ ὁ θεὸς τῶν πα-
τέρων σου, ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ); Ex. 2:24; 1 Chron. 29:18: “O Lord, the God
of Abraham, and Isaac and Israel (i. e. Jacob), our fathers” (κύριε ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ
καὶ Ἰσραὴλ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν); Ex. 6:3, 8; 33:1; Deut. 9:27; 2 Kings 13:23; Bar. 1:39. Cf.
P.Vat.Copt. 1, 42, no. 47: ⲡⲏⲟϥ̅ⲧⲉ ⲡⲏⲉⲓⲱⲧⲉ | ⲁⲃⲣⲁⲑⲁⲙ ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲓⲥⲁⲕ | ⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲓⲁⲕⲱⲃ̅ⲧ̅ ⲛ̅ⲁⲕⲓⲙⲟⲓⲉⲧ̅ⲧ̅
ⲑⲏⲧ̅ⲕⲓ, “[The] God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will guide [you]”.

Oracle 8

Pages <16–17>

Ⲛ ⲙⲓⲱⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ | ⲥⲙ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϣ|ⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲙ|ⲙⲟⲕ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩ|ⲡⲟⲛⲏⲣⲓⲁ | ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲧⲉ | ⲡⲥⲉⲟⲩⲏⲩⲩ |
ⲙⲙⲟⲕ ⲁⲛ· | ⲡⲉⲓ ⲡⲉⲕ|ϫⲁⲗⲁⲉ ⲁⲩ|ⲉⲡⲓⲱⲟⲩⲁⲉⲩⲩ || ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲡⲉⲕ|ϣⲟⲡ ⲥⲙ ⲧⲉⲩ|ⲡⲟⲛⲏⲣⲓⲁ ⲉⲧ |
ⲥⲙ ⲡⲉⲩⲩⲏⲧ· | ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲕⲁⲥⲧⲏⲕ | ⲉⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ | ⲡⲓⲙⲟⲟⲱⲉ | ⲥⲙ ⲡⲉⲩⲟⲩⲉⲥⲁⲥⲏⲉ ⲱⲁ
ⲉ|ⲡⲉⲥ· —

Fight for yourself in what has happened to you, because it is a human evil. Your enemies are not far from you. They have plotted against you again due to the evil that is in their hearts. But trust in God and walk in his commandments forever.

Fight for yourself in what has happened to you, because it is a human evil (ⲙⲓⲱⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲥⲙ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϣⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲡⲟⲛⲏⲣⲓⲁ ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲧⲉ): this sentence is, with small orthographic variations, also present in P.Oxy.Coptic Inv. 68↓. The verb ‘to fight’ (ⲙⲓⲱⲉ) occurs in Oracles 8, 18, 30, and 31. There is also fighting language in Oracle 19 and 36, expressed with the verb ⲧ·ⲟⲩⲱⲉ-, ‘to fight against, oppose’, and in 28 as ⲧ·ⲙⲏ-, ‘to fight with’.

Your enemies (ⲡⲉⲕⲁⲗⲁⲉ): the expression occurs five times in our text, see oracles 16, 18, 28, 31. Cf. “Hoskyns Fragment”, 2: ⲥⲁⲩⲩⲏⲉ [ⲓ. ⲡⲉⲛⲡⲉⲕⲁⲗⲁⲏⲟⲩ, “Your enemies have fallen”, and 8 [ⲡⲉ]ⲕⲁⲉⲁⲉ, “your enemy”; *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 134, no. 7.3: ⲧⲓⲙⲏⲧⲟⲛ ⲥⲉ ⲧⲓⲑⲉⲓ ⲃⲁⲓⲙⲱⲛ ⲉⲕⲑⲣⲱⲛ ⲧⲉ ⲕⲣⲁⲧⲓⲥⲓⲥ, “... you will be superior over your enemies”; *ibid.*, 180, no. 56.3: ⲉⲕⲑⲣⲱⲛ γάρ σοι ὄρῳ, “For I see something/someone hostile for you”; *ibid.*, 195, no. 5.4: γεῖν προδήλως ἐπιδιδόνς ἐχθροῖς χέρας “in full view offering your enemies the hands”. On enemies in the *Sortes Sangallenses*, see Klingshirn, “Christian Divination”, 108–9.

They have plotted against you (ⲁⲩⲉⲡⲓⲱⲟⲩⲁⲉⲩⲩ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ): ἐπιβουλεύω is a common verb in Greek literature but occurs only twice in the Septuagint (Esther 8:12; Prov. 17:26) and not in the New Testament.

trust in God (ⲕⲁⲥⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ): see also Oracles 11, 27, 30, and about not trusting vain people, see Oracle 13, 33. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 44, no. 56: ⲕⲁⲥⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ; *ibid.* 45, no. 69: [ⲡⲉⲧⲏⲁ]ⲱⲁⲉ ⲡⲙⲁⲕ ⲉ[ϣⲟⲩ]ⲱⲱ ⲉⲣⲕⲣⲟ[ϣ ⲉ]ⲣⲟⲕ [ⲙ]ⲡⲣ·. ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲕⲁⲥⲏⲧ [ⲉⲡ]ⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ϫⲉ ⲡⲓⲧⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ [ⲧⲉⲣ]ⲉⲧⲉⲩⲏ ⲥⲟⲩⲧⲱⲛ, “Do not give in to him who will speak with you, wanting to beguile/deceive you. But trust in God. For it is he whose path is straight”.

walk in his commandments (ⲡⲓⲙⲟⲟⲱⲉ ⲥⲙ ⲡⲉⲩⲟⲩⲉⲥⲁⲥⲏⲉ): *walking* and *commandments* are frequently associated in the Deuteronomistic redaction and writings, see Lev. 26:3; Deut. 8:6; 11:22; 13:4; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16; Josh. 22:5; 1 Kings 2:3; 3:14; 6:12; 8:58; 8:61; 11:38;

and 2Kings 22:3. The terms also appear together in 2Chron. 34:31. See especially Deut. 30:15–16: “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.” See also 2John 6: ἵνα περιπατῶμεν κατὰ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ; ⲭⲉⲕⲁⲥ ⲉⲛⲉⲙⲟⲟⲩⲉ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲛⲉⲕⲉⲛⲧⲟⲗⲏ, “that we walk according to his commandments” etc.; P.Vat.Copt. 1, 41, no. 33: ⲙⲟⲟⲩⲱⲛⲉ ⲛⲏⲏⲓⲉⲛⲧⲟⲗⲏ] (Van Lantschoot’s edition here is unclear as far as the brackets are concerned).

Oracle 9

Pages <18>–19

upper right corner of the right page: $\overline{\text{io}}$

ⲭ ⲧⲱⲟϥⲛ ⲛⲓⲃⲱⲕ ⲉⲛ ⲟϥⲥⲟⲟϥⲧⲛ ⲙⲓⲛⲓⲃⲱⲕ ⲛⲟϥⲉⲟⲟϥ ⲛⲥⲁ ⲟϥⲉⲟⲟϥ ⲭⲉ ⲧⲁⲓ ⲧⲉ |
ⲧⲉϥⲛⲟϥ ⲛⲧⲁⲓⲛⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ | ⲧⲱⲟϥ [[...]] | ⲛⲁⲕ ⲙⲟⲛⲓⲟⲛ ⲁϥⲕⲁⲧⲟⲓⲓⲓⲟⲣⲓ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ | ⲉⲓⲙⲟϥⲧⲧⲉ
ⲁⲁⲓⲁⲁ ⲁⲣⲓ ⲉⲁⲣⲱⲉⲛⲧⲧⲉ ⲛⲟϥⲕⲟϥⲓ

Get up and go immediately. Do not delay. For this is the moment that God appointed for you. They have simply accused you to (the point of) death, but be patient just a little. –

Get up and go immediately (ⲧⲱⲟϥⲛ ⲛⲓⲃⲱⲕ ⲉⲛ ⲟϥⲥⲟⲟϥⲧⲛ): cf. Oracles 26 and 31, and Fragments (Papini), 400 B1: “Walk and go immediately.”

ⲉⲛ ⲟϥⲥⲟⲟϥⲧⲛ also occurs in Oracles 25, 26, 31, and 34. See also P.Vat.Copt. 1. 43, no. 54; *Sortes Astramsychi* (εὐθύς; ἤδη).

They have accused you (ⲁϥⲕⲁⲧⲟⲓⲓⲓⲟⲣⲓ): for Greek κατηγορέω, “accuse, reject, frown upon”.

Do not delay (ⲙⲓⲛⲓⲃⲱⲕ ⲛⲟϥⲉⲟⲟϥ ⲛⲥⲁ ⲟϥⲉⲟⲟϥ): see also Oracle 31. Literally: “do not add day to day.” For the expression see Crum 730b, and “Instructions of Apa Pachomius the Archimandrite”, folio 28a (Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha*, 155): ⲙⲓⲛⲓⲃⲱⲕ ⲁⲙⲉⲗⲉⲓ ⲉⲕⲓⲃⲱⲕ ⲛⲥⲁ ⲉⲟⲟϥ, “Be not careless, and do not let day after day pass unheeding”.

be patient (ⲁⲣⲓ ⲉⲁⲣⲱⲉⲛⲧⲧⲉ): see Oracle 7.

Oracle 10

Pages <20>–21

upper right corner of the right page: κ̅λ̅

ⲓ ⲛⲣⲏⲛ ⲙⲓⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ | ⲛⲁⲩⲱⲡⲉ | ⲛⲙⲙⲁⲕ | ⲁⲅⲱ ⲕⲛⲁⲓⲟⲩⲭⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ | ⲥⲏⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲟⲕⲓ ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲕⲉⲣⲏⲧ ⲙⲓⲙⲟⲩ ⲭⲟⲕⲱ̅ | ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲭⲉ | ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ | ⲙⲉⲩⲡⲓⲣⲁⲗⲉ | ⲛⲗⲗⲁⲅ ⲛⲓⲧⲟⲕ ⲙⲙⲁⲧⲉ | ⲡⲉⲧⲟ ⲛⲁⲧⲓⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ –

The peace of God will be with you and you will be saved from the affliction that has come upon you. Fulfill what you promised, because God does not tempt anyone. It is you only who are disobedient.

The peace of God will be with you (ⲛⲣⲏⲛ ⲙⲓⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲩⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲙⲙⲁⲕ): see Luke 24:36 and John 20:19, 21: εἰρήνῃ ὑμῖν. Cf. Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:3, Gal. 1:3, Phil. 1:2, Col. 1:2, 2 Thess 1:2, 1 Tim. 1:2, 2 Tim. 1:2, Phil. 3, 2 John 1:3: “Grace to you and peace from God the father”; Coptic: ⲛⲣⲏⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲥⲏⲧⲁⲥ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ; *Wörterbuch* (Förster), 231–3; BKU III, 411.3: ⲧⲏⲣⲏⲛ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲓ ⲡⲁⲥⲁⲛ; P.Fay.Copt. 26.3: ⲧⲏⲣⲏⲛ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲓ ⲛⲉⲕ; P.Mich.Copt. 12.2: ⲧⲏⲣⲏⲛ ⲙⲡⲟⲩⲧⲓ ⲛⲏⲕ; P.MoscowCopt. 22, 16: ⲉⲛⲣⲏⲛ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲓ ⲛⲉⲙⲉ, “the peace of God”; *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.11 (ed. Metzger): Ἡ εἰρήνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, “The peace of God be with you all”. See also Barsanuphius and John, Epistle 92, line 44 (*Correspondance* I.2): Ἡ εἰρήνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἔσται μεθ’ ὑμῶν “the peace of God will be with you”.

P.Vat.Copt. I, 40, no. 32: ⲁⲅⲱ ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲓ ⲛⲟⲩⲙⲏⲧⲓⲟⲛⲓ ⲛⲥⲏⲧⲱ̅ ⲛⲓⲡⲁⲣⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁⲗⲉⲓ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ ⲥⲏⲧⲣⲏⲛⲓⲛⲓ ⲙⲏⲛⲭⲱ̅, “and you will find rest in it and will be confident in the peace of the [Lord]”.

you will be saved from the affliction that has come upon you (ⲕⲛⲁⲟⲩⲭⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲥⲏⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲟⲕⲓ): the word *affliction* (ⲉⲃⲟⲗⲓⲥ) also occurs in Oracles 16, 25, and 32. Oracle 32 has the same expression as here; Oracle 16 shares the phrase “the affliction that has come upon you.” See also Griechisches Losbuch, 315, no. 14; 316, no. 23; 317, no. 27, and 317, no. 32. This word does not occur in the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, nor in the dice oracles (*Kleinasiatische Losorakel*).

Fulfill what you promised (ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲕⲉⲣⲏⲧ ⲙⲓⲙⲟⲩ ⲭⲟⲕⲱ̅ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ): cf. P.Vat.Copt. I, 47, no. 164: ⲁⲣⲓⲡⲙⲉⲉⲅⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲉⲣⲏⲧ ⲛⲓⲧⲗⲗⲁⲩ, “Remember your promise and keep it” or “do it”; P.Vat. Copt. I, 50, no. 198: ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲕⲥⲏⲧⲓⲟⲟⲧⲕⲓ ⲉⲣⲟⲩ ⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲛⲓⲁⲓ ⲭⲟⲕⲱ̅ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ, “What you have attempted, the Lord will finish”.

God does not tempt anyone (ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙⲉⲩⲡⲓⲣⲁⲗⲉ ⲛⲗⲗⲁⲅ): see James 1:13: ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲙⲉⲩⲡⲓⲣⲁⲗⲉ ⲛⲗⲗⲁⲅ ⲉⲡⲡⲉⲟⲟⲩⲱ̅ ⲙⲉⲩⲡⲓⲣⲁⲗⲉ ⲛⲓⲧⲟⲩ ⲛⲗⲗⲁⲅ, “For God does not tempt anyone

to evil, he does not tempt anyone”. See also 1 Cor. 10:13. Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 47, no. 72 (with the noun instead of the verb): $\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{r}}\overline{\text{c}}\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{k}} \overline{\text{e}}\overline{\text{x}}\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{k}} \overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{y}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{k}} \overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{o}}\overline{\text{y}}\overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{e}}\overline{\text{i}}\overline{\text{r}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{s}}\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{o}}\overline{\text{s}} \overline{\text{x}}\overline{\text{e}} \overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{b}}\overline{\text{o}}\overline{\text{m}} \overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{o}}\overline{\text{k}} \overline{\text{e}}\overline{\text{c}}\overline{\text{i}}$ $\overline{\text{z}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{r}}\overline{\text{o}}\overline{\text{y}}$, “Do not bring a temptation upon yourself alone, for you cannot bear it” (an allusion to 1 Cor. 10:13).

disobedient ($\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{t}}\overline{\text{c}}\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{t}}\overline{\text{m}}$): see also Oracle 22 ($\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{t}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{t}}\overline{\text{c}}\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{t}}\overline{\text{m}}$); Fragments (Papini), 399, A II: $\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{i}}\overline{\text{n}} \overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{m}}\overline{\text{o}}\overline{\text{k}} \overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{e}}\overline{\text{t}}\overline{\text{o}} \overline{\text{p}}\overline{\text{a}}\overline{\text{t}}\overline{\text{c}}\overline{\text{w}}\overline{\text{t}}\overline{\text{m}}$, “you that are not obedient”.

Oracle 11

Pages <22>–23

upper right corner of the right page: κῑ

ⲭ ⲉⲱⲭⲉ ⲕⲓⲧⲏⲱ ⲉⲣⲡⲉⲓⲛⲱⲃ ⲁⲣⲓⲥ | ⲙⲡⲣⲁⲙⲉⲗⲓ | ⲭⲉ ⲁⲡⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲁⲉ | ⲡⲁⲱⲃ ⲉⲣⲁⲧⲱ
ⲛⲧⲟⲕ | ⲙⲙⲁⲧⲉ || ⲡⲉⲧⲕⲧⲟ | ⲙⲙⲟⲥ ⲉⲡⲁⲗⲟⲩⲱⲧⲱ ⲙⲙⲟⲛ | ⲙⲛ ⲡⲉⲑⲑⲟⲩⲱⲧⲱ | ⲛⲁⲧⲁⲗⲟⲕ |
ⲕⲁⲗⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲛⲓⲧⲱⲙⲣⲁⲛⲧⲱ ⲥⲏⲁⲩⲱ –

If you decide to do this matter, do it. Do not be careless, because God established the matter. It is you only who turns back. No, there is no evil that shall reach you. Trust in God and do not be of two minds.

If you decide to do this matter, do it (ⲉⲱⲭⲉ ⲕⲓⲧⲏⲱ ⲉⲣⲡⲉⲓⲛⲱⲃ ⲁⲣⲓⲥ): cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 47, no. 164: ⲁⲣⲓⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲉⲣⲏⲧⲱ ⲛⲓⲧⲁⲗⲁⲥ, “Remember your promise and do it”.

Do not be careless (ⲙⲡⲣⲁⲙⲉⲗⲓ): see Oracle 6.

God established the matter (ⲁⲡⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲁⲉ ⲡⲁⲱⲃ ⲉⲣⲁⲧⲱ): perhaps an allusion to Ps. 95:10: ⲁⲥⲧⲁⲗⲟ ⲉⲣⲁⲧⲱ ⲛⲧⲟⲓⲕⲟⲩⲙⲉⲛⲏ, “he established the inhabited world”.

No evil shall reach you (ⲙⲙⲟⲛ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲉⲑⲑⲟⲩⲱⲧⲱ ⲛⲁⲧⲁⲗⲟⲕ): see also Oracle 30. The phrase alludes to Ps. 90 (91): 10: ⲟⲩ ⲡⲣⲟⲥⲉⲗⲉⲩⲥⲉⲧⲁⲓ ⲡⲣⲟⲥ ⲥⲉ ⲕⲁⲕⲁ; ⲙⲙⲛ ⲡⲉⲑⲑⲟⲩⲱⲧⲱ ⲛⲁⲗⲱⲛ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ, “no evil shall befall you”.

P.Vat.Copt. 1, 44, no. 56 shares in reverse order two phrases with this oracle: ⲕⲁⲗⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲙⲡⲡⲉⲑⲑⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ, “Trust in God, no evil will happen to you”. See also *ibid.* 41, no. 34: ⲙⲓⲡⲡⲉⲧⲑⲑⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲗⲱⲛⲉ ⲓⲛⲁⲓⲕ ⲗⲁⲡⲉⲓⲛⲱⲃ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲓⲕⲟⲩⲱⲭⲏⲩⲱ ⲓⲁⲣ, “No evil will happen to you from this matter, for you are safe”.

Trust in God (ⲕⲁⲗⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ): P.Vat.Copt. 1, 44, no. 56, see above; Also *ibid.*, 45, no. 69: ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲕⲁⲗⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲭⲉ ⲛⲧⲟⲥ ⲡⲉ ⲓⲧⲉⲣⲓⲉⲧⲉⲥⲓⲛ ⲥⲟⲩⲱⲧⲱⲛ, “But trust in God for it is he whose path is straight”.

Do not be of two minds (ⲛⲓⲧⲱⲙⲣⲁⲛⲧⲱ ⲥⲏⲁⲩⲱ): see above at the *incipit*.

Oracle 12

Pages <24>–25

upper right corner of the right page: ⲕⲉ

ⲭ ⲧⲡⲓⲥⲧⲓⲥ ⲉⲧ | ⲥⲙ ⲡⲉⲕⲥⲏⲧ | ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲁⲗⲥ | ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲟⲩⲛⲧⲕ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ | ⲙⲙⲁⲩ ⲛⲓⲃⲟⲛⲟⲥ |
ⲕⲛⲁⲣⲥⲙⲙⲉ | <ⲙ>ⲙⲟⲕ ⲥⲛ ⲧⲉ || ⲥⲓⲛ ⲉⲕⲛⲁⲃⲱⲕ ⲛⲥⲏⲧⲕ ⲙⲟⲛⲟⲛ | ⲙⲡⲣⲁⲓⲕⲁⲗⲥ ⲭⲉ
ⲙⲛⲓⲃⲱⲃ ⲛⲁⲧⲓⲃⲟⲙ ⲛⲛⲁⲥⲓⲣⲙ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ —

Do not let go of the faith in your heart. You have God as helper. He will guide you on the path on which you will go. At all events, do not doubt because nothing is impossible for God.

This oracle occurs also in Fragments (Papini), 399, AI (my revised edition): ⲧⲡⲓⲥⲧⲓⲥ ⲉⲧⲥⲙⲡⲉⲕⲥⲏⲧ ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲁⲗⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲟⲩⲛⲧⲕ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲙⲙⲁⲩ ⲛⲓⲃⲟⲛⲟⲥ. ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲧⲟⲩ ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁⲣⲥⲙⲙⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ ⲥⲛ ⲧⲉⲥⲓⲛ ⲉⲧⲕⲓⲛⲁⲃⲱⲕ ⲛⲥⲏⲧⲕ. [ⲙⲟ]ⲛⲟⲛ ⲙⲡⲣⲧⲓⲥ[ⲁⲗⲥ] ⲭⲉ ⲙⲡⲁⲗⲁⲩ, “Do not let go of the faith in your heart. You have God as a helper. And he is the one who will guide you on the path on which you will go. Only do not doubt because no[thing ...]”.

The Vatican manuscript has a shorter oracle, that does not mention God: P.Vat.Copt. 1, 43, no. 53: ⲧⲡⲓⲥⲧⲓⲥ ⲉⲧⲥⲙⲡⲉⲕⲥⲏⲧ ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲁⲗⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲟⲩⲧⲁⲓⲕ ⲙⲙⲁⲩ ⲡⲟⲩⲃⲟⲛⲟⲥ, “Do not let go of the faith in your heart; it is of help to you.” For the *path that you will go*, see also *ibid.*, 43, no. 48: ⲥⲛⲧⲉⲥⲓⲛ ⲉⲧⲕⲓⲙⲟⲟⲩⲱⲉⲓ ⲛⲥⲏⲧⲕ, “on the path that you are walking on” (perhaps reconstruct the Coptic as ⲉⲧⲕⲓⲃⲱⲕ); and *ibid.*, 44, no. 61: ⲛⲁⲧⲓⲃⲟⲙ ⲙⲡⲣⲁⲓⲕⲁⲗⲥ ⲛⲁⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧ [ⲥⲏⲧⲕ] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲁⲩⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓ ⲛⲧⲉⲕⲓⲥⲓⲛ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲙⲧⲟ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ, “I will send my angel and he will guide you and he will make straight your path before you”.

See also Griechisches Losbuch, 313, no. 5 (lines 16–8): ὅπου γὰρ θέλεις, ἄνθρωπε, πορεύου ταχέως εἰς ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν σου καὶ μὴ διστάσης. τὸν θεὸν γὰρ ἔχεις βοηθὸν σου, “For wherever you want, o human, travel quickly on that road of yours and do not doubt. For you have God as your helper”, Rhiktologion, 214, no. 41: Ὁ θεὸς δῶκε σοι ὅπερ ἐλπίζεις καὶ αἰτεῖς παρ’ αὐτοῦ. Αὐτός ἐστι βοηθός σου καὶ κατευθύνει τὰς ὁδοὺς σου, “May God give you what you hope and ask from him. He is your helper and makes straight your paths.” See also *ibid.*, 212, no. 17 and 21.

God as helper (ⲟⲩⲛⲧⲕ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲙⲙⲁⲩ ⲛⲓⲃⲟⲛⲟⲥ): psalmic language, perhaps an allusion to Ps. 17:3: Ὁ θεός μου βοηθός μου, καὶ ἐλπὶς ἐπ’ αὐτόν, “My God is my helper, and I will hope in him”. See also Hoskyns Fragment, 2: [ⲛⲓⲧⲉⲩ]ⲉⲱⲟⲛⲉ [ⲛⲉ]ⲕⲓⲃⲟⲛⲟⲉⲓⲁ [“[God (?) will] be of help [to] you”].

Do not doubt (ⲙⲡⲣⲁⲓⲕⲁⲗⲥ): see also Oracle 15. Cf. Griechisches Losbuch, 313, no. 5: πορεύου ταχέως εἰς ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν σου καὶ μὴ διστάσης, “Walk quickly on this path of yours and do not doubt”; and *ibid.* 314, no. 10.

nothing is impossible for God (μηζωβ πατσομ πηαζρμ πηογτε): see Gen. 18:14: μὴ ἀδυνατεῖ παρὰ τῷ θεῷ ῥῆμα, and Luke 1:37: ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσκει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα, καὶ οὐκ ἔστι ἀλλὰ πᾶσα ῥατσομ πηαζρμ πηογτε, “Because no word shall be impossible with God”. Cf. Matt. 19:26 (Mark 10:27, Luke 18:27): Παρὰ ἀνθρώποις τοῦτο ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν, παρὰ δὲ θεῷ πάντα δυνατά, πηαζρμ πηογτε καὶ ἡμῖν ἀλλὰ πατσομ, “because for God nothing is impossible.” Also quoted, for instance, in Rhiktologion, 211, no. 5: τὸ πρᾶγμα ὅπου μελετᾷς νὰ κάμῃς μέγα ἐστίν· ὅμως ἐπιμελοῦ· οὐκ ἀδυνατεῖ παρὰ τῷ θεῷ πᾶν ῥῆμα, “The matter that you plan to do is great; nevertheless, take care, nothing is impossible with God”.

Oracle 13

Pages <26>–27, end of quire 2, begin of quire 3.

upper right corner of the left page: ⲛ̅; upper left corner of the right page: ⲛ̅; upper right corner of the right page: ⲛ̅ⲥ

ⲓ ⲙⲡⲣⲙⲉⲉⲃⲉ ⲥⲉ ⲉⲡⲧⲁⲭⲣⲟ ⲥⲱ ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲥⲱ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲭⲣⲟ ⲁⲛ ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩ ⲥⲱ ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲣⲟ
ⲥⲉ(ⲛ)ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲓⲥⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲭⲉ ⲙⲛⲁⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲟⲩⲟⲩⲉⲱ || ⲉⲧⲥⲟⲩⲉ ⲟⲩⲉⲛⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲥⲓⲭⲱⲕ
ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩ ⲙⲡⲣⲟⲕⲁⲥⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲛⲱⲗⲭⲉ ⲛⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧⲱⲟⲩⲉⲛⲧ

Do not think therefore about strength, o human. You will not be victorious now. You will endure great suffering because the difficult time has not yet passed by for you now. Do not trust the words of vain people.

There are no *obeloi* at the end of the text.

strength (ⲧⲁⲭⲣⲟ): see also Oracle 19 (and verb at 14).

be victorious (ⲭⲣⲟ): see also Oracles 14, 18, 28, and 34. Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 46, no. 154: ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲣⲟ ⲥⲙⲡⲧⲣⲉⲕⲓⲭⲓⲭⲁⲛ, “You will be victorious [by going to] trial”; *ibid.*, 48, no. 175: ⲟⲩⲛ ⲟⲩⲧⲱⲛ ⲛⲁⲱⲱⲛⲉ ⲙⲡⲛⲟⲩ ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲣⲟ, “There will be a dispute, after that you will be victorious”; and *ibid.*, 49, no. 192: ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲣⲟ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲛⲁⲱⲗⲭⲉ, “You will be victorious because of this word”.

now (ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩ): twice in this answer, but not elsewhere in the text. Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 46, no. 157: ⲛⲥⲱⲩ ⲛⲁⲟⲩⲱⲛⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩ, “The thing will be revealed now”; also Hoskyns Fragment, 5: ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩ ⲡⲉⲟⲩⲓⲭⲓⲉⲱ ⲡⲉ, “Now is the time”.

Do not trust the words of vain people (ⲙⲡⲣⲟⲕⲁⲥⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲛⲱⲗⲭⲉ ⲛⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧⲱⲟⲩⲉⲛⲧ): *on trust*, see Oracle 17. Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 41, no. 36: ⲡⲉⲩⲱⲱⲭⲏⲉ ⲱⲟⲩⲉⲛⲧ ⲁⲭⲱ ⲓⲉⲟⲩⲟⲩ ⲉⲙⲁⲧⲉ, “Reject [those who] advise you. Their counsel/advice is vain and very bad/evil”; *ibid.*, 45, no. 69: ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁⲱⲗⲭⲉ ⲛⲙⲙⲁⲕ ⲉⲓⲱⲩⲱⲱ ⲉⲣⲕⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲓⲣⲟⲕ ⲙⲛⲡⲣⲟⲩ. ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲕⲁⲥⲏⲧⲕ ⲉⲛⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲭⲉ ⲛⲧⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ ⲓⲧⲉⲣⲓⲧⲉⲩⲱⲛ ⲥⲟⲩⲧⲱⲛ, “Do not give in to him who will speak with you, wanting to deceive you. But trust in God for it is he whose path is straight”. And *Sortes Sanctorum*, 120, no. c. iii. ii (also c. iii. iii): *blandis sermonibus te decipere volunt*, “They want to deceive you with flattering words”.

Oracle 14

Pages <28>–29

upper right corner of the right page: ⲕⲟ

Ⲛ ⲥⲉⲛⲁⲧⲁⲛ|ⲛⲟϥⲧⲕ | ⲁϥⲱ ⲕⲛⲁⲣ̄|ⲭⲟ ^{vacat} ⲉ|ⲡⲉἴⲛⲱⲃ | ⲧⲁⲭⲣⲉ ⲡⲉⲕ|ⲛⲧⲓ ⲟϥ ⲉ|ⲃⲟⲁ
ⲛⲧⲧ̄ⲙ | ⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲡⲉ | ⲡⲛⲱⲃ || ⲙⲡⲣⲣⲛⲟⲧⲉ | ⲛⲧⲟⲕ ⲛⲱⲃ | ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲕⲛⲁ|ⲁⲁϥ ⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ
ⲱⲟⲟⲡ | ⲛ̄ⲙⲙⲁⲕ.

They will trust you and you will be victorious in this matter. Strengthen your heart.
This matter is from God. Fear not. As for you, every thing you will do, God is with
you. –

ⲕⲛⲁⲣ̄ⲭⲟ: metathesis for ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲣⲟ

victorious: see above at Oracle 13.

Fear not (ⲙⲡⲣⲣⲛⲟⲧⲉ): common biblical and divinatory idiom, e.g. Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:30: μὴ φοβοῦ, ⲙⲡⲣⲣⲛⲟⲧⲉ. Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 43, no. 54: [ⲙ]ⲡⲣⲣⲛⲟⲧⲉ ⲛⲧⲧ̄ⲙ ⲙⲡⲉⲓ|ⲛⲱⲃ, “Do not fear this thing”; *ibid.*, 44 no. 59: ⲙⲡⲣⲣⲛⲟⲧⲉ ⲥⲉⲛⲁⲃⲱ ⲱⲧⲣ̄ⲧⲱⲣ̄ⲕ ⲁⲛ, “Don’t fear, they will not be able to trouble you”; and *ibid.*, 50 no. 196: ⲙⲡⲣⲣⲛⲟⲧⲉ ⲕ[ⲛⲁⲭⲣⲟ] ⲉⲡⲉⲓⲛⲱⲃ, “Do not fear. You [will be victorious] in this thing”. The exhortation μὴ φοβοῦ occurs 15 times in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* (Naether, 179).

every thing you will do, God is with you (ⲛⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲕⲛⲁⲁⲁϥ ⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲛ̄ⲙⲙⲁⲕ): see Gen. 21:22: ὁ θεὸς μετὰ σοῦ ἐν πάσιν, οἷς ἐὰν ποιῇς, “God will be with you in all that you do” (this verse is not available in Sahidic).

Oracle 15

Pages <30–31>

ⲓ ⲱ ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ | ⲕⲓ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ | ⲛ̅ⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ | ⲛ̅ⲱⲡⲛⲓⲙⲟⲩ | ⲛ̅ⲱ ⲟⲩⲙⲉ|ⲉⲩⲩⲉ ⲛⲧⲉ | ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ |
ⲭⲉ ⲧⲉⲓⲭ ⲙ̅|ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ | ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁⲥⲭⲱⲥ || ⲉⲣⲟⲕⲥ ⲙ̅|ⲡⲣ̅ⲧⲓⲥⲁⲗⲁⲩⲉ ⲛ̅ⲙ̅ ⲡⲉⲕ|ⲛⲧⲥ
ⲛ̅ⲙⲟ|ⲟⲩⲱⲉ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅|ⲡⲱⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅|ⲡⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧ|ⲱⲟⲩⲩⲧⲥ

O human, bear every thing and give thanks with a thought of God. Because it is God's hand that was upon you. Do not doubt in your heart nor walk in the counsels of vain people. –

bear everything and give thanks with a thought of God (ⲕⲓ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ ⲛ̅ⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲛ̅ⲱⲡⲛⲓⲙⲟⲩ ⲛ̅ⲱ ⲟⲩⲙⲉⲩⲩⲉ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ): perhaps an allusion to Col. 1:11–2: ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυναμούμενοι κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ εἰς πάσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν, μετὰ χαρᾶς. εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ ...; εὐοχῇ ἐξυπομονῇ ἡμῖν ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲙⲓⲧⲁⲣⲱⲛⲧⲥ. ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲱⲡⲛⲓⲙⲟⲩ ⲡⲧⲙ ⲡⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲩⲱⲉ, “May you be made strong with all strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father ...”

See also P.Vat.Copt. 1, 46, no. 72: ⲙ̅ⲡⲣⲥⲱⲕ ⲉⲭⲱⲕ ⲙⲁⲩⲗⲁⲕ ⲛⲟⲩⲡⲉⲓⲣⲁⲥⲙⲟⲥ ⲭⲉⲙ̅ⲡⲱⲃⲟⲙ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲕ ⲉⲕⲓ ⲛⲁⲣⲟⲕ, “Do not bring a temptation upon yourself alone, for you cannot bear it”; *ibid.*, 46, no. 156: ⲕⲓ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲛⲟⲩⲕⲟⲩⲩ|ⲛ̅| ⲛⲟⲩⲉⲓⲱ, “Bear for yourself a little while”.

God's hand (ⲧⲉⲓⲭ ⲙ̅|ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ): also in Oracle 36. See also Oracle 28: ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ ⲧⲉⲕⲉⲓⲭ ⲡⲟⲩⲛⲁⲙ, “with his right hand”; and 17 ⲛⲉⲛⲛⲩⲩⲉ ⲡⲛⲉⲕⲉⲓⲭ, “the works of your hands”. The phrase “the hand of God” (Greek ἡ χεὶρ τοῦ θεοῦ) is a common biblical expression: e. g. Deut. 2:15, Prov. 21:1; Eccles. 2:24, 9:1, Ezek. 7:9, 28; 8:18, 22; 12:8, Wisd. of Sol. 3: 1.

Do not doubt (ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ⲡⲣ̅ⲧⲓⲥⲁⲗⲁⲩⲉ): see Oracle 12. Here and in Fragments (Papini), 399, AI, written ⲧⲓⲥⲁⲗⲁⲩⲉ with *tau* for Greek διστάζω (with *delta* at Oracle 12).

walk in the counsels of vain people (ⲛ̅ⲙ̅ⲟⲟⲩⲱⲉ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅|ⲡⲱⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲡⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧⲱⲟⲩⲩⲧⲥ): perhaps an allusion to Ps. 1:1: ⲙ̅ⲡⲉⲕⲉⲱⲕ ⲛ̅ⲛ̅|ⲡⲱⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲡⲡⲁⲥⲉⲃⲛⲥ, “... who did not walk in the counsel (sgl.) of the impious”. For *vain people* (ⲡⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲧⲱⲟⲩⲩⲧⲥ): see at Oracle 13.

Oracle 16

Pages <32–33>

Ⲛ ⲁⲣⲓ ⲡⲙⲉⲉϥⲉ | ϫⲉ ⲁⲕⲥⲟⲛ | ⲉⲥⲟϥⲛ ⲉⲡⲓⲙⲟϥ ⲛⲕⲉⲥⲟⲡ ⲥⲡ ⲧⲉⲛⲁⲓⲩⲓⲥ
ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲟⲕ | ϫⲉ ⲁⲕⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲥⲡ ⲛⲉⲕⲥⲃⲏⲛⲉ ⲡⲓⲱⲟⲣⲡⲓ ⲉϥⲥϥⲙⲃⲟϥⲁⲉϥⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ |
ⲡⲓⲱⲓ ⲛⲉⲕⲧⲁⲗⲁⲥⲉ ⲉⲕⲙⲉⲉϥⲉ ϫⲉ | ⲉϥⲙⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ | ⲕⲛⲁⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲛⲁⲱⲁⲗⲁⲥⲉ | ⲕⲟⲧⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ |
ⲛⲉϥⲣⲱⲙⲉ —

Remember that you were close to death another time in the affliction that has come upon you. Because you were in your former matters, while your enemies counseled you and you thought they loved you. You will understand my words. Turn away from these people.

Remember (ⲁⲣⲓ ⲡⲙⲉⲉϥⲉ): cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 47, no. 164: ⲁⲣⲓⲡⲙⲉⲉϥⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲉⲣⲏⲧ ⲡⲓⲧⲁⲗⲁⲥ, “Remember your promise and do it”.

affliction (ⲉⲛⲁⲓⲩⲓⲥ): see at Oracle 10.

while your enemies counseled you (ⲉϥⲥϥⲙⲃⲟϥⲁⲉϥⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲡⲓⲱⲓ ⲛⲉⲕⲧⲁⲗⲁⲥⲉ): for enemies, see also Oracle 8. Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 41, no. 36: [ⲛⲉⲧ]ⲥϥⲙⲃⲟϥⲁⲉϥⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ [ⲡⲁ]ⲣⲁⲓⲧⲉⲓ ⲙⲙⲟⲟϥ, “Reject those who give you counsel”, and *ibid.* 43, no. 54: ⲙⲡⲣⲟϥⲁⲥⲕ ⲛⲥⲁⲛⲉⲧ[ⲥ]ϥⲙⲃⲟϥⲁⲉϥⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ, “Do not follow those who give you counsel”.

Oracle 17

Pages <34>–35, end of quire 3, begin of quire 4.

upper right corner of the left page: $\bar{r}$; upper left corner of the right page: $\bar{\lambda}$, upper right corner of the right page: $\bar{\lambda}\bar{e}$

[illegible]

The peace of God will be with you in all your days. And you will rejoice and a large harvest will be yours in the year. And you will rejoice in the works of your hands, because the angel of the Lord will walk before you.

γ The *coronis* is very faint.

peace of God (†ΡΗΗΗ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ): see Oracle 10.

in all your days (ἐν παντὶ ἡμερῶν σου): cf. Rhiktologion, 214, no. 34: ὅτι αὐτός ἐστι βοηθός σου πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας σου, “for he is your helper all your days”; see also *ibid.*, no. 42.

And you will rejoice in the works of your hands (ἡν̄εὐφράνηε 2ἡ̄ η̄εβηγε ἡ̄ηκεσιχ): a biblical phrase, see Acts 7:41: εὐφραίνοντο ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν, “they rejoiced in the works of their hands” (this stands in a rather pejorative context, about the Golden Calf). See also, e. g., Deut. 16:15, 30:9, Ps. 91 (92):5, Heb. 1:10, Rev. 9:20.

the angel of the Lord will walk before you (ΠΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ ΜΗΧΟΪΣ ΠΑΝΘΟΥΣΕ ΣΑΤΕΚΣΗ): see similar phrase at Oracle 6.

Oracle 18

Pages <36–37>

ⲓ ⲡⲣⲟ ⲡⲧⲉⲡⲉ | ⲙⲡ ⲡⲕⲁⲛ | ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲡⲥⲁⲣⲥ | ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉ ⲙⲓⲱⲉ ⲉⲣⲁⲓ
ⲉⲭⲓⲛⲧⲏⲩⲧⲏ | ⲕⲏⲁⲧⲣⲉⲕⲭⲣⲟ ⲉⲛⲉⲕⲭⲁⲭⲉ ⲭⲉ ⲁⲛⲡⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲭⲓ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ
ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲧⲕ ⲡⲛⲓⲥⲉ | ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲡⲧⲁⲕⲱⲟⲡⲟⲩⲩ | ⲥⲉⲟ ⲡⲣⲟⲟⲩⲱ | ⲙⲡⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉ –

It is the king of heaven and earth and the God of all flesh who fights for you (pl.). He will make you conquer your enemies, for God has received your request about all the difficulties that you endured. They are a concern for God.

the king of heaven and earth (ⲡⲣⲟ ⲡⲧⲉⲡⲉ ⲙⲡ ⲡⲕⲁⲛ): see Gen. 24:3: καὶ ἐξορκιῶ σε κύριον τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τὸν θεὸν τῆς γῆς, “And I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth”.

the God of all flesh (ⲡⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲡⲥⲁⲣⲥ ⲛⲓⲙ): see. e. g., Jer. 39:27: Ἐγὼ κύριος ὁ θεὸς πάσης σαρκός, “I am the Lord, the God of all flesh”.

God ... fights for you (pl.) (ⲡⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉ ... ⲡⲉ ⲙⲓⲱⲉ ⲉⲣⲁⲓ ⲉⲭⲓⲛⲧⲏⲩⲧⲏ): See also at Oracle 8. This is a biblical expression, see Ex. 14:14: κύριος πολεμήσει περὶ ὑμῶν “The Lord will fight for you (pl.)”; Deut. 1:30: κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν ... αὐτὸς συνεκπολεμήσει αὐτοὺς μεθ’ ὑμῶν, “The Lord your God ... he will fight them together with you (pl.)”; Josh. 23:9–10; Rom. 8:31: εἰς ὃν ἡμεῖς ποιοῦμεν ἐναντίας αὐτοῦ, ὁ ὅστις ἐστιν ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν, τίς καθ’ ἡμῶν; “If God is the one who fights for us, who is the one who will be able to fight against us?” (The Greek is different here: τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν πρὸς ταῦτα; εἰ ὁ θεὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, τίς καθ’ ἡμῶν; “What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?”).

Cf. Fragments (Papini), 400, B I and II: ⲡⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲧⲙⲓⲱⲉ ⲉⲭⲱⲕ; P.Vat.Copt. 1, 43, no. 51: ⲡⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲧⲙⲓⲱⲓⲉ, “God is the one who fights.” Also *Martyrdom of SS. Paese and Thecla*, 67 Ri 20–3 (Reymond and Barns, *Four Coptic Martyrdoms*, 55): ⲡⲉⲩⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲓⲁⲣ ⲡⲉⲧⲙⲓⲱⲉ ⲉⲭⲱⲟⲩ, “For it is their God who fights for them”.

He will make you conquer your enemies (ⲕⲏⲁⲧⲣⲉⲕⲭⲣⲟ ⲉⲛⲉⲕⲭⲁⲭⲉ): The best parallel is PSI XVII Congr 5, 89, no. 71: νική[σ]εις πάντας τοὺς ἀντιδίκους σου καὶ ...]νεις εἰς τοὺς ἐχθρούς; see also Hoskyns Fragment, 1: ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲧⲉⲕⲁ[ⲛ ⲉ]ⲛⲉⲕⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ[ⲓⲕⲟⲥ], “and you will prevail [over] your opponents (ἀντίδικος)”; Griechisches Losbuch, 316, no. 23 (lines 17–9): νικήσεις τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου καὶ καταπατήσεις αὐτούς, “you will conquer your enemies and trample upon them”; Rhiktologion, 215, no. 51: καὶ εἶχεις νίκην κατὰ τῶν ἐχθρῶν σου καὶ χαράν, “and you will have victory over your enemies and joy”.

Cf. Deut. 28:7: παραδῶ κύριος ὁ θεός σου τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου τοὺς ἀνθεστηκότας σοι συν-
τετριμμένους πρὸ προσώπου σου, “May the Lord your God hand over your enemies who have
risen against you”.

God has received your request (ἀπηγοῦτε καὶ ἡπεκαλήθηα): see also Oracle 6 (“God has
heard your request”).

Oracle 19

Pages <38–39>

ἸΟΥΤΑΙΧΡΟ | ΠΕ ΠΑΪ ἘΒΟΛ | ΖΙΓΓ ΠΝΟΥΤΓΕ· ΑΛΛΑ ΑΡΙ ΖΑΡΩΖΗΤ | ΝΓΖΥΠΟΜΙ|ΠΕ·
 ΦΑΝΤΕ | ΠΕΥΟΕΙΩ | ΕΙ ΝΓΧΙ ΠΘΕΛΠΙΣ Μ|ΠΕΚΟΥΧΑΪ | ΠΕΚΛΟΜ | ΣΒΤΩΤ ΝΑΚ | ΑΛΛΑ
 ΣΕΤ·|ΟΥΒΗΚ Μ|ΠΤΡΕΥ|ΠΑΛΛΑ Μ|ΜΟΚ ΖΙΓΓ Π ΡΩΜΕ· —

This is a victory from God. But be patient and endure until the time comes and you receive the hope of your salvation. The crown is ready for you, but they oppose you, do not be led astray by people.

be patient ... hope of your salvation: (ἀρι θαρσύνῃτ' ... ἡσυχασθε ἐν ἔλπίδι τοῦ σωτηρίου μου; Job 2:9a: Ἰδοὺ ἀναμένων χρόνον ἔτι μικρὸν προσδεχόμενος τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς σωτηρίας μου; “Look, will I hang on a little longer, while I wait for the hope of my deliverance”).

be patient: see also Oracle 7; *endure*: see also Oracle 4. Cf. Col. 1:11: εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν, ἐξουὴν ἐξυπομονῇς ἡμῶν ὁ γὰρ ἡμῶν τὰ ἀρχαῖα ἔθηκεν, “into all patience in long-suffering”; and Ps. 26 (27):14.

hope: see at Oracle 5, also 20, 23, 31.

The crown is ready for you (ΠΕΚΛΟΜ ΕΒΓΩΤΗ ΗΛΑΚ): this oracle has a striking parallel in a Greek fragment: PSI XVII Congr. 5, 89, no. 72: ὁ θεὸς σοι δίδει τὴν ἐλπίδα [ἂν ἔτοιμος γάρ] ἔστιν ὁ στέφανος, “God will give you hope. For the crown is ready”; Paris Gr. 2510 (14th cent.), cited in PSI XVII Congr. 5, 87: τοῦ θεοῦ διδόντος τὴν ἐλπίδα μὴ ἐνθυμῆ· ἔτοιμός ἐστιν ὁ στέφανος τοῦ λαβεῖν σε. See also Hoskyns Fragment, 3: ΠΑΤΗΡ ΠΕΤΕΛΗΕΙΚΗ ΠΘΕΛΑΠΙ. ΠΕΚΛΟΜΗ ΓΑΡ ΕΒΓΩΤΗ. “It is God who gives you hope. For the [crown] is ready” (my reconstruction).

Oracle 20

Pages <40–41>

ἔτι κεκοῦγ' ἢ ποῦοειω | πε νῖ·χι μ' | π·χ·ω·κ μ' | πε·κ·ω·ν·ῖ· | π·χ·ο·ε·ι·ς γ·α·ρ | πε
πε·κ·μ·ε | σ·ι·τ·η·ς· ῥ·γ· | πο·μ·ι·ν·ε || α·γ·ω κ·η·λ | χ·ι π·θ·ε·λ·π·ι·ς | μ' πε·κ·ο·γ· | χ·λ·ι· ἄ·ε ο·γ· | η·ο·ς ἑ·
τ' | ὁ·μ μ' π·π·ο·γ· | ἑ· πα·ρ· τ' α' | π·ρ·ω·μ·ε· | α·γ·ω σ·ε·ν·α·ρ·ω·π·η·ρ·ε | μ' μ·ο·κ —

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.

A little longer (ἐτι κεκοῦγ' ποῦοειω): see Oracle 4. The third phrase of this answer alludes to Job 2:9a (just as Oracle 19 did) and this expression occurs also in the biblical passage as χρόνον ἔτι μικρόν.

For the Lord is your mediator (π·χ·ο·ε·ι·ς γ·α·ρ πε πε·κ·μ·ε·σ·ι·τ·η·ς): see Gal. 3:19–20, 1 Tim. 2:5, Heb. 8:6.

Endure (νῖ·ρ·γ·πο·μ·ι·ν·ε): see Oracle 4.

receive the hope of your salvation (χ·ι π·θ·ε·λ·π·ι·ς μ' πε·κ·ο·γ· | χ·λ·ι·): see Oracle 19. On hope, see also Oracles 5, 19, 23 and 31.

the power of God (τ' ὁ·μ μ' π·π·ο·γ· ἑ·): biblical (especially New Testament) expression (δύναμις θεοῦ), closest here is 1 Cor. 2:5.

they will marvel at you (σ·ε·ν·α·ρ·ω·π·η·ρ·ε μ' μ·ο·κ): see also Oracle 23 (“I marvel at you”).

Oracle 21

Pages <42–43>

ⲓ ⲉⲓⲥ ⲡⲉϥⲟⲓⲉⲱ ⲉⲧⲥⲟⲥⲉ ⲁⲣⲟϥⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲁⲓⲭⲱⲕⲥ ⲉⲓⲥ | ⲧⲉϥⲛⲟϥ ⲙⲓⲡⲉⲙⲧⲟⲛ
ⲁⲥⲧⲁⲥⲟⲕⲥ ⲟⲗⲁⲣⲓ | ⲙⲙⲁⲧⲉ ⲕⲛⲁⲓⲛⲁϥ ⲉⲧⲡⲁⲣⲓⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲙⲓⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲓⲛⲁ ⲧⲁⲥⲟⲕⲥ | ⲁϥⲱ
ϥⲛⲁⲭⲟⲟϥ ⲙⲓⲡⲁⲓⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲣⲏⲛⲏ | ⲛⲓⲭⲓ ⲙⲟⲉⲓⲧ | ⲁⲓⲛⲧⲕⲥ ⲁϥⲱ | ⲛⲓⲣⲓ ⲙⲧⲟⲛ | ⲛⲁⲕⲥ –

Behold, the difficult time passed for you. Behold, the hour of rest has come upon you. Simply be brave. You will see the confidence in God that will reach you. And he will send the angel of peace and he will guide you and give you rest.

difficult time (ⲡⲉϥⲟⲓⲉⲱ ⲉⲧⲥⲟⲥⲉ): see also Oracle 4 (“difficult burden”).

the hour of rest (ⲧⲉϥⲛⲟϥ ⲙⲓⲡⲉⲙⲧⲟⲛ) and *give you rest* (ⲛⲓⲣⲓ ⲙⲧⲟⲛ ⲛⲁⲕⲥ): cf. Isa 25:10: “God will give you rest.” Rest is a biblical concept, for instance in Genesis, Isaiah and the Psalms; in the New Testament: Matt. 11:29; 12:43, Luke 11:24, Rev. 4:8, 14:11.

Cf. Rhiktologion, 211, no. 7: θὰ βρῆς ἀνάπαυσιν καὶ χαράν, “you will find rest and joy”; P.Vat.Copt. 1, 49, no. 190: ⲟϥⲛ ⲟϥⲙⲧⲟⲛ ⲛⲁⲧⲁⲥⲟⲕ ⲙⲏⲟϥⲛⲟⲥ ⲛⲣⲁⲱⲉ ⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ, “You will obtain rest and a great joy will happen to you”, and *ibid.*, 40, no. 32: ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲓ ⲛⲟϥⲙⲧⲟⲛⲓ ⲛⲓⲛⲧⲓⲣⲓ, “you will get rest in it”.

be brave (ⲟⲗⲁⲣⲓ): see at Oracle 5.

the confidence in God (ⲧⲓⲡⲁⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲙⲓⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ): see at Oracle 4.

he will send the angel of peace (ϥⲛⲁⲭⲟⲟϥ ⲙⲓⲡⲁⲓⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲣⲏⲛⲏ): cf. Oracle 6: “he will send his angel”.

angel of peace: see 1 Enoch 40.1, where the angel of peace guides Enoch through heaven (ed. Black, *Book of Enoch*). See also Kaplan, “Angel of Peace, Uriel-Metathron”, and Test. XII Patr. 12.6. For Christian texts, see esp. *Apost. Const.*, John Chrysostom (frequently).

About sending angels (plural) of peace, Eusebius, *Comm in Isa.* 2.4 l. 99 (et al.) Ὁ μὲν οὖν φιλόανθρωπος θεὸς ἀγγέλους ἀπέστειλεν εἰρήνης πρὸς τὸν Ἰουδαίων λαόν.

Oracle 22

Pages <44–45>

ⲉϥⲓⲛⲓⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲓⲣⲟⲕ ⲛⲟⲉ ⲛⲓⲕⲉⲥⲟⲡⲓ ⲙⲓⲡⲓⲣⲉϥⲓⲟϥⲱ ⲛⲥⲉⲓⲧⲏⲗⲗⲁ ⲙⲓⲙⲟⲕⲓ ⲛⲓⲙⲟϥ ⲛⲓ
ⲟϥⲓⲛⲓⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲧⲉⲕⲓⲙⲓⲧⲁⲧⲥⲱⲧⲙ ⲛⲉ ⲁⲕⲓⲕⲁ ⲡⲉⲕⲛⲉⲧ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ —

Just as another time, they beguile you. Do not let them finish robbing you, so that you die violently on account of your disobedience, because you were careless.

they beguile you (ⲉϥⲓⲛⲓⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲓⲣⲟⲕ): see also Oracle 35. Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 69: [ⲡⲉⲧⲏⲗⲗⲁ]ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲛⲙⲙⲁⲕ ⲉⲓⲟϥⲓⲟϥ ⲉⲓⲣⲟⲕⲓⲟⲩ ⲉⲓⲣⲟⲕ [ⲙⲓⲡⲓⲣⲉ], “Do not give in to him who will speak with you, wanting to beguile you”, and ibid. 42, no. 45: [ⲥⲓⲗⲁⲩⲟⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲓⲧⲉⲓⲙⲓⲣⲉ [ⲛⲓⲕⲣⲟⲩ], “Remove yourself from this treacherous relationship”.

robbing (ⲥⲏⲗⲗⲁ for ⲥϥⲗⲗⲁ, ⲥⲓⲗⲁⲱ): cf. 2Cor. 11:8: ἄλλας ἐκκλησίας ἐσύλησα, λίσγῶν ἄλλων ἐκκλησιῶν, “I robbed other churches”.

you die violently (ⲛⲓⲙⲟϥ ⲛⲓⲟϥⲓⲛⲓⲣⲟⲩ): in Greek texts, ἀδίκως (ἀπο)θνήσκειν is common (not biblical). For the noun ⲙⲟϥ, ‘death’, see Oracles 9 and 16.

your disobedience (ⲧⲉⲕⲙⲓⲧⲁⲧⲥⲱⲧⲙ): see also Fragments (Papini), 399, A II: ⲙⲙⲓⲛ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ ⲙⲉⲧⲟ ⲛⲁⲧⲥⲱⲧⲙ, “You yourself are the one that is disobedient”.

you were careless (ⲁⲕⲕⲁ ⲡⲉⲕⲛⲉⲧ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ): at Oracles 6 and 11 this is rendered with the Graeco-Coptic ἀμελής (ἄμελής).

Oracle 23

Pages <46–47>

ⲉ ⲛⲓⲣⲱⲡⲏⲣⲉ | ⲙⲙⲟⲕ ⲱ | ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲭⲉ | ⲛⲧⲉⲕⲟⲙ | ⲁⲛ ⲧⲉⲛⲉⲛⲁⲓⲃⲓⲃⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ
ⲁⲧⲉⲕⲓⲃⲉⲗⲡⲓⲥ ⲃⲱⲕ | ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲧⲕ ⲛⲓⲕⲉⲥⲟⲡⲓ ⲛⲓⲥⲁⲃⲏⲗ ⲉⲑⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ | ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲩⲩⲗⲓ
ⲁⲛ ⲉⲧⲟⲣⲓⲛ | ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲥⲧⲁⲓⲟⲕ –

I marvel at you, o human, since it is not (in) your power. You will be afflicted. Your hope left you another time. Without the fear of God, you would not be saved from the wrath that has come upon you.

I marvel at you (ⲛⲓⲣⲱⲡⲏⲣⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ): see also Oracle 20.

hope (ⲃⲉⲗⲡⲓⲥ): see at Oracles 5, 19, 20, and 31.

the fear of God (ⲉⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙⲡⲏⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ): for the biblical expression (Greek: φόβος τοῦ θεοῦ), see Pss. 6:5, 13:3, 17:40, 18:7, 8, 9, 35:2; Prov. 1:7, 15:33; 2Cor. 7:1, Rom. 3:18.

you would not be saved from the wrath (ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲩⲩⲗⲓ ⲁⲛ ⲉⲧⲟⲣⲓⲛ): perhaps reminiscent of Ps. 137:7 or Rom. 5:9.

Oracle 24

Pages <48–49>

Ⲛ ⲗⲗⲟⲕ ⲕⲟ ⲛⲓⲛⲧ ⲥⲛⲗⲱ ⲱ | ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲭⲉ | ⲡⲉⲓⲛⲱⲃ ⲛⲗⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲭⲛ | ⲙⲙⲟⲛⲓ ⲥⲉ |
ⲕⲛⲗⲱⲱⲡⲉ | ⲑⲗⲣⲓ ⲛⲗⲕ | ⲛⲓⲛⲧⲙⲣⲓⲛⲧ | ⲥⲛⲗⲱⲓ ⲭⲉ ⲕⲓⲛⲗⲙⲟⲩⲛ | ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲙⲙⲗⲕ | ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ
ⲛⲓⲟⲩⲟⲩⲓⲱ | ⲗⲱⲱ ⲕⲛⲗⲭⲓ | ⲛⲟⲩⲣⲗⲱⲉ | ⲛⲓ ⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉⲗⲛⲗ —

Stop being of two minds, o human, whether this thing will happen or not. Yes, it will happen! Be brave and do not be of two minds. Because it will remain with you a long time and you will receive joy and happiness.

be of two minds (ⲛⲓⲛⲧ ⲥⲛⲗⲱ): see *incipit*.

yes, it will happen! (ⲥⲉ ⲕⲛⲗⲱⲱⲡⲉ): also in Oracle 6.

Be brave (ⲑⲗⲣⲓ ⲛⲗⲕ): see Oracle 5.

you will receive joy and happiness (ⲕⲛⲗⲭⲓ ⲛⲟⲩⲣⲗⲱⲉ ⲛⲓ ⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉⲗⲛⲗ): P.Oxy.Coptic inv. 67 (a): ⲕⲛⲗⲭⲓ ⲛⲟⲩⲣⲗⲱⲉ ⲛⲓ ⲡⲉⲭⲥ; you will receive joy in Christ”; P.Vat.Copt. 1, 49, no. 190: ⲟⲩⲛ ⲟⲩⲱⲧⲟⲛ ⲛⲗⲗⲟⲕ ⲙⲛⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲣⲗⲱⲉ ⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲗⲕ, “You will obtain rest and there will be great joy for you”. Cf. Rhiktologion, 211, no. 7: θὰ βρῆς ἀνάπαυσιν καὶ χαράν, “you will find rest and joy”.

Oracle 25

Pages <50–51>, end of quire 4, begin of quire 5.

upper right corner of left page: $\bar{\alpha}$; upper left corner of right page: $\bar{\epsilon}$

Ἰ ΒΟΚ ΝΓ· ἡ ΠΕΚΕΡΗΤ | ΛΥΦ ΠΕΠΤΑΚ|ΣΟΜΟΛΟΓ| Μ|ΜΟΦ ΧΟΚ| ΕΒΟΛ ΣΠ ΟΥ|ΣΟΟΥΤΠ·
 ΝΓ·ΤΜΡΣΗΤ|ΣΝΑΥ· ΧΕ ΟΥ|ΦΑΝΣΗΤΦ | ΠΕ ΠΝΟΥ·ΤΕ || ΠΤΟΦ ΠΕΤ|ΝΑΤΟΥ·ΕΙΟ | ΝΑΚ
 ΜΠΕΚ|ΔΙΤΗΜΑ· ΝΦ|ΒΩΔΑ ΕΒΟΛ Π·ΤΕΘΛΠ·ΙΣ ΕΤ|ΣΜ ΠΕΚΣΗΤ· –

Go, make your vows. And what you promised, fulfill it immediately. Do not be of two minds, because God is merciful. It is he who will bring about your request for you and do away with the affliction in your heart.

go (ἄωκ): Fragments (Papini), 400, B II: ἄωκ ἄνωγει[ς], “go quickly”.

fulfill it (χορκῆ εὐολα): cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 50, no. 198: πεντακλιτ[οοτκ] ερωχ πχουεῖς η[λ]χορκῆ εὐολα, “What you have attempted, the Lord will finish”.

immediately ($\mathfrak{z}\overline{\mathbf{N}} \text{ OYCOOYT}\overline{\mathbf{N}}$): see Oracle 9.

do not be of two minds (ΝΗΓ'ΤΜΡΖΗΤCΗΛΥ): see the *incipit*.

God is merciful (οὐ φανησεντῇ πε πνοῇτε): biblical idiom, see esp. Ex. 34:6, Deut. 4:31 and Ps. 85 (86):15: καὶ σὺ, κύριε ὁ θεός, οἰκτῖρμων, καὶ πτοκ πνοεῖς πνοῇτε πτκ̄ οὐ φανησεντῇ, “for you, O Lord God, are merciful”.

It is he who will bring about your request for you (πῶς πετῆατοῦεῖο ἡκ ἄπεκαίτημα): cf. Fragments (Papini), 400, BII: ἀὖθ ἡατῶφε ἡ[ακ] ἄπεκαίτημα ἡῶυσοῦγῆ, “And he will requite for you your request immediately”.

your request: see Oracle 6.

Oracle 26

Pages <52–53>

ⲓ ⲧⲱⲟϥⲛ ⲛⲓⲃⲟⲛⲟⲓ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ | ⲭⲉ ⲁⲧⲉϥⲛⲟϥ | ⲛⲧⲁⲛⲁⲓⲕⲏ | ⲉⲓⲧⲃⲉ ⲟϥ | ⲕ<ⲛ>ⲙⲟⲟⲥ
ⲉ|ⲛⲣⲁⲓ ⲥⲉⲛⲁ|ⲧⲱⲛⲙ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ | ⲉⲙⲛⲕ^{ⲙ2}ⲓⲙⲉ ^{ⲙ1}ⲙⲛⲣ|ⲙⲉⲉϥⲉ ⲭⲉ ⲕ|ⲛⲁⲣⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲡ||ⲕⲓⲛⲁⲭⲛⲟⲥ |
ⲉⲧⲛⲓⲭⲱⲕ | ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲃⲱⲕ | ⲛⲓⲥⲟⲛⲥ ⲙ|ⲛⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ | ⲛⲟϥⲥⲟⲟϥⲧⲛ –

Get up and help yourself, because the hour of necessity has come. Why are you sitting down? They will summon you without your knowledge. Do not think that you will avoid the danger that is upon you. But go and pray to God immediately.

ⲉⲙⲛⲕⲓⲙⲉ (52.9) the letters ⲓⲙⲉ are added, perhaps by a second hand, see also Oracle 28 (56.11) and Oracle 35 (70.3).

Get up and help yourself (ⲧⲱⲟϥⲛ ⲛⲓⲃⲟⲛⲟⲓ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ): exhortations for action occur throughout the text. For another oracle beginning with “Get up and ...” see Oracle 9: “Get up and go immediately.”

danger (ⲕⲓⲛⲁⲭⲛⲟⲥ): see Oracle 2.

sitting down (ⲕ<ⲛ>ⲙⲟⲟⲥ): opposite of “getting up” (ⲧⲱⲟϥⲛ) in the first sentence of the oracle (see also Crum 680b).

pray to God (ⲛⲓⲥⲟⲛⲥ ⲙⲛⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ): the only occurrence of prayer in the text. Cf. Griechisches Losbuch, 313, no. 7: ἐν προσευχῇ σου προσεύχου τὸν θεόν, “in your prayer, pray to God”; and ibid. 318, no. 37: προσεύχου τῷ θεῷ σου, “... and pray to your God”.

immediately (ⲛⲟϥⲥⲟⲟϥⲧⲛ): see Oracle 9.

Oracle 27

Pages <54–55>

ⲭ ⲕⲁⲥⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲓⲧⲣⲟⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲙⲓⲡⲉⲧⲭⲟⲥⲉ | ⲛⲉⲡⲓⲕⲁⲗⲓ | ⲙⲓⲡⲉⲣⲁⲛ | ⲥⲙⲓ ⲡⲉⲕⲥⲏⲧⲧ | ⲧⲏⲣⲁ·
ⲁⲅⲱ | ⲕⲏⲁⲭⲟⲟⲅ ⲙⲓⲡⲉⲣⲁⲓⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ | ⲛⲁⲅⲁⲑⲟⲥ || ⲛⲉⲭⲓⲙⲟⲓⲧⲧ | ⲥⲏⲧⲕ· ⲙⲓⲡⲣⲓⲑⲟⲧⲉ
ⲥⲏⲧⲟⲅ | ⲛⲏⲉⲧⲏⲁⲙⲟⲅⲟⲅⲧ ⲛⲓⲛⲉⲧⲏⲥⲱⲙⲁ | ⲉⲙⲏⲧⲟⲅ | ⲥⲟⲅⲟ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲉⲁⲓⲁⲕ ⲛⲏⲧⲏ –

Trust in the help of the Most High, and call upon his name with your whole heart. And he will send his good angel and he will lead you. Do not fear those who will kill your bodies without having more than this to do to you (pl.)

trust (ⲕⲁⲥⲧⲏⲕ): see Oracle 8.

in the help of the Most High (ⲉⲓⲧⲣⲟⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲙⲓⲡⲉⲧⲭⲟⲥⲉ): allusion to Ps. 90 (91):1: Ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν βοῇ τοῦ ὑψίστου; ⲡⲉⲧⲟⲅⲏⲥ ⲥⲓ ⲧⲣⲟⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲙⲓⲡⲉⲧⲭⲟⲥⲉ, “He who dwells in the help of the Most High”. See also Hoskyns Fragment, 2: [ⲡⲏⲧⲉⲣ]ⲉⲱⲟⲡⲉ [ⲛⲉ]ⲕⲓⲛⲟⲛⲟⲉ[ⲓⲁ] “[God (?) will] be of help [to] you”.

and call upon his name (ⲛⲉⲡⲓⲕⲁⲗⲓ ⲙⲓⲡⲉⲣⲁⲛ): the expression ἐπικαλεῖν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου, “to call upon the name of the Lord”, is common in the Septuagint and beyond. The phrase may allude here to Joel 3:5 (LXX): καὶ ἔσται πᾶς, ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου, σωθήσεται, “And it shall be, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” a sentence quoted also in Acts 2:21 and Rom. 10:13. It may also be an allusion to the same Psalm as the first part of the sentence: Ps. 90 (91):15: ἐπικαλέσεται με, καὶ εἰσακούσομαι αὐτοῦ, ⲕⲏⲁⲱⲱ ⲉⲣⲁⲓ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ ⲁⲅⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲏⲁⲥⲱⲧⲏ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ, “He will call to me and I will listen to him”.

Cf. also Rhiktologion, 215, no. 55: ἐπικαλοῦ τὸν Θεὸν καὶ Κύριόν σου, “call upon your God and Lord”.

with your whole heart (ⲥⲙⲓ ⲡⲉⲕⲥⲏⲧⲧ ⲧⲏⲣⲁ): see the *incipit*.

And he will send his good angel and he will lead you (ⲕⲏⲁⲭⲟⲟⲅ ⲙⲓⲡⲉⲣⲁⲓⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛⲁⲅⲁⲑⲟⲥ ⲁⲅⲱ ⲛⲉⲭⲓⲙⲟⲓⲧⲧ ⲥⲏⲧⲕ): see Oracle 6 (“send his angel”).

The phrase has a parallel in P.Vat.Copt. 1, 44, no. 61: ⲧⲏⲁⲧⲏⲛⲟⲟⲅ ⲙⲓⲡⲁⲓⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛⲉⲭⲓⲙⲟⲓⲧⲧ [ⲥⲏⲧⲕ] ⲁⲅⲱ ⲛⲉⲭⲟⲟⲅⲧⲏ ⲛⲓⲧⲉⲕⲓⲛ ⲙⲓⲡⲉⲕⲏⲧⲟ ⲉⲃ[ⲟⲗ], “I will send my angel and he will lead you and he will make straight your path before you”. See also Hoskyns Fragment, 8: ⲡⲉⲕⲏⲧⲧⲓ ⲁⲉ ⲛⲏⲉⲭⲓⲙⲁⲓⲉⲓⲧⲧ ⲥⲁⲧⲉⲕⲥⲏ, “Your God will lead your way”.

his good angel (ⲛⲉⲣⲁⲓⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛⲁⲅⲁⲑⲟⲥ): see 2Macc. 11:6: ἀγαθὸν ἄγγελον ἀποστείλαι πρὸς σωτηρίαν τῷ Ἰσραήλ, “to send a good angel for the salvation of Israel”; 2Macc. 15:23:

ἀπόστειλον ἄγγελον ἀγαθὸν ἔμπροσθεν ἡμῶν εἰς δέος καὶ τρόμον, “send a good angel before us for fear and trembling.” See also Griechisches Losbuch, 317, no. 23 (lines 26–7): ὁ θεὸς ἄγγελος <πέμψει> πρὸς σωτηρίαν τοῦ οἴκου σου τούτου, “God [will send] his good angels for the salvation of this your house”. For further discussion, see chapter 1.

Do not fear those who kill your bodies (ⲙⲡⲣⲣⲟⲩⲉ ⲉⲛⲩⲟⲩ ⲛⲏⲉⲧⲛⲁⲙⲟⲩⲟⲩⲧⲓ ⲛⲏⲉⲧⲛⲥⲱⲙⲁ): see Matt. 10:28: μὴ φοβεῖσθε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποκτεννόντων τὸ σῶμα, ⲙⲡⲣⲣⲟⲩⲉ ⲉⲛⲩⲟⲩ ⲛⲏⲉⲧⲛⲁⲙⲟⲩⲟⲩⲧⲓ ⲛⲏⲉⲧⲛⲥⲱⲙⲁ (and parallel in Luke 12:4).

Do not fear: see also Oracle 14.

your bodies: for the second person plural here, see chapter 3.

Oracle 28

Pages <56–57>

ⲓ ⲟⲁⲣⲓ ⲛⲁⲕ | ⲥⲛ ⲥⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ | ⲭⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲣⲟⲟϥ ⲁⲛ | ⲡⲉ ⲥⲁ ⲗⲗⲁϥ | ⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓⲥ | ⲛⲁⲃⲟⲛⲟⲓ
ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲥⲛ ⲧⲉⲙⲓⲭⲓⲭ ⲛⲟϥⲛⲁⲙⲓ ⲕⲛⲁⲗⲓⲙⲓⲭⲟⲟϥ || ⲙⲓⲙⲓⲭⲁⲛⲁ | ⲡⲉⲙⲁⲓⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛⲙⲟⲓⲛⲟⲓ
ⲉⲣⲟⲕ | ⲗϥⲱ ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲣⲟ ⲉⲛⲉⲧⲧⲓ | ⲛⲙⲙⲁⲕ ⲛⲙⲟⲓⲃⲓⲟ ⲛⲡⲉⲕⲭⲁⲭⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲙⲧⲟ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ –

Be brave in every thing, because your concern is over nothing. The Lord will help you with his right hand. He will send Michael, his angel, and he will help you. And you will conquer those who fight with you, and he will humble your enemies before you.

ⲭⲟⲟϥ (56.11) is added, perhaps by a second hand, see also 52.9 and 70.3.

Be brave (ⲟⲁⲣⲓ): see Oracle 5.

your concern is over nothing (ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲣⲟⲟϥ ⲁⲛ ⲡⲉ ⲥⲁ ⲗⲗⲁϥ): cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 48, no. 182: ⲕⲧⲟϥⲭⲏⲩ ⲛⲓⲃⲛⲱⲛⲓⲥ ⲛⲁⲧⲣⲟⲟϥ, “The carefree life is safe”.

The Lord will help you with his right hand (ⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲛⲁⲃⲟⲛⲟⲓ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲥⲛ ⲧⲉⲙⲓⲭⲓⲭ ⲛⲟϥⲛⲁⲙⲓ): see also Oracle 15 (“God’s hand”). Allusion to Isa. 41:10: ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι ὁ θεός σου ὁ ἐνισχύσας σε καὶ ἐβοήθησά σοι καὶ ἡσφαλίσάμην σε τῇ δεξιᾷ τῇ δικαίᾳ μου, “I am your God who has strengthened you, and I have helped you, and I have made you secure with my righteous right hand”. See also Hoskyns Fragment, 8: ⲥⲛⲧⲉⲙⲓⲭⲓⲭ ⲛⲟϥⲛⲁⲙⲓ, “with his right hand”.

He will send Michael, his angel (ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲟⲟϥ ⲙⲓⲙⲓⲭⲁⲛⲁ ⲡⲉⲙⲁⲓⲧⲉⲗⲟⲥ): see Oracle 6. *Michael*: see Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1, Rev. 12:7, and discussion in chapter 1.

and he will humble your enemies before you (ⲛⲙⲟⲓⲃⲓⲟ ⲛⲡⲉⲕⲭⲁⲭⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲙⲧⲟ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ): cf. Oracle 18: “He will make you conquer your enemies”; Oracle 31: “He will cause your enemies to subject to you.” For ‘enemies’, see Oracle 8. The expression is biblical, or even Psalmic, see, e.g. Ps. 80 (81):15: ἐν τῷ μηδενὶ ἂν τοὺς ἐχθροὺς αὐτῶν ἐταπείνωσα = Ps. 80:14 (Budge): ⲛⲉⲛⲓⲁⲟⲃⲓⲟ ⲛⲡⲉϥⲭⲁⲭⲉ ⲡⲉ ⲛⲟϥⲉⲱ ⲛⲗⲗⲁϥ, “In no time I would have humbled their enemies”.

Oracle 29

Pages <58–59>

ⲓ ⲥⲁⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ | ⲧⲁⲭϣ· ⲙⲡⲣ|ⲟϥⲱ ⲡⲓⲣ|ⲛⲧⲏⲕ ϫⲉ ⲡ|ⲧⲁᲓⲣⲟϥ ⲁⲛⲁᲓ | ⲧⲁⲱⲉᲓ· ⲁⲗ|ⲗⲁ
ⲱⲱⲡⲉ | ⲡⲁⲣⲱⲛⲧ· | ⲡⲕⲉⲕⲟϥᲓ | ⲡⲟϥⲟⲉᲓⲱ | ⲱⲁⲛⲧⲉ | ⲡⲡⲟϥⲧⲉ || <ⲉⲱⲗ?> ⲡⲡⲱⲃ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·
ⲙⲟⲛ|ⲟⲛ ⲛⲁⲱⲧⲉ | ⲉⲡⲡⲟϥⲧⲉ | ⲛⲙⲡⲉⲕ|ⲛⲧ· ⲧⲏ|ⲣᲗ· ⲁϥⲱ | ⲕⲏⲁⲛⲁϥ· ⲉ|ⲡⲉⲧⲏⲁⲱⲱ|ⲡⲉ
ⲉⲟⲗⲏ —

Go away quickly. Do not stop to reflect “What have I done? These things have caught up to me.” But be patient for a little while until God solves (?) the matter. Only believe in God with all your heart. And you will see what will happen in the end.

quickly (ⲧⲁⲭϣ): *ταχύ* frequently in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* (Naether, 169); see also P.Vat.Copt. 1, 42, no. 43: ⲁⲣⲡⲉ|ⲕⲧⲱⲱ ⲧⲁⲭϣ, “Set] your affairs in order quickly”.

But be patient (ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲡⲁⲣⲱⲛⲧ): see Oracles 9 and 19.

for a little while (ⲡⲕⲉⲕⲟϥᲓ ⲡⲟϥⲟⲉᲓⲱ): see Oracles 2 and 4.

Only believe in God with your whole heart (ⲙⲟⲛⲟⲛ ⲛⲁⲱⲧⲉ ⲉⲡⲡⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲛⲙⲡⲉⲕⲛⲧ· ⲧⲏⲣᲗ): Prov. 3:5: ⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲕⲏⲁⲱⲧⲉ ⲛⲙⲡⲉⲕⲛⲧ· ⲧⲏⲣᲗ ⲉⲡⲡⲟϥⲧⲉ, “Believe (or trust) with your whole heart in God” (Worrell, *Proverbs of Solomon*). See also Rom. 10:9: ἐὰν ... πιστεύσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ. “if ... you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 40, no. 25: ⲁⲗⲗⲁ [ⲡⲓⲕⲧ]ⲉϥⲉ ⲉⲡⲡⲟϥⲧⲉ, “but believe in God”, and ibid. 43, no. 50: ⲙⲟⲛⲟⲛ ⲡⲓⲕⲧⲉϥⲉ, “only believe”.

Oracle 30

Pages <60–61>

ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐκείνην ἡμέραν
 ἔμελλεν εἶναι ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐκείνην ἡμέραν
 ἔμελλεν εἶναι ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐκείνην ἡμέραν
 ἔμελλεν εἶναι ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐκείνην ἡμέραν

No evil will reach you in this matter, nor sorrow nor harm, because the Lord Jesus fights on your behalf. You will find joy and be happy even in your short lifespan. Trust in God and do not be of two minds.

No evil will reach upon you in this matter ($\overline{\text{MH}}\Pi\Theta\Theta\Omega\Upsilon \text{ HAT}\alpha\text{ZOK } 2\overline{\text{M}} \text{ P}\epsilon\tilde{\iota}2\Omega\text{B}$): allusion to Ps. 90 (91):10; see Oracle 11.

nor sorrow (οὐδ' ἄλγιν): cf. Fragments (Papini), 399, A II: κσοογν ἐτ'ωορν ἄλγιν
ἄτ'ατ'αζοκ, “you know the first pain that reaches you”.

the Lord Jesus fights on your behalf (πρωτις ις μωγε ερπαι εχουκ): see Oracle 8; on God fighting, see Oracle 18.

You will find joy and be happy (κλησινε νογραωε η̅ε̅γφρανε): see Oracles 24 and 2.

Trust in God (ΚΛΕΤΗΚ ΕΠΝΟΥΤΕ): see Oracle 8.

do not be of two minds (NΓΓΤΜΡΖΗΤ CNAΥ): see at the *incipit*.

Oracle 31

Pages <62–63>

ⲉ ⲙⲟⲟⲩⲉ ⲛⲓⲃⲱⲕ ⲉⲛ ⲟⲩⲥⲟⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓ ⲙⲓⲡⲣⲓⲥⲟⲩⲟⲩ ⲛⲥⲁ ⲟⲩⲥⲟⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓ ⲭⲉ ⲓ ⲛⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲓ
ⲛⲉⲧⲙⲓⲩⲉ ⲓ ⲉⲭⲱⲕⲥⲓ ⲓ ⲕⲛⲁⲧⲣⲉⲓⲓⲛⲉⲕⲭⲁⲭⲉ ⲓ ⲥⲩⲡⲟⲧⲁⲥⲥⲉ ⲓ ⲛⲁⲕⲥⲓ ⲉⲕⲩⲁ(ⲛ)ⲥⲣⲟⲩ
ⲛⲟⲩⲥⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓ ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲓ ⲓ ⲛⲉⲃⲉⲛⲓⲥ ⲙⲓⲛⲉⲕⲟⲩⲭⲁⲓ ⲛⲓⲃⲱⲕⲥⲟⲩ ⲙⲙⲟⲕⲥⲓ —

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.

This answer has an almost exact parallel in Fragments (Papini), 400, B1: ⲙⲟⲟⲩⲉ ⲛⲓⲃⲱⲕ ⲉⲛⲟⲩⲥⲟⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓ ⲭⲉ ⲛⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲧⲙⲓⲩⲉ ⲉⲭⲱⲕⲥⲓ ⲕⲛⲁⲧⲣⲉⲓⲓⲛⲉⲕⲭⲁⲭⲉ ⲥⲩⲡⲟⲧⲁⲥⲥⲉ ⲛⲁⲕⲥⲓ, “Walk and go immediately. For God is the one who fights for you. And he will cause your enemies to subject to you”.

Additionally:

Walk and go immediately (ⲙⲟⲟⲩⲉ ⲛⲓⲃⲱⲕ ⲉⲛ ⲟⲩⲥⲟⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓ): cf. Oracle 9, “Get up and go immediately”.

Do not delay (ⲙⲓⲡⲣⲓⲥⲟⲩⲟⲩ ⲛⲥⲁ ⲟⲩⲥⲟⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓ): see Oracle 9 (this phrase is not in Fragments [Papini]).

Because it is God who fights for you (ⲛⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲉⲧⲙⲓⲩⲉ ⲉⲭⲱⲕⲥⲓ): for language of fighting in this text, see Oracle 8; for ‘God fights’, see Oracle 18.

He will cause your enemies to subject to you (ⲕⲛⲁⲧⲣⲉⲓⲓⲛⲉⲕⲭⲁⲭⲉ ⲥⲩⲡⲟⲧⲁⲥⲥⲉ ⲛⲁⲕⲥⲓ): for ‘enemies’, see Oracle 8. Cf. P.Oxy.Coptic Inv. 68→: ⲭⲉ ⲛⲥⲉⲥⲓ ⲥⲩⲡⲟⲧⲁⲥⲥⲉ ⲛⲁⲕⲥⲓ. For conquering and humbling enemies, see Oracles 18 and 28 respectively.

If you are patient for a little you will receive the hope of your salvation (ⲉⲕⲩⲁⲛⲥⲣⲟⲩ ⲛⲟⲩⲥⲟⲩⲩⲧⲓ ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲓ ⲓ ⲛⲉⲃⲉⲛⲓⲥ ⲙⲓⲛⲉⲕⲟⲩⲭⲁⲓ): allusion to Job 2:9a, see Oracle 19.

patient for a little: see Oracle 7.

and you will be at rest (ⲛⲓⲃⲱⲕⲥⲟⲩ ⲙⲙⲟⲕⲥⲓ): see Oracle 21.

Oracle 32

Pages <64–65>

ⲉ ⲥⲉⲡⲏ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ | ⲭⲉ ⲉⲓⲥ ⲡⲉⲟⲩⲱⲟⲩⲉⲩ ⲁⲓⲉⲓ | ⲡⲉⲕⲛⲏⲧ ⲡⲁⲉⲩⲱⲡⲁ<ⲡⲉ> | ⲡⲉⲕⲟⲩⲱⲓ | ⲭⲉ
ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲱⲥ | ⲧⲏⲱⲧⲁⲕ | ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲓⲧⲙⲓ | ⲡⲏⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ || ⲕⲏⲁⲥⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ | ⲡⲁⲕ ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲛⲏ ⲉⲡⲁⲡⲟⲩⲱⲥ
ⲏⲡⲟⲩⲱⲭⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ | ⲛⲏ ⲧⲉⲑⲁⲓⲱⲓⲥ ⲉⲡⲧⲁⲥⲱⲧⲁⲛⲟⲕ –

Make haste because, behold, the time has come, your heart will be happy. Go forward because the matter is appointed for you by God. He will prepare for you a good path, and you will be saved from the affliction that has come upon you.

Make haste (ⲥⲉⲡⲏ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ): cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 51–2, no. 218: ⲁⲣⲓⲥ ⲛⲏⲟⲩⲱⲟⲩⲉⲓⲡⲏ, “do it hastily”, and ibid. 45, no. 65. Ibid. 42, no. 40 gives the negative formulation of this sentence: ⲙⲡⲣⲥⲡⲟⲩⲱⲭⲁⲛⲉ [ⲭⲉ] ⲡⲕⲁⲓⲣⲟⲥ ⲁⲏ ⲡⲉ, “do not hurry, because it is not the right moment”.

the time has come (ⲡⲉⲟⲩⲱⲟⲩⲉⲩ ⲁⲓⲉⲓ): for other statements of time, see Oracle 4 (“its time has not yet come”); Oracle 5 (“time is hastening for you”), and Oracle 19 (“until the time comes”).

He will prepare for you a good path (ⲕⲏⲁⲥⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲕ ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲛⲏ ⲉⲡⲁⲡⲟⲩⲱⲥ): cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 41, no. 33: ⲏⲓⲣⲥⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲕ ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲛⲏ [ⲉⲡⲁⲡⲟⲩⲱⲥ], “and prepare for yourself a good path”. In our text, the agency lies with God; in the Vatican manuscript, it lies with the client.

Instances referring to the biblical “straight” instead of “good” path are more common in other *sortes*. Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 69: ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲕⲁⲛⲏⲧⲕ [ⲉⲡⲏ]ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ ⲭⲉ ⲡⲧⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ [ⲧⲉⲣⲉⲧⲉⲕⲛⲏ ⲥⲟⲩⲱⲧⲟⲏ], “But trust in God for it is he whose path is straight”, and Rhiktologion, 214, no. 41: “God will give you what you hope and ask from him. He is your helper and he makes straight your paths/ways”.

you will be saved from the affliction that has come upon you (ⲏⲡⲟⲩⲱⲭⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲏ ⲧⲉⲑⲁⲓⲱⲓⲥ ⲉⲡⲧⲁⲥⲱⲧⲁⲛⲟⲕ): see Oracle 10.

Oracle 33

Pages <66–67>, end of quire 5, begin of quire 6.

upper right corner of left page: ē; upper left corner of right page: z̄

Ⲛ ⲙⲡⲣⲟϥⲁⲛⲕ | ⲛⲥⲁ ⲡⲟϥⲱⲩ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲓⲛⲧⲓⲥ ⲟϥⲕⲉ | ⲙⲡⲣⲡⲱⲧⲓ | ⲛⲥⲁ ϫⲱⲕ |
ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲁⲛⲧⲓⲛⲕ | ⲉⲛⲱⲕⲥ ⲛⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉⲥ ϫⲉ ⲁⲕⲣⲓⲧⲉⲕⲥⲟⲙ ⲧⲏⲣⲥ ⲛⲕⲉⲥⲟⲡ || ⲙⲡⲕⲉⲱⲧⲁⲛⲉ
ⲛⲁⲱⲃ ⲉⲣⲁⲧⲓⲥⲓⲥ ⲁⲕⲁⲗⲁ ⲛⲧⲟⲕ ⲙⲓⲙⲁⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲧⲓⲕⲧⲟ ⲙⲙⲟⲥ | ⲉⲡⲁⲛⲟϥⲓⲥ —

Do not follow your heart's desire nor pursue fulfillment. Do not trust the words of people, because you did everything in your power another time without being able to secure the matter. But it is you alone who turns back.

Do not follow the desire of your heart (ⲡⲟϥⲱⲩ ⲙⲡⲉⲕⲓⲛⲧⲓⲥ): biblical allusion, see Sir. 5:2 μὴ ἐξακολουθεῖ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ τῇ ἰσχύι σου πορεύεσθαι ἐν ἐπιθυμίαις καρδίας σου. “Do not follow your soul and your strength, to walk in your heart's desires”. See also Rom. 10:1 ἡ εὐδοκία τῆς ἐμῆς καρδίας, ⲡⲟϥⲱⲩ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲓⲥ, “the desire of my heart”; cf. Ps. 20:3, 36:4, Eccles. 11:10.

Cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 45, no. 65: ⲕⲏⲁⲗⲓⲥⲓⲥ ⲛⲁⲗⲓⲥⲓⲥ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲕⲁⲧⲁⲗⲓⲥ ⲡⲉⲕⲟϥⲱⲩ ⲛⲁⲛⲧⲓⲥ ⲛⲡⲟϥⲉⲣⲓⲛⲏ, “He will give you according to the your [heart's] desire hastily”.

Do not trust the words of people (ⲙⲡⲣⲕⲁⲛⲧⲓⲛⲕ ⲉⲛⲱⲕⲥ ⲛⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉⲥ): for a similar sentiment, see Oracle 13 (“do not trust the words of vain people”). See also exhortations to “trust in God” in Oracle 8.

Oracle 34

Pages <68–69>

ⲉ ⲛⲉⲕⲟⲩⲟⲩⲓ | ⲛⲓ ⲟⲩⲥⲟⲩⲟⲩⲧⲧⲓ ⲟⲩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲓⲧⲧⲓ | ⲛⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ | ⲛⲉἱⲛⲱⲃ | ⲕⲥⲟⲟⲩⲩ | ⲭⲉ
ⲉⲓⲥ ⲟⲩⲩⲙⲏⲱⲉ ⲛⲓⲛⲟⲩⲩ ⲕⲱⲛⲓⲥⲉ ⲧⲟⲛⲟⲩⲩ | ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲛⲥⲙⲉⲗⲓ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲁⲛ | ⲭⲉ ⲁⲕⲉἱ
ⲉⲛⲓⲙⲏⲩ ⲛⲓⲛⲉⲭⲣⲟⲩ –

Go forward immediately. This is a thing from God. You know that, behold, for many days you are suffering greatly. But it is of no concern to you, because you have come to the haven of victory.

Go forward immediately (ⲉⲛⲉⲕⲟⲩⲟⲩⲓ ⲛⲓ ⲟⲩⲥⲟⲟⲩⲧⲧⲓ): see Oracle 9; for the verb, see the *incipit*.

You know (ⲕⲥⲟⲟⲩⲩ): see Oracle 1.

the haven of victory (ⲛⲓⲙⲏⲩ ⲛⲓⲛⲉⲭⲣⲟⲩ): the word ⲓⲙⲏⲩ can be a Graeco-Coptic idiom (λιμήν), meaning ‘harbor, haven’, but can also mean ‘portrait’, or ‘cult object’, see Crum 143a, and Timbie, “Liturgical Procession”, 439 n. 117. Here the first meaning applies, for the expression alludes to 4Macc. 7:3: ἕως οὗ ἔπλευσεν ἐπὶ τὸν τῆς ἀθανάτου νίκης λιμένα, “until it sailed into the haven of immortal victory”.

See also Griechisches Losbuch, 313, no. 5: εἰς εὐδιον λιμένα εὐρήσεις τόπον, “and in a calm harbor you will find a place”, and Rhiktologion, 215, no. 45.

A funerary inscription compares death to a haven: SB Kopt. 780, 19, 21; dated to the year 765, see Wörterbuch (Förster), 473: ἀκκατὰντὰ ἐπαἱμᲓν ἑρσοᲩτᲟν. ⲛⲟⲩⲩ γⲁⲣ ⲟⲩⲓⲙⲏⲩ, “For death is a haven”.

victory (ⲭⲣⲟⲩ): see Oracle 13.

Oracle 35

Pages <70–71>

Ⲛ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲩ ⲛⲓⲥⲓⲧⲉⲩⲥⲉ ⲛⲁⲩ | ⲁⲛ ⲟⲩⲁⲉ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲩ ⲑⲁⲣⲓ | ⲁⲛ ⲛⲓⲧⲉⲩⲥⲉⲛⲩⲱⲗⲥⲉ |
ⲛⲉⲛⲣⲉⲩⲓⲣⲁⲗⲗ ⲛⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛⲉⲧⲁⲩⲱ || ⲛⲉⲛⲛⲣⲟⲗⲁⲟⲩⲧⲏⲥ ⲛⲉ ⲕⲟⲩⲧⲕⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙⲓⲙⲟⲟⲩⲥⲉⲧⲉ | ⲁⲩⲧⲣ
ⲕⲣⲟⲩ | ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲛⲕⲉⲥⲟⲛ ⲙⲛ | ⲛⲉⲛⲕⲟⲟⲩⲥⲉⲧⲉ —

You will not be able to believe them, nor will you be able to have confidence in their speech. These people are deceivers and traitors. Turn away from them, because they beguiled you another time, with other (people).

70.3 the letters protrude into the left margin and appear added later. See also Oracle 26 (52.9) and Oracle 28 (56.11).

You will not be able to believe them (ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲩ ⲛⲓⲥⲓⲧⲉⲩⲥⲉ ⲛⲁⲩ ⲁⲛ): cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 43, no. 55: ⲟⲩⲩⲁⲩⲉ ⲙⲛⲛⲓⲥⲓⲧⲉⲩⲥⲉ ⲛⲁⲩ, “and do not believe them”.

Turn away from them (ⲕⲟⲩⲧⲕⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲙⲓⲙⲟⲟⲩⲥⲉⲧⲉ): cf. P.Vat.Copt. 1, 47, no. 169: ⲕⲧⲟⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ [ⲛⲙ]ⲛⲉⲓⲛⲱⲃⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ, “Turn away from this thing”.

they beguiled you (ⲁⲩⲧⲣ ⲕⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ): see Oracle 22.

Oracle 36

Pages <72–73>

Ζ Ω ΠΡΩΜΕ | ΛΗΛΥ ΧΕ Π|ΤΑΚΡΟΥ· | ΜΟΩΤΚ ΖΑ|ΡΙΖΑΡΟΚ | ΕΜΜΟΝ | ΟΥΝ ΟΥΝΟΣ |
ΜΠΑΡΑΠ|ΤΩΜΑ ΩΟ|ΟΠ ΠΖΗΤΚ || ΜΗ ΤΕΚ|ΘΟΜ ΤΕ Μ|·ΟΥΒΕ ΤΩΙΧ | ΜΠΟΥΤΕ | ΑΛΛΑ
ΒΩΚ | ΠΓ·|ΕΟΟΥ Μ|ΠΠΟΥΤΕ –

O human, look, what did you do? Examine yourself alone. For verily, a great transgression is in you. It isn't in your power to oppose the hand of God, is it? But go and glorify God.

a great transgression (ΟΥΝΟΣ ΜΠΑΡΑΠΤΩΜΑ): παράπτωμα, 'transgression', is a biblical idiom, but the expression used here is not biblical.

the hand of God (ΤΩΙΧ ΜΠΟΥΤΕ): see Oracle 15.

go and glorify God (ΒΩΚ ΠΓ·|ΕΟΟΥ ΜΠΠΟΥΤΕ): see Oracle 2.

Oracle 37

Pages <74–75>

Ⲛ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲗⲟⲩ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲓ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ ⲥⲃⲧⲱⲧⲉ̅ | ⲉⲧⲣⲉ ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲱⲱⲓⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲛⲓⲧⲏⲧⲉ̅ | ⲙⲏ
ⲟⲩⲩⲣⲁⲓⲱⲉ̅. ⲭⲉ ⲡⲉⲓⲭⲥ̅ ⲓⲥ̅ ⲛⲁⲭⲁⲓⲣⲓⲩⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ | ⲡⲟⲩⲕⲁⲣⲓⲡⲟⲥ ⲉⲛⲁⲓⲡⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ̅ ⲙⲏ ⲟⲩⲩⲃⲓⲟⲥ |
ⲉⲓⲣⲱⲗⲩ̅. –

This is the day that God has prepared that peace and joy be in it. Because Christ Jesus will give you a good fruit (or: harvest) and a prosperous life.

This is the day (ⲡⲁⲓ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲗⲟⲩⲩ): allusion to Ps. 117 (118):24: αὕτη ἡ ἡμέρα, ἣν ἐποίησεν ὁ κύριος· ἀγαλλιασώμεθα καὶ εὐφρανθώμεν ἐν αὐτῇ, ⲡⲁⲓ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲗⲟⲩⲩ ⲉⲛⲧⲁⲓⲡⲁⲓⲱⲉⲓⲥ ⲧⲁⲙⲓⲟⲩⲁ ⲙⲁⲣⲏⲥⲱⲟⲩⲩ ⲡⲧⲧⲧⲉⲗⲏⲁ ⲡⲧⲧⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩⲁ ⲡⲉⲛⲓⲧⲉ̅, “This is the day that the Lord made; let us rejoice and be glad in it”.

peace and joy (ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲱⲱⲓⲡⲉⲛⲓⲧⲏⲧⲉ̅ ⲙⲏ ⲟⲩⲩⲣⲁⲓⲱⲉ̅): allusion to Rom. 14:17: εἰρήνη καὶ χαρὰ, ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲣⲏⲏⲏ ⲙⲏ ⲟⲩⲩⲣⲁⲓⲱⲉ̅. For joy, see also Oracle 1.

Christ Jesus will give you a good fruit and a prosperous life (ⲡⲉⲓⲭⲥ̅ ⲓⲥ̅ ⲛⲁⲭⲁⲓⲣⲓⲩⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲡⲟⲩⲕⲁⲣⲓⲡⲟⲥ ⲉⲛⲁⲓⲡⲟⲩⲩⲧⲉ̅ ⲙⲏ ⲟⲩⲩⲃⲓⲟⲥ ⲉⲓⲣⲱⲗⲩ̅): cf. the fruits of the spirit in Gal. 5:22: Ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἀγάπη, χαρά, εἰρήνη, μακροθυμία, χρηστότης, ἀγαθωσύνη, πίστις, πραύτης, ἐγκράτεια.

Cf. Fragments (Papini), 399, A II: ⲁⲓⲭⲁⲓⲣⲓⲩⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ, “He has given you”.

a good fruit or harvest: see Matt. 3:10; 7:19; 12:33 and Luke 3:9; 6:43. καρπός is also a frequent term in other lot divinatory texts. An inscription from Antioch on the Cragos displays a very similar expression: see *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 196, 12.2: καρπὸν (vac.) καλὸν τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ κέρδος φέρει, “The matter brings a good fruit and gain”.



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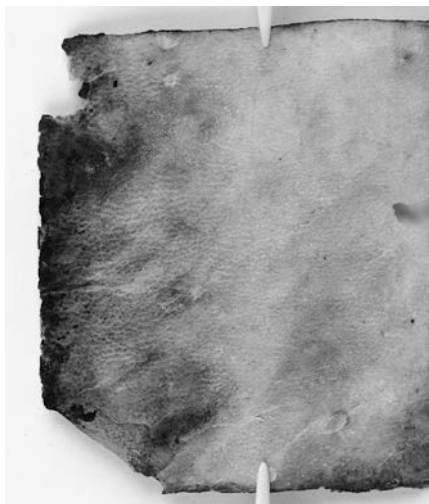




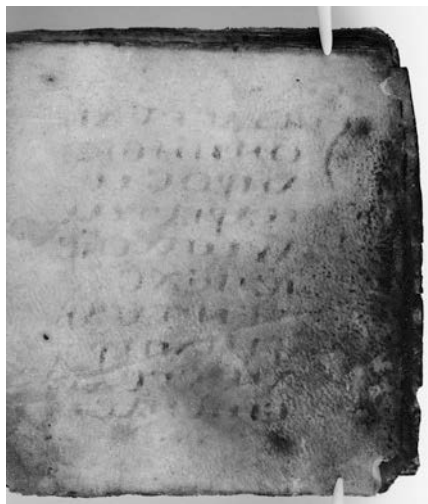
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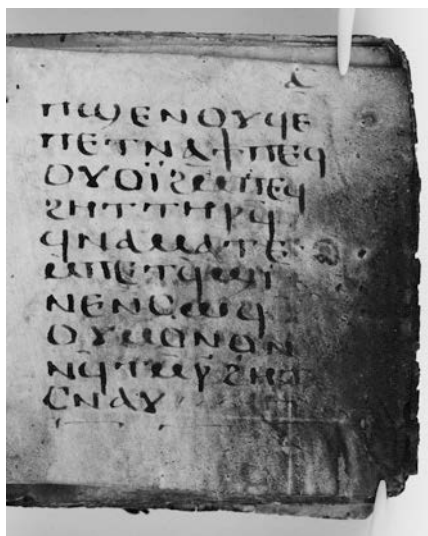


Fly leaves

i*ii*

Incipit

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Oracle 1

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Oracle 2

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Oracle 3

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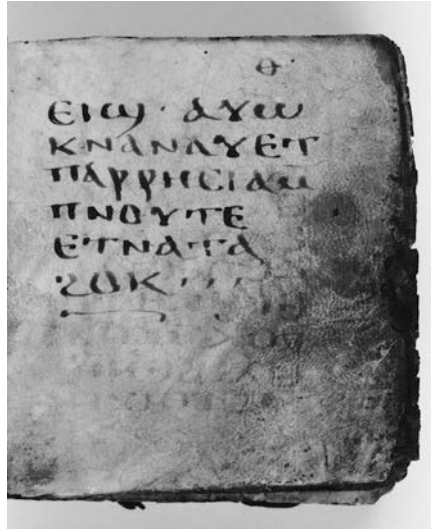


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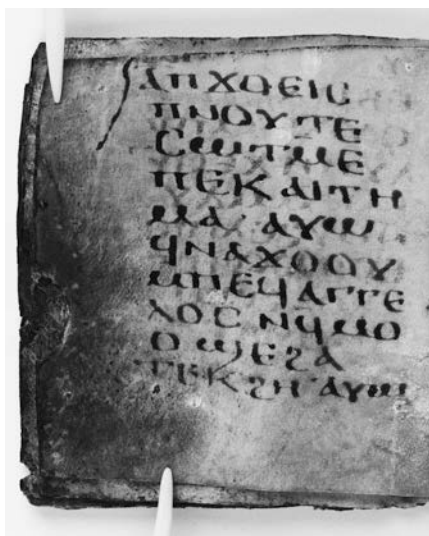


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Oracle 6

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Oracle 7

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Oracle 8

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Oracle 9

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Oracle 10

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Oracle 11

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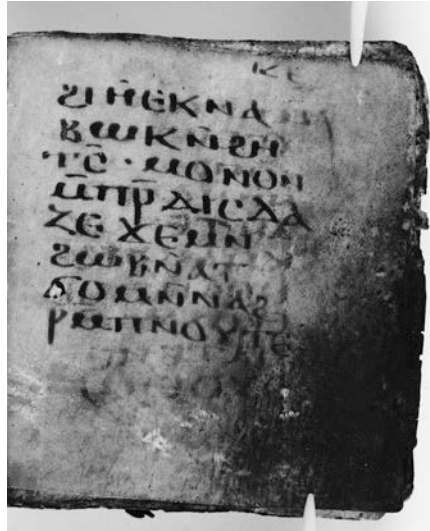


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Oracle 12

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Oracle 13

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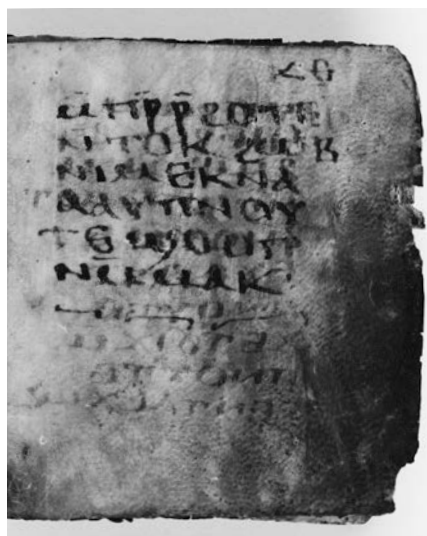


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Oracle 14

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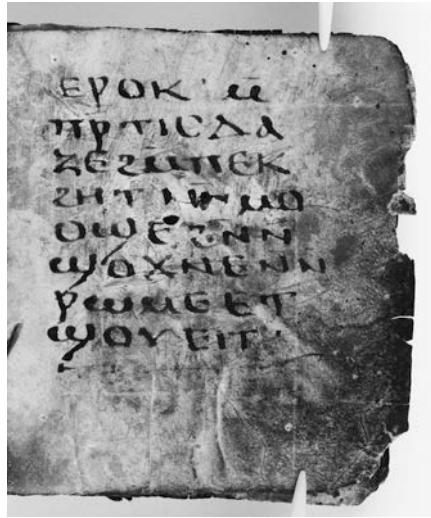


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Oracle 15

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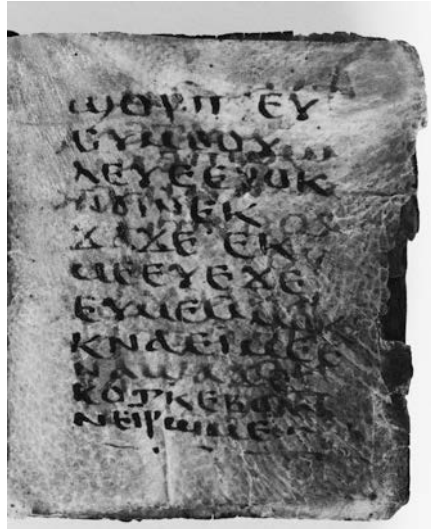


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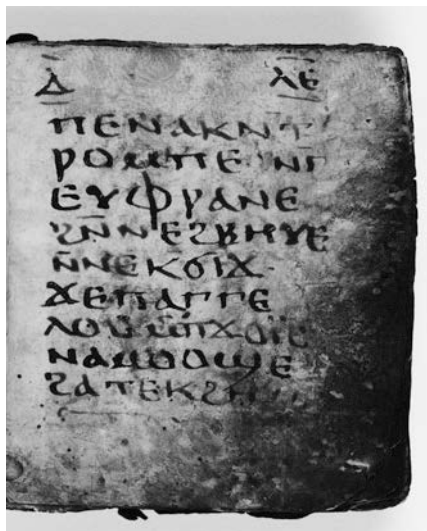


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Oracle 17

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Oracle 18

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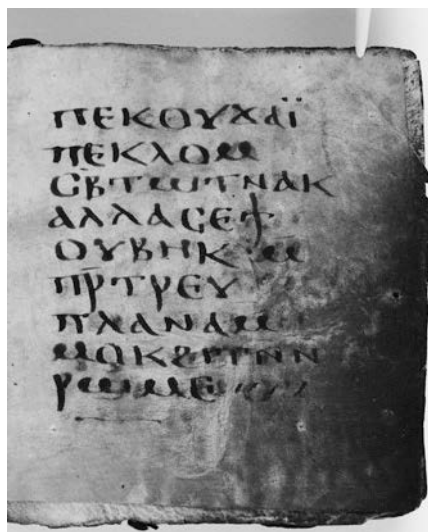


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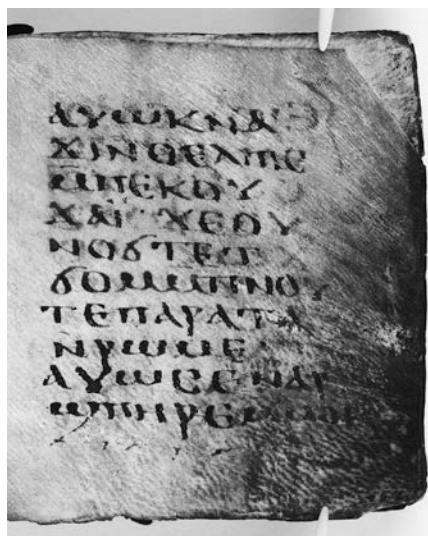


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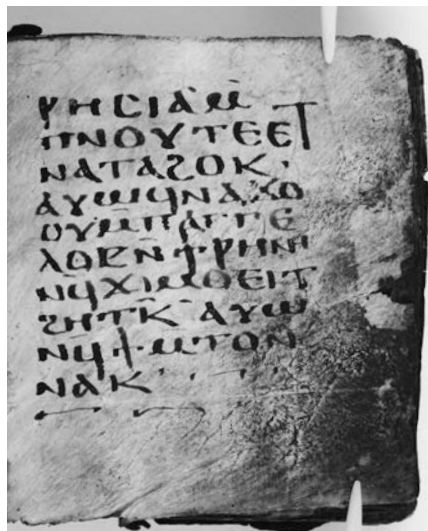


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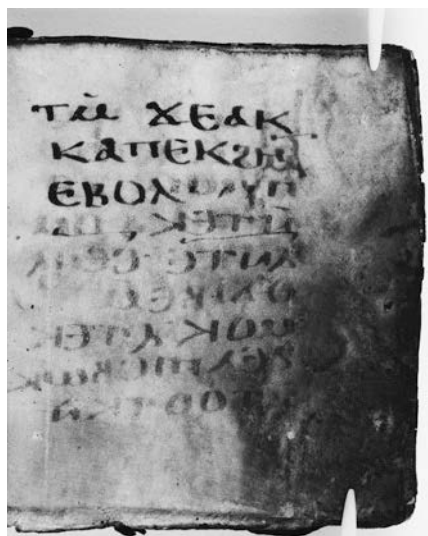


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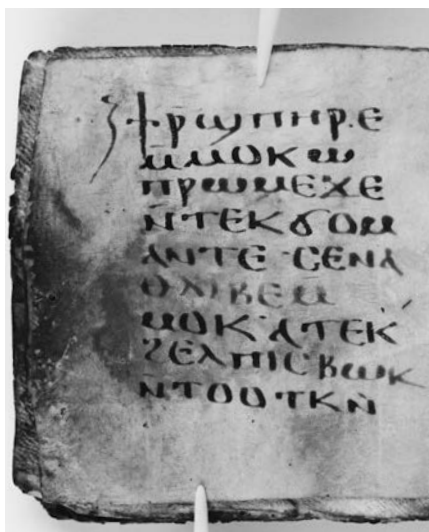


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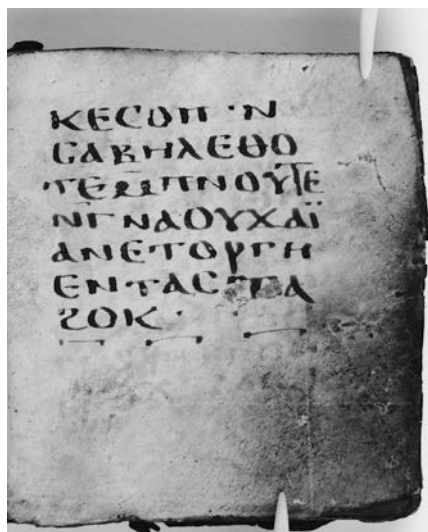


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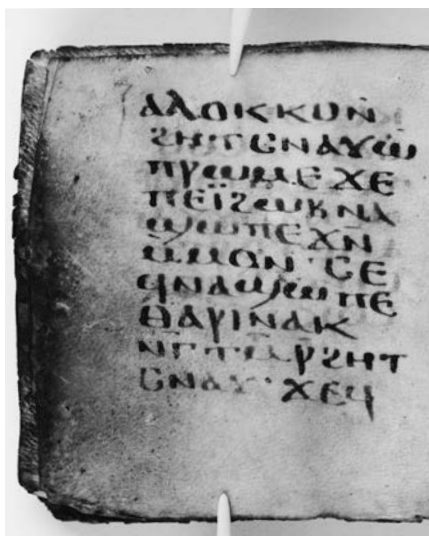


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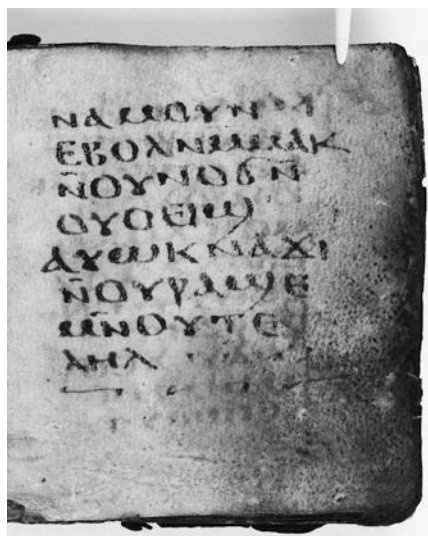


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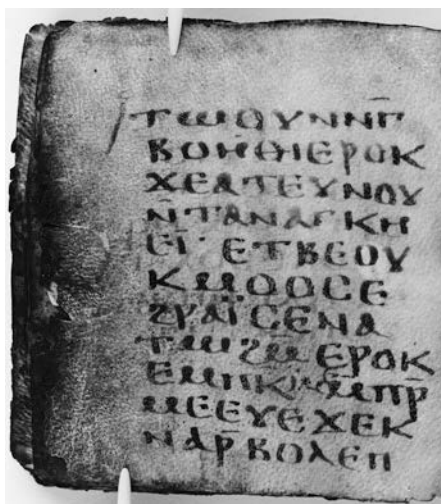


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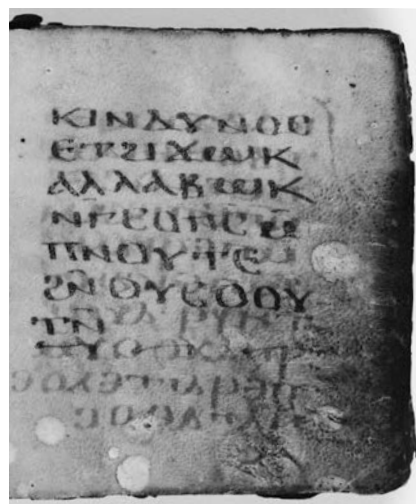


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Oracle 26

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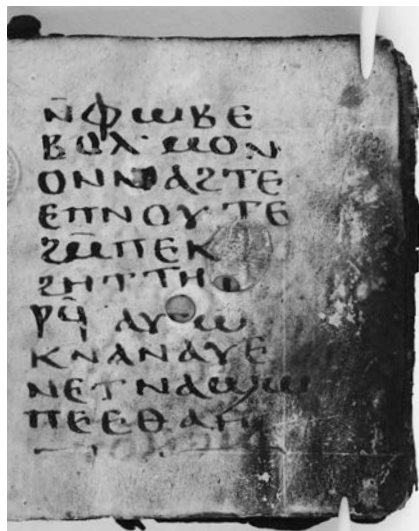


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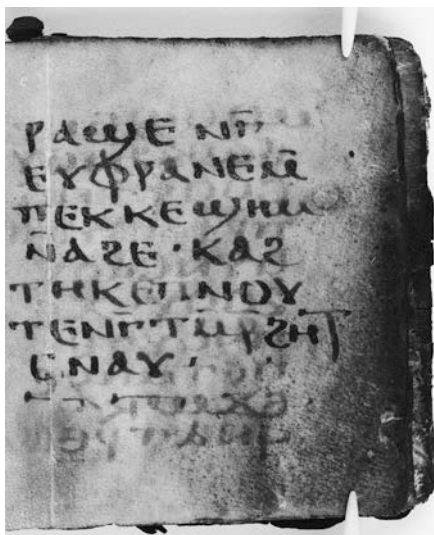


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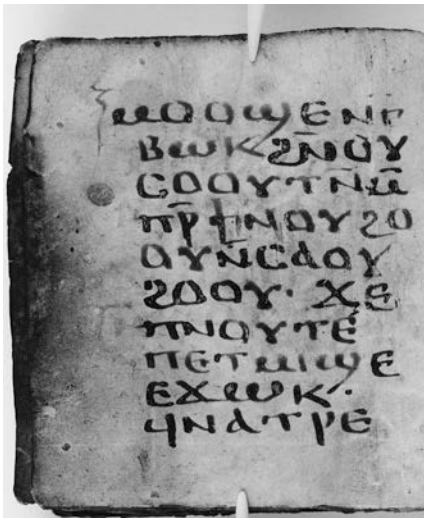


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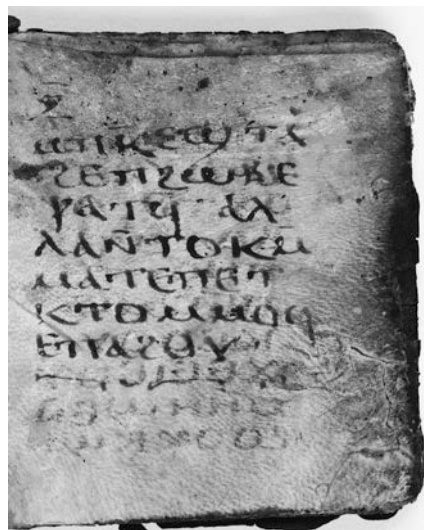


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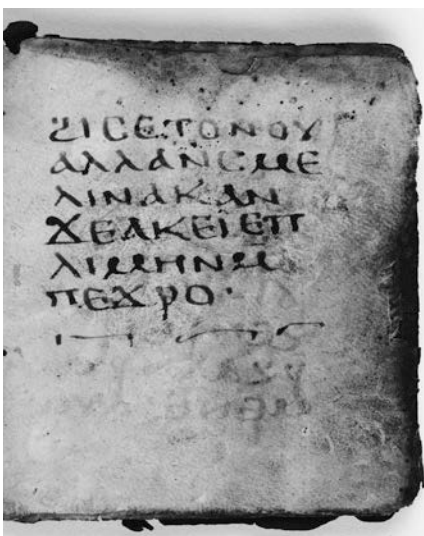


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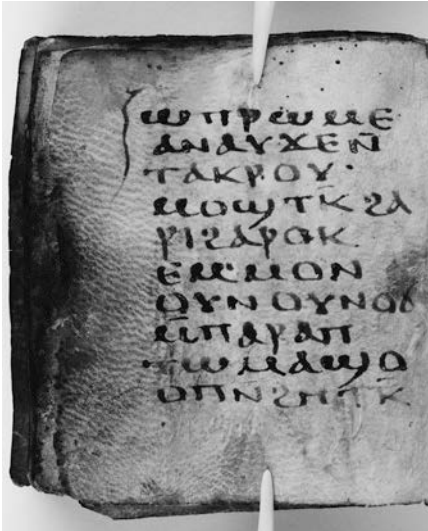


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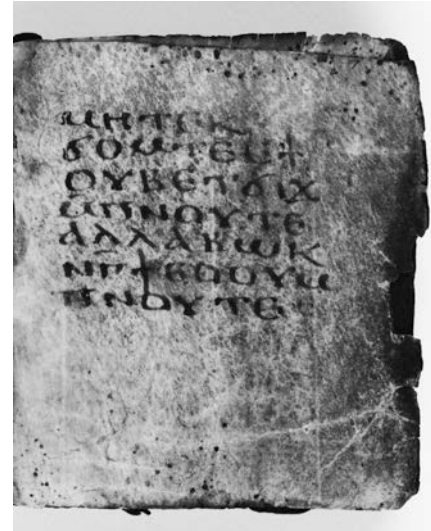


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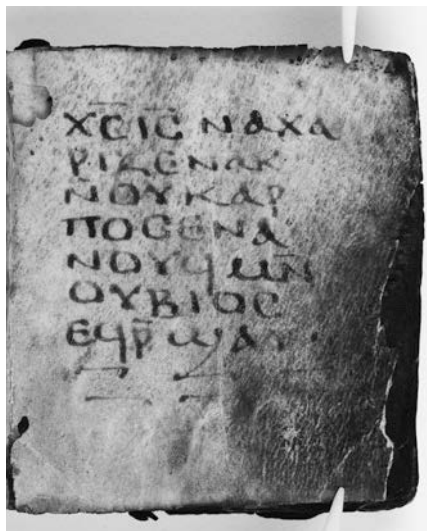


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