

Divination Practices—Part One

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Introduction and Influence

Divination has existed in all cultures throughout history. Its basic idea involves foretelling the future or accessing occult information by various means. Traditionally, the person who practiced divination was regarded as having supernatural powers.

Despite its frequent modern reformulation in psychological or parapsychological terms (e.g., receiving information from “the unconscious” or “higher” mind), historically, divination has always been an attempt to communicate with the supernatural or “divine” realm in order to secure information from the “gods.” Its fundamentally pagan and spiritistic nature has never changed, regardless of how “modern” its practices have become today.

In *Divination: Ancient and Modern*, occultist Dr. John H. Manas argues that the long history of divination forms an inseparable connection to spiritism and the occult. ¹ For example, he describes divination as an “ancient mysterious art of the gods,” i.e., spirits. ² He also explains that the method of spirit contact used in occult divination today was the same one used in ancient times:

The same process [of spirit contact] was followed by the ancient diviners. This can be seen in the meaning of the words used by the ancient Greeks for divination... which signify impulse, force, paroxysm, an unnatural condition of the individual concerned, which is under the influence and control of a psychic force, an invisible entity, of a god. This procedure and method of communication with the spirit world was then, as it is today, the most popular.³

Thus, the ancients interpreted divination as instituting contact with the “gods,” while modern practitioners often refer to divination as instituting contact with the spirits. Or, as we noted, the more naturalistically minded believe it to be contact with the untapped powers of the mind. Regardless, ancient diviners “were trance mediums through whom the spirit entity, the god, or as we say today, the control [spirit], or the [spirit] guide, spoke.” ⁴ In other words, “the same methods that were used in ancient times by the Oracles are used today by the most advanced of our mediums. In ancient times, the discarnate entity... was called [a] god.... Today these discarnate entities are called spirit controls or guides.” ⁵ Dr. Manas argues that all forms of successful divination require both psychic development and contact with the spirit world:

Divination is an art and, as such, it has to be mastered through patient effort and spiritual illumination. Certain brain, etheric and mental centers have to be opened and certain dormant faculties developed. It takes a long time according to the aptitude and the development of the candidate. A good diviner must also be a good philosopher and occultist.... Only a pure and unselfish diviner will send out high spiritual vibrations, which in turn will attract and make possible his communication with a correspondingly high discarnate entity.... ⁶

With the contemporary occult revival, many ancient methods of divination have reappeared in the last quarter century, and many new forms have also appeared—usually, it seems, through the assistance of the spirit world. Although some of these divination practices are marketed as “games,” many declare to be dealing with serious magic.

The following list includes several popular methods, their possible or probable origins, and examples of their use:

- Runes: Viking/European (magic and divination)
- Palmistry: possibly India (divination, character analysis)
- I Ching: Chinese (divination)
- Numerology: unknown (divination, character analysis)
- Tarot: Middle East (divination)
- Cartouche: Egyptian (magic and divination)
- Leela: Hindu (divination)
- Ouija Board, Phoenix Cards: American (divination or spiritism)
- Dungeons and Dragons: American (game of skill with potential occult involvement)
- Star+Gate Symbolic System: American (divination)

With one exception, Dungeons and Dragons, the goal of these practices is either divination or some form of occult self-knowledge or spiritual “enlightenment.” This is not unusual in that such methods are typically tied to a worldview based on ancient pagan magic or Eastern or Western occultism. Thus, those who author books on these subjects typically have a prior interest in the occult. For example, Murray Hope, the author of *The Way of the Cartouche: An Oracle of Ancient Egyptian Magic* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), is also the author of *Practical Egyptian Magic*, *Practical Greek Magic*, and *The Runes and Crystal Gazing*.

The appeal of these methods is their ability to allegedly divine the future, or the psychological self-insight they claim to offer, which explains their presence in modern psychotherapy. Virtually all the “how-to” books speak of the uncanny knack for accuracy that these practices are purported to have. As David and Julia Line observe in *Fortune Telling by Runes*, “[T]he uncanny knack they have of being right, for the greater part of the time, cannot be explained in purely factual terms. Rational theories can and are applied—but they still remain only theories. At the end of the day, you will either believe in runes or not.”⁷

Because of their alleged accuracy and power for self-transformation, certain segments of modern psychology show an increasing interest in these ancient forms of divination, particularly where they help achieve what can be interpreted as psychological insight or “growth.” This occurs principally through their ability to act as “counselor” or “guide” in psychological self-evaluation and by their ability to uncover relevant “unconscious dynamics” (e.g., archetypes or dream symbolism), which allegedly promote a more successful experience in psychotherapeutic treatment or in personal and spiritual “growth.”

As a result, their alleged “therapeutic” potential has attracted the interest of at least some segments of modern psychology. This is especially true in those schools most open to such an encounter: Jungian, transpersonal, humanistic, and now hundreds of fringe psychotherapies.

The famous psychoanalyst Carl Jung was a believer in the runes, I Ching, and the tarot, and his theories are often cited in support of the alleged psychological dynamics involved in these forms of divination. And articles in many psychology magazines also explore the psychotherapeutic “potential” of these or related methods.

In essence, modern methods of divination constitute one small portion of the contemporary American occult revival and, given our culture’s fascination with the supernatural (not

to mention the national penchant for novel psychotherapy), their success seems ensured.

But a fundamental question remains. If these methods work, especially supernaturally, what is their true source of power? Books on these topics often speak in terms of some kind of genuine, even supernatural, power behind these methods. And we will argue that by engaging in these divinatory arts, one can indeed tap a personal source of occult power that has access to hidden information, as well as an ability to manipulate events. In other words, we will show why we believe people are ultimately dealing with contacting spirit entities, and that this is where the genuine source of power is encountered. To our way of thinking, it is more logical to conclude that a supernatural personal intelligence outside space (and, perhaps, to some degree, time) is the source of information and volition, rather than to argue that sticks, dice, cards, and numbers can predict the future or reveal secret information about individuals.

Modern explanations for such uncanny powers often discard or downplay the supernatural in preference for natural, psychological, or parapsychological theories. As occult writer Michael Howard writes in *The Magic of the Runes: Their Origins and Occult Power*:

Today we have invented a brand new technical terminology to describe these powers which our ancestors took for granted. We call them extra-sensory perception, parapsychology, precognition, out-of-the-body experiences and telekinesis. Even our feeble attempts to rationalize these powers by giving them pseudo-scientific names cannot disguise how little we really know about them. Nowadays a scientifically educated psychic researcher or “parapsychologist” would laugh at you if you insisted on describing his field of study as “magic” or “magical,” but it was so regarded by our forebears—and who is to say they were wrong to do so? ⁸ Many of the millions of people utilizing these systems have indeed discovered that they are powerful. Yet such people are often informed that they are merely utilizing a principle of nature, or a “higher” aspect of their own mind, or nebulous “universal forces.” Of course, if the true origin of the power behind these methods is spiritistic, merely assigning the source of power to “natural” causes cannot change their reality.

Thus, historically, those who used these forms of divination viewed their source of power far differently than most modern psychologists and parapsychologists. The real power was attributed to magic and spiritism. When people sought out and obeyed the spirits through these methods, they often achieved their goals; the spirits also achieved theirs.

(to be continued)

Notes:

1. John H. Manas, *Divination: Ancient and Modern*, New York: Pythagorean Society, 1947, p. 211.
2. Ibid., p. 203.
3. Ibid., p. 205.
4. Ibid., p. 212.
5. Ibid., p. 235.
6. Ibid., p. 261.
7. David and Julia Line, *Fortune Telling by Runes*, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England: Aquarian Press, 1985, p. 8.
8. Michael Howard, *The Magic of the Runes: Their Origins and Occult Power*, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England: The Aquarian Press, 1986, pp. 53-54.

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