

Book is a Territory: A Hebrew Book of Fortune in Context

MICHAEL MEERSON

A book of fortune, or *sortes*, is a literary composition which includes a number of sayings independent from one another, each explaining or predicting a fate. These sayings are written down in such a manner that only one of them may be pointed to if the inquirer follows particular instructions. To this genre belongs a book written in Hebrew, part of which is preserved in the Cairo Geniza, and slated for publication in the fourth volume of magical texts from this collection.¹

Scholars have repeatedly attempted to classify books of fortune by their origin, construction, the method of divination, and the context in which these books were used.² My article pursues a number of goals. First, it summarizes the aforementioned attempts, while elucidating some aspects unnoticed or unexplained by other researches; second, it reconsiders the position attributed to Hebrew *goralot* in the history and evolution of books of fortune; third, the article seeks to reveal the origin of *sortes*, the reason of their appearance, and in addition, it will propose the external model for a specific kind, “staggered” *sortes*, thus drawing a link between books of fortune and other cultural phenomena.

¹ P. Schäfer and Sh. Shaked. *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*. Vol. 4. Tübingen. Forthcoming.

² See the bibliography in P. W. van der Horst. 1999. *Sortes: het gebruik van heilige boeken als lotsorakels in de oudheid*. Mededelingen van de Afdeling Letterkunde. Nieuwe reeks 62: 3. Amsterdam; and P. W. van der Horst. 1999. “Sortes: Sacred Books as instant oracles in Late Antiquity.” In *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*. Edited by L. V. Rutgers et al. Leuven. The earliest attempts to classify books of fortune were made by D. F. Sotzmann. 1850. “Die Loosbücher des Mittelalters.” *Serapeum* 20–22: 305–316, 321–332, 337–342, J. Bolte. 1903. “Zur Geschichte der Losbücher.” In *Georg Wickrams Werke*. Vol. 4: 276–341. Tübingen, and G. Björck. 1939. “Heidnische und christliche Orakel mit fertigen Antworten,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 19: 86–98.

Sortes I: from temples to saints

One of the earliest fortune-telling texts was discovered in the cities of Asia Minor – Phrygia, Pisidia, Lykia and Pamphylia (1st–2nd cc. CE). The full text of this so-called ABC or dice oracle consists of 56 verses-prophecies written in dactylic hexameter. Each verse follows after a combination of four numbers – one, three, four, six – and the name of the god or goddess responsible for this specific prophecy. Five knucklebones were thrown simultaneously, resulting in 56 possible variations (1–1–1–1–1–1; 1–1–1–1–3; 1–1–1–1–4, etc.).³

In the western part of the Empire, a similar practice of divination is known. Already in the mid-third century, the fame of *sortes* in the temple of Fortuna Primigenia in Praeneste (see Cicero *De div.* II 41, 85)⁴ was such that the Roman senate forbade the consul Lutatius Cerco the consultation of these “foreign” oracle (Livy 29.36.8). One might also consult *sortes* at Caere Falerii Antium and the river Clitumnus, where, as Pliny tells us, customers had left evidence of their regard on the walls and columns (Pliny, *Ep.* 8.8). To consult the oracle, the questioners could use bronze tablets, such as those preserved in the collection of the Vatican. The answers were written in vulgar hexameter and might be applied to any circumstance in life. Like the Greek dice oracle, they might have been interpreted as negative,⁵ positive,⁶ and in most

³ For a list of texts and cites where they were found, a tentative translation of the oracle, and the bibliography, see F. Graf. 2005. “Rolling the Dice for an Answer.” In *Mantike: Studies in Ancient Divination*, 51–97. Edited by S. I. Johnston and P. T. Struck. Leiden. Knucklebones (ἄστρογάλοι) have four flat facets with numbers one, three, four, and six. – Here is the introductory sentence and the first verse. The translation is from the Greek text published in F. Heinvetter. 1912. “Würfel- und Buchstabenorakel in Griechenland und Kleinasien.” Breslau, 4:

These are the oracles of Pythian Apollo by (throwing) five knucklebones; one must always listen to them.

1–1–1–1–1 5 (The oracle) of Zeus Olympios

All (the sides show) ace-dot [χιῶς], listen to the voice of Phoebus!

Zeus Savior will give good counsel to your mind.

He will give you happiness and everything whatever you wish.

But honor Aphrodite and the son of Maia (i. e. Hermes).

⁴ On this passage, see Ch. Grotanelli. 2005. “*Sorte unica pro casibus pluribus enotata*: Literary Texts and Lot Inscriptions as Sources for Ancient Kleromancy.” In *Mantike: Studies in Ancient Divination*, 131–132. Edited by S. I. Johnston and P. T. Struck. Leiden (pp. 129–146).

⁵ *CIL* I 2177 Est equos perpulcer; sed tu vehi non potes istoc. – The horse is wonderful, but you can’t ride that way.

⁶ *CIL* I 2183 Laetus lubens petito’r: quod dabitur gaudebis semper. – Joyfully celebrates the questioner, because (this fate) will be given to those who always enjoy.

cases neutral but warning prophecies⁷ no matter what the inquirer would ask.

The number of answers in one set and also the method of finding the answer are unknown. Most probably, the procedure was similar to that depicted on coins from Tegea: Athena holding an urn stands opposite to a small figure that was supposed to pick up one's prophecy. The same method was used for Greek alphabet-oracles from Asia Minor. Such oracles contain a number of prophecies usually corresponding to the number of characters in the alphabet of the given language: after each character, follows the prophecy.⁸

Judging strictly, these and other aforementioned texts cannot be considered in one group with actual books of fortune, the object of our research, because, as lapidary texts, they are public documents, a part of a standard religious practice, which validated their prophecies. Quite naturally, if a text, sacred due to its divine origin or a special status of its author, was used in the context of a public religious cult, such *sortes* gained especial credit. This happened to the poems of Homer⁹ and Virgil.¹⁰ Suetonius tells us how Tiberius went about the consultation of *sortes* at the spring of Aponus, near Patavium, which in the third century reappear associated with text of Virgil (*Tib.* 61.1; see also *Historia Augusta* 2.8 for Hadrian).

Though the poems of Homer and Virgil were not true *sortes*, a text composed of quotations from the *Iliad*, *Odyseey* and *Ennead* might cer-

⁷ CIL I 2173 Conrighi vix tandem, quod corvom est factum, [c]rede. – (It) may finally be improved, yet with difficulty, because it is crooked. Believe!

⁸ Alphabet-oracle from Adada in Pisidia; CIG 43790; The translation (introduction and four answers) is from the Greek text published in F. Heinvetter, 34, op. cit. at note 2: Honor the Lords, Apollo and Hermes, also praise Antiochus and Bianor! Read and enjoy the oracle's excellence (that) we from ancestors (received), that Apollo Phoebus had given us.

All you do and manage will be nice. (A)

Your helper will be the Pythian, and Tyche. (B)

Sweet is the fruit of a bee, yet the work is greater. (G)

Weak and unseasonable is the power of laws. (D)

See also M. Förster. 1933–1936. "Zwei kymrische Orakelalphabete für Psalterwahrsagung." *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 20: 228–243; W. R. Halliday. 1967. *Greek Divination: A Study of its Methods and Principles*, 215–6. Chicago; T. Curnow. 2004. *The Oracles of the Ancient World: A Comprehensive Guide*, Duckworth; J. Nolle. 2005. *Mit den Augen der Götter*. Zabern.

⁹ See F. Wehrli. 1928. *Zur Geschichte der allegorischen Deutung Homers*. Diss. Basel; R. Lamberton. 1986. *Homer the Theologian. Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*. Berkeley.

¹⁰ See D. A. Slater. 1922. *Sortes Vergilianae or Virgil and To-day*. Oxford; H. A. Loane. 1928. "The Sortes Vergilianae." *The Classical Weekly* 21: 185–189; R. Hamilton. 1993. "Fatal Texts: The Sortes Vergilianae." *Classical and Modern Literature* 13:309–336; Ph. Katz. 1994. "The Sortes Vergilianae: Fact and Fiction," *Classical and Modern Literature* 14:245–258.

tainly be. Papyri show fragments of the so-called Homer oracle.¹¹ In accordance with the instruction given in the introduction, the inquirer must first choose from the list a suitable day, read a prayer, and then throw one cube three times resulting in 216 possible combinations. In contrast to the aforementioned texts, the Homer oracle was not to be used in the context of a public ritual. Therefore, these texts are not improperly attributed to magical papyri. Also, unlike the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, surviving fragments of the Homer oracle show significant discrepancies, one from the other: different lists of days favorable for divination, and different quotations from Homer.

The *Sortes Sanctorum*, which appeared not later than fifth century and had its title changed to *Sortes Apostolorum*,¹² probably in the seventh century, also belongs to the category of ABC dice oracle. This book of fortune was frequently attacked by bishops' decrees, and totally forbidden in the eighth century.¹³ Before consulting on it, the inquirer must fast for three days on bread and water, sing the hymn to the Holy Trinity during the third day, and on the fourth day, after reading the *Pater Noster* and two other specific prayers, the inquirer may throw three dice and learn his fortune. Like all the aforementioned examples, verses of the *Sortes Sanctorum* might be interpreted as simply positive, negative, or neutral answers to practically any question. The whole text, whose Latin, French and Coptic variants survive, consists of 56 verses of which the first always begins with the phrase *post solem surgunt stellae* – "As Sun goes down the stars are rising." The *Sortes Sanctorum* does not use quotations from the Bible and Apocrypha. Similar to the Greek dice

¹¹ Preserved in *POxy.* LXI 3831 (3rd–4th cc. CE), *PLond.* I 121 (*PGM* VII 1–148) (3–4 cc. CE) and *PBon.* I 3 (2–3 cc. CE). The most recent publication is F. Maltomini. 1995. "PLond. 121 (= *PGM* VII), 1–221: Homeromanteion." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 106: 107–122. There are other fragments of magical formulae using quotations from Homer: *PGM* IV 467–474; *PGM* XXIIa 1–17.

¹² The translation (two answers) is from the Latin text (12th c. CE) published in C. Chabaneau. 1880. "Les Sortes des Apotres." *Revue des langues romanes* 17–18: 174: C. C. C. The Sun goes down, the stars are rising, and then the sun again returns to light. Just as your soul, whenever full of doubt, will soon, as you would see, arrive at clarity. You will possess what you desire – it comes to you – with the help of God. Show him your thankfulness! C. C. V. Deliberation of your heart will be resolved as you hope. You will be able to achieve what you desire. – See W. E. Klingshirn. 2002. "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum: Gibbon, Du Gange, and Early Christian Lot Divination." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10: 1: 77–130, with a list of manuscripts on page 129. For Coptic version, see *Papyrus Vatican Copt.* I (7th–8th cc. CE), in A. van Lantschoot. 1956. "Une Collection Sahidique de 'Sortes Sanctorum'." *Le Museon* 69: 35–52.

¹³ See O. Rühle. 1927 (repr. 1987) "Bibbel." *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* I. Berlin. J. D. Mansi. 1901. *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*. Paris (repr. of the Florence 1762 edition). R. MacMullen. 1997. *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, 237–238. New Heaven.

sortes, the time and probably place of their use was not arbitrary but connected to the cult of saints and feasts in their honor.

In the 15th–16th centuries, the peak of the popularity of *sortes*, ABC oracles became the most widespread; however, most of them were no longer used to predict the future or explain the present. The context pictured by their introductions, the language of the prophecies were more suitable to a dice game than to the oracle.¹⁴

In addition to ABC oracles with 56 and 216 verses just discussed, another kind of *sortes* appeared in the fifth century, *sortes* composed of individual prophecies numbered from one onward.¹⁵ Frequently containing a quote from John or Psalms,¹⁶ they could follow after the word

¹⁴ See, for instance, *Das Strassburger Würfelbuch von 1529*. Edited by A. Götze (1918). Strasbourg. The first answer (6.6.6):

In allem spyl bis tu der erst	In every game you are the first
Jetzt auch gern hoertest wer du werst	Now come and see whom you becomst
Dein nehster nachpaur weyss es wol	Your neighbor knows it very well
Wilrs wissenie wirff noch ein mol	Throw dice another time you shall

¹⁵ M. Naldini. 1983. "PSI XVII Congr. 5." In *Trenta testi greci da papiri letterari e documentari: editi in occasione del XVII Congresso internazionale di papirologia*, 12–15. Edited by M. Manfredi. Florence; P. Canari and R. Pintaudi. 1984. "Un système d'oracles chrétiens." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 57: 85–90.

¹⁶ The following is the list of manuscripts containing *sortes* with biblical quotations: *PBarc.* inv. 83 (3rd–4th cc. CE) (in R.Roca-Puig. 1966. "Papiro del evangelio de San Juan con 'Hermeneia'." *Atti XI Congr. Pap.*, 225–236. Milan), *PSI XIII* 1364 (4–5 cc. CE), *PBerol.* 21315 (6th c. CE), *PRainer.* IV 35 (6th c. CE, Fajum) (see also K. Aland. 1967. *Studien zur Überlieferung des Neuen Testaments und seines Textes*. Arbeiten zur Neutestamentlichen Textforschung 127, 128–9. Berlin), *PBerlin.* inv. 11914 (6th c. CE) (in O. Stegmüller. 1953. "Zu den Bibelorakeln im Codex Bezae." *Biblica* 34: 13–22), *PVindob.* G. 36102 (6th c. CE) (in H. Hunger. 1959. "Zwei unbekannte neutestamentliche Papyrusfragmente der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek." *Biblos* 8: 8–11, and H.Hunger. 1970. *Biblos* 19: 71), *PVindob.* inv. 26214 (6th c. CE) (in P.Sanz. 1946. *Griechische literarische Papyri christlichen Inhalts*. Vol. I, 58–59. Baden bei Wien.) *PBerlin.* inv. 3607 + 3623 (7th c. CE, Fajum), (in Stegmüller, op. cit.), *PColb-Nessana* II 3–4 (7th c. CE) (see also Aland, op. cit., 128–9), a lost fragment published by H. von Soden. 1902. *Die Schriften des NT* I, XI. Berlin (7th c. CE), *PVindob.* inv. 26084 (8th c. CE), (in K. Niederwimmer. 1965. *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 14: 10ff.) a Louvre papyrus from Antinoopolis published in W. E.Crum. 1904. "Two Coptic Papyri from Antinoe." *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 26: 174–178, *PSI I* p.VI (a reference by Vitelli to a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus). See also F. Drexler. 1941. "Ein griechisches Losbuch." *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 41: 311–318 and M. Förster. 1933–1936. "Zwei kymrische Orakelalphabete für Psalterwahrsagung." *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*. 20: 228–243. For the bibliography until 1953, see P. Courcelle. 1953. "L'Enfant et les 'sorts bibliques'." *Vigiliae Christianae* 7: 194–220. – Codex Bezae (9th–10th cc. CE): 69 short *hermeneiai* in the margins of *Mark* 1.1–10.22. See F. H.Scrivener. 1864 (repr.: Pittsburgh, 1864) *Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis*, 451–452. Cambridge. B. Outtier. 1996. "Les Prosermeneiai du Codex Bezae." In *Codex Bezae: Studies from the Lunei College*, 74–78. Edited by D. C. Parker and C. B. Amphoux, Leiden. – Codex Sangermanensis des Evangiles g¹ (Paris, *Bibl.Nat.Lat.* 11553, 8th–9th cc. CE): 185 sentences in the margins of the Gospel of John divided into 316 sections.

hermeneica, which literally means *interpretation* but in the given contexts must rather be understood as *divination*. Some texts, in addition to the primary, continuous numeration (1.1, 1.2, 1.3... 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, etc.), also had a secondary one. Perhaps the secondary numeration pointed to the number of the section in the whole book and the number of each prophecy in the given section.¹⁷ In contrast to the *Sortes Sanctorum*, the use of *hermeneiai* was never criticized by clergy. Nevertheless, this type had completely disappeared already in the Middle Ages: among the published texts and descriptions, I could find no text of this kind written or copied after the twelve century.

I now come to the group of *sortes* in which the *Geniza Goralot* belongs. The first books of this type appeared not earlier than the third century and are still being used in modernity. They all were constructed upon the identical scheme, but with numerous variants, some of which make their basic design quite obvious, others – mysterious.

The *Sortes Doudecim Patriarcharum* demonstrates the simplest variant. This book is written in Latin and dated to the twelfth century.¹⁸

For discussion of *John's hermeneiai*, see B. M. Metzger. 1988. "Greek Manuscripts of John's Gospel with 'Hermeneiai'." In *Text and Testimony. Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A. F. J. Klijn*, 162–169. Edited by T. Baarda et al. Kampen.

¹⁷ Naldini, 12, op.cit. at note 14.

¹⁸ A tentative translation is from the Latin text published in A. Boutemy. 1937. "Recueil Poétique du manuscrit Cotton Vitellius A XII." *Latomus* 1: 290–313, and T. C. Skeat. 1954. "An Early Medieval 'Book of Fate': the *Sortes XII Patriarcharum*." *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 3: 41–54: "If you want to use *sortes*, no offering should be given; take care to foreknow what is necessary to know: what and for which reason you should do, being certain of all approaching events when they happen. Bravely attempt to reveal future! Keep awake, fasting and praying for two days and one night, humbly entreating. You must have a double wax-light (?). Having this done, spread holy water. Do not forget the *Pater*, and the *Credo* do not omit. Find burial grounds, the closest to you. As you have come, take three dice of fortune and throw (them), because all twelve lots must well be maintained (be possible). Whatever you would like to know, dice thrown in this way will truthfully tell. If you would inquire these *sortes*, your hopes will not be deceived:

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

Having fulfilled the conditions set in the introductory part (that is to find a suitable place and to pray), one must choose one of twelve questions and throw two dice.

The inquirer then receives a number, from *two* to *twelve* and counts down the sections of the book, beginning from the section having the same number as the line in the list of questions where he found his one. The number of all questions is the same as the number of sections composing the book, i. e., twelve.¹⁹ The scheme of this book is clear. Having written twelve answers to each of twelve questions (preparatory stage 1, not actually issued), the author then “staggers” them in such a way that each subsequent answer to the same question is moved to the next heading in the subsequent section. Looking at the table (stage 2), one can easily understand how the inquirer, having asked the question B and thrown the number *three*, will find the answer in the third line of the fourth section.

Stage 1					Stage 2 – staggered				
A1	B1	C1	D1	E1	A1	B1	C1	D1	E1
A2	B2	C2	D2	E2	E2	A2	B2	C2	D2
A3	B3	C3	D3	E3	D3	E3	A3	B3	C3
A4	B4	C4	D4	E4	C4	D4	E4	A4	B4

The scheme of the partially preserved *Sortes Sangallenses*²⁰ and *Sortes Sangermaneses* (see at note 15) are the same, i. e., n (the column) + X (the throw of the dice) – 1 will point to the section where an answer under the number X will be the right one.

The matter in case of *Experimentarius Bernardini Silvestris* and *Goralot Urim ve-Tumim* is not that simple. The Latin version of the *Experimentarius*, dating from the twelfth century, is translated from the more

¹⁹ For instance, question 8, lot 3: Illi tuta fides in eoque per omnia fides. – You may safely trust to that one whom you trust everything.

²⁰ Hundreds of replies, each identified by a number, are grouped under 137 categories. See A. Dold, and D. Meister. 1948. *Die Orakelsprüche im St.Galler Palimpsest-codex 908 (die sogenannten Sortes Sangallenses) auf Grund neuer Lesung und mit erweitertem Text nach Materien geordnet*. Wien. – A. Demandt. 1990. “Die Sortes Sangallenses. Eine Quelle zur spätantiken Sozialgeschichte.” In *Atti dell’Accademia romanistica costantiniana. VII convegno internazionale*, 635–650. Edited by G. Crifò u. S. Giglio. Perugia-Napoli; K. Strobel. 1992. “Soziale Wirklichkeit und irrationales Weltverstehen in der Kaiserzeit. I Sortes Astrampsychi und Sortes Sangallenses.” *Laverna* 3: 129–141; R. Kussl. 2004. “Die Sortes Sangallenses: Ein antikes Losorakel.” In *Alte Texte – Neue Wege*. Dialog Schule – Wissenschaft. Klassische Sprachen und Literaturen 38: 129–154. Edited by R. Kussl. Munich; W. E. Klingshirn. 2005. “Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: The *Sortes Sangallenses*.” In *Mantike: Studies in Ancient Divination*, 99–128. Edited by S. I. Johnston and P. T. Struck. Leiden.

ancient Arabic original.²¹ This treatise has frequently been called a geomantic manual, because the first step is to draw a random number of points in a straight line. The inquirer then finds the theme of his question on the table and, if the number of points exceeds seven, counting that question as seven, he goes up the table until he reaches his number. If the number is seven, the inquirer begins directly from the theme of his question; if the number of points is less than seven, then the inquirer counts his question as that number and goes down the table until he reaches seven. The capital to which it points would lead him to the intermediate sections of moon phases, and finally to one of the judges, where adding the constant nine to his number of points, the inquirer would find the response. For example, having asked the question about the journey (22), and written seven points, we remain at the same place at the first table, then we go to *occidentem faciem turris Veneris*, hence to the thirtieth moon, to its first phase, and in the end, to the judge Algar-galafar, where, having omitted 15 lines, we read the answer: *Via tibi pacis, sed stare melius est.* – Your road is safe, but to remain is better.

The scheme of the *Experimentarius* is based upon the inverted (!) staggered table with 28 rows and columns. All intermediate pseudo-astrological tablets as well as nine verses beginning each capital are irrelevant and inserted to make the *sortes* more baffling. In addition, the staggered composition has been sophisticated a lot. In order to calculate its algorithm, one has to do the following. (1) In the first table, the topics must be numbered by minus quantities, $-1 \dots -28$. (2) The drawing of seven points must be set equal to one point, consequently the basic algorithm n (column) + X (number of points) – 1 becomes $-n + (X - 6) - 1$. For instance, asking the question four and drawing seven points, I count, $-4 + 1 - 1 = -4$; drawing five points, $-4 + (-1) - 1 = -6$. (3) Since the corresponding capital in the virtual table of answers has been moved seven cells forward (including the start cell), I subtract (because of the minus quantity) 6,²² $-n + (X - 6) - 1 - 6$, and, multiplying

²¹ L. Thorndike. 1923. *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*. Vol. 2, 110–123. New York. M. B. Savorelli. 1959. “Un Manuale di Geomanzia presentato da Bernardo Silvestre da Tours (XII secolo): l’*Experimentarius*.” *Rivista Critica di Storia della Filosofia* 14: 283–342; Ch. Burnett. 1977. “What is the *Experimentarius* of Bernardus Silvestris? A preliminary survey of the material.” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 44: 79–125; Ch. Burnett. 1998. “The *Sortes Regis Amalrici*: an Arabic Divinatory Work in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem?” *Scripta Mediterranea* 19–20: 229–2.

²² The figure presents the table of questions, where *seven* is *one* (let’s say we made seven points and remain in the same place as in other *sortes* if we have thrown *one*), the judge section showing nine lines of fake answers and the actual seventh answer which is moved seven sections forward. All intermediate sections are omitted.

Questions						5 points			1 (7 points)														
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28											
Answers ... 28 rows, 28 columns (19 + 9 lines of fake answers)																							
1	2																28						
	2																						
	3	D	U	M	M	Y																	
A	N	S	W	E	R	S																	
	5																						
	6																						
	7																						
	8																						
9	9																						
1	10																						
2	11																						
3	12																						
4	13																B4						
5	14																B5						
6	15															B6							
7	16													B7			a7						

by (-1), I convert the virtual algorithm into the real, $n - X + 6 + 1 + 6 = n - X + 13$.²³

No less mysterious is *Goralot Urim ve-Tumim*, a Hebrew book of fortune.²⁴ The instruction, however, is simple: having chosen one of the 72 questions (Let as say “Would the lost thing be found” [1.1]), the client at random opens the Hebrew Bible, notices the first character on the page and its numerical value (e. g., *bet* – two). He counts this

²³ In the given example (see the table): $22 + 13 - 7 = 28$; $19 + 13 - 5 = 27$.
²⁴ Partly published in E. Burkhardt. 2004. “Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften: zur Typologie einer jüdischen Divinationsmethode.” In *Jewish Studies Between the Disciplines*, 95–148. Edited by K. Herrman et al. Leiden; fully published in M. Bakal. 1964. *Goralot Urim ve-Tumim*. Jerusalem.

1. Ruby

2. Topas

... 72 (6 × 12)

1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	2.1
2						
2	ת					
2		נ				
2			צ			
2				כ		
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7	D	U	M	M	Y	
A	N	S	W	E	R	S

number down the table of questions (for instance 1.2), notices the title of section and the number he has reached in that section,²⁵ and goes to the indicated table of answers. There are 72 such tables titled as precious stones – one title for six tables subdivided by numbers (i. e., twelve titles). In the vertical row of “his” table, the inquirer finds the column that will correspond to “his” number (row 2 on the scheme) and writes down the first, uppermost character in this column (in the actual *goralot*: second column, first row). He then does the same for each subsequent character in the subsequent 14 tables (1.3: second column – second row; 1.4: second column – third row, etc.). Having them all written down, the inquirer will read: *timtsa me-ha-ebda mi-ktsata* – You will find a little part of the lost thing.

²⁵ The scheme of the table of questions is based on two kinds of numeration: continuous numerations, from *one* to 72, which enables the enquirer to find the reference in the table of questions; and the separated numeration – from *one* to *six* for each of the twelve sections titled as precious stones – which points to one of 72 tables of answers and the number of the column in that table. As each table contains seven columns, while only six might be referred to, the seventh is the column of dummy answers, which the inquirer could never reach.

In fact, this *goralot* may be virtually pictured as consisting of two staggered schemes, one inside the other. First is the main staggered scheme with seven rows and 72 columns. The inquirer having found his “cell” in the table, arrive at another staggered scheme with 15 rows and columns, each containing a letter of his answer.²⁶

Although the composition of this book clearly alludes to the staggered *sortes* of Late Antiquity one can hardly find a Hebrew manuscript with *goralot* dating from Middle Ages. Among the extant issues of *Goralot Urim ve-Tumim*, I cannot find one written or printed before the 17th century. This fact looks even more curious regarding the contemporary background of these *sortes*. Since the 15th century, the structure of European books of fortune changed totally. The journey of the inquirer from the question to the answer became longer and the place of answers in the final chapter was now random.

The *Libro di Sorti* of Lorenzo Spirito offers 20 question to the inquirer; the chosen question will lead him to the king; the king to the philosopher; the philosopher to the star or constellation inside of which in the inner or outer sphere, the inquirer will find a reference to one of 20 astrologists who, in turn, will read him the metric response.²⁷

Sortes also became more decorative. Konrad Mulitor, alias Bollstatter and Suedenschwanz, is known as illustrator of 22 books of fortune written in the second half of the 15th century.²⁸ He also illustrated and probably composed ABC *sortes* with 56 answers, all having entertainment or moralizing purpose as, for instance, the dice book for lovers or the book of answers by Judas, Satan Christ, Mary, and the Saints.²⁹

²⁶ The figure shows the scheme of answers: 72 tables subdivided into twelve sections. Each table has seven columns (one is fake), and 15 rows (on the picture, due to the space limitation, I showed only six rows and only in the second column of tables 1.1 [1] – 2.1 [7]).

²⁷ Lorenzo Spirito, *Libro di Sorti*, 1485; English version: 1618, see <http://www.lib.umi.com.ebo/image/16909>), Question 1 (p. 1): If thy life shall bee fortunate. Go to king Romulus. – Go to Socrates (p. 3) – Go to the Libra, to the spirit Caru (p. 5) – Go to Aram 45 (p. 25) –

For thy good manners and virtues all

Doubtlesse God thee reward shall:

No worldly life heere for to misse

And after in heaven to have his blisse.

²⁸ *Ein Losbuch Konrad Bollstatters*. (Facsimile CGM 312 d. Bayer. Staatsbibliothek München.). Edited by K. Schneider. Wiesbaden. 1973. Question 3: Ob der Geselle oder der Fruendt gutt sey oder nicht. So lueg drauf. – Would the companion or the friend be good? If not, so lie about it.

²⁹ W. L. Braekman, 1980. “Fortune-Telling by the Casting of Dice: A Middle English Poem and its Background.” *Studia Neophilologica* 52:1:3–29, esp. 9–10.

Sortes II: priority and dependence

Basic questions following from the picture presented here are priority and dependence in the evolution of books of fortune, and, actually, their origin as genre – how to explain the scarce evidence for *sortes* in the period from the first mention of the *Homeromanteia* in the *Pax* of Aristophanes (written in 421 BCE)³⁰ until third-fourth centuries CE, the age of the sudden and rapid rise of their popularity? In my opinion, the answer lies in reconsidering the relation between *sortes* and the temple oracle losing its popularity in the third and abolished in the fourth century CE (with only a few extant exceptions discussed below). The reason for this loss of trust in the oracles was, on one hand, the quarrel between Christianity and paganism, the latter arguing for the oracle as the main proof of the authenticity of pagan beliefs, and, on the other hand, these very beliefs, which, suffering crucial changes, brought the destruction of the oracle closer. The quarrel was lost: pagan and Christian authors mocked at imprecise and sometimes absurd prophecies (see, e. g., Luc. *Alex.* passim, and Porph. ap. Euseb. *PE* 5.16). Those who however still trusted the oracles considered as their origin not some specific deity whose voice had been heard from the crypt of a distant temple, but, in the case of philosophers, the one Supreme Being who exists everywhere, and, in the case of common people, the local deities in the local temples, which now enjoyed greater popularity than faraway sanctuaries of Zeus and Apollo. Coming to a temple of their town, people asked everyday questions and received prosaic answers, of course in prose.

The procedure of asking the oracle is best illustrated by *PHarr.* 54 and *POxy.* XVI 1926 dating from the fifth or sixth century CE, both considering one and the same subject – one's projects of studying the banking-business – but the one is phrased positively throughout, the other negatively.³¹ The god, by a mechanism unknown, returned one question to the questioner as his answer. The questions asked were pretty standard – the same ones recurring in most books of fortune. I here attempted to collect the published oracle questions in Greek and present

³⁰ 1089f.: Hierocles: What oracle ordered you to burn these joints of mutton in honor of the gods? Trygaeus: This *grand oracle of Homer's*: "Thus vanished the dark war-clouds and we offered a sacrifice to new-born Peace. When the flame had consumed the thighs of the victim and its inwards had appeased our hunger, we poured out the libation of wine."

³¹ See texts, translations and the discussion in H. C. Youtie. 1975. "Questions to the Christian Oracle." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 18: 252–257.

them as follows, showing the contents of each, and the responsible deity (not including *PHarr.* 54 and *POxy.* XVI 1926):³²

1. Concerning one's health:

- PSI inv. 15 (2nd–1st cc. BCE) (in *Trenta testi...*[op cit. at note 14], 45–48), Will
Tauserapis recover from her illness? / Thoeiris-Thonis-Harpebekis-Harpok-
rates
POxy. XLII 3078 (2nd c. CE) Must I go to Hermeinos, Hermopolitan physician,
to cure my eyes? / Helios-Serapis
PCalsberg inv. 24 (2nd c. CE) (in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 57:
91–92) (1c. CE) Will the sick die? / Horus-Harpsenensis
SB XII 11227 (2nd–3rd cc. CE) Will I recover from my illness? / Isis
BGU I 229 (2nd–3rd cc. CE) Will I recover from my illness? / Soknopaios-Soko-
noupis
POxy. VIII 1150 (6th c. CE) Should we take the sick to our hospital? / Holy
Philoxenos

2. Concerning one's journey:

- PTebt.* II 284 (1st c. BCE) The letter to one's sister, informing about the oracular
answer: I must go after 25th of the month / Suchos
PFay. 137 (1st c. CE) Should I remain in Bacchias? / Sokanobkoneus
PFay. 138 (1st–2nd cc. CE) Is it appropriate for me to go to Arsinoe? / Dioscuri
PStrasb. 352 (2nd c. CE) Is it appropriate for me to go to Pisais? / Soknopaios-
Ammon
PStrasb. V 353 (2nd c. CE) Is it appropriate for me to go to Nesten? / Soknopaios
PStrasb. V 354 (2nd c. CE) Is it appropriate for me to go to X? / Ammon
POxy. VI 923 (2nd c. CE) Is it appropriate for me to go to Alexandria? / Serapis
POxy. L 3590 (2nd–3rd cc. CE) Should I come (?)... / Thonis
POxy. VI 925 (5th–6th cc. CE) Is it appropriate for me to go to Chiout? / Jesus
Christ

3. Concerning one's marriage:

- PRain.* 26 = *WChr.* I:2 122 (year 6th CE) Is it appropriate for me to live with and
marry Tapetheutis? / Soknopaios)
PKöln IV 202 to (2nd c. CE) Is it appropriate for me to marry the daughter of
Serapikos? / Thonis
POxy. IX 1213 (2nd c. CE) May I marry X? / Helios-Serapis
POxy. XXXI 2613 (2nd c. CE) Should I live in unregistered marriage with Diony-
sios? / Helios-Serapis
PGM XXXc (2nd c. CE) Shall I remain with my wife? / Soknopaios-Sokonoupis

³² Demotic oracular questions see in *POx.Griffith* I 3–12 and *PCalsberg* III 15–20, 428–429, 481.

4. Concerning one's interaction with law and government:

POxy. LV 3799 (2nd–3rd cc. BCE) Shall I be successful in a bid to the governor? / Kurie

PLond. III 1267d (2nd c. CE) (in *ArchP* IV 559) Shall I be executed by the governor? / Sukis

PBerol. Gr. 13300 (2nd c. CE) (in *ArchP* XV 72) Will the governor be angered at me? / Soknopaios-Ammon

SB XII 11226 (2nd c. CE) Shall I continue in my office? / Soknopaios-Ammon

PLond. inv. 2935 (in *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 53: 121–122) (3rd c. CE) Should I employ a writer to manage the litigation? / Ammon

PLond. inv. 2936 (*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 53: 121–122) (3rd c. CE) May the plaintiff win the litigation? Ammon

5. Concerning one's legal transaction:

POxy. VIII 1148 (1st c. CE) Is it appropriate for my son and his wife to write a contract? / Helios-Sarapis

POxy. VIII 1149 (2nd c. CE) Is it appropriate for me to buy a slave? / Zeus-Helios-Serapis

PKöln IV 201 (2nd c. CE) May I trust Diogenis, concerning the contract in Alexandria, or must be afraid of him going to law (?)

6. Concerning “the thing”

PGrenf. II 12 (2nd c. CE) Should I do the thing I think about / to Soknopaios and Sokonpiaios)

Miscellaneous:

PFirenze. Mus. Eg. Inv. 10082 (2nd c. CE) Did X take everything? / through a mediator to Souchos-Soknebtynis ?)

PStrasb. IV 221 (2nd c. CE) Did the shepherds harm bulls of the Persian? / Ammon

PMilVogl. 127 (3rd–2nd cc. CE) Does Horos know about X?

“There is, in fact,” wrote Plutarch (1st – 2nd cc. CE),³³

“profound peace and tranquility; war has ceased, there are no wandering of peoples, no civil strives, no despotism, nor other maladies and ills in Greece requiring many unusual remedial forces. Where there is nothing complicated or secret or terrible, but the interrogations are on slight and commonplace matters, like the hypothetical questions in school: if one ought to marry, or to start on a voyage, or to make a loan – to clothe such things in verse, to devise circumlocutions, and to foist strange words upon inquiries that call for a simple short answer is the thing done by an ambitious pedant embellishing an oracle to enhance his reputation.”

³³ *The Oracles at Delphi*, 408 (transl. by F. C. Babbitt from *Plutarch's Moralia*. Vol. 5. Edited by T. E. Page. London-Cambridge.).

Long and exhausting pilgrimage became no longer necessary; and soon, from the fourth century the local temples have also remained without visitors.³⁴ The travel to the oracle, as a way from the question to the answer, would have finally lost its importance; and then, the book became a territory. Now the book was asked the same questions as the temple-oracle had been asked before, and even the phrasing of questions in books of fortune was similar to oracular inquiries.³⁵

The same subject matter, the similar wording, the overlapping time span when the one was fading out and the other emerging, there is yet more evidence of the shift from the temple oracles to the books of fortune – an answer of the oracle preserved in *PVindSal*. 1: “The thing you questioned about – you will do well! (ὁπὲρ ὧν ἠξιώσας ὑγιαίνεις). What you desire day and night, will be (prepared) for you. Gods will lead you (οἱ θεοὶ σε ὁδαγήσουσιν) to the thing you desire, and your life will improve, and your existence will be well-arranged.” The procedure of getting such an answer must be completely different from that described above. The passage from *PE* of Eusebius (5.22–23) may be of help. It tells about Oenomaus of Gadara, the Cynic philosopher who had consulted Apollo of Claros on some question concerning commerce, and received a pompous answer nearly promising an earthly paradise. Oenomaus, however, was seriously disturbed when he learnt that the same answer was given to one Callistratus, a merchant of Pantus. The secret is simple – the priests in temples obviously had books with ready-made answers which were sorted by topics. Had a questioner been allowed to use such books on his own, he would have used books of fortune similar to those which I discuss. Indeed, the resemblance of *PVindSal*. 1 to the answers in Greek and even Hebrew *sortes* is striking: compare, e. g., ἀγγέλοι γὰρ θ(εο)ῦ ὁδηγέσουσι σε (*PSI* XVII Congr. 5v. 4 – see supra at note 14), and numerous answers in the *Geniza Goralot* (see infra, section III, at a list of topics, questions eleven, 16, 20) beginning with *ha-davar she-bikashtha/shaalta*.

Therefore, the phenomenon of the staggered *sortes*, with their mystery on the one hand, and prosy questions and answers on the other, ap-

³⁴ See, e. g., H. W. Parke. 1967. *Greek Oracles*. Chpt. 12. London.

³⁵ R. Stewart (1985. “The Oracular EI.” *Greek Roman Byzantine Studies* 26: 67–73) argues that the *Sortes Astrampsychi* were, like oracular questions in Delphi and Dodona, constructed as direct interrogatives, which “places the *sortes* firmly in the oracular tradition.” In our opinion, *sortes* rather reflected the procedure and the phrasing of oracular questions in Egypt – indirect questions and apodosis (see examples supra). In this case, the linguistic parallel is not that clear and immediate, yet existent, e. g., *S. Astrampsychi* ξα εἰ μισθώσομαι καὶ συμφέρει μοι and *POxy*. LV 3799: εἰ συμφέρον ἐστὶ προσελθεῖν κτλ.

peared as nothing else but the magical rebirth of the tradition that had died in the fourth century; “magical” – in the literal sense of the word.

In truth, there were also the “new” Christian oracles showing the continuity of pagan divinatory traditions. The scheme of petitions remains exactly the same, only the name of the oracle changed – pagan deities became Christian saints: “O God of our patron Saint Philoxenus, if you bid us to take Anoup to your hospital, show your power and bring back this message” (*POxy.* VIII 1150 [6th c. CE]). Yet apart from these oracles, which were rather exceptional, the sanctuaries gave way to the books.

Subsequently, books of fortune might keep their essence and contents, or adapt themselves to the changing world vision. *Sortes Astrampsychi*, the oldest surviving example of books of fortune,³⁶ written around the third century, received a second life in the Middle Ages. Its introductory epistle, which in the original version took form of a letter of Astrampsychos to the king Ptolemy, now acquired a Christian continuation including a prayer to the Almighty God. Some questions were transformed into queries of the specifically Christian interest, and the corresponding answers were adjusted accordingly. For example, the question “Will I be reconciled with my girlfriend?” became “Will I become a bishop?”

In this way, if our reasoning is correct and the Hellenistic oracle is indeed a precursor of books of fortune, it is easy to arrive at the conclusion which was already made by other scholars, though through the different arguments: since the Jewish tradition had no such precursor as Hellenistic oracles, the emergence of Hebrew *sortes* cannot be a result of the genuine evolution, but rather of copying and translating from other languages, on the first phase; and only thereupon did a Jewish

³⁶ R. Hercher. 1863. *Astrampsychi Oraculorum Decades C111*. Berlin; G. M. Browne. 1970. “The Composition of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*,” *Bulletin of the London University Institute of Classical Studies* 17: 95–100; G. M. Browne. 1974. *The papyri of the Sortes Astrampsychi*. Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 58 (= *POxy.* XII 1477, XXXVIII 2832, 2833). Meisenheim am Glan; G. M. Browne. 1976. “The Origin and Date of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*.” *Illinois Classical Studies* 1: 53–58; G. M. Browne. 1983. *Sortes Astrampsychi*. Vol. 1. Tübingen; R. Stewart. 1995. “The Textual Transmission of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 20:134–147; R. Stewart. 2001. *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. II, Munich; *POxy.* LXVII 4581. – Complete bibliography up to 1995 see in W. M. Brashear. 1995. “New Greek and Divinatory Texts in Berlin.” In *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, 221–223. Edited by M. Meyer and P. Mirecki. Leiden. Complete translations see in R. Stewart and K. Morrell. 1998. “The Oracles of Astrampsychus.” In *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature*, 285–324. Edited by W. Hansen. Indiana; W. Clarysse and F. A. J. Hoogendijk. 1981. “De *Sortes Van Astrampsychus*. Een orakelboek uit de Oudheid bewerkt voor het Middelbaar Onderwijs.” *Kleio* n. r. 11: 53–99.

tradition evolve. Judging by the Hebrew *sortes* published or discussed until now, their emergence and evolution could hardly have happened before the late Middle Ages. Yet it is unnatural to imagine that *Goralot Urim ve-Tumim*, a genuine Jewish book, though also clearly reminiscent of late antique *sortes*, was derived from its immediate precursors, different in every respect, such as, for instance, the *Libro di Sorti*. Obviously, this picture cannot be true.

In fact, a majority of questions recurs in books of fortune of all times and nations, and for this reason can hardly help us in finding affinities between these books. The same is true about the titles of sections, be it *birds*, *kings*, or *saints*. The similar inner structure, however, especially when so complicated as in case of staggered *sortes*, does point to a common origin.

Sortes III: Hebrew milieu reconsidered – the Geniza Goralot

The *Geniza Goralot* must bridge the tradition of Greek and Roman antiquity with Hebrew books of modernity. This book of fortune offers twenty questions and ten answers to each: in other words, twenty chapters, each including ten prophecies staggered in the manner described above (see the description of the *Sortes XII Patriarcharum* supra). Five fragments of this book have been preserved,³⁷ of which the earliest is dated to the tenth century and the latest to the 13th. An introduction includes a prayer that should be read three times before consulting the book.³⁸ The chapters are titled with names of birds.³⁹ The titles of chap-

³⁷ *T. –S. K* 21.78 (10th c. CE), *JTSL ENA* 2938.2 (10th c. CE), *T. –S. K* 12.37 (11 c. CE), *T. –S. K* 1.79 (11th c. CE), *JTSL ENA* 3072.3 (13th c. CE), published in P. Schäfer and Sh. Shaked. *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*. Vol. 4. Tübingen. Forthcoming.

³⁸ This might be *T. –S. K* 131 published *ibid*. It is however questionable, whether this fragment dated to 13–14 cc. belongs to the book of fortune considered in this section, or to another, similar book.

³⁹ As the above examples of *sortes* show, the titles of sections in the books of fortune may help us, with a few exceptions, as little as subjects of questions – while the latter ones were quite predictable, the former were chosen arbitrarily. Titling the sections of various literary compositions (including books of fortune) with bird names has also become fashionable in Europe (see W. Seelmann. 1988. “Die Vogelsprachen: Vogelparlamente der mittelalterlichen Literatur.” *Jahrbuch für Niederdeutsche Sprachforschung* 14: 101–147). However, I do not exclude possibility that in the early stage of the development of *sortes*, the choice of the title for a section was deliberate. In the case of the *Geniza Goralot*, *dove* heading the first section may refer to the numeric number of the Greek word, *περίστερά* – 801 – in its turn referring to “I am the Alpha and Omega” ($\omega + \alpha = 801$), which is not necessary evident of the Christian origin or influence, but “are

ters two (*JTSL ENA* 2938.2) and 16 (*T-S. K* 21.78), however, are identical – *bird* (*tsipor*) – meaning that the version we have cannot be original: the inquirer asking question two or 16 would have been directed to start counting from two different chapters with the same title, and one of them must have led to a wrong answer. Therefore, the book may have originally had neither intermediate sections nor names of birds for titles, which were clearly irrelevant and even misleading for the divinatory procedure. When this book was first written or copied, its chapters were only numbered, as in the earliest Greek and Roman *sortes*.⁴⁰ This suggestion is also supported by one of the variants showing no titles but numbers – *T-S. K* 1.79.

Chapters I.9–10, II.9–6.8, XVIII.8–XIX.7, and XX.9–10 did not survive, while chapters IX.6–X.8, IX, XVII.1–7 are preserved in two variants. Discrepancies between fragments *T-S. K* 21.78 and *T-S. K* 1.79 (10th–11th cc. CE), both containing the eleventh chapter, may be instructive: whereas the sequence of themes is identical in both variants, their phrasings considerably differ from each other. Compare, for instance, *T-S. K* 21.78.3a10ff. (XI.3, the translation is literal): “Do not go to the place you have liked or the road you said, but wait and go to the place I show you etc.” vs. *T-S. K* 1.79.1a.12ff: “Do not go the road you said, but slowdown and go another road etc.” Biblical quotations of prophecies are also different,⁴¹ meaning that the quotations were “dressed over” the individual prophecies and not the reverse. Consequently, the stemma of the *Geniza Goralot* shows two branches at latest by the eleventh century. They may have been adapted or even translated from a common ancestor, but then, as a result of genuine evolution, they have become two independent books of fortune, which eventually may have had nothing in common except the staggered scheme and the themes of the questions:

1. About a government. – go to Pigeon (1)
2. About a friend’s love. – go to Bird (2)
3. About a prisoner. – go to 3
4. About a riches. – go to 4
5. About a marriage. – go to 5
6. About a traveler. – go to 6

mere bits,” as Hippolytus writes (*Philosophumena* VI, preface; I.2; and IV 43–4), of astrological theory and Pythagorean philosophy (sic! see *infra*, next section).

⁴⁰ See a similar reasoning for the date and origin of the *Sortes XII Patriarcharum* in Skeat, 48, *op. cit.* at note 17.

⁴¹ E. g., in *T-S. K* 21.78.3a.9–10 (for IX.2, regarding love of one’s friend): *Zach.* 8.17: “do not hold evil in your heart towards your brother” vs. *T-S. K* 1.79.1a.11–12: *Jes.* 41.6: “everyone helps his brother.”

7. About a ability to speak in public. – go to Bat (7)
8. About a enemy. – go to Raven (8)
9. About a journey. – go to Starling (9)
10. About a friend's love. – go to Hen (10)
11. About success ("the thing") – go to Goose (11)
12. About a benefit from joining someone. – go to Duck (12)
13. About a lost thing. – go to Peacock (13)
14. About a sick – go to Starling (14)
15. About a current year – plentiful or not. – go to (15)
16. About success ("the thing") – go to Bird (16)
17. About one's generosity. – go to Kite (17)
18. About one's fame. – go to Hoopoe (18)
19. About one's courage. – go to 19
20. About success ("the thing") – go to Falcon (20)

Parallels for most of these topics can be found in other books of this kind. For instance, the question concerning one's marriage, whether it is successful or not (start counting from chapter *five*), has three related questions in the *Sortes Astrampsychi*: 21 – εἰ γαμῶ καὶ συμφέρει μοι; 55 – εἰ λαμβάνω ἡνθέλω γυναῖκα; 70 – εἰ γαμήσω τὴν φίλην; Having thrown, let us say, the four, the inquirer arrives at the fourth answer in the eighth chapter (*T-S. K 21.78.1a*): "You will take a good and charming woman bringing you much favor and blessing. She descends from a good family and her Zodiac matches yours. And she is good for you. Whoever finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord."

The same throw of dice (4) but in reply to the question of chances in defeating one's opponent, paralleled by n.63 in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* (εἰ νικῶ τὸν ἀντίδικον), will read: "The Lord already defeated your enemy before your eyes; and he can do nothing against you. And if he would be overthrown by your hand do not have a mercy for him, because he is an evil man, and do not start talking (with him), and do not believe him. Slay the one who came to slay you!" (*IX.4 – T-S. K 21.78.3b*). Εἰ τὸ ἀπολλύμενον εὕρισκω; – "Will I find what I have lost?" (*Sortes Astrampsychi*, 40) might have been perfectly answered with "[You will not] find (the lost thing) for long, and when you will (already) forget about it [you will find it?] Give alms and he will return it to you. Be blessed who returns the lost" (*XVI.4 – T-S. K 21.78.7a*); question 54, concerning one who is sick (εἰ ὁ ἀσθενῶν σώζεται) – with "You are worried about the sick who will long be ill. And I am anxious about him. Pray that God have mercy on him and save him; and (the sick) will not die, because much mercy is with him. He kills and revitalizes. The Lord kills, and returns to life." (in this case only, the throw of dice is *two* – *XV.2 – T-S. K 21.78.6a*); and the question

three in the *S.XII Patr.*, “Utrum securum, vel utrum sit iter tibi durum” would have been answered: “Depart on the way you would like to, and trust in God. And he will help you, and you will much benefit; and give alms, and he will bring you back home in peace. And alms will guard you from all evil. Alms save from the death.” (XII.4 – *T.-S. K* 21.78.4a).

One of the subjects above, however, is quite unusual and only occurs elsewhere in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* and *Sortes Sangallenses*, the earliest staggered *sortes*. It is about one’s ability to appear a good speaker and to devise artfully. Εἰ σοφιστεύω in the *Sortes Astrampsychi* (question 41), for which the most frequent reply is οὐ δύνασθαι σοφιστεῦσαι, shows offensively negative answers in eight out of ten options in the *Geniza Goralot*, for instance, IX.3 (*T.-S. K* 21.78.2a): “You pretend to be wise, but you are a big fool, and your foolishness is intolerable. You better keep silent and people would not recognize your foolishness. Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise.” Analogously, answers of the *Sortes Sangallenses* are rather reproachful and moralizing (XL.4): “stude, ut homo esse possis, non orator” – “learn to be human, not an orator.” In the Middle Ages, inquirers of the books of fate don’t seem that much concerned with their mental abilities, and even in their contemporaneous copies of the old *sortes*, “intellectual” questions were replaced by more actual ones, such as εἰ ὑπάγω εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους τόπους (shall I perform pilgrimage to the holy places?) instead of εἰ σοφιστεύω. In the *Geniza Goralot*, however, questions regarding intellectual and moral qualities of the questioner still persisted, showing a clear parallel between these and late antiquity *sortes*.

Also noteworthy are the three groups of ten answering one and the same question, “would X be achieved?” (chapters eleven, 16, 20), and the two groups of ten regarding love of one’s friend (chapters two and ten). On the one hand, this may be a reminiscent of the precursor of the staggered *sortes* discussed above – *Homeromanteia*, *Sortes Virgilianae*, Greek dice *sortes* and oracles, which answered any question as “yes” or “no,” on the other, this may provide another evidence for the suggestion of the adaptation of a foreign book of fortune: those questions which seemed unsuitable for Jewish *goralot* were replaced by general ones concerning *ha-davar* – anything that the inquirer would like to achieve or obtain. This reasoning leads me to assume that by the ten century Hebrew *goralot* underwent the evolution and adaptation similar to other *sortes* of late antiquity and Middle Ages: from general oracles to books with specific questions, and from pagan to Christian or, as in our case, Jewish books of fortune.

Sortes IV: Pythagoras the magician

In my research (see section II), I suggested that the temple oracles were the precursor, and their abolishment was the reason that the *sortes* began to appear and evolve. I would now like to finish my paper by taking the risk of suggesting a model of that evolution. In the introduction to the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, the oldest surviving and arguably the most sophisticated example of books of fortune, Pythagoras is credited as its author. This fact has been lightly attributed to the authoritative tradition so commonly known from the magical papyri. The following excerpt from the *Architecture* of Vitruvius may urge us to review this opinion:⁴²

“Those who followed Pythagoras and his teaching liked to write their precepts in volumes according to the principles of the cube [*cubices rationes*]. And they established that 216 lines of words formed a cube, and thought there ought to be no more than three [of these cubes] in any single piece of writing. Now a cube is a square-sided body formed of six equal sides. After being thrown, if it is not touched, it remains motionlessly solid no matter what side it landed on. So that cubes are used for the dice that players toss on hollowed gaming boards. The parallel between the cube and the written work seems to be drawn from this, that the unit of [216] lines, like a cube, will land solidly in the mind. Thus the Greek dramatic poets... created subdivisions marked out into cubic lengths.”

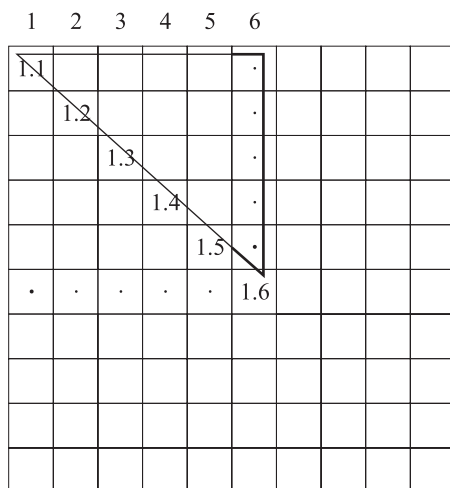
This passage has confused both architects and philologists. Whereas architects of Renaissance have attempted to figure out a “more understandable” number, philologists simply say that no such poem is known; in other words, both suggest that Vitruvius was mistaken.⁴³ However, some literary works were indeed composed of 216 lines or divided into 216 sections; these are books of fortune. In this light, the attribution of the authorship of the *Sortes Astrampsychi* to Pythagoras can be reconsidered as different from the custom of pseudoepigrapy. In fact, despite the mystical spirit of the Pythagorean doctrine and his reputation as a fortuneteller,⁴⁴ only one other magical text, also a divi-

⁴² 5 Pref. 3, 4. The excerpt is cited from G. L. Hersey. 1976. *Pythagorean Palaces: Magic and Architecture in the Italian Renaissance*, 4. Ithaca.

⁴³ In a few variants there is 250 instead of 216. “Cubica ratio” of 250 must look like 125 (i. e. 5^3) + 125, while 125 is irrational. Taking into account Greek architects’ hatred for irrational numbers, 216 seems more probable. Besides, 216 is the “Pythagorean circle of metempsychosis” in Iamb. *Theolog. Ar.* p. 40 Ast. (4th c. CE); and the *cube psychogonikos* in Nicom. *Ar.* II 17.7 (2nd c. CE). See more sources and a discussion in Vitruvius. *Architectura*, 186–187. Edited, translated and commented by S. Ferri. Rome. 1960.

⁴⁴ L. Kakosy. 1983. “Egyptian Magic in the Legend of Pythagoras.” *Oikumene* 4: 187–188; the paper particularly discuss the case of augury described in Iamb. XIII 62.

natory formula, names Pythagoras as its author.⁴⁵ Therefore, the allusion to Pythagoras may be truly informative in any staggered book of fortune: Pythagorean ideas might essentially influence the staggered *sortes* by making its construction not simply puzzling and confusing but having a particular meaning.⁴⁶ In fact, the famous theorem deciphered on some amulets⁴⁷ may also be seen in the staggered scheme, whose answers (1.1, 1.2, etc.), in a graphical presentation, proceed according to its rules.



Now, if I try to reconstruct the theory of figure numbers and the method of finding Pythagorean triads ($a^2 + b^2 = c^2$), as Pythagoras and his school may have done, the above suggestion would no longer seem a mere hypothesis. In contrast to the Euclidean geometry, which used lines to denote numbers, the authentic school of Pythagoras used pebbles (*psephoi*).⁴⁸

See also D. L. VIII 2–3; Porph., *Vita Pyth.* 8.11; Iamb. *Vita Pyth.* (II), 11; (IV), 18–19; Plut. *Numa* 8.

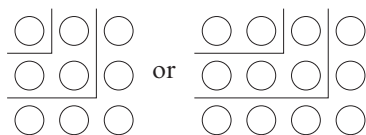
⁴⁵ *PGM* VII 795–845: “Pythagoras’ request for a dream oracle and Demokritos’ dream divination.”

⁴⁶ Number mysticism of Pythagoras and use of his number doctrines in divination was considered by Theodatus Osius of Milan in the two of his treatises written shortly after 1655. He asserts that Plato (following Pythagoras ?) related the composition of the world to arithmetical and geometrical progression. Similar works appeared under the name of Peruchio at Paris in 1657 and 1663; see L. Thorndike. 1923. *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*. Vol. 8, 488–489. New York.

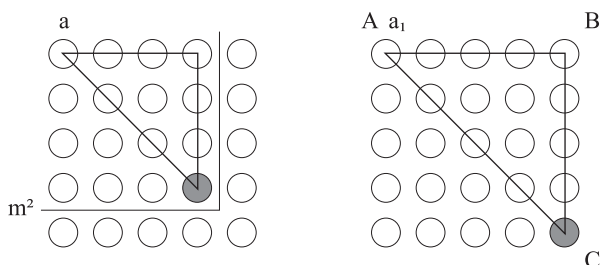
⁴⁷ H. A. Naber. 1908. *Das Theorem des Pythagoras*, 173–176. Haarlem.

⁴⁸ O. Becker. 1934. “Die Lehre von Geraden und Ungeraden im IX Buch der Euclidischen Elemente.” *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik* 3: 533–553, p. 538; W. R. Knorr. 1979. *The Evolution of Euclidean Elements*, 141 ff. Dordrecht 1979.

Figure numbers they built with help of the gnomon⁴⁹ (henceforth: m), by summing the simple arithmetical rows, namely, odd or even numbers.



The sum of odd-number-rows, which is the scheme of staggered *sortes* ($n-1$), will always result in a quadratic number: $1+3+5+\dots+(2n-1) = n^2$.⁵⁰ By adding the gnomon to the quadrate, I shall draw the subsequent quadrate (and receive the subsequent quadratic integer). I must, therefore, find a gnomon which itself would be a quadratic number – m^2 , in order to define two other components of the triad: $m^2 + a^2 = a_1^2$ (a and a_1 are the sides of the quadrate), or graphically:



$m^2 = 2a + 1$; hence, (I) $a = (m^2 - 1) : 2$; and (II) $a_1 = a + 1 = (m^2 + 1) : 2$

Consequently, $m^2 + ((m^2 - 1) : 2)^2 = ((m^2 + 1) : 2)^2$ that corresponds to the theorem for finding the sides of a rectangular triangle.

Bearing in mind that above numbers and figures were indeed interpreted in a mystical spirit,⁵¹ it would not seem farfetched to suggest that magical texts might be composed in imitation of the described method, i. e., in case of *sortes*, pebbles were replaced by answers; each subsequent answer resulted in the subsequent quadratic number in the total of pro-

⁴⁹ The geometrical definition of the gnomon is “the space included between the boundary lines of two similar parallelograms, the one within the other, with an angle in common.” Generally speaking, it is a kneepiece.

⁵⁰ On the authorship of this theory by Pythagoras, see *Ar. Met.* 1092a 13.

⁵¹ The gnomon, for instance, implied *mutation* or *transformation* of one body or figure into another, different but related: *Ar. Categ.* XIV 5, XI4; see also Naber, 24–29, op. cit. at note 46, and M. J. B. Allen. 1994. *Nuptial Arithmetic: Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on the Fatal Number in Book VIII of Plato's 'Republic.'* Berkeley-Los Angeles-London.

pheries (e. g., 1.2 – [4], 1.3 – [9], 1.4 – [16] etc.); numerically and graphically, each subsequent increase of the staggered *sortes* may be described in terms of the corresponding Pythagorean triad – $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ for figure numbers, or $AB^2 + BC^2 = AC^2$ for the rectangular triangle.

It remains now to once again summarize our assertions. Having considered linguistic, thematic and sociologic aspect of divinatory texts of the third century, I suggested the shift from the temple oracle to staggered books of fortune, Greek and Latin. For Hebrew *sortes*, however, the fall of the pagan oracle could not establish conditions for the incipience. Nevertheless, Hebrew books of fortune did take their origin in late antiquity. Already by the tenth century they reveal the genuine, quite independent tradition of *sortes*: in the attentive consideration of the Geniza book of fortune, one can discern traces of oracles with general and specific questions, Biblical oracles comparable to *hermeneiai*, and oracles without Biblical quotations similar to the *Sortes Astrampsychi* and the *Sortes Sanctorum*; the staggered scheme with and without intermediate sections. Whether The First Hebrew Book of Fortune was translated from another source, or genuinely composed on the basis of mystico-mathematical calculations – I can only speculate about.