With the gods on their side: divination and warfare in the Roman Republic

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Chapter 8

With the Gods on their Side: Divination and Warfare in the Roman Republic

Kim Beerden

Although there is a considerable bibliography about divination in the Roman Republic[1] – including its interaction with politics – a systematic exploration of divination and its relation to warfare seems to be an underdeveloped topic in the literature.[2] The two fields of study rarely intersect: take for example current handbooks in the field of ancient warfare. These are mainly concerned with motives, tactics, equipment and so on.[3] Recent handbooks on religion that include discussions of divination mostly discuss the phenomenon in general or in terms of its political aspects, and not especially in a military context.[4] The roles of divination in Republican warfare are, then, mostly discussed in passing. There is no apparent reason why this should be the case. Indeed, its neglect is all the more striking for the reason that scholars of Greek warfare have convincingly argued that divination is certainly a very important topic when modern scholars wish to understand practices of warfare.[5]

Divination is a crucial phenomenon within the study of ancient religions – both Greek and Roman – because within the spectrum of religious practices, divination takes up a special position. Divination was perceived to be one of the few ways in which the supernatural directly communicated with humans. The supernatural was seen to provide information, and humans could use this to diminish the uncertainties that are always part and parcel of decision-making. The most important function of divination is its role in the process of decision-making – essentially a psychological process in which the person taking the decision aims to select the best of the available options. Divination can support a particular decision – signifying the support of the supernatural for this decision. It is easy to imagine how important the role of divination was in the context of warfare: support from the supernatural enabled the commander to legitimize his decisions, and this supernatural legitimization must have benefited the soldiers' morale.[6]

At the same time the supernatural could show that it did not agree with recent actions or plans. Religion, and divination specifically, defined the permissible and impermissible.[7] This is true for any area of daily life: divination was important for personal matters – think of decisions about marriage or where to live – but also for public matters. Political appointments, for example, needed to be validated by means of divination. But the sources also reveal that many divinatory signs pertain to issues related to warfare. As such, the study of Republican divination aids our understanding of the process of decision-making in warfare. This article, then, provides a much-needed exploration of divination and its relation to Republican warfare. This includes battles against 'foreign' enemies, as well as civil wars.

Questions that will be asked in what follows are: what kinds of divination were employed? Did generals attempt to manipulate signs, or their interpretation? How did soldiers respond to decisions that were validated by the supernatural? How did divination contribute to legitimization of commanders? What happened when divinatory signs were disregarded? And what effect does all of this have on the soldiers' morale?

Sources

The most important primary sources for divination and warfare in the Republic are Livy (first century BC–first century AD) and Julius Obsequens (thought to have lived in the fourth century AD). These two authors claim to report *prodigia*[8] from the supernatural. Livy introduces these in his narrative of the history of Rome, while Obsequens simply lists the signs that had been observed in particular years on the basis of Livy's work.[9] Apart from these two, an author such as Cicero (first century BC) has much to contribute to our investigation: in his work *De divinatione*, he provides ideas and arguments concerned with questions regarding how divination worked and could be used or misused.[10] Cicero's attitude toward the validity and truthfulness of divination has been much discussed. *De divinatione* is a dialogue in which the two speakers, Cicero and his brother, provide arguments *pro* and *contra* belief in divination and the validity of supernatural signs. But what did Cicero himself think of the matter? We cannot know. A thoughtful argument has, however, been made by M. Schofield – which has been accepted by such commentaries as that of D. Wardle – that Cicero was indeed inclined towards scepticism on the subject.[11] Although these works above (which are, it should be noted, to be dated to the Late Republic) are pivotal to any study of Republican

divination, there are many more sources. The likes of Plutarch, Cassius Dio, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Appian refer to Republican divination, but do not take it as their main theme and their works will be referred to where useful.[12]

Source criticism is key: the main concern when using these sources is that it should be kept in mind that the modern reader is always presented with a particular narrative of the use of divination in warfare. Ancient authors – from Livy to Cicero – have used divination as a rhetorical tool with which normativity may be expressed: for example, they may present a particular commander as 'good' or 'bad' because of his regard, or disregard, for supernatural signs – and therefore, for the supernatural itself. What we read in the sources, including the more historical ones, are normative attestations of the use of divination in the Republic. These norms are of great interest here because they show ideas about what divination was and how it should function.

A Definition of Divination[13]

Divination is part of the broader ancient religious spectrum, at times overlapping with such phenomena as prayer and sacrifice.[14] However, as mentioned above, divination is remarkable in the sense that while other religious phenomena are concerned with communication *towards* the supernatural, divination was believed to be coming *from* the supernatural. Divination revolves around the idea that the supernatural could provide signs – in many shapes and forms – which humans could then see, hear or even feel in the world around them.

An important distinction is the one between solicited and unsolicited signs. It was possible to ask for these signs at any time when a decision needed to be made. For example, when a commander needed to make a decision about a battle he could consult the birds, as Livy relates that Camillus did in 385 BC when the Volsci and their allies had to be fought:

> 'On the morning after he had made his camp, the dictator [Camillus] took the auspices, and coming forth from his tent offered up a victim and besought the favour of Heaven. He then with great cheerfulness presented himself before the soldiers, who were already arming by the first rays of light, as they had been warned to do when the signal for battle should be displayed. "Ours is the victory, soldiers," he exclaimed.'[15]

Another possibility was to travel to an oracle site, such as the one at Praeneste, around 35km east of Rome. This was a lot oracle, where the client would ask a question and a lot (*sors*) would be drawn: it seems that a child took a pre-written tablet or lot out of a box on which the answer to the question was written.[16] However, asking for signs was not always necessary: the supernatural was also thought to provide signs on its own accord. It could indicate its displeasure by sending lightning or by the birth of a hermaphrodite, as in 186 BC:

> 'At the same time, it was reported too from Umbria that a hermaphrodite about twelve years old had been discovered. In their fear and awe of this portent they ordered the prodigy to be removed from Roman soil and killed as soon as possible.'[17]

Humans then interpreted these perceived signs – solicited or not – and imbued them with meaning, resulting in information which they believed to be coming from the supernatural. In other words: 'Divination is the human action of production – by means of evocation or observation and recognition – and subsequent interpretation of signs attributed to the supernatural.'[18] It is important to note that the signs do not have meaning in themselves, but are given meaning by the person(s) interpreting them. Divination is, then, very much a culturally specific phenomenon.

Individuals could take up the interpretation of a sign themselves, but they could also make use of an expert: for example, the first-century BC commander Sulla saw a snake at his headquarters when he was waging war against the Samnites. His divinatory expert (in this case the *haruspex*) advised him to march against the Samnites right away. It was said that, as a result, Sulla was then victorious.[19] Experts professed to have authority on the subject either because they were part of a *collegium* entrusted with the task of interpretation of signs, claimed to have received inspiration from the supernatural, or possessed an authoritative text. Naturally, these options do not exclude one another.

Whether the sign was solicited or not, whichever way meaning was given to the sign and whoever provided this meaning, it always stands that interpretation is at the core of the divinatory process: the result of the interpretative process is perceived to provide information about past, present and future – it is therefore certainly not necessarily predictive. In public divination during the Republic, this information was most often related to the *pax deorum* – the idea that the supernatural and

men existed in harmony – and support from the supernatural: was the supernatural pleased or displeased? Did it support the decision that was about to be made? This information could then be used in a process of decision-making.

Inspirational and Inductive; Public and Private

As indicated above, a sign from the supernatural could come in many shapes and forms: for example, in the shape of a bird flying by; the birth of a hermaphrodite; the entrails of an animal that had been sacrificed; or an inspired person making an oral statement, for example at an oracle site. In addition to the difference between solicited and unsolicited signs, the Romans distinguished between two categories: 'inspirational' signs and 'inductive' ones. Of the four examples provided above, only the latter is an inspirational sign: this category of signs is based on the idea that the gods would provide someone with inspiration (e.g., at an oracle or in a dream). Inductive divination, on the other hand, involved – according to the Romans – the kind of signs which required interpretation on the basis of learning. The bird flying by and the interpretation of the entrails are both examples of this kind of divination because the Romans argued that interpretation of these types of signs was based on skills and knowledge.[20]

It has often been stated that inspirational divination was not deemed as relevant or important to public matters (including warfare and battle). This is not to say that inspirational divination was not popular: on the contrary, it was probably very popular for private purposes.[21] Although the Republican sources pay little attention to these private divinatory practices, it is generally assumed that when people were ill, had worries or were unsure what to do, they would consult a lot oracle (*sortes*), consult an interpreter of dreams, go to an astrologer or use any other means of divination available to gain information with the aim to resolve their personal problem.[22] This could be a lot oracle such as the one at Praeneste that was mentioned above. It could also mean that an astrologer would be consulted, and although little is known about these practices, astrologers did work in Rome – among other reasons because they were sometimes expelled from the city.[23] Ennius, an author from the third–second century BC cited in Cicero, reveals a lively market place of various individuals claiming expertise who were working for private persons.[24] Still, the division

into inductive and inspirational divination and their respective uses is not completely clear cut: there are also attestations of dreams and visits to oracles related to the public matter of warfare and battle – at least from the first century BC onwards. These, too, could be decisive in the decision-making process.

However, where public matters were concerned, inductive signs were held in higher esteem and were used for purposes of public divination. Public divination concerned itself with matters of the Republic – and warfare was certainly an important communal issue. The supernatural was seen as having an active role in the welfare of the state, and it could approve or disapprove plans. In the context of warfare and battle it can even be stated that: 'Divine support combined with the prowess of the soldiers [functioned] to increase the power of Rome. It was axiomatic that the gods should be involved and approve.'[25]

Traditionally, the inductive forms of divination that were used for public divination are categorized into three categories. The first is the observation of the flight and feeding of the birds: *auspicia* (*impetrativa* and *oblativa*, meaning that they could be both solicited and unsolicited, with the first held in lower esteem). Second is the interpretation of *prodigia*; these are signs such as lightning which were generally unsolicited. Third is the solicited practice of extispicy. During extispicy, the entrails of sacrificial animals were inspected for divine signs. Here interpretation of dreams and oracles will be discussed as the fourth (inspirational) category. The methods were, at times, used to complement one another, and those working with one method of divination do not appear to have had an unhealthy competition with the other groups. As far as is known, all methods were used from archaic times to the Late Republic: however, over time, changes in importance and perceived reliability certainly took place (and are discussed below).[26]

Methods of Divination: Auspicia, Prodigia, Extispicy, Dreams and Oracles

Auspicia

When *auspicia impetrativa* were solicited, the supernatural was asked to make known whether or not it favoured a particular undertaking. Birds within a specific zone were observed by a magistrate who was standing in a demarcated sacred area, the *templum*.[27] Varro, an author from the first

century BC, provides us with an idea of the way this area was demarcated, by means of a ritual formula:

> 'Temples and wild lands be mine in this manner, up to where I have named them with my tongue in proper fashion. ... Between these points, temples and wild lands be mine for direction, for viewing, and for interpreting, and just as I have felt assured that I have mentioned them in proper fashion.'[28]

For the purposes of this chapter, it is also useful to know that when the army was camped, a special tent/*auguraculum* was set up for the purpose of ascertaining the divine will. When a commander set out with his army auspices were also taken, while when a commander crossed a river the auspices would need to be taken again in order to 'extend' the original auspices – these were called the *auspicia peremnia* (although these were no longer taken in Cicero's time).[29] Auspices were also normally taken before each battle, normally followed by a sacrifice and reading of the entrails.

Whereas in archaic times the flight of the birds was the focus of observation, by the Late Republic the behaviour of chickens while they were feeding was observed. How was this supposed to work? For the behaviour to be considered as a positive sign, it appears that hungry chickens, while feeding and eating enthusiastically, dropped their food.[30] The dropping of food and especially the sound this produced were considered positive signs,[31] and the supernatural was deemed to support the action that the magistrate was about to undertake on that particular day (both in peace and in war) or the post or rank that he was about to accept:[32] 'Tarentines, the keeper of the chickens reports that the signs are favourable; the sacrifice too has been exceedingly auspicious; as you see, the gods are with us at our going into action.'[33] The 'keeper of the chickens', called a *pullarius*, probably had a formal position in the army.[34] The obverse of a bronze *aes* ingot depicts the sacred chickens eating propitiously (Figure 8.1).

It is also important to mention the *augures*, who ensured procedures were performed correctly.[35] Apart from this they also observed *auspicia oblativa* – the unsolicited signs, especially in the sky – on their own accord. The *augures* were members of the elite who were united in their *collegium augurum*, which was, although all decisions were in the end made by the Senate, a powerful player in matters of public decision-making in the Republic.[36] A silver denarius minted by Sulla in 84–83 BC (Figure 8.2) depicts symbols of an augur on the reverse: the augur's staff (*lituus*) and

Figure 8.1: Cast copper alloy ingot (*aes signatum*). Obverse: the sacred chickens eating; 280–250 BC. Courtesy BM 1867,0212.4.

jug (*capis*). Sulla was not yet an augur when the coin was minted, but would become one a few years after.[37]

Prodigia and the Sibylline Books

Prodigia were unsolicited signs.[38] Occurrences that were 'out of the ordinary' (in a very broad sense of the word[39]) could be observed and reported by individuals, and were normally considered as a sign that the supernatural was displeased or, more generally, that the *pax deorum* was threatened. When an individual reported an occurrence as a sign, it was the Senate that decided whether or not to accept and recognize it as such. It remains unclear why one sign would be accepted, while another would not be: it seems the sign had to take place on Roman territory and that there needed to be a precedent.[40] The Senate could then consult the *collegia* of the *pontifices* or *decemviri sacris faciundis* – priests who were involved in the explanation and guarding of the Sibylline Books – or the Etruscan *haruspices* about the meaning of the sign and, more importantly, how it should be dealt with.[41]

Figure 8.2: Silver denarius. Obverse: diademed head of Venus right, with Cupid standing before her on left, holding a long palm (a symbol of victory). Reverse: two symbols of an augur, the *capis* (centre left) and *lituus*, between two weapon trophies. Minted by Sulla 84–83 BC in Asia during his campaign against Mithridates VI. Courtesy *CNG* 64, Lot: 795.

The three groups of priests involved in the interpretation of *prodigia* need some more explanation. The *decemviri* were an important *collegium* guarding the Sibylline Books that grew over time: from two members to ten, and then to fifteen and even sixteen by the time of the Late Republic. Still, they are normally referred to as *decemviri* (ten members) or *quindecimviri* (fifteen members). The Senate would ask the *decemviri* to consult the books when this seemed necessary or appropriate.[42] The *pontifices* were at first a group of three, but at the end of the Republic there were sixteen men appointed to this *collegium* at any one time, with the *pontifex maximus* as their leader. Their main function was to oversee all religious matters of the Republic, and the expiation of *prodigia* was one of them. As for the Etruscan *haruspices*, it is important to mention that they specialized in the interpretation of lightning and were united in an *ordo* which was held in high esteem (although there are certainly sources portraying these individuals as manipulative).[43]

Before any war was started, expiation of prodigies would have taken place to establish (or re-establish) the *pax deorum*.[44] If necessary, the *decemviri/quindecimviri* would – on request of the Senate – consult the Sibylline Books, of which there were three. Its contents were thought to be the frenzied utterances of a Sibyl, brought to Rome by an old woman and bought by King Tarquin.[45] The *decemviri* guarded the Books and their content,

making sure the original text was not changed and the text remained a secret (although some parts of the text were 'leaked'[46]). It was so important to have the 'original' text that, when the Books burned in 83 BC, an Empire-wide search was ordered to collect all available fragments – a difficult endeavour which was, according to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, not totally successful.[47]

When ordered to do so by the Senate, the *decemviri* selected the line or lines from the Book that they considered relevant for expiation of the *prodigium*.[48] The text the *decemviri* selected would, as far as is known, normally consist of instructions by which expiation could take place. This would usually be a ritual act: for example, a sacrifice would need to be made as in the fragment below. The contents of the Sibylline Books were guarded and therefore not disclosed to the public, and although we know the gist of the contents of the text we have very few extracts. One such rare extract was reported by Phlegon of Thralles in his second-century AD *Memorabilia*. He reports a publicized,[49] but very incomplete, extract from the second century BC in which a hermaphrodite is born; sacrifices to Demeter and Persephone should be made, among others:

> 'I declare that one day a woman will bear
> A hermaphrodite having all the male parts
> And all the parts that infant female women manifest
> I shall no longer conceal but declare to you straightforwardly
> Sacrifices to Demeter and holy Persephone.'[50]

The Sibylline Books could also be interpreted so as to prescribe new or out-of-the-ordinary rituals: on one occasion fear about impending war led to a consultation of the Sibylline Books because it was thought that the *pax deorum* was disturbed, and it was decided that human sacrifice would pacify the supernatural.[51] New gods were introduced on account of the Sibylline Books: the books instructed the Romans to import the Magna Mater from the East.[52]

Prodigia could occur anywhere within the sphere of Roman power, including in the army or among soldiers.[53] For example, Livy – and other sources based on Livy – mentions that many *prodigia* occurred during the Second Punic War in 217 BC. Among others, in Sicily the javelins of several soldiers had taken fire, and in Sardinia, as a horseman was making the round of the night-watch, the truncheon which he held in his hand caught fire. Many fires had flared up on the shore and two shields had sweated blood, while certain soldiers had been struck by lightning.[54]

When these signs were reported to the Senate and accepted as *prodigia*, the Senate ordered particular expiation rituals, mostly sacrifices, and also ordered the *decemviri* to consult the Sibylline Books. As a result, more expiations were ordered.[55]

The meaning of certain *prodigia* could also be related to warfare. Rosenberger discusses a number of *prodigia* announcing impending wars. Sounds of weapons, the spear of Mars moving on its own accord and non-domesticated animals coming into the city were seen as a sign of coming wars, especially bees and wolves.[56] The first two can, in our eyes, easily be connected to war. As for the animals, Rosenberger argues that the idea about bees (and other animals living in swarms) was that they could not live without their King. Wolves were connected to death.[57] Monstrous births were reported by Pliny in this context, and Cassius Dio provided *prodigia* signifying an uprising.[58] A comet in the western sky was seen during battles between Pompey and Caesar, and between Augustus and Antony in 43 BC – the comet was thought to mean civil war was at hand.[59] *Prodigia* announcing defeat may be identified as well, for example when lightning struck the *praetorium* (defensive constructions of the city) or Roman soldiers, or when it was raining stones or blood.[60]

Extispicy

Commanders employed a *haruspex* specialized in extispicy to join them during their campaign in times of war.[61] It is important to note that the *haruspices* active in the field of extispicy were not the same group as the Etruscan *haruspices* involved in the interpretation of *prodigia*. There were still other *haruspices* who were involved in private divination, but this third group does not seem to have enjoyed much prestige. So although the term *haruspex* was used for three groups of experts, the three groups had distinctly separate roles in the divinatory process.

Extispicy took place after sacrifice, when the *haruspices* interpreted the way the intestines (*exta*) looked – this happened on many occasions, among others before going into battle. The extispicy was normally preceded by the taking of the auspices. This example from Livy can be dated to 208 BC:[62]

> 'Some have related that the consul Marcellus offered a sacrifice that day, and that when the first victim was slain, the liver was found headless; that in the second everything usually found was present; that the head seemed even enlarged; also that the soothsayer had

> not been at all pleased that, after organs defective and deformed, others had appeared which were more than promising.'[63]

There are two aspects worth commenting on in this example: the headless liver and the fact that the entrails of two animals were inspected. Regarding the liver, we do not know that much about the mechanics of extispicy, and what we know is normally deduced from papyri or uncertain interpretations of the bronze liver of Piacenza, an Etruscan divinatory 'liver model'.[64] From the example above it certainly becomes clear that if (part of) the entrails – in this case the liver – was missing, this was seen as a negative sign.[65] Also, the head of the second liver was enlarged – this was normally interpreted as a positive sign (but in this case the experts regarded it as negative).[66] As for the fact that a second animal was sacrificed when the signs from this first liver were negative, this was a perfectly normal practice.[67]

Dreams and Oracles

It has just been stated that 'inspirational divination', and this includes dreams and oracles, did not play such an important role in public matters. This still holds, but as has been mentioned, there was a first-century BC development where more commanders started to receive dreams, and in this way personal communication, from the supernatural.

Oracles were used as a way to 'double check' other signs. During the siege of Veii in 298 BC, the Romans heard about an old prophecy regarding the conditions which would lead to their victory. They double-checked the prophecy at Delphi and set out to fulfil the conditions.[68] Another example can be dated to 216 BC, when the oracle at Delphi was consulted by the Romans to ask what needed to be done to please the gods. The oracle answered that the Romans would win in battle if sacrifices would be made to Apollo.[69] An oracle could also be consulted in order to receive additional information from the supernatural when the situation was very grave: for example, in Livy the Roman consul was recalled from the war after terrible prodigies, in particular the unchastity of the Vestal Virgins.[70] It was unclear what should be done to appease the gods, and this led to the fact that both the Sibylline Books and the oracle at Delphi were consulted.[71] Pierre Bonnechere argues that such a 'second opinion' – a confirmation of another sign by means of an oracle – should not be seen as impious or distrustful towards the supernatural, but as a way for the individual to receive more certainty. It provided more authority to the decision.[72]

Diachronic Changes

It is hard to provide detail about diachronic changes because they are hard to discern: most sources are from the Late Republic.[73] Still, they certainly took place. In archaic and Early Republican Rome the auspices were taken when armies crossed rivers and just before battle was waged. This example – and it is interesting to note that first the auspices were taken, after which a sacrifice (and inspection of the entrails) took place – from 385 BC shows a favourable outcome:

> 'On the morning after he had made his camp, the dictator [Camillus] took the auspices, and coming forth from his tent offered up a victim and besought the favour of Heaven. He then with great cheerfulness presented himself before the soldiers, who were already arming by the first rays of light, as they had been warned to do when the signal for battle should be displayed. "Ours is the victory, soldiers," he exclaimed.'[74]

The frequency with which the auspices were taken seems to have diminished over time. That the *auspicia peremnia* were no longer taken in Cicero's times has already been mentioned above, but as Cicero argues, there is a general tendency: there is 'no taking of omens when crossing rivers, none when lights flash from the points of the javelins, none when men are called to arms'.[75] Rich argues the following – and he notes that this is a controversial, but in his opinion the best interpretation of the sources:[76] commanders had the auspices and extispicy at their disposal if they needed to make a military decision, including those on the battlefield. However, the auspices could only be taken by magistrates in charge of the army. Then a change occurred: from the Middle Republic onwards, often promagistrates were in charge of the army. This meant that the auspices were no longer taken in the field, as promagistrates could not do so. They could, however, perform extispicy, and therefore extispicy became the prime method that was used in a military context. According to Rich, then, the expanding role of the promagistrates in the context of warfare is the reason that auspices were not used on the battlefield in the Late Republic.[77] Instead, for practical reasons, extispicy was primarily relied upon.[78]

The frequency with which divination played a role in daily life seems to have increased in times of warfare. Many have noted that the frequency of the

occurrence of *prodigia* (and consultation of the Sibylline Books) increased during the Second Punic War.[79] It has also been argued that there is a steep decline in *prodigia* after 133 BC – or at the latest 90 BC. This is striking: as the Late Republic is a time of unrest, this may have led us to expect another increase in divinatory practices. However, the likes of D. Engels and B. MacBain explain that with the rise of the strong politicians and commanders, allegiances shifted from the *res publica* to parties, individuals and one's class. In this argument, *prodigia* were less useful or necessary in the new political context.[80] Also, divinatory signs might have posed a threat if they were not according to politicians' or commanders' plans – and there may also have been increasing scepticism about the workings of divination. Or what if commanders or politicians manipulated the occurrence of signs or their interpretations?[81] Others argue that while the first century BC saw the decline established above, other divinatory methods (such as extispicy, but also the use of horoscopes, dreams and astronomy) grew in importance.[82] With these diachronic changes in mind, we may now turn to the various functions of divination in a discussion that will be largely synchronic.

Function: decision-making

The most important function of divination is its role in the process of decision-making. The signs thought to come from the supernatural, and their interpretation, could show supernatural support for this decision (or against it). It could reassure the leader of an army, it could legitimize him and boost the morale of the soldiers – or all at the same time. When a commander was reassured by divinatory signs, the outside world may have seen him as the legitimate leader of the army, and this in itself could be a way to increase morale among the solders. One divinatory sign may thus have several effects.

Reassurance

In the context of warfare these decisions took place on two levels: that of the Senate and that of the leader of the army. With the aid of divination, the Senate would decide whether or not war would be waged, and under whose command. Although the political decision-making process is not

the main focus of this paper, one example can be provided. It relates to a battle in 191 BC that was fought against the Seleucids:

> 'All these sacrifices were favourable and good omens were obtained from the first victims, and the interpretation of the haruspices was this, that in this war the boundaries of the Roman people were being enlarged and that victory and a triumph were foreshadowed. When this had been reported, the Fathers, their minds freed of religious scruples, directed that the question be proposed to the assembly, whether they wished and ordered war to be entered with King Antiochus and those who had followed his path.'[83]

The commander was the one who would consult the supernatural on decisions concerned with any aspect of his campaign (including when battle should be waged). For example, when moving his army in 209 BC Fabius Maximus was warned by the auspices that he should not go in the direction of Metapontum (where Hannibal had laid an ambush).[84] A commander such as Sulla was provided with oracles that he would fight another battle in the region where he had fought his first, and would win again.[85] In a further example:

> 'The consul [Gnaeus Manlius Vulso, 189 BC] spent two days in exploring for himself the character of the mountain, that nothing might be unfamiliar to him; on the third day, after giving his attention to the auspices and then offering sacrifice, he divided his army into four columns and led them out, planning to lead two up the central part of the mountain and to send two from the sides to oppose the flanks of the Gauls.'[86]

In such cases, divination provided reassurance to those involved in the campaign or battle – this includes its commander, who could now believe that his decisions were supported by the supernatural.

Legitimization

According to the sources, commanders certainly used divination to enhance the image they projected of their person: in the eyes of their soldiers, their charisma would benefit when they received positive signs from the supernatural.[87] As P. Ripat argues, the worthiest members of society

would receive divinatory signs, the interpretation of the most powerful man was the right one, and this meant that the best commanders were in communication with the supernatural – which provided him with knowledge.[88] Such personal legitimization may certainly be achieved by means of inductive divination: just before the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC, Caesar is reported to have seen a *prodigium* in the shape of a light above his camp, a torch rising from it and proceeding towards Pompey's camp.[89] To give another example, during the Second Punic War morale was low and after a defeat the commander Lucius Marcius made a speech. A flame shone from his head; the soldiers were emboldened by this and captured two Punic camps.[90]

In this part of the argument the dreams received by commanders were important: they were a powerful illustration of how commanders used divination to solidify their personal legitimacy, especially in the Late Republic.[91] According to the narrative, soldiers generally did not receive such dreams. Dreams thus stressed the contrast between commander and soldiers.

For example, one of the ways in which Sulla legitimized his march to the East was by means of a dream of the goddess Ma-Bellona that he received in 88 BC, at the time when he and Marius were in conflict about who should lead the Roman army against King Mithridates. Although Sulla received other dreams, this is his most famous one and even one of the most famous dreams known to us from the Republic. Our source is Plutarch, from the second century AD, but it is reasonably sure that it was publicized shortly after Sulla's death:[92]

> 'This goddess, as Sulla fancied, stood by his side and put into his hand a thunder-bolt, and naming his enemies one by one, bade him smite them with it; and they were all smitten, and fell, and vanished away. Encouraged by the vision, he told it to his colleague, and at break of day led on towards Rome.'[93]

Such dreams, whether they were 'real' or not,[94] were worth recording on coins decades later – signifying its enduring importance for the way Sulla wished to legitimize his power. This dream was depicted on coins and remained a well-know incident decades later (see Figure 8.3).

According to the narratives, dreams could foretell defeat: Cicero's *De divinatione* states that Hamilcar supposedly heard a voice in a dream, saying that he would be dining in Syracuse tonight.[95] That day, the

Figure 8.3: Silver denarius. Obverse: the goddess Venus. Reverse: Sulla's dream. Sulla (left) leans against a rock, sleeping, with a winged Nike (Victory) over him. The goddess Luna Lucifera (right) descends, holding a flaming torch in her right hand. Minted at Rome by the moneyer L. Aemilius Buca, January 44 BC. Courtesy *CNG* Triton XXI, Lot: 653.

Syracusans attacked his camp by surprise and carried off Hamilcar.[96] Roman commanders also had such dreams: Sulla, of course, but Pompey too was supposed to have seen an ambiguous image in a dream during one of the nights leading up to his defeat.[97] Even though the events were negative, the commanders were warned because of their personal connection to the supernatural. These narratives tie in to expectations of the supernatural as well as Roman commanders.[98]

Apart from announcement and warnings, the supernatural also conveyed its wishes to commanders by means of dreams. Decius Mus dreamt he would win fame by dying amongst the enemy – by sacrificing himself.[99] Again, even when the dreams foretold death or defeat, this still rendered the commander as special – at least as conveyed in the literary sources – because the supernatural communicated directly with the commander.

Claims to leadership could be enhanced even more when inductive and inspired divinatory methods were combined. See, for example, Scipio Africanus who reiterated the claim that his leadership was legitimized by the supernatural through signs of the birds as well as dreams (210 BC):

> 'Now the immortal gods, who are protectors of the Roman empire, who inspired all the centuries of the people to order that the

> command be bestowed upon me, by auguries, auspices and even visions in the night are likewise forecasting only joy and success.'[100]

In Livy, already briefly referred to above, two consuls dream that one of them should sacrifice himself in order for their army to be victorious; this dream is validated by means of extispicy.[101]

All in all, the idea that a commander had a particular god behind him, backing him in his endeavour, must have been very attractive to many as 'it helped to inspire confidence and loyalty and made the beneficiary seem personally auspicious'.[102]

Morale

Polybius attests the following about Scipio Africanus in an early example (209 BC) of a commander receiving a dream: 'finally he [Scipio] told them [his men] that it was Neptune who had first suggested this plan to him, appearing to him in his sleep ... [which] created great enthusiasm and ardour among the soldiers'.[103] Some of the examples provided above mentioned the effect positive signs had on the soldiers. The morale of the soldiers is a crucial aspect of all wars, including those of antiquity.[104] It has been argued that the psychological dimension to the study of morale, and its perceived subjectivity, has kept ancient historians from including morale in discussions of warfare.[105] However, it should certainly be included explicitly in this chapter.

The hazards of engaging in warfare are clear, and all kinds of personal and communal stress (e.g. heat, dust clouds, experience of violence and bloodshed, fear of the outcome or lack of faith in the commander or fellow-soldiers) could influence the outcome of a battle.[106] A.D. Lee considers a number of factors influencing morale: he argues that the important notion of honour, fear of punishment and of shame were crucial ideological factors in preventing desertion and cowardice. Furthermore, a unit of soldiers would be part of a group with its own identity, forming strong bonds of cohesion through time.[107] A. Goldsworthy argues that group dynamics were enhanced through training, rewards of service which encouraged a display of courage, and possibly through drink.[108] Their leader is another factor influencing morale, as devotion to his men and the strength of his leadership would stimulate the morale of his soldiers.[109] His perceived personal connection to the supernatural should be added to this list.

Religion is not explicitly taken into account in the study of morale by Lee, and receives little attention from Goldsworthy.[110] However, it is very important, as divination could work (among other factors) to alleviate fears of the masses (not only in warfare, but more generally). It may be argued that times of warfare are times of extreme uncertainty, and that people as well as soldiers are therefore more willing to perceive signs as coming from the supernatural.[111] It has, at the same time, been argued that the divinatory aspect to discipline should not be overestimated in comparison to all the other aspects above.[112] However, there are quite a few examples in which our authors consider divination to be important.

Turning to the sources, they make clear that divination could influence morale in a number of ways: Frontinus' *Strategemata*, dated to the end of the first century AD (so rather late for our purposes, although he discusses examples from the Republic), explicitly devotes a chapter to the idea that signs from the supernatural should either be interpreted positively by the commander, or otherwise he should be able to explain the occurrences as natural occurrences to his men.[113] An example of the former occurred during the Second Punic War in 204 BC:

> 'Scipio, having transported his army from Italy to Africa, stumbled as he was disembarking. When he saw the soldiers struck aghast at this, by his steadiness and loftiness of spirit he converted their cause of concern into one of encouragement, by saying: "Congratulate me, my men! I have hit Africa hard."'[114]

An example of the latter concerned the military tribune Gallus in 168 BC:

> 'Gaius Sulpicius Gallus not only announced an approaching eclipse of the moon [before the battle of Pydna], in order to prevent the soldiers from taking it as a prodigy, but also gave the reasons and causes of the eclipse.'[115]

Livy adds that this boosted morale of the soldiers. The Macedonians, on the other hand, panicked when the eclipse took place. Although Frontinus takes the commanders' perspective, both examples also indicate that soldiers were on the lookout for signs – they were in what has been called a state of 'omen-mindedness'.[116] As a consequence the commander needed to provide some kind of explanation, interpretation or expiation.[117]

Even more strikingly, Frontinus not only provides examples of how commanders could explain signs in a positive way, but also devotes a chapter

to morale and how it can be improved. The commander should be using all kinds of psychological tricks and ways of pressuring his men into a courageous performance on the battlefield:

> 'Lucius Sulla, in order to make his soldiers readier for combat, pretended that the future was foretold him by the gods. His last act, before engaging in battle, was to pray, in the sight of his army, to a small image which he had taken from Delphi, entreating it to speed the promised recovery.'[118]

This example also shows that Frontinus suspected that Sulla used divination in order to boost morale, and did not necessarily believe that the future was foretold to him. Apart from this issue, the passage also demonstrates the way morale of the soldiers could be boosted by means of divination.[119] Perhaps the strongest example showing this is a speech made by the commander of the Roman army in Livy:

> 'When they have discharged their missiles without effect, and come thronging upon you where you stand, then let your blades flash out, and let every man of you bethink him that the gods are the Romans' helpers, that the gods have with positive omens sent him into battle.'[120]

Divination could stimulate (or deflate) morale. Even though they were not in a position to make independent decisions and their opinion generally did not influence the decision-making process of their commander, the soldiers did now know that things would turn out well: they knew the gods were on their side.

Deviant uses of Divination: Disregard?

A pious (and therefore 'good') commander would take the signs from the supernatural seriously. He would really take them into account, even if this meant that battle had to be postponed and this was inconvenient: 'The dictator [Appius Claudius, 362 BC] had been unable to give the battle-signal before noon, having failed for a long time to obtain favourable omens, for which reason the struggle had been protracted until night.'[121] Aemilius Paulus is another example of a pious commander: on the night before battle, an eclipse of the moon took place. Aemilius provided eleven

heifers as a sacrifice to the moon. When he wanted to start a battle on the next day, he ordered for a sacrifice (and extispicy) to take place. It took twenty-one oxen to be sacrificed to Hercules – only from the twenty-first ox did Aemilius Paulus receive favourable outcomes and only then did he lead his army into battle.[122] However, according to the sources, there were many commanders who did not follow these shining examples and showed impiety in this way. They either disregarded the signs or did not even bother about obtaining them, or about doing so in the right manner.

Some commanders disregarded unfavourable signs if they did not support their plans. It was, however, thought that when signs were disregarded the supernatural would not be pleased, and the disregard could lead to defeat in battle. Very famously, according to Cicero, during the First Punic War Claudius Pulcher said of the chickens used for the *auspicia* which did not perform like they should that they could drink if they did not choose to eat – and proceeded to have them thrown into the sea. He attacked and then lost the battle.[123] There are more attestations of commanders disregarding such signs, mostly with dire consequences.

In 217 BC, when preparing for the Battle of Trasimene, Gaius Flaminius fell off his horse, and at the same time the standard-bearer had difficulties keeping the standard up. The officers were dismayed by these *prodigia*, but Flaminius disregarded the signs so proudly that the soldiers were actually encouraged. When he fell off his horse, he did not interpret this as a bad sign. When the auspices were negative, he disregarded them and he still continued into battle – and lost.[124] The consul Postumius offered sacrifice in 154 BC, but the head of the liver was missing in many victims. He set out despite this negative sign, but he had to return to Rome because of an illness only seven days later (and died soon after).[125] A final example comes from 126 BC:

> 'Some have related that the consul Marcellus offered a sacrifice that day, and that when the first victim was slain, the liver was found headless; that in the second everything usually found was present; that the head seemed even enlarged; also that the soothsayer had not been at all pleased that, after organs defective and deformed, others had appeared which were more than promising.'[126]

Even though the signs were negative, the army engaged in battle (and was defeated).[127] All in all, there are plenty of sources that suggest defeat or a bad end if negative signs were disregarded by the commander.

However, this idea should still be approached with caution. At times a victory might be won despite disregard for the signs. Cicero gives examples of commanders who disregarded the auspices and other signs, but still were victorious. He argues, as part of the wider argument of Book II of *De divinatione*, that common sense and experience are, in warfare, important as guidance.[128] However, it is then also argued that the auspices should be respected – and that commanders deserve punishment by the state if they do not – because the auspices are, after all, part of state religion and therefore part of official procedures.[129] An interesting case, in this sense, is that of the consul Flaminius: while he was already on campaign in the last quarter of the third century BC, the signs in Rome were negative and he was called back. However, he did not open the letter which ordered him back and won victories. When he, in the end, returned to Rome, the people were not pleased with him, as Plutarch relates.[130] Although, then, there are exceptional cases where a victory is achieved despite negative signs, these victories are not achieved in the 'right' way – whether it was against state religion or perhaps more emotional considerations.

There were commanders who did not follow the ritual procedures and signs which were not evoked when they should have. For example, it appears that the auspices were not taken, nor was extispicy practised, before the Gauls attacked Rome in 390 and gained a victory:

> 'There the tribunes of the soldiers, without having selected a place for a camp or fortified a position to which they might retreat, and, forgetting even the gods, to say nothing of men, without auspices or sacrificial omens, drew up their line with the wings extended to prevent being outflanked by the numbers of the enemy; yet could not stretch their front as wide as his, though they thinned it till the centre was weak and scarce held together.'[131]

The consequences of such disregard for the opinion of the supernatural seems clear: the defeat was crushing.

There was also the possibility of faulty procedures. If the commander knew what had happened but still continued to proceed, this did not bode well. For example, Livy relates an occasion in 176 BC where lots were cast. However, this did not occur in accordance with the auspices or in the right area; there was also a flaw in the auspices, of which the consul was aware, and soon afterwards he died in battle.[132] Cicero relates the second-century BC case where Tiberius Gracchus, when he was consul

and organizing the election of his successors, made a procedural mistake without knowing it. When he remembered, after the new consuls had taken office, he immediately let the Senate know. The consuls stepped down because the procedures needed to be respected. All three men were considered particularly pious for taking the procedures this seriously.[133] Creative solutions, however, could also be found: in 293 BC the auspices were taken before a battle against the Samnites, but while they were in fact negative, the person responsible had told his commander Papirius Cursor that they were positive. Papirius heard of this deceit, but proceeded to lead his army into battle anyway, putting the deceitful man in the front line in case the gods wanted to vent their anger. The man was killed and Papirius was victorious.[134]

In all three cases the supernatural signs needed to be taken into account. It was necessary to do so because the supernatural needed to have its say in the decision. If the signs were not taken seriously, if the rituals were not followed or if the procedures had been faulty, a real problem seems to have appeared. The examples provided in the sources relate strong norms about what was considered pious behaviour – and impious behaviour was clearly punished. In the context of warfare, this normally meant defeat.

Deviant Uses of Divination: Manipulation?

The use and misuse of divination for political or military gain is an important subject in the sources. Sulla had oracles to support him, as we have discussed, and some have argued that the way Marius employed Martha, a prophetess from Syria, in the first century BC was to boost his claim to power and leadership.[135] However, these examples can be seen as ambiguous – it is not quite clear whether this is straightforward manipulation of divinatory signs. Other sources express, more or less explicitly, the idea that manipulation of divinatory signs and their interpretation took place: chickens could be starved before they had to eat, making them peck with more vigour. A report of a *prodigium* could be unreliable: in 55 BC, when the chances were that Cato would be elected to office, 'on a sudden Pompey lyingly declared that he heard thunder, and most shamefully dissolved the assembly, since it was customary to regard such things as inauspicious, and not to ratify anything after a sign from heaven had been given'.[136]

Sources such as these and the important role of divination in Roman decision-making (both in a general context but also in that of warfare) has led to a scholarly debate about the issue of possible manipulation of

divinatory signs. If someone were able to manipulate the occurrence of supernatural signs or their interpretation, this would have been a powerful tool indeed. The debate is as follows: some argue that public divination in Republican Rome, over time, became a tool for the unbelieving elite to manipulate the gullible masses;[137] others are of the opinion that nobody – neither elite nor people – believed in divination anyway, and it was practised and accepted as such just because it had always been that way. In this way it simply alleviated fears, soothing the people. Some willingly deceived and others were willingly deceived – as long as the ritual requirements surrounding divinatory practices were respected, no questions were asked. The sources provide arguments for both opinions. Some members of the elite, Cicero being the most famous example, expressed doubts about the workings of divination, but still acknowledged its importance for Roman public religion.[138] Polybius, too, may be considered. He does not give much attention to divination (or religion more generally[139]) and mentions *prodigia* as incredible.[140] However, he argues that divination is used by Romans to calm their fears in times of war, implying that the people believed in it, or chose to do so.[141] In this last passage divination was, according to Polybius at least, used as a kind of 'opium for the people' in order to diminish hysterical tendencies in the masses.[142]

Seemingly, two intertwined issues were at stake. The first was concerned with belief: did the Romans – the people and the elite – believe in their gods, and therefore in divinatory practices? The second was whether the elite consciously used divination in order to take advantage of particular situations – and if so, for which purposes? Were the masses manipulated or soothed by means of divination?

Both issues will turn out to be a non-issue: the argument is that the elite did not believe in either the supernatural or in divination, and that they could and would therefore manipulate the signs. There are two aspects of this argument that need clarification. First, belief. It has been argued that the absence of ritual books – and other aspects of religion expected on the basis of Christian notions – shows that the Romans did not 'believe', but only 'practised' their religion.[143] However, the dichotomy between 'ritual' and 'belief' should not be drawn in this 'Christian' way. Furthermore, it is a *contradictio in terminis* to first argue that the Greeks (and I include the Romans here) performed their rituals, and then to claim they did this while thinking there was no recipient for, or aim to, their actions: '[One] would be hard put to show that the performers of ritual do not care about the results of their actions. One would rather expect the opposite.'[144] The question

regarding belief, then, is incorrect.[145] Second, the therefore-aspect is problematic. It may as well be argued that because the elite believed in the supernatural and in divination, they could use it for their own purposes. The more one believes in something, the more smoothly and convincingly one can tweak it in a way that is suitable at a particular moment – whether consciously or subconsciously.[146] Whatever the answer to the question of belief (if one needs to be given at all), divination could always be manipulated. The first issue is, then, irrelevant.

As for the second issue: is it necessary to choose between the various purposes ('manipulation' or relief of 'stress';[147] 'genuine' or 'political'[148]) of divination? The concept of 'inconsistency' helps us here because it shows that the options need not be seen as mutually exclusive, but as inclusive. H.S. Versnel explains how ancient individuals can both believe and not believe at the same time; and that they may choose to ignore facts that are not convenient at a particular time, and not experience problems at all. They simply switch between different registers:

> '[Adaptation is] part of the game. While one aspect [of a story] is dominant, others lose their relevance and become part of the background noise. It is all a matter of focus, of perception, of marked or unmarked positions. Evoking an undesired aspect at the wrong moment spoils the story and renders the message a mess: chaos. The good reader or perceiver applies the correct category.'[149]

Or in other words:

> 'Two visions do not even seem to be differentiated in terms of sharp boundaries or explicit intellectually satisfying reconciliations. In other words, the "logical" tension between the two different views does not seem to have been consistently experienced as tension.'[150]

As modern historians, 'it is our late-modern craving to remove the inconsistency as quickly and radically as possible'.[151] This is, however, beside the point when the aim is to understand divinatory practices because 'it is precisely the inconsistencies and contradictions in … beliefs which allow them to serve as a flexible means for the explanation of events'.[152] In short, choosing is unnecessary. If the aim is to gain a better understanding of the function of divination in the decision-making process, every source

needs to be judged independently (especially taking into account that it portrays a particular narrative of divinatory practice) and it is likely that inconsistencies will be encountered, which do not need to be smoothed over.

Conclusion

The sources show divination as having functioned as a powerful tool in decision-making processes in the context of warfare. The different methods that have been discussed – *auspicia*, *prodigia*, extispicy, dreams and oracles – are different means to the same end: divination helped to establish the boundaries of what is and is not permissible,[153] and who and what is legitimate. It has also been shown how divination boosted morale. All three aspects make divination, especially in times of the uncertainty of ancient warfare, an influential instrument. The narratives show that reassurance about the validity of decisions was needed. Morale was boosted and the commander legitimized. Because of its great influence in these important matters, motivations ('genuine' or 'political') or aims ('stress reduction' or 'manipulation') behind the use of divination may all have had their place – whether they only existed in the divinatory narrative or also in reality. There is no need to choose between the different motivations or aims: this is even counterproductive as it would constrain and limit our understanding of divination as used in the decision-making process. Divination has been shown to be of crucial importance to both the minds and physical realities of those engaging in ancient warfare. The Roman army and its commander needed to engage in battle with the gods on their side.

Notes

1. The most notable contributions from recent years are: Rosenberger, 1997; Rüpke, 2005; Orlin, 1997; Rasmussen, 2003; Santangelo, 2013; Engels, 2007 (*RVW*). *RVW* will be extensively used in what follows: it incorporates the sources and current literature regarding divinatory occurrences.
2. For exceptions, see Rüpke 1990; Rosenberger, 1997.
3. Rich, 2013: 543–68, is an exception. Still, not more than two pages of this article on religion are devoted to divination. The same is true of Dawson, 1996: 115. In Stoll, 2007: 451–76, religion (let alone

divination) does not receive much attention at all; the same applies to the recent Sabin, van Wees & Whitby, 2007.

4. Rosenberger, 2007: 292–303, discusses war very briefly on 302. Beard, North & Price, 1998: 324–28, devote some pages to a discussion of religion of the Army, but only briefly touch upon divination; Scheid, 2003, mentions Republican divination in relation to warfare in passing on pp.113–14; Rives, 2004: 558–61, provides one source related to war; as does Gordon, 2004: 387–90. The various authors of the chapter 'Divination Romaine' *ThesCRA* 2005: 79–89, do not explicitly discuss divination in the context of warfare either.
5. Pritchett, 1979, is still the standard work on religion and war in ancient Greece, showing that much is to be gained by studying the two in combination. For his discussions of divination and war in the Greek world see 47–153, 296–323. See more recently the chapter on the Greek *mantis* in war in Flower, 2008: 153–87; or the chapter on Greek sacrifice before and during battles, incorporating much information about divination as well: Jameson, 1993: 197–227. For divination in Greek warfare, see Nevin, 2019, vol. 1 in this series.
6. This dual function combines the 'stress' hypotheses and the 'manipulation' – which are certainly not mutually exclusive – as referred to in Rasmussen, 2003: 25. Both hypotheses will be introduced in more detail below.
7. Parker, 2016: 130.
8. A particular kind of divinatory sign (see below, 'Three methods of inductive divination').
9. See MacBain, 1982: 8–19, on reliability of Obsequens and Livy. The *prodigia* reports are seen as relatively historical, especially when compared to sources regarding *exta* and *auspicia*: Rasmussen, 2003: 16–24; and especially for source criticism (also for the other authors dealing with Republican divination): Engels, 2007: 93–258.
10. Note that the work is, in the first place, a philosophical treatise which we should treat carefully when looking for historical information. For commentaries, see Pease, 1920–23; Wardle, 2006; Schultz, 2015.
11. But it should be clear that we do not know what Cicero actually believed or thought: Schofield, 1986: 47–65; Wardle, 2006: 10–14. For other ideas on the matter of scepticism, see Beard, 1986: *passim*.
12. See for brief source criticism concerned with these authors: Rasmussen, 2003: 23–24.

13. This paragraph is based on the following pages of my book, which can also be consulted for a more extensive definition: Beerden, 2013: 19–42.
14. Beerden, 2013: 32–34. Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 28.10–11; Livy 30.25.12, 42.20.4–6.
15. Livy 6.12.7–8. Trans.: Foster, 1924: 235.
16. Cf. Champeaux, 1982–87; Santangelo, 2013: 73–80.
17. Livy 39.22.5. Trans.: Sage, 1936: 283; whether they were really killed has been questioned by Rosenberger, 1997: 132 n.15.
18. Beerden, 2013: 20.
19. Cic. *Div.* 1.72. Cf. Val. Max. 1.6.4; on the *haruspex*, see Haack, 2006: no. 75.
20. Cic. *Div.* 1.132.
21. North 1990: 56–61.
22. North 1990: 56–61.
23. Barton, 1994: 31–37. Only from Augustus onwards was astrology used for public purposes: Santangelo, 2013: 246–58.
24. Cic. *Div.* 1.132. Cf. Wardle, 2006: 420–25.
25. Beard & Crawford, 1985: 31.
26. E.g., that auspices became less important: Cic. *Div.* 1.28–29.
27. The practice of taking the auspices was already established in the time of Tarquinius Superbus, last king of Rome: Livy 1.36.6 (*RVW* 36).
28. Varro *Ling. Lat.* 7.8. Trans.: Kent, 1938: 275.
29. Rüpke, 1990: 147; Cic. *Nat. Deor.* 2.3.9; Cic. *Div.* 2.36.
30. Cic. *Div.* 1.27
31. See the explanation in Wardle, 2006: 174–75, commenting on Cic. *Div.* 1.27.
32. North, 1990: 53–54.
33. Livy 9.14.4 (320 BC). Trans.: Foster, 1926: 213.
34. Wheeler, 2008: *passim*. Figure 7.1: Crawford *RRC* 12.1. There is a similar example in the British Museum: 1867,0212.4.
35. The procedures themselves are unclear, but see the authoritative article by Linderski, 1986.
36. Cf. Cic. *Leg.* 2.2.1.
37. See for more detail on the coin, Fears, 1975: 29–37
38. See for related and subcategories, Engels, 2007: 259–82.
39. For our purposes, the discussion about whether these occurrences are physically possible and whether there are then 'false' and 'true' signs is not relevant. Cf. Rasmussen, 2003: 37–41.

40. Rasmussen, 2003: 53–116, on developments regarding the acceptance of particular signs.
41. Orlin, 1997: 76–115, is the best short introduction to the Sibylline Books.
42. There is much literature on the subject, see for more information the references given in North, 2012.
43. MacBain, 1982: 43–59. Here one may also find a discussion about their number and about the year they were officially introduced in Rome – MacBain argues 278 BC. On Etruscan roots of Roman extispicy, cf. Rasmussen, 2003: 117–48, esp. 135–40.
44. Livy 42.2.3–7 (*RVW* 182). Cf. Livy 42.20 (*RVW* 183/184).
45. Dion. Hal. *Rom. Ant.* 4.62.1–3.
46. Satterfield, 2011: 117–18.
47. Dion. Hal. *Rom. Ant.* 4.62.6
48. Dion. Hal. *Rom. Ant.* 4.62.4–5; Cic. *Div.* 2.110 (*RVW* 340). For a clear introduction to the origins of, and procedures concerning, the Books see Orlin, 1997: 76–85.
49. See Satterfield, 2011, for an historical explanation about why exactly this part of the Books was made public.
50. As in Phlegon *Mir.* 10.3–7. Trans.: Hansen, 1996: 40. The text is very problematic, as is the translation. An edition can be found in Diels, 111–24.
51. Plut. *Marc.* 3.5–7 (*RVW* 90).
52. Livy 29.10.4–6 (*RVW* 132). See also Fontenrose, 1978: Q237 for ensuing involvement of the Delphic oracle.
53. The geographical spread of where *prodigia* occurred (and what that may have been *ager romanus*, which is the geographical area under the influence of Rome) and what this means for our knowledge of the spread of Roman influence in Italy has been extensively discussed in the literature, first by Mommsen: see for a recent overview Rasmussen, 2003: 219–40.
54. Livy 22.1.8 (cf. *RVW* 101).
55. Livy 22.1.14–20 (cf. *RVW* 101).
56. Rosenberger, 1997: 97–101, refers to the spear of Mars in Obs. 6 (*RVW* 169); 36 (*RVW* 236); 44 (*RVW* 250/253); 47 (*RVW* 258); 50 (*RVW* 261). Bees, wasps and so on in Livy 35.9.4 (*RVW* 152); wolves in Livy 3.29.9 and many more occasions.
57. Rosenberger, 1998: 98–99.
58. Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 7.34–35 (*RVW* 267); Dio 42.26 (*RVW* 331).

59. Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 92 (cf. *RVW* 280, 327.3); a foaling mule or plague may also indicate civil strife, cf. Obsequens 29 (*RVW* 227); 65 (*RVW* 322).
60. Rosenberger, 1997: 97–101.
61. To give examples: Herennius Siculus was part of G. Gracchus' entourage (Haack, 2006: no. 37); Spurinna was Caesar's *haruspex* (Haack, 2006: no. 88). Cf. on Caesar and his *haruspices*: Santangelo, 2013: 107–14.
62. This is a very brief and standard overview of the different signs and their interpreters, in this case drawn from Gordon, 2004: 387–90. For more extensive literature on the groups of experts, see North, 1990: 51–71.
63. Livy 27.26.13–14 (cf. *RVW* 126 for context). Trans.: Gardner Moore, 1940: 319.
64. Rasmussen, 2003: 126–48.
65. Cic. *Div.* 2.36.
66. See Engels, 2007: 469 (*RVW* 126); Rasmussen, 2003: 121–22.
67. Although Cicero argues against it in Cic. *Div.* 2.36–39. However, this only confirms the existence of such practices.
68. Plut. *Cam.* 4. Cf. Val. Max. 1.6.3; Dion. Hal. *Rom. Ant.* 12.13–18; Cic. *Div.* 1.100; 2.69; Livy 5.15.2, 5.51.6 (*RVW* 52); cf. Livy 5.21.8–9; Plut. *Cam.* 5.4–6 (*RVW* 53). See also Fontenrose, 1978: Q202.
69. Livy 23.11.1–3.
70. Livy 22.57.1–6 (*RVW* 107).
71. Cf. the time before the Battle of Cannae: Livy 23.11.1–6 (*RVW* 107.2).
72. Bonnechere, 2010: 133.
73. Beard & Crawford, 1985: 36–39, see more interaction between politics and religion in the Late Republic; diversification of cults resulting in religious choices for the individual; and the development of intellectualism on the topic of traditional religion. The first development is most important here.
74. Livy 6.12.7–8 (*RVW* 59). Trans.: Foster, 1924: 235.
75. Cic. *Nat. Deor.* 2.9. Trans.: Rackham, 1933: 131.
76. Cic. *Div.* 2.76, *Nat. Deor.* 2.9.
77. Rich, 2013: 547–48.
78. Cic. *Div.* 1.28.
79. Engels, 2007: 763–68, refers to scholars such as Bloch, Wülker, Latte, Gladigow and Cousin. See his treatment of this issue for many more references. See, however, for a more nuanced view Orlin, 1997: 85–86.
80. MacBain, 1982: 80–82. Consider also Rüpke, 1990: 148–50.

81. Engels, 2007: 778–79, 797.
82. Engels, 2007: 785; Rüpke, 1995: 577–78; cf. Rosenberger, 1997: 205–33.
83. Livy 36.1.3–5. Trans.: Sage, 1935: 155.
84. Livy 27.16.15–16 (*RVW* 123).
85. Plut. *Sull.* 17.1–2.
86. Livy 38.26.1–2. Trans.: Sage, 1936: 89.
87. Phang, 2008: 89.
88. Ripat, 2006: 166.
89. Plut. *Pomp.* 68.2 (*RVW* 327.4).
90. Val. Max. 1.6.2 (*RVW* 117).
91. Engels, 2007: 765, discerns a development from the importance of public to private divination in a military context because of an increase in dream divination (and perhaps the claim to a more personal relationship with the god). It is true that many – but not all – examples are from the Late Republic. See also Kragelund, 2007: *passim*.
92. Flower, 2013: 297–98.
93. Plut. *Sull.* 9 (*RVW* 272).
94. This question of source criticism remains a key issue (for all divinatory methods).
95. Cic. *Div.* 1.50.
96. And cf. Hannibal's dream just before the Second Punic War in Cic. *Div.* 1.49; Livy 21.22.6–9; Val Max. 1.7 ext.1 (RVW 96); and his dream in 205: Cic. *Div.* 1.48 (*RVW* 133).
97. Plut. *Pomp.* 68.2 (*RVW* 327.3).
98. I do not consider ambiguity to have played a very large role in actual divinatory practices – although it is very important as a rhetorical device in the sources: Naerebout & Beerden, 2012.
99. Cic. *Div.* 1.51: (*RVW* 66; Cf., among others, Flor. 1.14.2).
100. Livy 26.41.18 (*RVW* 121). Trans.: Gardner Moore, 1943: 163.
101. Livy 8.6.11 (*RVW* 66).
102. Wardman, 1982: 29.
103. Polyb. 10.11.7–8 (cf. *RVW* 124). Trans.: Paton, Walbank & Habicht, 2011: 143. Walbank adds in his commentary (Walbank, 1957: 213) that these passages do not give any reason to believe that Polybius believed in these dreams himself.
104. As has been argued by, among others, Goldsworthy, 1996: 249.
105. Lee, 1996: 199.
106. Lee, 1996: 200–02.
107. Cf. especially MacMullen, 1984: 440–56.

108. Goldsworthy, 1996: 250–64.
109. Lee, 1996: 203–12.
110. Goldsworthy, 1996: 250.
111. Livy 21.62.11 (*RVW* 97). Cf. the remarks above about the increase of *prodigia* during the Punic Wars, note 68 above. This thought can of course be found in other sources as well – most notably, Thucydides, e.g. 2.21.3, but also 2.54. Apart from lawlessness and carelessness towards the supernatural as a result of the plague, in this last passage Thucydides describes citizens clinging to possible interpretations of the oracle.
112. Phang, 2008: 89–92.
113. Front. *Strat.* 1.12.1–12.
114. Front. *Strat.* 1.12.1. Trans.: Bennett & McAlwain, 1925: 81 (*RVW* 135). Cf. Livy 22.3.9–14.
115. Front. *Strat.* 1.12.8. Trans.: Bennett & McAlwain, 1925: 83 (*RVW* 189). Cf. Livy 44.37.5–9 (*RVW* 189). Cf. Polyb. 29.16; Plut. *Aem.* 16.
116. Term by Freedman, 1998: 1
117. Eclipses of the moon, but of the sun too, were seen as very disturbing signs from the supernatural. See in 413 BC, e.g., Plut. *Nic.* 23.1, 23.4. Also, Ross, 2016: 99–120, discusses eclipses in the ancient Near East and Greece in the context of warfare.
118. Frontin. *Str.* 1.11.11 (*RVW* 281).
119. Frontin. *Str.* 1.11.11 (*RVW* 281). Cf. Val. Max. 1.2.3; Plut. *Sull.* 29.6–7. See for another example, Polyb. 10.11.7–8. Cf. on Scipio and auspices App. *Bell. Hisp.* 26 (*RVW* 128). Marius uses divination in a similar way, Front. *Strat.* 1.11.12 (*RVW* 251). Cf. Val. Max. 1.2.4; Plut. *Mar.* 17.1–3.
120. Livy 6.12.9–10. Trans.: Foster, 1924: 237 (*RVW* 59), slightly adapted.
121. Livy 7.9.5–6; Cf. Livy 32.9.1–5 (*RVW* 144), where an army is detained in Rome due to divinatory outcomes.
122. Plut. *Aem.* 17.7 (*RVW* 189).
123. Cic. *Nat. Deor.* 2.7; Cic. *Div.* 1.29, see also Wardle, 2006: 179. Cf. Livy *Per.* 19 (*RVW* 85).
124. Livy 22.3.9–14. Also on Flaminius, see Cic. *Div.* 1.77 (and Cic. *Nat. Deor.* 2.8; Val. Max. 1.6.6 [*RVW* 102]). A variation on this theme is Marcellus' horse turning wild during the battle in Plut. *Marc.* 6.5–6 (*RVW* 93).
125. Obsequens 17. Other examples: Mancinus: Liv. *Per.* 55; Obsequens 24. Cic. *Div.* 1.29 (*RVW* 314): Marcus Crassus was killed in the Parthian

War when he disregarded the divinatory signs. Other commanders lost their fleet; Cic. *Nat. Deor.* 2.7–8: Junius also lost his fleet; Val. Max. 5.1. ext. 4; Val. Max. 1.6.9; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 16.1.1–4 (*RVW* 69); Obsequens 28.

126. Livy 27.26.13–14 (*RVW* 126). Trans.: Gardner Moore, 1943: 319. Cf. Plut. *Marc.* 29.4–5.
127. Another such example, this time with Crassus as commander, in: Plut. *Crass.* 19.4–8; 19.18–23 (*RVW* 318).
128. Cic. *Div.* 2.52 (*RVW* 332).
129. Cic. *Div.* 2.71 (*RVW* 85).
130. E.g. in Plut. *Marc.* 4.1–4.
131. Livy 5.38.1-2. Trans.: Foster, 1924: 129.
132. Livy 41.18.7–16 (*RVW* 177).
133. Cic. *Nat. Deor.* 2.10–12. Cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.33.
134. Val. Max. 7.2.5; Livy 10.40.4 (*RVW* 75).
135. Orlin, 2000: 197–99; Santangelo, 2013: 170.
136. Plut. *Cat.* 42.1.4–5. Trans.: Perrin, 1919: 337.
137. Cf. for a number of examples of those arguing for the decline of religion: Rasmussen, 2003: 31–32. On the 'cynical' and 'hysterical' dichotomy see MacBain, 1982: 7; Rasmussen, 2003, refers to the 'manipulation hypothesis' and 'stress hypothesis' and adds Rosenberger's 'liminal approach' which she finds convincing: 25–34.
138. Although *de divinatione* is first and foremost a philosophical treatise, written when he was retired from politics: Wardle, 2006: 27–28.
139. Although he praises the religious practices of the Romans in 6.56.7. Cf. e.g., Vaahtera, 2000: 251–64; Walbank, 1957: 11–12; Walbank, 1994: 28–42.
140. Polyb. 7.7.1, 12.24.5.
141. Polyb. 3.112.8–9. Walbank, 1957: 443, considers Polybius' reaction to Roman use of divination 'slightly contemptuous' and refers to 4.56.6–12 where Polybius reveals admiration for 'a statesmanship which [he believed] exploited and encourages such superstition for reasons of state'.
142. See the footnote above. This dual function combines the 'stress' hypotheses and the 'manipulation' – which are certainly not mutually exclusive.
143. Naerebout, 1997: 329–32; Versnel, 2011: 539–59.
144. Naerebout, 1997: 336.
145. Naerebout, 1997: 329–32; Versnel, 2011: 539–59.

146. F.G. Naerebout, lecture series 'Geloof aan de goden', Leiden University, 2015–16.
147. Rasmussen, 2003: 25
148. Versnel, 2011: 5, for a brief (historiographical) discussion of these terms in relation to belief.
149. Versnel, 2011: 7; citation: 148.
150. Versnel, 2011: 7.
151. Versnel, 2011: 86.
152. Harrison, 1997: 112.
153. Parker, 2016: 130.

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