

THE IDEA AND PRACTICE OF WITCHCRAFT IN AND
AROUND ANCIENT ISRAEL

by

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This study is an attempt to present the ideology and motivating factors behind A.N.E. witchcraft, with a view towards gaining an awareness of the system's superstitious and evil nature. God's mandate against and attitude towards the use of witchcraft had been adequately spelled out in the Pentateuch. His prophet Samuel, during the tumultuous days of the judges, compared rebellion and stubbornness to witchcraft (1 Sam 15:23). To gain an understanding into the nature and practice of the A.N.E. system of witchcraft with which Samuel was acquainted, will therefore lead to insight as to what constituted rebellion against God. Chapter one is an analysis of three important aspects within the craft, namely magic, divination, and demonology. Magic, being the key vehicle in witchcraft, is given extended treatment especially in its relation to religion.

Chapter two is an exegetical breakdown of Deuteronomy 18:10-12 into its constituent parts. In this Locus Classicus of Old Testament warnings against witchcraft participation, Moses selects nine divisions of the craft which the nation would confront after entering the land. The etymology and nuances of these principle participles are examined, thereby aiding the reader in understanding why witchcraft was ranked alongside other heinous sins in the Levitical law code and labeled as 'an abomination.' Chapter three surveys the severe penalties which were to be meted out upon one who dared to experiment in the occult.

The heart of the study is found in chapter four which describes the development of witchcraft from the seedbed of Sumer, westward towards the Mediterranean where in time the system came into contact with the Israelites. Modern archaeology has presented scholarship with vast amounts of evidence supporting the Biblical data which shows the Old Testament world steeped in sorcery. The various methods employed in A.N.E. witchcraft as well as its basic characteristics are considered.

The final analysis, demonstrated in chapter five, is that rebellion came to a head in Israel, causing God to bring Assyria and the Babylonians respectively against His people in judgment. The evil system of witchcraft spearheaded by Satan was a prime cause of captivity. The craft of Canaan, in which men imagined they could control their own destinies through magic and divination, gradually and subtly was incorporated into the camp of Israel, in spite of all the repeated prohibitions and warnings.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
Master of Theology

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A handwritten signature, possibly reading "L. M. D.", written in dark ink. The signature is somewhat stylized and includes a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Adviser

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts
BAGD	Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker (Greek Lexicon)
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs (Hebrew Lexicon)
BSac	Bibliotheca Sacra
IBD	Illustrated Bible Dictionary
ICC	International Critical Commentary of the Old and New Testaments
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JCS	Journal of Cuneiform Studies
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
NIDNTT	Dictionary of New Testament Theology
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

Dr. Leo Martello, a self-proclaimed witch of the twentieth century and founder of the Witches Liberation Movement, wrote the following words concerning his religion of witchcraft:

When we leave our coven we're all spiritually high, happy, healthy. We are there voluntarily, not by guilt or obligation. Our prayers and our rituals are done not by rote but in total reverence. We have no fear of an avenging god (and in our case, goddess), no horror of hell, and unlike so many others, absolutely no sense of evil. In fact our covens enable us to escape the evils of the world, to experience a sense of oneness, compassion, sharing, and joy denied to those who have accepted a hellbent theology.¹

Such sentiment is the norm for adherents to the occult sciences of today's world. In spite of the fact that the modern society is the greatest ever in technological advances, and education, interest in the black arts and spiritism has not declined. It has rather heightened intensely. Individuals are searching for much needed answers to questions such as: Who am I? What lies beyond death? What's the real meaning of my existence?

Universities, at the time of this writing, are offering courses in witchcraft and parapsychology. The unknown

¹Leo Martello, Witchcraft: The Old Religion (Secaucus, NJ: University Books, n.d.), p. 21.

is seeking to be discovered in ways which are contrary to, and indeed condemned by God's Word. Any cursory glance at most secular bookstores will reveal clearly the predominance placed upon astrology, fortunetelling, and magic.

To write this very popular phenomenon off as a passing fad, would be naïve, and an ignoring of the truth. The occult and non-Biblical divinatory practices are solidly entrenched. They have an ancient history, for they have been around since Satan, the master of sorceries, rebelled against God. The one who loves and believes the Word of God, will necessarily react to, and condemn, in total, the practices of witchcraft.

A disgruntled prophet named Samuel, once told a disobedient King Saul that "the (sin of) rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft (I Samuel 15:23)." The purpose of this work is an attempt to ascertain why Samuel, God's spokesman, attributed or compared rebellion against God, to witchcraft. Obviously he believed מַדְבָּר , translated "witchcraft" in the K.J.V., was a supreme example of that which can rightfully be labeled rebellion. The writer's purpose, therefore, is to examine the nature, characteristics, and basic foundational principles of the A.N.E. witchcraft, with which Samuel was well acquainted. That goal, when accomplished, will lead to a better understanding of what was involved in rebellion against the God of Israel.

Statement of Procedure

Due to the strictures imposed upon this work, and the lengthy material in the Old Testament concerning witchcraft, the writer recognizes the need for self-discipline in narrowing down a consideration of the subject at hand. The avenues which could be pursued are intriguing and also numerous. However the classical passages usually elucidated in such a study will only be examined as they relate to the flow of discussion, i.e. the Egyptian magicians (Exod 7-8), King Saul and the necromancer at Endor (1 Sam 28), the Babylonian astrologers (Daniel), etc. It is the intention of the writer to concentrate on the idea of A.N.E. witchcraft, and indepth analyses of specific examples would only impede that goal.

Definitions are very important for clarification, and therefore the first part of the work will be devoted to defining various aspects within witchcraft. Deuteronomy 18:10-12 can well be called the Locus Classicus of pejorative passages against witchcraft practices in the Old Testament, and therefore it deserves, and will be given much attention. After a brief survey of some key passages denouncing witchcraft from the Hebrew law, the methods and character of divination are reviewed, thus enhancing insight into the rebellion motif.

All rebellion against the sovereign God necessarily ends in disaster and devastation. Israel attempted to go above and beyond God's prescribed methods of revelation, by

engaging in unlawful activities, such as the nations around her were practicing. The chosen people of God sowed the seeds of sorcery and in the end, reaped a harvest of desolation. The final part of this work will demonstrate just how terrible and unrelenting the effects of witchcraft were upon Israel, the apple of Jehovah's eye.

Statement of the Problem Concerning
Terminology

By far the greatest obstacle in an examination of A.N.E. witchcraft and its practice in Israel is that of terminology. The term witch immediately conjures up images of cone hats, warts, and broomsticks in the modern mind. These images are as old as Medieval witch trials. Popular culture since 1965 has, in another vein, updated the witch. She is cute Samantha of Bewitched fame, with her middle class home in middle class America.¹ The tendency of vertical transference, or the imposing of modern ideas back into Old Testament history, will do great harm and confuse an understanding of A.N.E. witchcraft. The words witch and witchcraft used in the Authorized Version, do present a problem and help in misunderstanding the meaning of the original

¹Gary North, None Dare Call It Witchcraft (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1976), p. 32.

terms.¹ The translation has been changed in many modern versions (cf. R.S.V., N.A.S.B., etc.), thereby alleviating some of the bewilderment on the part of many readers. The term witchcraft will be used in this writing, although being clarified in the exegesis. The term is only a drip-pan catchword at any rate, which covers individual aspects such as divination, sorcery, magic, and demonology, all of which the author trusts will be clarified for the reader.

The necessary omissions will, it is hoped, be of a minor nature, and will not detract from the overriding goal of discovering the rebellious nature of witchcraft, as portrayed in the gallery of Old Testament Scriptures.

¹Whenever the terms are found, they are more properly rendered "sorcery" or "divination." For a more detailed discussion see chapter II on Etymology, from Deut 18:10-12.

CHAPTER I

THE DEFINITIONS OF MAJOR ASPECTS WITHIN WITCHCRAFT

A.N.E. witchcraft was a very complicated and elaborate system, involving numerous and varied ramifications. A breakdown of the system into the operational aspects within it, will help in establishing an understanding of how it functioned. The first aspect which needs to be defined is that of magic.

The Definition of Magic

Witchcraft needed a vehicle through which it could operate. Magic was that vehicle. The word comes from the Greek, *μαγεία*, simply meaning "magic arts."¹ The Greek word is derived from the magi or Zoroastrian priests of the Persian period.² T. Witton Davies gave the following definition of magic:

Magic may be briefly defined as the attempt on man's part to have intercourse with spiritual and supernatural beings and to influence them for his benefit³ (emphasis mine).

¹BAGD, p. 484.

²ISBE, s.v. "Magic," by T. Witton Davies.

³T. Witton Davies, Magic, Divination, and Demonology Among the Hebrews and their Neighbors (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1969), p. 1 (hereinafter referred to as Magic Among the Hebrews).

The key then to understanding magic is influence. Mankind in ancient civilizations, particularly the Near East, believed that the powers of the world, upon which their well-being depended, were energized or controlled by spiritual agents. These agents were very capable of being swayed or moved into acting kindly towards men, or perhaps acting violently towards the enemies of men. The swaying was done through magic. That being the case it is easily comprehended why magical charms and incantations were so prevalent. It was practical.¹ It was an art, by which the deities, or the spirits were compelled into doing the will of the practitioner.

Magic can be classed into two categories, that of impersonal and personal. Impersonal magic recognizes that there were certain forces in the world which could be activated or repelled by a charm or spell. The one casting the spell, believed in a cause and effect relationship, the principle of post hoc ergo propter hoc.² The magician did not necessarily believe the cause to be a personal agent or god. It was merely an impersonal force, and he believed that the recitation of some incantation or the wearing of a talismanic amulet produced, uniformly, a desired result.

¹For a fuller discussion of this, see below on "the expediency of A.N.E. Witchcraft" in chapter 4.

²ISBE, s.v. "Magic," by T. Witton Davies.

On the other hand, personal magic is that kind of magic in which "a living intelligent, spiritual being, was the agent which men by incantations, etc., influence, and even control."¹ Within magic, were two components which decided the type of result or outcome produced by the charms. If an evil result was desired, such as inflicting pain upon an enemy, Black magic was resorted to. If however, the performer of magic wished to undo a certain spell, or utilize magic for benevolent means, such as for the good of oneself or others, White magic was practiced.²

The practice of magic in general had some common features as Colin Brown demonstrates:

(i) The spell, the utterance of words according to a set formula, without which control over the desired power is impossible; (ii) the rite, or set of actions designed to convey the spell to the object concerned, involving imitation of the desired action or the use of similar substances; and (iii) the condition of the performer who must not breach any of the relevant taboos and must be in a requisite emotional state to perform the prescribed actions.³

Once the ancient began to believe he was influencing a supernatural spirit being (Personal magic), by his performance of ritual charms and spells, the association of

¹Ibid.

²John J. Davis, Contemporary Counterfeits (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1973), pp. 33-35. See also K. A. Kitchen's excellent discussion on the distinction between white and black magic in Illustrated Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Magic and Sorcery."

³NIDNTT, s.v. "Magic, Sorcery, Magi," by Colin Brown, 2:552.

magic with religion was very often indistinct.¹ The magical acts were at times accompanied by sacrifices, and the incantations or formulaic spells, became prayers. Because the ties between magic and religion are closely related, the connection of the two needs elaboration.

The Connection of Magic with Religion

Magic is indeed difficult to define because it has had numerous meanings over the last four thousand years. Also because religion is magic's sister discipline and in many ways indistinguishable from it.² Because both magic and religion involve a belief in the realm of the supernatural, and dealings in the realm of the unseen, it is often very difficult to delineate between the two.³ Helmer Ringgren believed that "the distinction between magic and religion can only be maintained strictly on paper."⁴ He then elaborated on this by writing:

The actions that accompany the incantations can perhaps therefore not be called cultic, but they are still rites through which men wish to make sure of the

¹Ibid.

²Bob Brier, Ancient Egyptian Magic (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1980), p. 10.

³Ibid.

⁴Helmer Ringgren, Religions of the Ancient Near East, trans. by John Sturdy (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), p. 34.

assistance of the gods, and the incantation priests function with a commission from the gods. The frontier between religion and magic is therefore very fluid.¹

Even as the ancient Near Easterner would have had no understanding of a distinction between church and state (for the king was god, and the cult functioned within the court), so also he would have known no separation between his religion and his magic, from the pragmatic standpoint. He used his magic in the performance of, and alongside of religion, very often. In this way magic did tend to merge with religion. The spell was reinforced by a prayer to the god, or perhaps magic was brought in as an accessory to religion when it was feared that the god might be away from his normal habitat, and so prayer alone might not reach him.²

There have been scholars who have attempted to separate magic and religion in relation to anthropological development. The most famous being Sir James Frazer, who separates magic from religion as an earlier practice,³ in his work, The Golden Bough. Frazer defines religion as:

a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life. Thus defined, religion consists of two elements, a theoretical and a practical,

¹Ibid., p. 35.

²For a fuller understanding of this see O. R. Gurney, The Hittites (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1952), pp. 160-64.

³See his discussion on "Magic and Religion" in the 2nd ed. of the Golden Bough, Vol. 1, pp. 220ff.

namely a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them.¹

Conceding to the greatness of Frazer's scholarship and expertise, this writer would still have to disagree with him, for whatever the case as to a definition of A.N.E. religion, it still is obvious that the religious element was never lacking even in the most primitive forms of magic. It stands therefore, that magic and religion had always existed together, and the religious aspect was not a later development. Magic was for sure a very poor form of religion, but it was religion.²

Therefore, the connection between magic and religion to the ancient was so intertwined that distinctions are hard to recover. There is perhaps, though one very evident distinction between the two which should be made, involving the area of worship. In the magic ritual, there was often a goal in sight, that goal usually being to influence the will of the god. But in religion that was not an essential element. The worshipper was not bound to ask for something. He could worship for the sake of worshipping. In magic, that was impossible. A spell was never recited for its own sake. Magic was never an end in itself but always a means to an end, i.e. to control supernatural forces.³

¹James George Frazer, The Golden Bough, 2nd ed., Vol. 1: The Magic Art (New York: St. Martin's, 1966), p. 22.

²Morris Jastrow, Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1911), p. 301.

³IBD, s.v. "Magic and Sorcery," by K. A. Kitchen.

Magic and religion, then, were often found to work together in the relationship of deity with mankind. However society principally covered man's relationship with man, and magical practices were instrumental in this area, apart from religion.¹ Magic, the vehicle of witchcraft, could well be described as a low kind of religion because the ethical element was often subordinated. The incantations accompanying magic, corresponding somewhat to prayer, laid stress on the mode of utterance rather than the moral condition of the practitioner.²

The Connection of Magic with Sorcery

Sorcery cannot be considered or defined separately from magic, simply because sorcery is the practice of magic. John D. Davis considered the sorcerer as:

one who practices sorcery, uses potions that derive a supposed efficacy from magical spells, and professes to possess supernatural power or knowledge gained in any manner, especially through the connivance of evil spirits.³

If, as it has been established, magic was the vehicle through which A.N.E. witchcraft operated, sorcery or the sorcerer could be labeled, the operator.

¹IBD, s.v. "Magic and Sorcery," by K. A. Kitchen.

²Davies, Magic Among the Hebrews, p. 2.

³John D. Davis, A Dictionary of the Bible (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1929), p. 739.

The Cataloging of Magic

There were several divisions or categories of magic practiced in the A.N.E. By far the greatest category under which magical practices fell, was that of sympathetic magic.

Sympathetic magic

Simply stated, sympathetic magic depended largely on the association of ideas for its success. When the magician performed sympathetic magic his underlying assumption was that, to produce a result or action, you have to imitate it. If the magician desired to harm or do any evil to an individual he would burn or injure some possession or belonging of that person, all the while believing that his action would affect the owner in a similar fashion.¹ The reader perhaps will be reminded of the infamous voodoo dolls which were pricked with sharp objects or burned, a practice common to African ancestor worship. Even today images of hated persons are burned in effigy, the initiators desiring the same destruction for the real individual. Evidence of this type of magic has been found dating as far back as cave-dwelling culture. There is evidence of cave art depicting animals stuck with darts, with a view to causing the same thing to happen in a future hunt, or the covering of corpses with a red pigment, suggesting blood, in order to restore

¹Davies, Magic Among the Hebrews, p. 17.

life.¹ Among the early Mesopotamian civilizations, such as the Babylonians, sympathetic magic was used even in purification rituals. The carcass of the ram used in the purification (kuppuru) rite, was tossed into the river, thereby assuring that the moral and physical impurities of the worshipper were also cast into the sea, via association or sympathetic magic.² Literature from the A.N.E. is filled with sympathetic magic practices. This seems to be especially predominant in Hittite literature, where witchcraft was performed mostly by women and was done primarily sympathetically. The following example is an excerpt taken from a purification ritual text, in which the help of protective demons is sought:

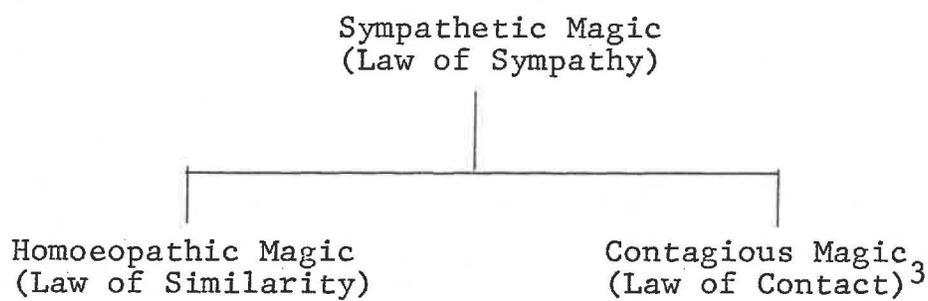
She wraps up a small piece of tin in the bowstring (35) and attaches it to the sacrifice's right hands (and) feet. She takes it off them (again) and attaches it to a mouse (with the words): 'I have taken the evil off you and transferred it to the mouse. Let this mouse carry it on a long journey to the high (mountains) (40) hills and dales!'³

¹NIDNTT, s.v. "Magic, Sorcery, Magi," by Colin Brown, 2:552.

²Some of the forms of O.T. worship were similar in methodology, i.e. the scapegoat of Lev 16. God often used pictorial forms, and actions with which the Hebrews were familiar. However, as J. Barton Payne suggests, "The important thing is not the prior existence of a given Biblical rite, but rather the transformation of the religious concept with which it may have been associated in paganism into that new meaning which God had assigned to it in reference to His own redemptive program," The Theology of the Older Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), p. 354.

³"Purification Ritual Engaging the Help of Protective Demons," translated by Albrecht Goetze, ANET, p. 348.

Frazer has broken down sympathetic magic into two branches, that of homoeopathic and contagious magic.¹ He explains homoeopathic magic as being founded on the association of ideas by similarity, whereas contagious magic, he believes, is founded on the association of ideas by contiguity.² Frazer illustrates this more clearly in chart form:



Therefore, in homoeopathic magic, the magician believed he had the power, through magical ritual, to affect another person or thing just by association. No contact between the sympathetic item, and the person upon which the spell was to be cast was necessary. When contagious magic was used however the contact was vital for the assuring of desired results.

It should be noted that many of the elaborate A.N.E. magic ceremonies, wherein this sympathetic magic took place,

¹Frazer, The Golden Bough, vol. 1, pp. 52ff.

²Ibid., p. 53.

³Ibid., p. 54.

could take several or more days. That is not to say that the magician could not perform a honed down, and speedy spell casting in the temple, if funds were scanty on the part of the consumer. The ceremony usually consisted of two parts: First, there was the invocation, consisting of the initial summons of the god for help, the secret utterings of the magical name or epithets, and then the request itself. The second part, was the ritual itself which took on various forms and involved the use of amulets, sacrifices, the mixing of special potions or libations, and secret writing.¹

Apotropaic magic

This was another category within the practice of magic which was used quite often in ancient witchcraft to gain the desired result. The term is derived from two Greek words, ἀπό and τρέπω. The first word is a preposition of place, meaning "from" or "away from."² The second is a verb meaning to "turn," or "direct."³ The idea then, in apotropaic magic is to turn away from or better to get rid of. The question is left to answer, namely: get rid of what? In the A.N.E., especially in Mesopotamian attitudes, ominous phenomena or uncharacteristic, non-normative signs were

¹NIDNTT, s.v. "Magic, Sorcery, Magi," by Colin Brown, 2:556.

²BAGD, p. 86.

³Ibid., p. 825.

considered very bad omens, and often bespoke of impending disaster or misfortune upon a king, country, city, or individual.¹ The unfortunate ones under such a plight needed protection. That protection often came in the form of apotropaic magic, which often made use of amulets, magic rings, and a host of other items.² Apotropaic rituals were considered potent enough to obviate all evil consequences, thought to be impending due to the signs. As Colin Brown relates, "belief in apotropaic efficacy of rings, crowns, and amulets,³ and numerous medical charms was widespread."⁴

¹Leo Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East," Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series 46:3 (1956), p. 239 (hereinafter referred to as The Interpretation of Dreams).

²Ibid.

³Since amulets seem to be the favored object used in apotropaic magic, a definition of an amulet by Sir Wallis Budge, late keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities in the British Museum, is appropriate: "'Amulet' is a name given to a class of objects and ornaments, and articles of dress and wearing apparel, made of various substances which were employed by the Egyptians and later by other nations to protect the human body, either living or dead from baleful influences, and from the attacks of visible and invisible foes. The word 'amulet' is derived from an Arabic root meaning 'to bear, to carry,' hence 'amulet' is 'something which is carried or worn,' and the name is applied broadly to any kind of talisman or ornament to which supernatural powers are ascribed." Wallis Budge, Egyptian Magic (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1901; reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1971), p. 25.

⁴NIDNTT, s.v. "Magic, Sorcery, Magi," by Colin Brown, 2:553.

Thus, people wore protective amulets, figures of fierce animals were buried in the foundations of houses, etc., all with a purpose to drive away evil forces or demons. O. R. Gurney wrote about a ritual to expel evil spirits from a royal palace, using this category of magic:

They make a little dog of tallow and place it on the threshold of the house and say, 'you are the little dog of the table of the royal pair. Just as by day you do not allow other men into the courtyard, so do not let in the Evil thing during the night.'¹

It goes without saying, that superstition and a belief in a myriad of evil spirit beings, were underlying motivations for the very common use of apotropaic magic in the A.N.E.. Sympathetic and apotropaic forms of magic were practiced on what might be termed, a professional level, by the priests and magicians. However, apart from those two distinct castes, there was at all levels the carrying on of popular magic, which was the endeavor of the common folk either to prevent spirit powers from doing harm to individuals or groups, or to make them minister to private interests.²

Productive magic

There was in the A.N.E. a very purposeful kind of magic used for assurance of production. Every serious

¹O. R. Gurney, The Hittites, p. 163.

²John Noss, Man's Religions (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), p. 17.

scholar of the Bible admits that there was a prominent role which fertility and sex enjoyed in the beliefs and practices of the A.N.E. One of the principal tasks which the commoner entrusted to his religion was the securing of the favor of the gods, so that they would either provide fertility or keep on sustaining it. This fertility was conceived of in a number of ways such as a thriving bumper crop, a large family, or plenty of livestock.¹ Therefore as Noss states, "The almost infinite number of procedures working toward social and individual well being, specifically by promoting fertility in field and flock and in womanhood is often called productive magic."²

This form of magic was evidenced in any number of ways, and was believed, again, to work on the basis of association. Often there was the sacrifice of a human, which was followed by the sowing of the flesh or the blood of the victim right along with the seeds. This was basically the nature of the major festivals of the A.N.E., particularly the famous New Year Festival, where ceremonial marriages of fertility gods and goddesses took place, via human actors or representatives, who served quite well as stand-ins for the gods. Operating on the mystical and magical principle that

¹Harry A. Hoffner, "Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity: Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals," JBL, 85:3 (September, 1966):326 (hereinafter referred to as Hoffner, Symbols).

²Noss, Man's Religions, p. 17.

to 'be like,' is as good as 'to be,' the ceremonial marriage of the king and the priestess was one made in heaven, and therefore assured the creative powers of spring. A potency was produced because "the magic willed it so or coerced the gods to bless."¹

The next aspect within witchcraft which needs definition is that of divination.

The Definition of Divination

It was evident from the foregoing discussion that magic was a vehicle to sway the deities or powers that be, either to act favorably or for benevolent reasons (White magic), or to act wickedly or retributively toward one's enemies (Black magic). Divination is a more precise and definitive aspect of witchcraft. Divination was not for the purpose of influencing, as magic was, but was the way in which information was sought. Divination was then, "roughly the attempt to discern events that are distant in time and space, and that consequently cannot be perceived by normal means."² It should be kept in mind that divination could occasionally be used in a good sense in the Old Testament. Proverbs 16:10, for example, speaks of the inspired decisions of the king, or a reference to divine guidance given through the king. The seership aspect of God-breathed prophecy (e.g.

¹Hoffner, "Symbols," p. 326.

²IBD, s.v. "Divination," by J. S. Wright.

1 Sam 9:6-10), whereby the true prophet of God exercised clairvoyant gifts, could be classed as good or lawful divination, for it involved discerning distant events. However, that was a case wherein God purposefully revealed His plan to a man so that he in turn could communicate His message to His people, or others to which He sovereignly chose to reveal Himself.¹

Apart from those exceptions when spoken of in a good sense, the Old Testament condemned divination, as will be seen, when it was used in an attempt to ascertain the future or the will of the false gods, apart from the true God of Israel willing it. A.N.E. divination was an attempt on man's part, then to obtain supernormal or superhuman knowledge. The process took for granted that spirit beings possessed and had means of knowledge which man did not, and that these beings were willing, upon certain conditions known to diviners, to communicate that elusive knowledge.²

The dividing line between magic and divination remains somewhat obscure, as both were often conjoined in the performance of Assyro-Babylonian religions.³ It is

¹Ibid.

²T. Witton Davies, Magic Among the Hebrews, p. 6.

³However the practice of black magic or sorcery was often a cause for the death penalty, as was the case in Hammurabi's code, ANET, p. 166, paragraph 2 (cf. NIDNTT, s.v. "Magic, Sorcery, Magi," by Colin Brown, 2:555).

interesting to note that as civilizations progressed, divination remained as a necessary function to the state, whereas magic in its evil forms was condemned.¹ The concluding word on divination, could well be that it was a prognostic form of magic in the A.N.E. Further, Merrill Unger has demonstrated the similarities between magic and divination:

The relation existing between divination and magic is similar to the relation between prophecy and miracle. Divination and prophecy imply special knowledge; magic and miracle special power. In prophecy and miracle the knowledge and power are divine. In divination and magic they are demonic (emphases mine).²

This writer does not attribute all magic and divinatory practices of the A.N.E. to demonic activity,³ but the influence of the spirit world is another aspect within witchcraft which will be noticed.

The Definition of Demonology

The commoner of the A.N.E. made extensive use of witchcraft, because he believed in the spirit beings who were

¹Ibid. Plato urged the death penalty for black magic in the Greek society.

²Merrill F. Unger, Biblical Demonology (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1952), p. 121.

³Not all sorcery and magic was genuinely Satanic. Much was motivated by human greed and self-seeking. See Fred Dickason, Angels: Elect and Evil (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 202, where he discusses the same admission in relation to modern occultism: "Satan stands to pounce upon victims who exhibit interest, for it is his domain."

in the know. The deities from which they attempted to gain superhuman knowledge were often invisible demons which were made concrete by representations, i.e., idols and images. The belief in demons was ubiquitous, in and around the Euphrates region as Merrill Unger demonstrates:

The history of various religions from the earliest times shows belief in demons to be universal. . . . By the time of Abraham (c. 2000 b.c.), men had sunk into a crass polytheism that swarmed with evil spirits. Spells, incantations, magical texts, and various forms of demonological phenomena abound in archeological discoveries from Sumeria and Babylon. Egyptian, Assyrian, and Chaldean . . . antiquity are rich in demonic phenomena.¹

The Old Testament regards demons as existing, evil entities. In view of the Bible's silence regarding the origin of demons, the best deduction from the few Scriptural hints, is that demons are fallen angels.² When Satan fell (1 Tim 3:6), other angelic, spirit beings followed the liar-leader and became evil also (Matt 25:41, Rev 12:4). It seems very probable, then that Satan's angels are known in Scripture as demons.³

The Hebrew does not possess a precise equivalent for the Greek δαίμωνιον. The LXX translates several Hebrew words with δαίμωνιον, among them being: שָׁדִים, the etymology of

¹Merrill F. Unger, Demons In The World Today (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971), p. 10 (hereinafter referred to as Demons Today).

²Ibid., p. 15.

³Fred Dickason, Angels: Elect and Evil (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 150.

which is not certain. Some have suggested the idea of ruler or lord from אֱלֹהִים,¹ meaning almighty, sufficient, or high.² Also, אֲשֵׁר, having the idea of a he-goat or hairy demon.³ The ancients styled many grotesque statuettes of the demons they believed existed, and controlled the forces of nature.

Witchcraft enlisted these demons to accomplish various goals, for the practitioner. Magic and demons went together quite often in the A.N.E. When revenge was sought, for instance, a demon, through magic, was employed to persecute the enemy. Fortune-telling was believed to be accomplished by a medium who was able to contact a familiar spirit (the אֵלִים),⁴ thereby receiving a supernatural knowledge, or insight into the will of the gods. Interestingly enough, the ancients even believed some of their demons or deities practiced witchcraft. The Babylonian Creation Epic (Enuma Elish) reported that in the struggle of the primeval pair, Tiamat and Apsu, Ea-Enki, the young hero of the deities, killed Apsu with the aid of a magical spell he recited.⁵

¹Ibid., p. 151.

²BDB, p. 994. It should be noted that in A.N.E. thought, not all demons were evil towards man. As H. W. F. Saggs suggests there were many malevolent and good utukku-spirits (cf. The Greatness that was Babylon [New York: Mentor, 1962], p. 301).

³Dickason, Angels: Elect and Evil, p. 972.

⁴See below, in chapter 2, for an explanation of the term.

⁵Unger, Demons Today, p. 75.

As was shown previously, magic was that art which attempted to bring about results which were beyond human power, by recourse to superhuman agencies. Impersonal magic conceived of natural law being influenced by incantations. However, genuine magic was for the most part personal, and so men believed they could influence demons (personal, intelligent spirit beings), and even control them. Great intelligence has always been ascribed to demons (2 Sam 14:20), and the practitioners of witchcraft in the A.N.E. had confidence in their intelligence, and therefore sought it through witchcraft.

In summing up these major aspects within witchcraft of the A.N.E., it may be said that magic attempted to tap secret power, divination attempted to tap secret knowledge, and demonology, or a firm belief in superhuman spirit agents, was the essential faith that made it all feasible in the practitioner's mind.

The author will seek to demonstrate in chapter four of this work, his belief that ancient Near Eastern witchcraft was predominantly a demonically based system, which bred rebellion in ancient Israel along with idolatry.

CHAPTER II

THE DELINEATION OF WITCHCRAFT: EXEGETICAL OBSERVATIONS FROM DEUTERONOMY 18:10-12

The passage under consideration in this chapter reads as follows:

There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord: and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you (Deut 18:10-12, NASB).

These verses demonstrate that the stark reality of occult powers was recognized in the Old Testament, but the Israelites were strictly forbidden to become entangled in any form of magic. The law points out the various practices of witchcraft by the surrounding nations, but prohibits them categorically. In fact the practices mentioned are said to be detestable, or an abomination to the Lord. The term used is תועבה, a feminine noun. BDB states that תעב, a denominative verb, derived from the noun, means to be "abhorred" or "corrupted."¹ In the book of Deuteronomy the noun is used in connection with such things as idolatrous images (7:25-26),

¹BDB, p. 1073.

child burning (12:31), transvestite practices (22:5), and sacral offerings financed from the earnings of sacral prostitution (23:19). Moshe Weinfeld states that "the general feature common to them all is the two-faced or hypocritical attitude of the malefactor."¹ Indeed, for the Israelite to engage in mantic practices of the nations, would be to condone, or evidence a belief in, something inconsistent with Yahweh, and condemned by Him. Weinfeld is right therefore, because the witchcraft malefactor would be a hypocrite, if he, while claiming allegiance to Yahweh, consistently engaged in sorcery or spiritism.

The Contextual Analysis

The context of Deuteronomy 18 needs to be expanded upon, in order to gain a fuller appreciation of why the witchcraft practices enumerated are so abominable.

Israel would soon be entering the land, promised to them by God. Moses, their leader, had been recounting to the people, the various covenant stipulations, and encouraging them to remain faithful to the God, with whom they had entered into a covenant relationship. In verses 19-22 Moses explains to the people about the gift of prophecy. The Lord was going to speak to them, and reveal Himself through the human instrument of a prophet. If Israel was

¹Moshe Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 268.

going to be preserved in faithfulness to God, it was going to be necessary that the Lord should make known His counsel and will at the proper time through the medium of prophets, and bestow upon them the sure prophetic words. God's plan and will would not be discovered by ways the heathen nations were endeavoring to know it, namely augury and soothsaying. The criteria for distinguishing between the true and false prophet is given in verses 20-22. The false prophet will either die (verse 20), or his prophetic oracle will not be actualized (verse 22). Moses introduces the comforting promise of a continuing prophetic office in verses 9-14 by issuing a stern warning against resorting to augury, soothsaying, and witchcraft.¹

George Wright elaborated on this warning and brought out clearly the important distinctions involved:

The whole pagan world of magic and divination is simply incompatible with the worship of Yahweh. He will make His will known when, where, and how He chooses. He cannot be tricked or coerced into revelation. He will make Himself known, not by the hidden world of the occult, but by means which He Himself chooses. His word will be heard directly, clearly, and understandably through His prophet whom He sends, and to whom He has revealed His counsel (emphasis mine).²

¹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, vol. III, trans. by James Martin in Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 393.

²George Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), pp. 86-87.

The Classification of the Arts:

Etymology of Terms

Determining the originations, and pertinent meanings, of the terms relating to forbidden witchcraft practices, recorded in these major polemical verses, will enhance the reader's insight into the idea of witchcraft as it was practiced by Israel's neighbors. Mendelsohn maintains "that the various forms not mentioned in the law of Deuteronomy 18:10f. represent Egyptian and Babylonian practice and that h^arāšîm and kiššēp and its cognates (Exod 7:11; 22:17; Deut 18:10; Mal 5:5; Dan 2:2; 2 Chr 33:6) were the Hebrew generic names for magic in all its aspects."¹

The verses begin with the emphatic prohibition, "there shall not be found among you," being the translation of לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּכֵם. The לֹא negative along with the niph'al imperfect of מָצָא meaning "to find," or "to be detected,"² expresses a permanent prohibition.³ Yahweh desired that there be absolutely no compromise, by His people, with the mantic practices of Canaanites.

The first practice Moses mentions in the list, seems at first blush, to be somewhat out of order.

¹Cf. IDB, s.v. "Magic," by I. Mendelsohn.

²BDB, p. 593.

³J. Weingreen, A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 77.

מַעֲבִיר בְּאֵשׁ

The translation of the hiphil masculine singular participle, מַעֲבִיר, is "one who causes to pass through," or "devotes or dedicates to a heathen god."¹ In this case, Moses refers to those who cause their children, בְּנֵי-יִבְחָאוֹ, to pass through fire, בְּאֵשׁ. The reference refers to children being passed through the fires of Molech, mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (2 Kgs 23:10, cf. Jer 7:31; 19:5). The connection of this well known atrocity with witchcraft practices, has caused some to yell addition. A. D. Mayes wrote: "Interpreted as a reference to child sacrifice the reference is quite out of place here. . . . It is probably a simple addition caused by the term, 'abomination.'"² This writer disagrees with such a solution and feels the inclusion of the Molech worship practice at the head of the list, fits well.

There has been great debate as of late concerning the meaning of the practice. In some passages the reference is clearly to a certain deity to whom human sacrifice was made, particularly in Topheth, or the Valley of Hinnom S.W. of the Jerusalem hill (cf. 2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 32:35). The deity Molech is associated with Ammon in 1 Kings 11:7.

¹BDB, p. 718.

²A. D. Mayes, Deuteronomy in New Century Bible Commentary (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott Ltd., 1979), p. 280.

"For a long time the word Molech, in Hebrew mōlekh was taken to be a disparaging distortion of the divine title Melek, 'King,' and it was assumed that the reference was to child sacrifice to a god with this epithet."¹ It is clear that human sacrifices occurred at least in special situations. Some have suggested that "the Hebrew consonants of melek, 'king,' and the vowels of bōsheṭ, 'shame,' were combined to form Hebrew molek, which expressed contempt for the heathen god."² Moshe Weinfeld suggested that "mlk is none other than a king (= Hadad/Baal) alongside the queen Istar (the queen of heaven), both of whom combined to form at that time the principle deities of the cult of 'the host of heaven.'"³ However there is other evidence that suggests that the term Molech may not refer to a deity. There is evidence from some Carthaginian-Phoenician (Punic) inscriptions that demonstrate the term was a general term for "sacrifice" or "offering" and a number of Old Testament passages may be interpreted as saying men caused children to

¹Ringgren, Religions of the Ancient Near East, p. 162; further, Ringgren demonstrates that the connection was made with a piece of information in Diodorus Siculus, according to which in Carthage there was a statue of a god made of bronze, on the outstretched hands of which children were placed, so that they fell into a fire burning beneath.

²IBD, s.v. "Molech, moloch," by J. A. Thompson.

³Moshe Weinfeld, "The Worship of Molech and of the Queen of Heaven and Its Background," Ugarit-Forschungen 4 (1972):154.

go through fire as a sacrifice.¹ The term perhaps suggests simply "dedication" of a child apart from sacrifice, to or for the service of a god as BDB was seen to demonstrate (cf. above). The etymology of the term is uncertain still, and a definite meaning probably will not be agreed on until new evidence is found. Suffice it to say the practice was in conjunction with worship or appeasement of a false god, as is clear from the Biblical accounts. There are many who see the practice as divinatory and therefore properly placed in Deuteronomy 18:10. George Barton stated that the practice was "part of Moloch worship and was probably a means of obtaining an oracle."² H. Tadmor wrote concerning the act of passing children through the fire, that it was "both an act of divination and a sacrifice" (emphasis mine).³ The cult of Molech evidently had close associations with astral divination.⁴ There is no clear evidence as to how oracles were divined, as the children were passed through the fire.⁵

¹Ringgren, Religions of the Ancient Near East, p. 162.

²The Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Witchcraft," by George A. Barton.

³H. Tadmor, A History of the Jewish People, edited by H. H. Ben-Sasson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 147.

⁴Gaalyahu Cornfeld, Adam to Daniel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 441.

⁵The methods employed in A.N.E. witchcraft are reviewed in chapter 4. As will be demonstrated any phenomena out of the ordinary were recorded and interpreted as good or bad omens. In this case perhaps the screams of the children

Moloch worship was in essence a political religion. It was, as often evidenced, state worship. In regards to this kind of religion-political system and its connection with rebellion, Rushdoony's comment is most helpful:

The Moloch state simply represents the supreme effort of man to command the future, to predestine the world and to be as God. Lesser efforts, divination, spirit-questing, magic, and witchcraft, are equally anathema to God. All represent efforts to have the future on other than God's terms, to have a future apart from and in defiance of God.¹

Next in this list are three terms which describe various practitioners of the art of divination. Each one will be considered separately.

קָטַם קְטָמִים

The expression used refers to one who practices divination. The expression includes a participle and a noun both derived from the root, קָטַם. The qal participle attached to the masculine plural noun קְטָמִים, has the sense of "to divide" or "assign," or "to distribute."² It furnishes the idea of getting a part allotted to oneself, especially by drawing lots. The LXX renders the phrase by using the passive participle μαντεύόμενος with μαντεία,³ or the attendant circumstances when children were passed through the fire were recorded and interpreted. Perhaps it was a kind of trial by ordeal or magical test.

¹Rousas John Rushdoony, The Institutes of Biblical Law (N.p.: The Craig Press, 1973), p. 35.

²BDB, p. 890.

³Alfred Rahlfs, ed., Septuaginta, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1950), p. 320.

both from $\muαντέομαι$, meaning "to divine" or "give an oracle."¹ This term appears to have been the most general word for a diviner. Balaam is said to be a $חֹזֵן$ in Joshua 13:22. Also, the prophets habitually applied the term to their opponents, thus confirming that it denotes the most prevalent and typical form of divination. Accordingly the $חֹזֵן$ was one who gave forth an oracle, by means of casting lots, or some other analogous token.

מְעִינִי

There is speculation as to the derivation of this term. BDB suggests the verb is a denominative but concedes that the original meaning is dubious.² It was for a time considered to have the meaning of divining from the formations of clouds. This meaning was arrived at by seeing the participle's root from $גָּנַן$ a masculine noun meaning "cloud mass" or "cloud."³ This interpretation has been generally abandoned for the most part.⁴ Gesenius believes it to be akin to the Hebrew $גָּנַן$, meaning "to cover," hence to "act covertly, to use covert acts, to practice magic or sorcery."⁵ Several of the versions understood by it some kind of special

¹BAGD, p. 491.

²BDB, p. 778.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵F. W. Gesenius, Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures, trans. by Samuel Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1949), p. 644 (hereinafter referred to as Gesenius, Lexicon).

divination. The Vulgate translates it by observans somnia, having given it the connotation of oneiromancy, or dream divination.¹

The better and most likely etymology is that the term derives from the Arabic root ghanna which means to emit a hoarse, nasal twang. Therefore it may have had a reference to the murmuring, hoarsely humming, soothsayer.² The characteristic utterance of an Arabic soothsayer was the monotonous rhythmical croon called saj, properly the cooing of a dove, a low murmur, zamzamah, or whisper.³

This interpretation does allow seeing the מְעוֹנֵן as a distinct class of diviner apart from קְטָמִים. The קְטָמִים קְטָמִים referred to the ones obtaining an oracle by lots, or a decision by a 'yes' or 'no' token. But the sounds of crooning or murmuring required an inspired interpreter.

מְנַחֵם

Apparently this term is an example of onomatopoeia.⁴
The term is a piel participle from מְנַחֵם, "to divine," or

¹Ibid.

²Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, s.v. "מְנַחֵם" (hereinafter referred to as TWOT).

³C. A. Briggs; S. R. Driver; Alfred Plummer, gen. ed., Deuteronomy, vol. V in ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), p. 224.

⁴Onomatopoeic words are those which sound like the action or thing which they are describing, i.e. English = "scratch." For an enumeration of this, cf. GKC, p. 4, paragraph h.

"observe signs."¹ The root שׁנן is used for "a hiss" or hence, "a snake."² Gesenius believed the form was from a similar Hebrew verb, שׁנן, expressing a "low hissing sound," especially of the hissing or muttering of sorceries.³ The hissing sound was used frequently by sorcerers in Semitic magic. Charms or spells were hissed out, not only by Semites but also throughout the A.N.E. for two reasons. First, this kept the secret magical formulas from the ears of outsiders. Also, in the case of malevolent Black magic it prevented the spells from working on persons, for whom they were not intended.⁴ In Mesopotamian magical texts the spell was often said to have been chirped like a sparrow song, and in Arabic magical texts the imitative word was was was often recited suggesting a hiss.⁵

¹BDB, p. 638.

²Ibid.

³Gesenius, Lexicon, p. 544. Gesenius adds an interesting footnote: "שׁנן, a root assumed to furnish an etymology for שׁנן 'brass,' or 'to be bright,' could be a play on words in the Numbers reference to the brazen serpent made by Moses." William Holladay adds that Hezekiah removed the brazen serpent of Moses from the temple, because the people were burning incense to it, and he called it Neshutan, שׁנן, or the "bronze snake idol." A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 235.

⁴Theodore Gaster, Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969), p. 565.

⁵Ibid. Gaster states that an Aramaic magical text from Nippur included the notation sh sh indicative of hissing.

The hissing sounds being substantiated most scholars feel the term primarily referred to one who looks for an omen from different phenomenon, as concluded by the LXX, οἰωνοῦζόμενος.¹ The same term is used with reference to Joseph's cup, i.e. divination by hydromancy (Gen 44:5, 15), and also to Balaam's hill-top omen seeking (Num 23:23; 24:1). The same root in Syriac occurs in a verb meaning to divine by watching birds fly, fire, rain, etc., i.e., by observing natural phenomena.²

The three preceding practices, then involved important ways or regions of divination. קִטְמִים קִטְמִים was said to mean those who obtain oracles by lot, and a general term. מְעוֹנֵל involved the use of an inspired mantic to interpret the coarse nasal sounds of the sorcerer. Finally מְנַחֵשׁ were those who divined by natural signs. These practices were all, in their origin, species or types of divination proper, such as was an essential part in the religious performances of the A.N.E. The next two terms מְכַשֵּׁף and חֹבֵר חֹבֵר, have to do with magic. These did not involve the reverential seeking to ascertain the will of the gods, but were used to sway or maneuver the operation of supernatural powers.

¹NIDNTT, s.v. "Magic, Sorcery, Magi," by Colin Brown, 2:554.

²J. A. Thompson, Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 5, in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. by D. J. Wiseman (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), p. 211.

קָטַף

This is also a piel masculine singular participle, from קָטַף. It is important for an understanding of its meaning to recognize that it is a denominative verb, or one derived from a noun.¹ Here the noun is קָטַף or "herbs."² The term is a cognate of the Assyrian kaššāpu, "to cut up," "break off a piece," or "to cut off."³ Because of this many have determined that etymologically the term means "to practice magic by cutting up herbs, and concocting a magical brew or potion." There is Apocryphal support for this idea from the book of Enoch (9:7), where it refers to the angels teaching the daughters of men various incantations, exorcisms, the cutting of roots, and also revealing to them certain healing plants.⁴ Also an Egyptian text about magical protection for a child, contains the following:

I have made his magical protection against thee out of cloves--that is what sets an obstacle--out of onions --what injures thee--out of honey--sweet for men, (but) but bitter for those who are yander--out of the roe of the abdu fish, out of the jawbone of the meret--fish--and out of the backbone of the perch.⁵

¹GKC, p. 114.

²BDB, p. 506. Also cf. TWOT, s.v. "קָטַף," by Robert L. Alden.

³The Assyrian Dictionary, vol. 8, K. ed. Miguel Civil et al. (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1960).

⁴The Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Magic," by Ludwig Blau.

⁵"Magical Protection for a Child," translated by John Wilson, ANET, p. 328.

The cutting up of herbs for a magic brew, then is a very tenable solution as to the etymology of ܩܘܘܘܢܐ, especially when the LXX inclusion of φαρμακός or "drugs" is considered.¹ However this writer believes that a possible idea of the term's meaning suggested by Gesenius is probably the better understanding. He agrees with the fact that ܩܘܘܘܢܐ refers to "cutting." However he takes it to mean "the cutting of one's own flesh,"² in religious ritual, a practice very common in Canaanite Baal worship, as is evidenced by the false prophets cutting of themselves in 1 Kings 18:28. Therefore the term can convey the idea of praying or invoking the god by cutting the flesh on the part of the supplicant until the blood ran out. The Syriac Peshitta supports this rendering.³

This etymology of ܩܘܘܘܢܐ does not take away from the magical element. The self inflicting of wounds often was simply a part of the magical ceremony intended to sway or influence the gods to act in a manner desired by the supplicant. The prayer (or better, the incantation) plus the deprecation went hand in hand in the ritual.

¹BAGD, p. 854.

²Gesenius, Lexicon, p. 418.

³BDB, p. 506.

חֲבֵר חֲבֵר

This cognate construction has to do with that class of magicians called charmers. חֲבֵר is a qal active participle from the verb חֲבַר which carries a basic meaning of "to unite," or "to be joined together."¹ The verb is used often in the Old Testament for the joining of allies (Gen 14:3), and the joining of oneself to an idol (Hos 4:17). This sense of the term has been expanded to take on the idea of "tying a magical knot," or "charming," or "casting a spell."² The infinitive absolute, חֲבֵר, conjoined with the participle, functions as the accusative, and can refer to "a spell."³ Holladay agrees that it means "to charm," or "conjure up a spell."⁴ The Assyrian Abâru, lends credence to this interpretation, its meaning being "to bind" or "to band" (of spells).⁵

In its narrowest sense the phrase was used in relation to snake charming, which was very common among the early Semites.⁶ The practice of serpent charming spread among the Hebrews, and the members of that magic profession,

¹Ibid., p. 287.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴William Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 94.

⁵BDB, p. 287.

⁶For an excellent discussion on this type of charming see M. Astour's article, "Two Ugarit Serpent Charms," in JNES 27:1 (January, 1968):13-36.

like their earlier Ugarit counterparts, were able to render venomous snakes harmless by reciting incantations. Psalm 58:5 refers to this practice, with reference to a deaf cobra, "that does not hear the voice of charmers, or a skillful caster of spells (חֹבֵרִים חֹבֵרִים, v. 6 in Heb.). In its broader sense, however, the term came to be used of any kind of charming by magicians for the purpose of spell casting, when that type of magic involved the use of tying magical knots to make the spell stick. By the tying of the knots, while at the same time chanting some magic words the sorcerer could cast a tapû on an enemy.¹ One incantation against an evil spell casting sorceress ends with the words, "her knot is loosed, her sorcery is brought to naught, and all her charms fill the desert."²

The "Uruk Incantation," a tablet inscribed with cuneiform characters and originating from Erech, demonstrates the popularity of the magic knot with this excerpt:

I have taken a (magic) band from the wooden roof, in silence from the threshold of the gate. . . . I have taken a (magic) knot from [the threshold?], soundless (by), from the room [(below) the roof]. I have entered into the presence of so-and-so . . . [. . .]. I have made him take off the garment of anger.³

¹R. Thompson, The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia (London: Luzac and Co., 1904), p. 37 in introduction.

²Ibid.

³"The Uruk Incantation," translated by Franz Rosenthal, ANET, pp. 658-59.

The last three terms, שֹׁאֵל אֹרֹב, יִדְעֹנִי, and דֹרֵשׁ אֶל-הַמַּתְיָיִם, all relate to various forms of consulting the spirit world. The first two refer to the ones who inquired of the spirits to gain information, while the third is more or less a summary term.

שֹׁאֵל אֹרֹב

שֹׁאֵל, a qal active participle from שָׁאַל, is simply translated, "the one inquiring or asking."¹ The real issue involves the accusative אֹרֹב, or that which is consulted. The English text renders the term by medium or necromancer, or even witch (K.J.V.), which is somewhat ambiguous, and does not help in gaining an understanding of the term. Those are labels of human instruments through which the אֹרֹב spoke. The question to be answered is what, or who, is in mind when אֹרֹב was used? The answer is important because of the classic passage in 1 Samuel 28:7 wherein Saul, being very desperate for guidance at the time, asked his servants to find him a woman who was possessed of a familiar spirit (אֹרֹב).

The LXX translates the phrase with ἐγγαστρούμθος,² here in Deuteronomy, as it does consecutively when it is used in the Hebrew. The term ἐγγαστρούμθος means "a ventriloquist."³ The LXX translation has led a few

¹BDB, p. 981.

²Rahlfs, Septuaginta, p. 320.

³Gesenius, Lexicon, p. 736.

scholars¹ to believe the woman at Endor was merely a ventriloquist, having the ability to throw her voice, thereby deceptively leading her clients to believe it was the voice of a spirit speaking through her.

The term אִבָּ means "skin-bottle," or "wine-skin."² The word came to describe the sound of a voice spoken into an empty bottle which was a hollow, mysterious, unearthly, kind of noise. This is the reason many feel the term meant a subterranean spirit, or ghost which spoke through the necromancer and the spirit's voice sounded hoarsey, or hollow. Isaiah 29:4 describes the אִבָּ as uttering a kind of twitter-sound, and originating, "out of the ground." Hoffner believes the word originally was used for a ritual pit used for communication with the netherworld, or the realm of the dead.³ The Syriac Peshitta renders the term with zakkuro or ghost which speaks ostensibly either from the netherworld or from the stomach of the soothsayer.⁴ This concept of a spirit being speaking through the necromancer seems to be the best interpretation of אִבָּ. The consultation

¹Cf. ISBE, s.v. "Endor, Witch," by James Orr; John S. Bonnell, "Resurgence of Spiritism," Christianity Today 2 (March, 1968):8.

²BDB, p. 15.

³See his excellent discussion on the etymology of אִבָּ in his article, "Second Millennium Antecedents to the Hebrew OB," JBL 86 (1967):385-401.

⁴Briggs, Driver, Plummer, ICC, p. 226.

of spirits for the sake of information is then expressly forbidden by Moses.

יְדַעְנִי

This term is generally found in association with אֹזֹב.¹ The term is a noun derived from יָדַע, "to know,"² and came to be used of a spirit being who was known in a special way by the medium. The distinction between אֹזֹב and יְדַעְנִי, or with respect as to how they differed is uncertain. The יְדַעְנִי being more directly the familiar spirit, was perhaps the sole, spiritual acquaintance, a particular medium would seek to consult. However those who divined by the אֹזֹב sought to call up any spirit being whether they were familiar to them or not.³

דָּרַשׁ אֶל-הַמֵּתִים

This particular phrase is a summary practice connected with the consulting of the spirit world. The term, דָּרַשׁ, is a qal active participle primarily understanding one "who resorts to," or "seeks." Figuratively referring to one who "repeatedly studies over," or "searches out."⁴ מֵתִים is derived from the verb מָתָה, "to die," so the idea of the dead,

¹KB, p. 18. ²BDB, p. 393.

³Briggs, Driver, Plummer, ICC, p. 226.

⁴BDB, p. 205.

most generally used of (dead) idols.¹ The nation was not to engage in this false attempt to divine information by consulting dead idols. This can be contrasted by the promise given in Psalm 9:10, "For thou Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek (Heb. [verse 11] דָּרְשׁוּ־יְהוָה) Thee." There is probably no special or particular method of necromancy intended with this term apart from אֹב and יִדְעֹנִי. Most likely it is a comprehensive term, intended to bring any other forms of the same superstition which happened to be in vogue at the particular time under the same prohibition.²

The list of practices Moses reviewed were all very common and widespread in Canaan, and therefore his stern admonition to stay clear was most appropriate.

¹BDB, p. 559.

²Briggs, Driver, Plummer, ICC, p. 226.

CHAPTER III

THE DECISIVE ACTION WHICH WAS TO BE METED OUT UPON WITCHCRAFT

The Israelites, upon entering the land of the Canaanites, would be immediately engulfed in a culture which practiced soothsaying and sorcery on a large scale. The tendency would be strongly felt to engage in the same practices, by God's chosen nation. They would see firsthand that magic seemed to work at times, so the attitude of, "Why not try it, if it works," would quickly be manifested. However the Old Testament saw magic as a potential rival to the worship of Yahweh, and a tremendous threat to the well being of the people.¹ The law of God was not ambivalent as regards the practice of witchcraft. Rather, it was final and conclusive, as to what penalty should be paid to those who succumbed to the pressure and their superstitious bent, and used magic or sorcery in spite of God's warning to have nothing to do with it. Rebellion from the covenant people would not be tolerated by God. The author will consider two key passages from Leviticus which show plainly the desire of Yahweh in regards to witchcraft and His people, after which the penalty of the practice of witchcraft will be elaborated.

¹NIDNTT, s.v. "Magic, Sorcery, Magi," by Colin Brown, 2:555.

The Derogation upon Witchcraft from
the Levitical Law Code

Leviticus 19:26

In Leviticus 19:26, Yahweh gave the following prohibition:

Eat nothing that contains the blood. Make use of neither fortune telling, or witchcraft practice (New Berkeley Version).

The reason for the connection between the eating of blood and witchcraft, for they are given in the same sentence, is not entirely certain. The words are probably not just a repetition of the law against eating blood (cf. Lev 17:10ff.). There seems to be a strengthening of the law here.¹ Rushdoony has offered the following explanation on the matter, on the basis of the blood being the life of the flesh:

Since life is given by God and is to be lived on His terms alone, no life of man or beast can be taken except on God's terms, whether by the state, by man to eat, or by man in his self-defense. To attempt to govern or take life apart from God's permission, and apart from His service, is like attempting to govern the world and the future apart from God. For this reason . . . the eating of blood, divination and soothsaying are all put on the same level as the same sin in essence.²

Whatever the connection, the demand of Yahweh is clear. The nation was not to make use of שִׁנְאָה, as the nations around them. As was confirmed from the etymology of this term, they were not to divine by signs, or the

¹Keil and Delitzsch, Pentateuch, p. 423.

²Rushdoony, The Institutes of Biblical Law, p. 36.

observation of different phenomenon. Similarly they were not to make use of עוֹנֵן, or the divining by an inspired sorcerer. Such rebellious practices were strictly off limits to Yahweh's people.

Leviticus 19:31

Do not turn to mediums and seek no wizard to defile yourselves by them. I am the Lord your God (New Berkeley Version).

In verse 30 just prior to this prohibition, the chief point made was the observance of the Lord's sabbath, and a reverence for His sanctuary, both of which embrace the true method of divine worship, as was laid down in the ritual commandments. When Yahweh's people kept the Sabbath holy, and as long as there was a holy reverence for the Lord's sanctuary in their hearts, many sins were capable of being avoided, and their social and domestic life was pervaded by a healthy fear of God, and there could be chasteness and propriety.¹ True fear of God would make the people have confidence in Yahweh, and His guidance and revelation, apart from false and deceptive necromantic practices. Therefore Yahweh issues the strong warning that they should not turn to הַאֲזָנָה and הַיִּדְעֹנִים, or as previously discussed, the seeking of information by spirits from the netherworld either unfamiliar to the necromancers (אֹז) or intimately

¹Keil and Delitzsch, Pentateuch, p. 425.

acquainted with them (יִדְעָנִים). To do so would constitute a deliberate disobeying of Yahweh's command, and therefore would be classed as rebellion.

The Death Penalty for Witchcraft from the
Levitical Law Code

The Immediate Execution of the Penalty by
Yahweh: Leviticus 20:6

Yahweh assures direct punishment to those involved in witchcraft in Leviticus 20:6:

The person who turns to spirits and to wizards, harlotting after them, against that person I will set my face and I will eliminate him from his people (New Berkeley Version).

Chapter twenty of the book of Leviticus lists the various punishments for the crimes committed against Yahweh, mentioned in chapters 18-19. The person who turns to spirits and wizards (again אֱלֹהִים and יִדְעָנִים) was to receive the capital punishment, because of the rebellious nature of such an offense. To consult the spirits as a necromancer was tantamount to idolatry. When the offenders went "harlotting after them," the translation of לְזִנּוֹתָ אִתָּם, they literally were committing fornication by having illicit intercourse with other spirits, which were often considered to be deities.¹ This would lead to the pronouncement of the sentence of death by Yahweh, "I will eliminate him," וְהִכְרַתִּי אֹתוֹ.

¹BDB, p. 275.

The first singular hiphil perfect הִכְרִיתִי is from the verb כָּרַח having the meaning of "to cut off," or "to cut down," and in this usage to destroy by way of the death penalty.¹ Yahweh is seen as pronouncing the sentence and executing the penalty, however He accomplished it (literally, "He caused it to be done), through mediate agencies, namely the people of Israel themselves, as will be seen.

The Mediate Execution of the Penalty
by the Israelites

Exodus 22:18

Allow no sorceress to live (New Berkeley Version).

The penalty was to be meted out by the people when it was discovered that a מְכַשֶּׁפֶת was in their midst. The magical practitioner was to be slain. The sorceress of the time was an expert in the mixing of magic potions (cf. etymology of כֶּשֶׁף) and was known as a poisoner.² The people were not to permit her to live, לֹא תִחַיֶּהּ , the negative לֹא plus the piel imperative from חָיָה , being a permanent prohibition.³

Leviticus 20:27

A man or a woman who is a medium or a fortune teller shall surely be put to death; They shall stone them; Their bloodguilt rests upon them (New Berkeley Version).

¹Ibid., p. 504.

²BAGD, p. 650.

³J. Weingreen, A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew, p. 77.

Yahweh had said just prior to this that the nation should be holy, set apart unto Him, because He had severed them from other nations. Because Israel had been called to be a holy nation the ones being possessed by the אֱלֹהִים or the יִדְעֹנִי were to be executed by stoning, בְּאֶבְרֵן יִרְגְּמוּ. The people were to put such offenders to a violent death. They were guilty of rebellion and therefore worthy of a fatal, speedy punishment, מוֹת יִרְמָחוּ (qal infinitive absolute).¹

The God of Israel would not allow witchcraft to go unpunished, if it rose its ugly head in the midst of His people. His command to exterminate it by stoning the practitioners was clear. However in His wisdom He left the actual execution up to human authority in Israel. Eventually, as will be seen, witchcraft became so entrenched in Israel and the people's hearts so hardened, that the death penalty was compromised upon and soon forgotten. In fact the punishment was so forgotten, and relaxed, that later on in Israel's history, a king could reign in Judah, very freely, who made sorcery and witchcraft practices his hallmark (cf. Manasseh's reign, 2 Chr 33).

¹BDB, p. 559.

CHAPTER IV

THE DESCRIPTION OF WITCHCRAFT AS IT WAS PRACTICED IN THE A.N.E.

The Contribution of Archaeology

Before the advent of modern archaeology there was shallow information available to A.N.E. scholarship, as regards to history and literature of the Mesopotamian valley and the western Levant. Greek and Latin historians catalogued very little information prior to the fifth century. The fervor was aroused when archaeological research began to open new vistas in the understanding of the A.N.E. The treasures of Assyria-Babylonia began to be uncovered toward the middle of the nineteenth century as a result of the work of Paul Botta, A. H. Layard, Henry Rawlinson and others.¹ Notable discoveries such as the Code of Hammurabi (1901), the Mari letters and the Lachish Ostraca (1935-1938), and the Ras Shamra texts (1929-1937), along with the decipherment of the Rosetta Stone, which unlocked Egyptian hieroglyphics, and the Behistun Inscription, which furnished the key to Assyro-Babylonian cuneiform, have provided a vast amount of insight for A.N.E. studies.² The discoveries of archaeology

¹Merrill F. Unger, Archaeology and the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), p. 10.

²Ibid.

have especially been valuable in deepening our knowledge of religions of the A.N.E. and the practice of witchcraft.

Insight into the Development of Witchcraft
in the A.N.E.

'Of course, the beginning of rebellion came with the fall of Satan into pride. The Bible, not archaeology, confirms that genesis of anarchy and opposition to God. It was probably not long after the fall of mankind into sin, which Satan instigated, that he began to seek alternative explanations for his existence. In his rebelliousness, man began to worship the creation rather than the Creator (Rom 1). The sun, moon, and stars became deities, and the first stages of astral prognostication developed. This course of life led man to seek information for the future, not from God's revelation, but from witchcraft and the mystical interpretation of cosmic forces and bodies. From that footing, the practice of witchcraft spread out and developed into the widespread phenomenon present in the glory years of the ancient nation of Israel. To trace the development of witchcraft, out from the earliest civilizations would be a task far beyond the scope of this work. However, the author has found it most helpful to see some important and vital links between Mesopotamian witchcraft, and witchcraft of more western peoples of the A.N.E., such as the Hittites, Hurrians, and Phoenicians.

The Sumerians

The Mesopotamian valley is considered to have been the fertile seed-bed of magic and divination. J. Lawrence writes:

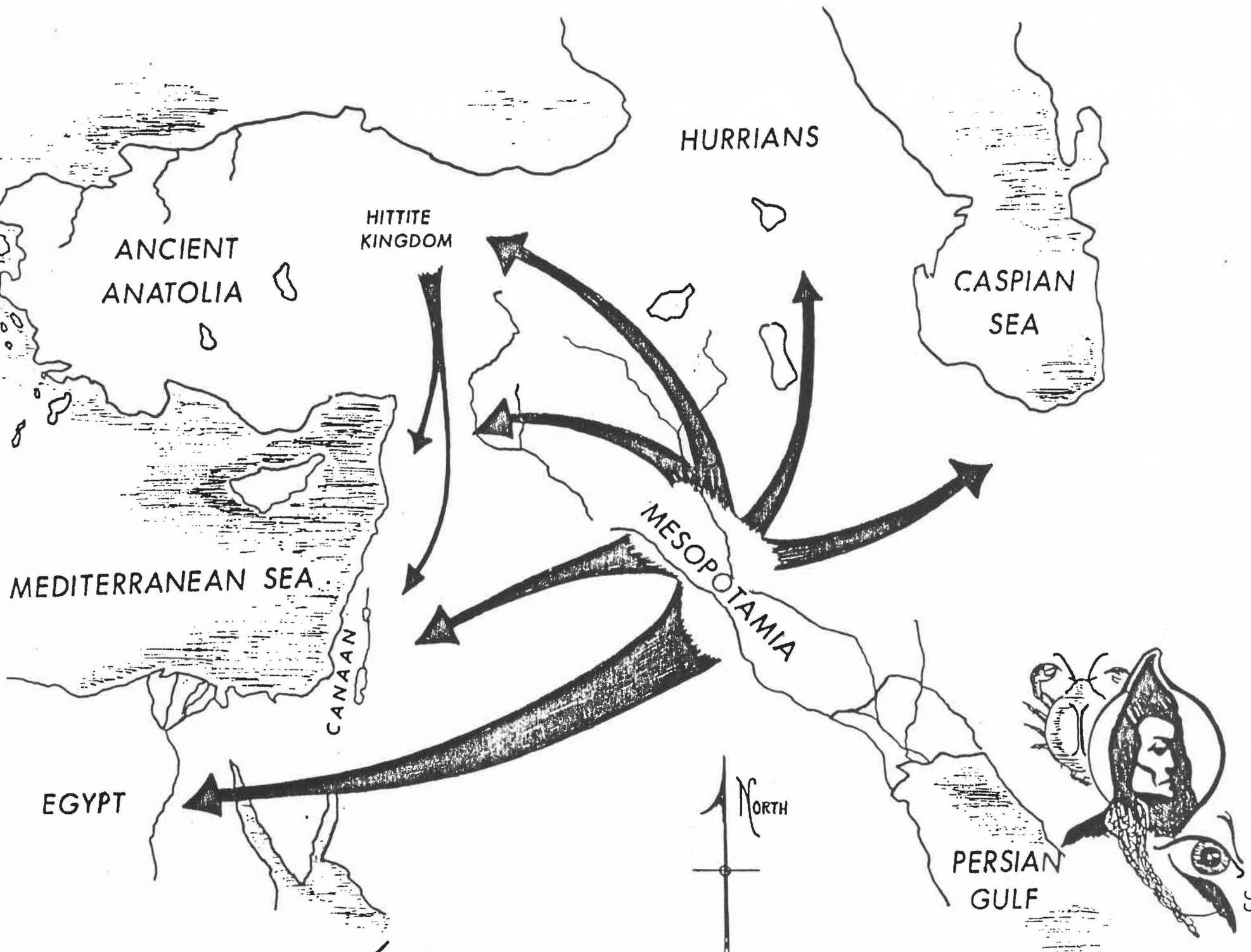
There is no disagreement among scholars of the Ancient Near East concerning the origin of divination. There is sufficient evidence that the Sumerians were the first to practice the art of divination.¹

The lower part of Ancient Mesopotamia was settled from c. 4500 b.c. by the Sumerians, whose origin is not fully known, although theories include migration from the East.² The invention of writing is attributed to the Sumerians from c. 3200 b.c. Originally developed for legal and economic transactions the Sumerian cuneiform script soon was employed for other types of literature. This cuneiform was used extensively to record divinatory and magic texts, along with omen literature, all of which are not extant in large volume. The maqlû manuals have been discovered which are texts full of ritual spells, and anti-witchcraft incantations.³ The script of the early Sumerians, which was non-Semitic, was gradually adopted and developed by the subsequent

¹John M. Lawrence, "Ancient Near Eastern Roots of Graeco-Roman Sacrificial Divination," Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin 15-16 (1980):51.

²IBD, s.v. "Sumer, Sumerians," by D. J. Wiseman.

³For a full discussion of the Maqlû texts, see Tzvi Abusch's article, "Mesopotamian Anti-witchcraft Literature: Texts and Studies," JNES, 33:2 (April, 1974):251-62.



The Development of Witchcraft in the A.N.E.

Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Hurrians, Canaanites and Elamites.¹ The cuneiform script in its various literary genres, including the omen and magical texts, influenced these other peoples greatly. Samuel Noah Kramer, who is one of the leading authorities on the early Sumerians, wrote:

On the intellectual level Sumerian thinkers and sages, as a result of their speculations on the origin and nature of the universe and its modus operandi, evolved a cosmology and theology, which carried such high conviction that they became the basic creed and dogma of much of the Ancient Near East (emphases mine).²

Early Mesopotamian witchcraft, then began to spread west (as the map illustrates) toward the Mediterranean Sea.

Ebla

One of the earliest bridges, linking Sumer with the West, was Ebla, or Tell Mardih. This was one of the principal cities of what later became Syria, during the Proto-Syrian I (c. 3000-2400 b.c.) and II (c. 2400-2000 b.c.) periods.³ Ebla was excavated in 1964 by an Italian team, under the direction of Paolo Matthiae. Around 18,000 texts were unearthed there, written in Sumerian and an early NW Semitic dialect called Eblaic.⁴

¹IBD, s.v. "Sumer, Sumerians," by D. J. Wiseman.

²Samuel Noah Kramer, The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 112 (hereinafter referred to as The Sumerians).

³IBD, s.v. "Ebla," by D. J. Wiseman.

⁴Ibid. For a full discussion on the archives of Ebla see Paolo Matthiae's, Ebla: An Empire Rediscovered (New York: Doubleday, 1981), pp. 150-63.

These texts have added a new dimension to the study of A.N.E. history, and conclusively demonstrate the influence of Sumer upon the western Levant from an early period. There was great trade between Sumer and the rich commercial center of Ebla, and no doubt Sumerian witchcraft was picked up and incorporated into Eblaic culture early on. This can be assumed largely by the literary texts, which included various Sumerian myths, rituals to Babylonian gods such as Enki, Marduk, and Enlil, as well as incantations.¹

Ebla then, as an early Syrian center, was heavily influenced by Mesopotamian civilization as early as 2500 b.c. Sumerian sorceries were on their way west. The penetration of witchcraft swelled to an even greater degree later on, as the Amorites invaded Sumer.

The Amorites

Around 2000 b.c., these Western Semitic people moved into Babylon by force, and were responsible for the collapse of the powerful 3rd dynasty of Ur. Their most powerful king, Hammurabi, conquered Babylon, Assur, and Mari (c. 1750 b.c.).² The Amorites synthesized much of Sumerian culture into their own. Except for the language, the mythology, religion, and literature of the Amorites was almost identical with the

¹Clifford Wilson, Ebla Tablets: Secrets of a Forgotten City (New York: Doubleday, 1977), p. 21.

²IBD, s.v. "Amorites," by A. R. Millard.

Sumerians. Hammurabi, and his empire, were steeped in divination, and sorcery was very prevalent, so much so that the great king had to set down some laws about evil sorcery in his famous code.¹ The Amorite dynasty could well be seen as another vital bridge of witchcraft, which connected Sumer with the West. The Amorites exercised tremendous influence on their less cultured neighbors to the West, including the Assyrians, Hittites, Hurrians and Canaanites, and they were very instrumental in helping to plant the Sumerian cultural seed, with its emphasis upon magic and divination, everywhere in the A.N.E.² The Babylonian diviners and barū priests, skilled in magic, gained a vast reputation during the reign of Hammurabi, and their influence began to penetrate into every region west of the Euphrates.

The Hurrians

In the northern reaches of Mesopotamia, a people known as the Hurrians (Biblical Horites), began infiltrating into the Fertile Crescent, and into the political vacuum

¹The following is an excerpt from Hammurabi's Law Code: "If a citizen has indicted a citizen for sorcery and does not substantiate the charge, the one who is indicted for sorcery shall go to the river and shall throw himself in. If the river overwhelms him (then) his indictor shall take away his house." D. Winton Thomas, ed., Documents from O.T. Times (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1958), p. 29. It was a good idea to learn to swim if you practiced sorcery! For the full wording of the laws of sorcery see Pritchard, ANET, p. 166.

²Kramer, Sumerians, p. 288.

created by the downfall of the Sumerian dynasty of Ur. They were a non-Semitic people who formed part of the indigenous population of Upper Mesopotamia. Their presence in the area is well attested from the 18th century b.c. at Mari and Alalakh. The Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni ruled from about 1500 b.c. to 1380 b.c. The kings ruling in Mitanni had Indo-Aryan names. Werner Keller has shed light on their magic laced beliefs:

The aristocracy of the country (Mitanni) was called Marya, which is the equivalent of 'young warriors.'¹ Marya is an old Indian word and their temples were dedicated to old Indian gods. Magic incantations from the Rigveda were intoned in front of the images of Mithras, the victorious champion of Light against Darkness, of Indra, who ruled the storms, and of Varuna, who governed the eternal order of the universe (emphases mine).¹

The Hurrian infiltration spread in and around Harran and Nuzu, until by the end of the 15th century b.c., they were to be found in every part of Western Asia, including Syria and Palestine.² Between the Hurrians and the Amorites the occult arts, and divination, were gradually propagated in the West.

The Hittites

By 2000 b.c. Asia Minor had been invaded by various peoples speaking Indo-European dialects. The most

¹Werner Keller, The Bible as History (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981), p. 110.

²Cornfeld, Adam to Daniel, p. 52.

influential of these groups were the powerful Hittites.¹ By the 17th century b.c. the foundations for a strong Hittite kingdom (located in Anatolia, or present day Turkey), had been laid which eventually pressed into Syria. In 1530 Aleppo fell to the Hittite conqueror Mursilus, who thrust across Hurrian territory and sacked Babylon. It was probably during this raid that an infiltration of Hittites entered Canaan.² Due to Hurrian pressure and inner difficulties the Hittite kingdom finally retreated to Asia Minor, but not before the specialty witchcraft of the Hittites made a strong influence throughout the Fertile Crescent.

The religion of the Hittites was the product of a long and complicated process. Much of it can be classed as magical. Elaborate rituals were performed in Hittite ceremonies, "making much use of sympathetic magic, for every purpose from averting impotence to persuading a reluctant deity to return to his shrine."³ The Hittite deities occasionally would speak through the mouth of an ecstatic, however more frequently they would pass information in dreams. Normally, though, the Hittite supplicant or penitent would

¹O. R. Gurney has written extensively concerning the Hittites, as regards to their origins, culture, and religious beliefs in his work, The Hittites (Baltimore: Penguin, 1952).

²Cornfeld, Adam to Daniel, p. 52.

³J. G. Macqueen, "The Hittites and Their Contemporaries in Asia Minor" in Ancient Peoples and Places, Glyn Daniel, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1975), p. 120.

seek to discover information or the nature of his offense by resorting to divination, by lot, augury, or the examination of the entrails of sacrificial victims.¹ The Hittites were very influential in spreading witchcraft throughout the western Levant.

The Phoenicians and Philistines

These two groups of peoples came to inhabit the land of Canaan during Old Testament times. The origin of the seafaring Phoenicians is obscure, although according to Herodotus, they migrated from the Persian Gulf area by way of the Red Sea, and founded the principal city of Sidon, on the Northern coast of Canaan.² By the 18th century b.c. there is evidence of extensive trade between the Phoenicians and Egypt, and they had settled in colonies along the coast such as Joppa, Dor, Acre, and Ugarit (Ras Shamra).³ Ugarit itself was in a perfect location (the N.W. corner of Canaan), to nurture several linguistically related groups, and therefore be a means whereby various cultures and superstitious practices were exchanged. The Phoenicians, who were intimately connected with Ugarit, were spreading east Mediterranean civilization wherever possible by sea.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 124.

²IBD, s.v. "Phoenicia, Phoenicians," by D. J. Wiseman.

³Ibid.

⁴Cyrus Gordon, Ugarit and Minoan Crete (New York: W. Norton and Company, 1966), p. 12.

By the time of David and Solomon, Phoenicia was allied commercially with Israel (2 Sam 5:11), and Hiram the Phoenician ruler of Tyre supplied wood, stone and craftsmen, for the purpose of building the temple. Hiram's successor, a high priest named Ethbaal, furthered the alliance with Israel by the marriage of his daughter Jezebel to Ahab (1 Kgs 16:31). The consequence of that action was tremendous because the Tyrian princess Jezebel, was a practitioner of sorcery (חַשְׁפָּא, 2 Kgs 9:22), which was common among the Phoenicians. Witchcraft was fostered in Israel by Jezebel, and later in Judah, by her wicked daughter Athaliah (2 Chr 22-23).

The Philistines were sea-peoples originally derived from Casluhim, the son of Mizraim (Egypt) the son of Ham (Gen 10:14; 1 Chr 1:12). When they later appeared and came into contact with the Israelites they came from Caphtor (Crete).¹ The Philistines were great believers in sympathetic magic, as is evidenced by their returning of the ark of the covenant to Israel, complete with the token golden mice and hemorrhoids (1 Sam 6), believing that by sending away images of their plagues, the twin plagues would also magically disappear. The Philistines, having some roots in Egyptian culture, no doubt assumed and assimilated much of Egypt's magic, thereby carrying the arts to Palestine.

¹IBD, s.v. "Philistines, Philistia," by T. C. Mitchell.

The Egyptians

Archaeological data confirms the fact that Egypt had a well developed system of magic and sorcery which had its roots in Mesopotamia. Magic was present in Egypt long before the Israelites came to the country. The magic of Egypt was of a different sort from other A.N.E. countries.¹ Egypt was separated geographically, and the conditions affected the practice of magic. Having little rain, the sun became the high deity Re⁶, and magic centered around the temple, whereas storms and rain were frequent in the western Levant, thereby placing an emphasis upon magic and the fertility cult. The fame of the Egyptian magicians and sorcerers spread as travelers ventured through Egypt en route to other destinations. The tales of Egyptian magic and ceremony were circulated among surrounding nations,² and the development of witchcraft progressed in full circle. The Greek visitors to Egypt took back to their own country large amounts of information concerning the ever expanding system of magic practiced in Egypt.³ This was perhaps the source from which

¹Wallis Budge explains: "The magic of every other nation of the Ancient East was directed entirely against the powers of darkness, and was invented in order to frustrate their fell designs, by invoicing a class of benevolent beings to their aid, whereas the Egyptians aimed at being able to command their gods to work for them, and to compel them to appear at their desire," Egyptian Magic (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), pp. 3-4.

²Ibid., p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 11.

the Philistines, embarking from Crete, learned much of the magic they took to S.W. Palestine.¹

The A.N.E. had set the stage for Israel to incorporate witchcraft, by the development of the occult arts originating primarily in the Mesopotamian Valley.

Indicative Literature from the A.N.E.

Attesting to Witchcraft

The literature now extant from the A.N.E. verifying the widespread use of witchcraft, is another valuable contribution of archaeological research. The author has selected a few excerpts from this literature, and has chosen to demonstrate that it was generally throughout the A.N.E., by considering literature from various regions, such as Mesopotamia, Canaan, and Egypt.

Mesopotamian literature

The maqlû

The series maqlû, the first edition of which came in 1895, is the single most important member of cuneiform literature which involves and records Mesopotamian magical attempts to counteract witchcraft and its effects.² Many of

¹Encyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, s.v. "Magic," contributor's name not given.

²Tzvi Abusch, Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Literature, p. 251.

the incantations of the maqlû are the most widely quoted, for examples of Babylonian magical literature. The meaning of the term maqlû is not known. The series is extremely long, containing about a hundred incantations dealing with the witch and witchcraft.¹ This series of incantations is not simply a random collection of rituals and magic texts, brought together because of their similarities. The maqlû represents a "consecutive and unified ceremony in which the incantations were recited and the rituals performed in the order given therein, and the ritual tablet, far from being a simple catalogue, is in fact the manual for the complete ceremony."² The following is an excerpt from the maqlû:

Ha! witch: you labored in vain to bewitch me!
 Ha! [enchantress]: you tried for naught to enchant me!
 For I am now cleansed by the light of the (rising) sun;
 [And whatever witchcraft [you d]id or had done (against me during the night) May they ([?] the traveler, messenger) turn back (against you) so that it seizes you, yes you!³

The Babylonian creation epic

The creation epic, anciently called the Enuma Elish, after the opening words of the poem, was annually recited at the New Year's festival.⁴ This epic was most important for the ancient Mesopotamians, for it recounts the struggle of cosmic orders, and the birth of the gods, who spring from

¹Ibid., p. 252.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 258.

⁴James Pritchard, ed., The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures, vol. 1 (Princeton University Press, 1954, abridged edition of ANET), p. 31.

the primordial gods Apsu and Tiamat. The god Ea was the local deity in Eridu, and one of the three gods given a share of the dominion of the universe along with Anu and Enlil. Ea was the god of incantation.

In his temple, 'the house of Apsu,' in Eridu there was a notable tree, kiškanū, whose branches were used in ritual sprinklings. The water that was employed to purify the patient in ceremonies of incantation was called 'Ea's water.'¹

In one section of the Enuma Elish Ea, while battling Apsu, is seen making use of sympathetic magic by using the help of a model:

But now the most wise, the accomplished and all-able, all-knowing Ea did foil their fell intent: He drew a faithful map of the (pristine) universe, skillfully composed for it Shuturu, his most masterly incantation. He recited this, setting it against the waters (of the map): The spell poured sleep into it, and the map fell sound asleep.²

A Babylonian prayer of a divination priest

The barū were a class of priests in Babylonia, who dealt primarily in charms, spells, and incantations. There have been discoveries of a genre of literature covering the ritual of the divination priests (bārūm) and the prayers which accompanied it. These tablets which were mostly

¹Ringgren, Religions of the ANE, p. 55.

²D. Winton Thomas, ed., D.O.T.T. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1958), p. 15.

fragmentary, were found in Assurbanipal's library.¹ An excerpt from one of the tablets demonstrates the heavy reliance upon divination by the priests.

O Shamas! lord of judgment, O Adad, lord of ritual acts and divination! . . . in the ritual act I prepare, in the extispicy I perform, put you truth!²

The preceding examples are but a few which show clearly that in Mesopotamian witchcraft was an essential part of ritual religion.

Hittite literature

The witchcraft of the Hittites was done primarily by old women, as the extant literature reveals. In the Hittite Telepinus Myth, Kamrusepas' ritual of purification is a good example of the very prevalent sympathetic magic recorded in Hittite:

Select ye twelve rams! . . . I have strewn about the selected sheep of Kamrusepas. 'Over Telepinus I have swung them this way and that. From Telepinus' body I have taken the evil, I have taken the malice. I have taken the rage, I have taken the anger, I have taken the ire, I have taken the fury.'³

In the Ritual to Counteract Sorcery, an old woman is reported to have taken a piece of rope, and having performed a magical ritual, she speaks these words, "Just as I have

¹Albrecht Goetze, "An Old Babylonian Prayer of the Divination Priest," JCS 22 (1968):25.

²Ibid., p. 26.

³Pritchard, ANET, p. 127.

burned [these threads] and they will not [come back], [even so], let also these words of the sorcerer [be burned up]!"¹

Canaanite literature

At Arslan Tash, on the Middle Euphrates, archaeologists discovered the earliest known Canaanite magical text, in the form of an incantation. The text dates from the 8th century b.c. and consists of an incantation against a particular child stealing demon. An excerpt reveals the use of the magic knot (חבר) for protection from the demon:

The bond of Ssm the son of Pdrsh (?). Take these and say to the strangling females: The house I enter you shall not enter, and the courtyard I tread you shall not tread.²

There is also a text called The Legend of King Keret wherein king Keret falls ill, and is healed by the magical powers of El:

Then declared El, the Kindly, the Merciful. 'Set, my sons, on your seats, Even on your princely thrones. I myself will resort to magic, and will stay the power of the disease, driving out the sickness.'³

These texts reveal the stark reality of Canaanite witchcraft, which would later infiltrate into Israel.

Egyptian literature

Because magic played such a large role in the daily life of the Egyptians, it is not surprising that it

¹Ibid., p. 347. ²Ibid., p. 658.

³Thomas, D.O.T.T., p. 121.

influenced their literature to a large degree. The Egyptians were particularly fond of stories with magical themes.¹

King Cheops and the magicians

This cycle of stories is about the marvels performed by a particular priest which is in the form of a series, told at the court of Cheops by his sons. The second tale of the series speaks of a marvel which happened in the time of King Nebka. In the story a particular priest called Webaoner fashioned a wax crocodile and "read out his [magic words saying . . .]: [if anyone] comes [to] bathe [in] my lake [. . .] the townsman . . . after the townsman goes down to the pool . . . you shall cast [the] crocodile after him."²

The temple texts from the Houses of life

Egypt had two kinds of magicians. There were the trained priest-magicians who were a part of the orthodox hierarchy and were well trained. Then there were lay magicians, untrained men who practiced magic but were not attached to any institution. The second type was closer to the faith healer or occultist. The first group were vital to the various Houses of life. The House of life was a building or buildings around the large temples where the library of the temple was stored. The laymen would come

¹Bob Brier, Ancient Egyptian Magic, p. 266.

²Ibid., p. 268.

when they needed magic spells or charms. In one discovered House of life at Edfu, a temple dedicated to the god Horus, there were several books on magic found including: The Book of Appeasing Sekhmet, the Book of Magical Protection of the King in His Palace, Spells for Warding off the Evil Eye, The Book of Repelling Crocodiles, the Book of Knowing the Secret Forms of the God.¹

The Execration Texts

The Execration Texts were a very interesting set of documents, dating primarily around the close of the Middle Kingdom (ca. 1900-1800 b.c.).² With these texts, the Pharaoh ceremonially and magically cursed his enemies. In form there were two different types: Some texts were written on red pottery bowls,³ others were inscribed on human figures made of clay. The curses or spells were then believed to be assured when the pottery was smashed, just as all opposition to Pharaoh must be smashed.⁴ The ceremony of magic, where these curses were performed, goes back to the Old Kingdom.

¹Ibid., p. 44.

²John Wilson, The Culture of Ancient Egypt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 156.

³The practice of writing magical curses and incantations on terracotta bowls was not at all uncommon. For example, see Stephen Kaufman's, "A Unique Magic Bowl from Nippur," JNES 32 (Jan.-April, 1973):170-74.

⁴Ibid., p. 156.

Funerary texts

The Egyptians' elaborate beliefs about the after-life, and the body as the material attachment to the soul, made the motivation, for magical protection in the life beyond, very predominant. To the Egyptian there was a more glorious other world ruled by Osiris. If that concept did not set well, other alternative hereafters included accompanying Rē⁶ on his daily voyage across the sky, or dwelling with the stars.¹ The Pyramids and mummification were just part of the great measures which went into the preparation for the after-life. The Egyptians were fearful that the glorious after-life could be hindered by the evil spirits and forces which lurked in the Netherworld, waiting patiently, for some soul to destroy. Because of this fear, magic formulas and spells were written down for the purpose of warding off evil, and were placed in, or inscribed on the walls of Pyramids (the Pyramid texts of the 6th dynasty); or painted in the inside of the coffin (The Coffin Texts). The Book of the Dead was also a collection of magical spells for protection beyond the grave. The various spells were copied in quantity and the consumer could purchase one of these protective parchments, to put in his or her coffin, and thereby be assured of reaching the resting place of the soul.

¹IBD, s.v. "Egypt," by K. A. Kitchen.

The evidence from the wealth of texts available, proves conclusively that magic and witchcraft were firmly entrenched all over the A.N.E. and knew no geographical boundaries.

The Common Methods Employed in A.N.E.

Witchcraft

As already defined, witchcraft, magic, and sorcery were attempts to influence the gods, people, or events by supernatural or occultic means. The practitioners of sorcery and witchcraft in Old Testament times believed in many gods, from which they derived their powers, and they attempted to influence. The following survey of methods is to demonstrate some of the more prevalent practices used in prognosticating witchcraft.

Non-voluntary methods were those wherein signs indicating the purpose of the gods were not sought but stemmed from natural phenomena, i.e. unexpected storms, cloud bursts, deformities, malformations, in short, "anything which, rather really unusual or not, had any feature which gave it prominence, might be a sign sent from a god."¹ Voluntary methods were the deliberate acts of seeking out some physical object through which it was hoped to secure the knowledge of future events, or influence the will of the god.

¹Jastrow, Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria, p. 146.

The Employment of Non-Voluntary Methods

Astrology

The fundamental factor in astrology was the identification of the heavenly bodies with the chief gods of the pantheon.¹ Astrology was the especial practice among the Babylonians,² although it was regularly practiced in other areas. The theory upon which astrology rested was the assumption of a strict co-ordination between occurrences on earth, and phenomena observed in the heavenly bodies. This is the kind of theory that emanated from minds intent on finding explanations of the mysteries of the universe.³ Astrology made no attempt to turn the gods away from their purposes, but rather attempted to determine in advance what those purposes were. The Biblical expression, "Hosts of heaven" reflects the Babylonian concept well, for they did believe that the moon, planets, and stars made up a great army, constantly moving towards specific purposes. It was the function of the inspectors or barū priests to interpret the heavens, and divine accordingly.

¹Ibid., p. 207.

²R. C. Thompson states, "Among Greek writers Strabo (died A.D. 24), asserted that the Chaldeans were skilled in astronomy and the casting of horoscopes, and Aelian (3rd Cent. A.D.) maintains the fact that both the Babylonians and Chaldeans enjoyed a reputation for possessing a knowledge of astronomy," Reports of the Magicians and Astrologers of Ninevah and Babylon (London: Luzac and Co., 1900), p. XIII.

³Jastrow, Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria, p. 209.

The practice of astrology was so great in Babylon that handbooks were collated called the Enuma Anu-Enlil, comprising around a hundred tablets which served as a legend for divining the ever-changing shapes of clouds, the color of the sky, and the number of thunderclaps on a special occurrence, just to name a few.¹ At the time when astrology was at its height in Babylon, the nation was literally surrounded by hostile enemies, and therefore the astrologer-priest who could forecast good for the nation was a man whose words were honored and held in awe. They were recorded as treasures for future astrologers to study.

Since astrology had its origins in idolatry, God warned the nation of Israel to stay clear of it. Isaiah condemned it (Isa 47:12-13), and the death penalty was to be executed for those who practiced it (Deut 17:2-5).

Oneiromancy (dream divination)

Since the beginning of recorded history, man has believed his dreams to be means whereby he can know or foretell the future. In Genesis alone, there are more than a dozen references to dreams, most of which were prophetic.² God did use dreams to reveal Himself, however without Him in it, the practice was futile. Oneiromancy seems to have been to Egypt what astrology was to the Babylonians. A

¹Ibid., p. 231.

²Bob Brier, Ancient Egyptian Magic, p. 214.

recently discovered hieratic papyrus gives a reference book for the interpretation of dreams. The manuscript presumably came from Thebes (2000-1800 b.c.). A few examples from the more than 200 given will suffice to show the detailed exegesis of dreams:

If a man sees himself in a dream:

- | | | | |
|--------|------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| (iii) | White bread being
given to him. | -- | good: it means things at
which his face will light
up. |
| (iv) | seeing a large cat | -- | good: it means a large
harvest will come. |
| (viii) | seeing his face
in a mirror. | -- | bad: it means another
wife. ¹ |

Dream exegesis was based on the assumption that dream-contents are of supernatural origin and are of prognostic importance. Leo Oppenheim takes the theory behind oineiromancy a step further:

The basic tenet that dreams foretell the future is linked either with a specific soul-concept or a specific philosophical world view. In the first instance, the human soul is considered endowed with certain pre-cognitive qualities released in sleep . . . in the second, the wandering soul of the sleeper is permitted to observe in the transcendent realm of 'ideas' his own fate before it materializes in time and space.²

¹"The Interpretation of Dreams," translated by John Wilson, ANET, p. 495. Also see L. Jerome, Astrology Disproved (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1977), where he shows that Egyptian priests would have people go into dark rooms in the temples, fall asleep, and they would interpret their dreams in the morning, p. 23.

²Leo Oppenheim, The Interpretation of Dreams, p. 237.

The "dreamer of dreams" (חֲלֹמֵי חֲלֹמִים) who was not receiving direct revelation from Yahweh (as Num 12:6 considers valid) was to be put to death immediately in Israel (Deut 13:1-5).

Augury

Originally augury was that form of prognostication by the flight of birds, however the term came to be applied to all forms of foretelling by the observation of any natural happenings. Augury was first systematized by the Chaldeans. The Greeks later were addicted to it, and among the Romans, no important action of state was considered without first consulting with the augurs.¹

The theory behind augury rested in experience. If a certain observation or natural phenomenon aroused attention and was followed by a particular event, either good or tragic, it was expected that the same consequence would always follow when that certain phenomena occurred again. In a number of instances an historical event was recorded, which followed in close succession to a particular omen. The people would, they believed, be able to learn from the records, because they felt history always repeated itself, a kind of cyclical view of history in contradistinction to the Biblical linear concept of history, moving always

¹The Jewish Encyclopaedia, s.v. "Augury," by Ludwig Blau.

towards a goal.¹ The same sign always had the same consequences.² It was in this method of foretelling that the private individual had a greater share. Many of the miscellaneous omens had bearing on the everyday lives of individuals, rather than just on public or royal events.

The method of augury, by interpreting the flight of birds, and the observation of other strange phenomenon, is not dealt with specifically in the Old Testament, however the practice is certainly common knowledge, as Ecclesiastes 10:20 demonstrates:

for a bird of heaven may carry the voice, and that which has wings will tell the matter.³

The Employment of Voluntary Methods

Hepatoscopy

Although the practice of hepatoscopy, or divining from the livers of sacrificial animals, was a highly

¹The Scriptures consistently portray history and events as moving forward \longrightarrow towards the establishment of God's Kingdom, and the eternal state. The Gospels, for instance, trace the progression of Christ's mission from birth to the cross, which work defeated Satan, and secured eternal victory for God's people. The cyclical view of history , however, considers history to be an endless cause and effect relationship, presupposing a certain regularity in life, so that the same phenomenon always has the same result or consequence.

²Ringgren, Religions of the A.N.E., pp. 94-95.

³This knowledge may also be assumed in view of the fact that the raven was considered to be a bird of omen, by the Arabs.

developed skill in Babylon, other portions of the A.N.E. were not unaccustomed to its use. M. A. Parrot found thirty-two clay liver-models with inscriptions at Mari, in 1935.¹ Tablets and clay models of livers have now been found in several locations in Syria and Palestine.² The nearness of these locations to Mesopotamia, along with the existence of identical modes of the practice, leads to the conclusion that Mesopotamian liver divination was transmitted to other areas.

The rationale behind hepatoscopy was the belief that the god to whom an animal was offered identified himself with the gift. The god in accepting the animal became, as it were, united to it in such a way as those who actually eat it. An essential feature in the theory was the belief that the spirit or soul of the god becomes identical with the soul of the sacrificial victim.³ The two souls became in effect attuned with one another. Through the soul of the animal a visible means was obtained for studying the soul of the god.

¹J. Lawrence, "ANE Roots of Graeco-Roman Sacrificial Divination," p. 56.

²See B. Landsberger's and H. Tadmor's informative article, "Fragments of Clay Liver Models from Hazor," IEJ 14:4 (1964):201-18.

³Jastrow, Religious Beliefs in Babylonia and Assyria, p. 148.

It is not hard to imagine why the liver was thought to be the life of the animal. It was the bloodiest of the organs and blood was naturally considered vital to and identified with life. With that kind of reasoning it was just another step to the belief that the liver was the organ of the deity's mind. Therefore ancient liver-exegeters were confident that the will of the god could be read on the liver. It involved magic, purely and simply. The principle of correspondence, some cause equals the same effect, was the basis upon which liver divination operated. The Babylonian liver-lookers usually limited their forecasts to political affairs and left less important fore-telling, such as the weather to sky-omens (i.e. astrology).

There are extant the remains of or references to over a dozen series of liver omens in the preserved portions of Ashurbanipal's library. The recorded signs for which to observe in the liver mount into the thousands. A few clearly show the extent to which analysis went:

If the cystic duct is long--the days of ruler will be long. If the cystic duct is long, and in the middle there is an extended subsidiary duct, the days of the ruler will soon end.¹

Hydromancy

Hydromancy (called also phyllomancy, and leconomancy) was the practice of divining from the formations

¹Ibid., p. 181; for an exhaustive discussion on hepatoscopy see Jastrow's chapter on "Divination."

which oil, leaves, or other substances, made when dropped upon water. Joseph divined the future (שׁוֹנֵן) by hydromancy (Gen 44). It was a practice particularly in vogue with the Persians, although somewhat established in Egypt¹ and among the Assyrians. The antiquity of this method is confirmed by Jastrow, who believes that it can be traced back to the legendary founder of the barū priesthood.² Besides an interesting allusion to the use of this method by a Cassite ruler (c. 1700 b.c.), before undertaking an expedition, there are in extant two elaborate texts, dating from Hammurabi's time, forming a handbook for the barū priests, which expound a large number of signs to be observed in the mingling of oil and water, together with interpretations.³ The practice of hydromancy at least in Mesopotamia, was completely overshadowed by the dominance upon hepatoscopy.

Belomancy

This method of divination involved the shaking of arrows from a quiver and then drawing omens from the way they fell. The practice was widespread in antiquity. It is alluded to in some early Mesopotamian documents, it is

¹Cup divination is only attested twice in Egypt. Two small statuettes dating c. 1900-1700 b.c. each depict a figure kneeling with the chin resting upon a cup held with the hands (cf. IBD, s.v. "Magic and Sorcery," by K. A. Kitchen).

²Jastrow, Religious Beliefs in Babylonia and Assyria, p. 201.

³Ibid.

mentioned in the Nuzi texts, and in pre-Islamic Arabian lore.¹ The custom was that when anyone was about to embark on a journey, or marry, or undertake an important project, they would seek an oracle from three arrows placed into a container. The first was inscribed, "God has forbidden"; the second, "God has commanded me"; the third was blank, and if drawn the choice would be made again.²

The classic Old Testament reference to this type of divination is found in Ezekiel 21:26, wherein the prophet visualizes the king of Babylon standing at the crossroads ready to divine as to which cities, Jerusalem or Rabbath Ammon, shall be the target of his invasion. To arrive at a decision the king was to apply three magical formulae (i.e., tossing or shaking of inscribed arrows, asking an oracle from the Teraphim, and hepatoscopy). A less practiced method, closely related to belomancy was rhabdomancy, or the use of a divining rod to obtain an oracle. In Hosea 4:12, the Lord referred to His people, "consulting wooden idols, and their diviner's rod informs them." The Hebrew term for the rod is מַקְלָה from the verb לִקַּח meaning "to shake,"³ hence the close association to the shaking out of arrows.

¹Samuel Iwry, "New Evidence for Belomancy in Ancient Palestine and Phoenicia," JAOS 91:1 (Jan.-March, 1961):27.

²Gaster, Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament, p. 620.

³BDB, p. 596.

Teraphim

These objects (תִּרְפִּים), are mentioned in every Old Testament period. In their use they are mostly associated with divination (i.e. paired with the ephod in Micah's idolatrous religion, Judg 17:5; with belomancy in Ezek 21:21; and with spiritist practices in 2 Kgs 23:24). The term is the Hebrew plural, the singular of which is not known. The term, and the object have been the source of great speculation. The LXX simply transliterates it with *θεραφίμ*, without bothering to translate it.¹ Possible derivations have been proposed such as *rāpā*, from "to heal," or post-Biblical *tōreḇ*, "obscenity."² To this author the most probable derivation is from the Hittite *tarpis*, or "spirit," sometimes evil, at other times protective.³ Hoffner states that, "the word must bear a signification in texts of its own language which is appropriate as a designation for deities, cult images, or mantic devices" (emphasis mine).⁴ Nowhere in the Old Testament is it stated just how they were consulted as divinatory objects. The important aspect to note

¹Cf. Rahlfs, Septuaginta in the many occurrences of תִּרְפִּים.

²Cf. William F. Albright, From Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1957), p. 311.

³See Harry Hoffner's two articles, "The Linguistic Origins of Teraphim," BSac 124-495 (July-September 1967):230-38, "Hittite Tarpis and Hebrew Terāphim," JNES 27:1 (January 1968):61-68.

⁴Hoffner, Hittite Tarpis, p. 63.

is that they were certainly voluntary, physical modes of foretelling by magic.

The Character of A.N.E. Witchcraft

The foundation upon which A.N.E. witchcraft was based was in opposition to God, and therefore rebellious. This being true it still was a system which operated on a practical level for the people.

The Expediency of A.N.E. Witchcraft

To a member of any of the ancient societies, all great matters as well as "nature" itself seemed to be governed by mighty beings (although man-like). Each division of the world was under the control of a separate deity. Polytheism was the theme of their day, and the popular belief was that each city had its temple, wherein lived a being who had resided there long before living memory.¹

There were always demons and evil spirits ready to bring misfortune. At times, they attributed misfortune to wrongdoing or sin, but for the most part bad times came as a result of cosmic forces fighting, or the struggles of right and wrong. The reason for misfortune was anxiously sought, the majority of times, through divination. The arts of divination and sorcery, presupposed a theology of deism,

¹O. R. Gurney, The Hittites, p. 156.

and demonism, and can well be considered the practical expression of that theology.

There was great power wielded by witches and sorcerers, but the ancient believed their power could be counteracted through spells and counterspells. When a man fell sick, for instance, he was considered tapû, or unclean, and not welcome in society's ranks. The sickness was commonly attributed to a witch's spell. The sick man had to seek out a priest, and through sympathetic magic, atonement was made for him.¹ He could then be active in society once again.

Ancient Near Easterners, although steeped in superstition and pagan beliefs, were still a practical people, concerned with their crops, the weather, and the welfare of the kingdom. Agricultural success depended heavily upon magic, and pleasing the gods.² Witchcraft was even resorted to in order to repair a man's fertility. If a man's sexual potency could be impaired by black magic, his military prowess would be hindered, for it was believed the two went hand in hand.³ Therefore sorcerers were sought to

¹R. Thompson, The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia, Introduction, p. 46.

²John Noss wrote of this: "The statuette of a man bearing a bag and a hoe, might have a charm written upon his chest, 'O statuette, counted for _____, . . . thou shalt count thyself for me . . . to cultivate the fields, and water the shores.'" Man's Religions, p. 55.

³Harry Hoffner, "Symbols," p. 327.

counteract the infertility spell and restore reproduction. Thus, among warring peoples witchcraft was vital. Every area of life was touched by witchcraft. It was practical and expedient. However, it was also an evil means to a desired end.

The Evil Nature of A.N.E. Witchcraft

A depraved system

When man rejected the authority of the transcendent God, his mental processes were disengaged from the possibility of knowing God, apart from divine intervention. His entire nature was engulfed in darkness. Custer wrote, "now man's rejection of God places him in a plastic, superficial state where the only authority he recognizes emanates from his twisted reasonings and unenlightened mind."¹ Satan's ploy was to attempt to get man to believe he could be as God. Mankind took the bait. The result was total depravity. Man is dead spiritually, and since the fall, he has projected false deities from his mental picture and worshipped them (cf. Rom 1). The problem lies within man himself. He is defiled. The heart of man is corrupt and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9). The imaginations of man's heart is evil from his youth (Gen 8:21).

¹James Custer, "What Makes Man Sin?" (Th.M. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1977), p. 36.

Witchcraft was a method whereby man, in his now tainted state, could hope to control his own destiny. The ancients dreamed up their own gods, and followed it up with an intricate system to influence, sway, and control them. In Psalm 14:2, the psalmist wrote that, "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any who did understand and seek God." The term "seek" (שָׁרַח) is the same used in Deuteronomy 18:11, with reference to the witchcraft practice of spiritism. Depraved mankind wound up in totality, seeking advice and counsel from inanimate idols (דְּמוֹתֵי אֱלֹהִים, Deut 18:11), rather than from the God of Israel. If God had not graciously chosen some, this author is convinced witchcraft would have been practiced by every individual and nation of the A.N.E.

A demonic system

The evil of witchcraft was indeed the invention of man's depravity. However the supernatural powers of witchcraft and magic were very evident. The Egyptian magicians did work wonders. The Babylonian magicians did perform supernatural feats. The Scriptures do not deny these realities. The power was not by man, but was supplied by Satan, and his super-human agents, called demons. Dickason writes:

Satan and his demons will encourage all sorts of errors to keep men from God and His grace. In primitive religions where magic, superstition, and worship of

evil spirits are key factors, demons provide the power to keep men enslaved.¹

Satan sought to replace God. He is the father of rebellion, and his demons actively promote occult practices, and feed people's interest in it, by providing the dynamic which causes it to work.

The religious environment of the A.N.E. was full of demonism, attested to by the frequent mention of the geni of Babylonia-Assyria. These demonic beings demanded magic, and incantations for their appeasement or protection.²

An idolatrous system

One of the reasons, the Hebrews condemned magic and witchcraft was because of its clash with monotheism.³ Witchcraft, in the vast majority of cases, demanded the belief in many gods, therefore it was intimately linked with idolatry. Every form of idolatry of the A.N.E. brought with it the practice of magic and sorcery. The two systems clung to each other with strong tenacity.⁴ Merrill Unger supports the connection of witchcraft with idolatry:

¹Dickason, Angels: Elect and Evil, p. 173.

²Unger, Biblical Demonology, p. 5.

³It should be noted, that a monotheist theoretically could be guilty of divinatory witchcraft, however in the A.N.E. one is hard pressed to find any sorcery or spiritism, not operating within a polytheistic framework.

⁴The Encyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, s.v. "Magic."

Magic, divination, prognostication, sorcery, witchcraft, necromancy, and ventriloquism are so inextricably connected with idolatry, and so inseparably interwoven with each other, in their character and history, that it is impossible, in every case, to draw definite lines of demarcation between them.¹

Samuel had told Saul that rebellion or arrogance was as iniquity (גְּנֵף) and idolatry (מְרִפְיִים) in 1 Samuel 15:23. The parallelism between the two is evident. גְּנֵף was used in the psalms with reference to the "workers of iniquity" (גְּנֵף) and may designate those skilled in magic or idolatrous ritual.² The term מְרִפְיִים, translated "idolatry," has been seen previously as a method of witchcraft or fortunetelling. The prophets condemned those seeking information from the 'hosts of heaven' (astrology) because astrology ultimately led to idolatry for the ancients believed the stars to be deities. The Babylonians and Sumerians had populated the earth and sky with multitudes of gods, as is evidenced by their mythical literature. Some were good, while others were evil. The greatest recourse the people had to protect themselves was witchcraft.

¹Unger, Biblical Demonology, p. 108.

²TWOT, s.v. "גְּנֵף," by G. Herbert Livingston.

CHAPTER V

THE DEVASTATION IN ANCIENT ISRAEL FROM THE INCORPORATION OF WITCHCRAFT PRACTICES

The penalty for participating in witchcraft for those of the Hebrew nation in covenant with God was death. Moses had condemned such vices, and had strictly forbidden the Israelites to participate in the occult arts, so prevalent in Canaan. It was not long after the conquest that the people ignored Moses' admonition and allowed witchcraft to run freely within the nation. The results were devastating to the welfare of God's chosen race.

The Infiltration of Witchcraft into the Nation

The Pressures of External Witchcraft Practices

The nations of the A.N.E. were thoroughly engulfed in sorcery and magic, as was seen above (chap. 4). Witchcraft had developed into a wicked monstrosity by the time of Abraham, and later when Israel entered the land, witchcraft was a well organized, systematized, and seemingly workable system in every culture. Although Israel was a holy nation, called by God, she still was not in a vacuum. God desired her to be a separated people, ruled by Himself,

however she was not an isolated nation. Israel was to be a righteous influence upon the peoples surrounding her; however, because of the nation's apostasy, the opposite was produced. The wickedness of the surrounding nations began to press in upon Israel until, as a nation, she allowed those abominable evils into her ranks.

Assyria to the east was a major influence upon Israel, as regards witchcraft. The Neo-Assyrian period (ca. 900-612 b.c.) produced great military advances under rulers like Tukulti-Ninurta II (890-884 b.c.), and Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 b.c.).¹ In a series of brilliant campaigns, Ashurnasirpal subdued the tribes of the middle Euphrates, and reached Lebanon and Philistia. His reign marked the commencement of a sustained pressure by Assyria on the West which included Israel. The capitol of Assyria, Ninevah, was called by Nahum, "the mistress of witchcrafts" (כַּשְׁפֵּי־מֶלֶךְ, Nah 3:4). Entire nations were subjugated by Assyria's occultism.² It was during Assyria's terror that Manasseh reigned in Jerusalem. His reign, as will be seen, was one which resulted in religious syncretism and incorporation of Assyria's cults. Under duress, Manasseh, as a vassal of Assyria, had little choice but to allow that nation's

¹IBD, s.v. "Assyria," by D. J. Wiseman.

²Roy Zuck, "The Practice of Witchcraft in the Scriptures," BSac 128:512 (Oct.-Dec. 1971):356.

sorcery to permeate, not only his reign, but all of Israel. The external pressure of Assyrian religious practices contributed heavily in Israel's adoption of it. However the enemy within, the Canaanites, also played a large part in Israel's incorporation of witchcraft.

The Perilous Enemy Within: The Canaanite Cult

During Saul's reign in Israel, the Canaanites posed no real political threat to the Israelites. They retained independent control of numerous cities and regions in Palestine. King David, however, captured these cities and incorporated them fully into his realm.¹ The result was that the Canaanites mingled with their conquerors, intermarried with them, so that before long the conquered became the conquerors. From the religious point of view the Canaanites were the enemy within the gates. It is not hard to understand why the Israelites began to adopt and practice Canaanite ritual and magical beliefs. The Israelites had been a nomadic people. This nomadic tribe moved into a region that was settled, by its inhabitants. The Israelites, as desert people, were unfamiliar with the skills and arts of settled life. Each new occupation had to be learned by the Canaanites. If the Israelites wanted to know how and when to plow,

¹David Payne, Kingdoms of the Lord: A History of the Hebrew Kingdoms from Saul to the Fall of Jerusalem (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), p. 198.

plant, or build a house, they were largely dependent upon the native Canaanites to teach them.¹ The Canaanite merchants traded with other parts of the world. They were skilled in architecture and agriculture. It was natural for the Hebrews to admire and imitate their highly skilled neighbors in art, culture, and sadly, even religious practices. Payne wrote:

Probably the Israelites fell into Canaanite ways without a great deal of conscious thought, and they often adopted the Canaanite's religious modes and manners along with everything else.²

Canaanite thinking was dominated by their concern for a fruitful harvest. Small wonder then that their imagined gods were: the god of storm and thunder (Baal), of corn and vegetation (Dagon), and of fertility (Anathoth). To harness these deities, the Canaanites felt they had to get on good terms with them, then cooperate with them. They knew little of scientific reasons for reproduction, so they envisaged the process in terms of human sexual intercourse. Accordingly most shrines had their female and male prostitutes who engaged in sexual intercourse representing the union of the gods Baal and Asharoth. Thus fertility was assured by sympathetic or imitative magic. For Israelites to turn to the fertility cult was not merely

¹Jacob Golub, Israel in Canaan (Cincinnati, OH: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1930), p. 162.

²Payne, Kingdoms of the Lord, p. 200.

to renounce morals and ethics, but it was a rejection of and rebellion against the covenant, and all it implied.

The Hebrews, being still a superstitious people, no doubt began to believe that the magic of the Canaanites might work. They witnessed their ritual and then saw their crops grow. It was not long before there was the special trappings of the fertility cult (Asherah poles and stone pillars), in every Israelite community. The cult of Canaan had become entrenched.

The Impairment of the Nation,

Brought on by Witchcraft

Witchcraft as the Deceiver of the Nation

The superstitious beliefs of the Hebrews played havoc with the nation. The people began to rely upon witchcraft more than upon the truthful revelation of God. Jeremiah 27:9-10 was a warning to the people:

Do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers who speak to you, saying, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon."

Babylon was about to overtake them for their rebellion, yet the people held to the inviolability of Zion, due to the sorcerer's deceptive lies. They "saw falsehood and lying divination" (Ezek 13:6).

A Handmaid for Rebellion

It is difficult to believe that the nation of Israel would adopt the sordid practices of Canaan, after the

faithfulness God had shown them. But such is the irrationality of sin. The nation became steeped in witchcraft and from it idolatry became rampant. For them to engage in magic and sorcery was in effect, to say no to Yahweh and yes to superstition.

A Cause for Captivity

A reference in the Talmud (Tosef, Sotah XIV.3) states that "The majesty of God departed Israel . . . when the wizards became too numerous."¹ The rebelliousness and arrogance in Israel brought on, in part, by witchcraft could only mean one thing. God would chasten His people by the humiliation of captivity and bondage by another nation. Manasseh of Judah could well be branded as the worst king ever to sit on David's throne. Second Chronicles 33 reveals that he built altars to the hosts of heaven in the temple environs. He caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of Hinnom. He observed times, made use of charms, used witchcraft, and dabbled in necromancy by consulting familiar spirits and mediums. It is interesting to note that Manasseh practiced every form of witchcraft which had been forbidden in Deuteronomy 18:10-11. His incorporation of astral worship led to idolatry and wickedness in enormous quantities. This writer believes

¹The Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. "Magic," by Ludwig Blau.

Manasseh's witchcraft was the major cause of Judah's downfall. The God of Israel promised captivity for them, "because they have done that which is evil in my sight" (2 Kgs 21:15). Verse 16 of the same chapter furthered the cause for captivity by a reference to Manasseh's "great sin, in which he caused Judah to sin." That sin was no doubt Manasseh's full devotion to witchcraft, the example of rebellion par excellence.

CONCLUSION

It has been the purpose of this writer to examine and interact with the ideology behind witchcraft, an intricate system, ubiquitous in the A.N.E. The prophet Samuel, arising from the midst of turmoil during the period of the judges as one of the great figures of Old Testament history, was very much aware of the basic beliefs and motives of such a system. For him to attribute the sin of rebellion against Yahweh to witchcraft (1 Sam 15:23), speaks volumes as to the nature of rebellion, and the seriousness of such a crime.

It has been demonstrated that A.N.E. witchcraft was a highly organized operation, making use of magic, sorcery, and divination, within its periphery. The magic employed so regularly by the practitioners, was for the purpose of either bringing harm to another (i.e. Black magic), producing a benevolent action (i.e. White magic), warding off evil, or influencing the deities. The belief that man could control his own destiny through magic, was a dominating motivation to engage in the same. If one would influence the gods by witchcraft, he would in effect be the captain of his own fate. The art of witchcraft allowed the operator to be himself, a god. The human I became, as it were, the master of forces. With the aid of witchcraft, depraved men imagined they were capable, and indeed possessed, the power

to stave off evil, take control, further their own needs, and override the sovereignty of the true God.

It was established that sinful man attempted to gain information, and discern events in yet future time and space, through divination. This was shown to be attempted through manifold means, all with the same end of ascertaining unknown knowledge. It was a pitiful attempt at most, to obtain superhuman knowledge, apart from God revealing Himself and His will. The prognosticator believed that certain spirit beings did possess valuable knowledge, and could be coerced into disposing it, upon certain conditions. This belief in spirit-beings was said to be the essential faith which made the performance of witchcraft a feasible idea in the practitioner's mind.

The writer concluded that the supernatural power which often was an accompaniment in the practice of witchcraft was a reality, as revealed in the feats of the Egyptian magicians in Scripture. Satan has sought to replace God, and deceive men from the point of his rebellion, and it often is his demons who actively promote witchcraft, and provide the stimulus which gives occult practice its mighty power.

Deuteronomy 18:10-12 was examined in detail, being the Locus Classicus of all Old Testament passages, with respect to witchcraft. The nine-fold breakdown of mantic practices, enumerated by Moses, provided a better

understanding of the far reaching extent to which witchcraft had progressed, and the powerful influence its adherents exercised on the peoples of the A.N.E., by the middle of the second millennium b.c. The warning given by Moses was timely. Israel, as God's covenant nation entering the land, needed to learn that God would reveal His word and will, through His chosen means; the continuing line of prophets, and not by augury or sorcery.

As was shown, archaeology has been a prime contributor in furthering insight and understanding of A.N.E. witchcraft. With the help of a vast number of comparatively recent discoveries of texts and artifacts, the development of witchcraft from Sumer, through cultural bridges, westward to the Mediterranean has become increasingly easier to track. The amazing number of incantation ritual texts, magic manuals, and divinatory objects, unearthed at countless sites, reveal clearly that witchcraft was entrenched and indeed a way of life for depraved societies of people under Satan's domain.

The bottom line was, and continues to be, that God's invasive power, revealing Himself on all sides, was absolutely incompatible with the operation of the forces by magic. He could not be swayed by magic; nor could anyone ward Him off by means of incantations or rituals. Magic was absolutely powerless to achieve effects which did not proceed directly from Himself. He, not magic, was and ever

shall be in complete control. To participate in witchcraft displayed an attitude of rejection and rebellion against His sovereignty. It would not be tolerated in ancient Israel, no matter if 'everyone was doing it,' throughout the A.N.E. The same holds true three centuries later in our day.

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