

1. Name and briefly describe one method of divination or seership technique common to three paleo-pagan Indo-European cultures. (minimum 100 words each)

According to Simek, Tacitus mentions in his *Germania*, chapter 10, that the Germanic tribes used “notae” carved into sticks to predict the future. Simek, however, is of the opinion that this reflects a Roman practice rather than a Germanic one. (Simek, p. 224) Thomas Höffgen, on the other hand, considers the lot oracle to be a common Germanic practice, as there are also references to it in Plutarch and Caesar. (Höffgen, p.16) However, both point out that runes were probably not used for this, but other signs. Simek suggests that these were pre-runic symbols that later found their way into the series of runes developed from Italic alphabets. At that time, a branch was cut from a fruit tree, divided into shorter pieces and carved with symbols. These sticks were then thrown onto a cloth. Three were picked up and interpreted. If the answer was negative, the oracle was finished for the day. If the answer was positive, it had to be officially confirmed by auspices. (Tacitus in Höffgen, p. 15)

(171 words)

The Slavs also used lot oracles as a form of fortune-telling based on deliberately arranged situations. They are mentioned in the Opatovice Homiliary, but unfortunately the nature of the lots is not specified. Saxo Grammaticus describes in the 12th century that the Baltic Slavs cast lots using three sticks, which were black on one side and white on the other. The color on the front side decided the lottery. Sometimes the lottery oracle was also combined with a horse oracle: In Retra, a horse was made to run three times over lances placed on the ground and buried lots. If the horse touched the lances, it was considered a lucky sign. Unfortunately, the function and shape of the lots is unknown. (Vana, p.272)

(123 words)

The Celts also used a form of the lot oracle. The Ogham is found among the Irish Celts. It probably originated at the same time as the runes among the Germanic tribes, around the 4th century AD. (Ellison, pos. 47) There were at least 150 different types of ogham writing, which were used for different purposes. Ellison mentions seven of them: as a normal alphabet, as a cipher, as an encoding, as a mnemonic device, as a sign language, for magical purposes and for divination. (Ellison, pos. 168) Unfortunately, there are only a few surviving examples of fortune-telling. Ellison mentions, for example, the "Boy Ogham", which was used to predict the sex of an unborn child. Another example is mentioned in *Tochmarc Etáine*. The druid Dallan has the task of finding Ètáin and uses the yew sticks, which he inscribes with Ogham signs. However, there is no evidence of this in other translations, so this example must be taken with a grain of salt. Ellison also mentions a third method of the lot oracle using ogham, the *chrannchur*, for which he was also unable to find any original sources. (Ellison, pos. 191)

(191 words)

2. Within the context of a single paleo-pagan Indo-European culture, discuss three different forms of divination or seership, and give an example of each. (minimum 100 words each)

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An important and frequently practiced method of divination in Rome was the **observation of birds**. So-called "auspices" were tasked with observing a part of the sky from a public square and using the birds flying there to predict whether or not an action already taking place or planned would meet with the gods' approval. In Rome, there was even a special place for this on the Capitol, the "auguraculum". The magistrate tasked with observing the birds was accompanied by another colleague (there were 15 augurs in total) who interpreted the observations blindfolded. If there was no other augur, which was sometimes the case outside Rome, the magistrate had to perform the ritual alone. Clues were provided by the type of birds and the way they flew ("alites") or sang ("oscines"). The pitch, intonation, and frequency or the tempo, direction, number, and flight altitude were interpreted. Day and season also influenced the meaning. Later, it was also observed how birds ate, i.e. whether and how they accepted food. This was often the case on military expeditions. Extra birds in cages were taken on a mission for this purpose. An example for such a divination was when Ap. Claudius Pulcher threw the sacred chickens into the Tiber when they refused to eat as requested at his augury for the First Punic War. The mission failed.

(223 words)

Another method was **reading from entrails**. This method originally came from the Etruscans and so the specialists for it, the "haruspices", also came from Etruria. Originally, no Roman citizen could become a haruspex. However, this rule was later abandoned. "Haruspices" were not officially considered priests. A liver was often inspected and 'read'. The different areas of the liver were assigned different meanings: It was divided into two halves, which were assigned to the sun and moon (presumably day and night). Each of these halves had eight edge sections. These sixteen sections corresponded to the sixteen areas into which the Etruscans divided the sky and indicated a connection between the cosmos and earthly life. Within the peripheral sections, there were sixteen sections on the day side and eight on the night side. Each of these 40 sections was assigned a deity who supposedly controlled it. Abnormalities in the individual sections were interpreted accordingly. An example for such a divination happened when emperor Vitellius' haruspex warned him that the entrails showed a danger and Vitellius was murdered on the same day.

(179 words)

A third form of divination was **dream interpretation**. Dreams were seen by many civilizations as a means of communicating with supernatural forces. Even Pliny the Elder, skeptical of many other methods, was convinced that dreams were of great importance. Dream interpretation is also mentioned by Livy and Virgil. In his fourth book, Lucretius devotes ample space to the scientific explanation of dreams. He attempts to remove the mystery from dreams, which gives them the appearance of divine inspiration. In the later Republic and the early Roman Empire, the interpretation of dreams was a flourishing business. There were even manuals on dream interpretation. However, dream interpretation played no role in official religion, as dreams were considered a private matter and difficult to validate. Livy tells of a man called T. Latinus who had a dream of Jupiter disapproving the prelude-dancer who opened the great games. Since he was a mere plebeian, T. Latinus didn't dare to go and tell this to the magistrate as ordered by Jupiter until some bad things happened to him and the dreams repeated. The senate immediately reacted and repeated the games.

(185 words)

3. Discuss both the role of seers within at least one Indo-European culture and the relationship of seers to other members of the society, including in that discussion how seers or visionaries would have supported themselves or how they would have been supported by their people. (minimum two paragraphs)

I would like to discuss the role of seers in Scandinavian countries. Seership was a common practice in Northern Paganism to gain insight into the present or future state of things and the will of the gods. Seers were consulted by both Pagans and Christians until late into Christian times. (Jones & Pennick, p.149)

There were two types of seers. Professional seers stood out from the masses and were often trained in a particular way. Some of them, like Veleda of the Bructeri, Ganna of the Semnones, or Aurinia and Albruna, are even known by name through the writings of Roman authors. They would travel around and visit people who wished to consult them.

A special type of magic called seidr was performed by women, as it was considered unmanly for men to do so. (Jones & Pennick, p.151) The seeress, known as a 'volva' or 'spákona', would sit on an elevated platform between earth and sky, in a liminal position, where she would go into a trance. People would climb up to her and ask her questions. (Davidson, p.160, 162)

Similarly, seeresses in Greece would sit next to an omphalos or over a cleft in the ground in oracle temples with trees and springs. They were believed to be in the center of the world with the easiest access to the gods.

Consulting a seeress was a common practice in Scandinavian countries, with many references to it found in literature dating back to the 13th century. (Davidson, p.160) However, many people were known to have a second sight without special training, so it could have been just a neighbor who had a way of knowing things or practicing magic in an ordinary place under no special circumstances. (Davidson, p.157, Jones & Pennick, p.149)

4. Identify and describe one method of divination to which you find yourself attracted, and discuss its relationship to paleo-pagan divination. (minimum 300 words)

At the moment I like to use a set of cards called "Oracle of Nehalennia". As I have been drawn to this particular goddess for a very long time and she has a permanent place in my shrine to the gods, I appreciate the beautiful images and their interpretation. The set comprises 33 square cards with a shell design and was created by Bela Sól and Igor Alexandre.

There are different interpretations for each card, depending on which question is asked.

Nehalennia is a goddess with somewhat unclear origins. It is still a mystery whether she was of Celtic or Germanic origin. In view of the fact that the boundaries between Gallic/Belgian and Germanic are blurred in the area on the left bank of the Rhine anyway, this aspect fits quite well with the goddess, who is worshipped as a "national goddess" by some pagans in the Netherlands. All the motifs deal with aspects that we know about her from archaeological finds and a few sources of information, for example "The Dog", a frequent companion on the stones found, "The Shell", which often adorns the back of the stones, "The Apple", of which she often carries a bowl full, or "The Boat".

The set is part of the tradition of the lot oracles, which was widespread in the Indo-European region. Unlike the abstract symbols of Ogham or runes, here you are given a picture as a template. However, as with the paleo-pagan oracles, you draw one or more cards and interpret them according

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to a certain pattern. For example, you draw 3 cards: the first represents the shell of possibilities, the second the shell of obstacles and the third the shell of results (Reading about events with 3 shells). In a survey on the subject of health, the first card describes where the problems may lie and the second card advises on how to deal with them. There are also much more complex reading patterns, such as Nehalennia's Rudder, which consists of 9 cards and provides information about different areas of the questioner's life.

(344 words)

5. Briefly describe the symbology of your chosen method of divination, and include a method of application for that system. (minimum 100 words overall description plus at least one sentence or line per symbol)

There are 33 square cards. Each motif is embedded in a shell frame. The frames are in various shades of blue, gray, pink and yellow. All the motifs relate in some way to the Germanic-Celtic goddess Nehalennia: some are nautical motifs (Angry waves, Serene Sea), other cards show objects that can be seen on her votive stones (Cornucopia, The Dog).

I usually just draw a single card for myself, which I then interpret in relation to the occasion of the ritual. If I don't get any further with this alone, I draw another card. Under certain circumstances, I also draw 3 cards and assign them to the past, present and future.

Each card is accompanied by a detailed description of what it means in which context. I limit myself to the general meaning here, otherwise it would get too much out of hand.

Nehalennia – This symbol is neutral, it has to be in company with other cards and supports them

The Altar – This symbol represents a solution to a problem or a favorable answer.

The Anchor – This symbol represents stagnation, delays, something that hinders you to get into action. It can also stand for procrastination or laziness.

The Sand – Underneath the sand things are hidden, purposely, that might hurt you. This card is about illusion and deceptive appearance.

The Sunrise – This card shows a new beginning, the start of a journey, a new phase in your life with all the tools you will need. (Personal comment: I got this card two days before I was diagnosed with leukemia. It sounds pretty, but the effect doesn't have to be positive.)

The Boat – The boat tells you you are on the right path. Its focus is on the natural flow, easiness and the fluidity of things. It might also stand for short trips.

The Dog – The dog is Nehalennia's companion and yours. Sometimes you can't see the one, sometimes you can, but there is someone who stands with you in every situation and supports you.

The Baskets – This picture symbolizes the harvest, all the blessings and acknowledgement that you deserve, and also on a more mundane level wages and compensations.

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The Pearl in the Shell – This symbol stands for the inner self, the unconscious part of a person, what somebody believes, thinks, their values. It says that the answer lies often within the person who asks.

The Shell – The empty shell represents all the possibilities and options you have, the undefined or unfinished things, a certain amount of flexibility. It can point towards an unsolved problem or an open-ended situation that is waiting for more direction.

The Cornucopia – This symbol represents growth, abundance, progress. It is mostly directed towards material riches. It enhances other cards. Things might be bigger than originally thought of.

The Sunset – The sun sets, and so can you. This card represents the end of something, and a deserved moment of rest. It can also stand for the maturation of an idea and it reminds us that there is a right time for everything.

The Emergence – Nehalennia rose from the sea, and so might secrets or surprising news do for you. The card also can hint at a pregnancy or birth. You should listen to your intuition and try to see beyond the surface.

The Seagull – The Seagull represents freedom: freedom to go where you want, to learn what you want, to say what you want. It is about learning new things, expanding your own horizon, even on a spiritual level, for example prophetic dreams. It is also the card for longer travels in contrast to the Boat.

The Island – This is a rather dark card. It symbolizes loneliness, separation, isolation, disappointment with the society, disagreement. Someone might try to escape from reality and in need of emotional support.

The Rudder – This is a classical symbol and stands for direction, control and responsibility.

The Apple – Nehalennia is often shown with apples. Here it stands for well-being, satisfaction, and pleasure. It can also mean self-love and self-esteem, passion and sexuality.

The Cloak – This card symbolizes divine protection. A deity is taking you under her cloak. This card points at religious affairs and blessings for you.

The Coins – The coins stand for exchange and reciprocity. They can also represent a payment and all kind of honest business-related affairs.

The Shipwreck – This card means the end, and a sudden and unhappy one. Things are not going well. The shipwrecks can mean violation, suffering and loss, but it is also a warning: With due concentration a situation might be avoided or the consequences reduced.

The Serene Sea – The Serene Sea stands for tranquillity and good news. You can relax, there are good news or a nice surprise for you. This is a time of harmony.

The Angry Waves – Now this is the opposite of the Serene Sea. The waves are high and the water is agitated. There are obstacles in your way, and difficulties ahead. These can be material ones, but also negative thoughts etc.

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The Breads – The Breads represent a sacrifice or a debt. You have to make the first step, and it might happen that you don't get the expected reward. It is a price you have to pay, a donation or the need to do something specific.

The Stone – Like the old votive stones this card represents commitments, promises and all kinds of formal affairs, be they bureaucratic, judicial or personal. It stands for a contract made.

The Fishes – Like fishes in a swarm this card stands for a community or partnership and the necessary communication and cooperation. You could compare it to the rune Mannaz. This card reaches out to the wider family and friends, in contrast to The Treasure.

The Harbor – The Harbor tells you you and what belongs to you are safe and protected. The situation is stable, something is certain, you have achieved what you wanted

The Shore – This card speaks of romantic involvement, be it a marriage or emotional commitment between two people. Love and harmony are in the air on this lovely beach.

The Fishing Net – While the Fishing Net might stand for memory and the past it can also hint at things in your past that are hindering you in the present, causing negative thoughts or even traumas. They are like a trap. Find out what it is and free yourself.

The Chalice – The card shows a chalice overflowing with shells. It symbolizes joy and victory, a celebration, an active social life.

The Storm – Like Hagalaz The Storm represents sudden and uncontrollable changes. But there is also a rainbow in sight. You can take shelter and wait for a better time or opportunity.

The Treasure – The Treasure traditionally symbolized the goods Nehalennia was asked to protect. I usually phrase it ,what is important for me'. Here the treasure means our closer family and ancestors, or a matter that is important for me.

The Throne – This card indicates leadership and authority, but also wisdom and knowledge. It says that you have the knowledge and power to change a situation the way you want it to be.

The Vase – This card shows a vase on a pottery wheel. It symbolizes all kinds of occupations, be it manual labor, arts or intellectual challenges. It stands for creativity, resources and the investment you make in a project.

6. Describe the results of three divinations performed by you. These divinations may be text assisted. (minimum 100 words each)

09/08/2024:

Past: The Vase, Present: The Fishing Net, Future: The Sunrise

In the past my work has played a big role. Being self employed with some employees and a partner I was very focused on work and everything that has to do with it: Do we earn enough money? Do our clients pay? Are there any problems with our employees? (The Vase)
But right now I have to deal with leukemia, an immune disease. (Fishing Net) I am treated against it since April and will undergo a transplantation in two weeks. So right now this is what I have to

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concentrate on. Also the Fishing net reminds me that I am responsible for my own happiness. I'll have to stay optimistic and make the best of the situation.

The Sunrise tells me that I have a chance for a new beginning in my future. I can handle things different if there is a shift in my perspective of what's really important for me.

(152 words)

09/15/2024:

Past: The Chalice, Present: The Shipping Wreck, Future: The Fishing Net

In the past I had an active social life. (The Chalice)

Currently with my cancer treatment this is a dangerous thing. There are lots of things that can go wrong and make my current situation very painful, from radiation to chemical therapy and the transplantation as such which leaves absolutely no immune system. Any direct contact can be dangerous for me and I have to listen to the doctors and nurses for the next months and be very very careful. (The Shipping Wreck)

Future: My immune system will be a thing to reckon with for a longer time. I will have to make the best of the situation and cherish each moment. If there are things from the past like problems from work I'll have to make sure they don't take my spirit down and block my recovery. (The Fishing Net)

(141 words)

09/22/2024 Fall Equinox, honoring 3 different deities

Tamfana: The Serene Sea, Hludana: The Shell, Hercules Magusanus: The Cornucopia

Tamfana is the goddess who measures time. She is keeping things in balance. Her feast was celebrated shortly after the equinox. This Germanic goddess gives me tranquility and a time to rest and calm down. It may not be the way I would prefer, but I definitely will get some down time here in hospital.

Hludana is another Germanic goddess from around this area. She is comparable to Hlodyn or Holle and was honored around the equinox. Some see her as a fall version of the spring Nerthus. Hludana is harvesting possibilities for me. My situation is open ended, I don't know yet if the transplantation will be well received by my body. But Hludana also tells me to think positive and make the best of this possibilities.

Hercules Magusanus was the patron deity of the Batavii, a neighbouring Germanic tribe. He protected his people and warded off possible dangers. He had the cornucopia for me. This means a lot of good things for me to come, a nice addition to Hludana's message. The cornucopia stands for abundance and prosperity. Things will go well when he is at my side.

(190 words)

7. Discuss your view of the purpose of divination. (minimum 100 words)

Divination has the purpose of 'discover the present or future state of things and the will of the spiritual beings'. [Jones & Pennick, p. 149]

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The plan is to get information by magical or divine means that couldn't be gained in any other way. It can include telling the future and present, but according to Ceisiwr Serith the past as well. [Serith, p. 258]

Isaac Bonewits presents another aspect that is relevant for modern Pagans: By doing a form of divination we want to find out the nature of the blessings we are about to receive afterward via the blessing cup. [Bonewits, position 481] He registers that the nature of those blessings can be different for the group and the individual.

So, essentially, we want to find out what time is going to bring, what the gods want us to do or advise us to do, and how they wish to support us. It's not set in stone, but it's a glimpse of possible developments, of the way ahead, and it is still our personal choice what to do with it.

(181 words)

8. Discuss the relative importance and effect of divination within your personal spiritual practice. (minimum 100 words)

During my time in ADF, I used different methods of divination. I started with tarot because I was already somewhat familiar with it. Then I tried Ogham but realized that this system did not suit me. I then switched to runes, which fit quite well given my Gallic-Germanic herd culture. I currently use the Nehalennia Oracle from Bela Síol, a set of 33 cards based around my favorite goddess Nehalennia. I generally try not to attach too much importance to divination, as I am one of those people who worry far too much about a negative interpretation. Nevertheless, for me, receiving some form of omen is part of every ritual. I generally only draw the omen for myself. If I were to hold rituals with a group in the near future, I would probably ask someone else whom I know as doing divination a lot to take over this part.

(149 words)

9. Discuss your view and understanding of the function of the Seer. (minimum 100 words)

The function of a Seer can be seen twofold:

First, the main function is taking the omen in ritual. The Seer has to choose the appropriate means and methods to do the divination. He or she has to perform it and take the omen and ultimately has to interpret the outcome for the group.

Different means include Ogham, runes, and tarot cards for example.

Different methods can be:

Has the offering been accepted? - What do the Kindred tell us? - What do they need?

Others ask: How was the past? - How is it now? - How will the future be? What might be the result of the situation?

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A third method might be to interpret a triple draw as a blessing from the ancestors, a blessing from the nature spirits, and a blessing from the gods.

In some cases, seers prefer to draw only one symbol, mostly either as a blessing or a hint of what's ahead of us.

A second function is the seeing while not in ritual: Here the Seer can either perform a divination for an individual or otherwise assist somebody with less expertise with his interpretations. [ADF Seers Ethics Policy]

It is important that when the seer draws an omen, he does not hesitate too long with the interpretation. Otherwise, this causes uncertainty in the group or the recipient of the omen and can lead to the ritual flow being interrupted in a group. His interpretation should also be clear and understandable for everyone.

(250 words)

10. Discuss the importance and value of divination as it relates to ADF. (minimum 100 words

Divination or the taking of omens is an important part of our rituals as it helps us understand what kind of blessings we will receive [Bonewits, position 481]. It is like opening a present to know what is in it.

After making an offering, we can ask whether it was accepted, or if we need to offer more. Sometimes the omen is drawn and named, and its interpretation applies to the entire group, strengthening the feeling of togetherness. In some groves, participants meditate on the meaning of the oracle for them personally.

However, there is a risk associated with divination. Some people tend to rely too much on it, making all their decisions based on what the cards or runes have said. Different forms of oracles have varying interpretations of symbols, and not everyone who owns a tarot deck or rune set can interpret them correctly. Even experienced practitioners sometimes encounter combinations they don't know how to interpret. Therefore, common sense is also required when it comes to divination.

Drawing an omen for a whole group reduces this risk as an omen that applies to a larger group has less influence on a certain person than an omen specifically drawn for them.

(201 words)

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