Divination By the 'Ôb amongst the Ancient Hebrews.

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As is well known, scholars are far from being agreed as to the nature of the superstitious rites practised amongst the Hebrews by means of the '*ôb*, and as to the origin and primary meaning of the noun '*ôb* itself. The passages of the Old Testament which refer to this kind of divination are the following :—Lv 19³¹ 20⁶· ²⁷, Dt 18¹¹, 1 S 28³· ⁷· ⁸· ⁹, 2 K 21⁶ (cf. 2 Ch 33⁶), Is 8¹⁹ 29⁴. In addition to the elements furnished us for an examination of the subject by an analysis and comparison of the contents of these texts, there is yet another which might be taken into account, viz. the fact that the word '*ôb*, pl. '*ôbôth*, exists in Hebrew with the signification of 'bottle.' If the '*ôb* of divination has any affinity with the '*ôb* signifying 'bottle,' from an etymological point of view, there will be a strong presumption that the former is to be explained by some such notion as that of something 'hollow.'

On reading the texts indicated, we notice, first of all, that the name '*ôb* is generally associated with *jid'ônî*. Both names are undoubtedly connected, at least originally, with necromancy, or the raising up of the spirits of the dead.

A difficulty meets us at the outset, namely, that the name '*ôb*, as also that of *jid'ônî*, is applied indifferently to the diviner himself, and to the spirit with whose assistance he practises his art. But, in opposition to the opinion of Gesenius,[1] it is certain, as Baudissin justly observes,[2] that both names apply to the spirit primarily, and only secondarily to the diviner himself. Consequently, we must not seek to explain the word as signifying anything proper to the diviner, and conceived of as proper to him.

A further source of difficulty is, that whereas the texts sometimes lead us to suppose that the names '*ôb* and *jid'ônî* were applied to the spirits of the dead themselves, they at other times directly negative any such identification. Scholars, as Stade[3] and König,[4] who, following Hitzig,[5] under-

stand the noun '*ôb* as equivalent to the French *revenant*, supposing or asserting its derivation from the Arabic '*âba*, take it as applying essentially to the spirit of the dead man himself. There are others still, as Kautzsch,[6] who share this opinion. But, in addition to the fact that we do not find the verb אוב, nor any of its derivatives, in Hebrew, we must note that Dt 18¹¹ distinguishes between the מֵתִים, namely, 'the dead,' or 'the shades of the dead,' and the spirits known as '*ôb* or *jid'ônî*. The explanation furnished by König, *l.c.*, who thinks that the name '*ôb* serves to distinguish from the mass of מֵתִים those spirits who were not at rest, is evidently coined to suit the case. The spirit of Samuel, for instance, besides that it is otherwise clearly distinguished in the text from the '*ôb* (1 S 28⁸), was certainly at rest; for it complains of being disturbed by those who had summoned it to appear (v.¹⁵) ! Moreover, since it is certain that in some of the passages above cited, the אוב is conceived as a spirit of a special nature (1 S 28⁷ᶠᶠ·, Lv 20²⁷), it should be explained how a name, expressly signifying a departed spirit, a *revenant*, could have been used to designate the superior spirit spoken of in these passages? It is more natural to suppose that the name properly applied to the higher spirit was extended secondarily to the spirits evoked by its instrumentality (Is 8¹⁹ 29⁴).

Nor can we accept Knobel's explanation,[7] which would connect the word '*ôb* with a supposed root אוב (=איב), signifying 'to be hostile,' and would thence explain the noun as signifying a malignant or hostile spirit. The constant association of the '*ôb* with the *jid'ônî* (='one who knows'), together with the very particular rôle fulfilled by the spirit in question, are not sufficiently accounted for on this hypothesis, apart from its doubtful etymological value.

Several have thought to find the true meaning of the word '*ôb*, even as the name of a spirit, in a root signifying something *hollow*, the same from which the word '*ôb* as signifying a 'bottle' would come; but the explanations they offer are very

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[1] *Thes. s.v.* אוב: '. . . incantator daemone fatidico obsessus quasi *uter* s. vas et vagina hujus pythonis esse videbatur.'
[2] *Studien zur Semit. Religionsgeschichte*, i. p. 141.
[3] *Geschichte des V. Isr.*, i. p. 504.
[4] *Offenbarungsbegriff des A.T.*, ii. p. 150.
[5] On Is 8¹⁹. Dillmann calls this interpretation *unwahrscheinlich* (*Ex–Lv*, p. 558).

[6] *Ap.* Riehm, *Handwörterb.* art. 'Todtenbeschwörung.'
[7] *Prophetismus der Hebräer*, i. p. 239.

diverse. Thus Hölemann[1] thought that the spirit derived its name from the stomach of the diviner or ventriloquist in whom it resided. But it does not seem from the texts that the spirit made its voice heard from the ventriloquist's stomach,[2] and, as Baudissin observes, this would hardly be considered a befitting origin for the spirit's name. Let us remark here that the expression used in 1 S 28[7], to designate the relation between diviner and spirit, אֵשֶׁת בַּעֲלַת אוֹב, does not imply habitual possession; we can legitimately render it with König: 'Eine Frau die mit einem (or *mit dem?*) 'ôb in Verbindung stand.' On the other hand, Lv 20[27] certainly implies the presence of the 'ôb or *jid'ônî* within the man or woman divining, though this presence might be reduced to the idea of an intimate intellectual union between diviner and spirit. Baudissin,[3] following Franz Delitzsch (on Is 8[9] 29[4])[4] thinks that the name 'ôb is applied to the spirit in the sense that the latter, though appearing in a bodily form, was considered as empty within. If this were the case, the name would signify a spirit in general, whereas in the texts under discussion, the 'ôb designates definitely the spirit of divination, exercising its power in the evocation of the dead. Besides, it is rather difficult to admit that the spirit would have derived its name from the supposed, not perceived, emptiness or hollowness of the bodily form in which it may appear to men. Another explanation has found favour with many; they refer the name of the 'ôb to the hollow tone of its voice; thus Böttcher, *De inferis*, 1846, p. 101; Kautzsch, *l.*

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[1] *Bibelstudien*, 1859, p. 162.

[2] The LXX translate 'ôbôth by ἐγγαστρίμυθοι, and probably the Vulgate attaches the same sense to the word *pythones*. Many authors are of opinion that the diviners in question were indeed ventriloquists; so Lenormant, *La divination et la science des présages chez les Chaldéens*, Paris, 1879, p. 161 ff.; Renan, *Hist. du peuple d'Israël*, i. p. 431, etc. But, whatever may have been the process really employed by the diviners, it is certain that by the sacred writers (with the possible exception of Lv 20[27], see below) the 'ôb was not looked upon as a spirit dwelling in the body of a ventriloquist, as Lenormant says, *l.c.*; but it is according to the view of the writers, which was that of the people in whose midst they lived, that the name is to be explained, and not according to some later or to our own view of the matter, as is done by Gesenius and Hölemann.

[3] *Studien*, p. 142 f.

[4] In the fourth edition of his commentary on *Das Buch Jesaia* (1889), Delitzsch does not reproduce this explanation; he contents himself with the following observation on the word אוֹב (p. 160): 'v. אוּב, bauchig, hohl s., dumpf tönen.'

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supra cit.; Dillmann on Lv 19[31]; Renan, *l. supra cit.*; Delitzsch? *l. cit.*, etc. In spite of its ingenuity this hypothesis seems to us hardly tenable. The terms 'hollow,' 'cavernous,' 'sepulchral,' 'deep,' are applied to the voice or its sound only in a metaphorical sense. If the spirit was to be designated by a name referring to the tone of its voice, would it not have been far more natural to borrow that name from an expression signifying in its proper sense a quality of the voice, as are the terms used by Isaiah (8[19]) to describe the voice of the 'ôbôth, הִהְגָּה, צִפְצֵף? The existence of a verb אוּב, meaning 'to give forth a hollow sound,' would of course explain everything, but its existence is a purely gratuitous hypothesis, and if Isaiah had had ready to hand an expression which precisely signified the sound of the voice of the 'ôb, it is difficult to conceive his not employing it in the above passage. Furthermore, it does not seem that it was the spirit, to which the name אוֹב was given primarily, that made its voice heard in the necromantic rites (1 S 28); consequently it was not to the sound of its voice that it owed its name.

We cannot find any confirmation of Lenormant's statement[5] that the Hebrew 'ôb should be derived from an Accadian *ubi* connected with magical art.

We said above that the name 'ôb was given to the diviner only by metonymy. Is it not possible, as Hölemann supposed in his otherwise untenable interpretation, that even to the spirit the name belonged only by metonymy? The Arabic *wa'b* (وأب) signifies 'a large cup.'[6] The affinity as to form and signification of the Arabic noun with the Hebrew אוֹב, meaning 'bottle,' is striking. We know that there existed a species of divination by means of a cup; the Bible mentions it in the course of the history of Joseph (Gn 44[5]), and its testimony is confirmed from other sources.[7] One might be inclined to ask if the 'ôb may not have been first the cup, and then the spirit whose instrument it was?[8] We have, however, no information given us which would enable us to declare a relationship between divination by the cup and necromancy; but the 'ôb is the spirit who presides over the summoning of the dead. Be-

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[5] *Op. cit.*, p. 164 ff.   [6] Also adj. 'thick,' etc.

[7] Vigouroux, *La Bible et les découvertes modernes*, 5th ed. 1889, t. ii. p. 152 ff.

[8] Comp. Lenormant, *op. cit.*, p. 78 ff.

sides, the texts of the Bible which refer to the latter, make no mention of, or allusion to, the use of the cup.

But following the same train of ideas, another hypothesis presents itself, which is more in accordance with the necromantic character of the superstition to which the name is attached.

The passage of the Bible which affords us the most clear data on the subject is 1 S 28[7ff.] Thus Saul in v.[8]: ' I pray thee, divine unto me by the *'ôb*, and bring me up whom I shall name unto thee.' Here, as we have noticed already, the *'ôb* is perfectly distinct from the diviner, and also from the spirit of the dead ; *the 'ôb* is a definitely determined spirit even before Saul has declared who the dead person is whom he wishes to see. It is through the medium of the *'ôb* that the woman of ʻÉndor is to raise up Samuel: ' *What sawest thou ?*' asks Saul in v.[13]—' *I saw a divine being ascending out of the earth.*'—'What form is he of ?' —' An old man *cometh up* . . . ' etc. Finally, it is not the woman but the shade itself which converses directly with Saul in the absence of the woman (vv.[15ff.] cf.[21]). It seems to us that this description supposes, or at least tallies well with the supposition, that the woman was watching the opening of a cavern or a cave in the earth, whence the shade would appear. Thus the Grecian and Roman oracles which depended upon necromancy were located in spots where large caverns existed, which were said to be in communication with Orcus.[1] May we not suppose that similar oracles existed in Palestine? May not, for instance, the בְּאֵר־אֵלִים = ' pit of the gods ' (Is 15[8]) have derived its name from some such shrine? We had proposed those questions to ourselves already when we found that Robertson Smith unhesitatingly affirms the connexion between divination by means of the *'ôb* amongst the Hebrews, and the superstitious worship of the chthonic deities amongst the Greeks and Romans.[2]

How, then, could the name *'ôb* attach itself to a necromantic oracle or sanctuary considered to be an escape-hole of Sheol? In Arabic the noun وَأْبٌ, signifies ' a hole in a rock,' and also ' a large and deep pit.' The Hebrew word אוֹב can be traced back to this Arabic word (*wa'b*) by a very

simple metathesis ;[3] we can also allow the permutation of א and ו.[4] The Hebrew has retained the word אוֹב, in the sense of ' bottle.' If we suppose a root אוֹב or וָאַב,[5] with the primitive sense of ' hollow,' ' open,' or ' gaping,' we can easily account for the noun אֹב, signifying on the one hand ' bottle,' and on the other, ' cavern ' or ' pit.' In Hebrew the noun *'ôb*, in the sense of ' cavern ' or ' pit,' was not in common use, else we should have had more abundant traces of it. But we may gather from the preventive measures which Saul took against the *'ôbôth* and *jid'ônîm* that necromancy under this particular form was of foreign origin. The name *'ôb*, then, along with the superstition with which it was connected, would have been borrowed from the Canaanites or some neighbouring Semitic people, and was in consequence, amongst the Hebrews, exclusively applied to those spots which were supposed to be connected with the nether-world. This supposition would also make it easier to understand how the metonymy took place by which the name signifying the cave or abyss passed to the spirit exercising its power there.

It is probable that originally the *jid'ônî* was not distinguished from the spirit known as the *'ôb*, since it is never mentioned apart; according to our hypothesis, one of the names belonged properly to the spirit, while the other was added later by the process of metonymy. Later on the double name led to the doubling of the spirit itself, but none the less the *'ôb* and the *jid'ônî* remained closely associated together in the popular mind, a fact which witnesses to their original unity.

As we understand 1 S 28, the shade of the dead person could converse directly with the mortal who had caused it to be summoned. The names *'ôb*, then, and *jid'ônî*, were applied also to the spirits of the dead who played a sensible rôle in these necromantic mysteries ; it seems, at least, that in Is 8[19] 29[4] it is the shades themselves who are designated by the names *'ôbôth* and *jid'ônîm*. At all events, it is certain that these same names

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[1] Comp. Daremberg et Saglio, *Diction. des antiquités gr. et rom.*, t. ii., *s.v.* ' Divination ' (p. 308 f.).
[2] *Rel. of the Semites*, 2nd ed., 1894, p. 198.

[3] אוֹב=אָנַב=וָאַב. Comp. Arab. *'ajasa—ja'isa* (נוֹאָשׁ), وسم =שָׁוַע, etc.
[4] Gesen., *Thes.*, sub. litt. א, p. 2 ; אוֹב=וָאַב=אָנַב. Comp. אֲצִיל=وصل ; (מֹאזְנַיִם) אֹזֶן=وزن. See Wright's *Lectures on the comp. grammar of the Sem. Languages*, Cambridge, 1890, pp. 47, 71, 237.
[5] Comp. אָב, *inhiare.*

were transferred by a metonymy to the diviners who held commerce with the spirit of the abyss. During the course of centuries the beliefs and superstitions connected with the '*ôb* underwent considerable change, as may be seen from later descriptions. The Mishna (*Sanhedrin*, vii.) asserts that the *ba'al 'ôb* is the diviner speaking from the hollow of his armpit, while the *jid'ônî* is the diviner speaking directly from his mouth. Josephus also (*Ant.* vi. xiv. 2) and the Septuagint only see in these mediums magicians or ventriloquists possessed by the spirit of divination (cf. Ac 16[16]). It is possible that the same idea is to be traced in Lv 20[27].

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