CHAPTER TWO

DIVINATION AND FOUNDATION

... oi παλαιοί ... μάλιστα μαντήσισιν ἐξέρεστο ... οὗτο πολίας ὑκιζον οὔτε τείχεα περιβάλλοντο οὔτε ... κτλ. ... πρὶν ἀν δὴ παρὰ μάντεων ἁκούσαι ἐκκαστα.

"... the ancients had divination in very great use ... would found no cities, invest themselves with no ramparts ... until they had been advised in all particulars by diviners." Lucian, Astrology, 23 (tr. Harmon, Loeb.)

The Purpose of Divination

In addition to the oikist’s consultation at Delphoi we have evidence for another practice with a similar, if less defined, purpose: divination. This is a better translation for μαντική in the context of colonization where the word denoted an attempt to divine the intentions of the gods, whether favorable or not, toward a prospective enterprise. This mantikē (the activity, especially, of the μάντις, "soothsayer," "seer," "diviner") was independent of Delphoi. The initiative and responsibility for consulting it belonged to the colonizer; the divination itself was conducted by a professional mantis under instructions from the oikist or by the oikist himself. The social function of this divination can be understood by analogy to military mantikē. Just as military mantikē encouraged the troops before battle by providing concrete and immediate proof that the gods looked on their cause with favor, so colonists were reassured by divine approval, as indicated through mantikē.1 It fulfilled the legalistic prescription of ritual in general and provided religious corroboration that was closer to the colonists’ day-to-day reality than the more awesome, yet more distant Delphoi. For the colonists the prospect of emigration (mostly to quite distant places) must have been faced with considerable apprehension and anxiety both before they set out toward their destination and upon arrival in a strange place. Religion expressed through mantikē was a means of allaying such inevitable fears. At the same time, it would also contribute to the authority and leadership of the oikist.

It is sometimes claimed that Greeks did not use auspicia in the foundations of colonies.2 This is true in the strict Latin sense, but, as we shall see, divination was important in the act of foundation itself. The mantikē, which involved divination, especially from the interpretation of sacrificial offerings, was not

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1 On military mantikē see Pritchett (1979: esp. ch. III); Lonis (1979: esp. ch. V.e).
2 Ehlers (1933: 44) for references and discussion.
a foundation practice of the type found in Roman colonies. There, in a ritual following the *Etrusca disciplina*, for example, a furrow was ploughed that formed an immediate symbolic bond between the colony and its orientation, which was influenced by religion.\(^3\)

We can discuss with some confidence several cases of divination. The first is supposed to belong to the 8th century B.C. but it is doubtful: the others are certain but late. They all date from the Classical period.\(^4\) We can place some confidence in the fact that we are concerned with traditional practices; any inferences about the Archaic period, however, must be drawn with caution. We shall return to this point in the conclusion of this chapter.

**Founders and Seers**

1. *Syracuse: Archias and the Iamidai*

The Scholia Vetera to Pindar’s *Olympian VI* 6–8 contain explicit statements that one (or more) of the Iamidai family of *manteis* was a *joint founder* of Syracuse together with its oikist, Archias. Pindar’s ode is dedicated to Hagesias, an Iamid seer (*mantis*) and a supporter of Hieron. Lines 28–73 are devoted to the mythological origins of the family, which was one of the three great families of hereditary seers in the Greek world, in addition to the Klytiadai and the Melampodidai. The Iamidai on the whole seem to have enjoyed high social status, and sometimes we hear that they won exceptional honours, as did Kalli­as at Kroton\(^5\) or Teisamenos and his brother at Sparta.\(^6\) The center of the family was at Olympia, where its members served as priests at the altar of Zeus, but it also branched out to various Greek cities.\(^7\)

The family’s fame and reputation extended over a period of more than one thousand years.\(^8\) Unlike the τέχνη that those *manteis* in the 4th century came to acquire through manuals of instruction,\(^9\) the art of divination among the Iamidai was hereditary. We may be justified, therefore, in expecting that special attention was devoted to matters of genealogy. It is even possible that from

\(^3\) Salmon (1970: n.27) for references and comments. Cf. Martin (1974: 39ff.).

\(^4\) We shall also mention the foundation of Zankle with its “bird divination;” see pp. 108–109.

\(^5\) And his descendants: Hdt. V.44.

\(^6\) The only ones to have “ever” received Spartan citizenship (as Spartiates): Hdt. IX.33. There are other examples; see for general accounts n.7.

\(^7\) Weniger (1915: 53ff.). For a general account see Hepting’s article in *RE* IX s.v. Iamos, col. 685–689; Bouché-Leclercq (1879–1882: Vol.II 62ff.). For other references and a prosopography see Kett (1966). On the importance of *manteis* in the realities of ancient Greek life see Pritchett’s chapter on “The Military Mantikê” (1979: 47ff.).

\(^8\) Kett (1966: 84ff.).

\(^9\) See “Conclusion (a)” of this chapter.