Between Necromancers and Ventriloquists: The Ἐγγαστρίμυθοι in the Septuaginta

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ἐγγαστρίμυθος is the Greek word chosen by the LXX to render the Hebrew term ḫb. The object of this contribution is to explore the development of the word Ἐγγαστρίμυθος ‘ventriloquist’, from its earliest occurrences to its later uses by lexicographers and commentators.

Other terms related by extant sources to the word will also be brought into the picture. Interesting cultural and linguistic questions will be tackled in the course of our enquiry: what was the contribution of the LXX to the semantic history of the word? Was it coined with a new, broader meaning? Does the association of the two terms have consequences for the view of necromancy or ventriloquism during Hellenistic times and later? What are the cultural realities lurking behind the words? Our suggestion is that in the melting-pot of Hellenistic Egypt, two previously unrelated forms of divination come to be fused and a new view of both emerges, as a result.

2. EARLY OCCURRENCES

The word is a semantically transparent compound meaning ‘the one who has words in his belly’, the ventriloquist. The earliest extant occurrence of the term is in a medical text. The author of the Hippocratic treatise Epidemiae (book 5, 63 and book 7, 28) describes,
sometime towards the middle of the fourth cent. BC \(^1\), the clinical condition of a woman suffering from quinsy: «she breathed as those who are plunged into water and drawn out; and she produced low, indistinct sounds from the chest similar to those produced by the females we call ventriloquists (ἐγγαστρίμυθοι)» \(^2\). The restriction of the practice to females is noteworthy \(^3\).

Philochoros (fourth-third cent. BC) might also have used the term, again with reference to female ἐγγαστρίμυθοι. The actual passage from Philochoros’ Περὶ μαντικῆς (On Divination) has not been preserved; the information comes indirectly from later sources: possibly Aelius Dionysius \(^4\), the scholia to Plato’s Sophist 252C \(^5\), the Byzantine scholar Photius (mid-ninth cent. AD) and the encyclopaedic dictionary Suidas (late tenth cent. AD) \(^6\). Not much is known about the contents of Philochoros’ treatise \(^7\).


\(^2\) Epidemiae (ed. Smith, cf. n. 1) 5, 63, 6: καὶ ἀνέπνευσεν ὡς ἐκ τοῦ βεβαπτίσθαι ἀναπνέοναι, καὶ ἐκ τῶν στήθων ὑπενθόγειν, διόπερ αἱ ἐγγαστρίμυθαι λεγόμεναι.

\(^3\) Peritonsillar abscess (quinsy) is described in a modern medical manual (R. Berkow and J. Talbott [eds.], The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy [ Rahway, N. J.: Merck Sharp and Dohme Research Laboratories 1977] p. 1645) as «an acute infection located between the tonsil and the superior constrictor muscle». One of its symptoms is that the patient «shows marked trismus», i.e. a spasm of the jaw muscle that makes it difficult to open the mouth. This indicates that the similarity between the condition of the Hippocratic patient and the characteristics connected with ventriloquism includes more points than the one explicitly mentioned (sounds).


\(^5\) Ἀττικὰ Ὀνόματα (Attic Words), Epsilon 2, 2 (H. Erbe [ed.], Untersuchungen zu den attitistischen Lexika [Berlin: de Gruyter 1950]).

\(^6\) Φιλόχορος δὲ ἐν τρίτῳ Περὶ μαντικῆς καὶ γνωστάς ἐγγαστρίμυθος φησίν (‘Philochoros in the third book of his treatise On Divination mentions female ventriloquists’).

\(^7\) Fragments in Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker (henceforth FGrH), F. Jacoby (ed.) (Leiden: Brill 1954) vol. IIIa, 328, fr. 76-79.
There are, however, some good reasons for accepting that Philochoros was likely to have actually included such information in his treatise. He was a prominent religious figure of his time and held the office of prophet and diviner in 306 BC. His knowledge of the field of divination, its types and ramifications must therefore have been very deep and detailed. If his treatise was as "voluminous and comprehensive of all kinds of divination" as it seems, the ἔγγαστρήμοθοι would not have been omitted. His description, which might well have functioned as the source for later information, has however perished.

3. ἔγγαστρήμοθος / 'ôb in the Old Testament and the Septuaginta

A turning point is marked by the use of the word by the translators of the OT from Hebrew into Greek (LXX or Septuaginta), a project fulfilled at different stages between the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphos in the third cent. BC and the beginning of the Christian Era. The Greek term ἔγγαστρήμοθος in the LXX basically renders 'ôb, the meaning of which is somewhat unclear: it is generally translated as 'soothsayer' or 'magician'.

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8 Jacoby stipulates on the basis of the extant fragments that «the work was arranged according to the several species of divination with perhaps a general historical introduction about the art and its 'inventors', i.e. its earliest known representatives» (FGrH IIIb [Suppl.] 328 vol. I [Text], 356). Jacoby maintains that Philochoros may well have given particulars, even names of female ventriloquists (Ibid., p. 358), but he categorically denies any possibility of Philochoros having ascribed to them necromantic activities (FGrH IIIb [Suppl.] 328 vol. II [Notes-Addenda-Corrigenda-Index] 263 n. 1).


One of the meanings of Οβ is ‘wine-skin’ as in Job 32,19. In consequence, some scholars have interpreted the term as a sort of device used by the necromancer to fake the voice of the spirit, like a hollow tubular object. The Οβ has also been interpreted as a point of contact between the living and the dead. Others prefer to see the term related to the Arabic term ṣaba ‘return’, thus the ‘returning spirit’; or as ‘hostile’, based on ṣyb ‘to be an enemy’, or «a sort of subterranean spirit which seems to speak from the ground with a twittering voice». A connection has been made between Οβ and ṣab ‘father, ancestor’. This thesis is also reinforced by the fact that in the Ancient Near East, necromancy was a part of the cult of the ancestors.

Certain words sometimes appear attached to Οβ. For instance, yidde’oni ‘the knowing one’, appears eleven times following Οβ. Others are metîm ‘the dead’, itîm ‘ghosts’ (Isa 19,3), téraﬁm ‘teraphim’, elohîm ‘gods’ (Isa 8,19), ellîm ‘false gods’ (Isa 19,3), glîlûm ‘idols’ and šiqqûsîm ‘abominations’ (2Re 23,24). These words indicate that the term must be considered as a personified being, rather than as an object.

In the OT, the term Οβ appears seventeen times: in a legal context: Lev 19,31; 20,6; 20,27; Deut 18,11 (in one case ba’alat-Οβ).
‘the mistress of the spirit’); in narrative literature: 1Sam 28,3; 28,8; 28,9; 2Re 21,6; 23,24; 1Chr 10,13; 2Chr 33,6; thrice in Isaiah: 8,19; 19,3; 29,4; once in Job 32,19, but this reference is uncertain.

Followed by yiddonî(m), and generally in the plural, it refers to the cult of other gods and idols. The vocabulary used in these contexts is typical of OT pronouncements against idololatry. In this format, we find the good kings, like Saul (1Sam 28,3,9) and Josiah (2Re 23,24) banning the ‘ôb-cult, and the evil kings, like Manasseh (2Re 21,6) promoting it. This ancestor-cult was considered polluting and the practitioners were unclean (Lev 19,31); the punishment reserved for necromancers was lapidation (Lev 20,27).

When referring to necromancy, the term appears in the singular. The person who invokes the dead is called ba‘alat-ôb the ‘mistress of the ôb’ This implies the existence of a specialist who has the knowledge of certain rituals of invocation. It is ambiguous, from the passage in the book of Samuel (1,28) whether the necromancer acted as a medium of the ghost, because no details of the ritual itself are given.

According to Lev 20,2, some people have an ôb in themselves, which enables them to be a medium for the dead. The actions of the ôb (tēsāṣef / ha-mētāṣēṣim ‘softly whispering’ and hēmahgim ‘murmuring’ Isa 29,4 and 8,19) may be pointing to the fact that the phenomenon of necromancy was transformed in the late OT-period, and the ancestor-cult had become mere soothsaying by means of a medium.

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15 TROPPER «Spirit» coll. 1526-1527.
18 TROPPER «Spirit» col. 1528. TROPPER Nekromantie p. 174, where he states that the Greek translation is filling the gaps of the ambiguous original and interprets the witch as a medium through whom the spirit speaks, hence ἑγγυότρυπμον.
In Isa 29,4, the word 'ôb in the singular is rendered οἱ φωνούντες ἐκ τῆς γῆς ('those who produce voices from the earth'), perhaps as an influence of the context: «And thy [sc. the city of Ariel] words shall be brought down to the earth».

The Greek ἐγγαστρίμυθος renders also the word bad in Isa 44,25, as meaning 'magician, false magician, diviner'. But this is a very unclear passage, and the sense is conjectural 19, other meanings of the word being 'lie, stone, power'. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that the translator of Isaiah was translating very freely 20.

Other versions of the Greek translations produce other terms. The version of Aquila when translating 'ôb: 1Sam 28,3; 28,8; 28,9; Isa 29,4; Deut 18,11, etc., uses the Greek word μάγος ('magician, wizard') 21. There are also some instances of 'ôb, not rendered in the LXX as εὐγνώστας 2Re (4Re) 21,6, on King Manasseh, who used divination and auspices: ἐκληθήσετο καὶ οἰωνίζετο, καὶ ἐποίησε θελήσει, καὶ γνώστας ἐπλήθυνε 22. Aquila again translates μάγος, while the Antiochian version translates εὐγαστρίμυθος. In the passage 2Re (4Re) 23,24: on Josiah, who «removed the sorcerers, and the wizards, and the theraphim, and the idols» the text we find is: καὶ τὰ ψευδεῖα, καὶ τὰ πέτρας, καὶ τὰ ψευδεῖα, καὶ τὰ εἴδωλα. In this passage, Symmachus 23 and the Antiochian text give the translation εὐγαστρίμυθος, while Aquila gives μάγος.

In the passages of the Leviticus, the manuscript M gives some variant translations: in Lev 19,31 μάντες ('diviners'), and in Lev 20,6 and 20,27 θελητής ('sorcerer').

There is also an instance of εὐγαστρίμυθος with no correspondence in Hebrew: 2Chr 35,19, about King Josiah.

The choice of εὐγαστρίμυθος can, according to all likelihood, be ascribed to the translators of the Pentateuch already in the third

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19 Cf. 1er 50,36: omitted by the LXX, where badim means also 'diviners'.
20 The evaluation of the competence of the translator varies greatly: cf. CAIRD Language p. 124, ORLINSKY «Septuagint» p. 551, n. 2.
21 On this translation, FERNÁNDEZ MARCOS Introducción pp. 119-132. We would like to point out that the term μάγος is used by Lucian in second century AD as well, in his Menippus, for the guide into the Netherworld.
22 'And he used divination and auspices, and he acted the sorcerer and multiplied the diviners'.
23 Only deduced from the Syrohexaplar version: the Syriac term is retranslated by F. FIELD, Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt (Oxford 1875) s.v. into Latin ventriloquus.
cent. BC. It is however not easy to establish with certainty the reason behind the general predilection for the term ἐγγαστρίμυθος, instead of—for example—the more appropriate Greek word ψυχαγωγός 24 or others. Perhaps it was due to a lack of accurate knowledge or a lack of interest to seek exact correspondences.

Biblical scholarship has established that «the translators were diplomatic legal scholars and the translation was the product of consensus as to the meaning of the Law. [...] The way Aristeas elaborates on their abilities makes it certain that he has in mind an essentially diplomatic quality in dispute and so he is not commenting on their use of Greek» 25. Although their translating principle was to reproduce the original word by word 26, not infrequent misreadings of the Hebrew text have been verified; in the same way, inaccurate knowledge of the corresponding Greek terminology in the field of divination could have led them to a mistake in the present case 27. Alternatively, their choice could have been based on contemporary reality, namely that in Hellenistic Alexandria divination through the dead had been taken over by private sorcerers, branded ventriloquists by the religious authorities 28. The aim of the translators was evidently to single

24 Cf. A Greek-English Lexicon, compiled by H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, revised and augmented throughout by Sir H. S. Jones, with the assistance of R. McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1976) s. v., for the meaning of the word and derivatives; a possible reason for avoiding this word is that the old meaning 'the conjurer of the souls' has given way to new meanings ('the one who wins over men's souls, who persuades') developed through use in philosophy and rhetoric. An interesting lexicographical entry (cf. I. Bekker, Anecdota Graeca [Berlin: G. C. Nauckium 1814] vol. I p. 73, 13) informs us that in Alexandria the word signified 'the educator of children' while at times past it denoted 'the conjurer of the souls': ψυχαγωγός—οἱ μὲν Ἀλεξάνδρεὶς τῶν τῶν παιδῶν ἀνήρωποιτηνοτο καλοῦσιν, οἱ δὲ ἀρχαῖοι τοῖς τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν τεθνηκότων γοητείας τοὺς ἄραντος θης αὐτῆς ἐννοιας καὶ τοῦ Ἀισχύλου τὸ δράμα ψυχαγωγός ('psychagogos: the term is used in Alexandria for the educators of children, while in times past it denoted those who by magical means conjured up souls of the dead; Aeschylus' play Psychagogos has this meaning').

25 Norton History pp. 7-8.

26 Caird Language p. 125; Orlinsky «Septuagint» pp. 548-552.


28 Tropper «Spirits» col. 1528. In his subsequent discussion of Job 32,19, where ὅθ means 'wine-skin' in state of fermentation: ἢ δὲ γαστὴρ μου δισπέρ ἀσκός γλυκοὺς ἔξιν δεδεμένον ἢ δισπέρ φιστήρ χαλκίου ἔρημης ('my belly is like a
out the conjurers of the dead as deceitful and the term ‘ventrilo­quist’ serves their purpose well 29. Despite Bouché-Leclercq’s opinion to the contrary 30, it is our belief that the necromantic connotations of the term definitely came about later. They were perhaps motivated by the text of Septuaginta and did not belong to the initial meaning of the word.

4. THE TERM ἐγγαστρίμυθος IN GREEK LITERATURE: TWO TRADITIONS

Following the association of ventriloquism and necromancy by the translators of the Sacred Scripture, the term ἐγγαστρίμυθος passes into the exegetical literature that either draws directly or is inspired by the LXX. In these texts, the word bears consistently its necromantic connotations. In particular the necromantic episode of 1Sam 28 triggered the exegetical zeal of both Christian fathers

wine-skin in a state of fermentation or like a blacksmith’s bellows bulging’), Troper considers this passage a textual corruption for no ḏōt ‘skin’, influenced by the expression ūnah bêtîl, appearing in the preceding verse; the expression confirms, in his mind, the fact that the later OT period considered the invocation of the dead as practiced by means of a medium or ventriloquist.

Perhaps a testimony of a similar practice – albeit later than the period examined – is PGM IV 850 (fourth century AD), the Solomon’s collapse (Papyri Graecae Magicae: die griechische Zauberpapyri, K. Preisendorf- A. Heinrichs [eds.] [Stuttgart: Teubner 1973]). It is a charm on papyrus, belonging to a magical handbook, which produces a trance or ecstatic seizure. It can be used for boys or adults, not for trivial consultations, but for ‘matters of necessity’ (πράγμα ἀναγκαῖον). There is a spell asking the gods to inspire the adult or boy in question and talk through him: ἐξαναγκασθεὶν τῷ δείναι ἀνθρώπῳ ἢ παιίδι ... διὸ ἔμελλε διὰ τοῦ δείνα ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἐξηγηθῇ μοι μετὰ ἀκριβείας (‘inspire the X person or child come to me through the X person or child and tell me in detail’). There is a formula for the dismissal of the possessive god or spirit and for the awakening of the medium. The elements of this ritual – libations and offerings similar to those used when the dead are summoned up – are not far away from what could be understood as necromantic ventriloquism or possession by the spirit of a dead person. In the corpus of the magical papyri from Egypt the spirits of the dead are generally considered as demons and gods that can be ‘consulted’.

29 The absence of the term in the Greek papyri recovered so far is an indication of its rareness. In particular we are inclined to interpret the fact that the word is unattested in the corpus of the magical papyri as an evidence of its being a derogatory, polemical term used by the opponents of sorcery in their attacks against its practitioners.

and Jewish writers who were faced with the dogmatic paradox that a mere sorcerer had managed to invoke a prophet like Samuel. We mention by way of example: Eusebius' *Demonstratio Evangelica* 6.20ff.; Origenes' *De Engrastrimytho*; Hippolytus' fragment *De Engrastrimytho*; Gregorius of Nyssa's *Epistula ad Theodosium Episcopum de Pythonissa*; Ioannes Damascenus' *Epistula ad Theophilum Imperatorem de Sanctis et Venerandis*; Georgius Monachus' *Chronica* 168ff. and others.

On the other hand, authors who belong to the pagan tradition or comment on pagan literature are clearly unfamiliar with the necromantic content of the word. The lexicographer Erotianus enters in his lexicon to the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, probably with reference to the passage from *Epidemiae V*: «engastrimythoi: also called *pythons* by some; the word occurs only once [i.e. in the

31 The word is used by Jewish authors who write in Greek: Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* VI 327ff. (J. THACKERAY, R. MARCUS, L. H. FELDMAN and A. WIKGREN [London, Cambridge, Massachusetts: LOEB 1926-1965]); Philo, *De Somniis* I 220, 8 (P. SAVINEL [Paris: Du Cerf 1962]), (both connected with the LXX and commenting on parts of it); *Oracula Sibyllina* III 226 (J. GEFFCKEN, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* [Leipzig 1902]) – all based in Alexandria. See the description in Josephus, who has already taken the meaning from the LXX *AJ* VI 330: τὸ μάρ τῶν ἐγκαστριμυθῶν γένος δύναν τὰς τῶν νεκρῶν ψυχὰς δὲ τῶν ἐκεῖνων τοὺς δικτύει τὰς ὁδηγήσαν ('the engrastrimythoi conjure up the souls of the dead and through them foretell what is to happen in the future to those who are in need of knowing'). Surprisingly, Philo never makes the connection between necromancy and ventriloquism, and when he mentions necromancy, he does not use the word *ἐγκαστριμὺς*: *De Specialibis Legibus* I 62-63 (S. DANIEL [ed.] [Paris: Du Cerf 1975]).


33 Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, in I. A. HEIKEL (ed.), *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte (= GSC*) (Leipzig 1913); Origenes, *De engastrimytho*, E. KLOSTERMANN and P. NAUTIN (eds.), *GSC* 3 (Leipzig 1983); Hippolytus, *Fragmentum de engastrimytho*, G. H. BONWETSCH and H. ACHELIS (eds.), *GSC* (Leipzig 1897); Gregorius, *Epistula ad Theodosium Episcopum de Pythonissa*, J. K. DOWNING, J. A. McDONOUGH and H. HORTNER (eds.), *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* III 2 (Leiden: Brill 1987); I. Damascenus, *Epistula ad Theophilum, Patrologia Graeca* vol. 95, col. 345; Georgius Monachus, *Chronica*, C. DE BOOR (ed.) (Leipzig: Teubner 1904). The only Christian father who mentions the ventriloquists in a context independent of the LXX is Clemens (O. STÀHLIN [ed.] [Leipzig: Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung 1936]). The association with necromancy is nevertheless still present as the necromancers are listed immediately after the ventriloquists (*Exhortation 2.11.2.8*). In his *Paedagogus* 2.1.15.4 the demon of gluttony is compared with the demon of the ventriloquists.
Corpus Hippocraticum]"; at about the same time (first cent. AD) Plutarch speaks about the ventriloquists in similar terms: «For it is silly and utterly childish to believe that God himself, like the ventriloquists called Eurykleis in the past and now pythons, enters the bodies of the diviners and speaks using their mouth and voice as instruments» 35. This is a most interesting testimony for us, as he connects the term with the oracles of the gods, probably in the original sense of these ventriloquists, who claimed to be possessed by the god 36, who spoke through them. In fact, the term is regularly connected by the lexicographers with python, an inspired prophet or soothsayer, and with Eurykles, well-known to be a ventriloquio, but not a necromancer.

The sound effects produced during ventriloquism become the target of Lucian’s humour in Lexiphanes 20, 23: «Lex.: There you are! You convinced me! I am drinking! Alas! What is this? Lots of stomach rumbling! As though I had swallowed a ventriloquist!» 37.

Galen in his lexicon to the Corpus Hippocraticum –compiled sometime in the course of the second cent. AD– provides a concise description of the ventriloquist: «engastrimythoi: those who speak with the mouth closed so as to give the impression that they speak from the belly» 38.

While necromantic connotations are impressively absent in the pagan line of tradition, the Christian exegesis also ignores the pagan terms of the discussion. Three exceptions will be mentioned:

36 Cf. also Cyrillus, Commentarius in Isaiam 70, 240 (Patrologia Graeca vol. 70, coll. 9-1449).
38 Lexinarum seu dictionum exoletarum Hippocratis explicatio 19, 94, 10 (in C. G Kuhn [ed.], Galeni opera omnia [Leipzig 1821-1823]): οἱ κεκλεισμένοι τούς στόματος φθέγγομεν, διὰ τὸ δοκεῖν ἐκ τῆς γαστρὸς φθέγγεσθαι.
A) Photius in his Bibliotheca (ninth cent. AD) lists various types of magic mentioned by Iamblichus in his Babyloniciaca, a second cent. AD novel in Greek. The author of this novel claims Babylonian origin «and he mentions magic by hail, magic by reptiles, necromancy and the ventriloquist, called Eurycles by the Greeks and Sakchouras by the Babylonians» 39. If Photius has reproduced the original with accuracy 40, then the juxtaposition of necromancy and ventriloquism could mean that in Iamblichus’ mind the two activities were closely associated. But Iamblichus was undoubtedly «an Oriental by birth» 41 (either Babylonian or Syrian) writing in Greek in the second half of the second cent. AD; in this context, his familiarity with the fusion of the two forms of divination is not difficult to comprehend.

B) In the biblical commentaries of Theodoretus, bishop of Cyrus (fifth cent. AD), the identification of ventriloquists and necromancers coexists with a range of pagan terms, never before associated with necromancy. In QOct 181, he asks: «What is a ventriloquist? Certain people, urged by demons, cheated many a fool, alleging that they could prophesy; these were called εντερομάντειες [‘diviners through the innards’] by the Greeks because they gave the impression that the demon spoke from inside them» 42. In the CommIsa, he writes: «... who [sc. the Jews]...»
were always slaves of false belief and trafficked with the dead asking them about the living and looked around for στερνομάντεις ['diviners from the chest'], but did not believe in the true miracles of the Apostles» 43. And further: «And they will consult their gods and idols, the ones who speak from the earth and the ventriloquists. He says that they who lack faith will resort to oracles and to the dead, they will call the στερνομάντεις ...» 44. Theodoretus’ wide ranging knowledge of Greek authors, especially Plato, is well-known. The question of his familiarity with Greek terms of divination is in itself intriguing.

C) Cyrillus too seems to have an acquaintance with the pagan tradition, when he describes the ventriloquists as those claiming to be possessed by «some gods» who dwell in their bellies and talk through them 45. His knowledge of the «pagan» meaning of the term proves, as in the case of Theodoretus, his double source of information.

5. THE EVIDENCE OF THE LEXICOGRAPHERS

The picture that has emerged so far is the following: in the pagan tradition, the term ἐγαστρίμυθος was applied to the inspired diviner who delivered his prophecy without opening his mouth (Galien). Noises were audible either from the chest (Corpus Graeca vol. 6, coll. 1249-1400): πῶς διὰ τῶν καλοκαίνων ἐγαστρίμυθουν οἱ δαίμονες φθέγγονται (‘how do the demons speak through the so-called engastrimythoi?’).

43 Commentarium in Isaiah 3, 696-705 (Patrologia Graeca vol. 81, coll. 216-493): τῇ γὰρ πλάνῃ παρὰ πάντα τὸν βίον δεδολευκότες καὶ νεκροίς κηρύσσοντες καὶ τοῖς νεκροῖς περί τῶν ξόντων ἐρωτάντες καὶ τοῖς στερνομάντεσις περισσοκούντες τοῖς ἀληθείᾳ τῶν ἄστιστολον οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν θαμμασίν.

44 Commlsa 6, 234: Καὶ ἐπικρίνομεν τούς θεούς αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ ἀγάλματα αὐτῶν καὶ τοὺς ἐκ τῆς γῆς φανοῦντας καὶ τοὺς ἐγαστρίμυθους. Οἱ δὲ ἐπιστούντες φησι τὰ μαντεῖα περισσοτέρους καὶ νεκροῖς κηρύσσονται καὶ στερνομάντεσις καὶ στερνομάντεσις καὶ στερνομάντεσις.

45 Commlsa 70, 240 (Patrologia Graeca vol. 70, coll. 9-1449): 'Ἄλλοι ἤμεῖς, φησι, κἂν εἰ προσεῖτο τις, λέγον προσόπασε τοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς φανοῦντας, τοῦτος ἐστι, τοὺς προσεῖτοντες ἄναφέρειν τοὺς νεκροὺς καὶ δύσερ ὡς ἄνδρον ζητεῖσθαι τὰς μαντεῖας. ἦγου τοὺς ἐγαστρίμυθους· οἱ προσεῖτονται μὲν θεοὺς τίνας ἔχειν εἰς τὴν κολίαν, οὕτω τοίς προσοίσῃ τὰ παρ’ ἐκείνων λαλεῖν, μὴ προσεῖσθαι τὴν συμβουλήν. Φανοῦσι γὰρ ἀπὸ μόνης τῆς ἑαυτὺν κολίας.' (If somebody approaches you, says the prophet, urging you to seek help from those who speak from the earth, i.e. those who pretend to conjure up the dead and to produce oracles from Hades, i.e. the engastrimythoi who pretend to have some kind of gods in their belly and to convey to the consultants their messages- do not accept their advise. For they simply speak nonsense).
or the belly of the diviner (Lucian). As for the prophesying voice, the crucial question is whether one or two voices are audible and where the voice was perceived to be located. *Python* is the alternative name for these diviners, current from at least the first cent. AD onwards.

From the second century AD onwards, the word becomes the subject of a number of lexicographical entries which yield some related terms. The entry *engaстримythos* in Aelius Dionysius' atticistic compilation *'Αττικά Ονόματα (Attic Words)* was the first of this sort. If its reconstruction by modern scholarship is accurate and the attribution correct, subsequent entries in Hesychius, Photius, Suidas and partly the Platonic scholia, stem - albeit not in a straightforward way - from Aelius Dionysius. The term *στερνόμαντις* first occurs in the above entry; Pollux, who also mentions it, attributes it to Sophocles.

Hesychius, the fifth cent. AD lexicographer from Alexandria, includes the word in his lexicon of rare poetic and dialectical words: *engaстримythos*: called *engaстрimantis* by some, *sternomantis* by others.

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47 H. Erbse (ed.), *Untersuchungen zu den attizistischen Lexika* (Berlin: de Gruyter 1950), Epsilon 2, 2: ἕγαστριμάντις ὅ ἐν γαστρί μαντευόμενος τούτον καὶ ἕγαστριμάντιν καλοῦσιν, δὲ νῦν τινες Πόθανα φασιν, Σοφοκλῆς δὲ στερνοκόμαντιν, Πλάτων ὁ φιλόσοφος Εὐρυκλῆς ἀπὸ Εὐρυκλῆος τοῦστοι ἀντίκας, Ἀριστοφάνης Ἰππίζις· μημοσεύμενος τὴν Εὐρυκλῆος μαντευμα καὶ δίδοναιν. Φιλόσοφος δὲ ἐν τρίτη Περὶ μαντικῆς καὶ γυναῖκας ἔγαστριμάντιος φησίν (*engaстрimythos*: the diviner by means of the belly, called also *engaстрimantis* and nowadays *python* by some, *sternomantis* by Sophocles and Eurykles by Plato on account of a diviner called Eurykles. Aristophanes in the *Wasps* writes: «taking his cue from the prophetic device of Eurykles». Philochoros in the third book of his treatise *On Divination* mentions women ventriloquists").


The mode of divination is also mentioned by Plato in the *Sophist*. This sort of diviner is called nowadays *python*: «ἐν στερνόμαντισιν ἔγαστριμυθοῖς» used by Sophocles in the play *Aíχμαλοτίδες* (*The Captive Women*); «python: engrafismythis or engrafimantis or in Byzantine terms python; a prophesying demon» 50.

Photius, the patriarch and scholar, speaks in detail about the ‘spirit of the belly’ (*Epist.* 151 L.-W.). He refers to the use of the terms *enteromantis* and *engastrimantis* as alternatives for *engrafismythis*. His explanation, however, that Sophocles and Plato replaced the above terms with *sternomantis* and *Eurykles*, respectively, because the former sounded vulgar, is an exercise in subjective aesthetics 51.

The encyclopaedic dictionary Suidas reads: *engegrafimantis; called python by some, sternomantis by Sophocles and Eurykles by Plato on account of a diviner called Eurykles. Aristophanes in the *Wasps* writes: “taking his cue from the prophetic device of Eurykles”. Philochoros in the third book of his treatise *On Divination* mentions women ventriloquists. The latter summon up the souls of the dead; one of them was consulted by Saul to conjure up the ghost of prophet Samuel» 52. The word ἔγαστριμυθοῦς further occurs in Suidas three times, once s.v. *telesphoros*: «perfect, diviner, engrafismythis» 53 and twice in entries reproducing the text of the LXX. In the light of all this, the association of ventriloquism with


52 *Suidae Lexicon*, *Epsilon* 45, 2 (cf. n. 6): ἔγαστριμυθός: ἔγαστριμυθιντίς ὁ νῦν τινες Πόθωνα, Σοφοκλῆς δὲ στερνόμαντις, Πλάτων, ὁ φιλόσοφος Εὔρυκλεία ἀπὸ Εὐρυκλείου τοιουτοῦ μαντείας. Ἀριστοφάνης Σφηξι: μιμησάμενος τὴν Εὐρυκλέος μαντείαν καὶ διάνοιαν. Φιλόσοφος δὲ ἐν γὰρ περὶ μαντικῆς καὶ γνωστῆς ἐγαστρίμυθος, αὐτὶ τὰς τῶν τεθνηκότων ψυχὰς ἑξεκαλύπτω, μὴ δὲ αὐτῶν ἐχρήσατο Σαουλ, ἢ τὰς ἑξεκαλύπτο τὴν ψυχὴν Σαμουὴλ τοῦ προφήτη. 53 *Suidae Lexicon*, *Tau* 266, 1: τέλεσφόρος: τέλειος, μάντις, ἐγαστρίμυθος.
necromancy in the last part of the entry ἐγγαστρίμυθος clearly originates from the compiler’s Christian sources 54.

6. EURYKLES

Eurykles emerges for the first time in the parabasis of Aristophanes’ Wasps 55 (1015-1022). The poet rebukes his audience and complains that he has been wronged by them. In the past, he explains, he did good to them secretly, ἐπέροις ποιηταῖς 56: in emulation of the diviner Eurykles, he slipped into other poets’ bellies and poured out lots of comic material 57; after that, he took his chances openly and held the reins of his own Muse and not those of other poets’. The passage does not lend itself to easy interpretation and has perplexed both ancient and modern interpreters: «Eurykles was a diviner manifesting himself through others; the poet says that like Eurykles I also gave to others» explain the scholia R (1019b, 2R); «that person, Eurykles, was called engastrimythos because he delivered prophecies to the Athenians by means of a demon inside him. The poet claims that he did the same thing in his poetry, using others as helpers ... hence all diviners assumed the collective name Εὐρυκλείδαι or engastritai» 58 explain another group of scholiasts. W. Starkie and D. McDowell 59 agree in that the voice came from the belly of other people as the diviner placed his familiar spirit inside them. Sommerstein maintains that «... Eurycles was not a human practitioner of prophecy, but the name of the spirit who was supposed

54 In the same vein cf. JACOBY FGrH IIIb (Suppl.) 328 vol. II (Notes-Addenda-Corrigenda-Index) p. 263, n. 1.
55 Staged at the Lenaean of 422 BC. Edited by V. COULON (Paris: Les Belles Lettres 1923-1930). For more editions, see below, ns. 59-60.
56 τὰ μὲν οὐ φανερῶς ἐπικουρών ἄλλα κρῆβδην ἔτεροις ποιηταῖς.
57 Βεσπαί 1019-20: ... μημησάμενος τὴν Εὐρυκλέεως μαντείαν καὶ διάνοιαν, εἰς ἄλλοτριας γαστέρας ἐνδός κομφοδικά πολλά χέσσατι ...
58 In Vespae 1019b, 8 (W. J. W. KOSTER [ed.], Scholia in Aristophanem, Pars II. Fasc. I. Scholia utera et recentiora in Aristophanis Vespas (Groningen 1978): ἐγγαστρίτι ταῖς ἐπὶ δὲ καὶ Εὐρυκλείδαι ἐκαλοῦντο ἐντεύθεν πάντες οἱ μαντευόμενοι.
to speak through mediums giving tongue to a voice not their own» 60.

The same Eurykles appears in Plato’s Sophist 252C. One of the conversants comments on the contradictions arising from the position that no alternative names for things can be used because then things partake of the effect produced by other things. «... and they [sc. those holding this position] do not need others to refute them but, as the saying goes, they have the enemy and future opponent in their own home and always carry him around, muttering indistinctly from within like the absurd Eurykles» 61.

The Platonic analogy between the inward voice of opposition and the voice that comes from Eurykles’ belly, suggests ventriloquism, rather than the intrusion of the spirit of Eurykles in other people’s bellies. This is corroborated by the scholia to the passage: «The expression Eurykles is proverbial, applied to those who with their prophecies cause harm to themselves. For Eurykles claimed that he had a demon in his belly urging him to prophesy; hence he was called engastrimythos. He once prophesied unpleasant things to someone and was badly dismissed [...]». Another group of scholia reads: «This is a proverbial expression applied to those who cause harm to themselves through prophecy. It originated from the diviner Eurykles, a seer-ventriloquist; hence all seer-diviners came to be called Eurykleis. Ventriloquist is the one who divines from the belly. Also called engastrimantis and now python; Sophocles sternomantis ...» 62.

61 Plato Sophista 252C: ὧν ἀλλὰν δέοντα τῶν ἐξελεγξόντων, ἀλλὰ τὸ λεγόμενον οἴκοθεν τῶν πολέμιων καὶ ἑναντιωσόμενον ἔχοντες, ἐντὸς ἑπορθεγόμενον ὅσπερ τὸν ἄστορα Εὐρυκλέα περιφέροντες ἂεί πορεύονται.
62 Scholia in Platonem vetera Dial. Sph Stephanus 252c 11 (G. C. GREENE [éd.] [Haverford 1938]): Εὔρυκλέα. (1) παρομία Εὐρυκλῆς ἐπὶ τῶν ἐαυτοῖς κακῶς μαντευομένων. Εὐρυκλῆς γὰρ ἐδόκει δαιμόνα τινα ἐν τῇ γαστρὶ ἔχειν, τὸν ἑγεμονευμένον αὐτῷ περὶ τῶν μελλόντων λέγειν· θέναι καὶ ἐγγαστριμύθος ἐκαλεῖτο. οὕτως δὲ προειπὼν ποτὲ τίνι τὰ μὴ καθ’ ἥδονην κακῶς ἀπῆλλαξεν. ἀτὸν τὸν μὴ ἔδρασιν ἄλλ’ ἂεί ἑκκοσίζοντα λέγει. (2) παρομία ἐπὶ τῶν ἐαυτοῖς τινα κακῶς μαντευομένων, λεγόμενη ἐξ Εὐρυκλέως ἐγγαστριμύθου μάντεως, ἀφ’ ὧν καὶ γένος τις μάντεως Εὐρυκλείς ἔλεγχον. ἐγγαστριμύθος δὲ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐν γαστρὶ μαντευόμενος, τοῦτον καὶ ἐγγαστριμύθος τὸν τὸν τινὰς Πόσιονόρας, Σοφοκλῆς δὲ στερνόμαντιν, καὶ Ἀριστοφάνης ἐν Σφῆξι—μαντεύμενος τὴν Εὐρυκλέους μαντεύων καὶ διάνοιαν. Φιλέχρος
The proverbial status of the expression is also attested by Pseudo-Plutarch in the treatise *On the Proverbs used by the Alexandrians* 63, a collection of proverbs arranged probably by Seleucus (early first cent. AD) 64.

7. INTERPRETATION

The nature of ventriloquism and its place in Greek divination appears to be a nebulous matter. The term εγαστρίμοθος is firmly attested in the fourth cent. BC. Its status in the lexicographic tradition is that of a rare word. Late Antiquity and Byzantine sources, the mutual dependence of which cannot be established with certainty, mention as alternatives the terms engastrimantis, engastrites and enteromantis. Sternomantis and generic term Eurykleis are, according to some of the same sources, the corresponding terms for ventriloquist in the fifth cent. BC. The expression Eurykles seems to have acquired a certain proverbial status at some stage (Ps.-Plutarch and Schol. Plat. Soph. 252C) 65. Python becomes current from the first cent. AD onwards.

It is further unclear whether the above terms were originally equivalent to each other or whether they came to be associated later by lexicographers and commentators. The initial meaning of στρόμαντις is bound to remain obscure due to a lack of context 66. The references to Eurykles in Aristophanes and Plato are hard to reconcile. The Platonic picture is that of a seer with an inner divinatory voice. In the *Wasps*, on the contrary, an analogy

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65 The proverbial status of the expression is implied by Platonic formulation τὸ λεγόμενον. Alternatively, the proverb could have been invented *ad hoc* by later commentators and passed into the paroemiographic literature. A possible link between the Platonic scholia and paroemiographic literature could have been Pausanias’ atticistic lexicon (*Cf. G. Wentzel, »Über den attizistischen Glossen in dem Lexikon des Photios«, Hermes 30 [1895] pp. 367-384: p. 373).

66 Could it be associated with θημαίνωντις ‘following the commands of my heart’ (Aeschylus *Persae* 224) as suggested by Liddell - Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, given that στρέψα in Sophocles is the seat of the emotions?
seems to be drawn between the voice of the poet heard through other poets and that of the seer. However, the formulation εἰς ἄλλησις γαστέρας ἕν ὅς does not of necessity establish a full analogy with Eurykles. The expression μιμητάμενος τῆν Εὐρυκλέους μαντείαν καὶ διϊόροιμα could well operate as a proverb meaning 'causing harm to myself like Eurykles'; then a broad, two-fold analogy might be at work in the passage between: a) the harm that both poet and Eurykles suffered, and b) the idea of the poet’s voice coming through other poets’ mouths and that of Eurykles’ demon speaking through the seer’s mouth.

Two further considerations might reinforce this argument: first, that the formulations of the passage are determined by the fact that the poet and not Eurykles is at the center of the description and second, that the ideas of harm and risk are instrumental for the passage (lines 1017, 1021).

Dominance of the field by female practitioners is weakly attested (Hippocratic author 67 and perhaps Philochoros). When it comes to the description of the voice or noises produced by the ventriloquist, the vocabulary suggests abnormal, muffled, almost imperceptible undertones.

Plato and Plutarch use forms of the verb ὑποθέτεσθαι, the Hippocratic author a form of the verb ὑποφορεῖν, the implication being that the voice or noise produced is slight, obscure, barely audible 68. Plutarch speaks of temporary possession of the bodies of the prophets by the divining god; by analogy, the ventriloquists were private diviners who claimed possession by a divining spirit 69. The possibility of a dialogue between the spirit and diviner during the consultations seems very remote 70. As to what really hap-

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67 The author of the passage of Epidemae V could have chosen the feminine by analogy to the gender of the patient.

68 Cf. similar compound verbs ὑποφορέσθαι and ὑποβορεῖσθαι in the Corpus Hippocraticum; ὑποβρέμειν Aeschylus Prometheus vinctus 433; ὑπογελάν Plato Charmides 162B; ὑποκλάειν Sophocles Ichn. 171; ὑποκλαίειν Aeschylus Agamemnon 69; ὑποκρίζειν Lucianus Dialogi mortuorum 6.4; ὑποπενάζειν Sophocles Ajax 322, 1001; etc. The nuance common to all those compounds is ‘low, discreet, secret, slight, almost imperceptible’.

69 The sources are not explicit as to whether the spirit dwelt permanently in them or possessed them during the divining sessions.

70 The impression that ὑποθέτεσθαι might mean ‘to carry on a dialogue with them’ is conveyed in Plato by the context, i.e. the idea of a secret inward opposition, while in Plutarch it is simply not there.
pened, Dodds was probably right to suggest trance. What remains unclear is whether the notion of ventriloquism, i.e. the idea that the voice is produced in the belly, originated in the claims of the ventriloquists themselves or represents a contemptuous dismissal of their art as deceitful.

No compelling evidence suggests that these diviners were associated with conjuration of the dead during classical times. Their involvement in such activities might have increasingly been the case in Hellenistic Alexandria. This fact was consolidated in the literary tradition through the choice of the term ἐγγαστριμυθός by the translators of the LXX to render Hebrew terms with unambiguous necromantic associations. Thus, the image of the seer-ventriloquist is radically transformed in Late Antiquity. He is not the atopos, the ‘strange, paradoxical’ medium, divining by means of his belly-voice, but the dark conjurer of the dead, an abhorrent and condemned sorcerer.

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71 «Blessing» pp. 71-72.
72 We would like to thank Natalio Fernández Marcos for his advice and help, and Abraham Marrache for the revision of the English expression in this paper.

The article by J. T. Katz and K. Volk, «Mere bellies?: A new look at Theogony 26-8», Journal of Hellenic Studies 120 (2000) pp. 122-131, appeared in print after the first submission of the present paper. Our point of view is that the passage of Job 32,19 did not generate the rendering of Hebrew ʿāb as engastrimythos in the translation of the LXX (Katz - Volk p. 126, n. 33; cf. our n. 28). We also disagree with these scholars’ interpretation of Eurykles as ‘the name of the demon inside the belly’ (p. 125).
RESUMEN

Esta contribución ha pretendido rastrear el término griego ἄγαστριμυθος, utilizado por los traductores de Septuaginta con claras connotaciones necrománticas. Sin embargo, la literatura griega anterior a esta traducción no proporciona elementos de juicio para pensar que estas connotaciones ya eran inherentes en época clásica a un término, que significaba ‘adivino inspirado’, aunque sus características tampoco quedan demasiado claras.

SUMMARY

This contribution pursues a lexicographical study of the Greek term ἄγαστριμυθος, used by the translators of Septuaginta to render Hebrew terms with unambiguous necromantic connotations. However, the Greek literature previous to this translation cannot yield sufficient evidence that these connotations were inherent to the term in the Classical period. The term signified initially a sort of ‘inspired diviner’ who prophesied by means of a belly-spirit; further details about his profession are however somewhat unclear.