

## Transferring Divinatory Practices: An Anatolian Intermediary Between Assyria and Greece

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**Abstract.** *The art of Babylonian divination was adopted by the neighbouring cultures and absorbed. Definitive evidence for direct contact between Assyria and the Ionian is lacking in Homer. However, proceeding step by step, we have confirmed Assyrian-Hittite contacts and Hittite-Lyidian contacts, and later Persian-Lyidian and Lyidian-Greek (Lyidian-Ionian) relations. We could suppose that Mesopotamian influence reached the Greek world, and this flow continued for centuries but was subject to many regional modifications. The first independent diviners were probably the itinerant experts, many of whom were non-Greeks originating from the Near East. Interactions related to war are evident in many sources; Greek mercenaries served in the East. The presence of Greek mercenaries in the army of Nebuchadnezzar is known from a poem of Alcaeus. It appears that the Hittites borrowed the methodology from the Babylonians via of the Hurrians (and/or Luwians), as many of the names for the parts and features are Hurrian. From the Hattusa archive, we know of 25 cuneiform texts relating to Ahhiyawa, with as many as seven of them being oracles. Among the Hittites, Arzawa was known as a famous center of divination, especially for the prevention of plagues. In the Iliad, Apollo from Troy was a god of such a type, and his sanctuary must have specialised in this kind of divination. Nearly all the divinatory branches were in use in the Hittite empire. The question remains only about the method of transmission of this divinatory knowledge and its accuracy to the original(s).*

**Rezumat.** *Arta divinației babiloniene a fost adoptată și absorbită de culturile învecinate. Dovezile unui contact direct între Asiria și Ionia lipsesc în textele lui Homer. Cu toate acestea, am demonstrat existența contactelor asiro-hitite și hittite-lidiene, iar mai târziu relațiile persano-lidiene și lidiene-grecești (lidiene-ioniene). Am putea presupune că influența mesopotamiană a ajuns în lumea greacă, iar acest flux a continuat timp de secole, dar a fost supus multor modificări regionale. Primii adoratori au fost probabil itineranți, dintre care mulți erau originari din Orientul Apropiat. Interacțiunile legate de război sunt evidente în multe surse: mercenarii greci au servit în Orient. Prezența mercenarilor greci în armata lui Nabucodonosor este cunoscută dintr-un poem al lui Alcaeus. Se pare că hitiții au împrumutat metodologia de la babilonieni prin intermediul hurrienilor (și/sau luwienilor), deoarece multe dintre denumirile părților și caracteristicilor sunt hurriene. Din arhiva Hattusa, cunoaștem 25 de texte cuneiforme referitoare la Ahhiyawa, dintre care aproximativ șapte sunt oracole. Printre hitiți, Arzawa era cunoscut ca un centru celebru de divinație, în special pentru prevenirea ciumei. În Illiada, Apollo din Troia era un astfel de zeu, iar sanctuarul său trebuie să se fi specializat în acest tip de divinație. Aproape toate ramurile divinatorii erau în uz în imperiul hitit. Întrebarea rămâne doar cu privire la metoda de transmitere a acestor cunoștințe divinatorii și la acuratețea lor față de cele originale.*

**Keywords:** Assyria, Anatolia, Greece, transfer, divination.

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## Introduction

The author explores the potential influence of Mesopotamian divination on Greek culture, beginning with the Mycenaeans, by examining its emergence as a distinct social practice featuring particular themes and rituals of divination. This article delves into the intricate relationships between Mesopotamian and Greek divinatory practices, highlighting their shared methodologies and the transmission of knowledge between these ancient cultures. The first challenge was selecting an appropriate title for the content under study. What is the most important issue addressed in the article? Contacts between the Mesopotamian and Hellenic worlds existed, and this is nothing new. Much more tangible is the flow of artistic influences<sup>2</sup> or heavy weaponry encountered by Greek mercenaries while serving in the Neo-Assyrian armies.

A colleague from my university, the classical philologist Bogdan Burliga, with whom I discussed this issue, asked whether there is evidence of direct borrowing of divination practices (all? selected? which ones specifically?). In his opinion, this is what the word ‘transfer’ suggests. So, the legitimate question is, is ‘transfer’ the right verb? Would not ‘adopt’ or ‘being inspired’ be more appropriate? The Greeks probably observed Assyrian divination practices and perhaps took the very idea of divination, among others, from Assyria. However, when transferring it to their own domains, did they apply it accurately and faithfully? Did they later modify it, only being under the influence of oriental inspirations? On the other hand, the term ‘inspiration’ is vague, and it is difficult, examining such rudimentary material, to be sure how to prove what ‘inspiration’ is.

In the end, I decided on the word ‘transfer’, with the emphasis that it is not about the transfer of things that, transported from point A to point B, are to remain the same. In the case of this article, it is about the transfer of ideas, ideologies, etc. and this does not mean that the same material or thought reaches from point A to point B, but rather that the original idea, as a result of this transfer, is modified and accepted to one’s own possibilities and imagination. According to *The Britannica Dictionary*, definition 3a states that it is: “to use (something, such as an idea, a skill, etc.) for a new or different purpose”.<sup>3</sup>

## Assyrian-Ionian relations

In the ancient world, divination was ubiquitous, forming a Near Eastern-Mediterranean *koine* of forms and traditions with local variants and intercultural infiltrations.<sup>4</sup> Ashurbanipal’s library contained over three hundred tablets devoted to lists of omens, more than any other class of document, encompassing every unusual occurrence in the heavens and on the earth.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> KÖSE 2012, vol. I, 330-9.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/transfer>.

<sup>4</sup> BOARDMAN, HAMMOND, vol. III, 1-31, 32-56.

<sup>5</sup> FLOWER 2008, 31-2; ULANOWSKI 2019.

In the second part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC texts of terrestrial, teratological, and physiognomic meaning were translated from the Akkadian language and found in Syria (Emar), Anatolia (Hattusa also Ḫattuša or Hattusas; Hittite: URUḪa-at-tu-ša) and Ugarit.<sup>6</sup> The art of Babylonian divination was adopted by the neighbouring cultures and translated into various languages: Ugaritic, Hurrian, Hittite, and Elamite. Babylonian influence extended as far as India, Egypt, and Greece.<sup>7</sup> Collections of *omina* from Mesopotamia dating to the 2nd millennium BC were also found at the courts of Iran. Divination was practiced in ancient Israel under Mesopotamian influence, as well as in Greece, Etruria, and Rome.<sup>8</sup>

The Hurrians served as intermediaries in spreading extispicy to Asia Minor.<sup>9</sup> Asia Minor was home to some of the oldest oracles in the Greek world and was the heartland of Greek prophetic practices, with legendary figures such as the Sibyls originating from there.<sup>10</sup> Cilicia located within the Assyrian empire at that time, likely felt the impact of Assyrian practices in divination.<sup>11</sup> The Hittites also had connections to this region.<sup>12</sup> Cicero, proconsul in Cilicia,<sup>13</sup> noted the special prestige attached to divination in this area.<sup>14</sup>

A well-known military clash between Greeks and Assyrians in Cilicia during the reign of Sennacherib is known through the late Armenian translation of the first book of Eusebius' *Chronica Bipartium*. Telmessos, located on the fringes of Lycia and Cilicia, was renowned in classical antiquity as *urbs religioissima* and the home of diviners, potentially serving as a significant link between Greeks and the ancient Near East.<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that there were two cities named Telmessos.<sup>16</sup> The one in Lycia, was famous for its seers, with some even journeying to distant Macedonia, highlighting the professional mobility among seers.<sup>17</sup> This city was famous for various divinatory techniques, with liver augury enjoying special status, possibly indicating an epoch when Carian mercenaries travelled to the Near East, similar to Greeks who would do so afterward.<sup>18</sup>

According to Christian writers, the Telmessians also practiced divination by dreams, further solidifying their mantic reputation. Oppenheim suggested that Hittite centers in Ionic

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<sup>6</sup> HEEßEL 2007, 8.

<sup>7</sup> KOCH-WESTENHOLZ 2000, 7; BACHVAROVA 2012; MAUL 2018, 176, 181.

<sup>8</sup> MAUL 2008, 370.

<sup>9</sup> POPKO 1995, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Paus. 10.12.1–4; ÖZYAR 2016.

<sup>11</sup> LANFRANCHI 2004, 481–96.

<sup>12</sup> STONEMAN 2011, 78.

<sup>13</sup> Cic. *De Div.* 1.1.2.

<sup>14</sup> See LEMCHE 1998, 55.

<sup>15</sup> Cic. *De Div.* 1.41.91.

<sup>16</sup> BACHVAROVA 2012, 157.

<sup>17</sup> HARVEY 1991, 245–58.

<sup>18</sup> Hdt. 2.152–4; DS 1.66.12–67.2.

Greece influenced Telmessos<sup>19</sup> and suggested Near Eastern influence on other Greek divinatory practices originating from there.<sup>20</sup> Herodotus recounts how the Persian general Mardonius sent a man called Mys to visit all the five oracles of Boeotia and Phocis (Apollo at Abae, Apollo Ismenios at Thebes, Apollo Ptoion at Ptoion, Amphiaraus at Oropos and Trophonius at Lebadeia) seeking signs for his forthcoming campaign. When Mys visited Apollo Ptoion, the oracle prophesized in the Carian language. Unfortunately, we do not know the decision of the oracle, but the implication is that Mardonius sent Alexander's son of Amyntas to Athens seeking for an alliance.<sup>21</sup>

The first known mention of the Ionians in an Akkadian text dates from shortly after 738 BC, in a letter where the Assyrian official in charge of Tyre and Sidon asks Tiglath-Pileser III to intervene against an Ionian attack.<sup>22</sup> While definitive evidence for direct contact between Assyria and Ionian is absent in Homer,<sup>23</sup> Assyrian-Hittite contacts<sup>24</sup> have been confirmed,<sup>25</sup> Assyrian-Phrygian and Hittite-Lyidian-Phrygian contacts (Gordion, the capital city of Phrygia had strong connections with Neo-Hittite kingdoms in ninth century).<sup>26</sup> Phrygians and Lydians at various times were in strong competition with each other. However, both, the Phrygians and the Lydians under the name of Maeonians were allied to Troy in the Homer's *Iliad* (*Il.* 2.864, 866). According to Herodotus (7.73), the Phrygians initially lived in Macedonia under the name of Briges and only after migrating to Asia changed their name. From the early 7th century BC, in the reigns of the Mermnad dynasty kings from Gyges onward, the Lydians gradually expanded as far east as the southern Black Sea shores.<sup>27</sup> Some inscriptions of Sargon II (721-705 BC) mentioned Mita who has been identified with the Midas, the Phrygian king, the son of Gordios.<sup>28</sup> According to the classical tradition, Midas of Phrygia and the Lydian kings offered gifts to Delphi and the eastern Aegean sanctuaries.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the Persian-Lyidian and Lydian-Greek (Lydian-Ionian) contacts were frequent.<sup>30</sup> The Hittite empire had economic,

<sup>19</sup> OPPENHEIM 1956, 239.

<sup>20</sup> NOEGEL 2007, 215–16, ref. 100–8; RUTHERFORD 2020, 142.

<sup>21</sup> Hdt. 8.133–6, ROSENBERGER 2003, 48–9, EIDINOW 2019, 56–7.

<sup>22</sup> ND 2715, SMITH 2013, 76.

<sup>23</sup> HAUBOLD 2013, 178; SCHROTT 2001.

<sup>24</sup> In this article, the author resigned from presenting the influence of Mesopotamia on Hittite because these are commonly known facts HAZENBOS 2007, 95–7; BACHVAROVA 2012, 153–8; FRANTZ-SZABÓ 2006, 2013–17.

<sup>25</sup> BECKMAN 1983, 97–114; RUTZ 2012, 171–88; MAUL 2018, 177–9.

<sup>26</sup> WITTKÉ 2022, 849.

<sup>27</sup> SHERRATT 2022, 129.

<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, mother of Midas should be skilled in divination: “The Telmissians were skillful in interpreting the meaning of divine manifestations, and the power of divination has been bestowed not only upon the men, but also upon their wives and children from generation to generation” (*Ar. An.* 2.3.3); GUNTER 2022, 169, 175.

<sup>29</sup> GUNTER 2022, 173, 180, 182, 185; NIEMEIER 2016.

<sup>30</sup> The Phrygians and the Lydians were claimed to have an ‘ethnic kinship’ with the Greeks (at least these from Peloponnese) (See MANOLEDAKIS 2022, 585), BEEKES 2003, 47–9.

diplomatic, and possibly religious contacts with the Mycenaeans, and Lydians. Therefore, we could suppose that Mesopotamian influence reached the Greek world, and that this flow continued for centuries but was subject to many regional modifications.

### **Hittite-Mycenaean contacts. The role of Milawata/Miletus**

Now, I will concentrate on Hittite-Mycenaean relations. The expansion of the Mycenaean world began after collapse of the Minoan palaces in c. 1420/1375 BC and reached its peak in the thirteenth century. Their expansionist activities led to conflicts of interest and tensions in their relations with the Hittite empire. The Mycenaean presence in Anatolia is well-documented in Hittite and Linear B textual and archaeological evidence.<sup>31</sup> The archaeological material, particularly seals, provides important and suggestive examples of the network of relations between the Near East and Aegean including the Minoan and Mycenaean world.<sup>32</sup> For the artistic motives, see for example.<sup>33</sup>

A crucial element in this complex puzzle is the history of Miletus. In the late 16th century BC Minoan immigrants established a colony in Miletus, known as Milawata/Millawanda/Millaunda in Hittite texts. According to Niemeier's excavations, Miletus could be safely considered a Cretan colony (Late Minoan IA-IB, c. 1600-1450 BC).<sup>34</sup> Greek mythical, literary, and archaeological sources support this; with accounts such as Pausanias' mentioning of Cretans landing in Miletus and, founding the city together with Carians<sup>35</sup>. Another variant of the story involves a son of Apollo named Miletos settling in Caria and establishing the city, which he named after himself.<sup>36</sup> Yet another version attributes the founding of Miletus to the Homeric hero Sarpedon, who led colonists from Crete to Miletus in Asia Minor (Str. 14.1.6). In Herodotus opinion, they were Lycians (after Lycus the son of Pandion), who emigrated from Crete led by Sarpedon.<sup>37</sup> But also, in Herodotus 1.146.2-3 we find the account according to which the Ionians expelled and killed Carians to marry their women and conquer the city.

In later centuries, Mycenaean interest in western Anatolia increased, particularly in cities like Miletus, Ephesos, Smyrna and the Larissa area. There was a substantial Mycenaean settlement in Miletus (Milawata, Milawa(n)ta) from c. 1400 BC, while the Hittites extended their territory claiming Milawata as their possession.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, not only Mycenaean

<sup>31</sup> MAGGIDIS 2007, 71; GENZ 2010, 13-22; MUHLY 2003, 23-35.

<sup>32</sup> See ARUZ 2008; REYES 2001.

<sup>33</sup> LAFFINEUR 1978; CROWLEY 1989; DEMARAGNE 2003.

<sup>34</sup> NIEMEIER 1998, 27-30; NIEMEIER 2008, 1-36.

<sup>35</sup> Homer mentioned the Carians as the inhabitants of Miletus and allies of Troy, see *Il.* 2.867-75. Strabo confirmed the participation of the Carians and added the mythical Leleges, see Str. 12.85, 7.7.2; Paus. 7.2.5; GORMAN 2004, 20, 168-71.

<sup>36</sup> FGH 70 F 3; FGH 31 F 45.

<sup>37</sup> See Hdt. 1.173; HILLER 1974/75, 301-5.

<sup>38</sup> BRYCE 2003, 199-212; GONZÁLEZ SALAZAR 2004, 77-122.

merchants had interests in this region, but Mycenaean kings were also politically, and military involved in this region. This is evident at least as early as 1320 BC, which year fell in the reign of the Hittite king Mursilis II's reign, when a Hittite rebel sought to ally himself with the king of Ahhiyawa (Ahhiya).<sup>39</sup>

The wall paintings depicting battle scenes, sieges and warriors found in the megaron of the palaces at Mycenae and Orchomenos in Boeotia likely reflect this turbulent period.<sup>40</sup> The memory of Orchomenos was still present in Homer (*Il.* 1.381–2). This city of Milawata was also under Ahhiyawan rule for some time.<sup>41</sup> The so-called 'Milawata letter' makes it clear that the Hittites later regained control of Milawata in 1320/1315 BC while suppressing an Arzawan revolt.<sup>42</sup> However, some scholars claim that Milawata was never ruled by the Hittites.<sup>43</sup>

In the Hittite sources, in the 'Madduwatta text' (KUB 14.1), a figure known as Attarssiya (Attarissiyas) described as a 'man of Ahhiya' appears. He was militarily active both in western Anatolia and on the island of Cyprus,<sup>44</sup> possibly leading attacks against Lukka (Lydia?), a Hittite vassal territory, and directly confronting the Hittite army. However, information about him is scant, and his exact roles, whether as a king or a military leader, remains unclear. From Hittite evidence, it seems he changed his allies during this politically turbulent period.<sup>45</sup>

### Greek mercenaries

According to Burkert, a highly mobile world of cultural interaction existed between the East and West in the Dark Ages and the early Archaic Periods. He argues that the first independent diviners were itinerant experts, many of whom were not Greeks but originated from the Near East.<sup>46</sup> A notable example of the Mesopotamian-Hittite 'exchange of experts' is a Babylonian doctor living in Hattusa.<sup>47</sup> West adds: "It is not easy to avoid the conclusion that at some stage of its history the Greek epic tradition has been strongly influenced by contacts with the Eastern tradition" further noting "It is hardly going too far to say that the whole picture of the gods in the *Iliad* is oriental".<sup>48</sup> The *Iliad*, indeed, took at least some of its shape in the Greek colonies of Asia Minor.<sup>49</sup> The Near Eastern motif of the 'seventh day' was used to indicate the rapid conclusion of a siege with declarations such as "for six days I besieged it, but on the

<sup>39</sup> KBo I 10 and KUB III 72 (CTH172) obv. 67–9; FINKELBERG 2007, 4, 167.

<sup>40</sup> See IMMERSWAHR 1990, 123–5, pl. 65.

<sup>41</sup> BRYCE 2003, 204.

<sup>42</sup> MAGGIDIS 2011, 80.

<sup>43</sup> SINGER 1983, 205–17; MEE 2008, 374.

<sup>44</sup> BRYCE 1998, 140.

<sup>45</sup> KUB XIV 1 = KBo XIX 38, see SCHUOL 2002, 348.

<sup>46</sup> See BURKERT 1993; BARNETT 1956, 212–38.

<sup>47</sup> BRYCE 2003, 63–75; GÖRKE 2007, 241; FRANTZ-SZABÓ 2006, 2009.

<sup>48</sup> WEST 1988, 169.

<sup>49</sup> MORRIS 1997, 599–623; BRYCE 2004, 85–91; KITTS 2013, 108.

seventh day I conquered it, in just one day” although sometimes this period is extended to seven months or even years.<sup>50</sup>

The interactions related to war are evident in many sources because Greek mercenaries served in the East.<sup>51</sup> The Neo-Assyrian empire influenced Lydia and neighbouring Caria.<sup>52</sup> The Lydians, under the dynasty of the Mermnad kings, were sent to aid the Egyptians in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>53</sup> The Carians, renowned as mercenaries in the Archaic Age, date back back to the first half of the 7th century BC. Due to the harsh and impoverished nature of their homeland, they hired themselves out as mercenaries. According to Herodotus, the Greeks credited the Carians with three military innovations: the introduction of shield handles; the decoration of shields with emblems; and attachment of crests to helmets.<sup>54</sup> Owing to this last invention, the Persians dubbed them “cocks”. Mainly during the 26th Dynasty, the Carians served in the Egyptian army and were regarded as highly loyal soldiers to the Pharaohs. Ancient Egyptian sources described them as “the bronze men who came from the sea”. Herodotus, who came from the Carian city of Halicarnassus, informs us that the Carians emerged “as mercenaries in Egypt in the 7th century BC when they teamed up with the Ionians to help Psammetichus I around 664 BC assume power as founder of the 26th (Saite) Dynasty”. Psammetichus I was told by oracle that ‘bronze men’ from the sea would come and help him one day. This prophecy was fulfilled when the Carians, clad in metal armour, arrived from the sea, and “he opened his heart to them and took them into his army and reunited Egypt,” which at that time was divided. Later, Pharaoh Amasis, a descendant of Psammetichus, formed his bodyguard from Carians, whom he resettled in Memphis; a quarter of the city was named Caricon, while its inhabitants were called Caromemphites. Several texts in the Carian language have been discovered in the Memphite cemetery near modern Saqqara, where Caromemphites were buried. Carians also joined the campaign of Psammetichus II, and “the Carian soldiers who immortalized their names at Abu Simbel temple participated in the attack on Nubia. The largest number of inscriptions in the Carian language was in the form of graffiti written by mercenaries on rocks, temples, and tombs mostly in Egypt and Sudan. More than 300 inscriptions in Carian have been found, with about 200 of them located in Egypt, namely in Memphis, Sais, Buto, north Saqqara, Luxor, Elephantine Island, Abu Simbel, Silsilis, Buhen, Gebel Al-Sheikh Suleiman and Khartoum”.<sup>55</sup>

An ancient tradition holds that Arselis of Mylasa, from a Carian dynasty, and his forces fought alongside Gyges in his quest for the Lydian throne. Assyrian and Greek sources indicate

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<sup>50</sup> See LIVERANI 2017, 126.

<sup>51</sup> BURKERT 1993, 25; ROP 2019; MORRIS 2022, 105-6.

<sup>52</sup> PARPOLA 2003, 102-3.

<sup>53</sup> SHERRATT 2022, 131.

<sup>54</sup> Hdt. 1.171-4.

<sup>55</sup> See PFEIFFER 2010, 15-24.

that Gyges employed mercenaries. The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal accused Gyges of sending troops to support rebels in Egypt.<sup>56</sup> In the opinion of Haider, mercenaries from Caria and other Anatolian regions, as well as Greeks, served in the Assyrian army as early as the reign of Esarhaddon.<sup>57</sup> As mentioned earlier, Herodotus recounted that thirty thousand Carians and Ionians joined in the service of the Egyptian pharaoh Psammetichus I.<sup>58</sup> Greek mercenaries in the Egyptian service are documented in 591 BC.<sup>59</sup> Herodotus does not note that Psammetichus I initially rose to power as an Assyrian vassal. After his father's death, he fled to his overlord Ashurbanipal and returned within the same year with a victorious Assyrian army. Assyrian sources concerning the reconquest of Egypt make no mention of Carian or Greek mercenaries. However, a much later source, Polyaeus' *Strategemata* dating to the mid-2nd century AD, states that when Psammetichus defeated Tementhes (=Tantamani) in a battle at Memphis, the Carian Pigres served as his advisor, and he had many Carian mercenaries at his side (Some sources note the presence of the Carian and Ionian mercenaries in Egypt.<sup>60</sup> The various Greek terms for mercenary, *epikouros* (ally), *misthophoros* (wage-earner) and *xenos* (stranger), permit an ambiguity of interpretation regarding the nature of their service. Since at least the 7th century BC, Greek hoplites have been documented fighting in Egypt and other regions in the Near East.<sup>61</sup> Alyattes (610–560 BC), the father of Croesus hired Colophonian cavalrymen and employed Alcaeus of Lesbos.<sup>62</sup> There is significant archaeological evidence of Greek mercenaries in Phoenicia and Palestine, such as in Tell Kabiri and Mezad Hashavyahu.<sup>63</sup>

Alcaeus, a poet and a leader of an aristocratic faction in Mytilene, wrote at the transition between the 7th and 6th centuries BC. He praised the service of his brother Antimenidas rendered to the Babylonians as an ally (*symmachos*); or more accurately, as a mercenary in Nebuchadnezzar's army)<sup>64</sup>:

You have come from the ends of the earth, having.

A sword with ivory hilt and bound with gold ....<sup>65</sup>.

Niemeier suggests that Antimenidas may have participated in the capture of Ashkelon by the Babylonians in c. 604 BC.<sup>66</sup> During this period, a bronze-faced, leather-backed shield of Ionian origin was discovered in the city of Carchemish, where Nebuchadnezzar defeated the

<sup>56</sup> Hdt. 1.7.2, see COGAN, TADMOR 1977, 65–84; Lanfranchi 2011, 234–5; Fuchs 2002, 415.

<sup>57</sup> HAIDER 1996, 95.

<sup>58</sup> Hdt 2.152, 2.163.1–3.

<sup>59</sup> See ROP 2019, chap. 4, 6.

<sup>60</sup> See Polyaeus. 7.3; NIEMEIER 2001, 17–18; SPALINGER 1976, 134–6, 138.

<sup>61</sup> See WHEELER 2007, LXI.

<sup>62</sup> YAVUZ, KÖRPE 2009, 439, ref. 8–13.

<sup>63</sup> See ROLLINGER 2020, 185.

<sup>64</sup> HAUBOLD, 2013, 74–5; TRUNDLE 2013, 330; MacGINNIS 2010, 160; FANTALKIN, LYTLE 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Alcaeus, fr. 350, see RAAFLAUB 2004, 208.

<sup>66</sup> NIEMEIER 2001, 18.



Egyptian pharaoh Necho II (610–595 BC).<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, it is plausible that some personal names of eventual Greek origin appeared in the Taymā inscriptions. These individuals seem to have been associated with the Babylonian king Nabonidus, who spent ten years in the Oasis of Taymā. These officers held high-ranking military positions and were part to the royal court.<sup>68</sup> If indeed these officers were Greeks, this would represent the earliest authentic Near Eastern testimony of Greek soldiers serving in the Babylonian army. Their extended tenure as officers likely afforded them the opportunity to learn the language and religious practices, including divinatory military customs.

Evidence for the mobility of seers in the ancient Near East is also apparent. This theme is present in biblical narratives as well. The renown of the prophet Elisha was such that he was summoned to the Syrian court (2 Kgs 5.8). In a biblical account, the king of Moab sought the services of a seer named Balaam from Pethor, identified as Pitru on the Euphrates south of Carchemish. Although summoned to curse Israel, the ‘spirit of God’ prompted the seer to pronounce blessings instead.<sup>69</sup>

In the Amarna correspondence requests for both physicians and seers are documented, made by the king of Ugarit as well as by the king of the Hittites and Alasia (Cyprus). King Muwatallis of Hattusa even ordered a conjurer from Babylon.<sup>70</sup> Babylonians dispatched physicians and exorcists to the Hittite court at Hattusa during the 14th and 13th centuries BC. Diviners, along with other specialists possessing esoteric knowledge such as doctors, augurs, and exorcists, were circulated among the elite during the Late Bronze Age and may have been presented as special ‘gifts’ by their kings.<sup>71</sup>

### **Divinatory specialists**

The Greeks probably borrowed their learning from the Near Eastern migrants, which they called the Chaldeans.<sup>72</sup> According to the Greeks, “the Chaldeans have observed the stars since ancient times and have the greatest skill in astrology; and discerning more keenly than all other men the movements and powers of each, they foretell to mankind many things which are destined to take place”.<sup>73</sup> They were treated as masters of prophecy and experts in Mesopotamian lore. Diodorus Siculus mentioned that the Chaldeans are said to have been interested not only in astrology but in viscera (DS 2.29). Probably in the Hellenistic period they still practiced extispicy. In Hellenistic Uruk, they associated parts of the entrails with months,

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<sup>67</sup> SEKUNDA 2013, 203.

<sup>68</sup> ROLLINGER 2020, 185–6.

<sup>69</sup> Num 22–4, see DALLEY 1998, 21–2.

<sup>70</sup> BURKERT 1993, 42; BREMMER 2008, 135–6; HELLBING 1979, 23–4.

<sup>71</sup> ZACCAGNINI 1983, 250–1; HEEßEL 2009, 15.

<sup>72</sup> LIVINGSTONE 2002, 127; MAUL 2013, 14–19.

<sup>73</sup> DS 2.30–1, MURPHY 1989, 39, 41.

gods, and zodiacal constellations.<sup>74</sup> Probably these Chaldeans, wandering diviners, visited Plato during his last night alive (It is interesting that Aristotle claims that ‘the Chaldeans among the Babylonians or Assyrians’ were among those who invented philosophy.<sup>75</sup> They were responsible for the dissemination of Mesopotamian wisdom in the late antique world.<sup>76</sup> According to the account of Ctesias, the Babylonian Belesys was not a warrior but an eminent priest and astrologer:

“This man was Belesys, the most distinguished of the priests whom the Babylonian call Chaldeans. And since he had great experience both of astrology and divination he was accustomed to predicting the future to the masses with unerring accuracy”.<sup>77</sup>

Herodotus in his account on the fall of Babylon let the Persian Zopyrus say that the Babylonian communicated with the gods.<sup>78</sup> The connection between *Šumma izbu* and the portent of the mule in Herodotus (1.91.5–6) is striking.<sup>79</sup> Belesys, the Babylonian (Chaldaean) priest is a very good example because he had great experience of both astrology and divination.<sup>80</sup> Diodorus stresses great appreciation of Alexander the Great for the skills of the Chaldeans.<sup>81</sup> The Babylonian seers might have performed extispicy for the health of the reigning king, and Peithagoras surely added this to his repertoire during his stay at Babylon. It is characteristic of systems of divination across cultures and across time that they are open to mutual influences.<sup>82</sup>

For the Greeks, the Chaldeans were often associated with magical utterances. The above mentioned Belesys says that the gods had given him a sign, and after observation of the stars that the rebels will win against Sardanapallus.<sup>83</sup> Sardanapallus was in possession of an oracle, handed down from his ancestors, which said that no one would take the city Ninus by force unless the river had first become hostile to it.<sup>84</sup> According to Ctesias, “torrential storms persistently broke out and it so happened that the Euphrates grew swollen, flooded the part of the city and brought down a section of wall 20 stades in length and Sardanapallus believed that the river became hostile to the city”.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See REINER 1995, 78; KUHRT 1982, 545–6.

<sup>75</sup> D. L. 1.1; Str. 3.7; ERLER 2011, 228, ref. 18.

<sup>76</sup> ANNUS 2010, 11–12.

<sup>77</sup> Books 1–3, F 1b 24 in LLEWELLYN-JONES, ROBSON 2010, 133, HAUBOLD 2013, 92–3.

<sup>78</sup> Hdt. 3.153.

<sup>79</sup> DALLEY, REYES 1998, 109–10.

<sup>80</sup> Books 1–3, 24.1 in LLEWELLYN-JONES, ROBSON 2010, 133.

<sup>81</sup> DS 17.116.4.

<sup>82</sup> FLOWER 2008, 131.

<sup>83</sup> Books 1–3, 25.5 and 8 in LLEWELLYN-JONES, ROBSON 2010, 135.

<sup>84</sup> Books 1–3, 26.9 in LLEWELLYN-JONES, ROBSON 2010, 136.

<sup>85</sup> Books 1–3, 27.1–2 in LLEWELLYN-JONES, ROBSON 2010, 137.

For Greeks, the Babylonians were not only skilled in astronomy but were outstanding in wisdom, in divination by means of dreams and portents, and for having complete knowledge as far as divine matters are concerned:

“Belesys, while talking to Arbaces in front of the doors near a certain manger at which two horses were feeding, fell asleep there at around midday. He had a dream in which he saw one of the horses bringing chaff in his mouth to him and the sleeping, and the other horse asking, ‘Why are you doing that, my friend – taking chaff to that man?’ And the other one answered, ‘I envy him: for he is destined to be the king of all the lands which Sardanapallus now rules’”.<sup>86</sup>

The art of extispicy originated in Mesopotamia (Tacit. *Hist.* 2.3). Even as late as in the 1st century BC, Diodorus Siculus was aware of the many methods of Babylonian divination.<sup>87</sup> Morris referring to the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 17.383), says that the diviners had introduced many Near Eastern practices to Greek religion.<sup>88</sup> Given the Mycenaean intensive contacts in the Eastern Mediterranean, they could hardly fail to encounter extispicy.<sup>89</sup> Various techniques of divination came to Greece from the Near East at different periods, and probably different Greek *poleis* took their heritage from different places and sources. There was not a single place of origin in the Greek world, but many.<sup>90</sup>

According to Bremmer: “They (the Greeks) were open to foreign influences, but they were never slavish followers”.<sup>91</sup> The terms of employment and image of the expert projected were transformed in relation to the new cultural conditions. The seer’s craft was no longer completely dependent on the palace and the king. The seer became an itinerant specialist, whose body of knowledge was oral, not written, and who was not required to serve a single employer. In the opinion of Flower, this may explain why some migrant charismatics probably left their homes in Babylonia or Assyria for the relative freedom of employment in Greece. Although some of the Greek seer’s functions were in the Archaic Age absorbed by other specialists, such as doctors and philosophers. Polycrates of Samos, the Athenians Tolmides, Cimon, Pericles, Nicias, and Alcibiades, the Spartans Lysander and Agesilaus, Dion of Syracuse, Timoleon of Corinth, and the Macedonians Philip II and Alexander the Great maintained private seers, undoubtedly at big personal expense.<sup>92</sup>

In the *Diagnostic and Prognostic Handbook* (Akkadian: Sakikkū, Sumerian: SA.GIG), attributed to Esagil-kīn-apli, the chief scholar of Babylonian king Adad-apla-iddina (1067–1046 BC), we

<sup>86</sup> FGrH 90 F3; LLEWELLYN-JONES, ROBSON 2010, 145.

<sup>87</sup> DS 2.29.

<sup>88</sup> MORRIS 1992, 107.

<sup>89</sup> FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 10–11.

<sup>90</sup> For the Near Eastern contacts and influence on the Greek world see DALLEY, REYES 1998, 85–124; NOEGEL 2007, 191–2, ref. 4. Greek divinatory practices from ancient Near East, see LÓPEZ-RUIZ 2010, 172–202; BREMMER 2008, 133–52; BURKERT 1993, 41–87.

<sup>91</sup> BREMMER 1999, 55.

<sup>92</sup> FLOWER 2008, 31.

find an early example of diagnosing illnesses based on natural causes through a range of symptoms such as temperature (hot or cold), moisture levels (moist or dry), and colors (red, yellow, black, or dark). These signs were interpreted as omens within divination practices. Interestingly, the four-color indicators align closely with the Hippocratic theory of the four main bodily humors, which played a key role in diagnoses and prognoses in the Hippocratic corpus. Specifically, each color corresponds to a bodily fluid: red to blood, dark to phlegm, yellow to yellow bile, and black to black bile. Furthermore, the characteristics of hot and dry relate to yellow bile, hot and moist to blood, cold and moist to phlegm, and cold and dry to black bile. This implies that Esagil-kīn-apli's use of these diagnostic and prognostic signs predates Hippocratic approaches, showcasing an early structured use of these indicators in medical practice.<sup>93</sup>

### Extispicy

West notes that various types of divination, including extispicy, were practiced in Greece, all of which originated in the ancient Near East and likely arrived in Greece between the 8th and 6th centuries BC.<sup>94</sup> Burkert is of the same opinion “the inspection of the livers of the victims developed into a special art: how the various lobes are formed and colored is eagerly awaited and evaluated at every act of slaughter. In Homer, at all events, there is an allusion to this practice at one point, evidently it was taken over from the East in the 8th–7th centuries”.<sup>95</sup> Though Homer does not explicitly mention hepatoscopy, the most recent books of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* refer to a seer inspecting entrails, and liver inspections appear on Athenian black-figure vases. It is probable that the technique of sacrificial divination entered Greece from the Near East around 700 BC.<sup>96</sup>

In the Assyrian school, there exists a strict order of examination of the ten parts of the liver, a practice with no parallel in the Greek world. Conversely, while the Assyrian adhered to a strict order, the Greeks seemed to place greater emphasis on visual associations, focusing particularly on the liver's overall shape, color, and texture. Etruscan hepatoscopy, however, retains more of the complexity of Near Eastern techniques compared to Greek divination.<sup>97</sup> Notably, the Etruscan bronze liver model exemplifies this complexity.<sup>98</sup>

The transmission of Babylonian techniques to the West is evidenced by agreements between Greek and Akkadian technical terms for parts of the liver, as well as discoveries of model livers in Etruria. Numerous linguistic borrowings remain the subject of ongoing

<sup>93</sup> GELLER 2019, 48; SCHUMANN 2024, 15.

<sup>94</sup> WEST 2003, 46–51; COLLINS 2008, 319–345.

<sup>95</sup> BURKERT 2007, 112–13, ref. 30.

<sup>96</sup> BREMMER 2008, 1–8; POWER, RASKO 2008, 421; FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 10; ULANOWSKI 2016.

<sup>97</sup> FLOWER 2008, 33; THULIN 1968; PFIFFIG 1975; COLLINS 2008, 319–345.

<sup>98</sup> FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 6.

discussion.<sup>99</sup> According to Burkert “a whole string of Greek terms looks like a translation from the Akkadian. Here as there, the liver has a ‘gate’, a ‘head’, a ‘path’, and a ‘river’”.<sup>100</sup> Nougayrol stresses that “the impressive number of semantically equivalent terms in Greek and Akkadian extispicy even if they do not denote the same parts of the liver could hardly be coincidental”.<sup>101</sup> Bachvarova observes that the Akkadian term ‘weapon’ and the Greek term ‘knife’ are both related to questions of personal safety and warfare.<sup>102</sup> Interestingly, letters from the royal palace archives of Mari, Old Babylonian extispicy records, and Greek descriptions demonstrate that in both traditions, in the case of important decisions, a double examination of two sacrificial sheep with two alternative questions took place.<sup>103</sup>

Furley and Gysembergh present the terminology used in extispicy in the Akkadian and Greek texts.<sup>104</sup> They suggest that “the Greeks did indeed learn hepatoscopy from their Eastern neighbours but modified the terminology over time and in accordance with influential models such as medicine/anatomy and astrology, which were strongly developed in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt”.<sup>105</sup> However, they caution that this coincidence in descriptive terms for the liver may be deceptive; the words with the same, or similar, meaning in Greek and Akkadian often seem to refer to different parts of the liver while others appear to describe the same phenomenon in both traditions.<sup>106</sup> The main difference is that the Greeks presented sheep’s liver in the papyrological texts personified as a *homunculus*, which represented a microcosm of man. It has a ‘head’, a ‘heart’, ‘ears’, ‘hands’, ‘shoulders’, ‘chest’ etc.<sup>107</sup>

There are ‘auspicious’ and ‘hostile’ sections of the liver, and the interpretation of observations varies accordingly: what is considered normal is good in the auspicious section but dangerous in the hostile one. Malformation in the hostile section is considered favorable and *vice versa*.<sup>108</sup> Popko also mentioned that “the signs could be good or bad. A good sign appearing on the right side was auspicious. This would suggest that a bad sign on the left side could also be regarded as a favourable presage”.<sup>109</sup> The Mesopotamian and Greek traditions are also very similar in their view of the ominous significance of the presence or absence of an organ (specifically the lobe or ‘head’ of the liver) during the examination of a sacrificial animal. A missing ‘head’ indicates that catastrophe will befall the leader, while two ‘heads’ predict two

<sup>99</sup> WEST 2003, 48; MEYER 1985, 105–20; Van der MEER 1987.

<sup>100</sup> The most detailed Greek text related to this topic is Rufus Onom. 158.5 ff., see BURKERT 1993, 50, ref. 21.

<sup>101</sup> NOUGAYROL 1955, 511.

<sup>102</sup> BACHVAROVA 2012, 148.

<sup>103</sup> MAUL 2018, 68–9, 99.

<sup>104</sup> FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 25–7.

<sup>105</sup> FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 28–9.

<sup>106</sup> FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 6, 88; BACHVAROVA 2012, 144–8.

<sup>107</sup> FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 20, 53, 58.

<sup>108</sup> BURKERT 1993, 50, ref. 20–2.

<sup>109</sup> POPKO 1995, 138.

rival powers.<sup>110</sup> A detailed study of the papyri sheds light on the extent to which Greek hieroscopy was influenced by *barâtu*. Naturally, this evidence must be handled with care, as the papyri date to the 1st–4th centuries AD.<sup>111</sup> Furley and Gysembergh claim that “although the Greeks probably acquired the art of hepatoscopy from Mesopotamia, they devoted independent thought to its rationale. Its authority derived presumably from its ancient credentials and pedigree, religious beliefs, and quasi-scientific theorizing”.<sup>112</sup>

The custom of investigating the liver was quite typical, and one finds evidence for it even in the Bible (Ezek 21.26.). Mesopotamian extispicy moved west to the Hittites in Asia Minor, and probably from there to Greece.<sup>113</sup> Herodotus’ claim (2.58) that extispicy originated in Egypt and that the Greeks adopted it from the Egyptians cannot be proved, as extispicy is not attested in Egypt before the Hellenistic Period.<sup>114</sup> The Greeks were likely influenced by the tendency among Egyptian intellectuals of the Late Period to present their culture as the oldest in human history.<sup>115</sup> Bachvarova suggests that the most probable source for Greek liver divination was Anatolia, especially considering the role of liver divination in planning war, which explains how the practice was transferred to Greece.

Mesopotamian hepatoscopy diffused, and models of livers have been found in Alalakh, Tell el Hajj in Asia Minor, Ugarit in Syria, Hazor, Megido (Megiddo) in Palestine, and in Cyprus (Ath. *Deipn.* IV 74, records that Zeus ‘dissector of entrails’ was worshipped in Cyprus; “This local attribute of Zeus is presumably connected with the role played by the storm god Adad, alongside the sun god Shamash in writing the signs on the liver in the ancient Near East tradition”.<sup>116</sup> Two miniature bronze livers with Ugaritic affinities were found in Enkomi, Cyprus, dating back to the 12th or 11th century BC.<sup>117</sup> The presence of Hurrian terminology in the Hittite hepatoscopic texts hints at Hurrian mediation in the spread of this practice into Anatolia. However, its origin must have been Mesopotamian, as in Hurrian texts, the same terminology (which is also partly derived from Akkadian) is expressed by Sumerograms.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>110</sup> For Mesopotamia, see MEYER 1987, 74, for Greek material, see Eur. *El.* 826–33; Cic. *De Div.* 2.34; STARR 2008, 2; FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 12.

<sup>111</sup> FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 77.

<sup>112</sup> FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 5.

<sup>113</sup> BURKERT 1993, 46–53.

<sup>114</sup> See Van der MEER 1987, 186, no. 3.

<sup>115</sup> See HAUBOLD 2013, 77.

<sup>116</sup> See FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 7, ref. 22; KOCH 2015, 74; BURKERT 1993, 48; CRYER 1994, 295–305; RUTZ 2013, 227; MAUL 2018, 178–9.

<sup>117</sup> See DIETRICH 1978, 2; MEYER 1987, 273; TURFA 2012, 265.

<sup>118</sup> 3394 MINUNNO 2013, 89; The cultural interaction between the Assyrian, northern Mesopotamian, and Hurrian traditions is discussed in PONGRATZ-LEISTEN 2015, 61–74; RUTHERFORD 2020; PONGRATZ-LEISTEN 2015, 61–74; RUTHERFORD 2020, 38.

Notably, one of the earliest references to Ahhiyawa (likely the Achaeans) is mentioned in a liver oracle from the 15th century Hittite heritage.<sup>119</sup>

According to Tacticus, the clan of Tamiras brought extispicy from Cilicia to Paphos in Cyprus, where it was taken over by the priests of Aphrodite's temple, who belonged to the clan of Cinyras, the legendary king whose west Semitic name reflects Late Bronze Age contacts between Cyprus and north Syria.<sup>120</sup> There is speculation that Assyrian hepatoscopy may have been practiced in Tarsos, Cilicia.<sup>121</sup>

Some technical information regarding the manufacture of model livers for instructional purposes appears to have bypassed the Greek mainland but traveled via Lydia to Etruria. In late Republican Rome, Cicero wrote that “nearly everyone uses entrails in divination (*extis enim omnes fere utuntur*),” a practice common to Greeks, Romans, and other ancient people.<sup>122</sup> According to Burkert, the correspondence between Etruscan and Assyrian hepatoscopy is evident.<sup>123</sup> Prophecy and oracles are also topics of potential mutual influences in the ancient world. Inanna (Ištar) was the main goddess of Arbela, and the method of prophesizing there might have influenced great Hellenic oracle centers like Delphi or Dodona.<sup>124</sup> Rosół suggests a connection between the ecstatic mantic of Apollo and that of the ancient Near East.<sup>125</sup>

### Dreams, ornithomancy, and other branches of divination

We can identify several common features in the practice oracle-making. In the *Assyrian Dream Book*, we read: “If a man dreams that he is eating a raven (*āribu*), he will have income (*irbu*). If a man dreams, he is eating human flesh (*šūru*), he will have great riches (*šarû*)”. Such wordplay is also employed in explaining dreams in the *Babylonian Talmud* and in the *Oneirocritica* of Artemidorus.<sup>126</sup> Noegel asserts: “Like the scholars of the Near East, Artemidorus employs word plays of all sorts, including *notariqon* and *gematria*, two interpretive strategies that consider the anagramic and numerical values of words, respectively. Another feature found in Artemidorus and in the Near Eastern dream oracles, is the use of literary and mythological texts as interpretive templates”.<sup>127</sup> In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon has a dream, termed a lying dream because he is intentionally misled by a divinity (*Il.* 2.6–34). We find

<sup>119</sup> AhT 22§25, see RUTHERFORD 2020, 38.

<sup>120</sup> Tact. *Hist.* 2.3.1, see BACHVAROVA 2012, 157, see BURKERT 1993, 49; BURKERT 2011, 418.

<sup>121</sup> BURKERT 1993, 48, ref. 7; BACHVAROVA 2012, 157, ref. 92.

<sup>122</sup> Cic. *De Div.* 1.10; LAWRENCE 1979, 38–41. 7; COLLINS 2008, 320.

<sup>123</sup> BURKERT 1993, 46.

<sup>124</sup> GURNEY 1981, 145.

<sup>125</sup> Wen-Amon 1.34–43, RITNER 2003, 219–20; 1 Kgs 16.26–8; ROSÓŁ 2010, 76.

<sup>126</sup> See ANNUS 2010, 8. Some Jewish commandments are formulated in the Talmud as conditional statements, which shows that these may well be the rudiments of some Hebrew divination in the form of Akkadian ones, formulated first through conditional statements in which the violation of a commandment is a sign (omen) for subsequent negative consequences. So, the violation of some commandments was an apodosis in divination (SCHUMANN 2021, 346).

<sup>127</sup> NOEGEL 2002, 170–171.

Mesopotamian parallels: “the Mesopotamian dream rituals also speak of ‘misleading’ (*sarāru*) dreams as well as ‘obscure’ (*ekēlu*, lit. ‘dark’) dreams”,<sup>128</sup>

In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, not all dreams are presumed to be direct messages from the gods, yet any dream is recognized as potentially portentous. The *Assyrian Dream Book* establishes a primary division between auspicious and inauspicious dreams, but also makes clear that dreams were not regarded as reliable sources of information. A calamitous dream might be considered auspicious, while a more pleasant dream might foretell doom. For example: “If a man [in his dream] ascends [to heaven] and the gods bless him this man will die ... and the gods curse him: this man will live long”.<sup>129</sup> Dreams could be auspicious or inauspicious, but through a special ritual, it is possible to neutralize the evil consequences of an inauspicious dream, or to activate the positive potential of an auspicious one. Theoretically, the greatest danger comes from dreams that remain unanalysed.<sup>130</sup> Interestingly, there existed a procedure that could be undertaken to change the contents of the king’s dream and, therefore his ensuing fate. Neither the specific contents of the dream nor their accurate interpretation appears to play a direct role in this ritual (Old Babylonian incantation collective).<sup>131</sup>

It is intriguing that in Herodotus’ work, all dreams come that true are dreamt by barbarians, who, according to Herodotus, do not know how to interpret oracles.<sup>132</sup> This could suggest that the Greeks believed they alone possessed knowledge of divination practices. Despite this, the Greeks did not attribute their divinatory practices to Eastern origins. Notably, the Lycian oracle in Patara, devoted to Apollo and established under Greek influence in 4th century BC, originated much earlier within an Anatolian context. It employed traditional Hittite methods; the priestess of the god would enclose herself within the temple at night for prophetic inspiration. During these dreams, they communicated with the gods.<sup>133</sup> The Hittites also distinguished their dreams for messaging and ominous content.<sup>134</sup>

Bird augury played a significant role in divinatory practices in Babylonia.<sup>135</sup> The treatment of thunder and lightning as omens, along with augury, was influenced by the Hittites, impacting not only Mesopotamian, but also Greek and Roman divination practices.<sup>136</sup> Hittite bird divination, called *mušen hurri* - a combination of bird divination and extispicy<sup>137</sup> - is well documented in the texts, and is primarily of Hurrian tradition. However, the analysis of bird

<sup>128</sup> NOEGEL 2007, 213.

<sup>129</sup> NOEGEL 2007, 213.

<sup>130</sup> HUSSER 1999, 31.

<sup>131</sup> VAS 17, 28 in PETERSON 2009, 125–141.

<sup>132</sup> STONEMAN 2011, 106.

<sup>133</sup> BRYCE 1986, 198–9; ARCHI 1971, 190.

<sup>134</sup> RUTHERFORD 2020, 39; MOUTON 2007.

<sup>135</sup> BURKERT 1993, 53, ref. 35.

<sup>136</sup> POPKO 1985, 136–7.

<sup>137</sup> CRYER 1994, 226–7; PUHVEL 2003, 325–6.



entrails for divination was also practiced in Mesopotamia.<sup>138</sup> Hittite augury, which had its own technical language was widely used including in military context.<sup>139</sup> In the opinion of Rutherford: “Like Hittite augurs, Homer knows a division of the augural field into a right (favourable) and left (unfavourable) side”.<sup>140</sup> A Greek inscription from Ephesus (probably from the late 6<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century BC) highlights the significance of a method based on the opposition of right/favourable and left/unfavorable.<sup>141</sup> Ephesus, known to the Hittites as Apaša was a capital city of Arzawa, held a special status in augury, particularly as a renowned center for divination aimed at preventing plagues. The Greek Apollo shared many attributes with his Eastern predecessors, such as Yarri, Nergal, Reshef etc. Later, many powerful oracles in Asia Minor, including the oracle of Clarian Apollo at Colophon, were dedicated to Apollo.<sup>142</sup> Interestingly, the Greeks claimed that the augury originated from the Phrygians or the Carians.<sup>143</sup>

The method of divination known as lecanomancy, which involves pouring oil onto water or sprinkling flour onto a liquid, was practiced both in Mesopotamia and Greece.<sup>144</sup> The term lecanomancy literally translates to ‘bowl-divination’ or ‘divining with a cup’.<sup>145</sup> The liquids would be poured into a dish, termed a *lekáne* in Greek, a word Burkert suggest is cognate with the Akkadian *lahannu* and Aramaic *laqnu*. Aeschylus, in his *Agamemnon*, mentions the act of pouring vinegar and flour into the same glass to observe their movements, indicative of divinatory practices.<sup>146</sup> The procedure with flour mentioned by Gudea is also familiar to the author of the *Odyssey* as a method to discern the will of the gods (*Od.* 3.440). Maul references the lexicographer Hesychius, who noted that in the fifth or sixth century AD, Apollo had taken on the role of the sun god Shamash from the ancient Near East, becoming known as the *aleuromantis*, the god who offered guidance to humans through signs made with flour.<sup>147</sup>

Divination through smoke, originating from Babylonian, was also widespread in ancient Greece. Lactanius Placidus writes of the existence of a *Liber de turis signis*, a book on interpreting signs from incense, purportedly authored by the legendary seer Tiresias.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>138</sup> MINUNNO 2013, 89, ref. 547; ARCHI 1975, 139–41; MAUL 2018, 104–6.

<sup>139</sup> MAH 15.987, Rs. 19–20 and BM 22.740, 38–44 in NOUGAYROL 1967, 24–5 and respectively 27, RUTHERFORD 2020, 132–3.

<sup>140</sup> RUTHERFORD 2020, 140.

<sup>141</sup> LSAM 30, see COLLINS 2002, 28; DALLEY, REYES 1998, 100.

<sup>142</sup> RUTHERFORD 2020, 134, 140.

<sup>143</sup> MAUL 2018, 129.

<sup>144</sup> See PETTINATO 1966; WINITZER 2010, 185, ref. 34.

<sup>145</sup> KOCH 2015, 134; MAUL 2018, 142.

<sup>146</sup> A. A. 322–5; BURKERT 1993, 53, ref. 35–6.

<sup>147</sup> *Od.* 3.440.

<sup>148</sup> MAUL 2018, 133, ref. 40.

The text *Šumma izbu*, which addresses monstrous births, is believed by West to have a counterpart in Greek divination practices.<sup>149</sup> This aspect of divination was undoubtedly known to the Hittites as well.<sup>150</sup>

Necromancy was also practiced under Mesopotamian influence.<sup>151</sup> Steiner illustrated how the mantic practices depicted in the *Odyssey*, specifically in chapter 11 (the *Book of the Dead*) derive from Hittite necromancy rituals, which, in his opinion, themselves have Mesopotamian origins.<sup>152</sup>

With the decline of Babylonian culture, the knowledge encapsulated in *Enuma Anu Enlil* was not lost but rather found its way into Greek literature. Gehlken notes that “passages from the weather tablets, translated almost literally, are found for example in the poem Περὶ σεισμῶν, which is attributed to both Hermes Trismegistos and Orpheus. In Aristoteles’ *Meteorologica* or Euktemon’s Περὶ σημείων one is also reminded of *Enuma Anu Enlil*”.<sup>153</sup> The so-called astrolabe also corresponds with Hesiod’s *Work and Days* and dates to the early 2nd millennium BC.<sup>154</sup> In the opinion of Starr, the practice of hemerology, as seen in the *Brontoscopic Calendar* of Nigidius Figulus, derives from Babylonian sources.<sup>155</sup>

### Celestial divination

The *Enuma Anu Enlil*, the Babylonian series of omens, which demonstrates a systematic approach to divination, linking celestial and terrestrial events in a causally connected universe. This perspective underpins the notion that the observable world, including the movements of celestial bodies, reflects the divine will, a concept deeply rooted in Mesopotamian culture and later absorbed into Greek thought. The transmission of this worldview from Mesopotamia to Greece contributed significantly to the development of Greek philosophy, particularly the natural philosophy of the Ionian thinkers, who sought rational explanations for the cosmos's structure and workings.

The Greeks referred to astronomy as ‘Chaldean’ acknowledging its ancient origins and the considerable influence of Babylonian scholars (DS 2.31; Cic. *De Div.* 1.2). The designation ‘Chaldean’ is repeated constantly in the Greek sources. For example, a Chaldean *mantis* is mentioned before battle when Attalus faced the Gauls in 241 BC (Polyaen. 4.20). Ptolemy showed that the main astrological themes were transmitted to Greek (*Tetrabiblos* bks. I–II).<sup>156</sup> The activities of the Babylonian astrologers, which had been carried out for centuries, exerted

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<sup>149</sup> WEST 2003, 49, ref. 208.

<sup>150</sup> RIEMSCHEIDER 1970.

<sup>151</sup> BEERDEN 2010, 265–82; LATRINER 2007, 811.

<sup>152</sup> STEINER 1971, 265–83; COLLINS 2002, 224, 242.

<sup>153</sup> GEHLKEN 2012, 1.

<sup>154</sup> GEHLKEN 2012, 5.

<sup>155</sup> STARR 2008, 2.

<sup>156</sup> ROCHBERG 2004, 67; KOCH-WESTENHOLZ 1981, 82.

considerable influence on Egyptian and Greek astrology and led to ‘scientific’ astronomy<sup>157</sup> during the Seleucid-Parthian Period<sup>158</sup>. Berossos<sup>159</sup> established the first astrological school in Greece, (FGrH 689 F 15–22). This school, according to Vitruvius, focused on astronomy (Vitr. 9.6.2) in the 4th century BC. The work of Ptolemy in the *Tetrabiblos* further illustrates how the main astrological themes were adopted and adapted from Babylonian to Greek contexts, showcasing a blend of observation, mathematical astronomy, and astrological interpretation that formed the foundation of Hellenistic astrology.<sup>160</sup>

The Stoics, including Zeno of Citium (c. 334–262 BC), the founder of Stoic philosophy, advocated strongly for various forms of divination. The Stoic philosophers (for example Diogenes of Babylon [c. 230–150 BC] and Posidonius [c. 135–151 BC]) embraced the Chaldeans’ astrology, recognizing it as a refined art of divination. Moreover, Philodemus made an observation comparing the Stoic logical handbooks to the Chaldaean’s omen books, suggesting that both used a similar logical method based on implications.<sup>161</sup> He concluded that this method was fantastical in nature: “And by publishing technical manuals they are able to publish dreams for the purpose of deceiving those who read them, as the Chaldaean and diviners do, and perhaps they too are in error themselves. And it follows, if anything, that sophistic is an art, but that it is also an art of politics, [not even] they themselves urge. And no one, surely, intended to derive those who speak with ability and intelligence in assemblies and courts as experts [from that source].

And yet [it was proposed] with regard to rhetoric [whether] certain people [seem] to conduct themselves technically [in assemblies] and courts. But those who are trained in the schools do not share even one of the virtues of those men”.<sup>162</sup>

The punning hermeneutic, a characteristic of Near Eastern divinatory and literary texts, also found its way into Greek material. This method, involving *amāt niširti* (‘hidden words’) and *pirištu ša ilī* (‘secret of the gods’) underscores the shared semiotic systems between Mesopotamian and Greek Cultures in interpreting omens and portends.<sup>163</sup>

For example, in several passages the planet Saturn is considered equivalent with the Sun, and with the constellation of the Scales (The Scales are the symbol of justice linked to royal ideology, and the heroic warrior god Ninurta).<sup>164</sup> This enables “the Mesopotamian scholars to

<sup>157</sup> PINGREE 1998, 125–37.

<sup>158</sup> MAUL 2008, 365; BROWN 2008, 467–8, ref. 21–3; ROCHBERG 2010, 1–11.

<sup>159</sup> It is very meaningful that Pliny the Elder talks about the statue which the Athenians set up to celebrate Berossos’ powers of prophecy and Pausanias makes him the father of the Sibyl. Plin. NH 7.123; Paus. 10.12.9, see MAUL 2013, 11–12.

<sup>160</sup> See ROCHBERG 2004, 117, 137, 193, 239, 243, 16, ref. 2; WEST 2003, 48.

<sup>161</sup> SCHUMANN 2024a.

<sup>162</sup> Philodemus, *Rhetorica*, col. XVIII, see CHANDLER 2006, 30.

<sup>163</sup> See NOEGEL 2002; NOEGEL 2007, 193; NOEGEL 2019, 31–2.

<sup>164</sup> See BROWN 2000, 61, 69–70; HUNGER, STEELE 2019, 149.

replace one by the other in the application of certain omens to a given observation. Greek astrological sources used in a special way the colors attributed to planets as well as to fixed stars: if a planet had the same color as a fixed star, it could take the place of the other in the interpretation of omens”.<sup>165</sup>

According to Campion, it is possible to identify a fundamental continuity from the earliest Babylonian astrology to its Greek counterpart. In his opinion, Mesopotamian astrology spread east to India and west to Asia Minor, Greece, and Egypt; “The customary route for the introduction of horoscopic astrology into India, as to Egypt, is said to be *via* the Hellenistic world following Alexander’s conquests”. Even more interesting is a Campion’s general statement that the popular opinion generally held among scientists, that there was no transition of “Mesopotamian culture to the Greek word was caused by the modern tendency to see Greece as the origin of the more admirable qualities of post Enlightenment culture, particularly its rationalism, individualism and reliance on science”.<sup>166</sup> A very strange attribute of the goddess Ištar is her beard. The ‘beard’ of the planet Venus (associated with Ištar) was a figurative description for the radiance of the planet.<sup>167</sup> Among the Hurrians the equivalent of Ištar was the goddess Šauška. This goddess is represented in double (male-female) nature in the reliefs of Yazilikaya. Probably this duality is caused by the complicated nature of Ištar who was represented both as Morning and Evening Stars, but another explanation is the depiction of this goddess with a beard which suggests dual nature of the god(ess). In a discussion in Herodotus about the city Pedasa in Caria, he mentions that the priestess of this city grows a long beard when her city is threatened by enemies.<sup>168</sup>

Mesopotamian divination was an all-embracing semantic system designed to interpret the whole universe. In Greece, the belief that the entire universe is causally connected, is an Ionian Greek invention which is already found in the *Babylonian Diviner’s Manual*:

“The signs on earth just as those in the sky give us signals. Sky and earth both produce portents though appearing separately. They are not separate, (because) sky and earth are related. A sign that portends evil in the sky is (also) evil in the earth, one that portends evil on earth is evil in the sky”.<sup>169</sup>

Thus, the flow of ideas from Mesopotamia to Greece and beyond represents a complex web of cultural exchange that laid the groundwork for significant developments in science, philosophy, and religion in the ancient world.

## Summary

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<sup>165</sup> SAA 8, XVI, no. 39, rev. 5–6, no. 40; SAA 10, no. 51, rev. 8–9; BOBROVA, MILITAREV 1993, 307–29.

<sup>166</sup> CAMPION 2000, 538.

<sup>167</sup> ROCHBERG 2004, 172.

<sup>168</sup> BELMONTE, CÉSAR GONZÁLEZ GARCIA 2014, 113; Hdt. 1.175.1.

<sup>169</sup> OPPENHEIM 1974, 204, ll. 38–42; see ANNUS 2010, 2; ROCHBERG 2004, 166.

In the process of cultural transmission, it's natural to observe differences between Near Eastern and Greek divinatory practices. Mesopotamian divination encompassed numerous specialized categories of practitioners, each with specific expertise, including purifiers belonging to a separate category.

In contrast, Greek seers combined various types and functions into one comprehensive profession. The practice of divination in the ancient Near East was notably complex, with extensive omen collections like those found in Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh far surpassing the size of any divination literature in Greece.<sup>170</sup> While, the Greeks had a range of technical literature available, their texts exhibited a less rigid formula compared to the Mesopotamian tradition; syntax varied, and the order of *apodosis* and *protasis* was interchangeable.<sup>171</sup> Essentially, the Greek world presented a simplified version of the sophisticated and technical Babylonian and Assyrian system of divination, reflecting the differing needs and bureaucratic complexity of Archaic Age Greek society compared to the ancient Near East.<sup>172</sup>

Interestingly, Greeks rarely acknowledged the influence of Near Eastern cultures on their own culture, instead attributing similar practices, particularly in divination, to other cultures like the Persians. Herodotus recounts instances of Persians employing Greek methods of divination, such as the Persian general Mardonius at the Battle of Plataea consulting a Greek *mantis* (Hdt. 9.37–8 and 41.4). As I have previously mentioned above, that Mardonius carefully queried the Greek oracles (Hdt. 8.133–5). Herodotus also gives to 'his' Persians several religious practices that, if not explicitly Greek, are identical with them. He has Persians using Greek-style divination from the time of Darius, as when Darius was leading six conspirators against two rebellious priests, "seven pairs of hawks appeared chasing two pairs of eagles, tearing out their feathers and scratching them. After they saw these things, the seven conspirators all approved Darius' plan and, encouraged by the birds, went to the palace" (Hdt. 3.76.3).

In the early stages of his expedition, Xerxes overlooked ominous signs reminiscent of those commonly recognized in the Greek tradition, such as the birth of a hermaphroditic mule or a horse giving birth to a hare (Hdt. 7.57). He also misinterpreted an eclipse, misled by the *magoi*, who, among their various roles, acted as seers for the Persian kings (Hdt. 7.37.2–3). His observance of omens before crossing the Strymon River mirrors Spartan practices, though Xerxes may not have realized the potentially older tradition behind it (Hdt. 6.76.1).

Herodotus describes Persian religious practices closely resembling Greek ones, indicating a cultural exchange that often went unrecognized by the Greeks themselves. This observation highlights the complex interplay of cultural borrowing and adaptation across ancient cultures, where influences may be acknowledged or obscured depending on the socio-political context and cultural perceptions of the time.

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<sup>170</sup> FLOWER 2008, 31.

<sup>171</sup> FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 82–4.

<sup>172</sup> FURLEY, GYSEMBERGH 2015, 34; BEERDEN 2013, 22.

Very important in the Persian Wars were the misleading dreams that prompted, almost coercively, Xerxes to embark on the expedition (Hdt. 7.12–18). These dreams, along with the subsequent discussions between Xerxes and Artabanus, reflect Greek imagination projecting expectations onto such situation.<sup>173</sup> While this evidence remains indirect and incomplete, lacking explicit mention of Mesopotamian influence by Greek historians, contemporary researchers can discern its impact. The Greeks' omission of direct discussion about Mesopotamian antecedents: can be attributed to their lack of awareness and access to such sources.

Moreover, the Greeks' perception of themselves as culturally superior to non-Greek-speaking nations, whom they labeled 'barbarians,' further contributed to their belief that Oriental cultures borrowed from them rather than vice versa. This mindset hindered them from acknowledging the possibility of influence flowing in the opposite direction. In conclusion, while the extent and consciousness of Mesopotamian influence on Greek divination practices can be debated, the fact of this influence appears indisputable.

#### **Abbreviations:**

Assyriology [http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/abbreviations\\_for\\_assyriology](http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/abbreviations_for_assyriology)

Classical Studies <https://oxfordre.com/classics/page/abbreviation-list/>

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<sup>173</sup> MIKALSON 2003, 156–8; ROETTIG 2010.

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