Worlds full of signs: ancient Greek divination in context
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Worlds full of signs

Ancient Greek divination in context

Proefschrift

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Kim Beerden

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in 1983

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The universe itself is but a pudding of elements. Empires, kingdoms, states and republics are but puddings of people differently made up.

H. Carey, *A learned dissertation on dumpling; its dignity, antiquity, and excellence. With a word upon pudding* (London 1726) 21.

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Kim Beerden
Leiden, August 2012

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Names of Greek and Roman authors and their works are abbreviated according to the standard practice used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*[2], where necessary supplemented by those in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* and the *Liddell, Scott and Jones* Greek dictionary. Where the names of Greek individuals have been written in full, I have rendered the name in Greek transcribed form unless this seemed out of place due to general familiarity of the Latinized name.

The Akkadian texts are in the editions of the State Archives of Assyria (SAA) series, unless otherwise indicated. Italicized words in the translation are dispited. In rendering the Greek and Latin I have used the editions of the Oxford Classical Texts (Budé or Teubner if no OCT was available). Translations are from the Loeb Classical Library series, unless otherwise indicated.

A&E Quart	Anthropology and Education Quarterly
AfO	Archiv für Orientforschung
AfR	Archiv für Religionsgeschichte
AJP	American Journal of Philology
AJSoc	American Journal of Sociology
AnnRevAnth	Annual Review of Anthropology

AC	L'Antiquité Classique
Ant	Antiquity. A Quarterly Review of Archaeology
AoF	Altorientalische Forschungen (Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients)
APhA	American Philological Association
Areth	Arethusa. A Journal of the Well-springs of Western Man
ARP	Accordia Research Papers
AS	L'Année Sociologique
ASS	Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik
BiOr	Bibliotheca Orientalis
BMCR	Bryn Mawr Classical Review
BMJ	British Medical Journal
CAD	I.J. Gelb *et al* (eds.), *The Assyrian dictionary of The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago 1956-)
CAJ	Cambridge Archaeological Journal
CCRAI	Compte rendu de la Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (Strassbourg, 2-6 juillet 1965)
Centaurus	Centaurus. An International Journal of the History of Science and its Cultural Aspects
Chiron	Chiron. Mitteilungen der Kommission für alte Geschichte und Epigraphik des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts
CIS	Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie

CJ	Classical Journal
ClPhil	Classical Philology
CogS	Cognitive Science
CQ	Classical Quarterly
CS	Current Sociology
CSSH	Comparative Studies in Society and History
CT	Various authors, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum* (London 1896-1990)
CurrAnthr	Current Anthropology
CW	Classical World
DP	Developmental Psychology
E&S	Ethnology and Sociobiology
Epigraphica	Epigraphica. Rivista internazionale di epigrafia
GRBS	Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
H&T	History and Theory
Hermes	Hermes. Zeitschrift für klassische Philologie
HN	Human Nature
HrwG	H. Cancik *et al.* (eds.), *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* 5 vols (Stuttgart 1988-2001)
HSClPh	Harvard Studies in Classical Philology
HThR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual

IJBD	International Journal of Behavioral Development
Iraq	Iraq. British School of Archaeology in Iraq
Isis	Isis
JANES	Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JCC	Journal of Cognition and Culture
JCS	Journal of Cuneiform Studies
JdI	Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts
JECH	Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health
JEOL	Jaarbericht van het Voor-Aziatisch-Egyptisch-Gezelschap (from 1945: Genootschap) 'Ex Oriente Lux'
JHE	Journal of Human Evolution
JHS	Journal of Hellenic Studies
JIH	Journal of Interdisciplinary History
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JPE	Journal of Public Economics
JRAI	Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland
JRAS	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JRR	Journal of Risk Research
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies

Kernos	Kernos. Revue Internationale et Pluridisciplinaire de Religion Grecque Antique
Klio	Klio. Beiträge zur alten Geschichte
Ktèma	Ktèma. Civilisations de l'Orient, de la Grèce et de Rome antiques
Lampas	Lampas. Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse classici
MEFRA	Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'École Française de Rome, Antiquité
Métis	Métis. Revue d'Anthropologie du Monde Grec Ancien: Philologie - Histoire – Archéologie.
MDOG	Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin
MTSR	Method and Theory in the Study of Religion
Nature	Nature. International Weekly Journal of Science
Numen	Numen. International Review for the History of Religions
OLZ	Orientalistische Literaturzeitung
Or	Orientalia
OrAnt	Oriens Antiquus
P&P	Past & Present
PBSR	Papers of the British School at Rome
PCPhS	Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society

Persica	Persica. Jaarboek van het Genootschap Nederland-Iran
PhilTrans	Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society
Phoenix	Phoenix. Bulletin uitgegeven door het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap 'Ex Oriente Lux'
PS	Psychological Science
RA	Revue d'Assyriologie et d'Archéologie Orientale
REA	Revue des Études Anciennes
RevPhil	Revue de Philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes
RHR	Revue de l'Histoire des Religions
RJb	Romanistisches Jahrbuch
RlA	E. Ebeling *et al.* (eds.), *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* (Berlin 1932-)
RSO	Rivista degli Studi Orientali
Science	Science
SHPS	Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science
SPAW	Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Phil.-hist. Kl.
Syria	Syria. Revue d'art oriental et d'archéologie
T&S	Time and Society

Talanta	Talanta. Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society
TFSC	Technological Forecasting and Social Change
ThesCRA	Jean Ch. Balty *et al* (eds.), *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum* vols. 5 (Los Angeles 2004-)
Viator	Viator. Medieval and Renaissance Studies
WSt	Wiener Studien. Zeitschrift für classische Philologie
ZA	Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete (from 1939: und vorderasiatische Archäologie)
ZPE	Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik
ZPhF	Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung
ZVS	Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung auf dem Gebiet der indogermanischen Sprachen

Introduction

A great many people have ambivalent feelings about uncertainty: we need it but try to diminish it at the same time. Uncertainty stimulates individuals to try to obtain the knowledge they feel is necessary to make the right decision in a particular situation. In order to develop this – sometimes perceived – knowledge, which can relate to past, present or future, external input is required. Data and interpretations of those data are needed to make sense of the world. Often, we turn to specialists, such as psychologists, journalists or economists.[1] Their external input allows us to think about ourselves and the situation in which we find ourselves. This facilitates choice in the present: the external input reduces uncertainty because we consider ourselves to have been guided by reliable information about past, present or future. In the ancient world, a large part of this external input was provided by divination. According to my etic definition on p. 30, divination is the interpretation of signs thought to have come from the supernatural, providing man with information. The outcomes of divination induced a sense of certainty, facilitating the decisions which had to be made in daily life.

1 In the end there will always be uncertainty and inconsistency, cf. H.S. Versnel, *TER UNUS: Isis, Dionysos, Hermes: three studies in henotheism* (Leiden 1990) 1-35.

In this study, I address the question of what is specific to the omnipresent phenomenon of Greek divination and why this might be so. My principal strategy will be to place Greek divination in a wider context by comparing it with Republican Rome and Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia. I shall analyse the ways in which divination worked in these three cultural areas, which leads to an insight into the phenomenon, especially in Greece. Although this research set-up is wide ranging, it should be borne in mind that Classical and Hellenistic Greece are the ultimate focus of my explorations.

Choices

The first choice made by the historian is that of subject. Divination is a phenomenon which is worthy of enquiry because it was prevalent in all known ancient societies, and touched upon the daily lives of individuals as diverse as kings, warriors, traders, farmers and slaves. Divination pervaded daily life.

A very usual way for the supernatural to manifest itself, or so it was thought, was by means of divinatory signs. Theoretically, all that was needed was a human interpretation of these supernatural signs, possibly with the aid of text, as a result of which man gained knowledge. Consequently, the divinatory materials are not only revealing about the practices of divination itself, but are among the few materials which reveal the perceived actions of the supernatural. Divination is then among the most important phenomena which are available for the study of ancient religion. My aim is to undertake a systematic

investigation of what divination was and the different ways in which it could function. My chief target is daily experience of divination rather than any philosophical explanations of signs and divinatory practices.

While the choice of subject is the first step, the second decision to be made is the approach. This research is carried out comparatively: there were rich varieties of practices and ideas inherent in divination and simultaneously intimate similarities can be discerned in the three cultural areas under consideration. Comparison requires a degree of decontextualization of the phenomenon: a re-contexualization of divination in Greek society is found in the last chapters and in the conclusion. Although the comparative approach implies a wide geographical scope, it is also restrictive because a comparison is only effective when the framework in which it is conducted is well defined.

Therefore, structure is the historian's third choice. I have chosen to concentrate on the three constitutive elements and on the main functions of divination. I consider the three elements to be the sign, the diviner (*homo divinans*) and the texts used in the divinatory process. The principal functions of divination relate to time and to uncertainty. I must emphasize that my purpose is not to provide a descriptive overview of all divinatory methods in the three cultural areas. Conforming to the approach advocated by Poole, the current work does not seek 'analytic disclosure *in toto* […]. Instead, each case presents […] a partial coherence among its metaphors and analogies

that may tell us something new, interesting, and even theoretically important.'[2] This work is concerned with aspects of the larger phenomenon of divination. I shall problematize some of these aspects and attempt a general explanation in my conclusions.

One final choice which still has to be made is that between a diachronic or synchronic approach. I have adopted a synchronic approach: a certain degree of generalization is necessary to say something about, for example, 'Roman divination'. In adopting this approach, I certainly do not wish to deny the dynamism which was so very prevalent in ancient religions. Nevertheless, a certain amount of generalization is useful to point out a feature of divination in one area in comparison to that in another. Without this leeway, the historian could not discuss anything but the specific. At the same time, this generalization should not go too far. Hence, time and place are restricted here to Republican Rome in its Italian setting; Greece in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods and Mesopotamia in Neo-Assyrian times (see pp. 81-83 below for a further discussion of the geographical and temporal scope).

Having made these choices, I can only hope to have fulfilled to some extent the three very ambitious requirements Jonathan Z. Smith considers crucial to a successful study of religion: 'First, that the exemplum has been well and fully understood. This requires a mastery of both the relevant primary material and the history and tradition of its interpretation. Second, that the exemplum be dis-

2 F.J.P. Poole, 'Metaphors and maps: towards comparison in the anthropology of religion', *JAAR* 54 (1986) 411-457, at 433.

played in the service of some important theory, some paradigm, some fundamental question, some central element in the academic imagination of religion. Third, that there be some method for explicitly relating the exemplum to the theory, paradigm, or question and some method for evaluating each in terms of the other.'[3] In my attempt to fulfil these three conditions, I use the comparative method to investigate divination – an important subject in itself – and relate it to the context of the societies in which it took place, hoping to give new impetus to ideas about the workings of ancient religion and its place in society.

Outline of this volume

This book is divided into three parts. An introduction to the subject of divination and a methodological background to this study will be provided in Part I (chapters 1-3). In Part II, the comparative method is used as a heuristic tool to impart a better understanding of the elements of divination, while demonstrating its diversity and similarity in three ancient cultures (Part II, chapters 4-6). In Part III (chapters 7-8), the comparative method is used to explore what I see as the central function of divination: obtaining knowledge of past, present or future in order to manage uncertainty.

Part I provides an introduction to the comparative study of divination. In chapter 1, a brief historiographical outline of research into

3 J.Z. Smith, *Imagining religion: from Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago 1982) xi-xii.

divination, both in the field of Classical Studies and Assyriology, is provided. I shall show that the current revival of divination studies revolves around the idea that divination can be used to obtain an understanding of such aspects of daily life as, for example, decision making. Divination is now seen as essentially a human act which tells us about human society. This is an anthropocentric approach which is also pursued throughout the chapters of this volume: according to the definition of divination, as formulated in chapter 2 (p. 30), human individuals have to recognize a sign as such, interpret it (with the aid of oral or written texts) and act on it. chapter 3 discusses arguments in favour of taking a comparative approach and points out the units of comparison used in this study, while drawing attention to the methodological pitfalls which are to be avoided. Building on these considerations, Part I argues that, for the purposes of a comparative enquiry, divination can be usefully conceptualized and analysed as a process consisting of three elements – present in all three cultural areas – *homo divinans*, sign and text.

Part II discusses the three elements of divination identified in the first part of the study. chapter 4 deals with the *homo divinans* and in first instance is concerned with the following question: when was an expert needed and when could an individual divine for himself? However, the major part of the chapter is devoted to what can be said about the role of this expert in the various societies, on the basis of a systematic comparison of the socio-economic status of certain groups of divinatory experts in Greece, Mesopotamia and Rome.

Conclusions about differences and similarities in socio-economic status contribute to an understanding of diversity among experts and consequently to the diversity in the element of the *homo divinans*. The sign is the topic of chapter 5: where were signs perceived to come from? How did an individual obtain a sign? How could these signs be recognized as being actual signs from the supernatural? These questions must be addressed because these are all preliminary stages to the human recognition of a sign, the first – pivotal – step in the divinatory process as outlined in chapter 1. Chapter 6 deals with the texts used in the divinatory ritual. The contents of the text are not discussed as such: instead, texts are analysed as cultural objects which had a function, or various functions, in the divinatory process. Examination of the categories of text contributes to our understanding of what went on during the divinatory process in the three cultural areas, thereby helping us to see more clearly what was specific to Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman divinatory practices.

Part III (chapters 7 and 8) deals with divination in relation to its main function. Divination is discussed in relation to experiences of time (past, present and future) and as a way to deal with uncertainty – two intertwined issues. How was time made explicit in the divinatory sources? How did divination illuminate past, present and future? Divination served as a tool to obtain knowledge about what would occur within a timeframe – but this raises the questions of how long this timeframe might be and what this tells us about divination (chapter 7). Chapter 8 is concerned with uncertainties

and how ancient man dealt with these through divinatory practice. Divination certainly helped to make the decisions which were necessary in daily life. Intriguingly, a comparison shows that uncertainties were dealt with quite differently in Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome.

Taken as a whole, these chapters allow an insight into what was general and what was specific to divination in Greece: while remaining part of one and the same phenomenon, divination developed a different face in each cultural area in which it manifested itself.[4] I am especially concerned with the face of Greek divination and its relation to society: Greek divination was characterized by a striking degree of flexibility on a number of levels, which might have been the outcome of a relative under-institutionalization. What is equally important, however, is that the cultural variations within one and the same phenomenon are shown. While the ancient worlds had much in common, plurality was always present, even within divination: practices of divination are constituted differently every time.

4 I simply use E.B. Tylor's definition of culture: 'The complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (*Primitive culture: researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art, and custom* (London 1871) 1).

Part I

An introduction to ancient divination

1. Historiography

Divination was omnipresent in the ancient world: 'If the ancient Mediterranean world was full of gods, it was full of their messages as well.'[1] The mindset of ancient individuals might even be described as a state of 'omen-mindedness', as is testified by the amount and nature of the ancient evidence.[2] We know that everyone – from king to slave – was a potential user of divination. Public (official) and pri-

1 D.E. Aune *et al.*, 'Divination and prophecy' in: S.I. Johnston (ed.), *Religions of the ancient world: a guide* (Cambridge, MA 2004) 370-391, at 371. '[...] it was full of their *signs* as well' would be more appropriate. After all, the sign is the occurrence produced by the supernatural, as perceived by man. Cf. below for the crucial role of man in the recognition and interpretation of a sign (which then becomes a message).

2 The term was coined by S. Freedman in: *If a city is set on a height: the Akkadian omen series* Šumma alu ina mēlê šakin, 2 vols (Philadelphia 1998-2006) Vol. 1, 1. The word 'omen' is not used in what follows because I consider the meaning of this word to be too restricted (in Graeco-Roman studies it usually refers to unprovoked signs only) and also too wide (it can refer to a text as well as to a sign in Assyriological studies). Instead, I have opted to use 'sign'. I have still quoted the expression 'omen-mindedness' here because it so neatly captures the state of mind ancient individuals must have been in, in order to perceive the signs from the supernatural (cf. pp. 38-39).

vate (unofficial) divination, with or without an expert, was very common. If an expert was used, individuals would consult a local expert or travel great distances in order to satisfy their need for expertise.[3]

The principal focus of this study is divination in Greece and – to a lesser extent – in Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia and the Roman Republic, but modern scholarship covers virtually all areas for which

3 E. Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires de Dodone* (Genève 2006) 329-335; 363-406. A discussion of those consulting Klaros is H.W. Pleket, 'Tempel en orakel van Apollo in Klaros', *Hermeneus* 66 (1994) 143-151, at 147-148 – individuals from around 50 cities consulted the oracle, coming long distances but notably not from Greek cities on the islands or the coast of Asia Minor. See also *SEG* 37, 961-980 for a list of towns coming to the oracle (from 128 AD to 177 AD). J.E. Fontenrose, *Didyma: Apollo's oracle, cult, and companions* (Berkeley 1988) 104-105. For a very insightful article on Didyma see C. Morgan, 'Divination and society at Delphi and Didyma', *Hermathena* 147 (1989) 17-42. *IG* IX 2 1109 and *Syll.*[3] 1157, lines 8-16. See further L. Robert, 'Sur l'oracle d'Apollon Koropaios' in: idem, *Hellenica: recueil d'épigraphie, de numismatique et d'antiquités grecques* 6 vols (Paris 1948) Vol. 5, 16-28, at 21. For parallels and on travelling to oracles more generally see V. Rosenberger, 'Reisen zum Orakel: Griechen, Lyder und Perser als Klienten hellenischer Orakelstätten' in: M. Witte & S. Alkier (eds), *Die Griechen und der Vordere Orient: Beiträge zum Kultur- und Religionskontakt zwischen Griechenland und dem Vorderen Orient im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Göttingen 2003) 25-58; for those travelling to Delphi see M. Arnush, 'Pilgrimage to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi: patterns of public and private consultation' in: J. Elsner & I. Rutherford (eds), *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and early Christian antiquity* (Oxford 2005) 97-110.

ancient sources are available.[4]

4 Recent additions to the scholarship of ancient divination other than Greek, Roman or Mesopotamian are many and varied. The following serves merely to give an impression: there is a plethora of literature on the subject of Chinese divination, mainly concerned with oracle bones, but also with geomancy and divination by dice. See for example R.J. Smith, *Fortune-tellers and philosophers: divination in traditional Chinese society* (Boulder 1991); D.N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang history: the oracle-bone inscriptions of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley 1978). On cleromancy see M.E. Lewis, *Dicing and divination in Early China* (Philadelphia 2002). The prophets of the ancient Levant have also been extensively researched. For an interesting comparison between biblical prophets and their non-biblical counterparts: L.L. Grabbe, *Priests, prophets, diviners, sages: a socio-historical study of religious specialists in ancient Israel* (Valley Forge, FA 1995); J. Blenkinsopp, *Sage, priest, prophet: religious and intellectual leadership in ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY 1995); J.G. Gammie & L.G. Perdue (eds), *The sage in Israel and the ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IND 1990). Further studies on ancient Israel and its neighbours: C. Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: a means of revelation in ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IND 1997); F.H. Cryer, *Divination in ancient Israel and its Near Eastern environment: a socio-historical investigation* (Sheffield 1994); A. Jeffers, *Magic and divination in ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden 1996). Egyptian divination is an under-developed area of research. However, there is an excellent overview article: A. von Lieven, 'Divination in Ägypten', *AoF* 26 (1999) 77-126. One area which has recently been investigated in depth is divination by dreams: K. Szpakowska, *Behind closed eyes: dreams and nightmares in ancient Egypt* (Swansea 2003). Divination among the Hittites became an area of investigation in the latter half of the last century. For a main overview and further references see Th.P.J. van der Hout, 'Orakel (Oracle). B.

Past scholarship

During the past 120 years, ancient historians have produced a large number of studies of Greek and Roman divination – these have been discussed together as well as separately. Their efforts are paralleled by those of many colleagues in the field of Assyriology who have built extensive datasets about Mesopotamian divination since the late 1890s. Nevertheless, the study of the phenomenon in the fields of ancient history and Assyriology has developed in a relatively isolated fashion: interpretations and conceptualizations of divination have only incidentally been passed on from scholars of the Graeco-Roman world to Assyriologists, and vice-versa.[5] It is still possible to distinguish a number of similar (and different) trends in both of

Bei den Hethitern', *RlA* 10 (2003) 118-124. Articles by leading scholars in the field of Hittitology are for example A. Archi, 'Il sistema KIN della divinazione ittita', *OrAnt* 13 (1974) 131-133; A. Unal & A. Kammenhuber, 'Das althethitische Losorakel Kbo XVIII 151', *ZVS* 88 (1974) 157-180; Th.P.J. van den Hout, 'Hethitische Thronbesteigungsorakel und die Inauguration Tudḫalijas IV', *ZA* 81 (1991) 274-300; V. Haas & I. Wegner, 'Die Orakelprotokolle aus Kusakli. Ein Überblick', *MDOG* 128 (1996) 105-120.

5 Fortunately, there are indications that this is changing. I refer to publications such as A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010), *passim*. See also K. Beerden, 'Review of: "Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world"', *BMCR* 2011.01.32 (see http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2011/2011-01-32.html [visited 27-07-2011]).

these fields of research. In what follows I shall offer a brief chronological synthesis of these developments, with the dual aim of highlighting current issues and identifying relatively unexplored roads in the study of divination.

Divination has invited analysis ever since Antiquity. The earliest surviving treatise containing extensive reflections on this topic is Cicero's *De divinatione*, which is primarily concerned with, what were to him familiar, Roman practices. His influence on the classification of divinatory methods and his reflection on the validity of divination are still clearly visible today. A limited but steady output of scholarly works on divination in the Graeco-Roman world and beyond can be observed throughout the ages, reaching a peak during the Renaissance.[6] A few hundred years later, in a response

6 I can only mention a small number of works dealing with or referring to divination in the period from Augustine to Auguste Bouché-Leclercq here. Some of these works do not deal specifically with *ancient* divination, but nevertheless are illustrative of a growing interest in the study and discussion of divination in the fifteenth century and thereafter. Augustine, *Confessiones*, Books 3 and 4 (note especially the foretelling dream God sent to Augustine's mother in Book 3 and the dismissal of astrology by Augustine in Book 4); G. Savonarola, *Tractato contra li astrologi* (Florence ca. 1495?); L. Daneau, *De veneficis, quos olim sortilegos, nunc autem vulgo sortiarios vocant, dialogus* (Geneva 1574); H. de Pisis, *Fasciculus geomanticus, in quo varia variorum opera geomantica continentur* .. (Leiden 1637); K. Peucer, *Commentarius de praecipuis divinationum generibus* (Wittenberg 1553); J. Raunce, *A brief declaration against judicial astrologie or, the diabolical art of astrologie opened, arraigned, and condemned* (London 1650);

to the innovations introduced by nineteenth-century scholarship, the study of divination was reinvigorated and a major publication appeared: Auguste Bouché-Leclercq's *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*. The aim of this author was to obtain an insight into ancient mindsets by studying divinatory methods and practices in great detail, in the process of which he collected a huge amount of source material, paying particular attention to the experts involved in the divinatory process.[7] In his work, he performed any past and present modern student of divination a great service. In fact, his work has recently been reprinted and can still be considered to be the standard work on Graeco-Roman divination.

Since the very beginnings of the discipline of Assyriology, many of its scholars have occupied themselves with the study of divination. In his *The religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, appearing less than a decade after the *Histoire de la divination,* Morris Jastrow presents one of the first great Assyriological overviews.[8]

G.M. Maraviglia, *Pseudomantia veterum, et recentiorum explosa, sive De fide divinationibus adhibenda* (Venice 1662); P. Mussard, *Historia deorum fatidicorum, vatum, sibyllarum, phoebadum, apud priscos illustrium: cum eorum iconibus. Praeposita est dissertatio de divinatione et oraculis* (Geneva 1675); G.A. Venier, *De oraculis et divinationibus antiquarum* (Venice 1624); F. Denis, *Tableau historique, analytique et critique des sciences occultes* (Paris 1842); F. Lenormant, *La divination et la science des présages chez les Chaldéens* (Paris 1875).

7 On his ideas and aspirations see A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité* 4 vols (Paris 1879-1882) Vol. 1, 1-5.

8 M. Jastrow, *The religion of Babylonia and Assyria* (Boston 1898)

One of the 20th-century scholars who followed up on Bouché-Leclercq's work, William Halliday, approached the topic from a different angle, emphasizing the development of the particular divinatory methods in the contexts of 'positive magic' and irrational practices, even though divination was seen to be founded on intelligible foundations: by means of divination, humans struggled against uncertainty.[9] After Halliday, a relative silence fell among ancient historians until the 1950s.

Developments in the field of Assyriology continued: Georges Contenau's important publication reflects the developments in scholarship in general and more specifically those in Assyriology.[10] The great scholar of the generation after Contenau, A. L. Oppenheim, produced a number of sophisticated, innovative articles in which he both published cuneiform tablets and also contextualized these texts.[11] The early 1960s witnessed a renewed Assyriological interest in

328-407.

9 W.R. Halliday, *Greek divination: a study of its methods and principles* (Chicago 1913).

10 G. Contenau, *La divination chez les Assyriens et les Babyloniens* (Paris 1940).

11 E.g., A. L. Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams in the ancient Near East, with a translation of an Assyrian dream-book* (Philadelphia 1956) 179-373; A.L. Oppenheim, 'Perspectives on Mesopotamian divination' in: J. Nougayrol *et al.* (eds), *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne et dans les régions voisines* (*CCRAI* 14) (Paris 1966) 35-43. For publications up to 1975 see R. Borger, *Handbuch der Keilschriftliteratur* 3 vols (Berlin 1967-1975). For publications after 1975, it is best to browse the overviews of literature in the

divination, culminating in a *Rencontre* on divination held in 1965.[12] It should be noted that during these years, many Assyriologists tended to give priority to the publication of the cuneiform tablets rather than to the analysis of their contents in a social context. Still, as a result of a steady output of publications, transliterations and translations of individual tablets, a solid foundation for the study of divinatory practices was built up in discipline of Assyriology – and the corpus of texts continues to expand each year as there is still an abundance of unpublished materials available.

In the course of the last sixty-five years or so, Greek and Roman epigraphic evidence – for example in the shape of materials from oracle sites – has also become more widely available, thereby providing new possibilities for research.[13] Not only have in-depth studies about particular divinatory methods begun to appear, but rather more gen-

Archiv für Orientforschung series. For an overview of Mesopotamian divination and its materials, one can turn to: S.M. Maul, 'Omina und Orakel. A. Mesopotamien', *RlA* 10 (2006) 45-88. In the present work, literature mainly concerned with divination in the Old Babylonian period has not been taken into account, unless it serves to illustrate the practices we find in the Neo-Assyrian period or when it includes analyses of both periods.

12 The publication resulting from the 1965 *Rencontre*, the annual meeting of Assyriologists, is: Nougayrol, *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne*.

13 See G. Rougemont's thoughts on what epigraphical evidence can add to the study of divination in: G. Rougemont, 'Apports de l'épigraphie à l'histoire grecque: l'example des oracles' in: Y. Le Bohec & Y. Roman (eds), *Épigraphie et histoire: acquis et problèmes* (Lyon 1998) 71-76.

eral works of a systematic and critical nature have also been published.[14] An empirical and evolutionary approach to divination has given way to a more analytical view. Scholars used to see divination as a speculative practice, but they have now begun to perceive it as a rational system: in Jean-Pierre Vernant's collection of essays titled *Divination et rationalité,* divination was, for the first time, *explicitly* studied as such by both ancient historians and Assyriologists.[15] The publication of this book marks an important watershed in the study of divination because it heralds a key change in attitude. Whereas divination had generally been considered an 'irrational' feature of religious life, which could not be fully understood by modern man, it was now emphatically being seen as a practice inviting rational

14 Examples of important titles from the 1950s and 1960s are H. Popp, *Die Einwirkung von Vorzeichen, Opfern und Festen auf die Kriegführung der Griechen im 5. und 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Würzburg 1959); R. Crahay, *La littérature oraculaire chez Hérodote* (Paris 1956); R. Flacelière, *Devins et oracles grecs* (Paris 1961); H.W. Parke, *Greek oracles* (London 1967); H.W. Parke, *The oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon* (London 1967); A. Caquot & M. Leibovici (eds), *La divination: études* 2 vols (Paris 1968); R. Bloch*, Les prodiges dans l'antiquité classique: Grèce, Étrurie et Rome* (Paris 1963); P. Kett, *Prosopographie der historischen griechischen Manteis bis auf die Zeit Alexanders des Grossen* (Dissertation Erlangen-Nürnberg 1966); F. Lutenbacher*, Der Prodigienglaube und Prodigienstil der Römer: eine historisch-philologische Abhandlung* (Darmstadt 1967[2]); P.L. Schmidt, *Iulius Obsequens und das Problem der Livius-Epitome: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der lateinischen Prodigienliteratur* (Mainz 1968).

15 J.P. Vernant *et al.* (eds), *Divination et rationalité* (Paris 1974).

analysis. This change in emphasis and approach is striking and has produced a renewed output of publications approaching divination in relation to such topics as ancient philosophy, warfare and politics.

The present revival

In recent years another revival of the study of classical, primarily Greek, divination has been taking shape. This trend is exemplified by the articles brought together by Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter Struck in their publication *Mantikê*.[16] Johnston's views on what she considers to be a general dearth of classical scholarship on divination and the reason for the current revitalization, are intriguing because of the shift in views about divination she has deduced. Her argument is that initially divination could not profit from the rising interest in Greek religion because it has often been, and sometimes still is, classified as 'magic' (my inverted commas). This classification tied in nicely with the idea which saw divination as an 'irrational' practice. Since 'magic' did not become a mainstream research area until the 1960s, scholarship on divination remained scarce. Even in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, when 'magic' became more popular, divi-

16 S.I. Johnston & P.T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: studies in ancient divination* (Leiden 2005). See also the special issue of the *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 224 (2007), among others with a very good introduction by N. Belayche and J. Rüpke.

nation remained under-examined because it was not a 'dark enough' topic for those interested in 'magic'. Recently, the view that research into 'magic' – and any phenomenon one chooses to classify as such – has to be about 'dark magic' has begun to shift. Johnston states that this change in attitude, in conjunction with the novel perception of divination as a rational part of religious systems, is the main driving force behind the present revival: scholars of both magic and of religion now regard divination as a potential object of study.[17]

Some issues which have recently been reinvestigated are formalized oracular practices and their role in politics and society. Did divination actually make a difference or was it a mere formality?[18]

17 S.I. Johnston, 'Introduction: divining divination' in: S.I. Johnston & P.T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: studies in ancient divination* (Leiden 2005) 1-28.

18 See for Rome, where there are many studies available on this topic: J. Champeaux, *Fortuna: recherches sur le culte de la Fortune à Rome et dans le monde romain des origines à la mort de César* 2 vols (Rome 1982-1987); J. Champeaux, '*Sors Oraculi*: les oracles en Italie sous la république et l'empire', *MEFRA* 102 (1990) 271-302; J. Linderski, 'Cicero and Roman divination' in: idem, *Roman questions: selected papers* 2 vols (Stuttgart 1995) Vol. 1, 458-484; J. Linderski, 'Watching the birds: Cicero the augur and the augural temple' in: ibid., *Roman questions: selected papers* 2 vols (Stuttgart 1995) Vol. 1, 485-495; B. MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation: a study in religion and politics in republican Rome* (Brussels 1982). For Greece see R. Parker, *Polytheism and society at Athens* (Oxford 2005), especially 108-123; R. Parker, 'Greek states and Greek oracles' in: R. Buxton (ed.), *Oxford readings in Greek religion* (Oxford 2000) 76-108, revised version of R. Parker, 'Greek states and oracles' in: P.A. Cartledge & F.D. Harvey (eds), *Crux: essays presented to G.E.M. de*

A connected theme is the study of scepticism about, and manipulation of, divination – which has received ample attention, especially by those concerned with Roman practices.[19] Even now, compared to the formal rituals, the more private and unofficial divinatory practices are still relatively unexplored territory. Nevertheless, there have been a number of recent publications on this topic.[20]

Ste. Croix (Exeter 1985) 298-326); V. Rosenberger, *Griechische Orakel: eine Kulturgeschichte* (Darmstadt 2001); H. Bowden, *Classical Athens and the Delphic oracle: divination and democracy* (Cambridge 2005).

19 On scepticism see for Greece, among others: J.D. Mikalson, *Honor thy gods: popular religion in Greek tragedy* (Chapel Hill 1991) 97-101; and for Rome among others W.V. Harris, 'Roman opinions about the truthfulness of dreams', *JRS* 93 (2003) 18-34 or the many publications on Cicero's *De divinatione*. The diviner and his influence on the process of divination are central topics in this discussion. On the diviner see R. Garland, 'Priests and power in Classical Athens' in: M. Beard & J. North (eds), *Pagan priests: religion and power in the ancient world* (London 1990) 75-91; J.N. Bremmer, 'The status and symbolic capital of the seer' in: R. Hägg (ed.), *The role of religion in the early Greek polis: proceedings from the third international seminar on ancient Greek cult: organized by the Swedish institute at Athens, 16-18 October 1992* (Stockholm 1996) 97-109.

20 Recent contributions on informal practices (there are many more publications): F. Graf, 'Rolling the dice for an answer' in: S.I. Johnston & P.T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: studies in ancient divination* (Leiden 2005) 51-97; W.E. Klingshirn, 'Christian divination in late Roman Gaul: the s*ortes sangallenses*' in: iidem, 99-128; C. Grottanelli, '*Sorte unica pro casibus pluribus enotata*: literary texts and lot inscriptions as sources for ancient cleromancy' in: iidem, 129-146. See also a number of the articles in *Kernos* 3 (Actes du

Furthermore, an apparent shift from an emic ('from the native's point of view') to a more etically orientated ('from the academic's point of view') divinatory model has occurred.[21] In the emic model, divination is considered to be communication from the supernatural to men.[22] The models using an etic orientation tend to emphasize

colloque 'Oracles et mantique en Grèce ancienne') (1990).

21 The terms etic and emic, borrowed from anthropological studies, signify the difference between the language and definitions which the researcher uses (etic) and the language the object of study uses (emic). Etic language and definitions should function as tools with which the researcher can tackle his study in a 'neutral' way. Naturally, etic language should remain closely connected to emic experience. See also, among many others, M. Harris, 'History and significance of the emic/etic distinction', *AnnRevAnth* 5 (1976) 329-350 and more recently T. Headland, K.L. Pike & M. Harris (eds), *Emics and etics: the insider/outsider debate* (Newbury Park 1990).

22 Communication is the transmission of information between two entities or from one to the other. This does not necessarily involve simultaneity. There are a number of approaches to the study of this phenomenon: most prominent are the *process school* and the *semiotics school*. For a concise summary of a number of models of communication see M. Burgoon, F.G. Hunsaker & E.J. Dawson, *Human communication* (Thousand Oaks 1994[3]) 18-34. For some introductions to communication, on the use of communication theory, and theory more generally see D. Holmes, *Communication theory: media, technology, society* (London 2005); J. Fiske, *Introduction to communication studies* (London 1982); on giving meaning to signs within a communicative framework see B. Aubrey Fisher, *Perspectives on human communication* (New York 1978) 266-283; U. Eco, *A theory of semi-*

divination as a religious phenomenon in which the human individual fulfils the central role. In this model, the supernatural does not play an active role in the divinatory process. The shift to stress the important position of human individuals in divinatory practice has paved the way for divination to be incorporated into studies dealing with human mentality and social issues: subjects like risk management and the seer as a religious expert spring to mind. Esther Eidinow, for example, uses two different types of epigraphic sources, oracle tablets (from the sanctuary at Dodona) and curse tablets, in order to illustrate the ways Greek individuals perceived risk, both in the present and the future.[23] Michael A. Flower takes the Greek divinatory expert as his central figure of research and analyses his role in society and the various themes related to this role, such as his actual influence on Greek warfare. At the same time, the Roman expert receives attention.[24]

otics (Bloomington, IND 1979[2]).

23 E. Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk among the ancient Greeks* (Oxford 2007). I do not use the term 'risk' to investigate the ancient world myself, as I do not think it a useful concept with which to pursue the study of ancient divination with. Cf. pp. 363-378.

24 M.A. Flower, *The seer in ancient Greece* (Berkeley 2008); for the central role of the *homo divinans* – but now in Rome – see also V. Rosenberger, 'Republican nobiles: controlling the Res Publica' in: J. Rüpke (ed.), *A companion to Roman religion* (2007) 292-303; J. North, 'Diviners and divination at Rome' in: M. Beard & J. North (eds), *Pagan priests: religion and power in the ancient world* (London 1990) 51-71. See for the most recent publications in the Graeco-Roman branch of divinatory studies Eidinow, *Oracles, curses,*

These recent upsurges of interest in Greek and Roman divination have been paralleled by more or less independent developments in the field of Assyriology. Because most Assyriologists are very specialized, scholarly productions in this field tend to take the form of detailed studies discussing one specific method of divination only. Extispicy has received a large amount of attention,[25] as has astrol-

and risk; R. Stoneman; *The ancient oracles: making the gods speak* (New Haven 2011); S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012).

25 An excellent overview is offered by the following: U. Jeyes, 'The act of extispicy in ancient Mesopotamia: an outline' in: I.M. Diakonoff *et al.* (eds), *Assyriological miscellanies* I (Copenhagen 1980) 13-32; see also: J. Aro, 'Remarks on the practice of extispicy in the time of Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal' in: J. Nougayrol *et al.* (eds), *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne et dans les régions voisines* (*CCRAI* 14) (Paris 1966) 109-117; I. Starr, 'In search of principles of prognostication in extispicy', *HUCA* 45 (1974) 17-23; I. Starr, 'Notes on some technical terms in extispicy', *JCS* 27 (1975) 241-247; J.W. Meyer, *Untersuchungen zu den Tonlebermodellen aus dem Alten Orient* (Kevelaer 1987); U. Jeyes, *Old Babylonian extispicy: omen texts in the British Museum* (Istanbul 1989); a very anatomically oriented study is R. Leiderer, *Anatomie der Schafsleber im babylonischen Leberorakel: eine makroskopisch-analytische Studie* (München 1990); one of the standard works of reference for study of the liver compendia is U. Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens: the chapters manzāzu, padānu and pān tākalti of the Babylonian extispicy series mainly from Aššurbanipal's library* (Copenhagen 2000); as well as U.S. Koch, *Secrets of extispicy: the chapter Multābiltu of the Babylonian extispicy series and Niṣirti bārûti texts mainly*

ogy.[26] Lately, prophecy has emerged as a focal point of research.[27]

from Aššurbanipal's library (Münster 2005). See also: U. Jeyes, 'A compendium of gall-bladder omens extant in Middle Babylonian, Nineveh, and Seleucid versions' in: A.R. George & I.L. Finkel (eds), *Wisdom, gods and literature: studies in Assyriology in honour of W.G. Lambert* (Winona Lake, IND 2000) 345-374; U. Koch-Westenholz, 'Old Babylonian extispicy reports' in: C. Wunsch (ed.), *Mining the archives: Festschrift for Christopher Walker on the occasion of his 60th birthday, 4 October 2002* (Dresden 2002) 131-145; J.C. Fincke, 'Ist die Mesopotamische Opferschau ein nächtliches Ritual?', *BiOr* 66 (2009) 519-558; J.J. Glassner, 'Le corps de la victime dans la sacrifice divinatoire' in: G. Barjamovic *et al.* (eds), *Akkade is King: a collection of papers by friends and colleagues presented to Aage Westenholz on occasion of his 70th birthday 15th of May 2009* (Copenhagen) 143-150.

26 A very important overview: U. Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology: an introduction to Babylonian and Assyrian celestial divination* (Leiden 2011). And more recently: F. Rochberg, *The heavenly writing: divination, horoscopy, and astronomy in Mesopotamian culture* (Cambridge 2004). Further literature: A.L. Oppenheim, 'Divination and celestial observation in the last Assyrian empire', *Centaurus* 14 (1969) 97-135; H. Hunger, *Astrological reports to Assyrian kings* (Helsinki 1992); E. Reiner, *Astral magic in Babylonia* (Philadelphia 1995); D. Pingree, *From astral omens to astrology: from Babylon to Bīkāner* (Rome 1997); E. Reiner, 'The uses of astrology', *JAOS* 105 (1985) 589-595.

27 S. Parpola, *Assyrian prophecies* (Helsinki 1997); J.G. Heintz (ed.), *Oracles et prophéties dans l'antiquité: actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 15-17 juin 1995* (Paris 1997); M. Nissinen, *References to prophecy in Neo-Assyrian sources* (Helsinki 1998); M. Nissinen (ed.), *Prophecy in its ancient Near Eastern context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian perspectives* (Atlanta 2000); M. Weippert, '"König, fürchte dich nicht!" Assyrische Prophetie im

Furthermore, compendia of ominous signs have been published in accessible form.[28] However, as already noted above, synthesis is lagging behind. To date Jean Bottéro's contribution to Vernant's *Divination et rationalité* remains the most comprehensive synthetic article on Mesopotamian divination.[29] During the past couple of decades, however, there has been a cautious shift in attitudes: a contextualization of divination in Mesopotamian culture has begun to take place. Scholars have started to explore the influence of extispicy on social and economic aspects, and have generally approached divination more theoretically. Ulla Koch is an excellent example of the latter approach, raising the study of divination to a new level.[30]

7. Jahrhundert v. Chr.', *Orientalia* 71 (2002) 1-54; M. Nissinen, *Prophets and prophecy in the ancient Near East* (Atlanta 2003).

28 See volumes such as E. Leichty, *The omen series* Šumma izbu (Locust Valley, NY 1970); Freedman, If *a city is set on a height*; publications of series such as *Enuma Anu Enlil* have been more scattered.

29 J. Bottéro, 'Symptômes, signes, écritures en Mésopotamie ancienne' in: J.P. Vernant *et al.*, *Divination et rationalité* (Paris 1974). Further work by Bottéro, e.g., on classification and on information about the expert: J. Bottéro, *La plus vieille religion: en Meśopotamie* (Paris 1998) 328-354.

30 The most striking article in this respect is U. Koch, 'Three strikes and you're out! A view on cognitive theory and the first-millennium extispicy ritual' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 43-59 but see also the work of other scholars: N. Veldhuis, 'Divination: theory and use' in: A.K. Guinan *et al.* (eds), *If a man builds a joyful house: Assyriological studies in honour of Erle Verdun Leichty* (Leiden 2006) 487-497; S. Richardson, 'Ewe should be so lucky: extispicy

A publication such as *The heavenly writing* by Francesca Rochberg contains valuable chapters about divination in general.[31]

All in all, the focus of the study of ancient divination has fundamentally changed character. A progression from systematization and publication of materials towards a more analytical approach to divination can be discerned in both Assyriology and Classical studies. Divination has become a means to obtain a better understanding of human societies.

reports and everyday life' in: C. Wunsch (ed.), *Mining the archives: Festschrift for Christopher Walker on the occasion of his 60th birthday, 4 October 2002* (Dresden 2002) 229-235; A.K. Guinan, 'A severed head laughed: stories of divinatory interpretation' in: L. Ciraolo & J. Seidel (eds), *Magic and divination in the ancient world* (Leiden 2002) 7-40.

31 Rochberg, *The heavenly writing*, especially 44-97.

2. Defining divination

Point of departure for my definition of divination as used in this book is the idea that divination is a phenomenon concerned with a human search, conscious or subconscious, for signs supposedly coming from the supernatural and the interpretation thereof. Many definitions of divination can be found in the literature.[1] Depending on whether these privilege the conceptions of ancient practitioners or those of modern observers, they can be classified as either predominantly emically or as more etically oriented. As has been noted, in emic definitions the supernatural tends to take an important place as the source of the divinatory sign. Auguste Bouché-Leclercq and Georges Contenau, for example, define divination as having, or finding, knowledge about divine thinking by means of signs.[2] Some would say that divination can be defined as the active human extraction of a sign from the supernatural in order to find

1 Johnston, 'Introduction', 10; although Vernant in 'Paroles et signes muets' in: J.-P. Vernant *et al*, *Divination et rationalite* (Paris 1974) 9-25, at 9, has chosen not to define divination as such. The sort of questions he poses to the material show that he emphasizes the human factor; for the latter see also E.M. Zuesse, 'Divination' in: M. Eliade & L. Jones (eds), *The encyclopedia of religion* vols 16 (1987) Vol. 4, 375-382, at 375; G. van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion* (Tübingen 1933) 355-360.

2 Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, Vol. 1, 7; Contenau, *La divination*, 9.

answers to questions and acquire knowledge of the unknown.[3] Both types of definition suppose the supernatural plays an active role in the divinatory process.[4] Another variation is the use of the word 'communication' (between man and supernatural) without the etic addition that this would have been *perceived* communication. Such a definition is essentially emic.

Other definitions use both etic and emic wording, inviting confusion. One example is Hartmut Zinser's definition in the *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*: he states that the purpose of divination is to find out what is as yet – and by human means – unknown.[5] Zinser incorporates function in his definition and does not explicitly mention the supernatural, suggesting an etic outlook. Nevertheless his definition is still partly emic in nature because knowledge gained by means of divination is *perceived* knowledge: it is impossible to find out the unknown.

There are etic definitions, too. The *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum* defines divination as the human observation of perceived divine signs and the response to these.[6] The *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* also emphasizes human observation and subsequent

3 M. Loewe & C. Blacker, 'Introduction' in: M. Loewe & C. Blacker (eds), *Divination and oracles* (London 1981) 1-2, at 1.

4 The emic vocabulary related to divination in the three units of comparison is found in Appendix 1.

5 H. Zinser, 'Mantik' in: *HrwG* (Stuttgart 1988) Vol. 4, 109-113, at 109.

6 W. Burkert, '6.a Divination: Mantik in Griechenland' in: *ThesCRA* (2005) Vol. 3, 1-51, at 1.

interpretation, allowing the individual an active role.[7] These definitions can be improved upon by assigning the human actor an even more central role: the individual not only interprets the sign but also creates it by detecting and recognizing it. This is an element not made explicit in many of the available definitions.[8]

For the present purpose, what is needed is a cross-culturally applicable, concise, etic definition that takes account of this twofold human role in producing and interpreting the sign. I propose the following etic definition: divination is the human action of production – by means of evocation or detection and recognition – and subsequent interpretation of signs attributed to the supernatural. These signs can be anything which the supernatural is perceived to place in an object (in the widest sense of the word), whether evoked or unprovoked, whether visible, olfactory or auditory: in all cases the human must recognize a sign as coming from the supernatural in order to consider it as a divinatory sign.[9] Once this has occurred,

7 Maul, 'Omina und Orakel', 45-46.

8 Such as the definition in J.N. Bremmer, 'Divination VI. Greek' in: H. Cancik & H. Schneider (eds), *Brill's New Pauly Online*. Visited 23-1-2010.

9 As appears from this definition, I do not make a distinction between 'prophecy', 'omen divination' and so on – made by, e.g., M. Nissinen, 'Prophecy and omen divination: two sides of the same coin' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 341-351. According to my definition, the sayings of a prophet such as those of Ishtar, or the pronouncements of the Pythia at the Delphic Oracle, are simply auditory signs. For emphasis on how interpretation is culturally specific cf. A. Hollmann, *The master of signs: signs and the interpretation of*

the signs need to be interpreted – whether this task is straightforward or difficult. This (culturally specific) interpretation produces a clear message.[10] On the basis of this definition, the following three constituent elements can be identified in the process of divination: first, the *homo divinans* – a term used here to designate any person divining, whether layman or professional –; second, the sign he detects, recognizes, and interprets; and third, the oral or written textual framework which the *homo divinans* might use while divining. These are the subjects of the chapters in Part II below. This definition allows room for variation in the functions of divination: to receive perceived information from the supernatural, to right what has gone wrong in the past, to know why the present is the way it is or to provide a – more or less detailed – guideline for the future. In short, the function of divination is to diminish uncertainty about the past, present and the future. Although divination is future oriented, it is also concerned with past and present – but it is always connected with uncertainty.[11]

signs in Herodotus' Histories (Cambridge, MA 2011) 32-54.

10 Some have considered divination, especially Greek divination, to be an ambiguous practice. However, in practice, everything was done to make the outcomes of divination as clear as possible. The only sources highlighting ambiguity are such literary sources as Herodotos and it can be argued that they did this for very specific rhetorical reasons. Cf. K. Beerden & F.G. Naerebout, '"Gods cannot tell lies": riddling and ancient Greek divination' in: J. Kwapisz, D. Petrain & M. Szymanski (eds.), *The muse at play: riddles and wordplay in Greek and Latin poetry* (Berlin 2012) 121-147.

11 For example, this uncertainty could be the consequence of the anger

The divinatory process and its function

My definition of divination consists of a number of elements – human agent (*homo divinans*), text and sign. Evocation, detection, recognition and interpretation are the actions of the individual in the divinatory process.

A sign is 'anything, whether object, sound, action, or event, which is capable of standing for something in some respect'.[12] A divinatory sign had to be recognized. It could be something which an individual detected and recognized as being out of the ordinary: a sign could therefore be a special occurrence, a disruption in the patterns

of the supernatural (as in Ael. *VH* 6.7) or other crises. Divination therefore might be called a 'high-intensity' ritual: it was performed in times of need. The contrasting occasion would be a low-intensity ritual: a ritual which was held to maintain relations with the supernatural, for instance, regular offerings. A special offering in time of crisis, on the other hand, is another example of a high-intensity ritual. It should be noted that this distinction is, in practice, not as very clear-cut as G. Ekroth indicates (G. Ekroth, *The sacrificial rituals of Greek hero-cults in the Archaic to the early Hellenistic periods* (Liège 2002) 326-328), I have therefore not used this distinction in what follows. Cf. A.M. de Waal-Malefijt, *Religion and culture: an introduction to anthropology of religion* (London 1968) 198-227; J.G. Platvoet, *Comparing religions: a limitative approach. An analysis of Akan, Para-Creole and Ifo-Sananda rites and prayers* (The Hague 1982) 27-28; J. van Baal, 'Offering, sacrifice and gift', *Numen* 23 (1976) 161-178, at 168.

12 Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 3.

of normality.[13] However, a sign could also be something perfectly normal which only became significant at the moment at which an individual detected it and recognized it as a sign.[14] It could be argued that the spontaneous occurrence of dark fungus in a house was a special occurrence[15] – if it was taken to be a sign. It was then significant in the mind of the individual who recognized it for what it, in his opinion, was. The supernatural could also be asked to give a sign by the performance of a ritual of evocation. Even in this case, the resulting sign would still needed to be recognized – although it will have been more obvious what was being looked for if the shape of the requested sign had been specified.

A sign should not have been influenced by humans: the sign had to be 'objective'. Fritz Graf mentions the 'randomising element' in divination.[16] A prime example is the use of dice for divinatory pur-

13 As W. Burkert puts it: 'Chance events could be turned into signs by "accepting" them.' W. Burkert, *Creation of the sacred: tracks of biology in early religions* (Cambridge MA 1996) 159. It should be noted that 'chance events' is a too restrictive term: the events in question might also be 'non-chance'.

14 For which crises and uncertain situations were perfect occasions. Cf. Burkert, *Creation of the sacred*, 162.

15 *Šumma ālu* tablet 12.43 as published by Freedman in: *If a city is set on a height*, Vol. 1.

16 Graf, 'Rolling the dice', 61. This idea is also visible in S.I. Johnston, 'Charming children: the use of the child in ancient divination', *Areth* 34 (2001) 97-117, at 109 – see also the references she provides. For more references on this topic see H.S. Versnel, *Transitions & reversal in myth & ritual* (Leiden 1993) 174 n.158.

poses. However, despite (or perhaps even because) randomization, signs could always be – or be suspected of having been – tweaked or influenced.[17]

Signs could occur in many shapes and forms, but are here categorized into two categories: of observation and discourse.[18] Within

17 But if the validity of divination was called into doubt, it was usually not the sign which was doubted, but its interpretation.

18 In the past, signs have been classified in many ways. The first classification is by means of method. Ernest Stefan Magnus has provided a historiographical overview of classifications of methods on the basis of a number of prominent publications about divination. The most used categorization is – what he calls – ecstatic versus technical. This distinction between intuitive ('ecstatic') and technical ('scientific') divination, referring to differences in the ways signs might manifest themselves and in the methods used to interpret them, goes back to Antiquity. (E.S. Magnus provides an overview of divisions of divination: E.S. Magnus, *Die Divination, ihr Wesen und ihre Struktur, besonders in den sogenannten primitiven Gesellschaften: eine einführende Abhandlung auf vergleichender religionsphänomenologischer Basis unter Berücksichtigung von parapsychologischen Ergebnissen und soziologischen Aspekten* (Hannover 1975) 225-243. Note that in the category of prophecy, there are elements which can be called ecstatic, but also interpretive, artificial or 'rational', as Mazzoldi and Bonnechere rightly state: S. Mazzoldi, 'Cassandra's prophecy between ecstacy and rational mediation', *Kernos* 15 (2002) 145-154; P. Bonnechere, 'Mantique, transe et phénomènes psychiques à Lébadée: entre rationnel et irrationnel en Grèce et dans la pensée moderne', *Kernos* 15 (2002) 179-186.) In his *De divinatione* – the most systematic work on divination left to us from the ancient world –, perhaps drawing inspiration from Plato's distinction between 'manic' and 'sane' div-

the category of observation, a human could observe visual or olfactory signs. These signs could be evoked or unprovoked. This category covers methods as varied as zoomancy/theriomancy (including ornithomancy and alectryonomancy), teratomancy, morphoscopy, hieroscopy, astronomy, empyromancy, dendromancy, aleuromancy, cleromancy, hydromancy, lithomancy/psephomancy, brontoscopy, keraunoscopy, nephomancy, anemoscopy, rhabdomancy, tyromancy, axinomancy, koskinomancy, sphondylomancy, ooscopy, libanomancy, and idolomancy.[19]

ination, Cicero distinguishes between *divinatio naturalis* (including prophecies or oracles provided in a state of frenzy and in dreams) and *divinatio artificiosa* (*ars*, basically all other signs) (Pl. *Phdr.* 244a-d; Cic. *Div.* 1.6.12). Two other frequently used categorizations are based on how and where the sign occurred: evoked versus unprovoked divination and terrestrial versus heavenly signs. The latter distinction, derived from the Mesopotamian compendia, is regularly used in Assyriological studies. It refers to the distinction between signs appearing on earth and those appearing in the skies (For example, in the article Maul, 'Omina und Orakel', 54-88.) I hasten to add that these classifications on the basis of the sign are only some of the many possibilities.

19 This is a non-exhaustive list primarily based on Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, *passim*. Zoomancy/theriomancy: *Šumma ālu* tablets 23-49; Aesch. *Cho*. 525-550; Ael. *NA* 11.2; Cic. *Div*. 1.18.34; Paus. 6.2.4/ FGrH 325 F 20; Theophr. *Char*. 16; Plaut. *Stich*. 3.2.45; Obseq. 12; Ath. 8.8; Liv. 42.2.3-7 (fish general); Obseq. 67-68; Plin. *NH* 2.96.98-99; Obseq. 16; Cic. *Div*.1.33.73; *Šumma ālu* tablets 65-79; SAA 10 58; Eur. *Ion* 180; Ar. *Av*. 16-22; *Syll.*[3] 1167; Polyb. 6.27; Cic. *Div*. 1.2.3; 2.34.71-72; Lucianus. *Somn*. 2; Amm. Marc. 29.1. Teratomancy: *Šumma izbu*; SAA 8 238; *Šumma ālu* tablets

Divination by means of discursive signs refers to the interpretation of verbal signs either in the shape of human language or metalinguistic sounds.[20] If a medium was used, this was another being, dead or alive, who provided the *homo divinans* (or his client) with

80-87, 103-104; Liv. 27.4.11-15; Liv. 27.11.1-6; Liv. 22.57.2-6. Morphoscopy: elements from *Alamdimmû and* Melamp., *Peri elaion tou somatos.* Hieroscopy: *Barūtu;* Eur. *El.* 826-833; Cic. *Div.* 1.52.119 ; Liv. 30.2.9-13. Astronomy: *Enūma Anu Enlil* tablets 1-22; Hymn. Hom. *In Lunam* 14; Plut. *Vit. Marc.* 4.1; *Enūma Anu Enlil* tablets 23-36; Herodorus of Heracleia *apud* Ath. 6.231d; Liv. 28.11.1-7; *Enūma Anu Enlil* tablets 37-49; Ar. *Ach.* 171; *Enūma Anu Enlil* tablets 50-70; Liv. 30.2.9-13. Empyromancy: *Šumma ālu* tablets 50-52; Soph. *Ant.* 1005-1011; *CIG* 5763/5771. Dendromancy: *Šumma ālu* tablets 54-60; Soph. *Trach.* 1158-1179; Theophr. *Caus. Pl.* 5.4.3; Plin. 17.38.243; Liv. 32.1.10-14. Aleuromancy: AO 3112; Hesych. s.v. *aleuromanteia.* Cleromancy: Hom. *Il.* 7.175-190; Cic. *Div.* 2. 41.85-87. Hydromancy: in the widest sense of the word: *Šumma ālu* tablets 61-63; Arr. *An.* 4.15.7-8; Plin. *NH* 31.3.27; 2.27; Paus. 3.23.8; Liv. 7.2.1-7.3.8. Lithomancy/psephomancy: LKA 137; Ps.-Plut. *Op. cit.* 21.2; Liv. 25.7.7-9; *Šumma ālu* tablets 1-22. Brontoscopy: SAA 8 1; Xen. *Ap.* 12; Hom. *Od.* 20.105-20.122; Nigid. brontoscopic calendar. Keraunoscopy: Liv. 10.31.8. Nephomancy: SAA 8 78; Liv. 37.3.1-6. Anemoscopy: SAA 8 4; Ael. *VH* 8.5; Obseq. 56a; Obseq. 62. Rhabdomancy: (non-Greek practice according to) Hdt. 4.67; Soph. *Trach.* 1165. Tyromancy: Artem. 2.69. Axinomancy: Plin. *NH* 30.1.14; 36.19.34. Koskinomancy: Artem. 2.69; Theoc. *Id.* 3.31. Sphondylomancy: Poll. 7.188. Ooscopy: Suid. s.v. *egchuton.* Libanomancy: Plin. *NH* 15.30.135.

20 SAA 9 4; Aesch. *Ag.* 1080-1195; Liv. 25.12; Dodonaïc tablets; Cic. *Div.* 1.18.34; Melamp., *Peri palmôn mantikes*; Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 14; 48; Cic. *Div.* 2.40.83-84.

the sign. Dreams and visions can be observational or discursive, or both: the categories are not mutually exclusive.[21]

The *homo divinans*, whether a layman or an expert diviner, interpreted the sign – with the help of an oral or written text, by means of discussion or simply on the basis of his own personal experience.[22] If a lay *homo divinans* was content with his own explanation of a sign, no expert needed to be involved in the process. If he was unsure, he would consult an expert who had, in his opinion, special knowledge:

> Just at this time, as Alexander was sacrificing, wearing garlands, and just about to initiate the first victim according to the ceremonial, a carnivorous bird hovering over the altar dropped on his head a stone which it was carrying in its talons. Alexander asked Aristander the seer what this omen of the bird meant, and he answered: "O King, you will capture the city; but for today you must look to yourself."[23]

21 [d]Zaqīqu; Hdt. 1.108; Hom. *Od.* 19.560-565; Hdt. 3.124 ; Cic. *Div.* 1.20.39-1.30.65. Note that epiphanies were not necessarily considered to be divinatory – it depends on whether or not a sign was provided in the epiphany.

22 See for an example of the idea that a diviner was needed to answer difficult questions: Aeschin. *In Tim.* 75-76. An example of a discussion about the meaning of a sign: Hom. *Od.* 15.160-15.178.

23 Arr. *Anab.* 2.26.4. Translation by P.A. Brunt. Edition: Teubner.
καὶ ἐν τούτῳ θύοντι Ἀλεξάνδρῳ καὶ ἐστεφανωμένῳ τε καὶ κατάρχεσθαι μέλλοντι τοῦ πρώτου ἱερείου κατὰ νόμον τῶν τις σαρκοφάγων ὀρνίθων ὑπερπετόμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ βωμοῦ λίθον ἐμβάλλει ἐς τὴν κεφαλήν, ὅντινα τοῖν ποδοῖν ἔφερε. καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος ἤρετο Ἀρίστανδρον τὸν μάντιν, ὅ τι νοοῖ ὁ οἰωνός. ὁ δὲ ἀποκρίνεται ὅτι· ὦ βασιλεῦ, τὴν μὲν πόλιν αἱρήσεις, αὐτῷ δέ σοι φυλακτέα ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῇδε τῇ ἡμέρᾳ.

The layman could also begin by consulting an expert when special knowledge of the divinatory process was needed. This expert would make a query for the client and interpret the sign. Of course, an expert could also recognize an unprovoked sign on his own account, choosing to share this knowledge with the person for whom the sign was, in his opinion, intended. It is, of course, possible that more than one *homo divinans* took part in this process. The prerequisite for any *homo divinans*, layman or expert, was 'omen-mindedness'. This term expresses the idea that human beings are constantly on the lookout for occurrences to provide them with meaning, as ancient individuals were and modern individuals still are. In other words, it expresses the idea that humans seek to detect agency in the environment – any occurrence is thought to have been brought about by someone or something.[24] In Antiquity, these agents were

24 I thank Dr U. Koch for bringing the cognitive approach to divination to my attention: Koch, 'Cognitive theory and the first-millennium extispicy ritual', 43-59; J.P. Sørensen, 'Cognitive underpinnings of divinatory practices' in: K. Munk & A. Lisdorf (eds), *Unveiling the hidden* (forthcoming) 311-327; A. Lisdorf, *The dissemination of divination in Roman republican times: a cognitive approach* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2007). See further, more generally on cognitive theory the following volumes which I found helpful, T. Tremlin, *Minds and gods: the cognitive foundations of religion* (Oxford 2006), especially 75-200; P. Boyer, *Religion explained: the human instincts that fashion gods, spirits and ancestors* (London 2001); P. Boyer & C. Ramble, 'Cognitive templates for religious concepts: cross-cultural evidence for recall of counter-intuitive representations', *CogS* 25 (2001) 535-564; J. Andresen, *Religion in mind: cognitive perspectives on*

usually people or animals. If an event for which no person or animal could be held responsible took place, humans still required an agent to explain the event: on account of the omnipresent belief in the existence of a supernatural in the ancient world, people could easily attribute otherwise unexplained occurrences to a 'hidden agent' of this type. In the field of cognitive religion this is called the 'Agency Detection Device'. Naturally, some sort of selection of what was a sign and what was not, would need to have been made in what has been dubbed: '[…] the economy of signification.'[25]

The divinatory process could be prognostic or diagnostic. It was prognostic when the sign was used to reveal unknowns still in the future. It could be diagnostic, too: a client could visit an expert sfter some misfortune had befallen him. The expert would ask whether or not the client had seen a particular sign. If so, this sign could be used to explain the particular current misfortune. During this process, the expert reasoned back in time, pinpointing the sign by deducing it from its consequences.[26]

When evoking a sign or interpreting it, or in both stages, the *homo divinans* could use a text. This text could be performative ('I evoke

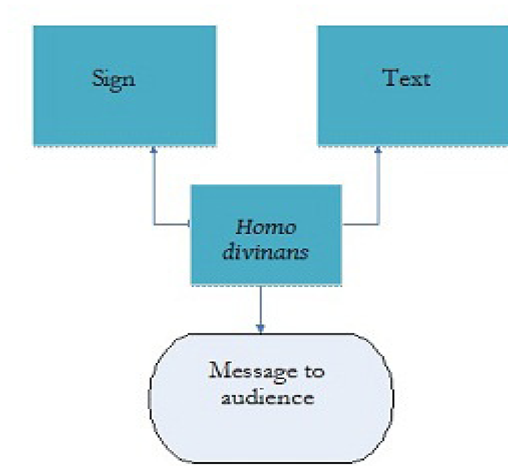
religious belief, ritual, and experience (Cambridge 2001); I. Pyysiäinen & V. Anttonen (eds), *Current approaches in the cognitive science of religion* (London 2002); M. Graves, *Mind, brain and the elusive soul: human systems of cognitive science and* religion (Aldershot 2008); J. Sørensen, *A cognitive theory of magic* (Lanham, MD 2007).

25 Smith, *Imagining religion,* 56.

26 This was first pointed out to me in a lecture by Dr U. Koch (2010).

a sign'), informative ('This particular sign X') or prescriptive ('This particular sign should be interpreted as follows'). These three main etic elements in the divinatory process are depicted in relationship to one another (Figure 1).

Figure 1: divinatory elements



Partly inspired by D. Zeitlyn: 'Finding meaning in the text: the process of interpretation in text-based divination', *JRAI* 7 (2001) 225-240, at 227.

It should be noted that the relative importance of each element could be greater or smaller in any given cultural area: variations in importance between the three elements illuminate what is specific to Mesopotamian, Greek, and Roman divination. The message to the

audience, the final element in the divinatory process, was completely dependent on specific situations and is therefore not suitable for analysis here. Hence, the message will play only a minor part in my investigations.

An etic model, based on an etic definition, provides a deeper understanding of divinatory practice than does its emic counterpart when looking from a scholarly point of view.[27] The model shown in Appendix 2 depicts objects as squares and actions as ovals It works as follows: first the individual detects and recognizes a sign. In the case of evoked divination, he has specifically asked for the sign and in his act of recognition acknowledges the sign to be the one he asked for; in the case of non-evoked divination he needs to designate a spontaneous occurrence as a sign. Then the *homo divinans* interprets the sign in question, after which it acquires an understandable meaning. The sign has become a message. Lastly the meaning provides the audience (either the *homo divinans* himself or his client) with knowledge about an issue about which he might have been concerned (although this concern does not need to have been articulated). This knowledge can stimulate the individual to act or decide, although this is not invariably so. It should be noted that in this etic model, too, misinterpretation of a sign is always possible (although this is a debatable issue in emic practice).

An important aspect that is implicitly depicted in the model is the function of divination. The outcome of the divinatory process, in the

27 For a more emic model see D. Briquel, 'Divination VII. Rome' in: H. Cancik & H. Schneider, *Brill's New Pauly Online*. Visited 23-1-2010.

shape of a message, provided the *homo divinans* with information which led to some perceived degree of certainty about causal links between past occurrences and present conditions, or even about events in the (near) future – for both public and private purposes.

Foundations of the process

The provision of divinatory signs by the supernatural should be seen in a larger context: that of perceived reciprocal relationships between mankind and its supernatural.[28] Ancient reciprocity 'is to be found as an ethical value, as a factor in interpersonal relations, as an element of political cohesion, as economically significant, as a way of structuring human relations with a deity, as shaping the pattern of epic and historical narrative, as a central theme of drama.'[29] Reciprocity lay at the heart of social, economic and political life.[30] Participation in perceived reciprocal relationships between man

28 On reciprocity and tragedy see R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and ritual: Homer and tragedy in the developing city-state* (Oxford 1994); for 'the gift' in mythology see, among others, J.F. Nagy, 'The deceptive gift in Greek mythology', *Areth* 14 (1981) 191-203.

29 R. Seaford, 'Introduction to reciprocity' in: C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite & R. Seaford (eds), *Reciprocity in ancient Greece* (Oxford 1998) 1-11, at 1.

30 H. van Wees, 'The law of gratitude: reciprocity in anthropological theory' in: C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite & R. Seaford (eds), *Reciprocity in ancient Greece* (Oxford 1998) 13-49, at 15.

and supernatural can be said to have been obligatory in the ancient world – for both parties.[31]

Reciprocal exchange creates a relationship between the parties: the transaction was therefore usually not instantaneous and the items exchanged were not required to have the same value.[32] They could, however, be of an economic nature.

31 If one individual gives to another on the understanding that this person will return the gift in some way, the ultimate purpose of reciprocity is putting another individual under a new or renewed obligation, either positive or negative, thereby creating a new (balance in a) relationship. It has been argued many times that early Greece was a society in which a very 'competitive generosity ruled'. See H. van Wees, 'Greed, generosity and gift exchange in early Greece and the western Pacific' in: W. Jongman & M. Kleijwegt (eds), *After the past: essays in ancient history in honour of H.W. Pleket* (Leiden 2002) 341-378, at 342 n.2. On biological explanations for gift-giving more generally see W. Burkert, 'Offerings in perspective: surrender, distribution, exchange' in: T. Linders & G. Nordquist (eds), *Gifts to the gods: proceedings of the Uppsala Symposium 1985* (Uppsala 1987) 43-50, at 44.

32 The value of the gifts – in both directions and both positive or negative – is primarily based on the value of the social meaning of the action of giving itself (R. Brown, *Social psychology: the second edition* (New York 1986). Negative reciprocity is of two kinds: the first in which the attitude of one of the parties in the exchange is selfish; the second in which the object given is negative. Cf. Van Wees, 'The law of gratitude', 24. 'The harm of taking away something cannot be undone by simply giving something comparable in return. This might explain why violence and aggression are likely to escalate much faster than kindness and co-operation.

Perceived relationships between humans and the supernatural were of an asymmetrical nature: ultimately humans were completely dependent on the supernatural as a source of benefits, protection and guidance, as well as providing for their afterlives (if applicable). They needed to compensate – although they never fully could! – the supernatural for the good it gave (or to improve on current gifts).[33] This asymmetrical relationship was the least severable reciprocal tie there was: ancient man could not quit this relationship – there was no life without the supernatural.[34] Without this human-divine relationship society was not perceived to be able to function and, more specifically related to this discussion, individuals would have been without divinatory signs to assist them.

The place of Greek divination in the system of reciprocal relationships between human and divine did change over time. The first step in examining the process is to discuss the 'gift' of knowledge of interpretation. The Archaic historical and mythological materials and those sources reflecting these times show unequivocally that knowledge of divination was originally perceived to be a gift from the supernatural, for which something had to be given in return: the

33 H.S. Versnel, 'Self-sacfrice, compensation and the anonymous gods' in: *Le sacrifice dans l'antiquité* (Genève 1980) 135-194, at 177.

34 E.g., R. Parker, 'Pleasing thighs: reciprocity in Greek religion' in: C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite & R. Seaford (eds), *Reciprocity in ancient Greece* (Oxford 1998) 105-125, at 122-124. The sources he used for this argument also deal with *philia* between man and supernatural, among other topics: Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 1238b26-39; *Eth. Nic.* 1158b33-1159a12.

mythological Teiresias gained knowledge of divination and his sight was taken in exchange. In other accounts of Archaic or mythological times, too, knowledge of divination could come at a price.[35] Between the Archaic and the Classical period a development can be discerned in accounts of the myth of Prometheus: the Hesiodic and Sapphic myths do not mention divination.[36] However, divination comes to the forefront when Prometheus is made the tragic hero of Aeschylos'

35 Aesch. *Ag.* 248-254; and Phineus' sight in A.R. *Argonautica* 2.178-208. It should be noted that this was not invariably the case: Kalchas, for example, acquired divinatory skills while nothing was taken from him and he was not reported to have sacrificed anything in particular.

36 Prometheus was a cunning individual who tricked Zeus into accepting the fatty parts of the animal for sacrifice and stole fire from the gods – the gods then gave woman and many other evils to man as a punishment. For a more detailed side-by-side analysis of the slightly different ways Hesiod treats this episode see: R. Lamberton, *Hesiod* (New Haven 1988) 95-100. Sappho, too, appears to have referred to the myth in this Hesiodic form in one of her poems, which leads to the assumption that this rendering of the myth was mainstream in the Archaic age. Servius, commenting on Virg. *Ecl.* 6.42. For a perspective on the development of the myth of Prometheus, which supposedly comes from the Near East and was developed in Greece by Hesiod and Aeschylos see J. Duchemin, *Prométhée: histoire du mythe, de ses origines orientales à ses incarnations modernes* (Paris 1974), especially 59-81. One of the most canonical publications about Prometheus (apart from commentaries) is still K. Kerényi, *Prometheus: das griechische Mythologem von der menschlichen Existenz* (Zürich 1946) although C. Dougherty, *Prometheus* (London 2006) might usurp its place.

tragedy *Prometheus Bound*.[37] In this tragedy, Prometheus had stolen not only fire but also knowledge of divination – both 'natural' in the shape of dreams and 'artificial' as in for example extispicy – , medicine and other arts and has given these to man:

> And I marked out many ways by which they might read the future, and among dreams I first discerned which are destined to come true; and voices baffling interpretation I explained to them, and signs from chance meetings. The flight of crook-taloned birds I distinguished clearly— which by nature are auspicious, which sinister—their various modes of life, their mutual feuds and loves, and their consortings; and the smoothness of their entrails, and what color the gall must have to please the gods, also the speckled symmetry of the liver-lobe; and the thigh-bones, wrapped in fat, and the long chine I burned and initiated mankind into an occult art. Also I cleared their vision to discern signs from flames, which were obscure before this.[38]

37 Usually dated to the first half of the 5th century. This was around the time coinage was introduced and society was greatly changed as a result of this. This is not the place to discuss dating of the play in greater detail, and the dating is certain enough to build this argument on it. For a discussion of the authenticity of this play see M. Griffith, *The authenticity of* Prometheus Bound 2 vols (Cambridge 1977). It has generally been argued that Aeschylos' work reflects some very important changes to the way Hesiod deals with the myth: Aeschylos' Prometheus myth no longer explains human suffering, but human progress. On the depiction of man in a state of need see D.J. Conacher, *Aeschylus'* Prometheus Bound*: a literary commentary* (Toronto 1980) 49-51.

38 Aesch. *PV.* 484-499. Translation: H.W. Smyth.
τρόπους τε πολλοὺς μαντικῆς ἐστοίχισα, | κἄκρινα πρῶτος ἐξ ὀνειράτων ἃ χρὴ | ὕπαρ γενέσθαι, κληδόνας τε | δυσκρίτους | ἐγνώρισ' αὐτοῖς ἐνοδίους τε συμβό-

It seems that in Archaic times divination was perceived as a gift from the supernatural but from early Classical times it was seen as knowledge that now belonged to man, it having been 'stolen' from the supernatural. This may show how, in the Classical period, divination increasingly was perceived to be a knowledge-based skill which could be learned (instead of a primarily inspired practice), in the way, e.g., the expert Thrasullos learned his arts by quite natural means.[39]

The second point to explore is concerned with the place of individual signs in the human-divine reciprocal relationship. Especially in Greece, the idea that individual signs were usually perceived to be a gift from the supernatural was often made explicit, but this perception was less well pronounced in Rome and Mesopotamia.[40] Nevertheless, during Mesopotamian-evoked extispicy, the gods Šamaš and Adad were called upon to provide man with signs (after having received a sacrificial gift).[41] Implicitly, these can be consid-

λους, | γαμψωνύχων τε πτῆσιν οἰωνῶν σκεθρῶς | διώρισ', οἵτινές τε δεξιοὶ φύσιν | εὐωνύμους τε, καὶ δίαιταν ἥντινα | ἔχουσ' ἕκαστοι καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους τίνες | ἔχθραι τε καὶ στέργηθρα καὶ συνεδρίαι· | σπλάγχνων τε λειότητα, καὶ χροιὰν τίνα | ἔχουσ' ἂν εἴη δαίμοσιν πρὸς ἡδονὴν | χολή, λοβοῦ τε ποικίλην εὐμορφίαν· | κνίσηι τε κῶλα συγκαλυπτὰ καὶ μακρὰν | ὀσφῦν πυρώσας δυστέκμαρτον εἰς τέχνην | ὤδωσα θνητούς, καὶ φλογωπὰ σήματα | ἐξωμμάτωσα πρόσθεν ὄντ' ἐπάργεμα.

39 Isoc. *Aegineticus* 5-6.

40 A great many examples could be provided here, also from Classical and Hellenistic times. See among many others: App. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.540-554.

41 See I. Starr, *Queries to the sungod: divination and politics in Sargonid Assyria* (Helsinki 1990) *passim*, for Mesopotamian examples of evoking the

ered gifts from the supernatural – and gifts were given to the supernatural in return. Even in Rome and Mesopotamia (as in Greece), it can be seen that humans attempted either to give back to the supernatural or provided gifts (usually by means of sacrifice) in order to build up some 'credit' in their reciprocal relationship with the supernatural. A spontaneous sign was among the things to be expected among future benefits.[42]

gods in order to receive a sign.

42 On votives and sacrifice see especially their recent explicit contextualization into the 'god-man-communication-debate': C. Frevel & H. von Hesberg (eds), *Kult und Kommunikation: Medien in Heiligtümern der Antike* (Wiesbaden 2007) 183-466; W.H.D. Rouse, *Greek votive offerings: an essay in the history of Greek religion* (Cambridge 1902); F.T. van Straten, 'Gifts for the gods' in: H. Versnel (ed.), *Faith, hope and worship: aspects of religious mentality in the ancient world* (Leiden 1981) 65-151; F.T. van Straten, 'Votives and votaries in Greek sanctuaries' in: A. Schachter *et al.* (eds), *Le sanctuaire Grec: huit exposés suivis de discussions* (Geneva 1992) 247-290; F. Graf, 'Sacrifices, offerings, and votives: Greek' in: S.I. Johnston (ed.), *Religions of the ancient world: a guide* (Cambridge, MA 2002) 342-243; I.S. Ryberg, *Rites of the state religion in Roman art* (New Haven 1955); R.L. Gordon, 'The veil of power: emperors, sacrificers, and benefactors' in: M. Beard & J. North (eds), *Pagan priests: religion and power in the ancient world* (London 1990) 199-231; W. Burkert, 'Glaube und Verhalten: Zeichengehalt und Wirkungsmacht von Opferritualen' in: J. Rudhardt & O. Reverdin (eds), *Le sacrifice dans l'antiquité* (Genève 1981) 91-133.

Contextualization

Magic, science or religion?

In the existing literature, divination has been assigned to the realms of science, magic, or religion.[43] The fly in the ointment is that the definitions of these categories are often vague. Adding to the confusion, both emic and etic definitions are regularly used indiscriminately.[44]

Divination has, by some, been put into the realm of the non-theistic, saying that divinatory signs were perceived not to have come from the supernatural.[45] In so far as this is so, the individuals who

43 On relationships between these three, taking special account of B. Malinowski's and J. Goody's ideas see K.E. Rosengren, 'Malinowski's magic: the riddle of the empty cell', *CurrAnthr* 17 (1976) 667-685. A number of key publications discussing religion, magic and science are H.G. Kippenberg, *Magie: die sozialwissenschaftliche Kontroverse über das Verstehen fremden Denkens* (Frankfurt am Main 1978); J. Neusner, E.S. Frerichs & P.V. McCracken Flesher (eds), *Religion, science, and magic: in concert and in conflict* (Oxford 1989) and S.J. Tambiah, *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality* (Cambridge 1990). I shall not venture into this discussion, my only purpose is to provide a background to the discussion about the current state of scholarship in publications about ancient divination on this topic.

44 For a concise overview of the 19th- and 20th-century traditions about defining religion and magic see especially G. Cunningham, *Religion and magic: approaches and theories* (Edinburgh 1999) but also, with an emphasis on the way great anthropologists, like B. Malinowski, have dealt with this theme: Tambiah, *Magic, science, religion*.

45 W. van Binsbergen & F. Wiggerman, 'Magic in history: a theoretical

reasoned like this were philosophers and other members of the elite

perspective, and its application to Mesopotamia' in: T. Abusch & K. van der Toorn (eds), *Mesopotamian magic, textual, historical and interpretative perspectives* (Groningen 1999) 3-34, at 25-27. At least in the matter of divination, Assyriologists seem, less troubled about the magic-religion than about the magic/religion-science debate. The discussion can be summarized as follows: owing to the systematic nature of the compendia and their casuistic structure it has often been argued that divination is a science. A science would in this case be defined as 'a way to rationally find out what will happen in the future'. In short, the compendia are the rational ways: they provide the guidelines in order to find out about the perceived cause-effect relationship (see for the pros and cons of this argument Guinan, 'A severed head laughed', 19-20). Another approach used to explore the science angle is the use of 'historical omens' (see for some examples of this kind of omen the two published by I. Starr, 'Historical omens concerning Assurbanipal's war against Elam', *AfO* 32 (1985) 60-67). The outline of the discussion is as follows: the 'historical omens' follow the pattern 'when X took place, the liver looked like this'. These 'facts' were written down for future reference when event X took place. The purpose was to ensure that when the liver looked the same at some point in the future, the diviner could predict what would happen on the basis of these 'records'. It should be noted that the historicity of the historical omens is hotly debated. These 'historical omens' would help to argue that the omens were originally noted on an empirical basis (and are scientifically grounded). This empirical basis has also been argued on other grounds, to a fairly persuasive extent. Some of the most important literature on 'historical omens', empiricism and divination as a science (including those for and against the idea) is: Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, 13-19; F. Rochberg-Halton, 'Empiricism in Babylonian omen texts and the classification of Mesopotamian divination

– they are not part of this investigation – while the majority of individuals did consider divinatory signs to come from the supernatural.[46] Furthermore, according to my etic definition, divinatory signs are by definition coming from the supernatural – otherwise they would not be divinatory, but just signs. Other scholars have gone further by contextualizing divination as a science.[47] They argue that any attempt to comprehend the world using rationality can be called 'scientific'. However, although divination can be seen as a rational phenomenon looking at causes and effects, backed up by a theoretical background of sorts, this does not necessarily mean it is a science – at least not in our etic sense of the word: the laws behind the divinatory cause-effect relationship were not clear and they could not be tested or verified,[48] but this verifiability is one of the central

as science', *JAOS* 119 (1999) 559-569. For Greece see D. Lehoux, 'Observation and prediction in ancient astrology', *SHPS* 35 (2004) 227–246.

46 An author such as Artemidoros, for example, was considering other options than the supernatural when it comes to origins of the divinatory sign.

47 For extensive arguments about divination and science see especially the work of F. Rochberg, much of which has conveniently been gathered in: F. Rochberg, *In the path of the moon: Babylonian celestial divination and its legacy* (Leiden 2010). See also F. Rochberg, 'Observing and describing the world through divination and astronomy' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 618-636.

48 U. Koch-Westenholz discusses divination as a possible science, conceding that '[Babylonian divination] shares some of the defining traits of modern science: it is objective and value-free, it operates according to

features of what modern individuals call science. Although divination was undoubtedly concerned with finding knowledge, it is not a science from an etic perspective.[49]

known rules, and its data are considered universally valid and can be looked up in written tabulations.' However, she rejects the claim that divination is a science. Her main argument is: 'our own natural sciences are based on a premise so simple that it is usually taken for granted: things behave according to universally valid laws. It is our task to discover those laws, and the mean to do so is observation, supported by controlled experiment. In a similar fashion, Babylonian divination is based on a very simple proposition: things in the universe relate to one another. Any event, however small, has one or more correlates somewhere else in the world. This was revealed to us in the days of yore by the gods, and our task is to refine and expand that body of knowledge. The means to do so is mystical speculation supplemented by observation. There is no evidence that the Mesopotamian scholars ever attempted to verify the results of their speculations by experiment.' Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, 13-19. For different views see M.T. Larsen, 'The Mesopotamian lukewarm mind: reflections on science, divination, and literacy' in: F. Rochberg-Halton (ed.), *Language, literature, and history: philological and historical studies presented to Erica Reiner* (New Haven 1987) 203-225.

49 I do consider an etic classification a necessity, although it is not my purpose to impose ideas about what is 'currently thought to be "correct" on divination.' On this and on divination as a system for finding knowledge see E. Robson, 'Empirical scholarship in the Neo-Assyrian court' in: G.J. Selz (ed.), *The empirical dimension of ancient Near Eastern studies/Die empirische Dimension altorientalischer Forschungen* (Vienna 2011) 603-629, at 625.

Instead, divination is seen here as essentially a theistic phenomenon: the signs are thought to have emanated from the supernatural – otherwise they would not have been divinatory signs. But should divination be considered as magic or as religion? What are magic and religion anyway? Those using emic definitions argue that religion and magic are plants in the same garden: some practices are socially acceptable and others unacceptable, depending on dynamic social opinions.[50] Although this is a valid argument, the emic discussion about whether or not the ancients 'had' magic or religion, in the sense of the social (un)acceptability of phenomena or in the sense that they defined these concepts themselves, is not of interest here. Etic definitions and distinctions are necessary: 'Magic does not exist, nor does religion. What do exist are our definitions of these concepts'.[51] Distinctions between magic and religion are regularly drawn on the basis of the idea that religion implies a human subjection to the supernatural because man understands he is powerless, whereas magic entails techniques by which man thought he could force the supernatural into action. Following up on this idea, I consider magic and religion to be part of one spectrum of human interaction with the supernatural. This can be visualized as a sliding scale. On the one pole we find 'acting religiously' – asking the supernatural – and on the other end we find 'performing magic' – forcing the supernatural to do or say something. On the basis of these considerations, I shall

50 Parker, *Polytheism and society*, 122.

51 H.S. Versnel, 'Some reflections on the relationship magic–religion', *Numen* 38 (1991) 177-197, at 177.

use 'interaction with the supernatural' (which could also be called 'religion' in the widest sense of the word) as the overarching category, with magic and religion (in their narrow sense) as the two poles on this sliding scale. It follows that divination was always some form of perceived interaction with the supernatural – but it depends on what actually happened during the divinatory process whether this could be labelled magical or religious interaction.

Necromancy, a divinatory method during which a ghost or some other supernatural being was evoked, shows how one particular method of divination could occupy various positions on the sliding scale. In the following scene in Aeschylos' *Persians*, the ghost of King Dareios is evoked:

> Chorus: Shah, ancient Shah, come, draw near
> arrive at the very top of your funeral mound
> raising the yellow-dyed slippers on your feet, [...]
> In the circumstances how can the Persian people do best?
> Dareios: Only if you take no expedition into Greek territory,
> not even if the Persian army is larger.[52]

A question is asked and Darius answers, providing bystanders with a guideline for the future. This example of mantic action is clearly

52 Aesch. *Pers.* 658-661; 788-791. Translation E. Hall, *Aeschylus: Persians* (Westminster 1997) 76-77; 84-85. See Aesch. *Cho.* 459-460 for another example. βαλήν, ἀρχαῖος βαλήν, ἴθι, ἱκοῦ, | ἔλθ' ἐπ' ἄκρον κόρυμβον ὄχθου | κροκόβαπτον ποδὸς εὔμαριν ἀείρων [...] | πῶς ἂν ἐκ τούτων ἔτι | πράσσοιμεν ὡς ἄριστα Περσικὸς λεώς; | εἰ μὴ στρατεύοισθ' ἐς τὸν Ἑλλήνων τόπον, | μηδ' εἰ στράτευμα πλεῖον ᾖι τὸ Μηδικόν

religious interaction with the supernatural – as is every purely mantic action: the supernatural is never forced to do anything as it is *requested* to reveal information.

However, it seems that divinatory interrogation could also be just a preliminary step after which the ghost could be *ordered* to perform actions (or to give information!) for the benefit of the human individual.[53] In these cases, a mantic element preceded magical interaction and commanding the supernatural became part of divinatory action. Even if allowance is made for the fact that it is not always possible to find out what the main purpose of a ritual was, it can still be argued that whenever a ghost was ordered to harm an enemy during the mantic session, divination contained a magical element and the ritual as a whole begins to move along the sliding scale. Conversely, mantic elements can also be seen during actions with a primarily magical goal. For example, when (in Plutarch's *Kimon* 6.6) Pausanias, the Spartan commander, wishes to contact a female ghost in the hope of appeasing her, she also foretells his future. This mantic (and religious) element in a primarily magical process,

53 Illustrating the wide variety of categories of necromantic action by example is: C. Faraone, 'Necromancy goes underground: the disguise of skull- and corpse-divination in the Paris Magical Papyri (PGM IV 1928-2144)' in: S.I. Johnston & P.T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: studies in ancient divination* (Leiden 2005) 255-282, especially at 264-265. On necromancy see also the references in D. Ogden, *Necromancy in the Greek and Roman world* (Princeton 2001); I.L. Finkel, 'Necromancy in ancient Mesopotamia', *AfO* 29-30 (1983-1984) 1-17.

directed towards making the ghost do something, causes it to move along the sliding scale from the purely magical in the direction of religious interaction.

What does this imply for the position of divination in society? Some have argued that interaction with the supernatural was 'embedded' in ancient society. The term was first used by Sir Charles Lyell who described the way a fossil was positioned in its environment as 'imbedded'.[54] These days, 'embedded' is often applied to the way reporters work when they are in a war zone: they are 'embedded' in the military. The underlying idea is that both the fossil and the journalist are part of their environment, but that they are also restricted by it. So the scholars who argue that interaction with the supernatural was embedded in ancient society are not only implying that religion was important but also that it was restricted as well as shaped by its environment (the society in which it occurred).[55]

54 Sir C. Lyell, *Principles of geology, being an attempt to explain the former changes of the earth's surface, by reference to causes now in operation* 3 vols (London 1830-1833) Vol. 1, 85. Since this first use of the word in the field of geology, it has found its way into many other fields of study: those of mathematics, linguistics and economy to name a few. In a linguistic sense, the word 'embedded' refers to a subordinate and a super-ordinate clause, where the embedded sentence has unequal status and is dependent on the other. In a linguistic sense 'embedded' was first used by C.S. Smith, 'A class of complex modifiers in English', *Language* 37 (1961) 342-365, at 346 (*non vidi*). For modern use see, for example, B. Aarts & A. McMahon (eds), *The handbook of English linguistics* (Malden, MA 2007) 198-219, especially 198.

55 In a sociological and economic sense it has been used to show that,

From an emic point of view, interaction with the supernatural is all-pervasive rather than embedded. Yet, from an etic point of view, I espouse the view that the specific features and modes of religion, including divination, are in constant interaction with other aspects of a specific cultural area. This also offers a partial explanation of religious dynamism: when features of religion and society change, this has a concomitant impact on other features.

Building blocks of ritual

A deeper contextualization of divination takes place on the level of ritual. Divination was a phenomenon which could entail ritual: the clearest example of a ritual element in divination is the evocation of a sign, a ritual which was closely connected to prayer and sacrifice.

Prayer could be associated with divination if it was used by an individual to ask the supernatural for a sign. A prayer can be defined as 'asking for good things'[56] (or keeping away bad things) – a sign can be such a 'good thing'. In the case of evoked divination, prayer was often a preliminary to the divinatory process. However, a prayer could also be a formal part of the divinatory ritual, as was the *ikribu*

where economy was a central feature of society, economic activity was constrained by many social restrictions. Economy was seen as embedded in society, meaning that economy was dependent on society. Cf. M. Granovetter, 'Economic action and social structure: the problem of embeddedness', *AJSoc* 91 (1985) 481-510.

56 S. Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek religion* (Oxford 1997) 8.

– the prayer *cum* ritual itself (cf. pp. 287-288) – used by the expert during Mesopotamian extispicy. Unlike a divinatory prayer of evocation, the *ikribu* explicitly guided the expert through the ritual needed to provoke a sign: it asked not only for good things, it was also the expert's 'script', integrating words and action.[57] Therefore, prayer could be a part of evoked divination in more than one way: although mostly a preliminary element, it could also be formalized and become an integral part of the evocation.

Although sacrifice could always precede or follow divination (either to thank the supernatural in the case of a good sign or to appease it in case of a bad sign), there are some very specific instances in which sacrifice was a necessity in the divinatory process. An obvious example is the sacrifice of the animal whose entrails were to be read for divinatory purposes.[58] Also – vice-versa – extispicy was

57 For *ikribu* texts see, although transliteration and translation are very outdated, H. Zimmern, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der babylonischen Religion: die Beschwörungstafeln Šurpu: Ritualtafeln für den Wahrsager, Beschwörer und Sänger* (Leipzig 1901). See also A. Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian prayers and hymns: an introduction* (Atlanta 2011) 46-49 for an analysis of the *ikribu* in relation to prayer and divination.

58 On extispicy in Mesopotamia see E. Leichty, 'Ritual, "sacrifice," and divination in Mesopotamia' in: J. Quaegebeur (ed.), *Ritual and sacrifice in the ancient Near East: proceedings of the international conference organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to the 20th of April 1991* (Leuven 1993) 237-242, at 242. On sacrifice in Mesopotamia see further T. Abusch, 'Sacrifice in Mesopotamia' in: A.I. Baumgarten (ed.), *Sacrifice in religious experience* (Leiden 2002) 39-48. On Greece and Rome see, among

usually a part of sacrifice. Despite these two building-blocks often being inseparable, in practice once again an etic separation can be made: sacrifice can be – very concisely – summarized as 'giving to the supernatural'. Sacrifice is like prayer, an action *towards* the supernatural. The sacrifice served to give something to the supernatural before asking it to do something in return or in this case, to provide a sign. Instead of being a mere preliminary, there was yet another way in which divination and sacrifice could overlap (and the two ways do not exclude one another): 'sacrificial divination'. The item or object sacrificed, or part of it, could *become* the sign, which is what happened during the process of extispicy. Another – possible – example in which this intertwinement took place is libanomancy. During libanomancy in Greece and in Mesopotamia, incense – a sacrificial substance – could be used to sacrifice and produce a sign in the shape of smoke.[59] Although it is unclear exactly

many other works, the classic volume S. Eitrem, *Opferritus und Voropfer der Griechen und Römer* (Oslo 1915) but also the recent D. Collins, 'Mapping the entrails: the practice of Greek hepatoscopy', *AJP* 129 (2008) 319-345.

59 On libanomancy in Greece see Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, Vol. 1, 181 or the brief mention in R. Parker, *On Greek religion* (Ithaka, NY 2011) 136. On libanomancy in Mesopotamia (note: sources are from the Old Babylonian period only) see, among other references, E. Ebeling, 'Weissagung aus Weirauch im alten Babylonien', *SPAW* 29 (1935) 869-880 (CBS 14089 and UCLM 9-2433); G. Pettinato, 'Libanomanzia presso i babilonesi', *RSO* 41 (1966) 303-327 (CBS 14089 and UCLM 9-2433); R.D. Biggs, 'A propos des texts de libanomancie, *RA* 63 (1969) 73-74 (CBS 14089); E. Leichty, 'Literary notes: smoke omens' in: M. de Jong Ellis (ed.), *Essays on*

how the ritual was conducted, there is a possibility (although the sources do not state this) that the incense was sacrifice and divinatory sign in one. In short, sacrifice and divination were intertwined phenomena. The examples given above show how divination was a religious phenomenon which cannot be seen to have existed independently of other phenomena – nevertheless, the mantic element in a ritual, with a divinatory or with some other aim, is always sufficiently clear to be able to distinguish it.

Contextualization in the social order

Divination can be contextualized: justice, games and medicine are phenomena that have been linked with divination, both in an etic and and emic sense. It is worth exploring these links in the different societies in order to provide some context to the phenomenon of divination.

the Ancient Near East in memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein (Hamden, CONN 1977) 143-144 (CBS 14089, UCLM 9-2433, CBS 156); I.L. Finkel, 'A new piece of libanomancy', *AfO* 29/30 (1983-1984) 50-55 (UCLM 9-2433, CBS 156 and a tablet in private possession without number). I owe these references to E. Gutova.

Justice

Links between justice and divination were present in a number of different ways, especially in Mesopotamia. To start with Greece: divination could play a role in a trial. Oracles were used during sessions in the law courts because of their normative force and in this way played a role in public trials, although in themselves they were neither a rule nor a law.[60] Oracles could also convey a rule with respect to cultic matters, as examples from the Greek *leges sacrae* show.[61] In Rome, negative auspices could rule out particular actions.

In Mesopotamia, justice and divination were connected in multiple ways. First, there was the idea that the supernatural had motivated or urged the human law-giver to provide justice by means of law, as in the case of Hammurabi.[62]

The second example is the river ordeal, a form of divination which simultaneously provided a judgement.[63] The accused would be sen-

60 See G. Martin, *Divine talk: religious argumentation in Demosthenes* (Oxford 2009) 28. Cf. 208-209; 219; 223-224. This way of proceeding with respect to oracles appears not to be restricted to Demosthenes.

61 But note that oracles were not used in the law court. Cf., e.g., J. Mikalson, *Athenian popular religion* (Chapel Hill 1983) 48. With respect to Greek sacred laws, I found the following title very useful: E. Lupu, *Greek sacred law: a collection of new documents* (NGSL) (Leiden 2005) 77-78.

62 Codex Hammurabi, introduction.

63 In particular cases: S.M. Maul, 'Divination culture and the handling of the future' in: G. Leick (ed.), *The Babylonian world* (London 2007) 361-372, at 362. The ordeal only took place in particular cases: if a person was accused of sorcery or witchcraft, this was not judged by human judges in

tenced to the river ordeal, 'an ordeal by immersion in the "Divine River" who could pronounce the accused guilty by drowning him, or innocent by letting him survive.'[64] It appears that either Marduk was associated with the river or that the river was considered a divinity itself.[65] The pronouncement of guilt or innocence by means of drowning or surviving can be seen as a sign from the supernatural, which again shows a connection between divination and judgement.

In Mesopotamia, divination and justice were also linked conceptually. Divine signs, especially those occurring as a result of the extispicy process, were considered to be a 'divine verdict': the signs were thought to have had a similar function to the judgements

a normal law court. If, apart from witchcraft trials, there was not enough evidence to make a case and the judge could not decide, he sought a different authority. See for examples R. Jas, *Neo-Assyrian judicial procedures* (Helsinki 1996) texts 47 and 48.

64 W. Farber, 'Witchcraft, magic and divination in ancient Mesopotamia' in: J.M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the ancient Near East* 4 vols (New York 1995) Vol. 3, 1896-1910, at 1898.

65 The ordeal was also practised in Neo-Assyrian times, in Mesopotamia and Anatolia. See the article by K. Radner and the introduction by R. Westbrook in the volume edited by Westbrook: *A history of ancient Near Eastern law* 2 vols (Leiden 2003) Vol. 1, 34; Vol. 2, 891. Also see his references. It is known from Old Babylonian times that poisonous herbs were taken to swear an oath: if the one taking the poison died, he was lying (see S. Démare-Lafont, 'Judicial decision-making: judges and arbitrators' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 335-357, at 351).

handed down in the human law courts, namely: deciding what was wrong and right and establishing a scenario of what would happen to the individual in his or her future.[66] Consider a Mesopotamian text known from Old Babylonian times: the so-called ‘prayer to the gods of the night’. Law, justice and jurisdiction play a role in this divinatory prayer which was recited during the divinatory ritual: ‘In das Orakel, das ich durchführe, in das Lamm, das ich darbringe, legt mir Recht!‘[67] *Recht*, justice, *kittum*, was a term normally used in jurisdiction. However, the same word was used to denote what the supernatural did when it was perceived to give a sign during extispicy. Other vocabulary also overlaps (*arkata parāsu* ‘investigate the circumstances’, *dina dânu* ‘give a verdict’, *purussâ parāsu* ‘make

66 J.C. Fincke, ‘Omina, die Göttlichen “Gesetze” der Divination’, *JEOL* 40 (2006-2007) 131-147.

67 Edition and translation by C. Wilcke, ‘Das Recht: Grundlage des sozialen und politischen Diskurses’ in: J. Hazenbos, A. Zgoll & C. Wilcke (eds), *Das geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient: Sprache, Religion, Kultur und Gesellschaft* (Wiesbaden 2007) 209-244 see 225-227.
AO 6769 22-25: i-na te-er-ti e-ep-pu-šu
ik-ri-bi a-ka-ar-ra-bu
ki-it-tam šu-uk-na
ik-ri-ib mu-ši-tim
Erm. 15642 22-25: i-na te-er-ti e-ep-pu-šu
i-na pu-ḫa-ad a-ka-ar-ra-bu-ú
ki-it-ta-am šu-uk-na-an
MU.BI ik-<ri>-ib mu-ši-tim

a decision'[68]). According to some sources, in this respect the extispicy ritual could even be seen as a law court in which the supernatural sat together, judged and then provided mankind with the judgment by means of a sign.[69] In other words, '[law and religion – this includes divination – serve] to establish and preserve tranquillity in a community of some size.'[70] In a best case scenario, both divination and law provided justice.

A final point of overlap concerns the striking formal similarities between the written texts used for divination and law codes: it has even been argued among Near Eastern scholars that, as a genre, law codes such as the Codex Hammurabi were related to divinatory compendia.[71] In these law codes, the *protasis* and *apodosis* construction (if…then) corresponded to these constructions in the compendia in terms of wording. An example from the Codex Hammurabi:

68 U.S. Koch, 'Sheep and sky: systems of divinatory interpretation' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 447-469, at 466. See for an in-depth analysis of *dīnum* J.J. Glassner, 'Droit et divination: deux manières de rendre la justice. À propos de *dīnum*, *uṣurtum* et *awatum*', *JCS* 64 (2012) 39-56.

69 Wilcke, 'Das Recht', 224-243; Fincke, 'Die Göttlichen "Gesetze"', 131-147.

70 G. Schiemann, 'Law [2] IV A' in: H. Cancik & H. Schneider, *Brill's New Pauly Online*. Visited 7-2-2011.

71 The Codex Hammurabi is referred to here because no collection of laws is known to us from the Neo-Assyrian period. See K. Radner, 'Neo-Assyrian period' in: R. Westbrook: *A history of ancient Near Eastern law* 2 vols (Leiden 2003) Vol. 2, 883-910.

> If a slave of the palace or the slave of a working man marries a man's daughter and she bears sons, the slave's owner shall have no right of slavery over any son of the daughter of the man.[72]

And an example from *manzāzu*, part of the *barūtu*, Tablet 3:

> If the Presence is like a knob of a punting pole: the prince will have no opponent.[73]

Although the sentences are semantically different, both the compendia and the codex describe a situation and state the consequence, expressed syntactically in similar ways. These could be a verdict in the codex or a prediction in the compendia, both appearing as casuistic sentences.[74] While at times Greek and Roman laws were also phrased casuistically (as some of the laws in the Twelve Tables and the Laws of Gortyn), we know very little of Greek and

72 Translation by M.E.J. Richardson, *Hammurabi's laws: text, translation and glossary* (Sheffield 2000) 97. Edition by H.-D. Viel, *The complete code of Hammurabi* 2 vols (München 2005) Vol. 2, 600-601.
175: Šum-ma [lu]warad É.GAL u [lu]warad MAŠ.EN.GAG DUMU.MÍ a-wi-lim i-ḫu-uz-ma DUMU.MEŠ it-ta-la-ad, be-ell wardim a-na DUMU.MEŠ MUMU.MÍ a-wi-lim a-na- wa-ar-du-tim ú-ul i-ra-ag-gu-um.

73 '37 (A r13'). Edition and translation: Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens*, 95. The text refers to the shape of the liver. [BE] NA GIM ṣer-ret pa-ri-si NUN GABA.RI NU TUK-šu.

74 Cf. Guinan, 'A severed head laughed', 22.

Roman interpretative texts.[75] Perhaps Melampos' writings could be considered here. Yet, in the matter of conceptual as well as textual overlap between law and divination, only Mesopotamia presents a convincing case.

Games

A number of scholars refer to a link between divination and games, both conceptually and practically.[76] On a conceptual level, games can be primarily defined as a free activity, belonging to the area of the 'as if', in which they create their own space and time in which an inner order is established.[77] The second and third criteria certainly

75 Cf. chapter 6, 252-286.

76 Recently most prominently by W. van Binsbergen.
See http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/gen3/mankala/mankala1.htm [visited 2 October 2009] for an otherwise unpublished article by Van Binsbergen about the close relationship he sees between the game *mancala* and geomancy, and between games and divination in general. For an up-to-date, accessible overview of ancient games see M. Fittà, *Spiele und Spielzeug in der Antike: Unterhaltung und Vergnügen im Altertum* [translated from the Italian by Cornelia Homann] (Stuttgart 1998), with games of chance at 108-129.

77 Simplified from the definition by G.G. Bauer, 'Play and research: a contradiction?' in: A.J. de Voogt (ed.), *New approaches to board games research: Asian origins and future perspectives* (Leiden 1995) 5-8, at 6. He bases this definition on that in J. Huizinga, *Homo ludens: proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur* (Haarlem 1938). See page 7 of the same

seem to be applicable to divination. Some would even claim that games based on chance derive from divinatory practice.[78]

The similarities between games and divination are particularly striking in two methods of divination: geomancy and cleromancy. These methods of divination and gaming were both (in an etic sense) partially based on chance, bound by rules, and the same objects could be used for both. The first step is to look at the use of objects: in geomancy, divination was performed by means of patterns drawn on the floor or earth. In board games, a comparable defined space was used – the gaming board.[79] Cleromancy could be conducted by using, among other items, dice and *astragaloi* – in the same way these would function in games or gambling. [80] *Astragaloi* used both

article for a more extensive definition.

78 On the supposed origins of games see H.J.R. Murray, *A history of board-games other than chess* (Oxford 1952) 226-238, divination and games on 233-235; N. Pennick, *Games of the gods: The origin of board games in magic and divination* (London 1988) *passim*; S. Culin, *Korean games: with notes on the corresponding games of China and Japan* (Philadelphia 1895) xviii-xxxvi. Most of their claims are, in my view, far fetched.

79 Note that this is not geomancy in the sense of modern Feng Shui. See W.M.J van Binsbergen, 'Rethinking Africa's contribution to global cultural history: lessons from a comparative historical analysis of mancala board-games and geomantic divination', *Talanta* 28/29 (1996-1997) 219-251, at 225-231.

80 In games: Hdt. 1.94.2-4. In divination: Artem. 2.69; Artem. 3.1; Aeschin. *In Tim.* 1.59; M. Guarducci, *Epigrafia greca* 4 vols (Rome 1967-1978) Vol. 4, at 107-108. For an example of Mesopotamian rules of a game in which *astraga-*

in divination and games were small, four-sided, knucklebones from the ankle of hoofed animals.[81] These – and later also dice and related objects[82] – would be thrown and the throw was interpreted in a divinatory fashion, possibly with the aid of texts such as the ones known

loi were used and a possible connection between games and divination see I.L Finkel, 'On the rules for the royal game of Ur' in: I.L. Finkel (ed.), *Ancient board games in perspective: papers from the 1990 British Museum colloquium, with additional contributions* (London 2007) 16-32. Another example of a 'gaming board', which the author claims to be at least partly cleromantic, is E. Weidner, 'Ein Losbuch in Keilschrift aus der Seleukidenzeit', *Syria* 33 (1956) 175-183 and cf. J. Bottéro, 'Deux curiosités assyriologiques', *Syria* 33 (1956) 17-35.

81 For a very short introduction to cleromancy, especially astragalomancy see J. Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel: Astragal- und Alphabetchresmologien der hochkaiserzeitlichen Orakelrenaissance* (München 2007) 6-17. The Greek ἀστράγαλος generally signifies the knucklebones from the hooves of an ox. It should be noted that the dice oracles discussed in this publication are mainly from the first centuries AD.

82 Note that a so-called dice existed in Mesopotamia, where they were used to decide who would become the eponym. This then was not divinatory (as the use of dice in, e.g., Hom. *Il.* 7.177-180 is not divinatory). This dice is depicted and briefly discussed in A. Millard, *The eponyms of the Assyrian empire 910-612 BC* (Helsinki 1992), frontispiece and 8-9, and more extensively in: I.L. Finkel & J. Reade, 'Lots of eponyms', *Iraq* 57 (1995) 167-172. This last publication reveals unequivocally that the dice was actually a lot, but we cannot tell for sure how it was drawn. In any case, its purpose was to decide who would be eponym, but this kind of lot was also cast when someone died, to divide the inheritance among the family.

from later cleromantic oracle sites in Asia Minor, while the outcome of the gaming throw was interpreted according to the rules of the game in question. Another connection here is the use of chance: the randomizing element was prevalent in cleromancy because of the use of dice, in the same way as when games were played and dice were thrown.[83]

Lastly, Mesopotamian gaming boards and the liver are thought to have resembled each other in some ways: both had a grid of twenty squares and a similarity can be seen in their shape.[84] Hence, this has

83 Dice were, among items, used in board games in the Roman world. See N. Purcell, 'Inscribed Imperial Roman gaming boards' in: I.L. Finkel (ed.), *Ancient board games in perspective: papers from the 1990 British Museum colloquium, with additional contributions* (London 2007) 90-97; examples from later times in: C. Roueché, 'Late Roman and Byzantine game boards at Aphrodisias' in: ibidem, 101-105.

84 I.L. Finkel, 'Board games and fortune telling: a case from antiquity' in: A.J. de Voogt (ed.), *New approaches to board games research: Asian origins and future perspectives* (Leiden 1995) 64-72, at 71. But see also about a possible connection between the twenty squares and the grids of liver models and gaming boards: J.W. Meyer, 'Lebermodell oder Spielbrett' in: R. Hachmann (ed.), *Bericht über die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen in Kāmid el-Lōz in den Jahren 1971 bis 1974* (Bonn 1982) 53-79. Apart from this theoretical similarity, three other objects combining a liver model and a gaming board have been found: see A. Becker, 'The royal game of Ur' in: I.L. Finkel (ed.), *Ancient board games in perspective: papers from the 1990 British Museum colloquium, with additional contributions* (London 2007) 11-15, at 12-15. Another line of enquiry was followed by both E. Weidner and J. Bottéro who have theorized about the nature of a number of cuneiform

led some over-hastily to conclude that this game and extispicy were in some ways related to one another.

Certainly divination and games were bound by a set of pre-defined rules, which could be flexible. When it was a matter of a divinatory session, the rules could have been written down but this did not necessarily mean they were unalterable: rules could be negotiated before the commencement of a divinatory session. The same applies to games: anthropological evidence shows that in a session of *mancala*, an ancient African game, the rules are established locally. When two individuals from different towns meet, they settle the rules there and then. Change can occur in the process of establishing these rules.[85] New rules are learned and used.

Finally, the matter of context has to be settled: when does a person play a game and when does he divine? Where did divination begin and throwing the dice for gaming purposes end?

> Upon entering we found that the boys had just been sacrificing; and this part of the festival was nearly at an end. They were all in their

tablets which appeared to link astragalomancy, games and divination by the zodiac. See Weidner, 'Ein Losbuch', 175-183 and Bottéro, 'Deux curiosités', 17-35. For a more anthropological angle on the connections between games and divination using the distinction between constitutive and regulative rules (which I have not used here) see E.M. Ahern, 'Rules in oracles and games', *Man* n.s. 17 (1982) 302-312.

85 A.J. de Voogt, *Mancala: board games* (London 1997) 22-27.

> white array, and games at dice were going on among them. Most of them were in the outer court amusing themselves; but some were in a corner of the apodyterium playing at odd and even with a number of dice, which they took out of little wicker baskets; and there were others standing about them and looking on.[86]

While the distinctions between games and divination might seem blurred to us, for the person throwing the dice or using a game-board it was usually obvious whether he was divining or playing a game: this depended on both the rules agreed on and on the context in which the game was played. These rules were normally decided and defined in advance and were partly dependent on the context. They were decided upon explicitly by means of the spoken word or by the use of a special board for ritual or for gaming purposes, or otherwise were agreed upon implicitly.[87]

Divination and games resembled each other in a number of ways but a distinction can still be made. First on an etic level: during divination the purpose was to obtain perceived information from the supernatural – this was not the purpose of gaming; during gaming

86 Pl. *Lys.* 206e3-9. Translation W.R.M. Lamb.
Εἰσελθόντες δὲ κατελάβομεν αὐτόθι τεθυκότας τε τοὺς παῖδας καὶ τὰ περὶ τὰ ἱερεῖα σχεδόν τι ἤδη πεποιημένα, ἀστραγαλίζοντάς τε δὴ καὶ κεκοσμημένους ἅπαντας. οἱ μὲν οὖν πολλοὶ ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ ἔπαιζον ἔξω, οἱ δέ τινες τοῦ ἀποδυτηρίου ἐν γωνίᾳ ἠρτίαζον ἀστραγάλοις παμπόλλοις, ἐκ φορμίσκων τινῶν προαιρούμενοι· τούτους δὲ περιέστασαν ἄλλοι θεωροῦντες

87 In the way recreational and ritual boards can be used during *mancala*: De Voogt, *Mancala*, 28-32.

a competitive element which was absent during divination was visible. To the individual, it was clear in advance whether the play was for fun, material gain or for seeking information from the supernatural. Gaming and certain methods of divining were therefore related in terms of a number of practicalities. Yet, they both served different purposes.

Medicine

In ancient societies, illness was often seen as a sign from the supernatural either as a punishment for religious transgression or, more generally, just being of divine origin.[88] In Greek, the word *nosos* can be etymologically explained as 'not having' divine favour.[89] In the Graeco-Roman tradition, the inscriptions from the healing shrines of Asclepius attest to an overlap between the practices of medicine and divination.[90] The incubation dreams recorded in these texts can

88 E.g., Burkert, *Creation of the sacred*, 102-128; for disease as a visitation of the divine see among others Hippoc. *Morb. Sacr.* 5.

89 A more linguistic explanation in: A. Willi, 'νόσος and ὁσίη: etymological and sociocultural observations on the concepts of disease and divine (dis)favour in ancient Greece', *JHS* 128 (2008) 153-171; and a historical study in: A. Chaniotis, 'Illness and cures in the Greek propitiatory inscriptions and dedications of Lydia and Phrygia' in: H.F.J. Horstmanshoff, Ph.J. van der Eijk & P.H. Schrijvers (eds), *Ancient medicine in its socio-cultural context* 2 vols (Amsterdam 1995) Vol. 2, 323-344.

90 For an interesting passage about this overlap and distinction is Plut.

be categorized into prescriptive and healing dreams. In prescriptive dreams, which appear to have been more prominent after the first century BC, the person received instructions by which he would be cured. In the case of a healing dream, the person reported to have actually been cured in his sleep. The same process of incubation could have a medical result and one which could be called divinatory: the individual had received information from the supernatural.[91]

The practices of medicine and divination were intertwined in Mesopotamia too – albeit in a different way.[92] One obvious example is that part of the Mesopotamian compendium *Sakikkû* called *Enūma*

Vit. Per. 6, in which a sign is interpreted in a divinatory and in a biological manner. Eventually the divinatory manner turns out to be the correct one.

91 K. Beerden, 'Dromen van genezing: een verkenning van Griekse incubatiepraktijken', *Lampas* (forthcoming).

92 Cf. T.S. Barton, *Power and knowledge: astrology, physiognomics, and medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor, MI 1994) 133-168 – Barton focuses on the Roman world but many issues she addresses are equally valid for Greece and Mesopotamia. Early Greek diviners would also be healers, for example, and the term *iatromantis* is a familiar one in these early sources. R. Parker explores the field of purifiers, doctors and seers in R. Parker, *Miasma: pollution and purification in early Greek religion* (Oxford 1983) 207-216. But see also for a more radical distinction between 'quack doctor' (including 'diviners') and 'a real physician', based on the two attacks on diviners in the Hippocratic corpus (*Virg.* 1 & *Acut.* 8): J. Jouanna, *Hippocrate* (Paris 1992) 261-267. For a brief and clarifying overview in which the various roles of the *iatromantis* are shown see I. Löffler, *Die Melampodie: Versuch einer Rekonstruktion des Inhalts* (Meisenheim am Glan 1963) 14-17.

ana bīt marṣi āšipu illaku ('when the *āšipu* goes to the house of the sick'), which relates the contextual signs an *āšipu* might observe on his way to visit the house of a patient.[93] These were divinatory signs. In other parts of the same compendium, where the same *āšipu* is at work, the physical symptoms of the patient himself functioned as signs – which were medical signs. Both types of sign were seen as providing the *āšipu* with information which could be used for diagnosis, prognosis and treatment.

A more structural point of overlap – in all three areas – is that both divination and medicine were based on the idea that 'an anticipation of the future' was possible.[94] The doctor would observe and interpret contextual and medical signs during diagnostic activity, after which a diagnosis and prognosis would follow (diagnosis might be implicit in prognosis and vice-versa – but the one was not pos-

93 The edition of these tablets is R. Labat, *Traité akkadien de diagnostics et pronostics médicaux* (Paris 1951) 6-7; 32-33.

94 L. Edelstein, 'Hippocratic prognosis' in: O. Temkin & C.L. Temkin (eds), *Ancient medicine: selected papers of Ludwig Edelstein* (Baltimore 1967) 65-85, at 69. The *mantis* and poet were both familiar with past, present and future, and were divinely inspired: see Hes. *Th.* 25-34. Similar questions about the education and practice of doctors might be – and have been – asked: see L.M.V. Totelin, *Hippocratic recipes: oral and written transmission of pharmacological knowledge in fifth- and fourth-century Greece* (Leiden 2009); M.M. Sassi, *The science of man in ancient Greece* (Chicago 2001 [translated from Italian]) 140-148.

sible without the other), resulting in treatment.[95] This is similar to the actions of the *homo divinans:* he also provided a prognosis which influenced a future action.

Despite these similarities, it is possible to make an etic distinction between medicine and divination, which is in my opinion not visible in *Sakikkû*. From an etic point of view, in medical prognosis there was an actual cause and effect relation between illness and outcome. There was no such cause and effect relationship between divinatory signs and the predicted consequences.[96]

Having discussed and analyzed the phenomenon of divination from multiple angles it can be said that divination was a central

95 See the model (of which the third option is relevant) in M. Hulskamp, *Sleep and dreams in ancient medical diagnosis and prognosis* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Newcastle-upon-Tyne 2008) 259. Cf. J. Althoff, 'Das Verhältnis von medizinischer Prognose zur religiösen Divinatorik/Mantik in Griechenland' in: A. Imhausen & T. Pommerening (eds), *Writings of early scholars in the ancient Near East, Egypt, Rome, and Greece: translating ancient scientific texts* (Berlin 2010) 47-68. On diagnostic and therapeutic activity in the Mesopotamian world (much focused on the texts available) see N.P. Heeßel, *Babylonisch-assyrische Diagnostik* (Münster 2000) 5-6; N.P. Heessel, 'Diagnosis, divination and disease: towards an understanding of the rationale behind the Babylonian diagnostic handbook' in: H.F.J. Horstmanshoff & M. Stol (eds), *Magic and rationality in ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman medicine* (Leiden 2004) 97-116. For a guideline to a system of ancient medical prognosis see, e.g., Hippoc. *Prog.* 1-2; 25.

96 Cf. M.J. Geller, *Ancient Babylonian medicine: theory and practice* (Chichester 2010) 15.

means for perceived interaction with the supernatural on a reciprocal basis and was closely connected to its societal context – ritual and otherwise. These etic foundations of the divinatory process apply to all three of the cultural areas discussed in this monograph.

3. Comparison

The analysis undertaken in this study is comparative: to discover what is specific to divination in a particular cultural area, it has to be compared. An examination of ancient divinatory practices by using systematic comparison has hardly been endeavoured yet, although a number of scholars have insisted on the need for a comparative approach and some initial moves have been made.[1] In 1965,

1 Cf. M.J. de Jong and H.M. Barstad who both plead for a comparison of the biblical prophetic books with Assyrian prophecies in order to obtain a better understanding of society and religion of ancient Israel and to compare this with more typological purpose in mind than has been the case before: M.J. de Jong, '"Fear not, o king!" The Assyrian prophecies as a case for a comparative approach', *JEOL* 38 (2003-2004) 113-121; H.M. Barstad, 'Comparare necesse est? Ancient Israelite and ancient Near Eastern prophecy in a comparative perspective' in: M. Nissinen (ed.), *Prophecy in its ancient Near Eastern context* (Atlanta 2000) 3-12. Jean-Pierre Vernant created a rough sketch of a comparative model of religion – but not for the specific purpose of studying divination: Vernant, 'Parole and signes muets', 9-25. See for examples of outlines specifically dealing with divination: J.P. Sørensen, 'On divination. An exercise in comparative method' in: T. Ahlbäck (ed.), *Approaching religion: based on papers read at the symposium on methodology in the study of religions held at Åbo, Finland, on the 4th-7th August 1997* 2 vols (Åbo 1999) Vol. 1, 181-188; and the article by the same

for instance, when Hans Klees produced a comparative study in which one particular source (Herodotos) was used to understand what the author considered to be non-Greek, 'strange', divinatory practices. The author's goal was to improve understanding of Greek practices.[2] However, I feel that this particular approach is too restrictive because its scope is restricted by the source materials and their inevitably emic angle. More recently, Sarah Iles Johnston has edited

author: J.P. Sørensen, 'A comparative approach to divination ancient and modern' in: K. Munk & A. Lisdorf (ed.), *Unveiling the hidden* (forthcoming) 227-261. G.E.R. Lloyd has touched upon the subject in a number of his many publications, most prominently *The revolutions of wisdom: studies in the claims and practice of ancient Greek science* (Berkeley, CA 1987) 38-48; *The ambitions of curiosity: understanding the world in ancient Greece and China* (Cambridge 2002) 21-43. Note that there is no such thing as *the* comparative method, as we shall see below; see also G. Śarana, *The methodology of anthropological comparisons: an analysis of comparative methods in social and cultural anthropology* (Tuscon 1975) vii-viii, 15. Other issues with the term are explained briefly in E.J. Sharpe, 'Comparative religion' in: M. Eliade & L. Jones (eds), *The encyclopedia of religion* vols 16 (1987) Vol. 3, 578-580. For discussions of method and its issues, cf.: R.A. Segal, 'In defense of the comparative method', *Numen* 48 (2001) 339-373; M. Pye, *Comparative religion: an introduction through source materials* (New York 1972); A. Sica, *Comparative methods in the social sciences* vols 1-4 (London 2006); E. McKeown, 'Inside out and in between: comparing the comparativists', *MTSR* 20 (2008) 259-269.

2 H. Klees, *Die Eigenart des griechischen Glaubens an Orakel und Seher: ein Vergleich zwischen griechischer und nichtgriechischer Mantik bei Herodot* (Stuttgart 1965).

a systematic overview of ancient religions, which includes a chapter on the divinatory practices of different Mediterranean civilizations.[3] Although the individual entries are valuable, they do not offer a real comparison or synthesis because of the encyclopaedic nature of the work. There is also no dearth of other poly-cultural studies about divination, but because of their all-encompassing nature, these volumes are not suitable for explicit comparison or cross-cultural analysis. One example is *Divination and oracles* in which divinatory practices in Tibet, China, Rome and Greece, and finally Germany are discussed, each in different chapters by a different author each with his or her own point to make.[4] *La divination: études*, a publication edited by André Caquot and Marcel Leibovici – which has become a standard work of reference on divination in various societies, ancient and modern –, has the same structure, as has the recent volume *Magic and divination in the ancient world*.[5] In the most recent collections of papers on divination this is also the standard approach.[6] Although unquestionably this approach

3 Aune, 'Divination and prophecy', 370-391.

4 Loewe & Blacker, *Divination and oracles*.

5 Caquot & Leibovici, *La divination*; Ciraolo & Seidel, *Magic and divination*.

6 J.M. Durand & A. Jacquet (eds), *Magie et divination dans les cultures de l'orient: actes du colloque organisé par l'Institut du Proche-Orient ancien du Collège de France, la Société Asiatique et le CNRS (UMR 7192) les 19 mai et 20 juin 2008, Paris* (Paris 2010); Annus, *Divination*; Georgoudi, Koch Piettre & Schmidt, *La raison des signes*.

does raise the reader's awareness of the variety of divinatory practices encountered among various peoples, it is not without serious disadvantages. Each author approaches the topic adopting his own methodology and perspective: the resulting kaleidoscopic picture does not really add to an understanding of the underlying issues. In short, it is time a true comparison should be attempted. Geoffrey Lloyd and Jean-Jacques Glassner have both reflected on questions about a comparison between Chinese and Greek (Lloyd) and Chinese and Mesopotamian (Glassner) divination. These articles provide a thought-provoking summary of, especially, Lloyd's previous attempts to compare Greek to Chinese divination, in which his purpose was – among other goals – to contribute to the typology of divination.[7]

7 The articles are: J.J. Glassner, 'Questions mesopotamiennes sur la divination' and G.E.R. Lloyd, 'Divination: traditions and controversies, Chinese and Greek divination', *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 21 (1999) 147-154 and 155-165 respectively. This is a special issue of this journal, edited by K. Chemla, D. Harper & M. Kalinowski and titled *Divination et rationalité en Chine ancienne*. Forthcoming is: L. Raphals, *Divination and prediction in Early China and ancient Greece* (Cambridge 2013). There seems to be a trend to compare China and Greece as well as China and Rome, also outside the field of divination: on Greece and China see the works of G.E.R. Lloyd more generally but also a work such as S. Shankman & S.W. Durrant (eds), *Early China/Ancient Greece: thinking through comparisons* (Albany, NY 2002); W. Scheidel (ed.), *Rome and China: comparative perspectives on ancient world empires* (Oxford 2009).

Units of comparison

In my own comparative inquiries Neo-Assyrian, Roman and Greek practices are the three units of comparison. What is specific to and what is general about the various divinatory practices? The underlying assumption is that divination, although a nearly universal human phenomenon, is manifested in many different ways and has varied through time and space. These variations are postulated to be related to social and cultural differences. Hence, the study of divination is not only of importance to understanding the phenomenon itself, but it is also a vantage point from which to observe a number of essential features of daily life in the societies discussed.

In my comparison of Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia, Greece and Republican Rome, I do not assume these remained static units throughout time. Indeed, I think of them as dynamic. I also assume that the three units of comparison are composed of culturally distinct areas. Nevertheless, there are enough common denominators to consider the three as units suitable to be used for comparative purposes.

Certainly, the comparison could have involved ancient or modern societies other than these three – the units of a comparison do not need to overlap in time or space for the results to be meaningful - but these three provide enough variety to produce results and they fall into my field of expertise. As far as the Mesopotamian material is concerned, I restrict myself to the Neo-Assyrian period, which

can be dated from 880 to 612, the year of the fall of Nineveh. In this period the great Assyrian kings ruked, in whose reigns most of our divinatory records originated: Sennacherib (688-681), Esarhaddon (680-669) and Assurbanipal (668-ca 610). These kings ordered many extispicies to be taken, and received letters from both Assyrian and Babylonian scholars. Although there are differences between the ways these scholars operated, as a whole these regions will be referred to as 'Mesopotamia'. The sources are drawn from throughout a large area. Many sources have been found in archives such as those in Nineveh, but reports and letters were sent to the king over great distances. Given the relative homogeneity of the materials, the vast majority concerned with public divination, it does not seem necessary to impose geographical restrictions or distinctions here. In addition to the Neo-Assyrian sources, some other texts from earlier periods – especially Old Babylonian texts – will occasionally be used to illustrate certain points.[8]

The Greek materials stem from Archaic (roughly 800-478 BC), Classical (478-323 BC), and the Hellenistic world before 146 BC. Materials from the period 146 BC and thereafter will only be used to illuminate the earlier sources. The area considered consists of the entire Greek-speaking world.

8 For overviews of the material/sources (but lacking either in detail or completeness) see F. Mario Fales, *L'impero assiro: storia e amministrazione* (*IX-VII secolo A.C.*) (Rome 2001) 244-283; for unprovoked divination: Rochberg, *The heavenly writing*, 44-97. There are many introductions to specific compendia, e.g,: Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*, *passim.*

Roman divination is represented by the Republican period. The sources either date from around 509 BC to ca 31 BC, or they are from a later period, but refer to divination in the Republic. It should be noted that most sources are from the first century BC. In my examination of the Roman materials, the scope of my inquiry will be limited to divination in the Italian peninsula itself – divinatory practices outside the peninsula are not taken into account here.

The number of sources from these three cultural areas which deal with divination in some way or the other is enormous. To provide just a glimpse of what kind of sources are available, I would like to draw attention to the fact that valuable information can be found in both tragedy and in the Dodonaic tablets for Greece; in Mesopotamia the evidence includes compendia as well as queries and letters; the Roman historian Livy and many other authors, for example Nigidius Figulus who translated a brontoscopic calendar from Etruscan into Latin, were interested in divination and its outcomes. Divination was central to society and this is reflected in the variety of the divinatory sources. With respect to the later Graeco-Roman sources, here used occasionally to illuminate earlier sources, it is often difficult to argue whether they are 'Roman' or 'Greek'. I have categorized such additional sources which discuss practices in Greece and the Greek-speaking parts of the Roman Empire as 'about Greece' and those discussing Rome as 'about Rome', in so far as this was possible. The place of origin of the author or the language in which he wrote have not been the prime concern. Another issue

regarding the sources is that they restrict our view of private divination – especially for Rome and for Mesopotamia, there is a bias in the sources towards public divination (in which experts were usually involved). For Greece, we have more sources on private divination, which will prove valuable for the purpose of this study.

The sources are categorized below in Table 1. Importantly, Greek and Roman epigraphical sources will be taken into account, bridging part of the gap which has often been thought to exist between Graeco-Roman literary materials and Near Eastern cuneiform tablets. I have made a subcategorization of the sources under another three headings: texts used in the process of divination, second-hand records of the process and explicit reflection (Why did it happen? Why do we do this?). The texts used in the process of divination detail, for example, how a sign could be provoked and how it could be interpreted. The Mesopotamian compendia are the best examples of texts serving the latter purpose. The second-hand records are reports of divination which can be found in the literary sources. Texts in the category of explicit reflections are one step farther removed from the process: these texts relate explicit thinking and opinions about divination. The divisions between the categories are not always clear-cut– does the 'Sin of Sargon' text report on divination or does it also reflect on its practice?

Table 1: sources

	Example Rome	**Example Greece**	**Example Mesopotamia**
Observation			
Ritual texts	Nigidius Figulus, *passim*	Melampos, *Peri elaion tou somatos*	Compendia, e.g., *Šumma alu*
Records	Livy 1.7	Stelae recording pronouncements of oracles	Letters to the King
Explicit reflection	Cicero, *De divinatione*, *passim*	Plato, *Phaedo* 244c	Sin of Sargon
Discourse			
Ritual texts	-	Dodonaïc *lamellae* (if the sign was indeed provided through discourse)	-
Records	Livy 25.12	Euripides, *Ion* 533-538	Letters to the king
Explicit reflection	Cicero, *De divinatione*, *passim*	Plutarch, *De Pythiae Oraculis*; Plato, *Respublica* 4, 427bc	-

This table shows the wide variety of sources dealing with divination. Up to a point, this undermines the widely held view that the Near Eastern sources provide practical outlines on how to perform divination and that the Graeco-Roman materials are more reflexive. The sources from all three societies are rich in their own ways: the evidence from Dodona reveals how divination worked in practice, and the Mesopotamian letters and reports to the king also provide information which is other than practical. It should be noted that, on account of the practical 'man(/king)-in-the-street' perspective I am taking, the more philosophical sources will not be used *in extenso*.

THE COMPARATIVE METHOD DISCUSSED

The aims of a historical comparison can be roughly threefold: evolutionary, typological and heuristic. The first task of the researcher is to explore the possibility whether one phenomenon or development could be derived from the other, implying a historical connection.[9] The trend in current research is to argue that many aspects of Greek divination are likely to derive from Mesopotamian divination. This discussion has been greatly advanced by Walter Burkert, Martin West and many other scholars. Theirs, and their critics,' main conclusion is that many aspects in Greek culture and religion have come from the Near East, but pinpointing these is another matter. I have not much to add to this discussion, important as it may be.[10]

9 The historical comparison can serve to 'attempt to prove an historical connection between two cultures and to reconstruct the social and cultural history of a certain society, people, or area': M. Malul, *The comparative method in ancient Near Eastern and biblical legal studies* (Kevelaer 1990) 15.

10 Their main focus is on the Archaic period. See W. Burkert, *Die orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur* (Heidelberg 1984); more recently W. Burkert, *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: eastern contexts of Greek culture* (Cambridge, MA 2004); M.L. West, *The East face of Helicon: West Asiatic elements in Greek poetry and myth* (Oxford 1997); and also R. Lane Fox, *Travelling heroes: Greeks and their myths in the epic age of Homer* (London 2008) for an introduction to the debate. Samples of microstudies are, e.g., P. Högemann & N. Oettinger, 'Die Seuche im Heerlager der Achäer vor Troia. Orakel und magische Rituale im hethiterzeitlichen Kleinasien und im archaischen Griechenland', *Klio* 90 (2008) 7-26; J.

The second purpose of the comparative method is to weigh up two, or more, units of comparison to attempt to reconstruct an unknown third or a 'type'.[11] This typological comparison is 'the study of the variety of life forms of human societies and the construction of a theoretical model for the study of universal human social phenomena'.[12] As Galton's Law explains: 'It is essential that the degree in which the customs compared are independent should be known, for they might be derived from a common source and be duplicate copies of the same original [...]'.[13]

Consequently, in any attempt to make a typological comparison, it is necessary to take examples from societies which are as independent of each other as possible, so as to minimize the risk of the intrusion of intercultural influence. This is an important issue: Rome, Greece and Mesopotamia were too close to one another and too much in contact with each other for this kind of comparison. Some influence (but most probably more rather than less) is bound to have occurred at some point. It is also impossible to rule out the

Scurlock, '"Chaldean" astrology: Sextus Empiricus illustrated by selected cuneiform sources', *Ktèma* 29 (2004) 259-265; J. Jacobs, 'Traces of the omen series Š*umma izbu* in Cicero, *De divinatione*' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 317-339.

11 Cf. on possibilities of the comparative method: A.P. David, *The dance of the muses: choral theory and ancient Greek poetics* (Oxford 2006) 4-7.

12 Malul, *The comparative method,* 15.

13 E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The comparative method in social anthropology* (London 1963) 9.

possibility that in some respects the three societies are all 'descendants' of an unknown other culture.[14] If my aim had been to make a typological comparison, it would have been necessary to compare Greek divination to, for example, Chinese divination.[15]

The aim of the comparative method can also be heuristic. An event or phenomenon from one culture can be used to illuminate aspects of a comparable phenomenon in a different culture. Any set of units of comparison can be chosen for this purpose. As Clifford Geertz comments on his purpose in comparing Islam in Morocco and Indonesia: 'At once very alike and very different they form a kind of commentary on one another's character.'[16] In his approach, the comparative method is used to highlight these 'characters'.[17] The aim is to use the two points of comparison in order to 'go beyond the constraints of the immediate context in order to construct a more

14 Cf. R. Naroll, 'Galton's problem: the logic of cross-cultural analysis' in: A. Sica, *Comparative methods in the social sciences* 4 vols (London 2006) Vol. 2, 3-21 (first published in *Social Research* 32 (1965) 428-451).

15 As some have indeed already done, see this chapter, n.7.

16 C. Geertz, *Islam observed: religious development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven 1968) 4.

17 Cf. D.M. Freidenreich, 'Comparisons compared: a methodological survey of comparisons of religion from "a magic dwells" to "a magic still dwells"', *MTSR* 16 (2004) 80-101, at 91-94, and the publication his argument is about: Smith, *Imagining religion*, 19-35, and some of the scholarly reception of this article in: K.C. Patton & B.C. Ray (eds), *A magic still dwells: comparative religion in the postmodern age* (Berkeley, CA 2002).

generally useful frame of understanding.'[18] This involves the idea that comparison serves to make particular aspects of phenomena more pronounced, as similarities and differences shed light on each other.[19] The result is a 'recontextualisation [which] facilitates entirely new ways to understand a given subject.'[20] This is exactly the purpose of the comparative exercises in the following chapters: to obtain an understanding of the variety in the phenomenon of divination as practiced in the units of comparison – with a specific focus on Greece.

The advantages of using the comparative method in this way are many: the results of explicit comparisons force the investigator to rethink structures and ideas usually taken for granted. Comparison aids in conceptualizing the variety to be found in a specific phenomenon, in this case divination. The comparison is used to reveal a number of varieties and similarities within one phenomenon: a comparison is rather like a lens, focusing on a number of issues which are then viewed from a different perspective than would

18 Pye, *Comparative religion*, 22. Of course, there are many more ways to make a comparison; cf. the overview in A. A. van den Braembussche, 'Historical explanation and comparative method: towards a theory of the history of society', *H&T* 28 (1989) 1-24. Cf. on thinking about the aims of using the comparative method Evans-Pritchard, *The comparative method*, 21-24.

19 Cf. Geertz, *Islam observed*, 55.

20 Freidenreich, 'Comparisons compared', 99.

normally be the case.[21] The next step is to attempt to explain and interpret the similarities as well as differences and then providing a cultural explanation.[22]

During the course of this study it should be taken into account that 'comparison does not necessarily tell us how things "are" [...]. A comparison is a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge.'[23] New questions related to meaning, function and development of a phenomenon in a cultural area automatically arise because there is a new set of emic material to be investigated and interpreted. A comparison might demonstrate that there are essential features in divination that every cultural area has in common – the similarities – but also that divination displays endless variability. More importantly, a comparison helps to generate ideas about the how, what and why of the phenomena under consideration.

21 Cf. 'In this model, comparison functions as a lens. Much as a microscope offers new insights even into specimens that can be seen with the naked eye, [...] comparison serves to provide a new perspective on the tradition being examined, to raise new questions or offer new possible ways of understanding the target tradition.' Quote by Freidenreich, 'Comparisons compared', 91.

22 On the importance of explaining differences as well as similarities see Evans-Pritchard, *The comparative method*, 17.

23 J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery divine: on the comparison of early Christianities and the religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago 1990) 52.

In the past, the comparative method has received some bad press.[24] The history of scholarship shows that the method has often been used to point out similarities between two societies while the differences were overlooked. In order to avoid this one-sided approach, it is necessary to focus on both differences and similarities. The similarities might indicate a historical connection or the more universal features of a phenomenon, whereas differences draw attention to aspects which, in many cases, assume a new importance. Both results are equally valuable, but for my purposes the differences are even more illuminating and significant than the similarities.

Another complaint lodged about the comparative method is that it has been used inconsistently and asymmetrically. Inconsistently in the sense that comparative materials are resorted to whenever they seem to come in useful in a study but are otherwise not referred to. The complaint of lack of symmetry has to do with the fact that dur-

24 I should also stress that it is not my intention to prove that a particular religion or culture (in this case the Greek one) is unique. I think all three cultural areas are unique – I merely highlight Greek peculiarities with regard to divination. A very brief discussion of the different aims of different 'schools of comparativism' can be found in I. Strenski, 'The only kind of comparison worth doing: history, epistemology, and the "strong program" of comparative study' in: T.A. Idinopulos, B.C. Wilson & J.C. Hanges (eds), *Comparing religions: possibilities and perils?* (Leiden 2006) 271-292; one of the problems of the comparative method has been that it has served those with a programme of judgementalism ('which religion is better?'), which is avoided here. See also G. Weckman, 'Questions of judgement in comparative religious studies' in: iidem, 17-25.

ing comparison only one of the cultural areas studied is discussed on the basis of primary and secondary sources, but conclusions about the other area(s) are reached by means of secondary literature only. I am aware of this pitfall and aim to avoid it, by making a systematic comparison on a symmetrical basis. It is essential to note that although the research is symmetrical, the results remain deliberately asymmetrical, as I am concerned specifically with Greek divination.[25]

This leads to another point which needs explanation: the source materials. The sources used in this research are taken from different genres, were produced by different cultural systems and originate from different time periods. Do these objections mean that they cannot be compared? I do not think so. Variety in the sources does not invalidate the enquiry as long as we 'take into account the character and goal of each type of evidence'.[26] Differences do not make materials or ideas incomparable: all materials, ideas or data are *always* intrinsically different from each other. Nevertheless, it is always possible to compare any two sets of data as long as it is not argued that they are identical or a historical connection is claimed. Indeed, comparing less similar or equivalent data makes the comparison more interesting because it opens up more opportunities for research and analysis.[27]

25 I thank Prof. Dr J. Duindam for a discussion on this topic (June 2011).

26 Malul, *The comparative method*, 70.

27 Cf. on comparison of units M. Detienne, *Comparer l'incomparable* (Paris 2000) 41-59 or Śaraṇa, A*nthropological comparisons*, 18-33 and for

One final issue which must be addressed is the necessary decontextualization of the phenomenon being compared in the different societies. In my view, this is the heuristic purpose of the comparative method: decontextualization of a phenomenon from a particular society enables comparison with that phenomenon in another society – the comparison can be performed systematically precisely because the phenomenon has been taken out of its context. In other words, instead of taking each and every aspect of Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman divination into account, my comparative enquiries will focus specifically on the *homo divinans*, the sign and the role of text in the divinatory process. Divination will be recontextualized into the various societies in Part III and in the concluding chapter.

a brief overview of the history of the historical comparison P. Borgeaud, 'Réflexions sur la comparaison en histoire des religions antiques', *Métis* n.s. 1-2 (2003-2004) 9-33, at 26-31; and a very good review article dealing with ancient historians comparing Greece with China is J. Tanner, 'Ancient Greece, early China: Sino-Hellenic studies and comparative approaches to the classical word: a review article', *JHS* 129 (2009) 89-109. Cf. about the levels on which comparison is possible J.S. Jensen, 'Universals, general terms and the comparative study of religion', *Numen* 48 (2001) 238-266. He distinguishes between form, function, structure, and 'semantic content'.

Part II

The elements of ancient divination

4. The *homo divinans:* layman and expert

The *homo divinans* can be a layman or an expert: I consider the expert to be an individual claiming knowledge about the evocation, observation, recognition and interpretation of the signs of the supernatural. He receives money, goods or less tangible rewards in exchange for sharing this knowledge with his client. The layman usually divines for himself and receives no tangible reward.

On account of the availability of the source materials, the greater part of this chapter revolves around the expert who played such an important role in all three cultural areas: it consists of a structural comparison of the socio-economic status of certain groups of experts in Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome. Establishing differences and similarities in the socio-economic status of these divinatory experts contributes to building an understanding of their diversity in the three cultural areas – and eventually of the structures of divinatory practice.[1]

1 I use the term 'diviner' for both laymen and experts from the three cultural areas: this, in my opinion, covers the idea that anyone could divine and could be a *homo divinans*. Where the experts are concerned, I use 'expert' as a neutral term. When a particular group of experts is meant, I distinguish them by means of the name of their group within – and in the language of – the cultural area. I avoid 'seer' because this implies a presence

To Divine-It-Yourself or to consult an expert?

Every individual could divine for himself should he choose to do so – whether his divinatory session was about a matter of public or private concern. Still, many chose to consult an expert – although this required time and money. Unquestionably certain methods of divination or particular occasions did require an expert, but perhaps there were other reasons to consult such a person as well.

D-i-y

What examples of divine-it-yourself *do* we know? For Rome and Mesopotamia, not many – in the Greek sources divination by the layman is more visible. Nevertheless, divine-it-yourself practices must have occurred more often in all three cultural areas than the available evidence suggests.

A divinatory method such as cleromancy was very suitable to divination by laymen because, as far as we know, this did not require complicated rituals, materials (like the animal used during extispicy) or procedures and provided a relatively simple sign.[2] Interpretation could – but not necessarily did – follow simple rules, a lot or dice

of charisma or inspiration in modern daily sense of the word – and as we shall see often this is not the case (or a debatable matter).

2 On cleromancy in Mesopotamia see Finkel & Reade, 'Eponyms', 167-172 and pages 67-69 above; on cleromancy in Rome, interpreted by laymen and specialists see Cic. *Div*. 2 40-41.

were easy and cheap to obtain and uncomplicated to draw or throw. This is one of the most obvious examples but in theory all methods could be used without calling in an expert: it all depended on the layman's confidence in his own skills. There was no 'wrong' interpretation of the sign as such, there were only differences of opinion about this: an expert would be needed only when the individual was in doubt about a specific interpretation or uncertain of his own abilities. Whether or not the layman interpreted the sign correctly in the eyes of the expert is a different matter.[3]

At least some signs and their meanings were thought to be familiar to large numbers of individuals. The Greek soldiers in Homer's *Iliad* all knew whether the sign produced by the flight of a bird was good or bad:

> Even as he [Ajax] thus spake, there flew forth a bird upon the right hand, an eagle of lofty flight; and thereat the host of the Achaeans shouted aloud, heartened by the omen.[4]

On another occasion, when he was reluctant to accept the command of the army, Xenophon argued that there were signs so obvious that

3 E.G., Hdt. 3.65. Here the dream had been misinterpreted – according to Herodotos –, apparently by the dreamer himself who had been certain about what the dream would mean. However, from an etic perspective, misinterpretation does not exist.

4 Hom. *Il.* 13.821-823. Translation A.T. Murray.
Ὣς ἄρα οἱ εἰπόντι ἐπέπτατο δεξιὸς ὄρνις αἰετὸς ὑψιπέτης· ἐπὶ δ᾽ ἴαχε λαὸς Ἀχαιῶν | θάρσυνος οἰωνῷ·.

anyone could interpret them: '[...] and the gods gave me such signs in the sacrifices that even a layman could perceive that I must withhold myself from accepting the sole command.'[5]

These, and many other, examples show that most laymen could probably recognize a good or bad sign when they saw or heard of one.[6] Laymen must have possessed a basic knowledge about the assumed meaning of certain signs.[7]

There are strong indications that the laymen among the elite were better informed than the average layman: extispicy is a good example. In Greece and Rome, a liver without its 'lobe' or 'head' was a bad sign.[8] Alexander the Great knew this particular sign well: 'And when the seer told that the victim's liver had no lobe, "Ah me!"

5 Xen. *An.* 6.1.31. Translation C.L. Brownson.
[...] καί μοι οἱ θεοὶ οὕτως ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἐσήμηναν ὥστε καὶ ἰδιώτην ἂν γνῶναι ὅτι τῆς μοναρχίας ἀπέχεσθαί με δεῖ.
There are more such examples, take for instance, the signs when Dareios became the Persian king: Hdt. 3.86. Cf. also Xen. *An.* 3.2.9.

6 Pestilence is another such example of an inherently bad sign in Rome and Greece.

7 As is visible in a source like Herodotos, where more laymen than experts perform divination (Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 62).

8 This cannot be checked for Mesopotamia because the unspecified Greek term *lobos* cannot be compared to any of the very specific Mesopotamian terms. Although we do not know if the signs were negative, we are aware that incidents such as the absence of an organ or the small size of a liver were thought to be ominous: SAA 13 131 and SAA 13 133.

said Alexander, “A forcible omen!”’[9] Julius Obsequens, as do other Romans, reports the occurrence of a liver without a head being recognized as a negative sign.[10] Other aspects of extispicy were widely recognized as well: in Euripides’ *Elektra*, Aigisthos is depicted as performing a hepatoscopy.[11]

> Aegisthus took the entrails in his hands and inspected them. Now the liver had no lobe, while the portal vein and near-by gall-bladder revealed threatening approaches to the one who was observing it. Aegisthus was angry, but my master asked, “Why are you disheartened?” “Stranger, I fear some treachery from abroad. Agamemnon’s son is the man I hate most, and an enemy to my house.” [12]

9 Plut. *Vit. Alex*. 73.4.2-73.5.1. Translation: B. Perrin.
ἠρώτησε τῶν ἱερῶν τὸν τρόπον· φήσαντος δ’ ὅτι τὸ ἧπαρ ἦν ἄλοβον, “παπαὶ” εἶπεν, “ἰσχυρὸν τὸ σημεῖον.
Cf. Arr. *Anab.* 7.18; Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.7; Plut. *Vit. Cim*. 18.4; Plut. *Vit. Pyrrh.* 30.3; W.K. Pritchett, *The Greek state at war* 5 vols (Berkeley 1979) Vol. 3, 76.

10 Obseq. 17. In 203 one of the consuls found that the head of the liver of his first sacrificial victim was missing: (Liv. 30.2.9-13); in 118 the consul Cato sacrificed and the liver of the animal had no ‘head’ (Obseq. 35); Cic. *Div*. 2.13.32.

11 Although multiple organs were inspected during extispicy, during a hepatoscopy only the liver was examined.

12 Eur. *El.* 826-833. Translation E.P. Coleridge with slight adaptation.
κἀνεῖτο λαγόνας. ἱερὰ δ’ ἐς χεῖρας λαβὼν | Αἴγισθος ἤθρει. καὶ λοβὸς μὲν οὐ προσῆν | σπλάγχνοις, πύλαι δὲ καὶ δοχαὶ χολῆς πέλας | κακὰς ἔφαινον τῶι σκοποῦντι προσβολάς. | χὡ μὲν σκυθράζει, δεσπότης δ’ ἀνιστορεῖ· | Τί χρῆμ’ ἀθυμεῖς; Ὦ ξέν’, ὀρρωδῶ τινα | δόλον θυραῖον. ἔστι δ’ ἔχθιστος βροτῶν | Ἀγαμέμνονος παῖς πολέμιός τ’ ἐμοῖς δόμοις.

Nowhere is Aigisthos is mentioned as an expert on divination or as having acquired special skills in this field, nor is Euripides.[13] Euripides depiction of Aigisthos' proficiency in extispicy makes it seem like something he just happens to know – and probably so did Euripides. A passage from Xenophon's *Anabasis* suggests the same: the leader of the army, in this case Xenophon, could learn more about divination by observing it, although he was not an expert himself:

> Now Silanus, the divinatory expert, answered me in respect to the main issue that the omens were favorable (for he knew well enough that I was not unacquainted with divination, from being always present at the sacrifices); but he said that there appeared in the omens a kind of fraud and plot against me, manifestly because he knew that he was himself plotting to traduce me before you.[14]

Xenophon had been present at the sacrifices many times, probably more than many others in the course of their daily lives, and had had the opportunity to observe the expert at work – a normal practice

13 At least, not in the *Elektra* (see especially Eur. *El.* 805-839) nor anywhere else either, as far as I am aware. Cf. Odysseus who was not famous for his divinatory skills – but even he knew that it was a good sign when birds flew on the right-hand side: Hom. *Od.* 24.311-312.

14 Xen. *An.* 5.6.29.1-7. Translation C.L. Brownson.
ʼΣιλανὸς δέ μοι ὁ μάντις ἀπεκρίνατο τὸ μὲν μέγιστον, τὰ ἱερὰ καλὰ εἶναι· ᾔδει γὰρ καὶ ἐμὲ οὐκ ἄπειρον ὄντα διὰ τὸ ἀεὶ παρεῖναι τοῖς ἱεροῖς· ἔλεξε δὲ ὅτι ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς φαίνοιτό τις δόλος καὶ ἐπιβουλὴ ἐμοί, ὡς ἄρα γιγνώσκων ὅτι αὐτὸς ἐπεβούλευε διαβάλλειν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς. ἐξήνεγκε γὰρ τὸν λόγον ὡς ἐγὼ πράττειν ταῦτα διανοοίμην ἤδη οὐ πείσας ὑμᾶς.

according to Aeneas Tacticus: 'A soothsayer shall not make sacrifice on his own account without the presence of a magistrate.'[15] Although Xenophon seems rather overconfident of his own abilities to learn these skills, it does appear that a leader of the army could become knowledgeable about the interpretation of signs without being an acknowledged expert. It could be argued that up to a point the more advanced particularities of divinatory practice were familiar to a better-informed layman elite.[16] Nevertheless, there were occasions on which knowledge such as that of Xenophon was not quite enough – in such cases, the aid of an expert was still necessary.[17]

It then has to be assumed that there was a great deal of private divine-it-yourself going on at all times in Rome and Mesopotamia too, but the evidence is scanty. With regard to Rome, we know, for example, of the existence of private experts and individuals could claim that an occurrence was a *prodigium* (the senate would make the final decision, however). For Mesopotamia, there are clues that show there must have been private, informal divination which could be performed without the help of an expert. The methods used during this 'divine-it-yourself' were perhaps different from those used by the king. Erica Reiner has analysed Sultantepe Text 73, which provides some information about divinatory techniques not – or not

15 Aen. Tact. 10.4.4. Translation: Illinois Greek Club. Edition: Budé. Μηδὲ θύεσθαι μάντιν ἰδίᾳ ἄνευ τοῦ ἄρχοντος.

16 See also F.T. van Straten, *Hierà kalá: images of animal sacrifice in archaic and classical Greece* (Leiden 1995) 156.

17 And as illustrated by Onos. 10.25-28.

commonly – mentioned in the Mesopotamian sources of public divination. These methods are sprinkling an ox with water to observe its reaction,[18] psephomancy,[19] and, more generally, a number of ways to induce 'a sign'.[20] A method such as the interpretation of dreams should also be added to this list. Some of these methods might have been used for private divination.[21] Nonetheless, we are left with the impression that knowledge of how to divine was, as far as the sources reveal, more restricted in Mesopotamia than it was in Greece.

18 As was a custom in the Greek world before sacrifice took place, as a way of the animal giving 'consent'. Yet, this was not necessarily a divinatory sign: Van Straten, *Hierà kalá*, 33; 100-102 esp. n. 309.

19 Cf. on Mesopotamian psephomancy: E. Ebeling, *Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur* (Berlin 1953) no. 137 (a review, in which this tablet dealing with psephomancy is discussed is: J. Nougayrol, *OLZ* 51 (1956) 38-42, at 41); W. Horowitz & V.A. Hurowitz, 'Urim and Thummim in light of a psephomancy ritual from Assur (LKA 137)', *JANES* 21 (1992) 95-115; I.L. Finkel, 'In black and white: remarks on the Assur psephomancy ritual', *ZA* 85 (1995) 271-276. A. Schuster-Brandis, *Steine als Schutz- und Heilmittel: Untersuchung zu ihrer Verwendung in der Beschwörungskunst Mesopotamiens im 1. Jt. v. Chr.* (Münster 2008) 56. I owe these references to L. van de Peut.

20 E. Reiner, 'Fortune-telling in Mesopotamia', *JNES* 19 (1960) 23-35.

21 Cf. J. Nougayrol, 'Divination et la vie quotidienne' in: P.W. Pestman (ed.), *Acta orientalia neerlandica: proceedings of the* [*19th*] *Congress of the Dutch Oriental Society held in Leiden on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, 8th-9th May 1970* (Leiden 1971) 28-36.

Consulting an expert

Why would a layman, if he could divine for himself or learn how to do so, still choose to turn to an expert? Ancient sources are not always clear on this matter, necessitating a more theoretical approach on this issue. An expert is presumed to have the skill, expertise and tools to perform a certain kind of divination.[22] On account of these claims, the expert is someone who can 'remove the agency and responsibility for a decision from the actor himself'.[23] If a layman performs the divination personally and on his own behalf, a perceived conflict of interests might occur: an individual cannot remove agency and responsibility from himself (although the ritual procedure and randomization create some distance) but the expert can take full responsibility for his interpretation on the basis of his authority. Furthermore, an expert is not only a mediator between the perceived supernatural and man, he also serves to mediate between men in social situations in which tensions might be present. The expert can be an outsider in a conflict and hence can

22 On tools used for divination – about which we know next to nothing for Antiquity – cf. V. Turner, *The drums of affliction: a study of religious processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Ithaca 1981[2]) 30-34. Here a expert performs a particular kind of divination and a description of his tools is given; for the Near East see E. Jan Wilson, 'A note on the use of *erinnu* in *bārû*-rituals', *JANES* 23 (1995) 95-98.

23 G.K. Park, 'Divination and its social contexts', *JRAI* 93 (1963) 195-209, at 197.

resolve such tensions in a seemingly unbiased manner.[24] It could be considered dangerous to have a member of local society, who might have knowledge of a client's family and affairs, perform the divination.[25] Furthermore, in ancient times, if the expert was itinerant and came from outside the region in which he worked, his knowledge could be perceived as exclusive and prestigious. An itinerant expert was an outsider, which enabled him to be more impartial. Another option in a search for impartiality and exclusivity was for the client to go to an expert or oracle-site far from his home.[26]

Since 'getting it right' was imperative, people were willing to spend time and money on an expert. The wealthier a Greek individual was, the more authoritative the interpretation he could buy by calling on the services of a more prestigious expert. Many economically less affluent members of society would have had to depend on the interpretation of signs by a local or itinerant expert. Those with a little more wealth could afford to travel to an oracle of supra-local importance, while the richer elite could consult or even employ an

24 As, for example, in the Yoruba community: Park, 'Social contexts', 197.

25 J. Jansen, *De lessen van Namagan Kanté: zanddivinatie in de Mandébergen* (*Mali-Guinée*) (Amsterdam 2007) 46-47.

26 But also note how civic oracles – close to the *polis* – were also used to make political decisions: Morgan, 'Divination and society', 17-42. Also, an individual might have wanted to go to an oracle which 'specialized' in his kind of topic. It seems that Klaros, for example, focused on plagues, earthquakes and pirates, while Didyma answered private queries (*SEG* 39 1326 for references).

expert who was famous for his skills. In the Archaic and Classical periods, members of the Greek elite could hire an expert for a longer or shorter period of time if necessary, for example, to join armies during a series of battles. In the Hellenistic period we begin to find possible references to experts being employed not only by individuals but also by *polis* communities, perhaps on particular occasions. For instance, it seems that experts would be present at the Athenian assembly.[27]

Although there is little evidence, it seems safe to assume that in Rome and Mesopotamia, as in Greece, those who could afford it consulted an expert for private divination on an ad-hoc basis.[28] A Roman would consult a private *haruspex*. A poor individual in Mesopotamia consulted an expert working 'under the city gate'.

Use of an expert for public purposes can be seen incidentally in Greece, but on a structural level in Mesopotamia and Rome: the Mesopotamian king had his own network of experts and astrologers on hand. Even King Assurbanipal needed experts although he claimed to have more knowledge of divination than many others:

> [Assurbanipal] [...] beloved of the god, whom Shamash and Adad gave insight, who learned extispicy, the secret of heaven and earth, the craft of Shamash and Adad [...].[29]

27 Flower, *The seer,* 122-123. Cf. Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, Vol. 3, 61-63.

28 In the Old Babylonian period, on the other hand, there were letters of non-experts and non-scholars discussing extispicy.

29 Colophon A iv 46-47. Edition and translation Koch, *Secrets of extispicy,*

The Roman elite also used various bodies of experts – *augures*, *decemviri* and some *haruspices* to explain public signs – whose members were even appointed from within the elite itself. In Mesopotamia and Rome the advantages of employing experts structurally and in an institutionalized context must have been deemed more advantageous than recourse to a freelance expert, certainly for public purposes.

In Mesopotamia, as in Greece and Rome, the expert was thought to have something the layman did not: authority on the basis of more-or-less objective knowledge. This is why individuals consulted experts. Nevertheless, a perpetual tension existed between confidence in one's own ability to interpret the sign correctly ('I would – or could – have done better!') and the need to have a sense of certainty obtained by using an expert ('Would he have done better?'), whether on an ad hoc or on a structural basis.

137. Colophon A: K 3945+3986+6297+6909+10681+10960+11713+12315+82-3-23, 5213 = CT 20 43-48. This colophon is known as 'type A': H. Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone* (Kevelaer 1968) 97 (number 318) and the even more famous colophon on pages 100-101 (number 325).
na-ram DINGIR.[MÉŠ ša] ^{d}UTU u ^{d}IŠKUR GEŠTU.2 DAGAL-tum id-di-nu-niš-šum NAM.[AZU AD.ḪAL AN-e u KI-tim] né-me-qí ^{d}UTU u ^{d}IŠKUR
There are many other types of Assurbanipal colophons, e.g. 'type N': Hunger, *Kolophone*, 97 (number 318). There is a lot of literature on the topic of Assurbanipal's education. See for references the recent S. Zamazalová, 'The education of Neo-Assyrian princes' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 313-330.

Relationship client-expert

Despite the fact that experts were regularly consulted, whether ad hoc or structurally, perceptions of their interpretations were not always positive – nor were they unquestioned: disbelief and outright anger were among the possible reactions. Homer relates the story of the expert Kalchas who knows Agamemnon would not be able to keep his slave girl because her abduction had offended the god Apollo who had caused a plague to break out in the Greek camp: to appease the god, the girl had to be released. Kalchas was afraid for his personal safety and did not want to come forward with this information because Agamemnon might harm him. He only spoke up when Achilles had assured him of his protection.[30] Expert and client were in a symbiotic relationship which was, at times, tense: Kalchas was dependent on the goodwill of his employers, in this case Achilles and Agamemnon specifically and the Greeks in a more general sense. However, the Greek army, and the rulers, were also dependent on what the expert said – although the final decision rested with the leaders.[31] The same tension is revealed in the

30 Hom. *Il.* 1.75-91.

31 Literary examples of such dependence (and the strains on this relationship) are found in a great variety of sources: Hdt. 9.61; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.2; Eur. *Phoen.* 754-759; Soph. *OT* 300-341; 602-610; Onos. 4.5; Onos. 10.25-28; Aesch. *Sept.* 377-380; Arr. *Anab.* 7.18. It is clear that 'politicians and generals still paid respect to divination' (at least in the 4th century): R. Parker, *Athenian religion: a history* (Oxford 1996) 214. The general or leader still needed to make the decisions in the end: Pl. *Lach.* 199a; Pritchett, *The Greek*

Anabasis when the army was literally unable to move on because the experts said it could not, even though this was necessary for it to survive.

Could they be trusted? Had they got it right? Were they wrong in their interpretation or did the experts perhaps have ulterior motives? Might the leader of the army have put pressure on the experts because he had ulterior motives?[32] The expert could, after all, exert a considerable influence on future actions by providing or not providing particular interpretations.[33] In Greece, high-ranking individuals were dependent on the knowledge of their experts – although, as noted, the final decision still rested with them.

A comparable situation can be seen during the power struggles in the later Roman Republic: politicians needed experts.[34] In the

state at war, Vol. 3, 48-49; 139-140; K.J. Dover, 'Some neglected aspects of Agamemnon's dilemma', *JHS* 93 (1973) 58-68, at 64. It should also be noted that, in the Athenian *polis*, oracles were consulted but this was not an essential action: a decision by the Assembly was also valid without a consultation: Parker, *Polytheism and society*, 115.

32 Xen. *An.* 6.4.14. For an illustration of the practical problems in such a situation in which the army was stalemated or other such situations see Plut. *Vit. Arist.* 18. Cf. Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, Vol. 3, 78-81.

33 See on demagogic powers of the divinatory expert, e.g., Plut. *Vit. Dion* 22.4-24.3; Xen. *An.* 5.6.16-19; And of divination in general, e.g., Plut. *Vit. Lys.* 22.2.

34 Just one example is the case in which Caesar and Sulla take stands, and the role of the experts in that conflict, as detailed by E. Rawson, 'Caesar, Etruria and the *Disciplina Etrusca*', *JRS* 68 (1978) 132-152. But see also the

Roman case, the situation was exceptional in the sense that client and expert might have belonged to the same peer group, or even have been the same individual. Another issue was that these experts were working on a more structural basis.

The Mesopotamian king also needed to trust his experts because they were employed to ensure his well-being – on a structural basis. They would provide him with advice, which could entail specifics about such topics as military strategy or his health.[35] The experts could restrain the king up to a point: they could tell him it was not right to go outside on a particular day or which people he should and should not meet.[36] In the end, however, it was the king who made the decision, perhaps after a discussion with his magnates.[37] The king-expert relationship can be seen as symbiotic, but was different from that in Greece and Rome: because the relationship was structural and because of the 'deep social chasm' between king and expert, the king was the empowered party. The relationship might even be characterized as one of patronage. Such asymmetry in the relationship is

perceived manipulation by *collegia* in MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation,* 41-42.

35 SAA 10 111 and SAA 10 112 are striking examples.

36 As in SAA 10 38; or they could strongly advise the king to stop fasting as in SAA 10 43; or whether or not he was allowed to see his son (SAA 10 49; SAA 10 74).

37 Yet, note that scholars also fulfilled the tasks of magnates under Esarhaddon: K. Radner, 'Royal decision-making: kings, magnates and scholars' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 358-379, at 372-374.

not found in Greece to such a degree, nor in Rome where the public experts and their clients were members of the elite (patronage also played a role in these circles but this was clearly not as asymmetrical as in Mesopotamia).[38]

In short, the expert was always part of the leader's 'religious capital'[39] – but his actual worth did not go unquestioned. This is primarily visible in Greece where the leader or client *chose* to consult an expert on an incidental basis. This incidental basis was not nearly as prominent in Rome and Mesopotamia, where an expert served formally for a longer period of time. This element of choice on the side of the client must have affected the position of the Greek expert *homo divinans* in society, an enquiry which will form the greater part of this chapter.

Experts: socio-economic status

In my analysis of the position of the divinatory expert in society, the concept of socio-economic status will play a central part. All experts

38 For the quote and on the depiction of this relationship as one of patronage see Radner, 'Royal decision-making' in: Radner & Robson, C*uneiform culture*, 358-379, at 363-365; E. Frahm, 'Keeping company with men of learning: the king as scholar' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 508-532, at 525. Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 605-607.

39 J.N. Bremmer, 'Prophets, experts, and politics in Greece, Israel, and early modern Europe', *Numen* 40 (1993) 150-183, at 155.

discussed were working in the field of divination, but there is much more to be said about their socio-economic status. This term is used to determine the position of an individual in society, by placing emphasis on his occupation. The three criteria by which this position is usually measured are education, income and career.[40] At least one addition to this list must be made: the evidence shows that an expert's social background was an important element of socio-economic status in the ancient world. Consequently, extra emphasis will be placed on family ties among experts. Other important elements which can be considered in determining the social background of an expert are gender and physique. I shall begin by discussing the this

40 Introductions to socio-economic status and related issues – among other applications its use in research into health and inequality – can be found in: G. Marshall, *Oxford dictionary of sociology* (Oxford 1998[2]) s.v. status attainment; N.J. Smelser & P.B. Baltes (eds), *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (Amsterdam 2001); see for socio-economic status and health; C. Kramarae & D. Spender (eds), *Routledge international encyclopedia of women: global women's issues and knowledge* (New York 2000) see for class. See the use of the term socio-economic status – among many others – in, e.g., V. Bos, *Ethnic inequalities in mortality in The Netherlands and the role of socioeconomic status* (Enschede 2005) *passim*, but especially 88-148 and 159-161; G. Davey Smith *et al.*, 'Education and occupational social class: which is the more important indicator of mortality risk?', *JECH* 52 (1998) 153-160; B.P. Kennedy *et al.*, 'Income distribution, socioeconomic status, and self rated health in the United States: multilevel analysis', *BMJ* 317 (1998) 917-921; J.J.A. Spijker, *Socioeconomic determinants of regional mortality differences in Europe* (Amsterdam 2004) *passim*.

background of the groups of observational experts, subsequently education, income and career will be discussed in relation to one another.

The basic assumption under investigation in a comparison of Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome is that more education, more income and more fame meant an individual was higher up in the socio-economic ranking. There are, however, no quantifiable data. Whereas sociologists would use relative percentages to 'measure' socio-economic status, the data necessary to do this are not available to ancient historians. However, historians can use a comparison, a method of research which is relative – as is the use of percentages –, in order to 'measure' the socio-economic status of people belonging to various groups. The confrontation between the various experts will lead to qualitative conclusions at a high level of abstraction. On account of this, I have only used three broad categories as designations of the experts' socio-economic status in the conclusion: low, middle and high socio-economic status.

Through this analysis an insight into the comparative status of experts will be gained. This helps us to understand the various positions of the experts in their respective societies. This analysis will focus on those experts interpreting signs perceived by observation: the Greek *mantis*;[41] the Mesopotamian *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil*

41 The *teratoskopos* also divined by means of observing signs, but as there are very few records of what exactly he did and how he differed from the *mantis*. He will only be briefly mentioned in this account.

and *bārû*; and the Roman *augur*, *decemvir* and *haruspex*.[42] These experts are well attested in the material – because of their public duties and the high status of their core divinatory methods –, ensuring enough knowledge about their background and career has been passed down to be able to make a systematic comparison. Other specialists will be used as a complement and as a contrast.

Terminology

Thus far I have used the word 'expert' to refer to anyone claiming some kind of expertise in relation to the evocation, recognition and interpretation of signs thought to have been sent by the supernatural. In reality there were various kinds of experts: they were involved in public ('official') and private ('unofficial') divination and they could at the same time be either dependent ('employed') or independent ('free-lance'). In what follows I shall take a closer look at variations in the social-economic statuses enjoyed by some of the experts. In doing so, I shall focus on one particular category of experts for which sufficient data are available: those divining mainly by means of observation. Other experts are only referred to.

42 Both legendary and mythical materials about the professional expert and historically attested actions of and practicalities concerning historical experts will compared and contrasted. Together these form a view of professional experts in which mythological texts can complement historical attestations.

Terminology and areas of expertise: Greece

The experts who concerned themselves with divination were many. The terminology used for these different groups of experts is often unclear. In what follows, a brief overview is provided, bearing mind that not all kinds of experts can be discussed, only those who are encountered most frequently.

A small category of dependent experts was constituted out of the *prophētai* and *promanteis* (functioning as mouthpieces of the gods), and in Hellenistic (and Roman) times the institutionalized *manteis*. These were linked to a sacred or oracular shrine.[43] In fact, they worked at an oracular shrine – but their precise functions are often hard to define. Context is helpful: at Korope, for example, there would be a priest, a dependent divinatory expert, a secretary to the gods and representatives of the various colleges present at the oracle when it functioned,[44] while at Didyma – at least in Hellenistic times

43 J. Dillery, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*: independent experts and the problem of authority' in: S.I. Johnston & P.T. Struck (eds), *Mantikê: studies in ancient divination* (Leiden 2005) 167-231, at 171; in Hellenistic and Roman times see A. Hupfloher, 'Mantische Spezialisten im Osten des Römerreiches' in: H. Cancik & J. Rüpke (eds), *Die Religion des Imperium Romanum: Koine und Konfrontationen* (Tübingen 2009) 273-287. The most extensive study of the *prophētēs* is still E. Fascher, *Profētēs: eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Gießen 1927) 1-75. These institutionalized *manteis* were thought to have worked until they died: L. Weniger, 'Die Seher von Olympia', *ARW* 18 (1915) 53-115, at 60.

44 *IG* IX 2 1109 and *Syll.*[3] 1157, lines 18-22. See Robert, 'Apollon Koropaios', 22 – where further references can be found.

– the expert appears to have been assisted by other functionaries.[45] A certain division of labour might be assumed on the basis of this evidence.

In the category of independent experts there was the *oneiropolos*, who interpreted dreams, and the *teratoskopos*, who interpreted signs, usually those appearing spontaneously without having been requested. However, the independent experts who appeared most frequently – especially in Classical times – were the c*hrēsmologoi* and independent *manteis*.[46] My use of the term 'independent' does

45 Fontenrose, *Didyma,* 78; on Claros and Didyma see pages 132 and 41-42 respectively of H.W. Parke, *The oracles of Apollo in Asia Minor* (London 1985). Cf. Morgan, 'Divination and society', 29-32. See for a much more detailed study – for which there is no space here and which is also beyond the scope of this research –, the very thorough A. Busine, 'The officials of oracular sanctuaries in Roman Asia Minor', *ARG* 8 (2006) 275-316; S. Georgoudi, 'Les porte-paroles des dieux: réflexions sur le personnel des oracles grecs' in: I. Chirassi Colombo, & T. Seppilli, *Sibille e linguaggi oracolari: mito, storia, tradizione* (Pisa 1999) 315-365, esp. 340-361. These articles also show the many complications which can arise from such a study. Note also the attention Georgoudi pays to the *Selloi* (who are not discussed here because I do not consider them to be *manteis*) at 335-340. Another group of functionaries at the oracle who are not discussed are the *Hosioi* at Delphi. See G. Jay-Robert, 'Les *Hosioi* de Delphes', *Euphrosyne* 25 (1997) 25-45.

46 The term *chrēsmologos* seems to have appeared in the 5th century: earlier chresmologues, such as Musaios and Bakis, were only referred to in these terms from the time of Herotodus. See Dillerey, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*', 184-185. For sources on some chresmologues see, e.g., Hdt. 7.6.3; 8.96.2; 9.43.2.

not imply these experts were always itinerant: it merely means they did not have permanent employment.

In practice, however, the actual occupations of these experts overlapped and their particular roles cannot always be distinguished from one another. For instance, the independent expert Lampon (480/470-410 BC) was referred to as a *chrēsmologos,* as a *mantis* (as well as an *exēgētēs*, a role not relevant here) and sometimes as both at the same time. The spheres of activity denoted by these terms seem to have overlapped.[47] In earlier times, the *mantis* was supposed to interpret both spontaneous and evoked signs and was also ascribed prophetic powers – or at least innate divine inspiration – in the literature.[48] The *chrēsmologos*, on the other hand, collected

47 Dillery, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*', 170; Flower, *The seer*, 60; Garland, 'Priests and power', 82-85; H. Bowden, 'Oracles for sale' in: P. Derow & R. Parker (eds), *Herodotos and his world: essays from a conference in memory of George Forrest* (Oxford 2003) 256-274, especially 261-264; Georgoudi, 'Les porte-paroles des dieux', 315-365, especially 327-328 but also *passim*. Especially her attempt to distinguish between *mantis, promantis* and *prophētēs* makes this article very worthwhile. Georgoudi shows that *mantis* and *promantis/prophētēs* cannot simply be distinguished in the sense that a *mantis* observed and the other two divined by means of discourse (345-347). The one distinction which can be convincingly made is that the *mantis* is not connected to a particular member of the supernatural, while the others are (331).

48 An example is Pind. *Ol.* 6.65-70. Ascribing innate divine inspiration seems like a literary feature to me. For secondary literature see Bremmer, 'Status and symbolic capital', 98 where he argues that experts based their

oracles and uttered these.[49] His trade was generally not deemed to be as prestigious as that of the *mantis* (although there were some exceptions).[50] It has been argued that this status had changed by Pausanias' time when a *mantis* seems to have been someone who based his divination on rational skills acquired through education, while the *chrēsmologos* had become an inspired speaker of oracles.[51] In reality, a division of labour between various types of expert is likely to have been less clear-cut than this neat distinction might suggest.

If a comparison of the esteem they enjoyed has to be made, experts at the oracle sites were high up in the hierarchy of the different branches of divinatory experts. The independent experts, first

knowledge on expertise in the Archaic age but were later also connected to inspirational divination; Flower, *The seer*, 38; Dillery, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*', 168-170.

49 As in, e.g., Hdt. 1.62.

50 It was, e.g., perfectly possible for a *chrēsmologos* to be honoured with a statue: *SEG* 42 1065 (Kolophon, 200-150 BC); L. & J. Robert, 'Décret de Colophon pour un chresmologue de Smyrne appelé à diriger l'oracle de Claros', *BCH* 116 (1992) 279-291. He was also allowed to advise the assembly (cf. Parker, *Polytheism and society*, 112). On the *mantis* who was held in high esteem see the discussion and references in Pritchett, *The Greek state at war,* Vol. 3, 49-56.

51 Dillery, 'Chresmologues and *manteis*', 170. The passage referred to is Paus. 1.34.4 (yet, in Paus. 2.13.7 it appears that a expert who was inspired to dream was called a *mantis*, too – matters are not clear-cut); A.W. Argyle, 'Χρησμολόγοι and Μάντεις', *CR* n.s. 20 (1970) 139.

and foremost the *mantis*, followed suit.[52] Those such as the dream expert and the *chrēsmologos* were held in lower esteem.

Terminology and areas of expertise: Mesopotamia

An example of a private expert was the *šā'il*(*t*)*u*, who interpreted both dreams and the flight of birds, and divined by smoke. A.L. Oppenheim adds lecanomancy and necromancy to his activities.[53] Much more is known about experts employed by the palace, who had the task to make sure that no harm befell the king..[54] These

52 Note that perhaps the *manteis* – but also the chresmologues – became less important over time, especially after the Sicilian expedition. See: Parker, *Polytheism and society*, 113-115.

53 Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams*, 223.

54 There were those who claimed to speak on behalf of the gods (and can therefore not be discussed here, because they are no divinatory expert according to my definition). The *maḫḫû* was an ecstatic figure, who provided the king with messages by interpreting dreams, speech omens, portents and signs. The *raggim*(*t*)*u* was another prophetic character with a perceived capability to communicate with the divine. Both *maḫḫû* and *raggimu* were probably connected to the temple. Although the two are distinguished in the texts, again it is impossible to draw a sharp distinction between the one and the other. Their function was that of servant of the deity, and in this capacity they could 'express demands to the king' and comment on his cultic and political functioning. M.J. de Jong, *Isaiah among the ancient Near Eastern prophets: a comparative study of the earliest stages of the Isaiah tradition and the Neo-Assyrian prophesies* (Leiden 2006) 220-236.

experts fell into the category of scholars (*ummânu*) or were 'scribe-experts' – it is often hard to distinguish between these two categories.[55] The overarching Neo-Assyrian concept of *ummânu* consisted of five different disciplines: the *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil* (celestial expert/astrologer), the *bārû* (*haruspex* – in the Assyriological literature usually translated as 'expert'), the *āšipu* (doctor/exorcist), the *asû* (medical practitioner) and the *kalû* (lamentation singer who was not involved in divination).[56] Note that the practice of the *āšipu* overlapped with, or was at least related to that of the *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil* and *bārû* but that here he is not considered to be a divinatory expert as such.[57] The following passage distinguishes the various disciplines (but leaves out the *kalû*), and adds the bird-expert (the *dāgil iṣṣūrē*, not an *ummânu*) to the list: 'The scribes, experts, exor-

55 E.g., K. van der Toorn, *Scribal culture and the making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA 2007) 57; Rochberg, *The heavenly writing,* 45.

56 Cf. Rochberg, *The heavenly writing*, 95.

57 See for the distinction between divination and medicine pages 72-75 above. It is currently in vogue among a branch of Assyriology to regard the medical compendia as explicitly non-divinatory. See Heeßel, *Diagnostik*, 4-5; Cf. the use of SA.GIG in explicitly medical studies by J. Scurlock & B.R. Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian medicine: ancient sources, translations, and modern medical analyses* (Urbana, ILL 2005) and I.L. Finkel & M.J. Geller (eds), *Disease in Babylonia* (Leiden 2007). I do not agree: I concur with U. Koch that there is an overlap in the practice and theory of expert and *āšipu*: U. Koch, lecture *āšipu and divination?* Leiden University, 12 May 2010. The *asû* and *kalû* do not seem to have been involved in divinatory practice.

cists, physicians, observers of birds and palace officials dwelling in the city'.[58]

Although a clear-cut division of roles is artificial, it is possible to make some distinctions. The *bārû* was a specialist in interpreting signs, mainly by means of inspection of *exta*. Some have argued that he was also involved in the observation of the flight of birds, lecanomancy and libanomancy. Ulla Jeyes argues that, in the Old Babylonian period, the *bārû* performed extispicy, lecanomancy, libanomancy, aleuromancy 'and a peculiar form of divination which involved observation of spots or discolouring on slaughtered and plucked fowl'.[59] However, Eleanor Robson has convincingly shown that the Neo-Assyrian *bārû*, although he did have knowledge of other areas outside his own specialization, did not practise in these areas.[60] The *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil* specialized in heavenly signs but was also involved in other areas. The *dāgil iṣṣūrē* apparently observed birds only.

Ivan Starr states that a *bārû* was held in much higher esteem than the prophet, *raggimu*.[61] This would also have applied to the *ṭupšarru*

58 Publication: R. F. Harper, *Assyrian and Babylonian letters* (Chicago 1892-1914) 33:9. Translation *Chicago Assyrian dictionary*, s.v. *dāgil iṣṣūrē.* LÚ ṭupšarru LÚ bārû LÚ mašmaššû LÚ ašû LÚ dagil MUŠEN.MEŠ manzaz ekalli āšibāli.

59 Jeyes, *Old Babylonian extispicy*, 15.

60 Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 623.

61 At least in the Old Babylonian period: I. Starr, *The rituals of the diviner* (Malibu 1983) 5.

Enūma Anu Enlil. The reasons for this esteem were the learning and knowledge the *bārû* (and the *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil*) needed to possess, something he shared with the wise man, the *apkallu*: 'I am a expert, I am a man of learning'; 'wise [*emqu*] member of the guild of experts'.[62] The *bārû* were united in a guild, to which new members were admitted on the basis of their wisdom and learning. In contrast, the *šā'il*(*t*)*u* was qualified by 'age, social status, or a personal charisma, inherited or magically acquired'. He or she and other non-*ummânu* experts were held in lower esteem than the *ummânu* because they had no extensive scholarly training, they were not organized into a politically powerful guild like that of the *bārû* or perhaps for other unknown reasons.[63]

Terminology and areas of expertise: Rome

The public experts in Roman Republican times can be split up into three groups: first, the *augures*;[64] second, the interpreters of prodigies (that is, the keepers of the Sibylline Books – the *decemviri sac-*

62 W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian wisdom literature* (Oxford 1959) 211, line 16; J.A. Craig, *Assyrian and Babylonian religious texts: being prayers, oracles, hymns &c.* (Leipzig 1895-1897) 60, line 2.

63 Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams*, 221.

64 The number of *augures* at any one time is unclear – at first, there seem to have been three, later four or six and from 300 there were certainly nine.

ris faciundis[65] – and, from the middle Republic but becoming more important during the later Republic, the Etruscan *haruspices*), and third, the readers of entrails (also *haruspices*).[66] Some would argue that the *pontifices* should also be ranked among the divinatory experts but since they were only marginally involved in the interpretation of certain signs, they are not discussed in what follows.[67]

65 It should be noted that the precise role of the Sibylline books in the divinatory process can be disputed: see p. 264. First there were two men consulting the Sibylline books, then ten (from 367) and from the time of Sulla their number was fifteen and later this number was raised again. Consequently I shall call them *decemviri* here as this number was used during most of the Republic, the timeframe I deal with here. See further S.M. Rasmussen, *Public portents in republican Rome* (Rome 2003) 169-170.

66 North, 'Diviners and divination', 51; 55. Cf. Rosenberger, 'Republican *nobiles*', 293; G.J. Szemler, 'Priesthood and priestly careers' in: W. Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* (Berlin 1986-) Vol. 16.3, 2314-2331, at 2325; D.S. Potter, *Prophets and emperors: human and divine authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge, MA 1994) 151-158. The dynamics and evolution in divination in this period, to a far greater extent than can be done here, have been discussed by J. Scheid, 'Le rite de auspices à Rome: quelle évolution? Réflexions sur la transformation de la divination publique des Romains entre le IIIe et le Ier siècle avant notre ère' in: S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012) 109-128; and by J. Rüpke, 'Divination romaine et rationalité grecque dans la Rome du IIe siècle avant notre ère' in: iidem, 279-500.

67 Cf. K. Latte, '12a. Orakel' in: idem, *Kleine Schriften: zu Religion, Recht,*

The *nobiles* who became members of the bodies of *decemviri* or the *augures* would hold life-long tenure: they had become members of a prestigious priestly college and should be considered part of the institutions of the State.[68] The *collegium* of *augures* would be asked by the Senate to observe and explain the *auspicia* and *auguria* (interpreting augural law) and to offer explanations of errors in the performance of a ritual – while individual augures could also do this on their own accord.[69] In other words, the *collegium* examined the potential success of an undertaking. It was part of the task of the incumbent magistrates, with the assistance of their *pullarii* ('chicken-keepers'), to take the *auspicia* before any official action, mainly by using birds, but also by keeping track of thunder and lightning – expressing the favour or disfavour of the supernatural. At a later date the principal way of taking the *auspicia* would to observe

Literatur und Sprache der Griechen und Römer (München 1968) 152-192, at 179-187. Those dealing with divination in Republican Rome do not mention the *pontifices* as experts as such (except for Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 170-171). Perhaps this is because the interpretation of *prodigia* was a relatively small part of their tasks. Cf. R.L. Gordon, 'Pontifex, Pontifices' in: H. Cancik & H. Schneider (eds), *Brill's New Pauly Online*. Visited 1-4-2011.

68 Rosenberger, 'Republican *nobiles*', 293; G.J. Szemler, *The priests of the Roman Republic: a study of interactions between priesthoods and magistracies* (Brussels 1972) 21-46; Szemler, 'Priesthood', 2325.

69 Cf. J. Linderski, 'The augural law' in: W. Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung Bd. 16.3: Religion* (Berlin 1986-) 2146-2312; Rosenberger, 'Republican *nobiles*', 298-299.

how chickens ate.[70] The feeding behaviour of the poultry would be interpreted by the *augures*. Prodigies could be remedied by consulting the Sibylline Books, which only the *decemviri* were allowed to do if requested by the Senate.[71] The *haruspices* were a different body of experts, consisting of members of the Etruscan oligarchy (and perhaps later of the Roman elite),[72] who read the *exta* (often in a military context)[73] and were consulted about lightning and prodigies which they were able explain with the help of their *libri rituales*.[74] These

70 J. Scheid, *An introduction to Roman religion* (Edinburgh 2003) 112-117.

71 Cf. on the Sibylline Books D. Engels, *Das römische Vorzeichenwesen (753-27 v.Chr.): Quellen, Terminologie, Kommentar, historische Entwicklung* (Stuttgart 2007) 739-844.

72 MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 43-59.

73 North, 'Experts and divination', 55. See, e.g., *CIL* VI 2166 (reference from North) for an example of a *haruspex* in the army. It should be noted that the Roman and Etruscan ways of performing extispicy differed. Nevertheless, I deal with this as one tradition here – the sources do not allow the two to be clearly distinguished.

74 Cf. Scheid, *Roman religion*, 123-124. See MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 43-59. It is not possible to provide a complete bibliography for the *haruspex* here, but see one of the – still – canonical publications dealing with the *haruspex*: C.O. Thulin, *Die Etruskischen Disciplin* 3 vols (Göteborg 1909) Vol. 3; as well as the bibliography in the recent work by M.L. Haack, *Prosopographie des haruspices romains* (Pisa 2006); M.L. Haack, 'Les haruspices II. Les haruspices romains' in: M.F. Baslez & F. Prévot (eds), *Prosopographie et histoire religieuse: actes du colloque tenu en l'Université Paris XII-Val de Marne les 27 & 28 octobre 2000* (Paris 2005) 187-206. It is not quite clear when the Etruscan haruspices were asked to come to Rome to

haruspices became more important during the first century BC. Under the Principate they too were united in an official *collegium*.[75]

In the private sphere, other *augures* and *haruspices* – often not easily distinguishable from their counterparts functioning in a public context[76] – performed extispicy, read nuptial auspices and interpreted oracles – provided by *sortileges* and *vates* – and interpreted dreams. The *hariolus* was considered to act as the possessed mouthpiece of the supernatural on occasion, and astrologers examined the heavens and read horoscopes. These individuals were not primarily concerned with divination related to State matters, but with private affairs. The elite regarded these experts in private affairs as lowly beings and their practice as unnecessary and undesirable.[77] The status of private, unofficial, experts was correspondingly low.

be consulted.

75 Note there is no consensus on the development of this *collegium*. B. MacBain argues the *haruspices* were in some way formally organized in the 3rd century but that the coherence of this organization remains unclear: MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation,* 47-50. Other *collegia* might have existed outside Rome. See *CIL* IX 1540. Reference from, and cf., Haack, *Prosopographie*, 50-51. Cf. Engels, *Das römische Vorzeichenwesen*, 733-735.

76 E.g., in the entourage of a member of the elite like Herennius Siculus (Val. Max. 9.12.6; Vell. 2.7.2). See Haack, *Prosopographie*, 61-63 where one can find further references. For the criteria which could be established to distinguish between the two see M.L. Haack, 'Haruspices officiels et privés: tentative d'une distinction', *REA* 104 (2002) 111-133. For private augurs see Cato *Agr.* 5.4.

77 E.g., Cic. *Div.* 2.24.

Terminology: conclusions

All three communities show experts involved in public and in private divination. Interestingly, the Roman and Mesopotamian sources suggest that experts would be involved in either public or private divination (although practice may have been different) while a Greek expert could potentially be involved in both. In practice, those (mainly) involved in private divination seem to be held in lower esteem.

All in all, the activities of Roman experts were restricted to a certain area of expertise – at least if they were officially employed and had a public function. The Mesopotamian *bārû* was also specialized to quite an extent (as was the *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil*, but he could also be active in more than one area). The Greek *manteis* were jacks-of-all-trades: they were active in interpreting many different kinds of signs and practised a variety of divinatory methods – but their principal work was in the field of observational divination.

Background

Gender

Divinatory experts in Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome were almost always men. There are very few female experts attested in our sources. The most eye-catching are the women who functioned as the mouthpieces of the supernatural: the female *raggintu* and *maḫḫūtu*

from Mesopotamia fit this description. Simo Parpola counts eight such individuals in the sources from the oracle of Ištar at Arbela.[78] The Greek Pythia and the Sibyls were invariably women too.[79] However, because these individuals did not *interpret* observed signs provided by the supernatural they fall outside the scope of this chapter.[80]

78 See Parpola, *Assyrian prophecies*, il-lii: Aḫat-abīša (SAA 9 oracle 1.8), Dunnaša-āmur (9 & 10), Ilūssa-āmur (1.5), Issār-bēlī-da''ini (1.7), Mulissu-Kabtat (7), Rēmutti-Allati (1.3), Sinqīši-āmur (1.5 [&2.5]), Urkittu-šarrat (2.4) and perhaps Bayâ (who might have actually been a transsexual) (1.4 [&2.2]). This would make 8 women and an 'unknown' out of 13 prophets in total. See further the comments by Weippert, '"König, fürchte dich nicht!"', 33-34; and J. Stökl, 'Gender ambiguity in ancient Near Eastern prophecy? A re-assessment of the data behind a popular theory', Unpublished paper given at SBL conference (2009).

79 For the Pythia being a woman see, e.g., Plut. *Mor. De Pyth. or.* 397bc where comments are made on how she functioned; or, for example, the relevant passages in Parke, *Greek oracles*, 28-32; for just one of the recent titles in which the Pythia and her role are analysed: Flower, *The seer*, 215-239. For the Sibyl see J.L. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles with introduction, translation, and commentary on the first and second books* (Oxford 2008); a great number of relevant articles in: Chirassi Colombo, *Sibille e linguaggi oracolari*. On the variety of different Sibyls see also sources such as Ael. *VH* 12.35.

80 This is a controversial issue. On the basis of the following literature and my ideas on how divination functioned, I adhere to the idea that the Pythia would only relate the words of Apollo – some even claim she was in a trance-like state when she did this, thereby even cancelling out her own personality. The Pythia will at least have needed an official who 'translated'

A few more references to female experts in the field of divination can be found in the literary sources: a mythological Greek woman called Manto (a name suitable for a divining woman) is found. She

her words into hexameters: she was simply the medium, just as a tree or the moon was a medium in which the sign could manifest itself. The sign, the perceived voice of Apollo, needed to be interpreted by the official. It should be noted that the way the Pythia functioned is still shrouded in uncertainty, as is the oracle in general. Many discussions are available on this topic – for a number of references (until the 4th Century BC) see the bibliography in E. Suarez de la Torre, 'Les dieux de Delphes et l'histoire du sanctuaire' in: V. Pirenne-Delforge (ed.), *Les panthéons des cités, des origines à la Périégèse de Pausanias: actes du colloque organisé à l'Université de Liège du 15 au 17 mai 1997* (Liège 1998) 61-87; see also the references in Versnel, *Transitions & reversal,* 283 n.188; B. Dietrich, 'Divine madness and conflict at Delphi', *Kernos* 5 (1992) 41-58; S. Price, 'Delphi and divination' in: P.E. Easterling & J.V. Muir (eds), *Greek religion and society* (Cambridge 1985) 128-154 is a useful introduction. For literature on the state of mind of the Pythia and issues related to this: H.W. Parke, 'A note on the Delphic priesthood', *CQ* 34 (1940) 85-89; I. Chirassi Colombo, 'Le Dionysos oraculaire', *Kernos* 4 (1991) 205-217; J.S. Clay, 'Fusing the boundaries: Apollo and Dionysos at Delphi', *Métis* 11 (1996) 83-100; D. Lehoux, 'Drugs and the Delphic oracle', *CW* 101 (2007) 41-55; L. Maurizio, 'Anthropology and spirit possession: a reconsideration of the Pythia's role at Delphi', *JHS* 115 (1995) 69-86; F. Egleston Robbins, 'The lot oracle at Delphi', *ClPhil* 11 (1916) 278-292. For examples of micro-studies see such articles as: A. Avagianou, 'Ephorus on the founding of Delphi's oracle', *GRBS* 39 (1998) 121-136; F. Quantin, 'Gaia oraculaire: tradtion et réalités', *Métis* 7 (1992) 177-199; M. Chappell, 'Delphi and the *homeric hymn to Apollo*', *CQ* 56 (2006) 331-348; P. Amandry, 'Propos sur l'oracle de Delphes', *JS* (1997) 195-210, at 195-197.

was supposedly the daughter of Teiresias and mother of Mopsos.[81] And there are more literary indications which point to the presence of real female experts. For instance, a third-century BC poem by Posidippos of Pella refers to a woman who is said to perform divination by means of birds as *mantis*:

> For aquiring a servant, the grey heron is your best
> bird of omen - Asterie the prophetess calls on it.
> From it Hieron took his cue, hiring one man
> for his fields, another - just as luckily - for his house.[82]

There is also a Greek *mantis* on a relief from around 420 from Mantinea, known as 'Diotima of Mantinea' (after the wise woman Diotima mentioned by Plato). A woman wearing a *peplos* carries a liver, with which she presumably will perform extispicy. Admittedly

81 Flower, *The seer*, 212; cf. D. Lyons, 'Manto and Manteia in the myths and cults of heroines' in: I. Chirassi Colombo, & T. Seppilli, *Sibille e linguaggi oracolari: mito, storia, tradizione* (Pisa 1999) 227-237. A word of caution, perhaps the daughter was just given a name related to the profession of the father and this might have had nothing to do with her own divinatory skills.

82 Number 26 (IV 36-39). Reference from Flower, *The seer*, 214. Translation by F. Nisetich in K. Gutzwiller (ed.), *The new Posidippus: a Hellenistic poetry book* (Oxford 2005) 23. Cf. B. Acosta-Hughes, E. Kosmetatou & M. Baumbach (eds), *Labored in papyrus leaves: perspectives on an epigram collection attributed to Posidippus* (*P.Mil.Vogl. VIII 309*) (Washington 2004) *passim*. Edition: C. Austin & G. Bastianini, *Posidippi Pellaei Quae supersunt omnia* (Milan 2002) 48. οἰκῆα κτήσασθαι ἐρωιδιὸς ὄρνις ἄριστος | πελλός, ὃν Ἀ[σ]τ̣ε̣ρ̣ί̣η μάντις ἐφ' ἱρὰ καλεῖ· | ὧι πεισθεὶς Ἱέρ̣ω̣ν ἐκτ̣[ή]σ̣α̣το τὸν μὲν ἐπ' ἀγροῦ | τὸν δ' οἴκων ἀγαθῶι σὺν ποδὶ κηδεμόνα

a determined sceptic might dismiss Posidippos' poem and the relief from Mantinea as artistic representations of mythical female experts.[83] One of the few scraps of more reliable evidence is that of the woman Satyra in the third century who is referred to as a *mantis* in her epitaph;[84] furthermore the 'female astrologer' Aglaonike was supposed to have lived in the second century AD;[85] and there was another divinatory woman called Athenais.[86] All in all, Greek female *manteis* are attested, but only rarely.

There appear to have been female dream-interpreters (*šā'iltu*) and *bārû* in the Old Babylonian period,[87] but no female *bārû* or *ṭupšarru* is referred to in the Neo-Assyrian sources.[88] In public divination at

83 Flower, *The seer*, 212-214.

84 *SEG* 35.626. Cf. Flower, *The seer*, 214 n. 8.

85 She is referred to as an 'astrologer woman': Plut. *Mor De def. or.* 417a. It is uncertain whether this might be said to be a similar function to *mantis* but she is included in the argument. Cf. S. Montero, *Diccionario de adivinos, magos y astrólogos de la antigüedad* (Madrid 1997) s.v. Aglaonice.

86 Str. 14.645; 7.814. Cf. Montero, *Diccionario de adivinos*, s.v. Atenais.

87 Oppenheim, *The interpretation of dreams*, 221-222: 'In the TCL [Textes Cuneiformes Louvre] II 5 there is a reference to a female *bārû* ("We shall ask here the *sa'iltu*-priestesses, the *bārītu*-priestesses and the spirits of the dead and then Assur will treaten you!")' Note that the person posing the enquiry is a woman too.

88 Unless C.J. Mullo-Weir really has pinpointed a female *bārû* (this is, according to many, most probably not so): 'Four hymns to Gula', *JRAS* 61 (1929) 1-18, at 12-14 (K 232 rev. 11; 29).

Rome, partly because the male elite magistrates were also the divinatory experts, no females were active as public experts. In the informal realm, the existence of female *haruspices* cannot be ruled out but the sources do not provide convincing evidence.

Physical condition

No special rules decreed the physical condition of Greek experts (beyond the normal regulations applicable at sanctuaries) and the situation in Rome appears to have been similar: a member of a *collegium* had to be free of 'bodily defect'.[89] A Greek expert could, if myth is something to go by, theoretically (although this might be problematical in practice) even be blind and this handicap would actually have added to his authority.[90] Teiresias lost his eyesight, but

89 Szemler, *The priests of the Roman Republic*, 31. Cf. for different emic options of why this might be so: Plut. *Mor. Quaest. Rom.* 281c. It should be noted that although the Pythia – who, again, is here not classified as an expert – was at first always a young girl, later in time an older woman would be chosen. See Flower, *The seer*, 222; see also Eur. *Ion* 1320-1324 where she appears to be 'of motherly age' – although this might only refer to her position or the stature she had acquired in her life and not to her age.

90 See for a number of Greek blind experts and more explanation about how they functioned Flower, *The seer*, 37; 50-51. The hand of Diopeithes, a 5th-century chresmologue, was permanently injured. He was not a *mantis*, but his case seems to correspond to the mythological evidence that it was not necessary to be physically perfect in order to divine (on Diopeithes see T. Kock, *Comicorum atticorum fragmenta* 3 vols (Leipzig 1880-1888) Vol. 1,

gained an 'inner' sight in return.[91] Another – and this time historical – example is that of Hegesistratos, a *mantis* who had his foot cut off and still practised as an expert afterwards.[92]

The Mesopotamian *bārû* had to answer other requirements: 'The diviner [*bārû*] of impure descent, not without defect in body and limbs, with squinting eyes, chipped teeth, a cut-off finger, a ruptured(?) testicle, suffering from leprosy [...]'.[93] was not allowed to approach the gods of extispicy, Šamaš and Adad.

This was perhaps motivated by the practical consideration that the expert could not perfectly perform the divinatory ritual if he suf-

fr.9, gr. 10; Ar. *Av*. 987-988; Plut. *Vit. Ages.* 3.3-4.).

91 For Teiresias as being blind see e.g., Eur. *Bacch.* 210; Soph. *Ant.* 988-990; Soph. *OT* 300-303. For an – in my opinion speculative – theory which relates Teiresias' blindness to his presumed bisexuality and ability to speak to animals (these three factors make Teiresias an all-encompassing figure) see T. Carp, '"Venus Utraque": a typology of experthood', *CW* 76 (1983) 275-285.

92 On Hegesistratos see Hdt. 9.37.1; 9.38.1; 9.41.4.

93 Manuscript A: K 2486 + 3646 + 4264 + 10038(+) K 9908 + Rm II 296; manuscript C: K 11307 + 18161 (+) K 11372. Edition (adapted) and translation: W.G. Lambert, 'The qualifications of Babylonian diviners' in: S.M. Maul (ed.), *Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994: tikip santakki mala bašmu* (Groningen 1998) 141-155, at 149, 30'-32' & 152, 30'-32'.
mār $^{\text{LÚ}}$ḪAL šá za-ru-šú la ellu ù šu-u ina gat-ti u ŠID$^{\text{meš}}$-šú la šuk-lu-lu zaq-tu īnī$^{\text{II.meš}}$ ḫe-šír šinnī$^{\text{MEŠ}}$ nak-pi ŠU.SI ŠIR DIR.KUR.RA ma-le-e SAḪAR.ŠUB.BA$^{\text{e}}$.

fered from defective eyes, teeth and so on.[94] This theory is supported by the fact we know of no such physical requirements for astrologers (who presumably did need sharp eyesight). However, the differences between Greece, Rome and Mesopotamia could also reflect the idea that Greek and Roman experts were not perceived to be in direct contact with the supernatural during the divinatory process and therefore did not need to be in a perfect physical condition. In contrast to this, the Mesopotamian *bārû* was supposedly treading before the gods and physically close to them while performing an extispicy – this also explains why the *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil* did not, as far as is known, have to be perfect: scanning the skies for portents did not entail direct contact with the supernatural.

94 See, e.g., Enmeduranki text lines 28-37. See Lambert, 'Qualifications', 149 and 152; B. Böck, 'Physiognomy in ancient Mesopotamia and beyond: from practice to handbook' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 199-224, at 218-219. This is not to say that the experts' purity was the only prerequisite for a successful approach to the supernatural: attributes such as the *erinnu* (usually translated as cedar rod) and so on played a role (Cf. on the *erinnu*: Wilson, 'Use of *erinnu*', 95-98). Objects could also play a role in Greece: a tradition of using stones to aid the divinatory process, both by layman and expert, seems to have existed – see the texts collected in R. Halleux & J. Schamp (trans.), *Les lapidaires grecs* (Paris 1985) *passim*.

Career span

Greek or Roman sources which tell us explicitly about experts' careers are scarce. What *is* known is that *augures* and *decemviri* retained their membership in the *collegia* until their deaths.[95] For *haruspices*, Roman private experts and other experts it can be assumed that they, too, worked until they died, providing there was demand for their services. This can also be assumed for wandering and institutionalized *manteis*.[96] For Mesopotamia there is more information, albeit still fragmentary. Parpola provides a table from which it appears that scholars at the court worked there for 8.08 years on average.[97] It should then be concluded that the actual period of practising at the palace was rather short. If the experts worked until their deaths, they must have been relatively old when they began to work for the palace. As experts received training before practising. This short career implies either a high death rate, a very long period of training or a long time between training and appointment

95 Szemler, *The priests of the Roman Republic*, 29.

96 Weniger, 'Die Seher', 60.

97 The table is based on 25 scholars who worked at court for a total of 202 years. The table is found at: S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian scholars to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipa*l 2 vols (Kevelaer 1970-1983) Vol. 2, 471. The names of some scholars are known before they began to work at court. I have not used these attestations in the calculations. I have taken all the scholars Parpola mentions, including those who were not involved in divination, in order to assemble more data on which to base the calculations. I am assuming that other scholars had an equally rigorous training.

as a expert to the king (during which an expert would have been working in the undocumented realm of private, unofficial. divination, for example). This is a striking difference with the Greek and Roman situations, in which training was not regulated as such and individuals could apparently commence divining without spending time following an official training. Greek and Roman experts would probably learn on the job, becoming more skilled as they continued to practise (cf. below). Therefore, they must have been able to practise for longer – if they worked until their deaths.

Family

We know the names of five Greek 'mantic families': the Branchidai, the Iamidai, Klutiadai, Telliadai and the Melampodidai, who claimed to be descendants of such mythical experts as Melampos, Teiresias, or Kalchas.[98] Some members of these 'mantic families' were employed at oracles or other sanctuaries where the records of them being active in the divinatory business were kept – making it

98 'Biographies' of a number of mythical experts can be found in Löffler, *Die Melampodie*, 31-58. Cf. on Teiresias G. Ugolini, *Untersuchungen zur Figur des Sehers Teiresias* (Tübingen 1995). An example of a primary literary source on this topic is Hom. *Od*. 15.222-257. See for epigraphical evidence the lists of *manteis* at Olympia (late sources: 36 BC – 265 AD) published in W. Dittenberger & K. Purgold, *Die Inschriften von Olympia* (Berlin 1896) 59-141.

easy to track family relationships.[99] The sources also show that 'it was fundamentally important that the seer was believed to be what he claimed to be, literally the blood descendant of another seer.'[100] Being part of a 'mantic family' was an ideal way to gain authority (the inheritance of knowledge was implied) which prompted experts to claim dubious biological relationships with other existing experts: Herodotos describes how the *mantis* Deiphonos went around Greece claiming to be the son of the famous expert Euenios.[101] According to Herodotos this was not actually true – but this claim evidently helped Deiphonos to acquire authority.[102] A historical example of a divinatory expert who followed in his father's footsteps is the third-century BC expert Thrasuboulos, whose father was said to have been the expert Aineas.[103] A late source such as Artemidoros, who

99 For an example of such an endeavour see Weniger, 'Die Seher', 53-115. Cf. for one example of such a family – but too late in time for the scope of this study – S.B. Zoumbaki, *Elis und Olympia in der Kaiserzeit: das Leben einer Gesellschaft zwischen Stadt und Heiligtum auf prosopograpischer Grundlage* (Athens 2001) 340-341; 121.

100 M.A. Flower, 'The Iamidae: a mantic family and its official image' in: B. Dignas & K. Trampedach (eds), *Practitioners of the divine: Greek priests and officials from Homer to Heliodorus* (Cambridge, MA 2008) 187-206, at 192.

101 Kett, *Prosopographie*, 32: Deifonos (18).

102 For a discussion on the image of the expert and why it was important to claim descent see M.A. Flower, 'The Iamidae', 192.

103 Member of the clan of Iamids. On Thrasuboulos see further Paus. 6.13.11; 6.14.9.

addressed Books IV and V of the *Oneirocritica* to his son who was also an interpreter of dreams, supports this notion.[104]

'Keeping it in the family' may seem to have been the natural thing to do: by training his son the father would, first, ensure that the family business was carried on. Second, if the expert trained his biological son, this could be considered a way to provide a member of the family with skills he could use to make his own living and, eventually, support the family. However, apart from the materials discussed above, evidence for the existence of actual biological relationships between historical Greek experts is sparse. It is possible to establish *stemmata* for the families of the experts Kleobolos, Telenikos and Philochoros among others. However, none of their relatives were known as an expert themselves.[105] In addition, a family of experts which is often referred to in modern literature, the Spartan branch of the Iamidai, was only a *hypothetical* family of experts:[106] Antiochos was father of Tisamenos and of Agias. Only his name is known and the only argument for considering him a *mantis* is that he is

104 Artem. 4 Prooemium; 5 Prooemium.

105 Kleobolos' father was Glaukos; Telenikos' son was Telenikos whose son was Teleas, and his descendant Telenikos; Philochoros was married to Archestrate, had a brother called Demetrios: his father was Kuknos whose father was Philochoros. None of the family members mentioned above was a *mantis*. They lived in the 4th, 5th and 4th/3rd centuries: there are too few data available to provide a diachronic perspective. See Kett, *Prosopographie*, 79-80.

106 Some also use the word family but because the evidence of actual families is so scarce, I prefer 'clan'. Cf. Flower, 'The Iamidae', 187-206.

the father of a *mantis* – his other son, Agias (1) was not known as a divinatory expert. His son Tisamenos was definitely an expert: he is designated as such in the sources.[107] Tisamenos' son, Agelochos, is himself not known as a *mantis* but, because his father and son were, he is also assumed to have been one.[108] Agelochos' son Agias (2) was a famous *mantis*, and was even honoured with two statues, one in Sparta and one in Delphi.[109] Tisamenos (2) was probably the brother or son of Agias, but nothing is known about any possible mantic activities. The sources for this stemma are incomplete. A hypothetical reconstruction of a family of experts remains just that: hypothetical.[110]

Regardless of these evidential problems, we must bear in mind Fontenrose's suggestion that the 'family relationships' between Greek *manteis* might have been based on relationships other than those of blood: 'Whether the *Branchidae* were a clan (*genos*), extended family, or a college or association (*synodos*, *thiasos*, *koinon*) cannot be said. The terms are not mutually exclusive; an extended family may

107 Hdt. 9.33.1; Plut. *Vit. Arist.* 11.2; Paus. 6.14.13. Cf. on Teisamenus (1) A. Schachter, 'The seer Tisamenos and the Klytiadai', *CQ* 50 (2000) 292-295.

108 Paus. 3.11.5.

109 Paus. 3.11.5; Paus. 10.9.7. Kett, *Prosopographie*, 20: Agias (3); 79; Montero, *Diccionario de adivinos*, 48.

110 It is possible to argue both sides of the story and I am convinced caution should be taken here. Examples of conclusions drawn are, e.g., Schachter, 'Tisamenos and the Klytiadai', *CQ* 50 (2000) 292-295 or Weniger, 'Die Seher', 53-115.

become a clan, and associations of men engaged in a common trade or profession or activity were often organised as *genê*; new entrants were adopted into them, and they claimed descent from a common ancestor […]'.[111] Although the sources might prefer to speak of families, potential experts to swell the ranks of these 'families' or 'clans' could have been selected on the basis of potential; those selected in this way also acquired the necessary authority.

In Mesopotamia there was a relatively large number of families of *ummanû*, consisting of members with various specializations (such as scribe, expert or physician). In view of the institutionalization of the professions, an individual could hardly have claimed descent on a false basis: he would have been found out. Unquestionably adoption of individuals into families could have taken place – but this generally only happened if the adoptive father did not have a natural son. The idea of families of *ummanû* corresponds to the literary texts which prescribe that a priest/scholar such as Enmeduranki should be born into a particular family of Nippur, Sippar or Babylon:[112] certain families brought forth the scribal elite who could specialize

111 Fontenrose, *Didyma,* 77. See also the Telmessoi Fontenrose refers to on page 78.

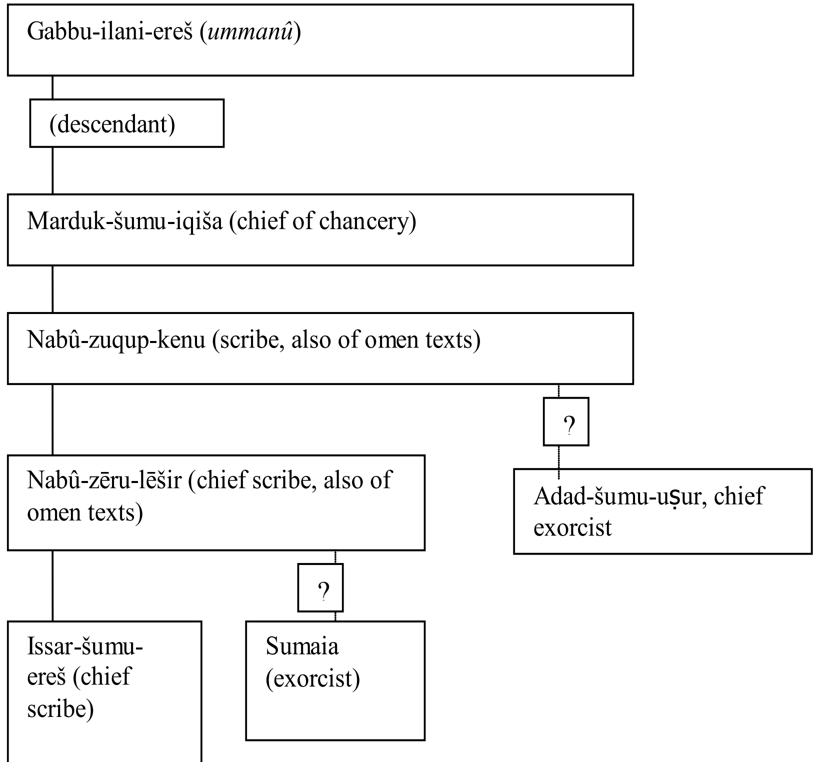
112 Lambert, 'Qualifications', 142. See the Enmeduranki text ll. 10-15 (BBR 1-20 1 ff = K 2834; K 2541+; K 3272+; K 10917+). In his article about the catalogue of authors, Lambert mentions one *bārû* and his ancestor, but it is unsure what the profession this ancestor was. Therefore, we do not get to know much more on this topic: W.H. Lambert, 'A catalogue of texts and authors', *JCS* 16 (1962) 59-77, at 75.

in divination, which was not to be taught to others who were born outside of these families. A goldsmith's son, for example, could not learn about divination because he was not from one of the suitable families:

> Parruṭu, a goldsmith of the household of the queen, has, like the king and the crown prince, bought a Babylonian, and settled him in his own house. He has taught exorcistic literature to his son; extispicy omens have been explained to him, (and) he has even studied gleanings from Enūma Anu Enlil, and this right before the king, my lord! Let the king, my lord, write to his servant on account of this matter.[113]

There are many families of *ummanû*, an example of which is the following:

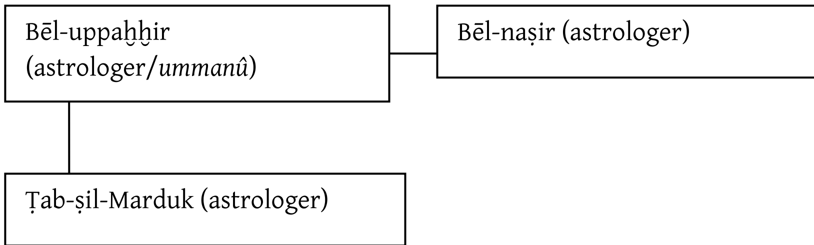
113 SAA 16 65 (83-1-18,121 = ABL 1245) obv. 2-13. Edition and translation M. Luukko & G. Van Buylaere.
EN-iá lik-ru-ub ^{m}pa-ru!-ṭu
LÚ*.SIMUG.KUG.GI ša É! MÍ—É.GAL
ki-i LUGAL DUMU—LUGAL DUMU—KÁ.DINGIR.KI
ina ŠÀ-bi KUG.UD i-si-qi ina É ra-mi-ni-šú
ú-se-ši-ib!-šú IM.GÍD.DA
ina ŠÀ-bi LÚ*.a-ši-pu-te a-na DUMU-šú
iq-ṭí-bi UZU.MEŠ i-ba-áš-ši
ša LÚ*.ba-ru-u-te uk-tal-li-mu-šú
li-iq-te ša! 1! UD—a-na—^{d}EN.LÍL
i-ba-áš-ši lu e-ta-mar
i-na pa-ni ša LUGAL EN-iá
ina UGU da-ba-bi an-ni-e
LUGAL be-lí a-na ARAD-šú liš-pu-[ra]



This family consists, among others, of scribes, exorcists.[114]

114 This family is attested in e.g., SAA 10 294; 10 110 rev. 4; 10 294 rev. 21; 10 257 rev. 7; 10 291 rev. 2; CTN 4 45 rev. 5; CTN 4 89; CTN 4 78 rev. 9; CTN 4 74; Hunger, *Kolophone*, 302:3; 298; 301:4; 300:3; 299:3; 303:3; 306:3; 307:3; 308:2; 309:2). One more family: it appears from SAA 160 136 that Marduk-šapik-zeri (astrologer and scholar) was the son of another scholar; it appears from STT 70 rev.17 = Hunger, *Kolophone*, 372:2 that Marduk-bāni-apli (scribe and

However, if a mantic family is defined as a family producing at least two named individuals explicitly referred to as divinatory expert in two successive generations, there are few cases which fit these requirements. In the following family, two brothers were both experts and one son became an expert as well:



These three men were all active in the field of divination.[115]

bārû) was the father of [.]-ibni (apprentice scribe); it appears from CT 31 49 rev. 32 = Hunger, *Kolophone*, 503:2 that Nabû-pāšir (*bārû*) was the father of Nabû-ušallim (scribe); it appears from SAA 8 473 rev. 3; 8 536 rev. 6 that Bēl-ušallim (scholar) was the father of another scholar whose name we do not know; it appears from SAA 4 334: rev. 4 that Marduk-šumu-uṣur (chief *bārû*) was the father of a *bārû* whose name we do not know.

115 Whether or not members of these families were adopted is still debated. An introduction to the adoption of boys in Neo-Assyrian times is K. Radner, *Die neuassyrischen Privatrechtsurkunden als Quelle für Mensch und Umwelt* (Helsinki 1997) 137-140. I have not dealt with the relationship described in SAA 160 36 because it is unclear what the father of this astrologer did. It is certain, however, he was also a scholar of some kind. Sources used to track this mantic family are SAA 8 447: rev. 6; 8, 448: rev. 2; 8 448; 8 445 rev. 3. Other references to father and son relationships are, e.g., in K

In early Rome the *augures* and *decemviri* were initially chosen (by their peers) from the elite group of magistrates. This group consisted of patricians but from 300 BC (the passing of the *lex Ogulnia*) plebeians were included – putting an end to the exclusive patrician claim to religious expertise. Another change was that the later *augures* and *decemviri* could also be elected.[116] There was a restricted but still fairly large number of families which could potentially produce experts, but the group of actual experts remained small: sons would succeed their fathers in *collegia*[117] and one person could be a member of both the *collegia* of *augures* and of the *decemviri.* One restrictive rule was that two members of the same *gens* could not be in the same college.[118] Although there was a limited number of potential experts,

6055 2 = K 11097 3 (*BiOr* 14 (1957) 191; K. 9766 obv.1; K 3819+ obv. 4 (*BiOr* 14 (1957) 192.

116 Szemler, *The priests of the Roman Republic*, 29-31; J. Linderski, 'Quindecimviri sacris faciundis' in: H. Cancik & H. Schneider, *Brill's New Pauly Online.* Visited 29-03-2011; Examples of primary sources are Liv. 6.37.13; Liv. 3.32.3; Liv. 10.6.6-10; Cic. *Agr.* 2.18; Plut. *Quaest. Rom.* 287de who suggests augurs were chosen for life (even if they committed a crime they could remain an augur) because of their skill, not because they held an office. Cf. J. Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum: die Mitglieder der Priesterschaften und das sakrale Funktionspersonal römischer, griechischer, orientalischer und jüdisch-christlicher Kulte in der Stadt Rom von 300 v. Chr. bis 499 n. Chr* 3 vols (Wiesbaden 2005) Vol. 3, 1421.

117 Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum,* Vol. 3, 1422.

118 Szemler, *The priests of the Roman Republic*, 66-178; 189. In Liv. 29.38.7, for example, we find a report that Marcus Pomponius Matho had been

there do not seem to have been specifically 'mantic families' who specialized in divination.

The public *haruspices* were probably first chosen from the Etruscan elite, and perhaps later also from the Roman elite.[119] There is some evidence for families of *haruspices*, or at least for father-son relationships.[120] Owing to the late creation of a *collegium*, a great deal is unknown although at least after the creation of the *collegium* of *haruspices* the situation might have been comparable to that of *augures* and *decemviri*.[121]

Family: conclusions

In Greece the idea of biologically related experts is rather less certain than might, at first sight, be expected. Experts are known to have claimed to be descendants of a particular expert but there is little proof of actual family relationships. It would probably be more

augur ánd *decemvir* at the time of his death and must have held these offices simultaneously (in the same way that Quintus Fabius Maximus had been *augur* and *pontifex* at the time of his death: Liv. 30.26.7-10).

119 Tac. *Ann.* 11.15.

120 Haack, 'Les haruspices romains', 193. See also L. Titinius L.f. Pelagianus Arnensis and L. Titinius Vitalis (CIL XI 633, reference from Haack, *Prosopographie*, 79); L. Vibius Primus and [. Vibius] Primigenius (from Haack, *Prosopographie*, 127-128); Quintus Fabius Maximus and Quintus Fabius Maximus (Liv. 30.26.7-10).

121 MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 43-59. Haack, 'Les haruspices romains', 193-195; Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 180.

realistic to see groups of experts as clans. Being a member of such a clan would imply a claim to knowledge passed on by the clan.

In Mesopotamia, the evidence of biological families is somewhat stronger: it is possible to discern a relatively large number of families of *ummanû* – but even so only one real 'mantic family' is attested there and it impossible to exclude the fact that individuals were adopted into these families. The institutionalization of the practice made it difficult for individuals falsely to claim descent from a family because their deception would be found out. Roman magistrate-experts and members of the *collegia* came from the same group of families but this could hardly have been otherwise: religious tasks were distributed among members of a relatively small number of elite families.[122]

The presence of Mesopotamian families of experts was reinforced by the education thought to have been for the prerequisite of the expert: as discussed below, the authority of Mesopotamian experts derived from scholarly instruction and learning. The best way to acquire this was to be trained from an early age. Being born into a family of scholars or perhaps being adopted at a very early age would therefore seem to have been an essential condition. In Greece, a rather less demanding training was required (cf. below), which also allowed a degree of flexibility about the age of a new clan member. A child could be introduced into the profession at a later stage or even commence its career on entering a clan as an adult. It could be

122 Just one example of an individual who held high political functions and was an augur is Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (Liv. 23.30.15).

argued that such a situation would have been practically unheard of in Mesopotamia on account of the educational demands made on the practitioner.

In short, in family status Roman and Mesopotamian experts scored 'high' on the relative socio-economic scale. They were recruited from families of known descent, which were members of the elite in Rome and were certainly not the poorest in Mesopotamia. Theoretically the Greek expert could have been born into any family before entering a divinatory 'family' or clan. Consequently, his socio-economic status should be classified as variable.

Education

Generally speaking, the more educated an individual, the higher his or her position on the scale of socio-economic status. Some education or training was required before a person could launch a career as a knowledgeable expert – unless an individual faked this knowledge. Although a Greek expert could assert his expertise by claiming the gods had taught him the art[123] and the mythical Melampus acquired his skills after snakes had licked his ears, in real life experts will have had to acquire the necessary skills in different ways – although Greek *manteis* may have claimed some degree of inspiration as well.[124]

123 E.g., Kett, *Prosopographie*, 38-39: Euenios (26).

124 On Melampus' perceived source of knowledge see Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.11; see also Paus. 9.10.6.

Yet, it seems that there was no 'official education' for experts in Greece.[125] Therefore the training of the Greek expert must be a topic closely linked to his membership of a group of experts, his clan. If an expert was a member of such a group, he could be trained and taught by more senior members during an apprenticeship of some sort. If not, he would have had to train himself.

In effect, there were three ways in which aspiring experts could train themselves or be trained by other people: a) empirically, on the basis of experience and common sense; b) by the oral transmission of knowledge; or c) by studying a written source containing such knowledge.[126] Naturally these options were not mutually exclusive and, in theory, could all be used simultaneously. In Greece, the first two possibilities will certainly have been available, as perhaps the third as well, but it should be noted that written text played a small part in Greek divination (as will be discussed in chapter 6) and the only, possible, Greek self-taught expert – perhaps by recourse to written texts – attested in the sources is Thrasullus, who inherited books from his guest-friend and used these in order to make

125 M. Griffith, 'Official and private in early Greek institutions of education' in: Y.L Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman antiquity* (Leiden 2001) 23-84, at 31-32.

126 Leaving aside the mechanisms, either linguistic or non-linguistic, of learning. A concise introduction to important literature on this topic from an anthropological angle can be found in M. Bloch, *How we think they think: anthropological approaches to cognition, memory and literacy* (Boulder, COL 1998) 7-11.

a living (and maybe from which to learn his craft).[127] Nevertheless, it is impossible to exclude the possibility that this guest-friend had already taught Thrasullos to divine during his own lifetime.[128]

Although apprenticeships are likely to have played an important part in the transfer of interpretative skills, a Greek expert needed to know both the appropriate form and the content to be able to practise his trade. Personality was crucial as the *mantis* needed to exude charisma and inspiration. Michael A. Flower states that learning how to employ charisma and to behave with the authority of an expert was one of the most important goals of the training an expert would have received.[129] Because of the lack of objective authority (for example, based on control of a body of difficult texts) about the exact meaning of a sign, a Greek expert could improvise quite freely and flexibly, within socially accepted boundaries. His charisma would have helped him to test and stretch the boundaries – which could differ depending on time and place and, more specifically, on client expectations. Where would all these skills have been learned? Most probably in practice. Watching an expert at work allowed the expert-to-be to become acquainted with the more performative side of the

127 Isoc. *Aegineticus* 5. What exactly the contents of these books were is unknown. R. Parker does not think they were guidelines for the interpretation of signs: Parker, *Polytheism and society,* 119 n.4. I consider them to have been some kind of instructions – but in a wider sense than a book of guidelines for interpretation.

128 Flower, 'The Iamidae', 190.

129 Flower, *The seer*, *passim*.

divinatory ritual. Consequently, most of the practical side of becoming an expert was based on learning by experience and imitating an acknowledged expert – whether in the context of an apprenticeship facilitated by the clan structure or on an individual basis.

In Mesopotamia the situation was different: divination was thought of as a secret of the gods (*niṣirti bārûti*) and, at least in theory, known only to a select number of individuals belonging to particular families, usually employed by the palace, working in a relatively closed profession.[130] A prerequisite for becoming an astrologer or a *bārû* was extensive training in the scholarly literature:

> The learned savant, who guards the secrets of the great gods, will bind his son whom he loves with an oath before Šamaš and Adad by tablet and stylus and will instruct him.[131]

130 On the secrecy of divinatory knowledge (which has been contested by some) see further N. Veldhuis, 'The theory of knowledge and the practice of celestial divination' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 77-91, at 79-80; and much more extensively A. Lenzi, *Secrecy and the gods: secret knowledge in ancient Mesopotamia and biblical Israel* (Helsinki 2008) 1-220. For an example of experts at the palace at a particular time (of course not the only evidence of employment of experts by the palace) see SAA 7 1 i.1-8; ii.1-6; rev.1.8-11 (astrologers, *bārû* and augurs respectively); SAA 7 7; rev.ii.7

131 Enmeduranki text: K 2487 + 3646 + 4364; K 3357 + 9941; K 13307, lines 19-22. Edition and translation (slightly adapted) W.G. Lambert, 'Enmeduranki and related matters', *JCS* 21 (1967) 126-138 at 132.
[lú]UM.ME.A mu-du-ú na-ṣir AD.ḪAL DINGIR.MEŠ GAL.MEŠ
a-píl-šu ša i-ram-mu ina tup-pi u GI-dup-pi

Traditionally, in Mesopotamia the son of a *bārû* was taught by his (adoptive) father. Wilfred G. Lambert argues that passing on the secrets of divination to chosen sons would ensure that there would be enough work for everyone (because this was a way to determine that only a restricted number of individuals were trained).[132] Training was the first priority in the process of becoming a Mesopotamian expert.[133] It would commence with the basic scribal and literary arts, which would give the student the status of a *ṭupšarru* (scribe). He could then prepare to specialize in becoming a *bārû* or a *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil,* (or an exorcist, or a medical practitioner or someone like these). A specialized teacher would educate him in astrology and other topics:

> [As] the king last year summoned [his scholars, he did not] summon me with [them], (so) I wrote to the palace: "The apprentices whom the king appointed in my charge have learned Enūma Anu Enlil; what is my fault that the king has not summoned me with his scholars?"[134]

ina ma-ḫar ^{d}UTU u ^{d}IŠKUR ú-tam-ma-šu-ma

ú-šaḫ-ḫa-su [...].

132 Lambert, 'Qualifications', 143.

133 For a brief introduction to the places were pupils were schooled see Van der Toorn, *Scribal culture*, 55-56.

134 SAA 10 171 (= K 00895 = ABL 0954) obv. 4-12. Edition and translation: S. Parpola.

šad-da-qàd [x x x x x]

LUGAL SAG LÚ.[um-ma-ni-šú i]š-šú-ú

LUGAL it-ti-š[ú-nu SAG-a ul i]š-ši

a-na É.GAL ⸢al⸣-tap-ra

These teachers were themselves experts in divination and training experts-to-be was one of their many duties:

> May Nabû and Marduk bless the king. Because of the *ilku*-duty and the corvée work we cannot keep the watch of the king, and the pupils do not learn the scribal craft. [135]

The study of both theory and written texts was the most important part of the expert's training at this stage, although it seems reasonable to suppose that he also learned such behavioural skills as how to deal with clients and crucially how to win their confidence. How long will this training have taken?[136] No attempt to answer this ques-

um-ma LÚ.ŠAMÁN.MÁL.LÁ-MEŠ
šá LUGAL ina pa-ni-iá ip$^{!}$-qí-du$^{!}$
1 UD*—AN—^{d}EN.LÍL il-ta-an-du
um-ma mi-nu-ú hi-ṭu-ú-a
LUGAL it-ti LÚ.um-ma-ni-šú

135 SAA 10 143 (Bu 89-4-26,009 = ABL 0346) rev. 1-8. Edition and translation S. Parpola. On the *ilku*-duty cf. n.113.
^{d}AG u ^{d}AMAR.UTU
a-na LUGAL lik-ru-bu
TA* pa-an il-ki
tup-šik-ki ma-ṣar-tu
ša LUGAL la ni-na-ṣar
LÚ*.di$^{!}$-da$^{!}$-bé-e
ṭu[p$^{!}$-šar-r]u$^{!}$-tu
la [i-l]am$^{!}$-mu-du

136 There are no clues to the existence of an initiation, which would have

tion can be made without making a number of assumptions. My first assumption is that in the Neo-Assyrian Empire the average age of death of a male child after it reached the age of five was 43.47 years.[137]

been helpful here. See also Koch, 'Sheep and sky', 455.

137 38.47 is the average life expectancy, according to the Princeton Regional Model Life Tables (West mortality level 4, maximum natural growth rate 0,5%), of a child who had reached his 5th birthday. This is the level and growth rate which is usually used for the ancient world, although M.H. Hansen pleads for a lower growth rate, for example, as used by W. Scheidel: between 0.25% and 0.45%. See M.H. Hansen, *The shotgun method: the demography of the ancient Greek city-state culture* (Columbia, MO 2006) 55 n.96. However, if the growth rate is lower, the life expectancy of those over 5 years old is higher. Consequently, taking 0.5% as growth rate is taking the cautious approach. For the Life Tables see A.J. Coale, P. Demeny & B. Vaughan, *Regional model life tables and stable populations* (New York 1983²). By using the life expectancy of a 5-year-old, I have cancelled out the high mortality rate of children under 5, inclusion of which would bring down life expectancy of a newborn considerably. This is possible because I have assumed that education did not commence before the age of 5. In fact at what age children would begin to receive an education is unknown. A text commonly referred to as 'Examtext A' obv. 4 (= Rm 148; VAT 10502; VAT 7853; K 10125; VAT 10382 = Kar 111) indicates that first education of the scribe began during childhood, not specifying the age: U_4.TUR.RA ZU.TA NAM.ŠUL.LA.A.ZU.[ŠÈ] É.DUB.BA.A Ì.TI.LE.EN (= ul-tu u_4-um ṣe-ḫe-ri-ka a-di meṭ-lu-t[i-ka] ina bīt tuppi áš-bat): 'Von Kindheid an, bis du ein reifer Mann wurdest, saßest du im Tafelhause'. Translation and edition: A.W. Sjöberg, 'Der Examentext A', *ZA* 64 (1974) 137-176 at 140-141. Cf. P.D. Gesche, *Schulunterricht in Babylonien im ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Münster 2001) 219. Duration of the training for various crafts is known from sources from

Other assumptions are that an expert worked until his death,[138] for an average of 8.08 years and his education commenced at the age of 5 (the precise age at which education began is uncertain; any age between five and fifteen seems feasible). The average lifespan minus the years spent working for the palace minus the first five to fifteen years of life equals the number of years spent in training and as a junior expert. If training began at the age of five, the sum is 43.47 - 8.08 - 5 = 29.92. If the age of fifteen is adhered to, the outcome would be 19.92. This would mean that, on average, twenty to thirty years were spent in preparation for working in the palace. No division can be made between the period of education and of first work experience: if there was employment at the palace gate or as a district expert, as in Old Babylonian times, this is included in the period of approximately thirty years. But even with this caveat, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that a Neo-Assyrian expert needed both rigorous training and experience before he was employed by the king.

There are only snippets of information about the Roman experts and these relate to those who worked in a public, official, context: for

the Late Babylonian period, but not for that of experts or other *ummānû* who had to be literate to practise their profession: H.P.H. Petschow, 'Lehrverträge', *RlA* 6 (1980-1983) 556-570 at 557-558. To give an indication: 5 years for weaving, 6 years for woodwork, 8 years for construction work. These appear to be relatively long periods of training/apprenticeship.

138 Unless he had fallen into disgrace or became infirm: blindness, deafness and so on might have rendered the expert unfit for his profession. Neither is generally visible in the sources.

example, 'in the days of the forefathers' the Senate prepared a decree to the effect that a number of young boys were to be sent to Etruria to learn their craft from Etruscan *haruspices*.[139] Perhaps this would have entailed some sort of selection and schooling of young boys so that they could learn skills they could later use to serve Rome (or transmit to their successors). However, there is no certainty about whether this was an incidental measure or whether it was a regular occurence – sources are lacking. Some think the education of *haruspices* took the form of oral instruction[140] – but this, too, remains a mystery. Those belonging to the *collegia* (*decemviri* and *augures*) did not need pre-existing knowledge but learned their crafts from their senior colleagues.[141]

The Mesopotamian craft of divination was taught on a more theoretical and textual basis than the training in Greece. The idea that only individuals from particular families were taught ties in with the belief that divination was the secret of the gods. It follows that divination in Mesopotamia was the preserve of a privileged and close-knit group. The same can be said about public divination in Rome, which was also based on written texts and traditions, only accessible to a select group – as an inheritance of old structures of political power. In Greece, there is less evidence of the need to undertake extensive scholarly training to understand the workings of divination. Instead, it is possible to detect more emphasis on the acqui-

139 Cic. *Div*. 1.41.92; Val. Max. 1.1.

140 Haack, 'Les haruspices romains', 192; 193-195.

141 Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum,* Vol. 3, 1422.

sition of behavioural skills. Practical apprenticeships were used for this purpose.

With respect to their education Mesopotamian experts should be regarded as having been in the 'high' category; Roman experts score 'low' on education as they did not receive formal training (however, the Roman experts were an elite-group in other ways – for example, with respect to non-divinatory education, Roman experts were probably the most learned of all experts); and Greek experts fell into the 'middle' category, because the Greek way of training by experience was obviously less systematic, theoretical, extensive and prestigious than that of their counterparts in Mesopotamia but more extensive than in Rome.

Occupation

The experts' employment, their loyalty to their clients, their hierarchical relationships among experts, not to mention competition and co-operation, were factors which helped to determine the level of socio-economic status assigned to the category of 'occupation'. Variations reveal how an expert could function in relation to his employer and among his colleagues.

Institutionalization and mobility

The divinatory work of Mesopotamian experts was relatively institutionalized. It was performed on behalf of the State and it was usual for experts to be posted to one place (although they might be moved). Therefore, their employment was relatively secure as long as they maintained good relations with the king by guarding him against potential dangers. Roman experts were semi-institutionalized, working in their *collegia* on a part-time basis. In Greece, – with the exception of those working at sanctuaries – many experts travelled from place to place and were not employed in the framework of an institution.[142] Nevertheless, more than once an expert would begin as an itinerant but later settle somewhere or find more-or-less regular employment. Compared to the situation in Mesopotamia this is a relatively non-institutionalized setting.

Still, some members of the affluent Roman and Greek elite would also employ an expert on a structural basis. When there was a regular need of an expert, one important benefit accruing from using the same expert thrusts itself forward. His good track records allied with his proven discretion towards his employer were apparently such a reassurance that, in exchange for this, clients would prefer the regular above the itinerant expert. In Greece, semi-regular employ-

142 E.g., Hom. *Od.* 17.380-386; working in the marketplace see Soph. *OT* 19-21; Ath. 13.605cd. For chresmologues knocking on doors of rich men seeking employment (admittedly not *manteis*, but the story still illustrates the circumstances with which wandering *manteis* might have had to cope) see Pl. *Resp.* 364b.

ment could be found by working for a commander in the army, at sanctuaries and, in later Hellenistic times, for the Greek *polis*.[143] The same conditions might also have applied to private Roman experts: some army leaders are known to have employed experts privately (see below).

Paradoxially, those who did not settle do not seem to have enjoyed a good reputation, at least for some of them this was certainly the case: the fact that Thrasullos was an itinerant expert of divination was used in a lawsuit to impugn his character:

> Thrasyllus, the father of the testator, had inherited nothing from his parents; but having become the guest-friend of Polemaenetus, the soothsayer, he became so intimate with him that Polemaenetus at his death left to him his books on divination and gave him a portion of the property which is now in question. Thrasyllus, with these books as his capital, practised the art of divination. He became an itinerant soothsayer, lived in many cities, and was intimate with several women, some of whom had children whom he never even recognised as legitimate, and, in particular, during this period he lived with the mother of the complainant.[144]

143 See for an example of the *mantis* in the army: *SEG* 29 361 i.4. Nevertheless, the *mantis* always hovered in the 'messy margins' of *polis* religion, according to J.N. Bremmer, '*Manteis*, magic, mysteries and mythography: the messy margins of *polis* religion?', *Kernos* 23 (2010) 13-25, at 14-16 – and I agree with him.

144 Isoc. *Aegineticus* 5-6. Translation G. Norlin. Edition: Teubner.
Θράσυλλος γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ καταλιπόντος τὴν διαθήκην παρὰ μὲν τῶν προγόνων οὐδεμίαν οὐσίαν παρέλαβεν, ξένος δὲ Πολεμαινέτῳ μάντει γενόμενος οὕτως οἰκείως διετέθη πρὸς αὐτὸν ὥστ' ἀποθνῄσκων ἐκεῖνος τάς τε βίβλους τὰς περὶ

Employment

In Rome, experts worked on a part-time basis. Magistrates with divinatory duties had many other tasks to fulfil: of the *augures* and *decemviri*, a significant number simultaneously held other magisterial offices.[145] So far it has not been possible to discover whether private divinatory experts worked in other professions apart from divination in Rome – their situation was probably comparable to that of Greek *manteis*, who are dealt with below.[146]

The Mesopotamian astrologers taught astrology and undertook both corvée and the *ilku* duty (a compulsory 'civil service').[147] Other activities were not excluded: Bēl-aplu-iddina combined his activi-

τῆς μαντικῆς αὐτῷ κατέλιπε καὶ τῆς οὐσίας μέρος τι τῆς νῦν οὔσης ἔδωκεν. Λαβὼν δὲ Θράσυλλος ταύτας ἀφορμὰς ἐχρῆτο τῇ τέχνῃ· πλάνης δὲ γενόμενος καὶ διαιτηθεὶς ἐν πολλαῖς πόλεσιν ἄλλαις τε γυναιξὶ συνεγένετο, ὧν ἔνιαι καὶ παιδάρι' ἀπέδειξαν ἀκεῖνος οὐδὲ πώποτε γνήσι' ἐνόμισε, καὶ δὴ καὶ τὴν ταύτης μητέρ' ἐν τούτοις τοῖς χρόνοις ἔλαβεν. See also how Hdt. 9.95 speaks negatively of a wandering expert.

145 Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 173-174.

146 E.g., Lucius Cafatius (*CIL* XI 6363 = *ILS* 4958. See Haack, *Prosopographie*, 38-40, where further references can be found) was a *haruspex* with other functions in the divinatory realm as well: he was netσvis, trutnvt, and frontac (*haruspex*, priest, interpreter of thunderbolts). However, this does not reveal anything about his non-divinatory functions.

147 SAA 10 143. See for general introductions on the *ilku*-duty: B. Kienast, 'Ilku', *RlA* 5 (1976) 52-59; J.N. Postgate, 'Royal ideology and state administration in Sumer and Akkad' in: J. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the ancient Near East* 4 vols (1995) Vol. 1, 395-411, at 406-407.

ties in the field of extispicy with being a commanding officer.[148] A *bārû* could also be a landowner[149] as well as a money-lender (see below). This variety of activities is quite remarkable, because the Mesopotamian astrologer and *bārû* worked under institutionalized conditions – which meant that they would also have administrative and practical duties.[150] Apparently there was some room for other activities of both a prestigious and a rather less prestigious nature such as the corvée obligations. The experts even complained about having to perform too many tasks, as in one of the sources discussed above, indicating that they regarded divination as their main duty. This was perhaps the price they had to pay for their otherwise relatively safe institutional environment and subordinate position in the relationship of patronage with the king.

In Greece, with its relative lack of institutionalization, there is plenty of evidence for divinatory experts working on a part-time basis: the Greek expert Agesias, son of Sostratos, who lived in Syracuse in the first half of the fifth century, won a victory in the mule races at the Olympic Games, probably in 468.[151] Astulos also

148 A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian rulers of the early first millennium BC I (1114 - 859 BC)* (Toronto 1991) A.0.101.1. iii 20.

149 Like Nabû-aḫu-riba, *bārû* and landowner: SAA 14 271; like Marduk-šumu-uṣur SAA 10 153 obv. 6-16; and an unknown in SAA 6 12 2.

150 SAA 10 96 obv. 1-b.e. 25; SAA 10 102 obv. 8-12.

151 Kett, *Prosopographie*, 18-20: (H)Agesias (2); Pind. *Ol.* 6. Cf. on (H) Agesias; N. Luraghi, 'Un mantis eleo nella Siracusa di Ierone: Agesia di Siracusa, Iamide di Stinfalo', *Klio* 79 (1997) 69-86.

won (three times) at the Olympic games. Another is Antifon, who also lived in the fifth century, who was called a *teratoskopos* en *oneirokrites*, but was also a poet and a philosopher. He probably wrote the lost treatise 'On divination by dreams'.[152] Lampon was an expert, but a powerful politician too.[153] There are also a number of attestations of experts who fought in the army, the most famous of whom must be Kleoboulos who died in 370 and is lauded both as *mantis* and warrior in his funerary inscription.[154] All these activities are examples of accomplishments which might have been expected of an educated Greek male individual and are not particular to the divinatory expert as such. There was indubitably an overlap between being an expert and other activities – but whereas the Greek (and Roman) sources only relate the prestigious activities which experts might undertake of their own accord, the Mesopotamian expert would also certainly have had to perform less exalted jobs.[155]

152 Kett, *Prosopographie*, 23: Antifon (9).

153 See on Lampon, e.g., Bremmer, 'Prophets, experts, and politics', 157.

154 *SEG* 16 (1959) 193. See for another *mantis* who died in battle (Megistias) Hdt. 7.228; and for a *mantis* who furnished the army with a strategy see Hdt. 8.27.3. A *mantis* could have both a military and strategic role – see Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, Vol. 3, 56-60; see 92-138 for an overview of signs in a military context; see also the discussion in R. Lonis, *Guerre et religion en Grèce à l'époque classique: recherches sur les rites, les dieux, l'idéologie de la victoire* (Paris 1979) 43-115.

155 Perhaps Greek experts did not record other, less prestigious jobs they needed to survive.

Loyalties

Institutionalized employment by the palace was particular to Mesopotamian divination. Certainly, Roman public experts were 'employed' by the Senate, but on occasion private *haruspices* and *augures* were also hired by high-ranking individuals.[156] As we have seen, in Greece from the second century BC some *poleis* seem to have employed a regular *mantis* and high-ranking individuals would certainly have hired their personal *mantis*, when they thought the circumstances required such services.[157] How did these different terms of employment influence the loyalty of experts?

Roman public experts only had one 'employer': the Senate. Their task was to help the Republic to function and their activities were narrowly defined. Because Roman experts were also members of the governing elite, there was a certain risk that they might feather their own nests as far as this was possible.[158] Even if manipulation of signs

156 There are indications in the sources which support this argument: Val. Max. 9.12.6; Sall. *Iug.* 63.1; Plut. *Vit. Mar.* 8.4; Cic. *Div.* 1.32.72; Plut. *Vit. Sull.* 9.3l; Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.10-11.

157 Flower, *The seer*, 122-123. But see also Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, Vol. 3, 61-63.

158 However, I think it impossible for Roman divination to have existed in the way it did if it had been a mere going-through-the-motions which could be manipulated for personal gain. Cf. the many discussions about possible manipulation of divination in both the Greek and Roman worlds; on skepticism see among others Mikalson, *Honor thy gods*, 87-114, and Flower, *The seer*, 132-152. In Rome: V. Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter: das Prodigienwesen der römischen Republik* (Stuttgart 1998) 71-78; or on a more

or their interpretation was common, not much can be said about a sense of loyalty to the Republic – only about the methods of self-advancement within the system of the Republic.

Mesopotamian experts had one employer and he should not be betrayed. There is a letter to the king from an expert saying conspirators had forced him, the expert, to perform divination. The expert duly wrote to the king to tell him he had been tricked into this punishable offence.[159] Other experts would ask the king for justice or favours.[160] Mesopotamian ties of loyalty were clearly defined and are part of the relationship of patronage discussed above.

In Greece matters are less clear. Wandering Greek experts could begin working for one Greek army and, for some reason, switch to the opposing party or even to another nation like the Persians. Hegesistratos, for example, worked for the Spartans who were dissatisfied with him and put him in prison. Obviously desperate to

textual level studies such as K.J. Dover, 'Thucydides on oracles' in: idem, *The Greeks and their legacy: collected papers* 2 vols (London 1987-1988) Vol. 2, 65-73. The most famous example of a Roman treatise in which divination is criticized is Cicero's *De divinatione* (although this is not necessarily Cicero's own opinion). Anthropological perspectives are offered by C.R. Whittaker, 'The Delphic oracle: belief and behavior in ancient Greece - and Africa', *HThR* 58 (1965) 21-47, especially 45-47. Park argues along the same lines: Park, 'Social contexts', 195-209; W. Bascom, *Ifa divination: communication between gods and men in West Africa* (Bloomington, IND 1969) 119.

159 SAA 10 179 obv. 11-12; 18-22; rev. 19-21.

160 Astrologers: SAA 10 58 rev.4-21; SAA 10 86; SAA 10 93; *bārû:* SAA 10 178; SAA 10 180.

escape, Hegesistratos managed to free himself by cutting off his foot, after which he began working for the Persians and was their *mantis* at the Battle of Plataea.[161] Hippomarchos, too, worked (indirectly) for the Persians: he was the *mantis* of the Greeks in the Persian army.[162] Another example of an expert who was paid to work by various parties is Silanus who lived around 400 BC. He was a *mantis* of unknown descent who came from Ambracia. He was able to inspect *exta* and became the expert of Cyrus the Younger when the latter went to fight his brother Artaxerxes III. After Cyrus had been defeated, he worked as an expert in the army of Xenophon (but ran away).[163] Apparently it was possible to change employer for personal reasons or when circumstances dictated. It should be noted that ethnicity was not a decisive factor in changing employers. Moreover, it appears Greek experts could also face dismissal: Periallos, a Greek expert, is one of the few experts who is known to have been given the sack because of misconduct.[164] Where divination was not institutionalized, loyalty in the strict sense of the word – working for one employer for a very long time and keeping his best interest at heart – does not seem to have been the rule. The situation at institutionalized oracles and

161 Hdt. 9.37.1; 9.38.1; 9.41.4. See on another Elean seer being saved (and probably put to work for Dareios) Hdt. 3.132.2.

162 Hdt. 9.83.2.

163 Kett, *Prosopographie*, 69-70: Silanos (62). For references (from Kett) see Xen. *An.* 1.7.18; 5.6.16; 6.4.13; 5.6.28-34; 6.4.13; 5.6.16-18; Ael. *NA* 8.5; Philostr. *VA* 8.7.43.

164 Kett, *Prosopographie*, 66: Periallos (58). See Hdt. 6.66.2 (from Kett).

sanctuaries where a *mantis* could work for a longer time was probably different. A Mesopotamian expert would have been expected to be loyal on account of the obligations imposed by the patron-client relationship. A Roman expert might have had conflicting interests, because he was both an expert and a member of the political elite, and needed to integrate the two roles.

Hierarchy

Little is known about a hierarchy among Greek and Roman experts, although it can be presumed that those who were perceived to be the best *manteis* and (private) *haruspices* would have been employed by the highest-ranking individuals in society. In the *collegium haruspicum*, there appears to have been a *summus haruspex,*[165] and in Greece some experts were deemed more important than others. In

165 It has been speculated that this *summus haruspex* was the head (and perhaps most senior member) of the *ordo LX haruspicum*. The famous Spurinna was perhaps a *summus haruspex*: Val. Max. 1.6.13. Cic. *Div*. 1.52; Suet. *Iul*. 81. See Haack, *Prosopographie*, 110-112, where further references can be found. Cf. Rawson, 'The *Disciplina Etrusca*', 143-145. See also the epitaph of the *haruspex maximus* (*CIL* VI 2164 = *ILS* 4951, see Haack, *Prosopographie*, 119-120, in which there are further references) and that of T. Flavius Clodianus, the 'magister har(us)p(icum) de LX' (*CIL* XIV 164. See Haack, *Prosopographie*, 49, where there are further references). The question still remains of whether one would consider the fact that an *ordo* had a head an indication of an internal hierarchy.

the *Anabasis*, Xenophon mentions a number of *manteis* by name although there were many more in his army.[166] Might these named experts have been the more important ones?[167] At sanctuaries where *manteis* were employed to examine the sacrificial animals, they had a leader, the *mantiarchos*.[168]

In Mesopotamia, sources from the Old Babylonian period give us an indication of a possible hierarchy and career path within the *bārû* profession:

> [the newly trained *bārû*] might then live and work in a team headed by either a *waklum*, 'overexpert', or a *šāpirum*, 'chief'. As a professional there was a career ladder for the expert to climb; this might be reconstructed as follows: the first practice could be at the palace gate where he could offer his services for a fee. [...] Perhaps in return for having a space at the palace gate, the expert was expected to perform miscellaneous duties to the palace. The Old Babylonian extispicy reports deal almost exclusively with the experts' service to private individuals. As a next step, in the royal employ, the expert could become attached to an army garrison. There is evidence to suggest that one or more experts accompanied a campaigning army and

166 Xen. *An*. 6.4.15.

167 Later in time, there also seems to have been a ranking among dream experts, at least according to Artemidoros: those who had a 'scholarly' background were, in his opinion, higher up in the hierarchy than those working in the marketplace. D. Harris-McCoy, 'Artemidorus' self-presentation in the preface to the Oneirocritica', *CJ* 106 (2011) 423-444, at 431; 426.

168 L. Robert, 'Sur un Apollon oraculaire à Chypre', *CRAI* (1978) 338-344, at 342 (= *SEG* 28 1299. See *SEG* 30 1608 for references to other opinions). Cf. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, Vol. 2, 392.

> there are references to a *bārûm* walking in front. Before entering royal service, it is very likely that the expert himself became the object of extispicy as a form of vetting.[169]

The *bārû* attached to a military unit can be – tentatively – identified in Neo-Assyrian times, for example, by his depiction on Assurbanipal's relief from Nimrud.[170] Possibly, like his Old Babylonian counterpart, the Neo-Assyrian *bārû*, after having served in the army could become a 'district expert' and finally a court expert. Although the facts about this in Neo-Assyrian times are still very uncertain, what has been established is that there was an 'elite' among the divinatory experts in the palace. This is attested by titles of individuals: there was, for example, a 'chief *bārû*'[171] and a study of titles reveals that a man could become 'chief scribe' after having been 'deputy-chief scribe'.[172] Another possible clue is provided by the way the names were listed in reports and letters. In the reign of Esarhaddon,

169 Jeyes, *Old Babylonian extispicy*, 15-16.

170 Although the individual on British Museum WA 124548 has also been designated a butcher: D. Collon, 'Depictions of priests and priestesses in the ancient Near East' in: K. Watanabe (ed.), *Priests and officials in the ancient Near East: papers of the second colloquium on the ancient Near East, the city and its life, held at the Middle Eastern culture centre in Japan* (*Mitaka, Tokyo*), *March 22-24, 1996* (Heidelberg 1999) 17-46, at 24 and figure 33.

171 E.g., [Mar]duk-šumu-uṣur ([md]AMAR].UTU.MU.PAB LÚ.GAL ḪAL. SAA 7 7 rev. ii 7; see also SAA 10 182 obv. 5-9.

172 See Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian scholars,* Vol. 2a, 467-470 (Appendix O). See also Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 608.

one Marduk-šākin-šumi (scholar and later chief exorcist) was listed below Adad-šumu-uṣur (scholar and chief exorcist), but this order was reversed later under Assurbanipal.[173] If this indicates an estimation of importance among peers, it shows that this eminence could fluctuate. However, this idea is contested.[174] Another indication that not every expert was equal is a letter from an astrologer who has been appointed to teach the crown prince and shows his gratitude to the king for his selection; and there are also letters thanking the king because an astrologer has been permitted to join the king's entourage.[175] These must have been 'promotions'. Therefore, the most substantial evidence for a hierarchy among experts comes from Mesopotamia and this is not unexpected: hierarchy is a logical corollary of institutionalization.

Competition and co-operation

Were the relationships among the various types of experts co-operative or competitive (or both)? Mesopotamian experts regularly co-operated. In the reports to the king, some *bārû* wrote how they performed extispicies together. It also appears that Mesopotamian *ṭupšarru Enūma Anu Enlil,* but not *bārû*, worked with people from outside their own circle.[176] For example, the astrologers Nabû-aḫḫē-

173 See Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian scholars*, Vol. 2a, 113; 152.

174 Some argue the way names were listed was not systematic: Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 608.

175 SAA 10 68.

176 See for the lack of co-operation with other groups Robson, 'Empirical

eriba and Balasî co-operated when they wrote joint letters to the king about eye-stones for the statue of the god, beseeching the king to give up fasting and eat, advising him to undertake a journey at a specific time, about conjunctions of Mars and Saturn, favourable days for the prince to visit his father and giving a reply to a question posed by the king.[177] Since their colleagues did the same, the result was a network of advice and discussion.

However, where there is co-operation there can also be competition: different experts could provide different or divergent interpretations of a particular sign, each claiming his to be the best.[178] Disputes and discussions could arise. The astrologer Balasî reports that:

> Concerning Mercury, about which the king my lord wrote to me: yesterday Issar-šumu-ereš had an argument with Nabû-ahhe-eriba in the palace. Later, at night, they went and all made observations; they saw (it) and were satisfied.[179]

scholarship', 610.

177 SAA 10 41; SAA 10 40; SAA 10 43; SAA 10 44; SAA 10 47; SAA 10 50; SAA 10 53; SAA 10 62.

178 Arr. *Anab*. 1.11.2.

179 See for similar examples of competition and showing that one's interpretation was best: SAA 10 51; SAA 10 52 obv. 6-9; SAA 10 60; SAA 10 72. SAA 8 83 (= K 01335+ = RMA 055) obv. 4 - rev. 3. Edition and translation: H. Hunger.

ina UGU M[UL].UDU.IDIM.GUD.UD

ša LUGAL be-lí iš-pur-an-ni

it—ti-ma-li ^{md}15—MU—APIN-eš

Texts such as these suggest that each expert attempted to provide the most accurate interpretation – to be 'proven' later in time –, and that experts competed in this way. Once again, it is institutionalization which paved the way for both extensive co-operation and extensive competition.

Without institutionalization, collaborations would have remained incidental. It is remarkable how little Greek evidence can be found regarding co-operation of *manteis*. Unquestionably, during military expeditions when more than one expert was available, some evidence of co-operation emerges. Xenophon's experts, like those of Alexander the Great for example, seem to have functioned as a team at times – although in Xenophon's case the evidence is not watertight.[180] The only time in the *Anabasis* where co-operation is certainly mentioned is when all experts are called together to be witness to the signs. This occurred when the army was in dire straits: there was no food left but the signs in the exta continued to be negative so the army could not move on. The experts were called together so that all of them could witness and confirm this. Nevertheless, such occasions are the exceptions in the sources. Usually just one expert, not a group, is specifically mentioned.

ina ŠÀ É.GAL ṣa-a-su
a-na ^{md}PA—PAB.MEŠ—SU ig-di-ri
i—da-a-ti ina nu-bat-ti
it-ta-al-ku gab-bi-šú-nu it-ta-aṣ-ru
e-ta-am-ru ib-tu-šu

180 E.g, Arr. *Anab*. 4.15.7-8; Arr. *Anab*. 7.11.8-9; Xen. *An*. 6.4.15; 6.4.20.

Competition must have been rife in Greek and private Roman divination. The chief priority of experts who were not structurally employed was to attract clients. They could do this by means of word of mouth or by textual advertisments such as the owl statuette with an inscription on the base advertising an expert from Rome – probably from the first century AD – now in the Museum of Antiquities at Leiden.[181] This owl has been thought to have stood outside the experts' door to attract clients. It has also been argued that Lusimachos, a fourth-century Greek expert who owned a tablet or writing table (*pinakion oneirokritikon*), used this to advertise his business.[182] However, what this *pinakion oneirokritikon* actually was is far from certain – it might have been a written textual guideline to interpreting signs. It should be noted that the 'freelance' experts were not the only ones who needed to stand out. Oracles would also need to win clients: Alexander of Abonouteichos advertised his business at the oracle site. In Lucian's satire, he is depicted as having sent

181 F.L. Bastet & H. Brunsting, *Corpus signorum classicorum musei antiquarii lugduno-batavi = Catalogus van het klassieke beeldhouwwerk in het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* 2 vols (Zutphen 1982) number 118 (no museum number mentioned). According to the museum website (http://www.rmo.nl/collectie/-topstukken-), the inventory number is ZM-7 (B434 is also mentioned). Text: [Α]ΡΧΑΤΗΣ.ΠΕΤΡΙΟΣ.ΗΟ | ΜΑΝΤΙΣ.ΜΑΝ | ΤΕΟΑΕΤ.Δ.ΑΣ | ΣΑΡΙΩΝ (*CIG* 4 10 6848). Another such advertisement (but for an individual interpreting dreams) is known from Graeco-Roman Egypt: Guarducci, *Epigrafia,* Vol. 4, 117-119.

182 Plut. *Vit. Arist.* 27.3.

people around to spread the word about his oracle.[183] In short, from the Greek and Roman materials, it appears that experts working for themselves needed a commercial pitch or presentation.

There is little explicit evidence of competitive confrontations with the exception of the story about Mopsos and Kalchas. When Kalchas did not manage to win the 'competition', he died of grief.[184] For Rome the famous saying by Cato, as quoted by Cicero, might be considered. One *haruspex* was thought to have been laughing at the other when they met each other in the street. Interpretations of this passage could be that it arose from competition, scepticism or both.[185] Some scholars have claimed that members of Roman *collegia* were in competition with those of other *collegia* – especially the *haruspices* and *decemviri* –, chiefly for political purposes, but this cannot be demonstrated convincingly. What can be shown is that the Senate would sometimes ask the various bodies of experts to give their individual opinions about the same signs.[186]

183 Lucian *Alex*. 24. Although this source cannot be taken at face value to reveal historical facts or even be taken to indicate anything about a historical reality (as A. Bendlin argues: 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Mantik: Orakel im Medium von Handlung und Literatur in der Zeit der Zweiten Sophistik' in: D. Elm von der Osten, J. Rüpke & K. Waldner (eds), *Texte als Medium und Reflexion von Religion im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart 2006) 159-208, at 202), it still reflects ideas about the possibility, at least theoretically, for someone to send people around to spread the word about an oracle.

184 Apollod. *Ep*. 6.2-4.

185 Cato *apud* Cic. *Div*. 2.24.

186 Or at least they were both consulted about the same sign and they

Worries about reliability

If an individual divined for himself, he had only his own lack of expertise to blame if it seemed he had it wrong. He would probably keep his 'failings' quiet and try again the next time around. However, if an individual consulted an expert, the dynamics of the divinatory process were completely different. When an expert seemed to have been wrong, this was far worse than a layman's mistake: after all, the expert was by definition someone who had the ability to get it right. Using an expert was of course reassuring for the client (he received an authoritative interpretation), but it was not without risk.[187] Potentially an expert should have had more knowledge than the layman himself, but did he really have the skills and could he be trusted? The expert might be prompted by hidden motives, such as pecunerary concerns which would lead him to tell his client what he wanted to hear. Perhaps a particular interpretation was to the expert's own advantage. All these fears which could beset the individual are illustrated in many literary sources. Jokes at the expense of the expert can regularly be observed. It appears that, 'by the latter half of the fifth century BC *mantis* could in comic context be used as a byword for certain forms of fraud.'[188] Experts were thought to

agreed on its meaning in Cic. *Div*. 1.43.97. Cf. MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation*, 57-59; Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 180-182; Liv. 42.20.2.

187 As is reflected in many sources, for example, in Herodotos. Cf. Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 109; 135-130.

188 R. Garland, 'Priests and power', 84. This also appears to be the way a later source such as Plutarch thinks about manteis and related experts

be lusting after money and political power: twisting the signs from the supernatural would be a good way to attain what they wanted. Sophocles' *dramatis personae* illustrate this in two tragedies: in *Antigone* it is claimed that experts are in it for gain and in *Oedipus Rex* Teiresias is depicted as a divinatory fraud who is out to make a profit. He is also accused of playing political games in a bid to gain power. These two factors are also discussed in Lucian's *Alexander*.[189] What should be noted is that all of these examples are literary representations of what must have been a widely felt concern: was the expert reliable? Nevertheless, the literary representations might be misleading: perhaps incompetence was a less pressing concern in Greece because – also in an emic sense – there was no mantic orthodoxy. How could an expert be wrong or rather, be proven wrong?

(Plut. Mor. De Pyth. or. 407c).

189 Soph. *Ant.* 1035-1039; Soph. *OT* 95-145; Soph. *OT* 605-610; See also Eur. *IA* 520; Eur. *Bacch.* 255-257; Eur. *IA* 955-958. Cf. on Teiresias in literary sources more generally Ugolini, *Teiresias*. Lucian *Alex. passim*; for some secondary literature on the subject see D. Elm von der Osten, 'Die Inszenierung des Betruges und seiner Entlarvung: Divination und ihre Kritiker in Lukians Schrift "Alexander oder der Lügenprophet"' in: D. Elm von der Osten, J. Rüpke & K. Waldner (eds), *Texte als Medium und Reflexion von Religion im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart 2006) 141-157. The historicity of Lucian's *Alexander* is discussed in Bendlin, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil', 202. However, the *Alexander* still reflects ancient ideas on these matters. False oracles were believed to exist: see Hdt. 2.174 and as appears from the story of Croesus in Hdt. 1.46-49.

Suspicions of unreliability and incompetence also pursued the Mesopotamian expert. An example is the text known as the *Sin of Sargon*.[190] The fact that Sennacherib separates the experts into groups indicates that he harboured suspicions, lest they talk to one another and influence the outcome of the extispicy (no motives why they should do this are given, although these can be speculated on):

> I w[ent and collected the haruspices], the courtiers of my palace guarding the mystery of god and king; I split them [into several groups] so that they could not ap[proach or speak to one another]. I [investigated] the sins of Sargon, my father, by extispicy, [enquiring of Šamaš and Adad] as follows: "Was it because [he esteemed] the

190 On doubts about the reliability of divination in general (not focused on the expert) see *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, tablet I, 49-52: iš-šak-na-nim-ma i-da-at pi-rit-ti | uš-te-ṣi <ina> bīti-ia ka-ma-a-ti ar-pu-⸢ud⸣ | dal-ḫa te-re-tu-ú-a nu-up-pu-ú-ḫu ud-da-kám | it-ti [lú]bārî(ḫal) u šá-'i-li a-lak-ti ul par-sat. Translation: 'Fearful omens beset me. I am got out of my house and wander outside. The omen organs are confused and inflamed for me every day. The omen of the expert and dream priest does not explain my condition.' (Edition and translation: Lambert, *Wisdom literature*, 32-33) This does not obviate the question of whether this text implies that the expert could not help, whether the divination did not work because it was thought to be intrinsically flawed or that this was simply seen as a ritual failure caused by the supernatural (*Cf.* for this last option, more examples and a discussion if scepticism about divination: C. Ambos, 'Types of ritual failure and mistakes in ritual in cuneiform sources' in: U. Hüsken (ed.), *When rituals go wrong: mistakes, failure and the dynamics of ritual* (Leiden 2007) 25-47, at 29; 42-46).

> gods o[f Assyria too much], [...] The haruspices whom [I had split] into [several groups un]animously [gave me a reliable answer in the affirmative]."[191]

This might have been an exceptional situation but the suspicion of the expert expressed here was not unique. As mentioned, one Neo-Assyrian text refers to an expert being forced to perform an extispicy for the enemies of the king.[192] The expert knew this was a punishable offence – his job was to protect the king, not to work for others (this is an additional aspect which fuelled Mesopotamian suspicions – an

191 SAA 3 33 (=K 4730 (+) Sm 1816) obv. 13-17; 21-22. Edition and translation: A. Livingstone.
u pag-ri it-ti DINGIR lu-še-e-ṣi al-[lik-ma ú-pah-hir DUMU-MEŠ LÚ.HAL-MEŠ]
na-ṣir pi-riš-ti DINGIR u LUGAL man-za-[az É.GAL-ia a-na 3-šú a-na 4-ú]
a-zu-us-su-nu-ti-ma la iṭ-[hu-ú-ma la id-bu-bu it-ti a-ha-meš]
hi-ṭa-a-ti mLUGAL—GIN AD-ia ina [bi]-[ri ab-re-e-ma dUTU u dIM áš-ʾa-al]
um-ma a-na UGU šá DINGIR-MEŠ š[á KUR—aš-šur.KI ma-aʾ-diš ú-kab-bi-tu-ma]
[...]
[DU]MU-MEŠ LÚ.HAL-MEŠ šá a-na [3-šú a-na 4-šú a-zu-zu-šú-nu-ti]
[pa-a] [e]-da iš-šak-nu-[ma i-pu-lu-in-ni an-na ke-e-nu x x x x]

192 And see for another example see SAA 10 109, in which the *bārû* prevaricated a while and did not report negative signs to the king but wrote instead that the signs had been obscure and see also SAA 18 124 obv. 3-5 where something apparently has gone wrong with a report because it has been erased (reading uncertain).

expert could 'betray' his master)[193] –, and he was afraid that the king would find out. He wrote to him to reassure him that he himself was still loyal, mollifying him with the thought that perhaps the extispicy had not revealed the enemy the truth:

> [...] saying: "You are an expert in divination?" (Break) He made me *love* him [...] "I'll tell you this: [*the king*] has *provi*[*ded* for m]e, until *in anger he placed* (*me*) *in your service*." "Go and perform the (following) divination before Šamaš: 'Will the chief eunuch take over the kingship?" [...] [By the gods of the king], my [lord]: The extispicy [which I performed was] but a colossal fraud! (The only thing) [I was th]inking of (was), "May he not kill me."[194]

In Rome, the private experts were treated with scepticism on account of the methods they used. However, in matters of public divination misgivings about ulterior motives were a much bigger worry: mag-

193 SAA 18 131 obv. 22-rev.9; SAA 16 21 obv. 9-rev.8.

194 SAA 10 179 (=83-1-18,122 + Ki 1904-10-9,169) obv. 20 - rev. 5; 19-21. Edition and translation: S. Parpola.

um-ma LÚ.ḪAL-[u]-[tu t]a!- [le!-'e!] -e! [...]
ú-šar!-im-man--[ni] x[x x x x x x x x x]
ši-i a-qab-bak-k[a um-ma LUGAL] in-du-[na-an-n]i
a-di ina lib-bat a-na p[a-ni]-ka ú-še-[zi]-[zu]
um-ma a-lik-ma LÚ.ḪAL-ú-ti a-na tar!-ṣi ^{d}UTU
bi-ri GAL--LÚ.SAG LUGAL-ú-tú i-na-áš-ši-i
[...]
[DINGIR.MEŠ šá LUGAL be-lí]-iá ki-I LÚ.ḪAL-ú-tú
[šá e-pu-šu] al-la šá-a-ru me-ḫu-u
[šu-ú TA ŠÀ-bi-ia a]-dab-bu-ub um-ma la (i)-du-kan-ni

istrates were accused of taking the auspices and looking the other way when it suited their purposes.[195] Whether this was true or not, in Rome – as in Greece and in Mesopotamia – there was a feeling that the expert had power over the divinatory process and that either he might abuse this power or simply get it wrong. However, this anxiety did not (positively or negatively) affect the experts' standing in society: it merely reflected their importance.

The foregoing discussion reveals that Mesopotamian experts were employed for longer periods of time by the same employer, appear to have been loyal, could rise higher up in the hierarchical ranking and did collaborate with others (this includes discussion and competition). The structured and steady nature of their work ensured they fell into the category 'high' in the 'occupation' branch of socio-economic status. The same could be said of the public Roman divinatory expert. In comparison to his colleagues, the unstructured nature of the occupation of the wandering *mantis* (and the private Roman expert) would have placed him in the category 'middle' or even 'low' socio-economic status. Always with the exception of those very few who really made it, naturally.

Income

An expert needed to live. The Mesopotamian expert employed by the palace would also have been paid by it. Although the astrolo-

195 MacBain, *Prodigy and expiation,* 41-42.

ger does not feature in the Nimrud Wine Lists – an eight-century Assyrian administrative text – the *bārû* (for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ) received a daily ration – in kind – of, usually, 2 *qa* of wine[196] for their group, the same as the A.ZU (*ašu*) and LÚ.MAŠ.MAŠ.MEŠ (*āšipu*).[197] The augurs from Commagene received 4 *qa* – and the Babylonian experts 6 *qa* – but it is not possible to verify whether they were part of a larger group or were entitled to larger rations.[198]

196 In the Neo-Assyrian period, the standard *qû* was about 1.842 or 1.83 litres. Kinnier Wilson assumes that among the skilled and professional workers six men would share one *qû*: J.V. Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud wine lists: a study of men and administration at the Assyrian capital in the eighth century BC* (London 1972) 117. Cf. *CAD* Q 288-291.

197 See Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud wine lists* (from now on KW). 2 qa? for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ in ND 6219, ob. 22 (KW text number 6); 2 qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ in ND 10047, ob. 28b (KW text number 8); ? qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ from 'Babylon' in ND 10055, 4 (KW text number 12); ditto for ND 10027 + 10028, ob. 20 (KW text number 13); 1.5 qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ in ND 10027 + 10028, rv. 8 (KW text number 13); 2? qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ in ND 10056 12 (KW text number 15); ditto for ND 10033/10050 32 (KW text number 16); 2? qa ND 10051 rv. 1 (KW text number 19); 3 qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ in 10053 obv. 10 (KW 30); 6 qa for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ from 'Babylonia' in ND 10038 (lower half of obverse) 5 (KW number 30); 1 sūt for LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ ND 2489, ii, 11 (KW text number 35) (a bread list); 5 qa voor LÚ.ḪAL.MEŠ who were 'Babylonian' ND 10038 obv. 16' (S. Dalley & J.N. Postgate, *The tablets from Fort Shalmaneser* (London 1984) no. 120). Cf. Kinnier Wilson, *The Nimrud wine lists*, 75-76.

198 Augurs: 4 qa for augurs from Commagene in ND 6218, i, 4-5 (KW text no. 3); 4? qa for augurs ND 10063 3? (KW text no. 29). The experts from Commagene are but one of the examples of experts 'from abroad'

The expert Urad-Gula describes how hard he worked and, he complains that his fellow scholar seems to be taking more than his fair share of the goods which are apportioned to the scholars.

> He is taking [for himself] the prime lot of garments [which came in on the 2]2nd and today, [gu]lēnu-coats, tunics, and mak[lulu]-clothes, every single one of them, and [shows] neither the chief [exorcist] nor Adad-šumu-uṣur that he has them. But we have ended up [empty]-handed; by which means are we supposed to fill the shortage of our garments? Whence are we supposed to get (our) wages, we who have not (even) as much money as a pupil of his? And yet the king knows [that] we are his equals![199]

(which was equally usual in Greece), which K. Radner shows: K. Radner, 'The Assyrian king and his scholars: the Syro-Anatolian and the Egyptian schools' in: M. Luukko, A. Svärd & R. Mattila (eds), *Of god(s), trees, kings, and scholars: Neo-Assyrian and related studies in honour of Simo Parpola* (Helsinki 2009) 221-238.

199 SAA 10 289 (= K 00991 = ABL 0117) rev. 3-14. Edition and translation: S. Parpola.

[x TÚG.g]u-zip-pi pa-ni-i!-⌈ú⌉-[te] [ša UD-2]2-KÁM ù ša ú-ma-a ⌈e⌉-[ru-bu-u-ni]

[TÚG.gu]l!-IGI.2 TÚG!.GADA TÚG.ma-ak-[li-li]

x [x]-šú! am-mar! gab-bu-un-ni [x x x]

i-na-áš-ši la-a a-na LÚ.GAL—[MAŠ.MAŠ]

la! a-na ^{md}IM—MU—PAB is-si-šú [ú-kal-lam]

ù a-né-en-nu TA a-hi-in-n[i! ra-aq-te]

né-ta-li-a bat-qu ša TÚG.gu-zip-pi-⌈ni⌉!

ina ŠÀ mi-i-ni ni-ik-ṣur TA a-a-kar

ni-iš-ši-a ig-re-e ša am—mar LÚ.TUR-šú

a-ni-nu la ma-aṣ-ṣa-ni-ni ù LUGAL ú-da

Apart from the wine lists, we hear remarkably little about an expert ever being paid – in cash or in kind – but in one Old Babylonian example a payment of four lambs is specified. In another instance, the payment is in cash.[200] There are also indications that Old Babylonian experts could have been moneylenders and earned their living this way.[201] In a nutshell, the remuneration of Neo-Assyrian scholars seems to have consisted partly of payments by the palace which might have been supplemented by other payments in kind.[202]

Greek experts were notorious for their proverbial greed and lust for payment (if necessary in kind).[203] They were paid by their clients, whether these were city states or individuals.[204] How much a *mantis* received is unknown: it appears that this could have been anything from relatively small amounts to large sums or expensive goods. Larger amounts were earned by famous experts, thought to be the best, like Hegesistratos who was reported to have earned great sums

[ki-i] me-eh-re-e-šú a-né-en-nu-ni

200 Claims Jeyes, *Old Babylonian extispicy*, 15 (YOS 5 155.33).

201 Richardson, 'Ewe should be so lucky', 230-231.

202 Fields in the possession of experts could also have been inherited, which is why I have not mentioned them in the text.

203 Soph. *Ant*. 1055; Ar. *Av*. 594 ; Ath. 8.344ef; Lucian *Iupp. Trag*. 30.

204 It can be expected that the pay was provided by the *polis* in the case of an elected expert (if these existed), but that a high-ranking individual would pay for his private expert. See the references above for possible official funding for experts employed 'privately' by generals, as perhaps attested in Plut. *Vit. Nic.* 4.2.

and was – presumably for that reason – reportedly a very zealous worker.[205]

Some more can be deduced from the amount an individual client would have had to pay for consulting an oracle. Whilst no direct payment to the divinatory expert, this shows how much it cost to make use of his services at an oracle site. The oracle of Alexander of Abonouteichus is described as to have charged one drachma and two obols for each oracular consultation.[206] A very large sum indeed. At other Greek oracles, the sacrifice preceding the divination (*pelanos*) was later transformed into a monetary 'sacrifice' or payment to the oracle. The amount of the *pelanos* depended on where the client was from and whether he was a private individual or had consulted the oracle on behalf of a *polis*.[207] For instance, at Delphi, the *pelanos* for the *polis* of Phaselis cost 10 Attic drachmai and for a private individual 4 obols (400 BC); for the bean oracle (during which a black or white bean was drawn as the alternative to an oracle), this was 1 stater for official delegations and 2 obols for a private person.[208]

205 Hdt 9.38.1. Supposedly this also applies to Thrasullos: Isoc. *Aegineticus* 7. For the rich son of a seer: Hom. *Il.* 13.663-664.

206 Although this might have been an exaggeration on Lucian's part: Lucian *Alex*. 23.

207 Envoys were regularly sent to oracles (Delphi especially) to ask questions on behalf of their community, e.g., Hdt. 6.57.3.

208 V. Rosenberger, 'Die Ökonomie der Pythia oder: wirtschaftliche Aspekte griechischer Orakel', *Laverna* 10 (1999) 153-164, at 154-155. The oracle at Delphi had a reputation for its riches – composed principally of costly dedications, but the structural income from the *pelanos* must have

There were also different prices depending on which *polis* the client came from.[209]

There is uncertainty about other, additional, payments (not the *pelanos*) which would have had to be made to obtain an actual consultation at Delphi – but Rosenberger thinks this was 2 obols for a consultation by the *polis* (Skiathos, in this case) and 1 obol for a private person.[210] However, this could be much more, one factor being which *polis* wanted an answer.[211] Ultimately, how much exactly was paid for a consultation seems to have depended on the descent, profession and prestige of the client and the public or private purpose of his consultation, and on the prestige of the expert or oracle.[212]

helped too: see, e.g., Ael. *VH* 6.9; Hdt. 3.57.2.

209 As a comparison between the *pelanos* for individuals from two different town shows (although the first attestation is from the 6th or 5th century, and the second one is from the 4th – this might also explain the difference in price): G. Rougemont, *Corpus des inscriptions de Delphes* (Paris 1977) Vol. 1, 8-10; 23-26.

210 P. Amandry, *La mantique Apollinienne à Delphes* (Paris 1950) 102-103; Rosenberger, 'Die Ökonomie der Pythia', 155-156. However, for many sites we do not have this knowledge. For the oracle site of Korope, for example, we can only assume that a *pelanos* was paid: see Robert, 'Apollon Koropaios', 19-20.

211 P. Bonnechère, *Trophonios de Lébadée: cultes et mythes d'une cité béotienne au miroir de la mentalité antique* (Leiden 2003) 57-58.

212 And also on the particular oracle. See for the best overview of different prices Bonnechère, *Trophonios de Lébadée*, 57-58. For an overview of historical (non-oracular) experts that have been paid see Kett, *Prosopographie*,

No specific sources deal with payment of a public Roman expert, which makes sense because these experts were all high-ranking patricians, and later plebeians, – membership of a *collegium* confirmed prestige and J. Rüpke considers it plausible that, instead of being paid, potential experts paid a fee to become a member.[213] A Roman employing an expert privately would have paid him, or at least this is what has been speculated about Sulla's *haruspex* C. Postumius (who was, probably, 'a salaried official').[214] There are few sources that touch upon private experts, but the same idea of experts' greediness as that in Greece is reflected in them.[215]

This investigation of the expert's income has not shed much light on the issue of socio-economic status. The reason for this is that sources are lacking. It must be concluded that payment depended on the skill of the individual expert, unless the latter had obtained official employment as happened in Mesopotamia. Structural employment changed matters quite drastically: the Mesopotamian expert would not be poor, nor would he have grown exceedingly rich like a Greek expert could become if he was very successful.

105-109. However, it must have been tough to make ends meet as an expert for some: Ael. *VH* 10.6. Others struck it rich: Pritchett, *The Greek state at war,* Vol. 3, 71-78. Cf., e.g., Hdt. 5.45.2.

213 Cic. *Div*. 2.65.134. Cf. Rüpke, *Fasti sacerdotum*, Vol. 3, at 1461-1471.

214 Rawson, 'The *Disciplina Etrusca*', 141.

215 As in the late – for our purposes – source Apul. *Met*. 9.8.

Concluding Observations

Experts played a major role in the practice of divination. Exploring the elements of socio-economic status has provided a clearer understanding of the experts' position in society.

One conclusion which has emerged is that the Roman and Mesopotamian experts under investigation were higher up on the socio-economic scale than their Greek counterparts. The Greek expert had to use his charisma and rhetorical skills to be able to survive (which could make him either very rich or very poor but would leave most experts somewhere in between), whereas the Mesopotamian expert worked as a learned man on the basis of his schooling and his descent.[216] The public Roman expert occupied his position on the basis of his pre-existing high status in society – his function as divinatory expert simply added to this status.

Besides socio-economic status, another etic distinction is possible: that between Greek *specialists* on the one hand and Mesopotamian *professionals* on the other. The latter had to fulfil certain requirements to qualify as professionals: they had formal training and were officially and publicly recognized as qualified experts. As a group, they had a virtual monopoly on the business of public divination. Above all, they were organized. It is not possible to argue

216 Some might be reminded of a Max Weber's ideas about the different kinds of authority of prophet and a priest: charisma for prophets and institution and tradition for the priest.

the same for the majority of Greek *manteis* or for private Roman *haruspices*.[217] The public *haruspex, decemvir* and *augur* in Republican Rome embody an interesting mixture of the qualities ascribed to the Mesopotamian and Greek experts. They cannot be called either specialists or professionals in the strict sense of these words: although they did work in a clearly defined context, their employment as experts was on the basis of descent and status.

These findings are closely connected to the relatively high degree of institutionalization of divination in Mesopotamia and Rome (at least where public divination was concerned) compared to what can be gleaned from the Greek world. Institutionalization enables the creation of, for example, a curriculum which experts-to-be had to learn.[218] This structured environment accounts for many of the factors which help Mesopotamian experts to score highly on the socio-economic scale.[219] In drawing these conclusions, we must not

217 See J. Rüpke, 'Controllers and professionals', *Numen* 43 (1996) 241-262, at 255-256.

218 Cf. on the effects of institutional frameworks on scholarship Lloyd, *The ambitions of curiosity*, 126-147; G.E.R. Lloyd & N. Sivin, *The way and the word: science and medicine in early China and Greece* (New Haven 2002) 82-139; and more theoretical introductions are S.N. Eisenstadt in: N.J. Smelser & P.B. Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* 23 (Amsterdam 2001) s.v. social institutions: the concept; A. Kuper & J. Kuper (eds), *The social science encyclopedia* (London 1996^{2}) s.v. institutions.

219 This is not to say that institutionalization is necessarily a 'good thing' – nor is a 'high' score on the socio-economic scale such a 'good thing' –

overlook the circumstance that public divinatory practices are over-represented in the sources from Rome and Mesopotamia. It must be assumed that there were also many experts working in private divination about whose circumstances next-to-nothing is known. These experts probably enjoyed a lower socio-economic status (comparable to that of the poorer Greek experts).

The relatively high degree of institutionalization in Mesopotamia not only entailed more bureaucratization, it also required the expert to have formal qualifications. In contrast, the lack of institutionalization in Greece led to the situation in which clients, including rulers and elite, would *choose* to consult experts when they wanted to. The upshot is that there was a lack of bureaucratization and experts did not need to have formal qualifications: their interpretations were based on their own experience and knowledge of divination and were therefore flexible. Their challenge was to build up a reputation for themselves by debate and performance – this was possible and indeed necessary, because there were no text-based mantic guidelines such as existed in Mesopotamia.[220] Every Greek expert needed to attract as many clients as possible by his charisma and personal authority.[221] He would have to entice individuals to use his services

these are not normative concepts. Institutionalization can be suffocating and negative, as well as enabling and positive.

220 By means of text. These ideas, although they are adduced about philosophers, doctors and the like, come from Lloyd & Sivin, *The way and the word*, 82-139.

221 Flower, *The seer*, *passim*.

in their attempts to solve their questions – his job was an extremely competitive one. The choice whether or not to use an expert, and if so which one, is an aspect which would probably have been absent if Greek divination had been more institutionalized. Rome is interesting in this respect: public divination was institutionalized and the experts were the members of the political and social elite.

Another consequence of institutionalization was that it affected the position of the expert in relation to the client, usually someone in power. The Mesopotamian expert was employed by the king and was therefore dependent on him: at the same time the king needed divination to make decisions. The same dependency can be seen in Rome, but here the public expert was a political power in himself: the public experts and their clients belonged to one and the same social group. It can be said that the Greek expert stood on the same level as his client: he was not structurally employed for life and could go from one client to the other, living independently. The client chose to consult him. This is one of the reasons the expert did not have any political power: decision making and divination were not closely integrated – both ordinary people and leaders *chose* to use divination instead. Consequently, institutionalization of divination mattered because it changed the model of interaction between decision making and divination.

5. Significance of signs

Without the sign, the *homo divinans* would have been out of a job. A divinatory sign was an occurrence which was thought to have been sent by the supernatural and was interpreted by man, who thereby imbued it with meaning. No sign meant no divination: the acceptance of an occurrence as being a sign began the divinatory process.[1]

This is not the place to discuss various semiotic aspects of the sign, linguistic or non-linguistic,[2] nor do I discuss the difference between

1 For a Greek example see Xen. *Oec.* 5.18-5.19; Xen. *Symp.* 4.47-48. The Roman and Mesopotamian evidence indicates the same, e.g., in SAA 10 45 and SAA 10 50 where the astrologers write to the king saying that there are no portents to report; or texts such as SAA 10 151 and SAA 15 5 where the watch for portents was unsuccessful because of the bad weather conditions.

2 It follows that the introduction of the cuneiform sign is not discussed here as such. The bibliography on the topic (and the possible relationship between divination and writing) is vast: see G. Manetti, *Theories of the sign in classical antiquity* (Bloomington IND 1993 [translation from Italian]) 2-5. On divination and writing see the work of J.J. Glassner, especially 'The invention of writing, Old Babylonian schools and the semiology of experts' (Unpublished paper read at the conference 'Origins of early writing systems' at Peking University, Beijing, 5-7 October 2007) and J.J. Glassner, 'Écrire des livres à l'époque paléo-

indexical and communicative signs.[3] I categorize the divinatory sign

babylonienne: le traité d'extispicine', *ZA* 99 (2009) 1-81. Mesopotamian individual omens always consist of a *protasis* and an *apodosis*. The first part of the sentence, in most cases, beginning with 'Šumma' ('if') is the *protasis*; the latter part of the sentence the *apodosis*. The relationship between them is complicated, and can be based on such things as paronomasia, contrast, associations/wordplay, association of ideas, contrast, for example between the right and the left, upper and lower, front and rear. An example of this last category is: 'If there is a hole in the head of the *naplastu*, on the right, someone among the servants in the man's household will die. If there is a hole in the middle of the *naplastu*, on the right, someone among the man's friends will die. If there is a hole in the base of the *naplastu*, on the right, someone in the man's family will die.' (edition can be found in A. Goetze, *Old Babylonian omen texts* (New Haven 1947) 17:49. Translation and a discussion of the texts and the associations in Starr, *Rituals*, 9-12. Cf. Manetti, *Theories of the sign*, 7-13; J. Bilbija, 'Interpreting the interpretation: protasis-apodosis-strings in the physiognomic omen series *Šumma Alamdimmû* 3.76-132' in: R.J. van der Spek (ed.), *Studies in ancient Near Eastern world view and society. Presented to Marten Stol on the occasion of his 65th birthday, 10 November 2005, and his retirement from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* (Bethesda MD 2008) 19-28; F. Rochberg, 'If P, then Q': form and reasoning in Babylonian divination' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 19-27. Greek interpretation also place by, e.g., linking one sign to something else, by analogy or other cultural inventions (Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 65-74).

3 There is an abundance of literature on this subject, for example, the following article and the literature mentioned there: Sørensen, 'Cognitive underpinnings', 314-218.

as communicative and it might have been either linguistic or non-linguistic (the pronouncement of an oracle is a linguistic sign – if provided in human language – while the flight of the birds is a non-linguistic sign). The most important points here are the distinctions that signs were thought to come into being either spontaneously or after evocation, and that they could be observed or took the form of discourse. However, as discussed on pp. 38-39, human 'omen-mindedness' was always essential. It seems easy for humans to imagine occurrences have some purpose or meaning and consequently we assume these occurrences are placed in the world around us by some agent.[4] In the case of divinatory signs, these agents were supernatural beings.

During spontaneous divination the individual recognized an occurrence as an observational or discursive sign, but evoked divination required a preliminary action (often in the form of a ritual) to evoke the sign, after which it still had to be recognized for what it was. However, when a sign was evoked the individual knew what to look for. Both evoked and spontaneous signs could be an extraordinary occurrence which could only be accounted for by interpreting it as a sign from the supernatural – the birth of a hermaphrodite is one instance which springs to mind. However, the sign could also be an occurrence which was usually considered perfectly normal. Despite its apparent normality, the individual detected that the

4 The study of divination and its cognitive foundation is still in the teething stage. However, see further the article by J. Sørensen referred to in the note above; Lisdorf, *The dissemination of divination*.

occurrence was – in his opinion – extraordinary and recognized it as a sign.[5] Only after recognition of the occurrence as a sign did it become significant: this is the first phase of the divinatory process described on pp. 40-42. Although the overarching model of how the divinatory sign was perceived to function was the same in Greece, Rome and Mesopotamia, there were also many differences in the ways signs manifested themselves, the reasons they were thought to be significant and the significance which was attributed to specific contexts in the interpretations of the signs.[6]

This chapter concentrates on examining what similarities and differences in signs are to be found in our three cultural areas and, more importantly, considers the causes and possible implications of these. I will begin by examining emic views concerning the genesis of the sign: where were signs perceived to come from? How could occurrences be recognized as being actual signs from the supernatural? The chapter continues by exploring the validity of the idea that 'everything' could be a sign and the idea that signs could have an inherent meaning. Another apposite question in this context is what happened when an occurrence was not thought to be a sign. An exploration of these issues should provide some insights into the divinatory sign and its role in the divinatory process.

5 As problematized in Cic. *Div.* 2.28.61-29.62.

6 Cf. also on the differences between the ways 'if *p*, then *q*' was perceived in Mesopotamia and Greece: Manetti, *Theories of the sign*, 2; and the article by Rochberg cited above.

In short, the sign will be shown to have been a very particular and significant factor in the divinatory process, requiring specific attention in each cultural area.

A variety of signs

The Greek term *sēmeion* was a general term for the divinatory sign, including the pronouncements of oracles. However, there is a wider vocabulary which should be taken into account. Some of the key terms have been conveniently discussed by Giovanni Manetti and recently by Alexander Hollmann. Manetti distinguishes words such as *oiōnos*, which was used for signs related to the flight of birds and signs in general;[7] *phasma*, which was used for signs from the heav-

7 Augury played a very important role as a divinatory method. For works on divination by means of birds see M. Dillon, 'The importance of *oionomanteia* in Greek divination' in: M. Dillon (ed.), *Religion in the ancient world: new themes and approaches* (Amsterdam 1996) 99-121; J. Defradas, 'La divination en Grèce' in: A. Caquot & M. Leibovici, *La divination: études* 2 vols (Paris 1968) Vol. 1 157-195, at 166-167; Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, Vol. 1, 127-145; J.R.T. Pollard, *Birds in Greek life and myth* (London 1977) 116-129. Inedible birds which were used were the following: the eagle was a very important sign (e.g., Xen. *An.* 6.1.23; Aesch. *Ag*. 104-139; Aesch. *Pers.* 201-210 – a falcon plays a role here too; Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 33.2-3; Xen. *An*. 6.5.2; Hom. *Il.* 8.247-8.252; Hom. *Il.* 24.315-325; Hom. *Od.* 20.240-243), furthermore there was the hawk (Hom. *Od.* 15.525-536; Hom. *Od.* 15.160-178; Hom. *Od.* 13.87 (pigeons and

ens but also as a more general term and *teras* which indicated an out-of-the-ordinary phenomenon.[8] Other terms include *sumbolon*, *tekmērion* and *marturion*.[9] Even though some distinction can be made between the terms, their meanings also overlapped and changed over time.

In Rome the vocabulary was also varied.[10] The *auspicia* were pro-

geese play a role here, but these are not the birds of ill-omen – only the victims)); the owl (Ar. *Vesp*. 1086; Theophr. *Char*. 16.8 – its hooting was an omen); the swallow (Arr. *Anab*. 1.25.1-9); the crow/raven (Plut. *Vit. Alex*. 73.2; Ael. *NA* 3.9); and many other birds such as kites (Paus. 5.14.1). Exceptions – because they were edible – were partridges (Ath. 656c) and herons (Hom. *Il*. 10.272-277). References mostly from Pollard, *Birds*, 116-129.

8 See for a more detailed study on *teras* I. Chirassi Colombo, '*Teras* ou les modalités du prodige dans le discourse divinatoire grec: une perspective comparatiste' in: S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012) 221-251. See Manetti, *Theories of the sign,* xiv-xvi; 14 for a brief overview of the philosophical use of this vocabulary in ancient Greece.

9 Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 9-19.

10 See further on the term *signum*, which is not dealt with here because it was most regularly used for all other kinds of signs except divinatory (although there are instances, such as Cic. *Div*. 2.14): S. Dorothée, 'Signum' to be found online at the website of the CNRS Linguistique Latine project: http://www.linguistique-latine.org/pdf/dictionnaire/signum.pdf [visited 7-4-2011]; S. Dorothée, 'Les employs de signum chez Plaute', *RevPhil* 76 (2002) 33-48; J.P. Brachet, 'Esquisse d'une histoire

duced by the observation of birds by magistrates and *augures*, serving to validate an undertaking.[11] The more generic term *prodigium* designated every spontaneous sign thought to have come from the supernatural. A *prodigium publicum* was acknowledged as such by the Senate.[12] Theoretically, a public sign would have had to have taken place on state-owned land. A private *prodigium* occurred on private land. However, this distinction was not always strictly observed in ancient times and is a difficult one for modern scholars to determine.[13] In addition to the term *prodigium*, there were various, more

de lat. "signum" (Towards a history of lat. "signum")', *RevPhil* 68 (1994) 33-50.

11 A magistrate would – sometimes at least– use an augur as in Cic. *Div*. 2.34.71. Cicero also claims that the magistrates in his time could choose not to take the auspices (Cic. *Div*. 2.35.76). See references, one of which to an extensive bibliography by J. Linderski in Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 149 n.236. It should be noted that there is a related divinatory process, the *augurium*: the two terms cannot be separated decisively from one another: it is often uncertain how they differ in meaning. Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 152-153, for a discussion and references.

12 Cf. Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 35.

13 Luterbacher, *Der Prodigienglaube und Prodigienstil der Römer*, 30-31. More recent and more extensive on this topic is Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 219-239 for the argument that, among other points, Th. Mommsen was wrong in using acknowledged signs as indicators of the land on which they were reported being public land belonging to the Roman State. It can be shown that there were signs seen on private property which were still expatiated as public signs. This makes the argument about why signs were discarded more difficult. Rasmussen

specific terms, for instance *portenta* and *ostenta*, denoting signs given to collectives. *Monstra* were those extraordinary occurrences - such as birth deformities – with an inherently negative meaning.[14] This also applies to *dirae*. However, there is uncertainty about the various terms.[15] To give some examples of discussions on this topic: F. B. Kraus indicates that '*prodigium*, *portentum*, and *ostentum* are decidedly synonymous, whereas *omen* and *monstrum* have more specific limitations.'[16] Other scholars support the contention that it is not an easy take to distinguish *portentum*, *ostentum*, *monstrum*, *praesagium* and *miraculum* from one another, and that this is also true of *prodigia* and *omina*.[17]

> At best, we can discern the tendency that in contrast to the *prodigia* that were important in the Republic for the Senate, that could take place at any time within a year, that were frequently considered to apply to the community, and always viewed as an expression of divine displeasure, *omina* occurred directly before an important event and foretold a future development. *Omina* could refer to a group or the

also poses questions about the reliability of the sources which Livy used for 43.13 and rightly queries why signs from *ager peregrinus* were reported at all, if the distinction was so clear and fixed as Mommsen appears to argue it was.

14 F.B. Krauss, *An interpretation of the omens, portents, and prodigies recorded by Livy, Tacitus, and Suetonius* (Philadelphia 1930) 31-34.

15 Recently most clearly described by David Engels: Engels, *Das römische Vorzeichenwesen*, 259-282. See also his extensive footnotes.

16 Krauss, *Omens, portents, and prodigies*, 34.

17 Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 7-9.

> community (e.g. Liv. 5,55,2) as well as to individuals: In 133 BC, when Ti. Gracchus stepped out of his house on the day of his murder, he bloodied his foot by hitting it against the threshold and ravens threw roof tiles in front of his feet (Plut. Ti. and C. Gracchus 17). Both signs indicated to him that it would be better if he stayed at home.[18]

The Mesopotamian vocabulary is as follows: *ittu* is a general word for sign; *tāmītu* can mean a question asked the supernatural at an oracle, but also the answer – a sign. The word *têrtum* can also be translated as 'sign' – this was primarily used during extispicy but also in a more general sense.[19] Apart from these terms, there is no widely used Akkadian vocabulary for divinatory signs.

It should be noted that there are uncertainties about the terminology of signs in all three cultural areas. However, this does not impede the research: in this chapter all divinatory signs found in the sources (including those which seem to contravene the laws of nature) will be used as evidence. The terminology used in the sources to refer to these signs is not of prime importance because the signs discussed here were all thought to come from the supernatural – otherwise they would not be divinatory signs. In what follows, I shall focus on various questions relating to the generation of perceived divinatory

18 V. Rosenberger, 'Omen' in: H. Cancik & H. Schneider, *Brill's New Pauly Online*. Visited 10-04-2011.

19 See Maul, 'Omina und *Orakel*', 70, and further on terminology S.M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale* (Namburbi) (Mainz am Rhein 1994) 6-7.

signs, underlining fundamental issues related to the functioning of the divinatory sign in the three cultural areas.

Spontaneous versus evoked signs

The occurrence of spontaneous signs was based on an existing reciprocal relationship between the human and the supernatural. The supernatural was thought to provide a sign voluntarily and because it wanted to.[20] Practically everyone enjoyed such a reciprocal relationship with the supernatural: this includes women, slaves and small children. The individual had already established a relationship with the supernatural by giving a gift beforehand, or was going to do so at some point in the future. The pre-existence of these relationships means that everyone could receive a spontaneous sign without giving the supernatural a particular gift in exchange for the sign. This reciprocal relationship ensured the perceived appearance of a spontaneous sign every once in a while: I give now so that you may give later.

In contrast, an evoked sign usually appeared instantaneously after the act of evocation had taken place. Evoking signs was a ritual action through which the individual could give and receive directly. When signs were evoked, a short-term reciprocal relationship between man and supernatural was created: I give now so that you can give now. For example, according to Herodotos, Croesus gift

20 Hymn. Hom. *Merc*. 541-549; Hom. *Od*. 2.143-149.

to the supernatural ensured that he could ask a gift in return, in the shape of a sign:

> When the Lydians came to the places where they were sent, they presented the offerings, and inquired of the oracles, in these words: "Croesus, king of Lydia and other nations, believing that here are the only true places of divination among men, endows you with such gifts as your wisdom deserves. And now he asks you whether he is to send an army against the Persians, and whether he is to add an army of allies."[21]

Modern observers might discern a resemblance between the bestowal of an evoked sign and a market transaction, because both types of negotiation are relatively direct and on a tit-for-tat basis. However, as discussed on pp. 42-48, the sources emphasize the reciprocal nature of these religious 'transactions'.

On receiving and not receiving signs

Ancient thinkers such as Aristotle pondered the question of why signs were given to all people and not just to the supposedly more

21 Hdt. 1.53.2. Translation: A.D. Godley.
Ὡς δὲ ἀπικόμενοι ἐς τὰ ἀπεπέμφθησαν οἱ Λυδοὶ ἀνέθεσαν τὰ ἀναθήματα, ἐχρέωντο τοῖσι χρηστηρίοισι λέγοντες· Κροῖσος ὁ Λυδῶν τε καὶ ἄλλων ἐθνέων βασιλεύς, νομίσας τάδε μαντήια εἶναι μοῦνα ἐν ἀνθρώποισι, ὑμῖν τε ἄξια δῶρα ἔδωκε τῶν ἐξευρημάτων, καὶ νῦν ὑμέας ἐπειρωτᾷ εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας καὶ εἴ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν προσθέοιτο σύμμαχον.

deserving elite: Aristotle discusses this problem in his *De divinatione per somnum* in which he states that he cannot reconcile the idea of his God or Unmoved Mover with the fact that dreams are sent to just anyone.[22] He explains this problem away in a very intricate manner. A more basic explanation lies in the inseverable tie between man and supernatural referred to above. Every man had a relationship with the supernatural, which could not be rescinded. Hence, the supernatural could send signs to everyone as this action was part and parcel of the gifts the supernatural was perceived to give.

Matters were slightly more complicated when evoked signs were concerned. If a problem arose in the relationship between an individual and the supernatural, the individual would be like a man cast adrift: he would become an outcast in his society because he would be ruled out of participation in the communal feasts and sacrifices. This is a major theme in various tragedies.[23] For instance, a polluted individual was forbidden to approach an oracle site because he could not enter the *temenos*.[24] Despite this prohibition, he could still

22 Arist. *Div. Somn.* 462b19-24.

23 For example, in Soph. *OT* 235-239.

24 Although the judgment of the supernatural was the final word in this: Ael. *VH* 3.44. Angering them was ill-advised and entry into the sanctuary would be denied by the god's wrath: Hdt. 9.65.2. See further the inscription as published in Lupu, *Greek sacred law*, number 12 (= *SEG* 26 524). This is perhaps a regulation stating that 'madmen' could not approach the oracle. Note that the readings of this inscription are disputed, as the references in *SEG* testify.

be the recipient of spontaneous signs (and perhaps even of certain evoked signs, although the sources are unclear in this respect). In other words, although participation in rituals entailing instantaneous give-and-take – for example, evoking signs – was out of the question for these individuals, they could still *receive* from the supernatural. In tragedies it is indicated that, despite being incapable of upholding his part of the bargain, the polluted individual was still not deprived of his chance to receive signs and hence be relieved of his worries and uncertainties: in Sophokles' *Oidipous Kolonos* Oidipous still thought he had received a sign and Orestes was convinced he had received support from Apollo.[25] The Greek supernatural could, and would, still send signs – to everyone, even to those who were polluted or had incurred divine displeasure because, by definition, everyone was in a reciprocal relationship with the supernatural.

Genesis of a sign

From whom?

A divinatory sign was, in the opinion of the ancient individual recognizing the sign as being divinatory, always coming from the super-

25 Soph. *OC* 94-105. Furthermore, apparently there were other prophecies – for instance by the Delphic Oracle - which were made *about* Oidipous (Soph. *OC* 385-420); Aesch. *Eum. passim*; Aesch. *Cho. passim*. There was clearly no 'taboo' on this.

natural – otherwise he would not have considered it a divinatory sign (and non-divinatory signs are not dealt with here).[26]

A pertinent question is: when requesting an evoked sign, did the sign have to be requested from one particular member of the supernatural? If a particular member of the supernatural did have to be approached, how would an individual know whether or not he was addressing the right one? At many oracle sites, Apollo and Zeus were responsible for providing the signs – but other oracle sites would have other 'divine patrons'.[27] So far, matters are quite clear-cut but

26 Some individuals, philosophers for example, may have had other thoughts about this – but these views are not taken into account here. There are, of course, different etic types of non-divinatory signs. I have already mentioned that there are linguistic and non-linguistic signs, as well as indexical and communicative signs. A recent publication on signs (in the widest sense of the word) in Herodotos distinguishes divinatory signs, personal names ('[...] a distinctive and special type of linguistic sign'), action, ritual and gesture ('can act as bearers of meaning which call for interpretation [...]') and objects which function as signs ('which become meaningful when interpreted according to a certain code'): Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 143, 163, 176.

27 A site such as Dodona was under auspices of Zeus (e.g., Pind. *Ol.* 8.1-6), while Apollo was in charge of Delphi (e.g., Ael. *VH* 3.1; Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.iv; Eur. *Ion* 5-7; Aesch. *Eum.* 1-18) but also, e.g., of the Trojan oracle in Hom. *Il.* 1.379-382. An example of another supernatural being in charge of an oracle is Trophonius (e.g., Paus. 9.39.1-14 – see further on Trophonius through the eyes of Pausanias V. Pirenne-Delforge, *Retour à la source: Pausanias et la religion grecque* (Liège 2008) 325-331; but in general Bonnechère, *Trophonios de Lébadée*). See on the problematiza-

in the other Greek divinatory sources – not related to oracles – it is often uncertain who was being called upon. The supernatural had to be involved.[28] Either 'the gods' in general or specifically Hermes or Apollo were called upon, or no members of the supernatural at all were entreated (but were left implicit).[29] On other occasions, when inspirational divination was supposed to have occurred, a god such as Dionusos was thought to have been involved.[30] There are other examples of a particular god playing an explicit role in providing man with signs. In the following account, Apollo plays a central role in revealing a plot by means of dreams:

tion of the same gods being patrons of many oracle sites: Lucian *Bis accus.*1.

28 See on this (in my opinion non-existent) anxiety about signs which were not explicitly sent by the gods: Hollmann, *The master of signs*, 55-58.

29 For Apollo and all divination see Hymn. Hom. *Merc*. 471-472; and for Hermes see Hymn. Hom. *Merc.* 527-537; cf. on Hermes but also on the 'three sisters of divination' Hymn. Hom. *Merc.* 550-569; D. Jaillard, 'Hermès et la mantique Grecque' in: S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012) 91-107. There were, of course, many other supernatural beings thought to have to do something with divination, e.g., Paus. 9.22.7.

30 Melampos was supposed to have taught the Greeks about Dionusus. He is said to have learned this in Tyre: Hdt. 2.49. Cf., e.g, Eur. *Bacch.* 298-301; Hdt. 7.111.2; explicitly on the relationship between alcohol and divination: Ath. 2.37ef-2.38a. A reference to an oracle of Dionusus can be found in Hdt. 7.111.

> For the fact that I met no such fate I have the gods to thank, who exposed the plot: above all, Apollo, who showed me dreams and also sent me men to interpret them fully.[31]

Roman oracle sites were regularly thought to be under the patronage of a particular goddess: Fortuna. Unquestionably Jupiter played an important part in sending the signs, especially when the *auspices* were taken. However, referring to many other non-oracular signs, texts generally refer to 'the gods' who have given signs or are displeased. The individuals explaining, interpreting and finding a remedy for the sign could find out which particular member of the supernatural was displeased, but not necessarily which of these had sent the signs – the Sibylline Books had to be consulted to discover which member of the supernatural had to be placated by performing rituals.[32]

Mesopotamian gods were also connected to specific oracle sites, most famously the goddess Ištar at Arbela, but some of them were also associated with certain divinatory methods. Šamaš was the god called upon during necromancy, helping to coax the ghost to enter into the skull whence he would then speak truthfully to the person

31 Lucian *Phal.* 1.4.14-16. Translation A.M. Harmon.
τοῦ μὲν δὴ μηδὲν παθεῖν τοιοῦτον οἱ θεοὶ αἴτιοι φωράσαντες τὴν ἐπιβουλήν, καὶ μάλιστά γε ὁ Πύθιος ὀνείρατά τε προδείξας καὶ τοὺς μηνύσοντας ἕκαστα ἐπιπέμπων.

32 For a Greek example see Eur. *Hipp.* 236-238; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.1079-1106.

who had evoked him. A first-millennium Mesopotamian text which is now in the British Museum reads as follows:

> May he bring up a ghost from the darkness for me! May [he put life back(?)] into the dead man's limbs! I call [upon you], O skull of skulls. May he who is within the skull answer [me!] O Shamash, who brings light in (lit: who opens) the darkne[ss!].[33]

The gods Šamaš and Adad were thought to provide the signs during the extispicy ritual. Some have assumed that Šamaš and Adad were the gods of divination in general, but there is no conclusive evidence to bolster this statement. In the extispicy ritual, the evocations were addressed either to both gods or only to Šamaš. The second type of evocation is more regularly attested in Neo-Assyrian times than in earlier periods.[34] These queries to Šamaš can commence as follows:

33 BM 36703 (= 80-6-17, 435) Ob. column II 3'-6'. Edition and translation: Finkel, 'Necromancy', 9. A later edition is by J. Scurlock, *Magical means of dealing with ghosts in ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago 1988) 322.
GIDIM e-ṭú -ti li-š[e-l]a-an-ni UZU.SA UG_7 l[-i-x-x]
gul-gul gul-gul-la-at a-ša-as-[si-ka/ki]
ša ŠÀ gul-gul-la-ta li-pu- la -[an-ni]
^{d}UTU pe-tu-ú ik-le-t[i (ÉN)]

34 See the discussion (with a special focus on the *tamîtu* texts) in W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian oracle questions* (Winona Lake, IND 2007) 1-10. These two Semitic gods were mentioned in curses underpinning a treaty around 2300 BC, but are only found together more frequently in the Old Babylonian period. All these early references to a duo of deities are in a formal setting (a treaty curse, a political oath, reports of court

"Šamaš, great lord, give me a firm positive answer to what I am asking you!"[35] However, in the *ikribu*, the prayer-rituals of the expert, he evoked both Šamaš and Adad, usually in the opening and the closing lines of his prayer, as part of the ritual of extispicy.[36] In this context, Šamaš is usually called upon, as the 'lord of judgement'; Adad is named 'lord of the inspection' or 'lord of the prayer and inspection'.[37] If a distinction can be made on the basis of these titles (which were probably not as finely drawn in practice), Šamaš' role was that of deciding on which sign would be given, while Adad made sure the inspection by the expert would be a proper one.

This still leaves open the question of why Šamaš, Adad, Jupiter, Zeus, Hermes and Apollo were chosen to be the overseers of particular methods. It has been suggested that from his elevated position Šamaš, the sun god, would have been able to oversee everything which happened on earth, and therefore would have been a good judge of contentious issues – he was also the god of justice, after all.[38] This same line of argument could also be applied to Apollo

cases). They appear as witnesses in court cases. No examples of combined worship can be found.

35 Just one example of many: SAA 4 28 obv. 1 (=83-1-18,540 = AGS 043): dUTU EN GAL-ú šá a-šal-lu-ka an-[na] GI.NA a-pal-an-[ni].

36 As published by Zimmern, *Beiträge,* 96-121.

37 dUTU be-el di-nim dIM be-el ik-ri-bu ù bi-ri-im (lines 1, 133, 126, 139, 141 of the Old Babylonian text YBT XI 23). Translated and transliterated by Starr, *Rituals*, 30-44; see further Lambert, *Oracle questions*, 8.

38 Cf. Démare-Lafont, 'Judicial decision-making', 335.

as the sun god and the patron of important oracles; Zeus was the most powerful god in the Greek world; Hermes the messenger of the supernatural; Jupiter was considered a ruling power determining future occurrences in the Roman world; Fortuna was another very potent deity, concerned with chance, and therefore it would have been wise to have put questions to her.[39]

What form?

In Mesopotamia, divinatory signs were seen to be relatively close to actual language. The supernatural was said to 'write' (*šaṭāru* and *eṣeru*) the sign into the liver, but also into the sky, oil and other substances, as humans would write cuneiform signs on tablets.[40] Consequently, the boundaries between cuneiform and divinatory signs were sometimes fluid: this was explicitly so when experts appear to have looked for actual cuneiform signs – which the super-

39 It was not strange to ascribe qualities (among them those of being all-seeing or all-knowing) to all the gods but simultaneously to one god in particular at one particular time: H.S. Versnel, *Coping with the gods: wayward readings in Greek theology* (Leiden 2011), especially 398-399; 434-436. On Sky gods as all knowing gods see: ibidem, 437.

40 J.J. Glassner, *Écrire à Sumer: l'invention du cunéiforme* (Paris 2000) 258; Bottéro, J., 'Symptômes, signes, écritures en Mésopotamie ancienne' in: J.P. Vernant *et al.*, *Divination et rationalité* (Paris 1974) 70-197, at 159-160; Rochberg, *The heavenly writing*, 48; Manetti, *Theories of the sign*, 5.

natural would have written – inscribed on livers. Jean-Jacques Glassner has even suggested that perhaps 'La divination, la volonté de déchiffrer les présages et de pénétrer le code graphique propre à la sphère divine, jouerait-elle un rôle moteur lors de l'invention [of writing]?'[41] Regardless of the merits of Glassner's speculative suggestion, it appears that, in theory, the Mesopotamian supernatural and educated humans did the same thing: they wrote.[42]

The supernatural in Greece did not normally write (though its representatives could read).[43] This is true of the Olympic gods at least (with the exception of Athena and the Muses, the patrons of

41 Glassner, *Écrire à Sumer*, 258-259. Here Glassner reverses the traditional paradigm in which writing came first and divination was based on it, put forward among other scholars by Manetti, *Theories of the sign*, 2-5.

42 But note the discrepancy between theory and practice as indicated by Glassner: that the cuneiform sign and the ominous sign differed in a number of ways: 'the shape, the texture, the colour, and the position on the medium. The signification of a written sign, once defined in its shape, does not change if its dimensions vary, or if it is written in one or another colour, if it appears in one or another place of the medium. On the contrary, in the case of an omen, all these parameters contribute to change its signification.' Glassner, 'The invention of writing'.

43 Cf. H.S. Versnel, 'Writing mortals and reading gods: appeal to the gods as a dual strategy in social control' in: D. Cohen (ed.), *Demokratie, Recht und soziale Kontrolle im klassischen Athen* (München 2002) 37-77, at 60-63; also the notes in Versnel, *Coping with the gods*, 383 n.13. An exception seems to be the *Himmelsbrief*.

writing).[44] The supernatural was conceived of as simply placing the sign in the world. Hence, given this cultural difference, the conceptions of the genesis and the nature of the divine sign in Greece and in Mesopotamia were different. The Roman world seems to have resembled the Greek world more closely than it did the Mesopotamian: Romans would interpret signs as an expression of the favourable or unfavourable opinion of the supernatural about a plan or the state of affairs, but not as divine writings.

These diverging conceptions of the sign show a fundamental difference which is crucial to our understanding of the process of divination and the role of the *homo divinans*. If the Mesopotamian sign was seen as a linguistic expression, the process of divination was the translation of the written divine language into the written human language. The expert 'read' the signs written by the supernatural and transposed them into human discourse. Therefore, the education of the expert – as discussed on pp. 147-156 – was essential: in the course of his scholarly training he would have obtained an understanding of both the divine and human language necessary to perform the interpretative process of divination. In a sense, the expert was a translator between the written language of the supernatural and man. In Greece, where the sign was not seen as a primarily linguistic phenomenon, the expert did not translate from one language to the

44 A. Henrichs, 'Writing religion: inscribed texts, ritual authority, and the religious discourse of the polis' in: H. Yunis (ed.), *Written texts and the rise of literate culture in ancient Greece* (Cambridge 2003) 38-58, at 38-40.

other – instead, he rendered the sign *into* a language expressed in words.

Preferred mediums

> Before undertaking anything, whether a business transaction, a marriage, or the purchase of food, you consult the birds by reading the omens, and you give this name of omen to all signs that tell of the future. With you a word is an omen, you call a sneeze an omen, a meeting an omen, an unknown sound an omen, a slave or an ass an omen. Is it not clear that we are a prophetic Apollo to you?[45]

Although Aristophanes implies differently, it is an exaggeration to state that 'everything' could potentially be perceived to be a sign, from a sneeze to a slip of a foot to a shout to an encounter and everything in between. The sign was closely related to the object which functioned as carrier of the sign (the medium). Nevertheless, there appear to have been various objects which did *not* function as a medium.

45 Ar. *Av*. 717-722. Translation E. O'Neill Jr.
ἐλθόντες γὰρ πρῶτον ἐπ' ὄρνις οὕτω πρὸς ἅπαντα τρέπεσθε, | πρός τ' ἐμπορίαν, καὶ πρὸς βιότου κτῆσιν, καὶ πρὸς γάμον ἀνδρός. | ὄρνιν τε νομίζετε πάνθ' ὅσαπερ περὶ μαντείας διακρίνει· | φήμη γ' ὑμῖν ὄρνις ἐστί, πταρμόν τ' ὄρνιθα καλεῖτε, | ξύμβολον ὄρνιν, φωνὴν ὄρνιν, θεράποντ' ὄρνιν, ὄνον ὄρνιν. | ἆρ' οὐ φανερῶς ἡμεῖς ὑμῖν ἐσμὲν μαντεῖος Ἀπόλλων;

The preferences for some mediums can be explained by the availability of a particular medium, or geographical and climatological factors. For example, divination using rivers and canals appears to have occurred in Mesopotamia – although perhaps not very frequently – but not in Greece.

In the Greek world, the supernatural would generally provide signs in objects which were considered 'natural' as opposed to 'cultural' (I see natural and cultural – like magic and religion – as the two ends of a sliding scale).[46] In other words, the supernatural would place a sign in the rustling of a tree, the movements of animals, the spontaneous babbling of a child or the chance remark of an adult (if language is considered something natural), but only very rarely in cultural constructs.[47] One exception to this rule were those cultural constructs explicitly associated with the divine, such as cult images.[48] I shall illustrate this argument by examining the use of potentially edible items during the divinatory process: during preparation, foodstuffs move from being a natural to a cultural object.[49]

46 I am aware of Levi-Strauss' ideas about these terms and the problems with them – which I hope to have avoided by using natural and cultural as a sliding scale: there are many grey areas in between.

47 There are, of course, exceptions such as in Hom. *Od.* 12.395-397. However, this passage could also be read as emphasizing the great exceptionality of roasted meat being a sign from the supernatural.

48 In contrast to Mesopotamian cult images, these were not considered to be the living god: W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart 1977) 153.

49 This division between the raw and the cooked is discussed exten-

Fish were suitable mediums for both evoked and spontaneous divination. Pliny reports an extraordinary way of consulting the supernatural at an oracle in Asia Minor, which appears to have represented a Lycian tradition:[50]

> When the fishes seize it [the food] with avidity, the answer is supposed to be favorable; but if, on the other hand, they reject the food, by flapping it with their tails, the response is considered to be unfavorable.[51]

These divinatory fish were clearly alive and part of the natural world: they could function as a medium. Now, Herodotos relates

sively in C. Lévi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit* (Paris 1964) *passim*. I do not discuss these theories in greater detail, although there is plenty to say. I merely use it to sketch a contrast which, in my opinion, was present in the Greek world.

50 For other attestations on this Lycian tradition see Polycharmus apud Ath. 8.333d-f; Plin. *NH* 31.18.22; Plin. *NH* 32.8.17 (references from, and see further T.R. Bryce, *The Lycians in literary and epigraphic sources* (Copenhagen 1986) 196-198); R. Lebrun, 'Quelques aspects de la divination en Anatolie du sud-ouest', *Kernos* 3 (1990) 185-195, at 192-195; Artem. 1.70-71. This last attestation also concerns fish – yet, Artemidoros is not concerned with the reading of signs from the fishes' behaviour or movement, but he discusses the fish as an object whose perceived eating could be either a positive or a negative sign when appearing in a dream. It is therefore less relevant to our purpose (and a late source at that).

51 Plin. *NH* 31.18.22.6-7. Translation J. Bostock. Edition: Teubner. Responsa ab his petunt incolae cibo, quem rapiunt adnuentes, si vero eventum negent, caudis abigunt.

the miraculous movement of dead fish which were in the fire when Artayctes saw them and realized they were an unprovoked omen meant for him:

> It is related by the people of the Chersonese that a marvelous thing happened one of those who guarded Artayctes. He was frying dried fish, and these as they lay over the fire began to leap and writhe as though they had just been caught. The rest gathered around, amazed at the sight, but when Artayctes saw this strange thing, he called the one who was frying the fish and said to him: "Athenian, do not be afraid of this portent, for it is not to you that it has been sent; it is to me that Protesilaus of Elaeus is trying to signify that although he is dead and dry, he has power given him by the god to take vengeance on me, the one who wronged him. Now therefore I offer a ransom, the sum of one hundred talents to the god for the treasure that I took from his temple. I will also pay to the Athenians two hundred talents for myself and my son, if they spare us."[52]

52 Hdt. 9.120.1-15. Translation A. D. Godley.
Καί τεῳ τῶν φυλασσόντων λέγεται ὑπὸ Χερσονησιτέων ταρίχους ὀπτῶντι τέρας γενέσθαι τοιόνδε· οἱ τάριχοι ἐπὶ τῷ πυρὶ κείμενοι ἐπάλλοντό τε καὶ ἤσπαιρον ὅκως περ ἰχθύες νεοάλωτοι. Καὶ οἱ μὲν περιχυθέντες ἐθώμαζον, ὁ δὲ Ἀρταΰκτης, ὡς εἶδε τὸ τέρας, καλέσας τὸν ὀπτῶντα τοὺς ταρίχους ἔφη· Ξεῖνε Ἀθηναῖε, μηδὲν φοβέο τὸ τέρας τοῦτο· οὐ γὰρ σοὶ πέφηνε, ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ σημαίνει ὁ ἐν Ἐλαιοῦντι Πρωτεσίλεως ὅτι καὶ τεθνεὼς καὶ τάριχος ἐὼν δύναμιν πρὸς θεῶν ἔχει τὸν ἀδικέοντα τίνεσθαι. Νῦν ὦν ἄποινά μοι τάδε ἐθέλω ἐπιθεῖναι, ἀντὶ μὲν χρημάτων τῶν ἔλαβον ἐκ τοῦ ἱροῦ ἑκατὸν τάλαντα καταθεῖναι τῷ θεῷ, ἀντὶ δ' ἐμεωυτοῦ καὶ τοῦ παιδὸς ἀποδώσω τάλαντα διηκόσια Ἀθηναίοισι περιγενόμενος.
For other spontaneous signs see Ath. 8.331f; Ath. 8.361e. Fish could appear in oracles as in Hdt. 1.62.4-1.63.3.

These were fish in the process of being prepared for consumption: the borderline is in the cooking. Before the fish were done, they were part of nature and could be used as a medium. When they were ready to be eaten, the product had become a part of the meal – a cultural construct – and was no longer appropriate to serve as a medium for divinatory signs: we have no such attestations in the sources.[53]

This applies to other foodstuffs: I shall examine some doubtful instances of foodstuffs – flour, eggs, cheese and the *splanchna* - used as a divinatory medium, showing that they do not undermine the general rule. My first object is the liver (and the other organs) used during extispicy. The animal would first have to have been ritually slaughtered and its intestines inspected. When this had been completed, a communal meal would have been held at which individuals ate, among other dishes, the *splanchna*, the heart, lungs, liver, spleen and kidneys.[54] Portions were not the prerogative of humans: a god such as Hermes (according to some sources) would have been served his share as well. If divination was performed, this was done when the intestines were raw.

Eggs, too, were, at least in their uncooked state, raw products and could therefore be used to divine with (although it should be noted that divination by means of eggs was a very uncommon practice).[55]

53 E.g., Ath. 8.331f.

54 Arist. *Part. An.* 665a28-672b8. Cf. Van Straten, *Hierà kalá*, 131. See for the best discussion of an eating Hermes: Versnel, *Coping with the gods*, 310-377.

55 Only one reference to divination by means of eggs can be found.

Aleuromanteia and *alphitomanteia* were two ways of divining using flour. Although there were differences in the origin and production of *alphita* and *aleura*, both were a half-finished product which was not ready for consumption.[56] Cheese, on the other hand, *was* an edible product which was used as a medium for signs and therefore an exception to the basic rule. The production of cheese is already attested in Homer's *Odyssey*: the Cyclops makes cheese.[57] It was produced and eaten regularly. Hence, cheese seems to be the only problematic foodstuff, as it was a product made by man and a medium for signs. However, during the period with which I am concerned in this monograph cheese does not seem to have been used to divine with.[58] In a nutshell, the supernatural was not generally considered to chose foodstuffs ready for consumption as a vehicle for signs.

These findings on food and divination are only a part of a larger divinatory reality: a distinction is maintained between the cultural

See the *ovispex* in C.A. Lobeck, *Aglaophamus sive de theologiae mysticae Graecorum causis II. III. Idemque Poetarum Orphicorum dispersas reliquias collegit* 2 vols (Königsberg 1829) Vol. 1, 361. Eggs of other birds were a more luxury food: A. Dalby, *Food in the ancient world from A to Z* (London 2003) s.v. egg.

56 Cf. on *alphita* and *aleura* L.A. Moritz, *Grain-mills and flour in classical antiquity* (Oxford 1958) 149.

57 Hom. *Od.* 9.237-249.

58 Although we have two attestations: Artem. 2.69; Ael. *NA* 8.5. Artemidoros, although late in time, denigrates those who divine by cheese as liars and false prophets, mentioning them in one breath with Pythagoreans, palmists and necromancers.

and natural world. In the Greek world the supernatural only placed signs in the natural world.[59] Why? Perhaps because the natural world could not be influenced by humans, which made it more suitable to divination: the medium in which the sign was placed had to be 'unspoiled' and not susceptible to human influence – which added to its high level of reliability. For example, the Pythia at Delphi was supposed to be unsusceptible to human influence and was therefore generally seen as very reliable.

In Rome, too, 'natural' signs were the most important. The liver and birds, important mediums in Rome, are both 'natural'. From the prodigies listed in Livy and Julius Obsequens, it would seem that Roman prodigies can be assigned to four categories: 1) inanimate in the heavens, 2) inanimate on the land, 3) actions of animals and 4) actions of humans. The first category consists of lightning, thunder, storms, showers of stones, earth, blood, rain and other water portents, the sun, moon, meteors and comets, unusual nocturnal lights and strange manifestations in the sky. The second category, signs in inanimate entities on the land, consists of earthquakes, the subsidence or upthrust of the land, plagues and pestilence, fire, the appearance of blood and trees. Animals which could function as signs included birds, wolves, serpents, bees, wasps, locusts, mice, fish, cows, oxen and bulls, horses, mules and asses, pigs, lambs, goats and domestic fowl. Humans could function as signs when a

59 While there are, of course, always possible exceptions. I have not discussed drinking, only eating in the above. An instance in which the way wine was poured was thought to be an omen is: Ath. 1.13de.

child was born deformed, if a person had a peculiar deformation in form or shape (such as a remarkable mole and so on), if a person made a certain utterance or stumbled and fell. Furthermore dreams, the appearance of ghosts, mysterious voices and sounds, accidental occurrences, the 'behaviour' of statues and images, or the lack of chastity of vestal virgins were all taken to be spontaneous signs. These were all 'natural' mediums – with the exception of the 'behaviour' of statues and images.

In Mesopotamia, the range of mediums in which signs could manifest themselves was much wider: in addition to the signs in natural objects and half finished products, in the compendium *Šumma ālu* signs are also manifested in manmade objects[60] Examples are the way a city or particular houses within that city were laid out; the way the foundations of a house were laid, what a house looked like, the doors of a temple, palace and house, repairs to various buildings and

60 On signs in animals see P.-A. Beaulieu, 'Les animaux dans la divination en Mésopotamie', *Topoi,* suppl. 2 (2000) 351-365. Recently, Stefan Maul has published an article on aleuromancy, a half finished product – see his bibliography for an overview of the primary and secondary literature available: S.M. Maul, 'Aleuromantie: von der Altorientalischen Kunst, mit Hilfe von Opfermehl das Mass Göttlichen Wohlwollens zu ermitteln' in: D. Shehata, F. Weiershäuser & K.V. Zand (eds), *Von Göttern und Menschen: Beiträge zu Literatur und Geschichte des Alten Orients: Festschrift für Brigitte Groneberg* (Leiden 2010) 115-13.

the temple and so on.[61] Other examples include divination by means of artificial light (fire and lamps).[62]

Although some Greeks poked fun at people in their own society who tended to regard 'everything' as a potential medium, few Greeks actually seem to have subscribed to this idea. In complete contrast to this, the idea that signs might manifest themselves in any natural or man-made object or phenomenon was commonplace of Mesopotamia.

Preferred divinatory methods

Not all methods were deemed equally reliable. In Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia two methods were preferred: astrology and extispicy, which were regarded as complementary. It should be noted that, although cultural constructs could be used as mediums, they were not considered the most reliable. Some claim that astrology might have enjoyed a somewhat higher status in the Neo-Assyrian period. They argue that extispicy was the preferred method until the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the first.[63] Celestial

61 Published of *Šumma ālu* are Tablets 1-40 (Freedman, *If a city is set on a height*). The unpublished Tablets 40-53 from the same series are said to contain similar content.

62 *Šumma ālu* Tablets 91-94. Divination by means of 'cultural light' is also come across in the Greek Magical Papyri (which are not discussed further here).

63 Starr, *Rituals*, 4-5.

observation is supposed to have assumed a more important role in the Neo-Assyrian period – although confirmation by extispicy was sometimes still considered necessary.[64] Others argue that extispicy remained the most important method.[65] Wherever the truth lies, the primary positions taken by celestial observation and extispicy are underlined by the fact that other methods, such as dreams, needed to be checked and confirmed using these methods: a dream of Assurbanipal had to be confirmed by extispicy.[66] Both astrology and extispicy are examples of expensive scholarly divination: a professional expert was required and an animal and other offerings were also indispensable in the use of extispicy. These more expensive, and therefore exclusive, methods were also deemed the most reliable.

In Greece, prophecy and oracles – by means of discourse – seem to have been the preferred divinatory methods: the consensus was that these were the most reliable, although there are also many reports of extispicy taking this position in a military context. The primacy of oracles can also be observed in Plato's *Phaedrus*: he argues that inspiration, or *mania*, is a divine gift, whereas non-inspired divination is a human creation.[67] The former was thought much more reliable. A

64 This has been argued many times see, e.g., Farber, 'Witchcraft, magic and divination', 1907; E. Reiner, *Your thwarts in pieces, your mooring rope cut: poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* (Michigan 1985) 9.

65 Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 610-611; 634-634.

66 For such a dream and its confirmation by means of extispicy see SAA 4 202.

67 Pl. *Phdr*. 244d. See also for the connection between 'mania' and

passage from Euripides' *Elektra* suggests that this view was shared by at least some of his contemporaries: '[...] the oracles of Loxias are sure, but human prophecy I dismiss'.[68] Theoretically, everyone could travel to a famous oracle to ask his or her question, or – if making a long journey was not an option – visit a local oracle. Only an educated guess can be made about the status of the other methods. The wealthy appear to have used provoked ornithomancy and extispicy: these must have been more expensive than other methods because an expert would have been required (who would need to be paid or compensated) and birds and other animals had to be bought or kept.[69] The remaining evidence for cleromancy and similar methods is scant, the exception being that from Roman Asia Minor: but these were probably popular methods of divination for the poor.[70] Given

divination Eur. *Bacch.* 298-299.

68 Eur. *El.* 399-400. Translation E.P. Coleridge. βροτῶν δὲ μαντικὴν here stands for non-inspired methods of divination.
'[...] Λοξίου γὰρ ἔμπεδοι χρησμοί, βροτῶν δὲ μαντικὴν χαίρειν ἐῶ.
Or see, for a mantic dream which is checked by consulting an oracle: Aesch. *PV* 655-662; and for a 'sign in the sky' which is checked by consulting an oracle Dem. *Orat.* 43.66; and Plutarch's ideas about the primacy of oracular practice (Plut. *Mor. De Pyth. or.* 407c).

69 References to ornithomancy by the kings and powerful individuals are abundant (e.g., Hom. *Il.* 24.290-295; Pind. *Isthm.* 6.42-54). See for extispicy used by high-ranking individuals a source such as Eur. *El.* 800-843.

70 Cleromancy is discussed in more detail below. In Artemidoros, we find that some ways of divining (cleromancy, necromancy and so on)

their exclusivity, ornithomancy and extispicy could have enjoyed a higher status than other methods of divination, but they were not as prestigious as oracles.

In Roman divination of the Republican period, the *prodigia* – remarkable occurrences – were most important, influencing the course of daily life in all its aspects. *Prodigia* were extensively recorded by authors such as Livy and Julius Obsequens. When the Senate had decided that a certain occurrence was a *prodigium* and accepted it as such, expiations were usually required. This had consequences for daily business in the city of Rome: trade and politics could be influenced by the measures thought necessary. Other important methods were the inspection of the *exta* – after sacrifice – and the *auspicia* (observation of the behaviour of birds in a limited area) – which were performed before such events as sessions of the Senate, lawsuits, new endeavours and so on, which gave them an important public function. Interpretations of *prodigia* and the inspection of *exta* and *auspicia* were the three preferred forms of divination in Republican Rome. There is no strong or convincing indication that one of these was generally perceived to have been more reliable than the others.

These findings lead to the observation that in Rome and Mesopotamia objects and natural phenomena, here classified in the category of observation, were used as highly esteemed mediums, whereas in Greece oracles, in the category of discourse, and observa-

are dismissed as unreliable: Artem. 2.69.

tion, were most popular.[71] An explanation for these differences must tie in with more general ideas about divination in the three cultural areas. In Mesopotamia, supernatural 'writing' played a very important role, corresponding to the literate nature of Mesopotamian divination. The Greeks seemed to have had a – relative – preference for being contacted by their supernatural by means of spoken words. Hence, it seems logical that words or even non-verbal noises (for example, auditory signs such as the rustling of leaves) uttered or induced by the supernatural were deemed the most reliable way of hearing from them. This assertion fits in with the relatively more generally oral nature of Greek divination. On the other hand, in Rome, the supernatural appears to have manifested itself in visual 'pictures' formed by objects. Might this indicate a relative preference for visual supernatural signs and a visual divinatory culture?[72]

71 Whether they were 'Panhellenic' or 'civic' – a distinction which has not been taken into account enough, as C. Morgan argues: Morgan, 'Divination and society', 18. See further on the early history and foundations of different oracle sites: C. Morgan, *Athletes and oracles: the transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the eighth century BC* (Cambridge 1990) *passim*.

72 The divinatory materials might seem to suggest another conclusion than many have reached in the past, noting that Romans tended not to visualize their supernatural but preferred to see them as 'powers' (*numina*).

RECOGNIZING A SIGN

How could a sign be recognized? When a sign was evoked, at least the individual involved already knew what he was looking for. When did an individual judge an occurrence to have been a spontaneous sign sent by the supernatural? This is where *homo divinans* and text come together to consider the sign.

A sign?

The Mesopotamian compendia provide us with a precise indication of what spontaneous signs looked like. Apart from perceived spontaneous movements and appearances of the moon, sun, stars and other celestial and atmospheric phenomena – such as the weather – treated in *Enuma Anu Enlil*, examples of specific spontaneous signs on earth can be found in *Šumma ālu*. Among these are incidents in the home, the people who visited the home, the behaviour of animals (especially snakes, scorpions and other small animals and insects) in the city, the behaviour of domestic animals kept in the vicinity of the home such as sheep, oxen, donkeys and horses, the behaviour of wild animals such as elephants and lions, the way a lamp shone and so on and so forth.[73] All these occurrences, and many more referred to in other compendia, could be recognized as signs. But how?

73 Maul, 'Omina und Orakel', 59-60.

Of course there were signs which were considered monstrous and exceedingly strange – and therefore instantly recognizable. Some of these signs are discussed in the Mesopotamian satirical text *aluzinnu* – translated as 'The Jester'.[74] Unfortunately, this text which deals with 'bizarre omens' has been preserved only in a very fragmentary condition. Roman signs such as the birth of a deformed animal and the Greek moving fish also fall into this category.[75] Therefore, first of all a sign could be anything out of the ordinary. It has been said that 'For the Mesopotamian, in other words, the ominous significance of reality did not lie in the normally functioning universe, but in the deviations from it […]'.[76] The same has been argued for Roman and Greek signs. However, the occurrence itself was not necessarily an obvious deviation from normality at all – it was the individual who made it so. When an animal crossed the road in a particular way, this did not have to be a deviation from normality as such. In other words, no exceedingly strange thing had to happen for a divinatory sign to occur, but an individual had to notice the occurrence and find it significant: 'significance' was very much in the eye of the beholder.

74 K. 4334; K 9886; K 6392; K 9287; K 8321. See for an up-to-date edition and translation B.R. Foster, 'Humor and cuneiform literature', *JANES* 6 (1974) 69-85, at 74-79; W. Römer, 'Der Spassmacher im alten Zweistromland, zum "Sitz im Leben" altmesopotamischer Texte', *Persica* 7 (1975/1976) 43-68.

75 See on the fish Hdt. 9.120. Deformed animals can be found throughout the literature on *prodigia* and *monstra*.

76 Starr, *Rituals*, 3.

A number of factors might have stimulated the individual to consider an occurrence a sign. Firstly, something could occur which 'in some way relates to a current concern of the agent; secondly, the occurrence might belong to a culturally established catalogue of signs; thirdly, the occurrence might be so attention demanding in itself that it seemed to demand an explanation.'[77] In Cicero's *De divinatione*, it is reported that Lucius Paulus was elected consul for the second time and was also given command of the war against Perseus.[78] When he came home and kissed his daughter Terentia, she was sad because her puppy, Persa, had just died. Lucius Paulus took this to be a positive sign meaning that he would win the war. This is an example of the first way a sign was thought to occur: Lucius Paulus had a current concern and interpreted an occurrence to address it.[79] The second way a sign could be said to have occurred was because 'everyone' recognized it as such because it was embedded in the communal memory. A Roman example is the observation of *dirae aves*, birds thought to be negative signs.[80] An example of a normally positive sign was the hearing of a thunderclap to the

77 Lisdorf, *The dissemination of divination*, 191.

78 Cic. *Div*. 1.46.103; Val. Max. 1.5.3. For a Greek example see the way Thucydides reports the mutilation of the herms: it was thought to be a sign relating to a military expedition (Thuc. 6.27.1-6.27.3).

79 See for a Greek – mythical, but illustrative, example: Apollod. *Epit*. 3.

80 See the birds mentioned as *dirae aves* in Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, Vol. 4, 199.

left.[81] When a cow spoke, when a four-footed cock was born or when particular objects – such as statues – were struck by lightning, these were thought to be such extraordinary occurrences they needed an explanation, hence fitting into the third category.[82]

The three main categories could also overlap and come into play simultaneously. It could be argued, for instance, that in the ancient world an eclipse was almost always deemed to be a sign from the supernatural, on account of its extraordinary impact on nature and its rarity. Thucydides relates that people were shocked by the fact that certain alarming occurrences such as eclipses took place with such frequency during the Peloponnesian war.[83] Arguably, these eclipses fall into all three categories referred to above: apart from the fact that an eclipse demanded attention and required some explanation, the Greeks were fighting a great war and they were alert to all occurrences which might have come from the supernatural. The

81 Cic. *Div*. 2.35.74. These examples are paraphrased by Lisdorf, *The dissemination of divination,* 192.

82 The examples can be found in Obseq. 53. This paragraph is based on Lisdorf, *The dissemination of divination*, 191-192. For a Greek example see Ael. *VH* 12.57. See also for a more abstract explanation about the reasons an individual would consider an occurrence to be a sign: A. Lisdorf, 'If a dog pricks up its ears like a wolf, it is a bad sign…Omens and their meanings' in: K. Munk & A. Lisdorf (ed.), *Unveiling the hidden* (forthcoming) 346-350.

83 Thuc. 1.23.3. Cf. on eclipses (not exclusively during the Peloponnesian war) Thuc. 2.28.1; Thuc. 2.8.3; Thuc. 7.50.4; Hdt. 5.86.4; Hdt. 9.10.3; Hdt. 8.64.1; Plut. *Vit. Nic.* 23.

eclipse was a standard sign in all catalogues of signs: everyone recognized it and was affected by its perceived consequences - all the Greek soldiers, the Roman legionaries and the king of Assyria too.[84] An example of a Roman sign which fits my second and third categories is the birth of a hermaphrodite, which was both inherently negative and required an explanation as it was so extraordinary. Recognition of Greek, Mesopotamian and Roman signs did, in this sense, not differ much.

When in doubt...

The *homo divinans* always had the option of deciding – on the spot and on whichever basis he had to hand – whether or not he considered an occurrence to be a sign. However, he was also allowed to express doubt. When a potential sign occurred in Mesopotamia there was always a written compendium which could be consulted. This textual basis for divination – in combination with an expert's training – also ensured that an expert would know what to look for when a client consulted him about a potential sign. When the expert had to interpret a sign, he would extract from his compendia those *lemmata* he regarded as potentially relevant or applicable. These

84 The Roman soldiers were told an eclipse would come and that they should not panic because this was, according to their leader, a natural phenomenon (Liv. 44.37.5-9). That the king should not be afraid: SAA 10 57.

would be sent to the king in a letter. He would decide on which lemma he found most appropriate (perhaps by consulting other experts).[85] This leads to the conclusion that it was not a straightforward process for the expert to connect an occurrence to a particular lemma in his compendium: more options were open.[86] This has been called the polyvalence of the sign.

In the Greek world, the question of whether or not an occurrence should be considered to be a sign was even harder to answer. When something occurred there were usually no sets of written textual guidelines (with the exception of a text such as that of Melampos and later in time dream books and guidelines for dice oracles) to help in deciding which occurrence was a sign in those cases in which intuition or experience did not provide the solution.[87] When in doubt, he would call in an expert who would decide either on the basis of his experience or of precedent.

In Rome a number of occurrences were regularly classified as signs. The most obvious were, again, the absolutely extraordinary events.[88] Furthermore, it seems that certain occurrences had to be accepted into the communal discourse as being signs, only after

85 SAA 10 100.

86 As, e.g., in SAA 10 23.

87 For dice oracles see those published in Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*. It should be noted that the dice oracles known to us are mainly from the first centuries AD, so rather late for the purposes of this discussion.

88 Pliny gives a number of examples in Plin. *NH* 17.38.244-245.

which it would have been permissible to report them as such. Whenever a precedent had been created (it is still uncertain how this was done – a list of 'recognized' signs would have been a suitable vehicle to assist in such an endeavour, but no such document is known), the first report of a particular sign would be followed by others. This idea is supported by the overview of *prodigia* drawn up by S. Rasmussen.[89] A development can be traced in the acceptance of lightning strikes or thunder as a sign. The earliest reference is found in Livy's account of the year 295 BC:

> This year, so successful in the operations of war, was filled with distress at home, arising from a pestilence, and with anxiety, occasioned by prodigies: for accounts were received that, in many places, showers of earth had fallen; and that very many persons, in the army of Appius Claudius, had been struck by lightning; in consequence of which, the books were consulted.[90]

The thirty-three signs, reported in the years before 295 BC and collected by Livy (and Rasmussen) do not include either lightning or thunder. Although lightning and thunder had probably been interpreted in divinatory fashion – brontoscopy – before, they had not previously been reported and accepted as *prodigia*, as far as we can

89 Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 53-116.

90 Liv. 10.31.8. Translation D. Spillan & C. Evans.
Felix annus bellicis rebus, pestilentia grauis prodigiisque sollicitus; nam et terram multifariam pluuisse et in exercitu Ap. Claudi plerosque fulminibus ictos nuntiatum est; librique ob haec aditi.

tell from the sources. This might be more than a coincidence: after 295 there was never a succession of thirty-three signs in a row of which at least not one consisted of something or someone being struck by lightning or a sign in the rumblings of thunder. This lends support to the theory that 295 BC marks the acceptance into the general discourse of lightning strikes or thunder as a sign, which was something both individuals and experts knew they could report. Precedents ingrained in communal memory seem to have played a major role in the Roman reporting of possible signs by individuals and the acceptance of these as signs by the Senate.

The Roman acknowledgement of occurrences as signs was heavily based on communal discourse and precedent; in Mesopotamia it was based on the systematization of written text; in Greece on precedent (something which will be discussed further on pp. 353-357). In the absence of written text, decisions about what was and what was not a sign were made in different ways. The *homo divinans* based his judgement of a sign either on an oral tradition which could not be verified, on his past experience with divine signs or on earlier events preserved in the communal memory whose contents were beyond argument or dispute. Again, this made the Greek *homo divinans* relatively more important in the process of distinguishing ordinary occurrences from signs. The decision was made on the basis of his personal authority, which he would continually have needed to assert by making the 'right' decisions.

Not a sign?

Recognizing an occurrence as a sign was one thing – deciding that an occurrence which could potentially be a sign, was actually not a sign, was something else indeed. There appears to have been a basic difference between the practices in Mesopotamia and Rome, whereas little is known about this aspect of divination in Greece. In Mesopotamia, there was no reason not to acknowledge such an occurrence as a divinatory sign (unless it had not been spotted).[91]

This is in contrast to Roman practice: not every rumble of thunder was necessarily a sign – there was a complicated procedure of acceptance, only some aspects of which are illuminated by the sources. However, it can be stated with confidence that not every occurrence which had previously been declared a sign, would have automatically again been accepted as a sign when it re-occurred. Although previous acceptance was important and lay at the heart of the process, other contextual and procedural factors had to be taken into account. There were a number of stages in this process: *nuntiatio* (announcement of an occurrence as a possible sign), *relatio* (reporting it to the Senate) and *susceptio* (acceptance of the occurrence as a sign by the Senate).[92] For our purposes, the most important stage is the *susceptio*, when the Senate decided whether the occurrence should be considered as a *prodigium publicum* or as *non susceptum*.[93]

91 Which could have been on account of different circumstances, for example, prevailing bad weather conditions. See SAA 15 5.

92 Rosenberger, 'Republican *nobiles*', 293.

93 See, e.g., Liv. 43.13.6 for the use of this term.

If the occurrence was accepted, it would be taken to signify that the *pax deorum* had been disturbed and action would usually have to be taken in the form of expiation.[94] That not all is clear to us in this procedure, especially in the *susceptio* stage, is illustrated by an example discussed in Rosenberger's book on Roman *prodigia*: in 173 BC there was a plague of locusts in the *ager Pomptinus*. This was accepted as a sign and the requisite expiations were performed. One year later, a plague of locusts afflicted Apulia. Although it appears to have been a giant plague, it is nowhere reported in the sources as sign from the supernatural.[95] Since large parts of Apulia had been confiscated after the Hannibalic War, it cannot be argued that the second plague was thought irrelevant because it had occurred outside the *ager Romanus*. We simply do not know why the second plague was (probably) rejected as a *prodigium* (*publicum*).

Certainly, there were a number of formal reasons for not accepting an event as a sign. The first was the criterion of location: the Senate could decide that a sign was not a public sign because it had not taken place on *ager publicus*, but on private property, which would have left it to be dealt with by the individual, should he feel the need.[96] As Rosenberger puts it '[...] Ein Zeichen musste [...] in

94 There are, of course, also situations in which the man in command of the army had to acknowledge the sign *ex-officio* and the Senate was not involved: Liv. 38.18.9.

95 Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 29. See Liv. 42.2.5-7 and Liv. 42.10.6-7 for the two reports of locusts and the subsequent action taken.

96 Liv. 43.13.6; cf., Rasmussen, *Public portents*, 47.

Verbinding mit einem wichtigen Ort oder einer Person im Rahmen der *res publica* stehen, um als Prodigium angenommen zu werden.'[97] To illustrate this, a passage in Livy shows that two potential prodigies were not acknowledged because one had happened in a place belonging to a private individual, while the other had occurred in a foreign location. The first was the springing up of a palm tree, the second was when a soldier's spear had burned for two hours without being consumed.[98] Both potential portents had occurred before, but then 'on land or places belonging to the state or to persons in the employ of the state'.[99]

The decision about whether or not to accept the sign could also be taken on the basis of other factors:

> In the beginning of this year [193 BC], the consulship of Lucius Cornelius and Quintus Minucius, earthquakes were reported with such frequency that people grew tired, not only of the cause itself, but of the ceremonies prescribed on that account; for the Senate could not be convened nor public business transacted, since the consuls were busy with sacrifices and rites of expiation [...]. Likewise, on the recommendation of the Senate, the consuls proclaimed that on any day on which an earthquake had been reported and rites ordained, no one should report another earthquake.[100]

97 Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 28.

98 Liv. 43.13.6. Cf. Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 28.

99 Krauss, *Omens, portents, and prodigies*, 32. Cf. Rosenberger, *Gezähmte Götter*, 28-29.

100 Liv. 34.55.1-2; 4. Translation E.T. Sage.
Principio anni quo L. Cornelius Q. Minucius consules fuerunt terrae motus

Livy recounts that there were so many signs – which had to be expiated, with the concomitant public disturbance – that the continuity of public life was actually affected. The Senate set a limit on the maximum number of reports of earthquakes (and hence potentially accepted signs and consequent expiations) which could occur on a single day as a measure to obviate public disturbances. It might be argued that the Senate was trying to tighten the rules governing the recognition of earthquakes as signs. In any way, the absence of reports of these occurrences, the Senate would not have had to acknowledge any signs.

Third, and lastly, the Senate also had to power to discard a possible sign because there were not enough witnesses to the event and the report was therefore not deemed reliable.[101]

In a nutshell, the Roman divinatory system allowed the Senate to decide which occurrence was a sign from the supernatural. This authority gave the Senate enormous power to influence the course of events. The magistrates had similar powers when they took the *auspicia* before an undertaking. Such dominance was unparalleled in Greece and Mesopotamia, where no such decisions about the acknowledgement of an occurrence as a sign could be made by

ita crebri nuntiabantur ut non rei tantum ipsius sed feriarum quoque ob id indictarum homines taederet; nam neque senatus haberi neque res publica administrari poterat sacrificando expiandoque occupatis consulibus. [...] Item ex auctoritate senatus consules edixerunt ne quis, quo die terrae motu nuntiato feriae indictae essent, eo die alium terrae motum nuntiaret.

101 Liv. 5.15.1.

those with political power – at least not formally. Those with political clout could perhaps exert some influence on the interpretation – but this was a different matter. Ultimately, the exercise of political power did not lie in the hands of the Greek and Mesopotamian *homines divinantes*. In Rome, on the other hand, those who had political power could also have religious power. To sum up, in Republican Rome authority over the divinatory process had a different location to Greece and Mesopotamia (see also pp. 187-188).[102]

Checking and ignoring a sign

After he had acknowledged an occurrence as a sign, the next step a Greek would have needed to take was to interpret it and make his decision according to what the sign advised.[103] Once the meaning of

102 Cf. Parker, G*reek religion*, 44-46 who agrees that divinatory experts had no power in the process of decision making. I would add that the decision makers had no, or perhaps only occasional, power in the process of divination in Greece. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule – such as the seer Lampon also discussed by Parker. He also refers to M. Beard, 'Priesthood in the Roman Republic' in: M. Beard & J. North (eds), *Pagan priests: religion and power in the ancient world* (London 1990) 19-48, at 42-43 with whom I do not completely agree.

103 Not consulting the supernatural seems to have been against Greek *mores*, at least if we trust Herodotos and Euripides on this: Hdt.

a sign had been found out, ignoring it was certainly unwise.[104] The arrogant leader Anaxibios did ignore the meaning of a sign from the supernatural – and this arrogance led to his death. He acknowledged this mistake at the end of his life:[105]

> Having done all these things he was not disappointed, for Anaxibius did come marching back, even though—at least, as the story ran—his sacrifices on that day had not proved favourable; but despite that fact, filled with disdainful confidence because he was proceeding through a friendly country and to a friendly city, [...] "Gentlemen, it is honourable for me to die here, but do you hurry to safety before coming to close engagement with the enemy." Thus he spoke, and taking his shield from his shieldbearer, fell fighting on that spot. [106]

5.42; Eur. *Hipp*. 1055-1059.

104 This can be seen throughout time see, e.g., Hom. *Od.* 20.350-358; Hdt. 3.124-3.125; Hdt. 5.72.4; possibly Hdt. 9.41.4; Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 73.1; Ach. Tat. 5.3-4; in Hdt. 7.139 the Athenians are praised for ignoring an oracle which ordered them to abandon Athens when the Persians came – however, they did not actually ignore the oracle, they just chose to request a new one from the Delphic Oracle (cf. below, 'ignoring signs'). The oracle had to be accepted and acted upon: Eur. *IT* 105.

105 Other Greek examples are Hdt. 3.124-3.125; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.44; Eur. *Suppl.* 155-158; Eur. *Suppl.* 212-218.

106 Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.36-39. Translation C.L. Brownson.
ταῦτα δὲ ποιήσας οὐκ ἐψεύσθη, ἀλλ' ὁ Ἀναξίβιος ἀπεπορεύετο, ὡς μὲν ἐλέγετο, οὐδὲ τῶν ἱερῶν γεγενημένων αὐτῷ ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ, ἀλλὰ καταφρονήσας, ὅτι διὰ φιλίας τε ἐπορεύετο καὶ εἰς πόλιν φιλίαν [...] Ἄνδρες, ἐμοὶ μὲν ἐνθάδε καλὸν ἀποθανεῖν· ὑμεῖς δὲ πρὶν συμμεῖξαι τοῖς πολεμίοις σπεύδετε εἰς τὴν σωτηρίαν. καὶ ταῦτ' ἔλεγε καὶ παρὰ τοῦ ὑπασπιστοῦ λαβὼν τὴν ἀσπίδα ἐν

The same way of dealing with signs can be seen in the Roman world.[107] Individual Romans could reject a potential sign with a prayer or by spitting.[108] Similar rejections of potential signs by the Senate have been discussed above. However, ignoring acknowledged signs was another matter. In 217 BC Flaminius ignored signs which were unfavourable. The first sign was that his horse stumbled and fell in front of a statue of Jupiter (inherently negative) – and then he also defied unfavourable auspices. According to some sources, he was responsible for the defeat of the Roman army at the Trasimene Lake because he had ignored these signs.[109] Another example: there are accounts of Roman *haruspices* consciously ignoring the consequences of the meaning of a sign because it portended the destruction of the *haruspices* themselves.[110] By keeping the interpretation to themselves, they hoped to prevent the – for them – negative outcome. They were, however, found out. In Mesopotamian sources there is a similar account (but of a legendary nature) conveying the

χώρᾳ αὐτοῦ μαχόμενος ἀποθνῄσκει.

107 Not performing a ritual correctly, like in Cic. *Div*. 1.17.33, was quite another matter.

108 Rosenberger, 'Omen', *Brill's New Pauly Online*. Visited 11-04-2011.

109 Cic. *Div*. 1.35.77-78. For another example see Obseq. 17 in which the consul Postumius travelled to his province although a number of sacrificial victims were missing the heads of the liver. Other examples of individuals ignoring signs: Cic. *Div*. 1.52.119; Cic. *Div*. 1.16.29 (these two cases are then refuted in Book 2); Liv. 25.16; Liv. 27.26.14-27.2.

110 Obseq. 44. This is something quite different from – consciously or subconsciously – misinterpreting a sign.

message that signs should not be ignored: the 'Cuthean Legend' tells us that the third-millennium King Naram Sin consulted the experts but the extispicy gave him a negative answer about going into battle.[111] He decided to disregard this, after which, according to the legend, his armies of respectively 120,000, 90,000 and 60,700 men were destroyed. Ignoring the signs would inexorably be punished.

Furthermore, there were cases in Mesopotamia – just as there were in the Greek and Roman worlds – of a double check being carried out after an unwanted, negative or uncertain outcome. When the second sign appeared to be positive, ignoring the first sign was regarded as justifiable. This idea is inherent in Mesopotamian extispicy.[112] It can also be found in Greece: when Xenophon received a divinatory outcome which was not to his liking, he had the option of repeating the divinatory process. The most notorious Greek literary occasion on which such a 'second opinion' was sought is that of the Athenians asking the Delphic Oracle what they should do now that the Persians were approaching. The first oracle stated that they should leave the city and save themselves. A number of Athenians did not like this outcome and proceeded to ask for a second oracle:

111 Standard Babylonian recension.

112 For the need of a check-up see, e.g., SAA 4 41 rev. 12 or see the first, second and third extispicy reports in SAA 4 43 rev. 14-24. See for a fundamental analysis of this issue Koch, 'Cognitive theory and the first-millennium extispicy ritual', 43-60. See for a Greek example: Xen. *An.* 6.4.16.

the famous oracle of the wooden walls.[113] As Pierre Bonnechere convincingly argues, this should not be seen as a sign of mistrust but of piety: 'it offered greater protection to the consultant, while clarifying the single truth received and investing it with additional religion [sic] authority.'[114]

In short, although asking for a second sign – and subsequently ignoring the first – can be argued to have been part of asking a second opinion, ignoring a sign as such was a different matter. This was definitely something to be avoided, in Rome, in Greece and in Mesopotamia.

Why was this so? Again, the reciprocal basis of the divinatory process plays an important role. While the supernatural would continue to bestow gifts at all times, man had to accept what was handed out on account of his subordinate position in the asymmetrical relationship. Gift rejection (ignoring a sign or discarding it outright) would not only have been ignoring the supernatural: it would have been a denial of the privileged position of the supernatural in this relation-

113 Hdt. 7.139. Another example in Eur. *Ion* 299-302; 407-409 where the oracle of Trophonius does not want to disclose any information before the oracle at Delphi has done so.

114 P. Bonnechere, 'Oracles and Greek mentalities: the mantic confirmations of mantic revelations' in: J. Dijkstra, J. Kroesen & Y. Kuiper (eds), *Myths, martyrs, and modernity* (Leiden 2010) 115-133, at 133. for examples of the use of more than one divinatory method see Xen. *An.* 6.5.21; Xen. *An.* 6.5.2; Xen. *Cyr.* 3.3.22. Signs seem to have confirmed each other in the following passages: Arr. *Anab.* 7.30; Plut. *Vit. Nic.* 13.

ship and, up to a point, even an attempt to destroy the reciprocal ties between supernatural and man. If the sign were rejected, this would have redefined the relationship between the giver and the recipient and this could only be bad news for man.[115]

Context

Context determined the meaning of the sign in Mesopotamia, where the month in which the sign occurred was considered highly significant, as were other contextual factors such as the exact day on which a sign manifested itself or the direction of the wind, to give just two examples from a much longer list.[116] Moreover, the combination of one sign with another could also be significant. One example is the following: if an animal was born with eyes on its forehead, the prince's brothers should leave both the country and the army. However, if an animal had eyes plus a bump on his forehead, the prince would enjoy a long reign, an apparently positive interpretation which might not have been expected in the light of the previous interpretation.[117] A similar interpretation by context is found in the

115 B. Schwartz, 'The social psychology of the gift' in: A.E. Komter (ed.), *The gift: an interdisciplinary perspective* (Amsterdam 1996) 69-89, at 71; Mauss, 'Essai sur le don', 161-164.

116 As, e.g., in SAA 10 26; SAA 10 79.

117 Tablet 10 44' and 45' in the reconstruction by Leichty, Šumma izbu, 125.

Etruscan brontoscopic calendar (*De Ostensis*), which will have been used in Rome. It ascribed various meanings to thunder depending on the day of the year.[118] Melampos' text on birthmarks also indicates some form of context: the meaning seems to depend on the gender of the person. These examples suggest that contextual elements, including the simultaneous occurrence of various signs, determined the meaning the Mesopotamian sign more so than they did in Greece and Rome. In Mesopotamia, not only did written text or perceived randomization provide some sort of 'objectivity', the context in which the sign appeared counted as well. At least in theory, the Greek expert had the option of ignoring context when interpreting a sign.[119]

Concluding observations

At various points in the preceding discussion, differences between the Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman ways of recognizing, acknowledging and interpreting signs have been noted. These seem to offer

118 For the text of the brontoscopic calendar see J. MacIntosh Turfa, 'The Etruscan brontoscopic calendar' in: N. Thomson de Grummond & E. Simon (eds), *The religion of the Etruscans* (Austin 2006) 173-190. MacIntosch Turfa's latest publication, *Divining the Etruscan world: the brontoscopic calendar and religious practice* (Cambridge 2012) appeared too late to be incorporated in this study.

119 Although, later on, Artemidoros used context at times.

possibilities to probe a little more deeply by enquiring into the backgrounds of these differences.

A synthetic explanation can be achieved with the help of the concept of religious authority. In our modern perception, authority is inextricably linked to institutions. In Rome and Mesopotamia, at least the public part of divination was institutionalized, whereas these matters were organized differently in Greece. In Greek divination the individual was the bearer of authority – in this case the *homo divinans*. In Greece, the *homo divinans* – layman or expert – was the pivotal element in divination – more so than in Rome and decidedly more than in Mesopotamia: the Greek *homo divinans* chose and decided which sign should be interpreted and how. Unquestionably the Roman and Mesopotamian *homo divinans* also played a role in this decision but his part was less pronounced than that of his Greek counterpart. As we have seen, in Rome signs were selected on the basis of precedent and communal memory. Mesopotamian experts could rely on systematized written texts. The Greek *homo divinans* depended on precedent and personal experience.

The importance of the Greek *homo divinans* in the divinatory process is crucial to explaining why signs could manifest themselves in 'everything' in Mesopotamia but not in Greece nor indeed in Rome. The Greek *homo divinans* had a relatively important place in conjunction with a desire for the sign and its interpretation to be 'objective'. The need for 'objectivity' reveals a wish for the sign and divination to exist independently of man, thereby validating the

outcome of divination. However, on account of the weight given to the individual authority of the Greek *homo divinans*, his opinion and experience greatly influenced the interpretation of the sign (a consequence of a lack of written text, as will be discussed *in extenso* in chapter 6) and also affected its recognition and acknowledgement. The idea can be put forward that, in order to ensure the 'objectivity' of divination, the prominent role of the *homo divinans* had to be 'balanced.' [120] In other words, in Greece the 'objectivity' of the process was not ensured at the stage of selection or interpretation of a sign (in which the *homo divinans* was the decisive factor), but depended on where the sign occurred: by way of natural (not man-made) objects. In Rome and Mesopotamia, where divination was more institutionalized, 'objective' standards had been created which meant that the interpretation of the sign was less dependent of the individual authority of the *homo divinans*. In Rome, the communal memory of earlier signs served as a touchstone, but apparently this was not enough: the sign had to occur in a natural medium. In Mesopotamia there was an equal desire for objectivity but the role of the *homo divinans* was more restricted because of the greater role accorded to the written text. This text formed an 'objective' basis of

120 On the added 'objectivity' to the divinatory process by means of using an object, or in this case a text, thereby taking some of the recognition and interpretation of a sign away from the subjective *homo divinans* see J.J. McGraw, 'Initial draft - Mayan divination: ritual techniques of distributed cognition' in: J. Sørensen (ed.), *Religious ritual, cognition, and culture* (forthcoming).

knowledge for interpretation and played a larger role than the personal experience of the *homo divinans*. In Mesopotamia, objectivity was derived partly in the interpretation and partly in the nature of the sign – therefore, it was possible for signs to manifest themselves in the cultural world. Sufficient impartiality was provided by using an 'objective text' during the interpretation of the sign.

The scope of these inferences can be widened by focusing on the importance of context in the interpretation of signs. The fact that the context of the sign did not necessarily have to be taken into account, again, allowed the Greek *homo divinans* greater flexibility when he was interpreting.

6. Playing by the book? Use of a textual framework

It is common knowledge that written texts are the historian's bread and butter. What historian could work without the information provided by texts? However, the theme of this chapter is not the content of texts about divination as such, but the written and spoken texts as functional objects in divinatory processes. As the textual framework is the third essential element in the divinatory process, this needs to be investigated in order to arrive at a coherent picture of divination.

Peter Burke describes the use of investigating written texts as functional objects in the following words:

> The idea of writing [on the subject of text as a functional object] came to me while waiting for documents in an Italian archive (a process which, not infrequently, affords leisure for contemplation) together with the realization, at once intoxicating and sobering, that every document in that vast repository would be of relevance to the research. One would in a sense be interrogating the documents about themselves, rather than, as usual, about something else.[1]

1 P. Burke, 'The uses of literacy in early modern Italy' in: P. Burke & R. Porter (eds), *The social history of language* (Cambridge 1987) 21-42, at 24. Others have described this approach to text as the 'contextual approach'. See for a further discussion of the interaction between text and context, which I shall not discuss here: J.P. Burris, 'Text and context in the study of

Although publications focusing on written texts as functional objects are noticeably few in number, this is surely a worthwhile angle of investigation when the importance of texts to the functioning of ancient religions in general and of divination specifically is considered.[2] Spoken as well as written texts were crucial to divina-

religion', *MTSR* 15 (2003) 28-47.

2 Some argue that writing was central to 'pagan' religions, e g., M. Beard, 'Ancient literacy and the function of the written word in Roman religion' in: J.H. Humphrey *et al.* (eds), *Literacy in the Roman world* (Ann Arbor, MI 1991) 35-58, at 37. I would go further and consider text in general to have been central. For an exception see the very brief outline in Sørensen, 'On divination', 185-188; but also E. Dianteill, *Des dieux et des signes: initiation, écriture et divination dans les religions afro-cubaines* (Paris 2000) 189-310. Rather more work has been done outside the field of divination. See especially, but not exclusively, R. Baumgarten, *Heiliges Wort und Heilige Schrift bei den Griechen. Hieroi Logoi und verwandte Erscheinungen* (Tübingen 1998); M. Beard, 'Writing and ritual: a study of diversity and expansion in the Arval Acta', *PBSR* 53 (1981) 114-162; M. Beard, 'Documenting Roman religion' in: *La mémoire perdue: recherches sur l'administration romaine* (Rome 1998) 75-101; W. Burkert, 'Im Vorhof der Buchreligionen. Zur Rolle der Schriftlichkeit in Kulten des Altertums' in: A. Holzem (ed.), N*ormieren, Tradieren, Inszenieren. Das Christentum als Buchreligion* (Darmstadt 2004) 25-39; R. Gordon, 'Shaping the text: innovation and authority in Graeco-Egyptian malign magic' in: H.F.J. Horstmanshoff *et al.* (eds), *Kykeon: studies in honour of H.S. Versnel* (Leiden 2002) 69-111; A. Henrichs, 'Hieroi logoi and hierai bibloi: the (un)written margins of the sacred in ancient Greece', *HSClPh* 101 (2003) 207-266; E. Eidinow & C. Taylor, 'Lead-letter days: writing, communication and crisis in the ancient Greek world', *CQ* 60 (2010) 30-62.

tory practices. Both these categories will be discussed in this chapter, as far as it is possible: the spoken texts are obviously no longer available but their presence (and some ideas about their functions) can be deduced from references in written texts and it should be borne in mind that some of the written texts will have been spoken (see Figure 2 on p. 253).

Spoken and written

The distinction between written and spoken texts immediately raises questions about orality and literacy. The ancient world, including Mesopotamia and all of the Mediterranean world, was 'literate' from the late fourth millennium onward. 'Literacy' is composed of many gradations and variations which have been, and are, the subject of such intense discussion that it would be impossible even to contemplate to summarize the topic of literacy in the ancient world here.[3]

3 Only a few recent titles out of many which might be used to access the topic: C. Baurain, C. Bonnet & V. Krings (eds), *Phoinikeia grammata: lire et écrire en Méditerranée: actes du Colloque de Liège, 15-18 novembre 1989* (Namur 1991); P. Bienkowski, C. Mee & E. Slater (eds), *Writing and ancient Near Eastern society: papers in honour of Alan R. Millard* (New York 2005); A.K. Bowman & G. Woolf (eds), *Literacy and power in the ancient world* (Cambridge 1994); A.E. Cooley (ed.), *Becoming Roman, writing Latin? Literacy and epigraphy in the Roman West* (Portsmouth, RI 2002); M. Detienne (ed.), *Les savoirs de l'écriture en Grèce ancienne* (Lille 1988); W.V.

Harris, *Ancient literacy* (Cambridge, MA 1989); W.V. Harris, 'Writing coand literacy in the archaic Greek city' in: J.H.M. Strubbe, R.A. Tybout & H.S. Versnel (eds), *Energeia: studies on ancient history and epigraphy presented to H.W. Pleket* (Amsterdam 1996) 57-77; W.A. Johnson & H.N. Parker (eds), *Ancient literacies: the culture of reading in Greece and Rome* (Oxford 2009); E.A. Havelock, *Prologue to Greek literacy* (Cincinnati 1971); E.A. Havelock, *The literate revolution in Greece and its cultural consequences* (Princeton, NJ 1981); E.A. Havelock, T*he muse learns to write. Reflections on orality and literacy from antiquity to the present* (New Haven 1986); Humphrey, *Literacy in the Roman world*; W.G. Lambert, 'Ancestors, authors, and canonicity', *JCS* 11 (1957) 1-14; Larsen, 'The Mesopotamian lukewarm mind', 203-225; M.T. Larsen, 'Introduction: literacy and social complexity' in: J. Gledhill, B. Bender & M.T. Larsen (eds), *State and society: the emergence and development of social hierarchy and political centralization* (London 1988) 173-191; P. Michalowski, 'Early Mesopotamian communicative systems: art, literature, and writing' in: A.C. Gunter (ed.), *Investigating artistic environments in the ancient Near East* (Washington, DC 1990) 53-69; S. Parpola, 'The man without a scribe and the question of literacy in the Assyrian Empire' in: B. Pongratz-Leisten, H. Kühne & P. Xella (eds), Ana šadî labnāni lū allik: *beiträge zu altorientalischen und mittelmeerischen Kulturen, Festschrift für Wolfgang Röllig* (Kevelaer 1997) 315-324; C. Wilcke, *Wer las und schrieb in Babylonien und Assyrien: Überlegungen zur Literalität im Alten Zweistromland* (München 2000); A. Livingstone, 'Ashurbanipal: literate or not?', *ZA* 97 (2007) 98-118; B.B. Powell, *Writing and the origins of Greek literature* (Cambridge 2002); K.T. Schousboe & M.T. Larsen (eds), *Literacy and society* (Copenhagen 1989); J.P. Small, *The wax tablets of the mind. Cognitive studies of memory and literacy in classical antiquity* (London 1997); J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: anthropologie de la lecture en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1988); R. Thomas, *Literacy and*

I shall only touch upon a small number of issues which are directly relevant to the study of the divinatory materials.

Verschriftlichung

Until the 1980s, many scholars operated with a neat dichotomy between oral and literate societies. During the past twenty years this approach has gradually been replaced by the idea that there was a continuum between these two types of society.[4] The new consen-

orality in ancient Greece (Cambridge 1992); the recent orality and literacy series: I. Worthington (ed.), *Voice into text: orality and literacy in ancient Greece* (Leiden 1996); E.A. MacKay (ed.), *Signs of orality the oral tradition and its influence in the Greek and Roman world* (Leiden 1999); J. Watson (ed.), *Speaking volumes: orality and literacy in the Greek and Roman world* (Leiden 2001); I. Worthington & J.M. Foley (eds), *Epea and grammata: oral and written communication in ancient Greece* (Leiden 2002); C. Cooper (ed.), *Politics of orality* (Leiden 2007); E.A. MacKay (ed.), *Orality, literacy, memory in the Ancient Greek and Roman world* (Leiden 2008); A.P.M.H. Lardinois, J.H. Blok & M.G.M. van der Poel (eds), *Sacred words: orality, literacy and religion* (Leiden 2011).

4 Orality and literacy have been a central theme in more than one branch of academia since the 1960s. Milman Parry should be mentioned here for his comparison of Homer with south-Slavic oral recitation. His work was continued by Albert Lord, whose most notable publication was A.B. Lord, *The singer of tales* (Cambridge, MA 1960). This work influenced the thought of Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, Jack Goody and Eric Havelock who all claimed that oral and literate societies could be con-

sus is that there was a slow, uneven transition from a more oral to a more literate society, including a very long stage in which elements of both were prominent. This new paradigm is based on the idea that literacy and orality are invariably intertwined and are both richly nuanced phenomena.[5]

The concept of literacy is a hotly debated topic. What is literacy? Is it being able to read, write, or perhaps both? Does an individual have to be 'skilled' at it to be 'literate' or is it enough that he is able to read or write his own name? There are many levels of literacy – Niek Veldhuis distinguishes between functional, technical and scholarly literacy – and the level of literacy of the individual is surely dependent on such factors as gender, social group and location.[6] I would like to emphasize that these complicating factors, which undermine

trasted: a society was either literate or oral. In a reaction to the schools of Havelock and Ong, a counter-movement appeared which propagated 'the literacy myth', for example, H.J. Graff, *The literacy myth: literacy and social structure in the nineteenth-century city* (New York 1979). Even those who first spoke about the 'divide' have nuanced their statements. E.g., J. Goody nuanced his statements in J. Goody, *The power of written tradition* (Washington, DC 2000) 1-25.

5 E.g., P. Koch & W. Oesterreicher, 'Sprache der Nähe – Sprache der Distanz: Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Spannungsfeld von Sprachtheorie und Sprachgeschichte', *RJb* 36 (1985) 15-43, *passim*.

6 Veldhuis, 'Levels of literacy', 70-80. The experts reading compendia had, according to Veldhuis' standard, technical literacy, whereas those composing and using commentaries on compendia fall into the category of the scholarly literacy.

any attempt to determine even the approximate proportion of 'literate' people in the populations of Mesopotamia, Rome or Greece, are of only peripheral interest to my discussion of the use of texts in divination.[7] For the purposes of my enquiries, it is enough to note that writing has an impact on society even if only a handful of people can read or write.[8] Whenever some measure of *Verschriftlichung* occurs in a society, and writing becomes – to a larger or smaller extent – part of everyday life, this has a profound impact, not just practically, but also intellectually and mentally.

Literacy transforms the way memory works as it allows memories or thoughts to be written down. Writing separates knowledge from the knowing mind, and is then a very important tool for the spread of knowledge, including divinatory knowledge. The knowledge con-

7 In Greece in the Classical period a percentage of no more than 5 and 10 percent might be estimated (these individuals would have had a relatively high level of skill). The same maximum of 10 percent applies to the Roman world in the period before 100 BC. This percentage is thought to have been lower in the provinces. See Harris, *Ancient literacy,* 328-329 for these figures. In Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia the percentage of literate individuals was probably less than in the Graeco-Roman world in the periods researched here, but there are no hard numbers or percentages available on the topic. It should be stated that Veldhuis claims literacy was relatively widespread (Veldhuis, 'Levels of literacy', 68-89). Of course, there was a large 'writing class' whose level of literacy was was, on average, probably higher than that in the Graeco-Roman world.

8 Beard, 'Ancient literacy', 39; see also Koch & Oesterreicher, 'Sprache der Nähe', 31-32.

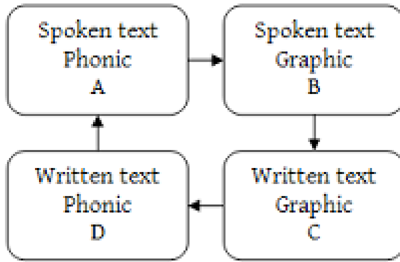
tained in a text is transformed into something which can be disseminated without requiring the physical presence of the individual who generated the knowledge.[9] Even when written texts play an important role after some degree of *Verschriftlichung* has taken place in a society, oral texts retain their importance. It is the relationship and interaction between the two which is relevant to my enquiry into divination.

Figure 2 is a schematic illustration of the possible interactions between the spoken and the written word. To provide an example of how the diagram works: a hypothetical individual writing down a spoken question to the supernatural (for instance, on a Dodonaic *lamella*) and then revising it into another document (for instance, a commemorative stele) and later reading it out loud, would have passed through all four stages. Initially the question was purely phonic (A); when it was written down it assumed a graphic shape (B); it was then used and edited in a graphic context (C); and the written text was read out aloud, making it phonic again (D). The diagram cannot only be started at stage A: the person could begin by writing his question to the supernatural (C) and then he could continue to read it out loud (D), and so on. In short, while a text can begin in

9 J. Goody & I. Watt, 'The consequences of literacy', *CSSH* 5 (1963) 304-345; J. Goody, *The domestication of the savage mind* (Cambridge 1977) *passim*; R.L. Gordon, 'From Republic to Principate: priesthood, religion, and ideology' in: M. Beard & J. North (eds), *Pagan priests: religion and power in the ancient world* (London 1990) 179-198.

both A and C, it can only move *through* the stages in a clockwise direction.

Figure 2: written to oral to written/oral to written to oral



Based on P. Koch & W. Oesterreicher, 'Sprache der Nähe - Sprache der Distanz: Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Spannungsfeld von Sprachtheorie und Sprachgeschichte', *RJb* 36 (1985) 15-43, at 17.

Judging from the surviving textual evidence, it seems that a certain degree of *Verschriftlichung* occurred in divinatory texts in Rome, Mesopotamia and to a smaller extent in Greece.[10]

The approach I have chosen to use is to adopt a neutral stance on the questions of whether many individuals were literate or not and the other general problems in the field of literary studies touched upon above. My goal is to explain the *uses* of written and oral texts.[11]

10 See for a most interesting article on – amongst other topics - the matter of speech and writing at oracle sites J. Champeaux, 'De la parole à l'écriture: essai sur le langage des oracles' in: J.G. Heintz (ed.), *Oracles et prophéties dans l'antiquité* (Paris 1997) 405-438.

11 As suggested by Burke, 'The uses of literacy', 21-42.

Types of text

Performative and informative

Besides the distinction between spoken and written texts, there are two other important categories: performative and informative texts.[12] Performative texts are texts which are perceived to do or change something in the real world: they are part of an action.[13] An example

12 A number of straightforward introductions to performative texts are G. Leech & J. Thomas, 'Language, meaning and context: pragmatics' in: N.E. Collinge (ed.), *An encyclopaedia of language* (London 1990) 173-206, at 191-197; K. Malmkjær, 'Speech-act theory' in: J.M. Anderson & K. Malmkjær (eds), *The linguistics encyclopedia* (London 1991) 416-424; K. Allan, 'Speech act theory: an overview' in: R.E. Asher (ed.), *The encyclopedia of language and linguistics* (Oxford 1994) 4127-4138; R.M. Harnish, 'Speech acts' in: W. Bright (ed.), *International encyclopedia of linguistics* 4 vols (New York 1992) Vol. 4, 64-66.

13 The distinction between informative and performative texts helps in gaining an insight into the way these texts functioned and the definitions used are necessarily short and simply serve as a tool for research. There is much more to say: J.L. Austin would, for example, argue that performative texts are neither true nor false, while informative acts or texts can be either true or false. He developed the thesis of 'felicity conditions' to promote this idea. However, there have been many discussions about this and no consensus has been reached. The idea of true or false has therefore been left out of the definition. For the nuanced and philosophical difficulties regarding the concepts see J.L. Austin, *How to do things with words* (Oxford 1962) 1-12; J.S. Andersson, *How to define 'performative'* (Uppsala 1975) *passim*; J.R. Searle, *Speech acts: an essay in the philosophy of language* (Cambridge 1969)

of a performative text is the following: during a wedding ceremony the words 'I hereby declare you man and wife' are pronounced. By speaking those words, the speaker changes something at that particular moment: 'It is not the case that words are one thing and the rite another. The uttering of the words itself is a ritual.'[14] Questioning, thanking, cursing, warning, ordering and wishing, among other acts of speech, also fall into this category. Performative texts used in religious ritual can exist both in spoken and written form – two categories which are, naturally, not mutually exclusive.[15] Still, all these texts

especially 22-53. Another issue is that of intention and meaning – in how far is intent needed to bring across a message during a speech act? See for this problem J. W. Du Bois, 'Meaning without intention: lessons from divination' in: J.H. Hill & J.T. Irvine (eds), *Responsibility and evidence in oral discourse* (Cambridge 1993) 48-71. Note that there are doubts about whether or not performativity is the right concept to integrate ritual word and action, pronounced among other scholars by J.Z. Smith, '"Great Scott!" Thought and action one more time' in: P. Mirecki & M. Meyer (eds), *Magic and ritual in the ancient world* (Leiden 2002) 73-91, at 89-90.

14 E.R. Leach, 'Ritualization in man in relation to conceptual and social development', *PhilTrans* 251 (1966) 403-408, at 407.

15 Obvious examples of ancient performative texts are curses and other 'magical' texts, including spells and incantations, but also all other texts in which the words function as part of the action. See also the symbolic pseudo-writing as found on curse tablets in Aquae Sulis (Bath): this made the curse tablet work – to perform as it were. If it is to work, the tablet appears to have needed this writing, but it did not actually matter whether or not the text was legible. B. Cunliffe, *The temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath* 2 vols (1985-1988) Vol. 2, 248-252; e.g. tablets 113, 114, and 115.

were thought to *do* something.[16]

As well as performative, there are also informative texts. This is the kind of text which describes, reports or prescribes actions, including rituals. An informative text can have multiple functions: for example, a report can be taken as proof that a particular ritual had actually been performed and it can also be used to keep a record. Its function in this case is descriptive. However, in Antiquity a report of this kind might also have functioned in a prescriptive sense when it served for future reference. Texts with prescriptive functions might have been written down to be used as a set of instructions – enabling someone else to repeat the same acts; to make sure there were no misunderstandings about how exactly a ritual worked; to be used as a reference when there was a difference of opinion or to create a communal memory. Examples of the last are listings of ritual acts and texts prescribing rules and regulations (the so-called *leges sacrae*). Any text could perform one or more of these purposes and the functions of a particular text or genre of texts were also subject to change over time.

Whether a text functioned in a prescriptive or descriptive way, or even perhaps performatively, depended on the (perceived) inten-

16 Other performative texts are, for example, hieroi logoi, pseudo-hieroi logoi; written texts could be used as an ingredient in magic potions, the text and the paper on which it was written was dissolved as the active ingredient in the potion. On hieroi logoi see Henrichs, 'Hieroi logoi and hierai bibloi', 207-266; but see also – for different opinions on a number of issues related to the hieroi logoi – Baumgarten, *Heiliges Wort und Heilige Schrift*.

tions of the author and user. It is often difficult to fathom what the function of a text was, because we do not know enough about its use. Nevertheless, the functions of texts have to be explored because this exercise helps to understand the divinatory process.

Categorization

For analytical purposes, I have distinguished between four types of divinatory texts: textual signs, interpretative guidelines, ritual manuals, questions and answers. Textual signs were those signs perceived to have been sent by the supernatural in the shape of text; guidelines were texts instructing how a sign should be interpreted; ritual manuals prescribed how divinatory rituals should be performed;[17] questions and answers served to document the questions to the supernatural, the answers or signs (oral or textual) provided to man and their interpretations. They possibly also functioned as a set of precedents. Of course, there are many more texts which reflect on some aspect of divination. However, this chapter is concerned only

17 Texts giving guidance on how to evoke a sign should be placed in the category of guidelines on performing divination. Here we can think of the likes of the Papyri Graecae Magicae from Roman Egypt – admittedly a different cultural area. Despite the work on these texts, they are still poorly understood and often used without referring to their proper context (R. Gordon, 'Stele, apograph and authority in the magical papyri', unpublished paper read at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Classical Association in Glasgow).

with texts which actually functioned *within* the divinatory process itself.[18]

TEXTUAL SIGNS

The supernatural was perceived as able to send its signs in the form of intelligible texts. This text could be spoken but it could also be written. The text could be produced on the spot, but signs could also

18 Therefore texts excluded from this investigation into text are literary texts and also the reports of the answers of the oracles inscribed on stelae, known from literary texts. These were not an essential part of the divinatory process but were reported and written down later (see for Delphi, e.g., Plut. *Mor. De Pyth. or.* 397c which indicates that answers from the supernatural were not written down in situ. A source which some believe indicates that oracles at Delphi were written down is Eur. Fr. 629 (Nauck) or Hdt. 5.90. Cf. D.E.W. Wormell & H.W. Parke, *The Delphic oracle* 2 vols (Oxford 1956) Vol. 2, xii. I do not consider this fragment conclusive evidence: if they did indeed exist, it appears that it were the reports of oracles which were kept) For examples of such texts see, e.g., Guarducci, *Epigrafia*, Vol. 4, 91-97 and for Delphi Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle*, 244-416; for Claros (mostly late sources) R. Merkelbach & J. Stauber, 'Die Orakel des Apollon von Klaros', *EpAnat* 27 (1996) 1-54; a catalogue and classification of oracles from Didyma and Klaros is by O. Oesterheld, *Göttliche Botschaften für zweifenlde Menschen: Pragmatik und Orientierungsleistung der Apollon-Orakel von Klaros und Didyma in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* (Göttingen 2008) 570-612; Cf. Parke, *Oracles of Apollo*, 1-111 (Didyma); 112-170 (Klaros).

appear in already existing texts. The latter happened during bibliomancy, in which a pre-existing text was picked up at random and read and also during cleromancy, in which the texts could be written on stick-shaped lots, round plaques or on tablets.[19] During the next

19 Whether the use of lots for the purpose of selection for civic or other official functions (such as in Hom. *Il.* 7.175-180) can actually be considered to be divination still has to be investigated. See S.I. Johnston, 'Lost in the shuffle: Roman sortition and its discontents', *AfR* 5 (2003) 146-156; for articles which do not consider this a divinatory method see N. Rosenstein, 'Sorting out the lot in republican Rome', *AJP* 116 (1995) 43-75; J.C.B. Lowe, 'The lot-drawing scene of Plautus' "Casina"', *CQ* 53 (2003) 175-183 and implicitly R. Bunse, 'Entstehung und Funktion der Losung (sortitio) unter den magistratus maiores der Römischen Republik', *Hermes* 130 (2002) 416-432. On selection for civic functions by means of lots in Mesopotamia see Millard, *Eponyms*, frontispice and 8-9 and more extensively in: Finkel & Reade, 'Eponyms', 167-172. On general cleromancy: Cic. *Div.* 2.41.86; for the way in which the oracle was deemed to work see J. Champeaux, 'Les oracles de l'Italie antique: hellénisme et italicité', *Kernos* 3 (1990) 103-111; Champeaux, *Fortuna*, Vol. 1, 55-84, especially 62-64; and 75-76 for possible inscriptions on lots from other oracular sites than Praeneste. Apart from at Praeneste, lots were drawn for other purposes, both in Republican times and later, as well: Pl. *Cas.* 296-418. Other Roman oracle sites which functioned using lots were Patavium, Forum Novum, Arretium, Iguvium, Viterbo, Falerii, Clitumnus, Punta della Vipera, Caere, Ostia, Tibur, Torino di Sangro, Histonium, Saepinum and Cumae. For these references see J. Champeaux, 'Les oracles sous la république et l'empire', *MEFRA* 102 (1990) 271-302. There are a number of micro-studies of lots, for an example see C. Letta, 'La sors de Fiesole e la fortuna 'laica' di Appio Claudio: un incon-

stage of the divinatory process, these characters would be interpreted and their meaning expatiated on (if necessary with the help of another text).[20] Therefore, in all three cultural areas, oral and written texts could function as signs.

Theoretically cleromancy and bibliomancy could also occur in combination. I call this clero-bibliomancy, a special case in the category of written textual signs. It was a method of divination in which the text (for example, from Homer) was part of the sign, but the sign still needed to be interpreted by means of another (written or oral) text.[21] The following fragment is from the Greek Magical Papyri from Roman Egypt, long after the periods discussed here but still worth quoting. The combination of numbers indicates the throws of the dice:

> 1-1-1 But on account of their accursed bellies they have miserable woes (*Od.* 15.344);

tro improbabile', *Epigraphica* 66 (2004) 37-45. For publication of such a lot (from Cuma): Guarducci, *Epigrafia*, Vol. 4, 81-82. On the shape of the sortes see: Champeaux, 'Sors Oraculi', 271-302, images of the various sortes at 286-299.

20 Which, in the case of *SEG* 27 1808 (2nd century AD) was engraved close by on a rock. At Praeneste, on the other hand, the lot itself was written on. Cf. Latte, '12a. Orakel', 179. Latte refers to Cic. *Div*. 2.82 et seq.

21 See for an analysis of this idea giving attention its difficulties: A. Karanika, 'Homer the prophet: homeric verses and divination in the homeromanteion' in: A.P.M.H. Lardinois, J.H. Blok & M.G.M. van der Poel (eds), *Sacred words: orality, literacy and religion* (Leiden 2011) 264-266.

> 1-1-2 neither to cast anchor stones nor to loosen stern cables (*Od.* 9.137);
> 1-1-3 being struck by the sword, and the water was becoming red with blood (*Il.* 21.21)[22]

Other textual signs were the oracle collections used by c*hrēsmologoi* when they spoke or chanted their oracles. The texts themselves have not been preserved but their function in the divinatory process is still relatively sure because references to their use are available, for example, in Thucydides 2.8.2.[23] Earlier – perhaps mythological – c*hrēsmologoi* such as Musaios and Bakis were believed to have been the authors of oracles or oracle collections, which usually claimed to have been inspired by the supernatural. These texts were relatively static: other oracles circulated but it seems there was a prohibition on incorporating these into these oracle collections (if the collections were indeed written down: perhaps they were also transmitted

22 PGM VII 1-3. Translation can be found in H.D. Betz (ed.), T*he Greek magical papyri in translation, including the Demotic spells* (Chicago 1986) 112. Edition in K. Preisendanz (ed.), *Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri* 2 vols (Stuttgart 1931) Vol. 1, 1. For another edition, plus commentary, of the papyrus see F. Maltomini, 'P. Lond. 121 (=PGM VII), 1-122: Homeromanteion', *ZPE* 106 (1995) 107-122.
[ααα αλλ' ἕνεκ̣] οὐλο[μένες γαστρὸς κακὰ κήδε' ἔχουσιν | [ααβ οὔτ' ε]ὐνας [βαλέειν οὔτε πρυμνήσια λῦσαι | ααγ ἄορι θεινομέ]νωṿ, [ἐρυθαίνετο δ'] αἵμ[ατι ὕδωρ

23 As well as, e.g., Thuc. 2.21.3; 2.54.3-4; Hdt. 7.6.3; 9.43.1-2.

orally).[24] Consequently, it seems that these oracle collections were composed of many pre-prepared oracles which were selected on the spot (either from his memory or read out from written texts) by the *chresmologos*.[25] Cogently, the selection procedure of these oracles did not differ from that during bibliomancy. In the latter, the supernatural supposedly inspired the individual to select a particular line or verse at random out of a longer text. In the former, the method seems to have been pretty much the same. Once determined, the textual sign needed to be interpreted.

Much of the evidence of the textual sign is from the Greek and Roman worlds. The Mesopotamian textual signs played a relatively small role. This is remarkable because of the important place occupied by text in Mesopotamian society in general. Perhaps the Mesopotamian supernatural theoretically did not *need* to use

24 A reference in which a chresmologue named Onomakritos is said to have interpolated text into existing writings is Hdt. 7.6.3. At first glance it might seem that he was not allowed to do so, but on closer inspection the faux-pas might not have been the act of inserting an oracle an sich but the fact that the contents of this oracle displeased the rulers (H.A. Shapiro, 'Oracle-mongers in Peisistratid Athens', *Kernos* 3 (1990) 335-345, at 336-337. For further comment see Dillery, 'Chresmologues and manteis', 189-192. The existence of written oracle collections is indicated by sources such as Eur. *Heracl.* 304-304.

25 As indicated by, e.g., Pl. *Rep.* 364b-e. See on this matter: Dillery, 'Chresmologues and manteis', 178-183. Inspiration from the supernatural can be found in, e.g., Ar. *Eccl.* 1015-1016. For interpretation of these verses see Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle*, 159.

human text as a sign: if the supernatural had wanted to produce a text it could do so. Perhaps the hypothesis that textual signs existed in Greece and Rome because their supernatural was not thought to write itself (not even in a metaphorical sense) should be considered. A human text was needed to provide the textual signs, whereas the Mesopotamian supernatural was thought to write its texts itself.

Guidelines

The category of 'interpretative guidelines' is exemplified by the Mesopotamian compendia. The Greek writings which fit this description most convincingly are the divinatory passages contained in Melampos' writings (*Peri Elaion Tou Somatos* - On Divination by Birthmarks - and the much longer *Peri Palmon Mantikes* - On Divination by Twitches) from the third century BC[26] and Artemidoros' dream books from Roman Asia Minor.[27] The Greek evidence for the

26 An edition can be found in: J.G.F. Franz, *Scriptores Physiognomoniae Veteres* (Altenbug 1780). Translation by Tim Spalding (http://web.archive.org/web/20070930181352/http://www.isidore-of-seville.com/astdiv/melampus.html, visited 09-02-2009).

27 Texts such as those described in Isoc. Aegineticus 19.5 and Plut. *Vit. Arist.* 27.3; Ath. 11.473b might also have been interpretative guidelines but this cannot be stated with any certainty because the contents are unknown. Artemidoros is a late source and can therefore not be extensively used in this study.

existence of divinatory guidelines is very sparse indeed.[28] The Roman evidence is even sparser: the brontoscopic calendar, as is referred to below, is the best example of a Roman interpretative guideline. There is a related expiatory guideline: the Sibylline books. Yet, this guideline is not interpretative.

The very existence of these guidelines raises questions: was there a 'right way' to interpret the signs from the supernatural? How could an individual interpret a sign in this 'right way'? Did the guidelines circulate in the form of a 'standard text' and, if they did not, were alternative divinatory textual traditions available for them to use? At this point, questions of authority – already touched upon in previous chapters – inescapably raise their heads. The various ways in which the textual guidelines were used in Greece, Mesopotamia and Rome can also be used to identify certain differences in modes of interpretation.

28 I do not consider hemerologies to be a divinatory source. A hemerology does not refer to past, present or future as such and does not offer information from the supernatural about a particular event, but indicates the 'right time' to do something or a context to the sign. This will be discussed on pp. 338-340. See for recent introductions to Artemidoros in context: L. Hermes, *Traum und Traumdeutung in der Antike* (Zürich 1996); J. Bilbija & J.-J. Flinterman, 'De markt voor mantiek: droomverklaring en andere divinatorische praktijken in de Oneirocritica van Artemidoros', *Lampas* 39 (2006) 246-266.

Functions of the text

Guidelines functioned descriptively in the sense that they could report such information as case studies and/or serve as a collection of past omens; they simultaneously functioned prescriptively because they detailed how a sign should be interpreted. At least in theory, divination – especially in Rome and in Mesopotamia – might have meant 'reading the signs' with the help of some guideline or manual. The guidelines would have provided assistance in recognizing signs and assigning them a meaning during, for example, extispicy. However, it should be noted that sources in which divination-in-action is described give the impression of the existence of an oral practice performed without (immediate) reference to written guidelines. This was affected by such matters as the practicality and accessibility of the texts.

One important feature of the guidelines was systematization. Unmistakably the compilers of the Mesopotamian compendia strove for a much higher level of systematization than the writers of guidelines in Greece or Rome: the compendia from Mesopotamia sketch every possibility in a systematic manner. When they did so, they did not restrict themselves just to *omina* which had occurred in the past but also included hypothetical ones which *might* occur.[29]

29 For an introduction to the Mesopotamian omen texts (with a focus on extispicy and the function of these texts) see, among many others, N. Veldhuis, 'Reading the signs' in: H.L.J. Vanstiphout (ed.), *All those nations: cultural encounters within and with the Near East: studies presented to Han Drijvers at* [*sic*] *the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday by colleagues and stu-*

The product of this thoroughness is a guideline of an almost encyclopaedic nature. For example, part of a guideline describes the various states which could affect the canopy of a house and considers the consequences of each possibility: 'If a house's canopy shines inside, its inhabitant will be happy; If a house's canopy is whole inside, its inhabitant will persistently have trouble; If a house's canopy is black, its inhabitant will have trouble'. Then followed the red, green, gleaming, dark, quivering canopies, and so on.[30] This does not mean that all these signs had actually occurred.

The Greek and Roman sources cannot answer questions about systematization in a satisfying way due to their scarcity (although, of course, absence of evidence is no evidence of absence): in so far as there are sources we do see some systematization in Melampos' texts: for example, in the text on moles he indicates many places on the body on which one could have a mole.[31] With regard to Rome,

dents (Groningen 1999) 161-174.

30 *Šumma alu* 6, 10-27 (K 190) + (CT 38 14-18 composite) + K 3755 + K 15584 + DT 288; K 2139 + (CT 38 14-18 composite) + K 8816 (CT 38 14-18) + K 15164 (unpublished) + K 15473 (unpublished) and K 12801 (CT 38 14-18 composite); W22256/0 (SBTU 1 73). Edited, translated and transliterated by Freedman, *If a city is set on a height*, Vol. 1, 110-113.
DIŠ E2 ta-ra-an-šu ina ŠA3-šu2 ZALAG2-ir ŠA3 DUR2 BI DUG3.GA; DIŠ E2 ta-ra-an-šu ina ŠA3-šu2 ša-lim DUR2 ŠA3-šu it-ta-na-an-zi-qa2; DIŠ E2 ta-ra-an-šu GI6 DUR2 ŠA3-šu ina-an-ziq.

31 It may be argued that Artemidoros' books are, in a way, systematized – but they are a late source we must reckon with the possibility that much had changed in Greek divination between the Hellenistic period and

an Etruscan brontoscopic calendar is systematic in the sense that it provides a list of days. Both this list and Melampos' text are innocent of other systematic information.[32] Circumstantial evidence for Rome may perhaps be found in the expiatory Sibylline books, However, no systematization can be convincingly deduced from what is left of these: unfortunately very little source material remains but a supposed fragment can be found in the *Mirabilia* by Phlegon of Thralles, of which a few sentences are quoted below:

> First gather together a treasure of coin, whatever you wish, from the cities with their mingled tribes, and from yourselves, And arrange a sacrifice to be offered to Kore's mother, Demeter. Thrice nine bulls at public expense I bid you [...].[33]

Artemidoros' time.

32 Such a text is probably referred to in Cic. *Div.* 1.33.72. Note that some have argued that these texts were never completely integrated into Roman religion: Latte, '12a. Orakel', 159-160. See on the brontoscopic calendars P.L. Schmidt, 'Nigidius Figulus' in: H. Cancik & H. Schneider (eds), *Brill's New Pauly Online.* Visited 18-11-2011. For the text of the brontoscopic calendar translated to Latin and adapted by Figulus from the Etruscan text dealing with brontoscopy (which was translated into Greek by the Byzantine scholar Johannes Lydus) see MacIntosh Turfa, 'Brontoscopic calendar', 173-190.

33 Note that there is great uncertainty about this fragment which Phlegon might have invented himself. Yet, see also E.M. Orlin, *Temples, religion and politics in the Roman Republic* (Leiden 1997) 80 n.14. Still, this is all we have and I shall therefore use it here. Phleg. *Mir.* 10.2.12-15. Translation: W. Hansen, *Phlegon of Thralles' book of marvels* (Exeter 1996) 40. Edition: K.

In a nutshell, and taking into account that conclusions can only be tentative for Greece and Rome, guidelines provided a textual aid for an individual who was weighing up what occurrences he should take to be a divinatory sign (and which not), and how to interpret this sign – but the systematizing possibilities of such written texts were only fully exploited in Mesopotamia.

Accessibility

How accessible was a particular guideline? Certainly the level of literacy to be expected of individuals was important, but other factors also affected accessibility. A text might have been ritualized (and perhaps written in a jargon) or written in an archaic form of the language. In each case these answers would have been either unintelligible or illegible to a layman, even if he were a 'literate' person: e.g., the Neo-Assyrian compendia are often full of ideograms, Sumerian signs which have been used to make an Akkadian word, at a time when Sumerian had been relegated to the status of a scholarly language. Furthermore, these texts are littered with many specific terms: linguistic analyses are superfluous here, but I shall provide one text to serve as an example. The following fragment is

Brodersen, *Phlegon van Tralleis: Das Buch der Wunder* (Darmstadt 2002).

Θησαυρὸν μὲν πρῶτα νομίσματος εἰς ἓν ἀθροίσας, | Ὅττι θέλεις ἀπὸ παμφύλων πόλεών τε καὶ ἀστέων, | Μητρὶ Κόρης Δήμητρι κέλευ θυσίαν προτίθεσθαι. | Αὐτὰρ δημοσίᾳ κέλομαί σε τρὶς ἐννέα ταύρους [...].

Cf. Cic. *Div*. 2.54.111-112.

from a compendium used for extispicy. The conventions for writing Sumerian and Akkadian have been followed here: the first line of the text is a transcription of the cuneiform tablet. The upper case letters represent Sumerian, the lower case letters represent Akkadian. The Sumerian words would have had to be translated into Akkadian by the expert: what this looks like can be seen in the second line, which is a rendition of the same text.

> [BE ina bi-]rit NA u GÍR GIŠ.TUKUL za-qip u ŠUB.ŠUB-ut SAHAR.HI.A ki-bi-[is] GÌR LÚ MUNUS.UŠ$_{11}$.ZU TI.MEŠ-ma DIB-ma GA[Z]

> Šumma ina birit manzāzi u padāni kakku zaqip u imtaqqut eperi kibis šēp amīli kaššaptu ilteneqqi iṣṣabbatma iddâk[34]

The person able to read this text would have had a basic knowledge of both Sumerian, the scholarly language, and of Akkadian. He would also have needed to know the appropriate technical vocabulary or jargon. In conjunction, these technical hurdles mean that the text would have been virtually inaccessible, except to those individuals who had received special training.

In so far as it was used, in Rome the written language was less of a barrier because it was written using an alphabet, which required less

34 Manzāzu 3 line 35 (K 3490 + K 8118 + K 9711 line 11) as edited and translated by Koch-Westenholz in her *Babylonian liver omens*, 95. Translation: 'If a Weapon sticks out and descends between the Presence and the Path: a witch will gather dust which the man's foot has trodden upon, but she will be caught and killed.'

training – and the elite will have been literate. This did not preclude difficulties: experts will have needed some specialized knowledge to access the text – an expiatory text such as the Sibylline Books was written in pretty esoteric (and Greek) language which was sometimes hard to grasp.[35] This means that also in Rome, a large section of the non-elite population was automatically excluded from direct access to these texts.

The distribution of a guideline such as the Roman brontoscopic calendar is unclear, but cannot have been very large – we know that certainly the Sibylline Books were closely guarded.[36] In Greece, the distribution of a guideline like that of Melampos (or even Artemidoros) would not perhaps have been very large – we

35 For an introduction to the Sibylline Books see H.W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline prophecy in classical antiquity* (London 1988) *passim*; Orlin, *Temples, religion and politics*, 76-97; Lightfoot, *The Sibylline oracles*, 3-23 and R. Buitenwerf, B*ook III of the Sibylline Oracles and its social setting: with an introduction, translation, and commentary* (Leiden 2003) 93-123. Note that use of 'Sibylline Books' usually signifies the Graeco-Roman oracles, wheras 'Sibylline Oracles' is used when the Judeo-Christian oracles associated with the Sibyl(s) are meant.

36 In the context of easily accessible divinatory texts, we might think of parallels with hemerologies – which I consider to be non-divinatory – an example of which has been found in the temple courtyard of Nabu. See for references A. Millard, 'Only fragments from the past: the role of accident in our knowledge of the ancient Near East' in: P. Bienkowski, C. Mee & E. Slater (eds), *Writing and ancient Near Eastern society: papers in honour of Alan R. Millard* (New York 2005) 301-319, at 311.

do not know who owned copies of it. In Mesopotamia, compendia were kept in more or less private libraries and archives and were not physically accessible for everyone to read. Access was restricted to scribes and certain people who might be called 'librarians'. A 'Geheimwissen' formula, which obliged the users not to reveal the knowledge they found in the compendia to the uninitiated, must have played an important role. It is also very doubtful whether we should think of experts actually carrying tablets about with them when they performed divination.

In short, in Mesopotamia and Rome access to the guidelines was restricted but they were used by experts for purposes of interpretation. It also seems reasonable to suppose that guidelines were tools of instruction and a source of reference in cases of doubt or conflict. There is so little evidence of guidelines in Greece that it is hard to tell just how accessible they were. Potentially they were available but in practice they were probably private property. If they were circulated, they will have provided some experts with knowledge, but there is nothing to suggest that they played a central role.

Getting it right

In the field of divination, 'getting it right' is a central problem. Divination in the ancient world allowed individuals to gain access to important information thought to be issued by the supernatural.

What if they got this information wrong?[37] The *homo divinans* was only human after all. Although the mere existence and theoretical availability of guidelines might have provided some sense of certainty, it also raises one pressing problem. How could an individual using a text be sure he was using the 'right text'? How did he know the text would help, rather than mislead or confuse him during the interpretation of a sign or when checking the meaning of a sign when he was doubtful?

Theoretically speaking, guidelines could have the status of a canon, meaning that they were generally regarded as reliable and authoritative. None the less, other guidelines in a less categorical, flexible state might have existed. It is possible to construct a sliding scale on which every text can be placed:

canonized-----------------standardized----------------unfixed

Since the contents of almost any text can be challenged, it was virtually impossible for texts to become truly canonical, except in the eyes of small groups of individuals who thought more or less dogmatically. The other side of the coin is that, if a text was utterly unfixed this could have caused confusion and worse discord. If some sort of consensus was to be reached about a text, it would have to be useful for a group. In practice, texts were usually neither completely canonized nor completely unfixed – they hovered, to a greater or

37 Basically the problem Cicero addresses in Cic. *Div*. 2.11.28.

larger extent, around the centre of this sliding scale. The first question which this poses is to what extent the guidelines in the three cultural areas were standardized. The next question is whether or not it was permissible for interpreters of signs to use a second text alongside a main divinatory guideline.

As we have seen, there is a conspicuous lack of Greek guidelines. Artemidoros, the author of the most important collection of guidelines left to us – which is of course of later date and may therefore be of limited relevance for our enquiries – had definite ideas about *his* guidelines being the best option to use: he relates that his famous predecessors, who also wrote dream books, copied each other's work, and the upshot was numerous clerical errors. They either misinterpreted older authors or failed to grasp a complete overview of the earlier source material. Some other predecessors did not know what they were writing about as they had had no practical experience of it.[38] Not averse to self-advertisement, Artemidoros claims that he has not only collected all the books of his predecessors but has also spoken to many knowledgeable individuals and dreamers. These two claims form the foundation of his claim to authority.[39]

38 Artem. 1 Prooemium.

39 He presents himself as a traveller and researcher in order to gain the confidence of his audience by the way he deals with sources. Other 'persona' he uses in order to gain authority are that of warrior and doctor: Harris-McCoy, 'Artemidoros' self-presentation', 423-444. See on the way he refers to literary works, in this way emphasizing his abilities as a scholar, D. Kaspryzik, 'Belles-Lettres et science des rêves: les citations dans

However, he does not claim to be *the* authority, leaving room for alternative (but of course, in his opinion, worse) interpretations.[40] In other words, he has produced a manual which does not claim to be *the* guideline, but just a very good one which he thinks everyone should use. This implies it was possible to use one of the many other dream books which were available on a 'free market' of guidelines, written by Artemidoros' competitors. The Greek choice of text, if any, appears to have been the choice of the *homo divinans* and hence his own responsibility. When searching for information about standardization, it appears that Artemidoros knew that his text would be copied, as he warned the next generation not to alter it as this would undermine its quality. 'I ask those who read my books not to add or remove anything from the present contents.'[41] It could well be that,

l'Onirocriticon d'Artémidore', *AC* 79 (2010) 17-52, 821.

40 E.g., Artem. 3 Prooemium. Others writing dream books were, for example, Nikostrasos (Artem. 1.2); Panyasis (Artem. 1.2; 1.64; 2.35); Apollodoros (Artem. 1.79); Apollonios (Artem. 1.32; 3.28); the supposed Astrampsychos from Graeco-Roman Egypt wrote a roughly comparable manual (Cf. E. Riess, 'Astrampsychos', *RE* 2 (Stuttgart 1894-) cols. 1796-1797; and other attestations (Macrob. *Sat*. 3.7.2; Amm. *Marc*. 25.2.7-8)).

41 Artem. 2.70.147-149. Translation: White, *Interpretation of dreams,* 137. Edition: Teubner.
δέομαι δὲ τῶν ἐντυγχανόντων τοῖς βιβλίοις μήτε προσθεῖναι μήτε τι τῶν ὄντων ἀφελεῖν
Note that this was not allowed in oracle collections. However these are a different category of divinatory text. See Hdt 7.6.3 and the discussion of these collections below.

if guidelines were already used in Classical and Hellenistic Greece (and then most probably on a very small scale) there was no single standard guideline for dream interpretation: the text was dynamic. In so far as they existed, guidelines were locked in competition with one another and were subject to constant alteration.

In Rome, the Senate's permission was needed to insert new books or entries into the corpus of the Sibylline Books – the best example of Roman guidelines, although not interpretative. Nevertheless, the Books were not regarded as irreplaceable or even as completely canonized. When the Sibylline Books accidentally burnt in 83 BC, the Roman Senate ordered a committee to find, what its members thought were, authentic oracles and to construct a new version. The committee found existing oracles, some of them in private collections, which were also deemed (after much debate) perhaps to have come from one of the Sibyls.[42] It appears from these events that the Books were unalterable in theory only, but in practice a certain amount of improvisation was thought necessary: if the worst came to the worst, even the Sibylline Books could be replaced, closely guarded and 'secret' as they were. The approval of the Senate would provide the 'New Books' with an aura of authority comparable to that accorded the old ones.

The advice extracted from the Books did not necessarily need to be followed by the Senate. This body would receive an interpretation from the *decemviri* and would have to decide on how to use it:

42 Tac. *Ann.* 6.12.

they could reject the advice.[43] Alternative texts do not seem to have played a large role. Some suggest that Livy 25.12, mentioning two prophecies of a man named Marcius, attests to the existence of such an alternative tradition. The first of these prophecies was considered to have come true and hence great importance was ascribed to the second. After a discussion about its interpretation, a consultation of the Sibylline Books was ordered. The consultation confirmed the validity of the second prophecy, adding more information and offering ways of expiation in the process. Although it appears that the alternative tradition of Marcius could be used, the Sibylline Books were still used and referred to in order to authenticate the alternative tradition. Therefore it seems that, if the Senate chose not to use the advice offered by the Books, alternative texts were hardly ever resorted to.

Mesopotamian guidelines, it must be re-emphasized, existed in unusually large quantities. However their quantity and unwieldy format means that the extent these texts were actually used during the execution of the divinatory process is debatable.[44] Mesopotamian compendia of ominous signs were created during the second and first millennia on the basis of previous traditions. This process was completed by Neo-Assyrian times, as shown by developments in the Old Babylonian, Middle Babylonian, and Middle Assyrian copies

43 Orlin, *Temples, religion and politics*, 83-84.

44 See for this option Koch, 'Sheep and sky', 464 where Koch refers to Veldhuis, 'Theory and use', 487-497.

of the compendia.[45] Standardization of these omen texts occurred 'in the sense that old material was conscientiously maintained in its traditional form and new material was no longer being incorporated': each compendium became a stabilized *textus receptus*. This resulted in the series in their standardized form: the *iškaru*. Nevertheless, standardized texts whose details varied could still be found in various editions in several different places.[46] The authority of these texts was based on the presumed antiquity of the texts and on their having been used from time immemorial. Sometimes the authorship was attributed to a god or a sage.[47] More importantly, as a result of their standardization through time, the series had become a text which was endorsed by the consensus of the scribal school (despite the existence of local variants and interpolations).[48]

In Neo-Assyrian times the compendia were carefully guarded: learning from, handling and copying the texts was restricted. In spite

45 F. Rochberg-Halton, 'Canonicity in cuneiform texts', *JCS* 36 (1984) 127-144, at 127. I have already used the word standardization: this term should be used instead of 'canonization': [about other kinds of texts, but applicable to the compendia] 'There was no systematic selection of works, nor was there a conscious attempt to produce authoritative works which were passed on': Lambert, 'Canonicity', 9. Texts were subjected to standardization, not canonization.

46 Rochberg-Halton, 'Canonicity', 128-129. Note that changes to series were sometimes consciously made: SAA 10 177 15-r.5.

47 As, e.g., the text (although it is uncertain what kind of text this was, it could well have been a divinatory guideline) discussed in SAA 10 155.

48 Rochberg-Halton, 'Canonicity', 134-137.

of such limitations, scribes did edit the texts and even interpolated in the process: they did not simply copy them.[49] Hence a certain dynamism in the use of the texts was a constant factor.[50] Still, a number of precautions were put in place to ensure the expert's sources as well as his mistakes or changes could be traced: in the colophon at the bottom of the tablet, the scribe wrote one of a number of standard phrases informing future readers who had copied the tablet and from which source. For example: '17 lines excerpted from (the tablet) "If a woman gives birth, and at birth the head (of the child) is already full of grey hair" Palace of Assurbanipal, king of the world, king of Assyria.'[51] The precaution enabled the user of this text to refer to the source from which this text had been copied.

With this standardized text in hand, theoretically all experts should have known without the shadow of a doubt how they should have interpreted any sign they might happen to come across – any uncertainties should have been eliminated because any sign and its interpretation would have been in the text. However, this ideal

49 D. Charpin, *Reading and writing in Babylon* (Cambridge, MA 2010 [translated from French]) 198.

50 See for an emphasis on dynamism E. Robson, 'The production and dissemination of scholarly knowledge' in: K. Radner & E. Robson (eds), *The Oxford handbook of cuneiform culture* (Oxford 2011) 557-576, *passim*.

51 Colophon lines 2-3 of tablet 4, text D (= K 2007) as published by E. Leichty. Translation: Leichty, Šumma izbu, 73.
17 MU.MEŠ TA ŠÀ BE SAL.Ù.TU-ma ul-la-nu-um-ma SAG.DU-su ši-ba-a-ti DIR ZI-ḫa
KUR mAN. ŠÁR-DÙ-A MAN ŠÚ MAN KUR.Aš+šur

model does not seem to have worked in practice: as has been noted, there might still be uncertainty about the context and combination of signs and what this might mean. We also know that the guidelines were discussed and debated: there is explicit evidence of experts disagreeing about a particular interpretation.[52] In fact, it seems to have been quite normal for one and the same expert to select multiple signs and their interpretations from the compendia to explain one occurrence.

The *iškaru* did not exist in isolation. First of all, additional commentaries were in use among experts, whose mere existence shows that experts did not always find the standardized texts unambiguous or satisfactory for their purposes.[53] The commentaries were used to elucidate obscurities in the *iškaru*.[54] An example of such an explanation drawn from a commentary can be found in a report on heavenly phenomena from the astrologer Akkullanu to the king:

52 E.g., SAA 10 51; SAA 10 52 6-9; SAA 10 60.

53 For an overview of variations from standard texts and an application of the theories of Rochberg-Halton (as referred to in the notes above) in a case study not specifically about omen compendia see S.J. Lieberman, 'Canonical and official cuneiform texts: towards an understanding of Assurbanipal's personal tablet collection' in: T. Abusch, J. Huehnergard & P. Steinkeller (eds), *Lingering over words: studies in Near Eastern literature in honor of William L. Moran* (Atlanta, GA 1990) 305-336.

54 Cf. on the explanatory commentary on this series Veldhuis, 'The theory of knowledge', 80-87.

> If the day [reaches its normal length]: a reign of long [days]. Normal length of a month (means) it completes the 30th day.[55]

The following is another example of a struggle with the meaning of a passage in the *iškaru*:

> As regards the planet Venus about which the king, my lord, wrote to me: "When will you tell me (what) 'Venus is stable in the morning' (means)?," it is [writte]n as follows in the commentary: 'Venus [is stable] in the morning: (the word) "morning" (here) means [to be bright], it is shinin[g brightly], (and the expression) "[its] posi[tion is stable]" means it [rises] in the west.[56]

55 SAA 8 106 obv. 1-3. Edition and translation H. Hunger.
1 UD-mu ana [mi-na-ti-šú e-ri-ik]
BALA [UD-MEŠ] [GÍD-MEŠ]
56 K 1039 (=ABL 37) rev. 8-19. Edition and translation Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian scholars*, 9 (number 12). (Also published as SAA 10 23, slightly adapted – but this is not important to our argument.)
ina UGU dDil-bat
ša LUGAL be-li iš-pur-an-ni
ma-a dDil-bat
ina še-re-e-ti i-kun
a-na ma-a-ti ta-qab-bi-ja
ki-i an-ni-i
ina mu-kal-lim-t[i! šà-ṭi]r
ma-a dDil-b[a]t
ina še-re-ti [i-kun]
ma-a še-[e]!-ru na-ma-ru]
šá-ru-r[u! na-ši-ma]

Other traditions were resorted to whenever the standardized *iškaru* fell short – just about the closest as one could come to a crisis in the Mesopotamian divinatory process. There were two alternative traditions: first, the *aḫû* series and second, the oral tradition of the masters (*ša pî ummâni*).

The *aḫû* series, literally the "different series" or "strange series," was used alongside a number of *iškaru*: the colophon of text E of tablet 4 of Š*umma Izbu*, for example, reads 'excerpted from non-canonical *Šumma Izbu*'.[57] The Akkadian term translated here as 'non-canonical' is *aḫû*. As Eleanor Robson argues, at least for the series Enuma Anu Enlil, '[…] the term *iškaru* simply represented material from a compiled series already known to a scholarly community, while *aḫû* described similar material from parallel textual traditions that was new to them.'[58] Another piece of evidence of the use of the *aḫû* is to be found in a letter to the king:

> (As) the king, my lord, knows, an exorcist has to avoid reciting a 'hand-lifting' prayer on an evil day: (therefore) I shall now look up, collect and copy numerous — 20 to 30 — canonical and non-canonical tablets, (but) perform (the prayers) (only) tomorrow evening and on the night of the 15th day.[59]

KI !.[GUB-sà GI.NA]

57 Colophon tablet 4, text E (= K 4031) (after line 61): ŠÀ BE iz-bu BAR-I ZI-ḫa, as published by E. Leichty. Edition and translation Leichty, Šumma izbu, 73.

58 Robson, 'Scholarly knowledge', 572.

59 SAA 10 240 obv. 20-rev. 1. Edition and translation: S. Parpola.

When these *aḫû* series were used to interpret a sign, reference to them was always explicit – perhaps reflecting an awareness that they might have been perceived to be less trustworthy – and their use not necessarily approved of. The following fragment is from a letter from an expert to the crown prince, in which he tries to discredit two other experts:

> Moreover, (whereas) [Aplay]a and Naṣiru have kept [in] their [hands] non-ca[nonical] tablets and [...s] of every possible kind, I have learned (my craft) from my (own) father.[60]

Apparently it was better and more prestigious for a son to learn the craft from his father, who is here presented as a 'better' source of

ep-pa-áš LUGAL be-lí ú-da
LÚ.MAŠ.MAŠ UD.HUL.GÁL.E la DÙG.GA
ŠU.ÍL.LÁ.KÁM la i-na-áš-ši
ú-ma-a re-eš ṭup-pa-a-ni
ma-a'-du-ti lu 20 lu 30
SIG5.MEŠ a-hi-ú-ti
ú-ba-'a a-na-áš-ši-a
a-šaṭ-ṭar
ina ši-a-ri ina nu-bat-ti mu-šú

60 SAA 10 182 rev. 24-28. Edition and translation: S. Parpola.

[ù] [ṭ]up-pa-a-ni a-h[u!-ú-ti x x x x]
[x] me-me-e!-ni šu!-un!-šú-nu [x x] x[x x x]
[mA]-a ù mna-ṣi-ru
[ina qa-t]i!-šu-un-nu-[ma!] uk-ti-lu
[a-na]-ku! TA*! ŠU.2 AD-ia as-sa-am-da

knowledge than the *aḫû* tablets. Nevertheless, the colophons and letters are not enough to permit us to determine the exact relationship between the various *aḫû* series and *iškaru*. Whether the *aḫû* contained materials which had been excised or excluded from the main series is not known; whether the *aḫû* was just an alternative not a competing tradition to the *iškaru*; whether it was a subsidiary of the *iškaru*, which would imply a hierarchy in traditions; or whether all of the above options contain an element of truth, since they are not mutually exclusive. Fragments such as the following do not exclude any of these options:

> [And concerning what the k]ing, my lord, [wrote to me]: "Let [all the omens] be e[xtracted]," — should I at the same time [copy] the [tab] let of non-canonical [omens of wh]ich [I spoke? Or should I write them] on a secondary tablet? [Wh]at is it that the king, my lord, [orders]?[61]

Current consensus is that the *aḫû* were a stream of tradition which, although it had an authoritative status, was used with caution.[62]

61 Note that some readings on this tablet are uncertain. SAA 10 101 rev. 1-6. Edition and translation: S. Parpola.
[ù ina UGU ša] LUGAL be-lí [iš-pur-an-ni]
[ma-a x x x] li-in-[x x x]
[x x MU.MEŠ a]-hu-ú-ti ša [aq-bu-u-ni]
[x ṭup]-pa-šú-nu is-se-niš la-[áš-ṭu-ru]
[ú-la-a] ina ṭup-pi šá-ni-im-ma [la-áš-ṭur]
[mi-i]-nu ša LUGAL be-lí [i-qab-bu-u-ni]

62 Rochberg-Halton, 'Canonicity', 141-144.

Besides the *iškaru* and *aḫû*, there was an oral tradition about which next to nothing is known except that it was perceived to be very old and that it was differentiated from the *iškaru*:[63]

> This omen is not from the series [*Enuma Anu Enlil*]; it is from the oral tradition of the masters.[64]

Simo Parpola speculates that there were oral traditions in Mesopotamian 'wisdom' (not restricted to divination), which were secret and were transmitted orally from father to son.[65] The letter to the crown prince might be interpreted as referring precisely to such a source of knowledge. However, the ancient origin of the oral tradition can be disputed: it is impossible to exclude the likelihood that an expert might have invented his own interpretation, even though there were standard texts available, and, to give it weight, ascribed it to some ancient tradition or other.[66] An example of the use of alter-

63 For difficulties with the oral tradition see Y. Elman, 'Authoritative oral tradition in Neo-Assyrian scribal circles', *JANES* 7 (1975) 19-32.

64 SAA 10 8 rev. 1-2. Edition and translation: S. Parpola.
šu-mu an-ni-u la-a ša ÉŠ.QAR-ma šu-u
ša pi-i um-ma-ni šu-ú

65 S. Parpola, 'Mesopotamian astrology and astronomy as domains of the Mesopotamian wisdom' in: H.D. Galter (ed.), *Die Rolle der Astronomie in den Kulturen Mesopotamiens: Beiträge zum 3. Grazer Morgenländischen Symposion (23.-27. September 1991)* (Graz 1993) 47-59, at 57.

66 Something which was sure to give a text authority: SAA 10 155 (a letter written to the king by an astrologer – it is uncertain if it is concerned

native traditions is the following fragment of a letter of the astrologer Balaṣi to the king:

> This night a star stood [in] the head of Scorpius in front of the moon. The omen from it does not portend anything (bad), it will not [alt: could not] be excerpted at all.[67]

Balaṣi continues by giving the interpretation of the sign according to the oral traditions or perhaps from a commentary.[68] This is signified in Akkadian by the use of the word *šumma* [DIŠ] (if…) instead of the usual Sumerogram '1', signifying that what follows is an extract from the *iškaru*, at the beginning of the sentence.[69] Apart from this, he phrases this as he would have done any other omen:

> If the Obsidian star (and) Antares, which stand in the br[east] of Sc[orpius, s]tood in front of the moon, this is a normal sign.[70]

with a divinatory guideline but this is quite possible).

67 SAA 8 98 obv. 7-rev. 3. Edition and translation: H. Hunger.
i-na mu-ši an-ni-i-e kak-ka-bu
[ina] SAG.DU ša MUL.GÍR.TAB
ina IGI d30 it-ti-ti-iz
GISKIM-šú la i-lap-pa-[at]
la-áš-šú la in-na-sa-[ha]

68 Personal communication Dr Ulla Koch, spring 2009.

69 This Sumerogram was used as the first sign of every official omen not related to a human or animal.

70 SAA 8 98 rev. 4-7. Edition and translation: H. Hunger.
šum-ma MUL.ṣur-ru MUL.LI9.SI4 ša GABA
ša MUL.[GÍR.TAB] iz-za-zu-[u-ni]

In short, the use of alternatives alongside a standardized text seems to have been regarded as acceptable, although the use of an alternative is always emphatically mentioned.[71]

The mere existence and use of written text was important in Mesopotamia because it made it possible to achieve 'objectivity' in interpreting the sign. Text provided a way to 'get it right'. In Rome, the interpretative part of divination does not appear to have received much attention, Yet, text was important in the expiatory phase. It seems that the state-controlled Sibylline Books enshrined a standardized text which was in theory unchangeable and verged on the canonical. In practice, however, this text could be altered, supplemented or even replaced should the need arise. Mesopotamians would create additions to their existing, highly systematized interpretative texts. Written guidelines played a less prominent role in the interpretation of signs in Greece. In so far as guidelines were used in Greece, new ones could be created – quite possibly on the basis of an older one – which suited the needs of their users. If Artemidoros shows us anything about how this may have occurred in earlier times, he shows us a Greek world in which the few avail-

ina IGI d30 [it]-ti-ti-[su]
šu-u GISKIM ka-a-a-ma-nu.

71 On the topic of alternative interpretations of particular omens in compendia, a discussion which does not need to be repeated here, see A. Winitzer, 'Writing and Mesopotamian divination: the case of alternative interpretation', *JCS* 63 (2011) 77-94.

able guidelines were constantly copied, pasted and changed. If texts were used to 'get it right', a large amount of leeway was permitted.

SCENARIO OF RITUAL

The Mesopotamian *ikribu* is a prayer-cum-ritual text which was used during rituals to evoke the signs: this was what was pronounced during the evocation of a sign in extispicy. The extispicy ritual was stretched out over a long period of time: it commenced before sunset and continued throughout the night until it was day again. At each stage of the ritual, a particular part of the *ikribu* had to be recited, providing a commentary on the ritual being performed simultaneously with the recitation. The spoken words were an integral part of the ritual – they had to be pronounced to facilitate the appearance of a sign and were integrated into the ritual.[72] The *ikribu* functioned as an informative prescriptive guideline for the performance and could be a self-referent text.[73]

The Mesopotamian *ikribu* has no known parallel in either Greece or Rome. Perhaps texts such as sacred laws come closest,

72 I would like to thank Dr J. Fincke, for allowing me to participate in one of her seminars in which she discussed these texts. See Lenzi, *Akkadian prayers and hymns,* 46-49 for an introduction to this genre of texts.

73 For such a text related to divination see the (Old Babylonian) 'sacrificial manual' published in D.A. Foxvog, 'A manual of sacrificial procedure' in: H. Behrens, D. Loding & M.T. Roth, *DUMU-E2-DUB-BA-A: studies in honor of Åke W. Sjöberg* (Philadelphia 1989) 167-176.

but they merely list certain rituals to be performed without giving a detailed scenario and without specifying the formulas to be recited.[74] Naturally, the possibility that the Greek or Roman scenario texts or other self-referent texts about divination have been lost or were transmitted orally should be taken into account. The Graeco-Egyptian parallel of the *PGM* allows us to consider the option that there were indeed Greek scenarios written on papyrus, now lost. Scenario texts, which are known to have been used in Roman religion, could have been recorded in the Roman 'magical' books burned by Augustus. It is also known that in expiatory rituals it was incumbent on the priest or *decemvir* to pronounce the correct words (with the help of a written text?), after which the others present would repeat these after him so that they would be saying the formula 'correctly'. Some have argued that ancient religion (but, admittedly, specifically in the Greek world) 'favors the *dromena* over the *legomena* [...]'[75] for a number of rituals of everyday life: these were, supposedly,

74 A sacred law could of course have been referred to during the ritual, but this was a different matter.

75 A. Henrichs, 'Drama and dromena: bloodshed, violence, and sacrificial metaphor in Euripides', *HSClPh* 100 (2002) 173-188, at 176. See also A. Henrichs, 'Dromena und legomena: zum rituellen Selbstverständnis der Griechen' in: F. Graf (ed.), A*nsichten griechischer Rituale: Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert* (Stuttgart 1998) 33-71, *passim.*

'action-oriented rituals'.[76] This is a rather bold statement and cannot be affirmed with certainty in the ritual of divination.

questions (and answers)

Another category of texts consists of questions addressed to, and the perceived answers received from, the supernatural. Questions to the supernatural were by definition in the form of a text – whether written or oral –, but this was not necessarily true of the answers: these were often converted into a comprehensible textual shape during interpretation.[77] For example, at the oracle at Dodona, the Greek supernatural did not speak or write in intelligible language and the auditory signs must have been put into the shape of understandable text by an intermediary.[78] With regard to Delphi there is a discussion

76 For example, lamentation, supplication or solemn curses were represented by both words and actions, whereas sacrifice and libations can be considered 'non-verbal and action-oriented rituals' (Henrichs, 'Drama and dromena', 176).

77 This is valid for many signs from the supernatural, with the exception of certain textual signs which will be discussed below.

78 See for a different approach to the problem of what happened in Dodona S. Georgoudi, 'Des sons, des signes et des paroles: la divination à l'œuvre dans l'oracle de Dodone' in: S. Georgoudi, R. Koch Piettre & F. Schmidt (eds), *La raison des signes: présages, rites, destin dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée ancienne* (Leiden 2012) 55-90.

about whether or not the Pythia, in her role of mouthpiece of the supernatural, spoke goobledegook or in perfect hexameters. I follow those who think the Pythia needed an interpreter who translated her spoken signs into an understandable text.

Questions addressed to the supernatural could be asked orally. These questions and answers were sometimes only remembered and discussed orally but some were written down later (sometimes with their answers) and so on. The main issues this raises concern the function of these written questions in the divinatory process and the identity of the reader or readers for whom they were written.

In Mesopotamia there are two specific genres of texts which are potentially useful in a discussion of these issues: the Assyrian extispicy queries and the Babylonian *tamītu* texts served as questions and blueprints for questions in the divinatory process. Investigation of the Assyrian queries is more useful to our purpose, since they are known to have been used in the context of divination. Of the *tamītu* texts, only scribal copies have survived.[79] Probably, these were not used during the ritual itself: instead they very much resemble administrative blueprints of the questions. Nevertheless, the queries addressed to the sun god do shed light on the function of this kind of texts *within* the Mesopotamian divinatory process:[80] An example:

79 Cf. Lambert, *Oracle questions*, 1-20 for an introduction as well as Lenzi, *Akkadian prayers and hymns*, 52-53 for an introduction and an excursus on how the tamītu differ from the queries.

80 The main publications of these texts are J.A. Knudtzon, *Assyrische Gebete an der Sonnengott* 2 vols (Leipzig 1893); E. Klauber, P*olitisch-religiöse*

[Šamaš, great lord, give m]e a firm [positive answ]er [to what I am asking you]! [Should Šamaš-šumu-ukin, son of Esarhad]don, king of [Assyria, within this year] seize the [han]d of the great lord [Marduk i]n the Inner City, and should he lead [Bel] to Babylon? Is it pleasing to your [great] divinity and to the great lord, Marduk? Is it acceptable to your great divinity and to the great lord Marduk? Does your great divinity know it? [Is it decreed] and confirmed [in] a favorable case, by the command of your great divinity, Šamaš, great lord? Will he who can see, see it? Will he who can hear, hear it? [Disregard the (formulation) of today's case], be it good, be it faulty, (and that) the day is overcast and it is raining.[81]

Texte aus der Sargonidenzeit (Leipzig 1913); Starr, *Queries*.

81 SAA 4 262 (= K 11478 = AGS 149), obv. 1-11. Edition and translation: I. Starr.

[dUTU EN GAL-ú šá a-šal-lu-ka an-n]a GI.NA a-[pal-an-ni]
[mdGIŠ.NU11—MU—GI.NA DUMU mdaš-šur—ŠEŠ—SU]M-na LUGAL KU[R— aš-šur.KI]
[i-na ŠÀ MU.AN.NA NE-ti qa-a]t EN GAL-i d[AMAR.UTU]
[i-n]a ŠÀ-bi—URU.KI li-iṣ-bat-ma a-na i-na pa-a[n dEN]
a-na KÁ.DINGIR.RA.KI lil-lik UGU DINGIR-ti-ka [GAL-ti]
ù UGU dEN GAL-i dAMAR.UTU DÙG.GA
pa-an DINGIR-ti-ka GAL-ti ù pa-an dEN GAL-i
[d]AMAR.UTU ma-hi-i-ri DINGIR-ut-ka GAL-ti ZU-e
[i-na] SILIM-tim i-na KA DINGIR-[t]i-ka GAL-ti dUTU EN GAL-ú
[qa-bi]-i ku-un IGI-ra IGI-mar še-mu-ú ŠE-e
[e-zib šá di-in UD-me] NE-i GIM DÙG.GA GIM ha-ṭu-ú UD ŠÚ-pu A.AN ŠUR [...].

On formalization see, for example: Starr, *Queries*, xiii-xxviii.

What was the purpose of these texts? Analysis of the handwriting suggests that the queries were compiled before and during the divinatory process. The query consisted of three parts: the actual question, the *ezib* (the 'disregard-clauses' where the expert asks the supernatural to overlook any mistakes) and the proposed time frame for which the extispicy would be valid. These were probably prepared beforehand. J. Aro puts it as follows: 'It seems that the tablet was prepared before the ceremony and laid before the god [...]. After the ceremony the omens obtained were added on to the tablet in an empty space left either before the last concluding sentence or after it; sometimes they are lacking altogether.'[82] This last part of the query could be written by a scribe, either actually during the extispicy process or perhaps shortly afterwards from notes jotted down during the process.[83] Afterwards, the query (including the signs) could be used to produce a report, which could either be sent to the king or kept as an archival copy.

The presence of the query *during* the divinatory process is the crucial point. It was 'laid before the god', in the words of Aro. What does this mean? What were men or the supernatural supposed to do with this written text? Its presence during the ritual must have served some purpose: either as an *aide-mémoire* for the *homo divinans*, helping him to ask the right question or as an essential feature of the divinatory process because it was thought appropriate

82 Aro, 'Remarks on the practice of extispicy', 110.

83 See further on use and background of the queries: Klauber, *Politisch-religiöse Texte*, i-xxv; Starr, *Queries*, i-lxxviii.

to record questions addressed to the supernatural in writing – or perhaps the writing was necessary for the supernatural to read the questions.

There is no body of written questions known from Rome (although there are reports and individual enquiries, no series of direct questions to the supernatural survives). In Greece it was a different story, there are many literary reports of the questions asked during the divinatory process, as well as one extensive epigraphic *corpus*: the Dodonaic tablets.[84] While there are other, smaller, epigraphic *corpora* related to divination, this *corpus* will be discussed extensively, as it is the only evidence from the Greek world which matches the Mesopotamian extispicy queries. Were these texts, like the queries, open to be 'read' by anyone, human or divine? What was the Greek question supposed to do? Bearing in mind that the corpus from Dodona might not be representative of all of Greek divination, nevertheless a discussion of the corpus does shed more light on the role of text in divination.

The questions addressed to the oracle were written down on small strips of lead; in some cases an answer from the oracle can be found on the back of the strip.[85] Many of the leaden strips were

84 There are also collections of oracles like the oracles of Orpheus, for example, but these were used by chresmologues. Although these can be seen as 'answers' or at least as discursive signs from the supernatural – there is uncertainty about the authenticity of the collections. Cf. on collections of oracles Burkert, 'Divination', 39-41; Latte, '12a. Orakel', 175-176.

85 Unfortunately, the number of surviving answers is small. For this

found still rolled up. One hundred and ninety-one of these texts have

reason it has to be assumed that answers were usually passed on to the client orally by the functionaries at the oracle site (Lhôte 12; 27; 35; 68; 92; 99?; 114; 137. Note that those texts Lhôte considers possible answers, but with strict reservations, have been left out here). Answers have been conveniently listed by Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 123-124. She mentions 12 to 15 answers (if fragmentary or doubtful cases are included the high count of 15 should be adhered to, otherwise the low count is the best option). See for another, contrasting, source which indicates that answers were written down: Soph. *Trach*. 1166-1168. Another possibility is that answers were not usually provided on the back of the tablet but perhaps on some other, perishable material. Nevertheless, on the basis of the materials available, it has to be concluded that text apparently did not play an important role in recording answers from the supernatural (this is also confirmed from other sites, such as Delphi, where the oracles were not written down as far as is known. Note that L.H. Jeffrey, *The local scripts of archaic Greece: a study of the origin of the Greek alphabet and its development from the eighth to the fifth centuries B.C.* (Oxford 19902) 100 claims that oracles were written down on leather at Delphi. We find a similar idea in Cic. *Div*. 2.55.115. The few answers we have are all about different topics and are phrased differently. There is no apparent reason why these specific answers were written down, and others not. It seems to have happened in the 5th and 4th centuries only, but there is not enough evidence to draw any conclusions about changing practices (all dates by Lhôte: Lhôte 12 (425-400); 27 (5th century); 35 (450-425); 68 (ca 350); 92 (4th century); 99? (ca 450); 114 (400-390); 137 (4th-3rd centuries). The answers listed in Eidinow are from the same period: page 123: 1) 330-320; 2) ? 3) Travel 5: c. 400 4) Travel 22: 5th century 5) Women 20: mid-4th century 6) Work 13: ? 7) Slavery 4: 5th century 8) Slavery 12: beginning of 4th century 9) Health/Disease 6: ? 10) Property 2: 5th century 11)

been published so far. Many more (ca 1,100) await publication.[86] The published texts range in date from 550 to 167 BC.[87] Some examples are the following:

> Whether it will be better for me if I go to Sybaris and if I do these things?[88]
> Will it be better for Agelochos (from Ergetion) if he sets out to be a farmer?[89]
> God. Good fortune. About the price of a slave.[90]

Prosperity/Safety 4: mistake in Eidinow, this is not an answer 12) Prosperity/Safety 5: 4th century 13) Military Campaigns 1: first quarter of 4th century 14) City affairs and politics 2: ? 15) Fragmentary 9: ?).

86 Most of the available lamellae have recently been (re-)published in Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires, passim*; M. Dieterle provides an overview but no publications: M. Dieterle, *Dodona: Religionsgeschichtliche und historische Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Entwicklung des Zeus-Heiligtums* (Hildesheim 2007) 70-72; 345-360; Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 72-124 has categorized the published oracles.

87 Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 11. We know that the oracle at Dodona already existed in some form when the Odyssey was written down: Hom. *Od.* 14.327-330.

88 Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 75 (number 2).
Ạἴ κα μέλλι ἐς [Σύ]βαριν ἰόντι λῷ̂ον | ἔ̓μεν [κ]α πράτοντι ταῦτα.

89 Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 96 (number 4).
Ἀγελόχῳ ἐξ | Ηεργετί̣ω ho | ρμημένωι | ἄμεινόν ἐστι | γαογρῆ[ν].

90 Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 103 (number 10).

> God. Luck. Leontios asks about his son Leon, whether he will be healthy and (cured) of the disease which has gripped him?[91]

Answers were only occasionally written down on the tablets:

> Side A: God…Good Luck. About possessions and about a place to live: whether (it would be) better for him and his children and his wife in Kroton?
> Side B (probably the response to A): In Kroton.[92]

Θεὸς τύχαν ἀ[γαθάν· περὶ ἀνθρ] | ώπου τιμᾶς.

91 Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 105 (number 3).

Θεός . τύχα . ἱστορεῖ Λεόντιος περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ | Λεόντος ἦ ἐσσεται ὑγεία τοῦ νοσήμα- | τος τοῦ ἐπιμ . . . του ὅ λάζεταί νιν.

Note that questions about children were very frequently asked, but had more to do with the begetting of children than anything else. This is attested by Dodonaic epigraphical evidence but also by literary sources on Delphi such as Eur. *Med.* 668-669 which indicates that asking whether or not there would be children was a question which could be asked at Delphi.

92 Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk,* 76 (number 5).

Side A: Θεός· τύχα ἀγαθά · | περὶ πανπασίας καὶ περὶ ϝοικέσιος | ἰς Κρ<ό>τονα ἔ βέλτιον καὶ ἄμεινο<ν>

αὐτοῖ καὶ γενε- | ᾶι καὶ γυναι | κί

Side B: Ἠν Κρότονι.

Textual (un)certainties

How the oracle at Dodona functioned is still largely shrouded in mystery.[93] Nevertheless, enough is known to sketch a hypothetical scenario: a client would arrive and be provided with a piece of lead. He (or she) would write down the question and fold the tablet. If the client had trouble writing, he would ask someone else – either another client or perhaps an employee at the oracle. Analysis of the handwriting reveals that the clients usually wrote down their own questions on the small lead tablets in Greek. Many questions were written in Doric, especially in the Corinthian alphabet, which points towards a great number of clients coming from the northwest, Corcyra especially. Other texts were written in the local Dodonaic alphabet, and there are also a number of texts written in the alphabets of Magna Graeca and Italy, as well as some texts using the Boeotian and Thessalian alphabets.[94] Whether the clients received the *lamellae* at the oracle site and subsequently wrote down their question, for which a Dodonaic 'production-site' would have been necessary (where the clients were perhaps supervised while writing their tablets – resolving any problems of a lack of literacy) is still uncertain. Perhaps they brought the tablets with them, after they had already written down the question at home. This raises yet

93 It seems that the oracle at Dodona worked in such a way that an immediate answer through observation or discourse would have been possible, although there were group proceedings as well which might have taken longer.

94 Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 229-335.

another matter: if the client had written down the question himself prior to his visit he would have had to know in what manner the god should be questioned. In other words, the client would have needed to know the format in which he should write down his question and what other markings on the tablet would be necessary to 'get the question right'. It should be noted that the standard questions were phrased simply and relatively homogenously – it is certainly not out of the question that it was generally known what these standards were.[95] The hypothesis that the client wrote his tablet at Dodona itself appears plausible, especially in combination with the archaeological evidence of the presence of putative writing materials and the (incidental) presence of scribes or writing functionaries at the sanctuary, who would have been on hand to help the people write their lead tags.

Although these inferences are relatively straightforward, one crucial uncertainty looms: from an emic perspective, the supernatural had to be informed of the questions which were asked them. From an etic perspective, it is clear that the functionaries present at the site also needed to know the questions.

There are a number of hypothetical options to consider: were the functionaries (or the clients themselves) supposed to read out these texts for the supernatural publicly so that the supernatural could 'hear' them – also providing the functionary with knowledge of what the question was about –, or would the *lamella* have remained rolled

95 Lhôte, L*es lamelles oraculaires*, 336-344; Versnel, *Coping with the gods*, 46-47.

up and was the supernatural supposed to 'read' the question from the closed *lamella*? In the latter case, the presiding functionary at the oracle site would have had to open the *lamella* secretly in order to find out what the question was – after all, he would have needed to provide an appropriate answer.[96] Another option is that, during the procedure, the client or functionary would have read out the question from the *lamella*, or that the client would have repeated his question vocally but left the *lamella* rolled up. This would have meant that the supernatural could have 'heard' the question, after which an answer would have been perceived to have been given by means of a sign.[97] This sign would have been interpreted by the functionary and transposed into human language. The functionary, now

96 Judging from handwriting, the few answers available to us were written down by people other than those who wrote down the questions. Lhôte 127, 35, 12, 92 have answers written on the back which are not in the handwriting of the person who wrote down the questions. The handwriting in the answer of 35 is in the same handwriting as an addition made on the back of the tablet (see above), also indicating the work of a professional who regulated the proceedings at the site. The answers might have been written by professionals at the sanctuary. On another tablet, tablet 95, however, the same handwriting is seen both front and back: in this case. On the basis of the use of the local dialect, the client or professional seems to have inscribed both the answer and the question. Consider also numbers 142; 166 and 68 in this context. See Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 356-357.

97 It would have to have been the functionary who did this, otherwise the client could simply have asked the question orally and the text would have been superfluous.

in full knowledge of the topic about which an answer was expected, could have tweaked the answer accordingly.[98]

The theory according to which the client wrote his question knowing that it had to be read to the supernatural by someone other than himself is supported by the fact that there are no significant traces of symbolic writing on the tablets. The questions are well written and lucid.[99] The texts also had to be written in Greek, although there are some peculiarities whenever an Illyrian language is used and also when a demotic Egyptian sign appears on one of the tablets.[100]

A second, antithetical option is suggested by one of the tablets (Lhôte 35), which seems to make it explicit that the writing was not intended for man, but only for the supernatural: the tablet appears

98 This is not to say this was fraud or manipulative behavior: it is perfectly reasonable to assume, if the procedure worked in this way, the functionary would have convinced himself that he had conveyed the true sense of the sign he had perceived.

99 When used symbolically, writing is a part of religious symbolism: it is not intended to be consulted (Beard, 'Ancient literacy', *passim*). Not what it says, nor its contents matter, but the that there is writing at all is what is relevant. A very clear example of symbolic writing, referred to above, are the curse tablets from the temple of Sulis Minerva in Bath inscribed with pseudo-handwriting (Cunliffe, *Sulis Minerva*, Vol. 2, 248-252). The curse was oral, or perhaps only in the mind of the curser, – but even so he felt he needed to produce a semblance of writing. The presence of writing, real writing or anything resembling it, is what is important.

100 See the commentaries on tablets 164 and 129 by Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 319-322; 266-271.

to have been folded open, engraved with an additional word on the back of the folded tablet, possibly by a functionary in order to clarify the (vague) question, and then refolded so that it would appear it had not been opened. This can be deduced from the fold marks and the position of the additional word on the back of the tablet.[101] The fact that such trouble was taken to ensure it appeared that the functionary had neither read the text nor unfolded the tablet points us in the direction of the idea that the question was not meant to be read by human eyes. Similar practices might have occurred when questions Lhôte 36, and perhaps 39, were asked. Analysis of handwriting tells that there are also a number of questions in which the key words were sometimes written on the outside of the tablet by the client himself – perhaps at the instigation of a functionary who then would not even have had to open the tablet covertly. He might also have asked the client to tell him what his question was but, of course, there are no source materials to back this theory up. Even if a group consultation took place, the functionary could still have identified the tablet as belonging to a particular client: the outside of the tablet could have been marked by scratching his name, a letter which would identify the question in the sequence, a number or by scratching a number of dots.[102]

101 Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 95-97; 354-355.

102 An example of a tablet in which dots have been scratched is Lhôte number 33. Identification by name: Lhôte tablet numbers 36, 43, 152, 151, 38, 103, 73, 150, 148, 153, 166, 8, 46, 121, 80. Other means of identification, such as profession, in: 149, 146, 104. See Lhôte, Les lamelles oraculaires, 351-

There are indications that written questions were used at other

352. This could have been done to identify which piece of lead belonged to which client, suggesting that consultation took place in groups and not individually, or that the client was required to hand his lamella in. These two options are not mutually exclusive. Another feature of the lamellae which would confirm group consultation is the letter which can be found on some plaques. For example, the letter B or a number would be scratched on and this indicated the order in which the questions were presented to the oracle. The order of questions/clients was also signified by numbers on the lamellae. Of the corpus of texts which Lhôte published, no lamella carries the number 1, three carry number 2, one carries 3, three carry 4, two carry 5, one carries 10, one carries 11, and two carry 24. These numbers suggest that, when group consultation took place, there were usually only a small number of client and queries at one time but there were also exceptions of up to 24 questions in one session (Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, 352-354. The numbers of the lamellae in question are: 121; 125; 111; 96; 1; 145; 46; 80; 89; 92; 109. Tablets 81 and 49 might also fall into this category but Lhôte is cautious and designates them 'difficult cases '. However, they do not alter the impression we get from the lamellae above). This identification of the tablets would also serve helped functionaries to give the answer to the right client. This points towards a practice of giving more than one tablet to the oracle at once, at least during some of the consultations. It indicates that group sessions did occur frequently but were not the norm. It should be noted that there are many tablets which are not inscribed on the outside at all. Either there was another system of ordering them during a group consultation, or these were given to the oracle by the individual clients themselves, which made marking unnecessary. At a number of other oracular sites (Delphi, Didyma, Korope), the order in which clients could pose their questions was arranged by means of promanteia, which

Greek oracle sites as well.[103] These might provide insight into the textual uncertainties of Dodona. At Korope, the procedure around 100 BC was as follows: a procession consisting of officials was conducted towards the oracle. When they had arrived, they sacrificed; following this, the secretary wrote down the names of the enquirers wanting to pose their questions on a public board; after they had been seated the individuals were called up before the officials and handed them their tablets; these tablets went into a jar which was kept in the sanctuary overnight; the following day the tablets were returned to the individuals, presumably with the answer. Louis Robert has argued that the procedure was already completed on the first day

directed that particular states (and later individuals) would be allowed to take precedence. Naturally, the existence of this system at Dodona does not exclude the possibility that the system of promanteia was also used. See on promanteia K. Latte, '12b. Promanteia' in: idem, *Kleine Schriften: zu Religion, Recht, Literatur und Sprache der Griechen und Römer* (München 1968) 193-195. This would imply that an immediate oral answer would await the client. Divine-while-you-wait, as it were.

103 There is also a report of the Athenians asking the Delphic Oracle to choose between two options: the two options were inscribed on tin plaques and put into jars which were subsequently sealed. However, this was an unusual consultation at Delphi and there are no indications that the oracle at Dodona chose between two alternatives in this sense (See Parke, *The oracles of Zeus*, 102-103). It should, of course, be noted that many questions were phrased 'is it better if.. ', which also implies a choice the oracle has to make (and it is not right if this choice is not made by the supernatural: Xen. *An*. 3.1.5-8).

but that there would have been no time to hand the tablets back to the enquirers in the evening. He suggests this is why it was necessary to wait until the following day.[104] Others have argued there must have been a purpose in delaying handing back the tablets: otherwise it would be a waste of time. Parke suggests that human incubation might have taken place overnight, as was the case at the oracle of Mallos.[105] If we accept this theory, returning the tablets 'was presumably meant to allow them [the clients] to satisfy themselves that their questions had not been opened or read by any human agent.'[106] Although the possibility of a nocturnal incubation as part of the proceedings at Korope should not be shrugged aside, another possibility might have been that the questions were read by officials overnight, which would have allowed them to provide a suitable answer the next morning. Of course, the two possibilities are not mutually exclusive.

One Graeco-Roman oracle at which the questions were submitted in written form was the oracle of Alexander of Abonuteichos in the second century AD. According to Lucian's satirical, and most probably unhistorical, description, Alexander had founded his oracle on false premises and built an enormous business empire on fraud.[107]

104 Robert, 'Apollon Koropaios', 25-26 ; O. Stählin, *RE* 11 (1921) s.v. Korope 1.

105 However, the discussion about timing of the oracle is not part of this argument. See on this opinion: Parke, *The oracles of Zeus*, 106-107.

106 Parke, *The oracles of Zeus*, 107.

107 For an analysis of Lucian's satirical topics see, e.g., C.P. Jones, C*ulture*

Regardless of whether Lucian's accusations are well founded, at least some of the ways in which the texts were handled by Alexander and his followers can give an idea about what perhaps happened at the oracle at Dodona, albeit the evidence referring to Alexander of Abonuteichos is much later. At the oracle of Alexander, the proceedings were as follows: first, the client had to write his question down on a small piece of paper and seal it so it could not be opened. Alexander took all the papers inside and had the clients called in one at the time so they could be given back their paper, seal unbroken; the answer was written on the outside of the paper.[108] In between

and society in Lucian (Cambridge, MA 1986) 133-148. On historicity of Lucian's Alexander see U. Victor, L*ukian von Samosata: Alexandros oder den Lügenprophet* (Leiden 1997) 8-26 and, more critically, Bendlin, 'Vom Nutzen und Nachteil'. The way Alexandros built his oracular empire and how he won a niche in the market is discussed in G. Sfameni Gasparro, 'Alessandro di Abonutico, lo "pseudo-propheta" overro come costruirsi un'identità religiosa. II. L'oracolo e I misteri' in: C. Bonnet & A. Motte (eds), *Les syncrétismes religieux dans le monde méditerranéen antique: actes du colloque international en l'honneur de Franz Cumont à l'occasion du cinquantième anniversaire de sa mort: Rome, Academia Belgica, 25-27 septembre 1997* (Brussels 1999) 275-305. Another example in which the god received written questions at an oracle, was – according to Lucian – at Mallos (Lucian *Philops*. 38).

108 Lucian *Alex*. 19. Lucian claims Alexander would break the seal, read the question and re-seal the document by means of trickery (Lucian *Alex*. 20). Cf. Parke, *The oracles of Zeus*, 107-108.

these sessions, he would, fraud that he was, have read the papers.[109] This may be seen as a reflection on the doubts about what was done with the 'secret' questions: they were not meant to be read by man, but in practice they were.

Taken as a whole, the fragmentary evidence suggests that use of a written text during the oracular procedure was, from an emic perspective, intended for the supernatural to read 'in private' – without any functionary interfering, thereby validating the procedure –, but in practice it served the functionaries. This twofold and contrasting use of text will have created tensions – which can be detected in the sources.

A function in the afterlife (of the text)?

What was done with divinatory questions after their use? Were written questions and answers archived, abandoned or left behind at the oracle? Were they perhaps re-used? Mesopotamian questions were certainly kept, along with the report of the sign which had been seen. This served as a record of the consultation and was also used for training purposes and for future reference. How did this work in Greece? Again, Dodona can serve as a point of departure.

The first Dodonaic tablets excavated were found by Constantin Carapanos in the temple area: 'un grand nombre d'exvoto en bronze [...] et la plupart des inscriptions sur plaques de bronze et de plomb, ont été trouvés, éparpillés dans ces ruines, à une profondeur de 5

109 There would also have been oral questions. Lucian *Alex*. 26-27.

metres environ.'[110] If this report can be trusted – which is the consensus – a number of inferences can be drawn from it. The fact that the tablets were found, many rolled up, scattered across the site suggests that the tablets were taken by the client and buried *in situ* in obedience to some preordained prescription, or were simply discarded. If the functionaries at Dodona had collected and perhaps archived the tablets, they would not have ended up scattered over the length and breadth of the site.

If the tablets were discarded or collected but without the specific purpose of creating an archive.[111] Used tablets could have been gathered, smoothed out, erased and prepared for re-use. This possibility is supported by some palimpsests and opisthographs.[112] These various clues suggest that, after use, the *lamellae* were no longer of use either to the client or to the oracle site.[113] The evidence suggests that the client did not take his question home.

110 C. Carapanos, *Dodone et ses ruines* 2 vols (Paris 1878) Vol. 1, 19.

111 For palimpsests and opistographs (of which some are questions and answers and others seem to have a question on each side) see, e.g., Lhôte numbers 10, 22, 36, 42, 46, 49, 50, 53, 58, 81, 89, 133, 137 (?), 141.

112 Cf. Parke, *The oracles of Zeus*, 108.

113 Some seem to suggest that the lamellae were buried, like defixiones. However, I see no reason why the lamellae would have had to have been buried: in the case of defixiones burial in graves had a function, but that function does not appear to be present here. It could be speculated that the questions had to remain secret and the tablets were therefore buried, but there is no other evidence for this and it would not tie in oracular practices elsewhere.

The tablet also lost its value for the oracle site itself: besides the small number of tablets which were re-used there is no evidence that the used tablets were ever looked at again. It certainly seems that questions (and records of answers) at the oracle were not centrally administered – going on the evidence available. This is peculiar because an archive could surely have been a way for the oracle to gain and retain authority, simply by giving it a history.[114] On the basis of the evidence we have, apparently this was not how affairs were run at Dodona nor indeed at any other oracle site. The oracular question (or the report of its answer) did not serve for remembrance, display or proof – unless the questions and answers were written down on papyrus or in other texts lost to us. Instead, the pronouncements of the oracle could have been written down at a later stage and in a different format, producing texts like stelae erected in public places.

Although Dodona was an institutionalized oracle and could have set up an infrastructure for the purpose of keeping a record of the questions which had been asked, this was – apparently – not deemed necessary. Why not? The answer ties in with conclusions above: questions were written down for the supernatural. The supernatural needed no record or proof of the interpretation of the sign it had provided. Nor was the text necessary for man: he knew his question and a yes-or-no answer is of course easily remembered. In

114 Alexander of Abonouteichos, for example, is said to have kept an archive of the oracles given at his oracle so that there would be records from which he could in retrospect be seen to have given the 'right' oracle. This may have then also occurred in practice. See Lucian *Alex.* 27.

important cases, the answer was later inscribed on a stele. In general, however, no need was felt either to solidify 'the word of the gods' for man by means of writing it down or to keep a record by means of an archive.[115] No bureaucratic apparatus was set up for these purposes – nor is this seen at other oracle sites. There are, of course, epigraphical reports of answers of the supernatural – but these are generally written down by and in the poleis who had consulted oracles. This oral tradition is in striking contrast to Mesopotamia, where the text served both the supernatural and man – during and after the process to serve as an archive as well as being a basis for reports to the king.

115 It seems that the oracle at Dodona worked in such a way that an immediate answer was possible, although there was a sequence of proceedings as well which might have taken longer. In practice the question had to be written down because the functionary needed to read it, but the writing was primarily meant for the supernatural. The functionary might perhaps have read it in private, so that the individual would remain under the impression that the supernatural had read the question and provided the answer. The functionary would also have needed to re-fold the tablet to give the impression he had not read it, which would explain the many folded tablets which were found at the site. Especially one instance in which a yes-or-no answer would not have done, this would not have been known before opening the tablet. Unless the client had been asked, the functionary would have needed to open the tablet for the client to have received an appropriate answer. As far as the individual was concerned the tablets were – and remained – folded because the supernatural knew what the question inside them was anyway. The answers were not written down and it must be assumed that the reason was that this act was not perceived to have added anything to the oracular proceedings.

Concluding observations

The most striking difference between the three cultural areas is the widespread use of informative texts during Mesopotamian divination and the apparently relatively low frequency of use of such texts in Greece. Rome occupies an intermediate position.

The extensive use of informative texts in Mesopotamia shows the apparent necessity for use of the written word as part of the Mesopotamian divinatory ritual – as does the use of text in Rome. The dearth of written divinatory texts in Greece supports the view that we are dealing with an under-institutionalized, decentralized, predominantly oral divinatory culture – albeit with a number of exceptions, such as the few guidelines we have and the written questions addressed to the supernatural at certain oracles. This created a situation in which a great variety in meaning could be given to the signs from the supernatural because the interpretation was not solidified in the shape of text, but it also meant that a much heavier burden was placed on the skills of the *homo divinans*. This might explain to some extent at least why the *homo divinans* was regarded with a relatively greater degree of suspicion in Greece than in Rome and Mesopotamia: in many cases there would have been no way to verify the Greek *homo divinans'* findings against an agreed standard.

In addition to the frequency of the use of written text, the variety in the use and function of written texts is another conspicuous fea-

ture, illustrating the wide diversity in divinatory practice in the three cultural areas. The first fact which emerges from the discussion on textual signs is that the Mesopotamian supernatural was supposed to be able to write their own signs, whereas Roman and Greek supernatural provided signs by making use of texts written by man. This fits in with ideas about the Mesopotamian writing supernatural and the Greek and Roman supernatural who did not usually do this.

Second, in all three cultural areas a guideline could be more or less standardized and assume some degree of authority, usually because this had been agreed upon by one or more experts. In theory, the authoritative written text was the standard text which should be used (at least according to the experts). In practice matters seem to have been organized rather differently in each of the three cultural areas. If the guideline did not seem to work and the expert needed to resort to an supplementary one, or another, completely different one, he could discard or supplement the standardized text and another written or oral tradition would have been sought, found and used. There seems to have been nothing problematic about this procedure: it was a matter of practicalities. Practicalities which were different in each of the three areas: on the basis of the scanty written evidence from Greece it does appear that a new written text would be created if the old one did not suit the requirements of the experts. Once produced, these texts would enter into competition with one another. Romans tried to hold on to their old texts by adding to them (or even replacing them but under the same name),

keeping the established tradition going at least theoretically, while in Mesopotamia a new written text would be produced to be used side-by-side with the old text as an extension of the corpus.

These guidelines, standards and alternatives were created to facilitate the task of interpreting the signs of the supernatural in the right manner. They were both descriptive and prescriptive. Ultimately, the *homo divinans* had the last say on how and according to which written text a sign should be interpreted. The degree to which he was free to do this depended on the conventions governing the use of guidelines.

Third, there were Mesopotamian scenario-texts providing shape and structure to the ritual. The existence of such texts in Greece and Rome can only be guessed at. On the basis of the available evidence, it has to be concluded that, certainly in Mesopotamia and specifically in the extispicy ritual, it was important to get the ritual right and pronounce the right words as an integral part of the ritual.

Fourth, questions and answers were sometimes written down, although this does not seem to have been done consistently in Greece. There is no evidence to suggest that records were systematically kept at Greek oracle sites. Either preservation was not thought to be necessary – or they have not survived. Why not? As we have seen, the most plausible answer is that the questions on the *lamellae* were written down for the benefit of the supernatural. Therefore, it was not necessary that they be recorded after the process: they had served their purpose. The functionary could seek clues in the written

text by reading it, secretly or openly. This was an essential feature of the divinatory process. The most important contrast between the Mesopotamian and the Greek materials in the use of questions and answers is that the Mesopotamian questions were laid before the supernatural in written form, for both the supernatural and man to read. In Greece, if used, the written texts were, at least in theory, meant for the supernatural only.

The ideas explored above have consequences for the way the Greek text, the *homo divinans* and sign interacted. In Rome and Mesopotamia, the interpretations were as clear and unambiguous as they were in Greece – but their mandate was reinforced by authoritative and standardized texts for interpretative purposes, facilitated by the existence of a divinatory bureaucracy in Mesopotamia especially, leading to less discussion. The dearth of written texts in Greece imbued the *homo divinans* with relatively greater importance but would also – in the Greek perception – have left room for discussion about the meaning of particular signs: different interpretations would have competed with one another. Again, the Greek interpretative process appears to have allowed for a relatively large degree of flexibility and choice.

Part III

The functions of ancient divination

7. Time and divination – divination and time

A complicated interplay between divination and conceptions of time was present in each of the three cultural areas covered by this study. Divination was intertwined with, organized through and restricted by temporal frameworks. Conversely, divination might also tell us something about conceptions of time – laying the foundations for the study of uncertainty in the next chapter.[1]

Ancient time is a problematic subject. Geoffrey Lloyd states: 'Quite apart from thinkers of whom we know nothing, there are many for whom the evidence is insufficient for us to speak confidently concerning their ideas on time'.[2] Nevertheless, the divinatory materials can fill up some of this lacuna because they are an expression of what the ancient man-on-the-street would have deemed 'normal' ideas and conceptions about time. After all, divination is based on

1 I take into account that there were many different conceptions of time simultaneously within one society, as discussed by P. Burke, who uses the term 'occasionalism' to express this: 'Reflections on the cultural history of time', *Viator* 35 (2004) 617-626, at 626. However, generalization is necessary because the sources do not always allow otherwise.

2 G.E.R. Lloyd, 'Views on time in Greek thought' in: L. Gardet *et al.* (eds), *Cultures and time* (Paris 1976) 117-148, at 117.

the idea of a connection between the past, present and future.[3]

3 The way cultural areas consider these three can be summarized under the headings: time perspectives, time attitude and time orientation (For these headers see J.R. Nuttin, *Future time perspective and motivation: theory and research method* (Leuven 1984 [translated from French]) 11; but see for another – for my purposes useful – way of categorization of the study of time, e.g., B. Adam, *Time and social theory* (Cambridge 1990) 93. Anthropologists consider the length and depth of thinking about time, the way events are distributed along the timescale, the degree of structuring and the level of realism of thinking about time. For an example of an article discussing time perspectives (especially linear and cyclical ones) see N.M. Farriss, 'Remembering the future, anticipating the past: history, time, and cosmology among the Maya of Yucatan', *CSSH* 29 (1987) 566-593). These factors construct, and perhaps even negotiate, ideas about time in every society (see for terminology of 'negotiating time': K. Clarke, *Making time for the past: local history and the polis* (Oxford 2008) vii). An example of a difference to modern Western time perspectives is the way cultures appear to have perceived their own position on a time line: while we may think that we are facing the future and have our backs to the past which is behind us, this can also be perceived as being the other way around. If the future is unknown it cannot be seen, which means we have to have our backs towards it and are facing the known past (see for explorations into this idea with regard to Greece and Mesopotamia A.G.E. Dunkel, 'Prossoo kai opissoo', *ZVS* 96 (1982-83) 66-87; M. Bettini, *Antropologia e cultura romana: parentela, tempo, immagini dell' anima* (Rome 1986) 133-143). As to different time attitudes, people in modern Western societies expect that they will reach a certain, fairly advanced age and live in a certain prosperous state. For several generations this has been almost a fact of life, a near certainty. In the ancient world this was not perceived in this way at all: life

This chapter commences with an exploration of certain chronological aspects of the process of divination itself.[4] On which days was it possible to divine, and on which days was it better not to? Was there a particular time of the day which was most suitable? On pp.

was subject to many threats. Human ones, such as war, as a consequence of which houses and harvest could be destroyed and people killed or enslaved, but Nature could also be overwhelming. How much time he had left in the future was very uncertain for an ancient individual. The future was a source of constant expectation but also of great anxiety. This is linked to time orientation: is the past, present or the future of particular concern in a particular culture? They were in the ancient world: although a mere moving point on the timescale, the present is central to the relationship between past and future. The past, as expressed in the present, consists of memories. These might be part of a communal memory (history) or personal memory ('my history'). The future, as expressed in the present, has the shape of expectation or anticipation. This includes fear and hope. The individual cannot avoid having thoughts in the present about the, personal or communal, past and future. A note on the above use of 'our modern Western society': I am aware of the fact that this is a generalization and many nuances can be made with respect to every modern culture I refer to as 'our Western culture'. However, in a study of the ancient world I think such a generalization permissible

4 Previous studies have explored time but not from the angle of divination, see, e.g., on time and magic: A. Livingstone, 'The magic of time' in: T. Abusch & K. van der Toorn (eds), *Mesopotamian magic: textual, historical, and interpretative perspectives* (Leiden 1999) 131-137. Such an approach is called for by B. Adam, 'Perceptions of time' in: T. Ingold (ed.), *Companion encyclopedia of anthropology* (London 1994) 503-525, at 522-523.

240-241 it has been noted that time functioned as a context to the sign: this will be discussed here in more detail. In the second part of the investigation, conceptions of time which can be identified in the divinatory materials are discussed. The use of divination for finding 'the right moment' for an undertaking is analysed: if there was a right moment, time cannot have been considered as homogeneous. This chapter delves deeper to show what might have been the time limits to obtaining divinatory knowledge of past and future. Is the time horizon made explicit or left unspecified? Finally, the past can be used to think about the future in the shape of precedent. What does all of this mean for ideas about time in the three cultural areas?

Background to time

Debates

Time as a topic is a major theme of discussion in many different subject areas – the literature on time, as time itself, 'has no beginning or end'.[5] Given restrictions on time and space in this book, only some issues related to experience of time are introduced here.[6]

5 N.D. Munn, 'The cultural anthropology of time: a critical essay', *AntRevAnth* 21 (1992) 93-123, at 93.

6 Historians and ancient historians alike have worked on the topic 'time', which has become a major focus of study since the 19th century. Historians such as K. Marx (*Das Kapital* (Hamburg 1867-1894) chapter 10) and M. Weber ('Die protestantische Ethik und der "Geist" des Kapitalismus',

Despite (or because of) the fact that time is discussed so inten-

ASS 20 & 21 (1904 & 1905) 1-54; 1-110) were concerned with time, as was W. Gent, *Das Problem der Zeit: eine historische und systematische Untersuchung* (Frankfurt 1934). In France, time was studied by such people as H. Hubert (*Étude sommaire de la représentation du temps dans la religion et la magie* (1905), reprinted in: *Mélanges d'Histoire des Religions* (Paris 1909) 189-229); M. Mauss & E. Durkheim, ('De quelques formes primitives de classification: contribution à l'etude des représentations collectives', *AS* 6 (1901-2) 1-72), M. Halbwachs ('La mémoire collective et le temps', *CIS* (1947) 3-31). In the United States: G.H. Mead (see M. Flaherty & G.H. Fine, 'Present, past, and future: conjugating George Herbert Mead's perspective on time', *T&S* 10 (2001) 147-161); P.A. Sorokin & R.K. Merton ('Social time: a methodological and functional analysis', *AJSoc* 42 (1937) 615-629). In the late 1940s, a new generation took up the study: M. Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* (Paris 1949); G. Poulet, *Études sur le temps humain* (Paris 1949); J. Le Goff, 'Merchants' time and church's time in the Middle Ages' in: idem, *Time, work and culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago 1980 [translated from French]); G. Gurevitch, *La multipicité des temps sociaux* (Paris 1958); R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main 1979); N. Elias, *Über die Zeit: Arbeiten zur Wissenssoziologie* II (Frankfurt 1984) – and these are only the 'big names' who have concerned themselves with this topic. A more extensive bibliography would include many more references. For a more extensive bibliographical overview concerned with time see G. Pronovost, 'Bibliography', *CS* 37.3 (1989) 99-124 and Burke, 'Reflections', 617-626, and the special issue of the journal *Métis* 12-13 (1997-1998). For an overview of the main literature – from an anthropological perspective – dealing with time before 1992 see the bibliography in Munn, 'The cultural anthropology of time', 117-123. The *Altertumswissenschaft*, in the meanwhile, was also concerned with time. See C. von Orelli, D*ie hebräischen Synonyma*

sively, there is still no consensus on its nature. Some say time is a dimension, closely linked to space, but it has also been argued that it does not exist in its own right but is a human creation,[7] and it is this

der zeit und Ewigkeit (Leipzig 1871) and a more general study by M. Nilsson, *Primitive time-reckoning: a study in the origins and first development of the art of counting time among the primitive and early culture peoples* (Lund 1920), with pages 362-369 on Greece specifically; E. von Dobschütz, 'Zeit und Raum im denken des Urchristentums', *JBL* 41 (1922) 212-223; H. Fränkel ('Die Zeitauffassung in der frühgriechische Literatur' in: idem, *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens: literarische und philosophiegeschichtliche Studien* (München 1955) 1-22); B. Snell (*Die Entdeckung des Geistes: Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen* (Hamburg 1946)); I. Myerson ('Le *temps*, la mémoire, "'histoire"', *JP* 53 (1956) 333-354); A.D. Momigliano, 'Time in ancient historiography', *History and the concept of time* (Beiheft *History and Theory*) (Middletown, CON 1966) 1-23; Lloyd, 'Views on time', 117-148. More recent studies are J.P. Vernant & P. Vidal-Naquet, *La Grèce ancienne: l'espace et le temps* (Paris 1992) and B. Stiegler, *La technique et le temps, 1: La faute d'Épiméthée* (Paris 1994). The most recent major contributions are C. Darbo-Peschanski (ed.), *Constructions du temps dans le monde grec ancien* (Paris 2000); B. André Salvini, 'La conscience du temps in Mésopotamie' in: F. Briquel-Chatonnet & H. Lozachmeur (eds), *Proche-Orient ancien, temps vécu, temps pensé: actes de la table-ronde du 15 Novembre 1997* (Paris 1998) 29-37, and see also E. Robson, 'Scholarly conceptions and quantifications of time in Assyria and Babylonia, c. 750-250 BCE' in: R.M. Rosen (ed.), *Time and temporality in the ancient world* (Philadelphia 2004) 45-90.

7 See V. Evans, *The structure of time: language, meaning and temporal cognition* (Amsterdam 2003) for an overview of the phenomenology of time, debate on its existence, as well as the problems related to the experi-

human experience of time which is important to the purpose of this discussion. Time is used in order to structure and measure human experience. Human experiences of time are astronomical and biological, societal and individual-psychological – categories which, in practice, cannot always be separated from each other.[8]

The first two varieties are usually the same for every human being (although their measurement is not because this is culturally defined). Societal time is important to the study of divination because both are cultural constructs which affect one another. Societal time is the way in which time is kept track of, described and measured – and whatever interpretation is put upon it. There have been many attempts to capture recurring patterns in something like a calendar, endeavours which have led to *Verzeitlichung*,[9] but keeping track of time and time measurement was a relatively primitive affair in the ancient world.[10] One of the main debates with respect

ence of time.

8 I am grateful to Dr F.G. Naerebout for perceptive comments on this topic.

9 For one of the many historical studies of the development of our modern concept of time see the articles in W. Katzinger (ed.), *Zeitbegriff: Zeitmessung und Zeitverständnis im städtischen Kontext* (Linz/Donau 2002). See for a very inspiring publication on the development of time, and *Verzeitlichung*: D.S. Landes, *Revolution in time: clocks and the making of the modern world* (Cambridge, MA 1983).

10 Mostly consisting of watching the sun, moon and stars, and observing nature: migratory birds, for example. Of course, there were sundials and water clocks, and there were calendars as well as very advanced equip-

to societal time in the ancient world is whether time was experienced in a cyclical or linear fashion or both simultaneously. Some have claimed that Greeks saw time as cyclical. This is one of the great contrasts which could – supposedly – be drawn between polytheis-

ment to assist in keeping calendrical time, like the famous Antikythera Mechanism. The studies on this Mechanism are countless. Recent ones are T. Freeth *et al.*, 'Decoding the ancient Greek astronomical calculator known as the Antikythera Mechanism', *Nature* 444 (2006) 587-591; T. Freeth *et al.*, 'Calendars with Olympiad display and eclipse prediction on the Antikythera Mechanism', *Nature* 454 (2008) 614-617. See further the bibliography on the website of the Antikythera Mechanism Research Project: http://www.antikythera-mechanism.gr/bibliography [visited 23-01-2010]. The studies on chronology and calendrical time are many – these can be seen as a sub-genre within ancient studies of time – and I shall mention only a few recent publications: D.C. Feeney, C*aesar's calendar: ancient time and the beginnings of history* (Berkeley 2007); R. Hannah, *Greek and Roman calendars: constructions of time in the classical world* (London 2005); D. Lehoux, *Astronomy, weather, and calendars in the ancient world: parapegmata and related texts in Classical and Near Eastern societies* (Cambridge 2007); M. Pasco-Pranger, *Founding the year: Ovid's 'Fasti' and the poetics of the Roman calendar* (Leiden 2006); J. Steele, *Calendars and years: astronomy and time in the ancient Near East* 2 vols (Oxford 2007-2011) Vol. 1. On measuring time also see, also among many others, D. Brown, 'The cuneiform conception of celestial space and time', *CAJ* 10 (2000) 103-122; D. Brown, J. Fermor & C.B.F. Walker, 'The water clock in Mesopotamia', *AfO* 46/47 (1999/2000) 130-148; O. Neugebauer, 'Studies in ancient astronomy 8: the water clock in Babylonian astronomy', *Isis* 37 (1947) 37-43; S.L. Gibbs, *Greek and Roman sundials* (New Haven 1976).

tic cultures and their Judeo-Christian counterparts. However, over forty years ago the work of Arnoldo Momigliano made it clear that a completely cyclical conception of Greek time is an untenable proposition: truly cyclical views were entertained by some philosophers, but in practice were a rare phenomenon.[11] If events are really seen to recur in cycles (everything which happens now has happened before and will happen again), these cycles follow one another in a linear progression.[12]

11 Momigliano, 'Time' . As Astrid Möller and Nino Luraghi have written: 'We cannot label one culture cyclical, another linear, because most people perceive time in different ways according to their context or situation, with the result that any one culture is characterised by a range of different perceptions of time.' A. Möller & N. Luraghi, 'Time in the writing of history: perceptions and structures', S*toria della Storiografia* 28 (1995) 3-15, apud Feeney, *Caesar's calendar*, 3. In the same vein, Denis Feeney observes that, 'In any society individuals are liable to inhabit different frames of time, often simultaneously – cyclical or recurrent, linear, seasonal, social, historical.' Feeney, *Caesar's calendar*, 3. For example, calendars with their annual cycles are always of a cyclical nature: a calendar 'mediates and creates continuity between past and present'. M. Beard, 'A complex of times: no more sheep on Romulus' birthday', *PCPhS* n.s. 33 (1987) 1-15 paraphrased by R. Laurence & C. Smith, 'Ritual, time, and power in ancient Rome', *ARP* 6 (1995-1996) 133-151, at 146; for similar thoughts on combinations of cyclical and linear, this time on the basis of Hesiodus/Hesiod: S. Kravaritou, 'La construction d'un "calendrier" en Grèce ancienne: temps du rituel et temps du récit', *Kernos* 15 (2002) 31-40, at 40.

12 See M.H. Hansen, *The triumph of time* (Copenhagen 2002) 47-59 for a concise introduction to various ways of conceptualizing time. For a

The individual-psychological experience of time going by is also important. This includes some of the biorhythms mentioned above, but also a person's lifetime and life span (the two are connected in, for instance, the perceived speeding up of time as a person grows older). Duration of time and the speed of time are the sphere of numerous illusions which are part of the individual-psychological experience of time.[13]

When time and our – societal or biographical – experience of it is analysed in greater detail, new distinctions can be made. People are living in times and places, but those of a different age, gender, or belonging to a different social group might not experience or understand the same thing: their concepts might differ, or they might have different concerns about and ways of expressing these.[14] When it

nuanced view of changes in perception of time see P. Vidal-Naquet, 'Temps des dieux et temps des hommes: essai sur quelques aspects de l'expérience temporelle chez les Grecs', *RHR* 157 (1960) 55-80.

13 D. Draaisma, 'Waarom het leven sneller gaat als je ouder wordt' in: idem, *Waarom het leven sneller gaat als je ouder wordt* (Groningen 2001) 205-229; M.G. Flaherty, *The textures of time: agency and temporal experience* (Philadephia 2011); M.G. Flaherty, *A watched pot: how we experience time* (New York 1999).

14 The most common classification of different experiences of time are: social and cultural time – as discussed above – but also political time, ritual time, spatial and bodily time or gendered time. See E.K. Silverman, 'Time, anthropology of' in: N.J. Smelser & P.B. Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Amsterdam 2001) Vol. 23, 15683-15686. For some examples of studies of groups and their perspectives

comes to experiencing and interpreting time, it is fairly obvious that the individuals from the three cultural areas discussed here – not even taking the factors of gender, social group and age into account, simply because the source materials to do this are not available – might have had viewpoints rather different from ours and from one another. Still, in what follows I suggest relationships between ancient divination and perceptions of time can be deduced.

TIME INFLUENCES DIVINATION

Good timing

Practices of divination could be restricted and influenced by existing conceptions of time. Specific times of day might have been thought to facilitate the perceived contact with the supernatural. Anthropological evidence shows that some cultures only divine during the heat of the day, never at night, or only in the early morning.[15] The Greek Magical Papyri – which lie outside the chronological

on time: G. Pronovost, 'Time and social class', *CS* 37.3 (1989) 63-74; Greek time and social differences into account: Darbo-Peschanski, *Constructions du temps, passim*; and also, for an example from a completely different period – Medieval to modern times – in which many different social groups are discussed, the publication by T. Elhlert (ed.) *Zeitkonzeptionen, Zeiterfahrung, Zeitmessung: Stationen ihres Wandels vom Mittelalter bis zur Moderne* (Paderborn 1997).

15 P. Peek, 'African divination systems: non-normal modes of cognition'

boundaries of my enquiries – contain information about the existence of days and hours suitable for divination: on the first of the month divination should take place at dawn, on the second at noon and so forth.[16] Why exactly these times were considered to be good to divine is shrouded in mystery.

The Roman and Greek materials with which I am concerned do not reveal extensive evidence of a preference for divining at a particular time of day. There are examples of oracular sessions being extended over two consecutive days, incorporating a night into the process – receiving questions on the one day and answering them the next. Examples of this practice can be found at such Greek oracles-sites such as Korope and Lucian's fictional account of practices at Abonuteichos (a late example which can still indicate possible practices).[17] Considering Korope, it could (emically) be argued that the inclusion of a night gave the supernatural the opportunity to 'read' the question and answer the next day. Alexander of Abonuteichos is depicted as claiming that he obtained answers overnight. There were also practical reasons why a particular time of day might be thought suitable to perform divination. Daylight was

in: idem, *Ways of knowing: African divination systems* (Bloomington 1991) 191-212, at 197.

16 PGM VII 155-167.

17 See for a discussion on the probability of the following practice at Korope, where the questions were kept in a jar overnight: Robert, 'Apollon Koropaios', 25-26 (with many references).

essential to some divinatory procedures,[18] while some examinations of the skies or evoked oneiromancy probably took place at night. The dreamer needed to be asleep to receive a sign and some phenomena in the skies could only be seen during the night.

More extensive evidence of the necessity of proper timing can be found in Mesopotamia. The practical considerations apply equally to Mesopotamia, and – in addition – there is a very specific Mesopotamian divinatory method for which the time of day at which the procedure took place mattered more for theological reasons: extispicy. This ritual took place during the night and culminated in the perceived production of a sign when the day started again: the *ikribu* prayers show that there were suitable times during the night for specific ritual actions in the performance of extispicy. In the early hours of the morning, a sheep had to be sacrificed; a smoke offering to Šamaš, Adad, Marduk, and so on, had to be made.[19]

18 Found in PGM VII 250-244 and 255-259, among others. No explicit examples of this use of light are available from the three cultural areas discussed here, but it is common sense that some procedures would have required clear visibility.

19 See the (at points problematic) edition by Zimmern, *Beiträge,* numbers 1-20 100-101; line 69-75; 104-105, line 127. But also see other times and actions in, e.g., lines 31 (being cleansed before the sun went down), 41 (feed the gods when the stars appear), 55 (start smoke offerings at an unclear time); 101 (offer to the gods when the darkness became lighter(?)), 127 (smoke offerings to gods before sunrise). I thank J. Fincke for first drawing my attention to the importance of time during the divinatory process, especially in the *ikribu.*

Some argue that the whole process was based on the idea that the future was determined when the sun appeared, after the supernatural had met during the night. The council of the gods would decide each case, with Šamaš presiding over the ruling (which might later be 'appealed' against by means of other rituals). This ruling was provided in the shape of a sign at the daily rising of Šamaš.[20] Hence, the ritual was conducted on a diurnal basis (although there were also monthly and yearly cycles).[21] The timing of the ritual can be assumed to have been a theological necessity.

Reasons of a theological nature are less visible in Greece and Rome than in Mesopotamia. Still, in all three cultural areas timing was necessary to facilitate the transmission of the divine sign – which needed to tie in with the timetable of the supernatural or for more practical purposes. In both cases, sign and interpretation needed to be organized into a time frame, which restricted and arranged divination.

20 Cf. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung* on how to avoid such a ruling by means of apotropaic ritual.

21 One of the sources is Plut. *Mor. Quaest. Graec.* 292ef in which he explains that, in the past, the one day on which the Delphic oracle was open, in spring was the birthday of Apollo. There are ideas in all three cultural areas about why one particular day would be chosen. For a summary of this argument on Mesopotamia by J. Polonsky see *The rise of the sun god and the determination of destiny in ancient Mesopotamia* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2002) 971-980. See for an argument why in the yearly cycle the New Year and spring were important to Roman oracular practice Champeaux, *Fortuna*, Vol. 1, 60-61.

On which days to divine

Day time and night time appear to have been non-homogeneous because there could be a 'right time' for divination. Continuing this theme, the suitability of particular days for divinatory activity can also be considered.[22] In Greece, the evidence is, again, scarce:[23] at Dodona it is not known if there were specific days on which the oracle could be consulted; at Didyma this seems to have been likely;[24] with regard to Korope, too, much is uncertain but it is clear that the oracle was available on ὅταν συντελῆται τὸ μαντεῖον ('On the oracular days') – whichever these might have been and with whatever frequency they occurred.[25] Only in the case of Delphi do we happen

22 For contemporary comparative evidence see, e.g., PGM VII 155-67 in which the 3rd, 6th, 9th, 16th, 17th, and 25th were unsuitable for divination.

23 For two Mycenaean examples, however, cf. M. Ventris & J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (Cambridge 19732) 6.311, number 207. We do know that some days were considered 'good' or 'lucky' but this did not have consequences for divinatory practice and was also not on account of any divinatory findings. For example, in Greece, the sixth of Thargelion was a good day (Ael. *VH* 2.25), but this is not in any way connected to divination.

24 At Didyma it is uncertain how many times the oracle was open each year – Fontenrose puts the maximum number at 52, arguing that the mouthpiece of the god needed to fast for 3 days before pronouncing, the fourth day would be the oracular day, and he seems to assume that normal food would be required for another three days before recommencing the fast (Fontenrose, *Didyma*, 85). However, this is all very speculative.

25 Dittenberger, *Syll.*[2], 790, I.18; see especially Robert, 'Apollon Koropaios', 17; 21.

to have more detailed information about suitable and unsuitable days for divination. Plutarch says that, in the Archaic age this oracle site was 'open' only one day a year, but at a later date it was used for nine to twelve days every year (the oracle in which a white or black bean was picked probably operated more often, perhaps even continuously).[26] These days were spread out more or less evenly throughout the year, corresponding to the Delphic religious calendar designating certain dates as the days of Apollo (in the Athenian calendar this was the seventh of each month).[27] It has been stated many times that the number of days the oracle was in business each year could, nevertheless, have only been nine, because the oracle was

26 Other divinatory methods, apart from the oracular pronouncements by the Pythia, seem to have been used at Delphi and we are not aware of any time restrictions related to them: cleromancy using white and dark beans is most famous, but some say ornithomancy, extispcicy, empiromancy, aleuromancy and dendromancy also took place at Delphi. See Amandry, *La mantique apollinienne*, 25-40; 57-65.

27 Plut. *Mor. Quaest. Graec.* 292ef. For an evaluation of Plutarch's ideas about the Delphic oracle see Parke, *Greek oracles*, 80-81. On the days dedicated to Apollo see J.D. Mikalson, *The sacred and civil calendar of the Athenian year* (Princeton 1975) 19, and the 7th of each month on Mikalson's calendar. Although an argumentum ex silentio is naturally not a solid one, it can here be said that the Athenian sacred calendar does not explicitly state that some days would have been more auspicious or positive for divinatory activities. See the absence of divination and oracles in the discussions by L.A. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932) *passim*; and the volume by Mikalson referred to above.

supposedly closed for three months because Apollo was believed to be in the habit of quitting Delphi during the winter months, temporarily ceding his place to Dionysus.[28] Whether there were nine or twelve days of oracular activity each year still leaves a very limited number of days suitable for oracular consultation. The following example, which has sometimes been used to illustrate leeway was possible, is very exceptional (and no real oracle is provided!):[29]

> And now, wishing to consult the god concerning the expedition against Asia, he went to Delphi; and since he chanced to come on one of the inauspicious days, when it is not lawful to deliver oracles, in the first place he sent a summons to the prophetess. And when she refused to perform her office and cited the law in her excuse, he went up himself and tried to drag her to the temple, whereupon, as

28 Amandry, *La mantique apollinienne*, 83. J.E Fontenrose, basing himself on Plutarch's text which says that the singing of the paian to Apollo stopped for three months – instead dithyrambs in honour of Dionysos were sung –argues that this does not necessarily mean the consultations stopped. See Plut. *Mor. De E apud Delphos* 389c and J.E Fontenrose, *Python: a study of Delphic myth and its origins* (Berkeley 1959) 379. W. Halliday supports this idea in *The Greek questions of Plutarch* (Oxford 1928); The evidence is discussed in Amandry, *La mantique apollinienne*, 81; for this opinion also see Parke, *Greek oracles*, 105. In A. Salt & E. Boutsikas, 'Knowing when to consult the oracle at Delphi', *Ant* 79 (2005) 564-572, it is shown when Apollo was supposed to return to Delphi each year on the basis of astronomical calculations.

29 See also Champeaux, *Fortuna,* Vol. 1, 59.

> if overcome by his ardour, she said: "Thou art invincible, my son!" On hearing this, Alexander said he desired no further prophecy, but had from her the oracle which he wanted.[30]

In Mesopotamia there were other arrangements in place: divination functioned in a system of 'auspicious days' (*uttuku*) which were formalized into hemerologies, and menologies, for 'auspicious months'.[31] Almost every month contained five intrinsically bad days.[32] The reason particular days were perceived to be intrinsically bad probably was related to the moon and its phases.[33] One Neo-Assyrian source shows that fifteen days in one particular month were suitable for divination.[34] The rules set by the hemerologies

30 Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 14.6-7. Translation: B. Perrin. Edition: Teubner. βουλόμενος δὲ τῷ θεῷ χρήσασθαι περὶ τῆς στρατείας, ἦλθεν εἰς Δελφούς, καὶ κατὰ τύχην ἡμερῶν ἀποφράδων οὐσῶν, ἐν αἷς οὐ νενόμισται θεμιστεύειν, πρῶτον μὲν ἔπεμπε παρακαλῶν τὴν πρόμαντιν. ὡς δ᾽ ἀρνουμένης καὶ προϊσχομένης τὸν νόμον αὐτὸς ἀναβὰς βίᾳ πρὸς τὸν ναὸν εἷλκεν αὐτήν, ἡ δ᾽ ὥσπερ ἐξηττημένη τῆς σπουδῆς εἶπεν˙ „ἀνίκητος εἶ ὦ παῖ," τοῦτ᾽ ἀκούσας ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος οὐκέτ᾽ ἔφη χρῄζειν ἑτέρου μαντεύματος, ἀλλ᾽ ἔχειν ὃν ἐβούλετο παρ᾽ αὐτῆς χρησμόν.

31 Hemerology is a term which is much broader than this and can be used by ancient authors to refer to texts ranging from a calendar to a diary. It is essentially 'a text arranged according to the days of the year': J. Rüpke, 'Hemerologion' in: H. Cancik & H. Schneider, *Brill's New Pauly Online.* Visited 04-02-2010.

32 And it should be noted that, just to complicate matters, bad days could also be favourable: Robson, 'Scholarly conceptions', 66.

33 Robson, 'Scholarly conceptions', 66.

34 SAA 8 235 obv. 12. Robson, 'Empirical scholarship', 612.

and menologies mattered: they were adhered to – including those regarding divination – and only very few exceptions are known.[35]

In Roman Italy, it appears that the oracle at Praeneste, as well as other oracles, was open only on a limited number of days every year (including on the first day of the New Year). Why the oracles were open on those particular days is still unknown, but for New Year's day explanations have been sought in the symbolism of com-

35 A. Livingstone, 'The case of hemerologies: official cult, learned formulation and popular practice' in: E. Matsushima (ed.), *Official cult and popular religion in the ancient Near East: papers of the first colloquium on the ancient Near East - the city and its life, held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 20-22, 1992* (Heidelberg 1993) 97-113, at 109. Many 'literary menologies' remain unpublished. R. Labat published the series Iqqur īpuš (*Un calendrier Babylonien des travaux, des signes et des mois (séries Iqqur Îpuš*) (Paris 1965); R. Labat, *Hémérologies et ménologies d'Assur* (Paris 1939). The ones which have been published in the last-mentioned volume are the 'bread offering' hemerologies (from a number of periods) named after the dominant theme in the prescriptions – see also J.C. Fincke, 'Zu den Akkadischen hemerologien aus Ḫattuša (CTH 546), Teil II: die "Opferbrot-hemerologie"', *JCS* 62 (2010) 127-145. When other texts are published, they will add to our knowledge of Mesopotamian hemerologies: an edition is currently in preparation by A. Livingstone. See for a recent introduction to Neo-Assyrian hemerologies: L. Marti, 'Les hémérologies Néo-Assyriennes' in: J.M. Durand & A. Jacquet (eds), *Magie et divination dans les cultures de l'orient: actes du colloque organisé par l'Institut du Proche-Orient ancien du Collège de France, la Société Asiatique et le CNRS (UMR 7192) les 19 mai et 20 juin 2008, Paris* (Paris 2010) 41-60.

mencing the year.[36] Moreover, there was a system of favourable and unfavourable days for particular actions – which affected when divination did and did not take place.[37] The beginning of new undertakings was regulated by a complicated system of favourable and unfavourable days.[38] Divination is not explicitly singled out as permitted or forbidden during any of these days, but is unlikely to have taken place since both public and private religious activities were avoided on *dies atri*.[39]

Although the means and the way it was institutionalized could differ, there were suitable and unsuitable days for divination in each cultural area. Time served as one of the organizing factors for divinatory practice.

36 This is evidence from the Empire – J. Champeaux takes it as an indication of what might have happened in the Republic. See Champeaux, *Fortuna*, Vol. 1, 58-59. Cicero states that the oracle opens and the lots are drawn when Fortuna wants it (Cic. *Div.* 2.41.86). One theory was that the goddess was supposed to let the people know it was the right time by nodding. This could, of course, have been on suitable days – but not necessarily.

37 See further on the intricate Roman system of days: J. Rüpke, *Kalender und Öffentlichkeit: die Geschichte der Repräsentation und religiösen Qualifikation von Zeit in Rom* (Berlin 1995) 563-566; 580.

38 Rüpke, *Kalender und Öffentlichkeit,* 567-575.

39 A.P. Michels, *The calendar of the Roman republic* (Princeton, NJ 1962) 65-66.

Time as context

Time could also function as a context for the sign, influencing its meaning. Mesopotamian menologies, hemerologies and the Roman brontoscopic calendar are evidence that this occurred in two of the three cultural areas. As noted above, I do not consider hemerologies divinatory texts: they were not inherently divinatory but did provide a context of time to the divinatory sign.

In Rome, the inauspicious character of the day on which a particular sign was observed might affect its meaning.[40] This is confirmed by the brontoscopic calendar which shows that the meaning of a sign could vary according to the date on which it occurred. In the following fragment from the brontoscopic calendar, in all cases the sign is thunder (perhaps longer or shorter rumbles), phrased in the protasis as follows: '*ἐὰν βροντήσῃ*' ('if in any way it should thunder') and '*εἰ βροντήσῃ*' ('if it thunders'). The apodosis is different for every day of every month. The sign remained the same but the date (the numbers in the fragment below) on which it occurred determined its meaning:

> 1. If in any way it should thunder, it signifies both a good harvest and good cheer.
> 2. If in any way it should thunder, there will be discord among the common people.
> 3. If in any way it should thunder, it signifies heavy rains and war.[41]

40 Rüpke, *Kalender und Öffentlichkeit*, 576-582.

41 Nigid. September (30) 1-3. Edition and translation: MacIntosh Turfa, 'Brontoscopic calendar', 184.

Although we do not have such unequivocal examples from other divinatory methods, this text indicates that time could be taken into account as a contextual factor in Rome.

The Mesopotamian hemerological series *Iqqur ippuš* shows that the meaning of a particular action depended on the month in which the action took place. Here, too, time provides a context for the sign:

> If in Nisannu (Month 1) he builds a temple: its foundations will not be stable
> If in Ayyaru (Month 2), ditto: he will see evil
> If in Simanu (Month 3), ditto: joy
> If in Du'uzu (Month 4), ditto: his temple will last
> If in Abu (Month 5), ditto: his heart will be content[42]

In Greece, the evidence does not indicate extensive use of time as a contextual factor, and it was not normally written down or systematized as it was in Mesopotamia or Rome. The meaning of the sign was, apparently, not changed by the time on which it occurred.

α. ἐὰν βροντήσῃ, εὐετηρίαν ἅμα καὶ εὐφροσύνην δηλοῖ. | β. ἐὰν βροντήσῃ, διχόνοια τῷ δήμῳ ἔσται. | γ. ἐὰν βροντήσῃ, κατομβρίαν καὶ πόλεμον δηλοῖ.

42 Iqqur ippuš, paragraph 5, 1-12. Edition: Labat, *Un calendrier Babylonien*, 63. Translation: Robson, 'Scholarly conceptions', 67.
DIŠ ina Nisanni É DÙ-uš SUḪUŠ.BI NU GI.NA
DIŠ ina Aiari MIN ŠÀ. ḪUL IGI-mar
DIŠ ina Simâni (MIN) ŠÀ. ḪÚL.LA (GAR-šu)
DIŠ ina Du'uzi (MIN) É.BI SUMUN-bar
DIŠ ina Abi ŠÀ.BI DÙG.GA

Divination reveals conceptions of time

Divination in order to discover the right time

One of the functions of divination was to determine the 'right time' to commence an undertaking or perform an action. When the Roman auspices were taken, the supernatural answered the question: should this action be performed and should it be performed now? If the answer was negative, the same question could be asked again at a later time. Taking the auspices in Rome – and in the final decades of the Republic extispicy and astrology also began to take an important place – both served to legitimate an undertaking and to discover the most favourable moment for it.

The standard Greek term for 'the right time' was *kairos* (in Latin: *occasio*).[43] The concept of *kairos* was already familiar in Greece in the Archaic period, for example implicitly in Hesiod's *Works and Days*.[44] Finding the right time was the central concern in the Greek divinatory processes performed before military actions of any kind. If the signs proved unfavourable, the army had to stay put, even if this

43 Cf. B. Schaffner, 'Kairos', *Brill's New Pauly Online*. Visited 18-08-2011.

44 E.g. Hes. *Op*. 694-698. Apart from the meaning 'the right time', *kairos* could also mean: the right season, the right place, due measure, advantage/profit. See for a detailed study of the concept and its uses in the archaic world, medicine, oratory, and politics: M. Trédé, *Kairos: L'à-propos et l'occasion* (*Le mot et la notion, d'Homère à la fin du IVe siècle avant J.-C.* (Paris 1992); but also M. Kerkhoff, 'Zum antiken Begriff des Kairos', *ZPhF* 27 (1973) 256-274.

was highly inconvenient. Xenophon's army wanted to move, but the signs did not allow it:

> When they sacrificed, however, with a view to their departure, the victims would not prove favourable, and they accordingly ceased their offerings for that day.[45]

In Mesopotamia, the queries contained explicit temporal restrictions: if the outcome of a divinatory session was negative, this would continue to be valid for, for example, thirty days' time.[46] In contrast to what is found in Greek and Roman sources, Mesopotamian queries could clearly be about a 'right time' in the future, tying in with a more fundamental difference which will be discussed later on:

> To the king, my lord: your servant Issar-šumu-ereš. Good health to the king, my lord! May Nabû and Marduk bless the king, my lord! The 20th, the 22nd and the 25th are good days for concluding the treaty. We shall undertake (that) they may conclude it whenever the king, my lord, says.[47]

45 Xen. *An.* 6.4.13.4-6.4.14.1.
θυομένοις δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ ἀφόδῳ οὐκ ἐγίγνετο τὰ ἱερά. ταύτην μὲν οὖν τὴν ἡμέραν ἐπαύσαντο.

46 Another way of finding the right time was to resort to hemerologies, as the expert Issar-šumu-ereš attempts in the fragment below. It should be noted that this is a different, non-divinatory, way of finding the right time.

47 Other examples are SAA 10 14 r.1-10; SAA 10 70. The text above is SAA 10 5 1-r.6. Translation: S. Parpola.
a-na LUGAL EN-ia

In all three cultural areas, there was such a thing as a 'right time' which could be discovered by means of divination. Again, time is perceived as non-homogeneous – it is not a free-flowing, undifferentiated mass but marked by distinct phases. This is supported by evidence for the dynamism of time in divinatory sources, most clearly in Rome. The Roman calendar was dynamic: a day could even *become* negative if a particularly bad event or sign from the supernatural (or both) happened to occur.[48] In this way, the appearance of signs affected the Roman calendar: divination could also influence the flow of time.

ARAD-ka m15—MU—KAM-eš
lu šul-mu
a-na LUGAL EN-ia
dAG u dAMAR.UTU
a-na LUGAL EN-ia
lik-ru-bu
UD-20-KAM2
UD-22-KAM2
UD-25-KAM2
a-na ša2-ka-ni
r. ša a-de-e
ṭa-a-ba
im—ma-at LUGAL be-li
i-qab-bu-u-ni
nu-ša2-aṣ-bi-it
liš-ku-nu

48 Michels, *The calendar of the Roman republic*, 63-64. See for an example Liv. 6.1.11-12.

Scope in time

The duration of time (‘time horizons’) which can be explored by means of divination differed in the three cultural areas.[49] One difficulty in the Greek material is that time (and its horizons) are normally left implicit. There are only a few scattered examples in the literary and epigraphical sources in which a moment in time is specified. Questions and answers usually referred to ‘somewhere in the near past and future’.

As always there is the exception which proves the rule. There are three small groups of oracle questions at Dodona and Didyma which do specify time albeit to a limited extent. Clients in the first group asked about the situation in the present and about what should be done now. The present is emphasized by the use of νῦν (‘now’):

> God. ... Luck. Would I fare better in Orikos in the countryside, or as I am living now?[50]

and:

49 See for ‘time horizons’: S.A. van ‘t Klooster, *Toekomstverkenning: ambities en de praktijk: een etnografische studie naar de productie van toekomstkennis bij het Ruimtelijk Planbureau* (*RPB*) (Delft 2007) 125-127.

50 Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 75-76 (number 4). Translation: E. Eidinow.
Θεός . Τύχα . | Ἐν Ὀρικõι κα | λõιον πράσοι- | μι κατά χõραν ἒ | hõσπ̣ε̣ρ̣ ν̣ῦν | Ϝοικέων

> For Kleanor, about offspring to inherit, from Gonthe, the wife he has now?[51]

Or by describing a situation which is already in existence:

> Hermon asks with which god he should reconcile himself in order to beget a useful child from Krètania apart from those he already has.[52]

The second group refers explicitly to the future by means of, for example, ὕστερον:

> [...] if I will be able to sail to Syrakuse, to the colony, later.[53]

Or by explicitly mentioning 'future time' or 'that which is to be':

> [...] and security of things and enjoyment from things to come.[54]

51 Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 89 (number 2). Trans.: E. Eidinow. Κλεάνορι περὶ γενεᾶς | πατροιόχο ἐκ τάς νῦν | Γόνθας γυναικός

52 Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaires*, number 41. Translation E. Lhôte. Ηέρμõν τίνα | κα θεõν ποτθέμ- | ενος γενεά Ϝ- | οι γένοιτο ἐκ Κ- | ρēταίας ὀνά- | σιμος ποτ τᾶι ἐ- | άσσαι;

53 Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 79 (number 17). Trans.: E. Eidinow. [...] καὶ δυνήομαι | πλε͂ν εἰς Συπακοσάς | πρὸς τὴν ἀποικίαν ὕστερο- | ν

54 Eadem, 92 (number 13). Translation: E. Eidinow. [...] κ̣ὴ χρε̄μάτων | ἐπιγγ[ύ]ασις κ̣ὴ τῶν ἰόντων ὄνασις

> Gods. Good luck. Eu[b?]andros and his wife ask Zeus Naios and Dione by praying to which of the gods or heroes or daimons and sacrificing will they and their household do better both now and for all time.[55]

Another (small) body of exceptions which belong to the second group can be found at Didyma: three questions asked of the oracle – all by the Milesians between 228-225 – which state explicitly: καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον.[56]

The third group refers explicitly to the past when explaining current signs which need to be dealt with in the present and near future.

> (Alexandra, priestess of Demeter Thesmophoros asks:) Since from the time she assumed the office as priestess never have the gods been so manifest through their appearances [...] why is this [...]?[57]

Furthermore, there is an oracle from Delphi stating that the enquirers should finish the work on the temple quickly so that the suppli-

55 Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 111 (number 6). Trans.: E. Eidinow. Θε(ο)ί. Τύχαν ἀγαθάν. Ἐπικοινῆται Εὔβαν- | δρος καὶ ἀ γυνὰ τῶι Διεὶ τῶι Νάωι καὶ τᾶι Δι- | ώναι, τίνι κα θεῶν ἤ ἡρώων ἤ δαιμόνων | εὐχόμενοι καὶ φύοντες λώϊον καὶ ἄμεινο- | ν πράσσοιεν καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ ἁ οἴκησις καἴ νῦν | καὶ ἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον.

56 And variations on this theme. Fontenrose, *Didyma*, H5 (228/7BC); H6(?) (228/7BC); H8 (225 BC).

57 Didyma, historical response 22 in Fontenrose, *Didyma*. Ἐπεὶ ἐξότε τὴν ἱερατείαν ἀνείληφεν, οὐ- | δέποτε οὕυτως οἱ θεοί ἐνφανεῖς δι' ̓ἐπιστάσεων | γεγένηνται | [...] τί τὸ τοιοῦτο [..].

ants can be received in the right month.[58] Another example is a reply stating that every eight years the Athenians should look towards Harma and that they will see a sign of lightning. When this happens a procession will have to be sent to Delphi and a sacrifice will have to be made.[59]

Despite these exceptions, in the Greek epigraphical materials explicit references to past, present and future are limited. Oracular questions obviously have a sense of time ingrained in them, but this is not formulated more specifically in the sources.[60] It might still be possible to ask whether there were limits to a predictable future and explainable past – and if so, what? Greek divination certainly tended to be concerned with a very restricted timeframe. In the Dodonaic materials, a suppliant could ask – and receive an answer to – questions about the near future. Clients asked about their children and there is one example in which a father enquires about his son's dis-

58 Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle*, H 31.

59 Ibidem, H 57.

60 Note that there is one lamella of a person without citizenship who asks the oracle if he should request this citizenship now or in the future, which might be translated more explicitly as E. Eidinow does: 'Shall I request citizenship this year or the next?' Yet, perhaps a more neutral translation is better: 'Shall I request citizenship now at this time or in the coming time?' The *lamella* in question is Lhôte, *Les lamelles oraculaire*s, number 61B (= Eidinow, Oracles, curses, and risk, 115 (number 1)).
Ἦ αἰτέωμαι τὰν
πολιτείαν ἐπὶ ταὐτὶ
ἢ τοῦ εἰσιόντος;

ease: whether or not he will get better. While this might theoretically refer to a longer period of time, the father was more probably concerned with a rapid cure.[61] Where time is made explicit, there are no questions or answers referring to a distant future or a distant past. Many of the literary sources mirror this image of short-term concerns: even when Alexander's seer Aristander predicted that Alexander would take the city of Tyre that same month, this prediction was made on the last day of the month – and Alexander duly took the city on that same day.[62] Propitiousness pronounced during extispicy usually had to do with an action or event which would take place in the very near future. This observation also applies to indications of negative events, such as impending death.[63]

Literary sources also reveal wider time horizons. The Pythia at Delphi tells Croesus two things after his defeat. The first is that Apollo desired the downfall of Croesus' family – the consequence of a crime committed five generations ago – to occur one generation later, but this turned out to be impossible. The second is that Apollo had managed to postpone the downfall for three years.[64] Note that this is a retrospective use of divination, explaining the current situation by reference to the past. Ancient authors might have been tempted to employ the aspect of wide time horizons as a literary

61 Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 105 (number 3).

62 Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 25.1-2.

63 See, e.g., also sources such as Arr. *Anab*. 7.18; Plut. *Vit. Alex*. 73.2; Plut. *Vit. Pyr.* 30.3.

64 Hdt. 1.91.1-3.

or rhetorical device, so caution should be taken with these literary materials – especially since epigraphical materials show such limited evidence of 'seeing into the future or the past'. Time is elusive in the divinatory materials.

Greek divination tends to have a sense of urgency about it. Divination was always about a time which was never far away although this apparently did not even need to be specified. If we say the Greek diviner knows past, present and future, we must in practice be referring to the recent past and near future – with exceptions.

The Roman materials are even more preoccupied with the very near future or the recent past. The *prodigia* required semi-immediate action to make up for a disturbance in the recent past. After having acknowledged a *prodigium* as such, a course of action would need to be set out - whether through consultation of the Sibylline Books or by the intervention of *haruspices* or *pontifices* – and this was executed within a small space of time:

> The sky seemed to be all on fire, and other portents were either actually seen, or people in their fright imagined that they saw them. To avert these alarming omens, public intercessions were ordered for three days, during which all the temples were filled with crowds of men and women imploring the protection of the gods.[65]

65 Liv. 3.5.14. Translation: Rev. Canon Roberts. Edition: Teubner. caelum visum est ardere plurimo igni, portentaque alia aut obversata oculis aut vanas exterritis ostentavere species. his avertendis terroribus in triduum feriae indictae, per quas omnia delubra pacem deum exposcentium virorum mulierumque turba inplebantur.

The two other principal methods of divination in Rome, the *auspicia* and reading the *exta*, revealed the approval or disapproval of the supernatural of present matters (reflecting the idea that it was important to 'find the right moment') or those in the near future.[66] In Rome, the most important methods of divination were concerned with the present and its immediate surroundings but this was normally not indicated very explicitly.

The Mesopotamian compendia are composed in a systematic and almost timeless fashion. In striking contrast to this, many of the queries of which they are composed mention very *specific* timeframes. Experts asked the supernatural a question such as:

> [I ask you, Šamaš], great lord, whether fr[om this day, the 28th day of this month, the month ... of t]his [year], to the 27th day of [this month, ... of this year, for 30 days] and nights, the [term] stipulated [for the performance of (this) extispicy] — [(whether) within this stipulated term M]ugallu the Melide[an with his troops will ......] [...].[67]

66 See also Plut. *Vit. Caes*. 43 where the time limit is 3 days and Plut. *Vit. Sull*. 17 where the limit is within a few days. It must be added that we do see some explicit timelimits here. Still, it must be noted that these are late and literary sources.

67 SAA 4 6 obv. 1-4. Edition and translation: I. Starr.
[a-šal-ka dUTU] EN GAL-ú GIM TA [UD-mu NE-i UD-28-KÁM šá ITI NE-i ITI.x]
[šá MU.AN.NA an]-ni-ti EN UD-27-KÁM šá [ITI NE-i ITI.x šá MU.AN.NA an-ni-ti]
[a-na 30 UD-MEŠ] 30 MI-MEŠ ši-kin [a-dan-ni-ia DÙ-eš-ti ba-ru-ti i-na

The question was framed by time: it was very specifically aimed at what the enemy would do during the next thirty days. The phrase containing the chronological reference describes the time period for which the divination would be valid, proposed to the supernatural by the expert:[68] 'From this day, the ..th day of this month MN, until the ..day of the month MN of this year, for a period of X days and X nights, the term stipulated for the performance of extispicy – within this stipulated term.'[69] There are also tablets on which the timeframe is 100 days, 90 days, 50 days, 40 days, 20 days and 7 days.[70] It is uncertain on what basis the experts asked the supernatural for a particular timeframe but unquestionably the supernatural was thought to set the definitive timeframe in its reply. This frame could then be discovered by calculations on the basis of findings in the liver.[71]

ši-kin]
[a-dan-ni šu-a-tú m]mu-gal-lu KUR.mi-li-[da-a-a x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x] [...].

68 Other examples are SAA 4 4 obv. 2-3; 4 5 obv. 2-3; 4 23 obv. 2-4; 4 35 obv. 2-3; 4 45 r. 1-3; 4 46 r. 1-3; 4 47 obv. 2-5; 4 51 obv. 2-3.

69 Starr, *Queries*, xvi-xvii.

70 100 days: SAA 4 43 obv. 2-3; 90 days: SAA 4 139 obv. 2-3; 50 days: SAA 4 124 obv. 2-3; 40 days: SAA 4 44 obv. 4-5. Another example is SAA 4 125; 20 days: SAA 4 203 obv. 2-3. Other examples are SAA 4 28 obv. 2-3; 4 60 obv. 2-3; 7 days: SAA 4 49 obv. 2-3. See also Starr, *Queries*, xvi.

71 Ulla Jeyes suggests that the *adannu* (timeframe as stipulated by the gods) was dependent on particular features of the liver: U. Jeyes, 'Divination as a science in ancient Mesopotamia', *JEOL* 32 (1991-1992) 23-41, at 32. For a more detailed study see N.P. Heeßel, 'The calculation of the stipulated

Mesopotamian divination was obviously directed towards defining the period for which the prediction was valid. The timeframe cannot be argued to have been much wider than the Greek one (although it was most probably more extensive than the Roman one). Nevertheless, it was very specific and precise: as a result of this specificity, the future with which Mesopotamian divination is concerned comes into much sharper focus than the Greek timeframe in which 'now' and 'later' were relatively fluid concepts for something happening either in the present or near future.

There is also a striking difference in social scope and space of divination, mirroring the findings on time. There was a Mesopotamian tendency to focus on the actions of the other as well as on one's own deeds. In Mesopotamia a client could have the expert ask about what *others* (for example, the enemy) would do or achieve. Only a couple of such questions are known from Greece: there, normally, either questions concerning the client himself or more general questions concerned with truth ('who/what caused X') were posed.[72] A

term in extispicy' in: A. Annus (ed.), *Divination and interpretation of signs in the ancient world* (Chicago 2010) 163-175, at 165- 168. He also refers to the fact that the timeframe is calculated differently from the way it was done for extispicy for the interpretation of celestial signs, as shown by Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian liver omens*, 64.

72 Exceptions are (according to Lhôte's edition): 10b asking whether another person will succeed; 73 about whether or not somebody will be cured. It could be argued for the last question that the individual who was ill, was not able to come himself and therefore someone else would have to ask the question.

certain focus on the individual in the Greek material is to be expected because of the private nature of many oracle questions. However, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that the same pattern reoccurs in questions asked by Greek communities.[73] In Greece – and also in Rome – questions were almost without exception about the persons or collectives asking them. In Mesopotamian divination, questions such as the following could be asked: will person X do Y within a specified period of time? The evidence of social scope concurs with the evidence of time scope: an answer to this question would bridge a gap in social dimensions as well as in time.[74] The Mesopotamian supernatural appeared to know across borders of time and space.

73 Some exceptions: see the catalogue of historical questions by Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle,* 244-267. Note that some of the questions included in the catalogue are late. Possible exceptions to the rule of asking about the self only are H3 (individual question, spurious according to Fontenrose), H17 (question about how to deal with a threatening individual); H37 (question appears to be about the status of another individual – unless the one asking the question is also the one the answer is about); H65 (question wanting to know Homer's birthplace and parents); H69 (question about wanting to know where the soul of Plotinus has gone). I have not dealt with the questions Fontenrose does not think are historical here but it appears the frequency of asking questions about the other is about the same in all categories.

74 Terminology from Van 't Klooster, *Toekomstverkenning,* 125-127.

Use of time in divination: precedents

Past interpretations of signs were important when these same signs had to be interpreted again. Memories and experience of the past could be an aid when shaping ideas about the future. For example, looking back to the past could help a suppliant to feel safer in the future, as this Mesopotamian oracle expresses it:

> [Like a] skilled pilot [I will st]eer [the ship] into a good port. [The fu] ture [shall] be like the past; [I will go] around you and protect you.75

This is shown more explicitly in the following oracle, which attempts to imbue its new pronouncement with authority by reference to the past:

> [O Esarhaddon, whos]e bosom [Iš]tar of Arbela has filled with favour! Could you not rely on the previous utterance which I spoke to you? Now you can rely on this later one too.76

75 SAA 9 2.2 i 16-19. Edition and translation S. Parpola.
[a-ki LÚ.M]Á*.LAH4 dam*-qí ina ka-a-ri DÙG.GA
[GIŠ.MÁ ú-k]al-la a-ki šá pa-ni-ti
[lu ina u]r*-ki-ti ina bat-bat-ti-ka
[a-sa-hu]r* ma-ṣar-ta-ka a*-na-ṣar.
76 SAA 9 1.10 vi 3-12. Edition and translation S. Parpola.
[maš-šur—PAB—AŠ šá] ina DÙG.GA
[d15] šá URU.arba-ìl
ha-bu-un-šú
tu-mal-lu-u-ni

Precedent is an even more explicit way of using the past to consider the future. A precedent is a past event, or previously 'proven' relationship between events, which serves as a guide for present decision making. Present circumstances are considered the same as those in the past: an analogy between past and present can be drawn. It should be noted that the use of a precedent is not necessarily binding; that a precedent is based on reason; although it can be followed, a precedent can be overruled if earlier decisions on which they were based are thought to be unjust. Therefore a precedent is different from experience, customs (although these two can overlap), and rules: experience is a personal or communal but general idea about how something has been done before; a rule (or law) is a standard which is officially organized and usually binding; and a custom derives from a supposedly ancient source. In contrast, a precedent is a particular instance or case from the past which merely provides a guideline about the future in the present.[77] It can come from an ancient source, but this is not necessary.

da-ba-bu pa-ni-u
šá a-qa-ba-kan-ni
ina UGU-hi la ta-zi-zi
ú-ma-a
ina UGU ur-ki-i
ta-za-az-ma

77 N. Duxbury, *The nature and authority of precedent* (Cambridge 2008) 1-20.

Using precedents

Precedents were occasionally found in Roman divinatory practice. For example, there is a possible attestation of precedent in Livy 8.18.12.[78] While it should be taken into account that most of the Sibylline Books are mostly lost, this does not amount to much. An interesting contrast can be found in the materials from Greece and Mesopotamia, which will be the content of the following paragraphs.

From Classical times, use of precedents was common in a number of non-divinatory Greek areas of thought. 'The precedent [...] may have served [...] to provide an aura of consistency to a system that was all too unpredictable.'[79] Predicting, or prognosticating about,

78 Liv. 8.18.11-12: prodigii ea res loco habita captisque magis mentibus quam consceleratis similis uisa; itaque memoria ex annalibus repetita in secessionibus quondam plebis clauum ab dictatore fixum alienatas[que] discordia mentes hominum eo piaculo compotes sui fecisse, dictatorem claui figendi causa creari placuit.

79 A. Lanni, 'Arguing from "precedent": modern perspectives on Athenian practice' in: E.M. Harris & L. Rubinstein (eds), *The law and the courts in ancient Greece* (London 2004) 159-171, at 167-168. Some Greek words could be translated as 'precedent', most notably *paradeigma*, although this is not usually used in our strict sense of the word as stated above. *Paradeigma* is usually translated as pattern or model, exemplar, precedent, argument, proof from example. What is interesting about the word *paradeigma* is that it is used in literature from the Classical period, and all our examples are from the Classical period. We might find a watershed here, showing a diachronic change in the way the past was used. The orators did use it in 'our way', e.g., Lys. *or*. 25.23; for an example from the

the future was used in the practice of ancient medicine. This calls to mind the method of prognosis favoured by Hippocrates. To practise this method, an ancient Greek doctor needed to be familiar with precedents, in this case previous patients diagnosed with the same illness – past case studies. The use of case studies was one of the innovative aspects of Hippocratic medicine. Non-binding precedent was also used in political or juridical speeches. Past cases would be used to point out similarities – and differences – in comparison to the present case, arguing for a punishment similar to, or different from, that handed down in the case used as a precedent. Lysias states: 'You ought therefore, gentlemen, to take the events of the past as your example in resolving on the future course of things.'[80]

law courts of ancient Greece see Lycurg. *Contra Leocrates* 9: παρεῖσθαι δὲ τὴν ὑπὲρ τῶν τοιούτων τιμωρίαν συμβέβηκεν, ὦ ἄνδρες, οὐ διὰ ῥᾳθυμίαν τῶν τότε νομοθετούντων, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ μήτ᾽ ἐν τοῖς πρότερον χρόνοις γεγενῆσθαι τοιοῦτον μηδὲν μήτ᾽ ἐν τοῖς μέλλουσιν ἐπίδοξον εἶναι γενήσεσθαι. ('The reason why the penalty for such offences, gentlemen, has never been recorded is not that the legislators of the past were neglectful; it is that such things had not happened hitherto and were not expected to happen in the future.' Translation: J.O. Burtt.)

80 Lys. *Ap*. 23. Translation W.R.M. Lamb.
χρὴ τοίνυν, ὦ ἄνδρες δικασταί, τοῖς πρότερον γεγενημένοις παραδείγμασι χρωμένους βουλεύεσθαι περὶ τῶν μελλόντων ἔσεσθαι.
Lanni, 'Arguing from "precedent"', *passim*; A.P. Dorjahn, 'Legal precedent in Athenian courts', *APhA* 58 (1927) xxviii-xxix; Clarke, *Making time for the past,* 274-286.

Use of precedent in divination cannot be explicitly proven in the Greek world until the second century AD, because the sources are not usually explicit about on what basis interpretation took place. Take, for example, the following passage from the *Iliad*: 'Even as he (Ajax) thus spake, there flew forth a bird upon the right hand, an eagle of lofty flight; and thereat the host of the Achaeans shouted aloud, heartened by the omen.'[81] Interpretation of this sign is, as far as we can tell, based on experience: good was expected to follow this sign. At other times, parallels seem to be at the basis of the interpretation.

Matters are clearer when the work of Artemidoros is considered. He claims that all the dreams he has noted down in his books had actually occurred and that his books have been wholly composed on the basis of precedent: '[...] I have patiently listened to old dreams and their consequences. For there was no other possible way in which to get practice in these matters. As a result, from the superabundance of examples, I am able to discuss each individually [more than anyone might have expected] so as to speak the truth without

81 Hom. *Il.* 13.821-823. Translation A.T. Murray.
'Ὣς ἄρα οἱ εἰπόντι ἐπέπτατο δεξιὸς ὄρνις | αἰετὸς ὑψιπέτης· ἐπὶ δ' ἴαχε λαὸς Ἀχαιῶν | θάρσυνος οἰωνῷ·' See also Homer *Il.* 24.290-295. Translation A.T. Murray: ἀλλ' εὔχεο σύ γ' ἔπειτα κελαινεφέϊ Κρονίωνι | Ἰδαίῳ, ὅς τε Τροίην κατὰ πᾶσαν ὁρᾶται, | αἴτει δ' οἰωνὸν ταχὺν ἄγγελον, ὅς τέ οἱ αὐτῷ | φίλτατος οἰωνῶν, καί εὑ κράτος ἐστὶ μέγιστον, | δεξιόν, ὄφρά μιν αὐτὸς ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσι νοήσας | τῷ πίσυνος ἐπὶ νῆας ἴῃς Δαναῶν ταχυπώλων.

nonsense [...].'[82] He chose to use those precedents which he had heard first hand: as these were the most reliable ones in his opinion. In Artemidoros' case his purpose was to make the precedents accessible, but simultaneously to formalize them to some extent, thereby providing a guideline for other dream-interpreters to use.

From the examples given above a Greek development towards the use of precedent can be cautiously discerned – bearing in mind the possibility that precedents might have begun to be used some considerable time before the first explicit reference to such a practice – when considering the non-divinatory evidence, it might be that precedent started to be used in Classical times.

The so-called 'historical' omens in Mesopotamia (partly) functioned on the basis of precedent: they indicated particular signs which had announced important occurrences in the past. Cogently, trainee-experts were taught the art of extispicy using model livers which were at least partly constructed on the basis of previous findings. This having been said, the historical omens and liver models were a relatively small body of texts and objects which were used on very particular occasions. Their role in divination was unimportant compared to that of the Neo-Assyrian compendia, the systematic nature of which has been discussed before. This systematization

82 Artem. 1 Prooemium 42-46. Translation: White, Interpretation of dreams, 13-14.
οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἄλλως χρήσασθαι τῇ κατὰ ταῦτα γυμνασίᾳ. ὅθεν μοι περιγέγονεν ἐκ περιουσίας ἔχειν περὶ ἑκάστου λέγειν [πλείονα μὲν ἢ προσδοκήσαι ἄν τις] οὕτως ὡς αὐτὰ τἀληθῆ λέγοντα μὴ φλυαρεῖν.

means that the future in Neo-Assyrian Empire was based on something other than precedents. Precedents could well have been the basis for the very first compendia, but by the first millennium the compendia had evolved into something quite different – a formalized list of every possible sign imaginable.[83] The institutionalized position of divination and scholarship in general permitted this formalization and systematization of compendia. Systematization disconnected the prediction of the future from a knowledge of the past: in Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia, prediction became timeless.

Two developments may cautiously be discerned, then: Greek use of experience became use of precedent; Mesopotamian use of precedent became radical systematization. While in the first case the past came to be seen as a reliable basis for a guideline, in the latter case explicit use of the past did not seem to do anymore and theory became a necessity.

83 Although there were exceptions: see the historical omens. But these are special and there are relatively few of them. See further on fate F. Rochberg-Halton, 'Fate and divination in Mesopotamia' in: H. Hirsch & H. Hunger (eds), V*orträge gehalten auf der 28. Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Wien, 6.-10. Juli 1981* (Horn 1982) 363-371; Bottéro, 'Symptômes, signes, écritures', 144-168; Larsen, 'The Mesopotamian lukewarm mind', 212-214.

Concluding observations

This chapter has shown that divination was organized and, to an extent, even restricted by existing conceptions of time. There were certain divinatory activities which needed to take place at a particular time of day or on a specific date. I have discussed how the interpretation of signs observed during divination was influenced by conceptions of time: a sign could have a different meaning, depending on the time of day at which or the date on which it occurred. Divination also illuminates existing conceptions of time. It has been noted that divination functioned to find time: the right time. As we have seen, finding out the right time in a divinatory context is only explicitly seen in Rome, where the supernatural was asked to legitimate the beginning of an undertaking at that particular moment. In a slightly different form, this feature is also found in Greece, where at Dodona both military commanders and individuals asked the supernatural whether or not they should do something *now*. In Mesopotamia, the 'right time' was, to a considerable extent, explicitly determined by means of hemerologies (and not by divination). Implicitly, the specific time horizons in the Mesopotamian queries also reveal a preoccupation with finding the right time. Thus, in all three cultural areas, time was conceived as non-homogeneous.

All in all, Mesopotamian divination can be described as a tool used to consider a relatively distant future which might lie a full year ahead: it could work as a 'telescope' in time, from the present into

the future. The future could be seen through the timeless lens of divination: to some extent time appears to have been made permeable by means of divination. In contrast, Greek and Roman divination worked as a 'looking glass' as far as time was concerned: in Greece and Rome, divination served to analyse a very narrow space of time in close proximity to the individual. The looking glass of Roman divination focused on past and present, while Greek past, present and future were closely connected and could be seen through the divinatory looking glass at one glance.

8. Dealing with uncertainty

How did ancient individuals deal with their uncertainties about past, present and future? These uncertainties certainly existed in the mind of ancient man, as much as in that of any man. They must have played an important part in daily life, as they are central to most human decisions and actions. What was the ancient day-to-day response to uncertainty? Part of the answer is certainly: using divination.

The following enquiry into the relationship between ancient uncertainties and divination touches upon wider issues of ancient dealings with uncertainty and provides an insight into this function of divination. In its turn, this nuances the way the ancient world is sometimes depicted – as a place whose inhabitants considered themselves to be in the grip of inescapable fate.[1]

Conceptions of fate in the ancient world have been a frequent topic of discussion – in both ancient and modern times –, but again:

1 See, e.g., A. Giddens, *Runaway world: how globalization is reshaping our lives* (London 1999) 40-41. This passage is discussed in more detail in what follows. His statements are not wrong, but it pays to be aware of the ease with which all too stereotypical ideas remain in use.

it is usually philosophers who have left us their ideas on this subject.[2] The particulars of the relationship between divination and fate have been the subject of much debate by modern scholars. J.N. Lawson explains the apparent paradox as follows: 'The only way in which one can 'divine' what the future holds is for the future to be *pre*deter-

2 See on the complementary and clashing roles of the gods and fate in Greece and Rome: Versnel, *Coping with the gods*, 218-220. This is where the question/paradox stated in Lucian *Demon*. 37 is relevant: if a divination expert can change what has been ordained for the future, he should ask a huge amount for his skills. If he cannot, why try to look into the future and pay for it? Some titles on the Graeco-Roman world are W.E. Heitland, *The Roman fate: an essay in interpretation* (Cambridge 1922); idem, *Iterum, a further discussion on Roman fate* (Cambridge 1925); P.E. Eberhard, *Das Schicksal als poetische Idee bei Homer* (Paderborn 1923); E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the irrational* (Berkeley 1951) 2-27; B.C. Dietrich, *Death, fate and the gods: the development of a religious idea in Greek popular belief and in Homer* (London 1965); W.C. Greene, *Moira: fate, good, and evil in Greek thought* (Cambridge, MA 1944); E. Sarischoulis, *Schicksal, Götter und Handlungsfreiheit in den Epen Homers* (Stuttgart 2008); and see also R.B. Onians, *The origins of European thought: about the body, the mind, the soul, the world, time, and fate* (Cambridge 1951). Focusing on Jews in the Graeco-Roman context is O. Kaiser, 'Gottesgewißheit und Weltbewußtsein in der frühhellenistischen jüdischen Weisheit' in: idem, *Der Mensch unter dem Schicksal. Studien zur Geschichte, Theologie und Gegenwartsbedeutung der Weisheit* (Berlin 1985) 122-134. On fate and divination in Mesopotamia see Rochberg-Halton, 'Fate and divination', 363-371; but also J.N. Lawson, *The concept of fate in ancient Mesopotamia of the first millennium: toward an understanding of Šīmtu* (Wiesbaden 1994); Polonsky, T*he rise of the sun god.*

mined. Yet, once one knows what is predetermined in one's future, then there exists the possibility of avoiding or changing it.'[3] As we shall see, this statement needs to be nuanced: in the three cultural areas the function of divination was not generally to find out what was predetermined. The predictability of the future and of fate are two issues which will recur repeatedly.[4]

Although I have used the word 'uncertainty', current scholarship concerned with assessing the way in which ancient individuals thought about, and dealt with, the future, has a tendency to focus on the concept of 'risk'. In his *Risk and survival in ancient Greece: reconstructing the rural domestic economy*, Thomas Gallant is essentially using the term in an etic sense when he argues that 'Greek peasants developed an extensive but delicate web of risk-management strategies.'[5] The term has also been used in its etic sense by various other scholars, as among them Peter Garnsey, Jerry Toner and Esther Eidinow.[6] On account of the modern preoccupation with risk, per-

3 J.N. Lawson, *The concept of fate*, 79.

4 See the difficulties Rochberg-Halton sees when applying the term 'fate' to Mesopotamia. She prefers to use the untranslated term šīmtu, 'that which has been determined by decree' instead of 'fate' (Rochberg-Halton, 'Fate and divination', 363).

5 T.W. Gallant, *Risk and survival in ancient Greece: reconstructing the rural domestic economy* (Cambridge 1991) ix, *passim*; see for an earlier use of the term risk by Gallant: T.W. Gallant, 'Crisis and response: risk-buffering behaviour in Hellenistic Greek communities', *JIH* 19 (1989) 393-413.

6 P. Garnsey, *Famine and food supply in the Graeco-Roman world: responses to risk and crisis* (Cambridge 1988) *passim*; J. Toner, *Popular*

haps it is not strange that this concept has been introduced into studies of the ancient world. For the purposes of our enquiries, it is essential to determine whether 'risk' really is a useful concept in analysing the role of divination as a tool for thinking about possibilities in the ancient world. This takes us into the field of future studies and related subjects.

Risk?

Uncertainty is created by everything humans do not or cannot know. Humans can thrive on uncertainty because they experience hope and even fear as stimulating emotions. Paradoxically, simultaneously every attempt is made to diminish that same uncertainty because it is necessary to have some idea or conception of the future if one is to make up one's mind about which actions to take.[7] Therefore, generally speaking, the attitude of most humans towards uncertainty is ambivalent. Even if humans accept the fact that they cannot esti-

culture in ancient Rome (Cambridge 2009) 11-53, especially 12; Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, *passim*, especially 22.

7 It appears that uncertainty is what upsets people most. Research into serious illness has found that, at least in the case of a test to find out whether or not individuals have the gene for Huntington's disease, they were actually less upset when the test indicated that they had the gene than if the test proved inconclusive. See R. Hastie & R.M. Dawes, *Rational choice in an uncertain world: the psychology of judgment and decision making* (London 20102) 331-332.

mate or predict the future by means of rational thought, they will still attempt to do so – anything is better than complete and utter uncertainty.[8]

In modern Western society, risk and uncertainty are inextricably connected:[9] there are risky uncertainties as well as uncertain risks.[10] Closer inspection reveals that risk is a sub-category of uncertainty. Uncertainty is always present, but some uncertain situations are also risks.[11] There are no risks which are not uncertain: death, for example, is not considered a risk – it is a certainty (the only question

8 In a game environment, 'despite feedback through a thousand trials, even when the subjects are explicitly told that only the base rate prediction is relevant – the sequence is random with no repetitive patters – subjects cannot bring themselves to believe that the situation is one in which they cannot predict'. Hastie & Dawes, *Rational choice*, 323.

9 On risk and uncertainty as two sides of the same coin: M.B.A. van Asselt, *Perspectives on uncertainty and risk: the PRIMA approach to decision support* (Boston 2000) 205; cf. 205-226.

10 See, e.g., M.B.A. van Asselt, 'Onzekere risico's en riskante onzekerheden' in: E. Vos & G. van Calster (eds), *Risico en voorzorg in de rechtsmaatschappij* (Antwerpen 2004) 1-16, at 3; M.B.A. van Asselt & L. Smits, 'Onzekere risico's: de ontdekking van rekenen met kansen' in: J.P.M. Geraedts, M.B.A. van Asselt & L. Koenen (eds), *Leven met onzekerheid: cahier bio-wetenschappen en maatschappij* (Leiden 2008) 5-11, at 8.

11 Cf. WRR rapport, *Onzekere veiligheid: verantwoordelijkheden rond fysieke veiligheid* (Amsterdam 2008) 113-115. On uncertain risks see M.B.A. van Asselt & O. Renn, 'Risk governance', *JRR* 14 (2011) 431-449; G. de Vries, I. Verhoeven & M. Boeckhout, 'Taming uncertainty: the WRR approach to risk governance', *JRR* 14 (2011) 485-499, at 489-491.

is *when* it will happen, not *that* it will happen).[12] Modern man thinks about most uncertainties almost automatically in terms of risk, but this is by no means a standard or natural way of thinking: risk is a human construct.

What does the term 'risk' mean and where does it differ from 'uncertainty'? Whereas uncertainty can be roughly defined as anything yet unknown, risk is usually thought to be *quantified* uncertainty and is used to refer to situations in which the probabilities of the occurrence of an event are known and the consequences of an event can be – or are attempted to be – estimated. These consequences are assessed by societal norms and values and this judgment decides to what degree the risk is considered negative.[13] When enough is known of the two factors of probability and consequences of the occurrence, uncertainty becomes a calculated risk which can be assessed and managed. In other words: 'risk refers to hazards that are actively assessed in relation to future possibilities'.[14] Risk assess-

12 I am grateful to M.B.A. van Asselt for a stimulating conversation on this topic. In my opinion, religion might be an additional factor: early Christians and those polytheists who believed in an afterlife might have thought differently about this matter. However, everyone can agree that at least the body will die and that this is a certainty – whatever happens afterwards.

13 For a (modern) example of how different people of different gender, age and class can experience risk see the excellent publication by J. Tulloch & D. Lupton, *Risk and everyday life* (London 2003) 17-40.

14 Giddens, *Runaway world*, 40. And in the form of a formula – which goes back to Frank Knight: risk = $\text{probability}_{\text{event}}$ x $\text{damage}_{\text{event}}$. Knight's

ment and management are not carried out on an incidental basis: they are a systematic way of dealing with hazards, dangers or chances (and often communally). Having said this, it bears repeating that risk always remains a construct: we quantify uncertainties on an uncertain basis.[15] Uncertainty cannot be completely quantified or

seminal work is: F.H. Knight, *Risk, uncertainty and profit* (Boston 1921). Cf. J.O. Zinn, 'Introduction' in: idem (ed.), *Social theories of risk and uncertainty: an introduction* (Malden, MA 2008) 1-17, at 5. This formula has been rightly criticized because it makes risk assessment look like a simple sum (although the header 'damage' does take a certain subjectivism into account and can, according to many, also consist of 'chances'), which is not the case – although it is often treated like this in practice. For explicit criticism on Knight's formula and its use see M.B.A. van Asselt, *Risk governance: over omgaan met onzekerheid en mogelijke toekomsten* (Maastricht 2007) 18-20; Van Asselt & Renn, 'Risk governance', 436-438.

15 On positive risks (related to the subjectivity of risks) see, for example, S. Lyng, *Edgework: the sociology of risk-taking* (London 2005), *passim*; S. Lyng, 'Edgework, risk and uncertainty' in: J.O. Zinn (ed.), *Social theories of risk and uncertainty: an introduction* (Malden, MA 2008) 106-137; P. Slovic, *The feeling of risk: new perspectives on risk perception* (London 2010) as well as the following more specifically historical work about why people took and take chances by buying lottery tickets and so on: R. Brenner & G.A. Brenner, *Gambling and speculation: a theory, a history, and a future of some human decisions* (Cambridge 1990) 19-48. In my view, the best publication on the psychological aspect of risk – on how modern individuals assess and determine dangers, thereby turning them into risks by probabilistic thinking, is G.M. Breakwell, *The psychology of risk* (Cambridge 2007). Cf. Van Asselt, *Perspectives on uncertainty and risk*, 152; I. Starr & C. Whipple, 'Risks

anticipated – otherwise it would become a certainty – and inherent uncertainty is an inherent component of risk (as the world 'probability' implies).[16] After the assessment of a risk, its management can commence: risk management is a conscious strategy adopted on the basis of a prior assessment.[17]

The way individuals deal with uncertainty has undergone great changes over time.[18] The first developments in the direction of our kind of risk society appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when the Spanish and Portuguese began to use the term which would become the English 'risk' in a spatial sense: it meant that a ship was sailing uncharted waters.[19] It was later used in a temporal

of risk decisions', *Science* 208 (1980) 1114-1119.

16 Van Asselt, *Perspectives on uncertainty and risk*, 81-82; Van Asselt, 'Onzekere risico's en riskante onzekerheden', 1-16.

17 Note that there is no generally accepted definition of risk. Therefore here I shall outline some current approaches. For research into how individuals use the term risk in the modern world, which we shall not pursue further here as it is an investigation of modern Western (subjective) attitudes towards risk and danger – and this is not applicable to the ancient world because ancient man was dealing with completely different circumstances see Tulloch & Lupton, *Risk*, 17-40.

18 For a concise introduction see D. Lupton, *Risk* (New York 1999) 17-35.

19 Giddens, *Runaway world*, 21-23. See for a somewhat earlier date I. Wilkinson, *Anxiety in a risk society* (London 2001) 92. The etymology of the word is disputed. One theory is as follows: 'ultimately it [the word risk] may be derived from the Arabic word risq which means riches or good fortune. However, where there is also an attempt to recover its origins in the Greek

sense, referring to the quantified uncertainties about the future.[20] Anthony Giddens among others says it is this embrace of risk which has created and indeed enabled the modern world – the way man thinks about himself, the globalization of the world and the widespread presence of capitalism. Ulrich Beck and Giddens consider modern society one in which the main aim is to minimize risk, a term which in our world is virtually equated with danger although this is by no means a given (as will be discussed).[21] The 'risk society'

word rhiza, meaning 'cliff', and the Latin resecare, meaning 'to cut off short', John Ayto suggests that risk might be understood to have its semantic roots embedded in a classical maritime vocabulary as a term invoking the perils of sailing too close to inshore rocks' (Wilkinson, *Anxiety,* 91).

20 Giddens, *Runaway world*, 21-23.

21 U. Beck, A. Giddens & S. Lash, *Reflexive modernization: politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order* (Cambridge 1994) 45; A. Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age* (London 1991) 109-143. On Beck and Giddens see also Lupton, *Risk*, 58-83. See also the bibliography for some of the prolific writings of Beck and Giddens. Their contributions to the risk debate have been applied in countless studies in different fields. See more generally Wilkinson, *Anxiety*, 93. There is a second approach to the theme of risk, as sketched by Lupton, the so-called 'governmentality' paradigm, partly based on ideas of Michel Foucault, which is basically concerned with governmental control of risks for society as a whole. This is the way the concept of risk is used by those who deal with terrorism and other communal threats, concisely explained in Lupton, *Risk*, 84-103 – again, including a useful bibliography for the paradigm. It will appear that a communal way of dealing with threats (whether they are uncertainties or risks) is very particular to the modern world. The

is something which is particular to the modern world.[22] The modern use of risk, which is deeply rooted in probabilistic thought, contrasts

third paradigm is that of Mary Douglas, which is usually referred to as 'cultural/symbolic' paradigm. Also according to these thinkers, risk is a modern Western invention. It is supposed to serve as a tool by means of which a particular danger can be managed. An important issue in this paradigm is the emphasis that the idea of risk is culturally defined. For various reasons, every society has cultural conceptions about what is considered a risk, but there are some common themes as well. Douglas argues that pollution, for example, is considered an ambiguity, and therefore a danger in many societies. Ambiguity is seen to be risky to the stability of society. This means that '[...] "risk" may be understood as the cultural response to transgression [...]'. (Lupton, *Risk*, 45). The biggest risks in societies are therefore usually moral and political. (For a brief critique on Douglas' theory but also the way it has been used, or misused, by others see Lupton, *Risk,* 56-57). See Douglas, *Risk acceptability*; M. Douglas & A. Wildavsky, *Risk and culture: an essay on the selection of technical and environmental dangers* (Berkeley 1982) 186-198). Lupton states that one of the main problems with this theory is '[...] the idea of risk is transcribed simply as unacceptable danger'. (M. Douglas, *Risk and blame: essays in cultural theory* (London 1992) 39). In this way, the concept of risk has become so general it can no longer be used as a a heuristic tool in research.

22 The 'risk society' is a term used by Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck ('Risikogesellschaft': U. Beck, *Risikogesellschaft: auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main 1986) *passim*) to qualify modern society. A brief summary and critique can be found in N. Huls, 'Recht en veiligheid in de risicomaatschappij' in: E. Vos & G. van Calster (eds), *Risico en voorzorg in de rechtsmaatschappij* (Antwerpen 2004) 31-43, at 31-33.

markedly with experiences in the ancient world.[23] From an emic angle, ancient risk-vocabulary is non-existent, whereas from an etic angle, quantifications of uncertainty and application of risk-thinking are not present either.[24]

To illustrate this, first an investigation into theoretical ideas about chance and probability is required. Mesopotamian mathematics was a very well-developed branch of science, but they are innocent of specific calculations of chance or of probability.[25] In Greece,

23 A very general article emphasizing this point is M. Adelson, 'Reflections on the past and future of the future', *TFSC* 36 (1989) 27-37; J. Johnson-Hanks, 'When the future decides: uncertainty and intentional action in contemporary Cameroon', *CurrAnthr* 46 (2005) 363-385. These are merely some examples of many publications which could be mentioned here. See for an recent publication in the field of ancient history in which probability is argued not to have existed in the ancient world, but the author still attempts 'to re-create an "embedded" discourse of risk' in the ancient materials: M. Beard, 'Risk and the humanities' in: L. Skinns, M. Scott & T. Cox (eds), *Risk* (Cambridge 2011) 85-108, at 90-91.

24 For example, the Greek world *kindunos* has many times been translated as risk or something similar, but in its strict sense this word means 'danger'. The translation of *kindunos* as risk reveals more about modern ways of thinking about danger than about those in the Greek world.

25 There is no discussion of probabilistic thinking in E. Robson, *Mathematics in ancient Iraq: a social history* (Princeton 2008) and K.R. Nemet-Nejad, *Cuneiform mathematical texts as a reflection of everyday life in Mesopotamia* (New Haven 2003) although, this last work, contains a discussion of the way interest was calculated – but, although thoughts about representing percentages can be seen here, this is not the same as probabi-

some elementary reflections of a probabilistic kind can be found in Aristotle:

> To succeed in many things, or many times, is difficult; for instance, to repeat the same throw ten thousand times with the dice would be impossible, whereas to make it once or twice is comparatively easy.[26]

In Rome we do come across some attempts to think about the future in terms of calculated chance, odds and probability: Cicero (perhaps on the basis of Aristotle!) thought about the problem of certain knowledge and the probability of certainty. He provides 'calculations on chance' for dicing, albeit only very basic ones: they express the thought that if one throws the knucklebones a hundred times, it is not possible to obtain the highest throw all the time:

> Four dice are cast and a Venus throw results—that is chance; but do you think it would be chance, too, if in one hundred casts you made one hundred Venus throws?[27]

listic thinking. In a personal communication, E. Robson confirmed the idea that probabilistic thinking was non-existent in Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia (15-09-2011).

26 Arist. *Cael.* 292a28-30. Translation by W.K.C. Guthrie.
Ἔστι δὲ τὸ κατορθοῦν χαλεπὸν ἢ τὸ πολλὰ ἢ τὸ πολλάκις, οἷον μυρίους ἀστραγάλους Χίους βαλεῖν ἀμήχανον, ἀλλ' ἕνα ἢ δύο ῥᾷον.

27 Cic. *Div*. 1.13.23. Translation: W.A. Falconer.
Quattuor tali iacti casu Venerium efficiunt; num etiam centum Venerios, si quadringentos talos ieceris, casu futuros putas?

Or in another passage:

> Nothing is so uncertain as a cast of dice and yet there is no one who plays often who does not sometimes make a Venus-throw and occasionally twice or thrice in succession.[28]

It seems unlikely that Cicero was the only person to think about these issues, but no Roman theory of probability has come down to us: ancient man simply did not reason in this way.[29] Furthermore, it should be noted that experts in probability theory are disinclined to see the elementary ideas expressed by Aristotle and Cicero as true probability theory in the modern sense.[30] For all these reasons it

28 Cic. *Div.* 2.59.121. Translation: W.A. Falconer.
Quid est tam incertum quam talorum iactus? Tamen nemo est quin saepe iactans Venerium iaciat aliquando, non numquam etiam iterum ac tertium.

29 Why the mathematics of chance were not developed in the ancient world is unknown – there are plenty of theories which ascribe this to an ancient sense of determinism, reliance on the supernatural, a lack of empirical examples and a lack of stimulus from economic developments which would have necessitated probability theories. Whatever the case, no mathematics of chance were developed, reasons for which must be sought in ancient mindsets, as discussed in what follows. Cf. I. Hacking, *The emergence of probability: a philosophical study of early ideas about probability, induction and statistical inference* (Cambridge 1975) 3-5.

30 P.M. Lee, 'History of probability theory' in: T. Rudas (ed.), *Handbook of probability: theory and applications* (Los Angeles 2008) 3-14, at 3-4. See for a very interesting and accessible – to non-mathematicians – publication about modern probabilistic thinking: I. Hacking, *The taming of chance*

seems a safe inference to assume that the idea of risk or its management is not convincingly attested in the three ancient cultural areas under consideration.

Second, practical applications of thinking about future occurrences might be investigated. The redistributive aspect of the Mesopotamian economic system might be seen as contributing in part at least to some form of risk management. For example, the provision of food seems to have been more structurally organized than in Greece or Rome.[31] At the same time, the supply of water seems to

(Cambridge 1990). Here the mathematics of chance are explained using case studies, to exemplify the developments which took place in the 19th and 20th centuries.

31 See for the supply of food and a comparison between Rome and early Europe and a number of problems related to coping with 'risk' and/or uncertainty in this sense: W. Jongman & R. Dekker, 'Public intervention in the food supply in pre-Industrial Europe' in: P. Halstead & J. O'Shea (eds), *Bad year economics: cultural responses to risk and uncertainty* (Cambridge 1989) 114-122. For more on soldiers' rations see L. Foxhall & H.A. Forbes, 'Sitometreia: the role of grain as a staple food in classical antiquity', *Chiron* 12 (1982) 41-90, *passim*. It should be noted that this article also states (pp. 59-60) that in 2nd century BC Samos citizens would receive rations of grain from the city –whether or not this was because of a crisis is not known. Unquestionably the import of grain was such an important topic in the Athenian assembly in Classical times that the city regulated the import of grain and attempts were made to regulate costs to achieve 'a fair price', especially if there was a shortage of grain. However, when grain was imported it was not redistributed by the polis. See for amounts that would have been imported P. Garnsey, 'Grain for Athens' in: P.A. Cartledge & F.D.

have been subjected to some sort of organization in all three cultural areas.[32] Furthermore, all of the areas had systems to spread the costs

Harvey (eds), *Crux: essays presented to G.E.M. de Ste. Croix on his 75th birthday* (Exeter 1985) 62-75. See for other ways of obtaining food Gallant, *Risk and survival,* 179-182. All in all, although some efforts were made, it is hard to speak of a real safeguard for the community. In Rome, mass storage, distribution and price regulation were definitely available – although import was never fully regulated by the State, contracts were handed out to individuals who supplied grain to the city: Garnsey, *Famine and food supply*, 188-268; P. Garnsey, 'Grain for Rome' in: P. Garnsey, K. Hopkins & C.R. Whittaker (eds), *Trade in the ancient economy* (London 1983) 118-130, at 126-128. Before Gaius Gracchus this was as far as it went: '[the grain supplies were] insufficient for the population of the capital as a whole. Only in emergencies was the government prompted to further action, and such action, most obviously the purchasing of additional supplies of grain, was usually ad hoc and not designed to ward off future crises.' Quote from Garnsey, 'Grain for Rome', 126. See also B. Sirks, 'Supplying Rome: safeguarding the system' in: E. Papi (ed.), *Supplying Rome and the Empire: the Proceedings of an International Seminar Held at Siena-Certosa di Pontignano on May 2-4, 2004, on Rome, the Provinces, Production and Distribution* (Portsmouth, RI 2007) 173-178 for a short overview of the changes made during the Principate, mainly by Claudius. Gaius Gracchus ensured that grain could be bought by everyone at a low, regulated price, and after 58 BC, grain became available at no cost.

32 There is a plethora of literature on water and its supply. For Rome see R. Taylor, *Public needs and private pleasures: water distribution, the Tiber river and the urban development of ancient Rome* (Rome 2000); G. de Kleijn-Eijkelestam, *The water supply of ancient Rome: city area, water, and population* (Amsterdam 2001). For Greece see D.P. Crouch, *Water management*

of the investors were a ship or caravan to founder or be robbed.[33]

in ancient Greek cities (Oxford 1993) 19-39. For Mesopotamia see RlA s.v. 'ilku' and S.W. Cole & H. Gasche, 'Second- and first-millennium BC rivers in northern Babylonia' in: H. Gasche & M. Tanret (eds), *Changing water-courses in Babylonia: towards a reconstruction of the ancient environment in Lower Mesopotamia* (Ghent 1998) 1-64; Codex Hammurabi 55, 56, 260.

33 Another way of discovering indications of the communal assessment and management of uncertainty is the insurance of trade goods. This practice spreads the uncertainty faced in commercial operations over at least one other person, thereby diminishing it (or at least creating the feeling that has been diminished). An example is the system of the Greek marine insurance loans ('bottomry'), first appearing between 475 and 450 BC. (On maritime trade see C.M. Reed, *Maritime traders in the ancient Greek world* (Cambridge 2003) 41; 73). These insurance loans were a loan to the captain to buy his cargo. If he lost his goods for some reason, he did not have to repay the loan. At least, two or three people involved were in this system: captain, ship-owner (who might also have been the captain) and lender. The shipper would borrow money from the lender, and make an agreement with a ship-owner to use his ship (unless the captain was also the ship owner): L. Casson, *Ancient mariners: seafarers and sea fighters of the Mediterranean in ancient times* (London 1959) 102-103; P. Millett, 'Maritime loans and the structure of credit in fourth-century Athens' in: P. Garnsey, K. Hopkins & C.R. Whittaker (eds), *Trade in the ancient economy* (London 1983) 36-52, at 36. In other words, this transaction worked on the basis of the following assumption: 'if a ship carrying the grain bought with borrowed money did not arrive safely back at Athens, the borrower normally was not obliged to repay the lender'.: Reed, *Maritime traders,* 34. Otherwise, the lender would have to be paid back – at a high rate of interest: lending money was considered a very precarious occupation. In practice, these sums of money

Flexible interest rates on grain – depending on the season – were also known. Betting was a favourite pastime, above all in Rome. These have been claimed to be the prime examples of the existence of 'risk' in the ancient world. Nonetheless, all these expressions of

functioned both as a loan – to enable the borrower to buy cargo and set sail – and an insurance – to spread the damage should disaster strike. See Finley and De Ste. Croix as discussed in Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk,* 17 (and see the references to the primary materials she gives). If the ship were to go down, the shipper (borrower), ship owner and the lender would lose all; if the captain (borrower) survived although the ship and cargo did sink, the captain (borrower) also did not need to pay back the price of the cargo. Consequently, the damage was spread relatively evenly as the chances of surviving shipwreck were naturally relatively small. In Mesopotamia, a similar mechanism was present: during overland trading ventures especially, a few different individuals shared the monetary responsibility, as is well known from the sources (K. Radner, 'Traders in the Neo-Assyrian empire' in: J.G. Dercksen (ed.), T*rade and finance in ancient Mesopotamia: proceedings of the first MOS symposium* (Leiden 1997) (Istanbul 1999) 101-126, at 116-118; L. Graslin-Thomé, *Les échanges à longue distance en Mésopotamie au Ier millénaire: une approche économique* (Paris 2009) 405-414). Nevertheless, the idea that this was possible and that it was seen as beneficial to spread the monetary responsibility shows a sense of communal uncertainty management in roughly the same way as this occurred in Greece: the risk was not calculated, but the traders unquestionably were aware that their business was an uncertain one. As a consequence, they had understood that it would be better for every investor to spread his money and invest in more than one caravan. This was not based on the mathematics of chance, but on experience – and hence it was ultimately intuitive.

thinking about the future differ crucially from modern conceptions of risk: there was no calculation of the chances or probabilities of disaster or success.[34]

If he did not calculate 'risk', how *did* ancient man think about his uncertain future and how might this thinking be explored? Anthony Giddens draws a contrast between the modern world and anything which came before by characterizing the latter as living in the past and using its ideas about the supernatural and fate in order to think about uncertainties in the future – because pre-modern man did not have the concept of risk as a tool for thinking about uncertainties.[35] These generalizations are perhaps based upon similar remarks made by scholars of the ancient world, among them the claim that the 'unpredictability of the future [...] makes the past more relevant'.[36] Nevertheless, on the basis of the ancient evidence, the first part of Giddens' statement seems especially rash. Ancient man did not live primarily in the past and the future *was* thought about in very explicit ways: apart from a consciousness of time and its components (including the future), the mere existence – let alone the prevalence – of at least partly future-oriented religious phenomena such as divination, curses or sacrifice suggests that the ancient future was thought about pretty intensively. The fact, however, that these religious activities were the strategies used most widely by the

34 Contra Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 17, and see her references. Instead, these bottomry loans were uncertainty management.

35 Giddens, *Runaway world*, 40-41.

36 Grethlein, 'Divine, human and poetic time in Pindar, Pythian 9', 401.

various people of the ancient world to deal with the future does back up the second part of Giddens' statement.[37] It confirms that ancient man sought the guidance of the supernatural for these dealings pertaining to the, not necessarily predetermined, future.[38] Ancient man wanted to know and influence or 'manage' the uncertain future and, for the first purpose, sought information from the supernatural – especially by means of divination.

37 Excluding the likes of philosophers, some of whom had very specific ideas on these matters.

38 I do not concur with P.L. Bernstein that: 'Although the Egyptians became experts in astronomy and in predicting the times when the Nile would flood or withdraw, managing or influencing the future probably never entered their minds'. This statement is partly based on a quote from H. Frankfort: '[...] the Egyptians had very little sense of history or of past and future. For they conceived their world as essentially static and unchanging. It had gone forth complete from the hands of the Creator. Historical incidents were, consequently, no more than superficial disturbances of the established order, or recurring events of never-changing significance. The past and the future – far from being a matter of concern – were wholly implicit in the present [...]' (H. Frankfort, T*he birth of civilization in the Near East* (London 1951) 20-21). Frankfort seems to be discussing a general, philosophical view of the cosmos, but the very existence of such rituals as divination and magical actions seems to imply that real Egyptian individuals were concerned about the future. Bernstein's idea still pervades too many of the publications about a 'history of the future'. This is a good example of how ingrained the idea of risk is in our way of thinking – we cannot imagine a world without risk and without managing risk. Cf. P.L. Bernstein, *Against the gods: the remarkable story of risk* (New York 1996) 29.

Certainly the term 'risk' cannot be found in emic use nor can it be applied to the ancient materials etically. 'Risk' is so ingrained in the probabilistic thinking of modern Western man that, almost by default, he projects this kind of thinking onto the ancient world.[39] Nevertheless, ancient man did lessen uncertainty by trying to obtain perceived information from the supernatural. Although the function of both the assessment of risk and divination is to reduce uncertainty, this is done in different ways. An associated issue is that risk is a future-oriented term and, although divination is mainly concerned with the future, explaining the uncertainties of past and present is also an important function of it. The use of the term 'risk' ignores this aspect of divinatory practice. For all these reasons, the term 'risk' should be avoided in the study of divination.

Ancient uncertainty

Uncertainty about what?

Ancient individuals were uncertain about a number of issues: both private matters, political dilemmas and the field of religion have lent themselves to a great number of divinatory enquiries. Still, all sorts of themes occur. When we want to categorize these, we could take Joseph Fontenrose's three simple categories which he used to cre-

39 See for similar thoughts, although by means of different reasoning: Beard, 'Risk and the humanities', 91. I do, however, not agree with Beard's idea that the Romans lived in an aleatory society.

ate order in the Delphic materials. Together, his categories cover all themes: *res divinae* (cult foundation, sacrifices and religious laws), *res publicae* (rulership, legislation, interstate relations and war), *res domesticae et profanae* (birth, marriage, death, careers, actions, *etcetera*).[40]

Yet, we may want to be a bit more specific than that and also focus on the Greek individual (in contrast to the many communal questions known to have been asked at Delphi). Again, the tablets from Dodona are the best corpus from our period in time to find out what the ancient Greek individual was uncertain about. Taking Lhote's edition we find the following categories of uncertainties.[41] First, those of a socio-economic nature: issues are a good harvest, whether bills should be paid, about goods and possessions, which job to choose and whether the person will be successful in that job, about buying and selling.[42] Second, and connected to the first category, is

40 J.E. Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle: its responses and operations: with a catalogue of responses* (London 1978) Appendix B II, 438-440.

41 A number of questions need to be omitted here: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6b, 7, 8b, 9, 11, 14 because they are asked by communities (their topics are questions about safety for the community, general prosperity, a good harvest, maintenance of the temple and the possessions of the community). There are also a number of questions that are too fragmentary to use here: 4, 12. 24, 31, 40, 42, 61A, 70, 79, 113?, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 155,156, 161, 162, 164, 165, 166, 167, 140, 142.

42 A good harvest: 77, 78. Which job to do: 74, 75, 76, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 89Aa, 90, 91, 93, 94, 95, 96A, 97?, 98, 99, 100, 102, 103, 105, 106A, 106B, 111, 141 Bb. Gaining results: 17. Should the bill be paid: 96b. Goods and posses-

happiness/success. Individuals ask how they should achieve success, whether they will be happy, if it is a good idea to do something, which road a person should choose, how to gain results, whether an individual should spend energy resolving an issue.[43] Another, third, related category is the question of where to settle and live: whether a person should stay or move, or should travel.[44] Fourth, on love, marriage and children: issues are the good of the family, begetting children, whether the person will be happy in marriage with his wife, whether the person should find another wife, about arranging marriages of his children.[45] Fifth, dealing with rules and institutions: asking for justice, about requesting civil rights.[46] Sixth, religion in which category the issues are varied: whether to use a necromancer, to request another oracle, and so forth.[47] Seventh, on matters of

sions: 28A, 28b, 58B, 65, 115, 116, 117, 118. Buying and selling: 101, 109, 110.

43 Spend energy resolving an issue: 112. Gaining happiness/success: 10b, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22a, 23, 33b, 35a, 37, 49bis, 65, 67, 81. 107A, 108. Unhappiness: 158. Is it good to do something? 163.

44 Where to settle or live? 6b 46Bb, 50B, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58A, 59, 60?, 62, 63, 64, 68B, 92, 130, 131, 132, 133, 157, 160. To travel: 86. Which road to choose: 154

45 The good of the family: 8a. Begetting children: 15, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46a, 47, 48, 49, 50Aa, 51, 52, 140, 141A. Being happy in marriage with their wife: 22 Bb, 22ba, 25, 26, 27, 36A, 52, 53Aa?, 53Bb. Seeking another wife? 29, 30, 32, 33a, 34, 35b, 36Bb. Arranging marriages of children 38, 39, 53Ac.

46 Requesting civil rights: 61B. Justice 16, 141 bis, 159

47 10a, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 141B, 143, 144.

health.[48] Eight, matters of warfare/military.[49] And last, about finding out the truth about past and present.[50]

In Mesopotamia most attested questions (the queries from the king to the sun god) would have fitted into Fontenrose's second category, of *res publicae*. The sources provide information about public divination: every question addressed to the sun god was – directly or indirectly – concerned with the well-being of the land. Questions relating to the person of royal individuals also belong in this category because they are concerned with the well-being of the ruler or those close to him, and hence that of his realm. Detailed information about the questions asked during private, unofficial, divination – which would perhaps fall into the other two categories distinguished by Fontenrose – is lacking and speculation on this issue is therefore ruled out: the specific nature of the questions asked during divination was determined by cultural factors.

It is, however, possible to make some more detailed observations about the uncertainties of the king: there are questions about cultic matters, such as whether a statue of Marduk should be made. A very large part of the questions asked by the King revolves around decisions in war. Others are concerned with whom should be appointed in which official role, who should be appointed crown prince, political uprisings, royal marriages, survival of officials on a mission, and the important question whether or not a written plan should be car-

48 46Ba, 50Ab, 65, 66, 68A, 69, 71, 72, 73.

49 127, 128, 129.

50 107B, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 125bis, 126.

ried out. The health of royals is a last important concern. It could, then, be argued that the uncertainties of the king were focused on 'military and political', 'medical', 'religious' and 'administrative'.[51]

Roman sources, too, deal mainly with public concerns, of which a glimpse can be gained: the nature of the three main methods of divination shows which uncertainties were diminished by using public divination. First and foremost, the *prodigia* show the fear of the displeasure of the gods. If these gods were not appeased, more bad things would happen and uncertainty about the future would increase. *Prodigia* are a cause for uncertainty and expiation takes the uncertainty away. It should be noted that *prodigia* are, in the end, recognized and acknowledged as such by man and should therefore be seen as markers of existing uncertainties. The *auspicia* show a concern about new endeavors: should a particular action be undertaken and is this the right time for it? The *haruspices* were concerned with finding information about the divine will, especially in a military and sacrificial context: again, an important issue here is to find some sense of certainty that one is doing the right thing in accordance with the will of the gods.

51 Cultic matters: e.g., SAA 4 200. For other cultic matters see , e.g., SAA 4 196; 4 262; war: e.g, SAA 4 11; appointments: e.g, SAA 4 150; 4 275; crown prince: e.g, SAA 4 149; uprisings: e.g, SAA 4 321; marriage: e.g, SAA 4 20; officials on a mission: e.g, SAA 4 71; a written plan: e.g, SAA 4 129; health: e.g, SAA 4 188. Starr, Queries, *passim*.

A grip on uncertainty

Humans can attempt to get a grip on their uncertainties. In how far this works out is, naturally, always a subjective issue. There are different ways in which uncertainties can be perceived and, for the ancient world, these can be deduced by analysing the ways humans deal with uncertainty by means of divination. If divination functions on the basis of prediction, gaining knowledge of the future is seen as being possible. An individual thinks he can obtain information and this provides him with a sense of certainty. If, however, divination does not work predictively, the future is not seen as something that can be known, for instance because the future is seen as being based on chance.[52] Where chance is prevalent, uncertainty can, in the eyes of the individual, only be alleviated up to a certain point. The supernatural can provide advice on what would be the best course to follow. It can do no more than suggest what is the best option at a specific moment. No guarantees are given. If the individual followed such advice and he appeared to be visited by misfortune, he could argue that, had he not followed the advice, things would have been

52 Luck, accident and chance are concepts which are often used interchangeably. Both lucky and accidental events occur on the premise that there is a small chance that the event will take place. Hence, chance is the central concept – events which are perceived to depend on chance can be accidental (and the qualification 'lucky' means these accidental events are welcomed). For a discussion of a definition of luck see D. Pritchard, *Epistemic luck* (Oxford 2005) 125-144.

worse.[53] In short, uncertainties are everywhere, but it is the cultural mix in dealing with them which can differ from society to society.

If the idea of chance is prevalent in a society, this points towards a different way of thinking about the occurrence of future events than would be in a society in which this idea is absent. If there is some sort of future that is not dependent on chance, this implies a different kind of uncertainty which should be reflected in the divinatory materials. Different ideas about uncertainty are linked to different conceptions of the future and of divination.

How should we see ideas concerning the existence of chance in the three cultural areas? This is pivotal for our understanding of uncertainties. It should first be noted that there is no consistency in these beliefs: in Greece, we encounter the idea of *moira* from the Archaic Age onwards. *Moira* was the 'allotted portion' in the life of an individual. We also know that the earliest Greek horoscope – to

53 These kinds of uncertainty have also been called epistemical and aleatory. Yet, these concepts are intrinsically connected and interlinked in multiple ways. It is therefore unadvisable to use them as binary opposites. Aleatory uncertainty might be based in: the inherent randomness of nature (natural randomness); value diversity (cognitive variety); human behaviour (behavioural variety); social, economic, and cultural dynamics (societal randomness); technological surprises (technological randomness). Epistemical uncertainty can be based on inexactitude, lack of observations or measurements, practicalities of measurement, conflicting evidence, reducible ignorance (unknown unknowns), indeterminacy (issues which will not be known) and irreducible ignorance (issues which cannot be known) (Van Asselt, *Perspectives on uncertainty and risk*, 86-87).

which some idea of fate must be connected – dates from the third century BC. These two pieces of information show that there was a notion of fate.[54] This statement can also be applied to Republican Rome where the *Parcae* personified the same idea as Greek *moira*.[55] Despite such concepts, it can be confidently stated that 'chance' was a central conception in Classical and (even more so) Hellenistic Greece and also in Roman Italy from mid-Republican times. The sources suggest that in the Archaic period, *moira* occupied a more important place, but even at that time some references to Tuche can be found.[56]

The combined literary, epigraphical and archaeological sources leave no doubt that both Tuche and Fortuna and the ideas they embodied were important in everyday life in Greece and Rome. In the Graeco-Roman world, chance was not only perceived as a force, it was also personified, at least from early Hellenistic times. The goddesses Fortuna and Tuche were powerful deities of chance, on whom depended both positive and negative events. In the first-

54 On how the gods, fate and moira played complementary and clashing roles see the reference to H.S. Versnel n.2 of this chapter.

55 Among so many relevant publications see for an introduction S. Eitrem, 'Moira' in: A.F. von Pauly *et al.* (eds), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart 1894-1997) Vol. 15, 2449-2497; Greene, Moira.

56 On Tyche's frequent appearance see G. Herzog-Hauser, 'Tyche' in: A.F. von Pauly *et al.* (eds), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart 1894-1997) Vol. 7A, 1643-1689.

century AD, Pliny described the wide-ranging activities of Roman Fortuna as follows:

> For all over the world, in all places, and at all times, Fortune is the only god whom every one invokes; she alone is spoken of, she alone is accused and is supposed to be guilty; she alone is in our thoughts, is praised and blamed, and is loaded with reproaches; wavering as she is, conceived by the generality of mankind to be blind, wandering, inconstant, uncertain, variable, and often favouring the unworthy. To her are referred all our losses and all our gains, and in casting up the accounts of mortals she alone balances the two pages of our sheet [...].[57]

The goddesses Tuche and Fortuna were viewed as fickle and changeable/volatile/unpredictable by nature.[58] Despite such unreliability, in the Republican period Fortuna appears as a positive goddess.[59]

57 Plin. *NH* 2.5(7).22.3-10 Translation: John Bostock. Edition: Teubner. toto quippe mundo et omnibus locis omnibusque horis omnium vocibus Fortuna sola invocatur ac nominatur, una accusatur, rea una agitur, una cogitatur, sola laudatur, sola arguitur et cum conviciis colitur, volubilis . . . .que, a plerisque vero et caeca existimata, vaga, inconstans, incerta, varia indignorumque fautrix. huic omnia expensa, huic feruntur accepta, et in tota ratione mortalium sola utramque paginam facit [...].

58 An article which discusses this overlap between the two goddesses is G. Herzog-Hauser, 'Tyche und Fortuna', *WSt* 63 (1948) 156-163.

59 F. Graf, 'Fortuna' in: H. Cancik & H. Schneider (eds) *Brill's New Pauly Online.* Visited 20-05-2010. Cf. W. Otto, 'Fortuna' in: A.F. von Pauly *et al.* (eds), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart 1894-1997) Vol. 7, 12-42.

Her Greek counterpart Tuche appears to have begun to be perceived a little more negatively over time, even though she also gained in importance.[60] Some have connected this rise to the fact that the structures of the *polis* became weaker towards and in the Hellenistic period, making life more uncertain, hence Tuche was perceived to be a stronger force. However, it would be unwise to rule out the possibility that there were other factors which contributed to Tuche's rise in importance.[61]

60 See N. Johannsen, 'Tyche' in: H. Cancik & H. Schneider (eds) *Brill's New Pauly Online*. Visited 20-05-2010. There is a noticeable lack of recent monographs on Tyche and on the idea that luck was regulated by the supernatural. There is a Dutch monograph which, although is outdated still gives an idea of the rather more philosophical ideas about Tyche, but do not exclude day-to-day evidence on this topic: A.A. Buriks, Peri Tuches: *de ontwikkeling van het begrip tyche tot aan de Romeinse tijd, hoofdzakelijk in de philosophie* (Leiden 1948), *passim* (with English summary). Furthermore, there are many articles and monographs on Tyche in various specific authors or in specific places, for example, A. Zimmermann, *Tyche bei Platon* (Bonn 1966) and T. Dohrn, *Die Tyche von Antiochia* (Berlin 1960). For a semantic study of Greek terms for 'happiness', in which eutyches – a related term – plays a part see C. de Heer, Makar, eudaimōn, olbios, eutychēs: *a study of the semantic field denoting happiness in ancient Greek to the end of the 5th century B.C.* (Amsterdam 1968). On Tyche as an abstraction see recently Versnel, *Coping with the gods*, 277-278. See also J.D. Mikalson, *Religion in Hellenistic Athens* (Berkeley 1998) 62-63 and footnotes; P. Green, *Alexander to Actium: the historical evolution of the hellenistic age* (Berkeley 1990) 400-401 and footnotes.

61 Buriks, Peri Tuches, 2.

Chance is rather less visible in Mesopotamia – although the concept must have existed. It was not personified in the Mesopotamian pantheon.[62] Instead, most people in Mesopotamia appear to have believed in the existence of a knowable future which was perceived to have been arranged by the supernatural in its judgement (made known to man through divinatory signs), but susceptible to tweaking by mankind through rituals, in a way which did not leave much room for chance occurrences. There seems to be no Babylonian or Assyrian word for chance, in the sense of a sudden occurrence.[63] One apparent exception is the term *egirr*û,[64] but this word was only used in a divinatory context for something which happened unexpectedly and does not seem to have been a general term for 'chance'. As we have seen, an important Mesopotamian concept in dealing with the

62 Some secondary literature states that there are 'lucky' and 'unlucky' days, marked as such in hemerologies. However, these do not have much to do with the presence or absence of chance: they have to do with the idea that a particular day can be 'good' or 'bad' for doing something. This has nothing to do with chance – but with favourability.

63 The words which are usually translated as 'luck' refer to luck as in happiness; that good things happen to you (damiqtu); that you have or obtain a protective god (angubbû, ilānû; lamassu; rašû); experience good fortune because of divine favour (damâqu; dumqu; ilu; mašru) – these categories also overlap – or the same but in a negative sense (tallaktu; lemnu). Chance is not mentioned in the vocabulary (apart from chance in the sense of 'opportunity'). Even he who suffers does so because his protective god has abandoned him and not 'by chance'.

64 Cf. *CAD* s.v. egirrû.

future was š*imtu*, a complicated concept of which 'fate' is the usual, but slightly misleading, translation: š*imtu* could, to some extent, be seen as being similar to the Greek *moira* – there are some matters which cannot be decided on, or influenced by, either man or the supernatural.[65] Š*imtu* (in a way similar to *moira*) did not imply that the future was completely predetermined, as is also testified by the existence of the *namburbû* ritual. This ritual has been described as 'measures for the elimination of the evil promised by the omens'.[66] Individuals could perform such a ritual, asking the supernatural to change events which had been predicted to happen. The *namburbû* ritual was closely connected to divination and was used for individual but above all for the common good. For example, if it had been predicted that something would happen to an individual or to the land, a *namburbû* was performed to avert evil.[67] Apart from the normal *namburbû* which warded off a specific danger, there were also so-called *Universalnamburbû* which could be used to avert any future danger, even leaving that danger unspecified.[68] One special

65 The one article on this topic is: Rochberg-Halton, 'Fate and divination', 363-371

66 J. Bottéro, Z. Bahrani & M. Van De Mieroop, *Mesopotamia: reading, writing and the gods* (Chicago 1992) 154. Note that it could also be used to ensure the extispicy ritual went well: Koch, 'Sheep and sky', 465.

67 Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung*; R.I. Caplice, *The Akkadian namburbi texts: an introduction* (Los Angeles, 1974). For another example see SAA 10 10 5-rev. 5.

68 See for some examples Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung*, 467-502.

case is the ritual of the substitute-king. If a negative omen had been observed, a substitute king would be placed on the throne and the evil would be deflected towards this substitute, instead of towards the real king.[69] As the king was the personification of the land and social order was dependent on the king, this kind of ritual was a tool for averting communal uncertainty. All this results in a very important observation: although the Mesopotamian future had been decided upon by the supernatural, it could still be changed.

Viewing the future as a divine judgement does not leave much room for chance (although it must have existed). Even the dice were sometimes thought to be predictive. Throwing the dice during a game in Mesopotamia, which was theoretically based on chance, could be a throw closely connected to the future:

> If the astragals score 2,
> the Swallow sits at the head of a rosette (or: at the first rosette).
> Should it (then) land on a rosette, a woman will love those who linger in a tavern;
> regarding their pack, well-being falls to them.
> If it does not land on a rosette, a woman will reject those who linger in a tavern; regarding their pack, as a group well-being will not fall to them.[70]

69 See among many other sources, the brief summary of this ritual practice in: Rochberg, *The heavenly writing*, 78; 222-223. See for a letter telling the king about such issues SAA 10 25.

70 BM33333B rev. i 9-15. Edition and transliteration Finkel, 'On the rules for the royal game of Ur', 20 and 29.
šum4-ma ZI.IN.GI.MEŠ 2 TA.ÀM

At first glance, an important role of chance implies a belief in an empty future in which random and unpredictable events will take place; if chance seems less important, this implies the idea of a future in which events will occur which can be known (and perhaps be changed or manipulated) and a past which can explained. Yet, the two kinds of uncertainty could easily exist side by side: the ordinary Greek, Roman or Mesopotamian individual was generally not concerned about this paradox. From an etic perspective, too, the two categories do not exclude each other but are indeed inextricably linked to one another.[71] What must be emphasized is that each cultural area appears to have had its own specific mix of the ways uncertainty was seen: although chance seems unlikely to have played an important role in Mesopotamia (although it still might have existed), it was prominent in Greece and Rome. Moreover, this contrast grew progressively more pronounced after more emphasis came to be placed on the idea of chance between Archaic and Hellenistic times,. This development is reflected in growing concerns about chance occurrences taking place: chance was fickle, could not be relied upon and

it-tab-ku-nim SIM.MUŠEN ina SAG SÙR TUŠ-ab
SÙR E11-ma MUNUS ina É [KAŠ].TIN.NAM a-šá-bi
i-ra-mu (sic) [KASKAL].KUR-su-nu šu-lum šá-kin-šu-nu-tu
šum4-ma SÙR la E11 MUNUS ina É KAŠ.TIN.NAM
a-šá-bi i-ze-er KASKAL.KUR-su-nu
I-niš SILIM ul šá-kin-šu-nu-tu

71 See n.53 of this chapter.

could not be controlled. This affected the way individuals attempted to get a grip on their uncertainty.

Divination

How did divination serve to get a grip on uncertainty in the three cultural areas? The exact way the supernatural was questioned differed: asking the supernatural for advice (for example, what is best?) indicates a different basis of uncertainty because it leaves room for chance, whereas asking for a prediction (and hence knowledge of future events, for example, will x happen?) presupposed that the future can be known, as do indicative questions - general questions about the future (for example, 'shall I be happy'), because these contain a predictive element. The third category (for example, 'which god shall I sacrifice to?') in which a specific answer is required is the instructive category, also indicating the existence of an idea that the future could be known and uncertainty taken away – but directed towards the present (as opposed to the future). Information about past occurrences may be asked for ('What have I done wrong?'), but these questions are about the past and are therefore not discussed in this research. The queries about the future reveal the cultural mix of the way individuals tried to get a grip on uncertainties and how divination worked to diminish or even resolve these.

Asking for advice and instructions

For Greece, the starting point of my investigation lies in the oracular questions, especially those contained in the corpora from Delphi and Dodona. The latter collection is important because it is so closely connected to actual divinatory practice; the former because it might help us to confirm or modify conclusions reached on the basis of the Dodonaic materials. Some methodological comments are in order before these corpora can be discussed in more depth. The Dodona materials have been relatively well published. For Delphi, I have based my analysis on the so-called historical questions (for which the criterion is that they were written down within thirty years after they were supposedly pronounced) as identified by Joseph Fontenrose.[72] I consider both sets of oracular materials to be strong indications of what was and what was not asked in Greek divinatory practice in general.

The first category of questions is illustrated by the following Dodonaic example from Eidinow's catalogue:

> Good fortune. Whether I would do better travelling to where it seems good to me, and doing business there, if it seems good, and at the same time practicing this craft.[73]

72 Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle*, 39; 440-442.

73 Translation (and bibliography concerning this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk,* 97, nr. 9.
Τύχα ἀγαθά. Ἦ τυγχάνοιμί κα ἐμπορευόμενος | ὅπυς κα δοκῆι σύμφορον ἔμειν, καὶ ἄγων, τῆι κα δοκῆι | ἅμα τᾶι τεχναι χρεύμενος

Will it be better for the questioner if he performs a particular action or makes a particular choice? This question asks for an answer of an advisory nature: the purpose is to ask the supernatural to guide the individual in a decision which needs to be made (rather than to reveal the future to him).

The second category is that of the instructive questions in which the oracle is asked to supply the enquirer with such replies as to which god he should offer or which other specific actions he should perform. These questions differ from the advisory ones in the sense that the supernatural is perceived to give a specific command about what to do. An example of an instructive question is 'Which god should I sacrifice to?' Here we see that uncertainties could be dissolved through the gaining of knowledge, as it is in the next two categories.

Apart from these advisory and instructive questions, there are also other kinds of questions, such as 'Shall I be happy?' and 'Shall I have children?' These questions are concerned with issues about which the individual feels powerless (such as happiness or begetting children). They contain a predictive element but the supernatural is not specifically asked to look into the future: the question is general and the timeframe vague. I therefore categorize these questions as 'indicative'.

The last category in these Greek oracular materials consists of requests for information about the truth in both past and present: 'Who were the parents?' and 'What is the truth about X?' are

examples of such questions. Their purpose is to obtain knowledge. Pertinently, it should be noted that these questions are not about the future: where the Greek past and present are concerned, knowledge is asked for, whereas the more future-oriented questions tend to seek advice and instruction.

Now for a more quantitative analysis, in so far as this is possible. Building on the four categories just defined, the questions are categorized according to whether they are advisory, instructive or predictive. The percentages for Delphi are as follows: Fontenrose has dealt with seventy-five historical oracles.[74] Of these, thirty-three are of an advisory nature (44%).[75] Thirty-one are instructive (41.3%).[76] Only five are indicative (6.6%).[77] Only two ask for information about both past and present (2.6%),[78] leaving another four (5.3%) which could not be assigned to these categories).[79]

A study of the Delphic historical materials reveals that the Greek gods mainly gave advice and instructions with regard to future

74 These are from different times – the common factor they share is that they were written down relatively soon after they were pronounced, which lowers the chance that they were falsified or twisted for a rhetorical purpose.

75 H 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 13, 17, 19, 20, 21, 25, 27, 29, 32, 33, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 55, 59, 61, 62, 64, 66, 74.

76 H 7, 8, 9, 10?, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16?, 23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 31, 35, 37, 44, 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 58, 60, 67, 68, 71.

77 H 4, 18?, 34?, 70, 75.

78 H 65, 69.

79 H 3, 22, 63, 73.

uncertainties. Do the Dodonaic materials show the same pattern? In the Dodonaic materials (in which 187 questions are asked), there are more questions of the indicative type than there are in Delphi (and even some exceptional ones which might be called predictive): thirty-five in total (18.7%).[80] Instructions are given on thirty-one tablets (16.5%),[81] whereas the great majority of questions is advisory in nature: seventy-three in total (39%).[82] Two tablets combine prediction and instruction (1.1%).[83] The last category consists of questions concerning both past and present, of which there are eleven in the Dodonaic corpus (5.9%).[84] Another thirty-five cannot be assigned to any category because they are illegible (18.7).[85] Although there are more indicative questions at Dodona than at Delphi, the questions most often asked at the oracles are instructive, above all advisory.

80 Lhôte 5; 6A; 10B; 13?; 18; 21; 22Bb; 26; 28B; 33B; 35A; 36A; 37; 39; 43; 44; 45; 46A; 51; 53Bb; 55; 58A; 63; 73; 82; 83; 84; 87; 88; 94; 109?; 118; 131; 140; 141.

81 Lhôte 1; 2; 3; 7; 8A; 17; 19; 20; 22A; 35B; 36Bb; 38; 41; 46Ba; 47; 49bis; 50Aa; 65; 66; 67; 68A; 72; 101; 102; 107A; 110; 116; 131; 138; 143; 157?

82 Lhôte 6B; 8B; 9; 10A; 11; 16; 22Ba; 25; 27; 28A; 29; 30; 31; 33A; 34; 46Bb; 50Ab; 50B; 53Aa; 53Ac; 54; 56; 57; 58B; 60; 61B; 62?; 64?; 68B?; 69; 71?; 74; 75; 77?; 78?; 80; 81; 85; 86; 89; 90; 91; 92; 93; 95; 96A; 97; 98; 100; 103; 105; 106A; 106B; 108?; 111; 112; 114; 115?; 117; 127; 128; 129; 130; 133; 134?; 137; 139; 144; 154; 158; 159; 160; 163.

83 Lhôte 48; 52.

84 Requests for truth and so on. Lhôte 14; 49; 107B; 119; 120; 121; 123; 124; 125; 125bis; 126.

85 Lhôte 4; 12; 15; 21; 23?; 24; 32; 40; 42; 59; 70; 76; 79; 99; 104; 113?; 136a; 142; 145; 146; 147; 148; 149; 150; 151; 152; 153; 155; 156; 161; 162; 164; 165; 166; 167.

The assumption that Greek people tended to use divination to obtain *advice* from the supernatural is confirmed by the evidence relating to the outcome of extispicies. Although we are still rather in the dark about how his questions were phrased, Xenophon's extispicies normally seem to indicate '(un)favourability', but it is often uncertain whether this concerns a particular action he wants to undertake or if he is asking a sign from the supernatural indicating general favourability. It is true that some favourable signs are seen as providing a positive background to specific actions. This connection is exemplified by the following passage: '[...] our sacrificial victims were favourable, the bird-omens auspicious, the omens of the sacrifice most favourable; let us advance upon the enemy. [...].'[86] Importantly the supernatural does not predict or say that Xenophon will win this battle: it merely advises that it is favourable to advance now. Everything else, including the outcome of battle, is still dependent on other factors, such as chance.

It should be noted that numerous Greek literary sources explicitly indicate predictive divination. One example is the following: Homer relates Penelope's spontaneous dream which was interpreted in such a way that it applied to her situation. She now knew that Odysseus was coming home:

> But come now, hear this dream of mine, and interpret it for me. Twenty geese I have in the house that come forth from the water and eat wheat, and my heart warms with joy as I watch them. But forth

86 Xen. *An*. 6.21.2-3. Translation C.L. Brownson.
τά τε ἱερὰ ἡμῖν καλὰ οἵ τε οἰωνοὶ αἴσιοι τά τε σφάγια κάλλιστα.

> from the mountain there came a great eagle with crooked beak and broke all their necks and killed them; and they lay strewn in a heap in the halls, while he was borne aloft to the bright sky.[87]

In my view, Greek predictive divination did not occur as regularly as the literary sources suggest. It must not be overlooked that predictions from the supernatural were a particularly good literary or rhetorical device. Although heroes were perceived to have been able to procure knowledge of the future, the materials from Dodona and Delphi are, in my opinion, a more trustworthy indication of the advisory way in which Greek divination functioned: advice from the supernatural leaves room for chance – suggesting that a large component of Greek uncertainty was based on the idea that chance played an important role and that the future could not be predicted.

Very instructive

Because we do not have any corpus of materials susceptible to quantitative analysis, any conclusions about the types of questions most commonly asked in Roman divination must be impressionistic to some extent. Despite this hitch, it seems possible to conclude that,

87 Hom. *Od.* 19.535-540. Translation A.T. Murray.
ἀλλ᾽ ἄγε μοι τὸν ὄνειρον ὑπόκριναι καὶ ἄκουσον. | χῆνές μοι κατὰ οἶκον ἐείκοσι πυρὸν ἔδουσιν | ἐξ ὕδατος, καί τέ σφιν ἰαίνομαι εἰσορόωσα· | ἐλθὼν δ᾽ ἐξ ὄρεος μέγας αἰετὸς ἀγκυλοχείλης | πᾶσι κατ᾽ αὐχέν᾽ ἔαξε καὶ ἔκτανεν· οἱ δ᾽ ἐκέχυντο | ἁθρόοι ἐν μεγάροισ᾽, ὁ δ᾽ ἐς αἰθέρα δῖαν ἀέρθη.

as in Greece, Roman divination was used as a tool to obtain advice but also and above all to ask the supernatural for instructions.

The auspices and *prodigia* provide an interesting combination of functions of Roman divination in getting a grip on uncertainty. The advisory element can be seen in the Roman sources when the auspices are taken:

> The consuls were busy with matters pertaining to gods and to men, as they are wont to be on the eve of an engagement, when the envoys from Tarentum approached them to receive their answer; to whom Papirius replied, "Tarentines, the keeper of the chickens reports that the signs are favourable; the sacrifice too has been exceedingly auspicious; as you see, the gods are with us at our going into action." He then commanded to advance the standards, and marshalled his troops, with exclamations on the folly of a nation which, powerless to manage its own affairs, because of domestic strife and discord, presumed to lay down the limits of peace and war for others.[88]

The auspices were taken to ensure that a particular action would be as successful as possible, but this is not to say a definitive out-

88 Liv. 9.14.3-5. Translation B.O. Foster. Edition: Teuber.
agentibus divina humanaque, quae adsolent, cum acie dimicandum est, consulibus Tarentini legati occursare responsum expectantes; quibus Papirius ait: 'auspicia secunda esse, Tarentini, pullarius nuntiat; litatum praeterea est egregie; auctoribus dis, ut videtis, ad rem gerendam proficiscimur'. signa inde ferri iussit et copias eduxit, vanissimam increpans gentem, quae, suarum inpotens rerum prae domesticis seditionibus discordiisque, aliis modum pacis ac belli facere aequum censeret.
Another good example is, e.g., Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.104

come had been decided. Chance played its part. The importance of chance is also revealed at oracle sites at which cleromancy was practised. For example, at the sanctuary of Praeneste, while the lot was apparently drawn by a small child, Fortuna was in charge, allowing for a maximum 'randomization'.[89] These cleromantic activities are another illustration of the way Roman man embraced uncertainty on the basis of chance, and how he simultaneously strove to diminish it: 'dice could be used not only to expose uncertainty, but also to resolve it'.[90] Using cleromancy under the auspices of the goddess of chance, the individual knowingly increased uncertainty by relying on the goddess to steer the divinatory process – hoping that chance would provide information.

Prodigia served to let the individual and community know what was wrong, for example, that the *pax deorum* had been disturbed: this type of information was instructive. The sign – or rather its interpretation – revealed the existence of an as yet unknown uncertainty or problem because the supernatural had been angered. Expiation of the sign would resolve the previously unknown problem: the supernatural instructed the individual what to do by providing a sign.

89 Tuche appears in the late dice oracle texts see, e.g, Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 133. It is interesting in this respect that it has been argued that κίνδυνος 'danger' and the worst throw of the dice 'the dog', are etymologically connected. But according to J. Knobloch, 'Griech. κίνδυνος m. Gefahr und das Würfelspiel', *Glotta* 53 (1975) 78-81, the theory should be rejected.

90 Beard, 'Risk and the humanities',, 99.

> A wall and a gate had been struck by lightning; and at Aricia even the temple of Jupiter had been struck by lightning. Other illusions of the eyes and ears were credited as realities. An appearance as of ships had been seen in the river at Tarracina, when there were none there. A clashing of arms was heard in the temple of Jupiter Vicilinus, in the territory of Compsa; and a river at Amiternum had flowed bloody. These prodigies having been expiated according to a decree of the pontiffs, [...].[91]

In Rome, taking the auspices served to obtain advice about how to do the right thing at the right time. By taking the auspices one chose the best future, implying the existence of options which remained unknown. By providing advice, divination supplied the certainty that the best option had been chosen or the best possible action had been taken at the best possible time. This transformed fear of uncertainties into hope – without eliminating these uncertainties. Uncertainties also were addressed by asking instructive questions: knowledge of what to do in the present was obtained and this seems to have played a relatively larger role than it did in Greece.

91 Liv. 24.44.8-9. Translation D. Spillan & C. Edmonds.
Murus ac porta Caietae et Ariciae etiam Iouis aedes de caelo tacta fuerat. Et alia ludibria oculorum auriumque credita pro ueris: nauium longarum species in flumine Tarracinae quae nullae erant uisas et in Iouis Vicilini templo, quod in Compsano agro est, arma concrepuisse et flumen Amiterni cruentum fluxisse. His procuratis ex decreto pontificum [...].

Asking for predictions

The Neo-Assyrian queries addressed to the sun god during extispicy show that Mesopotamia differed from Greece and Rome in a remarkable way.[92] Although advisory and instructive questions are recorded and indicative questions must have existed (second millennium sources show that individuals would ask indicative questions) – these are largely absent from the Neo-Assyrian materials. An overwhelming part of the surviving queries cannot be called anything but explicitly predictive: the gods were asked to provide a 'judgement' about what would happen in reply to the question, in the shape of a divinatory sign – in this way the individual would gain perceived knowledge and uncertainties related to the future were eliminated.

At this point, I shall provide an example of a query beginning with a request for advice or instruction which might also have been encountered in Greece or Rome (first part, should Esarhaddon send troops?). Then follows the part of the question asking for a prediction of future events, even within a specified time frame (second part, will the others then band themselves together?):

> Should he send men, horses and troops, as he wishes, to Siriš? Is it pleasing to your great divinity?

92 Starr, *Queries*.

> If the subject of this query, Esar[haddon], king of Assyria, having planned, sends (them), will the people of Siriš, or the Manneans, or the *Ridaeans*, or any (other) enemy, from this day to the day of my [stipu]lated term, *band themselves together into an army* (against) the army he is sending to [Siriš]?[93]

This question asks for both advice and a prediction and shows the two main varieties in Mesopotamian questions. If people felt that the gods could say something (semi-) definite about the future, this must have been the preferred option. Therefore, one would not expect large numbers of advisory questions to be found. Questions directed exclusively towards obtaining advice are a real minority and predictive questions assume a much more important place.

It is possible to take a quantitative view, taking into account that the amount of data is not large enough to draw definitive conclusions (and that indicative questions are likely to be under-represented). One hundred and fifty-two queries out of 354 are too fragmentary to provide any indication of what kind of question was

93 SAA 4 28 obv. 8-12. Translation and edition I. Starr.
ERIM-MEŠ ANŠE.KUR.RA-MEŠ A2.KAL mal2 ŠA3-ba-šu2 ub-lam a-na KUR.si-ri-iš liš-p[ur]
UGU DINGIR-ti-ka GAL-ti DUG3-ab GIM ik-p[u-d]u-ma il-tap-ru EN—MU.MU NE-i mAN.ŠAR2—[ŠEŠ—SUM-na]
LUGAL KUR—AN.ŠÁR TA UD-mu NE-i EN mál UD m[u ši-k]in RI-ia Á.KAL mál a-na URU.[si-ri-iš]
i-šap-pa-ru lu-ú KUR.si-ri-iš-a-[a lu]-ú LÚ.man-na-a-a lu-ú LÚ.RI!-d[a?-a-a] lu-ú LÚ.KÚR a-a-um-ma [a-n]a mim-ma Á.K[AL i-kàt]-ti-ru-ni-i lu-ú Š[U x x x]

asked and what kind of answer was expected.[94] Of the 202 remaining queries, only thirty (14.85%) ask for advice;[95] another sixty-six (32.67%) ask for advice and prediction as in the example above;[96] 106 (52.48%) of the queries are purely predictive.[97] In short, more than

94 SAA4 13; 25; 26; 27; 46; 52; 54; 55; 70; 97; 106; 109; 112; 120; 121; 123(?); 125; 126; 127; 128; 135; 138; 146; 147; 179; 180; 181; 182; 184; 186; 189; 193; 194; 195; 198; 199; 200; 201; 202; 203; 204; 206; 207; 209; 210; 211; 212; 213; 214; 215; 216; 217; 218; 219; 220; 221; 222; 223; 224; 225; 226; 227; 228; 229; 230; 231; 232; 233; 234; 235; 236; 237; 238; 239; 240; 241; 242; 243; 244; 245; 246; 247; 248; 249; 250; 251; 252; 253; 254; 255; 256; 257; 258; 259; 260; 261; 269; 273; 277; 279; 283; 284; 291; 292; 294; 295; 296; 297; 298; 304; 308; 309; 311; 312; 313; 314; 316; 317; 318; 319; 323; 324; 325; 326; 327; 328; 329; 330; 331; 332; 333; 334; 335; 336; 337; 338; 339; 340; 341; 342; 343; 344; 345; 346; 347; 348; 349; 350; 351; 352; 353; 354.

95 SAA 4 60; 76; 86(?); 95(?); 100 (?); 101; 103; 105; 110; 114; 129; 130; 137; 148; 149; 167; 173; 175; 178; 196; 197; 262; 263; 264; 265(?); 266; 270; 278; 310; 315.

96 SAA 4 8; 16; 24; 28; 30; 34; 51; 57; 58; 62; 63; 64; 65; 71; 78; 79; 81; 82; 83(?); 84; 85; 87; 88; 89; 90; 91; 94(?); 96; 99; 102; 104; 107; 108; 111; 113; 124; 150; 151; 152; 154; 156; 158; 159; 161; 163; 164; 166; 168; 169; 170; 171; 172; 174; 177; 185; 187; 267; 271; 272; 274; 287; 290; 299; 305; 306; 307.

97 I have also included 'requests for truth' in this category (and not provided a separate category as in the Greek materials), as they are primarily directed towards the future – except number 74, which I have indicated by a question mark. SAA 4 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 9; 10; 11; 12; 14; 15(?); 17; 18; 19(?); 20; 21; 22(?); 23; 29; 31; 32; 33; 35; 36; 37; 38; 39; 40; 41; 42; 43; 44; 45; 47; 48; 49; 50; 53(?); 56; 59; 61; 66; 67; 68; 68(?); 72; 73; 74(?); 75; 77; 80; 92; 93; 98; 115; 116; 117; 118; 119; 122; 131; 132; 133; 134; 136; 139; 140; 141; 142; 142; 144; 145; 153; 155; 157; 160; 162; 165; 176; 183; 188; 190; 191; 192; 205; 208(?); 268; 275; 276; 280; 281; 282; 285; 286; 288; 289; 293; 300; 301; 302; 303; 320; 321; 322.

half of the queries are purely predictive, and one-third combines advisory with predictive elements. Even if the exact percentages were subjected to discussion,[98] these figures clearly demonstrate the prevalence of predictions in the Mesopotamian materials and the relative unimportance of purely advisory questions. In other words (and also throwing the missing indicative questions into the balance), in Mesopotamia, uncertainty based on the idea that chance played a role seems to have been less prevalent than in Greece. The king needed to know if he should order the execution of his plan, yes or no. He needed knowledge and it was thought it was possible to ask whether or not a specific event would occur within a specific timeframe: here the supernatural was asked to provide a predictive answer in the form of a judgement.

Other evidence concurs with the idea that indicative and predictive elements were very important in Mesopotamian divination.
The compendia used to interpret signs other than those obtained through extispicy show that a sign was used to predict the future:

> If the smell of a man's house is like bitumen, grain and silver will be stolen from him.[99]

98 Criticism of these calculations can arise on account of the fact that some information might have been lost when tablets were broken, I have categorized the queries on the basis of the text which has been published, taking into account Starr's supplements. Other passages are missing but if Starr has not supplemented them, I have not made any assumptions about these.

99 Šumma alu tablet 6.113. Edition and translation: Freedman, *If a city is*

Leaving aside the possibility that events were explained in retrospect with the help of a divinatory text, the predictive goal of this text is clear.

The Mesopotamian tendency to ask for predictions and indications rather than advice can be plausibly connected with the telescopic function of Mesopotamian divination, discussed in earlier sections. A good example of such telescopic thinking about knowledge (and time) is provided by the following question in which the expert asks whether or not the Scythians will perform a particular act, which is specified in great detail:

> '[From this day, the 22nd day of this month, Sivan (III), to the 21st day of the following month, Tammuz (IV), of this year, for 30 days and nights], the stip[ulated term for the performance of (this) extispicy — within this stipulated term], will the troops of the S[cyth]ia[ns, which have been staying in the district of Mannea and which are (now) moving out from the territory] of Mannea, strive and plan? Will they move out and go through the passes [of Hubuškia] to the city Harrania (and) the city Anisus? Will they take much plunder and heavy booty from the territory of [Assyria]? Does your great divinity [know it]?'[100]

set on a height, vol. 1. 118-119.

DIŠ e-ri-iš É LÚ GIM ESIR ŠE.IM u KÙ.BABBAR ša-ri-iq-šú

100 SAA 4 23 obv. 2-10. Edition and translation: I. Starr.

[TA UD an-ni-e UD-22-KAM2 ša2 ITI an-ni-e ITI.SIG4 a-di UD-21-KAM2]

[ša2 ITI TU-ba ITI.ŠU ša2 MU.AN.NA an-ni-ti 30 UD-MEŠ 30 MI-MEŠ]

ši-[kin a-dan-ni DU3-ti ba-ru-ti i-na ši-kin a-dan-ni šu-a-tu2]

LU2.ERIM-MEŠ iš-ku-[za-a-a ša2 i-na na-gi-i ša2 KUR.man-na-a-a aš2-bu-ma TA UGU ta-ḫu-me]

This way of questioning the gods implies that there was one particular future known to the supernatural, although this future might be changed by performing rituals, and also that uncertainty about the future existed and could be taken away by means of knowledge of the future gained by divination.

Towards an uncertainty analysis

Before proceeding towards an analysis of the above findings, a repeated *caveat* is in order: inconsistencies abound in the ways notions of chance and fate could exist next to one another. Still, these inconsistencies do not make the contrast between Mesopotamian and Greek and Roman conceptions of uncertainties any less real or less important. It is still possible to produce an analysis. The ways in which future uncertainties were approached in Mesopotamia differ from those in Greece and Rome. The Neo-Assyrian questions known to us are largely of the following type: 'Will a particular event happen within a particular space of time' – a question requiring a predictive answer. This is a much more explicit way of asking about the future than the greater part of questions asked in Greece and Rome.[101] The

[ša2] KUR.man-na-a-a DU-MEŠ-ku i-ṣar-ri-mu-u i-ka-pi-du-u2 TA ne2-ri-bi
[ša2 URU.ḫu-bu-uš-ki-a]
[0] a-na URU.ḫar-ra-a-ni-a a-na URU.a-ni-i-su-us [x x x]
uṣ-ṣu-ne2-e DU-MEŠ-ku-ne2-e TA UGU ta-ḫu-me ša2 [KUR—aš-šur.KI]
ḫu-ub-tu ma-a'-du NAM.RA ka-bit-tu i-ḫab-ba-[tu-u2]
i-šal-la2-lu-u2 DINGIR-ut-ka GAL-ti [ZU-e]

101 After the completion of this study, D. Zeitlyn published an article in

underlying assumption seems to have been that the Mesopotamian future was decided on by the supernatural, who could choose to inform humans of their decisions: the future could become *known* to man. In Greece, advice (as well as instruction) tended to preponderate, whereas in Rome, divination appears to have been both advisory and instructive. The future remained unknown: man had to make *choices* on the basis of the advice that had been given. He had to make the best of it.

What does this imply for culturally specific ideas about the role of divination in dealing with it uncertainties? In Greece (and to a lesser extent in Rome), the advisory function of divination did not transform uncertainties into certainties but worked as a tool to diminish fear and turn it into hope by providing advice about obtaining the best possible future from a great authority – the supernatural. Uncertainty was diminished, but not taken away. In Mesopotamia, divination was used to obtain advice and instruction but very often also to obtain information about what was going to happen. In other words, Mesopotamian divination was a tool to eliminate uncertainty by obtaining perceived knowledge of the future. This is a real difference in the function of divination between the cultural areas. From the divinatory materials it would seem that Mesopotamian people appear to have believed that there was a future which could be known, shaped and controlled in particular ways, whereas most

which he provides a theoretical basis to his research which contains similarities with my findings. See D. Zeitlyn, 'Divinatory logics: diagnoses and predictions mediating outcomes', *CurrAnthr* 53 (2012) 525-546, at 527.

Greek and Roman futures seem to have come in multiple varieties. Although these could not be made known by means of divination, people could try to steer towards the best future available (whatever that future might have looked like) – by means of choices made on the basis of the outcomes of the divinatory process.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Divination was a tool for individuals to gain some grip on their futures. In Greece, there appears to have been multiple possible futures – from which man needed to choose the best. Fears about the future were turned into hope: man could hope to have made the right choice with the help of the supernatural in a world in which nothing was sure. In Mesopotamia, divination tended to be used to get to know the future (which could still be changed).

The ways ancient futures might have been conceived are not the main focus of this study. Nevertheless, some general conclusions can be drawn on the basis of divinatory materials. It should, first of all, be noted that sweeping statements about inhabitants of the ancient world being ruled by fate and predestination lack nuance.[102]

102 It must be conceded that, owing to the limited space assigned to the ancient world in future studies, nuance is often impossible to provide. For an example of a publication which does devote a reasonable amount of space to ancient futures but does not avoid the pitfalls as laid down above see B. Adam & C. Groves, *Future matters: action, knowledge, ethics* (Leiden

To judge from the divinatory materials, the ancient man-on-the-street had kaleidoscopic ideas about what the future looked like and how it could and should be considered and managed. Ideas about fate were undoubtedly present, but the evidence from the divinatory materials allows the conclusion that ancient people were not so very different from us as it is often said they were: they too usually saw their future(s) as open-but-not-empty. [103] Of course, there were variations in *how* open and *how* empty that future was. In all ancient cases, something was there. The Greek and Roman individual might attempt to pick the best course in life, whereas the Mesopotamian individual might even have tried to obtain knowledge about what was in store for him – and then change it, if need be. The Mesopotamian future can be seen as one road, of which one section at a time could be made known to man, who could still influence its direction. Greek and Roman futures can be seen as multiple roads originating from a crossroads among which man had to attempt to choose the best direction by means of divination, taking

2007). While I greatly appreciate their theory and their ideas, they are based on rather too general conceptions of what ancient futures were like and how they were handled.

103 This term has been used to describe how modern man sees his future as 'open, but not empty' see Van Asselt *et al.*, *Uit zicht*, 53-54; and continuing on this idea, most recently, B. Raessens, *Toekomstonderzoek: van trends naar innovatie* (Den Haag 2011) 17 and *passim*; Adam & Groves, *Future matters*, 17-38.

into account that chance would still play its part. Here, once again, Greek divination appears as a relatively flexible tool by which to discover a relatively flexible future.

9. Conclusion

Divination was an omnipresent practice in the ancient world and the cultural areas investigated in this study, Greece, Neo-Assyrian Mesopotamia and Republican Rome, were no exception. Signs were thought to come from the supernatural – and, by interpreting these, humans hoped to gain information about the past, present and future. Divination was a way of receiving perceived information from the supernatural which could not, or only with difficulty, be otherwise obtained.

The principal aim of this study has been to determine what is specific to Greek divination and to offer a possible explanation of why this might be so. To discover what is specific requires comparison. Similarities reveal the general features of divination, whereas differences expose variations and specific characteristics. In applying this method, my aim has not been to demonstrate the 'uniqueness' of one of the three cultural areas. I have certainly not tried to outline some sort of evolutionary framework for the 'development' or 'transfer' of divination, but have attempted to shed light on how divination functioned in the three societies investigated.

Divination is considered as an essentially human phenomenon: in an etic sense, the perceived signs were simply occurrences onto

which man projected supernatural origins and purposes. This meant that the divinatory process was a reflection of culturally defined values because, after all, it had been created by man. Therefore, an investigation of the similarities and differences between Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman divination not only enlarges our understanding of divination, it also expands our knowledge of the societies in which it took place. Divination is inseparable from its societal context.

Before embarking on the comparison, an outline of the phenomenon of ancient divination was provided. It has been shown that the process of ancient divination consisted of the human detection, recognition and subsequent interpretation of signs attributed to the supernatural. These signs could be concerned with past, present or future. There are three elements crucial to the functioning of this process: *homo divinans*, sign and text. At the outset of the divinatory process, an individual perceived an occurrence as a divinatory sign because he would, consciously or subconsciously and for whatever reason, judge an occurrence to have been caused by the supernatural. For instance, he might observe the flight of a bird and recognize it as a sign, or might have heard or seen a sign in oral or written discourse (for example, a pronouncement of the Pythia) or perhaps in a vision or a dream. Although most of these signs could be evoked, they could also occur spontaneously. The second step in the process was the interpretation of the sign by a *homo divinans*, either the person who had initially recognized the sign or a *homo divinans* who was called in on the basis of his expertise. The *homo divinans* would

interpret the sign with the aid of 'text' in the widest sense of the word: from a written text such as a Neo-Assyrian compendium to an oral discourse which would have been part and parcel of his professional appurtenances. His interpretation would imbue the sign with meaning – the message having been perceived to be from the supernatural. The strategy adopted in this book has been to compare divinatory practices in Greece, Mesopotamia and Rome by choosing to focus on these three elements of divination – *homo divinans*, sign and text.

The comparison reveals that especially the Mesopotamian but also the Roman experts investigated occupied a position relatively higher up on the socio-economic scale than their Greek counterparts did: the Mesopotamian experts were scions of specific scribal families, which were probably relatively well-off, having benefited from a sound education and enjoying regular employment. Roman (official) experts were born into the elite and were therefore high up the social scale (although this cannot be attributed to them being an expert), but those working in private divination, as most Greek experts, enjoyed no structured education, appointment or so on. Therefore, these latter experts had to assert their authority in different ways than the Roman official experts, who could claim authority on the basis of their descent, or the Mesopotamian experts, whose authority was based on their training. The Greek expert (and the Mesopotamian and Roman unofficial experts) had to find employment and exuded an aura of authority by presenting him-

self to the public as the best expert around. This could bring fame and fortune, but most Greek experts will have remained relatively obscure. Unquestionably, the low degree of institutionalization did create an open and competitive context for Greek divinatory experts to operate in. In contrast, the high socio-economic status of the Mesopotamian and Roman official experts was largely attributable to the level of institutionalization of the environment in which such experts worked. Hence the different degrees of institutionalization lead to the making of an etic distinction between Greek *specialists* on the one hand and Mesopotamian *professionals* on the other – with the Roman experts positioned somewhere in between.

The relatively low level of institutionalization of divination in Greece also affected the expert's position in relation to his client and isolated experts from political power. Since the Greek expert was incidentally employed by his client on the basis of a symbiotic relationship which could be dissolved relatively easily, decision making and divination were not automatically integrated – instead individuals or communities would *choose* to use divination. The higher level of institutionalization would have provided a virtually unassailable guarantee that the Mesopotamian expert would be structurally employed by the king. The relationship between king and experts was both hierarchical and symbiotic. The experts did depend on the king for their salaries but the king could not make important decisions without consulting the experts. King and experts were mutually dependent on one another on a regular basis. In Rome, the most

striking feature is that the official expert was a member of the political elite, so that experts and decision makers were linked by multiple ties. In a nutshell, the institutionalization of divination mattered because it determined the parameters of the interaction between decision maker and *homo divinans*.

Turning to the second focal point of my comparative enquiries, signs: an enormous variety of phenomena can be observed which might be recognized as carriers of messages from the supernatural, which is perhaps not surprising. What is more interesting is that certain culturally specific preferences for specific types of sign can be observed. In Greece and in Rome most signs were thought to appear in natural objects, whereas in Mesopotamia they could also appear in, or be, manmade objects. This discrepancy is closely related to the perceived objectivity of the sign. How could ancient man be sure something was a sign from the supernatural and not one contrived or influenced by man? How would he know if it had been interpreted correctly? Often the need for an authority was felt in order to decide what was a sign, what was not and how it should be interpreted. In Greece, the *homo divinans* performed his commissions on the basis of his previous experience, whereas in Mesopotamia written texts and in Rome communal memories were primary factors. As they were semi-independent of man, text and communal memory ensured that both the recognition and the interpretation of a sign were perceived to be more 'objective'. On the other hand, the dearth of Greek written divinatory texts points to the existence of

a predominantly oral divinatory culture. The *homo divinans* attributed meaning to the signs without reference to texts but by relying on his personal skills – so that the recognition and interpretation of signs were dependent on the individual. Some perceived objectivity or randomization was ensured by restricting the appearance of signs chiefly to natural mediums.

There is more to be said about text: the lack of a written text confirmed the relative importance of the Greek *homo divinans* because his personal opinion and experience weighed more heavily. It would also – in Greek perception – leave room for suspicion about the intentions of the expert (if he was asked to interpret the sign). In Rome and Mesopotamia, the interpretations were no clearer or any less unambiguous than they were in Greece – but these two cultural areas resorted to authoritative texts for interpretative purposes, an action which ensured perceived objectivity. This is not to say that written authoritative texts were dogmatic or canonized: in the very few cases in which a Greek guideline did exist, a new written text would be created if the old one was thought no longer efficacious. Thereafter, the two texts would be in competition with one another. The Romans simply tried to add to old texts and in Mesopotamia a new written text would be produced to be used side-by-side with the old text. In Rome and Mesopotamia the use of texts to achieve objectivity depended heavily on systematization, which was, in its turn, linked to a certain degree of institutionalization, even to the existence of a bureaucratic tradition in the field of divination.

Differences appear not just when the three main elements of divination are discussed, they are also clearly revealed in an analysis of the functions of divination. It has been shown that divination worked within a temporal framework, helping to get a grip on past, present and future. This happened in various ways in the three cultural areas. As far as time is concerned, Mesopotamian divination can be described as a device used to consider a relatively distant future which might lie as far as a year ahead: it worked as a 'telescope' in time, from the present into the future. This telescopic view of divination implies that time was seen as something which could be bridged quite easily: time, to an extent, was something permeable. In contrast, Greek and Roman divination worked as a 'looking glass' as far as time is concerned: in these two cultural areas divination served to look upon and analyse the very near future as well as the present and the near past.

These findings about time match the way divination functioned as a tool for dealing with uncertainty. In Mesopotamia, divination worked in a partly advisory and partly indicative sense, but functioned predictively in the majority of queries. By using divination, Mesopotamian individuals could obtain knowledge about what would happen in the future. Hence Mesopotamian uncertainties about the future could be reduced, because it was believed that, through divination, the supernatural could reveal its judgements to mankind: those things which *would* happen. Nevertheless, future events could be changed for the better by rituals: even though this

might appear to be a contradiction, Mesopotamian divination was rooted in the conviction that the future could be both known and changed by ritual manipulations. In Greece and Rome this predictive function of divination was much less important while still uncertainty was reduced. The Greek and Roman supernatural would provide its advice or information, but would not predict: uncertainty was omnipresent in the Greek and Roman worlds. Consequently, in Greece and Rome divination was a tool for revealing and exploring future possibilities, whereas in Mesopotamia divination could divulge a probable future. All in all, analysis of the divinatory materials leads to the idea that Greek futures can be seen as various roads going off in different directions and the seeker as the person standing at a crossroads, attempting to pick the best path to take – the various roads are in competition with one another. The option of divinatory prediction allowed the Mesopotamian future to be seen as one ongoing road which, bit by bit, was made known to the individual (and the individual could influence its direction). Both Greek divination and Greek conceptions of the future appear to have been based on the idea of *choice:* an individual would choose when to use divination, would choose his free-lance expert and would choose his best possible future on the basis of the advice obtained by divination.

On the basis of these observations Greek divination can be characterized as a competitive phenomenon but this idea can be taken one step further: divination was a flexible phenomenon, an appropriate instrument to deal with a flexible future. This flexibility is vis-

ible on a number of levels: individuals chose to consult the Greek supernatural, thereby using divination selectively. During the interpretation of a sign, the individual could opt to use an expert or to dispense with his services. If he chose to do so he could call on an expert of his own choice. This expert would interpret the sign, relying on his ideas and experience, as far as we know without the help of either text or communal memory. As a rule, the supernatural gave advice which was, strictly speaking, not binding: the Greek future was not empty, but still open, flexible. While 'ritual is an exercise in the strategy of choice', the choices of 'What to include? What to hear as a message? What to see as a sign? What to perceive to have a double meaning? What to exclude? What to allow to remain as background noise?' were largely systematized in Mesopotamia.[1] Up to a point, the same could be said of Republican Rome. One of the most striking features of Greek divination is that these choices remained individual ones.

Explanations for these differences must be sought in the contexts of the societies in which the divination took place.[2] My findings sug-

1 Quote from Smith, *Imagining religion*, 56.

2 Some have attempted to explain particular aspects of Greek divination by linking divination to its political context. Robin Osborne, for example, argues that divination had to be ambiguous because this would have enabled the democratic process to continue to function, despite the fact the gods had given their opinion (because this opinion could be interpreted according to the will of the majority: '[...] if democratic decisions could be declared wrong by superior authority how could confidence in

gest that institutionalization is a core concept in answering such questions.[3] By institutionalizing divination, the Mesopotamian king and the Roman *nobiles* could claim access to the supernatural and restrict such access for others. Those who were not well connected or well-to-do were condemned to be content with – quite possibly – less well-qualified private experts who would have been consulted on an *ad hoc* basis, in the way divination took place in Greece. In Greece, no such concentration of power existed.[4] In a Greek society

democratic decision-making be maintained?' R. Osborne, *Greece in the making, c. 1200-479 B.C.* (London 1997) 352 as cited in Bowden, *Divination and democracy*, 154-155. A similar idea can be found in Bremmer, 'Prophets, seers, and politics', 157-159. The idea has been critically received by some: Bowden, *Divination and democracy* (Cambridge 2005) 154-159. Robert Parker provides a nuanced view of the relationships between divination and politics in his important article 'Greek states and Greek oracles', esp. 82-101; 102-105.

3 On the importance of institutionalization or a lack thereof on developments in scholarship and more generally, G.E.R.. Lloyd, *Magic, reason and experience: studies in the origin and development of Greek science* (Cambridge 1979) 226-267; Lloyd, *The ambitions of curiosity*, 126-147.

4 Of course, there were those in charge of matters, but, from a relative point of view, power was dispersed: even in Bronze Age Greece, the many kings only exercised power over a small geographical area and the Classical polis ensured a division of power among its citizens. Of course, the powerful monarchs of the Hellenistic kingdoms might have attempted to institutionalize divination by centralizing it at their courts and such a putative centralizing endeavour could have led to a decline in oracles. However, this must remain pure speculation: there is too little evidence to endorse this

where *isonomia* was, at least in theory, at the basis of society, the relative lack of institutionalization and systematization of divination might be attributed to the idea that contact with the supernatural should take place in a way accessible to all and should not have been the prerogative of a few.[5] This ideal was achieved by ensuring that divination was flexible and accessible: theoretically, all should have been able to consult the supernatural. The supernatural was thought to have left individuals relatively free to act on their signs and each individual could choose his future from several options. Hence, divinatory practice had to be and to remain flexible and open to innovation. The institutionalization of divinatory practices – resulting in the systematization of divination – was never prevalent in Greece.

These findings suggest that a more general investigation into levels of institutionalization in Greek religion would be a promising topic for further research. Another topic worth investigating further is ancient thought about the future, change and innovation as

idea. See for the monarchs of the Hellenistic kingdoms Parker, 'Greek states and Greek oracles', 102; and 103-105 on the option of other institutions taking over the roles of oracle.

5 P.J. Rhodes, 'Isonomia', *Brill's New Pauly Online*. Visited 31-10-2011. Cf. P. Cartledge, 'Greek political thought: the historical context' in: C. Rowe & M. Schofield (eds), *The Cambridge history of Greek and Roman political thought* (Cambridge 2000) 11-22, at 15. Cf. M. Ostwald, *Nomos and the beginnings of the Athenian democracy* (Oxford 1969) 96-136. However, see the nuance introduced to the way the concept is used according to Mogens Herman Hansen: in the political sphere only (M.H. Hansen, *The Athenian democracy in the age of Demosthenes* (Cambridge, MA 1991) 81-85).

reflected in sources relating the daily experiences of ancient man. The outcomes of such investigations would not only be of interest to ancient historians, classicists or Assyriologists but also to those from outside these fields of study, such as social scientists.

A fundamental similarity between the three societies examined in this study is that they all used divination to obtain information from the supernatural. Nevertheless, many intriguing differences emerge among their various practices. I have shown how divination can be cast in various forms or shapes in different societies – which had their own views of past, present and future. One of the conclusions which emerge from this study, is that institutionalization, or its lack, is a key concept for those hoping to achieve a better understanding of this variety.

Appendix 1: terminology

This is a selective list of main vocabulary used in relation to divination. Names of compendia and methods of divination have been left out – these are discussed within the context of the argument above. I have followed the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (CAD), *Oxford Latin Dictionary* and *Liddell, Scott and Jones* and provided the main meanings of the word in its relationship to divination with a number of nuances and additions according to the way they are referred to in the main text (e.g., the word 'omen' has been replaced by the word 'sign' in the translations). The actual dictionaries should be referred to for more extensive meanings, derivatives and connections between words.

Akkadian

I have restricted this list to those words attested in the Neo-Assyrian period, unless otherwise indicated.

Amūtu (A1&2)	1. Liver (general), liver used during divination, liver model. 2. Sign.
Annu (2)	(Among others) positive divine answer to a query (usually through extispicy but also astrological).
Apālu (A2d 3')	Answer from the gods in the shape of an omen.
Āšipu	Exorcist/doctor

Bārītu	Female barû (OA, SB).
Barû (A12'c & 2)	1. To look upon, to keep an eye on, to watch over, to inspect, to observe an oracle. 2. To inspect extra, to observe omens; to check, to establish by observation (not only divination).
Bārû	1. Expert of divination involved in the follow ing activities: 2. Activities of the diviner concerned with extispicy, lecanomancy (OB only), libanoman cy (OB only), and other activities in different contexts.
Rabi bārî	Chief barû.
Bārûtu	1. Act of divination (referring to extispicy). 2. Lore, craft of the barû, also referring to the paraphernalia and rituals of the barû. 3. Designation of the series of extispicy texts.
Bīru (A)	1. Divination (act performed by diviner). 2. Answer received through divination. 3. In bēl bīri 'lord of divination' usually refer ring to the god Šamaš
Dāgil iṣṣūrē	Observer of birds (expert).
Dīnu (1 3'b)	Main meaning: decision, verdict, judg- ment. Also used for oracular pronouncement.
Epēšu	Main meaning: to act, be active, proceed. Can also mean: (2f2') to perform a divination.
Epēšu bārûtu	To perform a divination.
Eṣeru	To draw, to make a drawing. In divinatory context performed by the gods.

Term	Definition
Ikribu (3)	Prayer used in the divinatory ritual.
Iškaru (A6)	Literary work, collection of songs. In divinatory context: divinatory series.
Ittu (A2)	Sign
Kittu (A1)	Truth, justice, correct procedures. In divinatory context: to be provided by the gods.
Maḫḫû	Ecstatic
Nipḫu (3)	A false or unreliable prediction.
Parāsu (5d)	(With (*w*)*arkatu*) to decide the future.
Paqādu (5a)	To test (by repeating an extispicy).
Purussû	1. (Legal) decision, resolution. 2. Decision, verdict by the gods. 3. Prognosis, prediction, oracular determination given by the gods (many times through celestial divination, many times through other methods).

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Term	Definition
Qabû (4b2')	To give an order, to decree, to enjoin (said of gods) in dreams, through divination, oracles.
Qību (4)	Prognosis, prognostication.
Raggimu	Prophet
Šā'ilu (1)	Expert in interpretation of dreams, practicing necromancy (OB, RS, EA, SB).
Šā'iltu (1)	Female šā'ilu (Ur III, OA, OB, SB).
Šalimtu (2b)	Sincerity, truth, reliability: referring to extispicy.
Šalmu (1e1')	Favourable, propitious – said of signs.
Šâlu (A1d)	To ask gods for a sign.
Šalāmu (3)	To be favorable, propitious (said of signs and

	oracles).
Šaṭāru (1)	To write, to copy, to put down in writing, to inscribe a tablet or other object, to formulate a (legal) document.
Šīmtu (1-2)	1. Determined order, nature of things, divine decree 2. Lot, portion, personal fate
Šīru (A4)	Ominous part (examined in divination); ominous sign.
Tāmītu	Query for an oracle and the answer to it (OB, SB), referring to the diviners' query, specifying the question to which the answer is sought, referring to the answer given by the god.
Têrtu (6 & 7a & 6e)	1. Extispicy, also referring to the signs obtained during the extispicy. 2. Exta, liver as used during extispicy. 3. Exceptionally referring to portents not obtained through extispicy.
Ṭēmu (1)	Report, news, information, situation, matter – also used in divinatory context.
Bēl ṭēmi (1a)	Bearer of a report, reporter of oracular queries.
Ṭupšarru	Scribe, tablet writer.
Ṭupšar enūma Anu Enlil	Expert specialised in astronomy.
Ummanû (2b)	Scholar, sage
Utukku	Auspicious day
(W)aklu (A)	Overseer. Also: of barû.

Latin

This is a selective overview of the main Latin terms related to divination. Words that do not occur in Republican times – or shortly after – have not been included.

Term	Meaning
Augur ~uris, *m.* (*f.*)	1. a. Expert who observes and interprets the behavior of birds, an augur. b. (esp.) a member of the college of augurs, an official interpreter of auspices.
Augurāculum ~ī, *n.*	A place where the auguries are observed; hence, the citadel of Rome.
Auguratio ~ōnis, *f.*	Prediction by means of augury.
Augurātō *adv.*	After due observance of auguries.
Auguratus ~ūs, *m.*	The office of augur, augurship; augury.
Augurium ~(i)ī, *n.*	1. The taking of auguries; augury 429 2. The art of augury, faculty of divination 3. A sign 4. A prediction, prognostication 5. A foreboding, presentiment, surmise.
Augurō ~āre, āui, ātum *tr., intr.* ~or ~ārī ~ātus	1. a. To foretell by augury b. (intr.) to take auspices, practice augury 2. To initiate, etc., with the taking of auguries 3. To predict, foretell (from omens or other evidence) b. (intr.).
Auspicium	1. a. Augury from the behaviour of birds, aus pices b. the observing of signs from birds. 2. A sign taken from birds.

	3. The right of taking auspices, augural powers.
	4. Leadership, authority, auspices.
	5. An omen of any kind b. (poet) Fortune, luck.
Carmen ~inis, n.	1. c. an oracle or prophecy; a riddle.
Consulto ~āre, āvī, ātum, *tr., intr*.	3. a. To apply to (a person) for advice or information, consult; (esp. absol.) b. to consult an oracle, astrologer, or other expert or means of divination: also, to consult thus about (a question).
Consultor ~ōris, *m.*	2. One who consults: a. a lawyer b. an oracle or astrologer.
Consultum ~ī, *n.*	2. An oracular or sim. response.
Decemuir ~rī, *m.*	Also written as two words. A member of a commission of ten men appointed either permanently or for a limited term, esp: a. to look after theSibylline books.
Dīrus ~a ~um, *a.*	1. (of things regarded as signs) Awful, dire, dreadful.
Dīuīnō ~āre ~ārī ~ātum, *intr. tr.*	1. a. To make out or interpret things hidden from the senses, practice divination. b. to make a guess 2. (w. acc.) To know by inspiration or intuition, foresee; (also w. indir. sp.). b. to divine, guess (something already existing or past)
Extispex ~picis, *m.*	Expert who practices divination by the observation of the entrails of sacrificial victims.
Extispicium ~(i)ī, *n.*	The examination of the entrails of sacrificial victims as a means of divination.

Fātiloquus ~a ~um, *a.*	Foretelling destinies; prophetic; (masc. as sb.) a soothsayer.
Fātum ~ī, n.	(Among others) a. A prophetic utterance, prophecy b. (pl.) the decrees (of a god).
Fulgurātor ~ōris, *m.*	(Among others) Expert who interprets signs given by lightning.
(H)ariolor ~ārī ~ātus, *intr.*	To speak by divine inspiration or with second sight, prophesy (in comedy often in facet. or pejorative sense); to divine.
Hariolus ~ī, *m.*	A soothsayer, prophet, expert.
(H)aruspex ~icis, m.	(Also (h)ari~, arre~) An expert of a class originating in Etruria; according to Cicero they were interpreters of internal organs, prodigies, and lightning.
-mantīa ~ae [Gk.]	Various methods of divination.
Mīrāculum ~(i)ī, *n.*	1a. An amazing object or sight, a marvel431a freak 2a. An amazing event, act or circumstance c (applied to supernatural occurrences).
Monstrum ~ī, *n.*	1. An unnatural thing or event regarded as a sign. 2. An awful or monstrous thing or event.
Monstruōsus ~a ~um, a.; monstrōsus, compare. ~ior, superl. ~issimus –	Portentous, ill-omened; (esp. transf.) unnatural, strange, monstrous (also used in the context of divinatory signs).
Ōmen ~inis, *n.*	1a. Something that foreshadows an event of the outcome of an event, a sign. b. *~en acci pere*, to recognize a sign in an occurrence, etc;

~*en placet*, the sign is good.

Ōminor ~ārī, ātus, tr. (also ōminō) a. To know or tell of (a future event or utcome from signs)
b. w. reference to the use of words of good or bad omen, regarded by the ancients as constituting a prediction [...])
c.(pregn) to make gloomy prognostications.

Ōrāculum ~ī, *n.* (also ōrāclum) 1. A divine utterance usually made through the agency of a priest or priestess in a temple, shrine, or similar, an oracle.
2. The agency or mouthpiece of a divine utterance, also the place where it was given, an oracle.
3. An oracular saying, precept, maxim.

Ostentum ~s, m. – a. A manifestation or occurrence foreshadowing future events, b. (in wider sense) wonder, marvel.

Portendō ~dere ~dī ~tum, *tr.* a. To indicate (some future event, good or bad), portend, presage (esp. pass.) b. (of cir cumstances, naturally occurring signs) c. (of the gods) to reveal by means of signs; to give (signs) by way of warning.

Portentōsus ~a ~um, *a.* compare. ~ior, superl. ~issimus a. Strange and unnatural or abnormal, monstrous, portentous.

Portentum ~ī, *n.* 1. An abnormal phenomenon, usually regard ed as foreshadowing some momentous event, a sign.
2a. (without ref. to future) Something unnatu

ral or extraordinary, a sign; (esp.) a strange or abnormal creature, monster; also, an abnor mal growth, monstrosity.

Praedīcō ~cere ~xī ~ctum, *tr*. 2. To give warning of, foretell.

Praedictiō ~ōnis, *f.* 2. A prediction.

Praedictum ~ī, *n.* a. A statement made in advance, forewarning b. a prediction.

Praesāgātiō ~ōnis, f. The faculty of knowing the future.

Praesāgiō ~īre ~īvī, *tr*. 1. To have a foreboding or presentiment of. 2. To give forewarning of, to forebode, portend.

Praesāgium ~(i)ī, *n.* 1. A sense of foreboding, presentiment. 2. A forewarning, presage, sentiment.

Praesāgus ~a ~um, *a.* 1. Feeling a presentiment, having a foreboding. 2. Portending, ominous.

Prōdigiōsus ~ a ~um, *a.* 1. a. Having the nature of a sign b. concerned with signs. 433 2. Marvellous, monstrous, unnatural.

Prōdigium ~ ~iī, *n.* 1. An unnatural event of manifestation portend-ing a disaster, etc., sign. 2. a. a monstrous event or situation, marvel b. a monstrous person, creature, thing, etc., mon strosity; also, a wonder, marvel.

Respondeō ~dēre ~dī ~sum, *intr.* 4b To give a formal or official reply of oracles, priests, or sim.

Responsum ~ī, n. [pple. of respondeo] 2a An answer given by an oracle, soothsayer, or similar.

Signum ~ī, n. 5. a. A sign recognized as a regular accom-paniment or precursor of a particular form of weather, disease, or other natural

	phenomenon b. a supernatural sign.
Sors ~rtis f.	1. A lot b. as used in divination. 3. An oracular response (strictly one obtained by cleromancy).
Sortilegus ~a ~um, *a.*	Expert that predicts the future by means of lots (in quot., loosely).

Sortior ~īrī ~ītus, *intr., tr.* (also ~iō, īre, iī or ~īvī ~ītum) (Among others)
1c. (intr.) To predict the future (by lots or other means, divine).

Uātēs (uātis) ~is, m. (f.) 1a. A prophet (regarded as the mouthpiece of the deity possessing him).

Uāticinor ~ārī ~ātus, *intr.* (*tr.*) a. To utter divinely inspires predictions or warnings, prophecy b. (tr.) to warn of or predict (an event) by divine inspiration; (sim. with acc. and inf.) c. (in bad sense) to talk wildly, rave.

Greek

This is a selective overview of the main Greek terms related to divination.

ἀκάρπωτος, ον	χρησμὸς ἀ. an unfulfilled oracle.
ἀληθής, ές	Of oracles: true, unerring.
ἀμφήκης, ες	Of oracles: ambiguous.
ἀναιρέω	Oracle's or divinity's answer to inquiry.
ἀνυμνέω	Proclaiming by oracle.

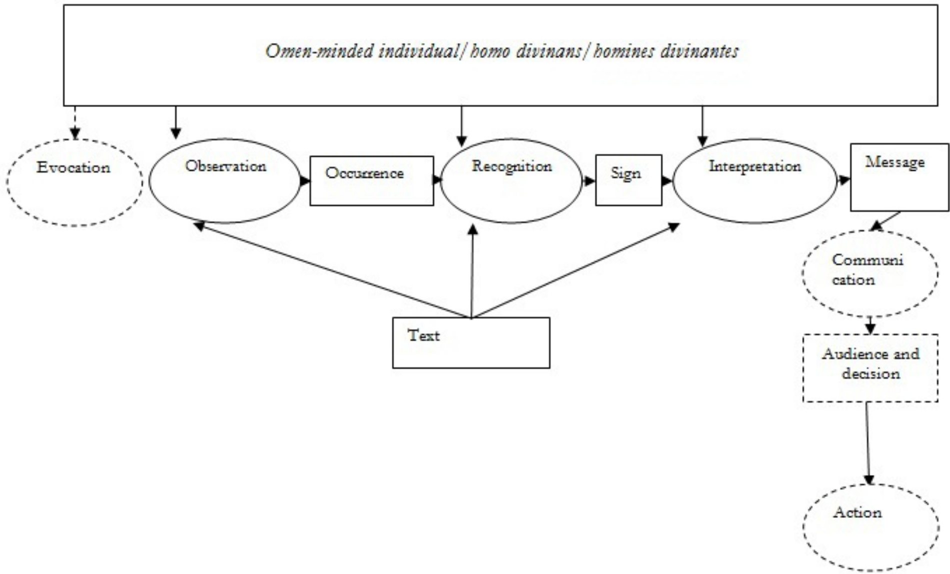
ἀποθεσπίζω	Utter an oracle.
ἀποθέσπισις, εως, ἡ	Oracle given.
αὐδάω	Of oracles: proclaim.
αὐδή, ῆς, ἡ	Voice or word, also: oracle.
αὐτώρης (ὄρνυμαι)	Proclaim a spontaneous oracle.
ἀψεύδής, ές	Without deceit, truthful, esp. of oracles and the like.
δέχομαι χρησθέν, τὸν οἰωνὸν δ.,	Accept the oracle, the omen.
διαμαντεύομαι	Determine by an oracle, make divinations, consult an oracle.
ἐκχρησμῳδέω	Deliver an oracle.
ἐξηγητής οῦ, ὁ	Expounder, interpreter, esp. of oracles, dreams, or other signs.
ἐπιτέλέω	Complete, finish, accomplish: also of the fulfillment of oracles, visions, etc.
θεομαντις, εως, ὁ	One who has a spirit of prophecy, an inspired person. 435
Θεοπροπιέω	To provide an oracle
θεοπροπία, ας, ἡ	Statement of the will of the gods, oracle.
Θεοπρόπος, ον	Utterer of oracles, public messenger sent to inquire of an oracle.
θέσπισμα, ατος, τό	Oracles, oracular sayings.
ἰατρομαντις, εως, ὁ	Physician and seer, of Apollo and Aesculapius.
καιρός, οῦ, ὁ	Due measure, proportion, fitness. Of time: exact or critical time, season, opportunity.
κιβδηλος, ον	Adulterated, base. Of oracles, etc.: deceitful, ambiguous.
κληδών, όνος, ἡ	Omen, presage contained in a chance

	utterance.
λόγιον, ου, τό	Oracle.
λόγος, ου, ὁ	A particular utterance or saying. Also: divine utterance, oracle.
λοξός, ή, όν	Of oracles: indirect, ambiguous.
μαντεία, ας, ἡ,	Power and knowledge of divination; oracle.
μαντεῖον, ου, τό	Oracle, i.e, oracular response, seat of an oracle, method, process of divination.
μαντεῖος, η, ον	Poet. for μαντικός, oracular.
μαντευμα, ατος, τό	Response of the oracle, oracle.
μαντεύω	Divine, interpret signs; consult an oracle; seek divinations; later, of the god, give an oracle.
μαντῐάρχης, ου, ὁ	President of a college of μάντεις.
μαντικός, ή, όν	Of divinatory utterances, oracular. 2. τέχνη μ. faculty of divination.
μάντις, εως, ὁ,	Divinatory expert.
οἰωνόμαντις, εως, ὁ,	Divinatory expert on the flight and cries of birds.
οἰωνοπόλος, ον	Divinatory expert on the flight and cries of birds.
οἰωνος, οῡ, ὁ	Sign
οἰωνοσκοπέω	To interpret signs from the birds.
οἰωνοσκόπος, ου, ὁ	Divinatory expert on the flight and cries of birds, an augur.
ὀνειρόπολος, ου, ὁ	Expert of interpretation of dreams.
πελανός, οῡ, ὁ	Any thick liquid substance. Also: sacrificial offering. Consequentially later also used to indicate the 'payment' at an oracle site.
προμαντεία, ας, ἡ	Right of consulting an oracle first (esp. Delphi).

προμαντεύω	To divine, to consult the oracle
πρόμαντις, εως, ὁ, ἡ	Oracle (person).
προφαίνω	Show beforehand, foreshow, also of oracles and divine revelations.
προφητεία	Interpretation of the will of the gods, gift of prophecy; oracular response; office of προφήτης; oracle (place).
προφητεύω	Activity of interpreting signs from the supernatural.
προφητικός, ή, όν	Oracular, prophetic.
προφήτης, ου, ὁ	One who speaks for a god and interprets his will to man, interpreter, expounder of the will of various deities. Also title of official keepers of the oracle at Branchidae; interpreter, expounder of the utterances of the mantis; possessor of oracular powers. 437
Πῡθία	Pythia, priestess of Pythian Apollo at Delphi, who uttered the responses of the oracle
σημαίνω	Show by a (divinatory) sign, indicate, point out. Also: sign of the Delphic oracle.
σημεῖον, ου, τό,	A mark or sign. Here specifically: sign from the gods.
στρᾰτομαντις, εως, ὁ	Prophet to the army.
σύμβολον, ου, τό	Token, sign. When thought to come from the gods: divinatory sign.
τεκμήριον, ου, τό	A sure sign or token.
τέρας, ατος, τό	Sign, wonder, marvel. Also: monster, monstrous birth.
τερατοσκόπος, ου, ὁ	Observer of τέρατα, diviner.

τέρασιτος, ον	Sign, monstrous sign.
φάσμα, ατος, τό	Apparition, phantom. Vision in a dream, sign from heaven,portent, omen, monster, prodigy.
χράω	Proclaim (by an oracle), be proclaimed. Also; consulting an oracle
χρεώ	To utter an oracle.
χρησμολογέω	Utter oracles.
χρησμολογία, ας, ἡ	An uttering of oracles.
χρησμολογος, ον	Uttering oracles, expounder of oracles χ. ἀνήρ: diviner.
χρησμός, οῦ, ὁ	Oracular response, oracle.
χρησμῳδέω	Deliver oracles, prophesy.
χρησμῳδια, ας, ἡ	Oracle.
χρήστηριάζω	To give oracles, to consult oracles.
χρήστήριον, ου, τό	Oracle (place); oracle, response.
χρήστήριος, α, ον	To give oracles.

Appendix 2: etic model of divination



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Samenvatting

Worlds full of signs
ancient Greek divination in context
door Kim Beerden

Dit proefschrift analyseert Griekse divinatie van de archaïsche tot en met de hellenistische tijd in haar maatschappelijke en religieuze context. Om dit doel te bereiken wordt een heuristische vergelijking gemaakt met divinatie in Neo-Assyrisch Mesopotamië en in Romeins Italië ten tijde van de Republiek.

In de Griekse en Romeinse wereld werd divinatie op grote schaal beoefend, zoals het grote aantal bronnen illustreert: 'If the ancient Mediterranean world was full of gods, it was full of their messages as well.'[1] Dit gold ook voor het Oude Nabije Oosten. De bovennatuur werd gedacht tekens te geven en door interpretatie van die tekens hoopten mensen kennis op te doen over verleden, heden en toekomst. Met deze kennis kon onzekerheid verminderd worden. Divinatie diende zo als een onzekerheidsbestrijder waardoor besluiten gemakkelijker genomen konden worden.

1 D.E. Aune *et al.*, 'Divination and prophecy' in: S.I. Johnston (ed.), *Religions of the ancient world: a guide* (Cambridge, MA 2004) 370-391, aldaar 371. '[...] it was full of their *signs* as well' zou gepaster zijn.

De literatuur die verschenen is op het gebied van divinatie is zeer uitgebreid, zowel in de *Altertumswissenschaft* als in de Assyriologie. Toch is er een weg die nog niet bewandeld is: die van de systematische vergelijking. Indien men wil weten wat specifiek is voor divinatie binnen een bepaalde cultuur, zal er een vergelijking plaats moeten vinden. Dit is de reden waarom in deze studie gekozen is voor een vergelijkende benadering. Het doel is door middel van systematisch onderzoek te ontdekken wat er specifiek was aan Griekse divinatie en het functioneren daarvan. Niet de filosofen of andere denkers staan centraal, maar divinatie wordt besproken als onderdeel van het dagelijks leven.

Divinatie wordt in deze studie beschouwd als een menselijk fenomeen: etic gezien zijn de divinatoire tekens simpelweg gebeurtenissen waar de mens bovennatuurlijke herkomst en intentie om te communiceren op projecteerde. Dit impliceert dat divinatie een reflectie van cultureel gedefinieerde waarden was: immers, de tekens en het verdere proces van divinatie worden door de mens gecreeërd. Onderzoek naar de overeenkomsten en verschillen tussen divinatoire praktijken in Griekenland, Mesopotamië en Rome vergroot hierom niet alleen ons begrip van divinatie maar ook onze kennis van de samenlevingen waarin divinatie plaatsvond.

De overeenkomsten die uit de vergelijking blijken, tonen de meer algemene trekken van het fenomeen divinatie, terwijl de verschillen laten zien wat de variaties en specifieke karakteristieken zijn. Het gebruik van de vergelijkende methode dient nadrukkelijk niet om

aan te tonen dat (divinatie in) één van de besproken samenlevingen 'uniek' zou zijn of om een waardeoordeel uit te dragen. Ook wordt er géén evolutionair perspectief verschaft voor de 'ontwikkeling' of 'overdracht' van divinatie. Veeleer beoogt deze studie te laten zien hoe divinatie functioneerde in de drie bestudeerde samenlevingen. Het hoofddoel is het belichten en verklaren van een reeks van specifieke kenmerken die de Griekse divinatie onderscheiden van vergelijkbare fenomenen in andere antieke samenlevingen.

Een historiografie en definitie van divinatie, alsmede een methodologische onderbouwing worden gegeven in DEEL I (hoofdstukken 1-3). In DEEL II (hoofdstukken 4-6) wordt de vergelijkende methode als een heuristisch middel gebruikt om de overeenkomsten en verschillen in de door mij centraal gestelde drie elementen van divinatie (*homo divinans*, teken en tekst) systematisch in kaart te brengen. DEEL III (hoofdstukken 7-8) bespreekt, ook in vergelijkend perspectief, de voornaamste functie van divinatie: het verkrijgen van kennis over verleden, heden en toekomst om hiermee onzekerheid te reduceren.

DEFINITIE VAN DIVINATIE

Divinatie bestond uit de menselijke detectie, herkenning en interpretatie van tekens die gedacht werden van de bovennatuur afkomstig te zijn, zoals in DEEL I besproken wordt. Deze tekens konden betrekking hebben op het verleden, het heden of de toekomst. Er

zijn drie, al genoemde, cruciale elementen die nodig zijn voor het proces: de *homo divinans*, het teken en tekst. Aan het begin van het divinatoire proces signaleert een mens een gebeurtenis. Hij meent dat dit een divinatoir teken is omdat het van de bovennatuur afkomstig zou zijn. Hij ziet, bijvoorbeeld, een vogel vliegen en beschouwt dat als een teken van de bovennatuur; of hij denkt dat hij een divinatoir teken ontwaart in orale of schriftelijke communicatie (zoals een uitspraak van de Pythia); of wellicht denkt hij een visioen of bovennatuurlijke droom gehad te hebben. De tekens konden zowel opgeroepen worden als spontaan ontstaan – maar uiteindelijk was er altijd een mens nodig die een teken als divinatoir zag. Na het herkennen en erkennen van het teken, moest het geïnterpreteerd worden door de *homo divinans*: dit kon zowel de persoon zijn die het teken herkende en/of erkende, maar ook een ander individu die op basis van zijn expertise autoriteit claimde. De *homo divinans* interpreteerde het teken met behulp van tekst (in de breedste zin van het woord): dit kon bijvoorbeeld een geschreven Neo-Assyrisch compendium zijn maar ook een mondeling overgeleverde interpretatietraditie. Interpretatie gaf betekenis aan het tot dan toe betekenisloze teken – de boodschap werd geacht te bestaan uit informatie gezonden door de bovennatuur.

Drie componenten van divinatie

Deel II bespreekt *homo divinans*, teken en tekst. Hoewel ieder individu een *homo divinans* kon zijn, vertellen de bronnen het meeste over de experts. De vergelijking toont dat vooral de – merendeels op officiële basis werkzame – Mesopotamische maar ook Romeinse experts een hogere positie op de sociaal-economische ladder innamen dan hun – merendeels op onofficiële basis werkzame – Griekse collegae: Mesopotamische experts behoorden tot specifieke families, die hoogstwaarschijnlijk relatief welgesteld waren door hun hoge opleidingsniveau en de institutionele basis waarop zij hun arbeid verrichtten. Romeinse (officiële) experts waren door geboorte lid van de elite en stonden hoog op de sociale en economische ladder, hoewel dit niet direct kwam door hun status als expert. In Griekenland zien we een ander beeld. Diegenen die werkzaam waren in onofficiële, private, divinatie – en dat gold voor de meeste Griekse experts – waren niet hoogopgeleid en verrichtten hun werk op freelance basis zonder structureel inkomen. Omdat zij freelance werkten, moesten de onofficiële experts zich op andere manieren in de markt plaatsen dan de experts werkzaam in geïnstitutionaliseerde divinatie. Officiële Romeinse experts konden zich een bepaalde autoriteit aanmeten op basis van hun afstamming en de autoriteit van Mesopotamische experts was gebaseerd op hun opleiding. De onofficiële expert moest zoeken naar werkgelegenheid en zocht zijn autoriteit in zijn presentatie: in een competitief veld

moest hij zich manifesteren als de meest gezaghebbende en meest competente expert. Hoewel dit een individu faam en geld kon opleveren, bleven de meeste Griekse experts relatief obscuur. Dit laatste gold ook voor de onofficiële experts in Mesopotamië en Rome, want ook in die samenlevingen vond divinatie tevens buiten de instituties plaats. Toch treedt het fenomeen van de onofficiële expert die zichzelf voortdurend waar moet maken vooral uit de Griekse bronnen zeer sterk naar voren, in die mate dat het kan gelden als een wezenskenmerk van Griekse divinatie. Er bestaat geen twijfel dat de relatief lage graad van institutionalisering van Griekse divinatie bijdroeg aan een open en competitieve context voor divinatie-experts, waarin een individu op persoonlijke merites tot grote hoogte kon stijgen. Dit staat in contrast tot de officiële experts in Neo-Assyrisch Mesopotamië: zij hadden hun hoge sociaal-economische status te danken aan het relatief hoge niveau van institutionalisering van hun beroepsgroep. Tegelijkertijd stond die institutionalisering niet toe dat er ruimte was voor een persoonlijke invulling van het beroep, in tegenstelling tot in Griekenland. Het bestaan van gradaties van institutionalisering leidt tot een onderscheid tussen Griekse *specialisten* en Mesopotamische *professionals*. De Romeinse expert nam in dit opzicht een tussenpositie in.

De lage graad van institutionalisering van divinatie in Griekenland had ook gevolgen voor de positie van de expert in verhouding tot zijn cliënt. De expert werd op incidentele basis ingehuurd door zijn machtige cliënt – individuen en gemeenschappen *kozen* ervoor

divinatie te gebruiken wanneer zij een besluit moesten nemen. Dit gebeurde op basis van een symbiotische relatie die makkelijk ontbonden kon worden. Experts namen geen besluiten: divinatie en besluitvorming waren over het algemeen niet in één persoon geïntegreerd. De Mesopotamische expert werkte structureel voor de koning: hun relatie was zowel hiërarchisch als symbiotisch. De expert had de koning nodig voor zijn levensonderhoud (hij kon niet zomaar een andere werkgever vinden). Op zijn beurt kon de koning geen beslissingen nemen zonder de expert te consulteren. Koningen en experts waren wederzijds afhankelijk van elkaar. In Rome valt het op dat de officiële expert deel uitmaakte van de politieke en sociale elite, zodat experts en besluitvormers op meerdere manieren met elkaar verbonden waren. In het kort kan gesteld worden dat de mate en wijze van institutionalisering van divinatie de parameters van interactie tussen besluitvormer en expert definieerden.

Het tweede element van mijn vergelijking is het teken. De variatie aan tekens die gedacht werden van de bovennatuur te komen, was groot. Toch is er een cultuurspecifieke voorkeur te zien voor het object waarin het teken zich voordeed. In Griekenland en Rome waren dit natuurlijke objecten, terwijl we in Mesopotamië zien dat tekens ook voorkwamen in objecten die door mensen geconstrueerd waren. Dit verschil is sterk gerelateerd aan de wens divinatie 'objectief' te laten verlopen. Hoe kon een individu denken zeker te weten dat een teken van de bovennatuur kwam zonder dat het door de mens beïnvloed was? En hoe wist hij of het teken correct geïnter-

preteerd werd? In Griekenland deed de *homo divinans* dit op basis van zijn ervaring, terwijl hierbij in Mesopotamië geschreven teksten een grote rol speelden. In Rome zien we dat het gemeenschappelijk geheugen dienst deed om dit alles te bepalen. In de laatste twee gevallen is de basis voor autoriteit, in ieder geval de perceptie daarvan, semi-onafhankelijk van de mens en biedt zo een zekere mate van 'objectiviteit'. De Griekse *homo divinans* gaf betekenis aan de tekens zonder gebruik van een objectieve tekst maar door op zijn persoonlijke expertise te vertrouwen. Het feit dat Griekse tekens alleen in 'natuurlijke' objecten voorkwamen zorgde ervoor dat er zo toch enige 'objectiviteit' in het Griekse divinatieproces zat ingebouwd omdat dergelijke tekens geacht werden niet of in mindere mate voor menselijke beïnvloeding vatbaar te zijn. Het bovenstaande bevestigt nog eens het relatief grote belang van de Griekse *homo divinans* – zijn mening was relatief zeer belangrijk in het proces. De grote rol van de expert laat bovendien – in de Griekse perceptie – meer ruimte voor achterdocht over zijn intenties. In Rome en Mesopotamië waren de interpretaties van de expert niet beter of 'kloppender' dan in Griekenland – maar ze werden wel 'objectiever' geacht.

Teksten die gebruikt werden in het divinatieritueel, zijn het derde element dat vergeleken wordt. Daarbij wordt niet zozeer de inhoud van de teksten als wel het gebruik ervan centraal gesteld. Het gebruik van geschreven tekst in Rome en Mesopotamië wil niet zeggen dat die teksten dogmatisch of gecanoniseerd waren. In Rome werden nieuwe teksten of tekstgedeelten aan de bestaande toegevoegd en in

Mesopotamië werd nieuwe tekst gebruikt als aanvulling of uitleg van de oude tekst. Vooral in Mesopotamië werden de teksten wel sterk gesystematiseerd en dit is weer te verbinden met een hoge graad van institutionalisering en zelfs met het bestaan van een bureaucratische divinatoire traditie. In die spaarzame gevallen waarin er een Griekse interpretatieve tekst overgeleverd is, is het waarschijnlijk dat nieuwe en oude teksten naast elkaar circuleerden. Niet alleen *homines divinantes* maar ook teksten concurreerden met elkaar in een divinatiemodel dat op keuze gebaseerd was.

FUNCTIES VAN DIVINATIE

De divinatiepraktijken in de drie bestudeerde gebieden laten zich ook duiden wat betreft functie. DEEL III van deze studie toont aan dat divinatie binnen bepaalde tijdskaders functioneerde en hielp een manier te vinden om om te gaan met de drie tijdsfases van verleden, heden en toekomst. Dit gebeurde op verschillende manieren. Mesopotamische divinatie kan gekarakteriseerd worden als een manier om relatief ver in de toekomst te kunnen kijken, tot een jaar vooruit: divinatie werkte als een 'telescoop' in de tijd, kijkend naar (vooral) de toekomst vanuit het heden. Het feit dat het geacht werd mogelijk te zijn in de toekomst te kijken impliceert dat tijd werd gezien als iets dat overbrugbaar of doorlaatbaar was. Griekse en Romeinse divinatie staat hiermee in zoverre in contrast dat het

functioneerde als een 'vergrootglas' in de tijd: divinatie diende om het verleden, het heden en de zeer nabije toekomst onder de loep te nemen.

Deze bevindingen zijn in overeenstemming met de manier waarop divinatie als een gereedschap voor onzekerheidsbestrijding werkte. In Mesopotamië werkte divinatie voornamelijk voorspellend. Door het gebruik van divinatie verkregen Mesopotamische individuen kennis over de toekomst, waardoor onzekerheid verminderd kon worden: de bovennatuur had haar besluiten aan de mensen medegedeeld en die mensen wisten nu wat er te gebeuren kon staan. 'Kon staan', omdat de voorspelde gebeurtenissen nog veranderd konden worden met behulp van rituelen. De Mesopotamische divinatie was dus geworteld in de overtuiging dat de toekomst gekend kon worden maar dat die tegelijkertijd nog veranderd kon worden. In Griekenland en Rome was de voorspellende functie van divinatie veel minder prevalent: de Griekse of Romeinse bovennatuur gaf zeer vaak advies of informatie, maar voorspelde zelden. Zo was divinatie in Griekenland en Rome een gereedschap om *mogelijke* toekomsten en mogelijkheden voor die toekomsten te verkennen, waar Mesopotamische divinatie één waarschijnlijke toekomst onthulde.

Een analyse van het materiaal biedt steun aan de gedachte dat de Griekse toekomsten gezien kunnen worden als verschillende wegen die in verschillende richtingen gaan. De mens staat op een kruispunt en probeert de best mogelijke weg te nemen – de verschillende wegen zijn in competitie met elkaar. In het geval van Mesopotamië

staat de mogelijkheid van voorspelling het individu toe de toekomst te zien als een doorgaande weg die stukje bij beetje zichtbaar werd, waarbij het individu de richting van die weg nog kon beïnvloeden. Zowel Griekse divinatie als Griekse ideeën over de toekomst zijn gebaseerd op het idee van keuze: een individu koos wanneer hij divinatie gebruikte, koos zijn freelance expert en koos de best mogelijke toekomst op basis van het advies verkregen door divinatie.

Het karakter van Griekse divinatie

Op basis van bovenstaande observaties kan Griekse divinatie gekarakteriseerd worden als een competitief fenomeen dat flexibel van aard was: een geschikt instrument om met een flexibele toekomst om te gaan. Deze flexibiliteit is zichtbaar op een aantal niveaus: individuen kozen om de bovennatuur te consulteren of een divinatoir teken als zodanig te herkennen. Gedurende de interpretatie kon een individu verkiezen een expert in te schakelen of het teken zelf te interpreteren. Indien hij een expert inschakelde, kon hij kiezen welke dat zou zijn. De expert zou het teken interpreteren vanuit zijn eigen ervaring, voor zover we weten zonder gebruik van veel tekst of van een in het collectief geheugen verankerde traditie. De bovennatuur gaf niet-bindend advies, waarna men verder zijn keuze moest keuze maken. De Griekse toekomst was flexibel, open en niet leeg. Deze flexibiliteit ontbrak in Mesopotamië omdat de keuzes

daar grotendeels waren gesystematiseerd.[2] Tot op zekere hoogte kan hetzelfde gezegd worden over divinatie in Republikeins Rome. De meest opvallende karaktertrek van Griekse divinatie is dat het individu een ruime sortering aan keuzes had, in alle fasen van het proces.

Explanandum

Mijn bevindingen kunnen verklaard worden vanuit verschillen tussen de maatschappelijke contexten waarin divinatiepraktijken plaatsvonden. Het concept institutionalisering speelt hierbij een centrale rol: door het institutionaliseren van divinatie konden de Romeinse *nobiles* en de Mesopotamische koning toegang tot de bovennatuur claimen en tegelijkertijd voor zichzelf houden. Anderen konden wel divineren, maar niet de beste experts en hulpmiddelen gebruiken.

In Griekenland bestond een dergelijke machtsconcentratie niet. In de Griekse samenleving waarin *isonomia*, in ieder geval theoretisch, een zeer belangrijke plaats innam in het denken, kan de relatief lage graad van institutionalisering en systematisering van divinatie verklaard worden door het idee dat divinatie voor iedereen toegankelijk was en diende te zijn. Deze cultuurspecifieke opvatting kreeg gestalte in een divinatiepraktijk met een lage graad van

2 J.Z. Smith, *Imagining religion: from Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago 1982) 56.

institutionalisering waarin individuen konden kiezen wat ze zouden doen met een teken en uiteindelijk zelf een toekomst konden kiezen aan de hand van een aantal opties. Zo was, en moest, divinatie een flexibele basis hebben en openstaan voor innovatie.

Hoewel alle drie de onderzochte samenlevingen divinatie gebruikten om informatie van de bovennatuur te verkrijgen, zijn er grote verschillen tussen hun praktijken te bespeuren. De onontkoombare conclusie is dat divinatie in samenlevingen die anders ingericht waren en, hiermee samenhangend, verschillende uitgangspunten hadden inzake heden, verleden en toekomst, in verschillende vormen gegoten kon worden.

ONDERZOEKSAGENDERING

Naar aanleiding van deze bevindingen lijkt een verdere analyse van de oorzaken en consequenties van institutionalisering of gebrek hieraan in de Griekse religie een belangrijke volgende stap. Een gerelateerd onderzoeksonderwerp is een nadere studie van antieke ideeën over de toekomst, verandering en innovatie in het dagelijks leven. Deze bevindingen zouden niet alleen van interesse zijn voor historici maar ook voor bijvoorbeeld sociaal wetenschappers.

Curriculum vitae

Kim Beerden werd geboren te Amsterdam in 1983. Zij behaalde haar gymnasiumdiploma aan het Montessori Lyceum Amsterdam in 2001 (profiel Natuur en Gezondheid). In 2002 begon zij aan een BA Classical Studies (University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Verenigd Koninkrijk) die zij in 2005 afsloot. Hierna volgde de Research Master Ancient History aan de Universiteit Leiden – Kim studeerde in 2007 *cum laude* af. Haar scriptie, waarvoor het onderzoek gedeeltelijk in Oxford plaatsvond, werd met de Fruinprijs 2007 bekroond.

In september 2007 werd Kim voor een periode van vijf jaar aangesteld als assistent-in-opleiding. Gedurende haar promotieperiode verzorgde zij onderwijs aan de Universiteit Leiden en de Universiteit van Amsterdam, in zowel de BA- als de MA-fase. Inmiddels is zij aangesteld als Universitair Docent bij het Instituut voor Geschiedenis van de Universiteit Leiden (sectie Oude Geschiedenis).

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