Worlds full of signs: ancient Greek divination in context
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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 rich-
ly 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 depen-
dent 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 com-
posing 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-

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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 dissemi-
nated without requiring the physical presence of the individual who
generated the knowledge.[9] Even when written texts play an impor-
tant 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 pho-
nic (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
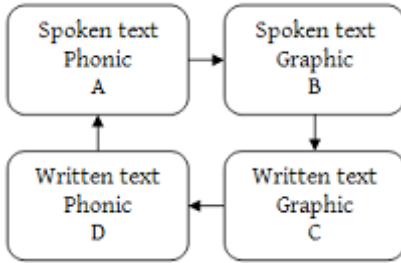
Based on P. Koch & W. Oesterreicher, 'Sprache der Nähe - Sprache der Distanz: Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Spannungsfeld von Sprachtheorie und Sprachgeschichte', *RJb* 36 (1985) 15-43, at 17.

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

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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 *chrēsmologoi* 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 – *chrēsmologoi* 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᾽ ἔνεκ] οὐλο[μένες γαστρὸς κακὰ κήδε᾽ ἔχουσιν | [ααβ   οὔτ᾽ ε] ὑνας [βαλέειν οὔτε πρυμνήσια λῦσαι | ααγ   ἄορι θεινομέ]νων, [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$_n$.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:

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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,

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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

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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

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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).
Ἀ̣ἴ κα μέλλι ἐς [Σύ]βαριν ἰόντι λόῖον | ἔμεν [κ]α πράτοντι ταῦτα.

89   Translation (and bibliography about this tablet): Eidinow, *Oracles, curses, and risk*, 96 (number 4).
Ἀγελόχῳ ἐξ | Ηεργετίω 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 ἢ ἔσσεται 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 ἒ βέλτιον καὶ ἄμεινο<ν>

αὐτοῖ καὶ γενε- | αῖ 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

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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

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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 hand-writing 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]

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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, *Culture*

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, *Lukian 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

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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 a 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.