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Figure 1: Kalchas examines a liver. Etruscan bronze mirror. Vulci, late 4th c. BC. Vatican Museum.

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Papyrological Texts on Ancient Greek Extispicy

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This work is the result of collaboration between William Furley (Heidelberg) and Victor Gysembergh (Reims). The whole work is our joint effort, and we take shared responsibility for it, but Furley has been principally responsible for the editorial side of the texts whilst Gysembergh has concentrated on inter-disciplinary questions of the Greek material and its Mesopotamian precedents. We have both benefited from feedback from a number of colleagues, especially Tiziano Dorandi and Jean-Marie Durand. We have one regret and that is the failure to obtain access to the Moscow papyrus, which is our main witness to ancient hieroscopy. Despite repeated inquiries – thanks here to Maria Kazanskaya and Inga Gotsiridze-Furley for their valiant attempts – the persons responsible in Moscow could no longer locate the papyrus and it did not seem sensible to travel there on a wild goose chase. Papyri do sometimes unfortunately disappear. We have had to rely for our remarks on this text on the initial edition by Bekshtrem and the improved re-edition by Zereteli-Krüger in P.Ross.Georg. The real *alma mater* of this book is the research cluster *Asia and Europe in a Global Context* in Heidelberg, which is funded by the Exzellenz-Initiative of the Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Here many disciplines collaborate in investigating intercultural and transcultural links between Asia and Europe in the broadest geographical and historical sense. Thanks go to Joachim Quack (Heidelberg, Egyptology) for his invitation to participate in this intercultural research group. From the beginning it was our aim to test the hypothesis that the Greeks basically learned the art of examining animal entrails for prophetic purposes from their Asian neighbours in Mesopotamia. This cultural focus combines with our intention to make available for the first time all the relevant papyrological material from ancient Greece pertaining to this subject. The introduction also cites most of the literary witnesses to this practice, so the reader is now equipped with a collection of prime sources on this branch of the Greek prophetic art. We also wish to thank the editors and

publisher of this series for taking on such a specialized study, which does however bear on the larger question just outlined.

Heidelberg/Paris, February 2015

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations not listed in *Année Philologique* have been used:

CCAG	*Catalogus codicum astrologorum Graecorum*, 12 vols., Brussels 1898-1936
Heeßel, KAL 5	Nils P. Heeßel, *Divinatorische Texte II. Opferschau-Omina*, Wiesbaden, 2012
Koch-Westenholz, BLO	Ulla Koch-Westenholz, *Babylonian Liver Omens. The Chapters Manzāzu, Padānu and Pān tākalti of the Babylonian Extispicy Series Mainly from Aššurbanipal's Library*, Copenhagen, 2000.
Koch, AOAT 326	Ulla S. Koch, *Secrets of Extispicy. The Chapter Multābiltu of the Babylonian Extispicy Series and Niṣirti bārûti Texts Mainly from Assurbanipal's Library*, Münster, 2005
NABU	*Notes assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires*
RlA	*Reallexikon der Assyriologie*
Šulgi B	Royal Hymn B of King Šulgi, sumerian text from the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature
YOS	*Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts*, New Haven 1915 ff.

Chapter 1

Introduction

We assume no one reading this work intends to use it as an instruction manual into the ancient art of hieroscopy (examining animals' entrails for prophetic purposes). We, the authors, certainly believe that the tenets expounded in the three ancient texts presented and discussed are, for want of a better word, hocus-pocus. Nevertheless they are interesting for a number of reasons. First of all, they are the sole surviving Greek texts relating to the practice of examining the liver of sacrificed sheep with a view to ascertaining divine will.[1] From earliest literature we know of a whole range of divinatory techniques, from public procedures such as consultation of the Delphic oracle, through augury of many types, to private magical practices.[2] With the exception of the last mentioned, about which we are informed in detail by surviving magical papyri, most references in literature are summary or allusive and rarely spell out what the seer saw and why he interpreted it thus. This is certainly true of extispicy. There is frequent mention from the fifth century BCE on of the practice of examining the entrails.[3] A considerable body of scholarship exists collecting and examining the literary and archaeological sources; there exist also detailed studies of the relation between Greek and Roman extispicy and Near-Eastern practices, in particular the Akkadian compendia of tenets of extispicy.[4] This comparison has led to far-reaching conclusions about the transmission of Mesopotamian extispicy to Greece, as if we had here a

[1] Paus. 6.2.5 mentions kids, lambs and calves as the victims used in *mantikē*: μαντικὴ δὲ ἡ μὲν ἐρίφων καὶ ἀρνῶν τε καὶ μόσχων ἐκ παλαιοῦ δήλη καθεστῶσά ἐστιν ἀνθρώποις.

[2] Apart from Bouché-Leclercq (1879-), some more recent works are: Johnston & Struck (2005); Johnston (2008); Flower (2008); Annus (2010a).

[3] For pictorial evidence (vase-painting), which begins in the later sixth century, see van Straten (1995); summary of the evidence: Johnston (2008, 125-128).

[4] See particularly Blecher (1905); Nougayrol (1955); Burkert (1984 Ber. 1, 48-54); Bachvarova (2012).

clear example of the Greeks learning wholesale from their Eastern neighbours. The remarkable thing about the scholarship on the question to date is that none of the papyrological texts presented here plays the slightest part in the modern discussions.[5] And yet they represent important evidence for Greek practice, indeed the sole extant evidence for details of the seer's art. With the help of these texts we are in a better position to judge how closely Greek practitioners were following Mesopotamian precedent. Following the presentation of the texts we return to this question in a concluding chapter.[6]

Secondly, despite what we said at the outset, that the theories advanced by the texts need have no empirical truth, the mode of thought revealed by these treatises on hepatoscopy is interesting both for the light it sheds on divinatory beliefs and for the symbolic language and concepts used. For here we are dealing with pure symbolism. The parts of the liver are all referred to by arcane, metaphorical terms and their appearances and positions in the individual organ are read as a symbolic language reflecting divine or even cosmic forces. The liver of a sheep is represented as both a microcosm of a human being, and as a mirror of divine powers otherwise invisible to humans.[7] The functioning of this symbolic system is an interesting, if minor, chapter in the history of Greek culture in itself; it has ramifications, however, for the understanding of divination generally. We often wonder when reading a literary passage in which it is said that the omens were bad for a particular military venture what exactly

[5]Bouché-Leclercq (1879-, 171) was writing before these papyri were discovered. Blecher (1905, 45) mentions the Amherst papyrus as it was first published by Grenfell and Hunt, but pays it scant attention. Flower (2008, 32-34), for example, writes: 'Given that the itinerant Greek seer was unable either to consult archived divinatory texts (such as omen lists) or to rely on an education based on such texts, he necessarily was far less constrained by fixed rules of interpretation than his Near Eastern counterparts'. The texts we present here show that there were indeed technical manuals of extispicy, and that they were highly sophisticated, at least in their complexity. Johnston (2008, 127): 'Although we have few details about how Greek *manteis* looked at the liver…'. Burkert (2005) writes without cognizance of these texts. Beerden (2013, 139-169) also misses these documents in her chapter 'Playing by the Book? Use of a Textual Framework', in which she comments that the Greeks seem not to have had instruction manuals on the precise meaning of signs.

[6]The project of Beerden (2013) is exactly this, to compare Greek divination with Mesopotamian (and Roman) parallels, but her work is on a large scale, and omits the detailed evidence presented here.

[7]On Stoic *sympatheia* as an explanatory model of divine signs in the universe see Johnston (2008, 127-8) and below p. 95.

was said by the *mantis* to the commanding officer. These texts give us a much more concrete picture of the actual practice of divination through animal sacrifice. A caveat must, of course, be mentioned: the texts all stem from the Roman province of Egypt. They are relatively late, anonymous,[8] and by unknown scribes. Nevertheless, there is a fair chance that they are recording traditional wisdom; as in the study of Greek magic, the assumption that the imperial age papyri contain much that is older and traditional, is based on comparison with earlier literary and archaeological evidence which points in the same direction.

Hieroscopy as revealed by these texts belongs to what we call the pseudo-sciences. The practioner acts as if there are empirical rules for the interpretation of minute signs on the sheep's liver; he has an intimate knowledge of the organ itself and claims to possess professional expertise pertaining to its interpretation.[9] These texts may be the remains of a centuries-old tradition, such as that documented by Mesopotamian clay tablets. They are the sole survivors of this tradition; with the advent of Christianity, extispicy was likely to have been expunged from the manuscript tradition. Interestingly, there is no mention of any god or goddess in the texts; this distinguishes them from the magical papyri, which are constantly referring by name to divine powers.[10] These texts act as if they are recording plain, objective fact. Such-and-such a shape of one particular part of the liver is 'good', another 'bad'. A certain marking on one lobe of the liver is 'good', its opposite 'bad'. What these signs are good and bad *for* is clearly stated in two of the texts. They are organized into sections relating to various areas of life. The Amherst text in its legible portion relates to 'friendship'. It contains instructions on the interpretation of omens for anyone contemplating making 'friends' with someone. As we argue in the discussion of this text, by 'friends' is presumably meant 'social and political ally'. In other words, hieroscopy was practised by some to establish the advisability or otherwise of establishing friendly

[8] Two sections of the Moscow text are ascribed to dubiously restored personal names.

[9] Cf. Beerden (2013, 28-32).

[10] And from the palmomantic texts P.Ryl. 28 and P.Flor. 391, which conclude each omen with instructions 'pray to such-and-such divinity'. This fact does not necessarily invalidate a definition of divination such as that of Beerden (2013, 20): 'Divination is the human action of production – by means of evocation or observation and recognition – and subsequent interpretation of signs attributed to the supernatural', as the texts may tacitly assume a god had planted these signs in the sheep's liver, without explicitly seeking to identify the god.