DIVINATION AS A SCIENCE IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

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The science in question is the type of divination which by various assyriologists has been called “artificially procured”, “inductive” or “deductive”, “empirical”, “provoked”, or “deliberately sought out”, whichever term one would choose for extispicy, lecanomancy, libanomancy, and aleuromancy. A slaughtered sheep, oil, incense and flour were all ingredients in a food offering to a deity, and it was in a sacrificial setting that these particularly Mesopotamian types of divination were based.

The bārū, “diviner” or “examiner”, was the professional who performed these types of divination. Of these, extispicy was by far the most important and complex method and the one which presented the greatest challenge to the diviner.

The bārū fulfilled many roles as: a man of education and learning, a scribe, a copyist, an editor, a librarian, a master of ceremonies, a man of god, an anatomist, and a courtier. The few who reached the top of their profession were called ummānū, “experts” or “masters”.

In sources outside the omen literature the task of the diviner is summarized as follows: lipit qāti hiniq immeri naqē niqē nēpešti bārūti, “the ‘touch of hand’, the restriction (?) of the sheep, the offering of the sacrifice, the performance of extispicy”.

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2) The various descriptive terms have been compiled by O. Gurney in M. Loewe and C. Blacker (eds.), Divination and Oracles (London 1981) 142 and n. 3.

3) For the divination from slaughtered and plucked fowl, see J.-M. Durand, ARM 26 I/l (Paris 1988) 11.

4) For the title ummānū, see S. J. Lieberman, “Canonical and Official Cuneiform Texts: Towards an Understanding of Assurbanipal’s Personal Tablet Collection”, in: T. Abusch, J. Huehnergard and P. Steinkeller (eds.), Linger over Words. Moran Homage Volume, HSS 37 (1990) 305-336. The title appears to have been used mostly by the scholars who specialized in astrology, but a tablet of the extispicy series, Multābiltu, is discussed by Assurbanipal in “the assembly of the ummānū”, see Streck, Assurbanipal (Leipzig 1916) II 254:15. The following reference is from the mukallīmitu, Boissier, DA 13: i 47: be-ma um-ma-an-ka i-ša-‘al-ka ..., “if your master asks you: ...”.

5) The references are quoted in the CAD L, 202.
The lipit qatti, I presume, refers to a gesture by which the sacrificial animal was introduced into the extispicy ritual).

The hiniq immeri is difficult. Hanāqu in the meaning, “to strangle”, is hardly appropriate because the sheep was certainly not killed by strangulation. At a guess, the expression might refer to a way of handling and restricting the animal prior to the slaughter.

The naqe niqē must refer to the killing and subsequent butchering of the animal and perhaps also to the libations afterwards of water7).

The nēpešti bārūti refers to the application of knowledge when interpreting the entrails.

The composite task of the bārū is described differently in the Neo-Assyrian ikribu, Zimmern, BBR no. 94+: obv. 21'-22' (duplicated by Zimmern, BBR no. 82+: i 1'-3'): ... ina šilit en garza ana garza1-šū en ih-zi ana ih-zi-šū [EN til-la-ti ana til-la-ti-šū [EN e-mu-qī ana e-mu-qī-šū it-kal, “upon a good (omen result), the master of the rite has trusted his rite, the master of skill his skill, [the master of assistance his assistance, the master of his strength”. According to this tentative translation, the diviner had to mobilize a proper ritual or rite (parṣu), all his skill or know-how (ihzu), the back-up forces (?) available to him (tillatu), and his own physical strength (emūqu)8).

In the same ikribu the diviner addresses Šamaš and Adad as follows: ba-ru-ta qišā-a-ni [pj-ta-a-ni uz-fnē-ta pj]el-ka-a ma-ši-ta lu-uh-su-us, “grant me bārūtu, give me intelligence, let me remember the forgotten knowledge” (Zimmern, BBR no. 94+: obv. 23'-24' and duplicate BBR no. 82+: i 5'-6')9).

Other sources from Nineveh, especially the colophons of Assurbanipal’s bārūtu texts, emphasize that divining required intelligence, in Akkadian literally “wide open ear” (uznu rapaštù, uznā palkātu, hasītu palkū). Nēmequ (NA.M.KU.ZU) likewise occurs in the above-mentioned colophons and, like uznu, it refers to god-given knowledge or wisdom10). Ritual texts from Zimmern, BBR also specify that the bārū must be kashid ihzūšu, “accomplished in his craft”11). Ihzu is gained from man-given instruction and perhaps kashid ihzūšu should simply be translated “experienced”.

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6) According to the Mari material, not just the sheep to be sacrificed, but also the people for whom the omens were taken, could be “touched” on their forehead (pītu), see J.-M. Durand, ARM 26 I/1 38-39.

7) See Zimmern, BBR (Leipzig 1901) no. 84: 10 and duplicate no. 85: obv. 10: ik-ri.b a.μεš a-na kud-ūs udū.nīta₂ bal-e, “prayer when libating water for the cut of the ram”.

8) The joins which have made a fuller understanding of this important passage possible have been made by W.G. Lambert who is publishing the ikribu texts.

9) No. 82: i 6' has: uz-nē pal-ka'. The reading of this line is uncertain; palkā/pelkā must be considered to be an error for palkāti.


The intelligence which the diviner was expected to possess was of the most comprehensive kind and because of the very wideness of the field he was supposed to cover, “scholar” or “scientist” hardly describes the bārū.

Neo-Assyrian rituals state further requirements for the diviner. His eyes must not be zaqtā and his finger must not be nakpat12). The AHw has two verbs, zaqātu I, “to sting”/“to hurt”, and zaqātu II, “to be pointed”. Although the exact meaning of zaqātā inā cannot be ascertained it is reasonable to suggest that the expression refers to a condition which results in impaired vision if not blindness13). According to the CAD, there are two verbs nakāpu, I translated “to butt”, and II left untranslated. I would suggest that nakāpu in the mentioned context should be translated “to butt” and that the relatively common apodosis, nikip ubānī, should be translated: “butting of a finger” and that it, like the expression, ša ubānšu nakpat, “whose finger is butting”, refers to clumsiness14). Furthermore, according to one Neo-Assyrian ritual, the diviner was not to have chipped teeth either15). Perhaps this requirement should be understood in the context of the chewing of cedar which was part of the purification ritual of the bārū16).

Texts from mainly the Old Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian periods suggest that there was a bedrock of tradition for the performance of extispicies.

The basic pattern can be summarized as follows: A ram or lamb was sacrificed, not to Šamaš and Adad, but, I believe, to the personal god of the client17). A question about one specific matter and, when relevant, for a limited period was put to the Divine Council (puhrû), chaired by Šamaš. This deity as the supreme judge authorized the verdict of the Council to be encoded into the entrails of the slaughtered animal. The diviner, using cedar as a cleansing agent, underwent a rite of purification before the ritual during which the great gods were invited for a meal. The sheep used for divination was killed by cutting the throat, decapitated, and

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12) See Zimmern, BBR no. 1-20: 4-5 and no. 24: obv. 31-32.
13) See M. Stoll, “Blindness and Night-Blindness in Akkadian”, JNES 45 (1986) 295-299, especially 295 n. 5. In the commentary, CT 20, 26, the following two apodoses are paralleled: obv. 17: iGI.2 LÚ iššal-la (var. CT 20, 11: obv. 27: is-sal-la), “the man’s eyes will deteriorate (literally: fall ill)”, and CT 20, 26: r. 2: ni-kip šULI.
14) In CT 51, no. 216: 6’, nikip ubānī is mentioned in connection with the musical instrument, šinnatu. Lack of dexterity would be as disastrous for the musician as it was for the diviner.
15) Zimmern, BBR 24: obv. 31: he-pu ZU.MEŠ.
16) Zimmern, BBR 75+: obv. 16’: gišERIN ina KA-šu i-na’iš, “he chews cedar in his mouth” (duplicated by no. 76+ obv. 4); no. 11: iii’7 has: gišERIN ina KA-šu i-na’-aš. The cleansing of the mouth with cedar is also referred to in the Old Babylonian ritual, YOS 11 no. 22: obv. 6: ak-pu-ur pi-ia ina ša-bi-im gišERIN, “I wiped my mouth with ... cedar”.
17) The role of personal god of the client in an extispicy will be dealt with in a monograph under preparation. The following passage gives an indication of the essential role played by this deity: Zimmern, BBR no. 88: r. 17-18’: GUB-az Dingir-šū 4TU u-sal-la ana 4Bu-ne-n[e[...] SUM-in 4TU ana DUMU LÚ.HAL AD.HAL 4TU u 4[fM[...], “his (the client’s) personal god is present, he (the personal god) appeals to Šamaš, to Bunene [...], Šamaš grants to the bārū the secret of Šamaš and Adad”.

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dismembered according to a settled procedure\(^{18}\)). The liver and the lungs were
taken out and subjected to a detailed examination. The condition of the various
anatomical parts was recorded and upon a majority of good features the omen
result was declared favourable, perhaps with reservations if there had been adverse
features of special significance. In certain cases, it was deemed necessary to conduct
a check-up examination (\textit{piqittu}) and even a third one. It is not entirely certain
whether this meant that one or two more animals were slaughtered or colleagues of
the diviner checked the entrails of the same animal\(^{19}\).

The basic rules of interpretation had been established by the time of the earliest
recorded extispicies which are the Mari liver models from the early Old Babylonian
period\(^{20}\). The main bulk of the omen literature consists of the compendia which
are composed to a strict pattern of repeating the \textit{summa} sentence. This grammatical
unit first occurs in the afore-mentioned liver models and it usually consists of a
protasis which describes a given condition of the entrails and an apodosis which, in
some cases, is phrased as an answer to a question\(^{21}\). Obviously, the ancient scribes
found this listing of \textit{summa} sentences a very useful way of communicating and
storing knowledge. Also it was an aid to memorization which the diviner needed in
his task.

One Neo-Assyrian source states: Zimmern, \textit{BBR} 11: ii 9': \textit{ina eli bēl niqē bārūta
teppuš}, “over the owner of the sacrifice you perform bārūtu”. In other words, the
interpretative apparatus of the diviner should only be used for the sake of the client
in a specific situation. There is nothing to suggest that animals were slaughtered
and entrails observed merely in order to increase the study material, although one
would have thought that the compilation of \textit{additional} data from experimentation
would have been most useful.

However, omen results from extispicies might have been man-made but they were
also god-given. Only in a carefully staged setting with an aura of mystique would
the gods communicate through the entrails. In this setting god and man, \textit{Heaven}
and Earth met. The link was, as claimed earlier, the personal god of the client
functioning as an intermediary between the great gods and the human protégé.
Before even contemplating a petition to the Divine Council, the individual had to
keep on good terms with his own personal god by regular offerings and also by
keeping to a certain standard of appearance, behaviour and ethical values. The


\(^{20}\) First published in M. Rutten, “Trente-deux modèles de foie en argile inscrits provenant de Tell-
Hariri (Mari)”, \textit{RA} 35 (1938) 36-70. For a study of these liver models, see D.C. Snell, “The Mari Livers
and the Omen Tradition”, \textit{JANES} 6 (1974) 117-123.

Physiognomic omens are one source which highlights the relationship between a man and his personal god). A good omen result could therefore be described as the crowning glory of this all important relationship. But it was also the result of an expensive and laborious ritual and a manifestation of god-given knowledge. Not surprisingly, barītu was sometimes called a niširu, “a treasure” or “a secret”, i.e. something to be safeguarded). The actual omen tablets and, in the first millennium, writing boards were regarded as manifestations of the divine, costly possessions and therefore something well worth stealing.

Because the diviner’s work programme was dictated by the needs of his client his study material could only increase gradually. Its sacredness meant validity but also, it could not be ignored. Tradition and stagnation, rather than innovation and progress, have caught the attention of assyriologists and to redress the balance, I shall go to some length to characterize Mesopotamian extispicy as a developing science.

There were indeed some factors in the whole system of divination which infused it with a certain dynamic force.

As already hinted at, the ritual was rich and elaborate and comparable to a courtcase in which the judges, before giving their verdict, had been mollified by splendid entertainment. There must have been a belief that one could, at least to some degree, mould the will of the gods, because otherwise, why go to such length? Apparently, the Mesopotamians did not have a principle which corresponds to our “fate”, i.e. something predetermined and inevitable which meant that they did not have to look to the future in a laid-back, fatalistic frame of mind). In partnership with the divine man could, in a sense, shape his own future, by necessity taken step by step, because the system required regular consultations by acts of extispicy. In this form of divination the gods could only deliver (or refuse to deliver) an answer to a question. If not asked they would have to express themselves by other means and through other channels.

The needs of the client in this anthropocentric form of divination were, up to a point, centred around words and expressions like: kapādu, “to plan”, sumeratu/tašmiru, “enterprise”. sibūtu, “project”, kišīti qāti, “gain”, šallatu, “booty”, zittu,

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22) Published in F.R. Kraus, Texte zur babylonischen Physiognomatik, AfO Beih. 3 (Berlin 1939). Another source in which the personal god is frequently mentioned is the proverbs, see W.G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature (Oxford 1960) 222-282; one example is: 227: 23-26: u₄-ma ta-kap-pu-ud dingir-ka ku-u u₄-ma ul ta-kap-pu-ud dingir-ka la-a ku-u, “on the day you plan ahead, your god is yours, on the day you do not plan ahead, your god is not yours”. According to my interpretation of this proverb, the meaning is something like: “God helps him who helps himself”.

For a comprehensive study of this deity, see H. Vorländer, Mein Gott, AOAT 23 (Neukirchen 1975).


"profit", ²ᵐⁱʳⁱ, "success", šumu, "fame", all frequently occurring in the omen literature. This enterprising spirit also shines through in e.g. the Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions in which the kings claim to build bigger, better and higher, travel further afield, annex more land, collect more booty and, in Assurbanipal's case, be more learned than any predecessor. Looking back at his ancestors with their failings and misfortunes, the king, as a client of the diviner, must have been minded for expressing a need for an improved and improving system of divination.

*Developments in the ritual*

We have ample textual material to reconstruct the Neo-Assyrian extispicy ritual performed for the royal client. The material from other periods is not nearly as comprehensive and comparisons will have to be made with great caution. However, there are indications that this ritual peaked in its complexity during the Sargonid period.

One important source is the collections of ikribû some of which are published in Zimmern, *BBR*. An ikribu may contain a petition to the Divine Council but also an introduction and consecration of a sacrificial item or a piece of the ritual gadgetry. These prayers were also recited during the Old Babylonian period but perhaps not in such quantity. In any case, it was considered to be necessary in the first millennium to produce texts which gave instructions about the order in which the ikribû should be recited. In Zimmern, *BBR* no. 75+, duplicated by nos. 76+, 77, and 78+, 21 different prayers are referred to. If this number of prayers, if not more, had to be offered during one ritual, it is not surprising that an excuse, a so-called ezib-formula, had to be given at the beginning of the whole procedure about a slip of the tongue. Altogether seven ezib-formulae are attested\(^{25}\). They are excuses for any indeliberate error which might creep into the ritual. These formulae are not attested to any earlier period and they may be a first millennium addition. Perhaps the following unique apodosis from a Nineveh compendium refers to the diviner having to start all over again if he made a mistake in his recitation: *CT* 30, 15: obv. 11': LŪ.HAL ana ik-ri-bi-šû GUR-âr, "the diviner will turn back (to the beginning of) his ikribus".

As far as I have been able to make out, the question posed to the Divine Council was whispered into the ear of a lamb which was given as a special offering to Šamaš and Adad\(^{26}\). Having, so to speak, eaten the question these gods communicated


\(^{26}\) See Zimmern, *BBR* no. 98: 8'-9' (duplicated by no. 99: r. 5'-6'): UDU.SILÂ₄ KU qud-du-sā ša mi-na-tu-šū šal-[ma ...] ta-mišt ša-ka ina GÎ.S.E.RÎ.N ina GEŠTUĜ.2 150-[šū ...], "You [...] a pure, consecrated lamb of healthy body. The query of your choice [...] in a cedar (pipe?) in [its] left ear"; also Sm 998* obv. 10'
the reply to the personal god of the client, the deity who for a short while became present in another animal, the ram which was used for the extispicy. It is likely that we are dealing with a late refinement in the use of two animals as channels of communication.

Ritual purity

The Old Babylonian rituals, *YOS* 11 nos. 22 and 23, published by Goetze and Starr respectively, have references to the cleansing of the diviner's person; *YOS* 11 no. 22 specifies mouth and hands. According to the first millennium texts, it appears that the diviner's toilette became more elaborate. The washing of mouth of hands was, of course, still a requirement, but there are also a reference to a change of clothes and tamarisk and cedar put into the ears of the diviner. Also mention is made of an anointing and fumigation of the diviner with sulphur and yellow sulphur (*kibrītu* and *ruṭitu*).

In the Neo-Assyrian texts belonging to the category, “Behaviour of the Sacrificial Lamb”, and in the series, *šumma isru* and *šumma manzāzu*, the following apodosis is recurring: *lā ellu niqā ilput*, “an unclean person has touched the sacrifice”. This apodosis has not been found in the earlier material and only two Old Babylonian parallels are attested. Such apodoses could have been given as answers to a question like: “What went wrong with the extispicy which produced a bad omen result”?

This assumed increased awareness of the need for ritual purity is reflected in other sources, like the *šumma ālu* text, K 1562, which was first published in

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28) See Zimmern, *BBR* no. 96: i 3; no. 97+ : r. 8'.

29) Zimmern, *BBR* no. 79: obv. 4-8; no. 11: iii 2'-11'.

30) Usually written: *NU KUŠ SISKUR TAG-ut*, see f. ex. *CT* 31, 32: r. 8'; *KAR* 423: i 11; K 2722+: *obv. 24, 29, 31, 33; K 3978+: ii 4; *CT* 51 no. 155: 13', 19'.

31) The first example, *YOS* 10, 17: r. 65, is quoted in U. Jeyes, *Extispicy* (1989) 43. The second example is: *CT* 3, 2: *obv. 2: lā ellum anna niqēm ittēhi*, “an unclean person has been near to the sacrifice” (oil omen compendium).
Boissier, *Choix II* (1906) 41-44\(^{32}\). The “wash omens” in this text concentrate on the washing of hands. Another text, *KAR* 52, which was not incorporated into the *šumma ālu* series, gives instructions for the right time and place for one’s ablutions; the first line is: [diš] NA *ina tal-lák-te* AMEŠ TUS *ul-tab-bar*, “[if] a man washes himself in the approach (to his house): he will last long”\(^{33}\). In a passage from an Assarhaddon inscription it says: Borger, *Esrh*. 105 §68 11: ii 29: *kîma li[lli (…) arki nîqêka tarammuk*, “like a fo[ol (…) you wash yourself after your sacrifice”\(^{34}\).

**Etiquette**

Tablets which I would label “etiquette” are, to my knowledge, only attested to the first millennium. One text, K 57, was published by Nougayrol in *RA* 61 (1967) 36. One instruction from this text is: obv. 21: “if he (the client) stands while the *bārū* is seated: a *pitrustu* (i.e. an ambiguous sign)”. An unpublished parallel text, K 11716 + K 12895, quoted by the *CAD*, warns not to sneeze (?), snivel, fidget, dress sloppily or to be clumsy\(^{35}\).

These texts have links with *šumma ālu* where tablet 95 (*CT* 39, 41-42) deals with a man’s relationship with his god. Another text, *CT* 39, 34-36, also focusses on the cult of the personal god. Further texts which may or may not belong to this series suffice to demonstrate that etiquette was a priority\(^{36}\). In my view, it is not justified to claim that divination in Mesopotamia required mere technique and no morals. On the contrary, etiquette as well as ethics should be included in the list which comprised the *bārū*’s field of expertise.

**Timing**

The afore-mentioned text, K 57, has a colophon which says: “(it is) written (as an extract) from “The Good Days of Divination’”. Although the Mari material gives indications that there, at that period, was a concept of good timing for performing extispicies\(^{37}\), the hemerologies from Assur and Nineveh provide more specific instructions. According to the earlier Assur hemerology the *bārū* should not apply his skills on the following days of the month: the 1st, 7th, 9th, 14th, 19th, 21st, 28th, 29th, and 30th\(^{38}\). The extispicy commentary, *KAR* 151, excludes the

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\(^{32}\) For the place of this text in *šumma ālu*, see F. Köcher and A.L. Oppenheim, “The Old Babylonian Omen Text VAT 7525”, *AfO* 18 (1957-58) 62-77, especially 70, 73.

\(^{33}\) According to a private communication from E. Leichty, *KAR* 52 is not a *šumma ālu* text.

\(^{34}\) Quoted in the *CAD L*, 189.

\(^{35}\) For obv. 8’: *šum-ma ap-pa-šu u-gan-na-as HAR.BAD d[al-hat]*, “if he wrinkles his nose (sniffs?): the omen is [n] fused]”, see the *CAD G*, 40. The full text will be published in the afore-mentioned monograph, see n. 17.

\(^{36}\) See Durand, *ARM* 26 1/l 35-36.

\(^{37}\) See Labat, *Un calendrier Babylonien des travaux, des signes et des mois*, (séries iqqur īpuš)
same days from the *bārū* acting professionally\(^{39}\)). The number of unsuitable days is reduced to five in the Nineveh calendar, *enbu bēl arhi*: the 7th, 14th, 19th, 21st, and 28th\(^{40}\). When checking the nearly one hundred datings preserved in the Neo-Assyrian queries and extispicy reports, it is clear that the days, 7, 14, 19, 21, and 28 were avoided as well as the days around the disappearance of the moon, i.e. the 29th, the 30th, and the 1st\(^{41}\).

From the far fewer datings (26) of the Old Babylonian and Kassite reports one can observe that the days, 1, 19, 21, 28, and 30 were not avoided\(^{42}\). Thus there is a sure indication of a move towards a more regularized timing for performing extispicies.

The first millennium material informs us that one apparently could anger the divine by overzealousness, cf. the *bārū* ritual, Zimmern, *BBR* 11, iii 18-19: *šamma bārū ana bīrī kajānu sadīr mūt arni imāt*, "if the diviner is in the habit of continuously being engaged in extispicy: he will die the death of wrongdoing". Another interesting reference is found in *CT* 51, no. 147: obv. 39: *šamma ana iššu dīna sadīr *šipši/*šibšat* ili, "if he keeps going to his god for a verdict: 'punishment'/'anger' of the god"\(^{43}\).

For the first time in the Neo-Assyrian period one finds references to some months being more favourable than others for taking extispicies. Zimmern, *BBR* 1-

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\(^{39}\) *KAR* 178: r. i 65-70: [UD.1].⟨KĀM⟩ UD.7.⟨KĀM⟩ UD.[9] 〈KĀM〉 UD.14.⟨KĀM⟩ UD.19.⟨KĀM⟩ [UD.2].⟨KĀM⟩ UD.28.KĀM [UD.29.KĀM UD.30.⟨KĀM⟩ UD.HUL.GAL [an]-nu-ti DUMU LŪ:HAL DUG₄, G[A] NU GAR ana DŪ ÁŠ NU na-tu UD.MEŠ ŠE:GA.MEŠ AL,TIL, "[the first day], the 7th day, [the 9th] day, [the 14th] day, [the 19th day], [the 21st] day, the 28th day, [the 29th day], the 30th day, [th]ese (are) the evil days (when) the diviner must not give a prognosis, they (the days) are not suitable for carrying out a project, 'the Favourable Days', completed".

\(^{40}\) *KAR* 151: r. 53-56: [UD.2.KĀM] UD.3.KĀM UD.5.KĀM UD.6.KĀM UD.8.KĀM UD.10.KĀM UD.11.KĀM UD.12.KĀM UD.15.KĀM UD.16.KĀM [UD.20]. KĀM [UD.2].KĀM UD.23.KĀM UD.24.KĀM UD.26.KĀM UD.29.KĀM k-i *30 na *UTU e-e-em' [la]-a te-ep-pu-us UD.[I].KĀM 1 UDU.NITA! IT-TI RIK-SI DŪ-UB [...] '15 UDU.MEŠ ša HAL-ša ÍTU-UR-SU, "[the second], third, 5th, 6th, 8th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 15th, 16th, [20]th [2]2nd, 23rd, 24th, 26th: you should 'not' do (extispicy) on the 29th day when Šin departs from Šamaš, you should 'do' one ram with offerings per day [...] 15 days (suitable) for divination each month". It can be deduced that the same days, and a few more, are unsuitable for taking extispicies as in the text quoted in n. 38.

\(^{41}\) See B. Landsberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Babylonier und Assyrier*, *LS* 6 (Leipzig 1915), 119.

\(^{42}\) A dating to the second day of the month is found in *SAA* 4 (Helsinki 1990) no. 157; the 3rd day: nos. 43, 45, 151; the 4th day: nos. 48, 89, 90, 280, 303, 309, 318, 335; the 5th: none; the 6th: nos. 49, 59, 74, 139; the 8th: nos. 50, 65, 152, 281, 334, 336; the 9th: no. 319; the 10th: nos. 3, 8, 14, 28, 51, 230, 304, 324; the 11th: nos. 4, 5, 285, 300, 326, 327; the 12th: none; the 13th: nos. 155, 229, 293; the 15th: no. 282; the 16th: nos. 13, 114, 212, 283, 298; the 17th: nos. 57, 110, 273, 279; the 18th: no. 156; the 20th: no. 284; the 22nd: no. 23, 76, 185, 195, 210, 228, 301; the 23rd: nos. 262, 305; the 24th: nos. 137, 331, 332, the 25th: no. 35; the 26th: nos. 16, 77, 317; the 27th: nos. 94, 279, 296.

20: 27 refers to ajaru, simānu and tašritu, i.e. the 2nd, 3rd, and 7th month. In the Neo-Assyrian reports one finds the highest number of datings (15) to ajaru, but otherwise extispicies were performed all year round as one would expect.

Another apparent novelty attested to the Nineveh material is the compendium, CT 30, 12 (K 1813) with the duplicate CT 28, 44 (K 717). This text contains 12 protases in which the very negative sign of a missing gall bladder is combined with each of the 12 months. It can be deduced that the hottest months, du'ūzu, abu, and ulūlu are the most unfavourable ones, whereas addaru, nisannu, and ajaru are the most favourable ones.

A certain sophistication was introduced into the calculation of the adannu which is the term used for the period “covered” by the prognosis. To my knowledge, this term does not occur in the Old Babylonian omen literature, although in the Mari material there are references to omens being taken for a given period.

The Assur text, KAR 452, and texts from Nineveh, CT 31, 2 (K 12390) and CT 31, 16, 18 (K 4061) link appearances of either a Split (piṭru) or a Hole (ṣīlu) on the caudate lobe with the calculation of the adannu.

I would suggest that the meaning of the following passage is that the unfavourable feature of a Hole of the right Plain (ṣēru) of the Finger (ubānu) reduces the length of the adannu, so if the diviner takes omens for two months, the adannu will only be 20 days. CT 31, 16: obv. 3'-5':

3': BE SUHUŞ EDIN 15 ŞU.SI U ŞUB-di 10 a.RĀ '3 30' [30 u₄-mi]
4': ina GIŠ.TUKUL ŞUB-ti ERIN₂-ni AN-'ūl [ŞUR-nun]
5': šum-ma a-na ITU.2.KĀM DŪ-uš SAG a-dan-ni-ka 20 20 u₄-m[i(...]]

“if a Hole is situated (on) the base of the right Plain of the Finger: ten times 'three (is) thirty' [thirty days],
in warfare: fall of the army, rain [will fall],
if you do (a divination) for two months: (from) the beginning of your adannu twenty, twenty day[s(...)]”.

44) datings to ajaru are found in Starr, SAA 4 nos. 3, 5, 43, 44, 45, 49, 50, 51, 57, 74, 94, 142, 288, 317, 335.
45) in K 11142* a missing ubānu is combined with each of the 12 months.
46) the apodosis relating to du'ūzu is: CT 28, 44: obv. 4: DINGIR LÚ iR-ba APIN-es ana qI-biŠ Dumu-zi, “the god will request a gift from the man, on the command of Dumuzi”; obv. 5 (for abu): ZÁH bu-ši ša LÚ GIG TI-kit, “loss of property belonging to the man, the patient will recover”; obv. 6 (for ulūlu): lu-úp-nu INA KUR GAR-ma E NA TER-ir, “There will be poverty in the country and the man’s estate will be diminished”; r. 12 (for addaru): NA.BI UG₃-ma É-su BIR-ah, “that man will die and his estate will be squandered”, obv. 1 (for nisannu): [NA ina ni]-qi-šu lu-u DUMU-su lu-u DUMU/ŠAL-sû [UG₃], “[the man during his sacrifice, either his son or his daughter will die]”; obv. 2 (for ajaru): EN SISKUR₅ UG₃, “the owner of the sacrifice will die”.
47) See Durand, ARM 26 1/1 57-59.
48) CT 31, 16, 18 is treated in E. Weidner, “Zahlenspielereien in akkadischen Leberschautexten”, OLZ 20 (1917) 258-266.
The Animal used for the extispicy

According to the Old Babylonian textual material, a lamb (puhādu) or a ram (immeru) could be sacrificed for a divination⁴⁹. In the Neo-Assyrian texts one only finds the writing uDU(.Nīţa₂) perhaps reflecting a practice in the later period of using the fully grown animal for the extispicy and reserving the lambs for food offerings and for sacrifices of atonement. The "pure lambs", described in idyllic terms in the ikribus, Zimmern, BBR nos. 100-101, are the sacrifices of innocence to atone for everything which might have gone wrong in a previously performed extispicy which had produced an unfavorable result⁵⁰. Incidentally, in ajaru, the favoured month for taking extispicies, there would have been a fresh stock of one-year-old and just fully grown rams.

Anatomical parts observed

The general trend in the Neo-Assyrian period, in comparison with earlier times, is to concentrate on fewer organs and anatomical parts. This impression is based on the evidence of exispicy reports and serialized compendia⁵¹. However, compendia have been recovered in Nineveh which deal with parts of the sheep's anatomy which were not examined according to current practice. These compendia represented a tradition which could not be dismissed altogether. One example is K 4112*, a copy of an Old Babylonian original, which contains kukkudru (abomasum) omens⁵².

While the heart quite clearly was examined in the Old Babylonian period, not one single libbu omen has come to light in texts from the first millennium⁵³. Often, a report from this period concludes: "the libbu of the ram was normal". Libbu, in this context, I would translate, "the inside", and suggest that the term refers to the thoracic and abdominal cavities.

An innovation, according to the Kassite and Neo-Assyrian reports, appears to be the inspection of the elitu and the ūpapitu, "the upper"/"lower part". Nineveh commentaries identify elitu with šubat ilimpi, "the seat to the right", which again is

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⁴⁹) The writing, SILA₄, occurs f. ex. in Ungnad, Babylonica 2 (1908) pl. 6: obv. 1, 11; 3 (1909) pl. 9
obv. 1; Goetze, JCS 11 (1957) 92 no. 6: obv. 1; 91 no. 8: obv. 1; TCL 17 no. 27: obv. 10. SILA₄:NITiPhone, occurs in Frank, Strassburger Keilschrifttexte (1928) no. 5 obv. 1: UDU is found in Goetze, JCS 11 (1957)
91 no. 7: obv. 1; Nougayrol, JCS 21 (1967) 220 ("B"): obv. 1, ("C"): obv. 1; UDU:NITa₂ is found in
Starr, Finkelstein Memorial Volume (1977) 207 obv. 1. Immerum is written syllabically in CT 4, 34b: obv.
1. See also, Durand, ARM 26 I/1 36-37.

⁵⁰) In no. 100 obv. 8-9, there is mention of "unfavourable (or) confused omens".


⁵²) For the term kukkudru, see Starr, Rituals (1983) 92. In Boissier, DA (1896) 97-99 there are small
collections of kukkudru, isru, ĥapaskašu, and šubit omens. Only the term isru occurs in the Neo-Assyrian
reports.

identified with irtu, "chest". Šubat imiter/šumēli are terms which occur in the Old Babylonian reports and, at a guess, I would identify "the upper / lower part" with "the seat to the right/left" and with the serous membranes which cover the thoracic and abdominal cavities, i.e. the pleura and the peritoneum. If this identification should happen to be correct so that accordingly "right"/"left" become "upper"/"lower", perhaps it reflects a change in the way in which the diviner handled the carcass of the sacrificed animal.

The finger measurement

It is a well known principle, established in the Old Babylonian period, that the normal length of a normally occurring groove on the visceral surface of the liver was assessed to be three fingerwidths. What was in excess of this measurement was interpreted as favourable. However, when the diviners used their fingers as measuring units, the problem would arise that one man with a small hand would deliver a good omen result whereas another with a big hand would deliver a bad result. Shortness, in contrast to length, was namely interpreted as unfavourable. My interpretation of the following expression, "in the big finger, (in) the finger of the bārū, (in) the finger(measurement) of the aslu unit" (see below p. 38), is that we have here an attempt to conform the diviner's finger to the aslu standard unit. In Boissier, DA 12: i 27-28 the parallel expression is: ... ina šu.sI as-li šu.sI GAL-ti šu.sI TUR-ti šu.sI LŪ.HAL 3 šu.sI.ta.ÂM man-da, "in the finger (measurement) of the aslu unit, (in) the big finger, (in) the small finger, (in) the finger of the bārū, they (the normally occurring grooves) are measured to three fingerwidths". One unpublished text, K 3690 + K 3722, appears to comment on this more accurate method of measuring. To me, the full meaning of the text has remained elusive, but I assume that the following equations are made:

\[
\begin{align*}
r. 3' & : \ldots \text{šu.sI GAL-tú} = 1 \text{šu.sI as-li} [...] \\
r. 5' & : \ldots \text{šu.sI 3-tu₄ MURUB₄-tu₄} = 1 \text{šu.sI as-li SAG.uš} \\
r. 6' & : \text{šu.sI 4-tu₄ šá Á TUR-ti} = 1 \text{šu.sI LŪ.HAL} \\
r. 7' & : \ldots \text{šu.sI 5-tu₄} = 1 \text{šu.sI TUR-ti}
\end{align*}
\]

"... the big finger ... (is) the finger(measurement) of the aslu unit [...] "... the third finger, the middle one ... (is) the finger(measurement) of the regular aslu unit,

\[54\] Eliti (nu.um.me) or (an-tu₄) is equated with šubat imiter (DAG 15) in Boissier, DA 11: i 19, quoted by the CAD E 99. Šubat imiter is equated with irtu in K 3667+K 1808: iii 16', quoted in Starr, Rituals (1983) 83. Šubtu which also is mentioned in f. ex. YOS 10, 49: 15-20, should not be confused with the šubtu of the zone of the padānu, see Jeyes, Extispicy (1989) 57-58.


\[56\] One example is YOS 10, 31: vi 36-38: šum-ma mar-tu[m] ūk-ta-ri le-me-in a-we-lim, "If the gall bladder has shortened: misery for the man".
... the fourth finger of the small side ... (is) the diviner's finger,
... the fifth finger ... (is) the small finger"

My interpretation of these quotations is that the diviner may use his index finger, middle finger, ring-finger, or little finger in any combination, but his finger must be equal to the regular *aslū* unit. It appears that the average middle finger comes closest to this standard unit.

**Right and left**

It is a well established principle that the right side is “my side” and the left side belongs to the enemy, but what exactly is right and left?

We can trace a development by which the surfaces of the liver and the lung were divided into more and more, smaller and smaller squares designated “right” or “left”. *CT 31, 1-5 (K 70+)* is a so-called “orientation tablet” which labels each subsection as “right” or “left”. One line of this somewhat tedious, text goes: *CT 31, 1: ii 10*: *SAG EDIN GÛB ŠU.SI GÛB MURUB₄ EDIN GÛB ŠU.SI ZAG SUHUŠ EDIN GÛB ŠU.SI [Gûb], “the head of the left Plain of the finger (is) “left”, the middle of the left Plain of the Finger (is) “right”, the base of the left Plain of the Finger is [“left’]. “Orientation tablets” are not attested before Neo-Assyrian Nineveh.

From the Neo-Babylonian period we have the liver model, *BM 50494*, which was published by Nougayrol in *RA* 62 (1968) 31-50. This model illustrates the same intensive dividing up of the liver.

This refinement of definition was a bit selfdefeating. The more subsections there were, the risk would increase of the ambiguity of a marking falling directly on a borderline or right in the middle of a zone. In theory the rules of interpretation were simple; the practicality of applying these rules created ever increasing difficulties.

*Mukallimtu*

*Mukallimtu* is the name for a series of learned commentaries and I would translate it, “Demonstration”. Each of the ten ektispicy (bārūtu) series from Nineveh has a mukallimtu. The unpublished one to the šumma isru series (K 3978+) is almost complete and quite a number of duplicates, one Babylonian (K 6075*) have come to light. Older versions are not attested to this type of text.

With various traditions compiled in one place, Nineveh, the scribes would inevitably be confronted with the problem that the same condition of the entrails would be described in different ways. I believe that one objective of the mukallimtu tablets was to collect and number the various descriptive expressions and to take a decision about which one should be adopted. One passage from the mukallimtu to the šumma manzâzu series should serve as an example: Boissier, *DA* 17 iv 35-38:

35: *BE NA kab-su KAL BAL-ut ú-šal-lam-šū*
36: *BE ši-bu-šū NA ina sip-pi 150 ME.NI GAR-kin*
37: BE NA ka-bi-is KAL GAR ši-bu-šu
38: BE NA ina sip-pi 150 ME.NI GAR-ma BAL-ut

“If the Presence is obliterated (and) the Strength is turned 90°: it will benefit him (to express it like this),
If (in) its old version, the Presence is placed in the left Doorjamb of the Palace Gate,
If the Presence is obliterated (and) the Strength is there, (in) its old version,
If the Presence is placed in the left Doorjamb of the Palace Gate and it is turned 90°”.

The condition which I believe these four lines describe is that of the normally occurring groove, the manzāzu, missing and the other groove, the danānu being observed in its normal position but turned 90 degrees from usually running parallel to the bāb ekalli to being drawn at a right angle to the umbilical fissure.

Some passages from the mukallimtu texts may list up to ten different versions of description). Inserted into the text one often finds explanations of words, e.g. K 3978 + i 38: ta-ra-ku la-pa-tu, “to be dark (equals) to damage”. Another example is: CT 20, 27: ii 9: KAR e-ke-mu e-ṭe-ru ka-ba-su, “(the sign) KAR (means) to hide (which equals) to take away (or) to obliterate”. The idea behind these explanations is not to claim that words of a different meaning are synonymous, but to list descriptive words which in the context of an extispicy would warrant the same interpretation. Whether a certain feature is “hidden”, “taken away”, or “obliterated”, the evaluation would be the same.

In mukallimtu one finds expressions like, “you should say” (taqabbī), “as they used to say” (kīma iqbū), or “which they used to say” (ša iqbū)58). The following warning is found in Boissier, DA 12: i 25: ana LŪ NA.ME ul iq-qab-bi, “it should not be said to anyone”.

Multābiltu

The learned series, Multābiltu, “Interpretation”, comprised, according to the catalogue tablet CT 20, 1, 17 tablets. The first tablet of this series lists the rules of association. The very first line is often quoted: CT 20, 39: obv. 1: diš a-rik-tu₄ ka-šit-tu₄ BE NA GĪD.DA-ma GĪR [KUR]-ud NUN ina KASKAL DU-ku KUR-ād, “if length: success (example:) if the Presence is long and reaches the Path: the prince will succeed with the campaign on which he is going”. This type of apodosis, consisting of one word plus an elaboration is not new, cf. this Old Babylonian example: Scheil RA 27 (1930) 142: obv. 2: ki-ši-if-tum a-al la-wi-at a-na ša-šu te-e-ru-ub, “conquest, you will enter the city which you are besieging”.

57) F. ex. CT 31, 44 + K 3324* + K 3926*: i 37*: BE 10-u, “if, its 10th (description)”.
One gets the impression from omen compendia of all periods that the diviner, having memorized these rules of interpretation, was programmed to produce a prognosis which consisted of one word and possibly, but not necessarily, an explanation.

Tablets two and three of Multābiltu deal with the ambiguous signs which turn (nukkurā) the final omen result. One of these "jokers" is the pitrūṣtu which is a negativity which occurs simultaneously on a right and left side. If the negative sign appears right in the centre of a zone, such as the groove of the manzāzu itself, it is also a pitrūṣtu. The other "joker" is the niphu which is, amongst other things, associated with the number three. If f. ex. there are three Splits on a right side, it is a niphu.

These two ambiguous signs are attested in the Old Babylonian period and the earliest text which provides a compact study of "difficult signs" is VAT 13798 which dates to Tiglatpileser I. In the "Sammeltext", KAR 423, there is a section, from r. i 78 to the end of the text, which methodically lists the features which are difficult to interpret. It is clear that it is not all occurrences of a negativity on both a right and a left side and not all triples which should be regarded as pitrūṣtu and niphu respectively, and one purpose of tablets two and three of Multābiltu might have been to settle which formations exactly should be given "joker" status.

These same tablets display a mindboggling complexity by demonstrating how one and up to seven niphus or pitrūṣtu would, in their different way, affect the final omen result which could be described as follows: "all good", "many good and few bad", "mixed", "many bad and few good", "all bad". Furthermore, we have the implication of such an ambiguous sign on the first, check-up, and third extispicy. Passages from the first three tablets of Multābiltu show that indeed the ancient scribes expressed themselves in other ways than by the list. But, on the whole, it was obviously not considered to be either necessary or desirable to detach abstract thought from the grammatical structure of the šumma sentence. Sometimes, instead of a "a niphu", one finds "ten tērānu". The count ten of the half turns of the colon spiral was a niphu. Instead of "unfavourable", an unfavourable apodosis is written. This preference for the concrete has perhaps to the modern scholar disguised an approach which was both methodical and logical.

59) See f. ex. K 6450* (is joined to CT 31, 48-49) obv. 1: [BE MU.ME$] šā ina ba-ru-ti nu-uk-ku-ru-ma [...], "if the omens which turn round (the omen result) in bārātu and [...]"); A variant writing is in CT 30. 43 r. 7: BE-MA MU.ME$ šā ina ba-ru-ti KUR.ME$-MA[....].
62) Compare KAR 423: r. ii 54: BE SĀ.NIGIN 10; (one entry in a list of difficult signs); Boissier, DA 231: r. 32: BE ditto (= HAR.BAD DŪ)-MA INA SILIM-TI SĀ.NIGIN 10, "if you take an omen and in a good (result) there are ten tērānu".
63) See below, CT 20, 44: i 49.
In the following passage from the second tablet of Multābiltu, the whole interpretative system has been put in a nutshell: CT 20, 44: i 48-61:

48: GIŠ.TUKUL a-frîj-du u ma-hi-ir-šû ana IGII GIŠ.TUKUL e-pê-ri' [...] 
49: 'TEŠ'-ti LÛ ina TI-šû LUGAL TûM ana IDIM u MAŠ.EN.KAK a-šar 'SIG₃' [...] 
50: NU KUR.MEŠ ina KI.DAL.BA.AN.NA ina Ė HA.LA 15 ma-la ba-šu-û' 
51: GIŠ.TUKUL GİR U DU₈ KAM-tu₄ BAR-tu₄ kak-su-û KAR-tu₄ ni-ip-'hu' 
52: MURUB₄ MEŠ sar-ra-a-tu₄ bi-re-e-tu₄ ni-ip-ha-a-ti NA GIR 
53: KA.DUG.GA KAL ME.NI SILIM ZÉ SIG-iš IGII ERIN₂ KÛR ŠUB AŠ.TE SÛ.SI ni-ru 
54: u MÂŠ 3 ŠU.SI.TA.AM GIŠ.HUR.MEŠ IGII TûN man-da ina ŠU.SI GAL-ti 
55: ŠU.SI LÛ.HAL ŠU.SI as-li GIŠ.TUKUL 7-ti 15-ti 
56: DU₈ 3-ti ana IZI.GAR-ma ta-nam-bi 1 ŠU.SI GİR 1/2 ŠU.SI DU₈ 
57) 2 ŠU.SI šit-qu 3 ŠU.SI šit-hu KI NÎG.GIG ū-lap-pa-tu₄ 
58) si-hi-ir-ti BÀ 1 KÛŠ 6 ŠU.SI SAG.KI BÀ IGII zu-û-ri BÀ 14 ŠU.SI 
59) bi-rit 15 ia-um-ma 150 šÀ KÛR ana SILIM LUGAL ana GIŠ.TUKUL ana KASKAL 
60) ana şa-bat URU ana SILIM GIG ana ŠUR-an AN-e ana DÛ-eš âŠ 
61) u mim-ma ma'-da-a-ti HAR.BAD DÛ-ma 

Translation:

48: A vertical Weapon and its equivalent(?) is [...] to the front of a Weapon of dust,
49: the king will take away the dignity of the man in his (the man's) lifetime, for the important man and the commoner: a place of good [...] 
50: they will not achieve. In the central area, in the House of Division to the right, as many as there are:
51: the Weapon, the Foot, the Hole, the Split, the Request, the Cross, the kaksû, the nêkemtu, the niphu,
52: the middle areas (are) lies, the central areas (are) confusion. The Presence, the Path,
53: the Good Word, the Strength, the Palace Gate, the Well-being, the Defeat of the Enemy's Army, the Throne Base, the Finger, the Yoke,
54: and the Increase: three finger(widths) is the measure of the grooves (“Drawings”) on the liver (“Pouch”), in the big finger,
55: (in) the finger of the diviner, (in) the finger(measurement) of the aslu unit. Seven Weapons to the right
56: (and) three Splits you should declare a niphu. A Foot is one Finger, a Split is half a Finger.
57: A cut of two Fingers (and) a damaged area of three Fingers will defile the consecrated place.
58: The circumference of the liver (is) one Cubit and six Fingers. The front of the liver on(?) the body(?) of the liver is 14 Fingers.
(What is to) the right of the central area is mine, (what is to) the left belongs to the enemy. For the welfare of the king, for the armed forces, for the campaign, for taking a city, for the welfare of the patient, for rainfall, for carrying out a project and for many other thing (when) you take an omen:

Commentary:

48: Normally a Weapon points towards some specific point on the liver. A vertical (unfocussed) Weapon is a difficult sign to interpret and requires special attention. The expression, *kakku āridu*, has so far only appeared in the first millennium texts, for references, see the *CAD* under āridu. Possibly, the prominence given to the "vertical Weapon" in this text is because we are here dealing with a Neo-Assyrian innovation to the interpretative apparatus.

49: A second apodosis, applying to other populations groups, is not new, see U. Jeyes, Extispicy (1989) 45, 48.

50: The *birītu*, "central" or "median" line, I assume, is the line which divides a zone of the liver in a right and a left half. The *birītu* will go through the normally occurring groove itself. The *bit zitti* is a rarely occurring expression which first appears in the Mari material, see Durand, *ARM* 26 I/1 (1988) no. 164: obv. 4'. The "House of Division" is unidentified. Perhaps it is a "no-man's land" between some of the zones.

51: The *kakku*, šēpu, šīlu, piṭru, erišt, išpalurtu, kaksu, and nēkemtu are the names for the most frequently occurring fortuitous marks which might be found on the entrails. *Niphu*, mentioned in this context, is perhaps not to be understood as the ambiguous sign of the same name, but as a fortuitous mark, "Inflated Part".

52: The *qabliatu*, "the middles", are the lines which cross the *birētu* at a right angle.

53-54: The manzāzu, padānu, pu ṭābu, danānu, šulmu, mihīṣ pān ummān nakri and *nūdi kussē* are the names for the normally occurring grooves ("drawings") on the liver. For the finger measurement, see p. 34-35.

55-56: The Seven Weapons and three Splits are two examples of formations which should be regarded as *niphus*.

57: The "cut" and "damaged area", I guess, are the ones which have been caused by the clumsy diviner, see p. 25.

58: The second half of this line is uncertain. Zu’ru, I understand as the Neo-Assyrian form for zumru. The measurement of 14 "fingers" on the "body" of the liver is otherwise unattested and it is not known how it was obtained.

59: One ammatu is 30 ubānu, i.e. ca. 50 cm. according to the *CAD*, see under ammatu.

59-61: A list of key-words and expressions found in questions put to the divine when an extispicy was performed.
A parallel text to this extract from *Multābiltu*, tablet two, is Boissier, *DA* 12:1 27-34. In the same text 14: ii 10 it says: šá ki-isp-rī GABA.RI BAL.TIL⁴¹, "from section(s), copy (copies) from Assur". Perhaps we have here a case of Assyrian diviners asserting their competence and authority over their Babylonian colleagues. Obviously, one purpose of *Multābiltu* was to direct the diviner towards delivering a correct omen result, favourable or not, but this is not necessarily the only purpose. Tablet ten has as its first line: *CT* 20 1:r. 25: ERIN₂ KUR ana KUR.MU ug-tip-pi-šá HAR.BAD Dû-ma šá HAR.BAD gir GAR, "(if) you perform an extispicy when the enemy’s army is massed against my country and, of (this) extispicy, the Path is there". The tablet has survived in an incomplete state and has been published in *CT* 20, 49. Many apodoses in this text are unique and strongly suggest a connection with recent political events of Assurbanipal’s reign⁶α). Tablets 14-16 of *Multābiltu* contain *šumma amûtu* omens, something hitherto unattested in extispicy compendia. The livers described as a whole in these tablets are of extraordinary appearances and thus hardly susceptible to normal rules of interpretation⁶ß). Tablets 10, 14-16, and perhaps other tablets of this series, I assume, had a special commemorative purpose.

*Extispicy, a secret science*

The changes which the extispicy texts underwent over the centuries are obvious. New terms for some, but not all features, in the interpretative apparatus replaced old ones and the writing became increasingly ideographic. In the Old Babylonian texts, readable by the literate layman, the underlying rules of interpretation would not easily have been detected by him and neither would they have been by the modern scholar if these texts were the only ones available. The first millennium texts are much more forthcoming in revealing the underlying principles of this science, but they would not have been readable by the literate non-professional. Some of the learned commentaries do however carry this warning, f. ex. Boissier, *DA* 46: r. 6'-7': SÀL.ŠES NAM.ÚZU₂ ina ZU.A ZU.A DINGIR NU ZU.A NU IGÎ-mar ÑÎ.GIG ṣullat û ḫa[n]iš [i.e. Šamaš and Adad]⁶⁶).

There are few cases of this secret knowledge falling into the hands of the non-professionals. Šulgi’s claim to competence in this science is under dispute⁶⁷).

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⁴¹ See the published version of “Assurbanipal’s bârûtu”, the paper given at the XXXIXe RAI, Heidelberg 1992.

⁶α) *CT* 30, 31 (Rm 153) is a fragment of tablet 14. The Seleucid version has survived intact: *TCL* 6 no. 1. *CT* 30, 9-10 is a commentary to tablet 15. Fragments of *šumma amûtu* tablets are: K 10599*, K 11011*, K 11141*, K 14549*, 79-7-8, 58 + *, 81-2-4, 249*.

⁶ß) A variant is *KAR* 151: r. 67 [nî]-šîr-tî NAM.ÚZU₂ NU ZU NU IGÎ ÑÎ.GIG ṣullat u ḫaniš [i.e. Šamaš and Adad].

Assurbanipal does not, to my knowledge, insist that he is able to perform extispicies, like Šulgi, but he does promote himself as somebody who possesses a sound knowledge of the whole theoretical basis of this applied science\(^{68}\). To judge from the Mari letters, the rulers there certainly had a working knowledge of the whole process of performing extispicies\(^{69}\).

Whereas it is doubtful whether the king could become a bārū, in the case of Aqba-Hammu it has been suggested that a bārū became king\(^{70}\).

**Conclusion**

The omen results from extispicies were projected towards past, present and future. A run of what we would call “bad luck” could be explained. The cause of a problem like an illness could be pinpointed and a plan for the near future could be sanctioned through this form of divination.

That was based on the belief that the liver of a sacrificed sheep was a map of what constituted human life: the king, the city, the palace, the personal god, the enemy etc. and that the whole interpretative system was a code waiting to be cracked by the expert diviner.

“A firm foundation”, a favoured expression in the omen texts, came about by a successfully conducted dialogue between the gods and the individual with the diviner acting as an interpreter. On this basis man could proceed towards happiness, success, and fulfillment, unimpeded by divine anger and will to punish.

The efforts towards a full understanding of this divinely ordained system of communication were directed on two fronts, firstly by eliminating from the ritual setting any human error or shortcoming and, secondly, by increasing the chance for the diviner of passing the exam which every extispicy posed for him.

To meet this intellectual challenge, data were collected in a manner which clearly demonstrates the Mesopotamian talent for order and organization.

As the study material increased, the rules of interpretation were refined and more emphasis was put on exactness and standardization in measuring, description, definition, and interpretation, and in this one observes a move towards a scientific method.

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\(^{68}\) Most noticeable is the Assurbanipal colophon to the extispicy texts in which the king claims to have been taught by Šamaš and Adad themselves, see H. Hunger, *Babylonische und Assyrische Kolophone, AOAT* 2 (Neukirchen 1968) no. 315 (type “1”).

\(^{69}\) For the Mari letters which contain details of extispicies, see Durand, *ARM* 26 I I (1988) 53.