THE TRANSMISSION OF LIVER DIVINATION FROM EAST TO WEST

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“The spread of hepatoscopy is one of the clearest examples of cultural contact in the orientalizing period. It must have been a case of East-West understanding on a relatively high, technical level. The mobility of migrant charismatics is the natural prerequisite for this diffusion, the international role of sought-after specialists, who were, as far as their art was concerned, nevertheless bound to their father-teachers. We cannot expect to find many archaeologically identifiable traces of such people, other than some exceptional instances.”

1. Introduction

Walter Burkert’s theory of freely moving craftsmen of verbal art and ritual technology bringing stories and magico-religious practices to the west in the orientalizing period (750-650 BCE) has caught the imagination of Classical scholars and been given great explanatory power in subsequent discussions of textual and cultural links across the Mediterranean. By simply referring to the theory as a given, Classical scholars have been able to avoid the questions of why and how, and to move directly to a discussion of the motifs or practices under consideration, using the Near Eastern sources to analyze Greek cultural artifacts. A re-examination of Burkert’s theory as a whole and his interpretation of its component parts is certainly overdue.

Key to Burkert’s argument concerning the role of itinerant diviners transmitting cultural features is the shared practice of liver divination. He argues, first, that parallels in the terminology of Greek and Akkadian hepatoscopy are evidence that the Greek hepatoscopic tradition was influenced directly by the Mesopotamian practice; secondly, he sees the bronze liver model found at Piacenza in Italy as directly related to the second-millennium Near Eastern liver models (he does not discuss the uninscribed terra cotta liver from Falerii Veteres); and finally, he argues that “migrant charismatics” brought the practice to the west. In this article I re-evaluate the evidence for liver divination in Greece, Rome, and the Near East, both going over evidence that has already been discussed and adding in new evidence. I


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will argue instead that we can distinguish three routes of transmission, one to
Greece, two to Italy, for the practice of liver divination, each with a different me­
chanism. One possibly extended from Anatolia to Italy at the turn of the second mil­
lennium BCE, as part of a migratory event. This one lies behind the Falerii liver
model. Another reached Greece between 750 and 530 BCE via southeast Anatolia
and/or Cyprus, probably through military contact. In a third phase during the Hel­
lenistic period, Etruscan hepatoscopy was influenced by the practices of Chaldean
seers, as shown by the Piacenza model.

I begin by critiquing the comparisons that have been made between the Greek
and Akkadian terminology, showing they in fact have little in common. However,
Greece cannot be claimed to have its own independent tradition because Homer is
unaware of liver divination.

I move on to a discussion of the relationship between the Near Eastern liver
models and the two Etruscan liver models. I side with those scholars who see a
west Anatolian origin for the Etruscans, suggesting that the immigrants brought
liver divination with them, and that the uninscribed Falerii liver is evidence for the
way in which Etruscan haruspicy was practiced before the major transformation
shown by the Piacenza liver, in which gods and areas of the heavens are associated
with areas of the liver. I bring in a hitherto neglected text that shows similar con­
nections, a Seleucid-era list from Uruk, and I propose that the connection between
the two separate arts of divination, astrology and extispicy, was a Near Eastern
innovation adopted by Etruscan haruspices.

I then turn to the materials found at Hattusa, which have not yet been brought
into the comparative discussion, exploring the relationship between liver models,
omen compendia, and oracle reports. The Hittite documents allow us to contrast
the relatively static Mesopotamian scribal tradition with hepatoscopy in action;
thus, liver divination provides an opportunity to explore the relationship between
written scholarly texts, which are our primary window into Mesopotamian culture,
and the orally transmitted practices that must have been the primary means by
which Mesopotamian practices, including liver divination, eventually reached the
Greeks. We can see that the orally transmitted technique of extispicy had already
begun to evolve away from the tradition as portrayed in the scribal compendia. I
argue that the most logical source for the Greek practice of liver divination was in
fact Anatolia, which served as a bridge between east and west, and retained into
the first millennium BCE many cultural features attested in the Late Bronze Age.
Finally, the role of liver divination in battle planning explains how the practice was
transferred to Greece.

2. The Parallels in Terminology

The Mesopotamian compendia of protases describing particular formations of
the exta and apodoses referring to consequences in the "real world" are our main
source for the Akkadian terminology. They were systematized and eventually can­
onized into multi-chapter works with commentaries, beginning already in the Old
Babylonian period, but they are best attested from the Neo-Assyrian period. In the
compendia, models, and reports, the liver was primum inter paria, but the condi-
tion of all the exta was relevant, and models of lungs, intestines, and a spleen have been discovered.²

Ever since the relevant Near Eastern texts began to be published in the 1800’s, scholars have noted with interest the similarities between Greek and Etruscan liver divination on the one side and the Akkadian terminology used in the study of sheep livers and Akkadian liver models on the other.³ The Greek, Etruscan, and Akkadian traditions split the liver into favorable and unfavorable sides, which can also be considered one’s own and the enemy’s side.⁴ Missing features are highly inauspicious.⁵ In the Greek and Akkadian traditions a light color of the organ is good, and dark is bad,⁶ and key terms seem to coincide: “gate(s),” “head,” “path/road,” and “river.” Finally, the Etruscan and Akkadian liver models look quite similar, and the very fact that models were used by the two groups is a striking coincidence.⁷

However, the terminology and interpretations of signs are surprisingly similar to those found in contemporary extispicy as recorded by anthropologists,⁸ and thus the general similarities cannot be considered to prove a direct connection between Greek and Mesopotamian extispicy. For example, the presence of an inauspicious mark on the left or an auspicious one on the right are considered good signs in east Indonesian liver divination, as with the Mesopotamian tradition. The absence or deformity of a lobe is highly inauspicious.⁹ Terms such as “river” and “road” are


³ Nougayrol (1955: 511-12) and Jastrow (1907: 131-2) provide important early discussions of the terminology of the various traditions. Burkert (1992: 180-1, note 1), Meyer (1985: 107), and Pfiffig (1975: 115-17) provide further bibliography for the early comparative discussions. Thulin (1902-1909: Vol. 2) is still the most detailed study of Greco-Roman and Etruscan extispicy, but his comparative analysis (1902-1909: 2.33-5, 20-1), itself dependent on earlier discussions by Boissier (1905, and earlier articles), is long since out-dated. Blecher (1905) provides a convenient compendium of most relevant Greek and Latin passages. The particulars of Roman probatio and litatio (inspecting entrails to see if the gods are favorable) will not be discussed here; see Guillaumont (2006: 292-3, with earlier refs.). On the Akkadian terminology see Koch-Westenholz (2000: 38-70), Starr (1990: xxxvi-lv), and Jeyes (1989: 51-96). Other important studies of Mesopotamian extispicy include Starr (1983), Meyer (1987), Koch (2005), and Veldhuis (2006), while Cryer (1994: 168-80) gives a useful overview. On Sumerian hepatoscopy see Michalowski (2006).

⁴ On the Akkadian division into positive (right) and negative (left) sides see Koch-Westenholz (2000: 38-9). Greek: schol. Aesch. PV 484 “[C]ast out (eblētheisa) and shaken up (anatinageisa) towards the side of the enemy, (the gall bladder) indicated their defeat.” Etruscan: Cic. Div. 2.28, Liv. 8.9, Luc. Bell. Civ. 1.621-2; also Sen. Oed. 363.

⁵ Mesopotamian: Meyer (1987: 74); Greek: E. El. 827-9; Etruscan: Cic. Div. 2.32.


⁷ For pictures of the Akkadian models see Meyer (1987); for pictures of the Piacenza liver see van der Meer (1987), and his Fig. 71 for the Falerii model.

⁸ See Collins (2008) for more on the cross-cultural comparisons briefly discussed here.

used to describe parts of the intestine in Ethiopia, and bad omens located in such
places are metaphors for blocking of the path to the goal of the questioner. Furthermore, in Ethiopian extispicy color is evaluated in a similar manner to the Greek and Mesopotamian traditions.

The methods of analyzing the liver are certainly different. Greek reports (all literary texts) comment on the “gates” (pulai) along with the caudate lobe and gall bladder. On the other hand, Akkadian reports follow a standard sequence running counter-clockwise and starting with the manzâzum ‘presence’ or ‘station’, an impression on the left lobe left by the reticulum (one of the sheep’s four stomachs); then the padãnûm ‘path’, an impression of the abomasum; the danûnum ‘strength’, the ligamentum teres hepatitis; the bab ekallim ‘gate of the palace’ or abullim ‘city gate’, the umbilical fissure; the subûnum ‘well-being’, a feature on the quadrate lobe; the gall-bladder; the nîð(i) kussim ‘base of the throne’, situated near the caudate lobe; the caudate lobe; the bab ekallim ‘gate of the palace’ or abullim ‘city gate’, the umbilical fissure; the sulûnum ‘well-being’, a feature on the quadrate lobe; the gall-bladder; the nîð(i) kussim ‘base of the throne’, situated near the caudate lobe; the caudate lobe; the sibtûm ‘increment’ or processus papillaris, and the nûrum ‘yoke’ or omasal impression.

When we compare more closely the Akkadian and Greek terminology, only the Greek term “gates,” referring to the porta iecoris, seems to match the Akkadian “palace gate,” the umbilical fissure extending down to the porta iecoris, through which the portal vein and bile ducts enter the liver.

Other terms, although similar, clearly do not refer to the same feature. The Latin term caput ‘head’ refers specifically to the caudate process, which is called lôbos ‘lobe’ in Greek and ubânûm ‘finger’ in Akkadian. The Akkadian term rûšûm ‘head’ does not refer to a particular feature, but distinguishes the top part of a feature, as opposed to the middle or base. The references to the caudate lobe in the Greco-Roman tradition indicate that it signifies the client of the ritual, and a

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10 This fits with terms attested as thyoscopic signs in Hesychius such as akeleutha ‘pathless’, antistatès ‘opposer’, kôûtês ‘blocker’, desmon ‘fetter’, and with the Akkadian qû ‘thread’. See Koch-Westenholz (2000: 63) and Jeyes (1989: 91-2) on blocking filaments (qû) in Akkadian.
12 Arist. Hist. An. 496b32, Cic. ND 2.137, Hp. Anat. 3 viii 538 Littré, Poll. 2.215, see Skoda (1988: 98, 120-2). Pl. T. 71c: “... fear, pulling it together, makes the liver shriveled and rough with respect to the lobe and gall bladder (dokhai ‘receptacles’) and the gates, bending the one down from an upright position and blocking and closing up the others.” Leiderer (1990: 53) notes that a bent over left lobe is typical of young animals. Compare E. El. 827-9: “There was no lobe to the innards; the gates and the receptacles of bile revealed to the observer that evil assaults were immanent.”
15 Collins (2008) has enumerated a variety of essential differences between the systems of the Greek and the Akkadian diviner, although his intent was not necessarily to argue that the systems were unrelated. For differences between the traditions also see van der Meer (1987: 157-64). There are some forty terms for regions and marks on the liver in Akkadian, while Hesychius lists twenty (Blecher 1905: 180-1). See Nougayrol (1955: 512) for an attempt to match up terms other than those discussed here.
16 The caudate lobe contains the processus pyramidalis and the processus papillaris, which are depicted separately on the liver models (Meyer 1987: 82).
serious anomaly spells his doom, while a particularly large caudate lobe is a good omen. In Akkadian its connotations are very different, for the “finger” has multiple zones and symbolizes that which is “foreign and hostile,” “hidden or sinister”; two of its three sides are negative. The Greek “roads” (hodoi) apparently can also refer to the same feature as the “gates” (and always appears in the plural), and therefore cannot be the same as the Akkadian “path.” The portal vein, which is referred to in the Akkadian texts as the “river of the liver” (nār amūtim), may or may not be the same feature as the potamos ‘river’ referred to by Hesychius as a “sign on the liver,” but its attested name in Greek is “gate” in the singular.

One pair of terms is sufficiently unusual to tempt us to consider that it shows a real dependence of Greek terminology on Akkadian nomenclature: Greek “knife/sword” (makhaira) and Akkadian “weapon” (kakku). But, in Akkadian the kakku refers to one or more pointed excrescences, a fortuitous marking which can appear anywhere on the liver and “stands up like a peg,” symbolizing warfare, while the makhaira refers to a region of the liver. It appears first in (pseudo-)Rufus of Ephesus (second cent. CE): “The gate of the liver is the vein through which nourishment enters. Those things which in hepatoscopy they call gates (pulās), and table (trapezan), and knife (makhairan), and claw (onux) are also in a human, but unclear and not easy to see, and it serves no purpose for medicine that they be named” (Onomasiás tôn tou anthrōpou moriōn 158.4-8, ed. Darmemberg and Ruelle 1963). The fourth cent. CE astrologer Hephaestion of Thebes similarly mentions several parts of the animal liver, including “gates,” “head,” “paths,” “hearth” (hestiā̂), “table,” and “knife,” which is also called the “sickle” (drepāne) or “bulwark” (eruma) (Apotelesmatica 3.6.15-16, ed. Pingree 1973). The Byzantine physician Theophilos Protopsaltari­os (sixth cent. CE) states that the four lobes of the human liver (left, right, caudate, and quadrate) had been named by a learned doctor “table,” “hearth,” “knife,” and
"driver" (hēniokhos) (Peri tēs tou anthrōpou kataskeuēs 2.13). What the similarity of the two terms, "weapon" and "knife," in the two traditions tells us is that both were pre-occupied with questions of personal safety and warfare.

An investigation of the terminology and procedure thus provides no evidence of systematic borrowing of the Mesopotamian system by the Greeks. On the other hand, we cannot postulate that the Greeks had a long-standing unrelated, or only distantly related, tradition of their own, because of Homer's complete ignorance of hepatoscopy. First of all, as M. L. West has shown, the thuoskopos mentioned at Il. 24.221 and Od. 21.145, 22.318-323 inspected smoke from a sacrifice, not signs on the liver, as has often been argued. While in later Greek literature, the term thuea develops a broader meaning, when Homer uses it he only refers to burnt offerings (Il. 6.270, 9.499-500, Od. 15.261).

However, omens do play an important role in the Iliad, creating tension between what the audience and gods know and what the mortal characters think they know, and one key case has been shown to draw on the earlier eastern Mediterranean epic tradition, while eliminating any reference to extispicy. Hector's repudiation of the sage advice of his seer Poulydamas in Iliad 12.230-42, which marks the beginning of the end for the Trojan hero, bears a remarkable resemblance to a passage in the Akkadian Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin, using strikingly similar wording, but, while Naram-Sin repudiates the results of extispicy, Hector speaks of brontoscopic and augural signs. This implies a real lack of familiarity with the practice on the part of the Homeric tradition. It appears that extispicy was not practiced in western Anatolia in the Archaic period, although the Arzawan tradition of augury appears to have continued to thrive.

Once Homeric epic is eliminated, the first evidence for liver divination in Greece begins in 530 BCE with representations in Greek art, and the first literary mention is in Aeschylus (PV 484-500). The question then to be answered is, how did the Greeks learn of hepatoscopy in the interval between the composition of the Homeric texts and 530 BCE, if they did not borrow it directly from Mesopotamia? Before we answer that, we turn to the Near Eastern background of the Etruscan liver models.

3. Mesopotamian and Etruscan Liver Models

Clay liver models have been found in at least fourteen sites in the Near East, concentrated especially in north Syria and at Hattusa. The interpretation of the models demanded an already well-developed tradition, and some of the 32 models found in Mari, which are among the earliest (ca. 1875 BCE, Middle Bronze Age),

25 See Jastrow (1907: 132).
30 Meyer (1987) is the chief work on liver models, see esp. 1-51, 266-71, 273 for an overview, also Meyer (1990: 242-8; 1993a: 532-5).
are inscribed with protases and apodoses, some relating their configurations to historical events, others drawing on the same ideas found in the compendia.31 While some inscribed liver models were clearly teaching texts, others, especially those that bear no inscriptions at all, but only markings of the features, seem to be oracle reports.32 There are two inscribed examples that date to the first millennium, both unprovenanced, an “orientation liver” (BM 50494) divided into many small zones and completely covered with inscriptions indicating right and left in each region,33 and KAR 444 from Assur, not a liver model per se but a drawing of a liver with inscriptions on one side of a tablet and a drawing of a lung on the other. Liver models with only markings, no writing, are found at Bronze Age Ebla, Hazor, Megiddo, Mumbaqqat, Tell el-Hajj, and Ugarit. Ugarit has also provided four oracle report models with alphabetic cuneiform writing and some unique inscribed models carved out of ivory.34 One important, relatively late, uninscribed example dating to the eleventh or twelfth century BCE has been found in Cyprus at Enkomi.35

Across the Mediterranean in Italy two liver models have been found, in Piacenza and Falerii Veteres. Because of the marked differences between the Piacenza and Falerii livers, it has frequently been suggested that the two livers represent two different streams of influence from the Near East.36

The uninscribed terra cotta Falerii liver, which can be dated prior to the destruction of the old city in 241 BCE, is quite similar to the second-millennium uninscribed models from the Near East, although it is somewhat bigger, being natural size. It bears marks showing the creases made by the pressure of other internal organs on the liver (the Akkadian manzáhum ‘presence’, or the impression left by the reticulum, and the Akkadian padámum ‘path’, or the abomasal impression).

Some of those who see a significant resemblance between the Falerii liver and the Near Eastern liver models have suggested that the Etruscans brought the tradition with them when they migrated from Anatolia, rather than looking to Mesopotamia or north Syria.37 The evidence pointing to an Anatolian origin for the Etruscans is actually quite good. Along with Herodotus’ claim of a “Lydian” origin for

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32 Meyer (1987: 7-17, 265-71)
33 BM 50494 and other unpublished “orientation livers” are discussed by Nougayrol (1968).
36 Meyer (1985: 107-10; 1987: 270) has argued most cogently for separate sources for the Piacenza liver and the liver from Falerii Veteres, one from capitalize late Bronze Age Syria, and the other in the Hellenistic period. He is followed by M. Haase in Brill’s New Pauly, “Haruspices C. Etruscan Records” (5.1156-8). Nougayrol (1955: 515-17) points out that the clay Falerii liver is considerably more similar to the Near Eastern models than the Piacenza liver is. But, the similarities in the stylization of the models noted by Nougayrol can be attributed to the exigencies of depicting the parts of the liver clearly in clay. See van der Meer (1987: 153) on the significant differences in the depictions of the “path” and “station,” arguing that there are too many differences between the models for them to be related (1987: 163-4).
37 Jastrow (1911: 192; 1907: 130); Meyer (1985: 110-14), connecting them with the ts listed among the “Sea Peoples” in the Medinet Habi inscriptions of Ramesses III; and Beekes (2003b: 32). In contrast Dumézil (1970: 628-32, 656-7), although he advocated an Anatolian origin for the Etruscans, discounted any direct connection with Anatolian extispicy. Magness (2001) argues that liver divination arrived in Italy with Near Eastern immigrants in the Italian orientalizing period of the seventh century BCE.
the Tyrsenoi, there were pockets of Tyrsenoi in western Anatolia, and the seventh-century inscriptions found on the island of Lemnos are written in a language clearly related to Etruscan. A detailed exposition of the evidence for the “oriental” origin of the Etruscans has been made most recently by Beekes. Some of his arguments are rather tendentious, but Beekes does critique effectively the modern theories that the Tyrsenoi in northwest Anatolia and the outlying islands are recent arrivals, since there are too many different sites, many in less than prime land for new settlers; or that Etruscan, Lemnian, and possibly Raetic are remnants of a far-flung very ancient language family, since that would require a time depth of some 2500 years for the division into separate languages, which is not supported by the relatively close similarities between the three languages in question. In addition, the Tyrrhenian languages share areal features with the Anatolian languages in phonology, morphology, and morphosyntax. And, there seems to be a connection between the Luwian Storm-god Tarhunt (“the powerful/victorious one”), the Etruscan name Tarquinius (cf. Tarquinius Superbus), and the Etruscan founding hero Tarchon, significantly the first human to learn divination. Finally, genetic studies of Etruscan cattle, human mitochondrial DNA, and the Y chromosome have supported the Anatolian origin of the Etruscans.

The Tyrsenoi who came to Italy would have been pushed out when the Phrygians, among others, invaded Anatolia from the west near the beginning of the Dark Ages. These same invaders may have also displaced the Lydians from the region around Troy, pushing them into Classical Lydia. In fact, the locations of the sites at which Tyrsenoi are attested in the Classical period indicate that they themselves were located around Troy in the Late Bronze Age. An arrival during

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38 Hdt. 1.57; D. H. 1.25-30, arguing against the theory; Str. 5.2.4 (Lemnos); Th. 4.109 (Tyrrhenians in Lemnos).


40 See Rix (1968) on the relationship between Lemnian and Etruscan, Rix (1998) on the relationship between Raetic and Etruscan, and further van der Meer (2004, with a review of the literature) on the Tyrrhenian language family, arguing for a date of 900-700 BCE for the differentiation of Raetic and Etruscan, and refuting the theory of de Simone (1996) that the Lemnians represent a west to east migration.

41 Noted briefly by Watkins (2001: 50-1, 56) and discussed in some detail by Bachvarova (2007), who focuses on the similarities between Hurrian Suffitzaufnahme; Anatolian genitival adjectives, especially in Luwian and Lydian; and double case marking in the Tyrrhenian languages. Areal features – or linguistic features shared by languages in a particular geographical area whether or not the languages are genetically related – are products of contact-induced convergence. Attempts to show a genetic link between the Tyrrhenian languages and the Indo-European Anatolian languages (Georgiev 1962; 1964; 1967; Adrados 1989; 1994; Woudhuizen 1992; 1998; also see most recently Steinbauer 2011) are less convincing (Carruba 1977; Neu 1991; Beekes 1993).


44 As argued by Beekes (2003a; 2003b). See map in Beekes (2003b: 6). It is of course very tempting to connect the place-name Tanuisa, which appears in the Middle Hittite Annals of Tushpa I/II as one of the members of the west Anatolian Assuwa confederacy (KUB 23.11 ii 14-19, translit. and trans. Carruba 2008: 36-7), and is usually equated with Troia, to the Tyrsenoi (so Meyer 1985: 115), an equation which would have far-reaching consequences for the prehistory of the Aeneas legend (Beekes 2003b: 45-7, 56). See Briquel (1991: 487-8, with earlier refs.) on Etruscan connections to Aeneas in the Aeneid.
the transition between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age roughly coincides with the dating provided by the Etruscans' *saecula*, which indicates that their society began anew around 1100 BCE.46

In contrast to linguists, most scholars who work on Etruscan art and culture do not espouse the theory of eastern origin for the Etruscans. Certainly it is best to look for the beginnings of the characteristic Etruscan culture within Italy,47 even while we accept that their language and some customs came from Anatolia. It may be appropriate to link these newcomers to Italy with the beginning of the proto-Villanovan culture, but it is possible to argue for the indigenous roots of proto-Villanovan. In any case lack of archaeological evidence is not probative, since languages, genes, and culture are not as tightly connected as one might expect, and, with the right social conditions, a relatively small group of people can impose their language on a large area, while linguistic and even perceived cultural differences do not necessarily leave a trace on the archaeological record.48

The appearance of cremation with the proto-Villanovan culture, although it has been compared to the use of cremation in the Late Bronze Age Urnfeld culture of central Europe, does not necessarily signal the arrival of a new people from the north;49 moreover, cremation was also practiced in Anatolia.50 The arrival of Etruscan-speakers should certainly not be connected to the seventh-century BCE orientalizing period in Italy.

The Falerii liver therefore could represent a form of hepatoscopy that arrived directly from Anatolia around the end of the second millennium BCE. The Tyrsenoi, however, did not get their tradition from the Hittites, for, as will be discussed later, the Hittites did not use uninscribed models. A more likely source would have been Cyprus or possibly Ugarit, where uninscribed models have been found. While there is not an abundance of evidence for contact in the Bronze Age between southwest Anatolia and Cyprus, at least the New Hittite *Indictment of Madduwatta* claimed that the west Anatolian leader had attacked Alasiya, so there was more or less direct communication between west Anatolia and Cyprus.51

The bronze Piacenza liver, on the other hand, shows instead clear Hellenistic influence. The Piacenza liver, dating to after the second half of the second century BCE,52 has marks for the abomasal impression and impressio reticularis like the Falerii liver. It is also inscribed with the names of gods inside delineated zones, a configuration matching the Etruscan division of the sky into zones assigned to

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46 On the beginning of the first Etruscan *saeculum* coinciding with their departure from Anatolia see Wainwright (1959: 199). The ninth *saeculum* ended in 44 BCE, and each *saeculum* was somewhere between 100 and 120 years.

47 Pallottino (1975: 64-81) made the point that the origin of Etruscan culture can only be found in Italy, and he has been followed most recently by Moser (1996), Barker and Rasmussen (1998: 83), Haynes (2000: 1-2), and Briquel (2000), who has also discussed thoroughly (if tendentiously) the ancient theories of Etruscan origins (Briquel 1991).


particular gods, applied in brontoscopy and fulgaroscopy. The inscriptions that appear on the Akkadian liver models, on the other hand, refer to the anomalies illustrated. Thus, the Piacenza liver reveals a very different system to that attested in the Bronze Age Near Eastern inscribed liver models.

However, we can see a close connection between the system of the Piacenza liver and that of a Seleucid (post 312 BCE) list from Uruk which equates liver parts with gods, months, and constellations, following the standard order for inspection of the liver. For example, “The Path (corresponds to) Shamash, the month Ayyaru (gu₄-su-sa) [April-May], the Bull of Heaven (Taurus), ... the Strength (corresponds to) Ninurta, the month Dumuzu [SU = du’ ēzu, June-July], the Crab (Cancer), the Plow-star, the Heroic, Sulpae [i.e., Jupiter].” Outside of Mesopotamia, “Chaldaean” seers versed in astronomy, weather signs, dream interpretations, and rituals to forestall the results of bad omens had come to dominate the market. With astrology on the rise in the Hellenistic period, and the prestige of hepatoscopy perhaps decreasing, an attempt was made to connect the two fields of knowledge. The Piacenza liver model shows that the disciplina etrusca, which already had connected zones of the heavens with particular gods, followed the new trend, connecting gods to zones of the liver. An awareness that interpretation of entrails varied according to region – a subject of comment by Cicero – and competition between practitioners for clients set the stage for the new developments in Etruscan haruspicy. Maggiani has already tried to argue that Chaldaean astrology left its mark on Etruscan haruspicy. While van der Meer effectively refuted the connections Maggiani drew between the Etruscan gods named on the Piacenza liver and specific planets, SpTU IV, 159 proves that there was a grain of truth in his theory. That


56 Oppenheim (1969: 124-6). But note that his remarks on the lack of direct attestation of the baru in the Neo-Assyrian period were in large part answered by Starr (1990: xxx-xxxv), and see Reiner (1995: 74-7) on the continuing importance of the haruspex through the Neo-Assyrian period. We can see that in the Seleucid period astrologers are well-attested as temple staff (McEwan 1981: 15-21), but the rarity of mentions of the baru is not surprising, since he was not necessarily attached to temples.

57 Div. 2.28. His reference to Egyptian extispicy and the claim by Herodotus (2.57) that they invented it were not based on fact; see the overview of Egyptian divination by Cryer (1994: 169).

58 See Briquel (1990) on the connection made between the legendary Greek seer Calchas and haruspicy, matched by the Greek grandfather named in the sepulchral inscription of the Etruscan haruspex Laris Pulenas (TLE 131, ed. Pallottino 1968), which shows that Etruscan seers were not as intent on claiming ethnic purity for their art as we might imagine from their claims that they invented it.

59 Maggiani (1982: 75-7).

60 Van der Meer (1987: 153-6).
the linking of astronomy and hepatoscopy was not an isolated phenomenon is shown by the connections made much later by Hephaestion of Thebes (b. 380 CE) between parts of the exta and stars and planets.  

4. Extispicy in Anatolia

The previous discussion has shown that the hepatoscopic tradition made its way west in at least three different eras: the tradition represented by the Falerii model arrived in Italy relatively early, possibly around 1100 BCE from Anatolia with the Tyrsenoi. Some elements of the tradition behind the Piacenza liver were incorporated later in the Hellenistic period, through Chaldaean seers or in response to their prestige. The Greeks learned of liver divination between 750 BCE, the earliest reasonable date for Homer, and 530 BCE. In order to determine how the Greeks were introduced to extispicy, it is necessary to look more closely at the Hittite evidence, which provides the earliest attestation of extispicy in Anatolia. Then, I will argue for transmission to the Greeks via Anatolia.

The unusually abundant Hittite material, which covers all three categories of sources, allows us to separate out several different strands of the hepatoscopic tradition and reveals the differences between the scholarly written tradition represented by inscribed "teaching models" or omen compendia, and extispicy in practice. Any evidence pertaining to the real-world practice as opposed to esoteric scribal lore is particularly valuable because it is unlikely that the omen compendia and inscribed liver models that are our main source for the Near Eastern tradition played any role in its transmission to the west before the Hellenistic period, as evinced by the complete lack of probative correspondence between the various systems. And after all, seers certainly could not have taken with them the multi-tablet compendia to consult on military campaigns. Some of the compendia are more theoretical than practical, using wordplay and abstract generalizations and describing impossible physical characteristics. The esoteric theoretical constructs of such compendia contrast with the oracle queries and reports, which reflect extispicy in action. The much more rarely attested real-life practice, which we can glean from oracle reports and the like, would have continued to adapt to new circumstances and world views, creating the marked differences in how particular configurations were interpreted, as noted in the first century BCE by Cicero (Div. 1.2-3, 90-94, 2.28).

The chief attested patron of the Mesopotamian diviner (bārû) was the king, and he was indispensable on a military campaign or anywhere there was likely to be

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62 I acknowledge the fact pointed out by a skeptical van der Meer (1987: 163) that the earliest attestations of hepatoscopy in Italian art are 450/400 BCE.


64 See the Neo-Assyrian reports collected in Starr (1990).
interaction with the enemy. He could, however, be employed by anyone who had the means, and Akkadian reports from the Old Babylonian to the Neo-Assyrian periods show that, although the apodoses of omen compendia focus on illnesses and especially on military issues, in actual practice a variety of questions about the future were posed. The written tradition and oral tradition must have been maintained side-by-side, since some reports contain protases and apodoses not attested in the compendia, and diviners, when asked to pose a question not covered by the apodoses in compendia, could certainly reason out an answer for themselves.

The Hittite material provides the earliest evidence, although conveyed by learned scribes, of an orally communicated north Syrian/southeast Anatolian tradition of extispicy diverging from the Mesopotamian one. Extispicy is well-attested in the Hittite capital with omen compendia, oracle results, and inscribed liver models, of which have been published so far, the most from any one site. The models (CTH 547) are found primarily in the king’s citadel of Büyükkale but also in the archives next to the Great Temple. At least three of the liver models are written in Old Script (KBo 9.67, 25.1, KUB 37.223); these have Akkadian protases and Hittite apodoses translated from the Akkadian by native Hittite speakers with a less than perfect grasp of Akkadian. The models that are written in Akkadian only are later in date. All belong to the category of teaching text rather than oracle result, with the key omens marked and then explained.

There are some seven extispicy omen compendia, with duplicates, in Akkadian, Hittite, or Akkadian with a Hittite translation on the same tablet. Some forty small fragments of Hurrian omen compendia are also extant. Most are New Hittite, but some are Middle Hittite and even Old Hittite. One New Hittite compendium concerning the “presence,” or reticular impression, stands out because it includes a couple of Hurrian terms and its – unfortunately lacunose – colophon names a Hurrian scribe Kušitesupa in three successive lines, then the north Syrian region Nuhaššē, with utjer (?) in the final line: “they brought from Nuhaššē (the tablet from which this tablet was copied/translated)” (?). A New Hittite translation of

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69 Meyer (1987: 38-44), Güterbock (1987: 157); also see the transliterations and translations collected in Riemschneider (2004). Meyer (1987: 50; 1993a: 534-5) notes that it is unusual to find models in a temple context as at Hattusa and suggests that this is because recorded Hittite religion was in the service of the king and magico-religious practices permeated every part of royal life.
72 The Hurrian omen texts are collected and discussed in de Martino (1992, ChS I/7), and see Wilhelm (2010) on a newly classified fragment, Bo 2002/08. On the debate over whether any of the Hurrian omen texts can be classified as Old Script, see Klinger (2001: 202), Miller (2004: 463-4, note 773), and Wilhelm (2010).
another compendium that substitutes the Hurrian god Kumarbi for Enlil indicates that a Hurrian intermediary was involved in transmitting other compendia as well.\footnote{KUB 4.1 iv 24', translating Enlil from 22' (translit. and trans. Riemschneider 2004: 44-5).} Furthermore, among the other types of omen compendia of Babylonian origin in Akkadian, Hittite, and Hurrian, which include omens of birth defects, dreams, meteorological events, earthquakes, and lecanomancy (oil in water), the partially preserved colophon of a Middle Hittite (?) fragment of a moon omen compendium mentions the same Hurrian scribe Kuziteššub in two successive lines (\(\text{x-zi-}^4\text{U-up}\)) and then Nuhašše in the final line.\footnote{KUB 8.29 iv 1'-3' (translit. Riemschneider 2004: 97). De Martino (2011: 33, 56) does not discuss the dating of this tablet in his discussion of Kuziteššub as a scribe of the Empire period. The Hurrian tablet KUB 8.47, of Old Hittite date, was analyzed as consisting of a moon omen list in column i and a list of gall bladder omens in column ii (see Kammenhuber 1976: 156-7; Archi 1982: 281), but de Martino’s edition (1992: 35-6, No. 6) makes clear that the entire tablet is devoted to gall bladder omens, so we do not have an example here of the two types combined in a single text.} This indicates that the original tablet that lay behind the New Hittite copy of the compendium about the “presence” was brought from Nuhašše at the same time as the moon omen compendium (or its Vorlage) attributed to Kuziteššub.\footnote{Also see Kammenhuber (1976: 83-4).} It was not normal for an Akkadian bārû to do celestial observation,\footnote{On the forms of divination practiced by the btiru, see Jeyes (1989: 15-16) and Veldhuis (2006: 489).} so it is surprising to see the same man presenting the terminology of two separate disciplines.

The results of extispicy, or SU-oracles, which are attested from the Middle and New Hittite periods, represent the procedure in action. The results involve the exta as a whole with special emphasis on the liver. They record questions asked by the king or a subordinate who had received his permission to consult the oracle, with a focus on anger of the gods or the dead, with reference to politics, military affairs, and illness.\footnote{Beal (2002: 80-1), Liu (1997: 119-26), Schuol (1994a: 88; 1994b: 303), Gurney (1981: 150-1). On the term SU ‘flesh’(?), see Beal (2002: 59) and Schuol (1994a: 88). Van den Hout (1998) and Unal (1978) provide editions and discussions of two sets of enquiries.} The practitioners, labeled \(\text{L}^0\text{HAL}\),\footnote{The Hittite diviner was always referred to with a Sumerogram, usually \(\text{L}^0\text{HAL} ‘seer’\), occasionally AZU (\text{NIINDAxNUN}) ‘magician, exorcist’ (Kammenhuber 1976: 130-42); he also supervised a variety of purification rituals, many Hurrian-derived.} came from Cilician Kizzuwatna, as shown by the terminology of the reports, for, as is typical for Kizzuwatnean texts and practices, they use Hurrian terminology that shows traces of being transmitted by Luwian-speakers.\footnote{Schuol (1994a; 1994b) presents a study of the terminology used in the reports based on one important Middle Hittite example. She suggests that several technical terms show Luwian influence (Schuol 1994a: 101; 1994b: 260-3, 288, 304). Although some of her specific analyses can be questioned, others are quite secure: zihi(t)-lipšiman ‘damaged gall bladder’, a Hurrian-derived Luwian neuter t-stem noun and Luwian participle, or ZE lipšiman ‘?ed gall bladder’ (Beal 2002: 62, n. 42); kiššit, ‘throne’, another Hurrian-derived Luwian t-stem noun and participle, or \(\text{adani-}\text{Hurr.} \text{adani} + \text{Luw.} \text{t-stem affix, converted to Hitt. a-stem; puḫunu-ḫiman} ‘tied-?’\), with Luw. participle, or puḫunuḫiman, Luwian noun (so \text{CHD ad loc}; \\text{irkipelli with Luw. -lli- suffix.})} While most of the terminology is traceable to the Mesopotamian tradition, there are some new terms, and the order in which the parts were read is different.\footnote{Schuol (1994b: 259, 304), correcting Starr (1983: 77-8).} The
questions asked of the oracles and the procedure by which the questions were posed and the results were recorded also differ somewhat from Akkadian enquiries. For, while the Akkadians focused particularly on learning about appropriate courses of action in the future, reading the liver as a palm-reader would a human hand and possibly deciphering information not related to the particular request that motivated the examination of the organ, the Hittites asked a series of specific yes or no questions one by one, often enquiring whether the gods or the dead were angry about a sin of omission or commission and what reparation they demanded. By the New Hittite period other methods of divination in the hands of other types of specialists were used to cross-check the oracle results. The method of writing reports also differs, with abbreviated one-syllable notations for features frequently used in the New Hittite period, as the recording procedures were systematized. The results are simply defined as either “favorable” (SIG) or “unfavorable” (NU.SIG).

Although a major part of the written tradition concerning extispicy at Hattusa, if not all of it, came by way of the Hurrians, it was not a unitary tradition borrowed once, and the actual practice of extispicy followed yet another line of transmission. How the liver models fit in is unclear, although they may be divided into two groups, one early and one later. The Hurrian compendia are too fragmentary to permit any conclusions as to their relationship to the oracle results, but some at least predate the Middle Hittite phase of Hurrian influence from Kizzuwatna. At least some of the Hittite compendia derive from a textual tradition directly imported from north Syria. However, the practitioners responsible for the reports we have came from Kizzuwatna, or were trained by practitioners from there.

I suggest that the extant omen compendia from Hattusa were not used to teach the diviners whose reports are preserved. Rather, the compendia would have been used to teach the relevant terminology to the scribes who would note down the results. Some of the apodoses of the omen compendia, mentioning such specifics as “the king dies” or “the sick man dies,” resemble their Mesopotamian counterparts more than the oracle results do. But, they use Sumerograms in place of writing out the Hurrian terms, as the reports do. The reports thus hew more closely to the terminology of the compendia than to their interpretations of the anatomical configurations. All the evidence indicates that the diviners dictated the results rather than wrote them down themselves; the answers are described as learned “through”

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83 In the Neo-Assyrian reports collected in Starr (1990), the protases echo those of compendia and are often matched by apodoses drawn from omen compendia, but they may simply state, like the Hittite ones, “favorable” or “unfavorable.” See also Starr (1983: 107-21) reviewing reports from the Old Babylonian to the Neo-Assyrian periods, Koch-Westenholz (2000: 12-13) for the use of “favorable” and “unfavorable” in Akkadian reports, and Beal (2002: 59-64, 80-1) for the Hittite ones.
85 Wilhelm (2010: 630).
86 Schuol (1994a: 86-7) notes the differing channels for compendia and practitioners.
or "from" (IŠTU) the practitioners, whether an "Old Woman," a LUGAL, or augur, and the scribe assembled the various answers, writing up a summary of the set of procedures used to answer a series of questions. The scribe therefore would need to know the specialized terminology for all the procedures, explaining why one scribe would write down both a set of moon omens and a set of extispicy omens. The focus for the scribe was less on learning what the configurations meant; rather, what was important was the correct terminology, Sumerograms, and abbreviations; thus, the apodoses of the compendia follow the conventional Mesopotamian interpretations, but are not used in the oracle reports, which record the practitioners' interpretations of "favorable" or "unfavorable," following their own separate teaching tradition.

This orally transmitted tradition of extispicy survived, I argue, the fall of the Hittite empire, and continued to evolve over time, until the Greeks came into contact with it in the first millennium BCE. The most logical route was via southeast Anatolia or nearby Cyprus. In the first millennium, southeast Anatolia, which shows some continuity of culture from the Late Bronze Age, had many sites internationally famed for divination, ranging from dream interpretation to lots and observations of animal behavior. Two cities named Telmessos, one in Lycia and one in Caria, were noted for extispicy, and according to Tacitus the clan of Tamiras brought extispicy from Cilicia to Paphos in Cyprus, where it was taken over by the priests of Aphrodite's temple, who belonged to the clan of Cinyras, a legendary king whose west Semitic name reflects Late Bronze Age contacts between Cyprus and north Syria. At the very least, Tacitus' story shows that the Paphians were aware that

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89 For example, KUB 50.6+ ii 46-7 (translit. and trans. van den Hout 1998: 182-3). Augury can also be framed as a report from a named individual: UMMA "Piyammu SI×SA-at=wa "Thus, Piyammu: 'It was ascertained.'" (KUB 16.46 iv 12, translit. and trans. van den Hout 1998: 154-5).

90 Lebrun (1995; 1998), Bachvarova (forthcoming), and Rutherford (forthcoming).

91 On the two sites named Telmessos see Harvey (1991). There is no evidence from either site of extispicy, only of other types of divination (Lebrun 1990: 187-8, 190-2), but Hsch. s.v. pilai, specifically refers to their skill (see note 20). On Cypriot extispicy, see Tac. Hist. 2.3 (Cypriots use pigs), Paus. 6.2.4 (Cypriots use pigs), Cic. Div. 1.2, 1.91, 1.25, Tatian Oratio ad Graecos 1.1 (Cypriots are famed for their hepatoscopy); Suidas s.v. thuein (Burkert 1992: 49). Cinyras first appears in II. 11.20-8, mentioned as having given Agamemnon an elaborately worked breastplate as a guest-gift. On Cinyras in Homeric sources, see West (1997: 628-9). He becomes the father of Adonis in later sources (Ov. Met. 10.270-502, Apollod. Bib. 3.182). The name Cinyras has been connected to kinnaru/kinor, the west Semitic term for lyre, and Franklin (2006) puts the legendary figure in the wider context of the supralocal song culture of the Late Bronze Age. Neumann's suggestion (1961: 36-7) that the name Tamiras is related to the Hittite temple functionary dammara is unlikely. Dammara-women (and one man, if this is not an error) were mentioned in oracular questions addressing their misconduct (citations in Pecchioli Daddi 1982: 397-8), but they did not carry out oracular inquiries. Unfortunately, the frequently repeated claim that "Assyrian hepatoscopy was practiced at Tarsos in Cilicia in the time of the Assyrians" (quoted from Burkert 1992: 48; also cf. Nouagayrol 1955: 511; Pfiffig 1975: 117) is less than conclusive. It is based on a small tablet (6.8 x 5.2 cm) published by Goetze (1939: 11-16, no. 8), apparently used as an amulet, as it has a hole through which a string could be passed, and is very worn on one side. It contains an incantation protecting the wearer against various evils, including "evil caused by haruspicia performed on deficient (or) unclean animals" (trans. Goetze 1939: 14, l. 5), cobbled together from a variety of known incantations. Lines 3-14 are drawn from the incantation Maqlû VII 123-9 (Goetze 1939: 4).
extispicy was practiced in Cilicia and wished to be affiliated with it. We, however, know from the uninscribed liver found at Enkomi that some parts of Cyprus had known the hepatoscopic tradition at the end of the second millennium. Most likely the tradition was imported from north Syria to Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age, for the letters found in Ugarit, where hepatoscopy flourished, show that it was in close contact with Alasiya in Cyprus, while the Enkomi liver model bears a close resemblance to the uninscribed models at Ugarit.93

Cultural continuity across the Dark Ages with increasing contact between Greeks and Anatolians in coastal Anatolia and the off-lying islands is the best way to explain how the Greeks learned of the practice, and a military alliance or confrontation was the most likely means, since the primary use of Greco-Roman liver divination in the Classical and Hellenistic periods was to determine battle tactics. Cicero (Div. 1.95) even comments that the Roman army could not make a move without consulting the haruspex, and the commander's dependance on his diviner is vividly portrayed in Xenophon's Anabasis. Because the bārū accompanied the army on campaign and had access to military secrets, he was a target for the enemy, who would try to cause him to defect or to capture him, and this concern is salient in the Akkadian sources.94 Alternatively, the diviner could have been sent as a "gift," just as people who possessed esoteric knowledge, doctors, augurs, and exorcists, were circulated among the elite in the Late Bronze Age, requested and sent from Babylon and Egypt to Ugarit, Hattusa, Tarhuntassa, and Cyprus.95

5. Conclusion

Although Classical scholars were right to argue that divination using sheep livers reached the Greeks and Romans from the Near East, the role of Anatolians in its transmission has been underplayed or misunderstood, in large part because the various mechanisms of transmission have not been properly explained or differentiated. We should focus on how hepatoscopy was actually used when discussing how it moved about, not on the learned esoteric scribal compendia, even though they are our primary sources for the practice. While the learned scribal compendia present us with an illusion of an unchanging methodology, the materials from Hattusa that give us a window into the orally transmitted practices show us that the use and methods of liver divination were altered over time, and the Greek and Etruscan practices show that hepatoscopy continued to develop in new directions as it moved into new places and was fitted into new systems of understanding the will of the gods. Finally, the focus has been on proving similarities, rather than on understanding how the tradition of hepatoscopy changed as it evolved over time in response to new milieus and changing conceptions of the relationship between

94 Jeyes (1989: 16-20, 23-4, 32-3, 35). Examples of diviners who were captured: AKA 351 iii 20 (see Liu 1997: 131), TCL 18.155: 26 ff. (see Renger 1969: 215); see CAD B:124 for other citations of diviners in the army, the danger of their being captured, and concern lest they betray secrets to the enemy.
humans and the divine. In fact, the similarities are not as probative as they seem at first glance, and the differences are key to understanding how its practitioners really worked.

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The transmission of liver divination from East to West


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**Abstract**

The connections between techniques of liver divination in Mesopotamia, Italy and Greece have long been recognized, but attention has not been paid to the significance of its regional differences. I argue that the Etruscans brought the technique with them when they migrated from Anatolia at the end of the Bronze Age, incorporating from Chaldean seers connections with astrology in the Hellenistic period, while the Greeks borrowed a much changed practice of hepatoscopy via east Anatolia or Cyprus after the Archaic period. The Hittite material allows us to see changes in progress, and to contrast the written evidence with actual practice.