

A history of ancient mesopotamia



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Divination of the Ancient Mesopotamians

To the Mesopotamians, everything was seen as divine. To the Mesopotamians, the world around them did not function without some form of supreme forces to make it function properly. Everything on earth was created by the gods and operated solely on their actions and will. According to Bottero there are two major type of divination in ancient Mesopotamia: inspired divination, in which it is seen as a revelation of the gods, and the other being deductive divination, in which it is only ' an mental activity of the people' (Bottero 125).

Bottero, however, does not discuss inspired divination any further than its introduction as it " is rather badly known and is confined to a few areas that are chronologically and geographically restricted." (Bottero 126). He also remarks that it does not seem to be typical for Mesopotamian civilization. The subject of deductive divination is quite prevalent from the ' beginning of the second millennium to the Seleucid period shortly before the Christian era'. Considering the vast amounts of data that have been preserved from that time period, Bottero deducts that deductive divination would have been the most common form of divination that is used and practiced.

The general conception behind deductive divination is a tricky one. What is important in understanding deductive divination is to ask how it (deductive divination) originated in ancient Mesopotamia. What is understood from it is enough to made general assumptions, ' with a high degree of probability' (Bottero 130), based on the similar elements found in recovered documents. It is understood that deductive divination originated as being entirely

empirical and based on 'a-posteriori observation'. This general understanding is derived from a large number of oracles found; unlike general conception, these oracles didn't deal with prophesizing and "looking in the future", instead they took events from the Mesopotamian history and assumed it would repeat itself.

For example: "If on the right side of the liver [of the sheep] there are two finger shaped [growths] it is the omen of a period of anarchy (in other words the period between 2198 and 2195, approximately, that preceded by some thirty years the fall of the dynasty of Akkad)" (Bottero 130). The famed 'liver models', which were only half a century later than the revolt (the rebellion against Ibbi-Sin (last king of the Third Dynasty of Ur)) (Bottero 131), which a liver model is said to have 'appeared', is formally associated with deductive divination.

There are some events recorded from these 'historical oracles' seems to indicate that some of these predicted events are somewhat authentic. One of the more impressive one's, according to Bottero, is the liver model from Mari (the example cited above). However, other than the impressive examples, there are many more that are shown to be very unimpressive examples in terms of lacking a necessary connection between the said events and the aspect of the omen in which they are supposed to be related. It is possibly, or better, safe to say that these oracles operated solely on coincidence and probability between the two.

It is known in ancient Mesopotamia that there was an interest in a phenomenon called portent, "unusual events that allowed the prediction of

something – sacrificers, when dissecting their victims, would take notice if the liver appeared to have a strange appearance.” (Bottero 131); and later, if an important event transpired in the country, the coincidence would be brought up, noted, and then stressed. The first phenomenon would then be seen as an announcement of the second phenomenon, and both would then be recorded as a prophecy so it may be seen again if the first phenomenon were to occur again. According to Bottero: “ The oldest layers of oracles have thus a very good chance of having been formed this way [the aforementioned way]: from an observance of a series of events that do not have any apparent link between them, but were noticed to have followed each other...” (Bottero 132).

Divination was also seen as a form of science to the Mesopotamians.

Divination in its own way, from the end of the third millennium, was seen as a ‘ real’ science that the need was seen to establish it in their Treatises; “ the Treatises were manuals of science that they wanted to make available to those who wanted to learn it...” (Bottero 135). This definition is also valid for many other disciplines among the ancient Mesopotamians.

The Treatises are manuals of casuistry. By looking further into the variable elements of similar objects, anyone (or for this period, any man) who observed these would acquire the sense of these laws without having to learn the abstract areas of them. The general idea that we are taught in this way that when we are little and our minds have yet to grasp the fundamental reasoning’s, and the abstract ways of arithmetic and grammar; we were under the impression that that we were made to learn the arts and sciences, mathematics, and grammar, such as the Mesopotamic Treatises. Making the <https://assignbuster.com/a-history-of-ancient-mesopotamia/>

existence of such works can stress the importance, and proof of the scientific character of divination.