

THE FIFTH ANNUAL UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO ORIENTAL INSTITUTE SEMINAR

SCIENCE & SUPERSTITION

INTERPRETATION OF SIGNS
IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

PROGRAM AND ABSTRACTS



The Oriental Institute
The University of Chicago
March 6-7, 2009

SCIENCE & SUPERSTITION

INTERPRETATION OF SIGNS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Organized by Amar Annus
The Oriental Institute – The University of Chicago

Program

Friday, March 6, 2009

- 8:15am Coffee
Introduction Breasted Hall, The Oriental Institute
9:00–9:15am Opening Remarks by Gil Stein, Director of the Oriental Institute
9:15–9:30 Amar Annus (Chicago)
“On the Beginnings and Continuities of the Mesopotamian Omen Sciences”

SESSION 1: THEORY OF SIGNS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Chair: Christopher Woods

- 9:30–10:00 Francesca Rochberg (Berkeley)
“‘If P, then Q’: Toward a Theory of Signs in Babylonian Divination”
10:00–10:30 James Allen (Pittsburgh)
“Reason and Experience in Ancient Greek Conceptions of Evidence and Inference”
10:30–10:45 Coffee Break
10:45–11:15 Ulla Susanne Koch (Copenhagen)
“A Cognitive Approach to Mesopotamian Divination”
11:15–11:45 Edward L. Shaughnessy (Chicago)
“Arousing Images: The Poetry of Divination and the Divination of Poetry in Early China”
11:45–12:15pm Discussion
12:15–1:45 Lunch

SESSION 2: HERMENEUTICS OF SIGNS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Chair: Robert Biggs

- 1:45–2:15 Eckart Frahm (New Haven)
“The Hermeneutics of Cuneiform Signs in Divination and Text Commentaries”

- 2:15-2:45 Scott Noegel (Seattle)
 “‘Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign’: Script, Power, and Interpretation in the Ancient Near East”
- 2:45-3:15 Nils Heeßel (Heidelberg)
 “The Calculation of the Stipulated Term in Extispicy Texts”
- 3:15-3:45 Coffee Break
- 3:45-4:15 Abraham Winitzer (Notre Dame)
 “The Divine Presence and its Interpretation in Early Mesopotamian Divination”
- 4:15-4:45 Clifford Ando (Chicago)
 “‘Everywhere is Full of God’: Tokens of Presence in Roman Cult”
- 4:45-5:45 Discussion
- 5:45-7:00 Reception: Oriental Institute Museum

Saturday, March 7, 2009

SESSION 3: HISTORY OF SIGN INTERPRETATION IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

- 8:30am Coffee
 Chair: Theo van den Hout
- 9:00-9:30am Seth Richardson (Chicago)
 “Believing is Seeing: Historicism and a ‘Created’ Old Babylonian Divinatory Literature”
- 9:30-10:00 Cynthia Jean (Brussels)
 “Divination and Oracles at the Neo-Assyrian Palace: The Importance of Signs in Royal Ideology”
- 10:00-10:30 JoAnn Scurlock (Chicago)
 “Prophecy as a Form of Divination; Divination as a Form of Prophecy: New Light on Sennacherib at Jerusalem and Nahum”
- 10:30-10:45 Coffee Break
- 10:45-11:15 John Jacobs (New Haven)
 “Traces of the Omen Series *šumma izbu* in Cicero’s *De divinatione*”
- 11:15-11:45 Ann Guinan (Philadelphia)
 “Response from a Cuneiform Scholar: Mesopotamian Omen Compendia from a Cognitive Perspective”
- 11:45-12:00 Respondent: Martti Nissinen (Helsinki)
 “Response from a Biblical Scholar: Prophecy and Divination”
- 12:00-12:30 Discussion

Abstracts & Bios

James Allen (Pittsburgh)

Title: “Reason and Experience in Ancient Greek Conceptions of Evidence and Inference”
(Friday, 10:00–10:30)

Abstract: Much of the debate in Greek antiquity regarding the proper use of evidence to draw inferences about the unknown fits comfortably within the framework defined by the opposition between rationalism and empiricism. This is hardly surprising. The distinction is a fundamental one, and the very terms we use, rationalist (*logikos*) and empiricist (*empeirikos*), go back to ancient Greece. Roughly speaking, empiricism holds that our knowledge of the world is restricted to what can be observed and perceived. This does not mean that we are confined to what is given to us in perception at any given moment and can draw no inferences from it. Long observation of the sequences and conjunctions obtaining among observable events permits us to frame empirical generalizations, which in turn underwrite inferences from present observations to observable but presently unobserved states of affairs past, present, or future. What is not possible, according to empiricism in the form in question, are inferences that extend our knowledge beyond the observable and rely on or contribute to an understanding of the causes underlying the patterns revealed in experience. By contrast, rationalism, while making a place for empirical knowledge, holds that human beings also possess a special faculty of reason affording insights into the nature of things, on the basis of which inferences to conclusions about matters beyond the reach of observation – inferences that also contribute to our understanding of the causes underlying what we observe – become possible. Once in place, a distinction as enormously useful as that between rationalism and empiricism comes to seem inescapable. There were, however, as I shall argue, views that resist classification as empiricist or rationalist. My principal exhibits will be certain pre-Socratic and Hippocratic authors and some later Epicureans who, if my argument is on the right lines, represent a kind of holdover from or throwback to an earlier era.

Bio: James Allen is professor of philosophy and a fellow of the Center for Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh. He has held a visiting appointment at Yale, been a visiting fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge, and a Stipendiat of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung at the Universität Hamburg. His principal interests are in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy. He is the author of articles about ancient conceptions of expertise, ancient scepticism, ancient medicine, Aristotelian logic, Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Cicero. He is the author of *Inference from Signs: Ancient Debates about the Nature of Evidence* (Oxford, 2001).

Clifford Ando (Chicago)

Title: “‘Everywhere is Full of God’: Tokens of Presence in Roman Cult” (Friday, 4:15–4:45)

Abstract: The actions of Roman religion rested upon the ability of humans to detect the gods, both the ongoing presence of the gods themselves as well as contingent communications from them. But Roman gods, in contrast to the gods of Greece, neither spoke nor appeared to humans in public cult. At times in Roman ritual, cult objects were treated as though they were the god, but that identity was never theorized

in antiquity, nor was it continually and regularly maintained. My aim is to treat a number of rituals, similar in form, in which the presence of the gods was ritually marked but enacted in quite different ways, and to ask of them how we should understand Roman conceptions of divine presence in cult

Bio: Clifford Ando is Professor of Classics and in the College at the University of Chicago. He is a historian of religion, law, and government in the Roman empire. He is the author of two monographs: *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), and *The Matter of the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Ando also edited the volume *Roman Religion* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2003).

Amar Annus (Chicago)

Amar Annus is the organizer

Title: “On the Beginnings and Continuities of the Mesopotamian Omen Sciences” (Friday, 9:15-9:30)

Abstract: In my presentation, a short history of the omen literature in ancient Mesopotamia and its legacy to the rest of the world is outlined. The wisdom of omens was often attributed to the antediluvian sages in Mesopotamia, which partly explains some apocryphal traditions about Old Testament patriarchs and the tradition of the seven sages of ancient Greece. The conditional clause of the omen formula is either similar or identical with literary formulae used in curses, law stipulations, proverbs, similitudes, and other kinds of wisdom literature. The conclusion of my paper insists that the vast corpus of the omen texts in ancient Mesopotamia represents both practical and metaphysical wisdom, which accounts for its popularity, spread, and long-lasting impact both inside and outside of its own culture.

Bio: Amar Annus is an Assyriologist, and currently a Postdoctoral Scholar at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. He received his MA from the University of Tartu (Estonia) in 1998 and his PhD from the University of Helsinki (Finland) in 2003. For the years 2003-2005 he worked in the Institute of Asian and African Studies at the University of Helsinki, compiling the Internet database for the Melammu Project, which studies the intellectual heritage of Assyria and Babylonia in the East and West (<http://www.aakkl.helsinki.fi/melammu>). He has scholarly interests in ancient Near Eastern religions and literature, and their legacy to the later world. He has written several articles on these topics. His major publications include two books, *The God Ninurta in the Mythology and Royal Ideology of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Helsinki, 2002) and *The Standard Babylonian Epic of Anzu* (Helsinki, 2001).

Eckart Frahm (New Haven)

Title: “The Hermeneutics of Cuneiform Signs in Divination and Text Commentaries” (Friday, 1:45-2:15)

Abstract: According to a famous etiology in the Sumerian Enmerkar epic, the main purpose of the cuneiform writing system was to accurately render spoken language and to enable communication over large distances. But the Babylonian and Assyrian scribes of the second and first millennia BC, especially those who dealt with divination and scholarship, believed that writing had a significance that transcended these functions. Diviners detected cuneiform signs, usually of archaic shape, in strangely formed grooves on the exta of sacrificial animals and interpreted them as indicators of future events. Experts in the art of

physiognomy saw such signs on the forehead of men and women and deduced from them whether the person so marked was a good candidate for promotion or marriage. Dream interpreters were confronted with nocturnal visions of messages conveyed to the sleeper by the gods in written form. And for the authors of exegetical treatises, who drew extensively on the polysemous character of cuneiform signs, the orthographic “fabric” of a text served as an important source for establishing additional layers of meaning. Not only etymology, but also “etymography” provided them with a hidden key to a true understanding of the Mesopotamian textual record. The goal of this paper is to investigate various examples of the way in which Babylonian and Assyrian scholars interpreted cuneiform signs and to place the phenomenon of etymography into the larger context of Mesopotamian “grammatology.”

Bio: Eckart Frahm (PhD Göttingen 1996, Habilitation Heidelberg 2007) has been an Assistant Professor of Assyriology at Yale since 2002 and a Professor since 2008. His main research interests lie in the fields of Assyrian and Babylonian history and Mesopotamian scholarly texts of the first millennium BC. His undergraduate courses at Yale have covered Mesopotamian history, religion, literature, and the Bible in its ancient Near Eastern setting. Frahm is the author of a book about the Assyrian king Sennacherib, published in the series *Beihefte des Archivs für Orientforschung* (Vienna), and of two books currently in press: a volume co-authored with Michael Jursa that provides autographs of two hundred Late Babylonian letters from ancient Uruk now in the Yale Babylonian Collection, and an edition of unpublished historical texts from Assur housed in the Vorderasiatisches Museum (Berlin). In addition, Frahm recently completed a monograph to appear in 2009 on Babylonian and Assyrian scholarly commentaries and the origins of ancient hermeneutics. Frahm has written numerous articles, encyclopedia contributions, and book reviews on topics including Sumerian royal inscriptions, the ancient reception of the Gilgamesh epic, Mesopotamian prophecy, and Babylonian prisons, as well as the history of modern scholarship on the ancient Near East. Before coming to Yale, Frahm was a research assistant for a project under the direction of Stefan Maul devoted to the reconstruction and publication of the cuneiform texts from the Assyrian capital of Assur (Iraq), and Assistant Professor of Assyriology at Heidelberg. He served in 2001 as epigrapher in the German excavations at Assur and has worked extensively in the collections of the British Museum in London and the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. In 2004, Frahm served as an instructor in a USAID-sponsored summer course for Iraqi archaeologists and Assyriologists held at the American Center for Oriental Research in Amman, Jordan.

Frahm is co-founder and editor, together with Michael Jursa, of the series *Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag), and subject editor for Assyriology of the series *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East* (Leiden/Boston: Brill). He serves as an external editorial advisor for the project “The Geography of Knowledge in Assyria and Babylonia” directed by Eleanor Robson (Cambridge University), and as a member of the advisory board of the *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archaeologie* (Berlin: De Gruyter). In 2007, he was elected Corresponding Member of the German Archaeological Institute.

Ann Guinan (Philadelphia)

Title: “Paradox and Praxis: Mesopotamian Omen Compendia from a Cognitive Perspective” (Saturday, 11:15–11:45)

Abstract: Divinatory scholarship occupied a place of prominence in Mesopotamian intellectual life. The investigation of ominous signs and the compiling of omen compendia were predicated on the understanding that links between signs and events, whether observed or construed, were systematic,

predictable, and accessible to assiduous scholarly scrutiny. Nevertheless, modern understanding of this process is limited. The preserved omens offer no intrinsic connection between sign and event and their meanings are often obscure. The texts that developed over time were not based on empirical observation and for the most part follow lines of reasoning that elude us. They become endlessly extensive and are characterized by an enormous accumulation of technical detail on subjects with no modern equivalence. We can observe the mechanisms by which sequences of omens were added to the texts as well as the positive and negative values of certain attributes, but meaning never accumulates, nor does a semantic hierarchy emerge. Further the documents delineate an autonomous signifying structure that seems to operate independently from the will of a specific god. Because of this, the compendia are difficult to reconcile with sources that relate to the actual practice of divination, specifically those that ritually appeal to a divine agency.

This paper argues that Mesopotamian divination has to be approached from a cognitive as well as an epistemological perspective. We need to look beyond Mesopotamia and examine the general at the process of divinatory cognition. Anthropologists who witness divination in action have studied the ways in which divinatory procedures can produce meaning that is credible and compelling. As a result, they have increasingly adopted cognitive approaches to account for the production of divinatory knowledge. In his summary essay in *African Divination Systems: Ways of Knowing* (Bloomington, 1991), Philip Peek argues that the defining feature of divinatory systems is the simultaneous utilization of synthetic-intuitive and analytic-logical modes of cognition. The idea that divination's effectiveness resides in the tension of opposing forces and overlapping modes of cognition has been frequently referred to, but never fully investigated. Barbara Tedlock's "Toward a Theory of Divinatory Practice" (*Anthropology of Consciousness* 17 [2006] 62-77) is the most sustained theoretical account. This approach has enormous potential for Mesopotamian sources and suggests ways of resolving some of the conceptual difficulties presented by the omen compendia.

Although derived from very different systems and cultures, these parallels nevertheless help us conceive of ways in which Mesopotamian omens might have been made to signify, how they achieved meaning and authenticity. These tools provide insights both into a general process of divinatory cognition and a specific Mesopotamian divinatory epistemology, the cognitive processes that help structure Mesopotamian omen compendia

Bio: Ann Guinan is a Research Associate at the Babylonian Section of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. She is an editor of the series, *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World* (Brill Academic Press), and is on the board of editors of *NIN-Journal of Gender Studies in Antiquity*. She is interested in comparative and theoretical approaches to divination. Her research deals with the Human Behavioral Omens of *šumma ālu* and is preparing a text edition of the third and final section of the omen compendium.

Nils Heeßel (Heidelberg)

Title: "The Calculation of the Stipulated Term in Extispicy Texts" (Friday, 2:45-3:15)

Abstract: Probably the most prominent divinatory technique in ancient Mesopotamia to get an answer from the gods for a specific question was extispicy. The result of an extispical inquiry, however, was not a truth that was valid for eternity. Instead, every extispicy had a specific time period for which the divination was valid. This "stipulated term," called *adannu* by the diviners, was defined in the question

of the extispicy itself, or it was calculated by the appearance of the finger of the liver. Several texts give detailed instructions for the calculation of the stipulated term as well as general rules for interpreting signs. They offer numerous possibilities to understand how signs on the complicated surface of the liver were evaluated, taken into account, or disregarded, and how the diviners established a yes-or-no result for the extispicy

Bio: Nils Heeßel received his PhD from the University of Heidelberg in 1999. Since 1998 he has been a researcher in “Assur-Forschungsstelle Heidelberg,” and he teaches at the seminary of ancient Near Eastern Studies at the same university. His main research interests lie in the religious history of the ancient Near East, especially in the medical and divination texts, and in Mesopotamian demonology. He is the author of several important text editions: *Babylonisch-assyrische Diagnostik* (Münster, 2000), *Divinatorische Texte I: Terrestrische, teratologische, physiognomische und oneiromantische Texte* (Wiesbaden, 2007); and the author of monographic study on the demon Pazuzu (2002). He is currently working both on diagnostic texts, and also on the Mesopotamian omen series *šumma ālu*, *šumma izbu* and extispicy omens from Assur. His new volume, *Divinatorische Texte III: Opferschau-Texte*, is in preparation.

John Jacobs (New Haven)

Title: “Traces of the Omen Series *šumma izbu* in Cicero’s *De divinatione*” (Saturday, 10:45–11:15)

Abstract: Divination plays a central role in the cultures, especially the political cultures, of both the ancient Near East and the ancient Mediterranean. Consequently, scholars have sought to identify points of similarity and difference which may prove whether any organic links exist between the two regions, for example, the Etruscans and Lydia. In this paper, I consider whether any evidence exists for the transmission of written collections of omens from Mesopotamia to ancient Rome. One of the most important of these omen collections from the ancient Near East is that known by its incipit as *šumma izbu*. The first tablet supplies a number of interesting omens related to human births which resemble those of animals, including the omen “If a woman gives birth to a lion, then the city will fall, and the king will be captured” (BE MUNUS UR.MAH U₃.TU URU.BI DAB-BAT LUBAL.BI LAL-MU) in 1.5. This very same omen reappears, first via Hittite and Ugaritic translations and then via Herodotus, in Cicero’s philosophical dialogue *On divination*: “If a woman dreams that she has given birth to a lion, then the state in which that has happened will be conquered by foreign nations” (*si mulier leonem peperisse visa esset, fore ut ab exteris gentibus vinceretur ea res publica, in qua id contigisset*) in 1.53.121.

In this paper, I begin with a review of what Cicero himself says about the origins of divination in Rome (*div.* 1.1.1–3), and I focus on the passages outlined above and consider their potential implications for the question of whether written collections of omens were transmitted from Mesopotamia to ancient Rome. Finally, I present a further example, in which another mother (here, that of Dionysius I, the tyrant of Syracuse) dreams that she, too, gives birth to an animal whose traits symbolize those of the son she will soon bear (*div.* 1.20.39, cf. 2.66.136).

Bio: John Jacobs is a PhD candidate in Classics at Yale University (degree expected in May 2009) and an instructor in Classical Studies at Seton Hall University. His dissertation is entitled, “*Anne iterum capta repetentur Pergama Roma?: The Fall of Rome in the Punica.*” He also holds a terminal MA in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations-Assyriology from Yale. His areas of interest include ancient epic, commentary on epic, and the relationship between the Classical world and the ancient Near East and India. In addition

to his work on divination, his research in the field of Assyriology concentrates on the *Enūma eliš*. His MA thesis provides a transliteration, translation, and analysis of this work's structure, language, and themes, and he has reviewed P. Talon's recent edition of the Babylonian Creation Epic in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 65 (2008): 154–58. He has received fellowships from the Jacob K. Javits Fellowships Program and the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation.

Cynthia Jean (Brussels)

Title: “Divination and Oracles at the Neo-Assyrian Palace: The Importance of Signs in Royal Ideology” (Saturday, 9:30–10:00)

Abstract: In everyday life and for national or international issues as well, Neo-Assyrian kings were eager to hear or read their scholars' reports and interpretations of omens. The royal archives found at Nineveh suggest an extensive use of divination in the management of the Neo-Assyrian state. This presentation focuses on the interpretation of omens and oracles in practice: In which cases was divination necessary or helpful in politico-religious matters? To what extent was the king influenced by oracular responses? Did he always trust these signs of the gods' will? What exactly was the role of the king's scholars concerning the interpretation of signs and what kind of advice did they give to the Sargonid kings?

Bio: Cynthia Jean is a Postdoctoral Researcher of the Belgian Funds for Research (FNRS) since 2007. She received her PhD in Assyriology from the Université Libre de Bruxelles in 2004 and an MA in Classics from the same university in 1998. She is the author of a book on Assyrian magic: *La magie néo-assyrienne en contexte: Recherches sur le métier d'exorciste et le concept d'ashiputu* (Helsinki, 2006). Her main interests are in the Assyrian royal ideology, the knowledge of official Assyrian scholars, and Near Eastern influence on ancient Western literature and magic. She also has an interest in Syrian archaeology and was a member of the Tell Beydar excavation in 2000 and of the Tell Ahmar (Til Barsip) excavation in 2004. Last year she was one of the curators of the exhibition *De Gilgamesh à Zénobie*, displayed at the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels (December 2007–June 2008).

Ulla Susanne Koch (Copenhagen)

Title: “A Cognitive Approach to Mesopotamian Divination” (Friday, 10:45–11:15)

Abstract: Recently, the fields of science of religion and anthropology have explored cognitive approaches to cultural and particularly religious phenomena. Among the earliest and most influential works were the books by Lawson and McCauley, *Rethinking Religion* (Cambridge, 1990) and P. Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication* (Cambridge, 1990), and in the past almost twenty years the interest in cognitive studies has grown. The study of the universal phenomenon of divination has also blossomed in recent years, but most research of a more theoretical nature has been done within the study of contemporary African divination systems. The application of anthropological approaches to the practice of divination in the ancient world is also well under way, though still in its infancy, and has mainly been attempted in the field of classical antiquity (e.g., the studies by Sørensen, Lisdorf, Rosenberger) but also to some extent in Assyriology (e.g., Cryer, Guinan). In my paper, I attempt to draw inspiration from the works of P. Boyer and other cognitive scientists, as well as from the results gained by the application of their theories primarily to classical antiquity.

Bio: Ulla Susanne Koch (MA 1990, PhD Copenhagen 1999) has received research fellowships and Postdoctoral scholarships from the Danish Research Council for the Humanities and the Carlsberg Foundation and was affiliated the Carsten Niebuhr Institute, University of Copenhagen, between 1991 and 2002. Her main interests are Mesopotamian science, religion, and literature. She is the author of *Mesopotamian Astrology: A Survey of Babylonian and Assyrian Celestial Divination* (Copenhagen, 1995), and of two volumes with editions of extispicy texts: *Babylonian Liver Omens: The Chapters Padanu, Manzazu and Pan takalti of the Extispicy Series, Mainly from Assurbanipal's Library* (Copenhagen, 2000) and *Secrets of Extispicy: The Chapter Multabiltu of the Extispicy Series and Nisirti baruti Texts* (Münster, 2005), as well as a number of articles. She is currently working on a volume in the series *Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record*, on the first-millennium divination texts. Since 2004 she has been employed at the Defence Command Denmark as special advisor in the ERP-planning branch.

Martti Nissinen (Helsinki)

Martti Nissinen is a respondent (Saturday, 11:45–12:00)

Bio: Martti Nissinen is the professor of the Old Testament Studies at the University of Helsinki since 2007. His areas of expertise are Old Testament studies, Assyriology, prophecy in the Old Testament and in ancient Mesopotamia, and sexuality in the Biblical world. His books include *References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources* (Helsinki, 1998), *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (1998), and *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (2003). During the academic year 2008/2009, Nissinen is a visiting researcher at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton.

Scott B. Noegel (Seattle)

Title: “‘Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign’: Script, Power, and Interpretation in the Ancient Near East”
(Friday, 2:15–2:45)

Abstract: In this paper I examine the generative role that scripts (writing systems) play in shaping ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the divine sign. Of particular interest are the cosmological conceptions and ideologies that inform the production of divinatory and other mantic texts, as well as expressed beliefs concerning the origin and function of writing. These contexts, I argue, allow us to understand the process of interpretation as a performative (illocutionary) act that empowers the “I” of the interpreter while simultaneously demonstrating and promoting the cosmological system upon which mantic exegesis is based. At the same time, they permit us to see the influential role that script had on the process of interpretation. Though my approach is necessarily comparative and takes into account evidence from Mesopotamia (Akkadian), Egypt (hieroglyphic Egyptian), and Israel (Hebrew), I delineate aspects of mantic interpretation that are unique to the cultures discussed.

Bio: Scott Noegel is Professor of Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Literatures and Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Washington. He received his PhD from Cornell University in 1995. S. Noegel’s publications include more than sixty articles and six books on a variety of ancient Near Eastern topics. His first two books examined the subject of wordplay in ancient texts. Some of his works include: *A Historical Dictionary of Prophets in Islam and Judaism* (co-authored with Brannon Wheeler); an edited work entitled *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible*

and *Ancient Near Eastern Literature* and a co-edited work entitled *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*. His most recent monograph, *Nocturnal Ciphers: The Allusive Language of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, examines the methods by which the peoples of the ancient Near East interpreted their dreams. In general, the book provides insights into a variety of subjects including the social context of divination and the production of literary texts, the role of writing and script in the divinatory process, the impact of Mesopotamian intellectual thought, the authorship of certain biblical pericopes, the relationship of oneiromancy to prophecy, and the function of ancient Near Eastern literary devices. In so doing, this work draws attention to broader theoretical concerns that confront the study of the ancient world. Prof. Noegel has given more than one hundred and twenty lectures for a variety of professional and community organizations. He has served as a consultant for the Discovery Channel's CD-ROM "Passage on the Nile" and also for the History Channel on ancient Egyptian language and history. He is the creator of *Egyptian Hieroglyphs Made Easy*, a CD-ROM designed for instruction in the ancient Egyptian language and he is the founder and former President of the American Research Center of Egypt's Northwest Chapter.

Seth F. C. Richardson (Chicago)

Title: "Believing is Seeing: Historicism and a 'Created' Old Babylonian Divinatory Literature"
(Saturday, 9:00–9:30)

Abstract: It is a near certainty that Babylonian extispical texts did not exist prior to the nineteenth century BC. It is equally likely that the practice of liver-divination in all subsequent periods relied on the interpolation of interpretive reading strategies to complement an extensive technical literature. Yet the common postulate that the literature's first redaction was at least partly a transfer of earlier oral tradition and craft practice continues to promote a view of extispical literature in its infancy as documentary and observational, rather than a radically new literary construct. The presumption of any oral-to-written "stream of tradition" then mistakenly enshrines a principle of observationalism in the Old Babylonian literature; by extension, it also retrojects Old Babylonian practices and precepts into third-millennium divinatory practice.

Emphasis on these ideas has distracted attention from the very specific context of Old Babylonian liver-divination and divinatory texts as practices and textual precipitates primarily related to specific discourses of knowledge and political power. The historical inception of this literature relates not so much to principles of scholarship, belief, or epistemology, but to the struggle for power between warring territorial states and their several needs to restructure intelligence through new political networks and a new authoritative language.

The development of the literature was a motivated, conscious, and manipulated construction of an apparatus for specific use, not a passive or "natural" evolution of substrate cultural forms. This "constructedness" is marked by two telltale paradoxes: by traditional messages written in new media, carefully glossed with archaisms and antique historical references, and by the appearance of "secrets" now only newly documented in written form.

This model contradicts the advent of liver-divinatory literature as either a Kuhnian "paradigm shift" or a Bachelardian "epistemological rupture." Rather, Old Babylonian extispical literature was a nineteenth-/eighteenth-century appropriation, reinvention, and re-deployment of a substantially different set of purposes and practices. Within the temporal framework of this one critically important conjuncture, extispical literature was composed and designed. The textual record instead supports the view that the

development of seventeenth-century reports and Middle Babylonian school texts points toward only a later, wider adoption of “technical extispicy” as a genuine and accepted ancient form: this renovated extispicy in fact re-gained a hegemonic status within civil society as early as the end of the Old Babylonian period itself. I will briefly review evidence disprivileging claims of extispicy as textually attested in the third millennium BC, and then turn my discussion to lines of evidence supporting the premise and nature of a wholly created literature

Bio: Seth Richardson is interested in unwriting the history of antiquity as a unity and rewriting it around its divisions and multiplicities. His early dissertation work (Columbia University, 2002), which focused on the end of the First Dynasty of Babylon, has led him to work on related topics of segmented Mesopotamian geographies, state collapse, and rebellion. His geographic work has had an especial focus on the countryside, its rural social orders, and the state’s struggle for control over open space as a corrective to approaches which continue to valorize an overwhelmingly agrarian Mesopotamian society as an “urban civilization.” Issues of state collapse primarily interest Richardson for their potential to establish parallels to historical and political-scientific discussions of modernity including failed states, borderlands identities, the role of non-state actors, and the “disenchanted communities” producing ideological collapses. Richardson’s work on rebellion animates the taciturn cuneiform sources commenting on antiquity’s most extremely disenchanted communities to show ancient Near Eastern revolts both as historical facts and as opportunities to see that even the most resolutely statist documents were produced dialogically. His continuing work on the Late Old Babylonian period (1683–1597 BC) includes regional studies, archival profiles, and the publication of legal and administrative texts of the period. Richardson also has ongoing research interests in economic questions about labor, theory-of-value, and scope-of-the-economy, as well as in the development of Old Babylonian divinatory literature. He has been Assistant Professor of Ancient Near Eastern History at the University of Chicago since 2003.

Francesca Rochberg (Berkeley)

Title: “If P, then Q’: Toward a Theory of Signs in Babylonian Divination” (Friday, 9:30–10:00)

Abstract: The investigation of signs in ancient Mesopotamia was a highly developed, learned, and refined expression of an interest in natural and other phenomena and a belief in divine causation. The product of this investigation was a prodigious and systematic body of omens of all kinds, unified by their conditional formulation as statements “If P, then Q.” By means of an examination of the formal structure of Babylonian omens and its related mode of inferential reasoning, predictive and empirical aspects of the omen texts can be brought into a new frame of analysis that approaches a theory of signs for Babylonian divination.

In the case of the predictive aspect, it is suggested that prediction is not necessarily to be seen as inherent in the conditional formulation of omen statements. Instead, on a formal analysis, Babylonian omens appear to have a greater affinity with statements of material implication “P implies Q” ($P \rightarrow Q$), which are the equivalent of conditional statements “If P then Q.” The predictive aspect of the omens is then seen as external to the canonical bodies of omens themselves and therefore epiphenomenal.

This line of investigation also affords a new look at the role of empiricism in the development of the cuneiform omen lists. It is well known not only that Babylonian omen protases are not limited to observable signs but also that the empirical element in the associations made between protasis and apodosis is not of importance. It is argued here that the validity and truth functionality inherent in conditional statements throws the question of empiricism in Babylonian omens into a different light

Bio: Francesca Rochberg received her PhD from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in 1980. She has been a fellow at the Altorientalisches Seminar, Universität Tübingen, and in History of Science at Yale University. She was named Michael Polanyi Visiting Lecturer in the History and Philosophy of Natural Science at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, for 1996. She is a recipient of a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship (1982–87) and a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (1993–94). She is co-editor with Alan C. Bowen of *Sources and Studies in the History and Philosophy of Classical Science* and the author of the monographs *Aspects of Babylonian Celestial Divination: The Lunar Eclipse Tablets of Enema Anu Enlil* (1988), *Babylonian Horoscopes* (1998), and *The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture* (2004, 2007). Her book *Babylonian Horoscopes* won the John Frederick Lewis Award from the American Philosophical Society in 1999. She is now at Berkeley as Catherine and William L. Magistretti Professor of Near Eastern Studies, and in 2006/2007 she was visiting fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford, and a member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. Since 2008, she is a member of the American Philosophical Society.

JoAnn Scurlock (Chicago)

Title: “Prophecy as a Form of Divination; Divination as a Form of Prophecy: New Light on Sennacherib at Jerusalem and Nahum” (Saturday, 10:00–10:30)

Abstract: There are a number of Akkadian texts from the late periods, particularly the Uruk Prophecy and the Dynastic Prophecy, whose phraseology positively invites comparison with the Book of Daniel. This apparent similarity of format has given rise to heated debate on the relationship, if any, between Mesopotamian forms of communication with the gods on the one hand and biblical prophecy on the other. It having been noted that the Mesopotamian examples are usually references to events that have, in fact, already occurred, it is tempting to regard them as some sort of prediction after the fact, at best false prophecy and at worst political propaganda. In this paper, I suggest a new approach to the problem of Mesopotamian “prophetic” texts by inverting the paradigm and asking not whether Mesopotamian divination can represent a form of prophecy but whether biblical prophecy can represent a form of divination. It is to be remembered that not all divinatory practices were rejected in Israelite religion (lot oracles were actually mandated) and, given the fact that God was believed to give signs in the form of specific outcomes to political events, there would be, in theory, no objection to using past historical events affecting the community to divine the will of God. We here examine two possible examples of prophecies in which historical events that had already passed at the time of composition were used to predict what was going to happen in the future. One of these is Nahum, which has not infrequently been classified as false prophecy, and the other is Isaiah 36–37 (= 2 Kings 18.13,17–19.37 – the alleged two sieges of Jerusalem by Sennacherib).

Bio: JoAnn Scurlock was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1953, of the union of a Law and a Chemistry professor. She received her BA in the department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago and then went on to complete her PhD in the same department in 1988. She is the author of two books, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine* (University of Illinois Press, 2005), written with medical professor Burton Andersen, and *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost-Induced Illnesses in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Brill, 2005). With Dr. Andersen she received a three-year National Endowment for the Humanities-grant “Ancient Mesopotamian Medical Therapies” in 2000, a project on which she is still working. A book of transliterations and translations of selected Assyro-Babylonian

medical texts for the WAW series is well under way. She is also the author of more than sixty articles on various aspects of Assyro-Babylonian civilization. While the majority of these involve Mesopotamian medicine, magic, and religion, she has also written on Mesopotamian warfare and law and contributed to knowledge in Classics, Biblical studies, and even Egyptology. She has traveled widely in the Islamic world and in Europe. She lectures on ancient history, Islamic history and politics, European history, and the history of magic at Elmhurst College since 1984.

Edward L. Shaughnessy (Chicago)

Title: “Arousing Images: The Poetry of Divination and the Divination of Poetry in Early China” (Friday, 11:15–11:45)

Abstract: *Xiang* or “image” is one of the two major categories of divination in China (the other is *shu* or “number”). It is also a term classically applied to the poetic kernel of a line statement in the *Yi Jing* or Classic of Changes, China’s quintessential divination text. In this paper, I show how the *xiang* or “images” of the *Yi Jing* derive from and reflect the same worldview as the *xing* or “arousal” motif of the *Shi Jing* or Classic of Poetry, ancient China’s other most important classic. Both the “images” and the “arousals” depended on a perceived correspondence between the natural world and the human realm; insofar as the natural world was intelligible, so too could be the human realm (or at least so it was thought – or hoped).

Bio: Edward L. Shaughnessy is Lorraine J. and Herrlee G. Creel Distinguished Service Professor of Early China at the University of Chicago. He is committed primarily to the study of China’s archaeologically recovered textual materials, whether they are on bone, bronze, or bamboo, while at the same time not neglecting the received literary tradition. He finds it most rewarding when it proves possible to use these two types of texts to explicate each other. Within this general scholarly agenda, he has two focal points of scientific interests: bronze inscriptions and the *Zhou Yi*, both of which reached their full maturity toward the end of the Western Zhou period (1045–771 BC). His most recent book is *Rewriting Early Chinese Texts* (Albany, 2006). With regard to divination, he has a long-time interest in the *Zhou Yi* or *Yi Jing* (better known in the West as *I Ching*) and is currently at work on a book to be called *The Changes Unearthed: Unearthed Manuscripts and the Classic of Changes*.

Abraham Winitzer (Notre Dame)

Title: “The Divine Presence and Its Interpretation in Early Mesopotamian Divination” (Friday, 3:45–4:15)

Abstract: If one approaches it from its conceptual background, then there can be little doubt of the place of the divine realm in Mesopotamian divination. In a very real sense what enabled diviners to proceed with their queries was the fundamental assumption of and hope for the divine’s manifestation via one of the various divinatory channels, of and for the divine’s virtual “presence” in the examined media, in the form of a sign.

When, however, one turns to the omen collections from ancient Mesopotamia – by far the most elaborate testimony of divinatory interest stemming from this civilization – it is the relative silence concerning the presence of deities that is striking. On occasion one does encounter statements that exhibit an interest in this basic theological premise, though frequently upon their assessment it becomes clear that these are marginal to the broader enterprise of the collections. And perhaps most telling of

the divine realm's place in these texts are those omens whose forecasts herald the presence of this-or-that deity but immediately see fit to gloss these statements, as if to reconfigure them, subsuming in the process proclamations of "divine presence" in the literature's deep technical sea.

This paper posits an explanation for this discrepancy and provides a model for the evolution from the basic concern in early Mesopotamian divination with the divine presence to the near absence of this presence in the divination literature.

Bio: Abraham Winitzer is an assistant professor at the Department of Theology in the University of Notre Dame. Professor Winitzer's areas of expertise are Assyriology, ancient Semitic languages, Mesopotamian divination and scientific literature, Mesopotamian religion, and ancient Near Eastern intellectual history and historiography. He is preparing a book, based on his dissertation, *The Generative Paradigm in Old Babylonian Divination*, forthcoming from Brill. He is also preparing a comprehensive critical edition of the Old Babylonian extispicy omen texts with a commentary.

ON SALE AT THE SUQ

MARCH 6-7, 2009

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE SEMINARS

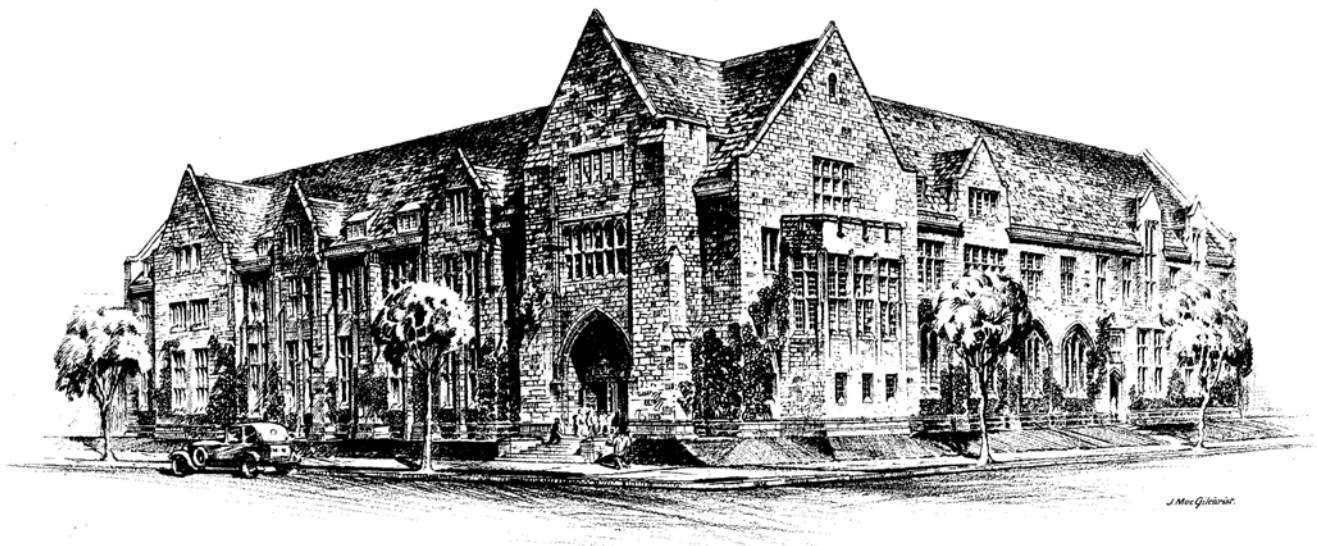
Proceedings from small, focused seminars that explore important theoretical, methodological, and cross-culturally significant topics relating to broader issues in the Near East

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE, 1155 EAST 58TH STREET, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637

oi.uchicago.edu

1. *Changing Social Identity with the Spread of Islam: Archaeological Perspectives*. Edited by Donald Whitcomb, with case studies by Jodi Magness, Tracy Hoffman, Yury Karev, Mark C. Horton, and Timothy Insoll. 2004. Pp. x + 102; 46 figures. \$17.95
2. *Margins of Writing, Origins of Cultures*. Edited by Seth L. Sanders, with contributions by Seth L. Sanders, John Kelly, Gonzalo Rubio, Jacco Dieleman, Jerrold Cooper, Christopher Woods, Annick Payne, William Schniedewind, Michael Silverstein, Piotr Michalowski, Paul-Alain Beaulieu, Theo van den Hout, Paul Zimansky, Sheldon Pollock, and Peter Machinist. 2006. Second printing, 2007. Pp. xi + 300; 9 figures. \$24.95
3. *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*. Edited by Nicola Laneri, with contributions by Nicola Laneri, Ellen F. Morris, Glenn M. Schwartz, Robert Chapman, Massimo Cultraro, Meredith S. Chesson, Alessandro Naso, Adam T. Smith, Dina Katz, Seth Richardson, Susan Pollock, Ian Rutherford, John Pollini, John Robb, and James A. Brown. 2007. Second printing, 2008. Pp. xviii + 318; 86 figures, 5 tables. \$24.95
4. *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*. Edited by Nicole Brisch, with contributions by Nicole Brisch, Gebhard J. Selz, Piotr Michalowski, Paul John Frandsen, Irene J. Winter, Erica Ehenberg, Clemens Reichel, Reinhard Bernbeck, Michelle Gilbert, David Freidel, Michael Puett, Bruce Lincoln, Greg Woolf, Jerrold S. Cooper, and Kathleen D. Morrison. 2008. Pp. xiii + 271; 7 figures. \$24.95

**ATTENDEES OF THE
SCIENCE AND SUPERSTITION SEMINAR
RECEIVE A 20% DISCOUNT ON ALL
ORIENTAL INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS**



Information on how to receive the discount is available on the order form at the registration desk.

Books must be ordered from the David Brown Book Company.