

# The Intertestamental Period



An Open Seminar  
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# Divination vs Prophecy

# Extispicy/Hepatoscopy

“My Lord has written to me previously concerning the detention of the caravan destined for Qatanim. I have been detaining these men for five days (now), and they have used up their lambs in making extispicies. Let me lord send instructions (as follows): let not these men be detained; Let them go. The men are distressed.”



Sheep's liver in clay. 14.6 cm across.  
Old Babylonian, circa 1900-1600 BC.  
Provenance: likely Sippar in modern  
southern Iraq. British Museum.

# Birth Omens: *Shumma Izbu*

- “If a woman of the palace gives birth to a deaf child—the possessions of the king will be lost.”
- “If a woman of the palace gives birth, and (the child) has six fingers on its left hand, the prince will plunder the land of his enemy.”
- “If a woman is pregnant, and her foetus cries—the land will experience misfortune.”



# Astral Signs: *Enuma Anu Enlil*

- Catalogue of 70 tablets
- Over 7,000 omens recorded
- Largely untranslated
- Recorded events accompanying celestial phenomena
- Two ancient catalogues of *Enuma Anu Enlil* are known.



# Astrological “Science”

Mesopotamian astrologers took the position that by looking for patterns, they could build a set of correlations between astral and earthly events.



# Case Study: Defeat of Darius

## Celestial Omens:

Year 5 of Artaxata who is called Darius, month 6.

Day 13 [20 September]: Sunset to moonrise:  $8^{\circ}$ . There was a lunar eclipse. Its totality was covered at the moment when Jupiter set and Saturn rose. During totality the west wind blew, during clearing the east wind. During the eclipse, deaths and plague occurred.

Day 14: All day clouds were in the sky.

Day 15: Sunset to moonrise:  $16^{\circ}$ . There were clouds in the sky. The moon was  $3\frac{2}{3}$  cubits below [the star] Alpha Arietis, the moon having passed to the east. A meteor which flashed, its light was seen on the ground; very overcast, lightning flashed.

# Case Study, continued

Description of the events that were believed to be predicted by the omens:

That month, the equivalent for 1 shekel of silver was: barley [*lacuna*] kur; mustard, 3 kur, at the end of the month [*lacuna*]; sesame, 1 pân, 5 minas.

At that time, Jupiter was in Scorpio; Venus was in Leo, at the end of the month in Virgo; Saturn was in Pisces; Mercury and Mars, which had set, were not visible.

That month, the river level was [*lacuna*].

On the 11th of that month, panic occurred in the camp before the king. The Macedonians encamped in front of the king.

On the 24th [1 October], in the morning, the king of the world [Alexander] erected his standard and attacked. Opposite each other they fought and a heavy defeat of the troops of the king [Darius] he [Alexander] inflicted. The king [Darius], his troops deserted him and to their cities they went. They fled to the east.

# Case Study: continued

If on either the 13th or 14th Ulûlu the moon is dark; the watch passes and it is dark; his features are dark like lapis lazuli; he is obscured until his midpoint; the west quadrant - as it covered, the west wind blew; the sky is dark; his light is covered.

The significance is: The son of the king will become purified for the throne but will not take the throne. An intruder will come with the princes of the west; for eight years he will exercise kingship; he will conquer the enemy army; there will be abundance and riches on his path; he will continually pursue his enemies; and his luck will not run out.

# Dream Omens: Oneiromancy

- Stele of the Vultures
- King Eanatum I (ca. 2454-2425 B.C.E.)
- Dreamed the god Ningirsu told him he would be victorious over neighboring city of Umma.

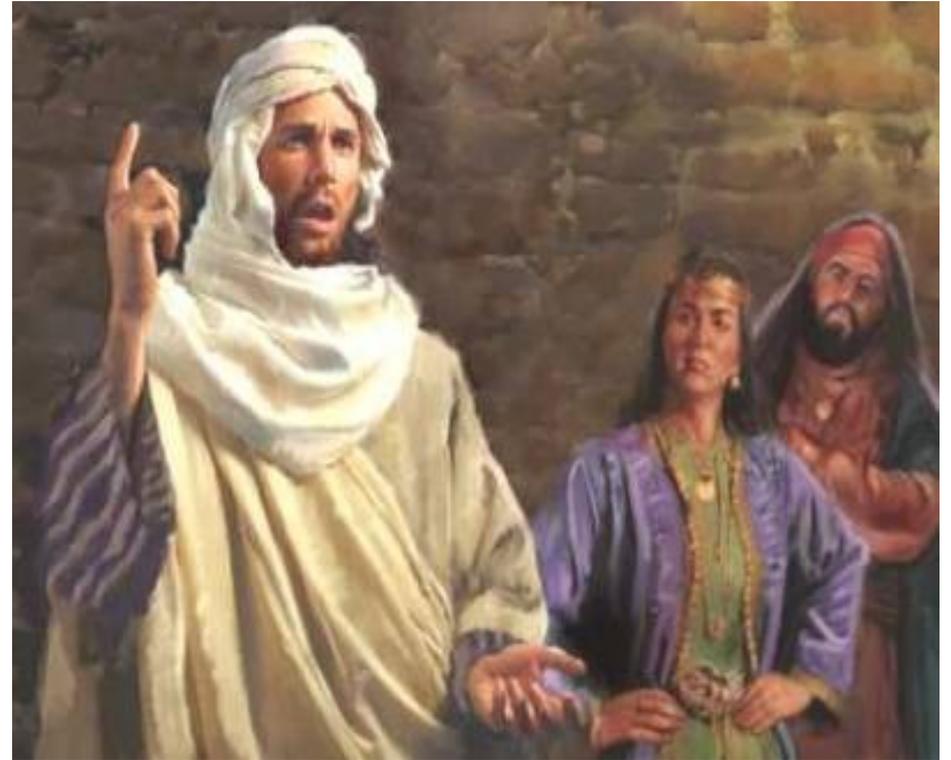


# Dream Omen: The Tale of Lugalbanda

“Dream-a door cannot hold it back, nor can a doorpost;  
To the liar it speaks lies; to the truthful the truth.  
It can make one happy or make one lament;  
It is a closed archive basket of the gods.”

# Prophecy vs. Divination

- Divination is strictly forbidden in the Bible; God cannot be coerced into revealing his will.
- Prophecy was known elsewhere, particularly in Mari texts, but was addressed to the king, where in Israel prophecy was usually directed to the people.
- Mari prophecies are devoid of social or ethical demands
- Prophecy outside of Israel could be verified (or not) via omens.



# Prophecy in Israel

- Israel allowed one form of divination, the Urim and Thummim, which allowed the asking of yes-or-no questions.
- Dreams were also acceptable.
- The common denominator for Israelite divination was the absence of expertise or human skill that would imply a coercive effect on the deity. They are, by nature, vehicles of unpredictable and uncontrollable divine communication.



