

Attempts to Understand the World: The significance of divination in Etruria in the mid first millennium BCE

Xulin Chen

Abstract:

The paper focus on divination in the Etruscan area. By tracing the evolution of divination in the Etruscan civilization and comparing it to other forms of divination in different regions, it aims to elucidate the proximate link between the evolution of divination in ancient societies, exemplified by the Etruscans, and the advent of urbanization. Furthermore, the paper seeks to illuminate the similarities between divination in the ancient Mediterranean and the Near East since the Iron Age, which reflect a marvelous resonance between two different societies during a period of transformative urban states. The preceding discussions collectively converge upon the central tenet of this paper: divination represents one of the figurative embodiments of the cosmology of the ancient ancestors, and it is their significant endeavor to read the world in a systematic manner.

Keywords: Divination, Etruscans, urbanization, ancient Mediterranean

1. Haruspice, Augury and Lightening.

The Etruscans, as the people active in Tuscany, Italy, in the middle of the first millennium B.C., are renowned for their mystical and systematic religious worship, of which divination is the most prominent. Cicero describes them “being in their nature of a very ardent religious temperament and accustomed to the frequent sacrifice of victims” in his book *De divinatione*.¹ As the Etruscan civilization entered “the Orientalizing Period” (720-580 B.C.) and “the Archaic Period” (580-480 B.C.),² divination matured and became a sophisticated science of “reading” the world along with the trend toward urbanization.

The *Etrusca Disciplina* is a corpus of texts from the sacred books and practices of Etruscan religious doctrines. The Etruscan version of these texts has not been preserved, and therefore it exists only in the dicta of Ro-

man writers.³ The Etruscans appointed two mythological figures to conduct the composition of their sacred text, *Etrusca Disciplina*. Tages, a sage with the features of a child and the erudition of an educated man, and Vegoia, a fairy.⁴ Cicero describes the occurrence and “preaching” of

3 See: M. Tullius Cicero, *De Divinatione*, ed. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), Book 1, Section 72; M. Tullius Cicero, *De Haruspicum Responso*, ed. Albert Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), Chapter 17, 25; Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita libri*, trans. Rev. Canon Roberts (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1912), Book5, Chapter 15; Pliny the elder, *Naturalis Historia*, trans. John Bostock (H. G. Bohn, 1857), Book 2, Chapter 86; Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri novem*, trans. Karl F. Halm (Leipsig: Teubner, 1865), Book 1, Chapter 1.1; Censorinus, *De Die Natele*, trans. William Maude (New York: The Cambridge Encyclopedia Co., 1900), Chapter 6.16.

In *De Div.*, Cicero mentions different categories of Etruscan books: the *Libri Haruspicini*, the *Libri Fugurales*, and the *Libri Rituales*. Varro likewise investigates the doctrine, especially in the realm of urban planning, which will be discussed in part 3. The other Roman writings above offer only cursory mention of this collection of texts.

4 Nancy T. de Grummond, “The Prophets,” in *Etruscan Myth, Sacred History, and Legend* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2006), 23-30.

1 M. Tullius Cicero, *De Divinatione*, ed. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), Book 1, Section 93.

2 David Ridgway, “The Etruscans,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Volume IV, Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean C. 525 to 479 B.C.*, ed. John Boardman, N. G. L. Hammond, D. M. Lewis and M. Ostwald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 653-667.

Tages at length,⁵ while the figure of Vegoia is shrouded in obscurity, with only glimpses of her existence discernible through few works and the traditions of the Chiusi city. Italian scholar Massimo Pallottino subdivided the *Etrusca Disciplina* into two parts, the *Libri Tagetici* and the *Libri Vegoici* based on the criteria of the writer. The former includes the *Libri Haruspicini* and a portion of the *Libri Rituales*, while the latter encompasses the rest.⁶

Haruspicy is a form of Etruscan divination that typically involves examining the entrails of animals to gain insight into the will of the gods. The examiners in Rome were known as *Haruspex*, and from the bilingual inscription of Pesaro, it can be inferred that a control word for *Haruspex* in the Etruscan language was *netšvis*.⁷ The *Haruspex* sought to identify the *caput iocineris* (head of the liver). This part was considered a negative omen if it was absent from the animal's liver, except in instances of disquietude or alarm. Conversely, an enlarged head was regarded as a positive indicator.⁸ Pliny the Elder offers corroboration of the above in his *Naturalis Historia*, wherein he records the signs that occurred at the time of the sacrifice at Spoleto, when Octavian was inaugurated as Augustus.⁹ In addition, the smoothness or roughness of the surface of the liver is also an important phenomenon to be examined by the diviner.

The liver of Piacenza unearthed near Gossolengo, Italy, in 1877, corroborates the accounts of Roman scholars and simultaneously opens up the possibility of further research into the procedures and rules of divination. The bronze model, divided into sixteen different sections, each engraved with one or more of the main gods in Etruscan mythology, is a microcosm, symbolizing the condensation of the Etruscan world view. In *De nuptiis Philologiae et*

Mercurii, Martianus Capella also refers the Etruscans' division of the sky into sixteen regions, each ruled by different deities. This list bears striking resemblance to the deities depicted on the liver of Piacenza.¹⁰ Traditionally, many scholars, represented by Thulin, have proposed that the system of zones observed in the bronzes is consistent with the system of celestial zones described by Martianus. Despite the lack of precise mathematical orientation, the liver is oriented in the same direction as that of the gods.¹¹ Stefan Weinstock posed challenges to this view: "Yet the longer I examine the list, the more convinced I am that the traditional position as developed by Thulin is not tenable. For what is really proved is no more than that the liver and Martianus have the sixteen regions and some divinities in common."¹² Putting aside the inconclusive controversy, the astrological lists and the Piacenza liver can at least prove that in the Etruscan religion deities had fixed "houses" in the sky, representing a certainty in orientation, which "makes certain techniques of divination in earthly matters at all possible".¹³

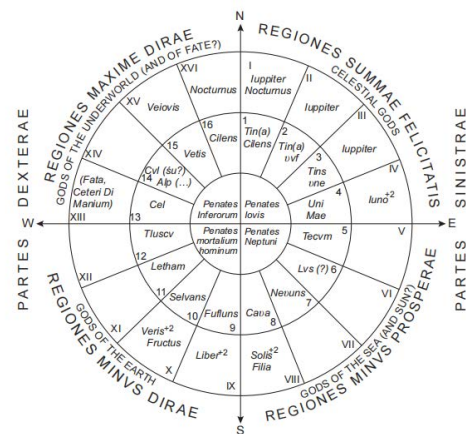


Fig. 1 Schema of the regions of the sky, following Nigidius Figulus (inside), the liver of Piacenza (middle), Martianus Capella (outer circle) and Pliny and others (margin).¹⁴

5 M. Tullius Cicero, *De Divinatione*, ed. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), Book 2, Section 50.

6 Massimo Pallotino, *The Etruscans*, trans. J. Cremona, ed. David Ridgway (Bloomington: Indiana university press, 1975), 154. Pallotino further subdivided the *Libri Rituales* into the *Libri Ostentaria*, the *Libri Acherontici* and the *Libri Fatales*, the first two belonging to the *Libri Tagetici*, the latter to the *Libri Vegoici*.

7 Nancy T. de Grummond, "Haruspicy and augury," in *The Etruscan World*, ed. Jean MacIntosh Turfa (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 539.

8 Natalie L. C. Stevens, "A New Reconstruction of the Etruscan Heaven," *American Journal of Archaeology* 113, no. 2 (2009): 154.

9 Pliny the elder, *Naturalis Historia*, trans. John Bostock (H. G. Bohn, 1857), Book 11, Chapter 73.

10 Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, trans. William H. Stahl and Richard Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 22-24.

11 C. O. Thulin, "Die Haruspicin," in *Die Etruskische Disciplin* (Göteborg: Zachrisson, 1905), 28.

12 Stefan Weinstock, "Martianus Capella and the Cosmic System of the Etruscans," *Journal of Roman Studies* 36, Part 1 (1946): 103.

13 Ingrid Krauskopf, "Gods and demons in the Etruscan pantheon," in *The Etruscan World*, ed. Jean MacIntosh Turfa (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 521.

14 Ibid, 515.

Another Etruscan method of divination is called augury, which refers to the prediction of signs by observing bird-related behaviors, usually checking the orientation of birds' flights. In contrast to haruspicy, augury is not a practice exclusive to Etruscan divination. Indeed, a few auguries with group characteristics emerged in ancient Greek and Roman divinatory practice. Perhaps the most renowned Etruscan *Auspex* (one who skilled in the art of augury) is Attus Navius, who lived during the reign of Tarquinius Priscus. In the writings, Cicero reflects on his formative years, recording that Attus divided the garden into four sections with his face oriented southward and eliminated three sections through the revelation of the flight of birds. Subsequently, he proceeded to "subdivide the fourth and final portion," where he discovered a remarkable cluster of grapes at the time of harvest.¹⁵ Livy presents a detailed account of the conflict between Attus and Tarquinius in his account of the Sabine Conflict. He concludes that: "At all events, auguries and the college of augurs were held in such honour that nothing was undertaken in peace or war without their sanction."¹⁶ Cicero also made a finer division of augury in his book *De divinatione*, a class of birds called *ex avibus* (divine from the bird itself), another called *ex tripudiis* (divine from bird feeding). Although these methods were formed and utilized much later in the Republican era, they still aid us in getting a glimpse of bird divination in the Etruscan period.¹⁷

It is believed that an Etruscan sacred book, *The Libri Fulgurales*, recorded practices related to the Etruscans' use of lightning for divination. The Etruscans were adept at interpreting lightning, a skill that the Roman Senate deemed worthy of study. In a decree, the Senate ordered that, "of the sons of the chief men, six should be handed over to each of the Etruscan tribes for the study of divination, in order that so important a profession should not, on account of the poverty of its members, be withdrawn from the influence of religion, and converted into a means of mercenary gain."¹⁸ The pupils are called "Calliphans" or

"Calliphoena" according to Valerius.¹⁹

Etruscans recognized that "there are nine Gods who discharge thunder-storms, that there are eleven different kinds of them, and that three of them are darted out by Tinia (Jupiter)".²⁰ The Etruscans provided a detailed categorization of the three types of *manubiae* (thunderbolt from God) emitted by their main god Tinia. The first type of *manubia* is benevolent and sent on the decision of Jupiter himself. The second type of *manubia* is sent on the advice of his council, which has the potential to be beneficial but also carries the risk of causing harm. Even the benefits of this type come at a price. The third *manubia* is sent by Jupiter once more, and it is destructive, invariably changing the private or public situation that it encounters. For fire, in its destructive capacity, allows nothing to remain as it was.²¹ They identify the type of lightning observed through a specialized method and interpret its indications, which were probably recorded in the unknown holy book. Roman writer Nigidius Figulus left a text about the Etruscan brontosopic calendar, the sole surviving text of Etruscan lightning. Although Figulus noted that the version he translated and published was appropriate only to the region of Rome, it is still important for us to understand how the Etruscans may have operated. The following is a snippet from the work:

NOVEMBER

1. If it thunders, it signifies discord for the city.
2. If it thunders, it foretells prosperity.
3. If it thunders, situations will pertain through which the lower classes will oppress [their] betters.
4. If it thunders, grain will be better.²²

2. Links between divination in Etruria and other regions.

It is well documented that the Babylonian and Etruscan traditions shared numerous similarities. Both cultures practiced the sacrifice of sheep, and both created models of livers with distinctive markings. They also employed a system of orientation to determine which parts of the

15 M. Tullius Cicero, *De Divinatione*, ed. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), Book 1, Section 31.

16 Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita libri*, trans. Rev. Canon Roberts (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1912), Book 1, Chapter 36.

17 M. Tullius Cicero, *De Divinatione*, ed. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), Book 1, Section 120; Book 2, Section 72-77.

18 Ibid, Book 1, Section 92.

19 Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri novem*, trans. Karl F. Halm (Leipzig: Teubner, 1865), Book 1, Chapter 1.1.

20 Pliny the elder, *Naturalis Historia*, trans. John Bostock (H. G. Bohn, 1857), Book 2, Chapter 52.

21 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones*, trans. Harry Morrison Hine (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2010), Book 2, Chapter 41.1.

22 Jean MacIntosh Turfa, "The Etruscan Brontosopic Calendar," in *The religion of the Etruscans*, ed. Nancy T. de Grummond and Erika Simon (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 173-190.

liver were favorable and which were unfavorable.²³ A famous clay model of the ancient Babylonian sheep's liver is preserved in the British Museum, a collection that predates the Piacenza liver by a long shot, dating from 1900 to 1600 BC. The model is probably used for instructing pupils and each hole describes the omens of a blemish appearing at that position.

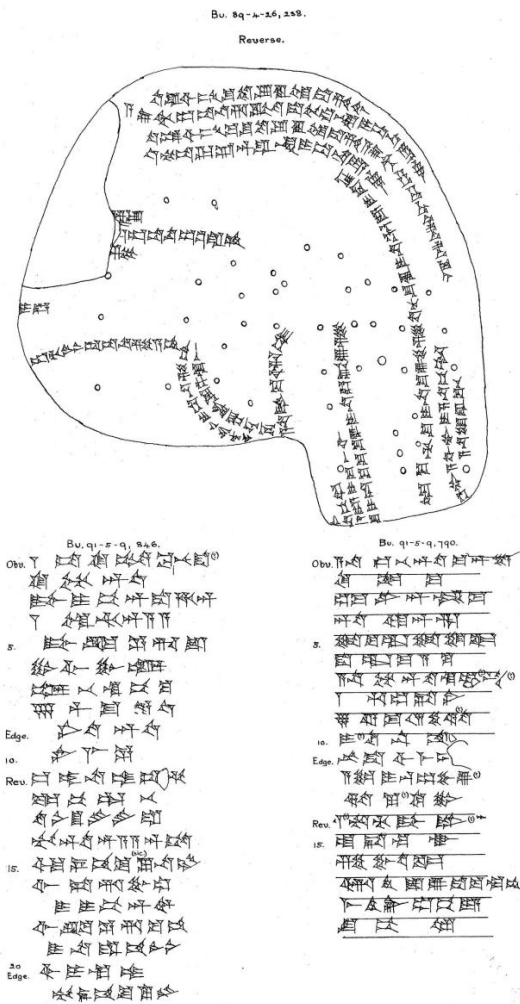


Fig. 2 Clay model of a sheep's liver in ancient Mesopotamia.²⁴

However, Babylonian divination used more than just the liver, *baru* (the diviner) investigated the windpipe, the lungs, the liver, the gall bladder, and the coils in which the intestines are arranged, following a specific sequence. Bab-

23 Nancy T. de Grummond, "Haruspicy and augury," in *The Etruscan World*, ed. Jean MacIntosh Turfa (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 547.

24 *The Liver Tablet*, 1900BC-1600BC, British Museum, London, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/477397001>.

ylonian divination appears to have been more nuanced, intricate, and meticulous than Etruscan in orientation. It encompassed a greater scope of information, such as the relative size of the intestines and liver, and possessed the capacity to discern messages inscribed by the gods. They even had "an elaborate and complicated technical terminology", which we have not yet fully deciphered.²⁵

Furthermore, the inquiry into the rationale behind the Etruscans' utilization of the numeral "eleven" to categorize lightning appears to be inextricably intertwined with that of the Near East. Servius the Grammarian stated that the Egyptians had twelve constellations, whereas the ancient Chaldeans believed that there were eleven, with Scorpio and Libra regarded as one.²⁶ This appears to be the sole remaining clue to the number eleven in the extant religious texts of ancient world and Thulin postulates that it is the origin of the Etruscan use.²⁷ Weinstock provides more evidence for Thulin's argument:

The eleven signs still occur on Tarentine discs of the fourth century B.C. and in Plato's *Phaedrus*; astronomers, like Eudoxus, Aratus, and Hipparchus, reckon with eleven signs (Libra, is first mentioned about 237 B.C.).²⁸

A consideration of the ancient Greek world reveals the following: next to the Delphic oracle, the most important form of divination in classical Greece was *Extispicy*. Divination through the interpretation of sacrificial animal entrails generally and through interpretation of the signs on animal livers could occur together, with the liver being examined first and then the other portions of the entrails. Often only the interpretation derived from the liver's features is mentioned as significant in the Greek sources, which accords with the organ's longstanding importance in Mesopotamian divination.²⁹ But Greece was not so complicated by comparison - the Greek *Extispicy* was a very simple binary system that provides only "yes" or "no" answers, which may have had something to do with their unusually

25 A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: portrait of a dead civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 212.

26 Servius Grammaticus, "Bucolica et Georgica comentarii," in *In Vergilii carmina commentarii*, ed. Georgius C. Thilo and Hermann Hagen (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), Line 33.

27 C. O. Thulin, "Die Blitzlehre," in *Die Etruskische Disciplin* (Göteborg: Zachrisson, 1905), 48.

28 Stefan Weinstock, "Libri Fulgurales," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 19 (1951): 126.

29 Derek Collins, "Mapping the Entrails: The Practice of Greek Hepatoscopy," *The American Journal of Philology* 129, no. 3 (2008): 320.

well-developed approach to oracles.³⁰ And accounts of augury appear early in ancient Greek mythology, most notably in *Prometheus Bound*: The Prometheus explained “the smoothness of the entrails, and having what colour the bile would be pleasing to the gods, and the mottled symmetry of the liver-lobe.”³¹ The famous soothsayer Calchas is also mentioned in the *Iliad*, in which he was called “the clearest by far of all the seers, who scan the flight of birds”.³²

In interpreting this parallel, it appears reasonable and natural to ascribe it to the influence of one civilization on another. As Burket posited the close correspondence can best be explained as “the transmission of a ‘school’ from Babylon to Etruria has been established”.³³ While the diffusion might accompany with the route of trade which can be identified, specific route of divination diffusion cannot be proven. However, when we examine this issue from the perspective of the origins of divination in antiquity, our conclusions may differ. In the eyes of the ancient people, the “cosmos” was a unity, and the natural, super-natural, and social realms were not categorically distinguished. Since the real world is governed and created by supernatural forces, people can interact with them to gain guidance about the real world.³⁴ The capacity for divination—an act of reading signs—is contingent upon the existence of a connection between all things. Thus, the forms of divination are usually closely related to the phenological characteristics of a region and metamorphosed from life experience. In brief, reading signs was a universal way of making sense of the world, but manifested in diverse approaches. Cicero realized it early on:

Now, for my part, I believe that the character of the country determined the kind of divination which its inhabitants adopted. For example, the Egeans and Babylonians, who live on the level surface of open plains, with no hills to obstruct a view of the sky, have devoted their attention wholly to astrology. But the Etruscans, being in their nature of a very ardent religious temperament and accustomed to the frequent sacrifice of victims, have given their

30 Ibid, 339.

31 Mark Griffith, *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 175.

32 Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin Book, 1998), 79.

33 Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 46-48.

34 Bruce G. Trigger, *Understanding early civilizations: a comparative study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 412.

chief attention to the study of entrails.³⁵

And at the more abstract level, religion, the system of supernatural forces to which divination is affiliated, reconciles human behavior with the envisioned cosmic order and projects an image of the cosmic order onto the level of human experience, which, like Clifford Geertz figured, is “a system of symbols that acts to...”³⁶

When people first attempted to understand the rules by which the world worked through the above interactions, they used what they are most familiar with as a medium. When a significant event occurs, individuals document any deviations in their daily routines before and after the event, to establish a pattern for future reference. Therefore, “divination seems to have been at first entirely empirical, based on simple a *posteriori* observation”.³⁷ The most basic form of divination is the temporal coincidence of two phenomena without any logical correlation. Here is an example that Jean Bottero mentioned:

If on the right side of the liver there are two finger-shaped outgrowths (probably what anatomists would call “pyramidal process”). 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).³⁸

The divination motto is reminiscent of the Etruscan brontoscopic calendar, which was previously discussed. This elucidates the similarities and differences in divination practices across disparate civilizations (the latter is frequently disregarded). The conceptual framework underlying divination in various ancient cultures is analogous, and when integrated with the same material practices, remarkable coincidences may emerge. In essence, divination represents an essential endeavor of ancient civilizations to comprehend the transcendent through the introspective.

3. Divination in Etruria and urbanization.

Nevertheless, a closer examination of the evolution of divination reveals that the unreliability of temporal coincidences was soon recognized. On one hand, divine power was introduced to establish a logical connection between the omens and interpretations. Seneca, while re-

35 M. Tullius Cicero, *De Divinatione*, ed. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), Book 1, Section 93.

36 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90-91.

37 Jean Bottero, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (Chicago: The university of Chicago Press, 1992), 130.

38 Ibid, 131.

counting the differences of concept between Roman and Etruscan perceptions, mentions that the Etruscans “ascribe everything to god, they are of the opinion that they (the thunders) do not indicate the future because they have occurred, but they occur because they are intended to indicate the future”.³⁹ On the other hand, Systematic records are beginning to appear, and “divination moved from the realm of folklore to the level of a scientific activity”.⁴⁰

The aforementioned transformation is closely linked to the phenomenon of urbanization. The precursors of urbanization have been present since the Villanova period (mid-tenth to eighth centuries B.C.), when a small number of strategically important large settlements had a voluntary or forced “synoecism” effect on the surrounding neighboring tribes, which resulted in the creation of “monocentric” situations.⁴¹ At the end of the Final Bronze Age, “more than ninety percent of villages in southern Etruria disappeared in a short time, at the same time as the formation of four very large proto urban centers”. These centers were the antecedents of Veii, Tarquinia, Caere and Vulci.⁴² Since the advent of the Orientalizing and Archaic period, the material culture of the Etruscan region has undergone profound and transformative changes, particularly in the realm of funerary practices.⁴³ The aggregation of the population will inevitably result in changes to the form of settlements. The emergence of fortifications, public buildings, and street systems represents the prototype of

“city” form.⁴⁴ Among the transformations, the imperative feature of Etruscan cities which related to our topic is temples and sanctuaries. The Portonaccio archaeological site in the Veii area comprises the Sanctuary of Minerva and the Temple of Apollo, which was completed around 530-510 BC. The oracles discovered in the Sanctuary of Minerva demonstrate the devotion of believers from other cities, including Carré, Vulci, Castro, and Orvieto, highlighting the sanctuary’s practical significance. The three-chambered Temple of Apollo, located in the western part of the sanctuary, is likewise one of the oldest and most venerated sanctuaries in Etruria.⁴⁵ In Pygri, a port of Caere, excavations have brought two temples back to life. Temple B was commissioned to built by King of Caere *The farie Velianas of Kare* around 510 B.C. According to the Greeks, the temple was dedicated to the Leucothea, or with Eilethya, while the gods mentioned in the Etruscan inscriptions were Uni, Tina and Astarte.⁴⁶ George Dennis, in his book, extols the opulence of this temple and its significance for Pygri.⁴⁷ Futhuermore, G. Sassatelli’s investigation in Marzabotto—part of the general economic and political reorganization of the Etruscan Po valley—reveals that there was once a small platform on the acropolis of this site, probably the *augurculum*.⁴⁸ In Livy’s account of Numa’s inauguration, *augurculum* was a rectangular space marked by a diviner with specific objects, in which the diviner was able to read omens, and trace a corresponding

39 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones*, trans. Harry Morrison Hine (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2010), Book 2, Chapter 32.1.

40 A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: portrait of a dead civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 210.

41 Robert Leighton, “Urbanization in Southern Etruria from the Tenth to the Sixth century BC: the origins and growth of major centers,” in *The Etruscan World*, ed. Jean MacIntosh Turfa (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 134-135.

42 Marco Pacciarelli, “The transition from village communities to protourban societies”, in *Etruscology*, ed. Alessandro Naso (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 564-568.

43 Graeme Barker and Tom Rasmussen, *In the Footsteps of the Etruscans: Changing Landscapes around Tuscania from Prehistory to Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 130.

44 Robert Leighton, “Urbanization in Southern Etruria from the Tenth to the Sixth century BC: the origins and growth of major centers,” in *The Etruscan World*, ed. Jean MacIntosh Turfa (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 141.

45 Anna Maria Sgubini Moretti, *Veio, Cerveteri, Vulci: città d’Etruria a confronto : Roma, Museo nazionale etrusco di Villa Giulia, Villa Poniatowski, 1 ottobre-30 dicembre 2001* (Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, Ingegneria per lacultura, 2001), 37-42.

46 Luisa Banti, *Etruscan Cities and Their Culture* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1973), 51.

47 George Dennis and Pamela Hemphill, *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 292.

48 G. Sassatelli and E. Govi, “Cults and Foundation Rites in the Etruscan City of Marzabotto,” in *Material aspects of Etruscan religion: proceedings of the international colloquium, Leiden, May 29 and 30, 2008* (Paris: Leuven, 2010), 27-28.

area mentally in the sky.⁴⁹

The advent of ritual architecture was a pivotal development in the evolution of divination, marking a turning point where divination truly became an indispensable aspect of urban society. Consequently, professional diviners emerged. They occupied a position of considerable prestige as “experts of reading signs” and offered guidance to those residing in urban areas through various ways. The status of the soothsayers has been cogently proved by the examples of Attus and Calchas, however, I would like to provide one additional example. Tarchon the elder was a *Haruspex* who received the *Etrusca Disciplina* from Tages and is believed to have been the founder of Tarquinia, or even the League of Twelve Etruscan Cities.⁵⁰

The professionalization of divination is closely related to the involvement of which as a craft and discipline in solving the problems of urban life. During this process, diviners recorded and organized more omens, which accelerated the systematization of divinatory techniques. At the same time, the authoritative status of divination was established. The *Libri Rituales*, said to have been inspired by Vegoia’s revelation, is particularly noteworthy. It chronicles the manner in which urban settlements, altars, and domestic structures were erected, the reverence accorded to defensive fortifications, the distribution of gates within these fortifications, and the formation of military units.⁵¹ In terms of urban architecture, Varro provides a comprehensive account of how the Romans adopted the Etruscan rituals in the construction of their settlements:

Many founded towns in Latium by the Etruscan ritual...The *orbis* ‘circle’ which was made back of this (the wall), was the beginning of the *urbs* ‘city’; because the circle was post *murum* ‘back of the wall,’ it was called a *post-moerium*; it sets the limits for the taking of the auspices for the city.⁵²

Varro does not directly state that knowledge about rituals is derived from the *Libri Rituales* (although this is a likely assumption), but it is sufficient to demonstrate that divination was a significant aspect of urban life, with a wide-

49 Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita libri*, trans. Rev. Canon Roberts (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1912), Book 1, Chapter 18.

50 Johannes Laurentius Lydus, *De mensibus, de magistratibus, de ostentis*, ed. August I. Bekker (1837), 274-275.

51 Sextus Pompeius Festus, *De Verborum Significatione quae Supersunt cum Pauli Epitome*, ed. Karl Otfried Müller (1880), 285.

52 Marcus Terentius Varro, *De Lingua Latina*, ed. Roland G. Kent (London: W. Heinemann, 1938), Book 5, Chapter 32.

spread practice among the Romans. In terms of delimiting property, another prophetic fragment of Vegoia was found in *Corpus agrimensorum Romanorum*, a Roman collection on land surveying.⁵³ The prophecy dealt with the principles of land division at the beginning of the emergence of Etruscan cities and the status of land annexation since then. Arruns Veltumnus received this valuable legacy. He probably lived in the late 2nd and early 1st centuries BCE and used the authority of the diviner to protect himself from the Roman institution of land distribution.⁵⁴

In general, from early empirical records and comparisons to systematic organization and prediction, urbanization has played an indispensable role in the development of divination. One can observe that, when conceptualizing the nature of the universe, humans in early societies always tended to use their most familiar understanding.⁵⁵ This was reflected in the projection of renewal of material life and the complication of social relations, brought about by urbanization, onto the reading of the world—divination. Conversely, the advent of novel challenges in urban life underscored the necessity for a guiding force, prompting divination to become an integral component of urbanization, addressing practical issues one by one. While modern science may regard this approach as superstitious, its underlying logic, “observation-recording-verification-induction,” aligns with scientific principles. It is imperative that we should respect this attempt to comprehend the world.

5. Conclusion

A review of the available evidence suggests that the techniques of divination described in Etruscan, Near Eastern and Greek literature share several commonalities. These include both the forms employed and the fundamental concepts underlying the practice. In scrutinizing the most primordial form of divination, we discern a unified religious and cosmic conception, which encompasses a predestined connection between the divine and the mortal, the nature and the living. “During the Bronze Age, this unified perception of cosmos reached a high point of complexity when it was linked to the rise of state formation and complex societies throughout the Near East and

53 Karl Lachmann, *Gromatici veteres ex recensione* (Bradi, 1961), Vol. I, 350.

54 Jacques Heurgon, “The Date of Vegoia's Prophecy,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 49, Part 1 (1959): 41.

55 Bruce G. Trigger, *Understanding early civilizations: a comparative study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 412.

Europe.”⁵⁶ The cosmic rhythms manifest order, harmony, pennance, fecundity,⁵⁷ which enables divination to accomplish the purpose of predicting the future in a way that is unthinkable in the modern era.

Additionally, it is possible to locate this phenomenon within an examination of the history of the evolution of divination that the functions of divination get formalized and institutionalized in organizations such as the temple as urban states develop. This process of transforming the ordinary function of reading the signs of the world into a professional priesthood is what links Etruria, Greece, the Near East, and Egypt. It is a process that is far from mere “borrowing,” but rather a commonality that transforms a

56 Kristian Kristiansen and Thomas B. Larsson, *The Rise of Bronze Age Society Travels, Transmissions and Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 320.

57 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1987), 117.

society into an organized city-state. Therefore, it can be posited that the proliferation of institutions within urban states, with their focus on the temple, is a key factor in the evolution of divinatory practices in temples across the ancient world. Temples and sanctuaries became one of the centers of sophisticated urban activities, including divination. This is particularly evidenced in the case of ancient Babylon: the temple could operate as an administrative center, a center of learning, a place of jurisdiction, a center for healing and an economic institution.⁵⁸

In terms of human beings and the structure of human society, humans devised a cosmic order under the influence of supernatural forces, which gave rise to the emergence of divination. The pervasive nature of this process, which was forged by the evolution of early social structures and urbanization, offers an invaluable lens through which to comprehend how people grappling with urbanization perceive the world.

58 Beate Pongratz-Leisten, “The Animated Temple and Its Agency in the Urban Life of the City in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Religions* 12, no.8 (2021): 628.