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“On Puns and Divination: Egyptian Dream Exegesis from a Comparative Perspective.”

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ON PUNS AND DIVINATION:
Egyptian Dream Exegesis from a Comparative Perspective

Scott B. Noegel

Virtually every scholar who has examined the Egyptian dream manuals found in the Chester Beatty papyrus¹ and the Carlsberg papyri,² has remarked on the ubiquitous use of punning or paronomasia found in them. As a rule, this punning connects the dream, or protasis, with its interpretation, or apodosis. A few examples from P. Chester Beatty³ will demonstrate.

- a. ...eating the flesh of a donkey (*ʕ.t*): Good. (It means) he will become great (*s:ʕ*) (r.2.21).⁴
- b. ...white bread (*hḏ*) is given to him: Good. (It means) something at which his face will light up (*hḏ*) (r.3.4).
- c. ...seeing his face (*hr=f*) as a panther: Good. (It means) acting as chief (*hry-tp*) (r.4.2).
- d. ...fetching vessels (*jn hnw*) out of the water: Good. (It means) finding life's increases in his house (*n h3w*) (r.4.17).
- e. ...seeing his penis stiffen (*nhḥt*): Bad. (It means) the stiffening of his enemy (*nhḥt*) (r.8.2).
- f. ...being given a harp (*bn.t*): Bad. (It means) something through which he fares ill (*bjn*) (r.8.4).
- g. ...removing (*jtḥ*) his finger nails (*ḏb3.w*): Bad. (It means) the work (*b3k*) of his hands will be removed (*jtḥ*) (r.8.7).
- h. ...his teeth falling out below him (*hry=f*): Bad. (It means) one of his dependents (*hry.w=f*) will die (r.8.12).
- i. ...Baring (*kf3*) his own back end (*ph.[wj]*): Bad. (It means) he will bear poverty in the end (*phwj*) (r.9.10).

Both oral and visual forms of punning have long been recognized as standard literary features in Egyptian texts,⁵ and Egyptologists have long been aware of their exegetical and illocutionary dimensions. Nevertheless, the puns in the dream manuals have never been collected or studied systematically.⁶ Moreover, research on these dream texts, with few exceptions, has focused on philological and historical matters, and so the puns contained

in these texts have received only brief mention, usually in footnotes. Some researchers have attempted to apply the tools of modern psychoanalysis to the dream texts and their puns, but the vast cultural and social gaps that separate ancient Egypt from our own day make such an approach problematic. One of the most potentially fruitful avenues of research has come from scholars who have drawn attention to a number of close parallels between Egyptian and Mesopotamian oneirocritic traditions.⁷ However, these studies have been primarily descriptive in purpose, and thus they have not fully explored the significance of these parallels. This is particularly the case when it comes to the punning phenomenon.

Thus this study takes a comparative look at the use of punning in the Egyptian and Mesopotamian oneirocritic traditions. Of course, the social matrices that inform textual production in Egypt and Mesopotamia were not identical. There are, however, important similarities between the oneirocritic traditions of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Both appear to have been the dominion of ritual authorities who were expert in a number of scribal arts and rituals, and who played a role in the transmission of literary texts. Both the Egyptian and Mesopotamian literati were from very early times aware of the exegetical utility of punning. For both cultures the concept of punning was grounded in a belief in the performative power of the spoken and written word. In both cultures symbolic dreams were understood to be manifestations of a higher order that required a professional interpretation.

Oneirocritic manuals in both cultures employ a vocabulary shared in the magical and medical arts, and in fact both sets of manuals integrate apotropaic spells designed to ward off bad dreams. Egyptians and Mesopotamians appear to have viewed dream interpretation therapeutically, and sometimes refer to enigmatic dreams as 'knots' or 'performative spells', that one must 'untie' or 'loosen' (Akkadian *kišru*, Egyptian *ṯs.t*).⁸ Both sets of manuals establish binary relationships between their protases and apodoses, and both sets exhibit examples of dream polarity – whereby something normally viewed as good while awake becomes bad when it is the subject of a dream. One could cite other similarities, but suffice it to say that the evidence, at the very least, encourages comparative study. At the most, it suggests cultural exchange.

My emphasis here, however, will be on how the recognition of these shared Egyptian and Mesopotamian taxonomies and beliefs can help us to create an arena of other possible comparisons. Thus, even if, in certain cases, the similarities do not demonstrate overwhelming evidence of cultural exchange, they will still be of value, since they serve to bring the study of Egyptian and Mesopotamian dreams into greater dialogue.

My investigation has four components. First, an introduction to punning

as an exegetical tool in Mesopotamian dream omens and other divinatory texts. Second, a brief look at the accurate portrayal of oneirocritic exegesis in Mesopotamian literary texts. Third, a comparative look at the use of punning in the dream stele of Tanutamani (664–656 BCE, 25th Dyn.). Lastly, I conclude with some thoughts concerning the significance of the comparative evidence for the question of possible cultural exchange with Mesopotamia.

Punning as an exegetical tool in Mesopotamian divinatory texts

The earliest evidence in Mesopotamia for the practice of collecting dream omens comes from the Old Babylonian Period (c. 2003–1595 BCE), though our most complete collection is a compendium known in antiquity as *Zaḳīqu* discovered in the archive of Assurbanipal (c. 669–627 BCE). The latter collection, upon which I shall focus, is believed to have been copied from Old Babylonian originals. As will become immediately apparent, these omens correspond in striking ways to the Egyptian dream manuals, not just in format, but also in their use of punning as a hermeneutic.⁹ A small sampling from hundreds will demonstrate.

- a. If a man dreams he is eating a raven (*arbu*); he will have income (*irbu*).
- b. If (someone) has given him *miḥru*-wood; he shall have no rival (*māḥiru*).
- c. [If] one gives him the head (SAG) of a pick-axe; his head (SAG.DU) [will be cut off].
- d. If (in a dream) a person goes to Laban (*La-ba-an*); he will build a house (DÛ-u[š], [i.e., *ibannuš*]).¹⁰
- e. If a man dreams that he is travelling to Idran (*ID-ra-an* = *Á-ra-an*); he will free himself from a crime (*aran*).¹¹
- f. If he seizes a fox (KA₅.A = *šēlibu*), he will seize a Lamassu (AN.KAL), but if he seizes a fox in his hand (ŠU), and it escapes, he will have seized a Lamassu, but it also will escape from his hand (ŠU).¹²
- g. If one gives him bird 'oil' (Ì + GIŠ MUŠEN [*iššuri*]); they will shout 'Watch out! Watch out!' (*i-šur i-šur KA-ú*).

The exegetical use of punning in the Mesopotamian dream omens is hardly an anomaly. On the contrary, throughout Mesopotamian history it was a staple hermeneutic of the entire divinatory enterprise. Thus we also find it at work in a number of Old Babylonian extispicy omens which punfully interpret divine messages in various features of an animal's viscera:

- a. If the 'station' is long (*arik*); the days of the ruler will be long (*irrikū*).¹³
- b. If the 'reinforcement' is thick (*ulluṣ*); rejoicing (*ulluṣ libbi*) of the army.¹⁴

- c. If there is a ‘desire’-mark (*erištu*) in the head of the ‘station’, request (*erišti*) of a great god; the god requests (*irriš*) regular offerings.¹⁵
- d. If the ‘gate of the palace’ (KÁ.É.GAL) is wide (*irtapiš*); (additional) income (*erbum*) will come (*irrub*) to the palace (É.GAL).¹⁶
- e. If a ‘sign’ (*kakku*) rides the finger high up: (it is the) weapon (*kakku*) of an enemy.¹⁷
- f. If the ‘head’ (*re-iš-ša*) of the View is wide: the god will raise the man’s head (*re-eš a-we-im*).¹⁸

Of special interest, are those omens in which the diviner’s interpretation draws a punning connection between a visceral feature and the shape or name of a cuneiform sign, thus demonstrating the importance of writing in the divinatory process.¹⁹

- a. When (the) lobe is like a *kaškaš* [grapheme], (then) Adad (the storm god) will inundate (with rain). (The grapheme *kaškaš* here plays on *kaškaššu*, which is an epithet used of the storm god Adad.)²⁰
- b. When (the) lobe is like GRAPHEME (*h*) [here we have the grapheme, not its name], then the king will kill his favorites in order to allocate their goods to the temples of the gods. (The grapheme (*h*) is called *kaškaš*, which plays on the verb *kašāšu* ‘exact services for a debt or fine, to hold sway, to master’.)²¹
- c. When in the place of a *šulmum* (there is a) HAL-sign, (then) the dynasty of Akkad is ended. (Not only does the section of the sheep’s liver known as the *processus papillaris*²² [i.e., the *šulmu*] echo the meaning ‘end, complete’ [from *šalāmu*], but we also can read the grapheme HAL as *zāzu* ‘to divide into two or more parts, to separate’, which might suggest a divided kingdom.)²³
- d. When (the lobe) (*naplaštum*) is like a *pappum* [grapheme] (*ki-ma pa-ap-pi-im*), (then) the god wants an *ugbaltum*-priestess. (Note the play between the grapheme name and the second syllable of *ugbaltum*.)²⁴

Examples of divinatory punning also appear in the Old Babylonian omen series *Šumma Ālu* which contains hundreds of omens based on the observations of various types of occurrences. Thus, one example based on sexual behavior.²⁵

DIŠ NA ana GU.DU (= *qinnatu*) me-eḫ-ri-šú TE NA.BI ina ŠEŠ.ME[-šú] ù ki-na-ti-šú a-šá-re-du-tam DU-ak

If a man has anal (*qinnatu*) sex with his social peer, that man will become foremost among his brothers and colleagues (*kinātū*).²⁶

Even the so-called ‘historical omens’ recorded in chronicles and annals sometimes note punning associations. One of the oldest of such omens

belongs to Naram-Sîn (2254–2218 BCE).

If the ‘palace gate’ is there twice, the kidney thrice, (and) there are two perforations (*pilšû*) at the right of the gall bladder and they are permanent (*palšû*); it is an omen of the Apišalian whom Naram-Sîn took prisoner when breaching (*pilšim*) (the wall of his city).²⁷

Punning also occurs in *Šummu Izbu*, an Old Babylonian omen series dealing with anomalous animal births.²⁸

If a ewe gives birth to a lion, and it has matted hair (*malî*); a reign of mourning (*malî*); the land will be full of mourning (*malâ*); attack of the enemy.²⁹

Even stones with healing and other medical uses could derive their properties from the punning associations suggested by their names.³⁰ Thus a Neo-Babylonian magic stone list refers to the *aban arê* ‘eagle stone’ which was used as an amulet for aiding women during childbirth precisely because of the homonymy between *arû* ‘be pregnant’ and *arû* ‘eagle’.³¹ Additional examples of medical punning could be cited,³² but suffice it to say that such punning had a long life in Mesopotamian divination, for we find it in later Seleucid hemerologies from Uruk which, according to E. Reiner, ‘...assign to each of the calendar dates an ointment whose ingredients are related to the zodiacal sign by a pun, either linguistic or purely orthographic, on the name of the sign’.³³ Indeed, throughout Mesopotamian history punning is arguably the quintessential hermeneutic for all divinatory disciplines.

The punning hermeneutic as portrayed in Mesopotamian literary texts

Mesopotamian priests and diviners also played a role in the production and dissemination of literary texts.³⁴ Since they were steeped in the mantic arts, when they portrayed divination in literary texts, they did so realistically. Thus, even when dreams are interpreted in literary texts, they illustrate the punning hermeneutic. The Epic of Gilgamesh is a case in point, though others could be cited.³⁵ In Tablet I i of the Old Babylonian version, Gilgamesh has an enigmatic dream that he shares with his mother.³⁶

Mother, in the middle of the night I was feeling lusty and walking around among the young men. The stars of heaven gathered to me, and a *kišru* from Anum (the sky god) fell on top of me. I tried to lift it, but it was too heavy for me. I tried to budge it, but I could not budge it. The land of Uruk gathered around it, the young men kissed its feet, I took responsibility for it, they loaded it on to me, I lifted it and brought it to you.³⁷

Gilgamesh’s mother then interprets the dream. Interestingly, her interpretation is connected to the dream by a series of puns. Note in

particular Gilgamesh's words: 'a *kišru* from *Anum* fell on top of me' ([*ki*]-*iš-ru ha* ⁴*Anim im-qu-ut a-na ši-ri-ia*). The word *kišru* is polysemous permitting a number of interpretations including 'meteorite', 'strength', and 'knot'. The cuneiform signs also can be read as *kezru*, meaning a 'curly-haired male prostitute'.³⁸

His mother realizing that the dream contains a *kišru*, i.e., a 'knot' that must be interpreted, sees the dream as referring to a *meteorite*, but one that foretells the coming of a *hairy* man who will match Gilgamesh's great *strength*. The reader, of course, realizes that this man is Enkidu, whom a previous tablet has just described as a wild and *hairy* man³⁹ who was introduced to the ways of human sexuality by a *prostitute*.⁴⁰ Thus all of the meanings associated with the word *kišru* are echoed in the interpretation.

His mother also sees import in where the *kišru* fell. Gilgamesh said that it fell 'on top of me' (*ana šeriya*), and so his mother says that the man whom the *kišru* represents will be *ina šeri iwalidma* 'one born of the steppeland'. In effect, she has heard in the preposition *šeri* 'upon', the homophonous noun *šeri* 'steppeland'.⁴¹ Again the reader recalls the previous mention of Enkidu who 'spread open her (the prostitute's) garments, and lay upon her (*šeriša*)' (I iv, 20).

Gilgamesh then has a second dream in which he sees a *haššinnu* 'axe' which he embraces as a wife. The word *haššinnu* plays upon the word *assinu* 'male prostitute of the goddess Ishtar',⁴² and thus similarly suggests Enkidu. Gilgamesh further states 'I put it (the axe) on my side' (*aštakanšu ana ahiya*), a line that one also may read as 'I treated it as my friend (lit. brother)', because of the polysemy of *aḫu* meaning 'side' and 'brother'.⁴³ In fact, once they meet, the two are called friends,⁴⁴ and Gilgamesh even refers to Enkidu as: 'the axe of my side, the weapon of my hand' (*haššin ahiya [tukul]at idiya*, VIII ii,4).⁴⁵ Such puns (and there are many more here) lie behind the hermeneutical strategy of Gilgamesh's mother who perceives both dreams as portending the coming of a man who turns out to be Enkidu.

Thus, not only do both the Egyptian and Mesopotamian dream manuals employ punning as an exegetical strategy, but Mesopotamian literary texts also reflect this strategy when depicting the interpretation of dreams. These similarities suggest that it might be appropriate also to ask whether Egyptian literary accounts of dream interpretation similarly portray the punning hermeneutic, especially since we are interested in establishing an arena of possible comparisons. To my knowledge only one such possible literary account exists for comparison, the dream stele of pharaoh Tanutamani (664–656 BCE). Nevertheless, I would suggest that it does exhibit the punning strategy.⁴⁶

The Dream Stele of Tanutamani (664–656 BCE)⁴⁷

rnp.t nj-1 s:h^c = f m nsw [...]

(4) *m3.n hm = f rs.wt m grh*

hf3.w-2

w^c.w hr wnm = f

ky hr j3b = f

nhs pw jrj.n hm = f

(5) *nn gm.n = f st*

dd.n [hm = f]

nn r = j hr m-^c

h^c.n whm(w) = s n = f m dd

jw n = k t3 rsj.t

jtj n = k t3 mh.t

jw nb.ty h^c m tp = k

rdj n = k t3 m 3w = f wsh = f

[*nn*] (6) *ky psš = f hn^c = k*

wn.hm = f h^c(.w) hr s.t Hr m rnp.t.-1 tn

prj(.t) pw jrj.n hm = f m bw wnn = f jm

mj prj Hr m <h> bj.t

Year one of his accession as king [...]

His Majesty saw a dream in the night:

Two snakes

One upon (*w^c.w hr*) his **right hand** (*wnm = f*)

The other upon (*hr*) his **left hand** (*j3b = f*)

His Majesty woke up,

without finding them **any more**.

[His Majesty] said,

‘Why has this happened **against** (*hr m-^c*) me?’

Then it was interpreted to him saying,

‘To you belongs the land of the South (*t3 rsj.t*)

Seize for yourself Lower Egypt (*t3 mh.t*).

The two goddesses **appear** in glory on your head;

Seize for yourself the land in its length and breadth,

None other will divide it **with** you.’

His Majesty **appeared** upon (*hr*) the place of Horus (*Hr*) in this year one.

His Majesty went forth from the place in which he was like the going forth of Horus (*Hr*) from Khemmis.

It seems obvious to us that the two snakes in the dream refer to the Kushite headdress, especially since an image of Tanutamani wearing the headdress appears on the stele itself. Nevertheless, the pharaoh was bewildered by the dream until an unnamed interpreter deciphered it. Interestingly, a series of visual and audible puns connect the dream to its interpretation. Note, for example the mention of Tanutamani's right (*wnm*) and left (*j3b*) hands which echo the words *jmn.t* 'West' and *j3b.t* 'East' respectively, with which they are related.⁴⁸ Moreover, the spelling of the latter with the 'chisel' sign (i.e., *3b*, Gardiner's U 23, instead of the frequent R 15), though sometimes confused in later periods, allows for a subtle visual and audible play on the name 'Yeb', i.e., 'Elephantine' (i.e., *3bw*). Thus the appearance of the two snakes on Tanutamani's right and left hands suggests pharaonic power extending to the cardinal directions, a meaning picked up by the interpreter who asserts: 'To you belongs the land of the South; seize for yourself Lower Egypt...; seize for yourself the land in its length and breadth.' In fact, shortly after the dream, Tanutamani launches a campaign to Elephantine.⁴⁹

Moreover, the importance of Tanutamani's hands as loci for the dream's interpretation is signaled by a frequent use of the arm glyph, the 'ayin-sign, both phonetically and as a determinative. To illustrate, I have marked the words containing arm glyphs in bold. The repeated use of this sign, I would suggest, both underscores the importance of Tanutamani's hands for the dream's interpretation and emphasizes Tanutamani's 'power'.

Another word that may have suggested the dream's interpretation is the repeated use of the preposition 'upon' (*hr*) with which the pharaoh describes the position of the snakes. When combined with the directional puns just mentioned, the repeated use of *hr* suggests the position of the uraei 'upon' pharaoh's headdress, and, as such, pharaonic power 'over' the East and West. It also provides a punning allusion to 'Horus' (*Hr*) to whom he is likened twice in the text.

Similarly, given the Egyptians' well-known love for puns on numbers,⁵⁰ I wonder whether the common words 'one' (*w^c.w*) and 'the other' (*ky*), here in reference to 'snakes' associated with pharaoh, suggest the words *w^c.t* and *kt* (*kty*) both meaning 'royal uraeus'.⁵¹ Be this as it may, the total impact of the dream's images conveyed the assertion of royal power in all directions, with special attention to Elephantine.⁵²

The question of cultural exchange

The numerous similarities between Egyptian and Mesopotamian oneirocritic traditions have long begged for an explanation, and typically scholars have accounted for them by positing a degree of cultural exchange or by suggesting that both traditions represent parallel but internal developments.

Assyriologists typically have argued in favor of cultural exchange,⁵³ citing as important evidence a close resemblance in format and the establishment of binary relationships between dreams and their interpretations.⁵⁴ Like the Mesopotamian compendium, they argue, the Egyptian manual also employs myths and proverbs in its interpretations, and integrates an apotropaic spell designed to ward off the consequences of bad dreams. Both manuals are decidedly androcentric in their orientation. Assyriologists also note that Deir el-Medinah, where the dream manual was discovered, was inhabited by a number of foreigners who had a great deal of contact with the outside world,⁵⁵ and observe that, unlike the Mesopotamian omens, papyrus Chester Beatty inserts the words 'good' and 'bad' between the dream and its interpretation in order to explain it. Since presumably the positive or negative import of an interpretation would be obvious to the interpreter and thus require no qualification, this has suggested to some the adoption of a foreign tradition.⁵⁶ They also emphasize that the hieratic manual is something of an anomaly, and that there is no evidence that it was ever put into use, nor is there evidence for a separate group of dream specialists for the first two thousand years of Egyptian history.⁵⁷

Egyptologists, on the other hand, have asserted that there is not enough evidence for Mesopotamian contact with, or for influence on, either the hieratic or demotic manuals,⁵⁸ opting instead to explain both as internal parallel developments.⁵⁹ Regarding the hieratic manual, scholars often relate it to the appearance at this time of hemerological and menological traditions.⁶⁰ Some also point to a general shift towards divine guidance characterized by the increased use of oracles and omens, especially during the New Kingdom.⁶¹ These scholars treat the demotic dream manual as representative of a rise in oracular practices brought about by increasing societal anxieties, perhaps the result of mounting Assyrian pressure. If the Chester Beatty manual represents a native-born tradition, the argument goes, so also does the demotic manual.⁶²

Therefore strong arguments have been made representing both sides of the debate. Neither side, however, has factored into its arguments the parallel punning hermeneutic. Yet I would suggest that the presence of this hermeneutic does shed light on the debate. In particular, it makes an internal parallel development for the hieratic dream manual less likely.

Though scholars have shown that the technical language of hemerology resembles that found in the dream manual, and that the hemerologies employ analogy as an exegetical strategy, the hemerologies do not, as far as I can tell, operate on a principle of punning. One does not even find puns on the numbers of the days, where one might naturally look for such things.⁶³ Moreover, one of the hemerologies which dates to the reign of Ramesses III

claims to have been brought from the land of Hurru;⁶⁴ and though Bács dismisses the possibility of foreign origin for this text, he does so on the basis of a lack of foreign elements in the entries themselves,⁶⁵ and not on the basis of a comparative analysis with other Near Eastern hemerologies. Yet one can find a number of Mesopotamian hemerologies and menologies as early as the Old Babylonian Period. The Mesopotamian hemerologies, in fact, like the Egyptian versions, also employ a vocabulary found in medical and magical texts.⁶⁶ Indeed, one could argue that the Egyptian hemerological tradition also might represent cultural exchange with Mesopotamia. As Livingstone has noted, the Mesopotamian hemerological traditions enjoyed such a widespread distribution already by the 14th century BCE, from Elam to Boghazkoi and beyond, that they were, in his words, 'more popular than the Epic of Gilgames'.⁶⁷ In any event, until thorough comparative analyses are undertaken,⁶⁸ it is difficult to rely on the Egyptian hemerologies alone as evidence for the internal parallel development of Egyptian oneirocritic traditions.

Moreover, as comparative work on dreaming in contemporary non-Western cultures has shown, exegetical approaches to dreams are thoroughly grounded in, and determined by, the specific cultural and ontological frameworks of their users. Thus, while the process of dreaming can be considered a 'universal', the methods by which different cultures interpret dreams cannot.⁶⁹ Each culture's oneirocritic strategy is distinct, unless cultural influence has occurred. It is noteworthy that even though punning appears to have had an exegetical function from the earliest times in Egypt,⁷⁰ it does not appear to have been employed as a *divinatory* hermeneutic before the dream manual. In fact, the divinatory arts themselves appear to have been rare before the New Kingdom.⁷¹

Had we a non-Near Eastern dream manual that exhibited the punning strategy, one that was contemporaneous with the Mesopotamian and Egyptian materials, the case for an internal parallel development in Egypt would be bolstered, but such a text does not exist.⁷² Dream manuals from late antiquity (e.g., Byzantine, Islamic, and Indian compendia) also cannot be used as evidence since we know they represent the influence of Greek oneirocritic traditions.⁷³ Moreover, as far as I have been able to determine, the punning strategy is not employed by dream interpreters in traditional societies in modern Africa,⁷⁴ where one might potentially look for analogs or survivals of this technique.

In fact, punning as an oneirocritic 'universal' appears only in the works of Sigmund Freud. It is a curious and ironic facet of the sociology of knowledge that when Egyptologists and Assyriologists began studying their respective dream manuals, they explained the presence of such puns as evidence for a 'universal' dream hermeneutic, often citing the works of Freud in support.⁷⁵

Later scholars would adopt this explanation.⁷⁶ Freud himself, however, admitted that he derived the ‘universal’ from the punning dream interpretations found in the Babylonian Talmud (tractate Berachot 55a–57b),⁷⁷ and in the work of the 2nd century CE Greek oneirocritic Artemidorus of Daldis. Both of these works are widely recognized as the result of considerable Mesopotamian influence.⁷⁸ Therefore, what has now come to be regarded as a hallmark feature of modern psychoanalytic therapy and an oneirocritic ‘universal’, is more accurately speaking, a testament to the persuasive impact of ancient Mesopotamian intellectual thought.⁷⁹ Thus, the numerous correspondences between the Egyptian and Mesopotamian dream manuals and the presence of punning as a divinatory hermeneutic make an internal parallel development less likely.

Of course, one cannot argue the point beyond this, and the debate⁸⁰ over whether the hieratic manual represents a Middle Kingdom or New Kingdom development does not permit us to offer a more definitive historical context with which to postulate any vehicles of cultural exchange. However, if we see with others the rise of oracular media in Egypt as a priestly response to political and economic insecurities,⁸¹ then we may see the proposed initial interest in Mesopotamian oneiromancy as a response to mounting uncertainties. Given their long-standing tradition of theological punning, Egyptian priests would have easily adapted this tool to the new context of divinatory hermeneutics. Like so many other things in Egypt, the Egyptians quickly made it their own.

Notes

¹ The papyrus (Chester Beatty III. Recto 1–11, P. BM 10683) dates to the reign of Ramesses II (1279–1213 BCE), and was published first by Gardiner 1935. See also Sauneron 1959. Dated to Ramesses II by Pestman 1982, 159.

² The papyri (P. Carlsberg XIII and XIV) were published by Volten 1942; see also Sauneron 1959, and Zauzich 1980. For Hellenistic attitudes on dreams see also the archive of Ḥor at Sebennyos, see Ray 1976. The latter texts, however, are primarily interested in the solicitation of omens from the gods.

³ Some of these puns are noted also by Ritner 1997.

⁴ Found in Szpakowska 2003, 82.

⁵ See, e.g., Sethe 1924; Dawson 1927; Drioton 1933; Fairman 1935; Clère 1938; Drioton 1940; Sander-Hansen 1948; Grapow 1952, 44–7, 117; Firchow 1953, 215–35; Drioton 1953; Brunner 1959; Mofah 1964; Zandee 1964; Stewart 1971; Meltzer 1975; Morenz 1975; Vernus 1983; Guglielmi 1983; 1984; Goedicke 1987; Foster 1989/1990; Eyre 1992; Ritner 1993; Colon 1999; Noegel 1996, 179–80; Volten 1942, 59–64; Rendsburg 2000; Loprieno 2000.

⁶ Notwithstanding the convenient collection of word plays in both dream books gathered in Volten 1942, 63–4. An exhaustive study of the puns in the two dream

manuals is something I plan to publish in the near future. For a thorough treatment of punning in the P. Chester Beatty dream manual, see now Noegel and Szpakowska forthcoming.

⁷ Volten 1942, 66–78, also devotes a discussion to the topic, but concentrates his comparisons on the work of the 2nd century Greek oneirocritic Artemidorus of Daldis, and periodically on later Islamic dream omens. Since Volten did not have before him the Mesopotamian dream omens published by Oppenheim 1956, his comparisons to Mesopotamia were limited primarily to other types of omens, except for those dream omens published in Boissier 1905.

⁸ For the use of ‘knots’ in magic, see Ritner 1993, 143–4; in dreams, see Hodge 1975. The latter has been republished in Noegel and Kaye 2004, 199–220. Parkinson (1999, 71) also notes that the Egyptian word ‘untie’ (*whꜥ*) can mean ‘interpret a text’. Cf., Akkadian *kišru* ‘knot, spell’, in the Epic of Gilgamesh in the context of a dream. Some Akkadian ritual texts used for averting the evil consequences of a dream also are prefixed with the term *kišru* ‘knot, spell’. See Butler 1998, 104. The Akkadian word is to be connected to the Aramaic קִטְרָה ‘knot’ in Dan 5, 6, as observed by Müller 1970, 474, n. 3. For a more complete discussion of the term and its use in Daniel see Noegel forthcoming.

⁹ For a recent treatment of punning as an oneiromantic tool in ancient Mesopotamia and Israel, see Noegel 2001.

¹⁰ The place name Laban suggests *labānu* ‘make bricks’ and *banū* ‘build’ (another meaning suggested by the cuneiform sign DÙ), though neither word appears in the apodosis. The play on *labānu* ‘make bricks’ is noted by Oppenheim 1956, 268, n. 34.

¹¹ The cuneiform sign ID is exploited here for its alternative value Á.

¹² The interpretation Lamassu (protective spirit) derives from reading *šēlibu* as if it were written syllabically. As *še₇-lib₇-bu*, the same signs can be read (A).AN.KAL-u = ‘Lamassu’. Though ŠU means *qātu* ‘hand’, one lexical list gives us the equation ⁴LAMMA = ⁴ŠU. See Noegel 1995.

¹³ Starr 1983, 10.

¹⁴ Starr 1983, 10.

¹⁵ Starr 1983, 10.

¹⁶ Starr 1983, 10.

¹⁷ *YOS* 10, 33, ii, 26 ff., cited in Leichty 1970, 5. As Leichty notes (also p. 5): ‘This apodosis is very common in extispicy, and particularly in this paronomastic usage where *kakku* is used in both the apodosis and the protasis in a punning relationship’. I add to his observations that the entire omen plays on the word *kakku* by alliteration of the consonant /k/. The omen reads: MAŠ ŠU.SI ka-ka-kum e-li-iš ra-ki-ib ka-ak-ki na-ak-ri-im.

¹⁸ Jeyes 1989, 54; 2000, 345–73.

¹⁹ Leiberman 1977, 167, n. 44 remarks: ‘...every one of the interpretations based on the descriptions of the shapes discerned in liver omens and described with the names of cuneiform graphemes...was based on paronomasia’. For detailed information on the mechanisms of extispicy consult Starr 1974, 17–23; 1983.

²⁰ Leiberman 1977, 148, n. 24.

²¹ Leiberman 1977, 148.

²² Goetze 1947b, 6–7. Noted also in Leiberman 1977, 147, n. 10.

²³ Whatever the etymology of *šulmu* (see Goetze 1947b, 7), the play on *šalāmu* is

obvious. Jeyes 1989, 60 notes that the *šulumum* 'was associated with health, prosperity and success, especially for the campaign'. On *zâzu*, see *CAD Z 77*, s.v. *zâzu*.

²⁴ Lieberman 1977, 148, n. 19.

²⁵ On this omens series see, Nötscher 1928; 1929; 1930; Moren and Foster 1988. See now also Freedman 1998.

²⁶ *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian tablets in the British Museum* 39 44:13. Cited and translated Guinan 1997, 474, 479.

²⁷ Following the translation of Goetze 1947a, 257, with minor alterations.

²⁸ Leichty 1970, 6. Given the extensive use of word play as the hermeneutic of choice in mantic texts, a fresh search for word play in the *Šummu Izbu* texts perhaps is warranted. See, e.g., the observations of Frahm 1998, 10–12.

²⁹ Leichty 1970, 77, V 39. Noted also in Tigay 1983, 178, but as an example of Mesopotamian 'parable, allegory, or symbol'. This example more accurately belongs with Tigay's *remez* category.

³⁰ See Lambert 1980; Horowitz 1992, 120, n. 14.

³¹ Cited in Reiner 1995, 123–4. On the longevity of the belief in the stone's medical properties, see Barb 1950. For the use of necklaces of prophylactic stones associated with ancient rulers such as Rim-Sin and Hammurapi, see Beaulieu 1998.

³² See also Civil 1974, 329; Scurlock 1991, especially 139, 145–6. George 1991, 147 also notes the use of fanciful etymologies connecting protases to apodoses in the omens series *Enūma ana bīt marši āšipu illaku* 'When an exorcist goes to a patient's house'. Note also the remark of Hunger 1990, 35: 'Writings of this kind are not restricted to colophons. They are e.g. not infrequently found in medical texts for names of ingredients. The plant *ata'išu*, e.g., is once written *à-ta₇-wi-šum*; the point of this writing can only be seen from the cuneiform: the transliterations *a*, *ta₇*, and *wi* all represent the same sign which by this trick is repeated three times, each time with a different reading!'

³³ Reiner 1995, 116. Compare also the observation of Reynolds 1998, 351 concerning the omenistic identification of Mars and the constellation Cancer, by way of a pun between ^{mu}*sarru* (lul.la) 'Mars' (lit. 'False Star'), and ^{mu}*alluttu* (al.lul), 'Cancer'. See also Reiner 2000, 426. Note similarly, the remark of Finkel and Reade (1996, 248) that '...patterns of stars were thought by Mesopotamian astronomers to correspond not merely to figures, animal and so on, as seen perhaps by preliterate Mesopotamians and in modern pictures of the zodiac, but to the cuneiform signs with which the names of these zodiacal constellations were written (*šitir šamē*): this would offer infinite possibilities for puns and esoteric interpretations'.

³⁴ This is supported by the archaeological record which is making us increasingly aware of the role that practising priests have had in controlling a variety of textual materials, including literary, magical, and lexical texts (e.g., at Ugarit, Emar, and Sultantepe). See, e.g., Courtois 1969; Charpin 1985; Arnaud 1985/7; Lambert 1959, 121–4; Walcot 1966; Cavigneaux 1998. See especially his comment that 'This library, with its diversity, bringing together popular and utilitary texts with higher literature, shows very concretely how Mesopotamian "holism" coexisted with the intellectual production of the "hegemonic", "theistic" ideology' (pp. 257–8). See also Livingstone 1998a. Pedersén 1986, N4, 530 also notes the discovery of a tablet of dream omens in the house of an exorcist in Assur. See also Livingstone 1997. In a later period we may compare the priestly background of Josephus, who proclaimed himself an expert at oneiromancy with prophetic abilities. On this see Gnuse 1996, 5–6, 23, 26.

³⁵ Noegel forthcoming.

³⁶ For an interdisciplinary look at the the concept of 'dream sharing' as reflected in Mesopotamian texts, see Sweek 1996.

³⁷ The translation, with minor modification, is that of Dalley 1989, 136.

³⁸ Observed first by Kilmer 1982, 128. *CAD* K 436, s.v. *kišru*, also reads the word as 'decoy' (i.e., read as *ar-ru-um*).

³⁹ Both are hairy men (II, iii, 23), both are identified as the *kišru* of Anu (I iii, 4, 16, 31), and at one point in the epic, the people of Uruk refer to Enkidu by shouting: *anami* ^dGIŠ *mašūl pitam* 'He is like Gilgamesh to a hair!' (II v, 15).

⁴⁰ Note that *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian tablets in the British Museum*, 18 19 K.107:31 ff. identifies the KAR.KID, among other things, as both a *ḥarimtu* and a *kezretum*. See also Kilmer 2000, 94–5, who notes a possible pun in the Pennsylvania Tablet II, 3–5 by which Gilgamesh's 'good mood' (*šamḥākuma*) alludes to *Šamḥat*, the prostitute. She also points out (p. 96) that Gilgamesh's reference to Enkidu as his 'shield' (*aritu*) constitutes a further allusion to Ishtar since this term is used to designate her as Venus. She adds: '...it is not unlikely that *isinnāti* ["festivals"] is a play on *isinnu*, a variant of *assinnu* ["male servant of Ishtar"], and that *nēbeḥu* ["sash"] is a play on *nēbeḥ kezērim* (= *kasap kezertim*), the special payment made in connection with prostitution'.

⁴¹ Noted by Dalley 1989, 126.

⁴² Kilmer 1982, 128–32. On this figure and other types of prostitutes, see Lambert 1992 and Maul 1992.

⁴³ See, e.g., *anāku ana ummiya āš-ta-na-ka-ki* 'I shall always treat you as my mother.' *CAD* Š/1 148, s.v. *šakānu*. Dalley 1989, 152, n. 4.

⁴⁴ The identification of the pair as *aḥḥū* 'friends' is confirmed in VI 156 when we are told 'the two friends sat down (*ittašbu aḥḥē* (ŠEŠ.MEŠ) *kilallan*)'.

⁴⁵ *CAD* A/1 207, s.v. *aḥu*.

⁴⁶ For a textual edition, see Grimal 1981, 6–7; Pierce 1994, 193–209. Nectanebo II (360–343 BCE) also appears to have recorded an enigmatic dream, but the texts on which this dream was recorded are too fragmentary to be of service. See Ryholt 1998, 197–200; 2002; Gauger 2002; Breyer 2003.

⁴⁷ The transliteration is based on Breyer 2003.

⁴⁸ The form *wnm* appears to be a Late Period spelling for *ymn*. See Breyer 2003, 94.

⁴⁹ Register 6. Grimal 1981, 9.

⁵⁰ Egyptian plays based on numbers are frequent. Loprieno 2000, 13–15, 19–20.

⁵¹ The former is a *hapax legomenon*. See Hannig 1997, 182 and 890. Volten 1942, 57, n. 1 astutely draws attention to the two-fold appearance of 'snake' (*ḥf3w*) in P. Chester Beatty III (r.4.1 and r.7.19) where both times it is interpreted as 'a dispute' (*mdw*). I would suggest that the interpretation in those dream omens is possibly based on the association of *mdw* 'words' with *qd* 'speech', the latter being written rather with the serpent-sign *ḏ*.

⁵² Pierce 1994, 208 suggests that the dream oracle preceded Tantamani's enthronement.

⁵³ Oppenheim 1957, 245 argued that the New Kingdom manual represents a parallel internal development, but posited Mesopotamian influence for the later demotic manual. See also Cryer 1994, 221–2.

⁵⁴ Noted also by Parlebas 1982, 21.

⁵⁵ On the contact with the outside world see McDowell 1994, 59; Ward 1994, 61–85.

⁵⁶ Cryer 1994, 221–2.

⁵⁷ Szpakowska 2001, 34.

⁵⁸ Szpakowska 2000, 93, n. 270, asserts the need for additional archaeological support for New Kingdom contacts (Amarna notwithstanding).

⁵⁹ Volten 1942, 66 asserts that we may attribute categorical and compositional similarities between Egyptian and Mesopotamian omen texts to the nature of the divinatory enterprise ('...liegt es in der Natur der Sache...').

⁶⁰ Vernus 1981, 89–124; Bács 1990, 41–64. See also Currid 1997, 227.

⁶¹ Szpakowska 2001, 36–7.

⁶² Volten 1942, 16 proposes that the demotic manual stems directly from a hieratic original.

⁶³ There is one example of a pun in the *Cairo Calendar* recto IX, 2, noted by Vernus 1981, 104, n. 38; namely *jm = k pr m pr = k* 'you should not go forth from your house' (i.e., *pr* 'go forth' and *pr* 'house'). But this paronomasia obtains in the apodosis itself, and is in no way connected to the protasis or day (i.e. 16) with which it is associated.

⁶⁴ Bács 1990, 49–50.

⁶⁵ Bács 1990, 64.

⁶⁶ Livingstone 1998b. Of course, since the Egyptian hemerological texts date to the Middle Kingdom, the contact would need to have taken place prior to the 14th century BCE.

⁶⁷ Livingstone 1993, 102.

⁶⁸ A well-defined and holistic methodology will no doubt be required for such work; one that does not presume the presence of universal or conventional genres. Cf. the statement by Bács (1990, 64) with respect to criteria for determining foreign influence on Egyptian hemerological traditions: '...similarities inherent in the genre are not decisive in themselves'.

⁶⁹ Cf. the comment of Volten 1942, 69: 'Während wir vorläufig den literarischen Zusammenhang zwischen ägyptischer und babylonischer Traumdeutung also problematisch hinstellen müssen, dürfen wir hingegen mit Sicherheit behaupten, dass ägyptische Traumdeutung mit der babylonischer Zusammenhang in der späteren griechischen, mohammedanischen und europäischen weitergelebt hat.'

⁷⁰ See Loprieno 2000, 9–10.

⁷¹ Only kledonomanancy and hemerology texts are known in Egypt, but not until the Middle Kingdom. See von Lieven 1999.

⁷² There are also a number of newly identified (though unpublished) hieratic dream manual fragments in Berlin that date to the Saite period and which need to be checked for the punning phenomenon. Unlike the P. Chester Beatty, these fragments appear to organize the dreams by type; a feature that makes them an even closer parallel to the Mesopotamian exemplars. I thank Dr Joachim Quack for drawing my attention to these manuscripts and encourage the reader to consult his contribution in this volume for more information.

⁷³ Steinschneider 1863; Fahd 1966; Oberhelman 1991; Lamoreaux 1999; Hermansen 2001, 73. Local traditions also might have played a role. See already Tfinkdji 1913; and Miller 1994. For Mesopotamian influence on Islamic Ascent traditions see Hämeen-Anttila 2001.

⁷⁴ The comparatist will find of interest the cultural studies found in Jedrej and Shaw 1992; Carskadon 1993.

⁷⁵ Volten 1942, 60, n. 2 remarks: 'Das Wortspiel ist bei allen Völkern ein Charakteristikum für die Traumdeutung.' Volten, however, cites no source for his observation.

⁷⁶ e.g., Vernus 1983; Romer 1990, 69–71.

⁷⁷ The literature on the subject of talmudic influence on Freud is voluminous. See already Lauer 1913; Roback 1929; Cohen 1932; Velikovsky 1933; Grinstein 1968; Bakan 1975; Bilu 1979; Haddad 1981; Levinas 1981; Frieden 1990. For an example of the impact of talmudic dream on later Jewish oneiromancy see Werblowsky 1962; Elman 1998.

⁷⁸ For Mesopotamian influence on Artemidorus, see already Blum 1936, 52; and more recently Gnuse 1996, 117, Noegel 2002; forthcoming. For Mesopotamian influence on the Talmud and its exegetical techniques, see Tigay 1983; Geller 1995. With regard to the Babylonian Talmud's 'dreambook', it is interesting that some scholars have assumed some degree of influence either from, or on, Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica*. See, e.g., Alexander 1995. See also Noegel forthcoming.

⁷⁹ Cf. the remark of Volten 1942, 38 that Europe is '...die Mutter aller anderen Wissenschaften'.

⁸⁰ On paleographic grounds, Gardiner 1935 dated the papyrus to the reign of Ramesses II (1279–1213 BCE), but opined that its language suggests a date sometime in the Middle Kingdom period. More recently, some scholars have begun to question a Middle Kingdom date on linguistic grounds, and have suggested that the language is deliberately archaic. See, e.g., Vernus 1981; Israelit-Groll 1985; and Szpakowska 2000, 92–4; 2003, 69–71.

⁸¹ Szpakowska 2001, 36–7.

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