LUWIAN RELIGION, A RESEARCH PROJECT:
THE CASE OF “HITTITE” AUGURY

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If we aim to understand the relation between Anatolian and Aegean culture, and the position of Luwian culture or Luwic cultures within it, we can hardly avoid taking into account religion, which was a large part of these cultures and also makes up an even larger part of the surviving evidence for them. The aim of this paper is to explore one type of religious practice well attested in both Anatolian and Aegean sources, which can be argued to have a special connection with the Luwian sphere. The religious practice in question is augury or ornithomancy, the practice of divination through observing the movement of birds.

The practice of augury is attested in many different religious traditions and from many periods. Interpretations of bird omens are attested in the Akkadian Šumma Ālu-texts, the earliest examples of which are Old Babylonian (early 2nd millennium BC). However, the first records of a systematic augural technique seem to be those from the Hittite archives of later 2nd millennium. From the 1st millennium BC we have traces of augury among the Greeks, but much more evidence from Roman Italy, perhaps deriving from Etruria. In the Middle Ages augury was one of a number of forms of divination of interest to Arabs. Over the last century and a half augury has been documented in many pre-industrial societies, and a form particularly reminiscent of ancient augury has been documented among the Iban and Berawan peoples of Borneo. To some extent, these

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2 On Hittite augury, the best general introduction is now Haas 2008: 27–47; still important is Archi 1975.
4 On Roman augury, see Linderski 1986 and Rüpke 2005.
5 On Arabic ornithomancy (‘iyafa or ilm al-tira), see the excellent study of Fahd 1966: 431–450; Fahd 1978; an early reference to Arab ornithomancy in the Egyptian Delta it in the Greek historian Appian, fr. 19 (referred to by Hopf 1888: 5–6).
6 Some references can be found in the very out-of-date survey of Hopf 1888: 39–51.
7 For the augury of the Iban, see Freeman 1961, Richards 1972, King 1977; that of the Berawan, Metcalf 1976. Hose/McDougall 1912 were struck by similarities between the
different traditions show similar features, e.g.: the idea of an augural field or ‘templum’ within which the augur observes bird movements;\(^8\) a distinction, implicit or explicit, between oracles that are deliberately sought out and ones that occur by accident;\(^9\) and an interest in the direction of the flight of the birds.\(^{10}\) Such similarities should not be taken as indications that the different traditions are linked: given an underlying belief that the behaviour of birds predicts the future or is a sign of the will of the gods, roughly similar techniques are bound to develop.\(^{11}\) At the same time, it may well be that in some cases the technique of augury, like other ritual practices, move from one culture to another.\(^{12}\)

Evidence for bird oracles in the Hittite archives has been studied extensively in recent years, and neither the hypothesis that ‘Hittite’ augury was Luwian, nor the one that Greek augury may have been influenced by it, is new.\(^{13}\) However, we aim in this paper to put the case for each of these claims on a firmer footing. The paper has three parts: in part 1, we aim to establish that Anatolian augury of the 2nd millennium BC is strongly Luwian in character, and may have originated in the Luwian Arzawa; in part 2, we look at evidence for augury in the Near East, and suggest that a case can be made for influence from the Luwian zone via SE Anatolia; finally, in part 3 we consider augury as reflected in Greek sources from the 1st millennium BC, and suggest that here too, although the evidence is limited, a case can be made for Luwian influence, this time via the West.

\(^{8}\) For the augural field in Greek, in Roman and in the augury of Borneo: Metcalf 1976: 102.


\(^{10}\) See below for Anatolian, Greek etc.; for right and left in Bornean augury, see Jensen 1970: 132 (“mimpin” = “right to left”, “raup” = “left to right”).

\(^{11}\) Worth mentioning here are the reactions of European anthropologists to Bornean augury. Hose/MacDougall 1912: vol. 2. 255–256 suggested that it might be Indo-European in origin, showing signs of Sanskrit vocabulary, and in fact they used this as part of an overall thesis that the inhabitants of Borneo were descended from Caucasians. By contrast, Freeman 1961: 165 suggested that augury might have been brought by Greek traders.

\(^{12}\) For example, an Arabic work elucidating crow oracles has been traced back to the Assyrian *Summa Ālu*: Fahd 1961.

\(^{13}\) See most recently Högemann/Oettinger 2008: 17 and Haas 2008: 66.