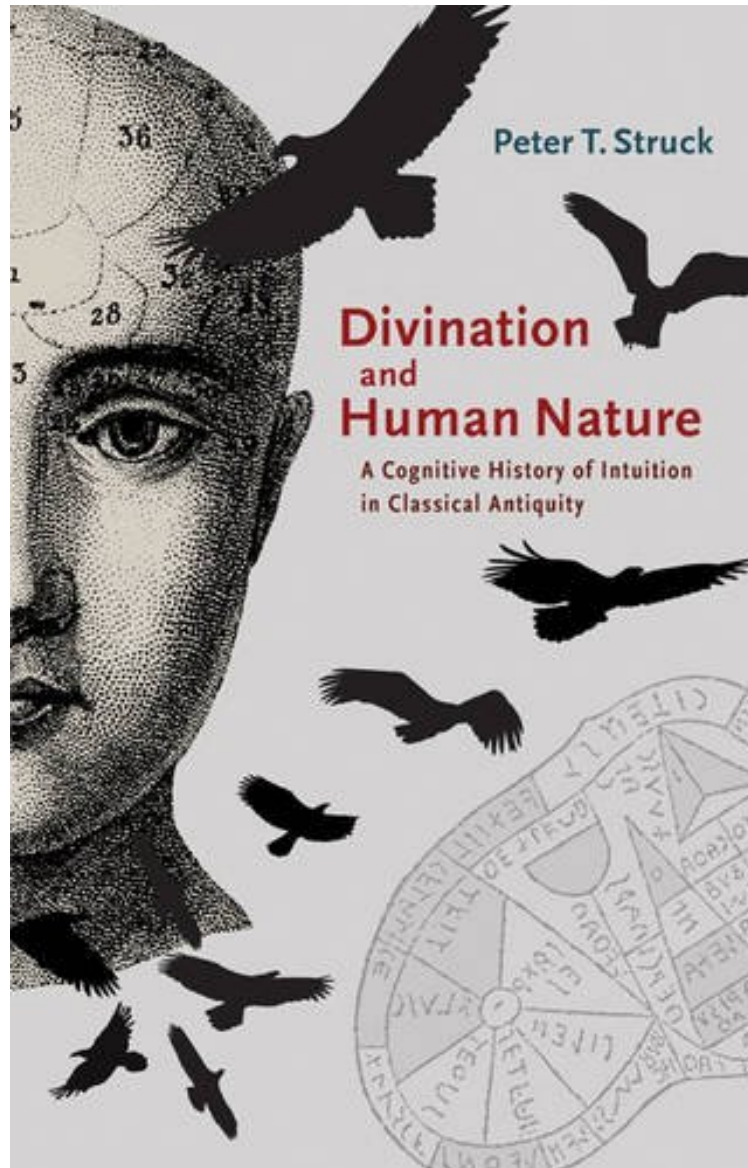


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# Divination and Human Nature: A Cognitive History of Intuition in Classical Antiquity

*Peter T. Struck*

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**Peter T. Struck : Divination and Human Nature: A Cognitive History of Intuition in Classical Antiquity** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Divination and Human Nature: A Cognitive History of Intuition in Classical Antiquity:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A surprising take on how the ancient Greeks saw divination  
By Massimo Pigliucci  
Peter Struck presents a scholarly, yet eminently accessible, treatment of the concept of divination in Ancient Greece. It is far too easy to dismiss the practice today as nothing more than superstition among preliterate people. Except that those people were highly literate, and included some of the giants of Western intellectual history, from Plato to Aristotle to the Stoic philosophers. Struck doesn't attempt to rehabilitate divination for the 21st century -- which would be silly -- but rather re-interprets the ancients' take on it, convincingly showing that they distinguished two types: i) divination done by experts, using clues from natural phenomena such as atmospheric happenings and animal entrails; and ii) divination done by people with unusual abilities to somehow perceive the future. The first one is a type of natural science, the latter is akin to what we call intuition. You will never look at divination, or the ancient Greeks, quite in the same manner after reading this insightful book.  
1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.  
intriguing and lively exploration  
By Heidi Ettinger  
Fascinating and incisive - original premise, written with verve and erudition.

Divination and Human Nature casts a new perspective on the rich tradition of ancient divination the reading of divine signs in oracles, omens, and dreams. Popular attitudes during classical antiquity saw these readings as signs from the gods while modern scholars have treated such beliefs as primitive superstitions. In this book, Peter Struck reveals instead that such phenomena provoked an entirely different accounting from the ancient philosophers. These philosophers produced subtle studies into what was an odd but observable fact that humans could sometimes have uncanny insights and their work signifies an early chapter in the cognitive history of intuition. Examining the writings of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Neoplatonists, Struck demonstrates that they all observed how, setting aside the charlatans and swindlers, some people had premonitions defying the typical bounds of rationality. Given the wide differences among these ancient thinkers, Struck notes that they converged on seeing this surplus insight as an artifact of human nature, projections produced under specific conditions by our physiology. For the philosophers, such unexplained insights invited a speculative search for an alternative and more naturalistic system of cognition. Recovering a lost piece of an ancient tradition, Divination and Human Nature illustrates how philosophers of the classical era interpreted the phenomena of divination as a practice closer to intuition and instinct than magic.

"The core of this beautifully researched and lucidly argued book is a study of the most important and influential philosophical analyses of divination from the ancient world."--Brad Inwood, Times Literary Supplement  
"An absorbing work of intellectual history, demonstrating a confident command of the philological and philosophical issues, and lucidly exploring Greek philosophical engagement with the epistemological and theological puzzles presented by divination. The book offers a fresh approach to the topic of divination by juxtaposing it with ancient and modern theories of cognition, and by moving past the debate over the (ir)rationality of the practice. . . . I hope that this excellent study will stimulate further research into such questions."--Jennifer Larson, Bryn Mawr Classical Review  
"How could sophisticated thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics accept divination as a valid source of knowledge? In this fascinating book, Peter Struck shows how the ancients viewed divination as seriously as we view the idea of intuition, and he reveals a deep structure of interpretation still of interest today."--David Konstan, author of Beauty: The Fortunes of an Ancient Greek Idea  
"This wonderfully interesting book marshals a great deal of information about ancient philosophy in order to make the fascinating argument that what we call divination would have been familiar to ancient intellectuals under Greek terms that we now translate as intuition.' It is a major step forward in understanding the concept of divination in ancient Greece and Rome."--Sarah Iles Johnston, author of Ancient Greek Divination  
"A novel account of the concepts of intuition in the ancient world, this book is a remarkable study of how these concepts were clothed in the language of divination. Struck traces this history of divination-as-intuition through some of the most important surviving ancient texts on the subject. His tremendously stimulating book is replete with fresh insights and makes a significant contribution to the histories of ancient philosophy and religion."--Phillip Horky, Durham University  
About the Author  
Peter T. Struck is the Evan C. Thompson Term Professor of Classical Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts (Princeton).