

# On the Intersection of Power and Prediction: Aspects of Divination in Early China and Greece

Lisa Raphals

University of California, Riverside

This material is part of an extensive comparative study of the roles of divination in the formative cultures of China and Greece.<sup>1</sup> By divination I mean a deliberate search for understanding of the *hidden* significance of events in the future, present or past. (If it were obvious, there would be no need to divine.) As a set of coherent reasonable technologies for predicting (and potentially controlling) the future, divination emerges as a major constitutive element in both Chinese and Greek thought and social practice, but its importance only begins with predicting the future. Divination was also used to interpret the hidden causes or significance of events, variously understood as the will of the gods, patterns of change, or cosmic principles. It affected the development of medicine, law, philosophy, politics, and the history of science.<sup>2</sup>

Recent research stresses the dual aspect of divination, as both a set of mental attitudes and a set of social institutions. A series of studies over the past two decades have focused on important sociological and epistemological dimensions of divination, both in antiquity and in the present. Recognition of the importance of the social role of divination invites many other questions. What domains of society were under the authority of divination, and where were diviners in the hierarchy of members of a society who wield the power of decision, such as kings, priests, or judges? The possibility and act of prophecy themselves created important choices that determined decisions on both public and private matters. It is important to stress the "normalcy" of both aspects of divination in civilizations where it was central. It was not an isolated mentality, opposed to such "ordinary" social practices as law, medicine, or

---

<sup>1</sup>This research was partially supported by funding from the President's Research Fellowships in the Humanities, University of California, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the American Council of Learned Societies.

<sup>2</sup>In particular see Vernant 1974 and Chemla et. al. 1999.

administration, but rather a coherent part of social thought (analogous, *mutatis mutandis*, to consulting a physician or a stockbroker).

Some Hellenists have applied the methods of anthropology to study the function of Greek oracles, and have concluded that their functions were less predictive than regulatory. In this view, oracles offered ways to resolve doubtful situations and to validate decisions already taken at the community level. Classical studies of the subjects of Greek divination take them as keys to changing stress points of Greek society.

A related question is the relation between diviners and political authority. What were the political roles of Greek or Chinese diviners? What were the tensions between divination and political authority? These questions are complicated by a longstanding (but now changing) tendency of both Greek and Chinese historians to downplay the role of religion and ritual in favor of (on the Hellenic side) Greek rationality and (on the Chinese side) Confucian humanism.

In a forthcoming book I make that broad argument that Chinese and Greek divination can be examined in comparable phases of intellectual, social and political organization. The first is a broadly theocratic phase in which divinatory activity arises in close connection to royal power and state ritual. Diviners are either officials or military figures, either of royal birth or high officials working closely with kings. In China this period includes the Shang, Western Zhou, and early Eastern Zhou, to the -6th century.<sup>3</sup> In the Greek world this phase is documented in accounts of legendary Homeric manteis and divination in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. It also includes the testimonies of Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns, and evidence for the rise of oracles in the -8th through the -6th centuries.<sup>4</sup>

A second phase is marked by the absence of central political power and intense competition, both among diviners and between diviners and other intellectual and textual specialists. This phase is most marked in Warring States China and with fifth and fourth century Greece. It is marked by the relative political independence of diviners. This period sees the domination of a quintessentially Greek mode of divination, oracles, and the rise of a very

---

<sup>3</sup>Chinese words are transliterated in Pinyin. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>4</sup>Except where otherwise indicated, Greek texts are referenced according to the Loeb Classical Library editions. With the exception of terms that are well known otherwise, Greek terms are transliterated according to the third edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

particular oracle, the pan-Hellenic shrine of Apollo at Delphi. Political consultation at Delphi and the unique reputation of this oracle stands in contrast to the management and procedures of more typical Greek oracles, such as those at Dodona and Didyma.

In a third phase, divination again comes under the sway of a powerful and centralized imperium. The independence of diviners from political authority is compromised or nonexistent, and divination becomes an important aspect of the legitimation of state power. I identify this imperial phase with the Qin and Han dynasties in China, with the rise of Alexander in the Greek world and, of course, Rome.

It should be said that this periodization is not without its problems, since the nature of the evidence and source materials is very different. There is significant Chinese evidence for the first period, but the Greek evidence is weaker, as the Homeric poems cannot be taken as historically transparent accounts of divinatory practices. Our knowledge of archaic Greek oracles all comes from oral tradition, via the Homeric poems, which had particular features in the values and heroic types they portrayed. Sources are by far the strongest for the classical period, where there is a wealth of historical accounts in both Greece and China. Other problems arise for Greco-Roman sources for the third period. For example, it is difficult to judge to what extent the decline of oracles in antiquity was a real phenomenon. Greek historical accounts are weak, and most evidence comes from accounts not interested in historical narrative.

Despite problems of evidence, I concentrate on the third period, from mid -4th to mid -2nd century Greece and Qin and Han China. In these periods, divination comes under the sway of a powerful and centralized imperium in both Qin-Han China and Hellenistic Greece and Rome. Reemergent political authority, and new uses of divination based on it, provide both advantages and disadvantages for diviners and also to the private individuals who still consult them. In this period, there is no independence from political authority, and divination again becomes an important aspect of the legitimation of state power.

I begin with the imperial uses of divination in Qin and Han China and Hellenistic Greece. These include what we might be tempted to call state sponsored scientific inquiry and the appropriation of divination for political authority and legitimation. Next I touch on the place of private divination in this complex scenario. Was mantic access constrained by the new interest

and control of the state? Finally, I take up a line of argument advanced by some Classicists that the primary function of oracles (or more broadly, divination) was the production of social consensus, rather than the prediction of the future (or interpretation of the past), in other words, that consensus was more important than validity. Although classicists have turned to anthropology to try to understand the social roles of divination, that comparative turn has not extended to China. I conclude with a Chinese perspective on this issue.

### ***Divination and the State***

In both Qin and Han China and Hellenistic Greece and Rome, divination was an officially sanctioned and supported state activity, both for military purposes and for other state purposes such as control of the calendar, management of agriculture, and legal administration. Divination became an important tool for the legitimation of the new imperium and its ongoing decisions and policies. One form in which divination was used to bolster political authority was in the inclusion of new or newly reinvented cosmologies that underscored the authority of the state. Another form of state sponsorship, and control, was the selective inclusion (or exclusion) of divination texts in canonical collections.

### **Military Divination**

In both China and Greece, distinctive modes of divination were used for the decision to go to war at the state level and battlefield divination in situ.

#### ***Greece***

Greek technical divination was closely connected with warfare. Both legendary and historic military diviners were trained in warfare and military command. From the -6th through the -4th centuries, such manteis served a variety of tyrants and kings, sometimes changing their allegiances when the signs were unfavorable. For example, when the tyrant Telys of Sybaris attacked Croton about -510, his Elean mantis Callias quit his service and fled to Croton because he could obtain no favorable omens on Telys' behalf. Croton gave him plots of land where his descendants lived, even in Herodotus own time.<sup>5</sup> Inscriptions and epitaphs indicate the presence of military manteis at several important battles, in some cases, staying to fight after predicting defeat. Most famous is Megistias, the mantis who predicted defeat at Thermopylae (480).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>Hdt. 5.44.

<sup>6</sup>Hdt 7.219-221.

Consultations to Delphi on warfare (and government) decrease compared to earlier periods. The topic that dominates consultation is religious cult, the single largest topic of consultation (roughly a third of all state consultations). But this is not to say that military divination disappeared. Military manteis continued to be employed by the Hellenistic kings.

In addition to the oracles, Alexander's biographers report several other incidents of divination for Alexander by the mantis Aristander. According to Plutarch, during the siege of Tyre in 331. Aristander performed sacrifices and interpreted the entrails to affirm that the city would be taken that month.<sup>7</sup>

Aristander reappears during the siege of Tyre in 331. According to Plutarch, he performed sacrifices and interpreted the entrails to affirm that the city would be taken that month.<sup>8</sup> Immediately afterward he proceeded to Gaza, when a portent occurred. A large bird flew over him and dropped a clod of earth on his shoulder. The bird settled on a battering ram and became entangled in the nets that protected the ropes of the machine. Aristander interpreted this as a confirmation of his prediction that Alexander should be wounded and the city reduced.<sup>9</sup>

On the eve of the battle of Gaugamela in 331, Alexander was said to have spent the entire night with Aristander, performing "mysterious ceremonies" and sphagia sacrifice. In the morning, his disheartened advisers urged Alexander to attack by night, to mask the actual danger of the battle. Instead, at the start of the battle, Aristander pointed out an eagle that soared over Alexander and flew toward the enemy, effectively encouraging the army to charge Darius' troops.<sup>10</sup>

Aristander disappears from the record after the murder of Cleitus in 328, but another seer, Demophon appears briefly in the accounts of Diodorus and Curtius (but not in Arrian or Plutarch). Demophon warned Alexander against attacking the town of the Malli in 326, and warned of portents indicating danger from a battle wound. Alexander rejected these warning

---

<sup>7</sup>Plut. Alex. 25.1-3.

<sup>8</sup>Plut. Alex. 25.1-3.

<sup>9</sup>Plut. Alex. 25.4-5.

<sup>10</sup>Plut. Alex. 33.1-3.

and led the attack, in which he was dangerously wounded.<sup>11</sup>

Given the extreme textual problems and their ultimate insolubility, what do we make of the problematic testimonies concerning the role of oracles and divination in Alexander's military campaigns and self-representation? One approach is to stress their highly fictional nature and to reject many of them as unhistorical. An alternative is to attempt a larger view of Alexander's attitudes toward divination. Lowell Edmunds has argued that Alexander's religiosity has been overlooked or underestimated in recent scholarship. Alexander's devotion to the gods was widely recognized; Arrian, for example, refers to him as "the most attentive with respect to the gods" (*tou theiou epimelestatos*).<sup>12</sup> Modern scholarship often trivializes this aspect of Alexander's character, either by reducing it to debates about whether he believed himself to be divine (based on the interpretation of a few historical incidents) or by representing his religiously motivated actions as political propaganda. Edmunds argues that Alexander's heroism and emulation of mythical heroes were aspects of a Macedonian religiosity that had more in common with 6th century or even Homeric values than with the values of 4th century Greece.<sup>13</sup> As he puts it: "Homeric kingship lived on in Macedon. The king was preeminent amongst the aristocratic chiefs on account of his own wealth and power. His power consisted in his own *aretê*."<sup>14</sup> And Macedonian kingship, like Homeric kingship, was deeply religious; Macedonian kings were priests who could, for example, purify the army at need.<sup>15</sup> Macedonian kings were also deeply involved with divination, and retained mantic seers such as Aristander and Demophon as advisers.

## **China**

Military prognostication was equally important in China, but since warfare was considered a ritual activity of the state, military divination at the state level was not separate in kind from other forms of state ritual divination. The decision of whether to go to war typically

---

<sup>11</sup>Diod. 17.93; Curt. 9.4.27-29. By contrast Arrian (*Anab.* 6.9.1-11.8) and Plutarch (*Alex.* 63) do not mention him.

<sup>12</sup>Arr. *Ana.* 7.28.2.

<sup>13</sup>Edmunds 1971.

<sup>14</sup>Edmunds 1971, p. 370.

<sup>15</sup>Curt. 10.9.11-12.

was taken at the state level by the use of turtle and yarrow divination. For example, the *Zuozhuan* records that in -645 Duke Mu of Qin orders a yarrow divination to determine whether to launch a retributive invasion against Jin.<sup>16</sup> Another account describes a divination in the state of Wei in -563. At the time, Chu and Zheng had invaded Wei's ally Song, and Jin had invaded Chu's ally Qin (in retaliation for an earlier incursion). The Marquis of Wei was away aiding Song, and in response to a crisis, the Wei official Sun Wenzi divined about whether to counterattack, but asked the king's stepmother Ding Jiang to interpret the cracks:

孫文子卜追之獻兆於定姜。姜氏問繇。曰：兆如山陵，有夫出征而喪其雄。  
姜氏曰：征者，喪雄禦寇之利也。

Sun Wenzi performed turtle divination on whether to pursue them, and then presented the crack to Ding Jiang. Lady Jiang asked for the omen. He said: "The crack is like a mountain suspended. There is a chief leading a raid only to mourn his fighters." Lady Jiang said: "The chief losing his fighters opposing bandits are your profit."<sup>17</sup>

The passage ends with a verification that Wei did counterattack and captured Huang Er of Zheng.

At a much later date, the use of turtle and yarrow divination to predict the rise and fall of states was justified at a more general level by Zhong Yong 中庸 (Unwavering Pivot) chapter of the *Liji*:

至誠之道·可以前知·國家將興·必有禎祥·國家將亡·必有妖孽·見乎  
蓍龜·動乎四體·禍福將至·善必先知之·不善必先知之·故至誠如神·

It is characteristic of him who is entirely perfect that he can foreknow. When a state or family is about to flourish, there are sure to be lucky omens, and when it is about to perish, there are sure to be unlucky omens. They will be seen in the turtle shell and stalks; they will affect the movements of the four limbs. When calamity or happiness is about to come, the good is sure to be foreknown by him,

---

<sup>16</sup>*Zuozhuan*, Xi 15.4, p. 353 (cf. Legge 167), cf. Xi 13 (Legge 161) and Xi 15.4, pp. 353 and 363 (Legge 167-69).

<sup>17</sup>*Zuozhuan*, Xiang 10.5, pp. 978-79 (cf. Legge 447).

and the evil also. Hence, he who is entirely perfect is like a Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

Military divination was also performed on the battlefield. Accounts of military divination in the *Zuozhuan*, descriptions of the military use of cloud divination and pitchpipes in the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* treatises, and the Mawangdui and Yinqueshan texts on cloud and wind divination all attest to the ongoing importance of these methods. Evidence from both the received tradition and excavated texts attests the use of "observing qi" for military and state purposes. Techniques for "Watching Qi and Clouds" (*wang qiyun* 往氣雲) became prominent in the Han, and persisted into the Qing.<sup>19</sup> These treatments of cloud qi are more extensive and systematic than the brief references to cloud qi (*yunqi*) in Warring States texts, either in naturalistic or divinatory contexts. The Han texts are closely linked to state and specifically military divination. The *Shiji* contains a treatise on the use of pitch pipes in wind divination.<sup>20</sup> It describes the six pipes as fundamental to state decisions, especially in military decisionmaking. The chapter describes eight directional winds, their relation to 28 lunar lodges (*xiu* 宿), and their domains of activity.<sup>21</sup>

There are also records of the use of turtle and yarrow divination to interpret dreams with state or military implications. For example, the *Hou Hanshu* describes a woman's nightmare being interpreted to signify an impending armed uprising in +27.<sup>22</sup> The next year, the rebel leader Tian Rong 田戎 used turtle divination to decide whether to surrender to Cen Peng 岑彭.<sup>23</sup>

### Conflicts of Authority

Military divination of this kind left the door open for potential conflicts of authority between court and military divination and command. During the Warring States period, an emergent class of military strategists positioned themselves against diviners in arguing for their

---

<sup>18</sup>Liji 53.4a (Zhongyong), trans. Legge ch. 28 sec. 24, p.

<sup>19</sup>Hulsewé 1979; Bodde 1981; Loewe 1988 rpt. 1994, pp. 191-213; Ho Peng Yoke and He Biaoquan 1985, Lewis 1990, pp. 139-44; Huang Yi-long and Chang Chih-ch'eng 1996.

<sup>20</sup>*Shiji* 25: 1239-54; Chavannes 3:293-319.

<sup>21</sup>Each "lodge" was each named by a star within it and each comprising some 13 degrees (*du* 度) of the circle. See Chen Zungui 1980-89, pp. 305-84; Needham with Wang Ling 1956 (vol. 2), pp. 351-57; Needham 1959 (vol. 3), pp. 229-59; and Major 1993, pp. 74, 84-86, 92-94 and 118-126.

<sup>22</sup>*Hou Hanshu* 12: 504.

<sup>23</sup>*Hou Hanshu* 17: 658, trans. Bielenstein 1959, pp. 26f.



own rationalized techniques for predicting victory and defeat. In an atmosphere of decreased competition, with only one Chinese state employing generals, there was less place, or need, for such polemics. Military divination found a new place in the ritual aspects of the Confucianized state that developed over the Han.

There was a different potential for competition between military diviners and other technical experts under the Hellenistic kings. On the one hand, they transformed the process of warfare with innovations in machinery and tactics, but they continued to employ diviners at the highest level. One might say the potential for conflict was addressed by a distinction between ends and means. Diviners were employed to determine whether victory was possible at a particular time; military engineers and strategists were consulted to bring it about. There is also evidence that both Chinese and Greek technical diviners passed their skills in lineages from father to son, and in a few Chinese cases, from father to daughter.

## **State-sponsored Astronomy**

### ***China***

Chinese state sponsorship of divination did not end with warfare. Evidence for state sponsorship of astronomy in the Han comes from its bureaucracy, from texts and instruments excavated from tombs, and from official Han records. In Han bureaucracy, astronomy was one of the functions overseen by the Chamberlain for Ceremonials (*Taichang*), the foremost of the Nine Chamberlains (*jiu chang*). The *taichang* was in charge of ceremonies in the Imperial ancestral temples and the “worship of Heaven and Earth.”<sup>24</sup> His subordinates headed several departments, and included the Grand Diviner (Taibu 太卜) and the Grand Astrologer (Taishiling 太史令), in charge of astronomy and astrology. The officials he supervised included officials in charge of astronomical observation (*Lingtai cheng* 靈臺丞 and *Mingtang cheng* 明堂丞) held low rank as “assistants.” This parallels the account of the *Zhouli*, where the astronomical bureau was located in the Ministry of Spring (Chunguan), which approximately corresponded to the Han Taichang ministry.<sup>25</sup> By the Later Han, the *Taishiling* supervised a staff that included officials devoted to observing *qi* (*hou qi* or *wang qi*).<sup>26</sup> In addition to the astronomical bureau,

---

<sup>24</sup>*Hanshu* 19A:726-727.

<sup>25</sup>Eberhard 1957, p. 46.

<sup>26</sup>*Hou Hanshu* 25:3572.

there are indirect accounts of emperors conducting astronomical observation. There is one record of emperor Ming of the Later Han "mounting the Divine Terrace to observe primeval qi (*wang yuan qi*)."<sup>27</sup> Whether or not the observations were conducted by the emperor or duly appointed officials, a "divine terrace" was constructed during the Han and observations were made during the initial month of each season.<sup>28</sup>

Qin astrocalendric texts from Zhoujiaitai and Han *liuren* and *jiugong* divination boards from Fuyang attest to the increasing complexity of astronomical observation. The occupant of the Zhoujiaitai tomb seems to have been a petty official of young age (less than thirty years), but some of the bamboo slips buried with him seem to be of an official nature. In addition to the astrocalendric text, there are medical recipes and a calendar that lists all the ganzhi days of the 34th year of Qin Shi Huang's reign period (the year -213).<sup>29</sup> The occupant of the tomb at Shanggudui, Fuyang was a far higher official; Xiahou Zao was the second marquis of Ruyin and a high Chu official. It has become a commonplace that the Qin preserved calendric and divination texts when other books were burned, and the Han founded academies for the study and exegesis of Confucian texts, starting with the *Yijing*, a transformation of a divination manual.

Astrocalendric and meteorological texts and instruments also appear in the tombs of Han officials such as Li Cang, the chancellor of Changsha and Marquis of Dai (the occupant of Mawangdui Tomb 1). Although there is too little evidence to generalize, the presence of astrocalendric texts and instruments combined with other official documents in the tombs of low ranked and high officials suggests state sponsorship of astrocalendric observation.

Han histories also indicate the official character of astronomy. The "Offices of Heaven" chapter of the *Shiji* (127) describes observations of the stars, planets, correlations, and prognostications. Astronomical information appears in accounts of portents and abnormal natural phenomena in three portions of the *Hanshu*: the annals (*benji*, *Hanshu* 1-12), the chapter on astronomy (*Hanshu* 26, the correlate of *Shiji* 27), and the Treatise on the Five Phases or *Wuxing zhi* (*Hanshu* 27). Court-sponsored astrocalendric treatises of the *Huainanzi* and the

---

<sup>27</sup>*Hou Hanshu* 2:100, cf. 69A:2246.

<sup>28</sup>*Taiping yulan* 877.3b, cf. Hulsewé 1979, p. 40.

<sup>29</sup>The tomb includes a total of 387 bamboo slips, as well as wood figures, lacquerware, and models of chariots and horses.

*Hanshu* include technical discussions of astronomical observation, including the lunar lodges and diviners' boards.<sup>30</sup> A related index of the official character of Han astronomy comes from accounts of portents in official Han sources and their use as moral and political critique of the throne.

The two major foci of Chinese court astronomy and astrology were the calendar, which itself was used for divinatory purposes, and the observation, recording and explanation of portents: celestial events such as eclipses, supernovae, planetary conjunctions and comets.<sup>31</sup> Observations of this kind were not possible during the turmoil of the Warring States, and Sima Qian himself observes that only with the political order of the Qin and Han were such regular observations possible.<sup>32</sup> The focus on calendrics is also prominent in other court sponsored texts (such as the Yueling calendars of the *Liji*) and in daybooks, which were nonofficial texts buried in the tombs of high officials.

The "Offices of Heaven" (Tianguanshu 天官書) chapter of the *Shiji* chapter has sections on prognostication by the sun, moon (including eclipses of both), various stars, and clouds and mists, as well as prognostications about harvests.<sup>33</sup> The section on clouds and mists describes "observing cloud qi" (*wang yunqi* 望雲氣).<sup>34</sup> Clouds are identified by resemblance to the figures of animals, color and topographical origin (arising over mountains, rivers, etc.). The *Shiji* passage describes clouds by color, size and height, and gives rules of thumb for judging their distance, and states that the most important clouds are those with the shapes of animals.<sup>35</sup> The discussion focuses on color, directions of origin, and the identification of types of cloud qi for military purposes.

徒氣白。土功氣黃。車氣乍高乍下，往往而聚。騎氣卑而布。卒氣搏。  
前卑而後高者，疾；前方而後高者，兌；後兌而卑者，卻。...  
稍雲精白者，其將悍，其士怯。其大根而前絕遠者，當戰。青白，

---

<sup>30</sup>See *Shiji* 127:3218; *Hanshu* 99B: 4190; *Zhouli juan* 27, Biot 2:108.

<sup>31</sup>Dubs 1958, Nakayama 1966.

<sup>32</sup>*Shiji* 27: 1348-49.

<sup>33</sup>*Shiji* 27: 1331-1342; Couvreur 3:385-401.

<sup>34</sup>Clouds and mists: *Shiji* 27:1336-39 (Chavannes 3:393-97); *Hanshu buzhu* 26:43a (trans. Hulsewé 1979, pp. 40-49).

<sup>35</sup>*Shiji* 27: 1336; Chavannes 3:393.

The qi of corvee labor is white; the qi of great earthworks is yellow. The qi of chariots is sometimes high and sometimes low but always continuous. The qi of cavalry is low and spread out. The qi of conscripts is rolling. If they are low in front and high behind, there will be illness [in the army]; if they are square and high in front and pointed and low behind, there will be discontent. . . .

When there are small clouds that are clear and white, the general is brave but his soldiers are slack. When they have a large root at the front but are frayed in the distance, one should fight. When they are green and white, and drooping in the front, there will be victory in battle. When they are red in the front and they rise up, one will not be the victor in battle.<sup>36</sup>

The chapter states that soldiers respond to prognostication and will follow those who can do it correctly. Cloud divination as described in the *Shiji* is based on form: the cloud qi of northern barbarians resembles the shapes of domestic animals and tents; that of southern barbarians resembles the shapes of boats and military banners. There are further variations based on geography: the presence of mountains, water, etc.<sup>37</sup>

This picture is amplified by a manuscript from Mawangdui, which modern scholars have titled *Tianwen qixiang zazhan* 天文氣象雜占 or Miscellaneous Prognostications by Astronomy and Qi Configurations.<sup>38</sup> It lists types of cloud, classified by the names of the fourteen states of Warring States China (starting with Chu), and by images such as cloth, ox, carriage, rat, crimson clothing, and dragon, each bearing an illustration (as well as the oldest known pictures of comets). The manuscript correlates the cloud images of animals (pig, horse, ox, etc.) with military prognostications, for example that a city cannot be taken (dog) or that the general of the army will die (pig).

There is considerable consistency between the representation of clouds and cloud qi in these two texts. By the Later Han, there are accounts of emperors themselves ascending to observatories to study the clouds.<sup>39</sup> In these accounts of cloud qi, the shape of the immediate sky

---

<sup>36</sup>*Shiji* 27:1337; Chavannes 3:394.

<sup>37</sup>*Shiji* 27:1353; Chavannes 3:409-410.

<sup>38</sup>*Tianwen qixiang zazhan*: Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu, pp. 154-55, trans. Loewe 1994, p. 193; discussed in Gu Tiefu 1978 (trans. Harper 1979).

<sup>39</sup>Ming Di (+59): *Hou Hanshu* 2.102; Zhang Di (+78): *Hou Hanshu* 8.353; He Di (+93): *Hou Hanshu* 79A.: 2545.

has become an image of the prospects of the state.

In addition, a wide variety of astronomical, astrocalendric and hemerological texts and instruments have been excavated from tombs, especially in the territory of what was once the state of Chu in south China. These include significant new astrocalendric instrumentation, which seems to have been developed during the Qin-Han imperium. Among them are new types of diviner's board, complete *liubo* sets, and texts describing the use of dipper astrolabes and the use of *liubo*六博 "chess" boards for divination.<sup>40</sup> It is tempting to infer that they were somehow an element of state-sponsored astronomical or hemerological divination. We cannot do so because there is substantial debate about the exact purpose of placing these objects in tombs.<sup>41</sup>

### **Greece**

The situation of state sponsored divination in -4th through -2nd century Greece is very different. The major form of state sponsored divination was not astronomical but oracular. It is well known that Greek political interest in divination, and specifically queries to Delphi about politics and warfare, declined during this period. In much of the Greek world we find the same pattern of decline in oracular consultation and the activities of military manteis. Nonetheless, Delphi continued to be consulted regularly in its other traditional role as an arbiter of questions on state religion and ritual.

This period marked the beginning of extensive Greek interest in astronomy, astrology and calendrics, but that interest did not take the form of state sponsorship. Increased contact after Alexander's conquest of Persia brought Greeks into contact with Mesopotamian ideas of the zodiac and the methods and data of Babylonian astronomy and astrology. These had profound effects on astronomy and astrological cosmology. Early Greek interest in astronomy is difficult to reconstruct. Plato gives an obscure description of astronomy and cosmology in the *Timaeus*. Contact with Babylon may have increased after the Persian wars. Babylonian methods may have

---

<sup>40</sup>Most of the diviners' boards or cosmic boards (*shi*) excavated to date are from the Qin and Han periods. The relative absence of these implements before the Qin may be an artifact of the archaeological record, rather than an indication of the state of Warring States astrocalendric technology. For review of these finds see Li Ling 1993.

<sup>41</sup>A recent survey (Falkenhausen 2003) of the contents of tombs from Chu suggests that daybooks and bamboo texts were buried in the tombs of members of the highest levels of the elite.

influenced attempts to reform the Athenian calendar about -432, and descriptions of the constellations by Eudoxus of Cnidus (408-355). In addition, various individuals were credited (or blamed) for bringing "eastern" astrology into Greece, including the atomist philosopher Democritus of Abdera (c.460-370), Berrosus (350-280), a Babylonian priest who settled in Cos and the Babylonian diviner Sudines (fl. c.240). Hellenistic Alexandria became the cradle of Greek astrology.<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, imperial ambitions within the Greco-Roman world continued to actively sponsor other forms of political divination. Both Philip and Alexander consulted court manteis on military and other matters. Alexander reestablished the oracle at Didyma, and used his contacts with oracles to propagate a myth of his divine origin and destiny.

### **Rome**

Rome too actively sponsored state augury in both the Republic and Empire. The -1st century Roman taste for Greek culture included both Greek Stoicism (with its defense of divination) and astrology, especially through the advocacy of Posidonius (125-50), who came to Rome as an ambassador in -87. Greek astrology gained purchase in Rome through the general reputation of Greek learning, through devices such as the armillary sphere of Posidonius and the astronomical poem of Aratus (translated by Cicero).<sup>43</sup> Rome also had its own distinctive modes of state divination.

In summary, an important difference between Chinese and Greek "imperial" divination was their very different relations to centers of political power. Chinese divination had a conspicuously official character and stood at the center of political power. Greek divination, by contrast, held authority by virtue of its separation from the centers of political power, in part through the physically marginal locations of major sanctuaries and the long-standing perceived neutrality of Delphi. Delphi, Dodona, Didyma and Ammon were outside the boundaries and direct control of any one state or party.

---

<sup>42</sup>See Barton 1994, chapter 1, especially pp. 21-23 and 30-31.

<sup>43</sup>Posidonius' advocacy of astrology: Augustine, *De civitate dei*, 5.2. Aratus (315-c.245) of Macedonia resided at the courts of the Macedonian king Antigonos II Gonatas and Antiochus I of Syria. His didactic astronomical poem *Phaenomena* put into verse an astronomical text of Eudoxus of Cnidus. For these developments see Barton 1994, pp. 33-41.

## State Cosmology and Rhetoric

When diviners predicted the future or unraveled the hidden significance of the past, they were not making abstract knowledge claims; they were acting with the support (or opposition) of powerful interests. Another political use of divination was to provide authority and legitimacy for rulers and political decisions, including the social and political costs of expanding an empire.

### China

Competing Warring States theories of "correlative cosmology" were powerful rhetorical tools for political purchase that could both descriptively model and prescriptively legitimize the new imperial order. This was done by systematic microcosm-macrocosm analogies. They used binary pairs (yin and yang) and the five "phases" (*wuxing*: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water) to "correlate" different domains of the cosmos (such as time, space, the contents of the heavens, the seasons) with human and social reality (the human body, human geography, morality, behavior, historical change and the new sociopolitical order). Correlative cosmology began to be systematized in the -3rd century, starting with the *Lüshi chunqiu* (Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals) of Lü Buwei (c. -239). Its reached a high point during the Han in such texts the *Chunqiu fanlu* (Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals), *Huainanzi* (-139) and *Bohutong* (Comprehensive Discussions in White Tiger Hall, + 79).<sup>44</sup>

Han discourses on omens also reflect new tensions between the rulers considered responsible for the cosmomoral order and the officials who prescribed it. On the one hand, scholar-officials used correlative cosmology to create authority and legitimacy for the new Han empire as symbols of a unified, centralized state. On the other, they used correlative cosmology and omens to criticize the government: if not the ruler in propria persona, then those close to him and in power. These theories also entailed strong claims by officials to both mantic access and moral authority. Han rulers fought these claims by employing a variety of magical and divinatory officials to increase their personal access to divine forces.

Divination provided legitimacy for Han rulers in various ways. The most powerful dynastic use of divination was in the context of new cosmological theories, shored up by divination, which provided "natural" explanations for the establishment and expansion of the

---

<sup>44</sup>The topic is immense. Of particular interest: Graham 1986, Nylan 1993, Loewe 1994, Lloyd 1996, Wang Aihe 2000. For issues in the dating and authorship of these texts see Loewe, ed. 1993.

Han dynasty. For example, the *Hanshu* specifies five qualities that qualified Han Gaozu to rule. The list begins with his descent from Emperor Yao and ends with his character and skill at managing subordinates. In the middle are divine signs. His physiognomy is extraordinary (*timao duo qiyi* 體貌多奇異) divine signs appeared when he assumed rule (*shenwu you zhengying* 神武有徵應).<sup>45</sup> Other accounts of extraordinary physiognomy appear elsewhere in the *Hanshu* (of Gaozu and Empress Lü) and *Hou Hanshu* (of Empress Deng). In perhaps the strongest case of cosmological rhetoric, Wang Mang used five-phase cosmology and appeals to divinatory discourse to justify his short-lived Xin dynasty. In a decree of 9 CE announcing his ascent to the throne, he claims that omens indicate that Heaven has transferred its mandate by selecting Earth as the current phase, replacing the Fire of the Han dynasty. He appeals to the generation order of the five phases, in which Fire begets Earth, and himself claims to represent Earth through descent from the Yellow Emperor.<sup>46</sup>

Accounts of dreams, essentially private experiences which by their nature cannot be shared, also served to justify political change. For example, the *Hou Hanshu* reports a dream ascribed to Empress Deng that predicts and justifies her future rule as regent. Similarly, in legendary antiquity accounts of dreams were used to justify dynastic change. For example, a premonitory dream of two suns fighting in the sky was ascribed to Moxi, the "dissolute" concubine of the last king of the Xia dynasty. Moxi (who is described as having a man's mind and divinatory abilities) interprets this as a warning that Jie's mandate to rule was coming to an end. Subsequently, the nobles rebel, Jie's soldiers abandon him, and Tang establishes the Shang dynasty.<sup>47</sup>

But early Chinese cosmology was also an expression of realpolitik. Scholar officials also used it to define (and circumscribe) royal power, to change social and political institutions, and to reconfigure earlier power relations, prominently including mantic access. Five-phase theory was based on the premise that mantic access was not the sole prerogative of rulers. It theorized a new direct link between humanity and heaven. By the Han, four major social groups had laid

---

<sup>45</sup>*Hanshu* 100A:4211.

<sup>46</sup>*Hanshu* 99B:4095-6, tr. Dubs vol. 3, pp. 255-56; *Hanshu buzhu* 99A:35b-36a.

<sup>47</sup>*Lienüzhuan* 7:1a; *Guoyu* 7.2 (Jin 1), p. 255; *Lüshi chunqiu* 15:1:2a. For discussion see Raphals 1998.



new claims to mantic access: religious and technical experts, officials, military specialists and the competing teaching lineages of classical Chinese philosophy.

The opposite side of the coin of using divine signs to legitimate authority is using portents to criticize it. In what has become the classic survey of this material, Wolfram Eberhard argues that many of these accounts of portents were inserted for political reasons, primarily as a method of criticizing the emperor or more broadly the government as represented by him.<sup>48</sup> Eberhard notes several peaks in accounts of portents over the course of the Han, and argues that negative interpretations of portents were directed, sometimes against the emperor himself, but often against other political actors. For example, portents between -195 and -185 are directed, not against Emperor Hui (194-88), but against the "usurpation" of his mother Empress Lü. Portents from -180 to -170 criticized not Emperor Wen (179-57), but a series of revolts by princes. Portents from 115 to 110 warned against the excessive wars of Emperor Wu (140-87). Other peaks in the latter half of the -1st century refer to the rise to power of Wang Mang and the Wang clan.<sup>49</sup> Eberhard uses this evidence to argue that portents were a powerful political method by which officials and moralists were able to exercise institutional checks upon the power of the emperor.

Yet another mode of legitimacy was provided by the selective canonization and officially sponsored study of certain texts and modes of knowledge. Five-phase discourse occurs in both the textual record and excavated texts. Perhaps most important is the "Treatise on the Five Phases" (*Wuxing zhi*) from the Han dynastic history (*Hanshu* 27). Wind divination (and its correlate, divination by pitchpipes) is also classified in the *Hanshu* Bibliographic Treatise as an area of Five-Phase cosmology. The "Disease" sections of the daybooks from Shuihudi also use five-phase correlations.

But in China, the earlier open-ended competition between technical *shushu* specialists and "Masters" textualists was completely reconfigured by the adoption of Confucianism by the Han state. Technical specialists continued to practice their expertise at both the official and private level, but official ideology was dominated by the dominant Confucian school. At the institutional level, academies and chairs were created for the study of Confucian texts. The

---

<sup>48</sup>Eberhard 1957, which attempts a statistical analysis of the information in all three sources.

<sup>49</sup>Eberhard 1957, pp. 57-58.

*Yijing* was transformed from a divination manual to a privileged form of textual exegesis distinct from more limited methods of divination. Bibliographic classifications such as the *Hanshu* Bibliographic Treatise elevated classics (*jing*) over Masters texts (*zi*), and separated the *Yi* from other divinatory works. Both *Yijing* exegesis and divination became modes of rhetorical persuasion within the Han court, as divination and omen interpretation provided a rhetorical framework for remonstrance or recommendations on state policy.

### **Astrology in Rome**

Again, the Greek and Roman situations are very different. Oracular divination during this period was used primarily to address questions of religious cult. But oracular divination did not have a strong engagement with, or reliance on, cosmology, beyond belief in the Olympian pantheon. Alexander's mythical claims to divine descent and a destiny to conquer Asia have nothing like the cosmological rhetoric of Han China. Greek cosmology manifests, not in imperial ambition but in humoral theories whose primary domain was medicine.

Finally, Greek astrology was incorporated into Roman politics. Astrology entered Rome as a component of Greek high culture, but it was only taken up by elite Romans in the last century BCE, when generals began to listen to astrologers. The rise of astrology in Rome coincided with the beginning of the fall of the Republic, a coincidence which, Tamsyn Barton argues, was no accident.<sup>50</sup> Under the Republic, the College of augurs or *haruspices*, elements of an earlier Etruscan tradition which had been absorbed into Roman life, were official state diviners. They were in charge of extispicy, weather divination and prodigies. They were expected to warn the senate of signs of the gods' (dis)favor and to advise on ritual action, but the power of decision was always held by the senate. The custodians of the books of Sibylline prophecy were drawn from the Senate itself. The constitution put power in the hands of the senate, and limited the power of diviners to set policy.

Astrology by contrast was the province of a ruler who held sole power. The association of astrology with Roman aristocratic leaders begins during the turbulence of the early -1st century. The "portent" of a comet during the mourning for Julius Caesar was used to justify his deification by the Roman senate. Caesar's adopted son Octavian then used its image, and the linked images of father and son, to provide legitimacy to his own rule as Caesar Augustus.

---

<sup>50</sup>Barton 1994, pp. 38- 41.

During this period, official diviners were effectively replaced by unofficial advisers close to the ruler. Anonymous college augurs were replaced by famous astrologers and other diviners who increasingly focused on the fates of individuals, rather than questions of divine approval for a particular course of action. Astrology helped to move the individual and individualized prediction to the center of the divinatory agenda. Astrology was suited to monarchy in that astrologers, unlike republican state augurs, had no obligation to report their findings publicly and could pick and choose their clients.

Although Augustus had used astrology to legitimate his position as the first emperor, by the end of his life, forbade private astrological consultations. Later emperors followed the pattern set by his successor Tiberius: belief in the infallibility of astrology, a kind of astrological paranoia about potential rivals to the throne, and strict regulation of astrology by law. These included decrees banning astrologers from Rome and Italy and trials of astrologers and their clients. This period also saw skepticism about astrology, but it manifested not in politics but in philosophical debates about free will and determinism.<sup>51</sup>

In summary, state sponsorship was an important element that shaped divinatory practice in China, Greece and Rome, but that sponsorship took very different forms. In all three contexts, divination continued to be an important element of the practice of warfare, and in interest in the Heavens. Rulers who seized power also used it to legitimate their reigns and promote their imperial ambitions. In China these activities were linked to state sponsored astronomy, calendrics, official cosmology, the creation and canonization of certain texts, and the relative marginalization of others. In Hellenistic Greece, interest in astronomy developed, not in the context of state sponsorship, but in the private investigation of the closely linked disciplines of astronomy and astrology. Greek astrology took a different turn in Rome, where court astrologers in the service of monarchs largely displaced the official diviners employed by the senate during the period of the Republic.

### ***Private Divination and the State***

The new state uses of of divination in Han imperial China and Rome coexisted with the ongoing, and in some cases, expanding use of personal and private divination. To what extent, if any, did the state attempt to control or curtail the private use of divination?

---

<sup>51</sup>Cramer 1956; Bouché-Leclercq 1899 and 1882, vol. 4; .Barton 1994, pp. 62-63;

## China: Marketplace Diviners

In China evidence of nonofficial divination dates back to uninscribed oracle bones of the Shang dynasty. There is extensive pre-Qin evidence that divination texts reflected origins in the life of the common people. It includes the use of daybooks, the *Yijing*, and the interpretation of dreams and physiognomy. The *Yijing* includes many references to marriage, childbirth, visits to officials, travel, defense against bandits, and animal husbandry; and daybooks provided instructions for selecting auspicious times for a wide variety of day-to-day activities.<sup>52</sup>

Most of the divination techniques that flourished and expanded during the Warring States were used during the Qin and Han for both official and nonofficial purposes. Nonofficial access to star divination focused on astrocalendric texts. It is unclear to what extent diviners' boards and *liubo* boards were used in private capacities, but the daybooks contain many prognostications that clearly relate to routine concerns such as travel, business, marriage and childbirth. Almanac texts and daybooks were used to predict auspicious days and times for a wide variety of activities, including marriage, childbirth, making clothes, building projects, travel, slaughtering farm animals, farming, and official audiences. Leisure activities and entertainment were also considered subjects for daybook divination, including eating, drinking, singing, and hiking in the mountains. The medical sections of daybooks also provided methods to enhance health and longevity by identifying the cause of an illness from eating the wrong food at the wrong time. They also reflected the interests and expectations of both men and women. Year divinations of the kind found at Baoshan, Tianxingguan and Wangshan sought to gain divine approval for the consultant's political success in office in the coming year. Historical narratives contain many accounts of *Yi* divination and consultation of spirit mediums by individuals, but the prestige and authority of the results were closely linked to their association with royalty, gods and ancestors. In other words, nonofficial divination drew its authority from state divination, and followed many of the same modes and procedures in miniature. The exceptions were the modes of divination specifically appropriated by the state: in particular, astronomy and cosmology.

The activities of the *fangshi* warrant more discussion since they straddle the line between official and nonofficial practice. They rose to prominence at the court of Qin Si Huangdi in the

---

<sup>52</sup>Range of the *Yijing*: Gao Heng 1984.

Qin and Wu Di in the Han.<sup>53</sup> But they served private clients as well as the state. Because they tended to come from outlying areas, their upbringing probably retained more of local practices not entirely dissolved by the new empire. A few examples illustrate this point.

*Shiji* 127, the collected biographies of diviners of auspicious days, gives an account of a visit to the marketplace of Chang'an by two officials: the palace counselor Song Zhong and Jia Yi (-206-169).<sup>54</sup> Jia Yi steers them to "Diviner's Lane" (*bu si* 卜肆) where they encounter the Chu diviner Sima Jizhu. It had rained and there were few people; they found him discussing the cycles of cosmology, yin and yang, and good and bad fortune with a few students. Realizing that he was someone to be reckoned with, they expressed surprise at his occupation and remarked on the low status of diviners. Sima Jizhu turns the tables on his visitors by inquiring into their own values and priorities. He defends diviners on several grounds, including their attention to ritual and the indirect beneficial effects of their activities, including social order, curing the sick, avoiding disaster, arranging marriages, and bring plans to fruition.<sup>55</sup>

Another example comes from accounts of the Han Daoist scholar Zhuang Zun 莊遵 (-83 to +10), who made his living as a diviner in the Chengdu marketplace.<sup>56</sup> After earning enough for his daily needs, he would close his shop and teach the Laozi and Zhuangzi. According to his *Hanshu* biography, he gave this explanation of his livelihood and activities:

卜筮者賤業，而可以惠人。有邪惡非正之問，則依蓍龜爲言利害。與人子言依於孝，與人弟言依於順，與人臣言依於忠，各因勢導之以善，從吾言者，已過半矣。

Divination is a low occupation, but even so it can benefit people. If they ask

---

<sup>53</sup>See Ngo 1976.

<sup>54</sup>*Shiji* 127:3215-3220. For discussion see Loewe 1994, pp. 170-171. For translation see Pokora 1987.

<sup>55</sup>Elsewhere the *Shiji* biography of physicians (105:2805-2807) reports the case of a young female slave who had learned *fang* techniques and used them to partially preserve herself against a serious (and eventually fatal) illness. She is not a marketplace diviner, but she is a commoner with knowledge of this domain. For discussion see Raphals 1998 and Hsu 2001b.

<sup>56</sup>He is better known by the style name Yan Junping 嚴君平. Ban Gu changed his surname to Yan because the personal name of the Hou Han emperor Ming Di was Liu Zhuang (r. +57-75). Zhuang Zun was a teacher of Yang Xiong (-53 to +18). See Farmer 2001, pp. 79-81.

about things that are wicked or not upright I speak of benefit and harm in the language of turtle and yarrow. To a son I speak in the terms of filiality; to a younger brother I speak in the language of deference; to a subject I speak in the terms of loyalty. Each according to situation, I lead him toward being good, and more than half follow my words.<sup>57</sup>

Neither Sima Jizhu nor Zhuang Zun report in detail what their clients consulted them about in any detail. In both cases, the rhetorical point of the passage is to praise the scholar-diviner and to show that these two diviners were a type of sage who used the necessity of making a living to help and improve the people who consulted them. For purposes of the present discussion, the point is that these individuals were consulted by ordinary people in the marketplace. The visit to "Diviners Lane" by two government officials makes it clear that the court was perfectly aware of marketplace diviners, and not overly interested. There is not at this point evidence of "paranoia" over the chance of predictive knowledge, especially the prediction of disasters, undermining imperial authority by finding its way into the broader population.

The notion of "private divination" raises a several questions, but first a caveat is necessary. To what extent can any divination said to be either non-ritual or private in a modern, Western, individualist sense of the term? Marketplace diviners of auspicious days addressed private queries, but these were not "individual" in the modern Western sense of the term. As Zhuang Zun's response attitude toward his own consultations makes very clear, these queries concerned families and groups, not isolated individual welfare.

### **Greece: The Rise of Individual Consultation**

The Greek evidence for the ongoing and indeed increased use of private divination is very different. It includes the ongoing use of oracular sanctuaries for private queries, the new rise of medical oracles associated with Asclepius and Trophonius, and the use of the divinatory spells and magical procedures described in the Greek magical papyri. Within the new imperial frameworks of Han China, Alexandrian Greece and Imperial Rome there is ongoing evidence of divination at the individual or local level, without either permission or proscription of the state.

The Delphic oracle distinguished between public (*daimosion*) and private (*idion*) queries: first by its fee structure and second by the awarding of *promanteia*, since public queries were in

---

<sup>57</sup>*Hanshu* 72.3056.

most cases not from residents of Delphi. Consultor states had their own procedures to ensure the accurate transmission and re-performance of oracular responses, but otherwise there was no marked difference in oracular procedure and ritual between group and individual.

Relatively few private queries to Delphi are preserved, but other oracles, such as Dodona, Didyma and the oracles of Asclepius, provide more information. There is ongoing evidence that individual, at times including women and slaves, consulted (usually local) oracles about individual problems. Ritual itself was a frequent topic of consultation for private as well as public inquiries. Just as a polis might ask to what god to offer prayer and sacrifice to achieve a desired result, individuals also asked to whom to pray for ongoing divine protection; possessions, offspring and marriage; cure of disease; or even "what the consultor has in mind."

With the exception of military divination, which had no nonofficial counterpart, there was no state sponsorship or proscription to restrict the use of any divinatory technique. That situation only changed with the proscriptions on horoscopal astrology under the Roman Empire. Nonetheless, some oracles or techniques were simply better suited than others to individual and local needs, and the growth of medical oracles reflects those priorities.

Medical oracles, by contrast, were focused on questions of individual health, diagnosis and cure that had no state counterpart. Even these nominally individual consultations inherently involved the welfare of families because "individual" welfare usually had important ramifications for others, including family, slaves, business associates, etc. The question to the oracle at Dodona by a certain Socrates is typical: what work he should do to better both himself and his lineage? The question about individual welfare is not limited to the welfare of the individual. Other queries to Dodona on such topics as whether or whom to marry, whether a wife would bear children (or in one case, a child's paternity), and how to prosper in business all affected the welfare not only of the consultor, but of his living family and ongoing lineage. In summary, the Greek "individual" consultor of oracles or the individual practitioners of the Greek magical papyri is also embedded in a network of family and local relations, and the attested queries reflect this.

Horoscopes, and specifically Roman astrology, present a very different situation because, by nature they concern an individual (even if they are used for queries about family or group

matters). Early Greek interest in astronomy and astrology is difficult to reconstruct.<sup>58</sup> Astrology came to Rome as part of the high culture of Greece. It only became of serious interest to elite Romans as the Republic began to collapse in the first century BCE. At this point there is evidence of generals taking astrologers' predictions seriously, including personal horoscopes. Astrologers make predictions for Pompey, Crassus, Julius Caesar, Augustus, and all the emperors. Augustus used it as a powerful tool to legitimate both Julius Caesar and his own position as emperor. But by the end of his he had issued a decree banning private consultations. Starting with Tiberius, belief in astrology led to imperial paranoia, and astrology took on a political role analogous to that of Delphi at an earlier period. But in this case, unlike China, belief in astrology and specifically horoscopy led to bans on its private use.<sup>59</sup>

So if the state drew on divination for legitimacy and authority, to what extent was the persistence of nonofficial, local divination a threat to state authority? State sponsorship implied state control. Just as the Qin and Han courts supported astronomical observation, they controlled access to state astrocalendrics, but had less interest in modes of divination that did not challenge their authority.

In Qin and Han China, Chu tombs provide particularly important evidence for the prevalence and importance of divinatory activity at the nonofficial level. (By contrast, there is a conspicuous absence of divination materials from the texts excavated from Guodian.) Han rulers on the one hand rejected the "barbarian" traditions of the south in favor of the traditional authority of turtle and yarrow. Yet they made ongoing use of astrocalendric divination. As scholar-officials turned to correlative cosmology to criticize government rule, emperors increasingly sought out private diviners to advise them.

---

<sup>58</sup> Plato gives an obscure description of astronomy and cosmology in the *Timaeus*. At some point it was informed by Babylonian astrology, but there is considerable controversy as to when that point first occurred. Various -3rd century individuals were credited (or blamed) for bringing "eastern" astrology into Greece. These include the "atomist" Democritus of Abdera (a younger contemporary of Socrates), Berrosus, a Babylonian priest who settled in Cos, and the Babylonian diviner Sudines. After the increased contact brought about by Alexander's conquest of Persia, the Greeks absorbed the data and methods of Babylonian astronomy and astrology. Greek horoscal astrology refined earlier techniques and introduced cosmological innovations; it was not a purely Greek creation. See Barton 1994, pp. 21-23.

<sup>59</sup>Barton 1994, pp. 38-63.



There is an analogous conflict in the Roman empire. When monarchs seized control of the Roman Republic, they advanced private astrologers in lieu of the official diviners of the Senate. With the rise of astrology, individual fate calculation became a locus of tension between mantic access and state authority. Augustus used portents and horoscopes to establish his own rule, and subsequently sought to contain the power of others to do the same thing by proscribing private astrology.

### ***Conclusions***

In China, Greece and Rome, a centralized empire had important implications for divinatory practice as a means to political authority. On the one hand, divination became a powerful tool of the state both as a tool for warfare and administration and as a means to promulgate the rhetoric of empire and justify imperial authority. But the details were very different, especially in the relation between state and private divination.

In China, new state divination techniques were developed for both civil and military purposes. Pitchpipes were used for both the prediction of harvests and for military prognostications. A cosmology based on correlations Wind divination, first attested under the centralized rule of the Shang, reemerged in new forms. New state sponsored forms of instrumentation for the selection of auspicious times appear in the tombs of high officials, as do daybook texts of similar purpose. Legal, administrative and military applications of preexisting divination techniques also proliferate. Physiognomy is an interesting exception to this trend. Han thinkers such as Wang Chong and Wang Fu described how destiny, character, or abilities could be read from the body, but we do not see the development of officially sanctioned methods of physiognomy for the examination and selection of officials. These developments coexisted with both private consultations of diviners and the use of divination by scholar-officials to criticize the government.

This is a surprisingly pluralistic situation, especially compared to Rome. Two factors may help account for this difference. One is the kind, and variety of divination practiced. Han China saw an ongoing development, or even expansion of a broad range of techniques that were used for a broad range of purposes, both state and private. Roman divination was less closely linked with "scientific" developments, in the sense of interest in prediction of events based on empirical observation or in the systematization of knowledge. In Rome by contrast, divinatory

attention increasingly was focused on one technique, horoscopal astrology, as private diviners eclipsed the official role of state sponsored augurs. This kind of attention downgraded the level, if not the degree, of state interest.

### ***Bibliography***

Barton, Tamsyn (1994) *Ancient Astrology*. London: Routledge.

Biot, Édouard, trans (1851) *Le Tcheou-li ou Rites des Tcheou*. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale.  
reprint Taipei: Chengwen, 1975.

Bouché-Leclercq, Auguste (1879-82) *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*. Rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1975. 4 vols.

Chemla, Karine, Donald Harper and Marc Kalinowski, eds. (1999) *Divination et Rationalité en Chine Ancienne*. Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident 21. Paris.

Chen Zungui 陳遵媯 (1980-89) *Zhongguo tianwenxue shi* 中國天文學史 [A history of Chinese astronomy]. 4 vols. Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe.

*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 [Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals and Zuo Transmissions]. Ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻. □Gaoxiong: Fuwen tushu chubanshe, 1991.

Cramer, Frederick H. (1954) *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 37.

Dubs, Homer H. (1958) "The Beginnings of Chinese Astronomy." *JAOS* 78.4 (Oct.-Dec.): 295-300.

Dubs, Homer H., trans. *History of the Former Han Dynasty*. 3 vols. Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938-55. Chapters 1-12 and 99a-c.

Eberhard, Wolfram (1957) "The political function of astronomy and astronomers in Han China." In John K. Fairbank ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 37-70.

Edmunds, Lowell (1971) "The Religiosity of Alexander." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 12:3 (1971: Autumn): 363-391.

Falkenhausen, Lothar von (2003) "Social Ranking in Chu Tombs: The Mortuary Background of the Warring States Manuscript Finds." *Monumenta Serica* 51: 439-526.

Farmer, J. Michael (2001) *The World of the Mind in Early Medieval Sichuan: the Life and Works of Qiao Zhou*. Ph.D. Dissertation. University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Fu Juyou 傅舉有 and Chen Songchang 陳松長 (1992) *Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu* 馬王堆漢墓文物 [The Cultural Relics Unearthed from the Han Tombs at Mawangdui]. Changsha, Hunan chubanshe.

Graham, Angus. C. (1986) *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking*. Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies.

Gu Tiefu 顧鐵符 (1978) "Mawangdui boshu 'T'ianwen qixiang zazhan neirong jianshu'" 馬王堆帛書天文氣象雜占內容簡述 *Wenwu* 2: 1-4 Trans. Donald Harper, "A Summary of the Contents of the Ma-wang-tui Silk-scroll book 'Assorted Astronomical and Meteorological Prognostications.'" *Chinese Studies in Archeology* 1.1 (1979): 56-74.

*Guoyu* 國語 [Discourses of the States]. Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1988.

*Hanshu* 漢書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962.

*Hanshu buzhu* 漢書補注 [Collected Commentaries on the Han History]. Shanghai: Shangwu, 1959. In *Guoxue jiben congshu*.

*Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 [Standard History of the Later Han]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965.

Hsu, Elisabeth (2001b) "*The Telling Touch: Pulse Diagnostics in Early Chinese Medicine. With a Translation of Cases 1-10 of the 105th chapter in Sima Qian's Historical Records.*" Habilitationsschrift, University of Heidelberg.

Hulsewé, A.F.P. (1979) "Watching the Vapours; an Ancient Chinese Technique of Prognostication." *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur-und Volkerkunde Ostasiens* (Hamburg) 125: 40-49.

Li Ling 李零 (1993) *Zhongguo fangshu kao* 中國方術考 [Study of the magical arts of China].

Beijing: Renmin Zhongguo chubanshe.

*Lienüzhuan jiaozhu* 列女傳校注 [Collected Commentaries on the Collected Life Stories of Women]. Attr. Liu Xiang 劉向, Ed. Liang Duan 梁端. Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1983.

*Liji yinde* 禮記引得. Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1983.

Lloyd, G.E.R. (1996) *Adversaries and Authorities: Investigations into ancient Greek and Chinese science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Loewe, Michael A.N., ed. (1993) *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographic Guide*. Society for the Study of Early China and The Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

Loewe, Michael A.N. (1994) *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Includes "Divination by Shells, Bones, and Stalks during the Han Period" (TP 74:81-118), "The Oracles of the Clouds and the Winds" (BSOAS 51:500-520) and "The Almanacs (jih-shu) from Shui-hu-ti" (AM n.s.1,2, 1988: 1-28).

*Lüshi chunqiu*. *Sibu beiyao*.

*Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋 校釋. By Lü Buwei. Ed. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷. Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1984.

Major, John S. (1993) *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.

Nakayama, Shigeru (1966) "Characteristics of Chinese Astrology." *Isis* 57.4 (Winter, 1966): 442-454.

Needham Joseph (1959) *Science and Civilisation in China, vol. 3 Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth*. Cambridge University Press.

Needham Joseph, with Wang Ling (1956) *Science and Civilization in China. volume 2: History of Scientific Thought*. Cambridge University Press.

Ngo, Van Xuyet (1976) *Divination Magie et Politique dans la Chine Ancienne*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Nylan, Michael (1993) *The Canon of Supreme Mystery: A Translation with Commentary of the T'ai Hsüan Ching*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 35-55.

Pokora, Timoteus (1987) "Shih chi 127: The Symbiosis of Two Historians." In LeBlanc and Blader (1987). Pp. 215-34.

Poo, Mu-chou (1998) *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Raphals, Lisa (1998) *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China*. . Albany: SUNY Press.

Raphals, Lisa (1998b) "The Treatment of Women in a Second-century Medical Casebook." *CS* 1998: 7-28.

*Shiji* 史記. [Annals] Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959.

*Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 [Imperially Reviewed Encyclopedia of the Taiping Era] Ed. Li Fang 李昉 (925-996). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960. rpt. 1983.

Vernant, Jean-Pierre, ed. (1974) *Divination et rationalité*. Paris: Seuil.

Wang, Aihe (2000) *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*. Cambridge University Press.

*Zhouli zhuzi suoyin* 周禮逐字索引 [Concordance to the Zhouli]. By D.C. Lau. ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series. Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1993.