CHAPTER 8

Early Chinese Divination and Its Rhetoric

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The present essay examines two remarkable and curiously interrelated phenomena of early China: on the one hand, the near-complete elision of ancient Chinese divinatory writings from the received textual tradition, and on the other hand, the rhetorical representation of divination in the service of early political sovereignty from Shang through Han times. As much as the routine practice of divination pervaded early Chinese society on all levels—a fact now proven by a rich record of archeological discoveries—almost nothing of it has remained in the textual heritage from antiquity: the single major exception is the *Classic of Changes* (*Zhouyi* 周易, or *Yijing* 易經).[1] Yet at the same time, even our earliest records of Chinese divination, which are also the earliest records of Chinese writing altogether, show how the actual *practice* of divination was transformed—in an act of Hegelian sublation, or *Aufhebung*—into an idealizing *account* of divination to support claims of political legitimation. It is of utmost importance to note that practice and account are decidedly different, and that the latter does not accurately report on the former. In fact, the account is both more and less than the practice, excising much of the latter while also imbuing it with additional significance. In other words, the received textual tradition at once erased and exalted the practice of divination in antiquity. In this way, the rhetorical and ideological appropriation and representation of divination does not diminish the original presence and importance of divination but, to the contrary, only confirms its relevance: rhetorically invoking divination for claims of political sovereignty implies acknowledging its generally respected authority. The present essay discusses a small number of separate cases to show how the rhetoric of divination played out in early China, together with some observations on the elision of divinatory practice from the literary tradition.

1 I thank Yuri Pines and Paul R. Goldin for helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay. For a convenient account of the *Zhouyi*, see Shaughnessy, "*I Ching* 易經." On the formation of the *Zhouyi*, see Shaughnessy, "The Composition"; and Kunst, "The Original *Yijing*."

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1 Late Shang Oracle Texts

The extraordinary attention the early Chinese devoted to the practice of divination is amply documented. When considering the nexus between divination and power at the dawn of Chinese history, one naturally thinks of royal Shang oracle bone inscriptions. The inscriptions incised on bovine shoulder bones and turtle plastrons—in anglophone scholarship summarily called "oracle bones"—are records of royal divinations from the late Shang dynasty (ca. 1250 to ca. 1045 BCE). Since first discovered in 1899 at the site of the last Shang capital near the modern city of Anyang 安陽 (Henan), some 150,000 such inscribed pieces have been found, testifying to a large-scale engagement with divination at the royal court that must have consumed very considerable resources of both labor and livestock supply.[2] It is further known that bone divination was continued by the Western Zhou (ca. 1045–771 BCE). Until recently, just a few hundred inscribed Western Zhou bones and plastrons had been found from that period, albeit from a variety of sites across several modern provinces from Shaanxi 陝西 in the west to Shandong 山東 in the east.[3] Then, since 2003, a large cache of inscribed Western Zhou oracle bones, carrying more than 2,500 characters, have been discovered in tombs at the site of Zhougongmiao 周公廟 (Qishan 岐山 county, Shaanxi), but only very few inscriptions are published so far.[4]

Remarkably, recent excavations—with the most significant discoveries made between 1985 and 1987—have also brought to light another, much later, batch of inscribed bones: more than 30,000 pieces from the site of the Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE) imperial palace near modern Xi'an.[5] Yet these inscriptions are not at all divinatory in nature; they are mostly administrative records. The

2 Standard accounts of the Shang oracle bone inscriptions are Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, Keightley, *The Ancestral Landscape*; and Eno, "Shang State Religion"; all with further references to the pertinent Chinese and Japanese scholarship.

3 See Wang Yuxin, *Xi Zhou jiagu tanlun*; Wang Yuxin, "Zhouyuan jiagu buci xingkuan de zai renshi he Xingtai Xi Zhou buci de xingkuan zouxiang"; Cao Wei, *Zhouyuan jiaguwen*; Cao Wei, "Zhouyuan xinchu Xi Zhou jiaguwen yanjiu"; Liu Yuan, "Jin liangnian lai de jiaguxue yanjiu"; Wang Hui, "Zhouyuan jiagu shuxing yu Shang Zhou zhiji jili de bianhua"; Wang Hui, "Cong Qi li, yili yu Zhou li zhi bie kan Zhouyuan jiagu shuxing"; and Men Yi, "Xi Zhou jiaguwen yanjiu." I thank Professor Adam Smith for guidance on the Zhouyuan inscriptions and their scholarship.

4 See Li Xueqin, "Zhougongmiao bujia sipian shishi." I thank Professor Paul R. Goldin for this information.

5 See Liu Zhendong and Zhang Jianfeng, "Xi Han guqian de jige wenti"; Wu Rongzeng, "Xi Han guqian zhong suojian de gongguan"; Li Yufang, "Lüelun Weiyanggong sanhao jianzhu yu Handai guqian" (with plates).

choice of bone for such texts is utterly exceptional and must have had some significance; with bamboo and wood widely available, bones were not nearly as convenient as writing material, nor could they be neatly stacked and archived. Whether the laborious incision of administrative texts into bones was in any way related to the much earlier practice of oracle bones or had some other ritual purpose remains unclear, but something must have inspired the imperial court to spend significant resources in order to produce such a large number of routine documents in the archaic fashion. Whatever that inspiration may have been, the result is *rhetorical*: with no practical purpose imaginable—considering that bamboo was now the standard stationery in the service of running the imperial bureaucracy—the very material of (mostly bovine) animal bone signified the exceptional status of these inscriptions *as material artifacts*.[6]

This example of early imperial archaism may appear significantly different from the Shang bones and plastrons that do contain divination records. However, the Shang kings' belief in divination does not explain the subsequent, extremely laborious incision of oracle records into 150,000 or more pieces of turtle plastrons and bovine shoulder bones. One could have bone and plastron divination without subsequently incising the oracular records—as confirmed by the large numbers of uninscribed bones and plastrons found at Anyang. Thus, there must have been some additional motivation, separate

6 In a contemporary analogy, one is reminded of the recent (and still ongoing) publication of the Qinghua University bamboo slips—presumably looted from a southern tomb and then purchased on the Hong Kong antiquities market—that is printed on heavy glossy paper suitable for its color photographs but then bound in traditional Chinese *xianzhuang* 線裝 style (and placed in a traditional blue case). This ostentatious and entirely rhetorical claim for tradition—apparently to balance the unsavory fact that Qinghua University (like the Shanghai Museum and Peking University) is now the official recipient and owner of stolen goods—is not merely useless but indeed makes the oversized and unwieldy book impossible to use, unless one also invests in two heavy bricks to hold down the pages. Another, perhaps even more pertinent example of the rhetorical use of outdated stationery is known from the United Kingdom. As reported by the New York Times on February 10, 2016, the British House of Lords finally, effective April 2016, moved to replace calfskin with archival paper for inscribing acts of Parliament and other important documents. According to the Times, the House of Lords "said that using animal skin to painstakingly record and preserve laws was hardly efficient, given, among other things, that it is more unwieldy and difficult to store than paper." Critics of the change have called it "a reckless breach of tradition" and claim that calfskin vellum lasts about 5,000 years, compared to the expected only 250 years of high-quality archival paper. "If early civilizations hadn't used vellum, our understanding of history would be diddly-squat!" See <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/11/world/europe/critics-ruffled-as-parliament-turns-the-page-on-parchment.html?emc=eta1&_r=0> (last accessed February 29, 2016).

from the divinations proper, to create such records. For this, our only guidance comes from the inscriptions themselves. The incised texts show the king in charge of a polity that put tight limits on the unexpected, and then responded with the appropriate sacrificial activities. The formulaic divination through yes/no alternatives strictly controlled the range of possible answers, showed confidence in a comprehensible and predictable world, and, perhaps most important, documented and propagated the king's capacity of communicating with the spirit world. In this way, the inscribed bones and plastrons rationalized and legitimized the king's course of action as being based on divination and hence concurring with the intent of the spirits. In short, even at that early moment in time, the inscriptions were not only religious and rationalizing—two interrelated dimensions that should not be falsely placed in mutual opposition—but also fundamentally rhetorical in nature.

They were, in fact, written speech acts to perform and constitute royal sovereignty, as can be seen from so-called display inscriptions in large characters, from the often neat symmetrical arrangement of the records, from traces of pigmentation that point to incisions later filled with color, and from the fact that the same divination was often recorded multiple times, without any informational gain, across a multiplicity of bones and plastrons.[7] What is more, almost always when a divination record was followed by a prognostication and then, at a much later time, closed by a confirmation of said prediction, it showed the king and his diviners as having been correct—which is, plain and simple, a statistical impossibility.[8] Another rhetorical feature is the increasing formularity, topical narrowing, and normalization of the contents of the oracle

7 See Kern, "Feature," 339–341; Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 46, 54, 56, 76–77, 83–84, 89. On the care devoted to the inscriptions and their resulting display function, see also Bagley, "Anyang Writing," 199–200.

8 On verifications, see Keightley, *Sources of Shang History*, 42–44, 118–119. The rare cases where a verification contradicted the earlier prognostication all come from the early (Wu Ding 武丁) period, a time for which the inscriptions depict a much less normalized practice of divination, compared to the reigns of the subsequent eight kings of the Late Shang. According to Keightley, "Theology and the Writing of History," the contradictory verifications do not explicitly or directly challenge the earlier prognostications; they simply confirm alternative events to have taken place—say, rain on other days than predicted, rather than no rain on days for which rain had been predicted. On verifications, see also Bagley, "Anyang Writing," 196 and 200, who argues that the inscriptions did not *merely* (my emphasis) serve "to advertise that [the king] was in touch with the spirits. Lady Hao's plastron is a record of a disappointment; why did the king display that? Surely not just to announce his success in prognosticating." I agree that such display was likely not the *only* function of the inscriptions, but it was surely *one* function; moreover, the case of Lady Hao (where the verification announced the "unlucky" birth of a girl) is very exceptional

inscriptions over the course of the Late Shang, depicting divination as becoming gradually both more routine and more limited in scope, and in the end being largely focused on the king's performances of sacrifice, another key expression of political and religious authority in Shang just as in early imperial times. Finally, as in Han dynasty Chang'an, the Shang oracle bones were found at the site of the royal capital. While not all Shang oracle texts are inscriptions of divinations initiated directly by the king, the available evidence so far shows no sign of such texts that were not controlled by immediate members of the royal family.[9]

On the question of whether or not the inscribed Shang bones and plastrons were kept above ground across generations before finally being buried, the archeological record remains inconclusive. If the claim by some archeologists can be substantiated that at least one of the pits at Anyang contained inscriptions spanning multiple reigns,[10] and if this was not due to a joint reburial of oracle texts that had been buried separately in the first place, we would have a case where such texts from an extended past were maintained as continuous and cumulative documentation of the royal privilege and ability to communicate with the spirits. Because of their dating conventions limited to sixty-day periods, these texts could not have served as a historical archive but, instead, would have constituted an institutional memory of divination and its recording as such, and on the whole.[11] On the other hand, if there was no such purpose of keeping the oracle texts over long periods of time, their "display features" are even more difficult to explain, and so is the practice of incision as opposed to brush-writing either on bamboo or even on the bones and plastrons themselves.[12] Animal bones must have carried with them the promise of durability, even if not yet explicitly as in the later topos of "metal and stone"

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and concerns a matter of great importance that for just that reason may have had to be reported.

9 See Smith, "Writing at Anyang," ch. 3.

10 See Zhongguo shehuikexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo Anyang gongzuodui, "1973 nian Xiaotun nandi fajue baogao." I am once again grateful to Adam Smith for this reference, and for explaining the overall evidence from Anyang to me.

11 In order to argue for the bones as a historical archive, one would have to assume that the inscriptions were all grouped together within their own sixty-day periods, and that, furthermore, each such period had to be stored separately (and somehow also dated or numbered, for which we have no evidence at all). If there was some system that would have allowed the specific dating of an inscription even after a longer period of time, nobody has ever been able to explain it.

12 Bagley, "Anyang Writing," 217–236, argues extensively for the presence of brush-writing especially for pragmatic (administrative, etc.) purposes at Anyang. Smith, "Writing at

(*jinshi* 金石) for bronze and jade.[13] However, if the bones were discarded at relatively short intervals of several years, this promise was pursued not in pragmatic but in purely rhetorical terms.

In sum, the very choices of producing records of the oracles, of producing them with the features noted above, and of painstakingly incising them into the very bones and plastrons that had been used for the divination must have been of rhetorical and ideological significance, even if we lack the evidence for other possible purposes served by the oracle texts. It is also likely not by accident that the only two types of early writing that have survived materially from the Shang and Western Zhou are oracle and bronze inscriptions: while this probably does not mean that writing was limited to divination records or, in the case of the bronzes, directly religious purposes, it does prove that the early Chinese kings spent far more effort and resources on writing in the service of these two functions, compared to all other writing they would have commissioned.

2 The Sublation of Divinatory Practice in the Literary Tradition

There can be no question that in late Shang and then Western Zhou times—the time of our earliest sources—the development and formulation of mantic knowledge was part of the larger quest for making sense of a universe that was conceptualized as fundamentally intelligible, and to some extent controllable. During these centuries at the dawn of history, and indeed all the way down to the formation of the empire, there existed no division between "knowledge" and "belief," and the art of divination was an integral part of the systematic observation and experience-based, rational conceptualization of the cosmic order.[14] At the same time, as shown for the Shang oracle texts, the practice of divination was already accompanied by the representation of that practice; it was not enough that the Shang kings divined, they also had to display their efforts.

Anyang," 155–173, also acknowledges the presence of brush-writing but proposes a different hypothesis for the origin, development, and presence of such writing at Anyang.

13 Brashier, "Longevity"; Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions*, 50–51.

14 See, for example, Keightley, "The 'Science.'" For the Eastern Zhou and early imperial period, we have several excellent surveys of early mantic texts as found in excavated manuscripts; see Kalinowski, "Diviners and Astrologers"; Kalinowski, "Divination and Astrology"; Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy."

Yet astoundingly, we would know preciously little about any of this from the received textual tradition; nothing there prepared us for the discovery of 150,000 pieces of inscribed bones and plastrons, not to mention their features of rhetorical display. Instead, divination is consistently marginalized and often even erased through its integration into larger moral and cosmological frameworks, giving rise to the false idea that the Chinese philosophical tradition since Confucius had overcome this mantic *practice* through a new rationality of *thought*. At the same time, according to historical sources such as *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, divination was routinely involved in political and military matters as much as in medicine and exorcism; it was crucial to the interpretation of the sky, the natural environment on earth, all forms of ritual, and human relations; it was the master tool not only for predicting the future but also for understanding the past. Four of the *Five Classics*—the *Classic of Poetry*, the *Classic of Documents*, the *Springs and Autumns Annals*, and the ritual canon—contain references to divination, while the fifth, the *Classic of Changes*, had itself originated as a divination manual. Divination, it seems, was everywhere.

And yet, none of the philosophical texts received from the classical period, that is, the fifth through third centuries BCE, places the mantic arts at the center of its discourse. As noted by Marc Kalinowski, "the literature of the Warring States, all genres combined, left little place for stories and conceptions relative to the practice of diviners and astrologers"[15] but, it seems, actively elided such writings from the record. A case in point is the *Zhouyi* that, as a divination manual, appears to have derived from Late Shang and early Western Zhou numerological pyromancy.[16] Likely composed in the ninth or eighth century BCE, it has by now appeared in manuscripts from three different tombs, dating from the late fourth through the early second century BCE.[17] By the time it reached the Warring States, it was already transformed into a wisdom book complete with a body of commentaries later attributed to Confucius; and by the end of the Western Han, it had become the preeminent text of the *Five Classics* for its all-encompassing cosmology that, in the commentary of the

15 Kalinowski, "Diviners and Astrologers," 343.

16 Ibid., 342, with references to the relevant scholarship.

17 A *Zhouyi* manuscript on silk was found at Mawangdui 馬王堆 (Changsha 長沙, Hunan; tomb sealed 168 BCE); another one on bamboo was found at Shuanggudui 雙古堆 (Fuyang 阜陽, Anhui; tomb sealed 165 BCE); and yet another bamboo manuscript, most likely from a late fourth-century BCE southern tomb from the Chu 楚 region, is part of the looted manuscript corpus that was purchased by the Shanghai Museum on the Hong Kong antiquities market; see Shaughnessy, "A First Reading of the Shanghai Museum *Zhou Yi* Manuscript." A much more extensive study and translation is now Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the Changes*, chaps. 2 and 3.

Appended Phrases (*Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳), explained the origins of all civilization, including of writing itself.[18] This is not to say that the *Zhouyi* was no longer used as a divination manual; as one Western Han manuscript of the *Zhouyi* shows, the opposite is true, even at the highest aristocratic levels of society.[19] In addition, two manuscript copies of a long-lost ancient divination manual closely related to the *Zhouyi*, the *Gui cang* 歸藏, were found in a southern tomb dating to the third century BCE and likewise reveal that they had been actively used for divinatory practice.[20] In other words, the practice of divination continued even as its principal text was simultaneously transformed into, and celebrated as, the primary philosophical text of Chinese cosmology. As will be seen below, this is a consistent pattern in the early history of Chinese divination and its rhetoric.

Aside from the *Zhouyi*, no text of early divination theory or practice has survived in the received tradition. We face a textual tradition that, both systematically and by accident, has lost virtually all mantic texts that once existed, together with all sorts of other technical (hemerological, medical, legal, military, administrative, etc.) writings of pre-imperial and early imperial times. As Donald Harper has noted, of the 278 titles of technical writings listed in the bibliographical treatise ("Yiwen zhi" 藝文志) in the *History of the Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書) from the first century CE, only two can be matched with surviving texts.[21] Moreover, the bibliographical treatise itself—an abbreviated version of the imperial library catalogue that was compiled at the end of the first century BCE—accounts for only a fraction of the technical literature from the preceding centuries. This is now clear from the countless recently discovered technical manuscripts on wood, bamboo, and silk: not one of them can be matched with

18 On the *Xici zhuan*, see Peterson, "Making Connections." The *Xici zhuan* is already connected to the *Zhouyi* silk manuscript found at Mawangdui; see Shaughnessy, "A First Reading of the Mawangdui *Yijing* Manuscript"; see also Shaughnessy, "*I Ching*".

19 This is the bamboo manuscript found at Shuanggudui; see Shaughnessy, "The Fuyang *Zhou Yi*." Here again, Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the Changes*, chaps. 6 and 7, will supersede the earlier essay. Interestingly, while the tombs at Mawangdui and Shuanggudui both belong to members of the early Western Han high aristocracy, the Shuanggudui text not only lacks the *Xici Zhuan* but, as noted by Shaughnessy, is more directly concerned with the divinatory practice itself and, furthermore, includes formulaic lines reminiscent of other divination texts.

20 These are the manuscripts found at Wangjiatai 王家台 (Hubei); see Shaughnessy, "The Wangjiatai *Gui Cang*"; now much revised and expanded in Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the Changes*, chaps. 4 and 5.

21 Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy," 822–823. One text is the cosmographic and mythological *Shanhaijing* 山海經, the other the medical text *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經.

the Han bibliographic treatise (not to mention any transmitted text). In its catalogue of technical writings, the "Yiwen zhi" is both incomplete and inconsistent: the many titles that seem related to divination are spread across virtually the entire catalogue and its manifold sections, suggesting that divination (a) was not considered a distinct discipline of knowledge in its own right while (b) pervading virtually every intellectual endeavor.[22]

Despite its systematic structure and long lists of texts, the Western Han library catalogue was highly selective. While the imperial edict of 26 BCE ordered the collection of "the lost writings from the entire realm" (*qiu yishu yu tianxia* 求遺書於天下), it appears that the imperial library was never conceived as a universal one.[23] Without a doubt, the archeological record contains but a fragment of the writings circulating at the end of the Western Han, yet in certain areas of knowledge, even this limited record far exceeds the listings contained in the *Hanshu*. The imperial library was an institution devoted not to the total inventory of writing but to a comparatively small corpus of exemplary texts deemed worth preserving for the future. In other words, the library was as much—and probably more—engaged in censoring as it was in curating. That almost none of the early technical writings, and none of the mantic texts beyond the *Zhouyi*, have survived in the subsequent textual tradition that for many centuries was built, lost, and rebuilt in the palace libraries of succeeding dynasties only confirms the bias against them in the imperial hierarchy of knowledge. This bias of tradition—now exposed by archeological finds—was already part of the intellectual milieu of the early imperial Chinese court and the cultural image it sought to project of itself.

The archeological finds of the past four decades have given us a treasure trove of writings that in one way or another are directly related to mantic practices. From the fifth century BCE onward, these texts come mostly from tombs of the Warring States areas of Chu 楚 in the southeast and Qin 秦 in the northwest, testifying to the presence and relative coherence of technical knowledge among the local elite of the time across considerable geographical distances. This knowledge, while specialized and likely developed in the lineages and textual communities of "masters of methods" (*fangshi* 方士) and other experts, was not isolated or esoteric. The Han aristocratic tombs of Mawangdui and Shuanggudui—as noted above, both with versions of the *Zhouyi*—contained canonical philosophical and literary texts side by side with mantic and other

22 For an inventory of the mantic works throughout the "Yiwen zhi," see Raphals, "Divination."

23 *Hanshu* 30.1701; see also *Hanshu* 10.310; and van der Loon, "On the Transmission of Kuantzu," 358–366.

technical writings, just as the latter were also found in the tombs of local office holders[24] such as the scribe interred at Shuihudi 睡虎地 tomb no. 11 (Yunmeng 雲夢, Hubei, tomb closed 217 BCE)[25] who, while literate and educated to a certain level,[26] did not belong to the aristocracy or the upper echelons at court. In other words, the technical writings of which mantic texts formed a significant subset were known to, and apparently appreciated by, the various literate social strata of Warring States and Han society ranging from local clerks to the top of the aristocratic pyramid. An excellent example of how various areas of technical writings could be combined with philosophical texts and grouped together under the sponsorship at the highest level—in this case of Liu An 劉安 (ca. 179–122 BCE), King of Huainan 淮南—is the *Huainanzi* 淮南子.[27]

Thus, the educated Han elite, including the curators of the imperial library, cannot have been ignorant of mantic knowledge or of the texts in which such knowledge circulated.[28] Instead, they chose to exclude most of these writings from the limited canon that was to be preserved, echoing the way in which some of the early philosophical texts polemicized against divination.[29] At the same time, the joint appearance of mantic with philosophical writings in various tombs, but also the way how mantic texts are listed in various sections of the "Yiwen zhi," indicates that Warring States and early imperial cultural and philosophical discourses aimed not to replace mantic knowledge but rather to accommodate and indeed appropriate (or, on the other hand, discredit) it gradually within larger intellectual frameworks of natural, moral, and political philosophy.[30] Where mantic expertise appears in the received sources, it is integrated into a vision of knowledge that is rigorously guided by its own agenda, in particular the art of government and social order. In addition to the *Huainanzi*, another compelling example of this inclusion of divination within an idealized outline of government is the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), which

24 See the discussion in Sou, "In the Government's Service."

25 Xu Fuchang, *Shuihudi Qin jian yanjiu*.

26 On the literacy requirements of local scribes, see Kern, "Offices of Writing," 71–77.

27 For a full translation of this text, including a substantial introduction, see Major et al., *The "Huainanzi"*.

28 Kalinowski, "Divination and Astrology," 358–366, gives a list of mantic practitioners in the Han histories, which includes some of the highest-ranking officials at the imperial court. Likewise, all the major interpreters of omens during the Western Han, as they are mentioned in the *Hanshu* "Wuxing zhi" 五行志, were historical scholars and cosmological experts deeply steeped in the canonical texts; see Kern, "Religious Anxiety," 29.

29 Kalinowski, "Divination and Astrology," 352; Kalinowski, "Diviners and Astrologers," 391–395.

30 Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy," 866–867, *passim*.

among its lists of functionaries contains the offices for the grand diviner (*dabu* 大卜) and the grand scribe (*dashi* 大史), both assisted by a large number of staff in their subordinate offices that all had their own sets of duties.[31] Like the early Western Han bamboo manuscript of legal statutes excavated from Zhangjiashan 張家山 (Jingzhou 荊州, Hubei; likely dating from 186 BCE), the *Zhouli* groups together the offices of the scribe, the diviner, and the invocator (*zhu* 祝),[32] providing detailed descriptions of the tasks performed by these officials and their various subordinate offices. In total, it lists the impressive number of 187 functionaries for the diviners (though most of them, as in all offices outlined in the text, being low-level "couriers" (*tu* 徒)); for the various invocators, the *Zhouli* lists 227 functionaries, and for the scribes, 445.[33]

3 "Day Books" and "Monthly Ordinances": Divination, Cosmology, Political Rhetoric

A list of excavated mantic texts from the Qin (221–207 BCE) and Han periods[34] shows that within the broad diversity of writings—divination records, prognostications of natural omens, writings on physiognomy, hemerological prescriptions, divination manuals, and others more—the hemerological "Day book" (*rishu* 日書) is by far the most prominent type, appearing in no fewer than seventeen of the twenty-odd early imperial archeological sites with mantic texts.[35] These almanacs are also more frequent than any other type of texts interred in tombs with the single exception of tomb inventory lists (*qiance* 遣

31 Kalinowski, "Divination and Astrology," 358–366. The *Zhouli* may well be a text composed during imperial Qin times (221–207 BCE) but in parts contains knowledge that matches remarkably well the information on Western Zhou offices as it has now been confirmed through numerous bronze inscriptions. See Jin Chunfeng, *Zhouguan zhi chengshu jiqi fanying de wenhua yu shidai xinkao*; Schaberg, "The *Zhouli*"; and Kern, "Offices of Writing."

32 Zhangjiashan ersiqi hao Han mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu, *Zhangjiashan Han mu zhujian (ersiqi hao mu): shiwen xiudingben*, 80–82; Li Xueqin, "Shishuo Zhangjiashan Han jian 'Shi lü,'" 55–59; Kern, "Offices of Writing," 71–74; and most recently, Barbieri-Low and Yates, Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China, vol. 2, 1084–1093.

33 The number for the office of the "grand scribe" and its subordinates does not include the low-level scribes that populate *all* the offices within the *Zhouli*; these low-level clerks number 1,095 altogether; see Kern, "Offices of Writing," 68–70.

34 See Kalinowski, "Divination and Astrology," 353–358.

35 Ibid., 345. The title *rishu* was found on one of the two almanacs discovered at Shuihudi and has been used for similar almanacs since then. For a comprehensive account of the early Chinese *rishu* manuscripts, see *Books of Fate and Popular Culture in Early China*, edited by Donald Harper and Marc Kalinowski.

冊). Astonishingly, the *rishu*, now excavated from sites dating from the fifth through the first centuries BCE, have left virtually no trace in the received textual tradition.[36]

Almost exclusively, the "Day Books" have been found in tombs of low- or mid-ranking officials who during their lifetime had run the daily routines of the imperial state on the local or provincial level, and who in death were accompanied by these books among their personal, even intimate, belongings. The "Day Books" were often placed inside the coffin close to the corpse and in some cases were the only texts interred.[37] To these functionaries, their "Day books" were the essential tool to conceptualize their daily decisions and actions within a cosmological framework of time that combined the agricultural and astrological calendars with popular ideas about ghosts and spirits who were believed to exert their benevolent or malevolent influences on specific days. In other words, the "Day books" allowed their owners to predict—successfully or not—the cosmic and spiritual forces in the world within the framework of the calendar, and then to adjust their administrative, legal, military, medical, and other activities accordingly. This "optimistic" (Keightley) conceptualization of the cosmos as ultimately understandable and thus to some extent controllable—as opposed to the capricious interventions of unpredictable gods—is evident in early Chinese divination already since the Shang oracle bone inscriptions.[38]

The same optimistic view of the universe underlies the grand encyclopedic works of early China that in one way or another represent the world as *the imperial world*. In this world, the supreme ruler, overseeing the machinations of his universal administration while also conducting himself according to a strict ritual regimen, aligns both state and society with the cosmic clockwork. His efforts to time and execute royal and governmental activities in accordance with the natural universe follow the same principles that guide the "Day books" of low- and mid-ranking officials. Both have the agricultural and astrological calendars as their basis, and both rely on divination to identify the correct days for specific endeavors. While this may reflect a "trickle-down" effect of "tech-

36 For a recent study of the *rishu*, see Harkness, "Cosmology and the Quotidian" (with extensive references to earlier writings on the topic).

37 See the detailed account in Harkness, "Cosmology and the Quotidian," 11–50. According to Harkness, 37–40, 50, so far the one possible exception of a *rishu* from an aristocratic site is the text found in the tomb of Wu Yang 吳陽, Marquis of Yuanling 沅陵侯 (d. 162 BCE), at Huxishan 虎溪山 (Yuanling 沅陵, Hunan). Of this text, however, only a short fragment has been published. This fragment does not seem to fit the typical contents of a *rishu*, which has led to the suggestion that it belongs to a different type of mantic writing.

38 See Keightley, "Late Shang Divination," 13–14, and "The 'Science,'" esp. 174–177.

nical arts moving from a court-centered milieu to the private sphere,"[39] one also recognizes that much of early Chinese natural philosophy, focused as it is on hemerology, must have emerged from the immediate concerns of an agricultural society where poor timing of essential tasks would have led to disastrous consequences. Moreover, as much as mantic knowledge found its way downward into the lower ranks of local administration, the grand early imperial schemes of cosmological order in turn incorporated a host of regional beliefs, including a diverse pantheon of natural spirits, that may, at least in part, have traveled upward from local social contexts.

It is thus not surprising that the received ideas of imperial cosmological order share the same framework of natural philosophy and divination—minor variations included—with local mantic knowledge and practice that is now coming to light in the form of "Day books" and other divinatory texts and artifacts. Yet clearly, in the texts sponsored and curated by the court and the political elite, much of the expression of such knowledge appears rhetorical and representational. An example is the *Annals of Mr. Lü* (*Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋), a large compendium divided into twelve "Almanacs" (*ji* 紀; each with five sections), eight "Examinations" (*lan* 覽; each with eight sections) and six "Discourses" (*lun* 論; each with six sections), which itself is meant as a cosmological scheme, representing the triad of Heaven, Earth, and Man, the twelve months, the five phases (*wuxing* 五行) of correlative cosmology, the sixty-four hexagrams of the *Zhouyi*, and the number Six associated with Man.[40] This totalizing textual structure already reflects the basis of all early Chinese mantic thinking: the cosmos is orderly and numerological—remember the origins of the *Zhouyi* in numerological arrangements—its structure can be discerned, and events—from natural disasters to the fate of states or individuals—can be correctly interpreted or predicted by identifying their relation to this orderly scheme.

Significantly, the textual order proceeds from the twelve almanacs, that is, a calendrical scheme that at the outset must have been a self-contained work independent from the two following sections of the "Examinations" and "Discourses": only the "Almanacs" part is followed by a postface that dates the completion of the text to 239 BCE.[41] The identity and integrity of the "Almanacs" section as a self-contained text is further confirmed by its textual parallels in

39 Harkness, "Cosmology and the Quotidian," 197.

40 See Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 32–43; Lewis, *Writing and Authority*, 302–308. Knoblock and Riegel offer a complete translation of the *Lüshi chunqiu*.

41 Several scholars have argued that the "Almanacs" were the only part of the *Lüshi chunqiu* complete in 239 BCE, and that the "Examinations" and "Discourses" are of a later date; see

both the *Huainanzi* (submitted to the throne in 139 BCE) and the Han-dynasty compilation *Record of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) where the "Almanacs" are titled "Seasonal Rules" ("Shize" 時則) and "Monthly Ordinances" ("Yueling" 月令), respectively—titles that programmatically express the normative, prescriptive, and even legal nature of the "almanacs" and their instructions.[42] Normative timeliness is given as the central device in ordering the cosmos: as all human action occurs within the natural and predictable framework of cosmic time, its preconditions can be divined and its consequences prognosticated.

Within the *Lüshi chunqiu*, the twelve "Almanacs" proper—constituting the first section in each of the twelve chapters—are entirely systematic. As summarized by Knoblock and Riegel, each "Almanacs" section

> records the activities undertaken in that month. These activities are defined cosmologically by the celestial coordinates of the sun, and the zodiacal constellations that culminate at dawn and dusk. They are refined by the Five Processes correlates, including the signs of the sexagenary cycle, the *di* 帝 Sovereigns, their assisting spirits, animals, musical tones, pitch-standards, numbers, tastes, smells, sacrifices, and bodily organs [… They] all reflect the influence of Heaven's operations through the movement of its celestial bodies and the influences of the Five Processes.[43]

Thereafter, each section offers observations of the natural phenomena for the respective month, including the weather, vegetation period, and animal behavior. From here, it proceeds to discussing the climate and natural events appropriate to their time and then gives detailed prescriptions and prohibitions of royal and social behavior both ritual and mundane, including the inevitable, and inevitably dire, consequences of enacting the prescribed activities at the wrong time of year.

While the *Lüshi chunqiu* does not include any self-commentary, the final chapter of the *Huainanzi*, in a tightly rhymed passage in tetrasyllabic meter, appraises its own "Seasonal Rules" as the foundation of good governance:[44]

Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 27–32. This has been questioned by Paul R. Goldin in his review of their book; see 116–117.

42 The parallel between the *Lüshi chunqiu* "Almanacs" and the respective chapters in *Huainanzi* and *Liji* is not complete, as the *Lüshi chunqiu* in addition includes original philosophical essays in each section.

43 Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 35.

44 For a rhetorical analysis of this passage see Kern, "Creating a Book." For more extensive studies of the chapter, see Murray, "A Study of 'Yao lue' 要略"; and Queen, "Inventories of

"Seasonal Rules" provides the means by which to:	時則者，所以
above, follow the seasons of Heaven,	上因天時，
below, fully explore the strengths of Earth,	下盡地力，
determine standards and enact correspondences,	據度行當，
merge them with the rules of Man,	合諸人則，
give form to the twelve divisions	形十二節，
and take them as models and guides.	以為法式，
As they end and begin anew,	終而復始，
revolving without limit,	轉於無極，
you should follow, comply, imitate, and adhere to them	因循倣依，
so that you understand [impending] disaster and good fortune.	以知禍福，
In taking and giving, opening and closing,	操舍開塞，
each has its prohibited days	各有龍忌，
for issuing commands and administering orders,	發號施令，
instructing and warning in accordance with seasonal timeliness.	以時教期，
[All this] will enable the ruler of humankind to understand the means by which to manage affairs.	使君人者知所以從事。

Together with "Celestial Patterns" ("Tianwen" 天文; chapter three) and "Terrestrial Forms" ("Dixing" 墜形; four), "Seasonal Rules" (five) forms a triad of foundational chapters that follow the *Huainanzi*'s two opening chapters of philosophical reflection.[45] As expressed in their appraisal above, adherence to the strict calendrical framework of seasonal timeliness enables the ruler to perform the right actions at the right time but also to "understand disaster and good fortune" and to observe "prohibited days," which are, on the level of local administration, precisely the primary concerns of the "Day books."

While in the *Huainanzi* and in the *Liji*, the "Seasonal Rules" and "Monthly Ordinances" are self-contained chapters that proceed through the twelve months in repetitive monotony, the "Almanacs" of the *Lüshi chunqiu* are different. Here, the account of the months is not a single chapter of foundational significance but a totalizing framework that already incorporates the entirety of social, political, and ritual activities. While each month is given its own

the Past." See also the annotated translation and brief discussion of the chapter in Major et al., *The "Huainanzi"*, 841–867.

45 For an annotated translation of the three chapters, see Major et al., *The "Huainanzi"*, 109–206. For an earlier translation and study, see Major, *Heaven and Earth*.

chapter, each of these chapters contains a series of four essays in addition to the "Almanac" proper. Each group of essays is centered on a common theme that is perceived as cosmologically correlated to a particular time of year.

Underlying this alignment of human behavior with cosmic time is an elaborate numerology all within the framework of *yin-yang* 陰陽 dualism and five phases (*wu xing* 五行) correlations. This cosmological, numerological, and specifically calendrical scheme is the framework within, and on the basis of which, all other mantic knowledge takes place in the early empire. It is not by accident that the same type of almanac appears in three different early texts, and that related calendrical schemes can be found in other received texts as well. This overall situation meshes well with the archeological record: as noted above, no other type of writing has surfaced in such abundance as the daily almanacs. Based on a mantically interpreted calendar, they are the exact equivalent of common (if still literary elite) daily life to the prescriptions and prohibitions that the royal calendar provides for the ruler.

Yet there is a difference between "Day books" and the highly systematizing "Almanacs," "Seasonal Rules," and "Monthly Ordinances" recorded in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, the *Huainanzi*, and the *Liji*. Just as the *Zhouyi* was transformed from a numerologically organized divination manual into a wisdom book of universalist thought, where divination was rhetorically invoked but ultimately subordinated to a philosophical framework, so do the grand calendrical schemes in the received literature appropriate common mantic concerns for the purposes of representing the ideal state and its ideal ruler as acting in accordance with the cosmic clockwork. In other words, as much as the notations in the excavated "Day books" were of immediate and practical concern to their owners, and to the pragmatic tasks they performed on a daily basis, the grand calendrical schemes were rhetorical representations of good rule. This is not to say that the prescriptions given there were not actually followed by some rulers; for such an evaluation, we lack any evidence one way or the other. But it is to insist that what is outlined in grand cosmological systematizations should not necessarily be equated with actual action: the representation of divination is not the same thing as its practice.

A fascinating case of the "Monthly Ordinances" in a local and pragmatic context is a wall inscription in a faraway Western outpost of the Han empire, dated to 5 CE and excavated between 1990 and 1992. Here, in Xuanquanzhi 懸泉置 near Dunhuang 敦煌 (Gansu), an imperial edict of 101 lines titled "Document of the Edict of Monthly Ordinances for the Four Seasons in Fifty Articles" ("Zhaoshu sishi yueling wushitiao" 詔書四時月令五十條) was written in black ink within a red grid on white plaster, covering an area 2.2m wide

and 48cm high.[46] As noted by Charles Sanft, there is a series of early texts from the early tradition that contain parallels to the wall inscription,[47] but the three closest parallels are the chapters from *Liji*, *Lüshi chunqiu*, and *Huainanzi* noted above. There is no doubt that the inscription is based closely on these earlier writings; moreover, it shares language with Qin and early Han legal and administrative documents and in addition with at least one pre-imperial Qin edict from 309 BCE.[48] At Xuanquanzhi, the wall inscription was not the only piece of writing; in addition, a trove of documents on wood, bamboo, and paper have been found, including official documents from all levels of Han government—from the central administration, the commandery, the prefecture, and the district down to the local level of Xuanquanzhi and its sub-stations—and furthermore some personal letters written on silk.[49]

But what was the point of having the "Sishi yueling" at Xuanquanzhi? Both at the beginning and at the end, the edict commands the wider distribution of the document to various administrators, which implies copies on portable stationery. It remains unclear, however, to whom exactly the edict might have spoken. Apparently, the document, which also contains an (inconsistent) commentary on individual articles, was legal in nature and when "compared with the texts of the received parallels [...] is distinguished by its distinctly practical character" and focused on "coordinating practical, especially agricultural, pursuits with specific times of the year." Moreover, "while the 'Yue ling' content of *Lüshi chunqiu* and the *Li ji* chapter 'Yue ling' mainly focus on acts prescribed for the ruler, these are not found in 'Sishi yueling' at all." Some of the articles seem directed at the populace, but others are clearly addressed to "those in positions of authority."[50] In addition, nothing in the document is specific to the locality of Xuanquanzhi, and its language suggests that it was circulated in other parts of China as well. This creates another problem, as noted by a number of scholars: no single agricultural calendar would have been useful for the vastly different climates across the enormous expanse of Han China.[51]

The "Sishi yueling" edict says nothing about divination proper, but it is directly based on the grand calendrical schemes of the early empire that are

46 The definite study of this text is Charles Sanft, "Edict of Monthly Ordinances for the Four Seasons in Fifty Articles from 5 CE: Introduction to the Wall Inscription Discovered at Xuanquanzhi, With Annotated Translation." Most of the following information on this inscription is derived from Sanft's study.

47 Ibid., 158–159.

48 Ibid., 170–173.

49 Ibid., 133–134.

50 Ibid., 139–140, 150.

51 Ibid., 142.

indeed closely related to the correct timing of all human activity, and furthermore, as mentioned above in the passage from the *Huainanzi*, concerned with "understanding [impending] disaster and good fortune," and with knowing the "prohibited days for issuing commands and administering orders, instructing and warning in accordance with seasonal timeliness." It is also directly related to the ritual system of Han government, and it expresses Wang Mang's 王莽 (45 BCE–23 CE) "conspicuous and self-conscious classicism" that tied his activities to the ancient model of the Duke of Zhou 周公 (r. 1042–1036 BCE) and that was sanctioned by the Grand Empress Dowager (*taihuang taihou* 太皇太后), the nominal authority behind the edict. Twice in the document Wang Mang appears in full ceremonial gear, so to speak, by way of his "impressive string of titles."[52]

And yet, despite its grandiose appearance, the edict is incoherent on a number of levels. While its agricultural prescriptions were likely off the mark for the arid climate of China's northwest, its content seems to speak to various constituencies, literate and illiterate alike. Altogether, the document sits uncomfortably between the "Monthly Ordinances" of the received tradition—which offer prescriptions for the ruler—and the pragmatic needs of the common people, or even of the local officials, at any particular place in the empire. It exalts Wang Mang within the medium of a traditional set of legal and ritual prescriptions while seemingly addressing a populace that, as we now know from archeology, was deeply involved with organizing all forms of daily activities according to mantic prescriptions laid out in the ubiquitous "Day books." The "Sishi yueling" reinforced the notion of timeliness that in daily life was detailed in the "Day books," but at a level of generality that did not match the specificity and possible usefulness of day-to-day prescriptions.

If the document raises such questions of purpose and applicability, its inscription on a wall adds another layer of uncertainty. As all other writings collected at Xuanquanzhi station were maintained on their perishable stationery, why was the edict written on a wall? Nothing in the text itself suggests that it should be presented that way; to the contrary, as noted above, the language suggests wide dissemination in portable media. The possible argument that the inscription may have been read out loud to the illiterate populace does not hold; first, one may just as well read aloud from a manuscript on wood or bamboo, and second, much of the document was directed at the local officials. What is more, the classical references to both the earlier "Yueling" texts and hallowed writings such as the *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書) will not have spoken to the local population in the far-western region of China.

52 Ibid., 145.

I suspect that the somewhat dysfunctional aspects of the document and the display function of the inscription were related in that both text and display are fundamentally rhetorical. Together, they represented the ideal of human activities within a cosmic order that was constantly navigated by mantic techniques on the one hand, and the political authority and geographical reach of the empire—now under the de facto governance of Wang Mang—on the other. From the perspective of political geography, it was eminently meaningful to turn an imperial edict into an inscription right where its influence ended. Symbolically, it demarcated the imperial realm from the neighboring cultures in the south (modern Tibet), west (Central Asia), and north that had neither the agriculture, nor the imperial expanse, nor the mantic cosmology, nor the classical textual background, nor the elaborate writing system of Han China. The edict, in other words, was likely inscribed at Xuanquanzhi not despite but because of the remoteness of place.

The "Sishi yueling" inscription is situated somewhere between the mantic "Day books," the imperial legal ordinances applied to local administration, and the ritual representation of political rule that the "Yueling" of the textual tradition had framed as cosmic sovereignty. Thus, it is not merely an edict sent from the central court to the last corner of the empire but it also—indirectly but unmistakably—reflects the presence of the mantic arts among the populace. Across the empire, the edict speaks to a diverse audience already prepared for "monthly ordinances"; every local administrator who in his routine decisions sought guidance from his "Day books" was well attuned to the prescriptions of the "Sishi yueling."

4 Divination in the *Shangshu*

Together with the *Zhouyi* and the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經), the *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu*) forms the early core of the *Five Classics*, in parts possibly dating from the Western Zhou. One of the first things one notices in the *Shangshu*, the fountainhead of Chinese political philosophy and rhetoric, is the near-complete absence of omens. There are only two specific omens—other than just some general mention of "Heaven sending down disaster"—in the entire text: one is a brief mention of the appearance of a "crowing pheasant" (*gouzhi* 雊雉) in the chapter "The Day of the Supplementary Sacrifice to Gaozong" ("Gaozong rongri" 高宗肜日); the other occurs in the "Metal-bound Coffer" ("Jin teng" 金縢) chapter where, after the Duke of Zhou had been exiled for his presumed desire to usurp the throne, Heaven sent down a devastating

storm that beat down the ripe grain and uprooted great trees. Only after the infant King Cheng 成王 (r. 1042/35–1006 BCE) discovered the document by which the Duke of Zhou had loyally offered himself to die in lieu of the former King Wu 武 (r. 1049/45–1043 BCE), did he declare: "We shall not reverently divine [the cause of the storm...] Today, Heaven has set into motion its awesomeness to display the virtue of the Duke of Zhou!" (其勿穆卜 [...] 今天動威，以彰周公之德) Thereafter, a benign reverse wind raised all the grain again, leading to a most fruitful harvest. In other words, no divination was needed because the cause of the storm—Heaven's intent—was already clear.

Surprisingly, this omen of the rising grains is utterly exceptional in the entire *Shangshu*. If in Eastern Zhou and early imperial political discourse omens and their interpretations came to occupy center stage—with the *Wuxing zhi* 五行志 ["Monograph on the Five Phases," that is, on omen interpretation] being by far the longest chapter in the *Hanshu*—nothing of this can be seen in the *Shangshu*. We do not know why this is the case, though one might hypothesize, perhaps, that since Eastern Zhou times, omens were observed and interpreted not by rulers but by their ministers. In this way, they were either directed at those in power—in attempts of admonition or persuasion—or served as historiographic judgments about them. Rarely were they part of royal or imperial speech *by* the ruler, the predominant genre in the *Shangshu*. The *Shangshu*, like the Shang oracle texts before and the "Day books" after it, shows divination not as a tool to understand omens or otherwise inexplicable events but as a proactive move to ensure the correctness and timeliness of one's chosen action.

Historians have long regarded the *Shangshu* as a text that in part, specifically in the section concerned with the Western Zhou, offered a contemporaneous account of historical events. This reading of the *Shangshu* as a work of history, however, strikes me as fundamentally problematic. Instead, I suggest to take the royal speeches in the *Shangshu* as a rhetorical text—a text not of historical writing but of the representation of Zhou political philosophy and political legitimation, and I believe this is reflected in the way divination is depicted there. In this, the question is not about the actual practice of divination—which must have been pervasive, just as it was at the Shang court—but about how royal divination was recorded in the service of Zhou cultural memory and political sovereignty. The following chart lists all the *Shangshu* chapters that mention divination:

TABLE 8.1 *List of* Shangshu *chapters mentioning divination*

Chapter title	"Ancient" (古) or "modern" (今) version of the text	Historical period referenced
"Da Yu mo" 大禹謨	"Ancient" (古) Text	High antiquity
"Pan Geng" 盤庚	"Modern" (今) Text	Shang
"Xi bo kan Li" 西伯戡黎	"Modern" (今) Text	Fall of Shang/Rise of Zhou
"Tai shi" 泰誓	"Ancient" (古) Text	Zhou
"Hong fan" 洪範	"Modern" (今) Text	Zhou
"Jin teng" 金縢	"Modern" (今) Text	Zhou
"Da gao" 大誥	"Modern" (今) Text	Zhou
"Shao gao" 召誥	"Modern" (今) Text	Zhou
"Luo gao" 洛誥	"Modern" (今) Text	Zhou
"Jun Shi" 君奭	"Modern" (今) Text	Zhou

We do not know why divination is mentioned in just these ten chapters, and not in some others—after all, there are fifty-eight chapters in the received *Guwen Shangshu* 古文尚書 [Ancient Text *Shangshu*] and twenty-nine chapters that are believed to have been in the *Jinwen Shangshu* 今文尚書 [Modern Text *Shangshu*] available at the Qin and early Han courts. In general, the reliability of the "ancient text" version is much doubted, as it was likely compiled in the early fourth century of the common era from snippets of other received texts, writings now lost, and passages created from scratch.[53] However, the pertinent passages of the two "ancient text" chapters involved here—the "Counsels of the Great Yu" ("Da Yu mo")[54] and "The Great Harangue" ("Tai shi")[55]—are also recorded in other pre-Qin sources; in the case of "Tai shi," the *Guoyu* 國語 even quotes the passage directly from a text titled "Da [that is, Tai] shi."[56]

53 For the intractable early textual history of the *Shangshu*, see Shaughnessy, "*Shang Shu* 尚書"; Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 120–167. Curiously, the justified doubt regarding the "ancient text" chapters, which is based on the compelling findings of Yan Ruoqu 閻若璩 (1636–1704) and other Qing dynasty *kaozheng* 考證 scholars, has also led to the fetishization of the "modern text" chapters as "genuine" or "authentic," as if we had any evidence that any of them existed in its present form before the Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE)—a full eight centuries after the purported dates of the chapters presumed to be the earliest, and despite the famous warning in *Mengzi* 孟子 7B.3 that "it is better not to have any *Documents* than trusting all of them."

54 James Legge, *The Shoo King*, 63.

55 Ibid., 291.

56 Xu Yuanhao, "*Guoyu" jijie*, 3.91 ("Zhouyu, xia 周語下").

Thus leaving the "modern" versus "ancient" text divide aside, only two of the ten records of divination are included in the chapters depicting either high antiquity or the Shang before its imminent collapse, that is, in the "Counsels of Yu the Great" and in "Pan Geng." In the "Counsels," Yu 禹, pressed to accept the throne from Shun 舜, asks for verification by divination. Shun, the ruling emperor, declines by saying that he has already made his decision, and that, in addition, he has already performed a divination which, *because it was auspicious*, shall not be repeated (卜不習吉).[57] Toward the end of the chapter named after him, Pan Geng addresses his people by saying that while not ignoring their opinions, he would not dare to go against the result of the tortoise divination (各非敢違卜).[58]

Remarkably, the eight remaining accounts of divination are all related to the early Zhou rulers, and several show how their actions at defining historical moments were based on divination:

- In "Xi bo kan Li" 西伯戡黎 ["The Lord of the West Killed Li"], the high minister Zu Yi 祖伊 rushes forward to the last Shang king to warn him: "Son of Heaven, Heaven has already ended the mandate of our Yin [dynasty]; the perfected [wise] men and the great tortoise have not dared to foresee auspiciousness! It is not that the former kings do not aid us latter men; it is only that the king has become lascivious and dissolute and by this brings the end upon himself. Thus, Heaven has abandoned us." (天子，天既訖我殷命。格人元龜，罔敢知吉。非先王不相我後人，惟王淫戲用自絕。故天棄我)[59] In both its language and its content, this account is doubtlessly the work of retrospective imagination. Foretelling the imminent and inevitable collapse of the Shang (and the successful conquest by the Zhou), which is confirmed by the moral authority of both the "perfected men" and the great tortoise, it is a piece of naked Zhou propaganda, written in Zhou times.[60] Here as elsewhere in both *Shangshu* and *Shijing*, the fall of the Shang is consistently and formulaically portrayed as brought about by the immoral conduct of its last king,[61] in response to which the Zhou could not but launch

57 Legge, *The Shoo King*, 63. Parts of the speech are also found in *Zuo zhuan* "Ai gong" 哀公 10 and 18, from where they were likely copied into the "Da Yu mo."

58 Legge translates this differently as "you [that is, the people] did not presumptuously oppose the decision of the tortoise"; see *The Shoo King*, 246. I follow Gu Jiegang and Liu Qiyu, "*Shangshu" jiaoshi yilun*, vol. 2, 952; see also Karlgren, *The Book of Documents*, 26.

59 Legge, *The Shoo King*, 268–271.

60 See Gu Jiegang and Liu Qiyu, "*Shangshu" jiaoshi yilun*, vol. 2, 1067–1070.

61 In the *Shangshu*, the argument is made in nearly every "modern text" chapter referencing the Zhou, including "Xi bo kan Li" 西伯戡黎, "Weizi" 微子, "Mu shi" 牧誓, "Da gao" 大誥,

the conquest in order to "respectfully execute the punishment appointed by Heaven" (惟恭行天之罰).[62]

- The counterpart to the purported Shang divination announcing the fall of the dynasty is included in the "Tai shi" 泰誓 ["The Great Harangue"]. Here, after listing the crimes of the present king—that is, the last king of Shang—the future King Wu of Zhou declares that he will conquer the Shang: "Heaven is about to rule the people by using me. My dreams concur with my divination, doubling the blessed auspicious portent. The attack on Shang must succeed." (天其以予乂民。朕夢協朕卜，襲于休祥。戎商必克)[63] The passage appears verbatim in the *Guoyu* (whence it is probably taken), and King Wu's divination is further mentioned in the *Gui cang* divination manual excavated at Wangjiatai.[64] In other words, Warring States texts affirm that King Wu launched the conquest only after having divined the matter twice: once through dream divination (for which the *Zhouli* lists a separate official) and once again by consulting the tortoise.[65] Wherever this knowledge (or retrospective imagination) may come from, the two accounts in "Xi bo kan Li" and "Tai shi" perfectly complement each other, with the first predicting the defeat of Shang and the second the victory of Zhou.

"Kang gao" 康誥, "Jiu gao" 酒誥, "Shao gao" 召誥, "Duo shi" 多士, "Wu yi" 無逸, "Jun Shi" 君奭, "Duo fang" 多方, and "Li zheng" 立政; in addition, it surfaces in the "ancient text" chapters "Tai shi" 泰誓 and "Wu cheng" 武成. In fact, the *Shangshu* chapters referencing the early Shang (chapters that, in fact, likewise date from the Zhou) advance exactly the same argument to rationalize the demise of the Xia and the rise of the Shang. In the *Shijing*, the moral argument against the Shang is made most forcefully in "Dang" 蕩 (Mao 255) and appears also in "Wu" 武 (285).

62 The full formula is used in both "Mu shi" ("The Harangue at Mu") where it is applied to King Wu's destruction of the Shang and in "Gan shi" 甘誓 ("The Harangue at Gan"), where it is attributed to the Xia 夏 king Qi 啟 who addresses his troops before battling rebel forces. Likewise, in the "Tang shi" 湯誓 ("The Harangue of Tang"), the first Shang 商 king Lü 履 is made to invoke the "punishment appointed by Heaven" (天之罰) before attacking the army of the last Xia king, Jie 桀, and thus establishing the Shang dynasty; see Kern, "The 'Harangues' (*Shi* 誓)."

63 Legge, *The Shoo King*, 291.

64 Shaughnessy, "The Wangjiatai *Gui Cang*," 98 (slip 198).

65 On dream divination, see Kalinowski, "Diviners and Astrologers," 359–362. The *Gui cang* is generally believed to predate the Warring States, though we do not know to which extent the third-century BCE manuscript from Wangjiatai may faithfully reflect a much more ancient text.

- The "Hong fan" 洪範 ["The Great Plan"] chapter, which is generally dated to the Warring States period,[66] purports to contain a "divine Great Plan of governance"[67] as delivered by the Shang prince Jizi 箕子 to King Wu. Yet unlike the other speeches in the *Shangshu*, the "Great Plan" describes the general bureaucratic system of the ideal empire—complete with office lists not unlike those found in the *Zhouli*—where it defines kingship as "the efficient marshaling of all the resources available to the state, especially those human resources to be found in the pool of bureaucratic candidates for office."[68] In that vein, the "Great Plan," under the header "examination of doubts" (稽疑), offers a systematic account of divination: it first describes the duties of the officers for tortoise and milfoil divination and then proceeds to advise the king on how to resolve doubts, namely, by consulting his own heart, his nobles and officers, the people, and the tortoise and milfoil. Here, divination is not privileged as the definite way to ascertain the correctness of one's decisions, to interpret unusual phenomena, or to foretell the future; it merely is one among a number of resources to be consulted.[69] The "Great Plan" does not relate divination to any particular historical occasion and for this reason is the single outlier among the ten chapters discussed here.
- In "Jin teng" 金縢 ["The Metal-Bound Coffer"], the Great Duke 太公 and the Duke of Shao 召公 suggest to "respectfully divine" (穆卜) after King Wu has fallen ill, while the Duke of Zhou objects. Instead, he decides to offer the spirits his life in exchange for King Wu's, writing his prayer and commitment on a set of bamboo slips. In it, he announces to the ancestral spirits that "now I will present my inquiry to the great tortoise" (今我即命于元龜).[70] After divining with "the three tortoises," he finds all of them auspicious (乃卜三龜，一習吉); thereafter, he opens "the bamboo receptacles to look at the (oracular) writings" and finds them "likewise auspicious," concluding that "according to the configurations, the king will suffer no harm" (啟籥見書，乃并是吉。公曰：體，王其罔害). He then hides away his written commitment to the spirits in the metal-bound coffer and is recognized for his loyalty only after having been exiled (see above).[71]

66 See Gu Jiegang and Liu Qiyu, *Shangshu jiaoshi yilun*, vol. 3, 1219–1220; Jiang Shanguo, *"Shangshu" zongshu*, 228–232.

67 Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 139. For a study of the entire chapter, see Nylan, *The Shifting Center*.

68 Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 140.

69 Legge, *The Shoo King*, 334–338.

70 Following Karlgren, *Glosses*, 254 (#1573).

71 Legge, *The Shoo King*, 355–356.

As has often been noted, this narrative remained significant for over two millennia of subsequent Chinese history, raising as it does the relationship between ruler and minister, and more specifically, and precariously, between an infant ruler and a regent who could not escape the suspicion of trying to usurp the throne[72]—or who, in fact, did install himself as the new ruler (with Wang Mang, who exalted the Duke of Zhou as his model, being the most prominent early example). Thus, the "Jin teng" narrative is of crucial significance in two respects: first, as it depicts the critical moment when the dynasty was saved merely three years after its founding; and second, as it establishes the forever ambiguous paradigm of governance during the reign of an infant ruler.

In particular in the aftermath of its appropriation by Wang Mang, the figure of the Duke of Zhou remained ambivalent, but it had been problematic, and multifaceted, even before.[73] Most fascinating today, however, is the discovery of a (looted) manuscript now in the possession of Qinghua University that is clearly another version of the "Jin teng."[74] While matching much of the received text closely and often even verbatim, the manuscript text lacks two central elements: first, the Duke does not offer his life in exchange for King Wu's but rather suggests taking his place; and second, after the Duke's initial objection to a divination about the King's disease, at no point does he (or anyone else) engage in divination.[75] In other words, both the central element of the traditional narrative and the Duke's central device—that is, divination—in making his decision, are absent in the Warring States period manuscript. The question of which version may be the "correct" one is futile, given that both texts, at least in the form in which we have them, are removed from the early Western Zhou by seven or more centuries. More significant is the recognition that there were at least two different narratives of the same story, and that in these narratives the inclusion of divination was a choice.

- The "Da gao" 大誥 ["The Great Announcement"] presents the most emphatic account of divination among all the *Shangshu* chapters. First, the Duke of

72 Shaughnessy, "The Duke of Zhou's Retirement."

73 Nylan, "The Many Dukes."

74 Qinghua daxue chutuwenxian yanjiu yu baohu zhongxin, *Qinghua daxue cang Zhanguo zhujian*, vol. 1, 14–17, 157–162. If genuine, the manuscript likely dates from around 300 BCE. Dozens of studies of this manuscript have been published online, including Chen Minzhen and Hu Kai, "Qinghua jian 'Jinteng' jishi."

75 Ribbing Gren, "The Qinghua 'Jinteng' 金縢 Manuscript."

Zhou states that the "tranquilizing king" (寧王)[76] has left him the great precious tortoise in order to transmit to him Heaven's clairvoyance (寧王遺我大寶龜紹天明)—which the Duke then uses to divine about military action against an insurrection that threatens the young dynasty. Thus he speaks to his officers: "Our great affairs are blessed—my divinations have all been auspicious!" (我有大事休，朕卜并吉) and then repeats with further urgency "I have obtained the auspicious divination!" (予得吉卜) When his princes and officers suggest going against the divination, he declares: "I, being the young son, do not dare to discard the mandate from God-on-High! Heaven bestowed blessings on the tranquilizing king and gave rise to our small state of Zhou. It was the tranquilizing king who divined and acted on [the result], and thus was able to calmly receive this mandate! Now, as Heaven shall assist the people, how much more must I divine and act on it!" (予惟小子，不敢替上帝命。天休于寧王，興我小邦周。寧王惟卜用，克綏受茲命。今天其相民，矧亦惟卜用) After further pondering the situation and his duty to secure the work of the tranquilizing king at the moment of severe peril, the Duke concludes emphatically: "Now that I have explored the divination to the utmost, how could I dare and not follow it? If I were to follow the tranquilizing man in having these fine territories, how much more so now that the divinations are all auspicious! And so with you, I will grandly march eastward. Heaven's mandate is unerring: what the divination displays is indeed like this!" (予曷其極卜，敢弗于從。率寧人有指疆土，矧今卜并吉。肆朕誕以爾東征。天命不僭。卜陳惟若茲)[77] Here, as in "Jin teng," the Duke of Zhou once again acts decisively after having conducted multiple divinations. In rejecting the advice of his officers, he uses a single argument: he has inherited the "great precious tortoise" from his ancestors, who had relied on it before when establishing the dynasty, and will not discard its divine guidance as it reflects the mandate from Heaven and God-on-High. The fate of the young dynasty rests not in following human advice but in accepting the results of the Duke's divinations, and Heaven's will.

76 The term *ningwang* 寧王 ("tranquilizing king[s]") is much debated and has variously been understood to mean King Wen, King Wu, or both. Legge, *The Shoo King*, 365, understands *ning* literally as "tranquillizing" (sic); Karlgren, *Glosses*, 262–263 (#1593) takes the term to refer to the dead (and therefore "serene") kings. Qiu Xigui, reviewing earlier scholarship since Qing times, declares that it is not particularly difficult to understand that *ning* was an early miswriting for *wen* 文, which leads to the reading of *ningwang* as "King Wen"; see Qiu Xigui, *Gudai wenshi yanjiu xintan*, 73–80; likewise, see Gu Jiegang and Liu Qiyu, "*Shangshu" jiaoshi yilun*, vol. 3, 1266–1267. While I agree with this conclusion, I am reluctant to emend the text directly.

77 Legge, *The Shoo King*, 365–374.

- The "Shao gao" 召誥 ["The Announcement of the Duke of Shao"] chapter is rather laconic about divination. As the Grand Protector 太保 (the Duke of Shao, also known as Prince Shi 奭) inspects the eastern localities for the site of a new capital, he finally arrives at Luo 洛, obtains a positive divination about settling there, and begins to plan the new city (太保朝至于洛，卜宅，厥既得卜，則經營).[78] In the very next chapter, "Luo gao" 洛誥 ["The Announcement about Luo"], the Duke of Zhou, after arriving at Luo, performs extensive divinations about the locale; and having obtained positive results, he sends a messenger to the king to present the divinations (朝至于洛師。我卜河朔黎水，我乃卜澗水東，瀍水西，惟洛食。我又卜瀍水東，亦惟洛食。伻來以圖，及獻卜). The Duke's efforts are then acknowledged by the young King Cheng: "The Duke did not dare not to revere Heaven's blessings; he came and inspected the locality for residence. May he establish [the new capital of] Zhou to accord with the blessings! Having settled the locality, he sent a messenger to come here; and [the messenger] came here to show me how the divinations and blessings were constantly auspicious." (王拜手稽首曰：公不敢不敬天之休，來相宅。其作周匹休。公既定宅，伻來。來視予卜休恆吉)[79] After suppressing the rebellion mentioned in "Da gao," this was the Duke's second major accomplishment; and once again, it is legitimated by extensive divinations in order to secure Heaven's blessings.
- Finally, in "Jun Shi" 君奭 ["Prince Shi"], the Duke of Zhou, addressing his older half-brother Prince Shi (the Duke of Shao), notes how since high antiquity, virtuous ministers assisted their rulers by invariably following the divinations of the tortoise and the milfoil stalks (故一人有事于四方，若卜筮，罔不是孚).[80] While this mention of divination does not refer to any specific situation, it firmly grounds the decision-making at the royal court in the practice of divination which was "followed without exception" (罔不是孚) in order to accord with Heaven's mandate and to secure Heaven's blessings.

This, then, is the entire record of divination in the *Shangshu*, the classic of early Chinese political philosophy. Eight of the ten chapters where divination is recorded reference situations within the first years of the Western Zhou, the golden age of Kings Wen and Wu and of the Dukes of Shao and Zhou, a foundational time of glory soon to be lost—beginning with the reign of King Zhao

78 Ibid., 421–422.
79 Ibid., 436–438.
80 Ibid., 479.

昭 (r. 977/75–957), when the king was killed during a disastrous military campaign southward. While two chapters ("The Great Plan" and "Prince Shi") mention only the general importance of divination for governing the state in accordance with Heaven's mandate, the remaining six all focus on the four most critical moments at the beginning of Zhou rule: (a) the Shang conquest, (b) the illness and demise of the dynastic founder King Wu, connected to the rise of the Duke of Zhou and the resolution of the first succession crisis in Chinese history, (c) the suppression of the early rebellion that threatened the young dynasty, and (d) the establishment of the new capital. Also in each case, divination is the central proactive device to determine the right course of action, which then is pursued without exception. In each case, the proposed course of action is found to be auspicious, and so is the eventual outcome. There is no instance of an inauspicious divination (other than the one conducted by the Shang, foretelling their imminent defeat at the hands of King Wu, of course), nor is there any case where action determined by divination turns out to be ill-fated. In two cases—the Zhou conquest and the founding of the new capital—we are given not one but two divinations, both confirming the same course of action, and both interpreting the divinations as expressions of Heaven's mandate: first, the pair of divinations in "Xi bo kan Li" and "Tai shi" that foretell the fall of the Shang and the rise of the Zhou; and second, the divinations in "Shao gao" and "Luo go" as they together confirm Luo as the site of the new capital.

Looking at the evidence from the Shang oracle bones and plastrons, we may of course assume that before any such major political and military moves, the oracle was consulted—as it would have been on numerous other occasions and for many minor purposes as well. But the overall representation of divination in the *Shangshu* is strictly selective and, beginning with the highly propagandistic one in "Xi bo kan Li," seems aimed at a single goal: to sanction the Zhou's right to rule and to glorify the dynastic founders. In each of these cases, divination is a secondary religious and political move that is then presented as primary: first, the king or the duke decides on a course of action; second, he then divines about its auspiciousness. And third, the auspicious result is declared as expressive of Heaven's mandate, which one does not dare to ignore. In other words, it is the very act of divination that turns a military or political goal into something altogether different: the just execution of Heaven's will, which happens to concur exactly with the ruler's initially proposed course of action. Thus, divination is rhetorically represented not to rationalize and explain some otherwise inexplicable phenomenon but to provide the ultimate, legitimizing rationale for the Zhou rulers' most ambitious actions.

Most obviously in the case of "Xi bo kan Li," but just as likely in all the other cases that invariably turn out auspicious and successful, the account is, at a minimum, a retrospective ideological selection of whatever may have been the historical truth. Without a doubt, the future predicted in the *Shangshu* divinations was already the past by the time the text was written. Moreover, as shown by the Qinghua University manuscript that now parallels the "Jin teng" chapter, the account of divination was optional—it was a conscious choice about how to represent the early Zhou. In sum, it is this particular representation of divination, together with other aspects of the text, that reveals the *Shangshu* not as a collection of historical documents but as a work of political rhetoric and philosophy.[81] In this work, aside from legitimizing Zhou rule, the implausibly restrictive record of divination may yet have served another important function in both political and narrative terms: to mark rhetorically the most decisive moments of early history.

This essay has pursued the presence and the absence of divination in early Chinese literature, focusing on a small number of case studies. In each case, I suggest that the literary text vastly obscures and elides the widespread and routine mantic practices of the time while simultaneously imbuing divination with high political significance. In no case should we mistake this rhetorical sublation and representation of divination for "wie es eigentlich gewesen" or, in Chinese terms, a "true record" (*shilu* 實錄). But just as much as this rhetorical account conceals historical truth, it also reveals it, albeit merely by indirect reflection: the ancient authors of our texts could consider the rhetoric of divination compelling only because—despite all literary obfuscation—the mantic practices were real and trustworthy, as they were woven tightly into the fabric of the commoners' daily life and the Royal Way (*wangdao* 王道) of their rulers alike.

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81 See Kern and Meyer, *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy*.

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