

Astrology in Time and Place

This volume has been made possible with the aid of a generous grant from the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, School of Archaeology, History and Anthropology at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and the financial and editorial resources of the Sophia Centre Press.

<http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/sophia/>
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We gratefully acknowledge permission from Cambridge University Press to publish extracts from David Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 436-40; and David Pankenier, 'Did Babylonian Astrology Influence Early Chinese Astral Prognostication?', *Early China* 37 (2014): pp. 1-13 (p. 9) in Chapter 1.

We are grateful to Brill for permission to publish material from 'The Zodiac Calendar in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q318) in relation to Babylonian Horoscopes', from H. R. Jacobus, *Zodiac Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls and their Reception: Ancient Astronomy and Astrology in Early Judaism*, IJS 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2014) in Chapter 11.

Astrology in Time and Place:

*Cross-Cultural Questions
in the History of Astrology*

Edited by

Nicholas Campion

and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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Cross-Cultural Questions in the History of Astrology

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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-8381-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8381-8

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book emerges from work coordinated at the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, a research centre in the School of Archaeology, History and Anthropology at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. The Centre has a wide-ranging remit to investigate the role of cosmological, astrological and astronomical beliefs, models and ideas in human culture, including the theory and practice of myth, magic, divination, religion, spirituality, politics and the arts. Much of the Centre's work is historical but it is equally concerned with contemporary culture and lived experience. The Centre is responsible for teaching the University's MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology, which takes historical and anthropological approaches to explore humanity's relationship with the cosmos.

Special thanks are due to the continued support of Dr Jeremy Smith, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and the Performing Arts, Dr Kyle Erickson, the Vice Dean, Professor Janet Burton, Head of the School of Archaeology, History and Anthropology, and of all our colleagues in the University. Lastly, enormous thanks to the diligence and patience of our editor, Kathleen White.

Dr Nicholas Campion and Dr Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum

INTRODUCTION

CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON AND TRANSMISSION IN THE HISTORY OF ASTROLOGY

NICHOLAS CAMPION
AND DORIAN GIESELER GREENBAUM

The chapters in this book are based on the conference on ‘Astrology in Time and Place’, the tenth conference held by the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, now at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, in 2012. The conference title had a double meaning. First, the practice of astrology depends on the coming together of time and place in a single experience. Second, the way in which it is practiced varies from one culture to another, from time to time and from place to place. Astrology, broadly defined as the practice of relating events on earth to those in the sky, is increasingly recognised as a global phenomenon. Its methodologies vary considerably from one culture to another, as from China to the Near East and to Mesoamerica. Within cultures it can be both innovative and conservative. In both India and Europe, for example, multiple schools of practice and philosophy emerged, yet earlier doctrines were not always discarded but existed concurrently or only changed slowly. We might then use the word ‘astrologies’ rather than astrology, as we did in a previous Sophia Centre conference, in 2010.¹

The 2012 conference brought together scholars with different specialities in order to consider manifestations of astrological theory and practice in a variety of cultures and periods. Asia is the focal point for four essays. David Pankenier and Kristina Buhrman consider China and Japan, respectively, and the extent to which both cultures proved resistant to, or

¹ Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene, eds., *Astrologies: Plurality and Diversity* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2010).

receptive of, influences coming from the West. Audrius Beinorius and Mario Friscia focus on India: Beinorius from a historical perspective in discussing the social and religious roles of astrology and astrologers, while Friscia takes a modern and ethnographic approach, exploring planetary propitiation rituals in present-day Tamil Nadu.

Five papers explore the nature and transmission of ideas in Western theory and practice. Micah Ross and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum explore the transmission of words and concepts among different Mediterranean cultures in the Greco-Roman and Late Antique periods. Micah Ross also provides a chapter comparing the early iconography of Gemini in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and India, considering possible transmissions among some cultures. Johann Hasler moves from ancient Greece to modern France in focusing on connections between music and astrology, specifically the association of musical pitches to planets. Liana Saif examines the use of Arabic doctrines of astral causation to support a seventeenth-century defence of English astrology against its critics. Gustav-Adolf Schoener considers frameworks for understanding modern Western astrology's cultural locus.

Lastly, four papers consider calendars. In the venue of the ancient Near East, Ulla Koch looks at the history and integration of calendar divination with astrology, while Helen R. Jacobus examines connections between the Qumran zodiac calendar and the Babylonian calendar used in cuneiform horoscopes. Michael Grofe discusses cosmological cycles among the Maya, including astronomy's role and the mythological significance involved in these practices, and how a modern epigrapher can best describe and interpret them. Christel Mattheeuws examines the calendrical practices of Central East Madagascar and its wider environs, finding that different versions of these calendars, in terms of relationships between sun, moon and stars, influence how electional astrology in these areas is practised.

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PART ONE

**THE EAST:
TRADITION, RITUAL AND TRANSMISSION**

CHAPTER ONE

ON CHINESE ASTROLOGY'S IMPERVIOUSNESS TO EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

DAVID W. PANKENIER

Abstract

Despite claims to the contrary, Chinese astral omenology reveals no discernible foreign influences on the theory and practice of astromancy. This article briefly examines the evidence of Babylonian influence put forward a century ago and concludes that there is no basis for the contention that Chinese astral prognostication was imported from Western Asia. A number of unique characteristics of astromancy as practiced in China are illustrated by translated passages from classical literature. One historical episode in the Tang Dynasty is cited as the only known occasion when Sāsānian and Chinese planetary astrology might have intersected, if only briefly.

KEYWORDS: An Lushan, astral omens, astrology, Babylonia, Bezold, China, diffusion, planets, portent, Sāsānian, Sima Qian, *tianwen*

My topic is the imperviousness to foreign influence of early Chinese astrological theory and practice. Given astrology's notable resistance to fundamental change wherever it is found—except in the case of conquest, colonization, and subjugation—you may have the impression that I am merely setting up a straw-man which I will then proceed to knock down 'as easily as pointing to the palm of my hand', as the ancient Chinese would say. After all, anyone with a passing acquaintance with the history of Western astrology knows how great a debt is owed to Babylonian and Hellenistic traditions now more than two millennia in the past. Why else would we still preserve in the 21st century the bizarre zodiacal Goat-fish, Capricorn, rather than substituting, say, a Submarine? To begin with, this paper discusses a long-standing but unexamined claim of Babylonian influence on Chinese astrology, mainly to show the claim to be baseless. Then there are some illustrative examples of the staunch resistance in

China of basic astrological theory and practice to change of any kind, despite revolutionary social and cultural transformations. Finally, I will briefly review the circumstantial evidence for a unique intersection of Chinese and Western planetary astrology at the very highest political level.

Purported traces of Babylonian Astrology in the ‘Treatise on the Celestial Offices’ (ca. 100 BCE)

Due to a studied neglect of the role of astrology in early China, for a century the received wisdom has been that Chinese astronomy and astrology owe their inspiration to Babylonia. This is because in 1919 Carl Bezold, a noted Assyriologist, published an article in which he claimed to identify specific Babylonian influences in Sima Qian’s ‘Treatise on the Celestial Offices’ (ca. 100 BCE).¹ The ‘Treatise’, a *summa* of the accumulated astronomical and astrological knowledge in the early empire, is in Joseph Needham’s opinion ‘a text of the highest importance for ancient Chinese astronomy’ (and, I might add, ‘astrology’). Bezold, who claimed no Sinological expertise, based his study on Édouard Chavannes’ translation of the ‘Treatise’ in *Les Mémoires Historiques de Se-Ma-Ts’ien* (Paris, 1895-1905). So we are talking about the early days of European Sinology.²

So influential was Bezold’s 1919 paper, and so dominant the prevailing Eurocentric perspective with respect to China, that his conclusions have gone unquestioned and no attempt has been made to confirm his findings. Surprisingly, in his volume on *Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth* in the monumental *Science and Civilisation in China* series, even Joseph Needham concurred, even though

¹ Carl Bezold, ‘Sze-ma Ts’ien und die babylonische Astrologie’, *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift* 8 (1919): 42-49.

² In part, Bezold was drawing on comparisons between Chinese texts and cuneiform passages earlier made by Morris Jastrow; see Morris Jastrow, *Die Religion Babyloniens und Assyriens* (Giessen: Ricker, 1905), 745ff. Of course, Bezold could know nothing of the late Shang Dynasty oracle-bone divination inscriptions from the 12th to mid-11th centuries BCE first excavated in quantity in the 1930s. It is only within the last decade that the Taosi altar platform (ca. 2100 BCE) designed for solar observations (and presumably worship) was discovered; see David W. Pankenier, Ciyuan Liu, and Salvo de Meis, ‘The Xiangfen, Taosi Site: A Chinese Neolithic “Observatory”?’’, *Archaeologia Baltica: Astronomy and Cosmology in Folk Traditions and Cultural Heritage* 10 (2008): 141-8. This site is roughly contemporaneous with the earliest date proposed for the famous Babylonian MUL.APIN compendium of late-Sumerian astronomical lore.

his project was conceived to set the record straight on China's unrecognized contributions to the world in science and technology. No less surprising is that a generation later noted China scholars like Roy Andrew Miller and Edward H. Schafer also uncritically accepted Bezold's study as authoritative, perhaps because Needham had explicitly endorsed Bezold's view:³

It seems safe to conclude . . . that on the whole the Chinese nomenclature of the constellations represents a system which grew up in comparative isolation and independence. *Such, too, was the mature conclusion of Bezold . . . who pointed out that it does not exclude the transmission of a body of Babylonian astrological lore to China before the 6th century BCE, which, as we saw above [vol. 2, p. 354], seems rather probable. Nor would it militate against the belief that certain basic ideas were transmitted about a thousand years earlier, e.g., the planispheric 'roads' which led to the system of the hsiu [28 lodges], the use of the gnomon, the recognition of the position of the pole and the equinoctial points, and so on.*⁴

I suspect a major reason for the failure to seriously test Bezold's conclusions is the Needham imprimatur. Needham must have found Bezold's arguments plausible because diffusion in the opposite direction was a major finding of his study of technology transfer in *Science and*

³ Roy A. Miller, 'Pleiades Perceived: From MUL.MUL to Subaru', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108.1 (1988): 4; Edward H. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: T'ang Approaches to the Stars* (Berkeley, University of California 1977), 10.

⁴ Joseph Needham, with the research assistance of Ling Wang. *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 3, *Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1959), 273 (italics mine). Previously (Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 2, *History of Scientific Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969], 271), Needham had concluded, 'the number of cases in which any parallelism of symbolic nomenclature can be made out is remarkably small'. See also (Needham, *Science*, 186) where Needham cites Shinjō Shinzō's opinion, and later (Needham, *Science*, 254) that of Hommel, concluding, 'the connection, therefore, was not very striking' (Needham, *Science*, 354). For his part, Otto Neugebauer was harshly critical of Needham's claim of Babylonian influence; see Otto Neugebauer, *A History of Ancient Mathematical Astronomy* (Berlin, Heidelberg, and New York: Springer, 1975), 1073; also Qiyuan Liu, 'Yaodian Xi He zhang yanjiu' (Research on the Xi-He Chapter of the *Yaodian*), *Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan lishi yanjiusuo xuekan* (*Bulletin of the Institute of History, Academia Sinica*) 2 (2004), 64ff.

Civilisation in China, and the archaeology of the early dynastic period in the 2nd millennium BCE was still largely a blank slate.⁵

In essence, Bezold's conclusion, to which Needham alludes above, was that 6th century BCE Babylonian astral divination,⁶ exemplified by the cuneiform texts from the library of Assurbanipal, left telltale traces in the Chinese astral omenology as represented in the 'Treatise on the Celestial Offices'. Space does not permit me to discuss in detail the errors and false assumptions that undermine Bezold's analysis, and in fairness it must be said that the material he had at his disposal was extremely limited.⁷ But for the sake of illustration, let me quote just one example from among the small sample of seven passages Bezold cited as dispositive.

Babylonian text:

'Wenn sich Irgendwer [Mars] der Großen Zwillingen nähert, wird der König sterben, und es wird Feindschaft sein'.

'If someone [Mars] approaches the Great Twins, the king will die and there will be enmity'.

Chavannes translation from the 'Treatise':

'Quand [la planète du] Feu se trouve dans les Fleuves du Sud [Procyon, β, η du Petit-Chien] et du Nord [Castor et Pollux et ρ des Gémeaux], des guerres s'élèvent et la moisson ne pousse pas'.

Original Chinese from the 'Treatise':

火守南北河，兵起，穀不登

Author's translation:

'If the FIRE [STAR = MARS] guards NORTH or SOUTH RIVER, fighting breaks out and the grains fail to grow'.⁸

Assuming Bezold's identification of MARS is correct, and overlooking his having ignored the Chinese reference to Canis Minor and lack of equivalence between the asterisms mentioned, the only discernible parallel is MARS' position in Gemini. This example is not encouraging, and as I show elsewhere none of Bezold's remaining six passages is any more

⁵ E.g., Needham and Wang, 177.

⁶ I make a distinction between Babylonian astral divination and astral prognostication in early China, since there was no divinization of celestial bodies in China prior to the arrival of Buddhism.

⁷ My close analysis of Bezold's arguments and examples is found in David W. Pankenier, 'Did Babylonian Astrology Influence Early Chinese Astral Prognostication *xīng zhàn shù* 星占術?', *Early China* 37 (2014): 1-13.

⁸ *Shiji*, 'Treatise', 27.1302.

suggestive of borrowing than this one.⁹ At a remove of nearly a century, what Bezold found so persuasive in these examples is baffling: not one meets any reasonable standard of proof of cultural contact. To his credit, Bezold conceded the incongruity between his Babylonian and Chinese examples, calling it an 'inexplicable inconsistency'. But convinced as he was, in spite of the evidence, that the Babylonian zodiac system and astral divination *must* have been transmitted to China, Bezold reasoned that the contradiction resulted from a reformulation of Babylonian astronomy *after* it somehow made its way to China prior to about 523 BCE. He ventures the following rationalization for his findings:

If one rejects the attempt to resolve the discrepancy discussed above, there remains, as far as I can see, only one way out of the dilemma, which entails the following explanation. In ancient times the Chinese gave many constellations original names as groups of stars recognized as such, including some clearly distinguishable as figures in the sky, and that the Babylonians had independently embraced those having the same or nearly the same extension. *The Chinese would then have become acquainted with Babylonian astrology, probably before 523 B.C., and adopted at that time the received figures as their own as best they could, while maintaining the ancient native Chinese names and underlying ideas.* A legacy of this amalgamation is found in Sima Qian's *Shiji*.

Bezold offers no evidence whatsoever in support of the ethnocentric conjecture that Babylonian astrological principles and practices had been adopted wholesale by an intellectually supine Chinese civilization. Neither he nor Needham asked the obvious question: *cui bono*? Where has such substitution ever occurred except in the wake of conquest, forcible conversion, and/or genocide, such as occurred in the Americas at the hands of the Conquistadors and missionaries? Bezold's proposed scenario of the supplanting of sophisticated age-old Chinese traditions by an utterly alien scheme, from an unknown foreign entity, transmitted by a handful of merchants or magicians, beggars the imagination.¹⁰ In the case of the

⁹ Pankenier, 'Did Babylonian Astrology Influence Early Chinese Astral Prognostication'.

¹⁰ As John M. Steele concluded: 'Historically and textually, I see no evidence Chinese celestial divination originated in Babylonia; nevertheless, in both cultures the heavens were used to provide portents, and in both cases these portents were at times exploited for political purposes . . . there were clear differences between how the Babylonians and the Chinese conceived of celestial measurement . . . this would make [transmission] harder and does, I think, place the onus on historians claiming the transmission of Babylonian astronomy to China to explain how this

adoption of certain technologies, such as the chariot and early iron smelting, there was undoubtedly sporadic contact with Western Asia from mid-2nd millennium BCE on.¹¹ But the rapid adoption of new military technologies or materials, including the wearing of trousers for fighting on horseback arising from conflict with steppe-dwelling mounted adversaries is one thing, *throwing out* an established theory and practice of astral omenology in favor of an incommensurate alien system is quite another.¹² Clearly, Bezold was in the grip of an *idée fixe* regarding the ineluctability of Babylonian influence on China.

Concerning Mars

In contrast to Bezold's isolated selections taken out of context, consider this section from the 'Treatise', which summarizes the prognostication principles concerning MARS and what was known about the planet's movements.

One observes the punishing *materia vitalis* (*qi*) to locate SPARKLING DELUDER [MARS]. [MARS] is the South, Fire, and governs summer; its stem

problem was overcome'; see John M. Steele, 'A Comparison of Astronomical Terminology and Concepts in China and Mesopotamia', Origins of Early Writing Systems Conference (Beijing, October 2007) at <http://cura.free.fr/DIAL.html#CA> (accessed November 2012). Moreover, David Pingree and Patrick Morrissey concluded that the evidence 'argues strongly against a common origin or even association of the twenty-eight Chinese *xiu* with the Indian *nakṣatras*'; see David Pingree and Patrick Morrissey, 'On the Identification of the Yogatārās of the Indian Nakṣatras', *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 20 (1989): 99-119. See also F. R. Stephenson's detailed study of stellar nomenclature with 'reference to the *Shiji* and later star lists, which show that correspondence between Chinese and Babylonian-Greek names for constellations is rare, emphasizing their independent origins'; F. R. Stephenson, 'Chinese and Korean Star Maps and Catalogs', in J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography, Book 2, Cartography in the traditional East and Southeast Asian societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 528. Compare Table 1 and Fig. 1b below.

¹¹ As Needham and others have shown, for most of China's history the technology transfer went the other way and included much more than just printing, the compass, and gunpowder. See, e.g., John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹² David W. Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), traces the history of Chinese preoccupation with astrology and cosmology from the earliest times through the early imperial period, revealing the archaic origins of the concepts and practices briefly outlined here.

days are *bīng* and *dīng*. When propriety is lost, punishment emanates from MARS {and MARS moves anomalously}. When [MARS] appears there is armed conflict, when it disappears troops disperse. One identifies the subject state based on the lodge [MARS occupies]. MARS is rebellion, brigandage, plague, bereavement, famine, war. If it retraces its path for two lodges [1318] or more and then dwells there, within three months there will be calamities, within five months there will be armed invasion, within seven months half the territory will be lost, within nine months more than half the territory will be lost. Accordingly, if [MARS] both appears and disappears together with [a single lodge], that state's sacrifices will be terminated. If [MARS] occupies a place and calamity promptly befalls it, though [anticipated to be] great, it ought to be small; [if the calamity is] long in coming, though it ought to be small, on the contrary, it will be great. If [MARS] is south [of a lodge] there will be male obsequies, if north, female obsequies. If scintillating rays encircle it, reaching now in front, now behind, now to the left, and now to the right, the calamity will be even greater. [If MARS] duels with other planets, their gleams touching each other, it is injurious; if [their gleams] do not touch, it is not injurious. If all FIVE PLANETS follow [MARS] and gather in a single lodge, its state below will be able to attract the entire sub-celestial realm through Propriety. [1319] As a general rule, [MARS] appears in the east and travels through sixteen lodges before halting, then it retrogrades through two lodges; after six ten-day weeks, it resumes eastward travel, [to?] ten lodges from where it halted.¹³ After ten months it disappears in the west, then travels for five months in obscurity before appearing again in the east.¹⁴ When it appears in the west it is called RETURNING BRIGHTNESS, and rulers hate it. Its eastward motion is quick, each day traveling $1\frac{1}{2}^d$.¹⁵ Its motion to the east, west, south and north is rapid. In each case troops gather beneath it. In war those who comport with it are victorious, those who defy it are defeated. If MARS follows VENUS, the army is beset; [if MARS] departs from it, the army retreats. If [MARS] emerges northwest of VENUS, the army will split; if [MARS] moves southeast of it, generals on the flanks do battle. If during [MARS'] travel VENUS overtakes it, the army will be shattered and its general killed. If MARS enters and guards or trespasses against the GRAND TENUITY [PALACE], CHARIOT POLE, or ALIGN-THE-HALL (#13), those in

¹³ The passage literally reads 'for several tens of lodges from where it halted', which is so egregious an error the text must be defective here. MARS's retrogradation lasts some 75-80 days and covers only about 20°. I suspect the 'ten lodges' has been transposed from the preceding lines, 'for ten months' appears to be missing from the first line.

¹⁴ This implies a synodic period of 27 months or some 797 days, compared to the modern figure of 780 days. As late as the monograph on astrology in the *Jin shu* (648 CE), MARS's movements were still held to be problematical, *Jin shu*, 12.318.

¹⁵ Superscript ^d stands for Chinese *du*, of which there are 365 in a circle, not 360 as in Babylonia.

command hate it. HEART (#5) is the HALL OF BRILLIANCE, the TEMPLE OF MARS – carefully watch this.¹⁶

If one is to investigate seriously the possibility of cross-fertilization between China and Western Asia, passages like this would be a good place to begin. My knowledge of Babylonian planetary astrology, however modest, does not make me sanguine about the prospect of proving any more than the most superficial resemblance. This is especially true in view of the fact that prognostications involving not just Mars, but Jupiter, Venus, and Mercury as well, overwhelmingly concern military conflict.

Portent Astrology and Jupiter in Early China

In order to gain a better appreciation of the flavor of Chinese astral portentology in the late 1st millennium BCE, consider these further examples from the pre-imperial and early imperial literature. First, a typical prognostication involving JUPITER from the *Tradition of Zuo* (*Zuozhuan*), a 4th century BCE pseudo-commentary on the canonical *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*) which chronicles the events of 722-481 BCE from the perspective of one of the ‘Warring States’ of the age.

In the 8th year of Duke Zhao of Lu (533 BCE) the *Spring and Autumn Annals* records the destruction of the state of Chen by the southern state of Chu. The *Tradition of Zuo* elaborates:

The Marquis of Jin asked the historiographer Zhao, ‘Will Chen cease to exist after this?’ and was told, ‘not yet.’ ‘Why is that?’ asked the Duke. [The historiographer] replied: ‘[The house of Chen] is descended from [legendary pre-dynastic ruler] Zhuan Xu. JUPITER was in QUAIL FIRE and [the dynasty of Zhuan Xu] was extinguished; it will be the same with the extinction of Chen. Now [JUPITER] is in the [MILKY WAY] FORD AT SPLIT WOOD [Sgr], [Chen] will be restored again. Moreover, the branch of the House of Chen which is in [the state of] Qi will obtain the government of that state and only after that will Chen perish.’¹⁷

¹⁶ One commentator suggests that the ‘Treatise’s’ pithy conclusion concerning MARS from near the end (*Shiji*, 27.1347) actually belongs here: ‘MARS causes fuzzy stars [tailless comets]. Externally it governs [the use of] military force, and internally it governs [the conduct of] government’. Therefore, the ‘Treatise’ says: ‘though there may be a perspicacious Son of Heaven, one must still look to where MARS is located’.

¹⁷ Translated from William Hung, *Combined Concordances to Ch'un-ch'iu, Kung-yang, Ku-liang and Tso-chuan*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, supplement 11 (Taipei: Cheng Wen, repr. 1966), Vol. 1, 623.

The restoration of Chen by Chu occurred in 529 BCE, its annihilation by Chu in 479 BCE. A venerable historical-genealogical tradition and JUPITER'S location in its 12-year cycle are adduced as the basis for the prediction that the time of Chen's demise had not yet come. The prognostication is explained in the *Zuo* commentary for the next year, as follows:

In the 9th year of Duke Zhao (532 BCE) the *Spring and Autumn Annals* records a fire in the capital of Chen. The *Tradition of Zuo* adds:

In the 4th month there was a fire in Chen. Pi Zao of Zheng said: 'In five years the state of Chen will be restored, and after fifty-two years of restoration it will finally perish.' Zi Chan asked the reason and [Pi Zao] replied: 'Chen belongs to [Zhuan Xu's element of] Water. Fire is antagonistic to Water, and the state of Chu [descended from Regulator of Fire, Zhu Rong] emulates Fire. Now the FIRE [STAR = ANTARES] has appeared and set fire to Chen [indicating] the expulsion of Chu and the establishment of Chen. Antagonistic [relations] reach fulfillment in fives, therefore I said 'in five years.' JUPITER will reach QUAIL FIRE [α Hya] five times and after that Chen will finally perish. That Chu will then be able to possess it [Chen] is the Way of Heaven. Therefore, I said 'fifty-two years.'¹⁸

Here, the Warring States period (5th to late 3rd century BCE) correlative scheme of the Five Elemental-Phases (Wood-Fire-Water-Metal-Earth) is invoked to explain the antagonism between Chen and Chu, based on their archaic astrological linkage with Watery and Fiery asterisms and corresponding quadrants of the sky. The spring appearance of the FIRE STAR, ANTARES, is said to be the cause of the conflagration in Chen.

A Planetary Alignment Signaling the Conferral of Heaven's Mandate

The following examples, a planetary portent and a cometary apparition, are translated from Sima Qian's *Grand Scribe's Records (Shiji)* and the *History of the Former Han Dynasty (Han shu)*, 1st century CE). By the beginning of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE) it had become well established that a grouping of all Five Planets was the preeminent sign of the conferral of Heaven's Mandate on a virtuous new dynastic founder:

¹⁸ Hung, 370.

§ “When Han arose, the Five Planets gathered in Eastern Well [lodge #22, Gem]”. *Shiji*, “Treatise”, 27.1348.

§ “First year of Emperor Gaozu of Han, 10th month, the Five Planets gathered in Eastern Well. Extrapolation based on the astronomical system [i.e., ‘calendrics’] shows they followed [the lead of] JUPITER. This was the sign that August Emperor Gao had received the Mandate. Hence, a retainer said to Zhang Er, ‘Eastern Well is the territory of [the state of] Qin. When the King of Han [i.e., Gaozu] entered Qin, the Five Planets, following JUPITER, gathered together signifying that [he] ought to gain all of the Sub-Celestial Realm through righteousness”.¹⁹

The sinocentric astral-terrestrial scheme underpinning these portents was based on the late Spring and Autumn period (722-481 BCE) political circumstances and as a result is topographically confined to China north of the Yangtze River. Indeed, the very basis of the correlations of astral and terrestrial fields is the analogy between the SKY RIVER (Milky Way) and the Yellow River (Fig. 1a), the entire sky being allocated to the ancient Chinese provinces. (No sign of Mesopotamian input here!) Compare this with the equally Babylonia-centered conception in the contemporaneous map of the world in the British Library (Fig. 1b). Here too there may be a hint of a correspondence between the Heavenly and Earthly Oceans, but that would seem to be the only point of similarity.

According to Babylonian ideas, the [eight?] islands said to lie between the *Earthly* and the *Heavenly Oceans* connected the heavens and the earth. These islands form bridges to the *Heavenly Ocean*, wherein are the various animal constellations, 18 of which are mentioned by name. Thus round the heavens flowed the *Heavenly Ocean*, corresponding to the *Earthly Ocean* on the earth. And in the *Heavenly Ocean* were animal constellations, the [eighteen] ‘vanished’ gods. These probably recur in the expression ‘belt of heaven’, the Sumerian for which may be literally translated, ‘divine animals’. As the animal constellations also sank below the horizon, so the *Heavenly Ocean* extended beneath the earth, so that plenty of room existed below the Underworld for the passage of the sun, moon, and planets. After the overthrow of the old world order of Apsu and Tiamat or Chaos, the

¹⁹ *Han shu (History of the Former Han Dynasty)*, ‘Monograph on the Heavenly Patterns’, 26.1301. The ‘10th month’ 206 BCE date for the event is an interpolation [erroneous] based on the date of the Qin ruler, Wangzi Ying’s, surrender to Han founder Gaozu at Xianyang, the Qin capital. The actual planetary line-up occurred the following year, in May 205. Sima Qian is more circumspect and simply says, ‘when Han arose’. For the theoretical statement that clusters of the Five Planets initiated by JUPITER portend the rise of a ‘righteous’ dynastic founder, see *Shiji*, ‘Treatise’, 27.1312.

former gods, according to the Babylonian Epic of Creation, were deposed and banned as animals to the Heavenly Ocean, by command of the creator of the new world.²⁰

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Azure Dragon – East (東方青龍) | | | White Tiger – West (西方白虎) | | |
| 角 | <i>Jiao</i> α Vir | Horns | 奎 | <i>Kui</i> η And | Stride |
| 亢 | <i>Kang</i> κ Vir | Neck | 婁 | <i>Lou</i> β Ari | Pasture |
| 氐 | <i>Di</i> α ₁ Lib | Base | 胃 | <i>Wei</i> 41 Ari | Stomach |
| 房 | <i>Fang</i> π Sco | Chamber | 昴 | <i>Mao</i> η or 17 Tau (Pleiades) | Tassel |
| 心 | <i>Xin</i> α Vir | Heart | 畢 | <i>Bi</i> ε Tau | Hunting Net |
| 尾 | <i>Wei</i> μ ₁ Sco | Tail | 觜 | <i>Zuizi</i> λ Ori | Owl |
| 箕 | <i>Ji</i> γ Sgr | Winnowing Basket | 參 | <i>Shen</i> ζ Ori (belt) | Triaster |
| Dark Warrior – North (北方玄武) | | | Vermillion Bird – South (南方朱雀) | | |
| 南斗 | <i>Dou</i> φ Sgr | Southern Dipper | 東井 | <i>Dong jing</i> μ Gem | Eastern Well |
| 牽牛 | <i>Niu</i> β Cap | Ox-Leader | 輿鬼 | <i>Yu gui</i> θ Cnc | Ghost Conveyance |
| 女 | <i>Nü</i> ε Aqr | Serving Girl | 柳 | <i>Liu</i> δ Hya | Willow (aka Beak) |
| 虛 | <i>Xu</i> β Aqr | Ruins | 七星 | <i>Qi xing</i> α Hya | Seven Stars (aka Gullet) |
| 危 | <i>Wei</i> α Aqr | Roof | 張 | <i>Zhang</i> ν ₁ Hya | Spread (aka Crop) |
| 營室 | <i>Yingshi</i> α Peg | Align-the-Hall | 翼 | <i>Yi</i> α Crt | Wings |
| 東壁 | <i>Dongbi</i> γ Peg | Eastern Wall | 軫 | <i>Zhen</i> γ Crv | Chariot Platform |

Table 1: The 28 Chinese Lodges and their Determinative Stars.

²⁰ For detailed description and analysis, see Monograph. The inscription on the seventh island, outside the ring of the Earthly Ocean to the east says only, ‘where the morning dawns’.

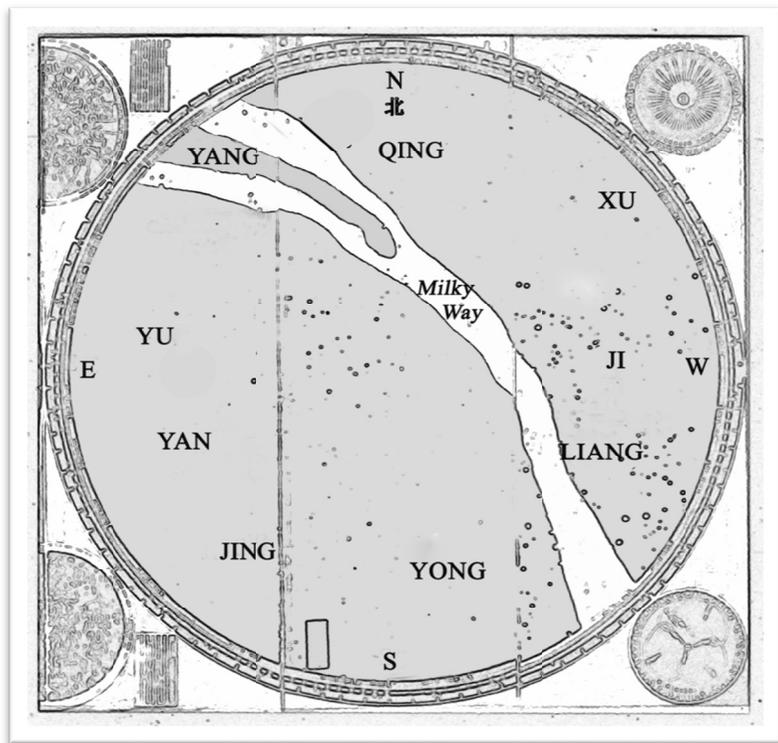


Fig. 1a: Song dynasty (960-1276) planisphere on which the astral fields are labeled with the names of the corresponding ancient provinces, illustrating their distribution in relation to the Milky Way in the field-allocation astrological scheme. Adapted from Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan kaogu jianjiusuo, *Zhongguo gudai tianwen wenwu tuji* (1980), 101, fig. 97.



Fig. 1b: Babylonian map of the world (ca. 600 BCE). Cuneiform tablet in the British Library. Babylonian World Map.

The expansion of mainstream Chinese civilization south and west by the end of the Han Dynasty (220 CE) had already rendered those correlations hopelessly out of date. Nevertheless, the relevance of the scheme was still being debated in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), when in a blatant expression of Chinese chauvinism the famous astronomer Li Chunfeng (602-670 CE) denigrated frontier peoples in his astrological treatise *Yisi Prognostications* (*Yisi zhan*) of 645 CE, baldly reasserting the validity of the exclusively sinocentric scheme.²¹ In the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), Wang Zhen (1290-1333), in a chapter on land utilization in his influential *Treatise on Agriculture* (*Nong shu*), proposed a new scheme classifying the suitability of the entire country's land and soils for agriculture and stock-raising in accordance with the twenty-eight lodges and the same twelve astral fields.²² Remarkably, even the prestigious Qing Dynasty encyclopedia of 1725, the *Complete Collection of Illustrations and Writings from Ancient Times to the Present* (*Gujin tushu jicheng*), continued to identify geographic locations in terms of the 2,500 year-old field-allocation scheme of astral-terrestrial correspondences.

A Cometary Apparition in the Former Han Dynasty

135 BCE Aug 31 - Sep 29:

§ 6th year of the *Jianyuan* reign period of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, 8th month; a star became fuzzy* in the east and stretched across the sky. [**xing bo* = an initially tailless comet grew a tail]

§ 6th year of the *Jianyuan* reign period of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, 8th month; a long star [comet] emerged in the east, so long that it stretched across the sky; after thirty days it departed.

§ 6th year of the *Jianyuan* reign period of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, 8th month; a long star appeared in the east, so long that it stretched across the sky; after thirty days it departed. The prognostication said, "this is Chi You's Banner; when seen the ruler will attack the four quarters." After this the troops punished the Four *Yi* [barbarians] for several decades in succession".²³

²¹ Xiaoyuan Jiang, *Tianxue zhenyuan* (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu, 1991 [rev. 2004]), 70.

²² Yoshida Mitsukuni, 'The Chinese Concept of Technology: A Historical Approach', *Acta Asiatica* 36 (1979), 60-61.

²³ Trans. David W. Pankenier, Zhentao Xu, and Yaotiao Jiang, *Archaeoastronomy in East Asia: Historical Observational Records of Comets and Meteor Showers from China, Japan, and Korea* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria, 2008), 19. For a comparison of the Chinese and Roman accounts of the comet of 135 BCE, see J. T.

In Oct-Nov 134 BCE, to commemorate (i.e., 'spin') what was actually an inauspicious portent, the youthful Emperor Wu was advised to inaugurate the 'First Year of Primal Brilliance' reign period. Meanwhile, his paternal uncle, Liu An, King of Huainan, was galvanized into seditious action based on the earlier precedent of the 'Revolt of the Seven Kingdoms' in 154 BCE:

6th year of the *Jianyuan* reign period [135 BCE] a broom star was seen. In the mind of the King of Huainan it was an anomaly [i.e., a sign]. Someone said to the King: "Earlier, when the army of Wu rose up [154 BCE], a broom star several *chi* [feet] long appeared, whereupon for a long time blood flowed for over 1,000 *li* ['mile' = 0.5 km]. At present there is a broom star so long it spans the sky, so the armies of the Empire ought all to rise in force". In his mind, considering there was no imperial heir above and [seeing that] anomalies were occurring in the Empire and the various lords were contentious, the King [of Huainan] increasingly desired to fabricate weapons, [siege] engines, and instruments of offensive warfare. He accumulated money with which to bribe the lords of commanderies and kingdoms, wandering braves, and those with unique talents. The various sophists who devised schemes and strategies indiscriminately fabricated rumors and flattered the King. The King was delighted, handed out even more money, and his plotting to rebel grew in earnest.²⁴

It is important to distinguish clearly between what is generally considered to fall within the purview of observationally based astral omenology, which concerns itself with divining the consequences of significant celestial moments (e.g., comets, eclipses, planetary conjunctions, meteor showers, meteorological phenomena) for the conduct of affairs of state. In contrast, Marc Kalinowski has explored the elaborate prognostication practices and their associated schema documented in excavated manuscripts from late Warring States and Han times. These concern the techniques and prohibitions involving *yin-yang*, the Five Elemental-Phases, the 'calendrical' spirits *xing-de*, Supreme Yin (a 'time spirit'), and others, and offer no evidence at all of observation of celestial bodies. The preoccupation is exclusively with hemerology, which concerns itself with whether each day of the month is favorable or unfavorable, or with the spirit influences active each day of the month, or with which activities

Ramsey, 'Mithradates, The Banner of Ch'ih-Yu, and the Comet Coin', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 99 (1999): 197-253; and also Gary Kronk, 'A Large Comet seen in 135 B.C.?', *The International Comet Quarterly* 19 (1997): 3-7.

²⁴ Sima Qian, 'Monograph on the Kingdoms of Huainan and Hengshan', *Shiji*, 118.3082.

may be undertaken or should be avoided, or with prognostications for one who falls ill or is born on that day, and so on. Such preoccupations suffuse the *rishu* ‘day books’ Mawangdui *Xing-De* text, and other recently excavated bamboo manuscripts from the late Warring States and Former Han periods. They also permeate the *Book of Master Huainan* (*Huainanzi*), compiled under the auspices of the King of Huainan, whom we encountered above, a work presented to Emperor Wu in 239 BCE.²⁵ The prevailing practice among its specialist authors was to rely virtually exclusively on schemata and devices like the mantic-astrolabe (Fig. 2) to make astromantic and hemerological predictions, rather than on direct visual observation.²⁶ Cosmological and astromantic knowledge was valuable, not in the abstract but as instrumental in ruling the state, its application permitting the sovereign to conform to the Dao or ‘Way’ of the cosmos. As the *Book of Master Huainan* states:

The ‘Heavenly Patterns’ [chapter] provides the means by which to harmonize the *materia vitalis* of yin and yang,
 give regular pattern to the radiances of the SUN and MOON,
 regulate the seasons of opening [spring-summer] and closing [fall-winter],
 calendar the movements of the stars and planets,
 know the changes of retrograde and direct motion,
 avoid the misfortunes of prohibitions and taboos,
 comply with the correspondences of the seasonal cycles,
 and take as one’s model the constancy of the spirits of the five directions.

²⁵ ‘In the *Huainanzi* it [*Taiyin*] appears as a calendrical spirit whose mantic virtues and power to control, initiated at the beginning of time, arise from the application of the sexagenary norm to the numbering of the years . . . while *Xing* and *De* are ‘among a multitude of calendrical spirits (*shensha* 神煞) . . . whose functions are always to confer auspicious or inauspicious qualities on some division or another of space and time’; see Marc Kalinowski, ‘The Xing De 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui’, *Early China* 23-24 (1998-99): 157. See also John S. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993), 87.

²⁶ As John S. Major points out (1993, 122, 218), the mantic-astrolabe ‘was an abstraction and idealization of the observable universe, and thus suitable more for astrological than for astronomical purposes’. Here I would only note that I think the term ‘astromantic’ is preferable to ‘astrological’ for practices that do not involve plotting the positions of celestial bodies based on actual observation. See also Donald Harper, ‘Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought’, in Michael M. Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy, eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China, from the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 849.

[thereby] enabling one to possess the means to gaze upward to Heaven, effect compliance, and not bring disorder to the constancies [of Heaven].²⁷

A rather different perspective on 'heavenly pattern reading' is provided by the military applications spelled out in the Warring States text *Six Quivers (Military Strategies)* (Liu Tao). This text provides an idealized roster of specialist advisors who made up the entourage of the army general staff.

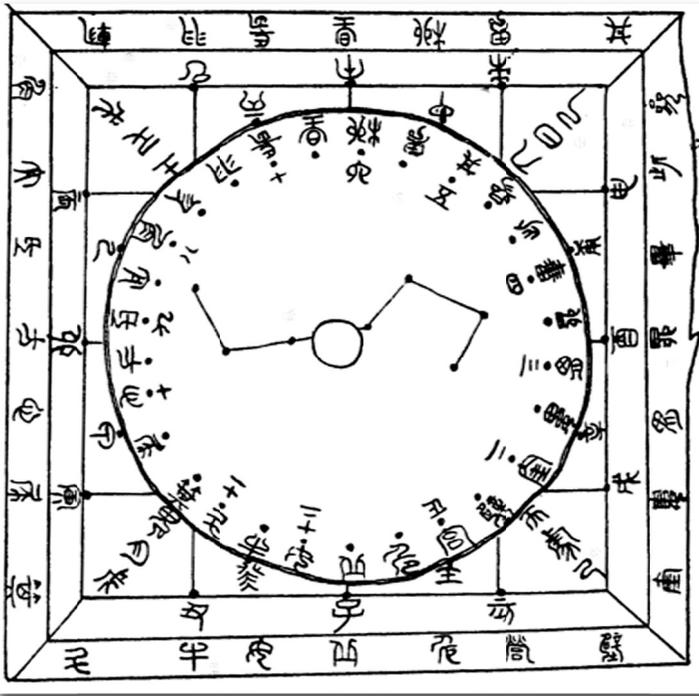


Fig. 2: Early Han mantic-astrolabe from the tomb of the Marquis of Ru Yin (ca. 168 BCE) with the DIPPER at the center of the round rotating Heaven Plate. After M. Loewe and E. L. Shaughnessy, *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC* (1999), 840, fig. 12.5.

²⁷ Martin Kern, 'Creating a Book and Performing it: The 'Yaolie' Chapter of *Huainanzi* as a Western Han *Fu*', in Sarah A. Queen and Michael Puett, eds., *The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 124-50 (trans. modified).

The so-called ‘Heavenly Pattern Men’ (*tianwen ren*) rank third in order of importance, after the ‘confidential advisers’ and the ‘strategists’. The duties of these ‘astrologues’ are described as follows:

The three Heavenly Pattern Men have charge of observing the movements of the heavenly bodies, watching the winds and atmospheric phenomena, projecting [the auspiciousness of] seasons and days, studying the signs and verifying predictions, examining [the implications of] natural disasters and anomalies, to understand the mechanisms [*sc.* ‘triggers’] that move people’s minds.²⁸

Even if the *Six Quivers* represents a retrospective idealization of the membership of the general staff in the early Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BCE), it is still instructive with regard to priorities in the late Warring States period when it was composed. Two things are immediately clear from this passage: the definition of Heavenly Pattern Men is extremely broad, and its practitioners enjoyed high status in military affairs. By the Later Han, Ban Gu (32-92 CE), compiler of the *History of the Former Han*, characterized Military *Yin-Yang* specialists by placing even greater emphasis on their mantic skills, many of which are far removed from general astrology: ‘The *yin-yang* [military] specialists comply with the seasons in setting out. They calculate *xing-de*, follow the striking of the DIPPER, conform to the Five Conquests, and call on ghosts and spirits for help’.²⁹

At the same time, reliance on heavenly pattern reading was not without influential detractors. Sometime counselor to the First Emperor of Qin, Han Fei (ca. 280-233 BCE), famously derided all such practices:

Initially, for several years Wei turned eastward to attack and finish off Wey and Tao. For several years later it then turned westward [to attack Qin] and lost territory. This does not show that the FIVE THUNDER SPIRITS, SUPREME ONE, the six *SHETI* spirits, and FIVE CHARIOTS, the SKY RIVER, SPEAR OF YIN, and JUPITER [all auspicious] were in the west for several years. Nor does it indicate that HEAVENLY GAP, HU’NI, PUNISHING STAR,

²⁸ Kalinowski (1998-99, 134), quoting the 4th century BCE text on military strategy, *Liutao* ‘Six Quivers’ *Liutao*. Bingjia baodian, ed. (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renwu, 1991), 740-41 (trans. modified).

²⁹ *Han shu*, 30.1768-69; Kalinowski (1998-99, 134). ‘Striking of the DIPPER’ refers to the belief that the direction/cosmogram to which the handle of the DIPPER pointed on the mantic-astrolabe was disadvantageous. ‘Five Conquests’ refers to the conquest sequence of the Five Elemental-Phases (Wood, Metal, Fire, Water, Earth).