ABSTRACTS

Fate and Prediction in Chinese and European Traditions
Key Concepts and Organization of Knowledge

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Abstract: “Fate and Prediction from a History of Science Perspective”

Historians in general and historians of science in particular carefully separate writings about magic and astrology from those on the subjects of the quadrivium, and do not entertain the possibility that they might be connected (with the exception of Lynn Thorndike, whose subject was, however, “Magic and Experimental Science”). And yet no one interested in the history of civilisation and education between the beginning of the Migration Period (375) or the end of the Imperium Romanum (476) and Gerbert von Aurillac should completely disregard the frequent commingling of these areas, especially in the writings of the early Middle Ages. The mixing of astrology/magic/numenology with astronomy and arithmetic is particularly instructive, enabling us to probe the motives which inspired people to engage with the classical educational canon in a time where there was little schooling.

Sex sells, and so of course does horror! Augustine had contributed to this in his writings, especially in *De Civitate Dei*, by describing the various practices before showing their incompatibility with Christianity. The ancient interest in magic and astrology was kept alive in this way, even if Augustine, despite his open-minded attitude towards science, did not write about astronomy himself. The subjects of the quadrivium, which would hardly have attracted interest on their own, were studied in the midst of this tantalizing mix of circumstances, partly due to the assurance that astrology could only be understood and practised if one knew its astronomic foundations. The next step is to put this to the test by asking: what new elements of science emerge in this ‘darkest’ period between the beginning of the Migration Period and Gerbert? And the final question to be considered is: when is the darkness of the Middle Ages supposed to have started?
Timetable

Firmicus Maternus (4. Jh.)

Augustinus (354-430)

Macrobius (um 400)

Martianus Capella (5. Jh.)

End of Imperium Romanum (476)

Boethius (c. 480-524)

Isidor von Sevilla (c. 560-636)

Beda Venerabilis (673-735)

Alkuin (um 730-804)

Karl der Große (768-804)

Karolingische Renaissance (c. 780-850)

Hrabanus Maurus (780-856)

Johannes Scotus Eriugena (c. 845 am Hof Karls des Kahlen)

Gerbert von Aurillac (c. 940-1003)
Abstract: “Prediction and Predictability in Early Chinese Divination Terminologies”

In an interesting historical survey, inspired by Alistair Crombie's (1915-1996) claim that the development of modern science is contingent upon the presence and combination of originally separate modi ponendi characterized as ‘postulational’, ‘experimental’, ‘hypothetical modelling’, ‘taxonomy’, ‘probabilistic’, and ‘historical derivation’, Mark Elvin (2002, forthcoming 2011) shows that sustained activities, which could be interpreted as probabilistic thinking in pre-modern China, are conspicuously absent “in a social and economic context that would have seemed to call out for it”, including gambling, gaming, economic calculations, and, indeed, divination. Proceeding from an onomasiological approach to the lexicon of prediction (cf. Buck 1943, Apresjan 2000, 2004), the first part of this paper will summarize etymological information on some of the more commonly encountered terms of early Chinese divination, such as zhān 占 (Old Chinese *tem), bù 卜 (*pʰ’ok), ming 命 (*mə-r[ɬ,ɬ]-s), zhēn 贞 (*tren), shì 策 (~册 (*tsʰrek) vs. 测 (*tsʰrək) etc., before subjecting them to a genealogical comparison within Tibeto-Burman, the family of the closest linguistic relatives of Old Chinese, and a typological confrontation with the pertinent semantic fields in reconstructed Indo-European and Semitic.

Since Old Chinese was a language characterized by a fairly rich derivational morphology (Pulleyblank 2001, Sagart 1999, Jin Lixin 2006, Schuessler 2007), special consideration will be given to textual examples, culled from Shāng and Zhōu oracle bone inscriptions and the divinatory bamboo slips from the Bāoshān 包山, Wàngshān 望山 and Tiānxīngguān 天星觀 corpora, which reflect traces of word
formation processes in the vocabulary of pre-imperial divination practices. Several morphologically conservative Tibeto-Burman languages have grammaticalized systems marking evidentiality (i.e. the kind of evidence supporting a proposition; cf. Aikhenvald 2003, 2004) or mirativity (i.e. the fact that an action is unexpected; cf. DeLancey 1997, 2001), epistemic modality (i.e. the speaker's evaluation of an information; cf. Palmer 1986) and volitionality (i.e. the subject's control over an action, its characterization as deliberate or accidental; DeLancey 1986, Lieber 2004 etc.), and at least the latter type of morphology has recently been reconstructed for the Old Chinese verbal and negative domain as well (Sagart 1999, Takashima 1988.a,b).

It may thus be possible to show that some seemingly ‘neutral’ divination statements linguistically imply a notion of control of the querent over the ‘charge’ submitted to the ‘oracle’, or at least an absence of astonishment about the oracle’s pronouncements on the part of the diviner, acting on the querent’s behalf. Prediction in such cases, it would seem, is not irrevocably at the mercy of a volatile and erratic response mechanism: it involves divinatory confidence in predictability. Whether the related idea of early Chinese fate as an entity manipulable by means of mantic or even semi-bureaucratic hedging is best interpreted in terms of an archaic ‘epistemological optimism’, eventually barring the early path to scientific development, and whether it is a fortiori well represented as a form of thought juxtaposable to an ‘episteme’ quelconque of Delphian skepticism (Keightley 2001, 2002), hopefully remains to be debated at this conference.
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- Publications:

Abstract: “Robert Fludd’s Utriusque Cosmi Historia”

Fludd understands the ‘secret arts’ as a consequence of neo-Platonic metaphysics and physics (vol. III, 1, 2 Utriusque Cosmi Historia). Physics is conceived in Fludd’s work as macrocosmic and microcosmic psychology; he thus makes no distinction between physics and metaphysics. The distinguishing feature of the science specific to humans is that humans, as microcosms, are aware of their relationships with the macrocosm. In this respect the issue of the soul, vacillating between cosmic and individual soul, still shows the typical Renaissance patterns of platonically interpreted late Averroism and Augustinism. Fludd’s metaphysics and physics are never a science of being in the Aristotelian, Thomistic/empirical or Scotistic/intentionalist sense. He works on the assumption that the structures of divine wisdom divulge themselves to humans through the mediation of the living world soul. Because its soul partakes of the divine in this way, the microcosm is the mirror par excellence of divine wisdom. Thus in Fludd’s view metaphysics and the science which explores the secrets of nature and the soul belong together. Both areas of knowledge show the part which the human soul, aware of its own divinity, finds in itself. It knows, of course, that it is gifted with the ability to experience the secrets which slumber in the nature of the macrocosm, ordained and created by the word of God, and which have their potential counterpart in the knowledge of the microcosm.

The techniques which teach how to deal with the secrets of the cosmic and human soul are derived from universal psychology: 1. prophecy, 2. geomancy, 3. ars memoriae, 4. astrology, 5. physiognomy, 6. chiromancy, 7. pyramidum scientia, in which the insights of world harmony are meant to be put into practice.
Abstract: “Key Concepts of Fate and Prediction in the Yijing (Classic of Changes)”

As the chapters in Christopher Lupke’s edited volume, The Magnitude of Ming (2005), abundantly illustrate, there have been a great many different constructions and understandings of the Chinese term ming (命) over the past 3,500 years or so. One of these is most certainly ‘fate’ or ‘destiny.’ But, as the Lupke volume also indicates, there have been a great many different constructions and understandings of this particular notion. This paper explores some of the ways that the Yijing (Classic of Changes; 易經) addresses issues of ‘destiny,’ giving particular attention to the specialized terms in the Changes that deal with the related problems of “knowing fate” (zhiming; 知命) and “establishing fate” (liming; 立命). It will also give attention to the highly refined vocabulary employed by the Yijing and related works to evaluate cosmically ordained situations, and especially the way that understandings of this specialized vocabulary have evolved over time and have been expressed in various commentaries, from sophisticated exegetical studies to relatively simple primers such as the late Ming work by Huang Yun (黃蘊) known as Understanding the Yijing at a Glance (Yijing yijian nengjie; 易經一見能解). Some of these evaluative terms to be discussed (listed alphabetically in Pinyin transliteration) are: lì 利, lìjì 厲, lìn 吝, huì 悔, jiù 咎 and wújiù 無咎, jí 吉, wáng 死, xiǎng 享 (hèng 亨), xiōng 凶, yòng 用, yuán 元 and zhēn 贞. Any study of specialized terms—especially those that appear in an ancient Chinese texts like the Changes—confronts the philological problems of multiple loan words, obscure meanings, and, of course different understandings of terms over time.
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Abstract: “Fate, Providence, Determinism and Freedom in the Stoa”

The paper’s main concern is to determine the relationship of fate and freedom in the philosophy of the Stoa. To answer this question the Stoic theory of causality, the concept of fate, the concept of providence, the concept of necessity and the concept of freedom are analysed. Everything points to the conclusion that the Stoics taught the compatibility of determinism and free will. They regarded determinism as a prerequisite for the possibility of scientific prognosis and religious divination.
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Abstract: “Destiny as Duty: the Concept of Ming in Classical Chinese Philosophy”

To understand ming in classical Chinese Philosophy two perspectives seem to be helpful: a ‘kairotic’ and a ‘deontic’ view. To ask about the ‘will of heaven’ and to determine the kairos was a main task in the old oracle practice. Greek kairos is the ‘right time’ and ‘opportunity’, it resembles ming in the sense of a sort of focal point of destiny. The second notion, to deon, resembles Chinese ming in a more important way; it means ‘moral necessity’, which is something to do as ordained, that means to be felt as a duty ordained by heaven. The old behavior of the warrior-ethic – to be brave in fight, honest with friends and helpful with the weak – was transformed in the classical period into an ethics of the noble man and scholar (junzi and ru). To do your duty as a noble was not only a necessity in the eyes of the community but also a necessity for oneself in one’s stand against destiny. Rooted in courage and steadfastness the noble had to stand against the waves of fate and corruption. Ming is fate in the sense of a power determining life and death (cf. Lunyu 12.6), but it had a strong deontological dimension in tianming, the ‘command’ or ‘decree of heaven’, issued forth to test the worth of an emperor and, in Mengzi, of a noble, by “exercising his mind
with suffering, and his sinews and bones with toil” to “stimulate his mind, harden his nature, and supple his incompetence” (ME, 6B15). Comparing this with the statement of Epictetus (Diatribe, 1.24), that hardness shows the quality of a human being, and God is like a trainer, who lets you fight against a champion. For Mengzi it was equally important to understand ming in such a deontic sense, because who did this, “does not stand beneath a collapsing wall”: “To exhaust the way (dao) and dying thereby, this is correct fate (zheng ming).” (ME, 7A2) For Eno (1990, 126 f.) this passage focused on reading “personal imperatives out of the course of events”. “Standing in the rain of descriptive events that are tian’s decrees, watching for the moral opportunities”, as Eno puts it, the Confucian ‘gentleman’, tried – without any guarantee to be successful in his undertakings – to show his worth before himself and his community. This is exactly the moral meaning of to deon in Sophist and Stoic thought, and this deontological understanding of the situation leads in both cultures to an important understanding of virtue (de and Gr. arete). Virtue in this sense means the spontaneous capacity to know ‘what is morally necessary to do’. This developed notion of ming in classical Chinese Philosophy belongs to an approach to ethics called deontological virtue-ethics, which is very different from the understanding of duty in Kant and the European Kantianism up to now.
Fate and Prediction in Chinese and European Traditions – Key Concepts and Organization of Knowledge

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- Publications:

Abstract: “Fate and Prognostication in the Weishu 緯書 Literature”

Much of the numerology associated with the Book of Changes (Yijing) is related to calendar computations. A clear example occurs in the paragraph on the Great Expansion (Da yan) in the Commentary on the Attached Words (Xici zhuan) of the Ten Wings (Shi yi) where the milfoil sticks used for divination are said to correspond to the days of the year. Other obvious examples are the numbers of Qian’s and Kun’s divination sticks, which total 360 corresponding to the days of a lunar year, the 384 lines of the 64 hexagrams, which correspond to the number of days in a year with an intercalary month, and the numerical designations 6, 7, 8, and 9, which result in 30 when added. These are all examples of conscious correlations with a relatively primitive calendar.

In the present paper I will focus on how these calendrical correlations are picked up by the anonymous authors of the Weishu to construct increasingly complicated prognostication systems, which found political application in the Later Han and subsequent centuries.
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Abstract: “Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) and divination through the Zhouyi 周易. A case Study at the End of the Northern Song Dynasty”

In 1098, during the last exile on the Hainan Island, having no news from his beloved brother Su Che 轼, Su Shi recorded in his famous miscellanea the Dongpo zhilin 東坡志林 that he inquired in the Book of Changes (Zhouyi 周易) through the milfoil and obtained two main hexagrams. The first, the 59th image of the ‘Scattering’ 渙 changed into the 37th of the ‘Family’ or the ‘Members of the Clan’ 家人. This very short text does not provide a full interpretation neither a careful reading of the prediction in itself, maybe because the prognostic is clear enough, just quoting the various sentences attached to the lines of the changing hexagrams, but at the same time it offers an original procedure in the puzzling problem of choosing which line must be kept in mind to construct a definite diagnosis of the future.

By taking this short record as its primary source, the aim of the paper is to address some questions about the scope of divination in the culture of scholars at the end of the eleventh century and to ask about the issue of forecasting. At the same time, I shall try to put this use of the Book of Changes in line with the commentary that Su Shi was finishing at the same time on this Confucian classic.
**Abstract: “Fate and Time in the Koran”**

The Koran thunders with powerful statements about God’s predestination of human fate; these statements correspond with the basic meaning of Islam as submission to God’s absolute power. On the other hand, the Koran emphasizes the eschatological judgment of human beings based on individual responsibility. The question arises necessarily, therefore, as to whether the Koranic conception of predestination leaves enough space for a human free agency large enough to justify divine sanctions. This question has been subject of intensive debates since the beginning of Islamic theology and philosophy. However, analyzing the Koranic predestinarian views within the framework of the multi-faceted and multi-layered concept of time in the Koran sheds new light on this complex issue. After briefly presenting the Koranic conception of time, I will discuss the intrinsic connection between fate and time in the Koran and try, from there, to develop an interpretation of Koranic determinism which, to a certain extent, allows human freedom.
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Abstract: “Fate and Prediction in Texts of Muslim Mystics and Writers”

If one were to believe that all things on Earth are ordained by God, life would be simple. But few people believe this. People plan and act with the risk of failure. Some think that events are either willed by humans or occur by chance. Many, however, believe in a higher plan or in events caused by structures, not planned by individual people. It is impossible to say with any certainty what influences life. It might be ‘society’ or ‘the system’, ‘drives’, ‘fate’, ‘God’, or multiple gods.

Now one might think that these matters would be relatively clear-cut for Muslims. The dogma states that God is almighty. If this were the case without restriction or qualification, however, then there would be no human responsibility, and punishment at the Last Judgement would be unjust. Hence theologians devised the theory of ‘appropriation’: God creates the deeds, man can appropriate them or not. This is probably the dogma accepted by most Muslims. Not all, but many Muslims also believe in ‘effective time’ (in Arabic: dahr, which can also be roughly translated as ‘fate’). They speak of this time having a destructive effect, bringing about the downfall of humans, kingdoms, and all that is good. But how can this time take effect without almighty God stopping it? The author of these lines has found no convincing answers to this question in Muslim texts. Perhaps there are none, and the tension between God and time is not meant to be resolved. Whether Muslims believe in ‘effective time’ is to some extent a matter of taste. The concept mainly appears in texts by writers (Arabic udâbâ’, sing. adîb), not mystics, as far as we know. The following reason would seem logical: mystics tend to embrace the concept of divine omnipotence, writers tend to believe in human freedom of action, or the randomness of life, with the added nuance of some unspecified sort of fate. The writers referred to here could be in danger of being
described as ‘non-believers’. This did not often happen, however. On the contrary, they have been part of ‘Islamic culture’ for centuries, though the concept of ‘effective time’ seems to be used less in the Near East today than it was in the 17th century.

What does the attitude towards time have to do with prediction? For those writers with a belief in time it is clear that little is certain in the future except for the fact that time will eventually destroy everything that is good. Mystics, on the other hand, tend to attribute to certain people the ability to accurately foretell future events. One thesis of this paper is that ultimately this is all about whether the world has an order, i.e. a deeper meaning. If one accepts this premise, one can make predictions, but not if one is a radical adherent of the principle of contingency.

The paper does not present any new textual material or new theses, but takes up older work by the speaker. The aim is to enter into an interdisciplinary dialogue about whether and how the constellations of ideas described can also be identified in other cultures, and whether connections can perhaps be detected between notions of fate and prediction in Islamic culture and other cultures.
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  - ‘Fate and Prognostication in Late Imperial Chinese Buddhism: the Case of Ouyi Zhixu (1599-1655)’

Abstract: “Fate and Prognostication in Late Imperial Chinese Buddhism: the Case of Ouyi Zhixu (1599-1655)”

Although Buddhist monastic codes formally prohibit Buddhist monks from practicing prognostication through divination, astrology or fortune-telling, the late imperial Chinese Buddhist monk Ouyi Zhixu (1599-1655) describes engaging in such activities throughout his life. This paper focuses on Ouyi’s use of divination as means of revealing his fate. Divination enables Ouyi to determine his karmic obstacles, his spiritual potential, and his future rebirth; it allows him to understand himself and uncover karma that would otherwise be hidden. His practice of divination not only offers insight into how he understands karmic causality and cosmology, but it also reflects his own values and spiritual aspirations. Ouyi takes divination quite seriously, holding himself accountable for the lots chosen. Although some scholars consider divination to be evidence of the degeneration of Buddhism in late imperial China, if we consider that karma was portrayed as something hidden or opaque in early Chinese Buddhist texts, it makes sense that divination could be used as a means of uncovering karma, especially given the prominence of divination rituals and texts such as the Zhouyi 周易 from the earliest dynasties of Chinese history to today. I discuss three divination texts that serve as the primary basis for my argument that Ouyi views divination as a tool for understanding his karmic fate: one commentary on the Zhouyi and two works about the Sutra on the Divination of Good and Bad Karmic Retribution (Zhancha shan’è yebao jing 占察善惡業報經). Divination serves as a strategy for self-interpretation, enabling Ouyi to determine his future potential by shedding light on his karmic past.
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- Publications:

Abstract: “Auspice Determination in Eight-House Fengshui”

Much of Chinese divination owes its methodology to the theories of the Warring States philosopher Zou Yan whose unique contribution to the history of Chinese cosmology was to correlate what he called the ‘five powers’ with the cyclical patterns of human history so that the rise and fall of dynasties could be predicted. From this point forward in Chinese history, knowledge of the current phase of any aspect of phenomena would make it possible to know its future characteristic. Such important forms of divination as meteoramancy—the observation of the wind, hemerology—choosing the proper day for activities, and early fengshui all based prognostication on the cycle of five phases. In my analysis I will first show how five-phase cycles operated in Han dynasty divination. I will then turn to the most popular form of fengshui practiced in the world today—bazhai or ‘Eight-House’ fengshui—practitioners of which also claim that auspice is determined by five-phase orders. However, I will show that this is not the case. Good fortune in bazhai fengshui is strictly a factor of numerology, not of five-phase production and destruction orders.
Abstract: “Natural Science and Concepts of Knowledge at the 13th-Century Papal Court”

The 13th-century papal court in Rome evinces one distinguishing feature in comparison to the preceding centuries: popes, cardinals and members of the curia cultivated interests in the natural sciences which made the papal court a notable place of production, translation and dissemination of subjects, works and books in the fields of optics, alchemy, medicine and astronomy.

When Witelo wrote his *Perspectiva* in Viterbo in 1277, there were at least four other specialists working in related areas at the papal court: William of Moerbeke, Campanus of Novara, John Peckham, and even the reigning pope himself, John XXI (whatever doubts there may be about his identity today). This ‘Circolo di Viterbo’ (in the 13th century the papal court often resided for long periods of time in this town in the Papal States) can be considered typical of the structural scientific interests at the papal court: Campanus of Novara was a sort of papal astronomer; his career was closely linked with his commentary on Euclid, of which Pope Urban IV possessed a manuscript, still extant today. John Peckham was employed in the curia as a teacher of theology, but his *Quodlibet romanum* and his curial *Sermones* contain scientific subjects. It may be a coincidence that these ‘scientists’ knew each other, as the biographies of Witelo and William of Moerbeke show: the former was at the curia as the ambassador of Ottokar of Bohemia, the latter was a papal penitentiary. Both contributed to the rise of optics, which reached its apogee in the papal court in Viterbo in the 13th century – a development also noted by contemporaries.
Contemporaries also linked alchemy and its heyday with the papal court, where they were cultivated in relation to medicine and *prolongatio vitae* in particular. Today we know that all the important texts on the *prolongatio vitae* were written for or addressed to popes. This is a peculiarity which lasted well beyond Marsilio Ficino’s *De vita longa*. (In the paper this is followed by further details on astronomy, medicine and its relationship to surgery, and the translation and dissemination of manuscripts with scientific content.)

Even though many contacts may have been coincidental, such a prolonged and striking phenomenon raises many questions. Firstly, it is testimony to the central position of the curia in the European occident, and to the complex learning of 13th-century clerical elites, which can no longer be ‘reduced’ to theology and law. The papal court was consciously raising itself (by imitation, ‘competition’) to the level of other princely courts as a cultural centre. Particularly noteworthy in this context are the ‘Mediterranean rulers’ such as Frederick II, Manfred, and Alfonso of Castile. The incorporation of popes and cardinals at the highest level made the court appear a place of scholarly disputation. Moreover, as part of the organizational changes in the papal court, medicine and astronomy came to play a completely new role. Statements from Roger Bacon also show that – at least in theory – ‘science’ or ‘knowledge’ (*scientia*) was supposed to serve the general interests of the church. Science was interpreted as an ‘instrument of domination’.

This phenomenon can neither be understood in a linear fashion, nor chronologically fixed: the central decades of the 13th century show an intensity (and also ‘opening’) which can no longer be observed after 1280; on the contrary, in the last quarter of the 13th century suspicions arose, culminating in a series of curial trials against alchemy and magic in 1310-1320. Legends (such as that of Albert the Great) also give insight into the potentially conflicted relationship between natural science and orthodoxy. Thus alchemy and *prolongatio vitae* were very closely linked with the issue of the ‘papal body’; this contrasted with the notion of the pope’s physical corruptibility which had arisen in the 11th century. Innocence III, still in his capacity as cardinal, composed a dissenting opinion in *De miseria conditionis humanae*. After becoming pope he continued to show a great interest in *cura corporis*. Furthermore, anonymity and self-censure feature in scientific works written at the papal court.

Roger Bacon’s views on the *prolongatio vitae* are a special case. This English Franciscan sought to give his views a Christian theological foundation, and included them in each of the great *opera* he addressed to Pope Clemens IV. The question is whether these views were partly due to the contacts between the Occident and China.
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Abstract: “A Parting of the Ways: Astrology versus Astromancy in Early China”

This study seeks to distinguish the two predominant modes of portentology and prognostication in the early Empire. The focus will be on two of the most influential texts of the period, the “Heavenly Patterns” chapter in Huainanzī and the “Treatise on the Celestial Offices” in Shiji, comparing and contrasting their respective theoretical grounding, methodologies, objectives, and constituencies. It will be seen that the loose application of the term ‘astrology’ to a variety of divinatory and prognosticative practices has tended to obscure important historical, political, and theoretical considerations and developments. In fact, a clear distinction needs to be made between astrology and astromancy. Observationally based general astrology concerns itself with the relationship between significant celestial moments (e.g. comets, eclipses, planetary conjunctions, meteor showers, meteorological phenomena) and the fate of officials or affairs of state. In contrast to this, in early China there are a variety of mantic practices and schema documented in excavated manuscripts from late Warring States and Han times. These mainly concern the techniques and prohibitions involving yin-yang, the Five Phases, the ‘calendrical’ spirits of xíng-dé, Tàiyīn (‘time spirit’), and others, and offer no evidence at all of actual observation of significant celestial events. The preoccupation is exclusively with hemerology or what I prefer to term ‘astromancy,’ which concerns itself with which days are favorable or unfavorable, or with the spirit influences active each day of the month, or with which activities 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 rìshū ‘day books,’ Māwángdūi Xíng-Dé 刑德 text, and other recently excavated bamboo manuscripts. They also permeate the Huainanzī, which will serve as a proxy.

The two approaches, astrological and astromantic, share essentially the same theoretical grounding. But the prevailing practice among the Huainanzī’s specialists was to rely virtually exclusively on schemata and mechanical devices like the shī 式 cosmograph to make astromantic and hemerological
predictions, rather than on direct visual observation of the heavens. This is in keeping with the Huainanzi’s focus on tools. Cosmological and astromantic knowledge for the Huainanzi authors is valuable because it is instrumental. One might think of the Huainanzi as a programmatic zhinan 指南— a heuristic précis of the applicable knowledge base of the time. Huainanzi’s “Heavenly Patterns” is preoccupied with how cosmology and cosmography (the theoretical ‘roots’), are expressed in phenomenological correlations, astromancy, numerology, and the schema of the shi-cosmograph (the diverse applications or ‘branches’), mastery of which allows one to align oneself with the operations of the cosmos (Dao).

In contrast, the Sima’s “Treatise on the Celestial Offices” is concerned with astral nomenclature, positional astronomy, general astrology, the history of the office of Grand Scribe-Astrolger, and state-level portentology. In it we also encounter something quite radical, for in addition to providing an account of the theory and practice of age-old field allocation astrology, the Sima’s present a lengthy disquisition on what one might call ‘imperial macro-astrology’ which marks an unmistakable transition from ancient conceptions to a new prognosticative paradigm. Remarkably, given astrology’s resistance to change, the Sima’s account bears witness to a major reformulation of astrological theory and practice, in which the former preoccupation with a multivalent sinocentric world is adapted to the circumstances of the Han empire with its ‘us vs. them’ view of contemporary power relations. The Huainanzi’s “Heavenly Patterns,” on the other hand, is conservative, syncretic, formalistic, non-observational, neither current at the time nor forward-looking. Thus the contrast between the two texts’ presentations of “heavenly pattern reading” (tianwen) suitable for the elite could hardly be more stark. In terms of a vision of empire, and from the perspective of portentology the two texts give the impression of being addressed to very different constituencies. Huainanzi’s “Heavenly Patterns” is literary, popular, eclectic, and practical, aimed at a wide literate audience, while the Sima’s “Treatise” is bureaucratic, focused, historical, and synthetic, its astrological methodology more responsive to the ideological and administrative requirements of an imperial court.
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- Publications:
  - (Ed. with Bink Hallum) Ancient and Medieval Alchemy (= Ambix 56), 2009.
  - (Ed. with Anna Akasoy and Ronit Yoeli-Talim) Astro-Medicine: Astrology and Medicine, East and West, Florence 2008.

Abstract: “The Place of Divinatory Sciences in Arabic and Latin Divisions of Knowledge”

Alfarabi denies a place to the divinatory sciences in his Classification of the Sciences. But for Avicenna magic and various forms of divination are among the seven sciences which ‘branch off’ from the natural sciences (medicine, astrology, physiognomy, dream-interpretation, talismans, magic and alchemy). The same division is subsequently found in Algazali and in Averroes, and hence in the Latin translations of the Destructio Destructionis of Averroes. A similar division, but into eight physical sciences, is found in an Arabic text ‘On the Origin of the Sciences’ which survives only in Latin; from this source the sciences are listed in Dominicus Gundisalvi’s On the Division of Philosophy and Daniel of Morley’s Philosophy. Finally, a Hebrew scholar adds some of these sciences to his translation of Alfarabi’s Classification of the Sciences.
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- Publications:
  - (Ed. with Timothy B. Weston), China In and Beyond the Headlines, 2011.
  - (Ed. with Susan D. Blum), China Off Center: Mapping the Margins of the Middle Kingdom, 2002.

Abstract: “The Mantic and the Metaphysical: The Ethnopoetics of Zhu Xi’s World Picture”

This paper explores the confluence of magic and philosophy in certain texts of Zhu Xi (1130-1200) and attempts to remedy a scholarly misapprehension of medieval Chinese philosophy by attending to the mantic agency behind one of Confucianism’s most spectacular inventions: daotong or “legacy of the way.” By examining this invention in the specific context of an ethnopoetics of twelfth-century Fujian, the paper offers a glimpse of a larger experiment in middle period Chinese intellectual history that develops a different language of interpretation for a specific, but very significant textual archive: some of the ‘conversational,’ ‘literary,’ and ‘philosophical’ artifacts of Zhu Xi’s engagement with the supernatural. By restoring a sense of the natural rhythms of the biology of being celebrated in the ancestral cult of Zhu’s daotong, the paper will enable the reader to obtain a new and very different understanding of Confucianism, one in which the mantic and the metaphysical are intertwined and mutually enriching.
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- Publications:

Abstract: “Getting it Wrong, Again and Again and Again”

All prognosticators and systems of prognostication must deal with the inevitability that they will ‘get it wrong.’ Nobody and no system gets it right 100% of the time. And every practitioner of prognostication has a variety of ways to deal with ‘getting it wrong,’ especially through speaking in obscure language that lends itself to reinterpretation. But what about a system, and a tradition of practitioners who always get it wrong? 0% right. That is the record for apocalyptic prophets who announce either the End of the World entirely, or the advent of a perfect society on earth where there is no suffering and oppression, where everyone lives in abundance, happiness and freedom. One might, with the record of the last 3000 years before us, say ‘they were fated to fail.’

This talk explores several points on the apocalyptic curve, from the initial prognostication (especially a date) and the growth of the movement, to the onset of an awareness of failure (cognitive dissonance) and responses to it, as well as some of the techniques that apocalyptic prophets use to retain disciples after prophecy fails. This process raises fascinating questions about the degree of ‘freedom’ disappointed apocalyptic believers can exercise in processing their cognitive dissonance.
Coping with Chinese mantic practice was probably the most hectic experience that the Jesuits in China had ever encountered, for the whole mission was nearly destroyed by it. An anti-Christian literatus named Yang Guangxian accused Adam Schall von Bell, then in charge of calendar-making at the Manchu court, on several accounts: treachery, altering the calendar, and usurping the right of calendar-making of the emperor. Schall, however, was sentenced for choosing the wrong date of the funeral for Shunzhi’s favourite son in the end. Schall and all the Jesuits at court were jailed; others in the provinces were deported to Macau. Thanks to a huge earthquake, Schall and other Jesuits were vindicated because the quake revealed the warning from Heaven about an unjust trial. He died in 1666 soon after his release. Although the Jesuits at the Manchu court had attempted to shape their identity as mandarins of science, the Goddess of Fate seemed to joke on them, rendering their downfall and vindication through what they considered ‘superstitious.’

This dramatic encounter was only a short episode of the long history of struggle against Chinese ‘superstitions’ by Chinese Christians at that time. The Jesuits and their Chinese coverts had written a series of treatises to rebut all sorts of Chinese religions and mantic practices, which they referred to as mi 迷 or wang 妄 during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This current paper will focus on the Christian criticisms to prognosticative practices. By examining contacts and conflicts between the two cultures regarding prognostication, this paper will investigate the concepts of fate, freedom of human actions, and the power which determined the course of human destiny, through which the art of prognostication was organized in Chinese and Christian cultures.
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- Publications:

Abstract: “Astral Determinism in the Middle Ages”

During the fourth and fifth centuries, astrology underwent systematic and thorough condemnations from the Christian Church on various charges, among which the most important was arguably its denial of man’s free will. ‘Astral determinism’ became thereafter, and throughout the Middle Ages, the major argument raised by ecclesiastical authorities against astrology. At the same time, astrology enjoyed extraordinary success in Christian Europe from the twelfth to the seventeenth century, when it was officially taught in universities, openly pursued by popes and bishops and sometimes fiercely defended by theologians. The aim of this talk is to sort out this apparent contradiction.
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Abstract: “Ways of Organizing Knowledge in Early China”

The goal of the present paper is to explore the place, or rather places, of mantic and astrological knowledge within the overall system of knowledge in early China. The focus is not on the internal organization of mantic and astrological knowledge within its own boundaries; instead, I am interested in the relations between such knowledge and other areas of knowledge as they appear in early Chinese sources.

In early China, the organization of knowledge took many different paths. However, many of them we can no longer trace, as the imperial tradition, both systematically and by accident, lost the vast majority of texts that once existed especially of technical (mantic, astrological, hemerological, medical, legal, military, administrative, etc.) Fachprosa of pre-imperial and early imperial times—that is, precisely the kinds of text that concern us most immediately in our research agenda on “Fate, Freedom, and Prognostication.” To illustrate this point in the most straightforward way: of the 278 titles of technical writings listed in the bibliographical treatise “Yiwenzhi” 藝文志 of the History of the Han (Hanshu 漢書) from the first century AD, only two can be matched with surviving texts. Moreover, the bibliographical treatise itself—an abbreviated version of the catalogue of the imperial library compiled at the end of the first century BC—accounts for only a fraction of the technical literature from the preceding centuries, as is now clear from numerous recently discovered manuscripts. Thus, the overall corpus of lost texts is hard to overstate; by one estimate, ninety per cent of all newly discovered manuscripts, dating from the fifth century BC through the third century AD, have no counterpart in the received tradition—and not one of the technical writings can be matched with a transmitted text. This situation itself already speaks to the
place and status of mantic and astrological knowledge within the larger system of knowledge from Han times onward: even though the Western Han imperial library had a considerable number of such works on its shelves, they were evidently not important or secure enough to maintain their place in the textual tradition.

Of course, any text or collection of texts implies some sort of organization of knowledge simply in the ways of what is selected and excluded. This is sometimes made explicit by the compilation of explicit or implicit lists that in manuscripts appear in various forms: the tomb inventories (qiance 遣策 e.g., in the very extensive lists from Mawangdui 馬王堆 tombs 1 and 3), sometimes accompanied by letters to the officials of the netherworld; the almanacs (rishu 日書, e.g., of Shuihudi 睡虎地 and Fangmatan 放馬灘) from which one can extract catalogues of spirits and mantic practices; legal texts—such as from Shuihudi and Zhangjiashan 張家山—that contain both statutes and exemplary cases; administrative texts, e.g., from Juyan 居延, that provide categories for how to judge the performance of governors; the medical texts from Mawangdui that supply recipes to cure all sorts of ailments; various kinds of diagrams that show and identify phenomena from spirits (as in the famous “Chu Silk Manuscript” from Zidanku 子彈庫) to comets (as in a silk manuscript from Mawangdui); and many others more. However, all these represent arrangements of knowledge only within a specific subfield; they do not rise to the discussion of what ‘knowledge’ as a system means and comprises, and how this system may be divided in different categories. Of course, it is conceivable that among the troves of lost texts, some were devoted to the broader systematization of knowledge. Yet in the absence—at least to date—of such material, it will be best to first look at early works from the received tradition that present such broader systematizations. As it happens, all these systematizations from Warring States through Han times include accounts of mantic and astrological knowledge.

These texts include large compilations of writings on various topics such as the Annals of Mr. Lü (Lüshi chunqiu 呂氏春秋) from the late third to early second centuries BC and the Master from Huainan (Huainanzi 淮南子) that is dated to 139 BC; in the Hanshu bibliographic treatise, both are grouped together under the rubric of ‘miscellaneous’ or ‘syncretist’ (za 雜) writings. Another work of classification par excellence is the Rituals of Zhou (Zhouli 周禮) with its list of 366 offices of, purportedly, the Western Zhou (1046-771 BC) bureaucratic system, a compilation possibly of imperial Qin (221-207 BC) times that nevertheless includes pieces of knowledge reaching back across many centuries. Next comes the great work of early imperial historiography, Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145-ca. 85 BC) Records of the Archivist (Shiji 史記) that both in its particular (and at the time entirely new) textual structure and in its postface
(attributed to Sima Qian’s father Sima Tan 司馬談 [d. 110 BC]) contains systematic approaches to the organization of knowledge. Then there are the various dictionaries of early imperial times, even though many of them have left only limited traces, if any at all; and another source are the Han times ‘poetic expositions’ (賦) with their extensive catalogues of things from the natural and cultural world. Finally, our most important source is still the bibliographic treatise of the Hanshu “Yiwenzhi,” the basis of which was compiled after 27 BC on imperial command as the catalogue of the imperial library that aimed at the comprehensive representation of writings available at the time. Despite its limitations noted above, this work is a systematic and wide-ranging attempt at ordering the received textual universe of the Western Han (202 BC-AD 9) and as such offers the richest source for the question of the organization of knowledge in early China.

The present paper discusses in detail these different sources, their specific characteristics in both form and contents, and the variety of approaches they show to the organization of knowledge. In this, I focus my attention on how mantic and astrological knowledge is integrated within the overall system, and on how it relates to the texts of the literary tradition that often move away from actual technical concerns in favor of rhetorically and ideologically colored representations of such knowledge. In the process, I refer to some of the newly discovered manuscripts to the extent that they include corroborating, contrasting, or otherwise pertinent evidence.
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Abstract: “The Representation and Official Practice of Mantic Arts in Medieval China”

We tend to think of mantic arts as a feature of early Chinese culture that fades by medieval times (ca. 200-900) into obscurity if not desuetude. It is perhaps surprising therefore to realize that discussion and practice of divinatory techniques remained active among the literate elite in the medieval period, even to the point of inclusion in the bureaucratic structure of the Tang dynasty (618-907). Although repeated official proscriptions of the apocryphal, prognosticatory texts of the Han-dynasty chenwei 譴緯 tradition were decreed throughout the medieval era, this did not succeed in banishing remnants of such works from the acquaintance of state and scholars. For instance, quotations from these works are legion in the Da Tang Kaiyuan zhan jing 大唐開元占經, the great compendium of astrological lore compiled during the first decade of the reign of Tang Xuanzong (r. 712-756) by the Indian savant, Gautama Siddhartha 瞿曇悉達, then serving as the court’s astronomer-royal. Even a cursory examination of this work opens one’s eyes to usually ignored perspectives of late medieval culture.

But throughout the Nanbeichao and Tang periods the three most important methods of divination were those of plastro-pyromancy (bu 卜), milfoil sortilege (shi 筊), and the so-called cosmic board (shi 式). The first two of these take prime place, as can be seen in the sections devoted to them in the Tang encyclopedias Yiwen leiju 藝文類聚 (completed 624) and Chuxue ji 初學記 (completed 727). The material quoted in these sections suggests the extent of general knowledge pertaining both to tortoise-shell and Yijing 易經 divination that was regarded as commonplace for scholars and officials in the seventh and early eighth centuries. The quite different categorization of the ‘divination’ sections as
seen in the two encyclopedias raises even more interesting questions with regard to ways of ordering knowledge. This too deserves our attention.

Of equal and perhaps more significance is the fact that there was a well-staffed Bureau of Divination in the Tang bureaucracy. In this the Tang differed from the ‘southern dynasties’ that preceded it, which had no such office, instead following the practice of some of the preceding ‘northern’ regimes. Our information about the working of this bureau comes largely from the *Da Tang liu dian* 大唐六典 (completed 739) and the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 monograph on officialdom.

We also find sporadic illustrations of divination practice, including that of the relatively neglected ‘cosmic board,’ in the works of certain literati throughout the whole medieval era. Time permitting, we shall consider a few of the more interesting examples written in verse as well as prose.