

Jōu Evidence for Yì 易 Divination

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WSWG Note 120 (5 Jan 97)

Abstract. Evidence for Jōu Dynasty use of the Yì or stalk divination (shè 筮) is not convincing. The Yì appears to have a later, and perhaps a southern, origin.

Jōu

We know from oracle bones found at Jōu-ywǎn 周原, near the capital of Jōu, that the early Jōu used bone divination, as had the Shāng before them. There is no hint of stalk divination at this or any Jōu site,¹ and no Jōu bronze inscription mentions it.²

Spring and Autumn

Chūn/Chyōu. This Lǚ chronicle, covering the 242 years from 0722 to 0481, does not mention stalk divination (shī 筮). It first mentions bone divination (bǔ 卜) in 0629:

5/31:2. 四卜郊。不從，乃免牲

Divined for a fourth time about the jyāu sacrifice.

It was not favorable, and we accordingly let the sacrificial victim go.

The divination was undertaken to see if the intended sacrifice would be acceptable. On the fourth negative answer, the sacrifice was abandoned and the intended victim was released. This is how the Shāng had used divination: not as a sacral act in itself, but to ascertain the acceptability of an *intended* sacral act.³ Bone divination, always in association with the jyāu 郊 sacrifice, is also recorded at CC 7/3:1 (0606), 8/7:1 (0584), 8/10:2 (0581, a fifth divination), 9/7:2 (0566, a third), 9/11:2 (0562, a fourth), 11/15:2 (0495), and 12/1:3 (0494; rats had nibbled the horns of the intended victim, but a second was divined for, and was accepted: the sacrifice was offered in the next month on the correct syīn 辛 cyclical day). Jyāu sacrifices are mentioned *only* on these occasions and on 8/17:6 (0574: 用郊 “we performed the jyāu sacrifice”). Note the distribution of these nine entries: *all fall in the last 149 years* of the 242-year record. Statistically, the probability that the jyāu sacrifice was known in Lu before 0629 is on the order of 1%: exceedingly small.⁴

¹For archaeological evidence of bone divination in Jōu, see Flad **Divination**; the author knows no *archaeological* evidence for stalk divination (Personal communication, July 2011).

²The character 筮 does not occur in the index of Jōu Hú; 卜 (Jōu p481) occurs 7 times.

³Keightley **Sources** 33, “The divinations . . . sought to establish . . . if the offering of a particular ritual . . . would be . . . auspicious and efficacious.” For a sacrifice divined about, but in the end not offered, see Keightley **Landscape** 32.

⁴The arithmetic required is to raise 0.6157024 to the ninth power.

Was there an occasion when Lǚ might have learned Shāng-style bone divination (and the jyāu sacrifice itself) from Sùng, the Shāng successor? Most diplomatic contacts between states were held between capitals, but with Lǚ and Sùng there were two exceptions. (1) In winter 0638, Chǔ and others seized the Prince of Sùng and invaded Sùng. Chǔ sent an envoy to Lǚ with some of the spoils. In the 12th month the Prince of Lǚ intervened in the situation, made a covenant with all parties in Bwó 薄,⁵ and secured the release of the Prince of Sùng. Bwó had been a Shāng capital, and was the site of the Sùng ancestral shrine. (2) In winter 0633, Chǔ and others besieged Sùng. In the 12th month, the Prince of Lǚ intervened in the situation, and made a covenant with the relevant parties in the capital of Sùng. (Lǚ wanted Chǔ as a counterweight to the stronger northern states, but not as a dominant neighbor). Either of these covenants, which put a Lǚ diplomatic party on Sùng sacred space, might have been the occasion for a divination, and for Lǚ to *become acquainted* with divination, most probably in the Shāng style still employed in Sùng.

The implication, then, from the Lǚ official record, is that the Lǚ court before 0629 did *not* divine,⁶ and that when they *began* to do so, it was not by sortilege, but with a Shāng-style technique which had most probably been acquired from the Sùng court.

The Book Classics

The Shī. Bone divination is mentioned in Shī 50B6 (building a palace for the relocated state of Wèi), 166D5 (auspice of long life), 196E5 (inquiry how to become good), 209D4 (auspice of good fortune),⁷ and 244G1 (choosing a capital for Jōu). These mix the dynastic with the personal or (in 196E5) even the personalized (196E5); personal use is unlikely to be early. Stalk sortilege is mentioned twice, always with bone divination, and on private, not public, occasions. Shī 58B7 爾卜爾筮 (“You divined; you consulted the oracle”) describes the wedding preparations of a young merchant; the point of the poem is the unfaithfulness of merchants. In Shī 169D5 a wife divines about her absent soldier husband: 卜筮偕止 (“divination and oracle I have sought”), and gets a favorable answer, about which the poem leaves us in suspense, since the end of the soldier’s hard homeward journey is not represented in the text. Neither poem is evidence for state use of sortilege divination; on the contrary, for whatever period they may reflect, both suggest *private* use of sortilege divination.

The Shū. Those to be considered are the jīn-wǎn 今文 or “modern script” corpus, the rest of the present canonical Shū being 4c forgeries, concocted to replace the lost gǔ-wǎn 古文 or “old script” Shū of Hàn;⁸ I exclude the doubtful Tàì Shī (Shū 27-29), which exists (albeit in nonidentical form) in both repertoires.

⁵Also written 毫; not to be confused with the separate *state* of 毫.

⁶Though the Lǚ chronicle was *interested* in omens; it records not only eclipses, but many weird and portentous events, such as birds flying backward (0644), or a rain of locusts (0624).

⁷Here and in 166D5, commentators equate 卜 with 予 “give;” perhaps “will give,” but this assurance presumably comes not as a statement of the poet, but as a result of divination.

⁸Shaughnessy in ECT 377, 384f.

Shū which mention bone or shell augury (bǔ 卜) *only* are:

- Shū 18 (盤庚上) 卜稽曰 “I have inquired by augury, and it said, . . .”
- Shū 20 (盤庚下) 各非敢違卜 “None of you dared disobey the augury.”
- Shū 34 (金縢) 爲王穆卜 “Let augury reverently be taken on the King’s behalf”
- Shū 35 (大誥) 朕卜并吉 “I have taken augury, and all was favorable,” etc
- Shū 40 (召誥) 卜宅 “and took augury concerning a residence [for the King in Lwò]”
- Shū 41 (洛誥) 我卜河朔黎水 “I took augury for the Li River north of the Hí . . .”

These are momentous occasions: the founding of a new capital, the illness of a King.⁹ The King either consults the oracle or has it done on his behalf. Without necessarily crediting these as contemporary reports,¹⁰ the picture of antiquity which they present is of high-level divination at moments of dynastic consequence.

Shū which mention stalk sortilege (shǐ 筮) are two in number:

- Shū 32 (洪範). No divination; many theoretical possibilities listed
- Shū 44 (君奭). Comparison: 若卜筮.

Both these texts purport to describe Shāng (Shū 44) or to derive from Shāng (Shū 32), and both mention bone and stalk divination together (there is no *separate* mention of sortilege in either the Shǐ or the Shū). Shū 32 and 44 have a third point in common: their context is public confidence in the state. If the government is staffed with able men, says Shū 44, it will be trusted “like the results of a divination.” Shū 32 takes this a stage further with a scheme in which state policies are approved by a the ruler, the tortoise 龜 (bone divination), the milfoil 筮 (sortilege), the officers 卿士, and the common people 庶民. The permissible differences among these five are interesting. One point is that the ruler can be outvoted; another is that the approval of the tortoise oracle counts more than he stalk oracle. With + indicating approval and - disapproval, the weighting of votes for policy decisions according to Shū 32 is:

Ruler	Tortoise	Milfoil	Officials	People	Auspice
+	+	+	+	+	Lastingly good
+	+	+	-	-	Good
-	+	+	+	-	Good
-	+	+	-	+	Good
+	+	-	-	-	Good internally; bad externally
-	+	+	-	-	Inaction good; action bad
+	-	-	+	+	[same]

But most remarkable of all is the place given to the people as a source of policy approval or disapproval; with the oracles, they can outvote even the ruler and his men. This is the highest point reached by Chinese populism, the rest of whose tradition is found in certain strata of the Dzwǒ Jwàn (04c), the Mician writings,¹¹ the speeches of the historical Mencius, and the theoretical writings of the 03c post-Mician schools. The impression we get is of an 04c populist utopia, not an evocation of antiquity.

⁹For the Shū 34 augury on the illness of a king, see Nivison **Jīn**.

¹⁰For example, Shū 18-20 purport to be from a time before writing was known in China.

¹¹For Mician synchronisms with other lines of 04c thought, see Brooks **Analects** 259-262, Brooks **Heaven** 82-87, and Brooks **Ethical**.

The Yì itself recognizes that it and the bone oracle may differ. Not surprisingly, it prefers its own results: 舍爾靈龜 “Cast aside your magic tortoises” (Yì 27:1), and twice, 十朋之龜弗克違 “Ten *strings* of tortoises could not oppose” (Yì 41:5 = 42:2). That is, the Yì acknowledges the existence, and we might even say, the previously higher prestige, of the bone divination system. In doing so, it is consistent with the two Shī poems, and the last two Shū texts, which were quoted above.

So on the testimony of the book classics, when should these texts, and the double divination practice they describe, be dated? It has elsewhere been suggested that the populist Shū 32 postdates Shī 195,¹² and that *all* Shū are linguistically later than at least one stylistic trait of the Shī.¹³ The evidence here reviewed gives independent witness to a political-theory affinity between Shū 32 and the Dzwǒ Jwàn. If we consider that the Dzwǒ Jwàn is the earliest text to quote the Yì, and that the Dzwǒ Jwàn itself is much at home in the philosophical world of the 04c,¹⁴ we are led toward the conservative conclusion that sortilege divination of the Yì variety, whether in parallel to bone divination or as done independently, is itself not earlier than the 04c.

The Philosophical Texts

These texts are useful in showing the degree to which the Yì text, and sortilege divination in general, were acknowledged and accepted in the Warring States period.

Analects. Confucius did not know any of the classical texts; not only does the early Analects not mention them, it shows Confucius teaching on a quite different basis.¹⁵ When Confucius does appear, in the mid 04c, as an expounder of a classical text, that text is the Shī (LY 3:18, c0342). A slighting comment on a maxim about divination from “the men of the south” (LY 13:22a c0317) is no more than an attempt to ethicize an idea from the divination tradition. It is not an endorsement of divination, and merely remarks that divination is nothing with action on the part of the individual.

Mencius (see the genuine interviews in MC 1),¹⁶ the exponent of an economically modernized version of classical Confucianism, never mentions divination or the Yì. No more do his 03c successor schools (the rest of MC 1 plus MC 2-3, and MC 4-7).

Sywndž (c0310-0235), the exponent of a late and ritualized Confucianism, evokes an Yì idea in SZ 3:6 (c0242) and cites a phrase from the Yì in 5:6 (c0272), but the Yì plays no major role in his thought, and it is not included in the five-text canon in the early posthumous SZ 1:8 (Shī, Shū, Lǐ, Ywè, Chūn/Chyōu). The later posthumous chapter SZ 27 twice cites the Yì (27:38, 27:49; the latter also cites the Chūn/Chyōu), and once reinterprets an Yì theme in a moral and not a divinatory way (27:81). This implies philosophical engagement. It is probably an attempt of the Sywndž school, at some time after Sywndž’s death, to keep current with the enthusiasms of a later age.

¹²See Brooks **Shī 195**.

¹³See Brooks **Fěi**, and for a parallel example, Brooks **Jyǒu Gàu**.

¹⁴See Brooks **Heaven**, Brooks **Value**, Goldin **Emmentaler**.

¹⁵For the famous crux of the variant 易/亦 in LY 7:17, see Brooks **Analects 41**.

¹⁶For which see Brooks **Interviews**.

Mician ethical texts ignore the Yì and divination; the Micicians had their own doctrine of “ghosts and spirits” as the supernatural agency in human affairs.¹⁷ The Mician logical texts (MZ 40-45) focus on technology. The Lǚ Micicians (MZ 46-50) mention bone divination (46:2, c0340), but attribute a prediction thus obtained to the “ghosts and spirits” which, as the ethical chapters would agree, lie behind the process. Diviners figure in the 03c layers of the Mician defensive warfare texts (MZ 51-71) as part of the culture of *the besieged city*, not as their own technique. These mid 04c and later contacts attest a divination culture which the texts neither esteem nor accept.

Lyòu Dv 六德 (“Six Virtues”), a c0290 text buried in Gwōdyèn Tomb 1 with the tutor to the Chǔ Heir Apparent, lists Six Classics in the order Shī, Shū, Lǐ, Ywè, Yì, and Chūn/Chyōu. Another Gwōdyèn 1 text, Syìng Dè Mìng Chū 性自命出, lists only the first four of these. The Syìng Dè Mìng Chū four-classic canon better agrees with the actual teachings of Mencius and Sywǎndž. The six-classic canon of the Lyòu Dv appears to be a crypto-Confucian expansion, perhaps a specifically Chǔ one. That tradition shows up in the post-Sywǎndžian writings (probably compiled in Lán-líng, the site of Sywǎndž’s school after his move to Chǔ in 0254) and in the enthusiasm for the Yì which arose in early Hàn.

Yì Transmission Tradition as given in SJ 67¹⁸ relies on Shāng Jyw 商瞿, a fictive disciple, as the link between Confucius and later Yì tradition; in the Yì Apocrypha, Shāng Jyw figures instead as the *teacher* of Confucius.¹⁹ He is part of a transmission genealogy which probably derives from Szmǎ Tán’s Yì teacher Yáng Hú.²⁰ The more plausible names in that genealogy, with the year in which (at 40 years per disciple generation) they may be estimated to have inherited the tradition of the Yì, are:

Hán Bì 駢臂	(Dž-húng 子弘)	of Chǔ	[0385]
Chyáu Tsž 矯疵	(Dž-yüng 子庸)	of Jyāng-düng 江東	0345
Jōu Shǔ 周豎	(Dž-jiā 子家)	of Yēn	0305
Gwāng 光羽	(Dž-chvng 子乘)	of Chún’yw 淳于	0265
Tyén Hú 田何	(Dž-jwāng 子莊)	of Chí	0225
[Chín Dynasty, 0221-0206]			
[Hàn Gāu-dzǔ, r 0206-0195; Tyén Hú required to move to Hàn Capital]			
Wáng Túng 王同	(Dž-jūng 子中)	of Dūng-wǔ 東武	0185
Yáng Hú 楊何		of Dž-chwān 菑川	0145
[Yáng Hú became a Palace official at c50, in the period 元朔, 0128/0123] ²¹			

Tyén Hú, as a descendant of the ruling clan of Chí, was compelled to move to the capital, probably in c0200; this transferred one strand of the Yēn/Chí Yì tradition to the west. His successors, as their birthplaces indicate, were also from old Chí families. Yáng Hú’s position under Wǔ-dì, said to have been due to his knowledge of the Yì, represents official Hàn recognition of this still not quite centrally Confucian text.

¹⁷For a brief overview, see Brooks **Ghosts**.

¹⁸SJ 67 5/2211; variants in SJ 121 (written after Szmǎ Tán’s death) and Hàn Shū seem not superior, and SJ 67 (written by Tán, who was himself a student of Yáng Hú) has been preferred.

¹⁹Yì Wěi 47.

²⁰See SJ 130, 6/3288.

²¹This would have been after he had taught Szmǎ Tán, which was probably 15 years earlier.

If we take this tradition seriously (it is probably more schematic than literal, but as such, it is the earliest we have, besides coming from the living Yì tradition of Hàn), a recognizable Yì first arose in Chǔ in the early 04c,²² moved to the east later in that century, and appeared (in a technically advanced form) in Chí at the end of the 04c. In early Hàn, one Chí tradition of the Yì was moved to the Hàn capital. All this agrees well with the time when we first hear of the Yì in other sources, and with the fact that only after the Dzwǒ Jwàn shifts its base to Chí, at the end of the 04c, does that text become aware of such sophisticated forms of Yì expertise as trigram analysis.²³

Conclusion

The traditional view of the Yì associates it with the Jōu Dynasty. Archaeology shows instead that bone divination, so far from being superseded by stalk divination, continued to be practiced by the Jōu. That Lǔ, with its Jōu heritage, should by its own account adopt divination very late, and then in bone form rather than sortilege form, tells in the same direction. There is no reason in this evidence to reject the external witness of the classical texts, and the internal witness of the Yì transmission tradition, suggesting an origin of sortilege divination *within the Warring States period*.²⁴

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²²We may now notice the association of divination with “men of the south” in LY 13:22. That agrees with the probably southern six-classic canon of the Chǔ text Lyōu Dǔ, and with the Chǔ locus of the post-Sywndzian writings (preceding SZ 27 with its Yì quotes is SZ 26, where Sywndž is made to appear as a poet writing in the southern fù or “rhapsody” form). Chyáu Tsž, a man of the eastern Chǔ domain (“Jyāng-dūng”) may indeed have been the person who carried to the Chí area a tradition which arose in 04c Chǔ, and to which 03c Chǔ remained receptive.

²³Brooks **Heaven** 70f. If the transmission genealogy is reliable, this second generation of Yì analysis was probably an innovation of Chyáu Tsž, known (in c0317) in Chí but not in Lǔ.

²⁴Despite the undoubted vogue of the Yì in Hàn, it should be remembered that it officially reached the top of the canon only at the imperially sponsored Shī-chyǔ Gǔ conference of 051, and had slipped to third place in the Hàn Stone Classics, which were engraved in 175-183.