Early China (2015) vol 38 pp 151–193
doi:10.1017/eac.2015.1 First published online 5 May 2015

SIGNS, CLUES AND TRACES: ANTICIPATION IN ANCIENT CHINESE POLITICAL AND MILITARY TEXTS

Albert Galvany*

Abstract

In a considerable number of the military texts of ancient China the success of any manoeuvre demands adaptation to constantly changing circumstances and anticipation of the enemy's moves. Hence, idealized descriptions of the figures of the commander and the sage frequently overlap. In both cases, these are individuals who are able to move forward in time and predict the nature of events before they take definitive form. However, these skills of prognostication are the result of attentive scrutiny of the most inconspicuous aspects of reality. By analyzing military episodes and biographical material referring to some of the strategists of the time, this article attempts to demonstrate that the military commander can be seen as a master of signs and that, accordingly, the art of warfare can also be represented as requiring semiotic aptitudes and techniques which enable accurate interpretation of hints that will determine the outcome of the battle.

Reoccupying the Temple? Divination, Forecast and Accounting

The celebrated military text traditionally attributed to Sunzi 孫子 begins with three sentences that explicitly declare the crucial importance of war

* Albert Galvany, 高梵寧, Universitat Pompeu Fabra; email: albertgalvany@hotmail.com.

The ideas which prompted the writing of this article have their origins in discussions I took part in as a member of the research group "Looking for Knowledge: The Theories and Practices of Observation in Pre-Modern China and Beyond" at the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities (Erlangen, Germany), together with L. S. Chardonnens, D. Drettas, and S. Katz in 2011. An earlier version of this article was presented at the international workshop "War of Ideas, Ideas of War. The Role of Military Thought in Early China," held at the Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona, Spain), June 5–6, 2013. I am indebted to all the participants of this event for their questions, suggestions, and criticism. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to J. Levi and to the anonymous readers of *Early China* for providing me insightful and constructive comments. If there is any remaining error or oversight it is, of course, solely mine.

for the survival of the state.[1] The work emphasizes the risks and threats to which anyone who decides to resort to arms is irrevocably exposed, while also postulating warfare as something that must perforce be pondered. In fact, it was most probably compiled in a period in which interstate wars already involved vast numbers of people, with consequences spreading across the whole social body and outcomes that might bring about the utter ruin of the whole state, and this would account for the resort to "rational" procedures that might guarantee success in such hazardous undertakings. These procedures extended both to the motivations that led to the decision to open hostilities as well as to the actual waging of war. The ultimate criterion for deciding on military action took the form of an impassive reckoning of the benefits (*li* 利):

> 主不可以怒而興師，將不可以慍而攻戰。合於利而動，不合於利而止。怒可以複喜，慍可以複說，亡國不可以複存，死者不可以複生。故明主慎之，良將警之。此安國全軍之道也。
>
> The sovereign should not deploy his troops out of anger and neither should the general fight a battle because he is resentful. Action should be taken only if it is to his advantage and shunned if it is not. Rage may be followed by happiness, and resentment by joy, but the state that has been destroyed cannot be restored and the dead cannot be brought back to life. The enlightened sovereign therefore acts prudently and the good general is cautious. This is the way to keep the state secure and the army intact.[2]

Absolute rigor is therefore the condition for deployment of troops and the slightest sign of lack of seriousness or negligence is punishable. Such caution demands, first of all, a meticulous assessment of all the circumstances relevant to the battle (from the strength or weakness of the economy, through to topographical or weather conditions, the degree of social and political cohesion, the robustness of the administrative institutions, the authority and trustworthiness of the commanders, the discipline and psychological state of the troops, and so on),[3] in order to be sure about whether to order a military attack or, on the contrary, to pronounce it inadvisable and thus to decide not to proceed. Hence, methods based on calculating (*suan* 算) these factors are prominent in the text credited to Sunzi. The work is vehement in insisting that the outcome of an armed conflict can (and must) be known before the

1. *Shi yi jia zhu Sunzi jiao li* 十一家注孫子校理, ed. Yang Bing'an 楊丙安 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1999), 1.1.
2. *Shi yi jia zhu Sunzi jiao li*, 12.283–84.
3. *Shi yi jia zhu Sunzi jiao li*, 1.2–8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

clash takes place on the battlefield, and such foresight is possible by means of a series of questions concerning the circumstances of each of the combatants. The appropriateness or otherwise of each military undertaking is therefore decided in accordance with a state of balance or imbalance that is ascertained beforehand by weighing up the results of these series of questions which are put forth in the ancestral temple.

> 夫未戰而廟算勝者，得算多也；未戰而廟算不勝者，得算少也；多算勝，少算不勝，而況於無算乎？吾以此觀之，勝負見矣。
>
> Victory is achieved when the calculations carried out in the ancestral temple before the battle show a majority of factors in its favour; when the propitious factors are few, victory is not possible. He who finds auspicious results in all his calculations will be the victor, while he who only finds a few will be defeated. And what of the person who finds no factors in his favour? By means of these observations it becomes evident whether the result will be victory or defeat.[4]

This passage plays with different meanings of the term *suan* 算. When it is a verb, it denotes the action of calculating or reckoning but, as a noun, it refers *inter alia* to the device (bamboo counting rods arranged to represent a decimal place system) used to carry out this exercise of arithmetic calculation.[5] More than a few commentators and interpreters have seen in this passage a radical change of direction in the conception

4. *Shi yi jia zhu Sunzi jiao li*, 1.20. Furthermore, chapter XV of the *Huainanzi*, which is also devoted to military strategy, has a similar passage regarding the anticipation in the temple of the results of a battle in which, after a series of questions by means of which it is possible to compare the circumstances of each of the adversaries, one finds the statement: "Hence, one moves the counting rods in the hall of the temple (*miao tang* 廟堂) and ascertains victory a thousand miles away from the battlefield": *Huainanzi jiaoyi* 淮南子校譯, ed. Zhang Shuangdi 張雙棣 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1997), 15.1569. The expression *miao suan* also appears in a chapter titled "Methods of Warfare" ("Zhan fa" 戰法) of the *Shangjunshu* 商君書: see *Shang jun shu zhuizhi* 商君書錐指, ed. Jiang Lihong 蔣禮鴻 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1986), 10.70.

5. See, for instance, Li Yan 李儼, *Zhongguo gudai shuxue shiliao* 中國古代數學史料 (Shanghai: Zhongguo liaoxue tushu yiqi, 1955), 1 *sq*. and Li Ling 李零, *Bing yi zha li. Wo du Sunzi* 兵以詐立. 我讀孫子 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2006), 57–59. The manuscript version of the *Sunzi* which was found in Yinqueshan 銀雀山 in 1972 would seem to support this reading since it presents the homophonous variant 筭. Besides having the range of meanings that are usually accepted for the term ("calculation," "reckoning," "computation," and "evaluation"), this variation adds the notion of "calculating rods or counters." See Yinqueshan Hanmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 銀雀山漢墓竹簡整理小組, *Yinqueshan Hanmu zhu jian* 銀雀山漢墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1985), 3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of warfare. When, in his essay on the military chapters of the *Yizhou shu* 逸周書, Robin McNeal discusses the expression *miao suan* 廟算 in the *Sunzi*, he concludes that the use of these counting rods for purposes of calculation suggests a long history of evolution from divination and consulting ancestral spirits to the adoption of more rational procedures.[6] It is striking that the *Sunzi* should situate this accounting exercise in a section originally concerned with ritual and sacrificial practices related to the above-mentioned series of questions about the real situation of the combatants. After all, such arithmetical calculations could be done in other more appropriate administrative spaces equipped with more useful and relevant resources such as maps and reports. Indeed, according to a passage in the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, the army commander received his orders in the ancestral temple (*miao* 廟)[7] while other, later, textual sources also note that, before launching the military offensive, the monarch came to this sacred place in order to hand the commander the battle axe or some other type of weapon as the symbol of his command.[8] In the light of these passages, it would seem evident, then, that in the earlier model of warfare, which was dominated by the aristocratic elites and their values, the ancestral temple was used as the setting for certain ritual practices that were deemed important for guaranteeing the successful outcome of the bellicose undertaking. From this perspective, the *Sunzi* would be controversial in presenting a new use for this space since, rather than being the hallowed location for performing ritual practices long enshrined in aristocratic customs, it would be the setting for a mere numerical exercise seeking objective knowledge about the outcome of the battle before it took place.[9] With this, the

6. R. McNeal, *Conquer and Govern. Early Chinese Military Texts from the Yizhou shu* (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2012), 118. For a similar interpretation, see also Mark E. Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 115.

7. *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), 1.271 ("Min gong" 閔公 2.7).

8. See *Tai gong Liu Tao jinzhu jinyi* 太公六韜今註今譯, ed. Xu Peigen 徐培根 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu, 1984), 21.114; and also *Zhouli zhengyi* 周禮正義, ed. Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2008), 45.1852.

9. It is not improbable that the use of the term *suan* in the *Sunzi* is also an expression of this disputatious stand *vis-à-vis* the earlier customs associated with warfare, which were determined by the values of the aristocratic ruling elite, since in a passage from the *Yuejue shu* dating from before 56 B.C.E. the term would not seem to refer to arithmetical calculation but rather to numerological divinatory rituals performed in the ancestral temple: *Yuejue shu jiaoshi* 越絕書校釋, ed. Li Bujia 李步嘉 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue, 1992), 15.290; for the dating of this section of the *Yuejue shu*, see Olivia Milburn, *The Glory of Yue* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 314. Although this text was certainly written later,

footnote continued on next page

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

text would simply be extending its attacks against the aristocratic conception of warfare already suggested in its opening lines when it paraphrases a passage from the *Zuo zhuan* stating that the most important affairs of state are sacrifices and warfare (*si yu rong* 祀與戎),[10] which are precisely the exclusive activities of the aristocratic classes. In the *Sunzi*, however, these are supplanted by concerns about managing the new armies composed of large numbers of foot soldiers (*bing* 兵).[11]

Accordingly, in line with this "rationalistic" interpretation, the *Sunzi* would then be testifying to the transformation of the temple—which had formerly been used for making sacrificial offerings or even for engaging in divinatory practices—into a space that now only welcomed methods based on rational deliberation and calculation. Some passages of the work in which the use of certain mantic techniques by soldiers would seem to be proscribed or at least subjected to harsh critical scrutiny, have contributed towards the emphasis given to the importance of this rationalist development.[12] However, it is in a passage from chapter XIII, which is devoted to the information services, where one finds confirmation of the shift in the *Sunzi* from ritual practices, sacrificial offerings, and divinatory techniques to more rational methods.

---

it could very well be describing the prevailing practice of earlier times. In this regard, one might point out that a passage in the military treatise titled *Wuzi* 吳子 alludes to the ruler who frequently turns to divinatory practices (using tortoise shells) which are performed in the ancestors' temple (*zu miao* 祖廟): *Wuzi jinzhu jinyi* 吳子今註今譯, ed. Fu Shaojie 傅紹傑 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu, 1985), 1.47. If it is true that later texts reflect earlier practices, the passage in the *Sunzi* might have been raising the question of replacing these divinatory practices (which were certainly linked with sacrifices and rites taking place in the ancestral temples) by more "rational" analytical methods.

10. *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, 2.861 ("Cheng gong" 成公 13.2).

11. For a more detailed analysis of the arguments in the *Sunzi* against the ideas and values of the aristocratic elites, see Andrew S. Meyer, "Reading Sunzi as a Master" in *War of Ideas, Ideas of War. Military Writings and Early Chinese Intellectual History*, ed. Albert Galvany and Paul van Els (forthcoming).

12. *Shi yi jia zhu Sunzi jiao li*, 11.249. Nonetheless, it should also be noted that it is highly probable that these explicit proscriptions in the *Sunzi*, expressed in the words "prohibit the inauspicious and remove doubts" (*jin xiang qu yi* 禁祥去疑), aim not so much to exclude from the military sphere the use of divination as to preserve the categorical authority of the commanders by preventing the troops from turning to other voices that may contradict them or sow doubt about orders issued by their superiors. Indeed, one passage from the *Mozi* states that, when under siege, the military commanders of a city must ensure that the specialists in divination only convey good omens to the population while informing leaders of the real message of the auguries, adding that anyone who made dire predictions and sowed panic among the population should be condemned to death: *Mozi jiangu* 墨子間詁, ed. Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2001), 70.608.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

故明君賢將，所以動而勝人，成功出於眾者，先知也。先知者，不可取於鬼神，不可象於事，不可驗於度，必取於人，知敵之情者也。

If the clear-sighted ruler and the competent general are the victors every time they are moved to act and if they achieve extraordinary results, this is due to their capacity of foresight. The capacity of foresight is not endowed by ghosts or by spirits, and neither does it come from analogy with past events or from conjecture. It is exclusively the result of information from those who are apprised of the real circumstances of the enemy.[13]

With these words, the *Sunzi* accepts that the success of any military venture resides in being able to anticipate what lies in the future, or that efficacy in the domain of action depends on the ability to predict (*xian zhi* 先知) events and proceed accordingly. Nevertheless, where one might expect to find resort to divinatory arts and the beneficial intervention of numinous powers, one sees instead their substitution in the form of information supplied by agents who have secretly infiltrated the enemy side. Does this shift in the *Sunzi* imply definitive abandonment of the prognostication techniques that permeate all military literature of the pre-imperial era? The answer is, of course, no. Despite an explicit opting in the *Sunzi* for procedures of rational calculation on the basis of information offered by special agents, it is also true that even a cursory glance at the military literature of ancient China is sufficient to confirm the extent to which divinatory methods, far from fading out, keep emerging as a legitimate tool which, in some cases, can play an important role. In many passages of these ancient military writings, divinatory consultations, whether they take the form of pyromancy performed with turtle shells, or observation of celestial bodies and other natural phenomena, are accepted as valid instruments when dilemmas need to be resolved or decisions endorsed.[14] Moreover, and although almost all of these works have been lost, the "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志 treatise of the *Han shu* 漢書 lists a considerable number of military-style writings following yin-yang (*yinyang jia* 陰陽家) doctrines which, in all

13. *Shi yi jia zhu Sunzi jiao li*, 13.290–91.

14. See, for example, *Tai gong Liu Tao jinzhu jinyi*, 1.48, 18.108, and 21.114; *Sima Fa jinzhu jinyi* 司馬法今註今譯, ed. Liu Zhongping 劉仲平 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu, 1991), 3.58; *Wei Liaozi jinzhu jinyi* 尉繚子今註今譯, ed. Liu Zhongping 劉仲平 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu, 1984), 8.105. For a historical study on the relationship between divinatory practices and warfare in China, see Robin D. S. Yates, "The History of Military Divination in China," *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* 24 (2005): 15–43.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

likelihood, included several divinatory techniques as an essential part of their approach.[15] Hence, to return to words attributed to Sunzi in *The Art of War*, one can affirm that the ancestral temple underwent a kind of reoccupation by this new rationalist mentality. However, it did not completely cast out all the concerns and tendencies associated with this space in earlier centuries. A strange cohabitation occurs in the heart of ancient military literature between, on the one hand, the influence of rational practices by means of which troops are organized, soldiers disciplined, plans of attack determined, and armed combat made to run its course and, on the other, a range of prognostication techniques which are still being resorted to in the hope of gaining insight into battle tactics or knowledge of the enemy's circumstances.[16] What, then, would explain the persistence of these prognostication methods in the military writings? What would be the reason for this (at least apparently) contradictory concord between the newly introduced rational dispositions and the obstinate presence of forecasting procedures at the core of strategic thinking? In what sense did the ancients distinguish qualitatively between these systems of knowledge? What set foreknowledge systems apart from other systems that sought clarification of the hidden? Should this coexistence in the ancient literature be attributed, then, to common conceptual, methodological, or ideological foundations? And if this is the case, how is this shared structure presented and organized? These are some of the questions that have inspired and informed this article.

Anticipatory Gazes: The Permanent Longing for a Transparent World

One clue that helps to respond, at least partially, to these questions lies in the crucial role of knowledge of the enemy in this new way of understanding war. The theories expounded in the *Sunzi* and other ancient military

15. Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1956), 1760–61. On this topic, see Robin D. S. Yates, "New Light on Ancient Chinese Military Texts: Notes on their Nature and Evolution, and the Development of Military Specialization in Warring States China," *T'oung Pao* 74 (1988), 211–48; and also Lisa Raphals, "Divination in the Han shu bibliographic treatise," *Early China* 32 (2008–9), 45–101. However, a number of military yin-yang manuscripts have been unearthed recently. Among them we should note the "Di dian" 地典 and "Xiongpin cheng" 雄牝城 manuscripts excavated at Yinqueshan in 1972 as well as the manuscript titled "Gai Lu" 蓋廬, recovered at Zhangjiashan 張家山, in 1983. For a study of these documents, see, for instance, Shao Hong 邵鴻, "Bing yinyangjia yu Handai junshi," 兵陰陽家與漢代軍事 *Nankai xuebao* 南開學報 (2002.6), 81–90; and also Olivia Milburn, "Gai Lu: A Translation and Commentary on a Yin-Yang Military Text Excavated from Tomb M247, Zhangjiashan," *Early China* 33–34 (2010–11), 101–40.

16. For a general survey of this issue, see Ralph D. Sawyer, "Paradoxical Coexistence of Prognostication and Warfare," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 157 (2005), 1–13.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

writings hold that the essence of success in vanquishing a rival is the knowledge obtained of him. Subjugating an enemy necessarily entails projecting a light that encounters no impediment, and depends on ensuring that he is permanently exposed to the vigilant gaze. This reiterated concern in military literature for converting the adversary into a being stripped of all dark areas and secrets so that he is rendered transparent and predictable, clearly conveys the extent to which scrutiny of others became a preoccupation for the elites, politicians, and intellectuals of the Warring States period.[17] This is, in effect, a society that is profoundly marked by the desire to monitor, inspect, and penetrate the intimate reality of the Other. In this context, the concurrences and analogies with the divinatory arts become clear. It is by no means a coincidence that in the section "Xici" 繫辭 of the *Zhouyi* 周易, when it traces the genealogy of the invention of the Eight Trigrams (*ba gua* 八卦)—the basis of the sixty-four hexagrams—the term "observe" (*guan* 觀) appears over and over again in a particularly conspicuous way.

> 古者包犧氏之王天下也，仰則觀象於天，俯則觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文，與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。
>
> Long ago, when the venerable Bao Xi [Fu Xi] ruled the world, he raised his eyes and observed the celestial phenomena; he lowered them and observed the guides of the earth. He observed the patterns of the birds and the animals and the proper order of the land. Once he had taken as his reference both what was near him and what was far away, he began to draw the eight trigrams in order to be able to penetrate the virtues of sublime clairvoyance and catalogue the real conditions of the ten thousand beings.[18]

In this passage, Fu Xi's creation of the eight trigrams is the result of his intense, scrupulous observation of natural processes, both those pertaining to the heavens and those happening on earth. The act of observing

17. On this issue, see Michael Nylan, "Beliefs about Seeing: Optics and Moral Technologies in Early China," *Asia Major* (3rd. ser.) 21.1 (2008), 89–132, especially 101–3.

18. *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義, ed. Liu Yujian 劉玉建 (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 2005), 404. In the Western tradition, observation plays an essential role in some of the most prominent ancient divinatory techniques as can be seen, for instance, in the regular use of the verb "to observe" (*amāru*) in the Babylonian omens: Francesca Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing. Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Also Cicero's work titled *On Divination* (*De Divinatione*), written in the first century B.C.E., emphasizes the predictive aims of observation. Divination is defined here as an art on the part of those who, having learned old things by observation (*observationes*), seek new things by conjecture. On this issue, see Katharine Park, "Observation in the Margins," in *Histories of Scientific Observation*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 15–44.

or of paying attention to the world by means of an inquiring gaze is, then, intimately associated with the production of techniques of augury and prediction which, in a certain sense, are pursuing nothing other than a prolongation in time of the scope of this visual scrutiny. The original meaning of the term *guan* 觀, which is frequently used to describe observation of the movements of stars in the firmament and to depict a variety of divinatory activities, is given in Xu Shen's dictionary as "contemplate at great length" (*di shi ye* 諦視也).[19] This, of course, is neither an isolated case nor a minor coincidence. A considerable part of the vocabulary used to designate the omens and foretokens managed by the experts in different techniques of prognostication is closely linked with the semantic field of vision (*jian* 見, *shi* 視, *wang* 望, *hou* 候, *cha* 察). Thus, for example, the graphic sign used to name specialists in physiognomy and their techniques, *xiang* 相, contains the radical of the eye and embraces the idea of descrying, contemplating, and looking closely at an object. One of the most oft-used expressions for describing divinatory procedures, *zhan* 占, offers a similar example. Often written with the homophonic variant *zhan* 覘, the term is used in the ancient literature to denote actions of "scrutinizing," "observing closely at length," "visually inspecting," or "carefully examining".[20] This constant slipping back and forth between the different levels of semantic fields pertaining to visual observation and prognostication, as is clearly reflected in this rich shared vocabulary, confirms the fact that these are actions understood as complementary, as linked together, frequently to the point of being indistinguishable.

---

19. *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, ed. Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1996), 408. Besides this general meaning of "observing," *guan* 觀 also denotes the inspection of customs and rules through journeys or expeditions made by rulers or by ministers. In this sense, a passage from the so-called *Huangdi sijing* manuscripts from Mawangdui, unearthed in 1973 and entitled "Observations" ("*Guan*" 觀), is pertinent as it describes how the Yellow Emperor orders one of his ministers to go out secretly and travel around to observe those laws and rules which are not constantly good: *Huangdi sijing jinzhu jinyi* 黃帝四經今註今譯, ed. Chen Guying 陳鼓應 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu, 1995), 263. As this manuscript makes clear, these visual expeditions, which are described as "observations," are often the prelude of certain kinds of administrative actions (punitive missions, wars, or political reforms). For a more complete study of the scope and meaning of the term *guan* in pre-imperial literature, see the article by Wu Zhongwei 吳忠偉, "Lun guan—dui xian Qin dianji yujing zhong 'guan' gainian de kaocha" 論觀 — 對先秦典籍語境中觀概念的考察, *Kong Meng yuekan* 孔孟月刊 38.1 (1999), 22–27.

20. See in this regard the contribution of Su Peng 蘇芃, "Zuozhuan 'zhan' shi 'chakan' yi yongli fafu" 左傳占釋察看義用例發覆, *Hanyu shi xuebao* 漢語史學報 (2009): 212–14, available online at: http://www.gwz.fudan.edu.cn/SrcShow.asp?Src_ID=1312. The paper by Su Peng is exclusively focused on the *Zuo zhuan* but, in my opinion, it is also possible to attest these overlapping meanings of the term *zhan* in the ancient military literature: see for instance *Wuzi jinzhu jinyi*, 4.123.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The affinity between these actions translates into a shared volition to reveal what is hidden, what escapes the normal use of eyes. This proclivity for close inspection of the inner state of people and objects is not only expressed in the resort to divinatory techniques. It is, in fact, a very widespread concern and also detectable in other spheres, for example ritual theories. Throughout the *Liji*, ritual is described as a means for fathoming the inner dispositions of people taking part in formal ceremonies, and even for diagnosing the strengths and weaknesses of a state's institutions. The reality of these traits, usually opaque and inaccessible to the eyes of the inexperienced, becomes apparent to people who know all the ins and outs of the rites and are able to observe correctly the external bodily signals of these participants.[21] Indeed, according to these ritual doctrines, the inner disposition and the very future of a person can be read in his bodily attitude, for instance, in the particular way he puts down and moves his feet. The following anecdote extracted from the *Guo yu* 國語 is illuminating in this regard: in the course of a convention of political ambassadors of various states that took place in Keling 柯陵, located in the western area of the state of Zheng 鄭, Lord Xiang Dan 襄單公, counsellor of the sovereign of Chu 楚, meets Lord Li 厲of Jin 晉; however, when the encounter occurs, the gaze of the Lord of Jin, who is clearly looking upwards, is faraway and he raises his feet too high when he moves. After noting all these subtle but significant elements, Lord Xiang Dan meets the Lord of Lu and warns him about the troubles that will soon beset the state of Jin. Surprised by this statement, the Lord of Lu asks how he has come to such a conclusion. Lord Xiang Dan is unambiguous: it is sufficient to scrutinize the movement of the prince's feet and the nature of his gaze to deduce the misfortune that will soon afflict the state of Jin.[22] The excessively raised stride of Lord Li of Jin reveals his profound ignorance of protocol, which brings about an inevitable disturbance in social relationships, and this is read by Lord Xiang Dan as a revealing foretaste of what is to come. In fact, this is not the only passage in early Chinese literature where a mistake in the somatic manifestation of the ritual protocols is interpreted as an unequivocal symptom of impending fatality.[23] Similarly, attentive

21. *Liji jijie* 禮記集解, ed. Sun Xidan 孫希旦 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996), 607 ("Li yun" 禮運 9.2); and 662 ("Li qi" 禮器 10.2).

22. Shanghai Shifan daxue guji zhengli xiaozu 上海師範大學古籍整理小組, *Guo yu* 國語 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1990), 3.89–91 ("Zhou yu xia" 周語下 1).

23. See *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, 4.1600–1601 ("Ding gong" 定公 15.1). On this matter, see Zhang Duansui 張端穗, *Zuozhuan sixiang tan wei* 左傳思想探微 (Taibei: Xuehai, 1987), 134–36.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

observation of facial color (*guan se* 觀色) is frequently cited in the ancient texts as a practice concerned with probing the personality or revealing the moral quality of an individual, and even foreseeing his future.[24] Here, one might mention the anecdote about Dongguo Ya 東郭牙 who, having observed the facial color of Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公, was able to discover the plans for launching a military offensive against Ju 莒 which Lord Huan had secretly confided to his adviser Guan Zhong 管仲.[25]

Naturally, the revealing of a person's intimate state or real condition (*qing* 情) as well as the forecast of his future can be achieved not only by means of visual observation and close scrutiny of movements, postures, attitudes, and bodily parts or expressions that can be seen with the eye, but also by analysis of the audible tones and nuances expressed by the voice. Highly pertinent at this point are two famous anecdotes describing the feats of sages who are capable of uncovering past occurrences or prognosticating future events by dint of interpreting the sounds made by individuals.[26] In the first, described in the *Liji*, Confucius and Zi Lu are walking on Tai Mountain when, on hearing the heart-rending wails of a woman before a grave, Zi Lu is able to divine the exact cause of the emotions that have given rise to them.[27] In the second, which is in the *Han Feizi* 韓非子, to the surprise of everyone, Zi Chan 子產 on hearing the sobbing of a newly widowed woman who is mourning the loss of her husband, orders that she be arrested and interrogated; the woman then confesses that she has murdered her husband.[28] These vignettes essentially emphasize the validity of a single axiom, according to which it is possible to discern a direct, immediate equation between

24. On the relevance of this practice in ancient China see Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 172–85.

25. *Hanshi waizhuan jianshu* 漢詩外傳箋疏, ed. Qu Shouyuan 屈守元 (Chengdu: Ba Shu, 1996), 5. 496–97.

26. Although I am giving particular emphasis to the confluence of visual perception and prognosis, it is evident in the pre-imperial literature that there is also an overlap with auditory skills. Hence, for example, the section devoted to pitch pipes in the *Shi ji* opens with a meaningfully formulated reference to the use of these instruments for military purposes: "By observing the enemy you can know what will be auspicious and inauspicious; by listening to sounds you will find the patterns of victory and defeat" (*Shi ji*, 1239). Then again, a section of the *Tai gong Liu tao* titled "The Five Musical Notes" (Wu yin 五音) asserts that, by means of analysing sounds, it is possible to anticipate enemy formations, and not only this but also the outcome of the battle (*Tai gong Liu Tao jinzhu jinyi*, 28.134).

27. *Liji jijie*, 292 ("Tan Gong xia" 檀弓下 4.2).

28. *Han Feizi xin jiao zhu* 韓非子新校注, ed. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2000), 38.913.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

emotion and its expression and between inner feeling and its bodily manifestation. Nevertheless, in my view, it is a passage from the *Guo yu* where it is possible to find a particularly explicit acceptance of this direct connection between the observation of outer marks and the revelation of an inner intention. The anecdote, which includes also a meaningful analogy with divinatory practices, is as follows:

> 虢之會，楚公子圍二人執戈先焉。蔡公孫歸生與鄭罕虎見叔孫穆子，穆子曰：「楚公子甚美，不大夫矣，抑君也。」鄭子皮曰：「有執戈之前，吾惑之。」蔡子家曰：「楚，大國也；公子圍，其令尹也。有執戈之前，不亦可乎？」穆子曰：「不然。天子有虎賁，習武訓也；諸侯有旅賁，御災害也；大夫有貳車，備承事也；士有陪乘，告奔走也。今大夫而設諸侯之服，有其心矣。若無其心，而敢設服以見諸侯之大夫乎？將不入矣。夫服，心之文也。如龜焉，灼其中，必文于外。若楚公子不為君，必死，不合諸侯矣。」公子圍反，殺郟敖而代之。
>
> For the meeting in Guo, Gongzi Wei of Chu ordered that he should be preceded by two guards with halberds when he made his appearance. Together with Hanhu of Zheng [Zipi], Gongsun Guisheng [Zijia] of the state of Cai went to see Shusun Muzi who said, "Gongzi of Chu has presented himself with a great deal of fanfare. He seems more like the sovereign himself than a great minister." Zipi of Zheng remarked, "I am somewhat suspicious about the fact that he ordered that he should be preceded by two hired applauders." Zijia of Cai answered, "Chu is a great state and Gongzi Wei is Prime Minister. Would he not enjoy the prerogative of being preceded by two guards with halberds?" Muzi replied, "No, it is not right. The Son of Heaven has his guard of honour to demonstrate his martial spirit; the feudal lords have their guards to protect them from major misfortune; prime ministers are escorted by two carriages so that they are prepared for sending emissaries; advisers are followed by a carriage so that their orders will be conveyed. If a prime minister is now bedecked as a feudal lord it is because he has some secret intention. If this were not so, do you believe he would dare to array himself as a feudal lord when he is coming to a meeting with prime ministers from different states? When he returns, he will not do so in the same capacity (as prime minister). Vestments are the heart's adornment. It is like the tortoise. If it is exposed to fire inside, the signs appear on the surface. If Gongzi Wei of Chu is unable to become sovereign, he will certainly die; he will not meet with the feudal lords again." When Gongzi Wei returned [to his state], he assassinated Jia'ao and usurped the throne.[29]

29. *Guo yu*, 5.195 ("Lu yu xia" 魯語下 6). An anecdote from the *Zuo zhuan* also stresses the correspondence between clothing and accoutrements (*fu* 服) and the quality of the person: *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, 2.638 ("Wen gong" 文公 18.7).

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This strict consonance between innermost and outermost being, the invisible and the visible, the latent and the manifest, which makes it possible to decode in outward features a person's hidden reality is, as I have just shown, deemed efficient in ritual doctrines (and even in important moral approaches)[30] and also represents the theoretical foundation of some widespread ancient divinatory practices, in particular physiognomy (*xiang* 相) and morphoscopy (*xingfa* 形法).[31] Although, unfortunately, no complete treatise on these methods has been conserved, and the recently discovered manuscripts are fragmentary and present many material difficulties for reading and interpretation, it would seem that there can be no doubt as to the popularity of these procedures in early China. Their extensive use and influence are testified to not only in the numerous episodes recorded in the ancient literature of interventions and cases attributed to specialists in these techniques, but they also appear in the criticisms and reproaches that some thinkers feel obliged to register in taking a stand against them with the aim of neutralizing the enormous power and authority wielded by these experts.[32] It is understandable that, when they were obliged to choose the advisors and office-holders of their administration, the rulers of the time would have felt the need to turn to practices which, by means of observing physical manifestations, bodily features, gestures, bearing, voice, or other external traits, promised to reveal the inner state of candidates, both concerning their aptitude for the tasks required of them and their loyalty and moral calibre. While it is true that these inquiries were frequently concerned with human beings (from a ruler's newborn son to a candidate for some or other civilian or military position), such application of methods seeking to establish a direct correlation between the physical bearing of the body and the inner qualities

30. For an account of how these principles pertaining to physiognomy are adopted in the moral theory of the *Mengzi* and other related early written sources, see Mark Csikszentmihalyi's contributions in *Material Virtue. Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 127–41.

31. For a study of physiognomy in ancient China, see, for example, Xiao Ai 蕭艾, *Zhongguo gudai xiangshu yanjiu yu pipan* 中國古代相術研究與批判 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1996), and for a suggested classification of different physiognomic techniques prevailing in ancient China, see Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu xu kao* 中國方術續考 (Beijing: Dongfang, 2000), 5–6.

32. In this regard, the chapter "Against Physiognomy" (Fei xiang 非相) of the *Xunzi* and that titled "Mr. He" (He shi 和氏) of the *Han Feizi* unquestionably present two revealing examples of the authority and prestige enjoyed by these experts. The influence and popularity of physiognomy increased during the Han dynasty and several eminent authors of the time wrote about it, including Wang Chong 王充 and Wang Fu 王符. The interested reader may consult the book by Zhu Pingyi 祝平一, *Handai de xiangrenshu* 漢代的相人術 (Taibei: Xuesheng, 1990).

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of an individual was not limited to humans. Experts in physiognomic techniques were also apt to cast an inquisitive eye on other objects deemed valuable by the political and social elites: horses,[33] precious stones,[34] dogs,[35] swords[36] and even the wood of trees[37] are some of the objects that were prone to being examined using these techniques of observation. The physiognomic gaze, and almost any form of prognostication technique in ancient China, basically assume a world that, like the surface of the turtle shell in the meaningful analogy from the anecdote of the *Guo yu* above, is replete with symptoms, full of

33. Anecdotes featuring Bo Le 伯樂, a legendary practitioner of physiognomy who specialized in horses, appear in many written sources from early China (*Xunzi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Han Feizi*, *Lüshi chunqiu*, *Huainanzi*, etc.) and testify to the importance of these procedures. Apart from the evidence offered by texts found in the Mawangdui 馬王堆 archaeological site (discovered in 1973), a text written on silk titled "Classic of Horse Physiognomy" was also found (Xiang majing 相馬經). For a transcription of this manuscript, see the article "Mawangdui Hanmu boshu Xiang majing shiwen" 馬王堆漢墓帛書相馬經釋文, *Wenwu* 文物 1977.8, 17–22. Also with regard to this text, see Li Ling 李零, *Zhongguo fangshu gaiguan* 中國方術概觀 (Beijing: Renmin, 1993), 1–10.

34. See the previously cited anecdote concerning Mr. He, in the *Han Feizi*: *Han Feizi xin jiao zhu*, 13.271.

35. A fragmentary manuscript consisting of twenty bamboo strips and devoted to canine physiognomy (*xiang gou* 相狗) was recovered from Tomb Number 1 at the Shuanggudui 雙古堆 archaeological site. For a report on, and description of this material, see Hu Pingsheng 胡平生, "Fuyang Shuanggudui Han jian shushu shu jian lun" 阜陽雙古堆漢簡數術書簡論, *Chutu wenxian yanjiu* 出土文獻研究 (1998.4), 12–30. In addition, fragments dealing with the same subject were found at the archaeological site at Yinqueshan, and titled by their editors "Prescriptions for Physiognomising Dogs" (Xiang gou fang 相狗方). It is highly likely that, among these writings on physiognomic techniques, there were also others dealing with domestic animals, although they have not been conserved. The *Han shu*, for example, includes a missing work in six scrolls titled "The Physiognomy of the Six Domestic Animals" (Xiang liu chu 相六畜), which is listed under the bibliographic section of "Morphoscopy" (*xingfa* 形法): *Han shu*, 3.1775.

36. Several manuscripts concerned with the physiognomy of swords were discovered in the archaeological site of Juyan 居延 and regrouped under the heading "Physiognomy of Swords and Precious Daggers" (Xiang baojian dao 相寶劍刀). For studies of these materials see, among others, the article by Ma Mingda 馬明達, "Juyan Han jian 'Xiang jiandao' ce chutan" 居延漢簡相劍刀冊初探, *Dunghuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊 (1982.3), 79–89, and that of Zhong Shaoyi 鍾少異, "Gu xiangjian shu chulun" 古相檢術初論, *Kaogu* 考古 1994.4, 358–62.

37. One of the anecdotes in the *Zhuangzi* concerns a master carpenter and one of his apprentices, and describes how good wood can be discerned through the art of recognizing the tree's external characteristics. See *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1968), 170–71 ("Ren jian shi" 人間世 4).

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

signs.[38] Within this decipherable universe, a certain empirically accessible state of affairs refers to and takes the specialist to another situation that escapes ordinary perception.[39] The trained eye of the connoisseur, and the people who require his services, are seeking a clear, transparent world, one that is ultimately stripped of all secrets and dark corners.

The Foundation of Perspicacity: Perceiving What Is Not Yet

Rather than judging men on the basis of their works and deeds, the essential principle of physiognomy is that of deducing the inner dispositions of beings using a semiological system constructed over the external, visible appearances. The physiognomist's attention is focused on the body of the Other, perceiving in it only a surface or a configuration, an object that, once delivered to his keenness of perception, must be deciphered. The technique is founded on the idea that men disguise their feelings and true intentions, but the adept in these procedures of observation can bring out the inner dimension that has thus far been concealed. This, then, is an art of suspicion that is, accordingly, conceived as an instrument for mastery and domination over others. However, the scrutiny of this physiognomic gaze also, and in particular, seeks to disclose the intentions and designs that are veiled in external appearances in order to gain prior knowledge because the guarantee of

38. In this article I use a broad definition of what constitutes a sign: anything, whether object, sound, gesture, action, or event, capable of standing for something in some respect. However, in accordance with the seminal works by Charles Pierce, Winfried Nöth writes: "Every object, event, or behavior is thus a potential sign. Even silence can have the semiotic function of a zero sign […] Everything can thus be perceived as a natural sign of something else, and by prior agreement between the sender and a receiver, every object can also serve as a conventional sign. This does not mean that every phenomenon of the world is semiotic. It only means that under conditions of semiosis every object can become a sign to a given interpreter." See W. Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 81.

39. From their very earliest manifestations, divinatory techniques in China have been associated with interpreting marks or signs made on a reading surface (see, in this regard, Léon Vandermeersch: "De la tortue à l'achilée," in *Divination et Rationalité*, ed. J.-P. Vernant (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), 29–51). Giovanni Manetti's ideas concerning the "semiotic" foundation of divination in his comparative study of divination in Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome are therefore relevant here and, in particular, his statement that "[...] reading the future and gaining knowledge of hidden things were not achieved through direct divine inspiration but rather through the same process which operates in the interpretation of the written sign" (G. Manetti, *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity*, trans. C. Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 2). With regard to the idea of a world saturated with signs or, better said, symptoms, see also Hans Blumenberg's essay *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981).

success lies precisely in an early appraisal of the situation. If, for the prevailing mentality in early China, the whole world is an object to be submitted to continuous scrutiny, this is due not only to the desire—expressed as these omnipresent acts of observation—to penetrate the intimate reality of people and objects so as to discover their inner qualities, but it is also the result of the ambition of the powers-that-be to be forewarned when planning their actions which, otherwise, would not succeed. Indeed, in both the political literature and the military treatises, the sage is able to distinguish himself from the mediocre individual or the fool thanks to his capacity of foresight (*xian zhi* 先知, *xian jian* 先見) and his ability to anticipate, to predict events before they happen, and thus to offer a timely response to them. In other respects, physiognomy, which is nothing other than the art of offering a judgment about people and objects on the basis of their somatic constitution and thereby attributing to them some or other quality, wholly belongs to the framework of the evidential paradigm as defined by the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg.[40] According to this paradigm, the internal realities of individuals and things cannot be deciphered unless it is by means of detection and interpretation of traces, symptoms, and clues.

In fact, both ideas, the forecasting of events and the correct interpretation of tenuous signs, are necessarily linked. Predicting events depends on an accurate reading of the surrounding evidence. Hence, sagacity lies in skills of foresight and the clairvoyant man is, above all, hypersensitive to subtle symptoms which are unperceived by people who lack his superior powers of discernment. A passage from the *Shangjunshu* 商君書 expresses this principle when citing a maxim that goes, "The fool glimpses no more than accomplished facts while the one who knows sees what is not yet even budded" (愚者闇於成事，知者見於未萌).[41] Far-sighted intelligence, with its scrutiny of the tiniest elements of reality,[42] anticipates what has not yet taken shape, announces what, still in an embryonic state, has not yet achieved its final form. This visualizing of the incipient (*wei meng* 未萌), of the abstruse (*ming ming* 冥冥), of what is still lacking a completed form (*wei xing* 未形), is the feature that defines and singles out the wise man in many political and

40. C. Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 96–125.

41. *Shang jun shu zhuizhi*, 1.2. The adage is mentioned again, with some variations, in the *Zhanguo ce* (*Zhanguo ce jian zheng* 戰國策戔證, ed. Fan Xiangyong 范祥雍 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2008], 19.1046), and also in the *Xinxu* (Liu Xiang 劉向, *Xinxu jinzhu jinyi* 新序今注今譯 [Tianjin: Tianjin guji, 1988], 9.298).

42. The following discussion of far-sighted intelligence is indebted to, and aims to complement, the excellent work of Jean Levi in his book *Les fonctionnaires divins. Politique, despotisme et mystique en Chine ancienne* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), 30–45.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

philosophical writings of ancient China.[43] Foreknowledge of events is based on close attention to, and meticulous observation of, the smallest details because, for the person with superior skills of perception, these miniscule, discrete, almost indiscernible elements contain and give prior notice of the unfolding of a series of circumstances which, once they eventually reach their critical point and crystallize into a definitive form, no longer permit any kind of intervention. The sage is often portrayed as someone who shows himself circumspect about the most trivial elements of reality and prudently scrutinizes tenuous signs.[44] At this point, one could cite, among other examples, a passage from Sima Qian's biographical notice about Zou Yan 騶衍, who is thought to be responsible for promoting some of the most influential cosmological theories of the epoch.[45] This passage explicitly states that only on the basis of foresight gleaned from minute signs is it possible to divine what will later turn out to be great events (必先驗小物，推而大之).[46] Active and diligent participation in the never-ending flow of events can only be managed as a result of this anticipatory perception that affords the sage valuable room for manoeuvre, which is unattainable to those who settle for looking at congealed structures. The *Han Feizi* offers a precious anecdote in this regard in the chapter devoted to explaining the *Laozi* ("Yu Lao" 喻老) where it sets out to illustrate one of its sentences—"Set about the difficult while it is still easy, the large while it is still small" (圖難於其易也，為大於其細也)[47]—by means of telling the story of a diagnosis offered by the famous physician Bian Que 扁鵲.

> 扁鵲見蔡桓公，立有間，扁鵲曰：「君有疾在腠理，不治將恐深。」桓侯曰：「寡人無。」扁鵲出，桓侯曰：「醫之好治不病以為功。」居十日，扁鵲復見曰：「君之病在肌膚，不治將益深。」桓侯不應。扁鵲出，桓侯又不悅。居十日，扁鵲復見曰：「君之病在腸胃，不治將益深。」桓侯又不應。扁鵲出，桓侯又不悅。居十日，扁鵲望桓侯而還走。桓侯故使人問之，扁鵲

43. *Huainanzi jiaoyi*, 18.1899–1900; *Guanzi jiaozhu* 管子校注, ed. Li Xiangfeng 黎翔鳳 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2004), 1.17; *Shuo yuan jiaozheng* 說苑校証, ed. Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989), 16.397–98; *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證, ed. Zhong Zhedian 鐘哲點 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), 4.131; *Kongcongzi* 孔叢子, ed. Wang Junlin 王鈞林 and Zhou Haisheng 周海生 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2009), 21.274; *Yantie lun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校注, ed. Wang Liqi 王利器 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), 59.604; *Lun heng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, ed. Huang Hui 黃暉 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), 78.1072; *Shi ji*, 43.1807.

44. *Huainanzi jiaoyi*, 18.1891.

45. Li Hansan 李漢三, *Xian Qin liang Han yinyang wuxing xueshuo* 先秦兩漢陰陽五行學說 (Taibei: Weixin, 1981), 51–62.

46. *Shi ji*, 74.2344.

47. *Boshu Laozi jiao zhu* 帛書老子校注, ed. Gao Ming 高明 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996), 133.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

曰：「疾在腠理，湯熨之所及也；在肌膚，鍼石之所及也；在腸胃， 火齊之所及也；在骨髓，司命之所屬，無奈何也。今在骨髓，臣是以無請也。」居五日，桓公體痛，使人索扁鵲，已逃秦矣，桓侯遂死。故良醫之治病也，攻之於腠理，此皆爭之於小者也。夫事之禍福亦有腠理之地，故曰：聖人蚤從事焉。

Bian Que once went to see Lord Huan of Cai. Before long he said, "You have an ailment which so far only affects the surface of your skin but, if it remains untreated, there is a risk that it will spread deeper into the body. The Lord replied, "I have no such thing" and, once Bian Que had left, he told those in attendance, "These doctors are only concerned to take credit for curing people who are not sick." Ten days later, Bian Que once again had an audience with the Lord. Again he warned him, "Your disease has spread beneath the skin. Unless treated, there is a risk that it will go still deeper inside the body." The Lord did not respond and, when Bian Que left the hall, his displeasure was evident. Another ten days passed before the physician again examined the Lord and pronounced, "The disease has spread to the intestines and stomach and, left untreated, it will only worsen." The Lord did not respond and, after Bian Que left the hall, he lapsed into silence. Ten days later, after a mere glance at the Lord, Bian Que went back. The Lord sent someone to inquire why had had behaved thus, and he replied, "When a disease is still on the surface of the skin it can be treated with steam or hot poultices. When it has penetrated the skin, metal or stone needles will suffice. Even when it affects the digestive system, a decoction can be effective. When the malady has spread into the bones, the cure no longer depends on the physician but on the Manager of Allotments.[48] The Lord's disease lies in the marrow of the bones. What remedy can I offer him now?" Five days later, the Lord was in pain all over his body. He sent for Bian Que but he had already fled to the state of Qin. Lord Huan died shortly afterwards. This is why, when diseases are treated, they should be attended to when they appear on the surface of the skin as they must be combated in the germinal phase. All matters arising from fortune and calamity have a moment when they are in the epidermal phase and this is why it is said, "The sage is able to anticipate the flow of events."[49]

The main concern of the author or authors of the chapter that relates this incident is to warn of the many dangers besetting the person who occupies the position of authority and to offer some guidelines that

48. For a more detailed study of this deity called "Manager of Allotment" (*si ming* 司命), who was concerned with lifespan and was also the object of sacrifices in early China, see Mark Csikszentmihalyi, "Allotment and Death in Early China," in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, ed. Amy Olberding and Philip J. Ivanhoe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 177–90.

49. *Han Feizi xin jiao zhu*, 21.440–41.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

might help to counteract, or at least neutralize, these threats.[50] The fact that the story from the *Han Feizi*, which is of clear political vocation, as I have just noted, is set in the context of a clinical situation is not a trivial detail in this line of argument. Another anecdote in the *He Guanzi* 鶴冠子 featuring Bian Que, and once again set in the framework of political concerns, highlights the crucial importance of foresight by means of observation of symptoms when the illness has barely begun to appear and still lacks any clear form. After praising the ability of his older brother who is able to diagnose a disease before its particular form is revealed (*wei you xing* 未有形), and defining the procedure of the best doctors, the text attributes the following words to Bian Que, "[Good physicians] are able to detect an ailment in healthy patients. They treat the malady before it is given a name and even before it has taken shape. The treatment is perfect when patients are persuaded that the result has come about by itself" (凡此，者不病病。治之無名，使之無形。至功之成其下，謂之自然。).[51] Medical practice, as conceived in ancient China, required extreme awareness and vigilance in the early detection of symptoms that foreshadowed an illness because, once they were recognized in their embryonic state, the physician could embark on early treatment, and the chances of its being successful were therefore greater.[52] The intervention that guaranteed the greatest chance of

50. See Sarah A. Queen, "*Han Feizi* and the Old Master: A Comparative Analysis and Translation of *Han Feizi* Chapter 20 and Chapter 21," in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, ed. Paul R. Goldin (Berlin and New York: Springer, 2012), 209. The *Han Feizi* once again situates in a clear political context this idea of acting on what is as yet tiny: *Han Feizi xin jiao zhu*, 38.914.

51. *He Guanzi hui jiao jizhu* 鶴冠子汇校集注, ed. Huang Huaixin 黃怀信 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2004), 16.338–39. A passage from the *Yantielun* also mentions the clinical skills of Bian Que and states that the sage is characterized by his ability to respond to circumstances before they have become manifest (*wei ran* 未然) while the noble man is distinguished by the fact that he acts upon what still lacks an established form because he can visualize what has not yet germinated (治未形，睹未萌): *Yantielun jiao zhu*, 59.604. See also *Shi ji*, 45.2793.

52. In this regard, see for example chapter "Ba zheng shen ming lun" 八正神明論 of the *Huangdi neijing suwen* 黃帝內經素問: *Huangdi neijing zhangju suoyin* 黃帝內經章句索引, ed. Ren Yingqiu 任應秋 (Beijing: Renmin weisheng, 1986), 81–83. Punctilious observation of tenuous signs constitutes, therefore, the shared foundation of medical theories and of a considerable part of morphoscopic procedures in ancient China. Much the same occurred in classical Greek culture where medical literature also played a significant part in the development of physiognomy and other divination techniques associated with semiotic practice. For a more complete study of this question, see G. Manetti, *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity*, 37–52, and Armelle Debru, "Signes, indices, inférences en médecine antique," in *L'intérpretation des indices. Enquête sur le paradigme indiciaire avec Carlo Ginzburg*, ed. Denis Thouard (Villeneuve d'Asq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2007), 175–88.

success when dealing with any health setback entailed tackling it when it had scarcely begun to appear or when the problems it was going to cause were virtually imperceptible, and there was still room to manoeuvre. Hence, the illustration in the anecdote of the *Han Feizi* concerning the physician Bian Que emphasizes that the ailment must be dealt with when it has only just begun to show on the outer layer of the skin (*cou li* 腠理), which is to say on the most superficial part of the organism.

The Wide Horizon of Premonitory Signs

The story of Bian Que's diagnosis of Lord Huan's ailment is a clear allegory of the concern to predict later unfolding of events by early detection through attentive visual observation (*jian* 見, *wang* 望) of symptoms that emerge as external manifestations in the form of tenuous signs (*xi* 細, *wei* 微) on the visible outer layer of a body or object. Related to these ideas and closely linked with the epidermal dimension of things, the term *biao* 表, denoting the covering, surface, or external appearance of a body or garment, plays a significant part in this shared scheme pertaining to pre-emptive action. It is not surprising, then, that one of the sections of the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 is titled "Observation of Outer Signs" ("Guan biao" 觀表) and that it is exclusively concerned with the matter of long-term forecasting of events through painstaking observation of faint signs on the surface of beings. This ability distinguishes wise men from ordinary mortals.

> 人之心隱匿難見，淵深難測，故聖人於事觀[53]志焉。聖人之所以過人以先知，先知必審徵表，無徵表而欲先知，堯、舜與眾人同等。[…] 無道至則以為神，以為幸。非神非幸，其數不得不然。
>
> The hearts of men are so hidden and veiled that they are difficult to perceive. They are so deep and abyssal that they are almost impossible to fathom. This is why sages devote themselves to observing intentions. If sages are exceptional it is because of their ability to foresee what the future brings. This power of prediction necessarily entails scrutiny of the revealing signs on the surface of things. Without these revealing surface signs, not even Yao or Shun would show superiority over ordinary men in predicting the future. […] People who are unable to acquire such skills attribute such preparedness to spirits or chance. Nonetheless, foresight depends on neither, but only on the use of these techniques.[54]

53. I amend this passage by introducing the term *guan* 觀 following the reading of Chen Qiyou.

54. *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiao shi* 呂氏春秋新校釋, ed. Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2002), 1422 ("Guan biao" 觀表, 20.8).

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Once again, the concern is to penetrate and shed light on the obscure inner worlds of men. According to this passage, however zealous men may be in trying to conceal their plans and desires in the most recondite corners of their hearts, the sage has the capacity to unveil them and know what they are in advance (*xian zhi* 先知), thanks to methods entailing careful study of the revealing signs (*zheng* 徵) which are only just discernible on the outside of things. Indeed, one of the most interesting elements of this passage is that it suggests—contrary to what many people might have thought—in a formula, which is not unlike the warnings in the chapter on spies in the *Sunzi*, that the ability of these wise individuals to forecast events and actions is not the result of having invoked the intervention of divine powers or of mere fortuity but, rather, of the skilled use of techniques of observation that might once again be linked with the evidential paradigm. As frequently happens in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, the structure of the argument in this chapter is also organized by means of general theoretical approaches that are announced at the start of the section and completed with references to a series of historical examples used to endorse the original postulations. The first illustrative episode concerns the case of Viscount Cheng of Hou 后成子 who, on a journey to Jin, stays in Wey where he is invited to a banquet. On his return from Jin, the Viscount decides not to stop in Wey and, when questioned about this by one of his companions, he describes some moments in the feast that led him to foresee the dangers faced by this territory and its impending ruin. The second story refers to the famous strategist Wu Qi 吳起, who is travelling to visit the court of the state of Wei 魏. Once reaching Anmen 岸門, Wu Qi stops to gaze on the Xihe 西河 region and weeps bitterly as he does so. When asked why by one of his attendants, he confesses that, while he was still serving the ruler of Wei, he could have used his abilities to bring about the defeat of Wei's most feared rival, Qin, by means of Xihe. He predicts that since the ruler has ignored his advice, these lands and the entire state of Wei will be conquered by the troops of Qin.[55] After referring to these two cases of sages with prodigious skills in anticipating future events thanks to their close attention to what appear to their companions as insignificant or insubstantial elements of present time, the section closes with the following passage, which deals with the procedures entailed in the physiognomy of horses.

55. This anecdote concerning Wu Qi is mentioned in another two sections of the *Lüshi chunqiu* with the significant titles "Farsightedness" ("Chang jian" 長見) and "Scrutiny of the Subtle" ("Shen xiao" 慎小). They are also concerned to describe how wise men can predict events on the basis of scrutinizing subtle signs: *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiao shi*, 612 ("Chang jian" 長見, 11.5) and 1690 ("Shen xiao" 慎小, 25.6).

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

古之善相馬者：寒風是相口齒，麻朝相頰，子女厲相目，衛忌相髭，許鄙相脈，投伐褐相胸脅，管青相唇胹，陳悲相股腳，秦牙相前，贊君相後。凡此十人者，皆天下之良工也，其所以相者不同，見馬之一徵也，而知節之高卑，足之滑易，材之堅脆，能之長短。非獨相馬然也，人亦有徵，事與國皆有徵。

In antiquity, the experts on the physiognomy of horses were Han Fengshi, who examined the teeth; Ma Chao, who examined the head; Zi Nüli, who examined the eyes; Wei Ji, who examined the mane; Xu Bi, who examined the rump; Tou Fahe, who examined the chest and flank; Guan Qing, who examined the muzzle and neck; Chen Pei, who examined the legs and hoofs; Qin Ya, who examined the front of the animal; and Zang Jun, who examined the rear. All ten of these men were the most skilled of their times and, while none of them coincided in the part examined in their physiognomic studies, all of them studied a single sign that revealed the horse's quality. From this they could know whether the horse had superior or inferior joints, whether it was clumsy or fleet of foot, whether it was of fragile or robust constitution, and whether its endurance was of long or short duration. Not only horses can be thus examined, but people, too, and affairs of state also have revelatory signs.[56]

According to this chapter of the *Lüshi chunqiu* there is a clear, natural continuity between the expertise of Viscount Cheng of Hou or of Wu Qi, who could see into the future of an individual or a state by means of reading subtle signs and that of the ten specialists in physiognomy, who were able to discern the quality of a horse by means of meticulous observation of some or other revealing feature. In both cases, the procedure is the same: success in prognostication depends on interpretation of revealing signs (*zheng* 徵).The term *zheng* covers several interlinked meanings which, in the last instance, go back to something akin to an ingredient that makes it possible to infer the real state of an entity. This is therefore a concept that is frequently used in the political literature to refer to precursory factors or symptoms that offering premonitory glimpses of a coming emergency or the ruin of a state. Although the number and nature of these factors can vary from one text to another, there are many theoretical writings that pose the existence of a series of signs that can be observed in order to diagnose the real state of the civilian and military institutions of a state and, by extension, what the future holds for it.[57] Aware of the imperative need to have prior knowledge of the enemy's real situation and plans, the military

56. *Lüshi chunqiu xin jiao shi*, 1423 ("Guan biao" 觀表, 20.8).

57. In this regard, see for example: *Guanzi jiao zhu*, 23.468; *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, ed. Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988), 10.194; *Han Feizi xin jiao zhu*, 15.300.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

literature uses the same concept when elaborating part of its theoretical framework.

As I have indicated above, the denouement of a battle must be accomplished in advance through exhaustive knowledge of the enemy's circumstances, which make it possible to know whether the military undertaking is viable and, if so, furnishing the keys for planning the perfect strategy in keeping with its particular characteristics. It is a matter of shedding light on the situation, of perceiving the initial moments of a process in such a way that its result becomes foreknowledge.[58] If the quotation from the *Han Feizi* that demonstrates Bian Que's talent in his early diagnosis of illness concludes with the statement that the sage is able to anticipate the flow of events (聖人蚤從事), in the terrain of military operations it is the commander who carries out this function. In some military writings, he is responsible for keen observation and prediction of the enemy's movements, to such an extent that if he is not present there is no way to fathom the adversary in advance (兵無主，則不蚤知敵).[59] It is not strange then to find that, within this shared cognitive scheme, the *Tai Gong Liu Tao* 太公六韜 contains a chapter with a title that might be translated as "Military Factors" or "Premonitory Signs of Military Affairs" ("Bing zheng" 兵徵). Like the other chapters of the work, this section, too, opens with a discussion about military science between King Wu and the Grand Duke Wang. It begins as follows:

> 武王問太公曰：吾欲未戰先知敵人之強弱，豫見勝負之徵，為之奈何？太公曰：勝負之徵，精神先見，明將察之，其敗在人。謹候敵人出入進退，察其動靜，言語祆祥，士卒所告。
>
> King Wu asked the Grand Duke, "Is there perchance any way of knowing in advance the strengths and weaknesses of an adversary before going into battle with him, or of discerning by means of revelatory signs who will win and who will lose?" The Grand Duke replied, "The revelatory signs of victory or defeat are manifested in subtle elements that can be perceived in advance. Thus, knowing that defeat is something that depends on men, the farsighted commander observes them with the closest attention. With great care, he observes their comings and goings, the advances and the retreats of his rival, monitoring him both when

58. See, for instance, *Tai gong Liu Tao jinzhu jinyi*, 13.85.

59. *Guanzi jiao zhu*, 17.317. Among the military manuscripts exhumed in Yinqueshan in 1972, under the heading of "Wang bing" 王兵, there is a very similar sentence: 無將不蚤知. *Yinqueshan Hanmu zhu jian*, 136. See also *Wei Liaozi jinzhu jinyi*, 18.204.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> he is in action and when he is at rest, examining the tone of his discourse and the words exchanged among his troops when orders are given from above."[60]

The question that King Wu puts to his adviser refers, once again, to the necessity of having advance knowledge of and, by this means, prognosticating (*xian zhi* 先知, *yu jian* 豫見) the adversary's military potential. In these opening lines, the premonitory signs constitute the nucleus of this tenacious desire to have foreknowledge of the real situation of the enemy and anticipate the outcome of the battle. The adviser's response extends and develops this recurring idea, namely that rigorous observation of some visible features and aspects of one's rival discloses patterns of behavior which, in turn, allow one to draw general conclusions regarding the enemy's strength. The reasoning in chapter II of the *Wuzi*, significantly titled "Evaluating the Enemy" ("Liao di" 料敵), is almost identical. Here, the Marquis Wu 武侯 says to the military strategist, "I should like to learn the inner reality of the enemy by observing his outer manifestations, to discover his rules of action by watching him while he is at rest and thus to obtain certain knowledge of the outcome of the conflict. Would you give me your opinion on the matter?"[61] The response of Wu Qi and the guidelines offered by the Grand Duke in order to satisfy the curiosity of their rulers coincide in the essential fact that one must examine certain external attributes and characteristics of the enemy with the utmost attention in order to gain access to his inner reality. Both texts offer numerous examples to illustrate the method: watching how, in certain circumstances, soldiers fall into formation or align themselves in rows; gestures, looks, and words exchanged by the troops before going into battle; the movements of flags and coats of arms in the theatre of operations, and so on, permit one to infer the disciplinary rigor on the enemy side. Then, in the last instance, through observation and interpretation of these subtle signs, one can anticipate the outcome of the battle. Nonetheless, in the *Liu Tao*, following the list of these foretokening factors which offer clues as to the real condition

60. *Tai gong Liu Tao jinzhu jinyi*, 29.135. The expression *yao xiang* 祆祥, literally meaning "good and bad omens," most probably refers here to optimistic or pessimistic rumours circulating among the soldiers, which make it possible to gauge their loyalty to their commanders and their mood. Another passage in the military literature, in this case from the *Wuzi*, uses the same expression to denote an idea of solidarity: *Wuzi jinzhu jinyi*, 2.80.

61. *Wuzi jinzhu jinyi*, 2.83.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the enemy one finds a description of a method of observation clearly linked with divinatory procedures. If the line of argument in the chapter from the *Lüshi chunqiu* devoted to observation of external signs consists of a description of the ability to foresee future events on the basis of subtle elements of the present time, after which it describes the extraordinary skills of several experts in the physiognomy of horses, something similar occurs in the chapter of the *Liu Tao* devoted to premonitory signs. In both texts, there is a natural, seamless shift, from explanation of a deductive method based on visual observation of certain signs, to description of what is, strictly speaking, a divinatory technique. Hence, in the latter work, immediately after specification of some of the external features that intimate the circumstances and potential of the rival army, one finds the following paragraph:

> 凡攻城圍邑，城之氣色如死灰，城可屠；城之氣出而北，城可克；城之氣出而西，城必降；城之氣出而南，城不可拔；城之氣出而東，城不可攻；城之氣出而復入，城主逃北；城之氣出而覆我軍之上，軍必病；城之氣出高而無所止，用日長久。凡攻城圍邑，過旬不雷不雨，必亟去之，城必有大輔。此所以知可攻而攻，不可攻而止。
>
> In general terms, when a walled city is attacked, one needs to know that if grey vapour, similar to the colour of dead ashes, rises from the walled enclosure, the city can be destroyed; if the vapour comes from the northern section, the city can be conquered; if it rises in the west, one can be sure of its capitulation; if it rises in the south, the city cannot be taken; if it rises in the east, the city should not be attacked. If the vapour rises and then falls back, it means that the city's ruler has fled; if it envelops our troops, it means they will be harmed. If the vapour rises high into the air without obstruction, it means that the siege will continue for a long time. Usually, when a walled city is under attack, if there is no thunder or rain for ten consecutive days, the siege must be abandoned because the city will receive considerable reinforcement. This is how one may know whether to proceed with an attack or, on the contrary, whether it should be stopped.[62]

The closing words of the Grand Duke's comments in this chapter of the *Liu Tao* certainly hark back to the divinatory technique known as "observation of the vapours" (*wang qi* 望氣), which is mentioned in

62. *Tai gong Liu Tao jinzhu jinyi*, 29.136.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

other military writings as well.[63] If, as I have previously noted, there is a smooth transition in the line of argument of this chapter from inference based on observation of tenuous indicators or premonitory signs to an explicit account of a divinatory method, it has happened because the affinity of these procedures is undoubtedly expressed as fruit of one and the same mentality that situates foresight acquired by means of meticulous probing of the Other at the heart of all mental operations. This repeated convergence of deductive procedures starting from an examination of external signs and prognostication techniques has what I believe is a highly significant precedent in two anecdotes from the *Zuo zhuan* wherein they appear almost consecutively and, moreover, within a military context. In two different situations, three observers, who are minutely examining tenuous signs and symptomatic details, issue a series of statements which, although they concur, are in fact the result of deductive operations based both on observation of perceptible manifestations and on divinatory practices. The first of these scenes refers to the battle of Pingyin 平陰 in 554 B.C.E., in which the troops of Qi 齊 faced the armies of Jin 晉.

> 齊侯登巫山以望晉師，晉人使司馬斥山澤之險，雖所不至，必旆而疏陳之，使乘車者，左實右偽，以旆先，輿曳柴而從之，齊侯見之，畏其眾也，乃脫歸，丙寅晦，齊師夜遁。師曠告晉侯曰，烏烏之聲樂，齊師其遁，邢伯告中行伯曰，有班馬之聲，齊師其遁，叔向告晉侯曰，城上有烏，齊師其遁。
>
> The ruler of Qi ascended Mount Wu in order to observe the troops of Jin. The men of Jin had sent the marshal to reconnoitre strategic places in the mountains and marshes. Even at the places that the army would not reach, he set up military formations with banners. He sent chariots, with real soldiers on the left and fake ones on the right, to move ahead with banners and carts dragging branches after them. The ruler of Qi, when seeing this, feared that the adversary's armies were numerous and he thus left his army and turned back. On

63. One passage from the *Mozi* offers a succinct description of the technique, stating that it is a means of clearly ascertaining who will be the victor and who the vanquished in combat, and who will enjoy good fortune and who will suffer misfortune (Sun Yirang, *Mozi jiangu*, 58.606). Moreover, in the section of the *Huainanzi* devoted to military matters, this divinatory technique is mentioned together with other mantic methods (*Huainanzi jiaoyi*, 15.1558). This prognostication method is also the object of a chapter from the *Yuejue shu*, entitled precisely "Records of Military Vapours" ("Ji jun qi" 記軍氣). It is highly likely that these procedures were included in a lost text titled Bie Chengzi 別成子and mentioned in the *Han shu* (*Han shu*, 30.1760). For a more detailed study of this divinatory technique, see the contributions by A. F. P. Hulsewé, "Watching the Vapours: An Ancient Chinese Technique of Prognostication," *Nachrichten* 125 (1979), 40–49, and by Michael Loewe, "The Oracles of the Clouds and the Winds," in his *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 191–213.

> the twenty-ninth day [of the tenth month], the last day of the moon, the Qi army decamped during the night. Music Master Kuang told the ruler of Jin: "The crows are cawing joyfully; the Qi army must have decamped." Xing Bo then told Zhonghang Bo: "There is a distant sound of the horses coming back; the Qi army must have decamped." Shu Xiang told the ruler of Jin: "There are crows on the city walls: the Qi army must have decamped."[64]

The marshal of Jin was able to exploit the faint-heartedness of the ruler of Qi who, according to the text, lacks courage and noble bearing (*wu yong* 無勇).[65] The strategist of Jin was able to intimidate the adversary thanks to a ruse which gave the false impression of a very large army. Believing that the enemy forces were greatly superior in number, the troops of Qi therefore decided to retreat. It is at this point in the story that the unanimous judgment of the three observers concerning the definitive withdrawal of the troops of Qi is introduced. The first pronouncement comes from Music Master Kuang, also known as Ziye 子野, a famous blind musician who was an adviser in the court of King Ping of Jin 晉平公 (r. 557–531 B.C.E). He was known for his prodigious musical sensibility and a great talent for politics,[66] as attested to in several ancient texts describing his feats and skills, which include predicting events by means of sounds and even his use of music to subjugate spirits.[67] Here, Music Master Kuang concludes that the enemy has fled after appraising the joyful sounds of birds. As noted above, the inner nature of an individual or the denouement of a future situation can be divined by means of highly skilled and attentive analysis of sounds.[68] Hence, the first prognostication is based on a

64. *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, 3.1038 ("Xiang gong" 襄公 18.3). See also Wai-yee Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 175.

65. *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, 3.1037 ("Xiang gong" 18.3).

66. On the political ideas and activities of Music Master Kuang, see Yuri Pines, *Foundations of Confucian Thought. Intellectual Life in the Chunqiu Period, 722–453 B.C.E.* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 139–46.

67. See, for instance, *Guo yu*, 10.460–61 ("Jin yu ba" 晉語八 7); *Han Feizi xin jiao zhu*, 10.205–7; *Huainanzi jiaoyi*, 11.1182. Then again, it should also be noted that the *Han shu* includes the title of a work related to Music Master Kuang in eight books, in addition to other works concerning divinatory techniques applied in the military sphere: *Han shu*, 30.1760.

68. As is repeatedly sustained in a considerable part of early China's political and philosophical literature, music and sounds can come to reveal, at least to somebody with a trained and sensitive ear, the inner qualities of individuals playing, of animals, and even of their inner state. On the capacity of sages for deciphering the inner state of someone wailing by contrasting it with the sounds of birds, see *Kongzi jiayu shu zheng* 孔子家語疏証, ed. Chen Shike 陳士珂 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1980), 5.125.

procedure linked with certain predictive or divinatory qualities. The second observer, an official of Jin, comes to the same conclusion, once again thanks to his sharp, fine-tuned hearing, this time by discerning the distant sounds of horses and, although this may seem to be an inference based on a sensory perception, it is also true that the allusion to sounds of horses moving away from the battlefield takes one to a passage of the *Zhou Yi* where, in glosses on the hexagram Zhun 屯 ("Initial Difficulties"), it is repeatedly reported: "Chariots and horses are moving away" (乘馬班如).[69] Finally, the third observer, Shu Xian, who is also given the name of Yangshe Xi 羊舌肸, a senior official of great political influence in Jin, confirms the flight of the enemy, which he deduces by means of attentive observation of a revealing sign: the crows perched on the walls of Pingyin, a clear indication that the city has been deserted. This final mental operation might well be an example of inference through scrutiny of a perceptible sign or manifestation since, in another passage from the *Zuo zhuan*, which refers to a military campaign, the observers of Zheng 鄭 assert that the troops of Chu 楚 have retreated after seeing crows in the site of the enemy camp[70] and, similarly, a passage from the *Sunzi*, which lists a series of revelatory signs that can be used in order to ascertain the real state of the battle, also indicates that "where birds are perched it is empty [i.e. there are no enemies]" (鳥集者，虛也).[71]

Further on in the same section, one finds the second scene where many of the elements stressed above are reiterated. After giving a detailed account of the military incursion of the troops of Chu into the territory of the state of Zheng, an unsuccessful siege of the capital for several days and the failed assault in which a good number of soldiers are lost because of cold and rain during the retreat, the text recounts the responses of three observers from Jin who, on hearing the news of the invasion plans of Chu, are in agreement when they announce that Chu represents no threat to their interests. As in the previous anecdote, the consensus of their threefold prediction is, in fact, the result of different mental operations.

晉人聞有楚師，師曠曰，不害，吾驟歌北風，又歌南風，南風不競，多死聲，楚必無功，董叔曰，天道多在西北，南師不時，必無功，叔向曰，在其君之德也。

After the news concerning the manoeuvres of Chu reached Jin, Music Master Kuang said, "They cannot harm us. I have often interpreted the airs from the north and the airs from the south and the latter airs lack

69. *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 135–37.
70. *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, 1.242 ("Zhuang gong" 莊公 28.3).
71. *Shi yi jia zhu Sunzi jiao li*, 9.198.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

vigour for they are full of moribund sounds. Chu will certainly not succeed." Dong Shu added, "The way of heaven is in the northwest. This is not a propitious moment for armies from the south. Hence [Chu] will fail." Then Shu Xiang exclaimed, "[Success] lies with the virtue of the sovereign."[72]

The weakness and military ineffectiveness of Chu are predicted three times by these three observers who, in two cases, coincide with the characters who appear in the previous scene but now using different techniques. The first prognostication, once again uttered by Music Master Kuang, is made on the basis of melodies and songs characteristic of the north in comparison with those from the south, which is precisely where Chu is located. It is therefore based on application of a divinatory technique recorded in many ancient texts, this consisting of careful examination of modulations and sounds.[73] The second prediction would seem to be related—although not very explicitly—to observation of the firmament, a divinatory procedure examining the correspondence of heavenly bodies and the calendar, which was often used in military contexts.[74] Finally, the third forecast results from an inference drawn from close observation of a revelatory sign, namely the virtue of the ruler of Chu.[75] Consequently, as in the case of the battle of Pingyin, the three prognostications offered by the three observers are based on different but converging procedures entailing both observation of symptoms or divinatory factors such as the use of predictive techniques. At least for the personalities cited in these scenes and their authors, there is no rupture. As shown above in the analysis of passages from the *Lüshi chunqiu* and the *Liu tao*, the coming together of these mental operations, which are of a different nature for the modern interpreter although they start out from observation of signs and signals, reflects once again

72. *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, 3.1043 ("Xiang gong" 18.4).

73. One of the most celebrated cases apropos the revealing capacity of music and sounds is the anecdote from the *Zuo zhuan* concerning the ceremonial visit of Lord Zha 公子札 of Wu to the Lord Xiang 襄公 of Lu in 543 B.C.E. and the assessment by the former of the moral climate, and thus of the future in all of the states after carefully listening to their different musical styles and airs: Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, 3.1161–66 ("Xiang gong" 29.13). Confined to the military domain, a passage from the *Zhouli* also records the resort to analysis of sounds from the battlefield in order to divine whether the denouement will be favorable or otherwise: *Zhouli zhengyi*, 45.1852. On this issue, see also footnote 26 above.

74. For a study of astronomical divinatory procedures in military contexts in the *Zuo zhuan* as well as in other ancient written sources, see David Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China. Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 279–94.

75. It should be recalled that scrutiny or observation of virtue (*de* 德) is also one of the eight factors or revelatory signs (*zheng* 徵) mentioned in the *Liu tao* as being used to discover the real situation of the enemy: *Tai gong Liu Tao jinzhu jinyi*, 20.112.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the extent to which there is a seamless, contradiction-free transition between these two consecutive and matching scenes from the *Zuo zhuan*.

The Clues Game: Traces and Stratagems

The scene concerning the battle of Pingyin is particularly valuable and illustrative not only because, as just shown, it offers a paradigmatic case concerning this natural integration of different procedures in a military context but, also and more generally, it exemplifies the crucial role of examination and evaluation of signs in the outcome of a battle. The unanimous conclusions of the three observers concerning the retreat of Qi is preceded by the trick of creating a false impression devised by the Marshal of Jin who uses deceptive visual elements which, optimally exploiting the psychological condition of the enemy, are interpreted as genuine. From this standpoint, the lesson of the battle is evident: victory on the battlefield depends to a great extent on the ability to understand correctly the external signs that are presented to the senses, thus anticipating the plans and manoeuvres of the adversary. The good commander is the one who can distinguish true clues from false ones, as well as being able, by means of deceit and illusory devices, to impose on the enemy an impression that belies the reality.

Indeed, one of the main problems affecting the efficacy of the penetrating, foreseeing gaze I have just described arises from the fact that—unlike what occurs with the examination of inert objects such as stones, swords, vapors or even living but passive beings like dogs or horses—humans are able to deceive and dissemble. As I have shown, in both ritualistic and divinatory contexts, there is a tendency to establish a direct correlation between internality and externality, thus attempting to accede to a transparent world in which the inner quality and even the future of individuals is revealed by the appropriate interpretation of somatic or external signs. It is also true, however, that it cannot completely rule out the suspicion that some of these activities and results might not be wholly genuine. Since demeanor and bodily gestures can be imitated and faked, there are no guarantees or certainties as to the sincerity of these external expressions and, accordingly, misgivings about false appearances cannot be dismissed. Sincerity (*cheng* 誠), frequently the necessary condition for this strict equating of the outer packaging and the inner hidden essence, is always and inevitably impossible to demonstrate.[76]

76. See, for instance, *Da Dai Liji jiegu* 大戴禮記解詁, ed. Wang Pinzhen 王聘珍 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), 72.190; *Huainanzi jiaoyi*, 6.632; and also *Yi Zhoushu hui jiao ji zhu* 逸周書彙校集注, ed. Huang Huaixin 黃懷信 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2007), 58.774–75.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Bodily attitudes can always be feigned but in a situation of war, where resorting to wiles and ruses is the norm, doubts about the veracity of observable revelatory signs in the adversary are much more numerous and serious. Indeed, detached from commitment to any moral order, the lie is one of the pillars of military activity. This idea is very plainly expressed in the famous formula from the *Sunzi*: "War is the art of deception" (兵者，詭道也).[77] Bluffing and dissembling play crucial roles, not only in blocking the enemy's access to one's reality but also in making sure that his plans and manoeuvres will not succeed. The strategist must therefore be a master of deceit, always presenting himself as different from what he really is, adopting the guise of misleading appearances, seeking to dupe the enemy and inveigling him with the seductive power of his semblances to fall into the trap he has set. Deception, referred to in the above-cited passage from the *Sunzi*, is related with a consistent, recurrent set of notions like trickery (*zha* 詐) or artifice (*wei* 偽), elements that are part and parcel of the irregular side of the art of war, one of its exceptional and unpredictable dimensions (*qi* 奇) which the commander is skilled in deploying in order to ensure a decisive victory. Driven by this logic of duplicity and falsification, the military operation depends in good measure for its success on the cunning of the strategist in wielding his lures and trickery to befuddle the enemy.

This desire to decipher the reality of other beings through careful scrutiny of their external appearance, the need to be able to subvert the normal course of time so as to foresee events, and the dialectical relationship between the will to know and the obligation to hide oneself behind dissemblance and subterfuge in the terrain of military science converge in a particularly eloquent fashion in the biographical section concerning Sun Bin 孫臏 recorded in the *Shi ji*.[78] As happens with other illustrious figures sketched by Sima Qian, this account is not so much concerned to relate the whole life story and military career of Sun Bin (and, in fact, the episode offers very few strictly biographical details, barely mentions his training, omits martial exploits and says nothing about the end of his life) as to condense a few of the masterly lines from the strategic ideas that are attributed to him into a single significant anecdote that would then function as a kind of leitmotif.[79] As

77. *Shi yi jia zhu Sunzi jiao li*, 1.12. In the "Debating the Military" ("Yi bing" 議兵) chapter of the *Xunzi* the art of warfare is also characterized as a technique explicitly linked to the use of deception: *Xunzi jijie*, 15.266.

78. *Shi ji*, 65.2162–65.

79. See, in this regard, Grant Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo. Sima Qian's Conquest of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 50–55; Jean Levi, *La Chine romanesque. Fictions d'Orient et d'Occident* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), 155–57; and also Albert Galvany, "Philosophy, Biography, and Anecdote: On the Portrait of Sun Wu," *Philosophy East & West* 61.4 (2011): 630–46.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

shown below, besides contributing other valuable elements from the historical standpoint, the episode about Sun Bin could be taken as a summing-up of all my foregoing arguments: the interweaving of associations between the latent and manifest or between the visible and the invisible; the affinity between observation and prediction; the ability of anticipating events through correct interpretation of signs which, in the military domain, might just as easily be real or simulated. The biographical sketch of Sun Bin in the *Shi ji* opens with the following lines:

> 孫武既死，后百餘歲有孫臏。臏生阿鄄之閒，臏亦孫武之後世子孫也。孫臏嘗與龐涓俱學兵法。龐涓既事魏，得為惠王將軍，而自以為能不及孫臏，乃陰使召孫臏。臏至，龐涓恐其賢於己，疾之，則以法刑斷其兩足而黥之，欲隱勿見。齊使者如梁，孫臏以刑徒陰見，說齊使。齊使以為奇，竊載與之齊。齊將田忌善而客待之。
>
> A hundred years after the death of Sun Wu, Sun Bin appeared. [Sun] Bin, a direct descendant of Sun Wu, was born between the regions of A and Zhuan [in the state of Qi] and was trained in military methods together with Pang Juan. The latter was serving the state of Wei, where he had been given the rank of general in the armies of King Hui. Aware that his skills were no match for those of Sun Bin, Pang Juan summoned him to a secret audience. When Sun Bin arrived, Pang Juan, prey to envy and fear that he would eclipse him, plotted against him and managed to get him condemned to having both feet amputated and his face tattooed. This made him an outcast and, as such, unable to attend the audience [with the king]. The state of Qi then sent an emissary to [Da] Liang [the capital of Wei]. Since he had been mutilated, Sun Bin had to remain concealed when he attended the interview with him but, even so, managed to persuade him. The emissary understood that this was an exceptional man and took him back to Qi hidden in his carriage. The Qi general, Tian Ji, approved of this and agreed to welcome him as a guest of honour.[80]

While succinct, the first part of the biographical note concerning Sun Bin clearly reveals the plot hatched against him by his former peer Pang Juan. Aware that the presence of Sun Bin in Qi represents, at least potentially, a threat to his interests because his employment by the ruler of the enemy state gives that state a major military advantage, Pang Juan decides to arrange a meeting with Sun Bin, perhaps to offer his support or promising an interview with the ruler of Wei that would lead to his promotion. Furthermore, Pang Juan insists on secrecy so as not to arouse the suspicions of Qi which, alerted by such an occurrence,

80. *Shi ji*, 65.2162.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

might retain him in its territory so as to make sure that his talents could not be used by the enemy. Nevertheless, once Sun Bin is in Wei, Pang Juan, conscious of the superiority of his skills (自以為能不及孫臏) in military science, and fearing that he will be eclipsed or even supplanted as commander of the armies if his old rival has an audience with the monarch of Wei, seeks to eliminate the danger by scheming to submit him to corporal punishment that will make him unfit for any public office or being received in the court. Pang Juan's plot aims to put an end to Sun Bin's services to the enemy state while also ensuring that his presence in Wei would not pose a threat to his own career in that state. Otherwise, the story of Sun Bin and Pang Juan is similar to other biographies in the *Shi ji* of illustrious figures in the political life of the Warring States period. Some of the components and motifs are the same although there are a few variations and differences in construction and narrative function. One example is the biography of Zhang Yi 張儀. In this account, too, although it is briefer, one finds the same sequence of humiliation. While in the service of the court of Chu 楚, Zhang Yi is accused of stealing a precious jade from the ruler and, as a result, is condemned to corporal punishment in the form of a beating. Then, his old fellow student Su Qin 蘇秦, who occupies an important position in Zhao 趙 and who also knows that Zhang Yi is superior (自以不及張儀), manages to get him appointed as an official so that, once he is assured of Zhang Yi's gratitude and trust, he will be able to use him in a complicated diplomatic manoeuvre against Qin.[81]

A faithful reflection of the competitive context of political life in the Warring States period and brimming with plots, intrigues, and betrayal, the story of Sun Bin establishes a continuous interplay between visible and invisible signs, between the underhand and the evident. Hence, Pang Juan not only conspires to prevent the encounter between the

81. *Shi ji*, 70.2279–83. One finds elements of this story in the biographical note pertaining to Fan Sui 范睢 in the *Shi ji*, in which he is condemned to corporal punishment and other humiliations following a false accusation and, like Sun Bin, he manages to save his life only because he is able to conceal himself and flee to take refuge in a clandestine existence: *Shi ji*, 79.2401–2. Finally, Pang Juan's plot against Sun Bin is also similar to the famous manoeuvre, also described in Sima Qian's work (*Shi ji*, 58.2155), whereby Li Si 李斯 plots against his former classmate Han Fei 韓非 and causes his death. Sima Qian presents the theme of humiliation and destruction of bodily integrity in its different variants, including mutilation, as a key and recurrent *topos*. The story of the ridiculed hero whose bodily stigma ends up becoming a sign of choice is most probably a reference to the tragedy of Sima Qian himself. As I shall show below, Sun Bin's corporal punishment, which completely disqualifies him as a public figure, also distinguishes him as an exceptional individual. In the case of Sima Qian, at least, corporal punishment, far from forging a definitive, implacable tragic destiny, ends up by favoring other alternatives.

ruler of Wei and Sun Bin but also to disqualify his rival permanently by condemning him to total invisibility (*wu jian* 勿見) by means of a plot that, paradoxically, only makes him more prominent and visible. The corporal punishment which the scheming Pang Juan manages to inflict on Sun Bin automatically entails radical exclusion. As if they were not punishment enough, mutilations such as facial tattoos or, still worse, amputation of the feet, also had dreadful social consequences in ancient China. People bearing the marks of this bodily disfigurement were shunned and not allowed to take part in ritual activities, which meant that they were debarred from public life and, of course, this social exclusion was much worse when the mutilation was the stigma of punishment.[82] From this standpoint, Pang Juan's scheming against Sun Bin is based on an accepted principle of the indissoluble relationship between the internal and external dimensions of the individual whereby total transparency is achieved through a tortured body. Mutilation of the body may be regarded as a kind of radical semiotic act, since the mutilated person is exposed and condemned to general prejudice without anyone requiring special physiognomic skills because his stigmatized body yields a clear reading. It speaks for him and says everything. Sun Bin's probable yearning to shine, to achieve recognition by showing off his talents before the monarch, is thwarted by Pang Juan's machinations, which condemn him not only to ostracism but the need to take refuge in anonymity and to stay hidden. The corporal punishment marks his destiny, as can be seen in his very name,[83] and ensures that he is transformed into a being that must always be

82. For a more exhaustive study of the consequences of this kind of corporal punishment in ancient China, see Karen Turner, "The Criminal Body and the Body Politic: Punishments in Early Imperial China," *Cultural Dynamics* 11.2 (1999), 237–54; and also Albert Galvany, "Debates on Mutilation: Bodily Preservation and Ideology in Early China," *Asiatische Studien* 63.1 (2009), 67–91.

83. The importance of this marking of the body is reflected in the very identity of the person, the name by which he is known. The term *bin* 臏 refers to the knee bone and, by extension, to the cutting out of that bone. It was common practice at the time to refer to people by names, frequently posthumous ones, which may be understood as evocative epithets expressing a judgment on an individual's behaviour or features. On this matter, see the contributions by Zhou Fagao 周法高, *Zhou Qin mingzi jiegu huishi* 周秦名字解詁彙 (Taibei: Zhonghua congshu, 1958); Jens O. Petersen, "What's in a Name? On the Sources concerning Sun Wu," *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 5.1 (1992), 1–31; Paul R. Goldin, "Personal Names in Early China: A Research Note," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120.1 (2000), 77–81; and Wolfgang Behr, "What's in a Name, Again? Über Schall und Rauch in der antikchinesischen Personennamengebung," in *Dem Text ein Freund. Erkundungen des chinesischen Altertums Robert H. Gassmann gewidmet*, ed. R. Altenburger, M. Lehnert, and A. Riemenschnitter (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 15–38.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hidden away and invisible (which, in a certain sense, ends up being a major factor in his subsequent success and also in making revenge possible). He is therefore obliged to speak with the envoy from Qi from behind a screen, taking refuge from other people's gazes and, eventually, even when he impresses the king's representative, he is furtively borne off to Qi hidden in a carriage. Furthermore, later in the story, once he has re-established his reputation and ascended the social scale to occupy the position of the king's adviser, his physical condition prevents him not only from accepting the rank of commander of the army when it is offered because it is unseemly for a mutilated person (刑餘之人不可) to take up such an appointment, but he must also hide away inside a carriage so that, seated therein and discretely out of sight, he can decide the plans and strategies of the armies (居輜車中，坐為計謀).[84] Nevertheless, if Sun Bin manages to redress the fatality of his destiny, it is precisely due to an act of unveiling and his privileged knowledge of the inner condition of a being by way of interpreting its bodily form. Taking a leap in time, the account of Sun Bin's feats continues:

> 忌數與齊諸公子馳逐重射。孫子見其馬足不甚相遠，馬有上、中、下、輩。於是孫子謂田忌曰："君弟重射，臣能令君勝。"田忌信然之，與王及諸公子逐射千金。及臨質，孫子曰："今以君之下駟與彼上駟，取君上駟與彼中駟，取君中駟與彼下駟。"既馳三輩畢，而田忌一不勝而再勝，卒得王千金。於是忌進孫子於威王。威王問兵法，遂以為師。
>
> [Tian] Ji enjoyed betting and frequently gambled on chariot races with other nobles of Qi. Sunzi [Bin] observed the hoofs of [Tian Ji's] horses and saw that [in terms of quality] they were not very different [from those belonging to the ruler]. He classified the horses in the arena into groups of excellent, average and inferior. Sunzi [Bin] therefore said to Tian Ji, "If you bet against the prince's horses I'll make sure you win." Tian Ji trusted his judgement and, with the ruler and the nobles, bet a thousand gold coins. Having inspected the quality [of the horses], Sun Bin told him, "Race the inferior set of your horses against the rival's best set, your best set against the rival's average set and, finally, your average set against the rival's inferior set." After the three sets of horses had competed, Tian Ji had lost only one race and won the rest, which meant he won a thousand gold coins for the king. By way of rewarding him, Tian Ji introduced Sunzi [Bin] to King Wei, who then questioned him about military science and, having done so, made him his adviser.[85]

84. *Shi ji*, 65.2163.
85. *Shi ji*, 65.2162–63.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The interpretation I suggest for this passage differs in some points from the more conventional exegesis. The traditional type of commentary understands that in the words that I have opted to translate as "observed the hoofs of the horses" (見其馬足), the term *zu* 足, which means foot or hoof, refers to the capacity (*neng* 能) of horses;[86] while the expression that I have translated as "having inspected the quality [of the horses]" (及臨質) would in fact refer to the moment immediately preceding the start of the race.[87] However, in my view, these interpretations are not convincing. The reading of the first phrase in keeping with these commentaries is forced when, taken literally, the meaning of the expression presents no difficulty and requires no explanation. It is evident that, in order to determine the capacity and strength of the horses, one must examine their hoofs, an essential part of their anatomy.[88] As for the second phrase, I am also inclined to the more literal sense or that which refers to the visual inspection of the substance or inner nature of the horses and, in fact, in a passage from the *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 this selfsame verbal expression (及臨) is used with regard to the action of examining and evaluating an object without this seeming to designate the moment prior to an action.[89] Likewise, it should also be pointed out that the notion of substance (*zhi* 質) in this passage appears in other ancient written sources linked with techniques and procedures, probably physiognomic, for classifying horses.[90]

Naturally, Sun Bin draws on an astute combination of skills when the horses are about to race and, from this standpoint, what makes him victorious is, more than anything else, the art of classifying the animals and reorganizing the race in accordance with logical calculation. One should recall, however, that the success of such calculation resides, first and foremost, in the ability to decipher correctly the physical features of the horses, and to divine through reading external somatic signs, their

86. This would also seem to be the reading adopted in the English version edited by William H. Nienhauser, in which the passage is translated as "[Sun Bin] noticed that the horses' speed was not much different": *The Grand Scribe's Records*, ed. W. H. Nienhauser, Volume 7 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 39.

87. See Zhang Dake 張大可, *Shi ji quanti xinzhu* 史記全體新注 (Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe, 1990), 1337, footnote 3; and also Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川龜太郎, *Shiki kaichu kōshō* 史記會注考證 (Tokyo: Tōyō bunka gakuin, 1932–34), 3304.

88. In this case, Zhang Dake (*Shi ji quanti xinzhu*, 1336 footnote 14) reads the passage in the same way and also interprets the term *zu* as referring to the strength of the hoofs of the horses (馬的腳力).

89. *Fengsu tongyi xiaozhu* 風俗通義校注, ed. Wang Liqi 王力器 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981), 2.128.

90. The *Zhouli*, for instance, mentions an "assessor of horses" (*ma zhi* 馬質): *Zhouli zhengyi*, 57.2374.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

different inner qualities of strength and endurance.[91] It is thus significant that Sun Bin's ascent is due, at least initially, not to military exploits or to a display of knowledge linked with strategic skills but rather to simple prediction. His reinstatement, recovery of his honor, and recognition of his extraordinary aptitudes in the art of war are due, in fact, to a feat that is not unlike those of other famous experts in the physiognomy of horses, for example the above-mentioned Bo Le or Chen Pei. By referring to the skills attributed to Sun Bin in applying physiognomic procedures in order to perceive the qualities of beings, this part of the story endorses the relevance of observation in the unveiling of inner qualities and in anticipating future events. It also implicitly confirms the connection between foreseeing what is to come and strategic prowess. This latter relationship is further elucidated at another point in the chronicle.

The years have gone by and Sun Bin's military career has been remarkably successful, for example with the victory over the armies of Wei in the famous battle of Guiling 桂陵.[92] In the year 353 B.C.E. and with Sun Bin directing the military operations from inside a chariot, General Tian Ji routed the troops of Wei in the locality of Guiling. A year before that, the rulers of Wei had launched a military operation against Zhao by attacking its capital Handan 邯鄲. When, after a year of gruelling combat and under siege by the best troops of Wei, the city was about to fall, the rulers of Qi decided that this was a good time to provide the support that Zhao had often pleaded for.[93] According to the account in the *Shi ji*, the initial idea of Tian Ji, Qi's general, was to go to Handan to save the city from being conquered by Wei. However, Sun Bi came up with a better alternative: taking advantage of the fact that most of Wei's troops were in Handan, he suggested that they should attack Daliang 大梁, the capital of Wei. The

91. The fact that this part of the anecdote is situated in the context of a wager supports the hypothesis that Sun Bin's scrutiny of the horses was physiognomic or morphological since there are numerous examples in the ancient literature testifying to the fact that games and wagers were linked with a range of divinatory practices. On this issue see, for instance, Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu xu kao*, 20–27.

92. *Shi ji*, 65.2163. For a complete description of the battle, including an explanation of what led up to it, a tactical analysis, and the geopolitical consequences of the event, see Ralph D. Sawyer, *Sun Pin. Military Methods of the Art of War* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1999), 31–41. The fame of this battle, won thanks to the strategic skills of Sun Bin, is reflected in the saying, "Besiege Wei to save Zhao" (*wei Wei jiu Zhao* 圍魏救趙), which appears and is often cited in subsequent works.

93. Although, with some variations and main characters whose names differ from those mentioned in the *Shi ji*, the *Zhanguo ce* has a passage that describes a debate which seems to have taken place in the court of Qi between those in favor of coming to the aid of Zhao and those opposing the plan, the latter of whom recommended leaving Zhao to its fate of being conquered by Wei. See *Zhanguo ce jian zheng*, 8.504–5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

armies of Wei, under the command of Pang Juan, would then be obliged to leave the siege and hasten to rescue their capital. At one fell swoop, Zhao would be liberated and Qi would also have a decisive advantage in the battle against the troops of Wei, now exhausted after a long year's combat and the enormous effort of the headlong return to save their capital. Tian Ji decided to follow Sun Bi's strategy and inflicted a crushing defeat on the troops of Wei in the battle of Guiling.

However, among the manuscripts found in 1972 in the archaeological site at Yinqueshan 銀雀山, and deemed to be part of the lost work attributed to Sun Bin, were a series of bamboo slips titled "The Capture of Pang Juan" ("Qin Pang Juan" 擒龐涓). These provide further information about Sun Bin's strategic manoeuvres which won the battle.[94] Judging by what emerges from this material, Sun Bin's strategy would have been rather more complex and sophisticated that the version offered in the *Shi ji*.[95] Given Wei's siege of Handan, Sun Bin, in this account, decides to sacrifice some units of his side's army by ordering that they should be sent into battle against the city of Pingling 平陵, which is located in the southeast of the territory of Wei and very well defended. As envisaged, the units of Qi are easily defeated by the regiments defending the city, after which Sun Bin feigns a speedy and predictable counter-attack in which he once again orders that several lightly-armed units should be sent to attack Daliang, the capital of Wei, in order to enrage Pang Juan and, by dividing up his forces, get him to believe that his army is not very numerous (以怒其氣，分卒而從之，示之寡).[96] Convinced that this is a desperate, inept manoeuvre, trusting in the superiority of his forces, encouraged by Qi's recent defeat in Pingling, and no doubt keen to appear before his ruler as the outright victor, Pang Juan immediately sends a good part of his armies back to his own city to crush the enemy. Sun Bin anticipates the route Pang Juan chooses and sends the greater part of his troops to lie in wait for his army at some point on the frontier between Qi and Wei. Well situated and rested, they wait for Pang Juan's troops in

94. See *Sun Bin bingfa jiaoli* 孫臏兵法校理, ed. Zhang Yunze 張震澤 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1984), 1–15.

95. The manoeuvre consisting in neutralizing the offensive launched by one state against the capital of another by means of an attack on the territory of the former by a third state coming to the rescue of the latter has been described several times in the *Zuo zhuan*. According to this source, in the year 623 B.C.E., the troops of Chu laid siege to the capital of the state of Jiang. An army from Jin then invaded the capital of Chu and thus liberated Jiang (*Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, 2.531 ["Wen gong" 3.6]). Thanks to Sun Bin's misleading signs, it is likely that Pang Juan would have believed that the armies of Qi planned to repeat this hoary old stratagem.

96. Zhang Yunze, *Sun Bin bingfa jiaoli*, 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Guiling, favorable ground for them, which they also have time to reconnoitre. This gives them sufficient advantage to defeat the enemy. More than a decade after this first military victory over Wei, in 341 B.C.E., Sun Bin finally has the opportunity to wreak definitive vengeance on Pang Juan who, in the account provided by the Yinqueshan material, manages to survive the battle of Guiling and make his escape. The closing section of the anecdote in the *Shi ji*, describing the battle of Maling 馬陵, has the following to say:

后十三歲，魏與趙攻韓，韓告急於齊。齊使田忌將而往，直走大梁。魏將龐涓聞之，去韓而歸，齊軍既已過而西矣。孫子謂田忌曰：“彼三晉之兵素悍勇而輕齊，齊號為怯，善戰者因其勢而利導之。兵法，百里而趣利者蹶上將，五十里而趣利者軍半至。使齊軍入魏地為十萬灶，明日為五萬灶，又明日為三萬灶。”龐涓行三日，大喜，曰：“我固知齊軍怯，入吾地三日，士卒亡者過半矣。”乃棄其步軍，與其輕銳倍日并行逐之。孫子度其行，暮當至馬陵。馬陵道陝，而旁多阻隘，可伏兵，乃斫大樹白而書之曰“龐涓死于此樹之下”。於是令齊軍善射者萬弩，夾道而伏，期曰“暮見火舉而俱發”。龐涓果夜至斫木下，見白書，乃鉆火燭之。讀其書未畢，齊軍萬弩俱發，魏軍大亂相失。龐涓自知智窮兵敗，乃自剄，曰：“遂成豎子之名！”齊因乘勝盡破其軍，虜魏太子申以歸。孫臏以此名顯天下，世傳其兵法。

Thirteen years later, the states of Wei and Zhao, launched a joint offensive against Han, which then informed Qi of its desperate plight whereupon the government of Qi decided to send its troops, under the command of Tian Ji, in a direct attack against Daliang. When the general Pang Juan learned of this, he immediately abandoned his siege of Han and decided to return to his city. The armies of Qi avoided him and headed for the west. Sun Bin said to Tian Ji, “The soldiers of the three states coming from the break-up of Jin [Han, Wei y Zhao] are simple, impetuous and reckless and they underestimate the potential of Qi because they believe our state is cowardly. He who is skilled in the military arts adapts to the strategic potential of the enemy and turns it to his own advantage. The science of war decrees that he who covers a hundred miles in quest of benefits will pay with the fall of his commanders, and he who covers fifty miles in quest of benefits will attain his goal but with only half his troops.[97] Once our troops have crossed the frontier of Wei, I want you to order them to light a hundred thousand fires and, on the second day, fifty thousand, while on the third day they should only light thirty thousand.” After three days’ march Pang Juan exultantly exclaimed. “Now I have proof that the armies of Qi are cowards. They have been in our territory only three days and already they have lost more than half their officers and

97. This is, presumably, a quote from the military writings attributed to his ancestor Sun Wu, which contain a very similar passage: *Shi yi jia zhu Sunzi jiao li*, 7.137–38.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

soldiers." He therefore left the main body of his infantry and set out with just a few elite units to pursue the troops of Qi, covering in only one day a distance that normally took two. Sun Bin calculated the distances and concluded that Pang Juan would arrive in Maling by nightfall. The route to Maling was narrow, with many obstacles and ravines where hidden soldiers might be posted and Sun Bin carved out in the bark of a big tree in the vicinity a space where he inscribed, "Pang Juan died at the foot of this great tree". He then ordered ten thousand crossbowmen, the most able in the regiments of Qi, to take up position on the route to Maling and to remain in hiding, instructing them as follows: "At dusk, when you see a torch flare, you should all start firing your arrows." At dusk Pang Juan came to the place where the great tree had been marked and, glimpsing the inscription, lit a torch. He had not yet finished reading it when the ten thousand crossbowmen shot their arrows, all together. The bewildered soldiers of Wei succumbed to chaos. Knowing that his judgement was now discredited and that his armies would be defeated, Pang Juan cut his own throat after exclaiming, "I have contributed towards the fame of this infamous man."[98] The army of Qi took advantage of this victory to inflict a crushing defeat on the regiments of Wei and returned to their state with Prince Shen of Wei as their prisoner.[99] After these events, the name of Sun Bin was known throughout the world and his military science was handed down from one generation to the next.[100]

Allied with their former victim Zhao, the leaders of Wei continue with their aggressive policy of expansion and this time decide to attack the state of Han. In response to Han's request for help and, once again, after some discussion in the court, which is described in the *Zhanguo ce*, the ruler of Qi resolves to intervene and foil Wei's offensive.[101] In appearance at least, Qi's deterrent strategy depends once again on the typical resort of attacking the capital of Wei so that its troops would then be obliged to stop their siege against the capital of Han. Yet, behind this apparently straightforward manoeuvre, Sun Bin is hatching a more subtle plot in order to deceive his enemy. Instead of going ahead with the attack on Daliang, the armies commanded by Tian Ji and under the tactical guidance of Sun Bin pretend to be fleeing to the northwest. The aim of this movement is to pander to the pride of the enemy and turn to their own advantage his wish to benefit from this unexpected

98. According to the passage from the *Zhanguo ce*, general Pang Juan was captured alive in the battle of Maling: *Zhanguo ce jian zheng*, 23.1337.

99. A passage in the *Zhanguo ce* once again gives an alternative version in which Prince Shen dies in the battle: *Zhanguo ce jian zheng*, 8.508.

100. *Shi ji*, 65.2164–65.

101. *Zhanguo ce jian zheng*, 8.508.

https://doi.org/10.1017/eac.2015.1 Published online by Cambridge University Press

situation. Knowing that the troops of Wei believe that the armies of Qi are faint-hearted, Sun Bin beguiles them into assuming that his troops are fleeing after hearing news of the imminent arrival of the army commanded by Pang Juan. In all likelihood, rather than keeping his garrisons in the capital, the temptation of an easy victory over an enemy in flight persuades the ruler of Wei to send his soldiers, under the command of his inexperienced heir, Prince Shen 太子申, to capture Qi. With the aim of coaxing him into rash decisions and, by extension, making sure that Pang Juan will be blamed, Sun Bin lays a trail of false clues that only confirm the preconceived views of his adversary. Pang Juan falls into the trap set for him by Sun Bin because is fooled by an interpretation of Sun Bin's trail of false external signs that seems to confirm his opinion as to the morale of the troops of Qi. As I have noted above, if the punishment inflicted on Sun Bin due to Pang Juan's plotting in the court of Wei sought to bring about his social exclusion thanks to prevailing prejudices about aberrant bodily forms, Sun Bin's later revenge was also planned around principles following the same logic: clues in the form of a diminishing number of fires are interpreted as an outer sign that immediately and clearly translates into the inner state of the enemy. In contrast to the expertise shown by Sun Bin's observation of horses, Pang Juan's deductive operation on the basis of these visible signs, no doubt encouraged by his wish to punish his rival even more, leads him to draw the wrong conclusions about the real situation of the troops of Qi. Hence, thanks to his knowledge of the ongoing validity of these conventions and his skill in using such prejudices to get the upper hand, Sun Bin predicts Pang Juan's response and therefore outwits and defeats him. This permanent interplay of signs and symbols, of false and genuine clues, this network dense with anticipations within anticipation, culminates with Sun Bin's message for Pang Juan, carved into the tree. In some sense, the gesture is a synthesis of the lesson that can be learned from this anecdote regarding the risks and dangers of anticipation. Pang Juan believes he can anticipate the movements of his rival in his reading of the clues set out in Sun Bin's moves but, in fact, he is merely doing exactly what Sun Bin wants him to do. His ineptness and incorrect readings in interpreting the revelatory signs, and his failure to distinguish true pointers from false ones, are demonstrated in this final scene. Previously blind to the dupery in the trail of false indicators, when he finally manages to decipher the written signs left on the tree it is too late. His enemy has once again pre-empted him. Only then does he understand that he has fallen into a trap and, in a dramatic and ironic twist to the strategy of anticipation devised by his enemy, he foresees Sun Bin's brilliant destiny, which he himself has contributed towards shaping.

The anecdote about the feats and vicissitudes of Sun Bin as described in the *Shi ji*, functions as a kind of emblematic tale setting out the benefits and dangers of anticipating events through reading traces, clues, and signs. The lesson one should draw from this story is that, in order to adjust his patterns of action to fit the changing spatial and temporal circumstances of the events, the good strategist must necessarily have the ability to predict situations, discern the plans of the rival, and act accordingly. These prognostication skills make it possible to move ahead of the succession of events and overtake time in order to come up with a more effective response to the emergency of the moment. They distinguish the clairvoyant individual from the obtuse one, and it is at this moment when the figures of the sage and the strategist converge to the point of fusing. The typical features of the sage, as depicted in a large part of the political, philosophical, and even medical literature of ancient China tend to overlap with those cited in descriptions of the good commander. As it has been demonstrated, this is especially evident in relation to anticipation of events and revealing the inner reality of men, animals, and things, thanks to attentive observation of the most tenuous signs and accurate decoding of these discreet clues. In the light of all this, it is possible to consider in these spheres the convergence of several processes which, based on observation and minute scrutiny of "natural" elements, and without supernatural agents being called upon as oracles or intervening at any point, show a common vocabulary and appear to be organized around a recurrent constellation of notions sharing similar intellectual foundations.

These concurrent practices suggest preference for the forms of deductive prediction which, rather than aspiring to know the will of divinities or to receive their blessing or criticism in the management of human affairs, are more concerned to examine the components of a particular set of circumstances in search of revealing signs. Technically speaking, predictions based on altered states or divine inspiration are relegated to a marginal position in favor of procedures that prioritize observation of signs, their interpretation, and deductive reasoning.[102] Nonetheless, besides divesting the ancestors and divine powers of their authority over human decisions, the overlapping of these anticipatory processes might also be understood, at least partially, as supplanting the authority attributed to experts in divination techniques, or an attempt to counter their power. Perhaps with the aim of invalidating the prestige and privileges they enjoyed in the society at the time (and the potential dangers

102. On this issue, see Jacques Gernet, "Petits écarts et grands écarts," in *Divination et Rationalité*, 52–69, at 54; and also Marc Kalinowski, "Diviners and Astrologers under the Eastern Zhou," in *Early Chinese Religion. Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 341–96, at 369.

these authorities might also have represented in the management of military affairs) and, encouraged by an agonistic context in which specialists in different techniques and areas of knowledge competed to offer their services to powerful men, the figures of both sage and skilled commander fuse together in a shared framework whereby, usurping the prerogatives and attributes of the diviners, they appear as individuals gifted with great foresight methods, possessors of exceptional acuity and able to reveal what is hidden. From this standpoint, the commander as described in the ancient literature might be seen as a master of signs and, by extension, the art of warfare can also be represented as a form of knowledge that requires, among other virtues, semiotic aptitudes and techniques that can provide accurate prediction of events to come through correct interpretation of the signs and even, in some cases, their adroit manipulation on the battlefield.

符、徵、跡：古代中國政治與軍事文本中的預測

高梵寧

提要

在相當數量的中國古代兵書當中，任何計謀的成功都要求能夠適應不斷變化的情境，預見敵人的行動。因此，對軍事領袖和聖人的理想化描述往往相互重疊。二者都是一些能夠在事件定型之前便能預測其性質，及時採取行動的人。而這些預言的能力乃是對現實最細微、表層的面向仔細觀察透析的結果。通過分析當時一些軍事謀略家的傳記材料和相關戰事案例，本文試圖證明軍事領袖其實可以被視作為符號大師，而相應地，兵法則需要一定的符號學心態與技術，才能取得對徵兆的正確詮釋，進而決定戰鬥的勝負。

Keywords: anticipation, military writings, observation of signs, prognosis
預測, 兵法, 符號觀察, 預言