

The Power of an Alleged Tradition: A Prophecy Flattering Han Emperor Wu and its Relation to the Sima Clan*

by

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... es muß stets eine lange Übermittlerkette
vorhanden sein, damit sich die Hinweise oder
Gedanken, die Kommentare, wie immer man
es nennt, dehnen. Sie müsen durch zehn Hirne
hindurch, um einen Satz zu ergeben.**

(Alexander Kluge)

Introduction

During the early reign of Liu Che 劉徹, posthumously honored as Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 141–87) of the Han, a severe struggle for influence and power seems to have arisen among competing groups of experts concerned with the establishment of new imperial rites. This is at least the impression that the *Shiji* 史記 (The Scribe's Record) conveys to the reader in chapter 28, the "Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices" (*Fengshan shu* 封禪書). According to the account given there, the competing partners in this struggle were mainly the *ru* 儒 (here used in the sense of scholars who maintained that any advice in the question of ritual should entirely be based upon evidence drawn from the "Classics") and a group of specialists called *fangshi* 方士 (a term which should be translated by "masters of techniques" rather than by the often used, but rather biased term magicians).

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** "There must always be a long chain of transfer, so that the hints or thoughts, the commentaries, label it as you may, extend. They must pass through ten brains, in order to accomplish one sentence." (Translated from: Alexander Kluge, *Die Lücke, die der Teufel läßt: Im Umfeld des neuen Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003, 266.)

The rivalry between the representatives of these two groups as it is depicted in the *Shiji* has been the subject of several previous studies.¹ Comparatively little attention, however, has hitherto been paid to the tricky question of which of these groups was favored by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145–c. 86) and his father Sima Tan 司馬談 (?–110), both of whom contributed to the compilation of the *Shiji*.² Father and son Sima both served at the court of Emperor Wu in a function that was closely related to the central matter of the dispute between *fangshi* and *ru*.³ Even less consideration has been given to the fact that apart from Sima Tan and Sima Qian there was another member of the Sima clan who, if one follows the many implicit hints hidden in the historical record, must have had some share in the matter: Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (c. 179–117), the famous poet at the court of Emperor Wu.⁴

But apart from the involvement of the three members of the Sima clan, there is another person who seems to have been involved very much in Emperor Wu's

¹ To name only a few: Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, *Qin Han de fangshi yu rusheng* 秦漢的方士與儒生 (1954; Taipei: Liren, 1995) devoted a monograph to the conflict between *fangshi* and *ru*. He neglected, however, the important aspect of the position which the author of the *Shiji* adopted within this conflict; Mark Edward Lewis, "The *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices of Emperor Wu of the Han", in *State and Court Ritual in China*, ed., Joseph McDermott (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 51–52, stresses that the ritual reforms which had been established by Emperor Wu and whose pinnacle were the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices preceded the intellectual and institutional triumph of Confucianism. Marianne Bujard, *Le Sacrifice au ciel dans la Chine Ancienne: Théorie et pratique sous les Han occidentaux* (Paris: De Boccard, 2000), 163, wrote that the dispute recorded in the *Shiji* reflected "le récit des luttes d'influence que se livrèrent *fangshi* et lettrés au sujet du choix des divinités et des cultes que la religion officielle devait adopter". Yang Shengmin 楊生民, "Han Wudi 'bachu baijia, duzun rushu' xintan – jianlun Han Wudi 'zun rushu' yu 'xiyan (yin) baiduan zhi xue' 漢武帝「罷黜百家」·「獨尊儒術」新探—兼論漢武帝「尊儒術」與「悉延(引)百端之學」," *Fuyin baokan ziliao: Xian Qin, Qin Han shi* (2001.2), 92, already pointed out that Emperor Wu even after having proclaimed Confucianism as the only officially accepted doctrine still showed a strong personal concern for the teachings of the *fangshi*.

² Although the probable dual authorship of the *Shiji* is a matter widely accepted in the scholarly world, the implications of the need to distinguish between both has hitherto largely been neglected. A remarkable exception is the attempt undertaken by Bruce and Taeko Brooks focusing on the example of *Shiji* 63, the account on Laozi and Han Fei, to reconstruct those parts of the text which may have been the original contribution by Sima Tan and those parts added later by Sima Qian. See the section entitled Shr Ji in E. Bruce Brooks and A. Taeko Brooks, *Warring States Texts* (Warring States Project 1993–2004, www.umass.edu/wsp/wst). In this study I shall avoid calling either Sima Qian or Sima Tan by name but refer to the author of the *Shiji*, except for those passages which are clearly related to events after Sima Tan's death in 110 B.C. It will, however, be one purpose of the study to draw conclusions as far as the attribution of parts of the *Shiji* to Sima Tan or Sima Qian is concerned.

³ Michael Loewe in his study "Water, Earth and fire: the symbols of the Han dynasty," in *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*, ed., Michael Loewe (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 57, laconically remarked that the change from the element Water to Earth in the cycle in 104 B.C. was brought about probably with the support of Ssu-ma Chien. M. E. Lewis, "*Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices", 69–72, in his in other respects splendid analysis of the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices discusses Sima Qian's concern only with regard to his role as a historiographer, but neglects his official duties (as well as those of his father Tan) as *taishi*. Chen Tongsheng 陳桐生 recently emphasized in a study on the relationship between Emperor Wu's ceremonial reform and the *Shiji* that if one does not deeply consider the impact that this reform had on Sima Tan as well as on Sima Qian one would scarcely be able to fully understand the *Shiji*. See his "Hanjia gaizhi yu *Shiji* 漢家改制與史記," in: *Tangdu xuekan* 51 (1997), 6.

⁴ Ruan Zhisheng 阮芝生 has already devoted a study to the involvement of what he calls that of "the three Sima" (Sima Xiangru, Sima Tan and Sima Qian) in Emperor Wu's grand ceremonial reform, but without further investigating the relationship between Sima Xiangru and the other two Sima. See his "San Sima yu Han Wudi fengshan 三司馬與漢武帝封禪," in *Guoli Taiwan daxue lishi xuexi xuebao* 20 (1996), 307–40. I am grateful to Dr. Monique Nagel-Angermann who provided me with a copy.

grand ceremonial reform: his name is Gongsun Qing 公孫卿.⁵ He has been dealt with by the *Shiji* and by its successor, the *Han shu* 漢書, compiled by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), in a rather contradictory way: whereas in the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices” of the *Shiji* Gongsun Qing is several times depicted as a charlatan who abused Emperor Wu’s confidence,⁶ the *Han shu*, apart from largely reproducing the *Shiji* account in its “Monograph on State Sacrifices” (*Jiaosi zhi* 郊祀志), elsewhere depicts him as one of the leading experts of his day who was entrusted with the task to prepare the new calendar of the Han together with Sima Qian.

It will be the main purpose of this study to scrutinize more closely the ideological background of the critical or even derogatory attitude which the author of the *Shiji* displays toward Gongsun Qing in the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices,” and also to search for a perhaps more balanced judgment concerning the relation between the ideas propagated by Gongsun Qing and those represented by the three Sima.

The starting point of the paper, inspired by the special topic of this volume, inscription/orality, will be the prophetic message which Gongsun Qing introduced into Emperor Wu’s court in 113 B.C. This prophecy is claimed to have been handed down as part of a very old oral tradition combined with an even older inscription on a tripod. Certainly neither of these claimed traditions would stand up to a closer examination in terms of their credibility. But the very claim of having support of traditions other than and – most importantly – older than the evidence taken from the sacred canon sheds new light on the innovative methods by which the competing groups of intellectuals vied with each other for supremacy at the time of Emperor Wu. And moreover, Gongsun Qing’s prophetic message of 113 B.C. seems to offer a key to one of the most intricate secrets that the *Shiji* hides.

⁵ No exact data of his life are known, except from the evidence given in the *Shiji* according to which he must have been active as an advisor at the court of Emperor Wu mainly between the years 113 and 109. The important question whether Gongsun Qing should be reckoned among the *ru* or rather among the *fangshi* is difficult to answer. As we shall see presently from the advice he gives to the emperor one should expect that the author of the *Shiji* reckoned him among the *fangshi*. In the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices” he is, however, nowhere referred to as *fangshi*. In one passage of the chapter we find the expression Gongsun Qing *ji fangshi zhi yan* 公孫卿及方士之言” (*Shiji* 28/1397; 12/473), the coordinating particle *ji* 及 marking a certain hierarchical separation of both (e.g. elsewhere in the same chapter where *ru* and *fangshi* are likewise contrasted against each other by the particle *ji*, cf. *Shiji* 28/1398; 12/475). One may thus assume that Gongsun Qing enjoyed a position which was higher-ranked than that of *fangshi* in general, though the methods he propagated were certainly those typical for *fangshi*.

⁶ For a concise interpretation of the chapter’s content which follows exactly this explicit and implicit overall concern of the *Shiji* author (and rewritten in *Han shu* 25) see Hans van Ess, “Der Sinn des Opfertraktates feng-shan shu des Ssu-ma Ch’ien,” *Archiv Orientalní* 70 (2002): 125132, as well as his paper “Implizite historische Urteile in den Opfertraktaten von Ssu-ma Ch’ien and Pan Ku,” *Oriens Extremus* 43 (2002): 40–50, which focuses mainly on ideological differences between *Shiji* and *Han shu* as it can be concluded from slight but significant differences within that part of the “Monograph on the State Sacrifices” which the *Han shu* largely rewrote from the *Shiji* account.

The rivalry between *ru* and *fangshi* and the spectacular discovery of 113 B.C.

The idea of a rivalry between the *ru* and the *fangshi* may strike the reader at first sight. In fact, the *Shiji* seems to contradict itself in that it sometimes deals very critically with the *fangshi* while elsewhere it compares them straightforwardly to the *ru*, as if the *ru* in the final analysis were no better advisers than the intriguing *fangshi*. (This, indeed, was probably also the purpose of the author of the *Shiji*.)⁷ As it is beyond the scope of this article to further penetrate into the relationship between the *ru* as they would have defined themselves in the time of Emperor Wu and the perception of them by individuals such as Sima Tan or Sima Qian, we will have to focus here primarily on the perception of the *Shiji* account itself.⁸ Given this premise, the major events that preceded the arrival of Gongsun Qing at the imperial court according to the *Shiji* account (and rewritten in the *Han shu*) will now be roughly summarized.⁹

As the reader learns from the opening lines of chapter 28 of the *Shiji*, all the high dignitaries at court (*jinshen zhi shu* 搢紳之屬) already in the early days of the reign of Emperor Wu expected that this emperor would soon proceed to perform the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices, the most solemn of imperial rites, and also that he would take a step toward “correcting the standards,” an expression that usually refers to the measures taken by the Qin emperor when he unified the empire, but which here primarily seems to denote the installation of a new calendar.¹⁰

At that time, the *Shiji* account continues, the emperor favored the arts of the *ru*, those scholars who called Confucius their teacher and who based their judgment and advice solely on the six (and after the grand reform, corresponding to the then honored number, Five) canonical texts, the Classics.¹¹ Some of those men were summoned to the imperial court and ordered to deliberate on the establishment of the

⁷ A telling example of the way in which, according to the *Shiji* account, both *fangshi* and *ru* failed to give the emperor any satisfactory advice precisely how the sacrifices should be performed, see *Shiji* 28/1398; 12/475, where the *Shiji* author depicts the emperor's growing weariness of their advice and finally proceeds to perform the sacrifices without relying much on either of his advisers, very much the same, by the way, as it is described with regard to the First Qin Emperor shortly before in the same chapter. See *Shiji* 28/1366.

⁸ The author's critical attitude, especially during the times of Emperor Wu, toward the *ru* becomes clearly visible in many places. An example in which not only a critical but even a cynical and disdainful attitude is displayed toward the *ru* is the passage in *Shiji* 15/686 where the competence of the *ru* in matters related to the dynastic cycles is likened to someone who uses his ears to eat, but still claims to know something about taste – as the *Suoyin* commentary elucidates.

⁹ Cf. *Shiji* 28/1384–1393; 12/452–467 and the parallel account in *Han shu* 25A/1215–1226. See also the translations of the chapter by Édouard Chavannes, *Les Mémoires Historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien*, vol. III (Paris: Angers, 1895/1905), 461–485, and Burton Watson, transl., *Records of the Grand Historian by Sima Qian*, revised edition, vol. II (Hongkong, New York: Columbia University Press 1993), 3–35.

¹⁰ 天下艾安·搢紳之屬皆望天子封禪改正度也。Literally, the expression *jinshen zhi shu* 搢紳之屬 denotes “those who stick the official tablet into the girdle,” a metaphor for the highly decorated and distinguished dignitaries. Cf. the character variants in *Shiji* 12/452 (*jianshen zhi shu* 薦紳之屬) and *Han shu* 25A/1215 (*jinshen zhi shu* 縉紳之屬). For a detailed description of the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices see esp. Lewis, “*Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices,” and Bujard, *Sacrifice au ciel*, chap. 8 (“Le sacrifice *jiao* dans le *Shiji*”). Only recently, Michael Puett took a fresh look at the cosmo-political aspect of the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices as they are depicted in chap. 28 of the *Shiji* by subsuming them into the sacrifices that order the world. See Michael L. Puett, *To become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2002), 300–307.

¹¹ There are several passages in the *Shiji* in which the request proclaimed by the *ru* that solely the “Classics” were to be taken as an acceptable source of evidence is reflected critically, by formulations such as “[the *ru*] were restrained by the old texts of the *Odes* and the *Documents* and did not dare to gallop freely 又牽拘於詩書古文而不敢騁.” See *Shiji* 28/1397; 12/473.

Hall of Light (*mingtang* 明堂) where the feudal lords should be received in audience, as it was said to have been in ancient times.¹² As for making plans for the imperial tour of inspection, the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices, the reform of the calendar and of the color of the ceremonial vestments, however, no steps had yet been taken. But it then happened that the Empress Dowager Dou, who favored the teachings of Huang-Lao 黃老,¹³ felt insulted by some of the most prominent representatives of the *ru* scholars and thus reproached them for having been concerned only with serving their private ends – an accusation which resulted in the suicide of two of them. As a consequence of this incident, the author of the *Shiji* concludes, everything they had tried to initiate so far was abandoned.

Six years later, after the death of Dowager Dou (135 B.C.), the emperor summoned several specialists for the classical texts to court, among them Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (c. 200–121).¹⁵ It seems that due to his influence the emperor one year later traveled to Yong for the first time in order to perform the suburban sacrifice (*jiao* 郊) at the altars of the Five Thearchs there. From that time on, the emperor performed this ceremony once every three years.

At about the same time, as we are informed by the *Shiji*, the emperor also appointed several gentlemen reckoned among the *fangshi* who declared themselves to be specialists in the technique of dealing with ghosts and spirits. One of them, Li Shaojun 李少君, introduced himself as one who knew how to worship the God of the Fireplace and who also knew how to achieve immortality through special dietary measures. He promised the emperor to show him how to call spirits, melt cinnabar into gold and make golden vessels for eating and drinking which, when used, would lead to longevity. Moreover, he won the emperor's admiration by his ability to date an old tripod in the emperor's possession to the tenth year of the reign of duke Huan of Qi (676 B.C.) After the tripod's inscription had been deciphered and Li's prediction proved correct everyone in the palace believed he was either a God (*shen*) or several hundred years old.¹⁴

One piece of advice Li Shaojun gave to the emperor was that he should visit the island of Penglai and perform the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices there, after which the emperor would become an immortal, very much like the mythical Yellow Thearch (Huangdi 黃帝). Li also mentioned a certain Master Anqi 安期生 from Qi, an immortal who was supposed to roam about the island. He himself, according to the *Shiji* account, had visited Anqi before and was given jujubes big as melons to eat. Obviously with an undertone of mockery, the author of the *Shiji* concludes Li's biography by mentioning his death, adding that the emperor could not believe that he

¹² For the different philosophical concepts related to the Hall of Light (*mingtang*) in and before the Han, see Henri Maspero, "Le Ming-t'ang et la crise religieuse avant les Han," *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques* 9 (1948–51): 1–71.

¹³ It should be noted here that the term Huang-Lao is explicitly used several times in the *Shiji*. As for a political approach to what may be called the "Huang-Lao faction" in early Han see Hans van Ess, "Die geheimen Worte des Ssu-ma Ch'ien," *Oriens Extremus* 36 (1993): 5–28.

¹⁴ *Shiji* 28/1384–5; 12/452–4.

¹⁵ We may conclude from the fact that he had a biography in the *Rulin zhuan* (account on Confucians) that Gongsun Hong is to be reckoned among the *ru*. He came from Zichuan which at the time of his birth lay in the state of Qi. See *Shiji* 112/2949. Although there is no explicit hint of a relationship between Gongsun Qing and Gongsun Hong, it is possible that they too were related by blood, which is all the more probable as both are said to have come from Qi.

had really died and instead claimed that he had reached the state of immortality. Soon after Li's death, we then learn from the account, he entrusted Kuan Shu 寬舒, a Scribe of Huang and Chui 黃鍾史¹⁶ to adopt the techniques used by Li Shaojun.¹⁷ Interestingly enough, Kuan Shu is later mentioned in the *Shiji* account of the emperor's close advisers. As an official concerned with sacrificial matters (*ciguan* 祠官), and together with a representative from the office of "The Lord the Grand Scribe" (*taishigong* 太史公, Kuan Shu advised the emperor advised the emperor to set up an altar to the Earth Lord in Fenyin 汾陰 where a precious tripod had been found.¹⁸

The discovery of this tripod in the sixth month of the year 113 B.C. – an event of central importance for this study – seems to have been the result of a ceremony carried out by a shaman priest.¹⁹ She discovered that the earth close to the area of the sacrifice had the form of a hook. When she dug up the earth, she discovered a tripod which is said to have differed much from ordinary tripods. It bore some incised lines but no inscription.²⁰ She found this strange and talked to the government officers about it. The governor of Hedong reported the extraordinary discovery to the imperial court, upon which the emperor sent an envoy who was ordered to examine whether the mysterious discovery of the tripod was credible. As the envoy could not find any traces of deceit, he used the tripod in a sacrifice, took it with him and handed it over to the emperor. Emperor Wu took it with him when he proceeded to perform sacrifices at Zhongshan. There, we learn, a yellow cloud appeared, and a deer passed the emperor's entourage whereupon the emperor shot it and used it for a sacrifice.

After his return to Chang'an, the emperor requested the responsible officials²¹ to discuss the question of how the appearance of the tripod was to be interpreted. The officials explained to him that already Taidi 太帝 (The Greatest Thearch)²²

¹⁶ Huang and Chui are explained by the *Jijie* commentator Pei Yin (5th cent.) as the names of two districts in Donglai 東萊.

¹⁷ Cf. *Shiji* 28/1386; 12/455: 天子以為化去不死也，而使黃鍾史寬舒受其方。 It thus seems as if Kuan Shu was more or less urged by the emperor into the role of his former favorite Li Shaojun and thus into the role of a *fangshi* – or at least he must have been an official who had inherited the esoteric methods of a *fangshi*.

¹⁸ Fenyin was located northeast of Chang'an, to the east of the River He. It was a cult site to the deity Houtu (Earth Lord).

¹⁹ The discovery of the tripod, as well as the composition of a ceremonial song at the occasion of the discovery, is recorded also in the annals of Emperor Wu in *Han shu* 6/184.

²⁰ *Shiji* 28/1392; 12/464 (the latter has 毋 instead of 無); *Han shu* 25A/1225: 鼎大異於眾鼎，文鏤無款識，怪之，言吏。 This sentence has been rather differently translated by E. Chavannes and B. Watson. Chavannes, *Mémoires Historiques III*, 482, writes: "Il était orné de dessins ciselés mais ne portait pas d'inscription gravée en creux ou en relief." Watson, *Records II*, 34, has instead: "It had a pattern incised on it, but no inscription. Chavannes translation is certainly right that it is meant here that the tripod had an inscription, but due to the fact that it was not incised in relief, its content was not decipherable."

²¹ The term *you si* 有司 rendered here by "the responsible officials" means literally "those who are in charge of something." According to Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: University Press 1985), no. 8081, the term should be understood as a vague reference to governmental officials in charge of activities at issue in particular contexts [...]. In the context given here, *you si* seems to denote the officials entrusted to advise the emperor with regard to all the questions related to sacrificial matters.

²² According to Kong Wenxiang 孔文祥 quoted by the *Suoyin* commentary, Taidi 泰帝 is to be identified with Taihao 太昊, i.e. Fuxi 伏羲 (*Shiji* 28/1392; cf. the character variant Dadi 大帝 in *Shiji* 12/465). The *Han shu* commentator Yan Shigu (Tang) quoted by Sima Zhen (added to *Shiji* 12/466) writes that Dadi is identical with Master Taihao Fuxi and argues that he must thus date prior to Huangdi. 顏師古以大帝即太昊伏羲氏，以在黃帝之前故也。

had ordered a single tripod to be cast, that the number One symbolizes the unity of Heaven and Earth, that Huangdi had made three precious tripods, symbolizing Heaven, Earth and Man, and that the thearch Yu 禹 of the Xia dynasty had collected metal from the Nine Provinces and used it to cast nine tripods. They told him that tripods such as these were only produced in times of wise rulers and that they had been handed down through the Xia and Shang dynasties but that they had been lost when the Zhou dynasty declined; they sank from view. Now a tripod had appeared, together with the auspicious deer and the yellow cloud rising from the sacrifice which the emperor performed at the sacred site Zhongshan. This, as the officials knew, was something that only a virtuous ruler would be able to interpret correctly, and they recommended that the emperor store the tripod in the ancestral temple within the imperial court. Emperor Wu agreed to this. After that it seemed that the matter had come to an end.

The prophetic message announced at the court by Gongsun Qing

Following these events, the *Shiji* describes several further steps undertaken by the emperor to establish new ceremonies. Having traveled to Yong in the autumn of 113 B.C., an anonymous person (*huo* 或) recommended that the emperor establish a new cult of Taiyi 太一 (the Grand Unity), arguing that the Five Thearchs were nothing but assistants of this supreme deity.²³ While the emperor was still hesitating, Gongsun Qing appeared at court. The *Shiji* says:²⁴

齊人公孫卿曰：「今年得寶鼎，其冬辛巳朔旦冬至，與黃帝時等。」
A man of Qi, Gongsun Qing, said: "In this year, a precious tripod was found, and in the winter of this [year], the solstice will occur at dawn of a [day with the cyclical number] *xinsi* <18> which is the day of a new moon;²⁵ this is the same [conjunction of phenomena] as it occurred during the time of the Yellow Thearch."

Three elements are highly significant in the first sentence of Gongsun Qing's speech: first, the reference to the discovery of the precious tripod in Fenyin as the actual

²³ *Shiji* 28/1393; 12/467. A detailed study on Taiyi and its origin is Li Ling, "An Archaeological Study of Taiyi (Grand One) Worship," in *Early Medieval China*, 2 (1995–1996): 1–39.

²⁴ *Shiji* 28/1393–1394; 12/467–468. Cf. É. Chavannes, *Mémoires Historiques III*, 485–90; B. Watson, *Records II*, 35–37. See also Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川資言, *Shiki kaichū kōshō* 史記會註考證 (Taipei: Tiangong, 1993), 28/64–66; Wang Liqi 王利器, *Shiji zhuyi* 史記注譯, 4 vols. (Xi'an: San Qin, 1988), 994–95; Zhang Dake 張大可, *Shiji xinzhu* 史記新注 (Beijing: Huawen, 2000), 839–40.

²⁵ This means that precisely at daybreak of the first day of a lunar month which is also the day of the new moon, a new (solar) year will begin. According to an old calendrical rule which Gongsun Qing obviously refers to here, dawn (*dan* 旦) was taken as the beginning of a new day, the first day of a new moon (*shuo* 朔) should coincide with the first day of a month, and the beginning of the year should start at the winter solstice (*dong zhi* 冬至). On the neomenic basis of the Chinese calendar already during and before the Chunqiu time (722–481) see Robert H. Gassmann, *Antikchinesisches Kalenderwesen: Die Rekonstruktion der chunqiu-zeitlichen Kalender des Fürstentums Lu und der Zhou-Könige*. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), 10–14. The combination of a day of the new moon with the winter (or summer) solstice means that solar and lunar cycles coincide, whereas the sequence of the days according to the sexagenary cycle is a mechanical cycle, though roughly following the interval of two months. A possible explanation for the incompleteness of the date given in Gongsun Qing's prediction would be that vagueness seems to be an essential element of prophecies in all cultures. By formulating them in a vague manner the experts conveying them intentionally left the door open for different possible interpretations. See George Minois, *Die Geschichte der Prophezeiungen: Orakel, Utopien, Prognosen* (Düsseldorf: Albatros, 2002), esp. 48–50 (Eintreffen der Vorhersagen und Magie).

starting point of his message (which shows how familiar Gongsun Qing must have been with this discovery); second, its combination with the prediction of a coincidence of cyclical dates expected to occur in the same year, 113 B.C.; and third, the indication that the discovery of the tripod as well as this particular coincidence which had occurred in this year had happened once before – in the remote age of Huangdi, the Yellow Thearch.²⁶

Gongsun Qing then refers to a *zhashu* 札書, a term which literally denotes a text written on a small wooden tablet, but in the course of the Han due to its mostly divinatory content became a synonym for prophetic texts in general.²⁷ As regards the content of this text, we get detailed information in the *Shiji* account:

卿有札書曰：「黃帝得寶鼎宛胸，問於鬼臾區。鬼臾區對曰：『（黃）帝得寶鼎神策，是歲己酉朔旦冬至，得天之紀，終而復始。』於是黃帝迎日推策，後率二十歲復朔旦冬至，凡二十推，三百八十年，黃帝僊登于天。」

[Gongsun] Qing possessed a text written on a wooden tablet saying: “After the Yellow Thearch had obtained a precious tripod²⁸ at Yuanqu,²⁹ he asked Guiyu Qu³⁰ about it. Guiyu Qu said to him: Exactly in the year in which you will have obtained the precious tripod and the sacred calculation [stalks],³¹ the winter solstice will occur at dawn of a *jiyou* <46> [day] which will be the day of the new moon. [Then] a period of Heaven will be accomplished;³² [it] will end and start

²⁶ It may be added that a prediction such as this, though it must have been deeply impressive for non-specialists when the winter solstice really fell precisely on an indicated day, must have belonged to the easier exercises of a specialist in calendrical speculation already in Gongsun Qings time. This example illustrates well why non-specialists at that time will often have regarded events predicted by specialists based on empirical knowledge as prophecies and explains why at that time natural science, prophecy and magic were all part of the domain of the *fangshi*.

²⁷ For the *zhashu* as a genre of the early prophetic books see Itano Chōhachi 板野長八, “The t’u-ch’en Prophetic Books and the Establishment of Confucianism (I),” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko (The Oriental Library)*, no. 34 (1976), esp. 58.

²⁸ The first chapter of the *Shiji*, the *Wudi benji* 五帝本紀 (“Annals of the Five Thearchs”) which deals with Huangdi and his clan, also contains the story of Huangdi obtaining a tripod. Cf. *Shiji* 1/6. See also William H. Nienhauser (et al.), *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, vol. I (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1994), 1–19.

²⁹ There is no mention of a place called Yuanqu 宛胸 in the “Annals of the Five Thearchs.” However, in the account of Zhou Bo (*Shiji* 57/2066) it occurs as one of the places where the founder of the Han dynasty, Liu Bang, achieved his decisive victory over the Qin army. It was perhaps due to this victory that Yuanqu was established as a sacred site.

³⁰ Guiyu Qu 鬼臾區 is not mentioned by his personal name in the annals of Huangdi, but by what is referred to as his style (*hao* 號), shortly after this passage in the same chapter of the *Shiji* (28/1393; 12/468). He is mentioned in the “Annals of the Five Thearchs” as one of four (mythical) persons who served Huangdi as his ministers. Cf. *Shiji* 1/6, and also *Han shu* 25A/1229.

³¹ *Shence* 神策 in the four-character expression *baoding shence* 寶鼎神策 is identified by the *Suoyin* commentary as *shenshi* 神蓍, “sacred yarrow stalks,” in a parallel passage related to Huangdi (see *Shiji* 1/8). Whereas E. Chavannes, *Mémoires Historiques III*, 485, interprets *baoding* as subordinated to *shence*, rendering the passage as “les tiges d’achillée magiques du précieux trépied,” interpreting that these stalks which were used for oracles and thus for presaging) were probably contained in the tripod, it seems more plausible to me that both the tripod and the sacred calculations were part of Gongsun Qing’s prophetic message and should thus be understood as a coordination of two separate terms.

³² According to an explanation given in the *Shiji* chapter on the office of Heaven, one *ji* 紀 is equivalent with three *dabian* 大變 (great change) one *bian* comprising 500 years, thus standing for a period of 1500 years, and three *ji* 紀 altogether bringing about one *dabei* 大備. These, the account closes, were the great numbers, and the one who ruled the state should keep watch on the numbers Three and Five, so that he might be able to adopt the realms of Heaven and Man (*tian ren zhi ji* 天人之際). See *Shiji* 27/1344. An expression very similar to *de tian zhi ji* 得天之紀 mentioned here, rendered by “a period of Heaven will be accomplished,” can be found in the “Annals of the Five Thearchs” where it is related to Huangdi himself (*Shiji* 1/6). The *Zhengyi* commentator explains *shun tiandi zhi ji* 順天地之紀 as being in accord with Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang and the four seasons of the year (cf. *Shiji* 1/8).

anew. On hearing these words, the Yellow Thearch computed the days by the help of calculation [stalks]³³ and came to the conclusion that after twenty years the winter solstice would again occur at dawn of a day of the new moon.³⁴ After twenty of such reckonings, making three hundred and eighty years, the Yellow Thearch ascended to Heaven as an immortal.”

The text of the *zhashu* starts with a flashback to the time of Huangdi. One of his assistants, Guiyu Qu 鬼與區 – evidently his specialist in calendrical matters and also Huangdi’s teacher – explains to his ruler the special meaning of the year in which he obtained a precious tripod. Upon his assistant’s advice, we learn, Huangdi then computed the precise date when he himself would ascend to Heaven. Both dates – the day he obtained the tripod and the day of his ascension to Heaven – fell on a day on which the new moon coincided with the day of the winter solstice.

If we compare the main content of the *zhashu* with Gongsun Qings first sentence, we find a rather mysterious parallel between conjunctions of phenomena that happened or would soon happen when Gongsun Qing talked to Emperor Wu and certain phenomena that happened during the time of Huangdi. The discovery of the tripod at Fenyin has its precedent in Huangdi’s discovery of a tripod at Yuanqu, a parallel which is given additional stress by the statement that in the winter of the same year the solstice had occurred on a day that was also the day of a new moon (only the position of the days within the sexagenary cycle differed). Moreover, Gongsun Qing’s advice to Emperor Wu parallels the advice given by Guiyu Qu to his ruler Huangdi. Obviously the central lesson to be drawn from Gongsun Qing’s words is that certain astral configurations during the Han dynasty would be running parallel to events that happened during Huangdi’s time. But up to now, Gongsun Qing’s words had not even reached the emperor’s ear. Suo Zhong, the imperial censor,³⁵ even seems to have done his utmost in order to prevent Gongsun Qing’s mysterious message from reaching his addressee at all. We read:

卿因所忠欲奏之。所忠視其書不經，疑其妄書，謝曰：「寶鼎事已決矣，尚何以為！」卿因嬖人奏之。上大說，乃召問卿。對曰：「受此書申公，申公已死。」上曰：「申公何人也？」卿曰：「申公，齊人。與安期生通，受黃帝言，無書，獨有此鼎書。曰『漢興復當黃帝之時』。」

[Gongsun] Qing had hoped he might submit it to the imperial throne with the support of Suo Zhong. Suo Zhong who saw that his text [written on the wooden tablet] was not in accord with the established orthodoxy was suspicious that this

³³ The expression *ying ri tui ce* 迎日推策 can also be found in the annals of Huangdi. Cf. *Shiji* 1/6. The *Jijie* commentary (*Shiji* 1/8) adds an interesting explanation according to which precalculating *ying ri* was reckoned among the arts of foretelling the future.

³⁴ The hint of an interval of 20 years after which the same constellation – the coincidence of the winter solstice with the first day of a new moon – would recur probably refers to the early observation by Chinese calendar experts of a phenomenon as Nathan Sivin has already pointed out. He writes: “Nineteen years is the smallest interval in which winter solstice and new moon [or any other combination of solar and lunar events] will recur on the same day.” See N. Sivin, “Cosmos and computation in early Chinese mathematical astronomy,” *T’oung Pao* 55 (1969): 15.

³⁵ According to *Fengsu tongyi* (quoted in *Shiji* 117/3063), Suo Zhong had the position of a *jian dafu* 諫大夫. Yan Shigu (quoted in *Han shu* 24B/1171) writes that Suo here is the family name (*xing* 姓) and Zhong the personal name (*ming* 名), that Suo Zhong was a right-hand man of Emperor Wu and that the man mentioned here is the same as the one mentioned in the chapter on Sima Xiangru.

was a heretical text, and he turned down [Gongsun Qings] request, saying: “The matter of the precious tripod has already been dealt with. Why bring it up again?” After this, [Gongsun] Qing with the support of one of the emperor’s favorites succeeded in submitting it. The emperor was greatly pleased, summoned [Gongsun] Qing to the court and asked him [about the matter]. Qing then told him: “I received this text from Lord Shen. Lord Shen has already died.” The emperor asked: “And who was Lord Shen?” “Lord Shen,” [Gongsun] Qing answered, “was a man of Qi. He communicated with Master Anqi and [through the latter] received the words of the Yellow Thearch.³⁶ There is no text [handed down from that time], except for an inscription written on the tripod³⁷ saying: ‘After the rise of the Han, the [constellations] of the time of the Yellow Thearch will recur.’”

Gongsun Qing here reinforces the claim that the time of Huangdi would directly be related to the Han via a parallel position within the cycles of time. Moreover, we now learn from the answer which Gongsun Qing gave the emperor that the mysterious message was something which – according to Gongsun Qing – had been passed down to him by his teacher, Lord Shen, who had received it from his teacher, Master Anqi.³⁸ Gongsun Qing then continues by interpreting the words which – again according to Gongsun Qing’s testimony – had been incised on the precious tripod cast during the remote age of Huangdi’s ideal rule:

曰「漢之聖者在高祖之孫且曾孫也。寶鼎出而與神通，封禪。封禪七十二王，唯黃帝得上泰山封」。申公曰：「漢主亦當上封，上封能僊登天矣」。

And he [i.e. Gongsun Qing] said:³⁹ “This means that the Sage of the Han shall be among the grandsons and great-grandsons of Gaozu.⁴⁰ After the precious tripod appears, he [i.e. the Sage of the Han] will communicate with the deities and perform the *Feng* and *Shan* [sacrifices]. Of all the seventy two kings who have celebrated the *Feng* and *Shan* [sacrifices], only the Yellow Thearch had succeeded in performing the *Feng* [sacrifice] on top of Mount Tai.” Master Shen said: “The ruler of Han will again climb [Mount Tai] to perform the *Feng* [sacrifice]. After having performed the *Feng* [sacrifice], the emperor will be able to become an immortal and ascend Heaven.”

By referring to this long chain of oral tradition, Gongsun Qing seems to have appropriated the method by which the *ru* had already begun to win the emperor’s confidence in the matter of the ceremonial reform. However, there is a difference in the kind of authority claimed: whereas the *ru* requested that evidence be drawn solely from textual authority, based upon those scriptures which had been canonized shortly before, the authority Gongsun Qing drew upon was one of oral tradition

³⁶ The master Shen referred to here is certainly not to be identified with the *ru* scholar and *Shi* exegete Shen Pei 申培 who is also referred to in the *Shiji* as “master Shen” (*Shiji* 121/3120). This is pointed out by Michael Loewe in his *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods (221BC – AD 249)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 469.

³⁷ The context implies that Gongsun Qing claims that the inscription he refers to is the one on the tripod he says Huangdi had obtained at Yuanqu.

³⁸ Master Anqi has been mentioned above in connection with the *fangshi* Li Shaojun, an immortal who roamed about the island Penglai. See p. 247.

³⁹ Cf. the slightly different passages in *Shiji* 12/467 and *Han shu* 25A/1228 where the word *yue* 曰 (“and he said”) is lacking.

⁴⁰ Liu Che 劉徹 (posthumously called Han Emperor Wu) was a great-grandson of Liu Bang, posthumously called Gaozu, the founder of the Han dynasty (r. 206–195).

and inscriptions.⁴¹ Gongsun Qing continues by talking of tens of thousands of feudal lords of whom seven thousand⁴² had performed the *Feng* sacrifices before. He then turns to the sacred mountains. There were, he explains, altogether eight, of which three lay in the realm of the Man and Yi barbarians and five in that of the Center.⁴³ Huangdi (Gongsun Qing continues) regularly traveled to the sacred mountains, as a means of entering into communication with the various deities (*shen* 神). Finally, we learn more details about Huangdi, including the way he ascended to Heaven after having cast a tripod of copper from Mount Shou. The account ends:

於是天子曰：「嗟乎！吾誠得如黃帝，吾視去妻子如脫屣耳。」乃拜卿為郎，東使候神於太室。

Upon this, the Son of Heaven said: "Alas! Indeed, if only I could become like the Yellow Thearch, I would regard [the thought of] quitting my wife and children as being no more than casting off ones slippers." He then made [Gongsun] Qing a palace attendant and sent him to the east in order to maintain a watch for the gods at [Mount] Taishi.⁴⁴

To judge from the emperor's enthusiastic reaction, it seems to have been primarily the prospect of achieving immortality that led to the emperor's acceptance of Gongsun Qing's message. It thus seems as if this prospect was the one major motivation for the emperor to put Gongsun Qing's proposals into practice. We will have to see whether this suggestion is confirmed by other accounts.

Apart from giving Gongsun Qing the position of a Palace Attendant (*lang* 郎), the emperor sent him on an important mission: he was charged to travel to Mount Taishi, one of the sacred mountains, to watch for the immortals who Gongsun Qing had suggested might communicate with the emperor. Obviously, the search for ghosts and similar obscure practices, such as looking for a giant's footprint (for which the emperor even rewarded him with the post of a Palace Councilor [*zhong dafu* 中大夫]), seems to have become Gongsun Qing's major and overriding concern in the years to follow. However, as the author of the *Shiji* emphasizes several times in the remainder of this chapter, all his endeavors to provide the emperor with this long-desired contact failed in the end.⁴⁵ Thus, by reading the *Shiji* "Treatise on the *Feng*

⁴¹ The strong inclination toward oral traditions as well as toward traditions beyond those of the canonized scriptures which becomes plain in many passages of the *Shiji* is an important aspect which, as far as I know, has not received much attention. First steps toward an analysis on the background of this priority given in the *Shiji* have been taken in my paper "Die vielen Stimmen aus der Vergangenheit: Sima Qians Eintreten für Meinungsvielfalt," prepared for the annual conference of the DVCS in Köln, 14–16 November 2003. For an interpretation of the passage at the beginning of the chapter on Boyi 伯夷 where the *ru* are referred to as scholars who maintain that the question of reliability (*xin* 信) can only be solved by drawing on the six canonical scriptures, see also my study "Sima Qian's *Huo*-Zweifel in Kapitel 61 des *Shiji*," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 153 (2003), 115.

⁴² The *Suoyin* commentator Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (8th cent.) here cites Wei Zhao 韋昭 here who supposes that the number must have been 70 rather than 7000. See *Shiji* 28/1394.

⁴³ According to Gongsun Qing, the Five Sacred Mountains lying within the realm of the Center, Zhongguo 中國, as contrasted to the Three Sacred Mountains in the area belonging to the Man and Yi 蠻夷 (barbarians), were: Huashan 華山, Shoushan 首山, Taishi 太室, Taishan 泰山 and Donglai 東萊. He does not enumerate the other three.

⁴⁴ *Shiji* 28/1394; 12/468.

⁴⁵ On Gongsun Qing's manifold activities to summon ghosts, immortals and his claim to have found the footprints of a giant see *Shiji* 28/1397; 12/473–4; 28/1399; 12/477; 28/1402; 12/485 and 28/1403; 12/485.

and *Shan* Sacrifices,” the reader will get the general impression that Gongsun Qing was nothing but an ignorant and esoteric charlatan who by winning and abusing the emperor’s trust and confidence merely served his own ends. We will have to examine critically whether that picture is plausible or not.

The temporary triumph of one faction of the cosmologists

But what was the overall framework of the ideology behind the message conveyed by Gongsun Qing? He was only one of many representatives of the group of *fangshi* who rose to prominence during the time of Emperor Wu by presenting all sorts of methods by which a capable adept would be able to achieve immortality. Immortality, however, is but one aspect of a much wider range of ideas related to the relationship between Heaven and Earth and the role of Man. For want of a better term, I shall hereafter call the representatives of this ideology “cosmologists.”⁴⁶

Even a short historical survey of the teachings of the cosmologists must necessarily begin with Zou Yan 騶衍 (roughly 3rd cent. B.C.). In the *Shiji*, the specialists who discuss the cyclical growth, flourishing and decay of dynasties, are called “followers of master Zou” (Zouzi *zhi tu* 騶子之徒).⁴⁷ There is a short biographical account devoted to Zou Yan in the *Shiji*, interspersed between those of the philosophers Meng Ke 孟軻 and Xun Qing 荀卿, before and after some other descendants of the Zou family and followed by other philosophers somehow related to the Jixia 稷下 academy in Qi, one of the intellectual centers that flourished in the third century B.C.⁴⁸ According to the biographical data given there, Zou Yan was a man of Qi who lived shortly after the philosopher Meng Ke. The ideas he taught, we learn, were rather uncommon in his time: he tried to explain the political decline he witnessed in his days by drawing parallels between the rise and downfall of states and the rhythmic change of Yin and Yang. In his teachings, which he based on Huangdi as the ancestor of rulership he postulated the ideas of the Ends and Beginnings (*zhongshi* 終始) and of the “Cycles of Rule” (*zhu yun* 主運). We also learn from the *Shiji* account that according to Zou Yan there would be a regular alternate succession of five different powers or virtues (*wude zhuanyi* 五德轉移). Each reign was favored by one of these virtues (*zhi ge you yi* 治各有宜); auspicious signs would accompany these events. Kings, dukes and high ministers, when first confronted with his teachings,

⁴⁶ Nathan Sivin, “The Myth of the Naturalists,” in *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China: Researches and Reflections* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1995, IV), 1, calls the followers of Zou Yan the “school of Naturalists,” as Joseph Needham had earlier done. Cf. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2: *History of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), 232–253. I would, however, prefer the term cosmologists. The terminology Modernists versus Reformists which Michael Loewe proposed to use for the representatives of the two ideological camps at the beginning of the Han dynasty does not seem to me to be apt as applied to the context given here. See Michael Loewe, The Former Han dynasty, in: *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1: *The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.A.D. 220.*, ed., Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: University Press 1986), esp. 104–105 (definition of the terms Modernists and Reformists), and 153–79 (“The Full Force of Modernist Policies”).

⁴⁷ *Shiji* 28/1368.

⁴⁸ *Shiji* 74/2344. For an analysis based on the surviving fragments related to Zou Yan see Wang Meng’ou 王夢鷗, *Zou Yan yishu kao* 鄒衍遺書考 (Taipei: Shangwu, 1966). See also J. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, 232–44.

the *Shiji* continues, trembled with fear and strove to reform themselves; in the end, however, they were not able to keep their resolves.

As for the further passing down of the teachings of Zou Yan, the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices” of the *Shiji* offers a very interesting historical survey according to which the teachings of Zou Yan after having first been developed in Qi, were transported to Qin at the time when the later First Emperor had successfully unified the empire and were then propagated at the imperial court by men from Qi and Yan as well as from the seacoast:

自齊威、宣之時，騶子之徒論著終始五德之運，及秦帝而齊人奏之，故始皇采用之。而宋毋忌、正伯僑、充尚、羨門高最後皆燕人，為方僊道，形解銷化，依於鬼神之事。騶衍以陰陽主運顯於諸侯，而燕齊海上之方士傳其術不能通，然則怪迂阿諛苟合之徒自此興，不可勝數也。

From the time of [kings] Wei and Xuan of Qi [r. 378–314], the followers of master Zou discussed and wrote on the Cycle of Ends and Beginnings of the Five Virtues, and when [the king of] Qin proclaimed [himself] Thearch, men of Qi sent memorials about these [doctrines] to the court. Thus the First Emperor selected them and made use of them. But Song Wuji, Zheng Boqiao, Chong Shang and Xianmen Gao were finally all men of Yan; they practiced the Way of Immortality, how to dissolve and transform the physical form, and thereby drew on the services of ghosts and spirits. Zou Yan had won fame among the feudal lords for his [philosophy] of Yin and Yang and of the cycles of rule. The *fangshi* from Yan and Qi and from the seacoast passed on his arts without being able to fully grasp them. From then on, those capable of fantastic prodigies, skilled in flattery, and willing to do anything to win people over, flourished [in the court] in numbers beyond counting.⁴⁹

The author of the *Shiji* obviously intends to emphasize here that those *fangshi* who came from afar in order to offer their knowledge to the First Emperor of Qin were not capable of fully comprehending the teachings of Zou Yan. His remark that they practiced the Way of Immortality here clearly enough again indicates the derogatory attitude of the author of the *Shiji* to what these men had specialized in. The enthusiasm which impelled the First Emperor to embrace these theories and put them into practice is described in detail in the *Shiji*. According to that account, the emperor once again received instruction by an anonymous person (*huo* 或) who seems to have been quite familiar with the idea of dynastic cycles, as he gave the emperor a profound lesson concerning the growth and decline of all dynasties, reaching back to the time of Huangdi. He then added his conception as to which virtue was the force influencing Qin. As this is of utmost importance for the understanding of the theory in its ideological context, it is given in full below:

秦始皇既并天下而帝，或曰：「黃帝得土德，黃龍地螾見。夏得木德，青龍止於郊，草木暢茂。殷得金德，銀自山溢。周得火德，有赤鳥之符。今秦變周，水德之時。昔秦文公出獵，獲黑龍，此其水德之瑞。」於是秦更命河曰「德水」，以冬十月為年首，色上黑，度以六為名，音上大呂，事統上法。

After the First Emperor of the Qin had united the world and proclaimed [himself] Thearch, someone advised him, saying, “the Yellow Thearch ruled by the power of Earth, and thus yellow dragons and mole crickets appeared in his time. The Xia [dynasty] ruled by the power of Wood, and thus a green dragon came to rest in its court and the grasses and trees grew luxuriantly. The Yin [= Shang]

⁴⁹ *Shiji* 28/1368–1369.

dynasty ruled by Metal, and silver flowed out of the mountains. The Zhou ruled by Fire, and thus it was given a sign in the form of a vermilion bird. As now the Qin have replaced the Zhou, it is the era of the Power of Water. In ancient times when Duke Wen of Qin went out hunting, he captured a black dragon. This is an auspicious sign which indicates the [effects of the] power of Water.” For this reason, the First Emperor of Qin changed the name of the Yellow River into Water of the Power. He fixed the start of the year on the tenth month, honored the color Black and used the number Six, the number corresponding to Water, as a standard for all measurements. In music, he honored the first note in the musical scale, and in all his government affairs he put laws above all else.⁵⁰

At the beginning of the Han dynasty, one of the most important scholars concerned with the question of ceremonials who at the same time adhered to the cosmologists' ideas was Zhang Cang 張蒼 (?–152 B.C.). As is emphasized in the biographical account devoted to him, he was fond of books and of matters concerning the pitch pipes and the calendar.⁵¹ Moreover, he was an expert on the theory of dynastic cycles and was entrusted with the installation of the first imperial calendar of the Han, the *Zhuanxu li* 顓頊曆 (calendar of Zhuanxu). However, the calendar he propagated – as the author of the *Shiji* remarks with an unmistakably grudging undertone – was still the one which had been used during the Qin dynasty.⁵²

As we turn now to the situation during the reign of Emperor Wen (r. 180–157), we may infer from the *Shiji* account that there arose a conflict of opinions among the representatives of what was two different strands of essentially the same theory of dynastic cycles. The main opponents within this conflict were Zhang Cang on the one hand and Gongsun Chen 公孫臣⁵³ and Jia Yi 賈誼 (201–169) on the other. The conflict is described in several chapters of the *Shiji*.⁵⁴ The account in the “Treatise on the Calendar” runs as follows:

至孝文時，魯人公孫臣以終始五德上書，言「漢得土德，宜更元，改正朔，易服色。當有瑞，瑞黃龍見」。事下丞相張蒼，張蒼亦學律曆，以為非是，罷之。其後黃龍見成紀，張蒼自黜，所欲論著不成。

When it came to the time of Emperor Wen, Gongsun Chen, a man of Lu, submitted a document which was based on Ends and Beginnings of the Five Virtues, saying: “The Han received the virtue of Earth, thus it would be fitting to make a new begin-

⁵⁰ *Shiji* 28/1366. Note the striking parallel between the text of this anonymous memorial and the following passage in the chapter *Yingtong* 應同 of the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (quoted after the ICS Concordance Series: 13.2/64/10) where the last lines differ remarkably from the above quoted *Shiji* account: 代火者必將水，天且先見水氣勝，水氣勝，故其色尚黑，其事則水。水氣至而不知，數備，將徙于土。天為者時，而不助農於下。 “The [force] which will replace Fire is certain to be Water. Heaven has again first given signs that the ethers of Waters are in ascendance. Since the ethers of Water are ascendant, the ruler should honor the color Black and model his affairs on Water. If the ethers of Water culminate and no one knows [of it], after the numbers have come to their full, [the cycle] will shift toward Earth: What Heaven makes, is [only] the time period, but He will not help farming below.” Cf. John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study* (Stanford: University Press 2000), 283; see also John Louton, “Concepts of Comprehensiveness and Historical Change in the Lü-shih Ch’-un-ch’iu,” 106–7.

⁵¹ *Shiji* 96/2675.

⁵² *Shiji* 96/2685.

⁵³ The only information on his dates is the remark in the *Shiji* that the discussion concerning the question where the Han dynasty should be positioned within the cycle of rule took place in the year 166 B.C. The fact that Gongsun Chen shared the clan name Gongsun 公孫 with Gongsun Qing is certainly not accidental. It may be relevant that the cognomen of Huangdi, as recorded in the “Annals of the Five Thearchs” (*Wudi benji* 五帝本紀) of the *Shiji* (1/1), is Gongsun.

⁵⁴ *Shiji* 26/1260; 28/1381; 96/2681–2682 and again in the Grand Scribe's remark, *Shiji* 96/2685.

ning, to alter the beginning of the first month [of the new year] and to alter the color of the ceremonial vestments. There will be portents [corresponding to the virtue of Earth]; the portents will become visible in the form of yellow dragons." The matter was handed down to the counselor-in-chief Zhang Cang. Zhang Cang who himself was a specialist of the pitch pipes and the calendar, maintained that this [prophecy] was false. Thus the proposal was abandoned. After that, yellow dragons appeared in Chengji. As a consequence of this, Zhang Cang asked to be dismissed from office, as all his efforts at interpreting [the cycles] had turned out to have been wrong.⁵⁵

It now becomes plain how intimately the prophetic message Gongsun Qing had launched into Emperor Wu's court was linked with an elaborate theory that interprets the progress of history in terms of dynastic cycles. By favoring Huangdi who was correlated with the color Yellow and the element of Earth, Gongsun Qing can even be clearly identified as the representative of one special faction of these theorists of dynastic cycles. In a personal remark by Ban Gu, near the end of the "Monograph on State Sacrifices" in the *Han shu*, we find a survey of the history of the ideas related to dynastic cycles. Ban Gu first summarizes the situation of the ceremonies at the beginning of the Han, then sets forth Zhang Cang's theory that the dynasty was still favored by Water and thus describes the conflict between the competing specialists. Ban Gu continues:

孝武之世，文章為盛，太初改制，而兒寬、司馬遷等猶從臣、誼之言，服色數度，遂順黃德。彼以五德之傳從所不勝，秦在水德，故謂漢據土而克之。

In the generation of Emperor Xiaowu, there were ceremonial texts and verses in abundance. In the Taichu [period], the regulations were [officially] changed, but [in establishing these reforms] Ni Kuan, Sima Qian and others still followed the teachings of [Gongsun] Chen and [Jia] Yi: [this means] that for the color of the [ceremonial] vestments and the [officially honored] numbers, they continued to adapt [the dynasty] to the virtue of Yellow. They were quite in accord with the transmission of the Five Virtues according to which the one whom [the former] could not conquer would follow [in the cycle], maintaining that Qin was [favored by the] virtue of Water, and thus they said that Han, supported by [the virtue of] Earth would conquer it.⁵⁶

He then arrives at what Liu Xiang and his son Xin thought to be the correct sequence, based on a different theory of time cycles and thus reveals that he too adhered to a theory of time cycles, but one which obviously concurred with the one favored by Sima Qian and his colleagues.⁵⁷ But does Ban Gu do justice to his col-

⁵⁵ *Shiji* 26/1260. Cf. E. Chavannes, *Mémoires Historiques III*, 329.

⁵⁶ *Han shu* 25B/1270. The branch of the cosmological theory assumed here is also called the "mutual conquest sequence of the Five Virtues" (*wude xiangsheng* 五德相勝). According to the adherents of this faction, the sequence of virtues within this cycle was: Earth, Wood, Metal, Fire, Water. This sequence corresponds with that associated with the dynasties Xia down to Han, as cited from the *Lüshi chunqiu*. Cf. n. 50. Competing with this system is the "mutual generation sequence" (*wude xiangsheng* 五德相生), according to which the sequence of elements would be: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water. For an analysis of the different theories concerning the sequence of dynasties and the five elements in Han times see Gu Jiegang's study: "Wude zhongshi shuo xia de zhengshi he lishi 五德終始說下的政治和歷史" (1930), in *Gu Jiegang gushi lunwen ji* 顧頡剛古史論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996), 254–459, and the table on p. 302.

⁵⁷ The concurring system which Ban Gu and his father, and before them Liu Xiang and his son Xin adhered to is the theory of the "mutual generation sequence" mentioned above, n. 56. Its adherents maintained that because the Zhou dynasty was correlated with Wood, Qin had to be dropped out of the cycle, as this dynasty was not regarded by them as legitimate, and the Han as the successor of Zhou would be favored by Fire.

league and predecessor Sima Qian when he characterizes him as adhering to one theory of time cycles? In order to find a reliable answer on this, we shall have to scrutinize more closely Sima Tan's and Sima Qian's professional engagement.

Sima Tan's and Sima Qian's share in Emperor Wu's new sacrifices

The fact that Emperor Wu started to put his ceremonial reform into practice almost immediately after Gongsun Qing had appeared at court and introduced his prophetic message to the emperor was more than Gongsun Qing's personal triumph. It was at the same time the fulfillment of a hope that many high dignitaries at court had long cherished. One of those who certainly shared this hope – even though he should perhaps not be reckoned among the high dignitaries – was Sima Tan.⁵⁸

Sima Tan served Emperor Wu in the position of a *taishiling* 太史令, a title which might best be rendered as “Director the Grand Scribe.”⁵⁹ It is emphasized in the last chapter of the *Shiji* that Sima Tan died in the year 110 B.C., shortly before the emperor performed the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices on Mount Tai for the first time. As Sima Qian reports, his father became ill – supposedly during the time he was traveling in the imperial entourage – and thus had to stay behind. Sima Qian must have visited his father shortly before he died, since we learn from the *Shiji* record that Tan, when he lay on the point of death, grasped his sons hand and with tears beseeched him:

余先周室之太史也。自上世嘗顯功名於虞夏，典天官事。後世中衰，絕於予乎？汝復為太史，則續吾祖矣。今天子接千歲之統，封泰山，而余不得從行，是命也夫，命也夫！余死，汝必為太史；為太史，無忘吾所欲論著矣。

“Our ancestors were Grand Scribes for the house of Zhou. From the most remote times on, [our clan] had a good reputation and at the time of Yu of Xia [we] were in charge of the affair of the Office of Heaven. In later ages [our clan] declined. Will it end with me? After you in turn will have become Grand Scribe, you must continue the work of our ancestors. Our present Emperor will pick up the thread of a tradition of a thousand years;⁶⁰ he [thus] will perform the *Feng* sacrifice on Mount Tai, but I won't have the privilege of accompanying him there. Oh, that's fate! Such a fate! After I am dead, you will become Grand Scribe in turn. When you are Grand Scribe, do not forget what I hoped to expound and write about!”⁶¹

These few lines strongly convey the impression that the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices of

⁵⁸ As we shall see presently, Sima Tan in his office as a *taishi* had an income of 600 *dan* (bushels) which seems to have been that of an average court official.

⁵⁹ Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge: University Press, 1980), 9, 19 et al., translates the title as Prefect Grand Astrologer. Hucker, *Dictionary of Official Titles*, no. 6218, renders the title with regard to the Han period simply as Grand Astrologer. As I will argue below, neither title is adequately rendered in translation, given the many functions of this office in the lifetimes of Sima Tan and Sima Qian.

⁶⁰ As for the obvious allusion here made to a thousand-year-cycle, compare the remark quoted by Sima Qian from the mouth of an “ancestor” or “predecessor” (*xianren* 先人) which has been plausibly interpreted by the *Zhengyi* commentator Zhang Shoujie (8th cent.) to be Sima Tan's words. In the statement, two successive 500-year-cycles are referred to, one starting from the death of the duke of Zhou up to Confucius, the second starting from Confucius' death up to “today” (*jin* 今). See *Shiji* 130/3296. It seems as if Sima Tan adheres to a theory which is already reflected in the *Mengzi*. For an analysis of the meaning of the cycle of five hundred years in the *Mengzi* see my study on “Ein Philosoph in der Krise? – Meng Ke und die Zeitenwende,” *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung*, vol. 24 (2000), 113–32.

⁶¹ *Shiji* 130/3295.

Emperor Wu – the *feng shan* matter (*feng shan shi* 封禪事), as it is called several times in the *Shiji*,⁶² – must have been an event of utmost importance in the life and thinking of Sima Tan. The expression *jie qiansui zhi tong* 接千歲之統 (to pick up the thread of a tradition of a thousand years) is strongly reminiscent of the prophecy spread by Gongsun Qing, according to which during the reign of Emperor Wu the astral configurations of Huangdis time would recur. But what exactly did Sima Tan – as far as his official duties were concerned – have to do with time cycles and with the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices? To answer this question, we must take a closer look at the duties related to a *taishiling*, the office Sima Qian followed his father in three years after his death.⁶³ The preface to the “Tables of the Hundred Officials, Dukes and Ministers” (*Baiguan gongqing biao* 百官公卿表) of the *Han shu* offers only a laconic listing of the title *taishi* among others.⁶⁴ More information about the office of the *taishiling* can be obtained from the “Monograph on the Hundred Officials” (*Baiguan zhi* 百官志) in the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書:

太史令一人，六百石。

本注曰：掌天時、星曆。凡歲將終，奏新年曆。凡國祭祀、喪、娶之事，掌奏良日及時節禁忌。凡國有瑞應、災異，掌記之。

The Director the Grand Scribe: one person [at a time], six hundred bushels [income].

The Original Note⁶⁵ says: “He is responsible for the [fixing of the beginnings of the] seasons and for the calendar of the stars.⁶⁶ Toward the end of the year, he submits the new annual calendar to the throne. For state ceremonials, such as sacrifices, burials or marriages, he is responsible for submitting to the throne the auspicious days and those to be avoided. In case there are portents, such as calamities or unusual events, he is responsible to record them.”⁶⁷

⁶² Cf. *Shiji* 12/473; 28/1382, 1397 (2 occurrences); 30/1438; 117/3063.

⁶³ *Shiji* 130/3296. Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 in a study first published in 1963 emphasized the importance of distinguishing Sima Tan and Sima Qian as two different authors who both contributed to the *Shiji*. See his “Sima Tan zuo shi 司馬談作史,” in: *Shiji yanjiu cuibian* 史記研究粹編, ed., Zhang Gaoping 張高評 et al. (Gaoxiong: Fuwen, 1992): 81–88.

⁶⁴ *Han shu* 19A/726.

⁶⁵ As for what is called *benzhu* (Original Note) here, Liu Zhao 劉昭 in his *Zhubu* 注補 (Commentarial Supplement) to the *Xu Han shu* 續漢書 upon which the *zhi* 志 part of the *Hou Han shu* is based, explains that at the beginning of the *Baiguan zhi* 百官志 (“Monograph on the Hundred Officials”) this refers to the commentary which was already contained in the *Xu Han shu* and which he compared with the commentary written by Ying (Shao) 應劭 (ca. 168–197), i.e. the *Hanguan juyi* 漢(官)儀 (Ceremonials of Han Officials). See the commentary to *Hou Han shu, zhi* 24/3556. See also Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han: Their Author, Sources, Contents and Place in Chinese Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 224, who supposes that Sima Biao by composing his notes relied on the *Han juyi* by Wei Hong (1st cent. A.D.).

⁶⁶ As we shall see below, the peculiarity of the new calendar of the Han consisted in bringing solar and lunar cycles into harmony. This is precisely what an astronomical calendar has to accomplish.

⁶⁷ Cf. the parallel account from *Han juyi*, quoted in *Taiping yulan* 235/3b. The Tang commentary to the *Hou Han shu* adds a quotation from the *Hanguan (juyi)*, which gives more details on the many fields of competence which were, in late Han times, assigned to the office of the *taishiling*. I render here the paraphrase given by H. Bielenstein, *Bureaucracy*, 22, replacing only the title Grand Astrologer by Grand Scribe, following the order of the text account and rendering the transcriptions in *Hanyu pinyin*: His staff consisted of 37 Expectant Appointees of the Grand Scribe [*taishi daizhao*], of whom 6 were Calendarists [*zhi li*], 3 Diviners by the Tortoise Shell [*gui bu*], 3 Directors of Buildings [*lüzhai*], 4 Experts in the Phases of the Sun [*ri shi*], 3 Diviners by the Book of Changes [*Yi shi*], 2 Directors of Sacrifices to Expel Evil Influences [*dian rang*], 3 Experts in the Traditions of Masters Ji [*Ji shi*], Xu [*Xu shi*], as well as Masters Dian and Chang [*Dian Chang shi*] respectively, altogether 9 [representatives], 2 Specialists of Methods [*jia fa*], two Supplicants for Rain and 2 Elucidators [*jie shi*] respectively, and 1 physician [*yi*]. 太史待詔三十七人，其六人治曆，三人龜卜，三人廬宅，四人日時，三人易筮，二人典禮，九人籍氏、許氏、典昌氏，各三人，嘉法、請雨、解事各二人，醫一人。”

丞一人。明堂及靈臺丞一人，二百石。

本注曰：二丞，掌守明堂、靈臺。靈臺掌候日月星氣，皆屬太史。

One assistant [at a time] and one assistant responsible for the Hall of Light as well as one responsible for the Terrace of the Spirits, two hundred bushels [income].

The Original Note says: "Two assistants, being in charge of the Hall of Brilliance and the Terrace of the Spirits; [the one being] responsible for the Terrace of the Spirits is in charge of watching the sun, moon, stars and the ethers; they both belong to the office of Grand Scribe."⁶⁸

According to this account, the office of the *taishiling* must have comprised a wide range of responsibilities. As Hans Bielenstein puts it, the office of the *taishiling* was even the most versatile and technically trained official in the ministry and, for that matter, the entire central government.⁶⁹ Of course, this account mainly reflects the situation of Later Han times when there was, as Bielenstein puts it, "a real amalgamation of offices," as proved by the titles of the lesser subordinates of the Prefect Grand Astrologer during Later Han and when, as Bielenstein maintains, the sphere of his authority was increased by absorbing into his office that of the former Prefect Grand Augur.⁷⁰

As far as the duties of the *taishiling* official are concerned, the *Hou Han shu* account seems, however, to be taken from an earlier source, the *Han jiuyi* 漢舊儀 (Old Ceremonial of Han) by Wei Hong 衛宏, a text supposed to reflect the situation of the Earlier Han times. But to be sure about the duties of the *taishiling* during the time of Han Emperor Wu, we had better turn to the description in the *Shiji* account itself.

Before examining more closely two passages in chapter 28 which described the field in which Sima Tan was engaged during the time he served at the court of Emperor Wu, some remarks should be added on the title *taishigong* 太史公 (The Lord the Grand Scribe) as it occurs in this context. Already in his genealogical account of the Sima clan at the beginning of chapter 130 of the *Shiji*, Sima Qian mentions that his father Tan became a *taishigong*.⁷¹ Moreover, the expression *taishigong yue* 太史公曰 ("The Lord the Grand Scribe says") is used as a marker to introduce the author's personal remark, usually near the end of a chapter.⁷²

It is evident that the advisory function of Sima Tan was closely linked with the

⁶⁸ *Hou Han shu*, "Baiguan zhi" 2/3572. The Tang commentary to the *Hou Han shu* adds to this another quotation from the *Hanguan (jiuyi)* which sheds further light on the competences of the altogether 42 (or 41) offices or Appointees, as H. Bielenstein renders them, who were affiliated to the Terrace of Spirits which has been identified by Bielenstein as the imperial observatory. 14 of them were Watchers of the Stars (*hou xing*), 2 Watchers of the Sun (*hou ri*), 2 Watchers of the Winds (*hou feng*), 12 Watchers of the Ethers (*hou qi*), 3 Watchers of the Sun's shadow (*hou guiyang*), 7 Watchers of the Zhong Pitch Pipes (*hou zhonglü*) and 1 Member of the Suite (*sheren*). 靈臺待詔四十(二)〔一〕人。其十四人候星，二人候日，三人候風，十二人候氣，三人候晷景，七人候鍾律。一人舍人。 Cf. Bielenstein, *Bureaucracy*, 22–23,

⁶⁹ H. Bielenstein, *Bureaucracy*, 19.

⁷⁰ H. Bielenstein, *Bureaucracy*, 22. According to proposals made by the *taishiling* and other officials in charge of the sacrifices, the Grand Augur (*taizhu* 太祝) should be entrusted with responsibility for the newly established ceremonies for Taiyi (cf. the *Shiji* passage translated on p. 21). This passage is of special interest as it demonstrates the relatively high position of the *taishiling* within the hierarchy of officials at the time of Sima Tan, as even the office of the *taizhu* was subordinated to the *taishiling*.

⁷¹ *Shiji* 130/3286.

⁷² For the different hypotheses concerning the origin of the title *taishigong* 太史公 in the *Shiji*, see the notes added by the *Jijie*, *Suoyin* and *Zhengyi* commentators to *Shiji* 130/3287 as well as to *Shiji* 12/461.

establishment of two new cults, or, perhaps more aptly, with two cults which had existed before, but which were now for the first time made part of the great imperial cults which Emperor Wu performed in person: the cult of Houtu 后土, the deity of Earth, and the cult of Taiyi 太一, the Grand Unity.⁷³ The advice to establish the cult for Houtu as a new cult of the empire is the first instance in which the advice given by the *taishigong* in ceremonial matters is explicitly mentioned in the *Shiji* account. It is recorded for the winter of the year 113 B.C., the year in which the precious tripod had been discovered in Fenyin, that

有司與太史公、祠官寬舒議：「天地牲角繭栗。今陛下親祠后土，后土宜於澤中圓丘為五壇，壇一黃犢太牢具，已祠盡瘞，而從祠衣上黃。」

The officials debated with the Lord the Grand Scribe and the Minister in Charge of Sacrifices, Kuan Shu, and made the following announcement: "In the past, at the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, oxen with horns as small as silk cocoons or chestnuts were used. Now if Your Majesty wishes to sacrifice in person to Houtu, it is necessary to set up five altars on a round hill in the middle of a swamp. At each altar a yellow calf and a set of three sacrificial animals should be offered, and when the ceremony is completed these should all be buried in the earth. All persons attending the ceremony should wear vestments honoring the color Yellow."⁷⁴

It is important to note that it had been a sacrifice dedicated to Houtu, the Deity of Earth, performed by a shaman priestess in Fenyin, during which the precious tripod had been discovered. This cult, which had formerly been a regional cult, thus seems to have been co-opted by the emperor and made part of the central imperial cult. Kuan Shu, the successor of the *fangshi* Li Shaojun,⁷⁵ and the Grand Scribe must have been very familiar with this cult and instructed the emperor with regard to the sacrificial tools and the color of the ceremonial vestments. The second account in which the *taishigong* is explicitly mentioned in the *Shiji* text is related to the establishment of a ceremony addressed to the Grand Unity, Taiyi 太一. As the *Shiji* records, Emperor Wu performed this sacrifice for the first time on a *xinsi* <18> day, a day which coincided with the first day of the new moon of the eleventh month, a day on which simultaneously the winter solstice occurred, just before daylight.⁷⁶ The

⁷³ As Gu Jiegang pointed out in "Taiyi de boxing ji qi yu Houtu de bingli 太一的勃興及其與后土的並立" (1936), Taiyi was conceived at that time as the deity of Heaven, thus being complementary to Houtu as the deity of Earth and simultaneously as the Supreme Deity which was identified with the highest Thearch, Shangdi, whom the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices on Mount Tai were dedicated to. See his "Sanhuang kao 三皇考" in *Gu Jiegang gushi lunwen ji* 顧頡剛古史論文集, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996), especially 59–65. See also the chapters "Taiyi ming de lai yuan 「太一」名的來源," *ibid.*, 55–56, and "Tianshen guizhe Taiyi ji Sanyi 「天神貴者太一」及三一," *ibid.*, 57–58.

⁷⁴ *Shiji* 28/1389; 12/461; in the parallel account in *Han shu* 25A/ 1221, the word Tan 談 is added. Cf. the translation by B. Watson, *Records II*, 44.

⁷⁵ *Shiji* 28/1386.

⁷⁶ *Shiji* 28/1395; 12/470. 十一月辛巳朔旦冬至，昧爽，天子始郊拜太一。 This date agrees strikingly with the astral configuration which Gongsun Qing in his prophetic message had predicted would occur in the winter of the same year in which the tripod had been found in Fenyin (see the translation on p. 249). Whereas this date is thus confirmed as actually having happened by the *Shiji* record there seems to be a deviation from this with regard to the date indicated in the annals of Emperor Wu in *Han shu* 6/185. Although the main elements of the day constellations (*xinsi* day, eleventh month, winter solstice) are repeated there, the year under which this event is recorded is the year Yuanding 5 (i.e. 112 B.C.) and not 113 B.C. The explanation might be simply that the dates recorded in this part of the *Han shu* are based upon a different calendrical system, but one could also suggest that the fulfillment of the prediction given by Gongsun Qing is intentionally denied here.

ceremony, during which yellow vestments were worn, was accompanied by verses of praise pertaining to the discovery of a precious tripod, certain sacred calculations (*shence* 神策) as well as the end and beginning of cycles, combined with the date on which the ceremony took place. After having cited the verses in full, Sima Qian states that the officials in charge of the ceremonies had reported that a light had appeared in the sky over the offerings, and on the following day yellow exhalations rose from the altar. The passage continues:

太史公_祠官寬舒等曰：「神靈之休，祐福兆祥，宜因此地光域立太時壇以明應。令太祝領，秋及臘間祠。三歲天子一郊見。」

The Lord the Grand Scribe, the Minister in Charge of Sacrifices, Kuan Shu and others said: "The mercy shown by the Gods who protect our good fortune and send us auspicious portents requires that an Altar to the Grand Unity should be permanently established in this region where the light shone, as a clear answer [to all this]. The Grand Augur should be made responsible for these ceremonies, and they should be performed in the time between [the beginning of] the autumnal quarter of the year and the end of the year. And once every three years the Son of Heaven should go and perform the *jiao* [sacrifice there] in person."⁷⁷

In this passage, the officials, including the *taishigong*, appear as the representatives of certain domains of knowledge, as ritual experts, who give the emperor good advice in explaining to him the meaning of the heavenly portents. That Sima Tan is the person to whom Sima Qian refers here is supported by the remark quoted from the "Monograph on the Hundred Officials" in *Hou Han shu*, according to which there was only one person at a time serving in this position.⁷⁸ Besides, the suggestion that the *taishigong* could be identified with Sima Tan is explicitly made already in the *Jijie* commentary for the first of the two above quoted instances.⁷⁹ Moreover, in the chapter of the *Jiao* sacrifices, both times that the *Shiji* says *taishigong*, the *Han shu* version replaces the anonymous *taishigong* by *taishiling* Tan.⁸⁰

The peculiar date chosen for this first sacrifice in honor of Taiyi deserves special attention. As stated before, the sacrifice took place on a *xinsi* day which was not only the first day of the eleventh month and the day of a new moon but also the day on which the winter solstice occurred. If one compares this date with the constellation predicted by Gongsun Qing in his prophetic message one finds that both dates match perfectly, except for the designation of the month which, as we recall, was left open in the prophecy.⁸¹ Moreover, the fact that all these events took place in the course of the year 113 B.C., the very year in which – in the sixth month – a tripod is

⁷⁷ *Shiji* 28/1395; 12/470; in *Han shu* 25A/1231 (Sima) Tan is added. Cf. the translation of this passage by B. Watson, *Records II*, 53–54, according to whose interpretation the statement of the specialists in charge of the sacrifices ends after *ying* 應, whereas according to the interpunctuation offered by the Zhonghua edition the whole passage is part of the statement, which seems to me more plausible.

⁷⁸ Cf. p. 259.

⁷⁹ Cf. the commentary to *Shiji* 12/461.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Han shu* 25A/1221; 1231. Moreover, the commentary to *Han shu* 25A/1222 cites a note by Yan Shigu according to which Tan can be identified with Sima Tan. As for the possible reason why Sima Qian only mentions the title *taishigong* here, without adding the personal name of his father, it has been argued that this might be due to a name taboo Sima Qian obeys here; see Liang Jianbang 梁建邦, "Shiji de biwei 《史記》的避偉," *Shaanxi guangbo dianshi daxue xuebao* 3 (2001), 25.

⁸¹ Cf. the translation on pp. 250–51.

recorded to have been excavated at the sacred site of Fenying, again perfectly matches with Gongsun Qing's prophecy, according to which the exceptional calendrical constellation would take place in precisely the year during which a tripod was found.⁸²

As Gongsun Qing had emphasized in his message, all these coincidences – the discovery of the tripod and the exceptional astral configuration – were something that had occurred only once before, during Huangdi's age, and would now recur for the first time during the Han. The conclusion to be drawn from this is anticipated by Gongsun Qing, namely that the times of Huangdi and that of the Han dynasty were located on parallel positions within the time cycles.

It is not so difficult to guess who was responsible for the choice of precisely the *xinsi* day of the winter of the year 113 B.C. for the inauguration of the sacrifices for Taiyi. As we learned from the *Hou Han shu* account cited above, it was one of the major duties of the *taishiling* to recommend auspicious days appropriate for state ceremonials, such as sacrifices to the throne.⁸³ The *taishiling* at that time, as I argued above, was Sima Tan. Thus it may not be too farfetched to assume that the choice of this *xinsi* day as the day on which the sacrifice in honor of Taiyi was performed for the first time was made by someone who closely collaborated with Gongsun Qing, or at least by a person who operated within a strikingly similar ideological milieu in which specialist knowledge on calendrical calculations played a pre-eminent role.

Apart from the two instances referred to above, there is also a third passage in chapter 28 of the *Shiji* in which the activity of a Grand Scribe (*taishi*) is mentioned. Although for this passage no *Shiji* commentary discusses whether the *taishi* here might be identified with Sima Tan, and although Ban Gu in the *Han shu* parallel text does not make that identification, it will nevertheless be so rendered here, as it reveals the manifold responsibilities of the *taishi* which seems to have even included services meant to ban or manipulate ghosts, as well as services related to events of war.

其秋，為伐南越，告禱泰一，以牡荆畫幡日月北斗登龍，以象天一三星，為泰一鋒，名曰「靈旗」。為兵禱，則太史奉以指所伐國。

In the autumn of this [year], before launching an attack on the state of Southern Yue, an announcement was made to the Grand Unity, along with prayers for success. A banner was made, fixed to a handle of thorn wood, and painted with representations of the sun, the moon, the Big Dipper, and an ascending dragon. These represented the Spear of the Grand Unity.⁸⁴ It was called Spirit Banner, and when the announcement and prayers for the soldiers were offered, the Grand Scribe took it in his hand and pointed it at the country that was going to be attacked.⁸⁵

⁸² Cf. the report of the discovery of the tripod at Fenying summarized on p. 248.

⁸³ See the translation on p. 259–60.

⁸⁴ Here, the Grand Unity alluded to is a star constellation, namely the three stars in the mouth of the Big Dipper. For the position of the Taiyi constellation, see *Shiji* 27/1289.

⁸⁵ *Shiji* 28/1395; 12/471; cf. *Han shu* 25A/1231 (no identification with Tan given in the commentary). Cf. B. Watson, *Records II*, 54. The astrological method alluded here has elsewhere in Han texts been called *fenye* 分野 (Field Division). On the astrological implication of this method see Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 3: *Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), 545. A table on the correlation between the regional states and the lunar mansions (*xiu* 宿) according to the geographical chapter of *Han shu* has been given by Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky during the Han: Constellating Stars and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 106.

One may infer from this passage how close the duties of the Han *taishi* must still have been to those of shamans or sorcerers: the *taishi* seems to have applied his knowledge about phenomena in the heavens to practical needs on earth, such as warding off the enemy who inhabited a certain area on earth by pointing with the spear of Taiyi toward the corresponding position in the sky, a practice similar to voodoo.⁸⁶ As for Sima Qian's professional engagement, the fact that he must have been deeply involved in Emperor Wu's grand ceremonial reform can be concluded from the last chapter of the *Shiji*. There we learn:

卒三歲而遷為太史令，紬史記石室金匱之書。五年而當太初元年，十一月甲子朔旦冬至，天曆始改，建於明堂，諸神受紀。

When three years had gone by since [his father's] death, [Sima] Qian became Director the Grand Scribe.⁸⁷ He [then] excerpted the records of the scribes⁸⁸ as well as the books of the stone room and the metal casket.⁸⁹ The fifth year [after his father's death] was the first year of the Taichu [era].⁹⁰ At dawn of the *jiazi* <1> [day], in the eleventh month, the winter solstice occurred. The heavenly calendar was brought to a new start, [the calculations?] were deposited in the Hall of Light, and all the Gods received the record.⁹¹

The way Sima Qian refers to both events, first in a three-year-step and then in a five-year-step as being somehow related to his father's death, strongly conveys the impression that he intended to emphasize an inner connection between his father Tan and these events, that both events must somehow have been intimately linked with his father or, at least, that these events were of utmost importance to his father – a phenomenon which finds its parallel in the biographical account of Sima Xiangru to which I will turn presently.

The calendar reform was certainly the single most important event during the time Sima Qian served at court in the position of *taishiling*. Yet in spite of its significance and although the event is treated here and elsewhere in the *Shiji* as a matter of major importance, there is only one passage in the *Shiji* in which Sima Qian explic-

⁸⁶ The term "voodoo" has been applied by Hans van Ess to the practices of the scribe (*shi* 史) Chang Hong 襄弘 who advised his ruler, the Zhou king Ling, to perform a ceremony in the presence of the feudal lords during which they had to shoot with bows at the head of a wildcat – due to a magical play with words, van Ess explains, this became equivalent with attacking those feudal lords who did not attend the meeting. See his "Implizite historische Urteile," 48.

⁸⁷ According to the *Bowuzhi*, Sima Qian entered office on a *yimao* <52> day, in the sixth month of the third year (of the era Yuanfeng, which would be 108 B.C.), at the age of 28, and had an income of 600 *dan* (bushels). Cf. *Jijie* commentary to *Shiji*, 130//3296.

⁸⁸ For the records of the scribes, *Shiji* 史記, mentioned here, cf. the passage shortly before where Sima Tan in his long monologue expresses his fear that the texts of the scribes of the whole world (*tianxia zhi shiwen* 天下之史文) might get lost, due to his inability to finish his grand project without the help of his son (*Shiji* 28/3295). It seems that the endeavor to collect texts written by earlier scribes of the different feudal states before the unification of the empire was the reason for several of the journeys Sima Tan undertook. This is indicated in a passage quoted from *Han juyi* (*Taiping yulan* 235/3b).

⁸⁹ The stone room and the metal casket, as the *Jijie* commentary (3296) remarks, were both places in which official documents of the state were stored.

⁹⁰ Although a note by Li Qi in the *Jijie* commentary emphasizes that the counting of years had to be started from Qian's entering upon office, simply from the distance of almost six years between Sima Tan's death and the first year of Taichu, it must be in both cases related to the year in which his father had died.

⁹¹ *Shiji* 130/3296. The *Jijie* commentary here cites a remark by Xu Guang 徐廣 who refers to the almost parallel formulation in the rhymed preface to chap. 28 (cf. *Shiji* 130/3306).

itly mentions his personal share in the calendar calculations – not, as one would expect, in the “Treatise on the Calendar,” but in one of the biographical chapters.⁹² What can be found, however, in the “Treatise on the Calendar,” is not only a theoretical essay on the cosmological ideology inextricably linked to the correct measures of the calendar of a state, but also a historical survey starting out with Huangdi, who is clearly depicted here as the first calendar maker and as the paragon of cosmological rule in accordance with calendrical rules, and ending with the calendar reform established in the time of Emperor Wu. A long list follows in this chapter covering 76 years in which the calendar for these years to come is calculated in a way that the increasing gap between the solar year and a year consisting of 12 added lunar cycles is adjusted by adding altogether 7 intercalary months within 19 years, the so-called Metonic cycle.⁹³

Since the section of the historical survey which pertains to the time of Emperor Wu is of special interest, I shall now translate and comment upon a part of it:

至今上即位，招致方士唐都，分其天部；而巴落下閔運算轉曆，然後日辰之度與夏正同。乃改元，更官號，封泰山。

When the present Emperor came to the throne, he entrusted the *fangshi* Tang Du⁹⁴ to divide Heaven according to his [theory].⁹⁵ Then Luoxia Hong from Ba made his calculation by basing himself on the cycles of the calendar, so that the measures of the sun and the heavenly bodies would coincide with the calendar of the Xia dynasty. After this [had been achieved], the first day of the New Year would be changed, the titles of the officials would be renamed, and the *Feng* [sacrifice] on Mount Tai would be performed.⁹⁶

From what follows, however, it can be concluded that up to the point of time described above these plans cannot yet have been put into practice. This becomes plain from a passage contained in an edict of Emperor Wu:

⁹² The Grand Scribe's personal remark at the end of the biography of Han Anguo 韓安國 begins with the remark: “When I fixed the pitch pipes and the calendar together with Hu Sui, [...] 余與壺遂定律曆 [...]” See *Shiji* 108/2865.

⁹³ The Metonic cycle, named after the Greek astronomer Meton who in the 5th cent. B.C. introduced this calculation method into the calendar, solves the problem of the otherwise increasing gap between solar and lunar cycles by adding altogether 7 intercalary months within 19 years. This means that 12 years of this cycle consist of 12 months and 7 years of 13 months. For the hypothesis that a system comparable to the Metonic cycle had been applied by the calendar specialists of the Chunqiu period, see R. Gassmann, *Antikchinesisches Kalenderwesen*, 19–20. N. Sivin, “Cosmos and Computation,” 10, characterizes the calendar in whose preparation Sima Qian took part as the earliest astronomical system of which we have adequate records. E. Chavannes, however, had noted some problems with this list. For one, there are obviously some later interpolations with regard to era names that Sima Qian could scarcely have known because he died before they were proclaimed. Moreover, it seems as if the calculations given in this list are not those on which the calendar of the Han had been actually based. For a discussion of the so-called method of four fourths (*sifen fa* 四分法) applied to the new calendar (the *Lishu jiazi pian* 曆術甲子篇), see the detailed study of Wu Shouxian 吳守賢, *Sima Qian yu Zhongguo tianwen xue* 司馬遷與中國天文學 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin, 2000), esp. 28–45 (“Lishu jiazi pian xidu 曆術甲子篇析讀”).

⁹⁴ According to Sima Qian's biographical sketch of his father, Tang Du was one of Sima Tan's teachers. See *Shiji* 130/3288.

⁹⁵ E. Chavannes, *Mémoires Historiques* III, 330, renders the passage *fen qi tianbu* 分其天部: “[I] lui assigna le ministère du ciel,” but the commentary to the *Han shu* parallel contains a note by Meng Kang 孟康 is added, who explains that Tang Du divided the skies into 28 *xiu*. See *Han shu* 21A/977. According to a note by Chen Jiujin 陳久金, this new dividing method differed from the one on which the earlier calendar, the *Zhuanxu li* 顛項曆, was based. See his “*Shiji* ‘Tianguan shu zhuyi’ 《史記天官書》注譯.” *Boshu ji gudian tianwen shiliao zhuxi yu yanjiu* 帛書及古典天文史料注析與研究 (Taipei: Wanjuanlou, 2001), 265.

⁹⁶ *Shiji* 26/1260.

「乃者，有司言星度之未定也，廣延宣問，以理星度，未能詹也。蓋聞昔者黃帝合而不死，名察度驗，定清濁，起五部，建氣物分數。然蓋尚矣。書缺樂弛，朕甚閔焉。朕唯未能循明也，紬績日分，率應水德之勝。今日順夏至，黃鐘為宮，林鐘為徵，太簇為商，南呂為羽，姑洗為角。自是以後，氣復正，羽聲復清，名復正變，以至子日當冬至，則陰陽離合之道行焉。十一月甲子朔旦冬至已詹，其更以七年為太初元年。⁹⁷年名「焉逢攝提格」，月名「畢聚」，日得甲子，夜半朔旦冬至。」

“Earlier, the officials in charge of the matter said that the measures concerning the [position and motion of the] heavenly bodies have not yet been fixed correctly.⁹⁸ Although I have upon this ordered to reinforce the efforts to inquire about the laws of the [position and motion] of the celestial bodies, [the measures] still cannot be confirmed. I have heard that in ancient times the Yellow Thearch achieved perfect [harmony] and thus never died.⁹⁹ Examining the names and verifying the measures [of the celestial bodies] he distinguished the pure and the impure [tuning of the pitch pipes?], started off the Five Departments¹⁰⁰ and established the categories and numbers of the ethers [of the year]¹⁰¹ and living beings. But this all belongs to high antiquity: the fact that [in our time] the scriptures are fragmentary and the music has gotten out of tune is something about which I have been much concerned. [Now] by meticulously strengthening our efforts to distribute the days [within the astronomical calendar], we took advantage of [the principle] of the element by which Water was overcome.¹⁰² Nowadays we have adjusted to the summer solstice; Huangzhong is the basic tone, Linzhong the second, Taizu the third, Nanlü the fourth and Guxi the fifth [of the pentatonic music scale]: having achieved this, the ethers [of the year] has returned to correctness, the tone of the note Yu sounds pure, and the names are made correct again, so that the winter solstice will fall on a *zi*¹⁰³ day. As the first day of the eleventh month which is a day of the new moon and at the same time a *jiazi* <1> day and on which the winter solstice will occur has already been calculated as lying ahead, we will replace the 7th year of Yuanding by Taichu [i.e. Great Beginning], first year. The name of the year will be *yanfeng zhetige*,¹⁰⁴ the name of the [first] month will be *biju*. The day [provided for the new beginning] will be the [cyclical day] *jiazi* <1>, at midnight [of this day] the day of the new moon will start and at dawn the winter solstice will occur.”¹⁰⁵

There are many remarkable things to be discussed with regard to this passage. Per-

⁹⁷ According to the punctuation of the *Zhonghua* edition, everything that follows after this is still part of the imperial edict, but a comparison with the *Han shu* parallel rather suggests that the edict ends here.

⁹⁸ According to Wang Liqi, *Shiji zhuyi*, II, 918, this refers especially to the Five Planets and to the 28 lunar mansions (*xiu* 宿).

⁹⁹ The meaning of the term 合 has been explained by E. Chavannes as follows: “Le mot 合 indique que Huangdi avait su réaliser l'accord entre le Ciel et la Terre grâce à un calendrier parfait. L'immortalité avait été la récompense. L'empereur Ou n'était pas sans espérer parvenir à la vie éternelle en faisant, comme Hoang-ti, un calendrier exact.” See E. Chavannes, *Mémoires Historiques III*, 330, n. 4.

¹⁰⁰ The term Five Departments (*wubu* 五部) is, according to Chen Jiujin. “*Shiji* ‘Tianguan shu zhuyi’,” 266, n. 7, synonymous for the Five Elements (*wuxing* 五行).

¹⁰¹ This refers to the 24 divisions of the year, the ethers of the seasons.

¹⁰² This refers to the element Earth which, according to the conviction of specialists of that time, was the virtue favoring the Han dynasty.

¹⁰³ This means a day within the sexagenary cycle falling on the earthly branch *zi* 子. According to the *Suoyin* commentary, the winter solstices of Shang, Zhou and Lu should occur on a *zi* day. See *Shiji* 26/1255.

¹⁰⁴ *Yanfeng* 焉逢 is explained to be synonymous with the celestial stem *jia* 甲, *zhetige* 攝提格 with the earthly branch *yin* 寅, the combination of both – *yanfeng zhetige* – meaning a *jiayin* year. *Jiayin* is, according to the *Suoyin* commentary, the first year of the very first calendar which was even prior to the mythical Thearchs Huangdi and Zhuanxu, the “Taichu calendar of the very first beginning” (*shangyuan taichuli* 上元太初曆). See *Shiji* 26/1255.

¹⁰⁵ *Shiji* 26/1260; cf. the translation of E. Chavannes, III, 330–332; cf. *Han shu* 21A/975. The exact day on which the Taichu calendar was installed corresponds, according to N. Sivin, “Cosmos and Computation,” 10, with December 24th, 105 B.C.

haps the most striking detail is the fact that again the coincidence of the day of the new moon with the winter solstice – the constellation Gongsun Qing had prophesied to be of special significance – was chosen as the date on which the new calendar of the Han was established. In this case, apart from the start of a new yearly cycle and that of a new month cycle, the start of a third cycle is added, namely the beginning of a sexagenary day cycle (*jiazi* 甲子).¹⁰⁶

Even more remarkable is a detail in the imperial edict, namely that Emperor Wu refers to the fact that Huangdi “had achieved perfect [harmony] and thus never died.” If we recall the enthusiastic reaction of this emperor who, according to the testimony of the *Shiji*, upon hearing Gongsun Qing’s report of Huangdi’s ascent to Heaven would regard the thought of quitting his wife and children as being no more than casting off one’s slippers,¹⁰⁷ this remark – surprisingly enough found in an official document – matches perfectly with the historical account. Given that the edict is authentic, one cannot but get the impression that the emperor’s endeavor to achieve harmony between microcosm and macrocosm in fact originated in his hope to achieve immortality. According to Gongsun Qing’s words, Huangdi alone – the first calendar maker – had achieved this before. It has been suggested above that the matching of the dates prophesied in Gongsun Qing’s message with Emperor Wu’s actual calendar reform would have been intentionally brought about by the specialists entrusted with the installation of the new calendar.¹⁰⁸ This, of course, was not so difficult to achieve for a person who was responsible both for the prophecy and for the task of making it come true. As for the persons who were ordered to take steps to prepare for the calendar of the Han, the passage in the “Monograph on Pitch Pipes and the Calendar” (*Lüli zhi* 律曆志) of the *Han shu* continues:

遂詔卿、遂、遷與侍郎尊、大典星射姓等議造漢曆。

Then [the Emperor] ordered [Gongsun] Qing, [Hu] Sui, [Sima] Qian together with the Attendant Gentleman Zun, the Official in Charge of the [observation of the] Planets, Yi Xing and others to deliberate on the question of how to establish a calendar for the Han.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ One might perhaps expect that the change of the calendar should have taken place in the very same year when the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices had been performed for the first time. An indication that this probably was the original idea is given at the beginning of the part pertaining to Emperor Wu in the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices” (*Shiji* 28/1384; 12/452). As mentioned earlier, it is recorded at the beginning of this chapter that all the high dignitaries at court had hoped that the emperor would soon proceed to perform the sacrifices and change the calendar. Later in the same chapter we find the entry that on the *jiazi* day in the eleventh month, when the winter solstice occurred on the day of the new moon the calendar specialists took this date as the basis for the new beginning (*Shiji* 28/1401; 12/481: 推曆者以本統). Only after having accomplished this, the emperor was allowed to proceed to perform the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices on Mount Tai. But shortly after that we also read that in the first year of the era Taichu that the calendar was changed (*Shiji* 28/1402; 12/483). It is open to speculation whether Sima Qian and his colleagues originally planned to establish the new calendar simultaneously with the performance of the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices, but – for whatever reasons – there was a delay.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. the translation on p. 253.

¹⁰⁸ I am grateful to Licia DiGiacinto (Bochum) who directed my attention to an article by Christopher Cullen in which he had already pointed out that Emperor Wu, by establishing the new calendar, satisfied Gongsun Qing’s expectations. See his “Motivations for Scientific Change in Ancient China: Emperor Wu and the Grand Inception Astronomical Reforms of 104 B.C.” in *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 24 (1993), 199. As Aihe Wang argued, it was Jia Yi’s proposal which Emperor Wu’s court put into practice when he decided to change the calendar. See Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 148.

¹⁰⁹ *Han shu* 21A/975.

Gongsun Qing, according to the *Han shu* account, was thus one of the specialists entrusted with the establishment of the new calendar. The fact that his name preceded that of Sima Qian is certainly not an expression of Ban Gu's disregard for Sima Qian, but rather a reflection of the hierarchy of the advisers positions.¹¹⁰

The fact that nowhere in the *Shiji* is Gongsun Qing explicitly identified as Sima Qian's colleague raises the question of how the lack of exactly this information about the relationship between Gongsun Qing and Sima Qian should be explained. Might it be that Ban Gu's treatment of Sima Qian as Gongsun Qing's colleague is simply a token for his being ill-disposed toward Sima Qian? Certainly, Ban Gu had a rather critical attitude toward Sima Qian, and would have had a motive for discrediting the *Shiji* as the work of an ideologically biased author. A severe reproach such as this would certainly have helped Ban Gu to justify his decision to rewrite the history of the Han dynasty when asked to do so by his emperor, Guangwu 光武 (r. 25–55).¹¹¹ However, the details given in the passage on the calendar reform match so well with the evidence drawn from the *Shiji* that this is not plausible. It rather seems as if any indication that Sima Qian and Gongsun Qing were colleagues is intentionally suppressed in the *Shiji* account.

Though this is the project which has been given special emphasis in the secondary sources, Sima Qian's participation in the preparations for the grand calendar was certainly not the only duty he fulfilled as *taishiling* at the court of Emperor Wu. Among others, it becomes apparent from at least two passages that Sima Qian had to accompany the emperor on his travels to the various sacred places where sacrifices were performed by him in person.¹¹² This becomes plain from Sima Qian's personal statement, introduced by the formula *taishigong yue* 太史公曰 (The Lord the Grand Scribe says) near the end of chapter 28, where he writes:

太史公曰：余從巡祭天地諸神名山川而封禪焉。

"I have accompanied [the Emperor] on his travels, when he was performing sacrifices to all the Gods of Heaven and Earth as well as to the rivers and mountains and when he performed the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices."¹¹³

¹¹⁰ It seems, however, from the further record in the *Han shu* account, that the group of specialists to whom Gongsun Qing and Sima Qian belonged were finally not able to achieve satisfactory results by their calculations, so that the emperor entrusted a different group, with Tang Du and Luoxia Hong as the leading experts, who proved able to adjust the calendar to the required dates in the cycle. See *Han shu* 21A/975–76. There seems to be no hint in the *Shiji* which would confirm this slight, but for Sima Qian certainly decisive, difference.

¹¹¹ As we know from Ban Gu's preface to his *Dianyin* 典引, a eulogy praising his ruler, Emperor Guangwu in fact asked Ban Gu and some of his colleagues working in the imperial library whether or not there were ideological uncorrectnesses and flaws in parts of the *Shiji*. See *Wenxuan* 文選 48/13ab. For a translation of the *Dianyin xu* 典引序 see Erwin von Zach, *Die chinesische Anthologie: Übersetzungen aus dem Wen hsüan von Erwin von Zach 1872–1942* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1958), 905–906.

¹¹² Li Ling, "An Archaeological Study of Taiyi (Grand One) Worship," 6, pointed out that when Emperor Wu proceeded to the many sacred sites where he performed sacrifices, he traveled within the enormous radius of 200 kilometers, taking Chang'an as the center.

¹¹³ *Shiji* 28/1404; cf. *Shiji* 12/486. Sima Qian's duty to accompany Emperor Wu when he traveled to one of the sacred sites to perform the sacred sacrifices is confirmed in the famous letter which Sima Qian wrote to Ren An. In his letter he writes that one of the reasons for his delay in answering his friend's and former colleague's letter was that he had only recently been returning from one of the emperor's travels to these sacred sites. Cf. *Han shu* 62/2726: 書辭宜答，會東從上來，又迫賤事，相見日淺，卒卒無須臾之間得竭指意。"I should have answered [earlier, but] I had to accompany the Emperor on a travel to the east and, apart from this, I was squeezed by petty matters." Cf. the translation by Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin dynasty* (Hongkong and New York: Columbia University Press 1993), 228.

Summarizing the professional duties of Sima Tan and Sima Qian as they become evident from the *Shiji* as well as from the *Han shu*, it becomes plain that both were very much involved in Emperor Wu's grand ceremonial reform. As we learn from the two accounts in which a *taishigong* is explicitly mentioned in this chapter, Sima Tan, in collaboration with the officials of sacrifices, advised the emperor to inaugurate at least two cults: the cult for Houtu in Fenyin and that for Taiyi in Ganquan.¹¹⁴ Apart from Sima Tan's role as an imperial adviser in questions of sacrifices, we saw that Sima Tan and Sima Qian both had the duty to accompany the emperor on his travels to these manifold sacred sites.¹¹⁵

All these activities including that of fixing the calendar match exactly with those mentioned in the *Hou Han shu* passage cited above as belonging to the position of a Director the Grand Scribe (*taishiling*).¹¹⁶

And from the notion in the *Hou Han shu* that one of the duties of the *taishiling* was to be responsible for submitting to the throne the auspicious days and those to be avoided one may conclude that the choice of the day on which the cult for Taiyi was first established during the time of Emperor Wu – a *xinsi* <18> day which was a day of the new moon and the day on which the winter solstice occurred – was made by the Grand Scribe as the emperor's adviser.

If one compares Sima Tan's and Sima Qian's activities with the content of Gongsun Qing's prophetic message we find striking parallels. First, the newly established sacrifice to Houtu was closely linked with the discovery of the precious tripod at Fenyin, the event by which Gongsun Qing had justified his claim to get access to the emperor and reveal him the oral tradition of this teacher in combination with the alleged transmission of the inscription on Huangdi's tripod. Second, the inauguration of the sacrifice dedicated to the Grand Unity was performed precisely on the day which coincided with the winter solstice, the date to which, as we remember, a special significance had been attributed by Gongsun Qing. Third, the color Yellow which the Grand Scribe recommended to be the color appropriate for the ceremonial vestments was the color related to Huangdi from whom Gongsun Qing had – via his teacher – received the presage that within the cycle of dynastic succession the grandsons and grand-grandsons of Gaozu would be favored. Moreover, the day on which the New Year Taichu began, based on the new calendar calculated by Sima Qian and others, was the day of the new moon and corresponded, as Gongsun Qing had predicted, with the winter solstice.¹¹⁷

We may thus draw the conclusion that the ideological framework within which Gongsun Qing on the one hand and Sima Tan and Sima Qian on the other hand were engaged was very much similar. Indeed, one might even be inclined to say that they must have operated within the same ideological milieu. And to put it more precisely, this ideological milieu seems to be very close to, or even to overlap with,

¹¹⁴ Ganquan was located at about 70 km to the northwest of Chang'an.

¹¹⁵ The conclusion that Sima Tan too had the duty of accompanying Emperor Wu on his travels to sacred sites, can be drawn from the above quoted words of Sima Tan's on his death-bed that he "will not have the privilege to accompany him [i.e. the emperor]" when he would proceed to perform the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices, cf. p. 258 above.

¹¹⁶ Cf. p. 260 above.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Shiji* 26/1260–1261. The precise date on which the new calendar was established is also contained in an imperial edict which Sima Qian quotes before describing the details of the new calendar.

the fields of specialization of the *fangshi*. Even though there are difficulties in grouping Gongsun Qing with the *fangshi* – without doubt his position at court was much higher than that normally held by *fangshi* – his ideas were certainly much closer to those of the *fangshi* than to those of the *ru*. A similar situation seems to have occurred with regard to the two Sima: their position as *taishiling* was also higher than that occupied by the *fangshi*, though it was directly related to their activities. Several of the offices subordinate to the *taishiling* were occupied by men who elsewhere in the *Shiji* are called *fangshi*.¹¹⁸ The question raised at the beginning of this study, whether the position of the *taishi* was closer to the *fangshi* or to the *ru* may thus be answered tentatively here: it seems that although Sima Tan and Sima Qian belonged to neither of these two groups, they both were much more inclined toward ideas propagated by *fangshi* than toward those represented by the *ru*.¹¹⁹

Although the main focus of my analysis thus far has been the question of how far Sima Tan and Sima Qian were professionally engaged in the *Feng* and *Shan* matter, some of the passages that have been referred to convey the impression that this engagement meant more to those involved in the matter than simply operating within in a given ideological frame. A good example would be the famous passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter where Sima Tan begs his son not to forget what he hoped to expound and write about.¹²⁰ As I have already pointed out, the two tasks Sima Qian was asked to continue after his father's death were to examine carefully the outcome of the solemn *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices (as only a sage ruler was allowed to perform them, it would now turn out whether Emperor Wu was such a sage ruler) and to continue the work which Sima Tan had begun.

I have argued elsewhere that in that part of the *Shiji* which records the time after Emperor Wu for the first time had sacrificed at Mount Tai, Sima Qian displays a rather critical attitude toward his own emperor.¹²¹ In contrast to this, his father Tan who did not live long enough to become an eye-witness of these events obviously had a much different attitude toward Emperor Wu. It seems that he was full of hope and expectation until his death and that the cosmological ideology should be regarded as the solid foundation of his view of the world.

¹¹⁸ For the notion that the calendar specialists Tang Du and Luoxia Hong were reckoned among the *fangshi*, see the passage rendered in translation on p. 265.

¹¹⁹ By contrast, Chen Tongsheng in a study on Sima Tan's scholarly attitude has argued that Sima Tan should be reckoned among the faction of the *ru*. See his "Lun Sima Tan you dao er ru de zhuanbian 論司馬談由道而儒的轉變," *Renwen zazhi* 1995.5: 102–107. Chen maintains that whereas Sima Tan in earlier years, when he wrote his famous *Liu jia zhi yao zhi lun* 六家之要指論, must still have been mainly inclined toward Daoist thought, in the later years of his life changed and became a *ru*. I don't think, however, that this interpretation does justice to Sima Tan. I would argue instead that Sima Tan consistently tried to undertake steps toward a kind of synthetic view of the world, but one perceived from the point of view of a scribe.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Shiji* 130/3295. In the words of Sima Tan, reported by Sima Qian, the emperor "for the first time established the *Feng* sacrifices for the House of Han" (*shi jian Hanhia zhi feng* 始建漢家之封).

¹²¹ For Sima Qian's critical attitude displayed toward Emperor Wu in the "Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices" in the *Shiji* see my article "Der Herrscher und sein Richter: Zur Bedeutung von *biao* 表 und *li* 裏 in Kap. 28 des *Shiji*." *Oriens Extremus* 43 (2001/2002), 134–38.

The third of them – Sima Xiangru's impact on Emperor Wu's reforms

We should now take a closer look at the third man of the Sima clan who seems to have been involved in the *Feng* and *Shan* matter as well: Sima Xiangru. Strangely enough, although their common surname implies that the three Sima were related by blood, no such relationship is mentioned in his biography in the *Shiji*.¹²² However, on closer examination some hints are given which make it probable that Sima Xiangru was a very close relative of the other two Sima, perhaps an elder brother of Sima Tan and thus Sima Qian's uncle.¹²³ But if this hypothesis were true, it would immediately raise the question why the biographical account is silent about it.¹²⁴ One answer could be that the relationship was so obvious that there seemed to be no need to explicitly point it out. Another possibility would be that the biographer for some reason wanted to withhold this information from the reader. We will return to this question by the end of the essay. Close to the end of the chapter on Sima Xiangru, an intrinsic causal bond is suggested between Sima Xiangru's death and Emperor Wu's performing of the sacrifices:

司馬相如既卒五歲，天子始祭后土。八年而遂先禮中嶽，封于太山，至梁父禪肅然。

¹²² *Shiji* 117/2999–3074, and rewritten in *Han shu* 57B/2529–2611. Due to a reference to Yang Xiong 楊雄 (53 B.C. – A.D. 18), instead of 楊 more frequently written 揚) at the end of Sima Xiangru's biography in the *Shiji*, it has been argued by some that the biography in the *textus receptus* is that of the *Han shu* and has later been added to the *Shiji*. It seems to me, however, much more plausible that, apart from this one sentence which is certainly a later addition, the biography is the authentic *Shiji* text, simply because the numerous details on Sima Xiangru's life and thought depicted there could scarcely have been written by someone who was not personally familiar with him. Earlier, Prof. Dr. Hans Stumpfheldt in an unpublished paper entitled "War Ssu-ma Ch'ien, der Vater der chinesischen Geschichtsschreibung, eigentlich ein Barbar?" (Paper given as part of a series of lectures on "Ursprungsmythen und Weltanschauung in asiatischen Kulturen," Nov. 19, 1997, at Hamburg University) has put forward the hypothesis that Sima Qian was probably closely related by blood to Sima Xiangru, arguing that the reason for his keeping silent on their relationship was that they both had a Barbarian background.

¹²³ An interesting hint of a close family relationship between the three Sima may be the following. As the reader is told in Sima Xiangru's biography, he lived in the same place where Sima Tan and Sima Qian had their home, i.e. in Maoling 茂陵, at least after he retired due to his illness. Cf. *Shiji* 117/3062. The conclusion that Sima Tan and Sima Qian must also have had their residence in Maoling can be seen from the titles attributed to them. See the note of the *Jijie* commentary (*Shiji* 3288) according to which Sima Tan received the title of *zhongshu* from Maoling (茂陵中書司馬談), and also the note of the *Jijie* commentary (*Shiji* 3296) where Sima Qian is mentioned in connection with the title "Director of the Grand Scribe, from the village Xianwu in Maoling district, the Grand Master Sima Qian 太史令茂陵顯武里大夫司馬遷." According to Yves Hervouet, *Un Poète de cour sous les Han: Sseu-ma Siang-jou* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), 65, Maoling was situated to the west of Xianyang and 30 or 40 kilometers from Xi'an, close to the place where Emperor Wu decided to have his tomb built. It thus seems as if they shared a kind of family seat there. Besides, from the genealogical account given at the beginning of *Shiji* 130 we learn that in the time of the Zhou kings Hui and Xiang (r. 676–618), the Sima clan left Zhou and went to Jin, that from that time on, the members of this clan were scattered, that some lived in Wei, some in Zhao, and some in Qin. Moreover, we learn that Sima Cuo, a general under King Hui(wen) of Qin (r. 337–310), was ordered to lead an army against Shu and that the general after having subdued Shu remained there, which implies that the descendants of this branch of the family, too, stayed in Shu (*Shiji* 130/3286). Sima Xiangru, his biography states, was a man from Chengdu, the capital of Shu (*Shiji* 117/2999).

¹²⁴ Hervouet, *Un poète de cour*, 3, does not even discuss a possible blood relationship between Sima Xiangru, Sima Tan and Sima Qian. As for Sima Cuo 司馬錯, the famous Qin general during the Warring States time, who is mentioned as a remote ancestor of Sima Tan and Sima Qian in *Shiji* 130/3286, Hervouet writes that he could have well been an ancestor of Sima Xiangru. He dismisses, however, this possible descendency of Sima Xiangru by arguing that if he had been Sima Xiangru's ancestor, this would certainly have left traces in the *Shiji* account. This is, however, in my view not a very well-grounded argument, as there is (as I will argue later) a good reason to assume that any indication of Sima Xiangru's genealogical background has intentionally been omitted from the historical record.

When five years had gone by since Sima Xiangru's death, the Son of Heaven for the first time sacrificed to Houtu. The eighth year [after his death]¹²⁵ was [the year] when he first exercised the rites on the Middle Peak, then performed the *feng* [sacrifices] on Mount Tai and [finally] proceeded to Mount Liangfu to perform the *shan* [ceremonies] at Suran [peak].¹²⁶

The causal link drawn between Sima Xiangru's death and the steps taken by the emperor toward establishing first the sacrifices for Houtu and then performing the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices on Mount Tai reminds one very much of the passage cited earlier, in which an inner connection was established between Sima Tan and Emperor Wu as well, i.e. between the year in which Sima Tan died and the emperor's first performing of the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices and the installation of the new calendar.¹²⁷ The striking parallel raises many questions, but the primary question to investigate here will be how Sima Xiangru, the poet who became famous primarily for his outstanding prose poetry (*fu* 賦), might have been connected with Emperor Wu's *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices.

In fact, there is one text written by Sima Xiangru the title of which explicitly reveals a close connection with the sacrifices: his "Fengshan wen 封禪文" (Prose on the *Feng* and *Shan*), the only text recorded as left in Sima Xiangru's home after he had died.¹²⁸ Suo Zhong¹²⁹ who was sent by the emperor to Sima Xiangru's home to take all the remaining texts in the poet's home, was told by his widow¹³⁰ that her husband had kept no texts in his home, because each time he had written something, someone had come to take it away. She went on:

長卿未死時，為一卷書，曰「有使來求書，奏之。」其遺札書言封禪事，所忠奏焉，天子異之。

Before Changqing¹³¹ died, he made one *juan* [*quan?*] *shu*.¹³² He told [me]: "In case that an envoy would come and look for texts, present it to him." The text written on a wooden tablet he had kept [in his home] talked about the *Feng* and *Shan* matter. When Suo Zhong submitted it to [the emperor], the emperor was surprised at it.¹³³

¹²⁵ As the year 117 B.C. was the year in which Sima Xiangru died and the year 113 B.C. was, according to evidence from *Shiji* as well as from *Han shu*, the year in which Emperor Wu for the first time sacrificed to Houtu, the time indication *ba nian er* 八年而 here again, as in the above discussed passage in *Shiji* 130/3296 where the time indication was *wu nian er* 五年而 and where it was related to Sima Tan's death, can only refer to Sima Xiangru's death.

¹²⁶ *Shiji* 117/3072; cf. *Han shu* 57B/2600.

¹²⁷ See *Shiji* 130/3296 and the translation below.

¹²⁸ *Shiji* 117/3063.

¹²⁹ As for comments that the Suo Zhong mentioned here is the same man as the one who later tried to keep Gong-sun Qing away from the emperor, cf. n. 35.

¹³⁰ His wife was Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君. As the reader learns from the beginning of Sima Xiangru's biography, she had fallen in love with Sima Xiangru when he had played the zither in her father's home. See *Shiji* 117/300–301.

¹³¹ Changqing was the style (*zi* 字) of Sima Xiangru. Cf. *Shiji* 117/2999.

¹³² Whereas *juanshu* 卷書 is not to be found elsewhere in the *Shiji* and seems to be unusual as a compositum, the similar word *quanshu* 券書 (券 being, according to the *Hanyu da zidian*, vol. 1, 316, frequently used as a synonym for 卷) appears three times in *Shiji* 75/2360. A *quanshu* is, according to *Hanyu da cidian*, vol. 2, 648, a treaty, an official document. The problem which arises if one regards the *juan* in *yi juan shu* as a numerical adjunct, "one roll book (indicating a text written on paper or silk and rolled up) was mentioned by Yves Hervouet, *Le Chapitre 117 du Che ki: Biographie de Sseu-ma Siang-jou* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1972), 204, n.4, who remarks in a note on the term *zhashu*: "Contrairement à ce qu'indiquerait le *kiuan* qui précède, il semble d'après le *tcha* que nous avons ici le manuscrit de Sseu-ma Siang-jou qui ait été écrit sur des tablettes."

¹³³ *Shiji* *ibid.*

The name Suo Zhong, which we have met in connection with Gongsun Qing, and the term *yi zhashu* 遺札書 (an inherited text written on a wooden tablet)¹³⁴ deserve our attention. The term *zhashu* is only used twice in the *Shiji* – here and in the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices” where it denotes the prophetic text which Gongsun Qing submitted to the throne.¹³⁵ It seems as if by mentioning the term *zhashu* only in these two passages, the author of the *Shiji* intended to indicate a connection between both texts in the historical record.¹³⁶

So what does this last document say about the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices, and why was the emperor so surprised at it when he held it in his hands? The content of the “Fengshan wen” is quoted in full in the account.¹³⁷ The text has a bipartite structure: the first part consists of an introduction which is mostly in prose, but with some verses interspersed; the second part, which is called a *song* 頌 (hymn) is divided into six stanzas consistently held in four-character verse.¹³⁸

The introductory part starts out with a short historical survey according to which 72 rulers who had received the heavenly mandate, beginning with Zhuanxu,¹³⁹ proceeded to the sacred mountains Tai and Liangfu.¹⁴⁰ Even though the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices are not explicitly mentioned here, it can be assumed from the context that it is the sacrifices which the poet alludes to when he writes that “the details of it are nothing which can be received by (simple) hearsay.”¹⁴¹

Sima Xiangru then compares the virtue of the Zhou kings Wen and Wu with that of king Cheng of Zhou and maintains that his virtue surpassed that of the

¹³⁴ Yan Shigu (*Han shu* 57B/2600) explains the term *yi zha* 遺札 as “to write something on a wooden tablet and keep [it]. 師古曰：「書於札而留之，故云遺札。」”

¹³⁵ Cf. p. 250 above.

¹³⁶ Although this inner connection may be speculative, there is an interesting note concerning the term *fubie* 傳別 in the *Zhouli* quoted by the *Suoyin* commentary (*Shiji* 8/344). The commentator Zheng Xuan remarks: “*Fubie* [literally: to spread on – to divide] is equated with *quanshu* 券書.” And he adds: “It means to write with a masterly hand on a wooden tablet and [then] divide it into two. Thus, in olden times, texts written on tablets made from bamboo were used, so that they could be broken apart.” 鄭司農云：「傳別，券書也。」康成云：「傳別，謂大手書於札中而別之也。」然則古用簡札書，故可折。

¹³⁷ See *Shiji* 117/3063–72; cf. *Han shu* 57B/2600–09. The prose poem is also contained in the *Wenxuan* 文選 48/1b–6a, as a model example for the genre *fuming* 符命 (a term which has been rendered by E. van Zach as “Abhandlungen zum Lobe der Dynastie.” See E. von Zach, *Die chinesische Anthologie*, 893, and his translation of the Fengshan wen, 893–98. Cf. the translation by Hervouet, *Le Chapitre 117 du Che-ki*, 205–226. A perhaps more literal rendering of the term *fuming* would be “portents sent by Heaven as a signal for a ruler having by Heavenly mandate.”

¹³⁸ For the introductory part see *Shiji* 117/3063–3070, for the hymn see 3070–3072. Cf. the beginning of the song part in the translations of von Zach, 897, and Hervouet, *ibid.*, 205 (which differ quite a lot from each other). Unfortunately, neither von Zach nor Hervouet offered a formal analysis of the prose poem.

¹³⁹ Zhuanxu 顓頊 was, according to *Shiji* 1/11, the grandson of Huangdi and thus a member of the Huangdi clan.

¹⁴⁰ The 72 rulers who proceeded to Mount Tai are also mentioned in the historical survey given in the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices” in the *Shiji* (28/1361), in a dialogue between Guan Zhong and duke Huan of Qin reported there. Cf. also my “Der Herrscher und sein Richter,” 130. In some respect, the historical survey of the “Fengshan wen” conveys the impression of being *in nuce* very much parallel to the overall attitude of chap. 28 of the *Shiji*, and even the title is strikingly similar to the title of the chapter: “Fengshan shu” (vs. “Fengshan wen”).

¹⁴¹ *Shiji* 117/3064: 其詳不可得聞也。 There is a striking parallel with a formulation in the introductory words to the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices” in the *Shiji* (28/1355) which is related to the sacrifices, too: 其詳不可得而記聞云。 As I argued in “Der Herrscher und sein Richter,” 125, this statement emphasizes the peculiarity of these sacrifices the tradition and meaning of which cannot be known by ordinary men but only by specialists. Compare also Gongsun Qing’s words in which he emphasizes that the prophetic message he conveyed to the emperor was passed down to him by a long oral tradition. Cf. pp. 252–53.

two others.¹⁴² The text then continues by enthusiastically praising the virtue of the present dynasty which he compares with the sparkling and bubbling water of a clear fountain, by glorifying the enormous influence of the Han throughout the world, comprising all the living beings, including the animals. After that, numerous auspicious signs are said to have already appeared: among them white tigers, extraordinary deer, a special sort of grain with six heads on one stalk, an animal with two horns that grow from the same root – obviously a unicorn. The emperor, however, in spite of all these portents would still not dare to proceed and perform the sacrifices, as if he was not confident of his own virtue. In this context, Sima Xiangru also alludes to the auspicious fish which had leaped into the boat of king Wu of Zhou and which he took and used for a sacrifice – obviously a hint of the colors correlated with the cycle of dynasties.¹⁴³

After this, an imaginary dialogue between the emperor and a *dasima* 大司馬 (Commander-In-Chief)¹⁴⁴ begins. His words are rendered partly in verse, partly in prose. He again praises the glory of the Han and tries to persuade the emperor to proceed to perform the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices. He even goes so far as to threaten the emperor that if he does not immediately undertake steps to put the preparation for the sacrifices into practice he would insult the dynasty and its accumulated glory. Upon hearing this, Sima Xiangru writes, the emperor changed color and promised to try it, i.e. to proceed to perform the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices.¹⁴⁵ As Sima Xiangru finishes his description, the emperor discussed the matter with his ministers and ordered that ceremonial hymns should be composed as a means to make known the good fortune which the auspicious omens presage.

Following the dialogue, the texts of altogether six hymns (*song* 頌) are given in full, thoroughly composed in a consistent four-character meter. In these hymns, as in the preceding prose text, the glory of the Han dynasty and of the emperor is praised in a way that conveys the picture of an ideal universal or even cosmic monarch who brings Heaven and Earth into complete harmony and who is capable of commanding the forces of nature. A multitude of portents signaling that he is the ruler by heavenly mandate are mentioned, e.g. the auspicious plant with six heads on one stalk¹⁴⁶ which had already been mentioned in the prose text; an exotic animal with black patches or spots on a white skin¹⁴⁷ probably the legendary *zouyu* 鄒虞 – and a *lin* 麟 (unicorn) which gambled in the imperial park during the tenth month.¹⁴⁸ And once again the emperor is asked why he still hesitates to proceed to the sacred

¹⁴² The view that only king Cheng of Zhou would have had come close to the ideal of a ruler who was fully authorized to perform the sacred sacrifices, is expressed in the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices” in the *Shiji*, too: 爰周德之治維成王，成王之封禪則近之矣。 Cf. *Shiji* 28/1384.

¹⁴³ *Shiji* 117/3065. According to *Shiji* 4/120, it was a white fish (symbolizing the color of the dynasty Shang). According to a note by Ma Rong, the leaping of the fish into the boat of king Wu of Zhou was a metaphor for the capitulation of the soldiers of the Shang dynasty. The story continues with the mention of a fire (symbolizing the triumphing Zhou, as Red/ Fire succeeds to White/ Metal) that rose up to the king’s house and then turned into a red crow.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Hucker, *Dictionary of Official Titles*, no. 6039.

¹⁴⁵ *Shiji* 117/3070.

¹⁴⁶ 嘉穀六穗. Hymn 1 (*Shiji* 117/3070).

¹⁴⁷ 般般之獸，樂我君囿；白質黑章，其儀可喜。 Hymn 3 (*Shiji* 117/3071.)

¹⁴⁸ 濯濯之麟，游彼靈時。孟冬十月，君俎郊祀。 Hymn 4 (*Shiji* *ibid.*).

mountain. And finally, there are at least two remarks in the text which doubtless refer to the idea of dynastic cycles.¹⁴⁹

Highlighting some of the topics raised in the “Fengshan wen,” the many hints to ideas that we have learned to perceive as those of the cosmologists’ faction simply cannot be overlooked: the allusion to Xianyuan alias Huangdi as the ancestor of all the rulers of antiquity who received the heavenly mandate; the allusion to the legend of the white fish which leaped into king Wu’s boat and which the king took and used for a sacrifice, a metaphor for the correlation of the dynasty Shang with the color White (and as implicit consequence of the conquering dynasty of Zhou with Red);¹⁵⁰ the hint of a crouching yellow dragon which, we recall, was not only the auspicious omen correlated with the successor to the dynasty favored by the Black/Water dynasty, but also the portent predicted by Gongsun Chen at the time of Emperor Wen. Yellow dragons appeared, as the *Shiji* records, soon after Zhang Cang had been able to achieve a last victory for the faction of those cosmologists who were convinced that the dynasty was still favored by Water;¹⁵¹ finally the stress laid on the idea that the strength and flowering of a dynasty is dependent on recognizing the correct virtue favoring ones reign. All these hints taken together clearly display that Sima Xiangru, too, must have belonged to that strand of cosmologists who maintained that the dynasty of Han was favored by the virtue of Earth, i.e. correlated with the color Yellow and the corresponding Yellow Thearch, Huangdi; the faction that maintained that the cycle of the five virtues proceeded according to the sequence of mutual conquest (*xiang sheng* 相勝); the group which Sima Tan, Sima Qian and also Gongsun Qing seem to have belonged to.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ The first remark is found in the sentence: “A crouching yellow dragon, he rises up in correspondence with that virtue which will be exalted 宛宛黃龍·興德而升,” Hymn 5 (*Shiji*, *ibid.*); cf. Hervouet, 225: “Le dragon jaune à la marche onduleuse s’élève quand L’Empereur déploie une grande vertu.” The rise of a yellow dragon was, as mentioned before, the auspicious sign which Gongsun Chen predicted to the Han Emperor Wen would arise as a proof of the reliability of his teachings, a prediction which, according to the *Shiji* account, came true soon after. Cf. the translation of the *Lüshi chunqiu* passage given in note 50, as well as the *Shiji* passage on the yellow dragons presaged by Gongsun Chen as rendered in the translation on p. 257. The second remark is found in the sentence: “As is contained in the transmitted account, it was said that this is what the One who had received the (Heavenly) Mandate will benefit from 於傳載之·云受命所乘,” Hymn 5 (*Shiji* *ibid.*); cf. Hervouet, *ibid.*: “Alors nous l’ont rapporté les chroniques qui nous disent: ‘Il et la monture de qui reçoit le mandat du ciel.’” What is meant by the transmitted account can only be guessed: it must be an account which contains a prediction according to which one of the five elements or virtues will favor the ruling dynasty. It thus probably refers to the sequence of virtues in correspondence to the dynasties favored by them as displayed in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, starting out with Huangdi, according to the scheme of the mutual conquest sequence mentioned above. Cf. n. 56.

¹⁵⁰ A white fish leaping into king Wu’s boat is also mentioned in *Shiji* 4/120.

¹⁵¹ Cf. pp. 255–56.

¹⁵² Interestingly enough, Sima Xiangru has also been credited with the composition of some or even all of the hymns contained in the cycle of altogether 19 sacrificial songs composed for the liturgy performed at the suburban altar which is transmitted in the sacrificial chapter of the *Han shu*. See the *Jiaosi ge shijiu zhang* 郊祀歌十九章, quoted in: *Han shu* 22/1052–1070; for a detailed translation and analysis of the texts of this cycle see Martin Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zu den Sechs Dynastien* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997), 174–303. Whether Sima Xiangru actually composed the hymns of this cycle or, which is more probable, the hymns were produced at a later date but inspired by his poems – it would certainly be worth comparing the texts of this cycle with Sima Xiangru’s poetry on a whole and especially with the “Fengshan wen” in terms of a specific vocabulary which, as Yves Hervouet already mentioned in his analysis of Sima Xiangru, is obviously strongly influenced by the *Chuci* 楚辭. Cf. Hervouet, *Un poète de cour*, 142:

Doubts have been raised as to whether this text really is what it pretends to be, namely a eulogy praising Emperor Wu. The opinion that it should be regarded as a masterpiece of subtle irony has been expressed, e.g. by Wu Rulun 吳汝綸 (1840–1903). He maintained that the central intention of the “Fengshan wen” was to remonstrate with the ruler and that this sole legacy of Sima Xiangru as the last document available to the imperial envoy in his home at Maoling had the character of a *shijian* 尸諫 (a rebuke by means of one’s corpse), meaning to remonstrate with one’s ruler in one way or the other with one’s own death.¹⁵³ Ruan Zhisheng in a recent study came to the same conclusion, arguing that Sima Xiangru by writing his “Fengshan wen” intended to posthumously criticize Emperor Wu.¹⁵⁴ – In fact, irony is something which is too subtle to be proven with certainty, but if one considers that prose-poetry has a long tradition of expressing criticism in a subtle way, it is certainly not too far-fetched to suggest that Sima Xiangru, though outwardly flattering Emperor Wu by his writings, might have had cherished the hope that he would be able by indirect criticism to dissuade Emperor Wu from an ever more exaggerated cult of his own person.¹⁵⁵

For our purposes, however, it is not necessarily relevant whether Sima Xiangru originally meant to express criticism against the emperor in his “Fengshan wen” or not. Emperor Wu obviously did not have the slightest doubt that Sima Xiangru’s last will came from his heart. Thus the only relevant matter is the impact that this text had on the emperor who obviously regarded the text as a sincere eulogy. To sum up: although Sima Xiangru died several years earlier than Sima Tan, he was in a very particular way involved in what came to be called the matter of the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices at the time of Emperor Wu. Although he had already died several years before Emperor Wu finally proceeded to perform the sacrifices on Mount Tai for the first time, it seems that it was Sima Xiangru who originally inspired the emperor to put the ceremonial reform into practice and embellish his rule over the empire with a ceremony grandiose enough even for a god, and who thus seems to have some

“Cette richesse de vocabulaire, surtout dans les descriptions interminables, est bien la caractéristique essentielle du style de Sseu-ma Siang-jou. Il est dans la lignée du Tch’ou ts’eu, du ‘Li-sao’ 離騷, des ‘Kieou tchang’ 九章, etc.” The strong influence of Chu culture and especially of the *Chuci* on the secular poetry as well as the sacrificial hymns composed at the court of Emperor Wu has also been emphasized by Gopal Sukhu who remarks that even the mode in which the hymns were composed was that of Chu. See his “Monkey, Shamans, Emperors, and Poets: The *Chuci* and Images of Chu during the Han dynasty,” in *Defining Chu: Image and Reality in Ancient China*, ed. Constance A. Cook and John S. Major (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1999), 156–57.

¹⁵³ *Lidai mingjia ping Shiji* 歷代名家評《史記》 edited by Yang Yanqi 楊燕起 [et al.] (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue, 1986), 692.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Ruan Zhisheng, “San Sima yu Han Wudi fengshan,” 307–340, esp. 334.

¹⁵⁵ As described in Sima Xiangru’s biography, the “Daren fu” 大人賦 (Prose-poem on the Great Man) in which an immortal roaming through the Skies is described in a language full of cosmological symbolism was already in the process of being written when the emperor heard of it, and that Sima Xiangru promised to submit it to him. The account goes on to say that Xiangru saw that the emperor was much inclined toward the way of immortals 相如見上好僊道 and that he “was of the opinion that those who according to tradition are reckoned among the immortal beings live in forests and close to swamps and who from their very conduct make one stand in awe of them, which would be completely different from how emperors or kings think of immortals 以為列僊之傳居山澤間，形容甚羸，此非帝王之僊意也。” (*Shiji* 117/3056; cf. Y. Hervouet, *Le Chapitre 117 du Che-ki*, 185). It thus seems as if – at least in the eyes of the biographer – Sima Xiangru was not intentionally deceiving the emperor but rather seems to have fallen victim of the emperor’s unwillingness to understand the underlying message.

responsibility for the bold steps which the emperor soon after the poet's death did in fact take.

Tracing the cosmologists' ideas in the *Grand Scribe's Record*

In the two previous parts I have attempted to deduce the degree of personal involvement of the three Sima in Emperor Wu's grand reform both from explicit and implicit evidence in the *Shiji*. I shall now examine how those ideological elements which we ascribed to the faction of the cosmologists came to be reflected in the historical account as a whole. In other words: is the ideology which Gongsun Qing propagated in his prophetic message and which seems to have been shared by Sima Xiangru, Sima Tan and Sima Qian, confirmed by the overall structure and underlying message of the *Shiji* as a whole, or is it rather denied?

Before this tricky question will be approached, it should perhaps be recalled that we do not know exactly which part of the *Shiji* Sima Tan or Sima Qian can reliably be credited with. We shall thus again avoid speaking of Sima Tan or Sima Qian as the author of the *Shiji* here and only after closer scrutiny of the text return to the question whether we can learn to distinguish between Sima Tan and Sima Qian from the text itself.

It should perhaps be also stressed that the writing of a historical work – other than activities such as advising the emperor in matters of ceremonial or making calendrical calculations – was not part of the official duties of a Grand Scribe, at least not during the time with which this study is concerned. The compilation of the work which only later was given the title *Shiji*¹⁵⁶ thus must be regarded as Sima Qian's (and before him, his father Tan's) private endeavor.¹⁵⁷ With these preliminaries in mind a closer look at the *Shiji* will be taken now, attempting to find traces of the cosmologists' ideas in the overall structure of the text.

Certainly the most striking peculiarity of the *Shiji* text is the fact that the first chapter is concerned with the Five (Mythical) Thearchs and especially with the fact that the very first ruler in the sequence is Huangdi, followed by Zhuanxu 顓頊, Ku 嚳, Yao 堯 and Shun 舜.¹⁵⁸ It should perhaps be added that the account might, for example, have begun with Yao – a decision which an adherent of the Confucian teachings, a *ru*, would certainly have approved. The choice of Huangdi required justification as to which sources would support such a sequence, and this justification is found in the Grand Scribe's personal remark at the end of this first chapter. In this remark, the author points toward sources that support the sequence given in the

¹⁵⁶ The original title of the book seems to have been *Taishigong shu* 太史公書, "The book of the Lord the Grand Scribe." See *Shiji* 130/3319.

¹⁵⁷ As for what may be called a "religious approach" toward the role Sima Qian had to fulfill as a scribe, see Michael Nylan, "Sima Qian: A True Historian?" *Early China* 23–24 (1998–99): 203–46. She proposes to render the word *taishi* 太史 as "Senior Archivist."

¹⁵⁸ For a synopsis of the various aspects of what he calls the Myth of Huang-ti as well as of the many previous studies devoted to this topic, see Charles Le Blanc, "A Re-Examination of the Myth of Huang-ti," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 13/14 (1985): 45–63. Of special interest is the table in which the references to Huangdi in sources of the 2nd cent. B.C. until the 2nd cent. A.D. are arranged according to themes or aspects related to Huangdi (50–51). Li Wai-ye in her study "The Idea of Authority in the Shih Chi (Records of the Historian)," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54 (1994), 370, maintains that Sima Qian "obliquely criticizes the cult of the Yellow Thearch" – a hypothesis which does not seem to be confirmed by textual evidence.

Shiji. He explicitly refers to a *Wudi de* 五帝德 (Virtue of the Five Thearchs) and a *Dixi xing* 帝繫姓 (Clan Names in the Genealogy of the Thearchs). By doing so, he seems to have intended to justify the choice of Huangdi as the paragon of rulership on the textual evidence of noncanonical scriptures.¹⁵⁹

One also finds that the decision to put Huangdi in the first place has an impact on the overall conception of the *Shiji*.¹⁶⁰

First, Huangdi as the ancestor of what is called here the “clan of the Yellow Thearch” (Huangdi shi 黃帝氏) is not only depicted as the ancestor of the mythical rulers following in the sequence of the Five Thearchs, but also as the one from whom even the rulers of the various feudal states have descended.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Huangdi seems not only to be the primogenitor for all Chinese rulers but also for those rulers who are reckoned in the *Shiji* among the Barbarians.¹⁶² This is a remarkably all-encompassing claim, and illustrates the consequences that the choice of Huangdi had for the work.¹⁶³

Furthermore, the choice of Huangdi as the first ruler in the sequence also finds its expression in the periodization of history. The connection between dynasties, beginning with the mythical rulers, with particular virtues, elements and colors, recurs in the “Annals” of the *Shiji*.

In Chapter One, “Annals of the Five Thearchs” (*Wudi benji* 五帝本紀), the origin of the name Huangdi – “Yellow Thearch” – is explained as the “style of the One who had received the auspicious portents of the virtue of Earth.”¹⁶⁴ Thus the correlation of Huangdi with the color Yellow and the element of Earth, as it is found in the *Lüshi chunqiu* and propagated by Gongsun Qing seems to be confirmed here in the very beginning of the *Shiji*.

¹⁵⁹ *Shiji* 1/46. Both titles are identical or almost identical with titles of chapters in the received texts of the *Da Dai Liji*. Cf. *Da Dai Liji*, chapters 62 (五帝德) and 63 (帝繫), the first being also contained in *Kongzi jiaoyu*, chap. 23. It is noteworthy that the author not only by his decision to put Huangdi at the very beginning of his work but even more by seeking support for this decision by referring to a source which did not belong to the then acknowledged orthodoxy, must have intentionally acted against the current of his times. Otherwise he would have referred to other sources, such as the *Shangshu*, according to which the earliest testified documents go back to Yao and not to Huangdi, and accordingly would have reserved the place on top of the historical record for him.

¹⁶⁰ For a discussion of several different hypotheses pertaining to the question what might have caused the author of the *Shiji* to put Huangdi at the very beginning of his work, see Li Weitai 李偉泰, “*Shiji xushi heyi shi yu Huangdi zhushuo shuping* 史記敘事何以始於黃帝諸說述評,” in *Huangdi yu zhongguo chuantong wenhua xueshu taolun hui lunwenji* 黃帝與中國傳統文化學術討論會論文集 (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin, 2001), 16–24.

¹⁶¹ The idea that the Five Thearchs as well as the rulers of the first three dynasties Xia, Shang and Zhou were all conceived as Huangdi’s direct descendants in the *Shiji* is illustrated most clearly at the beginning of the table in *Shiji* 13/488. Cf. the study of Zhang Dake 張大可: “*Shiji yili he Sima Qian de lishiguan* 史記義例和司馬遷的歷史觀,” in *Shiji wenxian yanjiu* 《史記》文獻研究 (Beijing: Minzu, 1999), 203–241, and esp. the instructive chart illustrating this, 228–29 (“*Shiji dayitong lishi guan* 史記大一統歷史觀”).

¹⁶² As Chi Wanxing 池萬興 has argued, by stressing Huangdi as a common primogenitor of all peoples including the “Barbarians,” the *Shiji* mirrors Sima Qian’s favoring unity of the peoples of All-under-Heaven. See his *Sima Qian minzu sixiang chanshi* 司馬遷民族思想闡釋 (Xi’an: Renmin jiaoyu, 1995), esp. 130–36.

¹⁶³ The importance of the “fact” that the historical record begins with Huangdi is further stressed by three remarks in the *Shiji* in which Huangdi appears as the starting point, but slightly varying with respect to the ending point: in one instance it is the capture of the unicorn, in the second the ending point is given with now, and in the third it is the era Taichu. Cf. the accounts in *Shiji* 130/3300 (here, somewhat curiously, the name Taotang, i.e. Yao, is given as the starting point before returning to the time from Huangdi until the unicorn), 3319 (from Xianyuan, i.e. Huangdi, until now and 3321 (from Huangdi until the Taichu period). A closer analysis of these variations may confirm the hypothesis that the original temporal frame as it has been conceived by Sima Tan was later enlarged – and perhaps in some respect changed – by Sima Qian.

¹⁶⁴ *Shiji* 1/6: 有土德之瑞，故號黃帝。

In Chapter Two, “Annals of the Xia” (*Xia benji* 夏本紀), no reference to a correlation with an element of the cycle is made. In the “Annals of the Shang,” however, we find the remark that Tang of Shang changed the beginning of the year (i.e. the calendar) and ordered the color of the ceremonial vestments to be White.¹⁶⁵ And the last sentence in the Grand Scribe’s personal remark at the end of the chapter confirms that (The Yin) honored White.¹⁶⁶

Chapter Four, “Annals of the Zhou” (*Zhou benji* 周本紀), contains an elaborate narrative according to the conquest of the virtue of Fire (Red), i.e. the Zhou, over the virtue of Metal (White), i.e. the Shang, is described. According to this, a white fish leaped into King Wu’s boat when he was crossing the River He. The king took it and used it for a sacrifice. After this, the narrative continues, there was a fire that came down from above the roof of the kings residence and changed into a raven, its color being Vermilion.¹⁶⁷

As for the state of Qin before the unification of the empire in 221 B.C., several rulers are said in Chapter Five, “Annals of the Qin” (*Qin benji* 秦本紀), of the *Shiji* to have directed sacrifices to one or the other of the Thearchs associated with one of the Five Colors. The only reference to an honoring of Black is made in form of a flashback in chapter 28, where an anonymous adviser directs the emperor’s attention to one of his ancestors, duke Wen of Qin (r. 765–716) who, according to the adviser’s words, once went out hunting and got a black dragon.¹⁶⁸

As regards Qin after the unification of the empire, there is no hint of an element having favored this dynasty in Chapter Six, “Annals of Qin Shihuang” (*Qin Shihuang benji* 秦始皇本紀). However, as one learns from the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices,” an anonymous adviser instructed the First Emperor about the cycle of dynastic rule upon which, the account continues, Shi Huang, the First Emperor of Qin, regarded himself as being favored by the element Water and the color Black and as a consequence proceeded to make the adjustments necessary for a shift in the cycle.¹⁶⁹

If we compare the succession of dynasties and their correspondence with elements of the dynastic cycle found in the *Shiji* with those we encountered earlier in the *Lüshi chunqiu* passage,¹⁷⁰ we can conclude that the major elements of the sequence propagated by the *Lüshi chunqiu* are taken up by the author of the *Shiji*.¹⁷¹ It thus seems that the periodization given in the annals part of the *Shiji* follows the sequence which Gongsun Qing referred to in his prophetic message.

The relationship between Huangdi and the calendar which had been advocated by Gongsun Qing in the words he directed toward Emperor Wu, is confirmed in several parts of the *Shiji*:

¹⁶⁵ *Shiji* 3/98.

¹⁶⁶ 殷 [...] 而色尚白。 See *Shiji* 3/109.

¹⁶⁷ *Shiji* 4/120.

¹⁶⁸ *Shiji* 28/1366. Cf. the translation of this passage above, pp. 255–56.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *Shiji* 28/1366.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. n. 50.

¹⁷¹ It should perhaps be added that the name of this cycle – literally “End and Beginning of the Five Virtues” (*wude zhongshi* 五德終始), – is a term which frequently occurs in the *Shiji*, too. Cf. the parallel expression in the words which Guiyu Qu according to Gongsun Qing directed to Huangdi, and in which he speaks of the time cycles *zhong er fu shi* 終而復始, in the passage translated on pp. 250–51.

- in the “Treatise on the Calendar,” Huangdi is confirmed to be the first ruler who established calendrical calculations;¹⁷²
- in the “Annals of the Five Thearchs,” a minister is mentioned who assisted Huangdi in preparing the calendar. Whereas in Gongsun Qing’s prophetic message his name was Guiyu Qu, he is now called Dahong 大鴻 (Great Goose).¹⁷³

Moreover, identical or almost identical expressions related to the cosmic cycles and the calendar calculations made by Huangdi as Gongsun Qing used them in his prophetic message appear in the “Annals of the Five Thearchs”:

- the expression *de tian zhi ji* 得天之紀 (to accomplish a period of Heaven)¹⁷⁴ used by Gongsun Qing in his prophecy is paralleled by a passage in the “Annals of the Five Thearchs” where Huangdi is characterized as someone who “adjusted to the periods of Heaven and Earth” (*shun tiandi zhi ji* 順天地之紀);¹⁷⁵
- the expression *ying ri tui ce* 迎日推策, to compute in advance a day in the future by the help of calculation (stalks), is – with only one slight character variant – used in Gongsun Qing’s address to the emperor as well as in the description of the accomplishments of Huangdi in the annals devoted to him.¹⁷⁶

The above examples clearly illustrate that Gongsun Qing disposed precisely of the vocabulary specializing in calendar calculation. This matches with the *Han shu* account discussed above according to which Gongsun Qing was, together with Sima Qian, entrusted to establish the new calendar for the Han.¹⁷⁷ It seems that Huangdi was, above all, the paragon of the calendarists.

As for the tripod, we remember that the incident which gave Gongsun Qing the occasion to appear at court was that a tripod had been unearthed in Fenyin in the sixth month of that year. A further detail concerning the tripod is that, according to the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices,” Xinyuan Ping 新垣平, a specialist on ether prognostications from the state of Zhao, during the reign of Emperor Wen of the Han had already tried to direct the emperors attention to the strange emanation of a precious golden object that he had perceived at Fenyin.

He tells him of a tradition according to which the tripods of Zhou, after the decline of Zhou and the destruction of the earth altar of Song, had sunk in the River Si, but emerged again when the He River, to which the Si River was connected, overflowed its banks. Moreover, he warns the emperor that in case one would not go and welcome the mysterious object (from which the ether emanation comes), it might not arrive.¹⁷⁸ Shortly after that, the *Shiji* account continues, someone sent

¹⁷² See *Shiji* 26/1256.

¹⁷³ Cf. *Shiji* 1/6. Dahong is identified in chapter 28 as the style of Guiyu Qu. Cf. *Shiji* 28/1393.

¹⁷⁴ *Shiji* 28/1393; cf. 12/467. E. Chavannes, *Mémoires Historiques* III, 486, translated: “Il se trouve que la période céleste est terminée [...]”

¹⁷⁵ *Shiji* 1/6. For the almost parallel term *de tian zhi ji* 得天之紀 used by Gongsun Qing, see p. 250 and the explanation rendered in n. 32. Cf. the translation given by W. H. Nienhauser (et al.), *Grand Scribe's Records* I, 4: he instructed [the people] in the periodicities of [the movements of] heaven and earth.

¹⁷⁶ *Shiji* 28/1393; cf. *Shiji* 1/6 (with 筮 instead of 策).

¹⁷⁷ *Han shu* 21A/975 Cf. the translation on p. 267.

¹⁷⁸ For the idea that in case that the ruler does not behave in a timely manner, i.e., in a way which makes use of the cosmic element or virtue favoring his rule, the next element in the cycle will become dominant without that the previous one having had a chance to come into effect, see the passage in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, translated above, n. 50.

a memorial to the emperor charging that Xinyuan Ping had deceived the emperor with his empty talk of ether emanations and ghosts, and the emperor did not pay any more attention to his advice.¹⁷⁹

But what makes the narrative on these tripods so interesting is the fact that some of Gongsun Qing's ideas appear already earlier in the *Shiji* record. In the "Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices" the reader is informed:

其後百二十歲而秦滅周，周之九鼎入于秦。或曰宋太丘社亡，而鼎沒于泗水彭城下。

One hundred years later, when Qin destroyed Zhou [255 B.C.], the nine tripods of Zhou entered Qin. Others say that after the Earth Altar of Song had been destroyed, the tripods sank down in the River Si, close to Pengcheng.¹⁸⁰

The question whether the tripods did reach Qin or whether they got lost on their way in the River Si is, of course, of utmost importance for an analysis of the question whether Qin, in the eyes of the author of the *Shiji*, had received a mandate to rule by Heaven or not. Although this question will not be further examined here, what is remarkable about the above passage is that the author here leaves space for both interpretations. The lore of the tripods, however, as it recurs several times in the *Shiji*, is obviously treated very seriously, as well as the prediction given by Xinyuan Ping. Although he may have been reckoned by the author of the *Shiji* among the *fangshi*, it seems as if the author is inclined toward his prediction and also to the idea that the tripods were lost in the River Si, indeed, by the middle of the 3rd century B.C., and only now, during the time of Han Emperor Wen, had appeared again.

As for Huangdi's journeys to the sacred mountains in connection with the performing of sacrifices such as the *Feng* and *Shan* mentioned by Gongsun Qing, both are confirmed again in the annals of the Five Thearchs. It is there that the reader learns that Huangdi traveled to sacred mountains to the East, West, South and North of his realm and that he kept on moving from one site to the next, without having a permanent residence.¹⁸¹ As a result of the emperor's traveling to these sacred sites, we learn, the ten thousand states were harmonious, and the performances of *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices honoring the ghosts and spirits on the mountains and at the rivers were highly esteemed.¹⁸² And at the beginning of the "Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices" the reader learns that in the time of Huangdi the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices to the gods and spirits were frequently performed. But, it is added, because this is not written in the Classics, the high dignitaries do not dare to speak of it.¹⁸³

It is important to note that all the above adduced examples (calendar, tripod, sacred mountains) seem to convey the impression that the *Shiji* must have been written or at least largely conceived by an ideologue who adheres to the set of ideas

¹⁷⁹ Cf. *Shiji* 28/1382; see also *Shiji* 10/430.

¹⁸⁰ *Shiji* 28/1365. See also *Shiji* 5/218 where the decline of the Zhou, in connection with mentioning the moving of the nine tripods from Zhou to Qin is recorded under the 52nd year of king Zhaoxiang of Qin (255 B.C.).

¹⁸¹ *Shiji* 1/6. The emperor's frequent traveling to sacred mountains, together with the erection of stone stelae, is a central event described in the "Annals of Qin Shihuang." Cf. *Shiji* 6/241–263.

¹⁸² *Shiji* 1/6. Cf. the translation of W. H. Nienhauser (et al.), *Grand Scribe's Records* I, 3: "The myriad states were harmonious, and their sacrifices to spirits, to mountain and rivers, as well as the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices during this time are considered to be the most frequent [in history]."

¹⁸³ *Shiji* 28/1359.

represented by one particular faction of cosmologists. Moreover, it might not be too far-fetched to assume that the original motivation for compiling a history with a consistent chronological thread might have originated in the urgent need of a specialist concerned with the question of how the present dynasty was to be positioned correctly within the cosmological cycles.

However, in spite of the many details that contribute to giving the reader the impression that the *Shiji* is strongly imbued with elements pertaining to what may be called the cosmologists' lore, there are quite a few details that seem to challenge the impression of a consistent overall ideology in this work. Only two short examples must suffice to illustrate that in some places a rather intricate critical attitude seems to become perceptible in the *Shiji* text.

As already mentioned above, chapter 74 of the the *Shiji* contains, interspersed between those of Meng Ke and Xun Qing, the biography of Zou Yan, the person who is credited as the earliest transmitted teacher for the theory of dynastic cycles as it finds its most elaborate reflection in the *Lüshi chunqiu*. At the end of this biography we find the laconic remark:

騶衍其言雖不軌，儻亦有牛鼎之意乎？

Zou Yan's words are, however, not [appropriate] to be taken as a model. Do they not tend toward what is meant by a cauldron [big enough] for an ox?¹⁸⁴

This subtle remark would seem to call the practicability of Zou Yan's teachings into question by comparing his doctrine of dynastic cycles to a cauldron big enough to boil an ox in, but when used to boil a chicken, it would be wholly worthless.¹⁸⁵ If this remark is taken as critical of the complexity of the doctrine, it can scarcely have come from a true adherent of Zou Yan. A true adherent, to take up the argument expressed in the *Shiji*, was to be distinguished from deceivers and charlatans, such as the many *fangshi* from Yan or Qi who were mainly concerned with the question of how to achieve immortality through Zou Yans teachings.

The question concerning Huangdi's immortality is a further example of a conspicuous inconsistency within the *Shiji* account. As we recall, the prospect that Emperor Wu would attain the state of immortality, as had Huangdi before him, was obviously a central motivating factor for Emperor Wu to adopt Gongsun Qing's teachings and to proceed to perform the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices and also to inaugurate the great reform of the calendar. In the last part of his speech he told the emperor that after Huangdi had melted copper at Mount Shou and cast a tripod, a dragon had descended from the sky to fetch him. Huangdi mounted the dragon. When some of his ministers had also tried to climb onto the dragon, some of the

¹⁸⁴ *Shiji* 74/2345.

¹⁸⁵ According to the *Suoyin* commentary this passage alludes to a remark in the *Lüshi chunqiu*. As he concludes, the author of the *Shiji* wanted to say that Zou Yan's teachings are too comprehensive to be applied to other than huge undertakings. Cf. *Lüshi chunqiu* (ICS: 18.7/1167–8); cf. J. Knoblock and J. Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 464. There, the criticism is directed against Hui Shi, a philosopher of the the school of the so-called Sophists. As the further dialogue in which this story is retold depicts, there are cases in which such a cauldron in the end turns out to be of some use. Perhaps this is what the author of the *Shiji* had in mind when comparing the cauldron to the teachings of Zou Yan.

dragons whiskers and Huangdi's bow fell to the ground and were the only memory left to the common people who witnessed Huangdi's ascent to Heaven.¹⁸⁶

However, if we look at the "Annals of the Five Thearchs" we find a laconic remark at the end of the account devoted to Huangdi's life that "after Huangdi had passed away, he was buried on Mount Qiao."¹⁸⁷ The word *beng* 崩 which denotes the death of an emperor can well be taken as evidence, if not for the fact that Huangdi was mortal, then at least for the fact that for the author of this passage, Huangdi did not become an immortal. It is precisely because the question of Huangdi's immortality was so important during the time of Emperor Wu that this remark cannot simply be regarded as a harmless error.

It would be much more plausible that the statement that Huangdi actually died expresses the author's personal conviction that Huangdi was mortal like everyone else. The conception of Huangdi represented here obviously does not accept his immortality as a central or even as a credible incident in his life. Of central importance, however, as it is emphasized here, seems to be his role as the ancestor of rulers and certainly also as the paragon of perfect rulership.¹⁸⁸ One might perhaps define this as a more rational approach toward the conception of Huangdi, laying more stress on the concept he represents than on the dogma of his immortality.

The impression that there is a strong tendency in some parts of the *Shiji* toward a more rational approach is confirmed e.g. by several instances in the later part of the "Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices" in which the activities of the *fangshi* and especially that of Gongsun Qing are examined in terms of their "evidence" (*yan* 驗) and efficacy (*xiao* 效). One example of this is the following passage:

今上封禪，其後十二歲而還，遍於五嶽、四瀆矣。而方士之候祠神人，入海求蓬萊，終無有驗。而公孫卿之候神者，猶以大人跡為解，無其效。天子益怠厭方士之怪迂語矣，然終羈縻弗絕，冀遇其真。自此之後，方士言神祠者彌眾，然其效可睹矣。

After the present Emperor had performed the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices [for the first time], he came back twelve years later to visit the Five [Sacred] Peaks and the Four Watercourses [again]. As for the men of techniques, however, who had been watching out for and sacrificing to the spirits and who had been traveling to the sea on the search for Penglai, in the end they failed to give any evidence. And as for Gongsun Qing's watching out for spirits, in spite of his explanations concerning the giant's footprints, he didn't have any efficacy. As for the Emperor, he became more and more entangled and put under pressure by the mysterious and exaggerating words of the *fangshi*, but until the end he was bound and snared by them, unable to free himself, because he secretly hoped that there would be a kernel of truth in them the words. From this time on, the words by *fangshi* on

¹⁸⁶ *Shiji* 28/1394. See also the ironic treatment of the legend of Liu An's ascent to Heaven as transmitted by some "books of the *ru*" in Wang Chong's *Lunheng* (ICS: 24/95/7–9).

¹⁸⁷ *Shiji* 1/10: 黃帝崩，葬橋山。The Tang commentator Zhang Shoujie who might have had the account of *Shiji* 28 in mind seems not to have been satisfied with the end of the "story" rendered here, as he quotes the story of Huangdi's ascent to Heaven from *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳.

¹⁸⁸ The opinion that the conception of Huangdi as it is propagated by the cosmologists must have been different from the Huangdi depicted in chapter.1 of the *Shiji* has also been raised by Lu Yaodong 遼耀東. "Han Wudi fengshan yu *Shiji* 'Fengshan shu'" 漢武帝封禪與《史記封禪書》，in *Di san jie shixue guoji yantao hui lunwen ji* 第三屆史學國際研討會論文集 (Taizhong: Qingfeng, 1991): 263–287. I am indebted to Dr. Achim Mittag for directing my attention to this article.

spirits and sacrifices grew more and more numerous, but the efficacy of this can be perceived.¹⁸⁹

Following the suggestion made in the beginning of this essay, one criterion for distinguishing Sima Tan's share in the record from Sima Qian's is that descriptions of those events which happened after the emperor's first performing of the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices in precisely the year in which Sima Tan died can only have originated from the hand of Sima Qian.

Summarizing the main arguments put forward in this chapter, we can thus cautiously distinguish between two major tendencies in the *Shiji*. One is strongly imbued by ideological elements which, as should have become plain from the above examples, reveal striking parallels to the ideology propagated by Gongsun Qing in his prophetic message. However, we also find instances in which this ideology seems to be challenged or, as in the case of the central topic of Huangdi's immortality, treated in a way that might be called an ironical denial of the applicability and the verifiability of the ideology. The gap between these two strands of thinking will strike every attentive reader of the *Shiji* as a reminder to understand this work as a whole, and not to draw conclusions too readily from one or another of its parts.

But if one takes into consideration that the *Shiji* must be regarded as a compilation of the writings of at least two persons, namely Sima Tan and Sima Qian, the only plausible conclusion is that those parts of the *Shiji* which are strongly imbued with ideological elements originate from the hand of Sima Tan, while those parts in which doubt, criticism and the need for verifiability is raised, should be attributed to Sima Qian.

Concluding remarks

It is now time to return to the question raised at the beginning of this study – the question why Gongsun Qing may have been treated in such a critical and even derogatory way in the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices” by the author of the *Shiji*, as contrasted to the *Han shu* account where he was depicted as one of Sima Qian's colleagues, and it is also time to search for a perhaps more balanced judgment concerning the relation between the ideas propagated by Gongsun Qing on the one hand and the three Sima on the other.

As it turned out, Gongsun Qing's role within the grand ceremonial reform was much more complex and also much more closely connected with that of Sima Tan and Sima Qian than one would believe from simply following the narrative line in the “Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices” of the *Shiji*. The comparison between the contents of the message which Gongsun Qing had introduced to Emperor Wu's court and the professional engagement of Sima Tan and Sima Qian in their successive functions as *taishi* revealed that the ideas which Gongsun Qing expressed in his prophetic message were imbued by very much the same ideological frame of mind as that within which Sima Tan as well as Sima Qian must have operated when they served the emperor as advisers on the question of how to reform the state sacrifices.

¹⁸⁹ *Shiji* 28/1403; 12/485.

One is even inclined to say that Sima Tan and Sima Qian must somehow have benefited from Gongsun Qing's success.

The *Han shu* passage in which Gongsun Qing is depicted as Sima Qian's colleague cooperating with him in preparing the new calendar for the Han agrees well with Gongsun Qing's obvious insider knowledge in calendrical matters as described in the *Shiji*. Thus the above mentioned assumption that Ban Gu in his *Han shu* might have intended to discredit Sima Qian and only for this reason have put him side by side with Gongsun Qing is certainly not plausible.

If we view the matter in this light we may, however, be even more puzzled as to how the critical or even derogatory attitude which is made so plain in the "Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices" of the *Shiji* should be explained.

Perhaps a key to answering this difficult question, which seems to touch a secret hidden in the *Shiji*, lies in the very distinction made in the *Shiji* between the true followers of Zou Yan on the one hand, and the deceivers, those who only serve their private ends by abusing the emperor's confidence and his weak points, on the other.¹⁹⁰ In fact, we saw that the aspect criticized most sharply by the *Shiji* author with regard to Gongsun Qing's engagement was that he had misled the emperor by making him believe that he might not only become able to enter into communication with the gods, but even achieve personal immortality. This was the bait that Gongsun Qing had laid out and which secured him and his colleagues a safe position at court. It seems, however, that precisely this aspect of Gongsun Qing's initiative became the one attacked most sharply by the person who was responsible for the historical record. As we argued above, among the two main contributors of the *Shiji* – Sima Tan and Sima Qian – it seems that Sima Qian had a much more rationalistic approach to the matters related to the calendar than his father Tan. It seems that with regard to Gongsun Qing the same rationalistic attitude becomes plain, and at the same time a very critical attitude toward someone who – no matter whether in good faith or not – applied methods which were in his eyes irrational and esoteric and which seems to have served primarily as a means of convincing the emperor of the importance and supremacy of a particular strand of thought. Viewed in this light, it seems plausible that it is Sima Qian who should be regarded as the historiographer whose critical and derogatory attitude toward Gongsun Qing is reflected in this chapter and who thus should be regarded as the person responsible for this chapter's final compilation.

Assuming that this critical attitude belongs to Sima Qian, one might ask why he would not attack his father Tan for his ideological tendency. The answer is not difficult to guess. Simply for reasons of filial piety, Sima Qian would not have dared to direct his criticism against his own father. On the contrary: as the reader is told in the last chapter of the *Shiji*, Sima Tan on his deathbed had begged his son Qian to continue what he himself had begun, but was not able to bring to an end. And we read in the record that Sima Qian upon hearing his father's words knocked his head on the floor saying:

遷俯首流涕曰：「小子不敏，請悉論先人所次舊聞，弗敢闕。」

¹⁹⁰ Cf. p. 282.

"I, [your] little son, though ignorant and unworthy, shall try my best and set forth in full the ancient reports passed down to us from our predecessors. I shall not dare to be remiss."¹⁹¹

Words such as these may convey an impression of how deep the conflict between piety and opposition may have been in a critical mind such as that of Sima Qian. If one contrasts the attitude displayed toward his father with the sharp criticism directed against Gongsun Qing – a man whose ideological background seems to have been very similar to that of his father – one may assume that as an object of his criticism, Gongsun Qing might have served Sima Qian as a suitable scapegoat, as he obviously did not feel himself to be obliged to him either by blood-relation or in any other way.

Last but not least, one might be tempted to find an answer to the question raised in the section on Sima Xiangru, namely, whether it would be plausible to assume that although Sima Xiangru was related by blood to Sima Tan and Sima Qian, any hint of such a relationship was intentionally omitted in this chapter. As mentioned earlier, it seems as if the person responsible for Sima Xiangru's biography had tried to lay stress on the fact that Sima Xiangru, though outwardly flattering Emperor Wu by denoting him as someone worthy of communicating with the immortals and roaming through the skies, had tried, but vainly tried, to dissuade the emperor from his growing inclination toward the cult of immortality by writing his eulogy in a perhaps ironical vein. It thus seems that the major reproach which is implicitly directed toward Sima Xiangru in his biographical account is that he failed to make use of his elevated position to open the emperor's eyes and thus did not prevent that in the end a ruler who turned out to be not a worthy one was encouraged to proceed to the solemn *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices.

Once again, the question of who may have been responsible for this remark can scarcely be answered with certainty. Sima Tan may well have compiled almost the whole of Sima Xiangru's biography. The remark at the very end of the chapter in which an inner bond is established between the death dates of Sima Xiangru and Sima Tan and the emperor's first performing of the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices¹⁹² is, however – simply due to the fact that Sima Tan did not live to experience the actual performance of the sacrifices on Mount Tai – a strong indication that it was Sima Qian who was at least the final compiler of this chapter. But perhaps an even more convincing argument supporting the thesis that it was Sima Qian and not his father Tan who wrote the biographical account may be that the reason for keeping silent with regard to the fact that they were closely related by blood was due to a certain embarrassment, shame or even anger that someone of his own clan was so closely involved in an initiative that had encouraged Emperor Wu in his growing tendency toward personality cult and megalomania – even though this ultimately may have been the result of a tragic misunderstanding.

¹⁹¹ *Shiji* 130/3295; cf. B. Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, 42 ff.

¹⁹² See p. 271.

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