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## Dicing and Divination in Early China

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### DICING AND DIVINATION IN EARLY CHINA

Links between gambling and divination exist in many cultures. As both activities involve an attempt to predict the future and a choice of actions based on those predictions, it is not surprising that the psychology, terminology, procedures, and even the implements of these two activities often overlap. Thus casting dice and winning money on the basis of which sides come up is a form of gambling, but casting tallies and deciding actions on the basis of which sides come up is a standard form of divination in Chinese temples. Spinning a wheel, drawing lots, dealing cards, and a whole range of other actions is used alternatively to gamble or to divine. While this overlap figures throughout the world, the specific forms that it takes and the manner in which these are incorporated into broader discourses is distinctive to each culture. These thus provide a useful ground for cross-cultural comparisons.

At the origins of Western civilization the ancient Greeks recognized the strong links between gambling and divinatory practices. These links are most clearly embodied in the mythical figure of Palamedes, who was credited as inventor of both dice and several forms of divination, as well as other types of gambling, of the alphabet, and of numbers. The mythology of this figure has been the subject of a useful discussion by Marcel Detienne that appears in a study of Greek ideas about the origins of writing in relation to the human voice.<sup>1</sup> The very name Palamedes, which derives from the same root as "palm" and suggests skill in the manipulation of the world, indicates the multiform resourcefulness and the cunning intelligence which the Greeks called *metis*.<sup>2</sup> Palamedes figures in the poem *Cypria* in the epic cycle as a rival and mirror image of Odysseus, who shares the latter's mutability and cunning. Palamedes's cleverness exposed the ruse by which Odysseus attempted to avoid departing for Troy, thus earning him

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<sup>1</sup>Marcel Detienne, *L'écriture d'Orphée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), pp. 101-15, especially pp. 105-09.

<sup>2</sup>Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, tr. Janet Lloyd (Sussex: Harvester, 1978).

the latter's enmity.<sup>3</sup> While at Troy he took charge of laying out the Greek forces and instituted the use of guards. He also introduced the alphabet for use as tokens in enumerating and distributing supplies, and he introduced dice and other forms of gambling to amuse the troops left idle by the unfavorable winds at Aulis. In the end he was destroyed by Odysseus in a ruse that involved the use of the writing he himself had introduced. However, he also used a written message carved secretly on an oar to alert his brother of his unjust fate and prepare the way for vengeance achieved by his family through the manipulation of false signals.

As Detienne has suggested, these tales of Palamedes, where dicing and divination converge, are a complement to the inventions of Prometheus. Whereas Prometheus gave humans fire and the other means of meeting their physical needs, Palamedes endowed men with the means of escaping from difficult situations and crises, of successfully analyzing situations marked by *aporia*. As the man who introduced the alphabet for use in marking and publicizing standardized units of measure, Palamedes represents that aspect of writing where it overlapped with numbers, in a world where letters were still used as numerals. Letters, dice, the tokens used in gambling or in calculations, as well as the osselets tossed in gambling and in forms of divination were all linked by the Greeks as forms of using number and measure to make sense of the world. All these were attributed to Palamedes. This same overlap between writing, number, and gambling also figures in Plato's accounts in the *Phaedrus* of the inventions of the god Thoth--creator of writing, geometry, astronomy, dice, and board games--and the remarks of the old man in Plato's *Laws* who notes that the use of chips and counters in games of chance places them on a par with the sciences that deal with calculating the quantities and measures of grandeur that constitute the world. As Detienne notes, the same word in Greek could apply to tallies used in arithmetical calculations, voting, games, and divination. The differences between tables for calculations and those for gaming are so small that archaeologists

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<sup>3</sup>Detienne, *L'écriture*, p. 105; Jonathan S. Burgess, *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer & the Epic Cycle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2001), ch. 3.

cannot always distinguish them. Thus the overlap in the mythology of Palamedes was carried over into terminology and physical culture.

In the Greek world the overlap between gambling and divination figured in accounts of the manipulations of cunning intelligence as opposed to the pure certainties of geometric proof, the role of calculation and number as means of guiding actions in the world, and the links between writing and the manipulation of physical tokens or tallies. One striking element of these accounts was the questionable, almost immoral, character attributed to the masters of gambling, divining, and the manipulation of signs. Just as the endlessly inventive cunning of Palamedes or Odysseus was both admirable and threatening, so the powers of the alphabet could be mobilized either to communicate the truth or to deceive. Palamedes, as Detienne notes, is a figure who demonstrates the dangerous powers of sealed messages and secret writings. This hiding and unveiling of meanings is also central to the divinatory act.

While no single mythic figure unites the realms of writing, divination, astronomy, and games of chance in early China, these fields are brought together in several texts. The most important of these deal with the origins and structure of the *Yi jing*.<sup>4</sup> The trigrams and hexagrams had originally been constructed from numbers manipulated for the purpose of divination. In the late Warring States commentarial texts found at Mawangdui or preserved as the "Ten Wings" they were still analyzed in numerical terms. However, in the same texts the hexagrams were described as the prototypes of written graphs and as visual depictions of the structure of the universe. Tallies identical in form with those used to create hexagrams were also used for arithmetic reckonings and, according to the *Sunzi*, for calculating the balance of forces in military campaigns. Thus the manipulation of the hexagrams, along with the stories of their origins and uses, brought together the fields of divination, number, cosmology, and writing. And evidence recently

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<sup>4</sup>Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: SUNY, 1999), pp. 252-86.

found in tombs shows that divination with the *Yi jing* was also related to gambling.<sup>5</sup>

The clearest evidence of this relation was found in a Qin-dynasty tomb at Wangjiatai. In this tomb the excavators discovered twenty-three large and small lacquered wooden dice accompanying the corpse, along with divinatory instruments such as a diviner's board and an alternative hexagram text identified as the *Guicang*.<sup>6</sup> The dice are six-sided with the numbers one through six incised on the sides. Two of the smaller dice are blank on two opposing sides, with the numbers one and six incised on the four remaining sides. While the precise use of these dice cannot be determined, their placement in the tomb in association with implements and texts for divination, in what is consequently tentatively identified as the grave of a diviner, suggests that the dice were likewise used in divinatory practices. Although their specific use in divination is unknown, the most likely explanation is that the dice were used to generate hexagrams. As in several early examples of the *Yi*, the hexagrams of the Wangjiatai *Guicang* consist of a vertical array of the numbers 1, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Given their numerical character, it is plausible to imagine that they could be produced through using the dice that accompanied them in the tomb.

While as noted above the links between the dice and the *Guicang* text at Wangjiatai are speculative, we possess much better evidence about the links between dice, gambling, and divination in the playing of the game *liu bo*. The links of this game to divination have long been suspected, and they have been dramatically confirmed by the discovery of the "*bo* divination chart" in a late Western Han tomb (dating from the reign of Emperor Cheng, 32-6 B.C.) at Yinwan. In the balance of this paper I will briefly discuss what we know about *liu bo*, what the discovery at Yinwan has revealed, and how the overlap between gambling and divination was part of a more general debate about the relation of humanity to the cosmos.

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<sup>5</sup>On this and related points see Li Ling 李零, "Bu bo tong yuan 卜博同源," in *Zhongguo fangshu xu kao* 中國方術續考 (Beijing: Dongfang, 2000), pp. 20-27.

<sup>6</sup>"Jiangling Wangjiatai 15 hao Qin mu 江陵王家台 15 號秦墓," *Wenwu* (1995:1), pp. 37-43. Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu xu kao*, pp. 312-13.

*Liu bo*, literally "six rods", was a board game which is mentioned in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Examples of the game have been found in tombs from the Warring States period state of Zhongshan, the Qin dynasty, and the Han. The standard board design echoes many features of the so-called TLV design on bronze mirrors, as well as the diviner's boards (*shi pan*) from the same period. This has elicited a considerable literature debating the filiation of these diverse objects.<sup>7</sup> The links to the diviner's board have also led scholars to argue that the *liu bo* game had some relation to divination.

One striking feature of the *liu bo* board is that it provides a schematic model of the cosmos. The board found at Zhongshan, those from the four complete Qin and Han sets discovered, and all the other Han boards thus far discovered have the same pattern of "roads" along which the pieces apparently moved. The structure of these roads on the *liu bo* board, like the patterns on the related diviner's board, manifests key features of accounts of the world from the same period. Their layout established a center and an orientation to the four primary directions, as well as the four intermediate directions. The four Ts that appear at the center of each side of the square board correspond to the four cardinal points of the earth, and together they indicate the lines of the two cosmic ropes (*sheng* 繩) that defined the structure of the earth in some early texts. The four Vs at the corners of the square marked the corners of Heaven as described in the *Huainanzi*. As Donald Harper has pointed out, these Vs correspond to the "four hooks (*si gou* 四鉤)

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<sup>7</sup>For a detailed discussion of the diviner's boards, *liu bo* game board, the TLV mirror, and related patterns, all of them explained as models of the world, see Li Ling, *Zhongguo fang shu kao* (Beijing: Dongfang, 2000), ch. 2, "Shi yu Zhongguo gudai de yuzhou moshi 式與中國古代的宇宙模式," pp. 89-176. This chapter is a revised versions of a three-part article originally published in 1991 in the *Jiu Zhou Xuekan* and *Zhongguo Wenhua*.

For discussions of the relation of such objects as TLV mirrors, sundials, game boards, divination boards, and apotropaic coins see Schülyer Cammann, "The 'TLV' Pattern on Cosmic Mirrors of the Han Dynasty," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 68 (1948), pp. 159-67; Lao Gan 勞榦, "Liubo ji bo ju zhi yanbian 六博及博局之演變," *Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo Jikan* 35 (1964), pp. 15-30; Li Jianmin 李建民, "Han dai ju xi de qiyuan yu yanbian 漢代局戲的起源與演變," *Dalu Zazhi* 77 (1988:3), pp. 1-20, (1988:4), pp. 27-47; Liu Fu 劉復, "Xi Han shidai de rigui 西漢時代的日晷," *Guoxue Jikan* 3:4 (1932), pp. 573-610; Yang Lien-sheng, "A Note on the So-Called TLV Mirrors and the Game *Liu-po*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 9 (1947), pp. 202-06; Yang, "An Additional Note on the Ancient Game *Liu-po*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15 (1952), pp. 124-39.

also mentioned in the *Huainanzi*, and with the cords they form a "cord-hook" design that figures prominently in many Warring States and Han divinatory charts, cosmic models, and decorative patterns.<sup>8</sup>

These closely related cosmic models offered by the divining board and the gaming board each presented a schematic model of the entire world constructed from circles, squares, cords, and hooks. Their geometric simplicity brought the entirety of existence within a small space that could be taken in at a single glance and easily manipulated. The user of these boards for gaming or divination could thus establish his relation to the entire cosmos by placing himself in a proper position within the schema generated in the chart. This is indicated by the remarks of a speaker in one Han text who stated that in using the diviner's board one should

take Heaven and Earth as his models [*fa* 法] and the four seasons as his images [*xiang* 象], accord with benevolence and duty, divide the sticks to fix the hexagrams, and revolve the divining board on a correctly placed square base.<sup>9</sup>

More specific details of this procedure are suggested in an account of the use of a divining board at the end of the reign of Wang Mang.

The astrologer placed the diviner's board in front and added in the positions of the sun and the season. Wang Mang then revolved his mat to sit in the position indicated by the handle of the Dipper [on the circular disk]. He stated, "Since Heaven has produced virtuous power (*de* 德)

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<sup>8</sup>Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought," pp. 836-39. For the references to cords and hooks, both in astronomy and construction, see *Huainanzi* 淮南子, in *Xin bian zhu zi ji cheng* (Taipei: Shijie, 1974), vol. 7, ch.1, "Yuan dao 原道," p. 16; ch. 3 "Tian wen 天文," pp. 37, 39; 11 "Qi su 齊俗," pp. 179, 185.

<sup>9</sup>*Shi ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959) 127, p. 3218. See also *Zhou li zhu shu* 周禮注疏, in *Shisan jing zhu shu* 十三經 (Taipei: Yiwen, 1976), vol. 3, "Da shi 大史," ch. 26, p. 15a. In his commentary on the line "The Grand Astrologer held in his arms the seasons of Heaven and shared a chariot with the Grand Musician," the Eastern Han commentator Zheng Zhong, writing in the middle of the first century A.D., made the following remarks: "When one sent out a large army, the Grand Astrologer was in charge of holding the diviner's board in order to know the seasons of Heaven and fix good and bad fortune. Astrologers were in charge of knowing the way of Heaven." Thus writing in the Eastern Han, Zheng Zhong regarded the diviner's board as the central tool for understanding the movements of Heaven and their impact on men.



in me, what can the Han troops do to me?"<sup>10</sup>

Here the admittedly misguided ruler appears to assume that the guidance of the diviner's board allows him to place himself appropriately in the world so as to guarantee the continued support of Heaven. Several anecdotes about people using the board also clearly show that they had to examine current astral phenomena to set the board properly and then adjust their own position in relation to it.<sup>11</sup> In short, the diviner's board was a replica of Heaven and Earth that allowed men to situate their place in relation to the dynamic trends of the cosmos and thereby obtain success in their affairs.

The structural similarity of the *liu bo* board to the diviner's board suggests that it could serve a similar function, and this is confirmed by an account of the game written in the Wei dynasty immediately after the Han.

Wu Cao invented *bo*. Its origins are indeed ancient! [It has] a pair of casting sticks as an image (*xiang* 象) of the illumination given by the sun and moon, and twelve pieces as an image of the movements of the twelve asterisms [*chen* 辰]. Next it takes as a pattern the movements of Heaven and Earth [i.e., all spatial movements], and imitates the waxing and waning of *yin* and *yang* [i.e. all temporal processes]. It manifests a total mastery of all human affairs, and exhausts the subtle starting points [*ji wei* 機微] of all changes.<sup>12</sup>

Here the elements of the game are directly mapped onto the spatial and temporal aspects of the physical world, and the action of the game is explicitly treated as an image of the totality of natural processes. In this way the playing of *liu bo* was like the diviner's manipulation of his cosmic board, or the ruler's movements through his cosmic Bright Hall (*ming tang* 明堂). In every case the actor created a schematic

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<sup>10</sup>*Han shu* 99c, p. 4190. See also *Shi ji* 128, p. 3229—"Wei Ping then set down the diviner's board and arose. He gazed up at the sky to examine the light from the moon, observe where the Dipper was pointing, and fix the direction of the sun. He was assisted by the carpenter's square and compass, backed up by the balances. When the four 'hawsers' [of the directions] were fixed, the eight trigrams faced one another [cast into the board]. He looked for good and bad fortune, and the beetle appeared first." The beetle mentioned here would be one of the animals that ring the circular disk. Thus through a combination of placing himself and the board, observing present astral phenomena, and manipulating the disk, the diviner produced an answer to the question posed.

<sup>11</sup>*Shi ji* 128, p. 3229; *Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962) 99c, p. 4190.

<sup>12</sup>Xue Xiaotong 薛孝通, "Bo pu 博譜," quoted in *Taiping yu lan*, ch. 754, p. 4a.

microcosm of the universe, and then acted so as to bring his actions in accord with that model. In doing so he secured the powers of the cosmos in support of his own actions.

In transforming the world into schematic charts the early Chinese used a whole series of numerological categories--the four directions, five positions (including the center), eight positions (including the intermediate directions), the nine palaces (a standard grid), and the twelve degrees--that could be mapped onto corresponding elements in other spheres. Thus the four directions were routinely associated with the seasons and the winds, and the eight positions were likewise associated with winds. The twelve degrees corresponded to the months and to the gods of those months, such as the figures portrayed on the Chu silk manuscript. In this way the charts could bring their user into a proper relationship with virtually any phenomenon and direct his actions in all fields. Most commonly these were used to select auspicious days for actions, as in the Mawangdui *Xingde* texts and related astro-calendrical systems, but they were also applied in other activities such as selecting the direction in which to bury the afterbirth during any given month.<sup>13</sup> The links of abstraction and enumeration were particularly clear in early Chinese models that assigned numbers to the five positions or the nine-square grid, resulting in the hook-and-cord grids, magic squares, and the charts known as "River Chart" and "Luo Writing".<sup>14</sup>

While the *liu bo* boards all shared a common basic structure based on ideas about the shape of the world, they varied in the number and distribution of animal figures--snakes, dragons, and tigers--that are distributed on the board as additional decor. Pieces made of ivory, bone, bronze, jade, and rock crystal have been discovered in excavations throughout north and south China. In the game each player had six

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<sup>13</sup>There are three texts from Mawangdui that the editors have grouped under the title of *Xing de*. The most studied is the so-called text B. This is transcribed in Fu Juyou and Chen Songchang, *Mawangdui Han mu wenwu*, pp. 132-43 and examined in detail in Marc Kalinowski, "Mawangdui boshu *Xingde* shitan 馬王堆帛書刑德試探," *Huaxue* 1 (1995), pp. 82-110. On the disposal of the afterbirth see *Mawangdui Han mu bo shu* 馬王堆漢墓帛書, vol. 4, ed. Guojia Wenwuju gu wenxian yanjiushi (Beijing: Wenwu, 1985), p. 134; Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, pp. 374-77.

<sup>14</sup>Li Ling, *Zhongguo fang shu kao*, pp. 146-54.

such pieces which he or she moved along the "roads" on the board. There would thus have been a total of twelve pieces, corresponding to the months of the year, the Chinese gamut, or the major celestial asterisms. This correspondence, as noted in the passage above, meant that the game imitated the temporal processes of the cosmos as well as its spatial order.<sup>15</sup>

This indicates a second important feature of both the diviner's boards and the *liu bo* game, that of dynamism. Movement was central to the function of each of the objects, as in the circular disk of the diviner's board which was physically rotated, or the movement of pieces across the *liu bo* board. And both these forms of movements were simulations of the annual cycle or other natural temporal patterns. This same insistence on movement and process figures in related visual charts, such as the aforementioned *Xingde* (刑德 "punishing power/life-giving virtue") charts from Mawangdui which map out astro-calendrical systems. For the most part the actual or implied mobility built into these charts reflects attempts to plot temporal processes onto the structure of space, thereby achieving a complete image of the cosmos. The possibility of such temporal mapping was fundamental to their use to divine the shifting course of processes over time.

The movement of the pieces in *liu bo* was originally determined by the casting of the eponymous six rods, which were made from split bamboo canes, often strengthened on the concave side with metal or lacquer. In the early history of the game these rods were thrown in the manner of divinatory casting. However, with the passage of time players began to use dice as well as rods in order to determine moves. The earliest known complete *liu bo* sets, discovered in two Qin dynasty tombs at Shuihudi, use six bamboo rods. A complete Western Han set from a tomb at Fenghuangshan in Hubei contained both the six rods and an eighteen-sided die marked with numbers. A nearly contemporary complete Han set found at Mawangdui contained the eighteen-sided die, but no rods. Thus by the Han the casting of rods and of dice

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<sup>15</sup>Li Ling, *Zhongguo fang shu kao*, pp. 129-46. Li Ling here elaborates how the use of the diviner's board and related objects such as the *liu bo* board entailed the depiction of the structure of both space and time.

seems to have become interchangeable. Consequently in the game of *liu bo* the implements of divination and gambling became interchangeable, just as the dice found at Wangjiatai indicate that the tools of gambling could also be used within the process of divination.

In addition to the linked structure of diviner's boards and game boards and the close echoes in written accounts of their use as cosmic models, a few other pieces of evidence link *liu bo* to forms of divination. The *Shi ji* lists the *liu bo* board and the diviner's board as two methods of divination.<sup>16</sup> The casting of six rods in the games likewise echoed the divinatory use of the *Yi jing*, and it is notable that in some depictions in Han art of immortals playing the game the rods form the visual equivalent of the hexagram *qian*. The aforementioned evidence from Wangjiatai now shows us that the casting of dice to move the pieces also echoed elements of some forms of *Yi* divination.

However, the clearest demonstration of the links of *liu bo* to divination comes from the Han tomb at Yinwan. In this tomb excavators found a wooden document, the upper register of which consisted of a replica of the roads of the *liu bo* board, while the bottom register contained five blocks of text. Each block consisted of nine lines of divinatory formulae dealing with different categories of regular concern: marriage, travel, illness, and so on. The top of the chart is inscribed "south [*nan fang* 南方]", which clearly demonstrates a directional orientation linked to the structure of the world. The center of the chart is marked by the character *fang* 方, and the sixty pairs formed by the "Heavenly Stems" and "Earthly Branches" are distributed along the roads. At the top of the nine columns of formulae appears a list of nine characters which are virtually identical with those figuring in a formula dealing with *liu bo* that is preserved in an anecdote in the post-Han *Xi jing za ji*. According to this anecdote the formula was coined by a certain Xu Bochang (博昌, "propagator of [*liu*] *bo*") who lived in the middle of the second century B.C. and was a good friend of the powerful minister Dou Ying. The formula was "recited by all the

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<sup>16</sup>*Shi ji* 127, p. 3218.

children in the capital region."<sup>17</sup> This clearly indicates that the words of the formula were widely known, which would facilitate their use in divination by ordinary people as suggested by the Yinwan chart.

A series of brief articles by Chinese scholars has worked out the essential method of linking the *liu bo* chart to the formulae for divinatory purposes.<sup>18</sup> The method, as thus far established, is based on the use of the sexagenary cycle that is inscribed on the chart to identify specific days. By reciting the gambling formula while moving through the sixty-day cycle along the paths of the *liu bo* diagram as marked on the board, each day would be associated with one of the nine terms that headed the columns. The questioner would then select the topic of interest, which would establish which horizontal block of the text was to be consulted, and indicate a day, which would establish the vertical column. By consulting the formula where the two lines intersected, the questioner could find whether the given day was auspicious for the desired activity. Alternatively, he or she could establish all days within the next two-month period that would be propitious for a given activity. While the exact relation of this form of divination to the game remains

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<sup>17</sup>See *Xi jing za ji* 西京雜記, in *Han Wei Liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan* 漢魏六朝筆記小說大觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji, 1999), p. 107. The nine characters on the Yinwan divinatory chart are *fang* 方, *lian* 廉, *jie* 揭, *dao* 道, *zhang* 張, *qu* 曲, *qu* 詘, *chang* 長, and *gao* 高. The four characters 方, 道, 張, and 高 appear in the formula from the *Xi jing za ji*. The character 揭 appears in the formula with the hand radical as 揭. The character 詘 appears with the corpse radical as 屈. The character 廉 is apparently replaced by its sometime synonym *pan* 畔, since both characters can mean "side". The characters 長 and 曲, which are both phonetically and semantically related to other characters on the list (張 and 詘), do not appear in the formula, which instead features *xuan* 玄 and *jiu* 究. However, it is worthy of note that the four-line formula in the *Xi jing za ji* uses only nine characters, exactly the number of columns in the Yinwan chart.

<sup>18</sup>For a photo of the chart and a transcription of the divinatory formulae, see "Jiangsu Donghai xian Yinwan Han mu qun fajue jianbao 江蘇東海縣尹灣漢墓群發掘簡報," *Wen wu* (1996:8), plate 2 (between pp. 16-17); "Yinwan Han mu jiandu shiwen xuan 尹灣漢墓簡牘釋文選," *Wen wu* (1996:8), pp. 30-31. For discussions of the manner of using the chart for divination, see Li Xueqin 李學勤, "'Bo ju zhan' yu guiju wen 博局占與規矩文," *Wenwu* (1997:1), pp. 49-51; Liu Hongshi 劉洪石, "Donghai Yinwan Han mu shushulei jiandu shidu 東海尹灣漢墓術數類簡牘試讀," *Dongnan wenhua* (1997:4), pp. 67-73; Liu Lexian 劉樂賢, "Yinwan Han mu chutu shushu wenxian chutan 尹灣漢墓出土數術文獻初探," in *Yinwan Han mu jiandu zonglun* 尹灣漢墓簡牘綜論 (Beijing: Kexue, 1999), pp. 177-82; Zeng Lanying 曾藍瑩, "Yinwan Han mu 'Bo ju zhan' mu du shijie 尹灣漢墓博局占木牘試解," *Wenwu* (1999:8), p. 62-65; Li Jiemin 李解民, "'Yinwan Han mu Bo ju zhan mu du shijie' ding bu 尹灣漢墓博局占木牘試解訂補," *Wenwu* (2000:1), pp. 73-75.

unclear, it is certain that the chart and the terms used to obtain formulae derive directly from the *liu bo* game. It is also quite likely that the order of the sexagenary signs on the chart followed the same sequence along the paths as did the movements of the *liu bo* pieces. This being the case, it seems that the movement of the *liu bo* pieces within the game, as dictated by casting rods or dice, followed a sequence either patterned on, or providing a pattern for, a system of divination.

While the archaeological evidence pertaining to *liu bo* and to the Yinwan divinatory chart clearly indicate the strong relation of gambling to divination, the significance of this link is revealed only in the early anecdotes on the game. Three of these were collected by Yang Lien-sheng in his second article on the subject.<sup>19</sup> As Yang noted, in these stories ambitious mortals seek to play *liu bo* with spirits or celestial powers in order to obtain superhuman powers from them. Thus in one *Shi ji* anecdote a Shang king had a statue made to represent a celestial spirit (*tian shen* 天神), and then played *liu bo* against it with one of the king's subjects making the moves for the god. When the spirit was defeated the king abused and insulted it. In a story in the *Han Feizi* King Zhao of Qin ordered artisans to climb Mt. Hua and there make giant *bo* throwing sticks from the cores of the trees. Afterwards he had an inscription carved stating, "King Zhao once played *bo* against a celestial spirit at this place." Finally one speaker in the *Zhanguo ce* tells of a "bold youth (*han shao nian* 悍少年)" who challenged the deity of a shrine to the god of the earth to a game of *bo*. The stakes stipulated that if the youth won he would borrow the god's power for three days, while if he lost the god could make him suffer. He made throws for the god with his left hand, throws for himself with his right, and won the match. He accordingly borrowed the god's power but then did not return it. After three days the god went to seek him, and as a consequence the grove around the shrine withered and died.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Yang Lien-sheng, "An Additional Note on the Ancient Game Liu-po," p. 138. See also Lao Gan, "Liu bo ji boju zhi yanbian," p. 22.

<sup>20</sup>*Shi ji* 3, p. 104; *Han Feizi ji shi* 韓非子集釋, annotated by Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (Shanghai: Renmin, 1974) 11 "Wai chu shuo zuo shang 外儲說左上," p. 644; *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 (Shanghai: Guji,

It is significant that the "youth" in this story with his propensity for gambling is an example of the violent youths described in many Warring States and Han texts. These figures, the early equivalents of modern *liu mang*, are said to spend their days in the market place staging cock fights, setting hounds on hares, and gambling, most notably at *liu bo*. It is thus noteworthy that all those identified in the stories collected by Yang as playing *liu bo* against spirits are portrayed as figures bordering on the criminal who challenge the conventional order.

This point can be developed further through examining a final story that Yang omitted. The late Eastern Han *Fengsu tong yi* tells how Emperor Wu played *bo* with an immortal at Mt. Tai, but the sticks that he cast were swallowed up in the rock. While the stakes of the game are not explicitly named, Ying Shao linked this story directly to a tale in which at the top of Mt. Tai there was a metal box with jade strips that could foretell people's lifespans. Emperor Wu, apparently while making his *feng* sacrifice in pursuit of immortality, drew out tallies indicating death at the age of eighteen, but reversed them in the act of reading them aloud and thus was able to live until he was more than eighty years old.<sup>21</sup> Given that the issue being discussed in this passage of the *Fengsu tong yi* is the folly of the emperor's pursuit of immortality, and that the story about the box deals with the extension of lifespan through the skillful manipulation of magic strips, it seems that Ying Shao understood that the game of *liu bo* with the immortal--in which the strips went back into the ground instead of coming out--was also about gaining immortality. The disappearance of the sticks thus indicated the emperor's defeat and his inevitable death.

The story does not say that the box with the strips indicating lifespans was buried, but it is clearly linked with the box containing the emperor's message to the gods--also on strips--that was buried on top

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1978) "Qin san 秦三," p. 197. For the argument that the *cong* 叢 discussed in the final story would indicate a shrine to the earth god (or goddess), see Wen Yiduo 聞一多, "Gaotang shennü chuanshuo zhi fenxi 高唐神女傳說之分析," in *Shenhua yu shi, Wen Yiduo quan ji* 全集 (rep. ed., Beijing: Sanlian, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 81-116.

<sup>21</sup>*Fengsu tong yi jiao shi* 風俗通義校釋, by Ying Shao 應劭, annotated by Wu Shuping 吳樹平 (Tianjin: Renmin, 1980), pp. 54, 55-56.

of the mountain as part of the *feng* sacrifice. Ying Shao ridicules both these stories, and points out that since the emperor was already forty-seven at the time he climbed Mt. Tai he could hardly have had an allotted span of eighteen years. Nevertheless, the important point is the existence of the stories, not Ying Shao's attitude towards them. Indeed the tradition that Mt. Tai knew the length of people's lifespans is also recorded in the third-century A.D. text, the *Bo wu zhi*.<sup>22</sup> Emperor Wu's manipulation of the strips to extend his life, and his playing *liu bo* to apparently gain even more years, show that the game when played against immortals was employed by humans to expand their own powers, alter their fate, and manipulate their world. And once again playing *liu bo* against spirits is linked with defiance of the established order.

In these stories what was at stake in the game was magical power for the winner, a power to be gained through a form of combat with the realm of the spirits. The king in the first story is described as an immoral man who shot arrows into a leather sack filled with blood and said that he was "shooting Heaven". In the end he was struck by lightning while hunting, so it is clear that the *bo* game was part of a struggle with the celestial powers that the king ultimately lost. Similarly the climbing of a mountain, a standard mode of seeking communication with spirits, and the placing of an inscription atop it was a form of claiming mastery over a state or the world, as exemplified in the mountain inscriptions of Qin Shihuang and in the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices of the Emperor Wu that likewise became conflated in myth with *bo* games against spirits.<sup>23</sup> Thus in every case the playing of *bo* with the spirit was an attempt to gain its power as a means of gaining mastery in the world. This theme of playing *bo* with spirits also figures prominently in Han tomb art and in later mirrors, although the examples that involve supernatural beings depict two immortals playing against one another, rather than against a mortal. Most of these matches in Han art between immortals are depicted on mountain tops, as in the stories of Emperor Wu and King

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<sup>22</sup>*Bo wu zhi jiao zheng* 博物志校證 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980), ch. 1, "Di 地," p. 10.

<sup>23</sup>Mark Edward Lewis, "The *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices of Emperor Wu of the Han," in *State and Court Ritual in China*, ed. Joseph P. McDermott (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), pp. 54-59, 63-65.



Zhao.<sup>24</sup> The relation between *liu bo* and immortality is also probably linked to the rise of immortals as the major motif in mirror decor in the last century of the Han.<sup>25</sup>

These tales of gambling with spirits to gain their power demonstrate a clear link between *liu bo* as a form of gambling and as a form of divination. Divination is also a method of manipulating spirits to secure elements of their knowledge and power which can then be used for the benefit of the diviner or his client. As discussed earlier, *liu bo* like the other forms of *tu* 圖 "charts" to which it is related was a graphic depiction of the structures of the cosmos, the mastery of which could give power. This relation between the manipulation of world models, divination, and commanding spirits figures in the story about Wang Mang's use of the diviner's board that was cited earlier. It is also demonstrated in the related story that depicts the diviner Wei Ping aligning himself and the diviner's board, observing astral phenomena, and manipulating the disk in order to obtain the knowledge that he seeks.<sup>26</sup>

In all these stories gambling and divination thus figure as two means of using the spirit world to secure mastery within the world of men. In the divinatory model *liu bo* or the diviner's board are described as replicas of the world which assist the user to situate himself within the hidden natural processes of the cosmos and thereby assimilate their powers to his or her projects. The Yinwan diviner's board, which offered a mechanical process to find days which the regular alternations of calendrical cycles made suitable for diverse activities, expresses a similar vision of the use of the *liu bo* board. In the anecdotes about gambling, however, *liu bo* becomes a duel between the world of men and that of spirits, or between two

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<sup>24</sup>Examples appear in Käte Finsterbusch, *Verzeichnis und Motivindex der Han-Darstellungen: Band II Abbildungen und Addenda* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1971), figs. 49, 118, 143, 148, 260a, 1001. Other examples are listed in Loewe, *Ways to Paradise* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), p. 145 note 40.

<sup>25</sup>On the rising importance of immortals in mirror decor in the late Han, see Hayashi Minao 林巳奈夫, "Kan kyō no zugara ni, san ni tsuite 漢鏡の圖柄二・三について," *Tōhō gakuhō* 44 (1973), pp. 24-65; Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise*, pp. 60, 70, 72, 83.

<sup>26</sup>*Han shu* 99c, p. 4190. See also *Shi ji* 128, p. 3229. See the translation in note 10.

spirits as depicted in Han art, in which the winner secures powers from the loser. Such rival visions of the use of the board are one aspect of a broader dispute in early China. On the one hand some people imagined a world dominated by active, anthropomorphic spirits who could be dealt with by versions of the means used in dealing with people: sacrifice as a form of payment, exorcism as a physical threat, and gambling as a battle for success and power. On the other hand were those who saw the cosmos as a regular order governed by invariable, if often hidden, rules and tendencies which responded only to mechanical processes of manipulating natural energies (*qi*) or human moral powers.

The clearest example of this debate is the manner in which several *ru* texts—including the *Mencius*, some chapters of the *Shang shu*, and the *Zuo zhuan*—denied the possibility of manipulating the powers of the spirit world through sacrifice or divination. These texts propounded the doctrine that the perceptions or will of Heaven were identical with those of the people, that to know human nature was to know Heaven, and that the mandate of Heaven was the equivalent of the will of the people. This doctrine also appears in the *Zuo zhuan* as part of a criticism of the belief that one could discern the will of Heaven in omens and secure the support of the spirits through sacrifices. In place of seeking support from a deified Heaven or celestial spirits, the *Zuo zhuan* argues that the ruler should base his power on the support of the people. Rather than attributing prodigies of nature to the actions of spirits, he should recognize that they reflected disturbances in the human realm. One speech even argues that people generated prodigies through the power of their *qi*, the same energies that guided natural processes. This same tension between explanation of the world through appeals to the actions of spirits and through reference to the influence of energy flows also appears in disputes in the *Zuo zhuan* over the origins of illness.<sup>27</sup> It is in within this larger debate over

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<sup>27</sup>*Shang shu zheng yi* 尚書正義, in *Shisan jing zhu shu*, vol. 1, "Gao Tao mo 皋陶謨," ch.4, p. 23b; "Tai shi 泰誓," ch. 11, p. 10a; *Mengzi zheng yi* 孟子正義, in *Xin bian zhu zi ji cheng*, vol. 1 (Taipei: Shijie, 1974) IB, "Liang Hui Wang xia," p. 89; IIA, "Gongsun Chou shang," p. 133; IVA, "Li Lou shang," p. 295; VA, "Wan Zhang shang," pp. 379-80, 381; *Li ji zheng yi* 禮記正義, in *Shisan jing zhu shu*, vol. 5, "Zhong yong 中庸," ch. 52, p. 1a; *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, annotated by Yang Bojun 楊伯俊 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981), Huan 6, pp. 111-12; Zhuang 10, pp. 182-83; Zhuang 14, pp. 196-97; Zhuang 32, pp. 251-52; Xi 5, pp. 309-10; Xi 15, p. 365; Xi 16, p. 369; Xi 19, pp. 381-82; Xi 21, p. 390;

the relation of humans to the cosmos or the non-human world that we can situate the links between gambling and divination in China. Both were forms of seeking mastery over the processes that lay beyond conventional human control, but they differed in their understanding of what those processes were and how they could be known or modified.

Gambling and divination are both activities that have played a major role in Chinese civilization down to the present day. While the latter has been the object of considerable study, the former has been much noted but largely ignored, perhaps because it is viewed as too disreputable, or completely alien to the "religious" significance with which we invest divination. In fact, as the new evidence found in Qin and Han tombs shows us, the activities of divination and gambling were linked as methods by which people sought to secure some sense of mastery over the unknown forces or the blind fate that seemed to dominate their lives, and to manipulate those forces to their benefit. One gambled with spirits to gain power over them or to secure their powers for oneself, and one used the tools of gambling in certain forms of divination to find a path through the realm of uncertainty. In spite of numerous attempts to keep the two activities separate, they repeatedly blended into one another. Thus perhaps only when we have taken the measure of the importance of *ma jiang* and horse racing in Chinese life will we be able to fully appreciate the significance of the *Yi jing*.<sup>28</sup>

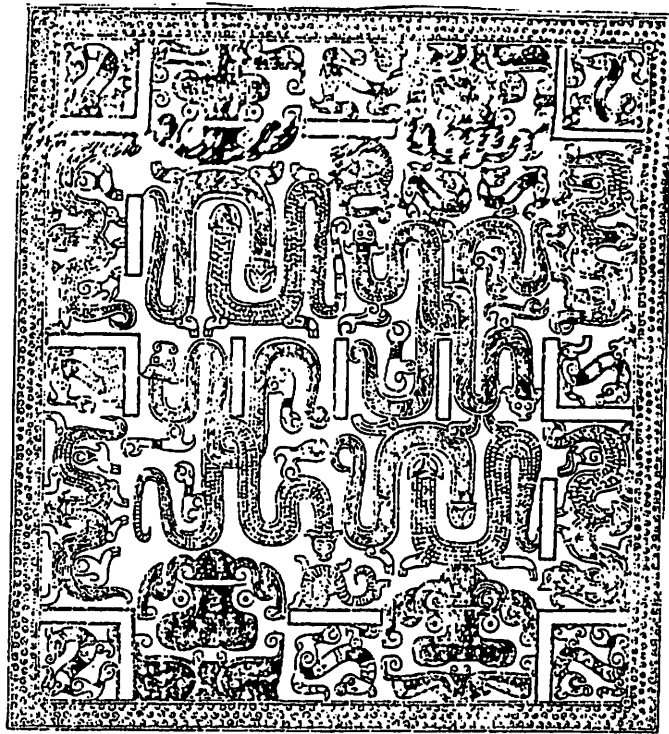
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Xi 28, pp. 467-68; Xuan 15, pp. 762-63; Zhao 1, pp. 1219-23; Zhao 11, pp. 1325-16. The idea that the people's *qi* in times of disorder could produce natural prodigies also appears in *Chun qiu fan lu yi zheng* 春秋繁露義證, annotated by Su Yu 蘇輿 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), "Tian di yin yang 天地陰陽," ch. 81, p. 466. On this line of argument see Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: SUNY, 1990), pp. 236-37.

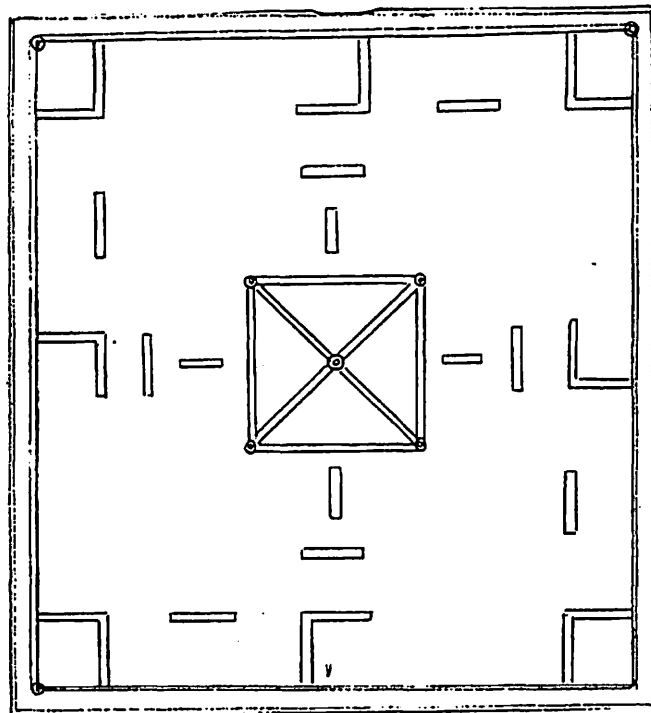
<sup>28</sup>For recent histories of gambling in China, see Ge Chunyuan 戈春源, *Dubo shi* 賭博史 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 1995); Guo Shuanglin 郭雙林 and Xiao Meihua 肖梅花, *Zhonghua dubo shi* 中華賭博史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995).



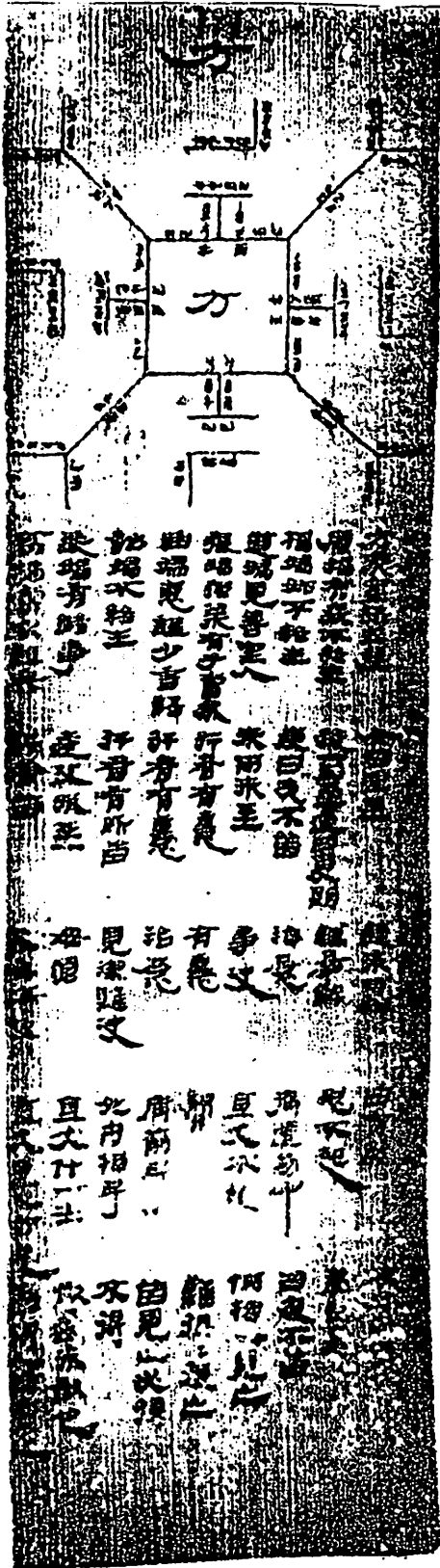
a) First Zhongshan liu bo board



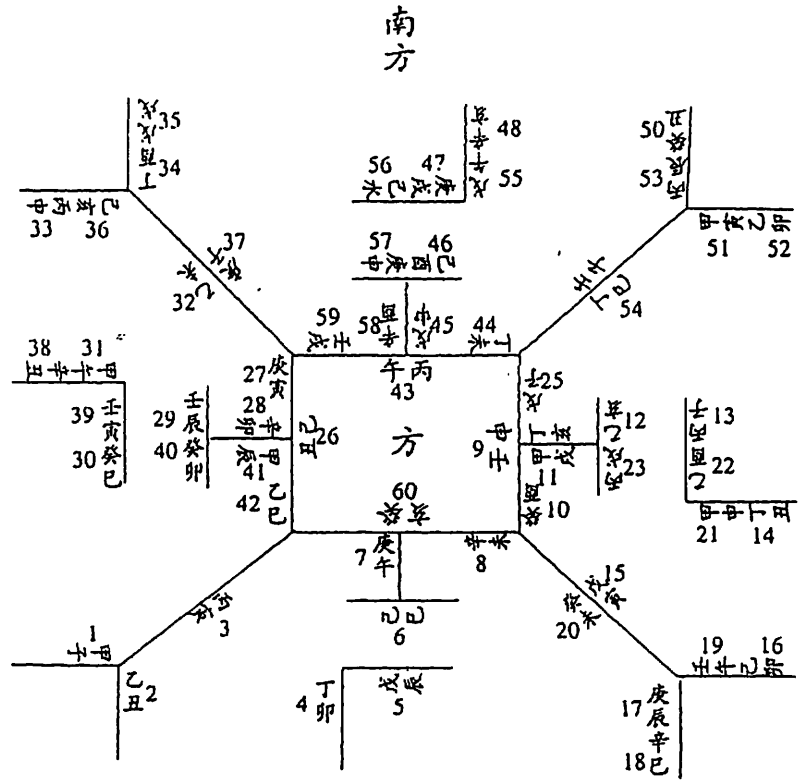
b) Drawing of second Zhongshan liu bo board

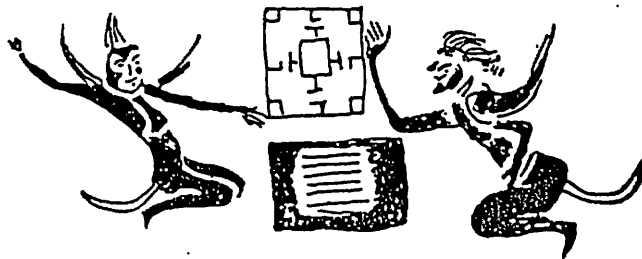
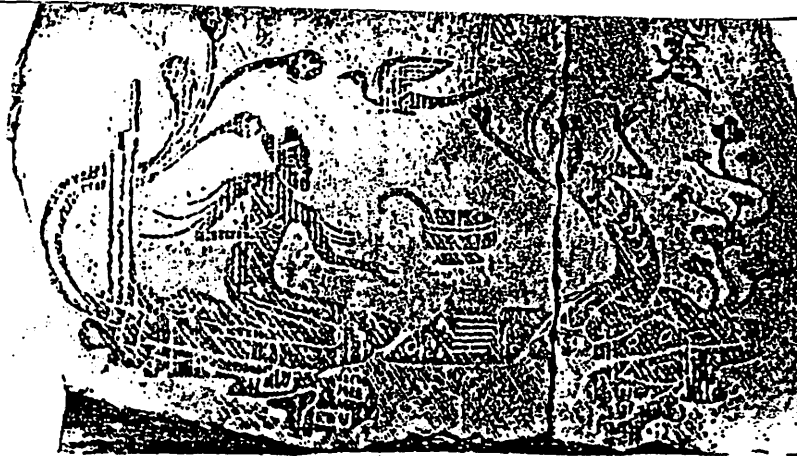


c) Pattern of roads on a liu bo board



c) Yinwan divinatory chart





e) Immortals playing liu bo. Rods forming hexagram qian.



f) Mortals playing liu bo.



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