

Watching the vapours; an ancient Chinese technique of prognostication

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To the indefatigable researcher in the wide domain of ancient Chinese religion I would like to present a modest flower — a flower which grows where our fields of interest overlap, in an area where research has only just started: that of religion during the Han period.¹

It is a well-known fact that since antiquity the Chinese were highly interested in signs and tokens, signifying either that the cosmic processes were running their natural course and that peace and harmony prevailed in All under Heaven, or that the world was out of joint and that all kinds of dangers were threatening. Proof of this belief is abundantly provided by the oracle bones in ancient times and by many passages in later literature; it is significant that the histories contain whole chapters devoted to the description of phenomena observed in the sky or on earth.

Scholars have devoted considerable attention to the astrology of the Han period and to the political aspects of this pseudo-science.² In this brief paper I want to take a closer look at another type of phenomena that were mostly observed in the sky, close to the sun and the other heavenly bodies (although one reads very little about the latter), but also close to the surface of the earth. These phenomena are the *ch'i*, the cloud-vapours (sometimes called emanations), visible signs, and as such different from the „ethers“ — evidently invisible forces — about which Professor Bodde has written.³

In view of the Chinese interest in astronomical-astrological phenomena it is not surprising that the Director of Astrology, *t'ai-shi ling*^[1] had fourteen star-watchers on his staff; for my present purpose it is significant for the importance attached to vapours that this staff also included no less than twelve vapour-watchers, *hou ch'i*^[2], a term mostly replaced by *wang ch'i*^[3] in other passages.⁴

Not only these officially appointed specialists watched these phenomena, but also the ruler did so, on specific occasions. The *Tso chuan* reports for the year 655 B.C. that the duke of Lu, after having performed the ceremonies connected with the new moon, „went up the Divine Terrace, *ling t'ai*, in order to observe; (he did so) on the equinoxes and the solstices, as well as at the beginning of the four seasons. The clouds and vapours were noted down, to provide against future contingencies.“⁵ There are no indications that the Han emperors regularly adhered to this practice, but there exists at least one passage which shows a Han emperor following the ancient custom. This is emperor Ming of the Later Han who on 20

February A.D. 59, after religious ceremonies in the *ming t'ang* for the late emperor Kuang-wu, „mounted the Divine Terrace to observe the primeval vapours.“⁶ This isolated report cannot prove that this was a normal practice; the following notice in the lost *San-fu chiu-shih* leaves the question open whether it was the emperor himself or an official who made the observations. The notice reads:⁷

The Han constructed a Divine Terrace; at the four initial months (i. e. of the four seasons) one mounted the terrace for observation. Yellow vapours meant disease, red vapours arms, black vapours inundations.

These colours reappear with some variations in a commentary by Cheng Chung (A.D. 5–85)⁸ and in one of the apocryphal additions to the Canon of Changes;⁹ for Cheng blue signified an insect plague, white funerals, red war and famine, black inundations and yellow plenty, whereas in the apocryphal text blue means famine, red a drought, black inundations, white arms, and yellow building activities.

The explanation of the phenomena will have been necessarily vague; we are mostly presented with some symptoms accompanied by the historian's *ex post facto* identifications with later – often considerable later – events. But sometimes we are presented with the vapour-watcher's own explanation of the phenomena he had observed. This is the case with Lang K'ai who early in A.D. 133 presented a long memorial to the throne in which he does so. In the fifth point of his memorial he mentions that in the night of 9 February 133¹⁰ a white vapour had appeared in the West and had impinged on several asterisms. This Lang K'ai believed to predict a rising of the Ch'iang tribes in the West; he proposed that this could be prevented, on the one hand by ordering the governors of the commanderies to lighten the burdens of taxation and statute labour and to be on their guard, and on the other by sending the Supreme Commander on a specific date to perform a ceremony in the Western Suburb.¹¹ In the sixth point of this same memorial Lang K'ai refers to „a white rainbow transfixing the sun“, observed between 9 and 11 a. m. on 7 March 133. This signified „an encroachment on the Great Yang“; he then mentions legal proceedings at this time, whereas these should be undertaken only after the beginning of autumn. He adds that the phenomenon having occurred on an *i*¹² day referred to the central government and he therefore advised the dismissal of the *ssu-t'u* (the Chancellor); it is to be noted that this dismissal only occurred in December 134.¹²

In its bibliographical chapter the *Han shu* mentions four texts (all lost) which dealt with the practice of watching the vapours;¹³ in actual fact there may only have been three, the third being a doublet of the second.

1) ^[6], „Vapours of the sun, the moon and the stars by Ch'angTs'ung“, in 21 *chüan* or rolls; the commentators indicate that Ch'ang Ts'ung, written^[7], is mentioned both in the *Shuo-yüan*, ch.^[8], and in the *Wen-tzu*, ch.^[9], as being a protégé of Lao-tzu.

2) ^[10], „Han vapours at the side of the sun; prognostications verified by action“, in 3 *chüan*. As indicated by the commentators, it is this work which seems to be referred to in the Tables as „The verified prognostications of (vapours) at

the side of the sun by Hua K'an, counsellor of the Imperial Household in the days of emperor Ch'eng^[11]; it contained the notice that a military leader from Ch'ang-sha, a certain Teng Jo, had been enfeoffed as Noble of Li in 198 B.C.¹⁴ It would therefore seem that this text contained prognostications – which have not been transmitted – and their realization, in this case of enfeoffment of Teng Jo.

3) a title identical with no.2), but omitting *shih*; also, it is said to have been in 13 *chüan* and not in 3. If this is not a doublet of the notice *sub* 2, it may, perhaps, have been a sequel. Yao Chen-tsung, *Han shu i-wen-chieh t'iao-li*¹⁵ has no further information on this subject.

4) ^[12], „Watching army vapours, by Pieh-ch'eng-tzu“, in six fascicles, with three *chüan* of charts. Neither the commentators nor Yao Chen-tsung¹⁶ have anything useful to remark, but it should be noted that *Sui shu* 21.2a–14b¹⁷ provides a detailed enumeration of vapours concerning military matters.

A number of persons are mentioned who gained fame as vapour watchers. Already in 209 B.C. we hear of the private practitioner Chou Wen.¹⁸ The best known, however, is Hsin-yuan P'ing, the charlatan who for some time enjoyed the trust of emperor Wen; of him it is said that he had gained the emperor's favour as a vapour watcher.¹⁹ Another is Wang Shuo in the days of emperor Wu; he was known as a vapour watcher, but he also observed the stars.²⁰ Early in the 2nd century of our era Lang Tsung was known for his knowledge of the mantic arts, which included watching the vapours;²¹ his son, Lang K'ai, I have already mentioned.

The art of watching vapours is discussed in the astronomical – or rather astrological – chapter of the *Han shu* (*HSPC* 26.43a ff.) and its parallel, The Functionaries of the Heavens, in the *Shih-chi* (*SC* 27.72 ff.). Fortunately, about half the text also occurs in the astro[no]mical chapters of the *Chin shu* and the *Sui shu*, both compiled towards the middle of the seventh century.²² These parallel passages, as well as the surrounding text in the two last mentioned works, are of some help in understanding the rather corrupt version in the earlier history. Quite remarkable is the manner in which fragments of the *HS/SC* text appear on widely different pages of both *CS* and *SS*. These fragments are not stated to be derived from either *HS* or *SC*; although *CS* 11.2a and *SS* 21.1b both say that they have collected material from various sources, these sources are never indicated.

The texts of *HS* and *SC* are completely parallel, with some significant exceptions which show, to my mind, that also this chapter of *SC* is a late reconstruction, based on *HS*.²³ There exists, as far as I am aware, only one translation of this text, namely by Edouard Chavannes, in the third volume of his *Les mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien*, pp. 393–397; as he disregards the *CS* and *SS* parallels, a new translation is perhaps not out of place. It seems doubtful whether a translation of the complete texts of *CS* and *SS* with their numerous fanciful and often conflicting statements would serve a useful purpose; the *HS/SC* paragraphs furnish sufficient information on the general ideas developed in these texts. What *CS* and *SS* do seem to provide is material on meteorology, but I am unable to judge its

value; still, the function of the vapour watchers was to foretell the future and not to make weather forecasts.

The beginning of the Han text is both abrupt and none too clear when compared to the *CS* and *SS*, and I therefore suspect that in the *HS* version the start consisting of several writing strips is missing. *CS* 12.20a and *SS* 21.15a read:

In general, the method for observing vapours (is as follows). When the vapour starts to come forth, (it is) like a cloud (and yet) not like a cloud, like a fog (and yet) not like a fog – hazily, as if something were visible. When it starts to come forth densely, at five or six feet above the horizon, this means that (its origin) is beyond 1.500 *li*. When it can be observed level eyed, then it is at 1.000 *li*. When it is to be observed by raising the eyes, then it is at 500 *li*; when one has to lift one's gaze to the centre of heaven, then it is within 100 *li*.

The initial phrase of *HS* (*HSPC* 26.43a) I believe to be the remains of a broken strip which belongs after „... 500 *li*“ in the last sentence, where it seems to be missing; it is to be noted that the eight characters of this phrase added to the 57 characters of the *CS/SS* text give a total of 65 characters, or the contents of three strips of 22 characters. This phrase reads:

When observed by looking upward, it is at 300 to 400 *li*.

From this point onward, the texts agree with a few minor differences:

When observing it at a level on the horizon, it is at 2.000 *li*.²⁴

When observing it²⁵ having mounted on high and it touches the earth below²⁶ it is at 3.000 *li*.

The following is an isolated statement, also found in *CS* and *SS*:

In all cases²⁷ when an animal²⁸ dwells on top of the cloudy vapour, then there will be victory. Now follows a long passage, fragments of which are found both in *CS* and *SS*.

South of the Hua(-shan)²⁹ vapours are black below and red above. In the area of the Sung-kao³⁰ and of the Three Rivers³¹ the vapours are wholly red. North of the Heng-shan³² vapours are black below and blue-green above. In the region between Po, Ch'ieh, Hai and Tai³³ vapours are all black. In the area between the Yang-tzu and the Huai River vapours are all white.

After this passage we find an odd fragment, with an inverted parallel in *CS* 12.20a:

The vapour of convict labourers³⁴ is white; the vapour of building activities³⁵ is yellow (*CS* adds: (and) white).

Next follows a longer passage with complete parallels in *CS* 12.20a and *SS* 21.14b:

Vapours (indicative of) chariots are now high, now low, and they repeatedly assemble. Cavalry vapours are low and wide. Infantry vapours are bent;³⁶ if low in front and high behind, they are hurrying, if square and high in front and pointed and low behind, they are retiring. If the vapour is flat, they are proceeding slowly; if high in front and low behind, they are turning without stopping.

For the following long passage (79 characters) I have found no parallels in *CS* and *SS*:

When two vapours are in opposition³⁷ the lower overcomes the higher, the pointed overcomes the square. When the vapour comes in lowly, following the tracks³⁸ of the chariots,

in no more than three or four days it will leave,³⁹ being visible for five or six *li*.⁴⁰ When the vapour comes along at a height of seven or eight feet, it will leave in no more than five or six days, being visible for more than ten *li*. If the vapour comes on at a height of more than ten feet, up to twenty feet, it will leave in no more than thirty or forty days, being visible for fifty to sixty *li*

In case of sleet bearing⁴¹ clouds, blue-green⁴² and white, their general is fierce, (but) his soldiers are cowards. If it has a large root and it is cut off faraway in front,⁴³ there will be battle.⁴⁴ If blue and white with a low front, the battle will be victorious; if the front is red and raised, the battle will not be victorious.

The next passage, also 79 characters in length, is again fully paralleled in *CS* 12.19b and *SS* 21.14a:

Battle-order clouds are like standing walls; spindle clouds resemble spindles; axle clouds are curved⁴⁵ and pointed at both⁴⁶ ends. Ladle clouds are like ropes; when in front they spread⁴⁷ across the sky, and when half, across half the sky. Rainbow clouds are like battling⁴⁸ flags. Therefore⁴⁹... Hooked⁵⁰ clouds are crooked. When all these clouds appear, prognostications⁵¹ are taken by means of their colour ...⁵² When their appearance moves people, then a prognostication is taken. Troops are sure to arise to battle with each other⁵³ at (the point) opposite to them (i.e. the vapours).

Now follows a brief statement which only occurs in *HS/SC*:

The observations by Wang Shuo⁵⁴ were decided by (phenomena) at the side of the sun,⁵⁵ vapours of the sun being the symbol of the Lord of Men. For all (these vapours) prognostications are taken according to their form.⁵⁶

The next passage of *SS* characters is paralleled in *CS* 2.19b and *SS* 21.14a:

(Hence)⁵⁷ the vapours of the Northern Barbarians are like (oxen and goats and)⁵⁸ herds of cattle, or like yourts; the vapours of the Southern Barbarians are like ships and boats, and flags and banners.⁵⁹

The following brief fragment is only found in *HS/SC*:

Places of great inundations, fields where armies have been defeated, ruins of states that have been smashed -below these, coins⁶⁰ accumulate. Over gold and treasures there are always vapours which have to be investigated.

Parallels to the next passage occur again in *CS* and *SS*:

The vapours of the great clam⁶¹ on the seaboard resemble buildings and terraces; the vapours of the vast plain form palaces and towers.

Next comes a fragment which is only found in *HS/SC*:

Cloudy vapours each resemble the mountains and rivers there, and the places where people collect. Hence, watchers for growth and decay enter into the states and cities, observing the correctness of the border ridges and the fields, the glossy appearance of gates and doors of the city walls and the houses, proceeding down to the splendour of the carriages and the clothing and the cattle. When there is effective growth, this is auspicious; when there is emptiness and decay, this is inauspicious.

The following fragment, consisting of 44 characters and therefore having the length of two writing strips, has a parallel in the *Chin shu*, but there it is divided into two widely separated passages, viz. in *CS* 12.13a and 18b:

Like smoke (and yet) not smoke, like clouds (and yet) not clouds, glorious and intricate, drifting and twisting – this is called a felicitous cloud. When a felicitous cloud appears,

this is a joyous vapour.⁶² Like a fog (and yet) not a fog; hats and gowns are not moistened. When it appears, the city concerned⁶³ will don armour and rush forth.

The long final passage of 123 characters occurs only in *HS/SC*:

Thunder and lightening, the blush of dawn and the rainbow, rumblings and shinings at night, are activities of the Yang-force; in spring and summer it unfolds, in autumn and winter it hides. Hence, there is nothing which the watchers do not inspect. When the heavens open (to display) the objects suspended (in it), when the earth moves and tears apart, when mountains crumble and shift, when rivers are blocked and valleys are filled, when the waters bubble up and the earth grows, when marshes are emptied – these are visible signs. Outer and inner walls, gates and posterns, luxuriance and desiccation, palaces and temples, colonnades and mansions, places where the people dwell, folk-songs and customs, carriages and clothing – (in order to draw conclusions from these)⁶⁴ one observes what the people eat and drink. For the Five Grains and herbs and trees one observes where they are attached. For storehouses and treasuries, stables and coachhouses, for the roads which communicate with the four directions, for the Six Domestic Animals, for wild birds and beasts⁶⁵ ... what they produce and whither they turn; for fishes and tortoises, for birds and rats, one observes where they dwell. Ghosts weeping or howling, antagonizing the people – these are surely lies.⁶⁶

The histories mention many instances when recourse was had to the observation of vapours, showing that these were taken most seriously, as is also proved by the number of the official watchers and by the fact that private practitioners of the mantic arts included the science of vapour watching among their attainments. To round off this contribution I therefore present the following far from complete survey of passages concerning the Watching of the Vapours during the two Han dynasties.

In 164 B.C. a divine^[65] vapour was observed East of Ch'ang-an by Hsin-yüan P'ing; it was five-coloured and resembled a hat or a crown. Thereupon emperor Wen had a sanctuary built for the Five Emperors north of the Wei River.⁶⁷

The next year the same charlatan observed the vapour of a precious jade at the foot of the palace towers and duly found a jade cup with the inscription „Long life to the Lord of Men“. ⁶⁸ He also saw the vapour of a metal treasure at Fen-yin, where the lost tripods of the Chou were expected to reappear, but then he was denounced as an impostor and executed.⁶⁹ Years later, in 114 B.C., emperor Wu was to build an altar to the Sovereign Earth at the same place, after purple lights (but no vapours) had been observed there.⁷⁰ Such lights were also seen when the emperor sacrificed there in 108 B.C.⁷¹

In 132 B.C. vapour watchers advised against repairing a break in the dykes of the Yellow River.⁷²

In c. 120 B.C. emperor Wu, under the influence of the magician Shao-weng, had carriages painted with „clouds and vapours“, which would enable him to avoid evil spirits.⁷³

In 114 B.C. the superstitious autocrat was made happy by the discovery of a tripod at Fen-yin;⁷⁴ its appearance had been signaled by a white and yellow cloud, shaped like a canopy.⁷⁵

In the summer of 113 B.C. emperor Wu sent out vapour watchers to search for the elusive Isles of P'eng-lai.⁷⁶

When the same emperor sacrificed to the Supreme One during the night of 3rd January 112 B.C., there were not only „shinings like rays of light“, but the next morning there was a yellow vapour reaching upward into the sky.⁷⁷ Again, when he had sacrificed on Mount T'ai-shan in 110 B.C., there were shinings in the night, whereas a white cloud arose from the man-made elevation in which his prayers to the deities had been buried.⁷⁸

In about 95 B.C., when emperor Wu was on a hunting trip in Ho-chien, vapour watchers deduced from their observations the presence of „an extraordinary woman“; she eventually became one of the emperor's Ladies and gave birth to emperor Chao.⁷⁹

In 89 B.C. at Yung Prefecture, when there were no clouds, there were three peals of thunder and something like rainbow-vapours, blue and yellow, like flying birds, gathered South of the Yü-yang palace; also two meteorites fell. This was interpreted as a favourable omen.⁸⁰

In c. 89 B.C. vapour watchers predicted successes in the campaigns against the Hsiung-hu.⁸¹

In 87 B.C. „vapours of a Son of Heaven“ were observed over the prisons of Ch'ang-an.⁸² In the hagiographic account of the early days of the founder of the Han dynasty similar vapours indicated the whereabouts of emperor Kao.⁸³

On 20 February 74 B.C. a black cloud (not a vapour) with roaring winds foretold „great armies“ and on 5 April of the same year another cloud, like a red dog with three long tails, presaged „rebellious subjects“.⁸⁴

In 62 B.C. emperor Hsüan said in an edict that he had been granted „felicitous^[67] vapours“.⁸⁵

In 29 B.C., in the days when the abolition or restoration of places of sacrifice were the object of violent discussion,⁸⁶ Liu Hsiang mentioned that one of these places was an ancient shrine for Yang-vapours.⁸⁷

During the night of 24 March 14 B.C. there were red and white coloured vapours, four *wei* (32 feet?)⁸⁸ wide and twenty feet long, „numerous, like trees“, in the East, whereas in the South there were vapours four or five *wei* wide, whose lower lines were over 100 feet long; all disappeared without having reached the earth. It is the author of the treatise who relates these phenomena to the armed rising which occurred nearly two years later.⁸⁹

At sunrise on 6 March 6 B.C. a white vapour, „as wide as a piece of cloth“ (hence 2ft.) and over 100ft. long moved towards the Southeast and there was a muttering noise, like thunder; it stood still for about a quarter of an hour. It is again the author of the treatise who refers to the uproar and the sacrifices to the Queen Mother of the West early in 3 B.C.⁹⁰

Early in 5 B.C. another white cloud arose, with the same dimensions, but this must have been visible at night, for it reached from Orion through another asterism down to the earth and lingered for no less than ten days. Here we have the words of the prognostication : the emperor was suffering from a Yin-disease; the compiler of the treatise refers to an edict of the Great Empress Dowager of much

later, dated 23 December 3 B.C., in which she complained about the emperor's protracted illness.⁹¹

In A.D. 20 vapour watchers augured that the time was ripe for construction work, providing support for Wang Mang's plans for building an ancestral temple.⁹²

Perhaps in A.D. 23 the vapour watcher Su Po-a, sent by Wang Mang to Nan-yang Commandery, observed „a beautiful vapour“, consisting of „impressive gleams of fire“ near the government hostel in Chi-yang, where the founder of the Later Han dynasty was born.⁹³

In A.D. 27, the warlord P'eng Ch'ung heard from augurs with the milfoil and from vapour watchers that „troops would rise from within“, whereupon he removed his son from his entourage; P'eng was killed two years later by his own slaves.⁹⁴

In the troubled years A.D. 188–190 vapour watchers predicted that the capital would see vast armies and that blood would flow within the palaces, and again, that high ministers of state would be executed.⁹⁵

On 24 November A.D. 195, when emperor Hsien was passing the night in the open during his flight, there was a red vapour in the South, passing through the area of the Polestar, but the meaning of this phenomenon is not provided.⁹⁶

NOTES

- 1 Mention should be made of the excellent study by Professor Derk Bodde, *Festivals in classical China: New Year and other annual observances during the Han dynasty, 206 B.C. – A.D. 220* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1975).
- 2 H. Bielenstein, „An interpretation of the portents in the *Ts'ien Han shu*“, in: BMFEA 22 (1950), and the same author's „The restoration of the Han dynast I“, in: BMFEA 26 (1954), pp. 156–161; Wolfram Eberhard, „The political function of astronomy and astronomers in Han China“, in: John K. Fairbank ed., *Chinese thought and institutions* (Chicago and London, the University of Chicago Press, 1957).
- 3 Derk Bodde, „The Chinese cosmic magic known as watching the ethers“, in: *Studia serica Bernhard Karlgren dedicata* (Copenhagen, Munksgaard, 1959), pp. 14–35.
- 4 *Hou-Han shu chi-chieh* (abbrev. *HHSCC*, quoted according to the original edition of 1915, or the reduced reprint by the Yi-wen Publishers, Taipei, c. 1960), Tr. 25.2a. There were also two sun-watchers and three wind-watchers. The texts clearly show that beside these official functionaries there also existed private practitioners of this mantic art.
- 5 Duke Hsi, 5th year; see Couvreur's translation vol. I, pp. 238–239.
- 6 *HHSCC* Ann. 2.4b, repeated in Mem. 69A. 1b.
- 7 *Tai-p'ing yû-lan* 877.3b
- 8 *Chou-li chu-su* in the Chung-hua shu-chü edition of the *Shih-san-ching chu-su*, vol. 3, 25.3a (p. 907); Sun I-jang, *Chou-li cheng-i*, in the Kuo-hsüeh chi-pen ts'ung-shu ed., vol. 5, XIV/51, p. 85; E. Biot, *Le Tcheou-li*, vol. 2, p. 85, note 4.
- 9 ^[4], quoted in Sun I-jang, loc. cit.
- 10 The commentators show that the date given in the Treatise is wrong, whereas the correct date is provided by *HHSCC* Ann. 6.7b.
- 11 *HHSCC* Mem. 20B.7b–8a; I omit some interesting details as being irrelevant.
- 12 *HHSCC* Mem. 20B.8a; for the date of the Chancellor's dismissal see Ann. 6.9.a.

- 11 *Han shu pu-chu* (abbrev. *HSPC*, quoted according to the original edition of 1900 or the reduced reprint by the Yi-wen Publishers, Taipei, c. 1960) 30.65a–b and 62b.
- 14 *HSPC* 16.45b; *Shih-chi* (abbrev. *SC*, Takigawa ed.) 18.90, E. Chavannes, *Les mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien* (abbrev. *Mh*) III, p.135, no.59.
- 15 *Erh-shih-wu shih pu-pien* II, p.144 (1668).
- 16 Yao, op.cit., p.138 (1662).
- 17 Quoted according to the T'ung-wen reprint of the imperial edition of 1739.
- 18 *HSPC* 31.4b; *SC* 48.10, *Mh* VI, pp.15–16.
- 19 *HSPC* 25A.20a; *SC* 28.41, *Mh* III, p.457. – For Hsin-yuan P'ing see further *HSPC* 4.16a–b, H.H. Dubs, *History of the Former Han Dynasty* (3 vols. Baltimore, Waverly Press, 1938, 1944, 1955. Abbrev. *HFHD*) I, pp.216, 258, 260; *SC* 10.34 and *Mh* II, pp.481–482; for his death see my *Remnants of Han law* (Leiden, Brill, 1955), p.342 and p.399, note 248.
- 20 *HSPC* 25A.38b, *SC* 28.78, *Mh* III, p.505; see also *HSPC* 26.44b and 54.6a, *SC* 109.13.
- 21 *HHSCC* Mem. 20.1a.
- 22 See E. Balazs, „*Le traité économique du „Souei-chou“*“, in : T'oung Pao 42 (1953), p.117.
- 23 Other chapters in *SC* whose secondary or derivative nature has been practically proved are ch. 117, on the poet Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju, and ch. 123, on the expedition to Ferghana in 102 B.C.; for the former see Yves Hervouet, „*La valeur relative des textes du Che-ki et du Han-chou*“, in *Mélanges de sinologie offerts à Monsieur Paul Demiéville*, vol.II (Paris, 1974), pp.55–76, and for the latter see my „*The problem of the authenticity of Shih-chi ch. 123*“, in: *TP* 61 (1975), pp.83–147.
- 24 Here both *HS* and *SC* seem garbled, introducing ^{(113) (14) (15)}.
- 25 *SS* omits ⁽¹⁶⁾.
- 26 *SC* and *SS* omit the apparently meaningless ⁽¹⁷⁾.
- 27 *CS* 12.8b and *SS* 21.8b add ⁽¹⁸⁾.
- 28 *CS* and *SS* writing ⁽¹⁹⁾ for the meaningless *HS* ⁽²⁰⁾ is undoubtedly correct. As Shen Ch'in-han also points out, this sentence is followed in *SS* by several examples of animal forms, like a suckling tiger or a crouching leopard.
- 29 The Hua Mts. East of Ch'ang-an.
- 30 The Central Peak in Honan.
- 31 The Three River Commanderies Ho-nan, Ho-tung and Ho-nei along the East-West section of the middle course of the Yellow River.
- 32 It is to be noted that only *HS* observes the Han taboo for *heng*, the personal name of emperor Wen; this is another indication that the *SC* version is late.
- 33 I.e. the Po-hai or Gulf of Petchili, Mt. Ch'ieh, which seems to be the northeastern extremity of the T'ai-hang mountains; Hai is the sea and Tai is the T'ai-shan.
- 34 *t'u*⁽²¹⁾ for this term see my *Remnants*, p.130.
- 35 Lit. *t'u-kung*⁽²²⁾; it should not be forgotten that nearly all walls were made of tamped earth.
- 36 *CS* and *SS* write⁽²³⁾.
- 37 Wang Nien-sun shows that the ancient *HS* reading was ⁽²⁴⁾; he assumes that *HS* was later „corrected“ to read *yü*⁽²⁵⁾, „to meet“, in conformity with *SC*.
- 38 Liang Yu-sheng (quoted in the Takigawa ed.), followed by Wang Hsien-ch'ien, thought that *SC*⁽²⁶⁾ was an easily understandable corruption of ⁽²⁷⁾, the *HS* reading. The reverse seems to be true, *SC t'ung* being correct, standing for *ch'e*⁽²⁸⁾, „cart tracks“, the tabooed personal name of emperor Wu.
- 39 I fail to understand what ⁽²⁹⁾ refers to; is it a certain place which the armies will leave?
- 40 Again, I fail to understand the meaning of ⁽³⁰⁾ (⁽³¹⁾ seems to be redundant)⁽³²⁾.

- 41 ^[33] may mean several things: to collect, or to beat, but Chin Cho says that it is to be pronounced like ^[34], and the latter means sleet or wet snow. Professor D. Bodde, of Philadelphia, with whom I corresponded about this text, suggests the reading ^[35] (I note that confusion between the hand and the tree „radical“ is extremely common), and ^[36] does occur in Han texts (see the references in Morohashi, vol.6, p.375). These „branch-tip clouds“ he believes to refer to „clouds scattered in tiny puffs across the sky, like the many tips of branches in a tree“; they would then be in apposition to the „large stem“^[37] of the following sentence.
- 42 The commentators indicate that ^[38] is a mistake for ^[39].
- 43 If this is really the meaning of ^[40] as indicated by Takigawa 27⁴.
- 74 *SC*^[41] is correct whereas *HS* ^[42] evidently is not ^[43].
- 44 *SC* adds ^[44] before ^[45].
- 45 *SS* mistakenly reads ^[46].
- 46 *SC*, *CS* and *SS* correctly read ^[47] for *HS* ^[48].
- 47 *HS*^[49], *SC*, *CS* and *SS* ^[50].
- 48 *CS* and *SS* read ^[51], „palace towers“.
- 49 The *SC* commentators suppose that the text is defective.
- 50 In view of the parallels, *HS* ^[52] is redundant.
- 51 *SC*^[53] is a mistaken doublet of ^[54].
- 52 I fail to understand the following ^[55] (*SC* and *CS* write ^[56]). Chavannes' rendering „et on s'empare en récompense de ce qui est mystérieux“ (*Mh* III, p.395) is not very meaningful.
- 53 *SC*, *CS* and *SS* correctly write ^[57] for *HS* ^[58].
- 54 See above, p.42
- 55 See above, p.41
- 56 This is a highly doubtful translation, based on Chavannes.
- 57 ^[59] only in *HS/SC*.
- 58 Added in *CS* and *SS*.
- 59 *SS* 21.14a contains a doublet of the information concerning the Southern Barbarians; after mentioning the Eastern and the Western Barbarians it writes: „The vapours of the Southern Barbarians are like towers and terraces, or ⁽⁶⁰⁾ like ships and boats.“
- 60 The commentary to *SC* quotes a remark by Hsü Kuang (352–425) that ^[61] was anciently written ^[62] – which is partly true.
- 61 A great mollusk, never seen, which exhales vapours that produce mirages; see the passages collected in Morohashi Tetsuji, *Dai Kan-Wa jiten*, vol. 10, p.39, no.33089.
- 62 *CS* 12.13a adds: „it is also called a shining cloud; this is a joyful vapour, the (visible) response to (the state of) universal peace“. This is of interest in view both of the name of Nestorian Christianity, viz.^[63], and of the use of the word *ching* in the text of the Nestorian stèle. – The passage translated below occurs in *CS* 12.18b.
- 63 ^[64]
- 64 I follow Chavannes in *Mh* III, p.397, by inserting an explanatory sentence.
- 65 It seems that „one observes“ has been omitted.
- 66 In view of the foregoing positive injunctions to go and observe the different features, the „lies“ necessarily refer to the final statement, but its syntax is curious.
- 67 *HSPC* 25A.20a; *SC* 28.41, *Mh* III, p.457. – Many years later, in c. 70 B.C., it was divine lights, ^[66], not vapours, that were observed in several imperial ancestral temples, acc. to *HSPC* 25B. 7b, cf. 15a.
- 68 *HSPC* 25A.20b ff.; *SC* 28.43, *Mh* III, p.459.
- 69 *HSPC* 25A.21b; *SC* 28.44, *Mh* III, p.460. Cf. my *Remnants*, p.342 and p.399, note 248.

- 70 *HSPC* 25A.27a; *SC* 28.56, *Mh* III, p.476. Cf. *HSPC* 6.19a, *HFHD* II, p.74.
- 71 *HSPC* 6.28b, *HFHD* II, p.93.
- 72 *HSPC* 29.6b; *SC* 29.9, *Mh* III, p.526.
- 73 *HSPC* 25A.25a *SC* 28.52, *Mh* III, p.470; see the latter, note 3, for the exact function of these carriages.
- 74 *HSPC* 25A.29a; 6.19b, *HFHD* II, p.75.
- 75 *HSPC* 25.A30a; *SC* 8.21, 28.61, *Mh* III, p.75.
- 76 *HSPC* 25A.30b; cf. 13a, where it is said that during earlier attempts they had been „observed from afar, like clouds“; see also *SC* 28.25, *Mh* III, p.437.
- 77 *HSPC* 25A.33a; *SC* 28.68, *Mh* III, p.492; cf. *HSPC* 6.21a, *HFHD* II, p.78.
- 78 *HSPC* 25A.37b; *SC* 28.76, *Mh* III, p.502. See also Michael Loewe, *Crisis and conflict in Han China* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1974), p.169, and *HSPC* 6.25a, *HFHD* II, p.86.
- 79 *HSPC* 97A.16b; cf. 7.1a, *HFDH* II, p.151.
- 80 *HSPC* 25B.6b–7a; cf. 6.37b, *HFHD* II, p.116
- 81 *HSPC* 96B.18b.
- 82 *HSPC* 8.2a, 74.7a, *HFHD* II, p.201 ; this discovery made the emperor order the indiscriminate execution of all prisoners.
- 83 *HSPC* 1A.7a and 21b, *HFHD* I, pp.27 and 60. *CS* 12.16a and *SS* 21.6b contain various descriptions of this vapour.
- 84 *HSPC* 26.54b ff.
- 85 *HSPC* 25B.7b; cf. 8.15b, *HFDH* II, p.238.
- 86 See Loewe, *op. cit.*, p.164ff.
- 87 *HSPC* 25B.15b, Loewe, *op. cit.*, p.177.
- 88 ^[68]; the most likely explanation seems to be „a circumference of 8 ft.“; see Morohashi, vol.3, p.89, no 4806, *sub* 4.
- 89 *HSPC* 26.58a–b; for the risings see *HFHD* II, p.406.
- 90 *HSPC* 26.59a; for the events of 3 B.C. see *HSPC* 11.7a, *HFHD* III, pp.35–36.
- 91 *HSPC* 26.59b; for the edict see *HSPC* 11.6b, *HFHD* III, p.12.
- 92 *HSPC* 99C.8b, *HFHD* III, pp.394–396; Dubs wrongly renders ^[69] as „phenomena of some signal achievements (to be done by the virtue) of the Earth“, whereas ^[70] has to be taken as ^[71], „work“.
- 93 *HHSCC* IB.23b. Emperor Kuang-wu was born on 13 January 5 B.C., hence at a time when the later „usurper“ Wang Mang was out of favour (cf. *HFHD* III, pp.132–134); Su must therefore have been dispatched many years later.
- 94 *HHSCC* Mem. 2.9b; cf. H. Bielenstein, „*The restoration of the Han dynasty II*“, *BMFEA* 31 (1959), p.131.
- 95 For the year 188 see *HHSCC* Mem. 59.6b, for 190 see Mem. 62.8a.
- 96 *HHSCC* Ann. 9.6a.

- [1]太史令 [2]候氣 [3]望氣 [4]易緯通卦驗說
 [5]乙 [6]常從日月星氣 [7]樅 [8]敬慎
 [9]上德 [10]漢日旁氣行事占驗 [11]成帝時光祿大夫滑堪日旁占驗
 [12]別成子望軍氣 [13]十 [14]餘 [15]里 [16]之 [17]居 [18]凡
 [19]獸 [20]戰 [21]徒 [22]土功 [23]搏 [24]禺 [25]遇 [26]通
 [27]道 [28]輒 [29]去之 [30]十餘里 [31]二十 [32]見 [33]稍
 [34]霄 [35]梢 [36]梢雲 [37]大根 [38]精 [39]青 [40]莫大根而前
 [41]前 [42]屯 [43]絕遠者 [44]當 [45]戰 [46]搏 [47]兩 [48]而
 [49]意 [50]巨 [51]關 [52]銳 [53]合 [54]占 [55]而澤搏密
 [56]安 [57]合 [58]占 [59]得 [60]或 [61]錢 [62]泉
 [63]景教 [64]其城 [65]神 [66]光 [67]嘉 [68]圍
 [69]土功 [70]功 [71]工