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The Mandate Of Heaven



Synopsis

The mysteries of the ancient Chinese text known as the I Ching continue to fascinate scholars and enthusiasts alike. While sinologists rely on historical criticism to explain the meaning of the work, those who use it for divination tend to accept without question the traditional account of its origin and purpose. Whereas modern scholars are generally dismissive of the book's reputed mystical significance, traditionalists often resent academic research into the oracle because it seems irreverent or iconoclastic. In *The Mandate of Heaven*, S. J. Marshall sets out to reconcile these opposing approaches. He plumbs the book's numerous, hidden historical references, reading them against other sources, and discovers that the oracle has far more narrative integrity and basis in historical fact than anyone has previously appreciated. *The Mandate of Heaven* focuses on the story of the I Ching's origins. The book is attributed to King Wen, who died before he could succeed in overthrowing the tyrannical Shang dynasty. His son, King Wu, eventually triumphed over the Shang and established the Zhou dynasty as the legitimate royal house. According to the tradition, these events are in some ways alluded to in the earliest layer of commentary in the I Ching, but no sound historical basis has been discovered to substantiate this claim. Consequently, since the 1930s sinologists have discounted the value of this tradition. Marshall uncovers an account of Wu's conquest in an important, previously overlooked passage that tells of a solar eclipse believed by the King to have been an omen from Heaven to immediately march against the Shang. Marshall is able to match this account with a scientifically verified solar eclipse that took place on June 20, 1070 B.C., just one of his many historical readings that show how the earliest layer of the I Ching has preserved a hidden history that has remained undetected for three millennia.

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Customer Reviews

S. J. Marshall's intriguing work will be read with great interest by ["I Ching"] aficionados, and it will also attract the attention of contemporary scholars. The former will be immensely grateful for the clarity that Marshall brings to such an enigmatic text. . . . Everyone who reads "The Mandate of Heaven" will return to the "Book of Changes" with a renewed historical perspective.

The I Ching is one of the cornerstone texts of Chinese civilization and remains a tremendously popular book throughout the world. Scholars have increasingly dismissed the traditions surrounding the text, while many readers in both China and the West have been more willing to accept this divinatory work at face value. S. J. Marshall sets out to reconcile these opposing approaches.

I don't know where to even begin here so I'll begin at the beginning. The author advances a hypothesis that the I Ching contains a historic record that points to a total eclipse that served as an omen that plays an important part of the overthrow of the Shang dynasty. This theory, if correct leads us to a more accurate dating of the Zhouyi and it's authorship both of which have been disputed for centuries. Marshall sets off to move his theory to a concrete state through a tortuous route using many sources. Half of the total pages are devoted to footnotes, appendices, indexes and a glossary of terms. No one can say the author neglected his research. Still I am uneasy with certain aspects of the book. Marshall is an amateur Sinologist swimming in a pool of well educated and highly revered professionals. In an effort to further his theories he appears (to me) to expect the reader to sweep aside the well accepted translations almost brutishly. "The judgement of this hexagram is misunderstood and mistranslated in Wilhelm/Baynes. The famous 'Be not sad, be like the sun at midday, means nothing of the sort in original Chinese." To accept this as truth we must also believe translations from some well known men of letters also misunderstood what they devoted much time and study to. I for one am not prepared to cast such works aside and label the authors as failing in their task in favor of the author's enthusiasm for his own findings. The hexagram here , number fifty five, is the locus of Marshall's theory. In the Harvard-Yenching version of the Zhouyi this particular hexagram is comprised of less than one hundred characters some of which are single words, some combine to comprise a single word. I am not saying that Marshall's theory is entirely incorrect. I just don't see it as mutually exclusive to others. Setting aside the

author's goal the book itself contains some interesting material packed into a tight space. Some things could have been said with fewer words for greater effect and many of the footnotes could have been integrated into the main body of text for greater affect and easier reading. Would I recommend this book to others? It's hard to say.

For those who are interested in a deep historical look at the origins of the I Ching, this is a must book for your library. There are quite a few translations of the "Yi" on the market now, but there really aren't that many books on its historical origins. This book will not teach you how to use the I Ching. It will not teach you how to dissect the trigrams or memorize the Later Heaven Sequence. What it will do is give you a fascinating glimpse into the world that created the Book of Changes. I highly recommend it.

Best historical context for the I Ching ever! A very engaging read.

This fascinating book balances rigorous historical research with a respect for the profundity of the *I Ching*. Marshall argues that the central text, the "Zhouyi", contains identifiable historical references to events in ancient China. Specifically, Marshall argues that the date of the Conquest of the Shang Dynasty by what would become the Zhou Dynasty can be located in the year 1070 BCE, on the basis of evidence in the "Zhouyi" --- including a hitherto undetected reference to a solar eclipse in the text of Hexagram #55! In the course of his argument, he brings to life the semi-mythical figures of King Wen & King Wu (virtuous founders of the Zhou Dynasty) and Zhou Xin (depraved tyrant, last Shang ruler). He cogently suggests specific links between Shang bone oracles and the text of the "Zhouyi". By citing Chinese characters in the text, and providing a glossary of them in the back, he allows the reader to feel a part of the detective work he is doing. Overall, I enthusiastically recommend this book to anyone with an interest in ancient China and to anyone who works seriously with the *I Ching*. The former will find historical bases for figures often dismissed as mythological, while the latter will find profoundly meaning depth in some of the *I Ching's* inscrutable phrases.

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