When ancient Chinese kings seared sacred bones with fire, reading the future from the resulting cracks went hand in hand with creating archival records to preserve the past. In this class, we will explore several interrelated early Chinese divination traditions, paying due attention in all cases to the complex interplay between past, present, and future. After starting with a discussion of the above-mentioned oracle bones, we will proceed to examine...
the enigmatic *Yijing (Classic of Changes)*, the earliest and most revered of all the Chinese classics and a text that has fascinated sages from Confucius to Leibniz. Finally, we will consider a popularization of divination practices in the form of almanacs that circulated widely in China from no later than the 4th century B.C. and helped transmit an entire cosmology as far afield as Korea and Japan. In all stages of the course, archaeology and recently excavated manuscripts will inform our analysis. Students can expect to try their hands at the actual practice of the various divination techniques covered, but most class time will be used to engage important themes arising from our investigations, including aspects of the history of writing, the interwoven histories of science and religion, and even the history of history itself.

**Course Texts:**


All other readings will be distributed through the class website.

**Course Policies and Requirements:**

**Grading:**

Grades will be awarded on the following basis:

10% Completion of 10 one-paragraph weekly response papers (submit by email)
attachment labelled with your name and the date no later than midnight on Monday of each week). Submit more than 10 responses for extra credit!

15% 1st writing assignment, due 10/7 at 5pm (submit by email)

20% 2nd writing assignment, due 11/4 at 5pm (submit by email)

25% 3rd writing assignment, due 12/9 at 5pm (submit by email)

30% Class participation, including punctual attendance, completion of assigned readings, and participation in class discussion. This aspect of the class is weighted heavily because it will be to everyone’s benefit if you are actively engaged with class readings and work together with your classmates through class discussion to draw connections with larger themes of the course. Please note – bodily attendance is a necessary but not sufficient condition for receiving participation credit. Exceptions will be made for documented medical illnesses or family crises. Whenever possible in such cases, please notify me by email in advance of your absence.

Late papers will be penalized by one letter grade per day. No rewrites will be allowed, but you are encouraged to discuss drafts of your papers with me or with tutors at the Writing Center in advance of final submission deadlines.

Academic Integrity: High standards of academic integrity are essential to your reputation and that of Gallatin/NYU. I will uphold the Gallatin policy on cheating and plagiarism found at http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html.

Electronics: Cell phones should be turned off and placed out of sight during class. Laptop computers, tablets, and e-readers may be used for class-related purposes.

Course Calendar:

Tues. 9/6: Preliminary Discussion; O. Neugebauer, “The Study of Wretched Subjects”

Thurs. 9/8: Robert Eno, “Deities and Ancestors in Early Oracle Inscriptions”; Peter Boodberg, “A Philologist’s Creed”; Edward Hallett Carr, “History as Progress”

Tues. 9/13: Peter Hessler, Oracle Bones, 1-147.


Tues. 10/4: Robert W. Bagley, “Anyang writing and the origin of the Chinese writing system”

Thurs. 10/6: Edward H. Schafer, “Ritual Exposure in Ancient China”

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1: 5-PAGE PAPER DUE FRIDAY 10/7 BY 5PM (EMAIL)**

Q: Peter Hessler weaves accounts of modern-day China with a discussion of China’s deep past and the scholars who are driven to unearth it. How do the two perspectives inform each other? Do you think this structure is effective?

Tues. 10/11: NYU Holiday!

Thurs. 10/13: Trip to Chinatown

Tues. 10/18: Richard John Lynn, tr., *The Classic of Changes*

Thurs. 10/20: Richard John Lynn, tr., *The Classic of Changes*

Tues. 10/25: Selections of traditional commentary on *The Classic of Changes*


Tues. 11/1: Michael Loewe, “Divination by shells, bones and stalks during the Han period” and Richard J. Smith, “The *Yijing* in Qing Society”

Thurs. 11/3: Peruse [www.iching123.com](http://www.iching123.com) to get a sense of modern manifestations of *The Classic of Changes*. Come to class with a question; students will work in groups to try their hands at *Yijing* divination.
WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2: 7-PAGE PAPER DUE FRIDAY 11/4 BY 5PM (EMAIL)

Q: Compare two or more translations of the *I Ching/ Yijing/ Book of Changes* and use specific examples to show how the translators have adopted this supremely malleable text for their own ends. What constitutes a legitimate interpretation and what is “going too far”?

Tues. 11/8: Donald Harper, “Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought”


Tues. 11/15: Liu Tseng-kuei, “Taboos: An Aspect of Belief in the Qin and Han”

Thurs. 11/17: An introduction to Chinese almanacs


Thurs. 11/24: Thanksgiving Holiday!


EXTRA CREDIT: SUBMIT DRAFT OF 10-PAGE FINAL PAPER FRIDAY 12/2 BY 5PM (EMAIL)


Thurs. 12/8: Ethan Harkness, tr., “Prognostications Based on the Sun, Moon, Wind, Rain, Clouds and Vapors” and selections from the Kongjiapo Day Book.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #3: 10-PAGE PAPER DUE FRIDAY 12/9 BY 5PM (EMAIL)

Q: TBA

Tues. 12/13: Lillian Lan-ying Tseng, “Representation and Appropriation: Rethinking the TLV
Mirror in Han China.”

Thurs. 12/15: Final Thoughts