
When the Heavenly Signs Were Untimely

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Having previously uncovered several instances in Chinese history when planetary astrology significantly influenced events on the ground, the present essay takes a slightly different tack. Explored here are two instances when strikingly similar astral signs involving mystical revelations may or may not have had epochal repercussions. The first has to do with a planetary portent during the early Han 漢 dynasty that evokes the same or similar associations as previous epochal dynastic omens, but which was most inopportune given the political developments on the ground. The second has to do with the famous hierophany involving the “unicorn” or *lin* 麟, the mystical creature that has captured the Chinese imagination for millennia. Concerning the *lin*, its origins and history are obscure, bordering on inaccessible. Nevertheless, an attempt is made to assemble the available evidence into a suggestive, if not quite definitive account of that iconic creature’s historical role.

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