Some of the Shang divinations involved routine administrative choices, as in:

4A. Crack-making on *gengzi* (day 37): "(We) order Fu to inspect Lin."[10]
4B. "It should be Qin whom we order to inspect Lin."
4C. "It should be Bing whom we order to inspect Lin."[11]

Other divinations involved choices about ritual activity, involving the number and type of victims to be offered, the timing or desirability of the offering, or the recipient of the cult:

5A. Divined: "On the next day, *jiawu* (day 31), (we) should not make offering to Ancestor [Yi] (the twelfth king)."
5B. Divined: "On the next day, *jiawu*, (we) should make offering to Ancestor Yi."[12]

The king also divined about his own participation in matters both secular and ritual:

6. On *dingmao* (day 4) divined: "If the king joins with Zhi [Guo] (an important Shang general) to attack the Shaofang, he will receive [assistance]." Cracked in the temple of Ancestor Yi (the twelfth king). Fifth moon.[13]
7A. Divined: "If the king dances (for rain), there will be approval."

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9. See the inscriptions numbered below as 31A–B to 35.

10. The designations 4A, 4B, and so on mean that inscriptions A and B are found on the same bone.

11. *HJ* 33237.

12. *HJ* 6167.

13. *Tunnan* 81. *Tunnan* is an abbreviation for Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, *Xiaotun nandi jiagu*.

7B. Divined: "The king should not dance (for rain, for if he does, there will not be approval)."[14]

THE POWER OF THE DEAD

The Shang oracle-bone inscriptions document the fear and respect that the living king showed his dead ascendants. This might manifest itself in general concerns about nonspecific harm:

8. Crack-making on *yiwei* (day 32), Gu divined: "Father Yi (the twentieth Shang king, Xiao Yi, the father of Wu Ding) is harming the king."[15]
9A. Divined: "Grandfather Ding (the fifteenth king, father of Xiao Yi) is harming the king."
9B. Divined: "It is not Grandfather Ding who is harming the king."[16]

Many of these divinations involved the king's health, as in:

10. Divined: "There is a sick tooth; it is not Father Yi (= Xiao Yi, as above) who is harming (it/him)."[17]

In addition to their ability to harm the king personally, the senior ancestors, like some of the Nature Powers, had the ability to influence both the weather and the harvests upon which the fate of the dynasty as a whole depended:

11. Crack-making on *dingchou* (day 14), Bin divined: "In praying for harvest to Shang Jia (the predynastic founder of the royal lineage) we offer in holocaust three small penned lambs and split open three cattle."[18]
12A. "It is Shang Jia who is harming the rain."
12B. "It is not Shang Jia who is harming the rain."[19]

One of the ways by which the king showed his concern for his people, in fact, was expressed in his divinatory prayers for harvest in his domains, as in the late inscription:

13A. On *jisi* (day 6), the king cracked and divined: "[This] season, Shang will receive [harvest]." The king read the cracks and said: "Auspicious."
13B. "The Eastern Lands will receive harvest."

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14. *HJ* 11006 front.
15. *HJ* 2231.
16. *HJ* 1901 front.
17. *HJ* 13636 front.
18. *HJ* 10109.
19. *HJ* 12648.

13C. "The Southern Lands will receive harvest." (The king read the cracks and said:) "Auspicious."

13D. "The Western Lands will receive harvest." (The king read the cracks and said:) "Auspicious."

13E. "The Northern Lands will receive harvest." (The king read the cracks and said:) "Auspicious."[20]

Ancestresses were less powerful than ancestors but appear to have had special jurisdiction in matters of childbearing:

14. On *xinsi* (day 18) divined: "(We) will pray for a child to Mother Geng and Mother Bing and offer a bull, a ram, and a white boar."[21]

The great importance that the Shang kings attached to male progeny is well revealed by the following charge, prognostication, and verification:

15A. Crack-making on *jiashen* (day 21), Que divined: "Lady Hao's (a consort of Wu Ding's) childbearing will be good." (Prognostication:) The king read the cracks and said: "If it be on a *ding*-day that she give birth, there will be prolonged luck." (Verification:) (After) thirty-one days, on *jiayin* (day 51), she gave birth; it was not good; it was a girl.[22]

15B. (Prognostication:) The king read the cracks and said: "If it be a *ding*-(day) childbearing, it will be good; if (it be) a *geng*-day (childbearing), there will be prolonged luck; if it be a *renxu* (day 59) (childbearing), it will not be lucky."[23]

Ancestresses played at least one other important role: they served to identify, by their presence in the cult of the five-ritual cycle, those kings who were subsequently treated by the Han historian Sima Qian (145? B.C.E.–86? B.C.E.) as members of the main line of descent, the *dazong* or "great lineage." This designation was reserved for kings who were both the sons and the fathers of other kings. The consorts of none of the collateral kings received such cultic attention; only the consorts of the main-line kings were so honored:

16. Crack-making on *renyin* (day 39), Xing divined: "The king hosts Da Geng's (the fifth king's) consort, Mother Ren, and performs the *xie*-ritual; there will be no trouble."[24]

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20. *HJ* 36975.
21. *HJ* 34082.
22. *HJ* 14002 front.
23. *HJ* 14002 back.
24. *HJ* 23314.

17. Crack-making on *xinsi* (day 18), divined: "The king hosts Wu Ding's (the twenty-first king's) consort, Mother Xin, and performs the *zai*-ritual; there will be no trouble."[25]

The ancestors apparently served as mediators with Di, God — occasionally referred to as Shangdi, the High God. Just as the Shang kings frequently divined about hosting (*bin*) their ancestors with ritual and cult, so too did the kings divine, although less frequently, to determine which of the ancestors would be hosted by increasingly senior ancestors who, in turn, would be hosted by, and thus be in communication with, the High God, Di, as the following inscriptions selected from a large turtle plastron reveal:

18A. Divined: "Cheng (= Da Yi, the first king) will be hosted by Di."
18B. Divined: "Cheng will not be hosted by Di."
18C. Divined: "Da Jia (the third king) will be hosted by Cheng."
18D. Divined: "Da Jia will not be hosted by Cheng."
18E. Divined: "Da [Jia] will be hosted by Di."
18F. Divined: "Da Jia will not be hosted by Di."[26]

THE HIGH GOD (DI) AND OTHER POWERS

The Shang kings lived in a world that was dominated by a complex pantheon of Powers that included: Di, the High God; Nature Powers, like the (Yellow) River, the Mountain, and Ri, the Sun; Former Lords, like Wang Hai, who were apparently ex-humans whom the cultists now associated with the dynasty; predynastic ancestors, like Shang Jia; dynastic ancestors, whose cult started with Da Yi and ended with the deceased father of the reigning king; and the dynastic ancestresses, the consorts of those kings on the main line of descent, who likewise received cult in the order of their husbands' accession. The worship of the nondynastic Powers, whether natural or human (a distinction that was not sharp), strengthened the king's position by enlarging the scope of his influence in the spiritual world. Such worship may be regarded as a form of "spiritual imperialism" in which the powers worshiped by local populations were co-opted into the Shang pantheon, frequently being placed in the shadowy, and relatively "empty," predynastic space in the ritual genealogy before the time of Da Yi, the founder. The jurisdictional distinctions within the pantheon, particularly those between the Nature Powers, Former Lords, and Predynastic Ancestors at the head of the hierarchy, were by no means rigid; the Shang ritualists conceived of these Powers as sharing many essential features, applying names like High Ancestor to some of them.

The original meaning of the word *di*, the name or title by which the Shang kings addressed their High God and, occasionally, their royal ancestors, remains hard to determine. It is equally hard to determine if the Shang kings regarded Di as their distant ancestor, but the lack of cult addressed to Di suggests that the ancestral tie, if it ever existed, had been greatly muted. If Di had once been an ancestor, the Late Shang kings treated him with uncharacteristic parsimony. The contrast with the generous way in which the kings treated their ancestors is so notable that it implies a difference in kind.

Di's jurisdictions were not always exclusive. The ancestors and Nature Powers could, like Di, also affect harvest, weather, campaigns, and the king's health.[27] It is clear, however, that Di stood at the peak of the ultra-human, ultra-natural hierarchy, giving orders, which no ancestor could do, to the various natural phenomena and responding to the intercessions of the Shang ancestors who were acting on behalf of their living descendants below. That Di was virtually the only Power who could directly order (*ling*) rain or thunder, as well as the only Power who had the winds under his control, sets him apart from all the other Powers, natural, predynastic, or ancestral. His ability to act in this commanding way helps to establish his unique role as the sky god of the Shang pantheon, foreshadowing the role of Heaven in the Zhou period that followed.

Although Di's wishes were not easy to divine, his approval was important to the Shang:

19A. Crack-making on *renzi* (day 49), Zheng divined: "If we build a settlement, Di will not obstruct (but) approve." Third moon.
19B. Crack-making on *guichou* (day 50), Zheng divined: "If we do not build a settlement, Di will approve."[28]
20A. Crack-making on *xinchou* (day 38), Que divined: "Di approves the king (doing something?)."
20B. Divined: "Di does not approve the king (doing something?)."[29]

Di was also a provider of rain. The king evidently took pride in his ability to forecast Di's meteorological intentions:

21A. Crack-making on *wuzi* (day 25). Que divined: "Di, when it comes to the fourth moon, will order the rain."
21B. Divined: "Di will not, when it comes to the present fourth moon, order the rain."
21C. (Prognostication:) The king read the cracks and said: "On the *ding*-day

27. As, for example, in 11, 12A–B, 26A–B, 29, and 30.
28. *HJ* 14206.
29. *HJ* 14198.

(e.g., *dingyou* [day 34]) it will rain; if not, it will be a *xin*-day (e.g., *xinchou* [day 38] (that it rains)."

21D. (Verification:) "(After) ten days, on *dingyou* (day 34), it really did rain."[30]

And, like the ancestors, Di was also capable of causing harm to the Shang:

22A. Divined: "It is Di who is harming our harvest." Second moon.

22B. Divined: "It is not Di who is harming our harvest."[31]

Di's role as a sender of difficulties, moreover, was not limited to the floods, droughts, and crop failures of the natural world; he could also, on occasion, stimulate an enemy attack:

23. [Divined:] "The Fang (enemy) are harming and attacking (us); it is Di who orders (them) to make disaster for us." Third moon.[32]

24A. Divined: "(Because) the Fang are harming and attacking (us, we) will raise men."

24B. Divined: "It is not Di who orders (the Fang) to make disaster for us."[33]

Di was in part a god of battle. Some twenty divinations end with the incantatory formula "Di will confer assistance on us," and, when the context was specified, Di's assistance always involved warfare, as in:

25. Crack-making on *jiachen* (day 41), Zheng divined: "If we attack the Ma-fang (another enemy group), Di will confer assistance on us." First moon.[34]

Di's great distance from the Shang, evident in the lack of cult and in his readiness to order enemy attacks (as in 23 and 24A–B) suggests that Di was accessible to various groups, Shang and non-Shang, and probably enigmatic to all. Di at best was an uncertain ally. The Shang prayed for his assistance (as in 25) but divined no ritual or sacrificial procedures for obtaining it in a routine, institutionalized way. After the reign of Wu Ding, in fact, they ceased to divine about Di's assistance at all. Di, in short, does not appear to have been a Jehovah-like figure, watching over his chosen Shang people. That the divination inscriptions record virtually no cult to Di was perhaps because his allegiance was so uncertain that no attempt to influence his intentions

30. *HJ* 14138.
31. *HJ* 10124 front.
32. *HJ* 39912.
33. *HJ* 6746.
34. *HJ* 6664 front.

was worth pursuing or, at least, divining. The Shang placated their ancestors through the offering of cult; it was evidently the ancestors who were expected to intercede with Di, as suggested by 18A–F.

Harm might also come from the Nature Powers.

26A. Crack-making on *bingwu* (day 43) divined: "It is the Mountain Power that is harming the rain."
26B. "It is the (Yellow) River Power that is harming the rain."[35]

One of the most common of all Shang divinations, in fact, involved the apotropaic conjuration, divined on the last day of the Shang week, that "in the next ten days (i.e., the next week), there will be no disasters" (as in 35). It was the king's constant concern to forestall harm and disasters of various types by identifying and mollifying the Powers that might be causing them. The king was particularly exposed to harm (frequently conceived in terms of bad weather) when he left the confines of the cult center on campaign or hunt, as the following conjurations suggest:

27. "On the present *xin*-day, if the king hunts, the whole day (he) will have no disasters and it will not rain."[36]
28. "If the king goes to hunt, the whole day he will not encounter the Great Winds."[37]

Other inscriptions reveal that the Winds were not simply meteorological phenomena but were conceived as Powers of great spiritual significance. It is evident, indeed, that the Shang kings lived in and traveled through a landscape that was pregnant with spiritual meaning. They offered cult and prayer to a variety of these non-Shang Powers:

29. Crack-making on *renwu* (day 19): "To the (Yellow) River Power (we) pray for rain and offer a holocaust."[38]
30. Crack-making on *xinwei* (day 8): "To the Mountain Power, (we) pray for rain."[39]

The considerable overlap in the jurisdictions of the ancestors and other Powers where the weather and harvests were concerned suggests, in fact, that the Shang had not yet developed orderly and consistent religious explanations for such large and strategically capricious phenomena.

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35. *Tunnan* 2438.
36. *HJ* 29093.
37. *HJ* 29234.
38. *HJ* 12853.
39. *HJ* 34916.

REGULARITY OF THE ANCESTRAL CULT

The Shang treated their ancestors with the kind of ritual regularity and order that they were unable to apply either to the Nature Powers or to Di himself. As ex-humans, the ancestors were approachable and comprehensible in ways that the other Powers were not. This regularity is seen most clearly in the use of the temple names that the Shang ritualists assigned to their dead kings, offering them cult or pyromantic attention on the days whose names they bore. One sees this strict ritual regularity, which became increasingly the rule after the reign of Wu Ding, in the following inscriptions, in which the day of cult matches the temple name of the cult recipient:

31A. Crack-making on *jiawu* (day 31), Que divined: "On the next day, *yiwei* (day 32), (we) should make offering to Ancestor Yi (the twelfth king)."

31B. "On the next day, *yiwei*, (we) [should not] make offering to Ancestor Yi."[40]

32A. Crack-making on *guiwei* (day 20), Que divined: "On the next day, *jiashen* (day 21), the king should host Shang Jia (the predynastic founder) and offer the (*jia*-) day cult." (Prognostication:) The king read the cracks and said: "Auspicious. We should host (Shang Jia)." (Verification:) "(We) really did host (Shang Jia)."

32B. Divined: "On the next day, *jiashen*, the king should not host Shang Jia and offer the (*jia*-) day cult."[41]

Thus in 31A–B the diviner contemplated offering cult to Ancestor Yi on an *yi*-day; in 32A–B, the cult was to be offered to Shang Jia on a *jia*-day. During the reign of Wu Ding, however, the identity of day name and temple name was still a topic for divination, as these two pairs of inscriptions indicate; similar uncertainty is shown in 5AB, where *jia*-day cult was being proposed for an Yi ancestor. During and after the reign of Ancestor Jia, the twenty-third king, however, such matching of cult name and cult day was rigorously observed:

33. Crack-making on *yihai* (day 12), Xing divined: "The king hosts Xiao Yi (the twentieth king) and performs the *xie*-ritual; he will have no fault." Eleventh moon.[42]

34. Crack-making on *dingsi* (day 54), divined: "The king hosts the fourth Ancestor Ding (the fifteenth king) and performs the *xie*-day ritual; he will have no fault."[43]

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40. *HJ* 9504 front.
41. *HJ* 1248 front.
42. *HJ* 23120.
43. *HJ* 35713.

In these cases the divinations and the cult to the Yi- and Ding-named ancestors were both performed on the *yi*- and *ding*-days, respectively. The regularity of the ritual schedule was so marked, in fact, that by the end of the dynasty, the rituals themselves were being employed to fix particular divinations in the calendar of royal cult. Divinatory time was frequently cultic time, as the following postface indicates:

35. On *guiwei* (day 20) the king made cracks in the Hui encampment and divined: "In the (next) ten days, there will be no disasters." (Prognostication:) The king read the cracks and said: "Auspicious." (Postface:) It was in the fifth moon, (for the week starting on the) *jiashen* (day 21) (on which we) offered the *ji*-ritual to Ancestor Jia (the twenty-third king) and the *xie*-day ritual to Xiang Jia (the seventeenth king).[44]

Although the king, the diviner of record in this case, was traveling, he evidently kept track of the *ji*- and *xie*-day rituals, which he used to situate the divination in the ritual calendar. The king may even have offered the *ji*- and *xie*-rituals while on the road. It is a striking fact, however, that the king never divined about performing such rituals or about hosting his ancestors when he was traveling; the ancestors, whose "hosting" was contemplated in numerous inscriptions like 32A–B, 33, and 34, could evidently not be contacted when the king put a distance between himself and the ancestral temples and royal burial grounds of the cult center at Anyang.

That the consorts of the main-line kings received cult on their own name days rather than those of their husbands — as in 16 and 17 — indicates that these royal women preserved their own ritual identity after death. Indeed, the distribution of the temple names, in which the kings tended to be awarded names that fell during the first half of the week (*jia, ding, yi, geng*) and the consorts tended to be awarded names that fell during the second half of the week (*wu, ji, xin, gui*), indicates the degree to which kings and consorts were part of separate yet related ritual systems.

DIVINATION AND THE ANCESTORS

A number of divinations were actually performed in the ancestral temple, as in 6 and 36:

36. On *dingwei* (day 44) divined: "It should be tonight that (we) perform the *you*-cutting sacrifice and perform an exorcism." Cracked in the temple of Father Ding (i.e., Wu Ding).[45]

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44. *HJ* 35886.
45. *HJ* 32330.

This suggests that the Powers to whom many of the divination charges were addressed may well have been the ancestors who, through the cracks, were speaking to their royal descendant, known in the bones as "I, the one man" (*yu yi ren*), at least partly because of his unique ability to communicate with his ascendants in this way. Other divinations specifically invoke an ancestor as the object of the prayer being divined:

37. Divined: "(We) pray for Lady Hao (one of Wu Ding's consorts) to Father Yi (the twentieth king and Wu Ding's father)."[46]
38. Crack-making on *guiyou* (day 10): "To Father Jia (the seventeenth king), we pray for (good) hunting."[47]

In such cases, the Powers who were responding through the bone cracks were, in all likelihood, the ancestors, like Father Yi and Father Jia, to whom the prayers were explicitly directed.

Many Shang divinations, however, appear to have involved general prayers for assistance that did not specify the particular Power whose blessings were being invoked. Whether the record was simply abbreviated in such cases or the Shang diviners themselves were being deliberately vague about the "divinee" is hard to tell.