A Refutation

— The allegations by Professors Mair & Didier

In the monograph In and Outside the Square (3 vols., Sino-Platonic Papers 192: 2009), author John Didier and editor-publisher Victor Mair make statements which have, and will be, interpreted as alleging impropriety on my part, based on the fact that ideas appearing in previous publications of my own [specifically Pankenier 2004b, and Pankenier, 2009c, see below], parallel in some respects Didier’s (2009). Examples of the objectionable insinuations include Victor Mair’s statement: “key components of his [Didier’s] research being appropriated before . . . he was able to publish them himself” [Mair, “Foreword”, iii]; John Didier’s, “Although apparently my earlier manuscript remains uncited, Professor Pankenier’s work now continues with his recent delivery of a paper on what in both my earlier and present manuscripts I have identified to be the highest, and celestial polar, power of Shang religion, Ding [Didier, 2009, I, “Preface”, vii]; and Didier’s, “Pankenier’s idea to project ding astronomically could only have originated in these very chapters, in their 2003-4 incarnation” [Didier, 2009, II, 169].

The implication of Victor Mair’s “appropriated” will be obvious to anyone. Didier’s “could only have originated” amounts to a charge of plagiarism. In what follows I will substantiate that these are not only reckless and false allegations, but will also show that John Didier was deeply influenced by my own work and is heavily indebted to it.

I reproduce text here from Didier’s “Preface” and book giving the substance of his allegations that I am somehow indebted to him for certain of my ideas, after which I will refute the charge by establishing my own prior publication which Didier obviously did not trouble himself to search out. Links to the pertinent documents are provided in the text and in the list of References below.

“At the same time, in late July of 2004, having been thoughtfully informed by one of the reviewers for the University of Hawaii Press that I should contact Professor David Pankenier because, the reviewer reported, his contemporary research on the gods Di and Taiyi paralleled my own . . . As it turned out, Professor Pankenier and I were working on much the same general topic, employing many of the same sources, and in certain matters reaching virtually the same conclusions . . . What is most striking is that in our work of 2003 and 2004 Professor Pankenier and I made several of the same mistakes . . . In other areas there were similar topical identities: the citation of Eliade’s and Wheatley’s work on the axis mundi or urban omphalos; the identification of Di and Taiyi as identical Chinese polar gods in the Han period, and, in the case of Di, a recognition of the likely astronomical significance of instances when that character appeared inverted on Oracle Bone Inscriptions (OBs); a discussion of the eclectic nature of Shang religion and culture in light of a shift that occurred from earlier times in the Shang’s recognition of the northern celestial pole’s location relative the earth observer; a mistaken identification of Taiyi, “Great One,” with yi, “One”; and the projection of the graph for the Shang god Di onto the stellar patterns of the pole of the 2nd millennium BC (even though our projections onto specific patterns of polar stars differed — and still do — considerably, mine have not changed since I first allighted on them in 2001). Even our breezily offered conclusion that the Warring States concepts of xu and wu, or voidity and nothing, had derived from a now-vacant celestial pole, was the same.” “Preface” [2009, I, iv-vi]:

“David Pankenier [2004] has, since these pages were first written, also projected the graph for the god Di onto the celestial polar region but in a way very distinct from my own projection.” [II, 103, n. 11]
"Pankenier’s idea to project ding astronomically could only have originated in these very pages . . ." [II, 169]

NB: Didier's claim implies his work of "2003-2004" had been accessible to others. In fact, he published NOTHING on the subject until SPP 192 appeared in January 2010.

— My own statement below:

(i) Proves that Victor Mair, as editor-publisher of SPP, published and disseminated online provably false accusations without bothering to make the least effort to establish the facts beforehand. My publications (Pankenier 2004a-b, 2008, 2009a-b) establishing priority and proving Mair's and Didier's allegations baseless were in print, publicly presented, and/or readily available from me prior to the publication of Didier's work in SPP 192 in January 2010.

(ii) Proves that before John Didier claims even to have completed the "rough draft" of his ms in December 2003, or submitted it [unsuccessfully] for publication, I had already published the ideas he alleges I purloined. His bibliography betrays no knowledge of my prior publications 2004a or 2008. I personally provided him with a copy of 2004b [by then in press] in July 2004.

(iv) Documents that every one of the so-called "topical identities" Didier itemizes in his "Preface" can be found published first [in Pankenier 2004a or 2004b] after formal presentation to the Oxford Conference on Archaeoastronomy/INSAP IV in August 2003. This conference took place nearly a year before I was made aware by a reader for U. Hawai‘i Press [mid-June 2004] of Didier's duplication of many of my ideas in his ms. [I had earlier declined, sight unseen, a request from UH Press to read Didier's ms., so I was shaken and dismayed by the duplication, but reserved judgement on how it came about.] Once alerted to the matter, I advised the reader to bring it to the attention of UH Press.

As for priority, anyone can confirm the public exposure and prior publication of my work by reading my two articles cited below [Pankenier 2004a-b]. They are virtually identical to the formal presentations I gave at Oxford University in August 2003 [Pankenier 2004a] and at the Columbia University Early China Seminar in March 2004 [Pankenier 2004b]. Numerous participants from the US had attended the international Oxford Archaeoastronomy meeting in August 2003.

(v) Shows that John Didier, by his own admission in SPP 192 [2009, vol. 2, 234ff], published accusations against me without ever having read either the published or unpublished material [from a subsequent Columbia Early China Seminar paper] to which he objects [Pankenier, 2008, 2009b-c]. Didier then incorporated portions of my unpublished material in an appendix to SPP 192 (2009, vol. 2) in an effort to preempt and blunt its impact while it was still undergoing pre-publication review [by Victor Mair, no less].

(vi) Proves that my own research owes nothing to Didier's work, and further that I have been exonerated through rigorous investigation by independent experts.

— Summary

To begin with, it is noteworthy that in his 2004 CV, John Didier claims no public presentations, lectures, or publications dealing with any of the topics in his book before the submission of his rough draft of In and Outside the Square to the University of Hawai‘i Press in early 2004. In contrast, in "The Cosmo-political Background of Heaven's Mandate" [Early China 20, 1995] I had already adumbrated central themes I subsequently took up in Pankenier 2004a, 2004b, 2008, 2009a-c, including, as I
noted above, the use of asterism Ding 定 in orienting dwellings. By mid-2002, I was prepared to publish my thoughts on the question of how the ancient Chinese used the Pole to align structures cardinaly in the absence of a Pole Star, by aligning circumpolar stars on opposite sides of the Pole at around 2000 BCE. In doing so, I conjectured that the ancients employed a transit-like sighting device analogous in shape to the oracle bone graph for Di, the high god. Pankenier (2004a) setting forth my ideas on the above was presented to INSAP IV at Oxford in August 2003 (abstract submitted in November 2002), which paper was selected for publication and submitted to the editor of the proceedings in late 2003. Also in the autumn of 2003, I offered to present a revised version of that paper ("Brief History of Beiji") to the Columbia Early China Seminar, and this was welcomed. “A Brief History of Beiji [Northern Culmen]: with an Excursus on the Origin of the Character di 帝” was presented to the Seminar on March 27, 2004, and was enthusiastically received. I submitted the article to Paul Kroll, Editor, Journal of the American Oriental Society, on June 30, 2004. It was published essentially as submitted.

The above narrative and attached documentation [references below] prove that by late summer of 2003, before John Didier even claims to have completed a “rough draft” of his 2003 ms that December, I had already published or exposed my ideas to national and international audiences for a year, and repeatedly in discussions with colleagues in the U.S., Europe, and China since 1995. In contrast, prior to early 2004, nothing by John Didier appeared in print on the subject of his book — not one talk, abstract, or article. There is only his Dec 2003 ms, which materialized only after my own research was already formally presented, circulated, and in the case of Pankenier (2004a) submitted for publication.

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— John Didier’s own words

A look at the exchange of emails between John Didier and myself of August 17-18, 2004 is especially revealing. First, Didier writes [JD emails 2004] to introduce himself. After preliminaries, he continues:

“In the book-in-progress I make significant use of your excellent work on planetary conjunctions and dynastic turnover (particularly your remarkable paper published in EC in 1995) and plan to continue to search your published work for additional help with particularly archaeoastronomical matters pertaining to the 2nd millennium BC. I have learned a great deal from your fine work. But I believe that you would be able to offer much to help improve the manuscript were you to read it critically before it is published. Would you be interested and have the time to read it please? It is about 350 manuscript pages long and includes just over 100 illustrations. If you would like, I could email you as an attachment in MS WORD or Nisus Writer my Table of Contents for the manuscript, perhaps allowing you to decide from that overview whether or not you would like to read the entire work. Thank you for kindly considering my request. I have long thought to introduce myself to you but only lacked an appropriate venue. I am happy now to have the opportunity to make contact.”

I responded briefly to say I would read his ms and that I was sending him a copy of my JAOS article “Brief History of Beiji” (Pankenier 2004b). I included the abstract of that article in the body of the email. John Didier replied the following day, 8/18/2004, as follows:

“Thanks so much for sending me your three fine articles. All three are very relevant to my own work, and they are naturally highly informative and useful. Particularly your forthcoming article on Beiji/Di will be helpful to me as I revise my manuscript [but the others are also very relevant, instructive, helpful, and delightful reads themselves]. I am very happy that I may cite for support a scholar of your stature working along parallel lines. While we overlap to some degree, I think our somewhat distinct approaches will complement each other’s work nicely. I should tell you that your work has been tremendously inspirational to me, and throughout the writing of my ms I have relied on your earlier articles as bases of sound theoretical and evidential orientations … I look forward to sending the entire ms to you on Friday … Thanks again for sending your wonderful articles. There’s plenty of
time before publication to work them in to my ms, for which I’m very grateful. The inclusion of their findings and also your comments on the ms are certain to make the book far more solid and convincing.”

No hint here in mid-2004 of any confusion about priority or suspicion of my having “misappropriated” his research. No comment on any perceived "topical identities." On the contrary, my findings are to be "worked in to" Didier’s book. "Particularly helpful," says Didier, will be my "forthcoming article on Beiji/ Di" [Pankenier, 2004b], the very work whose integrity he now finds cause to impugn. In sum, every one of the "topical identities" which John Didier itemized in his 2010 Preface can be found published first by me before I ever saw any of Didier’s work parallelizing my own — and Didier knew this by August 2004! How extraordinary that now, six years later in 2010, Didier claims I purloined my ideas from him! How extraordinary that in August 2004, after reading my JAOS article “Brief History of Beiji” [Pankenier, 2004b], not only did he find no cause for concern, he praised this specific article as "helpful to me as I revise my manuscript." Could it possibly be any more self-evident who influenced whom?

— Victor Mair’s role as purveyor of falsehoods.

Years ago, in my "Cosmo-political Background" [Early China 20, 1995, 121, n. 2] I had already broached the alignment function of lunar lodge Yingshi “Lay out the Hall,” which is alluded to in the Shiijing ode #50 “Ding zhi fang zhong” 定之方中: "When [asterism] Ding just culminated." I made reference to this function of Ding again in Pankenier [2004b, 229, n. 43]. Further research, calculation and simulation in 2007 yielded several important discoveries with regard to this function of asterism Ding 定. As noted above, this material [Pankenier, 2009a] was first presented to the Columbia Early China Seminar on February 9, 2008 as "Bringing Heaven Down to Earth in Ancient China.”

Subsequently, in Pankenier [2009b-c], at the behest of the organizers of the Columbia University Symposium on Writing and Literacy in Early China, I expanded on the implications of my study, adding in the process: [i] the significance of my previous findings for the genesis of Chinese writing; [ii] reiterating that Ding 定 or Pegasus was the precise location of the momentous planetary massing of 1953 BCE [Pankenier, 1995], showing that this celestial phenomenon was likely understood as a sign from the high god that close attention should be paid to the Great Square in Pegasus. This in turn explained the likely origin of the graph for the square stem-sign ding 丁, together with the ritually prescribed alignment function of the asterism Ding 定, as well as the relationships among a series of cognate graphs. My symposium paper was accepted for publication in Writing and Literacy in Early China [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011], and it turns out that Victor Mair was approached by the U. Washington Press as a peer reviewer. Here is a crucial paragraph from Mair’s review provided to me by the Press:

"Here we have another serious instance of lack of acknowledgement of previous work on a key part of Pankenier’s paper. Namely, I believe that it is essential that Pankenier recognize the fundamental contribution of John Didier [professor of Chinese history and dean at Colorado State University]. In his 2003 book manuscript... Didier was the first to propose the idea of ding 定 as based on a quadrilateral in the heavens that had important implications for astronomical and calendrical thought, as well as for Shang and Zhou religion. Didier’s enormous book is soon to be issued in 3 volumes [hence it will be have been published long before Writing and Literacy appears in print]." [ECS book - Outside reader comments on Pankenier 20090806, printed 2009.08.06 9:24 AM p. 2]

Leaving aside the allusion to the other “serious instance,” that of my not having cited Mair’s own speculations on the origins of Chinese writing [which I reject], here I just focus on the sentence after the ellipsis. Victor Mair asserts that "Didier was the first to propose the idea of ding 定 as based on a quadrilateral in the heavens." This claim, the basis of Mair’s serious allegation, is PATENTLY FALSE and a shocking error in such a context. Didier’s book deals with stem-sign ding 丁 in the Shang dynasty and
with his imaginary pre-Shang polar constellation, NOT asterism Ding 定 in Pegasus. Only after my formal presentation of Pankenier [2009b] to the Columbia Early China Seminar in February 2009 did Didier [by his own admission in SPP 192, vol. 2, 234ff] add an appendix to chapter five of his book vigorously attacking my analysis of Ding 定 and its astral association with the Square of Pegasus. Prior to my formal presentation in 2009, Didier had never alluded to the Shiijing ode “Ding zhi fang zhong,” had never mentioned the role of asterism Ding 定 in connection with the Pole, had never discussed asterism Ding 定 (Pegasus) in any connection with stem sign ding 丁, had never analyzed the Ding 定 / zheng 正 / zhen 贞 / ding 鼎 / ding 丁 word family, all of which I do in my chapter in Writing and Literacy.

One might have expected that as editor of Didier's book Victor Mair ought to have been able to distinguish my discussion of the textually attested polar alignment function of asterism Ding 定 in Pegasus from his protegé Didier's fanciful “astral-projection” of stem-sign ding 丁 onto the North Pole, the central focus of the very book Mair was just then in process of publishing, and which he referenced in his reader's review of my chapter in Writing and Literacy for UW Press. Therefore, Victor Mair must bear responsibility for Didier's rush to print my still unpublished ideas, as well for purveying false information about my work to both Didier and UW Press. Victor Mair's egregious incompetence both as editor and reviewer are inexcusable.

— A matter of priority

As shown above, prior to the publication of SPP 192 [2009] Didier had never discussed the identification of Ding 定 with the Great Square of Pegasus, or the astronomical and historical significance of the ode Ding zhi fang zhong “When Ding just culminated.” Instead, Didier’s thesis was that ding 丁 ([ ]) denoted a huge quadrilateral asterism at the Pole, a fanciful speculation for which there is no textual support. It was first in January 2010 that Didier alleged “Pankenier’s idea to project ding astronomically could only have originated in these very chapters, in their 2003-4 incarnation” [Didier, 2009, II, 169]. The allegation is hubristic, uninformed, and frankly, silly. The ancient Babylonians, Greeks, Native Americans, and Chinese all perceived the four stars in Pegasus to form a square and represented it as such — they were not inspired by Didier either. The identification of Ding 定 with the Great Square of Pegasus is made explicit in early Chinese texts and commentaries which Didier ignores completely. As for Didier’s specific accusation that my inspiration “could only have originated” in his imaginary polar quadrilateral, consider the following text and commentary from Erya, Shitian “Heaven Explicated” (3rd century BCE) where lodge Yingshi “Lay out the Hall” is identified as Ding 定 [Pegasus], after which Shitian goes on to say; “Zouzi’s ‘mouth’ is [lodges] Yingshi [Align-the-Hall] and Dongbi [Eastern Wall].” [Zouzi is the late Warring States and Han designation for Aqr-Psc, comprising lodges Yingshi and Dongbi; ‘mouth’ kou 口 in the gloss obviously refers to the Square of Pegasus.] Guo Pu’s [276-324 CE] comment reads: “The four sides of asterisms Yingshi and Dongbi resemble a kou 口, hence the name” (Shisanjing zhushu: 1970, vol. 2, 2609). The memory of the early history of asterism Ding 定 persisted well into the Tang, since the 8th century Kaiyuan zhanjing (ch. 61) still preserves a comment by the Eastern Han astronomer Xi Meng (fl. ca. 100): “the two stars of Yingshi are the west wall, and together with the two stars of Dongbi they combine to form a foursome, their shape an open square like kou 口 ‘mouth’.”

— So much for Didier’s utterly bogus claim of priority in being the very first to visualize a square in the Chinese sky. These are not obscure sources, but among the very first to consult for clarification regarding Ding 定 [Pegasus]. What kind of scholar advances such allegations – “could only have originated” – without bothering to do even minimal research?

— Independent investigation

So, abetted by his editor’s incompetence, John Didier published accusations against me on the basis of shoddy research, and without ever having read the article to which he objects, much less its published predecessors (Pankenier 2008, 2009a) which reproduce the passage just cited. At the same time, neither Didier nor Mair felt any compunction in reproducing in an appendix to SPP 192 [vol. 2, chapter five], unpublished material of my own from my 2009 presentation at Columbia University, the very paper
reviewed for publication by Mair, in violation of my explicit admonition against such citation.

Following the blatantly false allegation submitted to the University of Washington Press by Victor Mair in his reader's report, at the behest of UW Press Professors David Prager Branner and Li Feng, editors of Writing and Literacy in Early China (which includes Pankenier 2009c), conducted a thorough investigation. They [as well as other investigations] have concluded there is no substance to Mair's and Didier's allegations. To quote Prof. Branner:

“Li Feng and I have carried out a thorough investigation of the relationship between Dean John Didier's 2003 manuscript; In and Outside the Square’ and Prof. David Pankenier's 2008 article, ‘Bringing Heaven Down to Earth in Ancient China,’ which was rewritten in 2009 as 'Heavenly Pattern Reading' and the Origins of Writing in China.’

We find no textual basis for claiming influence by Dean Didier’s manuscript on Prof. Pankenier’s article or chapter.

A superficial similarity between the two works — discussion of a square asterism connected with the celestial pole, and the association of either asterism with the well-known square graph ding [口] — is simply irrelevant in the context of:

- sharply differing identifications of the asterism (for Didier, at the north pole, comprising the stars Alioth, Mizar, Pherkad, Kochab, and Thuban, all part of or near Ursa Major; for Pankenier, the Great Square of Pegasus, comprising the stars Markab, Alpheratz, α Peg, and β Peg, some 60-70 degrees of arc away from the pole, with which it is never simultaneously visible and cannot possibly be confused),
- the kinds of textual evidence adduced (for Didier, mostly oracle bone inscriptions; for Pankenier, mostly received Classical texts and scholia, and dealing with the practice of orienting buildings),
- the basic character of the linguistic evidence adduced (for Didier, graphic; for Pankenier 2009, phonosemantic),
- different names for the asterism (for Didier, Ding 丁 for his proposed polar quadrilateral; for Pankenier, the attested name Ding 定 for the Great Square of Pegasus),
- and above all, the entire thrust of each of the two presentations (for Didier, reconstructing the lore associated with the celestial pole in Chinese high antiquity, and discussing its place in cosmogony; for Pankenier, reconstructing a method of locating the celestial pole for use in orienting buildings of state, at times when the pole is not visible — a subject on which Pankenier has written since at least 1995).

Dean Didier's manuscript is cited explicitly in a long footnote to Prof. Pankenier's article (in its present form, dating from late 2009 but from after the draft sent to reviewers and studied here), which discusses differences between the two theories.”

David Prager Branner
February 6, 2010

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Under the circumstances, and in view of the overwhelming documentary evidence presented here of the priority and originality of my research, an objective assessment would suggest that it is John Didier who should be required to explain any duplication, not me. Even if Didier can credibly substantiate the independence of his research, none of which he published prior to the appearance of SPP 192 in January, 2010, the documentation I provide here shows that any accusations of misappropriation on my part are blatantly false and display a reckless disregard for the facts.

I leave it to others to pass judgement on the ethics of Victor Mair’s and John Didier’s neglecting to breathe a word of their concerns to me prior to the publication of Didier’s false accusations in January 2010. Had Victor Mair’s misreadings and false assumptions been corrected earlier the entire affair could probably have been avoided. At a minimum, a decent respect for truth and honesty would require a public apology and retraction of their irresponsible allegations. To date [10/2013], neither Associate Dean [!] John Didier nor Professor Victor Mair, though proven wrong, has had the common decency either to apologize or to repudiate their published falsehoods. In view of the above, it will come as no surprise that Victor Mair refuses to print this refutation in his self-published [!] journal SPP.

http://www.lehigh.edu/~dwp0/Refute_Didier-Mair.html
— David W. Pankenier

References:

http://sino-platonic.org/complete/spp192_vol2.pdf


