Reread In the falling of the yarrow stalks, are the contingencies of the I Ching, the Book of Wisdom. If we scatter the stalks virtually, is it the same? **Malcolm Learmonth** looks at an attempt to unveil the hexagrams digitally, in CD-Rom format.

The book of digital wisdom

The Multimedia I Ching *(Princeton University Press 1996)*

Princeton University Press

The I Ching is probably the oldest book in the world, and is central to Chinese culture. It is an oracular system, comparable perhaps with the Tarot in the west, but with a much less shady reputation. It elaborates the fundamental perception at the heart of the Chinese attitude to art, medicine, martial arts, cooking, interior design, and life in general. This is the notion that there are two fundamental aspects of the 'supreme ultimate' as it manifests as the perceived world. These patterns are called 'yin' and 'yang'. The 'Ten Thousand Things' as the Chinese put it, are all produced out of interactions of the basic energies of Yin and Yang.

The I Ching shows 4,032 possible permutations of yin and yang. Yin is represented by a broken line '– –', and yang by an unbroken line, '–'. Lines are built up into three line blocks, or trigrams. These eight trigrams have particular qualities and images related to them, often as natural forces (for example water, fire etc.) Two trigrams are brought together as a six line figure or hexagram. Each of the sixty-four possible combinations has in turn its own image and meaning. In addition, any yin or yang line can be 'moving', in other words in the process of turning into its complementary quality. The moving line reveals another hexagram evolving out of the first. Which as 64 x 63 yields our 4,032 permutations.

When the oracle is consulted each line is generated, whatever the method, out of three separate yin and yang responses. So our 4,032 permutations are built up out of 12,096 yin/yang responses. In other words, the I Ching works from binary code and, through algorithms, builds up a dazzling complexity. Just like computer. All computer languages are, at bottom, elaborations of binary codes. One of the first appearances of the Book in the west was around 1700, when a Christian missionary in China wrote to the mathematician and philosopher Liebniz pointing out the