Proposal to encode Geomantic Figures

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1 Introduction

Unicode currently contains characters encoded for several combinatorial divinatory systems including those of the 太玄經 Tai Xuán Jing (87 characters in the Tai Xuan Jing Symbols block), the 易經 Yi Jing or I Ching (64 characters in the Yijing Hexagram Symbols block), and the 八卦 Bā Guà (2+4+8 characters in the Miscellaneous Symbols block). It does not yet contain figures for the geomantic tradition, which have been used in many places around the world.

Geomancy is the name under which this form of divination is referred to in English. This list is not exhaustive.

There are sixteen geomantic symbols. Each consists of four markers of parity (even or odd) stacked one atop the other.† In the Arabic/European traditions the correspondence is that odd parity is represented by a single dot and even parity by two dots. In Ifá and related systems the correspondence is the opposite.[2, p. 8] In handwritten sources the two dots are often drawn instead as a horizontal line, and sometimes the single dot is presented as a vertical line (see Figure 2). In printed sources the marks are most commonly presented as separate dots, and this is invariably the case in European texts. There are also

†The symbols are always arranged vertically in traditional divinatory sources. The only places I know of that use a horizontal presentation are some 19th-century editions of ‘Napoleon’s Oraculum’, where the oracle is presented as a parlor game. See Figure 20.

†‘Geomancy’ here should not be confused with ’geomancy’ in the Chinese tradition (i.e. Feng Shui), which is of a different form and not related to the systems discussed here.

Figure 1: The sixteen geomantic figures, in a dotted style.
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“occulted” variations of the symbols which obscure the underlying construction, which will be presented below; these variations are purely stylistic and do not require separate encoding.

2 Suitability for inclusion

These symbols are characters according to the definition in the Glossary. As far as I could find, they do not appear in the Archive of Notices of Non-Approval, nor in the Unicode Pipeline Table.

These symbols appear in many pre-computer documents describing the divinatory practice—both handwritten and printed—and they are distinct from the symbols used for other forms of divination. Therefore, it would be useful to encode these characters for the transcription of existing works, and to enable textual search of such characters.

It would also benefit current practitioners of these systems of divination (“geomancers”) if they were able to use the symbols online; below I have collected evidence of people representing these symbols through combinations of other encoded symbols, with various degrees of success.

3 Evidence of use

3.1 In running text

Figures 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 show evidence of use of these figures in running text. These examples were obtained with only a couple of hours’ search, so with dedicated work many more examples would be able to be sourced.

3.2 In tables or aside from text

It is easy to find examples of the use of these symbols adjacent to text discussing them, or in tables or diagrams. See figures 7, 8. This method is often used in printed books, where due to the lack of pre-cast figures, symbols were also assembled out of asterisks (Figure 9), the letter ‘o’ (Figure 10), or simply replaced by numeric representations (Figure 11).

3.3 In art or on objects

In figures 12 and 13 are depictions of geomantic symbols on objects. Figure 14 shows a figure in a work of Islamic art, alongside its description.

4 Evidence of want

I have recently collected two examples from Twitter of users using alternate characters to represent geomantic figures in online text; see Figure 15. On other websites asterisks have been (attempted) to be used to construct the figures (Figure 16). In most cases, website authors must currently fall back to using images as a substitute.

‡ An isomorphism can be described between the Tai Xuan Jing Symbols and the geomantic figures, but the geomantic figures are always distinct in form from them, and can be written with many unusual variants which would never be used for the TXJ characters.
5 Character properties

These characters should have the same basic properties as already-encoded divinatory characters:

- General Category: Other Symbol
- Canonical Combining Class: 0
- BIDI: Other Neutral
- Bidi Mirrored: N

**Directionality** In the production of a geomantic ('shield') chart the figures are “read” in a right-to-left order (Figure 2 also shows a full chart written in linearized form in a single right-to-left line with Hebrew text). In Ifá the characters are always used in pairs, which are “read” in right-to-left order (the name of the right figure coming before the name of the left figure). The Ifá pairs are also constructed in right-to-left order in Ifá, but they are “written” during a divination by moving across both characters: the first row on both is entered before the second row of both, etc.[2, p. 41] Despite this preference for a right-to-left ordering, I think that to impose this ordering strictly would only serve to confuse users of Latin scripts, and they should be considered to be standalone figures the same as other divinatory symbols which match the ordering of the surrounding text. European practitioners do not have any concept that the figures would be read right-to-left when placed in linear sequence.

![Figure 17: A geomantic 'shield' chart with colour-coding to show how the four 'mothers' (top-right) are read in a right-to-left order to produce the 'daughters' (top-left).](image)

**Naming** I would suggest using the Latin names for the characters as these have been stable for a long time and are still currently used by practitioners. Using names from Arabic or other non-Latin scripts would face the usual issues of transliteration, and the names used in Ifá differ according to school and region.
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Ordering

There is no standard ordering for the geomantic figures. In European geomancy none is used. In Ifá divination an ordering is used, but there are at least two different systems, and possibly as many as twenty-one.[2, p. 48] Thus, I suggest a “mathematical” structural arrangement where they are ordered according to their binary value, where two dots is treated as 0 and one as 1 (assuming the least-significant bit at the bottom).³

According to the proceeding arguments, the following data for the characters is given, assuming that the characters will begin at U+1CEE0 within the new Miscellaneous Symbols Supplement block:

1CEE0;GEOMANTIC FIGURE POPULUS;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEE1;GEOMANTIC FIGURE TRISTITIA;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEE2;GEOMANTIC FIGURE ALBUS;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEE3;GEOMANTIC FIGURE FORTUNA MAJOR;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEE4;GEOMANTIC FIGURE RUBEUS;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEE5;GEOMANTIC FIGURE ACQUISITIO;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEE6;GEOMANTIC FIGURE CONJUNCTIO;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEE7;GEOMANTIC FIGURE CAPUT DRACONIS;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEE8;GEOMANTIC FIGURE LAETITIA;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEE9;GEOMANTIC FIGURE CARCER;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEEA;GEOMANTIC FIGURE AMISSIO;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEEB;GEOMANTIC FIGURE PUella;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEEC;GEOMANTIC FIGURE FORTUNA MINOR;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEED;GEOMANTIC FIGURE PUER;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;
1CEEF;GEOMANTIC FIGURE CAUDA DRACONIS;So;θ;ON;;;;;N;;;;;

Form of the characters

In Table 1, I include as representative glyphs examples of the figures as shown in “Alphabet of the Genii” (ALPHGENI.TTF), a freeware font created in 2000 by one “FuzzyPeg”[3] as well as the freeware font “NI Occult Symbols” (NIOCS____.TTF) produced by the Nu Isis Working Group.[4] Both of these fonts are encoded in a “Wingdings” style where letters and punctuation are replaced with the special characters.

Finally, I include a font that I created for this proposal named “Geomantic” which contains glyphs which are encoded at the codepoints suggested above. The glyphs in this table are presented in the codepoint order as suggested above.

Forms of the figures other than those shown in the images referenced so far are also used; Agrippa in particular presents some interesting graphical variations on the characters (Figure 18). Later examples which are based on Agrippa’s versions show further differences (Figure 19). Fonts may therefore make different choices about how the geomantic figures should be presented.

Four ways to write Puer: dots (common in printed or European sources), dots and strokes (seen in Arabic and Persian sources, e.g. Figure 3), strokes (see Figure 2), and joined strokes (seen in [2]).
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Genii</th>
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<th>Geomantic</th>
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</thead>
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<td>⠠قيقة</td>
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<td>Albus</td>
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<td>⠠قيقة</td>
<td>⠠قيقة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>⠠قيقة</td>
<td>⠠قيقة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>⠠قيقة</td>
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<td>⠛قيقة</td>
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<td>⠠حقيقة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunctio</td>
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<td>⠠حقيقة</td>
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<tr>
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<td>⠠حقيقة</td>
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<tr>
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<td>⠠حادثة</td>
<td>⠠حادثة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cauda Draconis</td>
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<td>⠠حادثة</td>
<td>⠠حادثة</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via</td>
<td>⠛حادثة</td>
<td>⠠حادثة</td>
<td>⠠حادثة</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Example glyphs as given by the AlphabetGenii and NI Occult Symbols fonts, alongside proposed representative glyphs.

7 Existing characters

As noted in the footnote on page 2 some of the existing Tai Xuan Jing Symbols could be used as substitutes for the geomantic figures, but as a whole they are not suitable for this purpose. Confusable characters could include much of the Braille block (depending on the font), as most of the characters are similar to two different Braille patterns. Some examples are shown in Table 2.

References


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codepoint</th>
<th>Glyph</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Geomantic Name</th>
<th>Figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
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<td>…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Some potential confusables.
Figure 2: This manuscript by Rabbi Yitzchak Kaduri (dated 1973) includes records of geomantic divinations below many entries. Image from @incunabula on Twitter, used with permission.
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Figure 3: Page from the *Kitāb al-nujūm* (Book of Stars), published some time between 1700–1800. Image from the Library of Congress.
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Figure 4: Manuscript T-S K1.12 from the Cairo Genizah shows geomantic figures in running text (Hebrew & Judaeo-Arabic). Image from Cambridge University Library.
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Figure 6: A page from *Mīṣdāq al-raml* (Persian, 1886) showing geomantic figures in running text. Image from the Library of Congress.
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Figure 7: Manuscript T-S Kl.7 from the Cairo Genizah shows figures in two different styles, 'dotted' and 'stroked', adjacent to text discussing them (Hebrew). Image from Cambridge University Library.
Figure 8: The same diagram from two different editions of Robert Turner’s translation of Agrippa’s fourth book of De Occulta Philosophia (1655 & 1665). Here the geomantic figures are presented on an equal standing to the alchemical-planetary and zodiac symbols. (The later edition has an error in the lunar figure.)
Figure 9: Geomantic figures assembled out of asterisks, *La geomance du Seigneur Chriftofe
de Cattan, gentilhomme Geneuois* (French, 1558). Image from [Internet Archive](https://archive.org).
Figure 10: Geomantic figures assembled out of the letter ‘o’, second edition of Robert Fludd’s Fasciculus Geomanticus (Latin, 1687). Image from Internet Archive.
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Figure 11: Numbers used to represent geomantic figures, La geomancie et nomancie des anciens (French, 1734). Image from Internet Archive.

Figure 12: Geomantic figures on a board from EKPA divination school, Benin. Image © 2017 Carsten ten Brink, used under Creative Commons license.
Figure 13: Divinatory device made in Syria (1241–2). Image © The Trustees of the British Museum, used under ©The Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 14: A geomantic figure (Amissio) in the Kitāb al-Bulhān (Book of Wonders, c. 1390). Image from Internet Archive.
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(a) Twitter user @gldrdragon uses U+2022 BULLET and U+007C VERTICAL LINE to construct geomantic figures.

(b) Twitter user @edwardW2 uses Unicode characters from the Mathematical Operators block to approximate geomantic figures.

Figure 15: People trying to work around the lack of geomantic figures in Unicode.
Figure 16: A website author **valiantly attempts** to use U+002A ASTERISK to construct their figures, but they are thwarted by their website publishing software, which turns some lines into bulleted lists.
Figure 18: Variations on the geomantic figures, from Agrippa’s *De Occulta Philosophia* book 3 (published 1533).
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Figure 19: Variations on the geomantic figures, from Francis Barrett's *The Magus, or Celestial Intelligencer* (published 1801).
Figure 20: Cards and instructions from *The Oraculum, or Futurity's Mirror* (c. 1825), showing rare horizontal presentation of figures. Images from the Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia.
## A. Administrative

1. **Title:** Geomantic Figures  
2. **Requester's name:** George Pollard <porges@porg.es>  
3. **Requester type:** Individual Contribution  
4. **Submission date:** 2023-09-04  
5. **Requester's reference:**  
6. **Choose one of the following:**
   - *This is a complete proposal:* Yes
   - *(or)* More information will be provided later:

## B. Technical – General

1. **Choose one of the following:**
   - a. This proposal is for a new script (set of characters): No  
   - b. The proposal is for addition of character(s) to an existing block:  
     - Name of the existing block: Miscellaneous Symbols Supplement (U+1CEC0–U+1CEFF)  
   - **Number of characters in proposal:** 16

2. **Proposed category (select one from below - see section 2.2 of P&P document):**
   - A-Contemporary
   - B.1-Specialized (small collection)
   - X
   - B.2-Specialized (large collection)
   - C-Major extinct
   - D-Attested extinct
   - E-Minor extinct
   - F-Archaic Hieroglyphic or Ideographic
   - G-Obscure or questionable usage symbols

3. **Is a repertoire including character names provided?** Yes
   - a. If YES, are the names in accordance with the “character naming guidelines” in Annex L of P&P document? Yes
   - b. Are the character shapes attached in a legible form suitable for review? Yes

4. **Fonts related:**
   - a. Who will provide the appropriate computerized font to the Project Editor of 10646 for publishing the standard? Submission Author
   - b. Identify the party granting a license for use of the font by the editors (include address, e-mail, ftp-site, etc.): Submission Author

5. **References:**
   - a. Are references (to other character sets, dictionaries, descriptive texts etc.) provided? Yes
   - b. Are published examples of use (such as samples from newspapers, magazines, or other sources) of proposed characters attached? Yes

6. **Special encoding issues:** Does the proposal address other aspects of character data processing (if applicable) such as input, presentation, sorting, searching, indexing, transliteration etc. (if yes please enclose information)? Yes

## 8. Additional Information:

Submitters are invited to provide any additional information about Properties of the proposed Character(s) or Script that will assist in correct understanding of and correct linguistic processing of the proposed character(s) or script. Examples of such properties are: Casing information, Numeric information, Currency information, Display behaviour information such as line breaks, widths etc., Combining behaviour, Spacing behaviour, Directional behaviour, Default Collation behaviour, relevance in Mark Up contexts, Compatibility equivalence and other Unicode normalization related information. See the Unicode standard at http://www.unicode.org and associated Unicode Technical Reports for information needed for consideration by the Unicode Technical Committee for inclusion in the Unicode Standard.

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### C. Technical - Justification

1. Has this proposal for addition of character(s) been submitted before?  
   - **No**

2. Has contact been made to members of the user community (for example: National Body, user groups of the script or characters, other experts, etc.)?  
   - **No**

3. Information on the user community for the proposed characters (for example: size, demographics, information technology use, or publishing use) is included?  
   - **Yes**  
   - Reference: Enclosed

4. The context of use for the proposed characters (type of use; common or rare)  
   - **Yes**  
   - Reference: Enclosed

5. Are the proposed characters in current use by the user community?  
   - **Yes**

6. After giving due considerations to the principles in the P&P document must the proposed characters be entirely in the BMP?  
   - **No**

7. Should the proposed characters be kept together in a contiguous range (rather than being scattered)?  
   - **Yes**

8. Can any of the proposed characters be considered a presentation form of an existing character or character sequence?  
   - **No**

9. Can any of the proposed characters be encoded using a composed character sequence of either existing characters or other proposed characters?  
   - **No**

10. Can any of the proposed character(s) be considered to be similar (in appearance or function) to, or could be confused with, an existing character?  
    - **Yes**  
    - Reference: Enclosed

11. Does the proposal include use of combining characters and/or use of composite sequences?  
    - **No**

12. Does the proposal contain characters with any special properties such as control function or similar semantics?  
    - **No**

13. Does the proposal contain any Ideographic compatibility characters?  
    - **No**

   If YES, are the equivalent corresponding unified ideographic characters identified?  
   - **Yes**