

sation of light from the *depths* of the star-filled *space of heaven* leads us back, by means of a chain of ideas, through myriads of centuries into the *depths of antiquity*. Although the impression of light which streams of falling stars, exploding aërolite fire-balls, or similar fire-meteors give, may be of an entirely different nature; although they may not take fire until they enter the Earth's atmosphere, still the falling aërolites present the solitary instance of a *material* connection with something *which is foreign to our planet*. We are astonished "at being able to touch, weigh, and chemically decompose metallic and earthy masses which belong to the outer world, to celestial space," to find in them the minerals of our native earth, making it probable, as the great Newton conjectured, that the materials which belonged to one group of cosmical bodies are for the most part the same.*

For the knowledge of the most ancient falls of aërolites which are determined with chronological accuracy, we are indebted to the industry of the all-registering Chinese. Such reports reach back to the year 644 before our era; therefore to the time of Tyrtæus and the second Messenian war of the Spartans, 179 years before the fall of the enormous meteoric mass near Ægos Potamos. Edward Biot has found in Matuan-lin, which contains extracts from the astronomical section of the most ancient annals of the empire, sixteen falls of aërolites for the epoch from the middle of the seventh century before Christ up to 333 years after Christ, while the Greek and Roman authors mention only four such phenomena during the same space of time.

It is remarkable that the Ionian school, in accordance with our present opinions, early assumed the *cosmical* origin of meteoric stones. The impression which such a magnificent phenomenon as that of Ægos Potamos (at a point which became still more celebrated sixty-two years afterward by the conclusion of the Peloponnesian war by the victory of Lysander over the Athenians), made upon all the Hellenic races, must have exerted a decisive and not sufficiently regarded influence upon the direction and development of the Ionian *physiology*.† Anaxagoras of Clazomena was at the mature age of thirty two years when that event of nature took place. According to him, the stars are masses torn away from the

* *Cosmos*, vol. i., p. 132.

† See the opinions of the Greeks as to the falls of meteoric stones, in *Cosmos*, vol. i., p. 133; vol. ii., p. 309, note *.