

Horoscopes and Public Spheres



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Gustavo Benavides and Kocku von Stuckrad

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Horoscopes and Public Spheres

Essays on the History of Astrology

Edited by
Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin, and
Kocku von Stuckrad

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Introduction: Horoscopes and History

GÜNTHER OESTMANN, H. DARREL RUTKIN, and KOCKU VON STUCKRAD

1. “The Study of Wretched Subjects”

“A savoir, qu’on ne perd pas son temps en recherchant à quoi d’autres ont perdu le leur”—with these words Auguste Bouché-Leclercq (1842–1924) justified his pioneering monograph on the history of Greek astrology (Bouché-Leclercq 1899, ix). For a classical scholar of his time, astrological sources were obviously somewhat offensive. In the nineteenth century only a very few scholars called for an unprejudiced assessment, such as the mathematician and historian of science, Siegmund Günther (1848–1923). He argued for thorough research into the history of astrology and astronomy as part of a general cultural history already in 1876 (Günther 1876a, 124 and 128; 1876b, 306). Astrology, left behind by modern astronomy and astrophysics, was generally looked upon condescendingly as a curious aberration of the human mind undeserving of serious consideration. But only a short time later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was notable progress. Aby Warburg’s (1866–1929) legendary 1912 lecture on the fresco cycle in the Palazzo Schifanoia and the pictorial tradition of its astrological motifs was a milestone (Warburg 1998ff.; see Bertozzi 1985). With his study *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten* (1920, see Warburg 1999), Aby Warburg broke new ground for a serious assessment of the role of astrological iconography in the Renaissance, which he interpreted as a conscious revival of ancient paganism. Subsequently other Warburg scholars, notably Ernst Cassirer and Eugenio Garin, paved the way for a fuller understanding of astrology in Renaissance culture (Cassirer 1964 [1927]; Garin 1983 [1976]).

Ancient astrology saw similar progress. Franz Cumont (1868–1947) and Franz Boll (1867–1923) systematically edited the corpus of Greek astrological texts (*Corpus codicum astrologorum Graecorum*) during the first half of the twentieth century (Cumont et al. 1898–1953). A classical philologist, Boll devoted his research activities almost exclusively to the history of astrology. The same is true for Wilhelm Gundel and his son, Hans Georg (see particularly Gundel and Gundel 1966). And for the history of science, Lynn

Thorndike (1882–1965) laid new textual and bibliographic foundations with his encyclopedic *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (1923–1958), which surveyed no less than seventeen centuries. Thorndike unearthed a great wealth of original sources—mainly in manuscripts—that were hitherto neglected or completely unknown. Nevertheless, historians of science (including Thorndike) often had trouble accurately interpreting and assessing astrological evidence, which, in 1951, George Sarton (1884–1956) universally dismissed as “superstitious flotsam of the Near East.” This remark provoked Otto Neugebauer’s (1889–1990) famous reply, “The Study of Wretched Subjects,” in which he emphasized the importance of astrological concepts for Hellenistic and Arabic astronomy, and the fact that astrological sources provided crucial evidence for reconstructing (inter alia) the transmission of ancient astronomy to India (Neugebauer 1951).

We should no longer need excuses or apologies. The history of astrology as an important element of western science and culture has received much scholarly attention in recent decades, some of the highest quality. Nevertheless, scholars writing on astrology today still encounter numerous problems and prejudices. The reasons are manifold, but two elements stand out as particularly important from an analytical point of view: problems of *ontology* (concerning astrology’s ontological status) and strategies of ‘*othering*.’ As far as ontological issues are concerned, historians of astrology are asked time and again, “do you believe in these things?,” a question with which historians of alchemy, mathematics, or Christianity are not usually confronted. Although the personal opinions of historians of astrology are not unimportant—as they might influence historical interpretations—the ontological status of the planets and their presumed influence and meaning, as well as whether astrology actually ‘works,’ are not directly addressed in historiographical research.¹ Historically meaningful and interesting are questions such as: Why and how have people used astrological methods and assumptions to interpret the past, present, and future? How and why do normative views about astrology change over time?

On a deeper level of analysis, the question of astrology’s ontological status reveals a strategy of ‘othering’ and a discourse of inclusion and exclusion that has had significant impact on the academic study of astrology. While astronomy and astrology had both been part of the canon of legitimate bodies of knowledge (*artes liberales*) for centuries, epistemological and disciplinary transformations (reconfigurations) associated with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Enlightenment encouraged a dismissive attitude that distinguished legitimate from illegitimate knowledge in different ways than they had previously been distinguished, framing the debate polemically in

1

This misunderstanding is a characteristic of battles between ‘believers’ and ‘non-believers’ of astrology that are fought out on the fields of social scientific research in particular; see von Stuckrad 2003b, 357–368.

terms of (e.g.) ‘science’ vs. ‘pseudo-science’ and ‘rationality’ vs. ‘superstition.’ These terms, which became instruments of analysis in subsequent academic disciplines, reflect the socio-professional identities and conceptual perspectives of ‘modern’ people who view themselves as progressive, rational, and enlightened, against which the ‘other’ was constructed as a necessary counterpart. In the wake of the ‘cultural turn’ in the humanities, however, scholars have turned their critical attentions toward analyzing and articulating the strategies of distancing that underlie these processes of identity formation. For example, Charles Zika argues that, with the help of such scholarly models of interpretation, Europe exorcised her demons to the margins of power, subsequently endeavoring to ensure their distance: “We exorcise them [the demons] to the geographical, cultural and chronological margins—to the underdeveloped, the poor, the disadvantaged, the colonized; to the primitive, the savage, the uncivilised; to the medieval imaginary of magic and mysticism and dark age barbarism” (Zika 2003, 4). Martin Pott analyzes the construction of ‘superstition’ with reference to the Enlightenment movement that was at the same time a “battle community” (*Kampfge-meinschaft*).²

When approached from contemporary critical perspectives, the impact of these processes becomes visible: the discourses of inclusion and exclusion that fostered identities of ‘modernity’ and ‘science’ during the last two centuries have contributed to distorting the scholarly understanding of astrology and other ‘wretched subjects’ (see also von Stuckrad 2000, 55-68). In a discourse of power, not only the themes but the scholars engaged with them have been marginalized and ‘distanced,’ tinged, as it were, with their subject’s lunacy. The production of scholarly historical knowledge is by no means an innocent or neutral endeavor.³ Consequently, every serious academic study of astrology has to include in its historical analysis an element of reflection that is aware of the precarious—often polemical—status of its instruments of analysis. Instead of fixating on underlying ontological commitments in favor of or against astrological truth claims, discourse analysis

2 “Stärker als andere Bewegungen der Kulturgeschichte ist die Aufklärung zugleich auch eine Kampfgemeinschaft, die ihre Geschlossenheit nicht zuletzt durch bestimmte Feindbilder gewinnt” (Pott 1992, 2).

3 This was noted by Paul Feyerabend in his critique of the “Statement of 186 Leading Scientists” against astrology (1975), including eighteen Nobel Prize winners. “The learned gentlemen have strong convictions, they use their authority to spread these convictions (why 186 signatures if one has arguments?), they know a few phrases which sound like arguments, but they certainly do not know what they are talking about” (Feyerabend 1978, 91). To be sure, Feyerabend did not intend his critique as a defense of modern astrology (nor do we thus intend these essays, although individual authors personally may): “It is interesting to see how closely both parties approach each other in ignorance, conceit and the wish for easy power over minds” (ibid., 96).

addresses the negotiation of identities that these competing statements reflect.⁴

2. The Status of Astrology in European Culture

The discourses of inclusion and exclusion that accompany processes of modern identity formation have also affected the way scholars describe the status of astrology in western cultural history. Besides labels such as ‘pseudo-science’ or ‘superstition,’ astrology has often been called an ‘occult science.’ This term seems to have originated in the sixteenth century (Secret 1988, 7), along with notions of *occulta philosophia*. ‘Occult,’ in this context, refers to hidden or secret powers that inform a substantial part of the disciplines lumped together under the rubric ‘occult sciences’—notably astrology, alchemy, and (natural) magic.⁵ Twentieth-century scholars turned this rubric from an emic (an “insider’s”) into an etic (an “outsider’s”) category, indicating a ‘unity’ of these various disciplines. While Keith Thomas (1971, 631f.) believed that astrology formed the basis of the occult sciences—and that consequently the ‘decline’ of astrology would inevitably lead to the decline of magic and alchemy—Brian Vickers (1988, 286) encouraged this tendency by arguing that all ‘occult sciences’ share a common “mentality” that is clearly distinguished from a rational ‘scientific’ mentality (see also Vickers 1984).

Such a distinction is problematic for several reasons. First, although these disciplines overlap in varied and complex ways, all of them have distinct histories with quite different and complex, multiply branching and mutually interacting trajectories. “Even during the heyday of Renaissance neoplatonism, astrology and alchemy lived independent lives, despite the vast inkwells devoted to the rhetorical embellishment of occult philosophy” (Newman and Grafton 2001, 26; see the whole passage pp. 18-27). Second, there are other disciplines and practices that had direct and longstanding links to astrology, notably, mathematics, philosophy (natural and moral), medicine, historiography, theology, and politics. Configuring astrology with the other so-called ‘occult sciences’ as a first interpretive move (consciously or unconsciously) tends strongly to distort our understanding of its relationship with these other (and to many scholars more legitimate) areas of knowledge. Third, the analytical notion of ‘hidden powers’ continues to remain important within the ‘legitimate sciences’ from the ‘scientific revolution’ to the present. One could even argue that contemporary science, from quantum mechanics to

4 On the discursive implications of self-reflection, which has to be applied recursively, see von Stuckrad 2003a.

5 In an influential work, Wayne Shumaker (1972) also adds witchcraft to this mélange.

string theory, is still trying to understand invisible powers that are difficult or impossible to apprehend and/or demonstrate directly.⁶

As Wouter J. Hanegraaff notes:

[I]n a context that insisted on science as a public and demonstrable rather than secret and mysterious knowledge, the very notion of “science” came to be seen as incompatible *ex principio* with anything called “occult”. As a result, any usage of the term “occult science(s)” henceforth implied a conscious and intentional polemic against mainstream or establishment science. Such polemics are typical of occultism in all its forms. (Hanegraaff 2005, 887)

Hence, relating astrology closely to magic or other ‘occult sciences’ is a quite modern configuration, reflecting again a discourse of identity formation through strategies of distancing. Against this, some scholars have recently pointed out that astrology is more accurately configured with mathematics, natural philosophy, and medicine (Rutkin 2002; see also Monica Azzolini’s contribution to the present volume), and that ‘esoteric discourse’ transgresses the boundaries between science, theology, and other cultural systems of knowledge (von Stuckrad 2004, 100-159).

3. Horoscopes and Public Spheres

Despite these difficulties, the scholarly study of the history of astrology has taken enormous strides during the last century. Scholars have become increasingly aware that “[t]rying to understand the society and culture of early modern Europe without taking astrology into account is exactly as plausible as trying to understand modern society without examining the influence of economics and psychoanalysis” (Newman and Grafton 2001, 14). A similar case can be made for the ancient, medieval, and modern eras. Perhaps surprisingly, however, the particular role of horoscopes in public and private discourse has only rarely been explicitly addressed by historians.⁷ The present volume intends to cast new light on this issue, combining historical case studies and methodological reflections. Although every author of this volume shares the opinion that astrology is a significant feature of western cultural history, the fourteen chapters reflect a variety of approaches and perspectives,

6 We do not mean, of course, to equate quantum mechanics and astrology, as Landscheidt 1994 tried to do. Scientific knowledge in physics is demonstrable and open to falsification, which is not the case in any obvious way with astrological knowledge, efforts to the contrary from John Goad to Michel Gauquelin notwithstanding. We refer here only to the fact that modern physics operates with ‘hidden powers’ such as quarks or “strings” that are necessary assumptions of theory, but are invisible and only indirectly demonstrable.

7 Notable exceptions are North 1986 and Holden 1996; see also various essays in Nauta and Vanderjagt 1999.

ranging from in-depth philological analysis to cultural criticism. Indeed, the editors themselves represent three different but complementary approaches. We believe that a multidisciplinary approach is more beneficial than problematic, however, revealing as it does both the richness of the topics addressed and the range of roles astrology played in western culture. In this light, some preliminary remarks will be useful to help orient the reader.

As the title *Horoscopes and Public Spheres* indicates, this volume approaches astrology as a key element of public discourse. Such an approach is not as self-evident as it might seem. It responds to recent developments in the academic study of religion that abandon older concepts of 'religion' as 'belief' and 'inner states of mind' in favor of 'religion' as a communicational, public, and processual positioning (see Kippenberg and von Stuckrad 2003). With regard to astrology in general, and horoscopes in particular, this leads to new questions: Although the analysis of concrete astrological sources in precise historical contexts remains fundamental, these analyses are carried out not only for their own sake, but also to gain accurate access to the *functions* and *roles* astrology played in a given cultural context. The communicative aspect of horoscopes, their public presentation, and the discourses of identity that attach to them are given greater emphasis.

On a theoretical level, the general topic "Horoscopes and Public Spheres" has at least four different and overlapping dimensions: *Horoscopes as historical sources* addresses the question of how the study of nativities can enrich historical research. Horoscopes can be regarded as a highly specialized genre of historical narrative that needs to be applied by historians in different ways than other source material (see Oestmann 2004, 16-29). How can horoscopes be scrutinized in order to understand and reconstruct historical events? In addition, the importance of horoscopes for the history of mathematics, medicine, and other modes of natural knowledge is at issue here. Moreover, *horoscopes as astronomical sources* refers (inter alia) to the astronomical parameters which underlie nativities. Any astrological interpretation relies on astronomical data, from which certain techniques for predicting (e.g.) the development of the native and future events have been derived. How are these parameters deduced and interpreted, and how are they employed in specific astrological techniques and calculations? *Horoscopes as rhetorical devices* considers the role of horoscopes in political and public discourse. Publishing imperial nativities and publically debating the horoscopes of religious leaders were two ways representatives of social elites used horoscopes to claim superiority over political and religious opponents. Likewise, annual prognostications published in almanacs were often used on both sides of political power struggles (see, e.g., Curry 1989). Finally, *horoscopes and biographical narrative* is closely related to the other approaches but stresses the role of horoscopes for constructing coherent and meaningful individual biographies. From the fifteenth through the twentieth century, nativities have been

used as powerful means for biographical (and medical) ‘emplotment’ and identity formation.

The present volume aims to explore the role of horoscopes in historical research and to apply these considerations to concrete case studies in different cultural contexts. The contributions cover a broad period of time—from classical antiquity through the nineteenth century. *Part I* engages astrology’s eminence in Roman antiquity. Nativities of high-ranking individuals—particularly the emperor—played a crucial role in political and religious discourses. In their respective contributions, W. Hübner, J.-H. Abry, and St. Heilen focus on the rhetorics involved in interpreting imperial nativities. At the same time, they demonstrate how important astrological sources can be for gaining new insights into significant episodes in ancient history. N. Campion then casts an interesting (perhaps controversial) light on Babylonian astrology’s influence on Christianity’s quarrel with paganism. Taking the coronation horoscopes of the rebel pagan emperors Basiliscus and Leontius as his point of departure, Campion argues for a surviving tradition of Babylonian astrological practice, linked to astral religion, that flourished within a Neoplatonic philosophical context in the fifth century CE.

In *part II*, four chapters address the influence of astrological interpretive techniques in medieval Islamic and Jewish discourses. While D. Pingree outlines the importance of *Māshā’allāh* as a link connecting eastern and western astrological traditions, E. Orthmann and A. Caiozzo break new ground for understanding the dynamics of astrological argumentation in medieval Muslim public spheres, as well as the cosmological visions that astrology inspired and enhanced. J. Rodríguez-Arribas then demonstrates that important Jewish authors of the Middle Ages interpreted biblical chronology in terms of mundane astrology, thus indicating that biblical narrative and scientific exploration were seen as mutually informative and complementary means of constructing a coherent Jewish identity.

Part III investigates various aspects of horoscopic astrology in early modern Europe. Focusing on Johannes Kepler, Galileo Galilei, and Francis Bacon, H. D. Rutkin provides an integrated portrait of various uses horoscopes had in Renaissance culture, indicating both technical aspects and socio-political contexts. M. Azzolini explores the strong bonds between astrology and medicine in the Renaissance and, in particular, the political dimensions of courtly medical practice. St. vanden Broecke analyzes the place of evidence and conjecture in Girolamo Cardano’s horoscope collection, and thus offers a fresh approach to practical and social aspects of early modern astrological interpretation. Both he and Azzolini insightfully discuss the medical theory of critical days. K. von Stuckrad also takes Cardano as his point of departure, but now examines literary and rhetorical functions of horoscope interpretation in autobiographical narrative from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. Finally, G. Oestmann describes J. W. A.

Pfaff's remarkable career in German Romanticism and the changing attitudes toward astrology in nineteenth-century scholarly debate.

The volume concludes with P. Curry's theoretical reflections on the historiography of astrology. Even if some of his positions—particularly the claim that experiencing “the truth of astrology in action” is a precondition of good historiography—will perhaps provoke controversy, Curry's considerations remind us once again of the many complex discursive problems that challenge and inspire the academic study of astrology.

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Part I

Horoscopes and the Public Sphere in Antiquity

Sulla's Horoscope?

(Firm. math. 6,31,1)

WOLFGANG HÜBNER

Among the numerous horoscopes transmitted from antiquity, only a few tell us the proper name of the intended person. It was forbidden, of course, to publish the nativity of an emperor,¹ but voluntary self-restraint protected the privacy of individuals as well. If we disregard the horoscope cast for Antiochos of Commagene, which was probably not a birth horoscope, but a coronation chart,² there remain only a few individuals whose horoscopes were published with their proper name, as that of Manetho in the *sphragis* of his didactic poem,³ that of the orator Aelius Aristides in a dream of the fourth sacred speech,⁴ that of Hephaestio as an example in his astrological manual,⁵ and that of Proclus published in the *Vita* by his pupil Marinus.⁶

Because most horoscopes in the astrological manuals have been transmitted anonymously, modern *curiositas* often tried to find out which individual might be hidden under the anonymous data. In earlier times the tables established by Paul Victor Neugebauer (Neugebauer 1912) or Bryant Tuckerman (Tuckerman 1964) rendered possible the dating of horoscopes. In

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- 1 Firm. math. 2,30,4: *cave ne quando de statu rei publicae vel de vita Romani imperatoris aliquid interroganti respondeas* eqs.
 - 2 Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1959, 14-16. Dörner and Goell 1963, 65-68 defend the old date. Dörrie 1964, 202-207 assumes an apotheosis without precise dating. See also Radke 1972, 259f. It was ultimately dated to 14 July 109 BCE by Crijns 2002, 97-99, but see Heilen, to be published.
 - 3 Maneth. 6(3),738-750 = Horosc. L 80 in Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1959, 92 (L signifies: transmitted in literature; the following number indicates the year of birth as far as is known).
 - 4 Ael. Arist. 50,57f. = Horosc. L 117,X in Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1959, 113f., the date calculated by Neugebauer (8 October) has been corrected to 26 November 117 by Behr 1981, 438; cf. the detailed discussion in Id. 1994, 1141-1151.
 - 5 Heph. 2,1,32-34, 2,2,22-27, 2,11,6-6, especially 2,2,23 ἐγὼ ἐτέχθην; on this see Pingree 1973 I, V and Horosc. L 380 in Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1959, 131-135.
 - 6 Marinus, Πρώτος ἢ περὶ εὐδαιμονίας = Horosc. L 412 in Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1959, 135f.; a new calculation has been proposed by Jones 1999; see also Saffrey and Segonds 2001, appendix 185-201: "L'horoscope de Proclus."

1894, Theodor Mommsen identified the owner of the horoscope transmitted in Latin by Firmicus Maternus as an example of *antiscia* with the Roman senator Ceionius Rufius Albinus; despite other proposals, this identification still prevails.⁷ Then, the first volume of the *Catalogus codicum astrologorum Graecorum* (CCAG) perpetuated another example that Wilhelm Kroll and Paul Stroobant in 1903 tried to attribute to Iulianus of Laodicea⁸ (but this remains doubtful.⁹ The same Wilhelm Kroll acknowledged that the first of the three horoscopes cast by Antigonos of Nicaea and published in the same year in volume VI of the *Catalogus* must belong to the emperor Hadrian.¹⁰ Armand Delatte and Paul Stroobant in 1923 attributed a horoscope given by Rhetorius for 440 CE and published in volume VIII 4 (1922) of the *Catalogus* to the grammarian and politician Pamphilius.¹¹

In recent years, this task has been facilitated enormously by computer programs like “Galiastro,” and a new kind of horoscope-hunting arose (as comet-hunting in former years). At least four scholars conjectured independently that the horoscope transmitted by Vettius Valens for the year 37 CE must concern Nero;¹² James Herschel Holden combined two horoscopes given by Paulus Alexandrinus and related them to Kronamon, the addressee of the work (Holden 1989).

7 Firm. math. 2,29,10-20: Mommsen 1894; Neugebauer 1953, 418-420; Barnes 1975, 40-49 (against Giovanni Polara); Bakhouche 2002, 76f. Claimed by Jones et al. 1971 and then by Polara 1973 (II 1-3 [test. 3], cf. also the comments on 1,13-18. 2,32. et al.); Id. 1978 for the poet Publius Optatianus Porphyrius. See also Koch 1931, 183: “Sein Horoskop ist nach unserer bisherigen Kenntnis das einzige literarisch überlieferte und als richtig erkannte einer historischen Persönlichkeit des römischen Altertums.” Koch dates the horoscope to the night 13–15 March 303.

8 CCAG I (1898), p. 171,2-14. IV (1903), p. 106-109; Cumont and Stroobant 1903.

9 Horosc. L. 497 in Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1959, 152-157.

10 CCAG VI (1903), p. 67-71, variae lectiones CCAG VIII 2 (1911), p. 82-84 = Antigonos von Nikaia in Heph. 2,18 = Horosc. L 76 in Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1959, 90f. The Editio princeps of the whole work written by Hephaestio was published only in 1973–1974 by Pingree. The extended horoscope will be treated in detail by Stephan Heilen.

11 Horosc. L 440 in Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1959, 140f.; Delatte and Stroobant 1923, 58-76. New edition by Pingree 1976, 144-146. Cf. Id. 2001, 9f.

12 Vett. Valens 5,11 = Horosc. L 37 in Neugebauer and van Hoesen 1959, 78f. Reece 1969; Barnes 1976, 76 note 2; Holden 1996, 53-55; Peter 2001, 120 note 128 (cf. 149). From the beginning, Nero’s horoscope was exposed to speculation: Suet. Nero 6,1 *multa et formidulosa multis coniectantibus*. Cardano took it into consideration: Grafton 1999, 161; see also Knappich 1967, 88.

1. The Horoscope

In 1996 James Herschel Holden tried to identify two other nativities transmitted by Firmicus Maternus in his *Mathesis*. The first one opens the final chapter of book 6. Here is the text in his fairly stilted language:¹³

si Saturnus in Libra fuerit constitutus, in finibus scilicet Iovis et in altitudine sua, et in eadem parte horoscopus fuerit inventus, in Ariete vero Venus constituta horoscopum ex occasu diametra radiatione respiciat, Mars vero et Luna aequata partium societate coniuncti in MC [Medio Caelo] sint partiliter collocati, Sol vero et Mercurius in Geminis constituti nonum ab horoscopo locum teneant, Iupiter vero in Aquario positus et stationem faciens quintum geniturae possederit locum, haec genitura potentissimum regni decernit imperium, vel potentis dignitatis decernit insignia.

If Saturn has come into Libra, that is, in the region of Jupiter and in its exaltation, and if the ascendant has been found in the same degree, (if) Venus in Aries aspects the ascendant with her opposite rays (shining) from the setting house, (if) Mars and the moon, conjoined by an equal partnership of degrees, are located in a partile conjunction in the midheaven, (if) the sun and Mercury, dwelling in Gemini, hold the ninth house from the ascendant, (if) Jupiter, situated in Aquarius and being stationary occupies the fifth house of the geniture—this nativity determines an omnipotent dominion of kingship, or determines decorations of mighty honor. (All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.)

The astronomical data are fairly precise.¹⁴ First of all, one must check to see if Mercury and Venus are not too far from the sun. This does not happen, since Mercury is in conjunction with the sun (and thus invisible), and Venus forms a sextile aspect, which distance is possible. Let us bring the astronomical data together into the following list:

- Saturn is in Libra in Jupiter's district, which, according to the most current system (named 'Egyptian') extended from Libra 15° to 22°. It is in it's exaltation, that is, Libra 21°, which is the ascending degree as well.
- Jupiter is stationary in Aquarius, in the fifth house, the ἐπαναφορά of the lower culmination.
- Mars, together with the moon, occupies the midheaven precisely, which must be Cancer.

13 Firm. math. 6,31,1 See Holden 1996, 73. On p. 74 follows a calculation of the data given by Firm. math. 6,31,54 with dating to 27–28 September 96 BCE and an assumed identification with "Ptolemy XI. Auletes," born c. 95 BCE. The surname Auletes, however, belongs to the furtherer of the cult of Dionysus, Ptolemy XII. (XIII.) Philopator II., born c. 111/108 BCE; Ptolemy XI. (according to the numbering of Bouché-Leclercq 1903–1907) had the surname Alexandros I. Philometor and was born c. 108 BCE. The next two ruling Lagides, the sons of Ptolemy XII., Ptolemy XIII. Philopator Philadelphos and Ptolemy XIV. Philopator, were born later, i.e. in 61 59 BCE respectively. Hence, a Lagide should be excluded.

14 I am grateful to Stephan Heilen for extensive discussion and valuable suggestions.

- The sun, together with Mercury in Gemini, occupies the ninth house.
- The descending Venus occupies Aries in opposition to the ascending Saturn.

James Herschel Holden has calculated these data for 23 May 139 BCE,¹⁵ taking three rulers into consideration: Ptolemy IX (X) Philometor Soter II (born in 143/2 BCE), Antiochus VIII Epiphanes Philometor Kallinikus Grypus (born in 141 BCE), and finally Sulla (born in 138 BCE). In this article, I want to show that not only the date but many other references make a case for Sulla.

As Otto Neugebauer pointed out, the astrologers generally presupposed an equinox at Aries 10°, ¹⁶ which was approaching, because of the precession of the equinoxes, to Aries 0°, covering one degree in about 72 years. In 140 BCE one has to add some eight degrees in order to arrive at the actual positions.¹⁷ Taking this into consideration, all the data fit for 139 BCE, except Saturn, the farthest and slowest of the planets, which at that time was retrogressing in the final part of Virgo, which leads, after an addition of eight degrees, only to Libra 5°. On the morning of 20 May, however, Jupiter actually became stationary (until 16 September) and just began to go retrograde: see ill. 1, which has been calculated for the latitude of Rome.

15 Holden 1996, 73f. He corrected his initial error “138 BCE” later in a list of errata, disseminated via the internet: “for 23 May 138 B.C. read 23 May 139 B.C.” For the numbering of years, see Ginzler 1914, 182. It seems to be only a strange coincidence that the first expulsion of astrologers from Rome happened in the year 139 BCE: Cramer 1951; id. 1954, 232-248.

16 Neugebauer 1975, II 593-600. One has to include also the positions of the paranatellonta in Manilius, located sometimes at the cardinal points of the year (8°): Hübner 1975, 401-403; id. 1984, 148 note 83 and 182-193.

17 According to the rule dressed by Theo Alexandrinus in his commentary on Ptolemy’s Πράξεις καὶ κανόνες 12 (p. 236f. Tihon), cf. Jones 1999, 343:
 $\lambda_s = \lambda_m + 6^\circ 15' - x/60^\circ$, this is in our horoscope: $\lambda_s = \lambda_m + 6^\circ 15' - -108/60^\circ = \lambda_m + 6^\circ 15' + 1^\circ 48' = \lambda_m + 8^\circ 03'$.

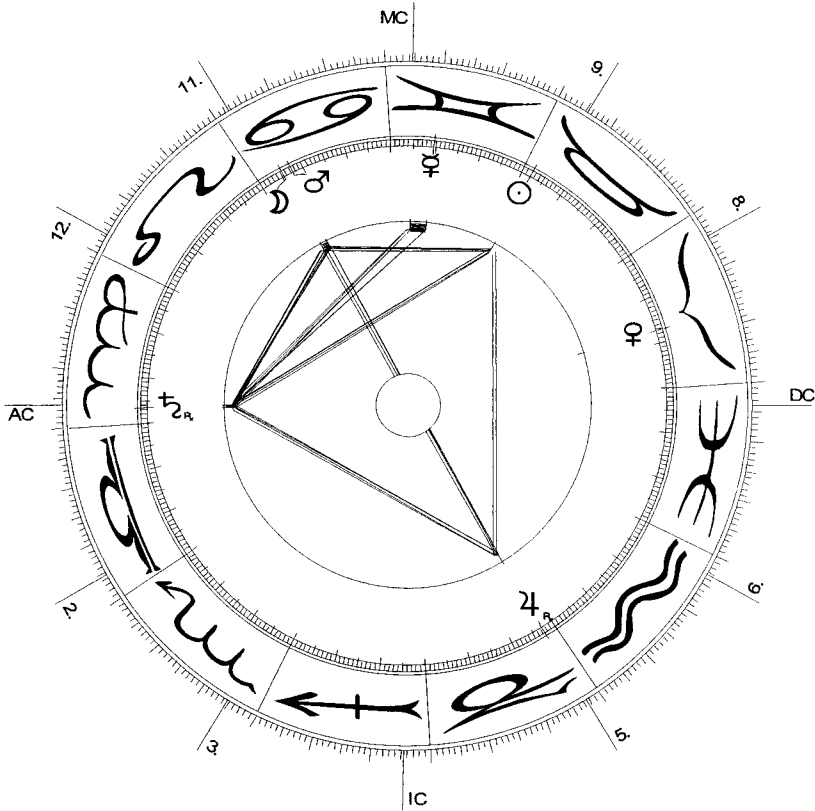


Illustration 1: Constellation for 23 May 139 BCE at 14:00 h

But how should we explain the inconsistency with Saturn, which indeed stayed in Libra, but only at Libra 5° and not in its exaltation at Libra 21°? A discrepancy of 16 degrees remains. A calculation for the following year 138 BCE, however, when Sulla actually was born, in the same period at the beginning of summer (the sun being in Gemini), leads to Libra 9°, that is, after adding eight degrees, to Libra 17°, which is within the district of Jupiter (Libra 15° - 22°) and only a little before Libra 21°, Saturn's exaltation (see ill. 2).

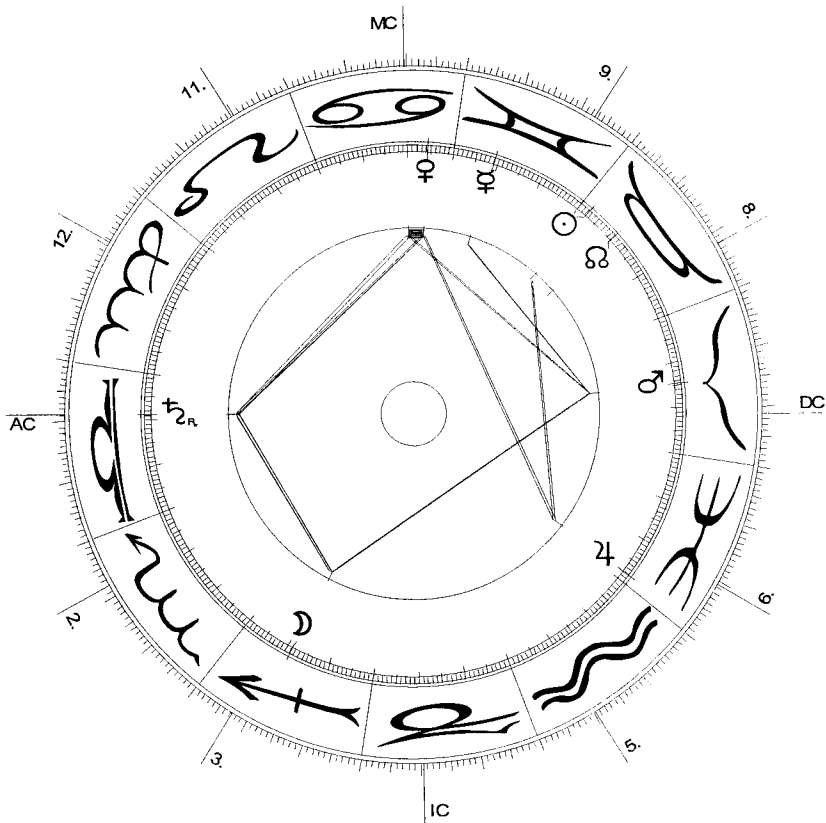


Illustration 2: Constellation for 23 May 138 BCE at 15:06 h

Thus Saturn's position fits with Sulla's year of birth, whereas all the other positions belong to the previous year. Following an appealing suggestion by Stephan Heilen, the astrologer who cast this horoscope could have found Saturn's position for 138 BCE in the ephemerides and conflated it with the positions of the preceding year 139 BCE, either accidentally confusing two columns, or doing so in order to obtain an ideal configuration. Likewise, one must assume a similar confusion of two consecutive years if the horoscope for the year 51 CE is really that for the birth of Domitian,¹⁸ and in a nativity transmitted on papyrus for the year 242 CE.¹⁹

¹⁸ Peter 2001, 134 and Suet. Dom. 1,1.

¹⁹ P. Oxy. XLVI 2398 col. II,9-12; see Baccani 1992, 153: Saturn's position, indicated for the beginning of Virgo, should be at Libra 10°.

Hitherto, Sulla's horoscope has been taken into consideration at least once.²⁰ We know of two glass gems showing Aries, Capricorn, and Libra,²¹ that seem to hint not at Augustus (for whose birth sign Capricorn and Libra are rivals), but at Sulla. I quote Joséphe Henriette Abry:²² "[...] il semblerait que Sylla ait diffusé le Bélier comme signe de sa naissance, accompagné peut-être du Capricorne. Cela supposerait que l'on avait déjà établi pour Sylla une nativité faisant intervenir au moins deux des quatre signes tropiques." Indeed, the tropical signs are decisive in our horoscope, for they occupy the cardinal houses.

2. The Context in Firmicus

Let us now look at the chapter's context. After having systematically considered from books 2 through 6 (chapter 27) all possible planetary positions in the zodiacal signs or houses, Firmicus proceeds to individual nativities that combine manifold different parameters, beginning (in chapter 6,29) with the lowest social class—slaves. Then he considers mythological and historical examples, and exceptionally he quotes some proper names here: Oedipus (§1), Paris Alexander (§11f.), Demosthenes (§22), Homer (§23), Plato (§24), Pindar or Archilochus (§25) and finally Archimedes (§26). These names seem to signify typical characters rather than individuals. This is confirmed by the fact that, in the case of poets, the author leaves the choice between Pindar and Archilochus to the reader. These strange ideal horoscopes deserve their own interpretation.

Chapter 31 begins a new series without any name:²³ *sed sufficienter tibi [...] illustrium virorum decreta narravimus. nunc ad incepti operis ordinem revertamur*. We should note an obvious but implicit opposition between the first example of chapter 29, the slave, and the first example of chapter 31, the greatest ruler: Firmicus begins the first series with the lowest, and the second with the highest social position.

The last example of horoscopes with proper names in chapter 30, that of Archimedes, differs from the others in three respects: first, Archimedes is neither a mythical figure nor a rhetorician or poet, but a mathematician and

20 It may be mentioned that under the rule of Caligula lived an astrologer named Sulla: Suet. Calig. 57,2; see Gundel 1966, 177.

21 Fossing 1929, no. 1596 and Zwierlein-Diehl 1979, no. 811. The fact that the represented Ram is looking back, confirms the zodiacal interpretation: see Hübner 1982, 118 no. 2.242.1.

22 Abry 1988, 110f. with note 28, on suggestion by Ernst Badian.

23 Firm. math. 6,31 pr. In 31,37 he adds another mythical name: the odd anti-hero Thersites, just for fun: *decretum ioculare monstrabo*.

engineer; second, he is the most recent of all (more than a hundred years before the next most recent, Demosthenes); and third, living at Syracuse, he is Firmicus's compatriot, as the author emphasizes (Firm. math. 6,30,26): *hic est Syracusanus Archimedes civis meus*. It cannot be excluded that a horoscope of Archimedes actually existed at that time. Indeed, he lived at Alexandria for some time, which was not only the center of scholarship in general, but of astronomy and astrology as well. Firmicus mentions his famous model of the universe, the armillary sphere (σφαῖρα κικλωτή).²⁴ The last example thus approaches the author in three regards: locally, temporally, and as to his subject matter, cosmologically. We have to wait only one and a half centuries to reach Sulla. For this reason, the opposition between chapters 30 and 31 is weaker than the author declares. The introductory sentence seems rather to announce a matter of greater importance.

This observation will be strengthened if we look at Archimedes's astrological data. The structure of Archimedes's horoscope corresponds in certain details with that of Sulla:

Ascendant, Mars, Venus, Mercury: Aries, in the district of Jupiter
(Aries 1° - 6°)

Jupiter: Libra (house VII)

Sol: Taurus (house II)

Luna: Leo (house V)

Saturn: Sagittarius (house IX)

Likewise, the cardinal houses are equally occupied by tropical signs. The data begin with the axis Aries – Libra that is inverted. In our horoscope Saturn (in Libra) is in opposition to Venus (in Aries); in Archimedes's horoscope Venus (likewise in Aries) is in opposition to Jupiter (in Libra). The ascendant likewise falls in a district of Jupiter, and finally the fifth and ninth houses are emphasized, the latter being governed not by the sun, but by Saturn, qualified sometimes as 'anti-sun'.²⁵

Supposing that the following horoscope belongs to Sulla, the destiny of both men form an impressive contrast: Archimedes, who is designated as a

24 Firm. math. 6,30,26: *cuius ingenio fabricata sphaera lapsum caeli et omnium siderum cursus exemplo divinae imitationis ostendit*. Archimedes also constructed a solid sphere (σφαῖρα στερεά), which the victorious M. Claudius Marcellus captured and set up at Rome in the temple of *Virtus*: Cic. rep. 1,21f.

25 Their exaltations and depressions are opposites, respectively, see Boll 1903, 313f.; id. 1918/19, 342-346; Cumont 1935, 14; Olivieri 1936, 25; Hübner 2002, 40 with note 68. The two stars also have been identified: Diod. 2,30,3; Hyg. astr. 2,42 l. 1323 Viré. 4,18 l. 628 Viré; Ptol. apotel. 2,3,23.

“divine man,”²⁶ was killed by a Roman soldier and was even lamented by the victorious Marcellus during his triumph at Rome.²⁷ Sulla, however, had a cruel character, but nevertheless lived a splendid life even after his abdication.

The contrast between the two men leads us to Firmicus's introduction in the first book, where he quotes Sulla in a long moralistic passage (such διατριβαί are not extraneous to astrological literature, as we can see in Manilius or Vettius Valens) as an example of the sharp opposition between virtue and disappointment, between moral perversity and success. The force of destiny seems to extinguish every kind of morality, which at first is demonstrated by the fortunes of two Greek politicians, Miltiades and Themistocles, who, despite their performances, earned from their citizens nothing but hatred (Firm. math. 1,7,23f.). To these two short Greek examples Firmicus contrasts one long Roman specimen, inverting the relationship: Despite his extraordinary cruelty, Sulla was extremely successful, endowed with the proverbial *felicitas*. This paradox had already acquired a considerable tradition by Firmicus's time.²⁸ Filling no less than fourteen paragraphs with his moralism (Firm. math. 1,7, 25-38), Firmicus seems to follow Sallust's *Historiae*.²⁹ But since he became so prolix, he begged his reader's pardon (Firm. math. 1,7,29): *permitte mihi longiore oratione Syllanorum scelerum replicare discrimina*, and felt the need to excuse himself:³⁰ *nimis longa oratione vim necessitatis fati [...] deflevimus*.

26 Firm. math. 6,30,26: *haec genitura divinum facit artis mechanicae repertorem*. It may be noted that according to Teucrus of Babylon (first century BCE) the beginning of Aries (Aries 3°-5°)—here distinguished by the ascendant, Mars, Venus, and Mercury—is qualified by the technical goddess *Pallas*, in opposition to *Vulcan* with Libra 24°-25°; see Anon. *De stellis fixis*, ed. Hübner 1995, I 1,2 (I 108f. and commentary II 2f.): ἕως μοίρας ε' Ἀθηνᾶ [...] μηχανικούς, Latin translation: *a tertio usque ad quintum oritur dea Pallas: locus iste facit [...] mechanicos*, and I 7,8 (I 118 and commentary II 59); only in Latin: *a vicesimo tertio [sc. gradu Librae] usque ad vicesimum quartum gradum oritur Vulcanus: facit fabros*.

27 Firm. math. 6,30,26: *hunc Marcellus in triumpho victoriae constitutus, inter ovantes militum strepitus et triumphales laureas collocatus, lugubri maerore deflevit*.

28 Cf. also, at the end of a chapter concerning Sulla's extreme cruelty, Val. Max. 9,2,1: *en quibus actis Felicitatis nomen asserendum putavit!* Plin. nat. 7,137: *quibus felicitatis inductus argumentis? [...] O prava interpretatio et futuro tempore infelix!* Paneg. 12(11),20,4; *Sulla Felix [...], felicior, si se parcius vindicasset*; Auson. 419,38 (p. 363 Peiper); *Sulla Felix, qui felicior ante quam vocaretur*. In Greek literature, Appian. civ. 1,492: εὐτυχέστατος δ' ἀνδρῶν ἔς τε τὸ τέλος αὐτὸ καὶ ἔς τὰλλα πάντα, ὥσπερ καὶ ὀνομάζετο. See Erkell 1952, 71-107: “Sulla Felix,” especially 91: “Die Benennung Felix ist unvereinbar mit der Grausamkeit; man stellt moralische Ansprüche an ihren Träger.” On the complexity of Sulla's personality see Gabba 1972. On the *felicitas* in general see below.

29 See “Useneri munusculum” in Maurenbrecher 1893 II, XV-XXI.

30 Firm. math. 1,7,39; cf. § 34: *quia in Syllanicis temporibus immoramur*.

3. Astrological Interpretation

In general, our horoscope is distinguished by the fact that three of the four cardinal houses, occupied by the tropical signs, are visited by a planet—the ascendant by Saturn, the midheaven by Mars and the moon, the descendant by Venus. The tropical signs generally are regarded as ‘political’ signs.³¹ The three remaining planets are in houses that form a favorable triangle to the ascendant, Jupiter being in the fifth and the sun and Mercury in the favorable ninth house, so that every sign of the ideal third triplicity, which consists only of human signs,³² lodges a planet: Gemini, the sun and Mercury (in house IX); Libra, the ascending Saturn; and Aquarius, the stationary Jupiter (in house V).

Let us now examine whether the stellar positions of the horoscope confirm the astrological lore presented by Firmicus in his *Mathesis*, while also paying attention to other astrological writings. The enormous mass of different prognostications with their numerous specifications and modifications increases the chance of finding elsewhere something that fits with Sulla; thus the following observations are far from decisive. Nevertheless, they may provide subsidiary arguments.

3.1. The Generally Favorable Prognostication

If Saturn, escorted by Jupiter (as here in a trine aspect from Aquarius) stays within Libra, this signifies good fortune:³³ *quicumque in genitura Saturnum habuerint in Libra benivolarum stellarum testimoniis adornatum, habebunt maxima subsidia facultatum*. The trine aspect of these two mighty planets farthest from the earth is generally evaluated as favorable. In our horoscope, their cooperation is enhanced by the fact that, on the one hand, Saturn resides in a district of Jupiter, and, on the other, that Jupiter dwells in the night-house of Saturn.³⁴ Firmicus evaluates the trine aspect of Saturn and Jupiter as positive if either both reside in a kindred zodiacal sign or one of them dwells in its own house. The first condition is given here by Saturn in its exaltation. Since at least this condition is fulfilled, the following prognostication may also be taken into consideration: *si itaque Saturnus Iovi fuerit trigonica radiatione coniunctus, [...] sint et ambo in his in quibus gaudent signis, vel unus eorum in domo sua constitutus alium trigonica radiatione respiciat, sintque horoscopo partili radiatione sociati, infinitas copias cum magna feli-*

31 See Hübner 1982, 212-213 no. 4.231 and 4.232.

32 See Hübner 1982, 130-135 no. 3.12.

33 Firm. math. 5,3,29. Cf. Dorotheos 2,14,1 p. 212 Pingree.

34 In the text of Firmicus, a general prognostication for this case has fallen out at the end of chapter 5,4.