

Introduction

Charles Burnett and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum

The essays in this volume of *Culture and Cosmos* arose from a workshop on ancient astrology which was held at the Warburg Institute on 16-17 February, 2007. It was, in part, made possible by a generous donation from the Sophia Trust, for which we are very grateful. The workshop, which was for invited participants, had the aim of bringing together both scholars and practitioners of ancient astrology for a fruitful discussion of the subject from different perspectives. The objective of this meeting was augmentation of knowledge on both sides, in a spirit of goodwill and cooperation. The consensus of the participants was that this objective was achieved.¹ We agreed that the success of the workshop should lead to more meetings of this kind.

¹ Here is a sampling of some of the comments received after the workshop:
‘The Astrology Workshop at the Warburg Institute was a wonderful, very inspiring experience for me, and I should like to thank you again for inviting me to this meeting.’ [Stephan Heilen]
‘It was an historic event and it will be fascinating to see what blooms arise from it – and where.’ [Darby Costello]
‘The workshop was really an amazing and unique opportunity....’ [Gabriele Mancuso]
‘It was more than a success...it was the most stimulating, enjoyable and informative astrological gathering I have ever attended, and has motivated me in so many ways.’ [Deborah Houlding]
‘One of the most interesting conferences I have had the pleasure of attending recently was a workshop organized by Charles Burnett and Dorian Greenbaum at the Warburg Institute.’ [Daryn Lehoux] (This quotation appears in his review of R. Beck, *A Brief History of Ancient Astrology*, in *Classical Review* (2008), vol. 58, no. 1, p. 289.)
‘I want to add my voice to the undoubtedly rising chorus of those who want to thank you and the Warburg for organizing and hosting the weekend workshop. I personally got a tremendous amount out of it....’ [Robert Hand]

In addition to the contributors to this volume of *Culture and Cosmos*, the workshop participants included Crystal Addey, Chantal Allison, Monica Azzolini, Alie Bird, Bernadette Brady, Nicholas Campion, Geoffrey Cornelius, Darby Costello, Patrick Curry, Meira Epstein, Liz Greene, Maggie Hyde, David Juste, Daryn Lehoux, Gabriele Mancuso, Garry Phillipson, Francesca Rochberg, Kocku von Stuckrad, Ronit Yoeli Tlalim, Graeme Tobyn and Angela Voss. David Juste and Kocku von Stuckrad made presentations which are not published here.² The sessions were chaired by Charles Burnett. Alie Bird took notes and wrote a report on the proceedings. We are very grateful to her for allowing us to use some of this report in this introduction.

Presenters were given complete latitude in the choice of subject material, as long as it fell under the broad heading of ancient astrology. Thus we received contributions on Demotic (Egyptian) astrology, Jewish astrology and the transmission of ancient astrological techniques into later periods, as well as several papers which considered some aspect of ancient western (Greco-Roman) astrology. Presentations covered both the philosophy and history of astrology, and its theory and practice. So in this volume we have:

- Micah Ross's survey of Demotic astrological texts, in which he brings up to date the work being done in the field of Demotic astrology, including comparisons between Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts
- Francis Schmidt's discussion of horoscopic prognostications on lifespan from Qumranian texts, in which he takes up the apparent conflict between traditional astrologers' seemingly deterministic pronouncements concerning nativities, and the freedom of choice possessed by the individuals for whom the charts had been drawn actively to pursue merit in the hope of overturning the worst of these pronouncements

² David Juste presented his *Corpus Catalogorum Astrologorum Latinorum*, the first two volumes to be published in the 'Boethius' series by Steiner-Verlag (Munich) in 2008 and 2009 as *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Latinorum*. Vol. I: *Les manuscrits astrologiques latins de la Bayerische Staatsbibliothek de Munich*; Vol. II: *Les manuscrits astrologiques latins de la Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris)*. Von Stuckrad's contribution was drawn from 'Jewish and Christian Astrology in Late Antiquity – A New Approach', *Numen* (2000), vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 1-40; and *Geschichte der Astrologie. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2003) (to be published in English by Equinox Press, London, 2008).

- Stephan Heilen's contribution on speculative horoscopes for the foundation of Rome, which considers the possible astrological philosophies which had informed their original proposers
- Joanna Komorowska's exposition of the different philosophies informing the works of Vettius Valens and Ptolemy, which emphasises the very different backgrounds and approaches they bring to their astrological writings
- Wolfgang Hübner's comparison of the images in Manilius invoked by the co-rising of various constellations with the tropical points of the zodiac, considering their mythology as well as the poetic words Manilius uses to describe them
- Aurelio Pérez Jiménez's essay on the consecration of statues in Hephaestio of Thebes, which draws on texts not only from Hephaestio but also from Julian of Laodicea and Cosmas of Jerusalem in exploring the explicit, implicit and aleatory reasons for the assignment of certain astrological signs and planets to the deities being consecrated as divine images or statues
- Robert Hand's argument that the predominant division of the astrological chart in antiquity was by a one sign = one place system. In this he synthesises his own work and that of others to argue against the assumptions epitomised, e.g., by John North in *Horoscopes and History*
- Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum's article dealing with the way that ancient astrologers calculated the Lots of Fortune and Daemon, their reasons for doing so, and the effect this has on astrological practice
- Susanne Denningmann's contribution to the exegesis of ancient astrological terminology, in which she painstakingly goes through the various definitions associated with the risings and settings of heavenly bodies to arrive at succinct and useful definitions for each of the terms she discusses
- Joseph Crane's demonstration of the harmonic underpinning for the astrological aspects given by Ptolemy in Chapter 14, Book I of the *Tetrabiblos*, drawing on ancient musical theory as laid out in one of Ptolemy's other books, the *Harmonics*
- Giuseppe Bezza's exhaustive survey of the meaning and usage of the Greek term *hairesis* in astrological texts, following its development in Arabic astrology under various guises, including that of *hayyiz*

- and, finally, Deborah Houlding's tracing of the transmission of the Ptolemaic terms, from Ptolemy through to his commentators (such as Hephaestio, an anonymous commentary sometimes ascribed to Proclus and the 'Proclus' paraphrase), and from the manuscript tradition, to early printed texts, to English translations of Ptolemy, to William Lilly and beyond.

When these papers were presented in the workshop (save for that of Pérez Jiménez, who at the last minute was unable to attend), lively discussion followed each presentation. Since many areas of expertise were represented by the participants (ranging from Egyptian and Babylonian divination and astral omens to astrological poetry, Medieval and Renaissance astrology, as well as modern astrology), comparisons were often made between the astrology under discussion and their own areas of specialisation.

This comparative and wide-ranging approach turned out to be a very productive and fertile one. For instance (as Alie Bird reported), Francesca Rochberg responded to Susanne Denningmann's analysis of terms used to describe planetary visibility by confirming that Babylonian astrology had been founded upon visible stellar and planetary phenomena, and had taken particular account of the relative positions of the sun and moon. These cyclical phases, together with those of the fixed stars, had been used from the very earliest astronomical systems right on through to the Middle Ages. During Joseph Crane's presentation, Ficino scholar and musician Angela Voss went to the piano to play us the musical intervals of which Joseph Crane was speaking and make apparent the harmonious and disharmonious relationships of the various chords. Angela Voss reminded the group that Marsilio Ficino had taken up Ptolemy's harmonics but added to them the notion that one could understand a planetary aspect in the same way that one heard and responded to the quality of a musical chord being played. Stephan Heilen agreed with Robert Hand's proposition that, during the first centuries of ancient astrology in which charts were calculated using the sidereal zodiac, the Signs and the Places were treated as equivalents; anything which suggests anything other than 'Sign equals House' can be argued, on that fact alone, to originate in more recent antiquity.

The workshop was an intense, exhausting and ultimately extremely rewarding experience. Though at times there was some tug and pull between scholars and theory, and astrologers and practice, the innate value of this kind of interchange was expressed by Joseph Crane, who

acknowledged the value of the work of scholarship in classical and medieval astrology, without which he would not be able to perform his task, which he saw as making sense of what it was that the ancient astrologers did. He did not object to scholars' preference for astrological theory over practice; instead, he suggested that the advantage of immersion in formal techniques was, for an astrological practitioner such as himself, that it somehow, procedurally, gave rein to intuitive practice. Alie Bird writes, at the conclusion of her report, 'The tensions between theory and practice, between academic scholarship and hands-on experience, are — I would suggest — endemic to astrology. They reflect its peculiar and particular hybridity as a source of knowledge and inspiration. They are precisely what make the subject so worthy of study.'

At the 'square-round' table in the Warburg lecture room (so described by Charles Burnett at the beginning of the workshop), people who shared a common interest in ancient astrological texts gathered together on a clear February day in 2007. As Alie Bird perceptively wrote, the "square-round" table...was to prove an apt image to stand as a symbol for so ground-breaking a session as this, a product of the early twenty-first century initiative to reintegrate self-acknowledged astrologers of a scholarly persuasion into the institutions dedicated to the advancement of formal scholarship from which they had for so long been excluded.'

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