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# Is Astrology a Divinatory System?

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**Liz Greene**

**Abstract.** This paper will consider whether astrology is correctly defined as a divinatory system. It discusses the relationship between astrology and divination according to varying cultural contexts and the ways in which they have been described by historians and individual practitioners within different cultural frameworks.

Any exploration of astrology in relation to divination necessitates some kind of definition of both terms. But this is problematic, since astrology, as Champion points out, 'exists only within a cultural context'.<sup>1</sup> Curry's broad definition of astrology as 'the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated' implies, through the word 'tradition', that a cultural context is necessary to extend the definition any further.<sup>2</sup> Astrology cannot be explained by any single theoretical framework, but must be viewed within a specific religious, philosophical, social and political background and, equally importantly, from the perspective of individual practitioners working within a particular milieu. Alexander Ruperti, an astrologer writing in the post-modern era, observes, 'There is not one Astrology with a capital A. In each epoch, the astrology of the time was a reflection of the kind of order each culture saw in celestial motions, or the kind of relationship the culture formulated between heaven and earth.'<sup>3</sup>

An even greater problem arises in attempting to define divination. Largely through the enduring although perhaps misleading influence of

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1 Champion, Nicholas, 'Introduction' in *Astrology and the Academy*, ed. Nicholas Champion, Patrick Curry and Michael York (Bristol: Cinnabar Books, 2004), p. xxi.

2 Curry, Patrick, 'Astrology' in *The Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, ed. Kelly Boyd (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), pp. 55-57.

3 Ruperti, Alexander, 'Dane Rudhyar: Seed-Man for the New Era' in *The Astrological Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Spring 1986), p. 57.

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Cicero's 1st century BCE work, *De divinatione*, divination has become an inclusive classification used by anthropologists and historians to encompass a wide range of magical, prophetic, prognosticative and ritual techniques, among which astrology is generally included.<sup>4</sup> Increasing scholarly interest in the diversity of divination systems across and within cultures has led Frankfurter, in a paper published in 2005, to note, 'Divination does not, apparently, provoke the same kind of amusement that it did a few decades ago.'<sup>5</sup> But this new recognition of the historical and cultural importance of divination has not resulted in any clear definition of its nature. Even more than astrology, divination changes its face according to its practitioners, its opponents, its historians, and the cultural milieu in which it is practised.

This mutability suggests two possible approaches: to examine the different ways in which both astrology and divination have been described within various cultural contexts, or to impose anachronistic assumptions on very different perspectives and cultural values. Even when researchers are able and willing to explore the different meanings attributed to astrology in different cultures, they do not always apply the same critical methodology to the term divination. For example, Potter observes, 'Pride of place among the various forms of inductive divination available in the Roman world must go to astrology',<sup>6</sup> but he does not define what he means by 'inductive divination', or why astrology belongs in this category. Geneva, describing William Lilly's astrological prognostications for the death of King Charles I, comments, 'It was this form of divination that Lilly followed' – although Lilly himself did not

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4 Cicero, M. Tullius, *De divinatione*, in *On Old Age, On Friendship, On Divination*, trans. W. A. Falconer (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970) [hereafter Cicero, *De div.*]; See, for example, the extensive list of practices considered as divination (including astrology) in Thorndike, Lynn, *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923) [hereafter Thorndike], and, more recently, *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (Leiden: Brill, 2005) [hereafter *Mantikê*].

5 Frankfurter, David, 'Voices, Books and Dreams: The Diversification of Divination Media in Late Antique Egypt' in *Mantikê*, p. 233.

6 Potter, David, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) [hereafter Potter], p. 17.

call his work divination and Geneva does not define her use of the term.<sup>7</sup> Barton describes early Mesopotamian astrology as ‘divination based on the stars,’<sup>8</sup> but does not clarify her use of the word. Johnston, reviewing the history of scholarship in magic and divination, includes lecanomancy (scrying), haruspicy (interpreting animal entrails), and astrology as practices of divination that ‘work by methods that are empirically unverifiable’.<sup>9</sup> Although she explores the intellectual and social dimensions of divination, she gives no indication why astrology should be likened to scrying, other than that both include ‘practices that some would define as irrational’.<sup>10</sup> There are occasional exceptions to this scholarly tendency. Thomas, although demonstrating symptoms of what Graf calls ‘Frazerian evolutionism’, does separate astrology from divination in his hopeful belief that ‘astrology, witchcraft, magical healing, divination, ancient prophecies, ghosts and fairies, are now all rightly disdained by intelligent persons’.<sup>11</sup> An evaluation of the perceptions of those practicing or witnessing what they call divination is likely to provide suggestive themes rather than objective definitions. An exploration of the ways in which astrologers describe their work may equally suggest only a fluid shape. However, Derrida suggests that objectivity is doomed to failure anyway: ‘What is called “objectivity”...imposes itself only within a context which is extremely vast, old, powerfully established, stabilized or rooted in a network of

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7 Geneva, Ann, *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind: William Lilly and the Language of the Stars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) [hereafter Geneva], p. 76; See Lilly, William, *Christian Astrology* (London: John Macock, 1659, reprinted David Cole, 1981) [hereafter Lilly].

8 Barton, Tamsyn, *Ancient Astrology* (London: Routledge, 1994) [hereafter Barton, *Ancient Astrology*], p. 11.

9 Johnston, Sarah Iles, ‘Introduction’ [hereafter Johnston] in *Mantikê*, p. 7.

10 Johnston, p. 7.

11 Graf, Fritz, preface to Eitrem, Samson, ‘Dreams and Divination in Magical Ritual’ in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) [hereafter *Magika Hiera*], p. 176; Thomas, Keith, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971) [hereafter Thomas], p. ix.

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conventions (for instance, those of language) and yet which still remains a context...There is nothing outside context.'<sup>12</sup>

### **Divination according to Cicero**

Morrison begins a discussion on divination with the Romans 'because acquaintance with ancient oracles and divination begins...with Livy, Virgil, and Cicero'.<sup>13</sup> Burkert opens a paper on Oriental and Greco-Roman divination by paraphrasing Cicero.<sup>14</sup> Graf commences his analysis of Anatolian dice oracles by quoting Cicero.<sup>15</sup> *De divinatione* contains both a description of astrology as a form of divination and a lengthy analysis of divination itself. This immensely influential text shaped not only subsequent polemics against astrology, but also the ways in which astrologers have defended themselves: Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, written two centuries after *De divinatione*, contains arguments in favour of astrology specifically worded to counter Cicero's attack.<sup>16</sup> Although still accepted by some as definitive, Cicero's use of the word *divinatio* needs to be viewed both in its cultural context and in terms of his intentions in writing the treatise. His diatribe against divination is directed chiefly at the powerful Stoic school of philosophy, founded by Zeno in the 4th century BCE and increasingly popular among the elite of republican Rome.<sup>17</sup> The purpose of divination, according to the fatalistic Stoic

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12 Derrida, Jacques, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 136.

13 Morrison, J. S., 'The Classical World' in *Oracles and Divination*, ed. M. Loewe and C. Blacker (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, 1981), p. 87.

14 Burkert, Walter, 'Signs, Commands, and Knowledge: Ancient Divination Between Enigma and Epiphany' [hereafter Burkert (2005)] in *Mantikê*, p. 29.

15 Graf, Fritz, 'Rolling the Dice for an Answer' [hereafter Graf, 'Dice'] in *Mantikê*, p. 51.

16 See, for example, Hippolytus of Rome, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, trans. J.H. Macmahon, Book IV.1-7, [www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus.4.html](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus.4.html), downloaded 30.12.05; Ptolemy, Claudius, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. F. E. Robbins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) [hereafter *Tetrabiblos*], Book I.1-2.

perspective, is 'to know in advance the disposition of the gods towards men, the manner in which that disposition is shown and by what means the gods may be propitiated and their threatened ills averted'.<sup>18</sup> The existence of the gods and of divination are interdependent truths, declares Cicero's brother Quintus, the Stoic 'mouthpiece' in *De divinatione*.<sup>19</sup> Goar asserts that the real purpose of Cicero's work is to 'destroy superstition without discarding belief'<sup>20</sup> and to maintain the rites of the official Roman religion (sharply differentiated from certain precepts of Stoicism, which was, after all, a Greek import). Falconer likewise comments that Cicero 'became convinced that the commonly accepted belief in divination was a superstition which "should be torn up by the roots"'.<sup>21</sup> Divination in all its forms (except those sanctioned by the state) is somehow 'foreign' and antithetical to the establishment, and its practitioners are 'outsiders' who, however sincere, are undermining the 'true' religion.

Cicero was not an astrologer, and displays either a limited knowledge of the subject or a deliberate intent to misinform. For example, he states that astrologers (whom he calls 'Chaldeans') 'insist that all persons born at the same time, regardless of the place of birth, are born to the same fate' – although his friend and political ally, the astrologer Nigidius Figulus, could have informed him (since he wrote a book on the subject) that the place of birth was deemed to be influenced by the heavens according to astrological geography.<sup>22</sup> This system allotted particular

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17 Long, A. A. and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Volume 1, p. 508; Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, p. 34.

18 Cicero, *De div.*, Book II.lxiii.130.

19 Cicero, *De div.*, Book I.v.9, p. 233.

20 Goar, Robert J., 'The Purpose of De Divinatione' in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 99 (1968), p. 247-48.

21 Falconer, A., 'Introduction to the *De Divinatione*' in Cicero, *De div.*, p. 216, quoting Book II.lxxii.148.

22 Cicero, *De div.*, Book II.xliv.93; Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, p. 37; Lindsay, Jack, *Origins of Astrology* (London: Frederick Muller, 1971) [hereafter Lindsay], p. 219.

lands and regions of the earth to the planets and zodiacal signs and assigned different characters to each nation and race.<sup>23</sup> Cicero's inclusion of astrology in his list of divinatory practices likewise reflects either ignorance or deliberate misinformation, since it would appear that Greco-Roman astrologers themselves did not consider their work as divination. The 1st century CE astrologer Dorotheus of Sidon, for example, writing a century before Ptolemy formulated his 'natural astrology' in the *Tetrabiblos*, calls his subject 'the science of the stars',<sup>24</sup> and does not use the word divination to describe his work. Willis and Curry consider Cicero's approach to divination a 'rationalized and naturalized definition'.<sup>25</sup> It is also a politically motivated definition. The pervasiveness of Stoicism provoked Cicero to direct his treatise against the hard fatalism of certain branches of this 'foreign' philosophy and its apparent fostering of 'superstitious practices' that threatened the authority of the state religion and the republic that religion supported.

#### **Divination as *mantikê***

One of Cicero's main targets is the 3rd century BCE Stoic philosopher Chrysippus, whose definition of divination is quoted in *De divinatione* as 'the power to see, understand, and explain premonitory signs given to men by the gods.'<sup>26</sup> But Chrysippus wrote in Greek, and there is no Greek equivalent to the Latin term *divinatio*, derived from *divi*, 'the gods'. The Greek term for prophecy or divinely inspired foresight is *mantikê*, and it carries a very different connotation, as Cicero himself acknowledges: according to Plato, *mantikê* is related to *manikê*, meaning 'madness' or 'furor', derived from *mainomai*, 'to rant or rage'.<sup>27</sup> For Plato, prophecy as

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23 Tester, Jim, *A History of Western Astrology* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987), p. 42. Also see *Tetrabiblos*, Book II.3, and Manilius, *Astronomicum*, trans. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), Book IV.807-817.

24 Dorotheus Sidonius, *Carmen Astrologicum*, trans. David Pingree (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1976), Book V.1.1-4.

25 Willis, Roy and Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon* (Oxford: Berg, 2004) [hereafter Willis and Curry], p. 60.

26 Cicero, *De div.*, Book II, lxiii.130.

'heaven-sent madness' is superior to the 'purely human activity of thought' evidenced by other prognosticative practices,<sup>28</sup> thus connoting the chief characteristic of the true diviner: temporary possession by a deity. *Mantikê* has no connection with astrology, unless the individual astrologer is infused by the madness of prophecy. But *mantikê* has a connection with *theos* (god). The Neoplatonist Iamblichus refers to magically invoked prophecy as *to theion mantikês eidos*, sharply differentiated from ordinary human prognosticative techniques, which he calls 'false and deceptive'.<sup>29</sup> Athanassiadi refers to Iamblichos' prophetic ecstasy as 'a stage on the way to mystic union'.<sup>30</sup> Other methods of prediction (including horoscopic astrology) are the result of human science, which can 'at best only make conjectures about the future by using the clues of universal sympathy'.<sup>31</sup> Burkert, exploring the etymology of Greek words derived from *theos*, observes that the Homeric word *theothatos* ('spoken by god') connotes an oracle, and comments that '*theos* refers to certain extraordinary and disquieting experiences, such as a singer astounding by his art, a seer giving striking interpretations of strange phenomena, a Dionysiac ecstatic, or even an epileptic collapsing in convulsions.'<sup>32</sup>

Although Johnston initially refers to astrology as a form of divination, she later observes that diviners experience a state of altered consciousness: ecstasy, possession, or revelatory trance. 'The semiotics

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27 Cicero, *De div.*, Book I.1; Plato, *Phaedrus* in *Collected Dialogues*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) [hereafter *Dialogues*], 244c, p. 491; Potter, p. 10.

28 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 244d in *Dialogues*, p. 491-92.

29 Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, 64.16-17 and 165.2-3, quoted in Shaw, Gregory, *Theurgy and the Soul: the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1995) [hereafter Shaw], p. 122.

30 Athanassiadi, Polymnia, 'Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus' in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 83 (1993) [hereafter Athanassiadi], p. 120.

31 Athanassiadi, p. 116.

32 Burkert, Walter, 'From epiphany to cult statue: early Greek *theos*' in *What Is a God? Studies in the Nature of Greek Divinity*, ed. Alan B. Lloyd (London: Duckworth, 1997) [hereafter Burkert (1997)], p. 17; Burkert (1997), p. 21.



of divination,' she notes, 'unlike those of Hippocratic doctors, or of farmers who predict the weather, or of predators tracking prey, was not acquired through experience or study alone, but was bestowed by the very gods with whom they communicated.'<sup>33</sup> An entirely different cultural context is thus implicit in the idea of *mantikê*, demonstrated by Homeric prophets such as Tiresias who receive their powers directly from the gods and foresee the future in a state of ecstatic trance.<sup>34</sup> *Mantis* (a seer), *prophêtês* (a prophet) and *chrêsmologos* (a speaker and/or interpreter of oracles) are, according to Potter, the most common words in Greek to describe the 'business of divine communication'.<sup>35</sup> *Astrologos* is not on the list. Although it might be argued that this is because horoscopic astrology did not develop fully until the Hellenistic period,<sup>36</sup> Babylonian astrologers could still have provided a model. Poets such as Orpheus might be *manteis*, divinely inspired to express the secrets of the universe through their art, and the gods themselves – especially Apollo – are occasionally described as *manteis*.<sup>37</sup> But the Greek *mantis* is never an astrologer – perhaps because astrologers, even Babylonian ones, were not perceived as possessed by a god.

Divination as *mantikê* presupposes certain conditions. There are gods 'out there' whose intentions – whether capricious or preordained as fate – can, and are meant to, be read in signs and omens. And diviners, whether or not they utilise techniques such as haruspicy to facilitate their prophecies, must be visited or temporarily subsumed by the god, or possess special powers lacking in other humans. The role of diviner also carries with it social and political ramifications allied with these special powers, in particular the threat of revolutionary sentiments opposed to the presiding religious or political authority. Dillery observes, 'One of the recurring features of *manteis* in myth is their opposition to the authority

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33 Johnston, in *Mantikê*, pp. 11-12.

34 Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. E. V. Rieu (London: Guild Publishing, 1987), Book XI.101-174.

35 Potter, p. 11.

36 Lindsay, pp. 47-62.

37 Dillery, John, 'Chresmologues and *Manteis*: Independent Diviners and the Problem of Authority' [hereafter Dillery] in *Mantikê*, pp. 168-169.

of kings.<sup>38</sup> The *mantis* is an independent ‘outsider’ with unusual powers, useful to rulers but always potentially dangerous. Burkert argues that the first independent diviners were itinerant experts, many of them non-Greeks from the Near East.<sup>39</sup> Apparently greed rather than gods inspired some of these itinerant seers: Plato expresses unveiled contempt for the ‘begging priests and soothsayers’ who practice divination for personal gain.<sup>40</sup>

These associations – greed, power, divine favour, political and social independence, and ‘foreignness’ – may all be discerned in Cicero’s carefully phrased attack on divination. Calling astrologers ‘Chaldeans’ implies something alien and foreign. Graf comments on the diviner as ‘an outsider or even a rebel...Diviners, in choosing to be diviners, also chose between ensuring their social respectability and ensuring the charisma they needed to ply their art.’<sup>41</sup> Thomas observes that the diviner ‘was always perched precariously on the brink of social isolation.’<sup>42</sup> The regular persecutions of both diviners and astrologers under the Roman emperors, based on fear of their political influence rather than denial of their efficacy, is well documented by both Barton and Cramer.<sup>43</sup> Dillery emphasises that ‘the independent diviner especially comes into view because of the attempts of political leaders to control the channels of religious authority.’<sup>44</sup> Prophecy, Potter points out, is ‘implicitly connected with power’.<sup>45</sup> Divination, bringing its Greek cultural context

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38 Dillery, p. 172.

39 Burkert, Walter, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 6.

40 Plato, *Republic*, 364b-c, in *Dialogues*, p. 611.

41 Graf, ‘Dice’, in *Mantikê*, p. 20.

42 Thomas, p. 291.

43 Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, pp. 36-57; Cramer, Frederick H., *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Chicago, IL: Ares Publishers, 1954), pp. 233-281.

44 Dillery, p. 184.

45 Potter, p. 3.

into the Roman world, thus implies not only political and social assistance through divinely inspired foreknowledge, but also a potential threat to the established order. In Lucan's poetic work, *De bello civili*, many seers are consulted to interpret the prodigies accompanying Caesar's march on Rome. All are mouthpieces for Lucan's republican political sentiments.<sup>46</sup> Among them is the pro-republican Nigidius Figulus, whom Eusebius later called '*Pythagoricus et Magus*' – in other words, a *mantis*.<sup>47</sup> In Lucan's poem the correct (anti-Caesarian) reading of the omens is not possible through astrology alone, but depends on Nigidius' gift of *mantikê*.

### **Divination as Magic**

Divination is sometimes conflated not only with astrology but also with magic. Cryer comments, 'It requires little argumentation to justify a concern with magic in the context of a discussion of the phenomenon of divination...After all, the phenomenon was assigned to the realm of magic already in antiquity.'<sup>48</sup> Cryer admits that 'magic is notoriously difficult to define',<sup>49</sup> but fails to recognise that divination is, too. Magic and divination do not necessarily have to overlap. For example, the aphrodisiac spell made of threads, dirt and spittle described by Petronius in the *Satyricon*<sup>50</sup> cannot easily be classified as divination. Luck defines magic as 'a technique that aims at imposing the human will on nature or on human beings by using supersensual powers.'<sup>51</sup> He considers the ability to predict the future – an essential element in divination – as a

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46 See Dick, Bernard F., 'The Technique of Prophecy in Lucan' in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 94 (1963) [hereafter Dick].

47 Dick, p. 38; Lindsay, p. 219.

48 Cryer, Frederick H., *Divination in Ancient Israel and its Near Eastern Environment: A Socio-Historical Investigation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) [hereafter Cryer], p. 42.

49 Cryer, p. 42.

50 Petronius, *Satyricon*, 131, quoted in Luck, Georg, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) [hereafter Luck], p. 89.

51 Luck, p. 3.

magical power.<sup>52</sup> He then confuses the issue by stressing that the magical use of *mantikê* is ‘only one form of divination; there are forms (for example, the interpretation of dreams, or astrological forecasts) that do not require – in fact, they preclude – abnormal behaviour.’<sup>53</sup> Thorndike, avoiding any concise definition, describes magic as ‘including all occult arts and sciences, superstitions, and folk-lore’.<sup>54</sup> Under this heading, astrology would be considered a form of magic, as would divination.

Fowden suggests that Hellenistic and Roman magic was ‘designed to harness the unpredictable divine powers that filled the universe’.<sup>55</sup> Obtaining knowledge of the divine realm often involved the extraction of oracles from the gods, and thus divination and magic are allied in many of the Hermetic magical papyri of the 1st to 3rd centuries CE.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, specifically astrological Hermetica such as the *Liber Hermetis* and various fragments included in the *Catalogus Codex Astrologorum Graecorum* do not involve magic and do not equate astrology with divination, although they describe techniques for prognostication.<sup>57</sup> Astrological knowledge could be utilised in magical work, but astrology could also stand alone. In the work of the 9th century Arab astrologer Al-Kindi, whose theory of the ‘rays’ emanating from the stars was influenced by both Aristotle and the Hermetic texts, magic, astrology,

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52 Luck, p. 10.

53 Luck, p. 229.

54 Thorndike, Vol. 1, p. 2.

55 Fowden, Garth, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986) [hereafter Fowden], p. 79.

56 See *Hermetica*, trans. Brian P. Copenhaver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) [hereafter *Hermetica*], pp. xxxii-xl; also see Fowden, pp. 79-87.

57 *Liber Hermetis*, trans. Robert Zoller (Berkeley Springs, WV: Golden Hind Press, 1993); *Catalogus Codex Astrologorum Graecorum*, ed. Franz Cumont, 12 volumes (Brussels: Lamertin, 1898-1953), Frag. 8,1;172ff, Frag. 1; 122-1241, trans. Robert Schmidt in *The Astrological Record of the Early Sages in Greek* (Berkeley Springs, WV: Golden Hind Press, 1995), pp. 7-16.

physics and psychology are interwoven.<sup>58</sup> But Al-Kindi makes a clear distinction between astral magic and astrology itself, which he pursues as a science, ‘observing mathematical method and physical laws’.<sup>59</sup>

The Renaissance saw a resurgence of Hellenistic magic, and in this syncretistic cultural context practitioners moved fluidly between a wide range of techniques and doctrines inspired by the newly rediscovered *Hermetica*.<sup>60</sup> Ficino adopts the Aristotelian/Hermetic theory of a universal cosmic effluence or *spiritus* as well as the idea of cosmic sympathies, applying his knowledge of astrology to magical practices which he considers ‘natural’ since astrological forces ‘could be construed a part of nature’.<sup>61</sup> Ficino had been trained as a physician, and to the end of his life he thought of himself as a healer; the purpose of his ‘astral magic’, both musical and talismanic, is ‘the healing medicine of souls’.<sup>62</sup> Voss conflates Ficino’s astrology with divination and mystical experience, and states that Ficino is a diviner ‘perfecting the techniques and rituals which may lead him to the deeper level of insight required to reap divine gifts’.<sup>63</sup> But Ficino understands astrology in the sense of planetary ‘influences’ and quotes Ptolemy regularly.<sup>64</sup> He does not see

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58 Al-Kindi, *On the Stellar Rays*, trans. Robert Zoller (Berkeley Springs, WV: Golden Hind Press, 1993); *Hermetica*, p. xlvi.

59 Thorndike, Vol. 1, p. 648.

60 Yates, Frances, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964) [hereafter Yates (1964)], pp. 1-9.

61 Walker, D. P., *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) [hereafter Walker], pp. 12-13; Ficino, Marsilio, *The Book of Life*, trans. Charles Boer (Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, 1980) [hereafter Ficino], Book III, Chap. 1, pp. 86-91. Also see Shumaker, Wayne, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972) [hereafter Shumaker], p. 131ff; Shumaker, p. 109.

62 Shumaker, p. 120; Dedicatory letter to Lorenzo de Medici in Ficino, p. 1.

63 Voss, Angela, ‘The Astrology of Marsilio Ficino: Divination or Science?’ in *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Autumn/Winter 2000) [hereafter Voss], p. 40.

astrology itself as either magic or divination; it is the uses to which he puts it that are. And the 'deeper level of insight' which Ficino pursues may be seen as the age-old mystical quest for union with God, rather than divination. In extending the term divination to include not only astrology but the effort to understand the nature of the world (which might be understood as scientific curiosity) and achieve a direct mystical experience (which might be understood as religious aspiration), Voss seems to adopt a type of 'monism', which Willis and Curry describe as comparing 'all things, including values and abstract ideas, to *one* overall master principle'.<sup>65</sup> The 'master principle' in this case is divination, which subsumes multiple areas of human activity that Ficino himself, as well as other Renaissance magi, utilise together but understand as discrete spheres of understanding and experience. For example, Agrippa's great work on magic, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*,<sup>66</sup> indicates that he does not confuse astrology with either divination or magic, although astrology is utilised in his magical practices. He discusses a wide range of divinatory techniques that he considers magical and, following Cicero, he views the Roman practices of *auspicia* and *auguria*, as well as prophecies made in states of madness, as forms of divination.<sup>67</sup> But in the chapters on astrology itself, the word divination, strewn throughout the rest of the work, is not used.<sup>68</sup>

Hanegraaff identifies three Renaissance theories of how magic operates.<sup>69</sup> The doctrine of correspondences postulates that the universe is united through a chain of cosmic sympathies, and a magical work using a particular substance or ritual will produce effects on a person or situation

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64 See, for example, Ficino, Book III, Chapter VI, p. 103.

65 Willis and Curry, p. 78.

66 Agrippa, Henry Cornelius, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. James Freake, ed. Donald Tyson (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1993) [hereafter Agrippa].

67 Agrippa, Chapters LII-LX, pp. 155-188; Agrippa, Chapter LV, pp. 169-171. On *auguria* and *auspicia* see Dumézil, Georges, *Archaic Roman Religion*, trans. Philip Krapp (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 594-610; Agrippa, Chapter LX, p. 188.

68 Agrippa, Chapters XXII-XXXII, pp. 72-97.

69 Hanegraaff, 'How magic survived the disenchantment of the world' in *Religion*, No. 33 (2003) [hereafter Hanegraaff], pp. 361-65.

at a distance through resonances along the links in the chain. Examples are found in Agrippa and the *Hermetica*.<sup>70</sup> The doctrine of *spiritus* – often combined with the theory of correspondences – postulates a subtle energy permeating the whole of the universe, which can be invoked or controlled by the magician. Examples are found in Al-Kindi and Ficino.<sup>71</sup> The doctrine of demonic intervention was favoured by the early Church in its attacks on divination, but is found in a more positive framework in the work of Neoplatonists such as Iamblichus.<sup>72</sup> Characteristic of all three theories of magic is the application of human will to ‘make something happen’ or ‘influence’ the outcome of an event. This is not relevant to astrology itself (although all three approaches to magic can utilise astrological knowledge), but can be applicable to divination if prophetic inspiration is invoked through ritual or the imposition of control over an object or entity.

Willis and Curry comment on Tolkien’s distinction between enchantment and magic, the former being ‘artistic’ in its invocation of an alternative world, while the latter is focused on ‘power in this world, domination of things and wills’.<sup>73</sup> *Mantikê* as an unprovoked prophetic vision or oracular trance is not magical because it is not ‘willed’: it is a spontaneous visitation by a god. Oracular pronouncements acquired through such techniques as necromancy (the calling up of the ghosts of the dead for consultation) are, in this context, magical. Faraone gives an example of a magical ritual known as the ‘Apollonian Invocation’, used to raise a dead spirit for divinatory purposes: ‘Send this ghost under my sacred incantations during the night, driven compelled at your commands...and let him tell me however many things I want in my

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70 Agrippa, Chapter I, p. 23; *Hermetica*, VIII.5.

71 Al-Kindi, Chap. 2, p. 7; Ficino, Book III, Chap. 3, pp. 94-96.

72 See Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine/ddc.html>, downloaded 22.12.05 [hereafter Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*]. For a modern presentation of this argument see *Catholic Encyclopedia*, [www.newadvent.org/cathen/o5048b.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/o5048b.htm), downloaded 21.12.05; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, trans. Thomas Taylor (Frome: Prometheus Trust, 1999), II.67-99. Also see Shaw, p. 40.

73 Willis and Curry, p. 87.

mind.’<sup>74</sup> But even if astrological knowledge is appropriated for magical purposes, the astrologer does not ‘will’ the ‘powers of the planets’, nor their messages as ‘signs’.<sup>75</sup> Magic can be allied with divination, and likewise can be allied with astrology, but neither astrology nor divination is itself an act of magic.

### **Divination as the work of demons**

The early Church condemned all forms of divination as the work of evil demons.<sup>76</sup> Astrology was included in the list. However, an exception was made for *mantikê* within sanctioned parameters, such as the divine inspirations of the Old Testament prophets and the Christian mystics.<sup>77</sup> The Church also recognised the link between divination and subversive activities, partly due to unauthorised practices within its own ranks. The 4th century CE *Concilia Galliae* offers an example: ‘Some clergy are devoted to the interpretation of signs [*auguria*] and under the label of what pretends to be religion – what they call Saints’ Lots [*sanctorum sortes*] – they profess a knowledge of divination.’<sup>78</sup> Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in the 5th century CE, began his career admitting that ‘many true things are foretold by astrology’ and that astrologers, unlike other diviners, ‘used no sacrifices and invoked the aid of no spirit for their divinations’.<sup>79</sup> But by the time he wrote *On Christian Doctrine*, he had become virulent toward astrology as well, claiming that all ‘arts of this sort’ arise from ‘a baleful fellowship between men and devils, and are to be utterly repudiated and avoided by the Christian as the covenants of a

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74 Faraone, Christopher, ‘Necromancy Goes Underground’ in *Magika Hiera*, p. 260-261.

75 *Tetrabiblos*, Book I.1; Dillon, John, ‘Plotinus on Whether the Stars are Causes’ in *La Science des Cieux. Sages, mages, astrologues, Res Orientales*, Vol. XII (1999).

76 See above, fn. 91, p. 12.

77 Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, p. 78.

78 Klingshirn, William E., ‘The *Sortes Sangallenses*’ in *Mantikê*, p. 100.

79 Augustine, *Confessions* [hereafter Augustine, *Confessions*] Book IV.3.5, trans. Albert C. Outler, [www.ccel.org/a/augustine/confessions/confessions.html](http://www.ccel.org/a/augustine/confessions/confessions.html), downloaded 21.12.05; Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IV.3.4.



false and treacherous friendship'.<sup>80</sup> Whereas Cicero denied that divination worked, Augustine recognised that it could work, but only under the 'fellowship of Demons...with the Devil their prince'.<sup>81</sup> Whether astrologers themselves perceived their work as divination made no difference in terms of the social and religious context of the time: in the eyes of the early Church they were inextricably linked.

In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas attempted to negotiate a dialogue between the Church and astrologers by emphasising the harmlessness of Ptolemy's 'natural' astrology while condemning divination. In the *Summa Theologiae*, he states that knowing events before they happen 'is God's prerogative'. If anyone else claims to foreknow the future without a direct revelation from God, 'then clearly he is arrogating to himself what belongs to God... Divining the future needs demonic advice and help.'<sup>82</sup> But an exception is made for 'natural' astrology, which Aquinas asserts is not divination because the stars 'can cause changes in human bodies, and so influence our sense-appetites which are functions of bodily organs. So the stars can incline us to certain behaviour.'<sup>83</sup> This is, in effect, astrology as a kind of proto-psychology. He then offers the Aristotelian precept that 'our sense-appetites obey reason', and therefore human beings are still free to act against celestial influences.<sup>84</sup> This differentiation between 'natural' astrology and divination made it possible for astrology to be practiced with the consent of the Church, as long as no claims of mantic power aroused ecclesiastical wrath. Although the religious climate of the Middle Ages demanded that astrology divest itself of divinatory associations, it had been developing in this direction from Hellenistic times. Willis and Curry consider that Aquinas' 'ambiguous accommodation' with Church authorities resulted in a 'fraudulent' anti-divinatory astrology based on 'the premise that the perceptible cosmos runs entirely on "natural", material and even

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80 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book II.23.35-36.

81 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book II.23.36.

82 Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Timothy McDermott (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1989) [hereafter Aquinas], II.11.95.1-3, p. 411.

83 Aquinas, II.11.95.1-3, p. 412.

84 Aquinas, II.11.95.5, p. 412.

mechanistic principles with no spiritual input or dimension'.<sup>85</sup> But as a devout Christian Aquinas did not lack a spiritual dimension in his understanding of astrology, nor, by his own declaration, did Ptolemy, on whose astrology Aquinas based his argument. 'Mortal as I am,' declares Ptolemy, 'I know that I am born for a day, but when I follow the serried multitude of the stars in their circular course, my feet no longer touch the earth; I ascend to Zeus himself to feast me on ambrosia, the food of the gods.'<sup>86</sup> Aquinas experienced the heavens as part of God's creation, but, in keeping with the cultural context of his time, understood astrology to be based on natural laws and applicable more to character and behaviour than to foretelling the future.

### **Divination as prediction of the future**

'Divination', observes Graf, 'relies on randomization as its fundamental logical step: into a chain of human causality, it introduces a gap where the hand and mind of the divinity can interfere.'<sup>87</sup> The random element may depend on drawing a particular lot, spontaneously selecting an oracular text, throwing coins, dice, knuckle-bones or bamboo sticks, or encountering a particular configuration of entrails. The advent of prophetic ecstasy or a premonitory dream is equally random. Babylonian omen interpretation, before the systemised observation and recording of planetary cycles and the introduction of mathematical theory, also relied on the random appearance of celestial and terrestrial 'prodigies'.<sup>88</sup> Cicero's division of divination into 'natural' and 'artificial' practices does not alter the importance of randomisation: augury, based on highly codified rituals and texts, still depends on the random flight of birds or the random appearance of lightning in a particular quarter of the heavens.<sup>89</sup> Carefully phrasing a question so that it becomes a request for divine advice or approval rather than a prediction of future events is a

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85 Willis and Curry, pp. 73-74.

86 Ptolemy in *Anthologia Palatina*, ix.577, quoted in Cumont, Franz, *Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Dover, 1960), p. 81.

87 Graf, 'Dice', in *Mantikê*, pp. 60-61.

88 Lindsay, pp. 30-33.

89 Cicero, *De div.*, Book II.xviii.42-47, xxxiii.70-75.

technique of diplomacy, and depends no less on randomisation to reveal the future. Xenophon's well-known trick, when marching with Cyrus against the Persians, of asking the oracle, 'To which gods should I sacrifice in order to succeed?' rather than, 'What will happen?' or even, 'What should I do?' was, according to Burkert, 'common practice'.<sup>90</sup> But even when the deity is approached with such tact, the response of the oracle is still random.

Once the Babylonians began to observe and record the cyclical nature of celestial phenomena and based their prognostications on these cycles,<sup>91</sup> the randomisation essential to divination was replaced by what might be understood as natural law. The conceptual framework of astrology – whether the heavenly bodies are understood as gods, physical influences, 'signs' or symbols, and whether the link between heaven and earth is perceived as causal or synchronous – alters according to cultural context, but reliance on predictable phenomena to make interpretations is characteristic of astrology in any context. Ptolemy's 'astrological foreknowledge' is based on predictability. Even interrogational astrology, based on a question asked at a particular moment, is dependent on the positions of the Sun, Moon and planets at various stages of their predictable cycles. The interpretation of individual character reflecting the moment of birth is likewise rooted in predictable cycles, and systems of astrological prognostication such as secondary progressions<sup>92</sup> reflect no randomness because the planets move forward according to fixed rates of motion and their positions can be predicted for any point in the future. This absence of randomisation, inextricably linked with time and the regularity of celestial movement, is perhaps the chief reason why so many ancient astrologers declared they were practicing a science rather than divination. In contrast, the 'altered state' of *mantikê* – referred to by Athanassiadi as an 'involuntary manifestation of an inner state of

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90 Burkert (2005) in *Mantikê*, p. 39.

91 Lindsay, p. 33.

92 On secondary progressions see, for example, Placidus de Titis, *Primum Mobile*, trans. John Cooper (Bromley: Institute for the Study of Cycles in World Affairs, 1983) [hereafter Placidus] and Leo, Alan, *The Progressed Horoscope* (London: Fowler, 1969; original publication 1905).

sanctity' or an illumination by 'divine light' – involves a transcendence of time and space.<sup>93</sup>

Many astrologers over the centuries have perceived the regularity of planetary cycles as conveying meanings more profound than the prediction of future events. Understanding the awesome geometry of these cycles, observes Plato, demands 'great wisdom' and the study of 'several sciences'.<sup>94</sup> In the *Epinomis*, Plato encourages his readers to recognise the stars as gods and strive to attain unity with them through contemplation. 'If such matters are handled in any other spirit,' he then states, 'a man...will need to invoke his luck.'<sup>95</sup> Lindsay interprets this passage as 'a contempt for the use of Star-divination; the man who truly worships the stars does not need to inquire what fate they weave for him, he is lifted above the reach of fate in his communion.'<sup>96</sup> Plotinus, writing six centuries later, likewise has little time for the prognosticative application of astrology. Dillon notes that he 'does not wish to deny that the stars can serve to foretell future events, as *signs*, or even that influences from the heavens can have an effect on our physical and even psychological make-up, but he persists in regarding this sort of influence as comparatively insignificant.'<sup>97</sup> Although arguments about the validity of astrological prognostication often centre on whether fate is absolute, negotiable, or nonexistent,<sup>98</sup> astrologies influenced by Plato and Plotinus focus more on the spiritual and psychological value of astrology than on its predictive aspects. This understanding of astrology as a contemplative vehicle, rather than as divination or prognostication of the future, is rooted in the message of order, beauty and benignity that the geometry of the heavens seems to convey. The astrologer John Addey, writing in the late 20th century, echoes Plato's sentiments when he comments that

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93 Athanassiadi, pp. 116, 120; Voss, p. 35.

94 Plato, *Epinomis*, 990a-e in *Dialogues*, p. 1531.

95 Plato, *Epinomis*, 992a in *Dialogues*, p. 1532.

96 Lindsay, p. 99.

97 Dillon, p. 91.

98 See, for example, Cicero, M. Tullius, *De Fato* in *Cicero: On Fate and Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. and commentary by R. W. Sharpley (Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1991), pp. 6-11.

astrology ‘is a system of symbolism of a high order which can be a most valuable aid to the contemplation of the truths of mystical philosophy.’<sup>99</sup>

Ptolemy represents astrology as a ‘stochastic *techné*’,<sup>100</sup> a craft with carefully developed rules for conjecture, not unlike medicine. He refers to ‘prognostication by astronomical means’ and ‘astronomical prediction’,<sup>101</sup> but he does not use the word divination. Dorotheus of Sidon devotes most of his work to prognostication, but states that he is ‘following the tracks of the learned of Babylon and Egypt since they were the first who looked concerning the science of the stars’.<sup>102</sup> Late classical astrologers such as Paulus Alexandrinus and Hephaistio of Thebes are also concerned with prognostication but, acknowledging their debt to Ptolemy,<sup>103</sup> speak of their work as science rather than divination. The early 16th century astrologer Guido Bonatti likewise declares that he practices the ‘Science of the Judgments of the Stars’.<sup>104</sup> Placidus de Titis, a major reformer in the movement to ‘renovate’ astrology following the astronomical discoveries of Brahe and Kepler, refers to his astrology as ‘a genuine and true science’, although his *Primum Mobile*, published in 1657, is essentially a work of prognosticative techniques.<sup>105</sup> Lilly, in *Christian Astrology* (published two years after Placidus’ *Primum Mobile*), likewise refers to his astrology as a ‘divine Science’.<sup>106</sup> These

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99 Addey, John, ‘Astrology as Divination’ in *The Astrologers’ Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Summer 1982), p. 39.

100 Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, p. 7.

101 *Tetrabiblos*, Book 1.3.

102 Dorotheus, Book V.1.1-4.

103 Paulus Alexandrinus, *Introductory Matters*, trans. Robert Schmidt (Berkeley Springs, WV: Golden Hind Press, 1993), p. 1; Hephaistio of Thebes, *Apotelesmatics*, trans. Robert Schmidt (Berkeley Springs, WV: Golden Hind Press, 1994), p. 1.

104 Bonatti, Guido, *Liber Astronomiae*, trans. Robert Zoller (Berkeley Springs, WV: Golden Hind Press, 1994) [hereafter Bonatti], Part 1.3, p. 6.

105 Thorndike, Vol. 8, p. 302; Placidus, p. x.

astrologers' understanding of science will inevitably differ from the way science is understood in the modern world. Yates suggests that they might 'see the Great Architect of the Universe as an all-embracing religious conception which included, and encouraged, the scientific urge to explore the Architect's work.'<sup>107</sup>

The assertion that prognostication is not astrology's primary purpose is expressed by Alan Leo, who states that astrology is 'first and foremost a means of general character-study...a means for the unbiassed examination of one's own character, and the most effective means of strengthening it.'<sup>108</sup> Leo's astrology, like other astrologies, reflects its cultural milieu: in this case the late 19th and early 20th century quest for hidden realities that presided over the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875 and the Society for Psychical Research in 1882, as well as the publication in the early 20th century of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Jung's *Symbols of Transformation*, and James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.<sup>109</sup> For Leo, the astrological chart is a map of symbols reflecting inner dynamics and the pattern of the individual's spiritual growth. Willis and Curry dismiss Leo's anti-divinatory astrology as they do Ptolemy's, on the grounds that it has 'no direct spiritual input or dimension'.<sup>110</sup> This overlooks the intense spirituality explicitly expressed throughout Leo's work. Spirituality too can only be defined within a cultural context. That these astrologies, although they may be used for predictive purposes, are not understood as divinatory by their practitioners suggests that astrology, in the views of astrologers themselves, can encompass many other dimensions of experience, and prognostication based on the predictability of planetary cycles is not the same as divination. Addey, writing seventy years after Leo, asserts that

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106 Lilly, William, 'Introductory Epistle' in *Christian Astrology* (London: John Macock, 1659, reprinted by David Cole, 1981).

107 Yates, Frances, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1972), p. 263.

108 Leo, Alan, 'The Rational Basis of Astrology' in *The Key to Your Own Nativity* (Edinburgh: International Publishing Company, 1964; original publication 1912), p. i.

109 Tarnas, Richard, *Cosmos and Psyche* (New York: Viking Press, 2006), pp. 362-363.

110 Willis and Curry, pp. 73-74.

‘astrology is a thoroughly rational and intelligible subject’.<sup>111</sup> Hone comments that astrology’s development ‘may well be compared with that of medical knowledge. From time to time, certain treatments have been believed to be the most effective possible. Further experience changes these ideas and differences of opinion are then acknowledged.’<sup>112</sup> The term divination does not appear anywhere in her work.

### **Divination as participation**

Some modern astrologers understand their work as divination.<sup>113</sup> Willis and Curry concur, suggesting that all astrology is divination because it is a ‘participatory’ experience rather than an objective one. ‘Insofar as astrology is divination,’ they comment, ‘it cannot be treated as if it was putatively, potentially or actually science (in the modern sense).’<sup>114</sup> A polarity is thus created: astrology is a science in the modern sense, or it is divination, which ‘unites and transcends, or subverts, the modernist divide between the human/cultural (e.g. the astrologer) and the nonhuman/natural (e.g. the planets).’<sup>115</sup> But several problems are raised by this approach. Such polarisation forces an artificial choice – a ‘true’ astrology versus a ‘false’ one – that denies the relevance of cultural context and excludes a plurality of perspectives within any single culture. Moreover, the ways in which science is defined are as culturally determined as definitions of astrology and divination. The astrological ‘science’ claimed by Ptolemy depends on reason and the predictability of planetary cycles rather than ecstatic *mantikê*, but it was never perceived as ‘science in the modern sense’; nor was it perceived as divination, a term which was part of the vocabulary of Ptolemy’s time but which he do not use.

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111 Addey, John, *A New Study of Astrology* (London: The Urania Trust, 1996), p. 1.

112 Hone, Margaret E., *The Modern Textbook of Astrology* (London: Fowler, 1951), p. 13.

113 See, for example, Cornelius, Geoffrey, *The Moment of Astrology* (London: Penguin, 1994) [hereafter Cornelius (1994)].

114 Willis and Curry, p. 114.

115 Willis and Curry, p. 118.

Cornelius believes that ‘the primary obstacle to opening up the territory of astrology-as-divination remains Ptolemy’s interpretation, binding the lineages of the tradition to the objective moment of time and to the authority of Aristotle.’<sup>116</sup> He also considers that ‘astrological reality is inaccessible to the modern mode of thought, based upon a rational and objective construct of the Universe...which we may broadly term scientific.’<sup>117</sup> Rochberg, in contrast, offers a post-modern approach which may, paradoxically, be closer to the way in which Ptolemy understood his work: ‘Science has ceased to be the exclusively logical and empiric inquiry it once was, clearly and cleanly separable from theology, metaphysics, and other speculative or “mythic” forms of thought.’<sup>118</sup> As the cultural context of science changes in the post-modern era, the sharp distinction between astrology as science and astrology as art, allegory, philosophy, poetic metaphor, symbolic language or stellar religion becomes increasingly meaningless. Attempting to define astrology as divinatory because it encompasses the ‘inaccessible’, imaginal dimension of the human being, as opposed to the ‘rational and objective’ dimension, is equally meaningless. It would appear that most astrologers, past and present, have consistently embraced both rationality and imagination in their work, yet do not define their work as divinatory. It might even be argued that, in creating such a polarity between divination and science, Willis and Curry are inadvertently perpetuating the ‘scientistic’ perspective they oppose.

Rochberg comments that ‘the desire to comprehend natural phenomena is the common denominator for science regardless of its cultural manifestation.’<sup>119</sup> If this is so, experiences such as spontaneous prophecy, which are not based on any relationship with ‘natural phenomena’, may be understood as divinatory, but astrology, based on the observation of

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116 Cornelius, p. 304.

117 Cornelius, Geoffrey, ‘Astrology and Divination’ in *Bulletin*, No. 41 (Canterbury: Company of Astrologers, 24 June, 2002), p. 2.

118 Rochberg, Francesca, ‘Empiricism in Babylonian Omen Texts and the Classification of Mesopotamian Divination as Science’ in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 119, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1999) [hereafter Rochberg], p. 560.

119 Rochberg, p. 56.



natural phenomena and a relatively stable tradition of assigned meanings as well as intuitive or imaginative interpretation, is exactly what Ptolemy claimed it to be: science, although not in the modern sense of the word. The religious as well as prophetic elements of divination are stressed by Cornelius when he states, 'I consider that astrology's ethical status takes its ultimate form in relation to prophecy...Astrology's prophetic power, as archetypally revealed in the story of the magi and the Star of Bethlehem, established for our Christian tradition a potential defining relation between astrology and the divine. On this interpretation, the spiritual purpose of astrology is that it should reveal Christ.'<sup>120</sup> While this approach to astrology clearly involves divination and reflects the religious perspective of the individual astrologer, it offers no comprehensive definition of astrology itself.

The concept of *participation mystique* ('mystical participation'), developed by the French anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl, describes processes of thinking that are 'altogether different from the laws of modern logical rational scientific thought'.<sup>121</sup> In contrast, causality is defined by Tambiah as the 'rules and methodology of positive science and discursive mathematico-logical reason.'<sup>122</sup> Participation and causality are modern terms imposed on cultures which did not articulate such a sharp distinction, and connote internal processes that may be more subtle and interdependent than descriptions such as Tambiah's imply. It would appear that astrology, from its very beginnings, has utilised both these 'processes of thinking' in a complex and interwoven manner. The dominance of participation may, for some astrologers, invoke a religious or poetic response, and the dominance of causality may, for some astrologers, generate a 'scientific' understanding; but an emphasis on one of these modes of perception reflects the bias of the astrologer, not the 'true' nature of astrology.

Participation may be understood as a psychological rather than a divinatory dynamic, although definitions of psychology also tend to mutate according to cultural context. Jung defines *participation mystique* as 'a peculiar kind of psychological connection with objects...the subject

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120 Cornelius (1994), p. 306.

121 Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien, *Carnets* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949); Tambiah, Stanley J., *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) [hereafter Tambiah], p. 85.

122 Tambiah, p. 105.

cannot clearly distinguish himself from the object but is bound to it by a direct relationship which amounts to partial *identity*'.<sup>123</sup> He equates participation with projection:<sup>124</sup> the transference of a subjective psychological content onto a person or object. Jung also observes that 'the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious', in particular the heavenly constellations, 'whose originally chaotic forms were organized through the projection of images.'<sup>125</sup> Astrology as the projection of inner archetypal images onto the heavens is, like other definitions of astrology, a perspective emerging from a particular cultural context: the 'consciousness revolution' of the late 20th century.<sup>126</sup> The psychologically orientated astrology which has developed from this context might be viewed as a 'meaning system', which Wuthnow suggests 'emphasizes the role of symbolism and the meanings that inhere in particular symbolic configurations'.<sup>127</sup> 'Transcendent' meaning systems such as astrology both encompass and move beyond everyday reality: 'Each realm of life is no longer discrete, but perceived as connected with and having significance for other realms.'<sup>128</sup> This understanding of astrology has nothing in common with divination, since there is no prerequisite belief in a divinity with whom one is in dialogue, nor are any special powers or visions of the future implied. Nor is it 'science in the modern sense', since planetary 'influences' are not assumed to be objectively 'real'. Prognostication is

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123 Jung, C. G., *Psychological Types*, CW6 (London: Routledge, 1971), para. 781.

124 Jung, C. G., *Civilisation in Transition*, CW10 (London: Routledge, 1964), para. 361.

125 Jung, C. G., *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, CW8 (London: Routledge, 1960), para. 325.

126 See Wuthnow, Robert, *The Consciousness Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976) [hereafter Wuthnow].

127 See, for example, Sasportas, Howard, *The Gods of Change: Pain, Crisis and the Transits of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto* (London: Penguin, 1989); Idemon, Richard, *The Magic Thread: Astrological Chart Interpretation Using Depth Psychology* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1996); Wuthnow, p. 59.

128 Wuthnow, p. 76.

less relevant than self-knowledge, the object of which is ‘to integrate the discrete realms of personal life and to provide a larger frame of reference in relation to which personal meaning can be perceived.’<sup>129</sup>

Astrologically inclined post-Jungians such as James Hillman define both astrology and psychology in terms of poetic metaphor. ‘In this way,’ Hillman observes, ‘the poetic basis of mind takes psychology out of the confines of laboratory and consulting room...into a psychology of things as objectifications of images with interiority, things as the display of fantasy’.<sup>130</sup> Kochunas echoes this approach: ‘Astrology is a form of imagination, an imaginal poetics’.<sup>131</sup> Moore, writing about Ficino’s astral magic, states, ‘The human imagination is always at work...making metaphors of everything.’<sup>132</sup> From this perspective, it is irrelevant to attempt to define astrology as ‘science’ or ‘divination’, since both paradigms are expressions of the archetypal story-making function of the human psyche. In response to the question posed by Willis and Curry about what happens during an astrological consultation – ‘What is there important about this situation, then, that is not divinatory?’<sup>133</sup> – it might be asked, with equal validity, ‘What is there important about this situation that is not psychological?’

### Conclusion

Discussing science, Ann Geneva commented that it is no longer seen as a ‘steady progression from truth to truth’, but as ‘lurching from paradigm to paradigm’.<sup>134</sup> Astrology too has lurched from paradigm to paradigm, variously envisioning itself as science, art, philosophy, psychology, and

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129 Wuthnow, p. 77.

130 Hillman, James, ‘Soul, Metaphor and Fantasy’ in *Archetypal Psychology* (Putnam, CT: Spring Publications, 2004), Vol. 1, pp. 34-35.

131 Kochunas, Brad, ‘Why Astrology Works’ in *The Mountain Astrologer* (Dec. 1999-Jan. 2000), p. 37.

132 Moore, Thomas, *The Planets Within: The Astrological Psychology of Marsilio Ficino* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), pp. 42-43.

133 Willis and Curry, p. 63.

134 Geneva, p. 1.

poetic metaphor. The paradigms vary according to individual astrologers and specific cultural contexts and astrology appears to survive through adaptation without losing its essential core. Willis and Curry's hypothesis that astrology has moved steadily over the centuries from enchantment to disenchantment implies a kind of Biblical Fall, with a lost pre-scientific Eden in which astrologers dialogued with the gods and divined the future in a state of transcendent participation before the serpent of Ptolemaic cosmology intervened.<sup>135</sup> But divination as participation can be understood as a psychological experience, and divination as *mantikê*, magic or prognostication, from the perspective of astrologers themselves, is and always has been an optional ingredient in astrological work. Experiences of a mantic kind occurring within astrological practice may be defined as religious, psychological, poetic, or even physiological. Whether the heavens are mechanistic or created and inhabited by deity, and whether the future is entirely, partially or minimally predictable, are beliefs open to interpretation according to the religious perspective and cultural bias of the astrologer. Historically, astrology has demonstrated the capacity to retain a stable tradition of symbolic forms while adapting itself to a vast variety of cultural settings.

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135 Willis and Curry, pp. 77-92.