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The Dragon of the Eclipses—A Note

Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs

Abstract. The astrological concept of the ‘dragon of the lunar nodes’, responsible for eclipses of the sun and the moon, may have derived from a combination of ideas prevailing in Late Antiquity with respect to the *ourobóros* or ‘tail-biting serpent’—that it constituted a ring of darkness, that it was bent around the sun and that it was positioned on the ecliptic band. Various Mithraic, astrological and alchemical images of celestial dragons appear to represent this aspect of the dragon.

The dragon of the eclipses as a development of *ourobóros* symbolism

From the classical period onwards, astronomers have been able to understand the causes of solar and lunar eclipses in terms of the so-called *lunar nodes*, ‘the points at which the moon crosses the ecliptic, at the ascending node (*anabibazon* ...) from south to north and at the descending node (*katabibazon* ...) from north to south. Eclipses can take place only when the sun and moon are simultaneously at or near the same node (solar eclipses) or different nodes (lunar eclipses).¹ Curiously,

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1 R. Beck, *Beck on Mithraism; Collected Works with New Essays* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2004) [hereafter Beck, *Mithraism*], p. 171. ‘Only when the moon is on (or very close to) the ecliptic at one of the nodes, and simultaneously the sun is at the same point on the ecliptic or else at the diametrically opposite point, does an eclipse take place. If the sun and moon are in conjunction at the same node the eclipse is solar (the moon interposes itself in line of sight between the earth and the sun). If the sun and moon are in opposition at different nodes the eclipse is lunar (the earth blocks the sunlight from reaching the moon)’, p. 161; cf. W. Hartner, ‘The Pseudoplanetary Nodes of the Moon’s Orbit in Hindu and Islamic Iconographies’, in *Oriens-Occidens*, ed. W. Hartner (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968), pp. 349–404 [hereafter Hartner, ‘Nodes’], p. 359;

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Indian, Persian and Arabic astrologers customarily refer to the lunar nodes as the ‘head’ and ‘tail’ of a cosmic dragon, who is known as *Gawzar* in Arabic; the conventional Latin names are *caput draconis* for the head, at the ascending node, and *cauda draconis* for the tail, at the descending node.² Though this terminology has been abundantly documented, modern scholars have seldom speculated on the original motivation to connect the lunar nodes with dragon symbolism. It is here argued that the dragon of the eclipses is best understood as a theoretical development of a number of traits—prominent in Late Antiquity—in the symbolism of the *ourobóros* or tail-biting serpent.³

Particularly manifest in ancient Egyptian art and magic are the age-old notions that the *ourobóros* personifies *darkness* and that it encloses or devours the sun god.⁴ In the early centuries of the present era, these ideas survived especially within the context of Gnosticism. In an eschatological scene in the Coptic text *Pistis Sophia* (2nd or 3rd century CE), ‘the *disc* of the sun was a great *dragon* whose tail was in its

A. McBeath, *Sky Dragons & Celestial Serpents* (London: Dragon’s Head Press, 1998) [hereafter McBeath, *Sky Dragons*], p. 64.

2 Hartner, ‘Nodes’, p. 377f.; *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature*, ed. J. Dowson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 157, s. v. ‘Ketu’, pp. 252–53, s. v. ‘Rāhu’; R. Gleadow, *The Origin of the Zodiac* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), p. 40; E. Burgess, trans., *Translation of the Sūrya-Siddhānta; A Text-book of Hindu Astronomy* (Varanasi-Delhi: Indological Book House, 1977), p. 56; McBeath, *Sky Dragons*, p. 65; A. Jeremias, ‘Sterne’, in *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, ed. W. H. Roscher (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1909–1915), Vol. 4, pp. 1427–500, p. 1474, [Hereafter Jeremias, ‘Sterne’].

3 These traits are detailed in M. A. van der Sluijs and A. L. Peratt, ‘The *Ourobóros* as an Auroral Phenomenon’, *Journal of Folklore Research* 46, no. 1 (2009), pp. 3–41.

4 Textual examples of the sun god within the coils of the serpent include *Coffin Texts*, p. 321 (IV. 147); 758–60 (VI. 387–90); *Book of the Dead* (Papyrus of Nu), p. 131; *The Book of Overthrowing ‘Apep: The Book of Felling the Foe of Rē’ Daily* (4), Papyrus Bremner-Rhind (British Museum 10188), 24. 11.

mouth'.⁵ While the *ourobóros* is here a manifestation of the sun god, its cosmic proportions and its links with darkness and the infernal region were preserved in an enunciation attributed to Jesus: 'The outer darkness is a great *dragon* whose tail is in its mouth, and it is outside the *whole world*, and it surrounds the whole *world*'.⁶

In Late Antiquity, moreover, a tendency arose to describe the *ourobóros* as an expression of the ecliptic band, the circular 'pathway' within which the planets are seen to make their circuits. As the sun was deemed the chief planet, the *ourobóros*' affinity with the ecliptic band generally amounted to a close association with the 'year'.⁷ Virgil's

5 Valentinus (?), *Pistis Sophia*, 4. 136 ; C. Schmidt, ed., and V. MacDermot, trans., *Pistis Sophia* ('Nag Hammadi Studies', 9; 'The Coptic Gnostic Library'; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978) [hereafter Schmidt/MacDermot, *Pistis Sophia*], pp. 354 and 708–9.

6 Valentinus (?), *Pistis Sophia*, 3. 126, in Schmidt/MacDermot, *Pistis Sophia*, pp. 317 and 634–35; compare further 3. 102, 105–7, 119, 127f. The Gnostic identification of the serpent with 'darkness' recurs in the *Vision of Poimandres*, p. 4. Compare *Hymn of the Pearl*, apud *The Acts of Thomas*, 32; *Acts of Cyriacus and Julitta*, 6, trans. H. Stocks, 'Ein Alexanderbrief in den Acta Cyriaci et Julittae', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, Vol. 31, no. 1 (1910), pp. 1–47, p. 3; compare further R. Reitzenstein, *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium; Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Bonn: A. Marcus & E. E. Weber, 1921), p. 78.

7 On the *ourobóros* as a symbol of the zodiac or the year, see K. Preisendanz, 'Ein altes Ewigkeitssymbol als Signet und Druckermarke', *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (1935), 143–49, p. 143; *A Dictionary of Symbols*, eds. J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant, trans. J. Buchanan-Brown, (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 846, s. v. 'serpent'. Beck's argument that the zodiacal dragon represented the diurnal rotation of the heavens conflates the symbolism of the equator with that of the ecliptic, overlooking the ancient emphasis on the year rather than the day as the *ourobóros*' responsibility (*Mithraism*, p. 163). Compare: 'These ideas of cosmic serpents surrounding the universe were quite appropriate as symbols of the recurrence of the planetary revolutions, accurate in their several periods but incommensurable', J. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China; Volume 5: Chemistry and Chemical Technology; Part IV: Spagyric Discovery and Invention: Apparatus, Theories and Gifts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) [Hereafter Needham, *Science*], p. 376. Judaic examples are cited in R. Graves and R. Patai, *Hebrew Myths; The Book of Genesis* (London: Cassell,

commentator, Maurus Servius (4th century CE), referred the linkage of the *ourobóros* and the year back to the Egyptians: ‘For according to the Egyptians, the year was indicated before the invention of letters by the image of a dragon biting its own tail, because it returns in itself’.⁸ The late Egyptian scholar, Horapollo (5th century CE), added to this:

When they wish to depict the Universe, they draw a serpent devouring its own tail, marked with variegated scales. By the scales they suggest the stars in the heavens. ... And, as each year it sheds its skin, it [represents] old age. But as each season of the year returns successively, it grows young again.⁹

Tacitly endorsing the popular folk-etymological equation of Chronus and Cronus, meanwhile, his African contemporary, Martianus Capella (5th

1964), p. 48; L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), pp. 127–45.

8 ‘*annus enim secundum Aegyptios indicabatur ante inventas litteras picto dracone caudam suo mordente, quia in se recurrit*, Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidis Commentarius*, 5. 85, in *Servii Grammatici qui Feruntur In Vergilii Carmina Commentarii*, eds. G. Thilo and H. Hagen (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1923), p. 603. A smattering of later authors appear dependent on Servius in this respect, or else to have shared a common source with him: Isidore of Sevilla, *Etymologiae*, 5. 36. 2; Lydus, *De Mensibus*, 3. 4; Anastasius Sinaita, *Anagogicarum Contemplationum in Hexaemeron*, 1 (864).

9 Horapollo Niliacus, *Hieroglyphica*, 1. 2, in *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*, trans. G. Boas (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 43. Referring to him as ‘Horus’, the Jesuit savant and ‘last Renaissance man’, Athanasius Kircher picked up on this passage in Horapollo’s work to explain the significance of the circular serpent featured in his Coptic cosmogram: ‘... Serpente verò annuum cyclum, teste Horo signant ...’; See, *ÆDIPI ÆGYPTIACI Tomi Secundi PARS ALTERA* ... (Rome: Vitalis Mascardi, 1653), p. 193, and *ÆDIPI ÆGYPTIACI Tomus III. THEATRVM HIERO-GLYPHICVM, HOC EST, Noua & Hucusque Intentata OBELISCORVM Cæterorumque Hieroglyphicorum Monumentorum, quæ tùm Romæ, tùm in Aegypto, ac Celebrrioribus Europæ Musæis adhuc Supersunt* ... (Rome: Vitalis Mascardi, 1654), p. 54.

century CE), reduced the *ourobóros* to an emblem held in the right hand of the god Saturn and identified with the year: ‘In his right hand he held a fire-breathing dragon devouring its own tail—a dragon which was believed to teach the number of days in the year by the spelling of its own name’.¹⁰ Through Martianus’ work, the specific association of the *ourobóros* and the year with Saturn survived throughout the Middle Ages, with attestations in the works of the French theologian, Remigius of Auxerre († 908 CE),¹¹ the anonymous Third Vatican Mythographer (12th century CE),¹² and Albericus Philosophus of London (13th or 14th century CE).¹³

Bearing the above in mind, astrological terminology involving the ‘head’ and ‘tail’ of a celestial dragon makes most sense if this creature is conceived in a circular or at least a curved form, *id est*, as an adaptation of the *ourobóros*. Insofar as the eclipse of the sun or moon entails the ‘consumption’ of that luminary, a motif with a strong mythological resonance, the head of the eclipsing dragon would logically be located at the same node as the sun or moon. The placement of the tail-end would

10 Martianus Capella, *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, 1.70, in *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, trans. W. H. Stahl and R. Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 26. The Latin for ‘a fire-breathing dragon devouring its own tail’ is *flammivomus draco caudae suae ultima devorans*. ‘It is not clear what Martianus means by saying that the number of days in the year is signified in the spelling of the dragon’s name; the medieval commentators interpret this by claiming that the dragon’s name is Greek, *Tex*, the letters of which have a numerical value totalling 365—but there is no such Greek word or name’, pp. 26–27, note 97.

11 Remigius, *In Martianum Capellam Commentarius*, 33.8, in *Remigii Autissiodorensis Commentum in Martianum Capellam; Libri I–II*, ed. C. E. Lutz (Leiden: Brill, 1962), p. 127.

12 Vaticanus Mythographus Tertius, *De Diis Gentium et Illorum Allegoriis*, 1. 1, 5–6, in G. H. Bode, ed., *Scriptores Rerum Mythicarum Latini Tres Romae Nuper Reperti ad Fidem Codicum MSS. Guelferbytanorum Gottingensis, Gothani et Parisiensis* (Celle, Germany: E. H. C. Schulze, 1834), pp. 153–55.

13 Albericus Philosophus of London, *De Deorum Imaginibus*, 1, in *Auctores Mythographi Latini*, ed. Au. van Staveren (Leiden: Samuel Luchtmans, 1742), p. 897.

depend on the particular type of eclipse: in case of a solar eclipse, it would be situated at the same node, producing a fully circular *ourobóros*, whilst a lunar eclipse would require it to be at the opposite node, limiting the section of the ecliptic band occupied by the dragon to a semicircle.¹⁴ This interpretation ties in with the serpent's rotatory movement around the cosmos, expressed through the theme of the head chasing the tail,¹⁵ as 'The nodes are not fixed points on the ecliptic but move slowly westwards, and they are of course always diametrically opposite each other'.¹⁶ The 'dragon of the lunar nodes' thus moves within the zodiac 'as a symbol of the progress of sun and moon, or of the sun alone, and hence of genesis and time'.¹⁷

The dragon of the eclipses in western esotericism

The dragon of the lunar nodes is a common fixture in medieval Arab and Hindū astronomy, yet its significance in the western esoteric tradition has perhaps been underestimated. With the theoretical prerequisites of the idea – the *ourobóros* as embodying darkness, encircling the sun and occupying a segment of the ecliptic band – firmly in place towards the end of the Imperial Age, the dragon of the eclipses could have been conceived as early as at this time. A stucco zodiac on the ceiling of the cult niche from the Mithra Temple on the island of Ponza in the Tyrrhenian Sea sports 'a coiled snake ... that entwines both Bears on the

14 Compare Jeremias, 'Sterne', p. 1474; Needham, *Science*, p. 376.

15 'Your thought of Time, for example, is manifold and mobile, maintaining that Time is speedy and by a sort of revolution joins the beginning to the end ... The Egyptians comprehend this whole discourse in one stable image, painting a winged serpent that holds its tail in its mouth ...', Marsilio Ficino († 1499 CE), *In Plotini Enneades*, 5. 8. 6, in *Plotini Enneades cum Marsilii Ficini Interpretatione Castigata*, eds. F. Creuzer & G. H. Moser (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1896), p. 354, trans. Lindsay, J., *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (London: Frederick Muller, 1970), p. 269.

16 Beck, *Mithraism*, p. 171. 'The westward motion attributed to it stems from the fact that the nodes do not occupy fixed points on the ecliptic but move gradually westwards, completing a full circuit in approximately 18 2/3 years'. p. 161.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 197.

northern side and whose menacing head is turned towards the muzzle of the Little Bear'.¹⁸ The snake 'occupies one half of the circle lying between the zodiac and the bears on the ceiling of the Ponza Mithraeum' (See Figure 1).



Figure 1 Detail of a stucco zodiac on the ceiling of the cult niche from the Mithraeum on Ponza. M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithriaca* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), p. 9, Figure 6. © Antonio Solazzi; compare Beck, *Mithraism*, p. 152, fig. 1.

Although Vermaseren identified this form of the *draco caelestis* as the constellation 'draco', the noted specialist on Mithraism, Roger Beck, convincingly argued that it represents the dragon of the lunar nodes, though 'the tradition locating the dragon of the nodes in the semicircle

18 M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithriaca* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), p. 10.

from Leo to Capricorn was set well before the building of the Ponza Mithraeum ...¹⁹ ‘The 180° extent of the dragon reflects, of course, the fact that the nodes occupy diametrically opposite points on the ecliptic’.²⁰

Another Mithraic reflex of the ‘nodal’ dragon can be recognised in the circular snake crowning a blue marble pedestal found at the Flaminian Gate, Rome, and dedicated *Inuicto Soli Mithrae*, ‘to the Invincible Sun Mithras’ (See Figure 2).²¹ Because ‘the serpent’s head is crested and radiate, as is characteristic of solar creatures, and on the last section of the tail, just before the mouth, can be made out a sort of meniscus or figure of the moon’,²² it is reasonable to infer that the two luminaries on the head and the tail of the dragon—producing a solar eclipse in unison—establish the link of these extremities with the lunar nodes.

19 Beck, *Mithraism*, pp. 171–72, 152–57, refuting the assumption that this creature denoted the constellations of Draco, Hydra or Serpens. ‘The zodiac ... is so positioned that Leo and the head of the snake lie towards the west and are closest to the site of the tauroctony; Capricorn and the snake’s tail lie towards the east and the entrance to the Mithraeum ...’, p. 153. The ‘dragon of the lunar nodes’ thus moved within the zodiac ‘as a symbol of the progress of sun and moon, or of the sun alone, and hence of genesis and time’, p. 197.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 161.

21 ‘Piédestal de marbre bleuâtre ... Au-dessus d’une base carrée portant l’inscription ... est un morceau cylindrique taillé dans le même bloc ..., entouré d’un serpent à longue barbe, se mordant la queue, sculpté en relief. Six rayons se dressent sur sa tête, et sa queue est ornée d’un petit croissant’. Inv. No. 9308, Galleria Lapidaria, Vatican Museum, Cortile delle Pigna, F. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments Figurés Relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra* (Bruxelles: H. Lamertin, 1896), p. 208, s. v. #25; R. Pettazzoni, ‘The Monstrous Figure of Time in Mithraism’, in R. Pettazzoni, ed., *Essays on the History of Religions*, trans. H. J. Rose, (Leiden: Brill, 1954), pp. 180–92 [hereafter Pettazzoni, ‘Monstrous Figure’], pl. XII, fig. 12. Whether this pedestal originally supported a statue of the lion-headed Cronus is uncertain. Compare with W. Deonna, ‘Ouroboros’, *Artibus Asiae*, 15. 1/2 (1952), pp. 163–70, p. 165.

22 Pettazzoni, ‘Monstrous Figure’, p. 190f.

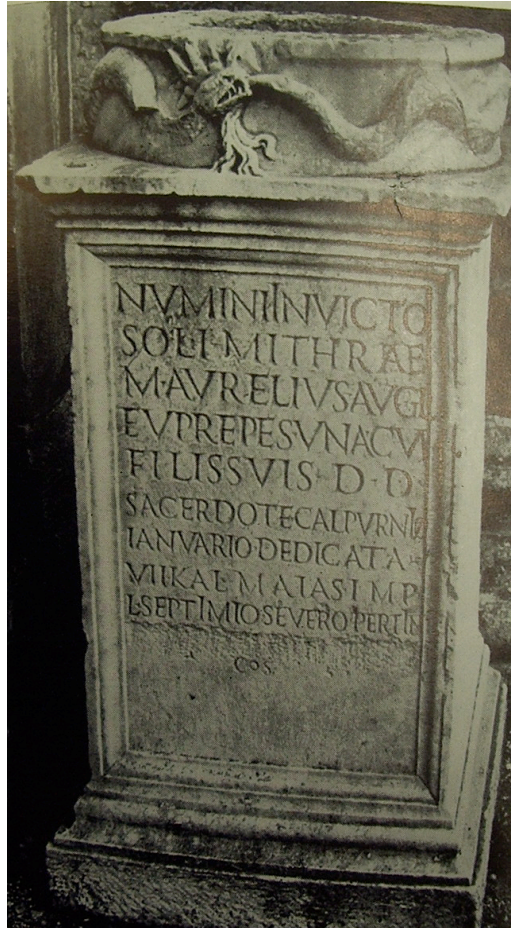


Figure 2 Relief on a Mithraic pedestal, blue marble, found at the Flaminian Gate, Rome. F. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments Figurés Relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra* (Bruxelles: H. Lamertin, 1896), p. 208, s. v. #25.

A purportedly ‘Chaldaean’ variant—apparently complemented by a duplicate copy of itself to complete the circle—is featured in an astrological codex (12th century CE) asserting that the *pneuma drakontoeidés*, the ‘dragon-like soul’ of the cosmos, carries the name *Athalía* and possesses two heads and two tails, apparently with one pair

stretching from Libra to Taurus, the other from Scorpio to Aries, such that the two heads adjoin as well as the two tails.²³ The name *Athalía* is authentic, as it corresponds to Akkadian *attalû*, with variants *antalû*, *antallû*, *namtallû*, and *nantallû*, which means ‘(lunar or solar) eclipse’.²⁴ This word was borrowed into Aramaic as *’ātaljā* and occurs in what is arguably the most detailed portrait of the ‘eclipse dragon’ found in the astrological literature—a refutation of the dragon’s existence furnished by the Syrian writer, Severus Sebokht, bishop of Qennešrê (±575–±666 CE), which is worth being cited in full:

23 *‘Babylōnioi égoun Chaldaioi athalian kalousin touton hypárchonta pneuma drakontoeidés, diképhalon, diouron kai tēn mian képhalōn autou hypárchein dōm’eihein Zygōi, tēn dē hetéran en tōi Skorpiōi; homoiōs dē kai tās ouràs tēn mian en tōi Kriōi katà diámetron tou Zygoi, tēn dē hetéran en tōi Taúrōi’*, anonymous, Codex 8 (Paris 2423), Fr. 9, in *Codicum Parisinorum Partem Primam*, ed. F. Cumont (‘Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum’, 8. 1; Bruxelles: Maurice Lamertin, 1929), p. 195. ‘... *toútōn tōn <dýo> kýklōn hē periphéreia parà tōn Chaldaíōn Drákōn ōnomástē kai hai toútōn symbléseis hē mēn kephalē toútou hē dē ourá’*, anonymous, Codex 7 (Paris 2506 [13th century CE]), f. 175v., in *Codices Germanicos*, ed. F. Boll (‘Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum’, 7; Bruxelles: Henry Lamertin, 1908) [hereafter Boll, *Germanicos*], p. 125. Compare further H. Leisegang, ‘The Mystery of the Serpent’, in *Pagan and Christian Mysteries; Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, ed. J. Campbell (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1955), pp. 3–69, p. 26f. The ‘two circles’ indicate the ecliptic and the lunar orbit, Beck, *Mithraism*, p. 161. A. Mastrocinque outrightly identified *Athalía* with the *ourobóros*, but did not explain how its semicircular shape relates to the circular form of the *ourobóros*. Nor did he produce evidence for his claim that the authors of these passages identified it with the constellation Draco. (A. Mastrocinque, *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), p. 162). Meanwhile, the Qabbālistic dragon has also been interpreted as the ‘imaginary line joining Caput to Cauda Draconis, the upper and lower nodes of the Moon’. W. W. Westcott, *Sepher Yetzirah; The Book of Formation with the Fifty Gates of Intelligence and the Thirty-Two Paths of Wisdom* (Edmonds, WA: Holmes Publishing Group, 1996), p. 33.

24 *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, eds. M. Civil, I. J. Gelb, B. Landsberger, A. L. Oppenheim, and E. Reiner (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1968), 505–9, s. v. ‘attalû’, p. 505.

... des hommes renommés dans cette science disent que les éclipses et la disparition des astres ont lieu à cause du Dragon (*Ataliâ*). Pour confirmer leurs paroles, ils dessinent une figure de ce genre, et ils disent que le dragon (*Ataliâ*) est un corps qui a une figure de dragon: souvent aussi ils l'appellent dragon et serpent. La largeur de son corps est de 24°, et le longueur est de 180 degrés, ce qui fait six signes du zodiaque ou la moitié de la sphère; on voit ainsi dès maintenant que sa tête et sa queue se font vis-à-vis et sont toujours diamétralement opposées. Ce dragon (*Ataliâ*) marche toujours dans deux signes du zodiaque, sa tête dans l'un et sa queue dans l'autre. Le milieu de son corps est en dehors de toute la couronne des signes du zodiaque, vers le nord, du côté du char, car il est courbé et a la forme d'un demi-cercle, comme un arc ... Son mouvement a lieu non comme celui des planètes, de l'Occident à l'Orient, mais comme celui des douze signes, de l'Orient à l'Occident. Il se déplace de 3'11" en un jour et une nuit, de 1°33' en un mois, et de 19°20' en un an. Il fait donc une révolution complète en 18 ans, 7 mois et 16 jours. Parce que ce dragon (*Ataliâ*) est en dessous du soleil et de la lune, chaque fois que la lune est en conjonction avec le soleil dans le signe et le degré où se trouve la tête du Dragon (*Ataliâ*) ou sa queue, le Dragon (*Ataliâ*) se tient devant la lune et cache aussi le côté du soleil ...²⁵

In addition, a 16th-century German manuscript discussing the *Astéra melané* or 'black star' responsible for eclipses features an illustration of this lunar dragon, coloured red, in which the head biting the tail is situated in the centre of the creature (Fig. 3).²⁶

25 Severus Sebokht of Qennešrê (Manuscript 346, Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris), 51, in F. Nau, 'La Cosmographie au VIIe Siècle chez les Syriens', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 15 (2. 5) (1910), 225–54, p. 254; compare 2–5, 52.

26 'Subest figura draconis οὐροβόρου rubro ornata quam infra repetimus ... Sequitur figura serpentis cum figuris mysticis'. Codex 34 (Erlangensis Ms. 93), Fr. 18, in Boll, *Germanicos*, pp. 76, 245–46. The 'ophiomorph' star is also depicted in the *Codex Latinorum Monacensi* 14456 (9th century CE), F. 73, and discussed in Codex Dresdensis, Da 33 (17th century CE), Fr. 7.



Figure 3 Illustration in an astrological text, Codex 34 (Erlangensis Ms. 93) (16th century CE). *Codices Germanicos*, ed. F. Boll ('Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum', 7; Bruxelles: Henry Lamertin, 1908), p. 246.

If medieval astrologers were cognisant of the 'nodal' dragon, it is conceivable that the two semicircular dragons biting each other's tails on an English alchemical scroll from 1588 CE (Fig. 4).²⁷ similarly denote

²⁷ "Finis corruptionis et principio generationis" [Ende der Fäulnis und Beginn der Zeugung]. *Der Kampf der beiden Urkräfte Sonne und Mond, Schwefel und Quecksilber im Himmelskreise*, Ripley Scrowle, 1 (Ms. Sloane 5025), library of the British Museum, London, United Kingdom, in T. Burckhardt, *Alchemie; Sinn und Weltbild* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Walter-Verlag, 1960) [hereafter Burckhardt, *Alchemie*], p. 99. 'Der alchemistische Prozeß im Zodiakus', in C. G. Jung, *Psychologie und Alchemie* (Zürich: Rascher Verlag,

the pair of monsters in charge of solar and lunar eclipses, especially since the circle formed by their bodies is placed within the ring of the zodiac and encloses part of the sun and the full moon in conjunction.

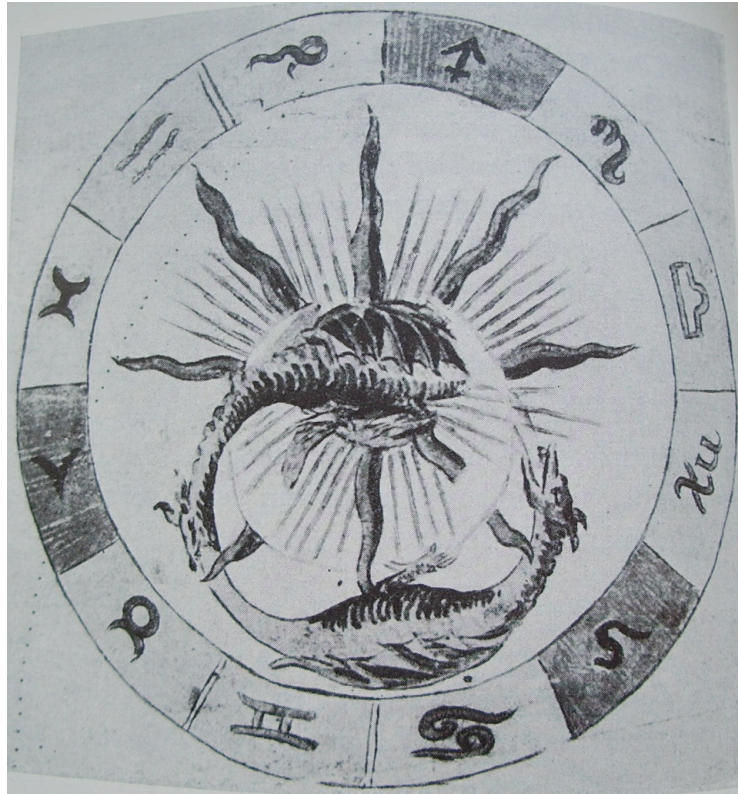


Figure 4 Ripley Scrowle, Lubeck 1588. British Museum, MS Add. 5025.

1944) [hereafter Jung, *Psychologie*], p. 266, fig. 92. To speak of a ‘*Kampf der beiden Urkräfte Sonne und Mond, Schwefel und Quecksilber im Himmelskreise*’ (Burckhardt, *Alchemie*, p. 99) or of ‘*Der alchemistische Prozeß im Zodiakus*’ (Jung, *Psychologie*, p. 266, fig. 92) without reference to eclipses does little to illuminate the symbolism.

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