

CULTURE AND COSMOS

A Journal of the History of Astrology and Cultural Astronomy

Vol. 14 no 1 and 2, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter 2010

Published by Culture and Cosmos
and the Sophia Centre Press,
in partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
in association with the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology
in Culture,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
Faculty of Humanities and the Performing Arts
Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales, SA48 7ED, UK.

www.cultureandcosmos.org

Cite this paper as: Cornelia Linde (trans.) and Dorian Greenbaum (trans. and annotated), 'Kepler's Nativity of Augustus', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 14 no 1 and 2, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter 2010 pp. 151-162.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue card for this book is available from the British Library

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ISSN 1368-6534

Printed in Great Britain by Lightning Source

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Translations of Kepler's Astrological Writings

Part I, Section 3.2. Kepler's Nativity of Augustus

Translated from the German and Latin by Cornelia Linde and Dorian Greenbaum (Latin only); edited and annotated by Dorian Greenbaum

Taken from Opera Omnia 8.1, pp. 331-33; Gesammelte Werke 21, 2.2, pp. 484-85 (translated by Cornelia Linde)

Taken from Opera Omnia 8.1, pp. 333-334; Gesammelte Werke 21, 2.2, pp. 486-490 (translated by Cornelia Linde [German and Latin] and Dorian Greenbaum [Latin])

We thank Anna Akasoy for her assistance with parts of the translation.

This section translates two reports, with calculations, that Kepler wrote to Emperor Rudolf II on the topic of the Emperor Augustus's nativity. The reports are undated, but the second wishes the Emperor a Happy New Year. This was not the only time that Kepler attempted to recreate the birthchart of Augustus. In a series of 1599 letters to Herwart von Hohenburg, Kepler discusses what the nativity of Augustus might be, basing his research on ancient authors. In those letters, he supposes that sub Capricorno' means a Capricorn Ascendant.¹ In the following analysis, however, he advocates a Capricorn Moon.²

¹ See, e.g., GW 13, pp. 320-322 (postscript to a letter from Kepler to Herwart von Hohenburg, 9-10 April 1599); on p. 320 is a facsimile of a chart for Augustus with 1° Capricorn rising (the Moon is at 17° Leo).

² For more on Kepler's writing on this topic, see the commentary of Friederike Boockmann in GW 21, 2.2, pp. 620-623; p. 623, n. 3, lists the correspondence on this topic between Kepler and Herwart von Hohenburg.

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First Report to Rudolf II on the Nativity of Augustus³

[*OO* 8.1, p. 331; *GW* 21, 2.2, p. 484]

[*Pulkovo XVIII, 176r*]

Most gracious Lord.

I have for some weeks in a row now been putting an awful lot of effort – but as I see, to almost no avail – into the nativity of the Emperor Augustus, which Your Royal Majesty wishes to know. For although it is no great work to calculate the figure (*figura*) of the sky for a certain time, what is lacking for this geniture, today, is that we no longer know the right time. It is true that not only the year but also the day and the hour are found in the ancient authors, for he was born under the consuls Cicero and Antony, that is, in the year 63 BC, in the form we have now in common usage. The time of day is known from Suetonius⁴ – and there is no contradiction – that he was born before sunrise, for his father Octavius arrived somewhat late to the council that day because he was delayed by his son's birth. About the day, as well, it is explicitly stated that it was the ninth before the Calends of October,⁵ that is, the 23rd of September. What kind of September this was, and how long it was from that September to the beginning of our year, cannot be determined from all the historians – so far as they are extant today – though [*Pulkovo XVIII, 176v*] in the meantime I have read Livy; Florus; Pliny;⁶ the letters of Cicero to his friends, to Atticus and to his brother Quintus; Suetonius; Solinus; Censorinus; Dion; Plutarch; Manilius;⁷ Gellius; Macrobius; Manutius; Scaliger's *On the Emendation of Time*; and others more.⁸ The reason is that before Julius Caesar the Romans had a disordered calendar and a year of 355 days, and according to ancient custom should have inserted

³ My title.

⁴ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, II (Augustus), 5.

⁵ Also from Suetonius, *ibid.*

⁶ 'Pliny' added in the margin.

⁷ 'Plutarch, Manilius' added in the margin.

⁸ For more on the history of the Roman calendar, see William Smith and Charles Anthon, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (3rd edition, New York, 1857), pp. 191-201.

an additional month of 22 days every two years in February. But their priests did that when it pleased them, and the documents relating in which years they did or did not do it are lost today. Yes, if only one could correctly calculate the last of these disordered years, which Julius Caesar called the Year of Confusion [*Annus Confusionis*],⁹ and how long it was, one could still make a guess. But those authors who write about it either do not give enough information, or they betray the fact that they themselves do not understand it.

Solinus¹⁰ indicates that the ancient Greeks had a year of 354 days, for each year was 11¼ days shorter than at present. This lack of 11¼ comes to 90 days in eight years, [*Pulkovo XVIII, 177r*] that is, three proper Egyptian months, each calculated at 30 days. [*GW 21, 2.2, p. 485*] If, then, these [*OO 8.1, p. 332*] 90 days are added to the ancient Greek year or 354 days, the sum is 444 days, namely 15 months. Censorinus read this,¹¹ and also found in Suetonius that the Year of Confusion had 15 months, which is why he concluded that the Year of Confusion had had 444 or 445 days (since the Roman lunar year is one day longer than the Greek one, namely not 354, but 355 days). And since he knew that Mercedonius,¹² one of the additional months, customarily had only 23 days, he subtracted 23 from 90, leaving 67, and therefore he surmised that the additional two months between November and December had 67 days altogether.¹³ The following has come from an Egyptian historiographer, Dion Alexandrinus,¹⁴ who added more to the story: he contradicts the other opinion and wants to improve it thus: because in his fatherland of Egypt the year has 13 months, that is, 12 months of 30 days and a thirteenth short month of 5 days (for they call the first day, as well, the ‘Neomenian Epagomenon’¹⁵); and Julius Caesar constructed his calendar

⁹ See Macrobius, *Saturnalia* I, 14.3.

¹⁰ See Solinus, *Polyhistor* I.39-47.

¹¹ Censorinus, *De die natali*, Chapter 20 (The Calendar).

¹² Mercedonius was the name of the Roman intercalary month, consisting of 22 or 23 days and inserted into the calendar of Numa, as Kepler says, every two years.

¹³ ‘And since he knew ... days altogether’ added in the margin.

¹⁴ Kepler means Cassius Dio; see his *Roman History*, Book XLIII.26.

¹⁵ Literally, the ‘new moon intercalary’ days.

in Egypt, and Suetonius testifies that the Year of Confusion had had not 13 months but 15,¹⁶ it follows that Julius Caesar added two Egyptian months, that is 60 days, that therefore the Year of Confusion had not 445 but 425 days. [*Pulkovo XVIII, 177v*] But one could as well make 67 out of these 60 days. Then Caesar, unlike the Egyptians, did not make a special month out of the 5 Egyptian days, but patched them into the preceding 60. Furthermore, he also took two days away from February's 30 days (the length of a month in Egypt), so that today it has only 28 days. Now these two, the preceding 5 and the 60 make together 67 days. From this, the 60 days make two whole months of 30 days, and he split up the remaining 7 days so that seven months, i.e. January, March, May, July, August, October [and] December each get one more day than an Egyptian month – not 30, as the remaining ones – but 31. The good Dion therefore thought, as he is Egyptian by birth, that he would like to reveal something for the Romans that they had not known before. But he got it wrong, because from time immemorial February has had 28 days; March, May, July [and] October each 31; and the remaining ones 29 days each.¹⁷ Thus it becomes clear that the Year of Confusion did not have 425 days, because three years before, the equinox was on 16 May, or on the Ides, as [*Pulkovo XVIII, 178r*] is clear from Cicero's letter to Atticus.

Since, then, all these testimonies about the ancient Roman year are suspect, I did as much as was possible for me to do and [then] chose the time.

For there is testimony from Suetonius,¹⁸ Manilius¹⁹ and Germanicus Caesar²⁰ that Augustus was born under Capricorn.²¹ But at that time of year Capricorn could not be rising, for the Sun at rising back then was in

¹⁶ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, I (Julius), 40.

¹⁷ These are the lengths of months in the Republican calendar.

¹⁸ Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (ca. 69 CE – aft. 122 CE), Roman biographer and historian.

¹⁹ Marcus Manilius (fl. ca. 10 CE), Roman astrologer and poet, author of the didactic poem *Astronomica*.

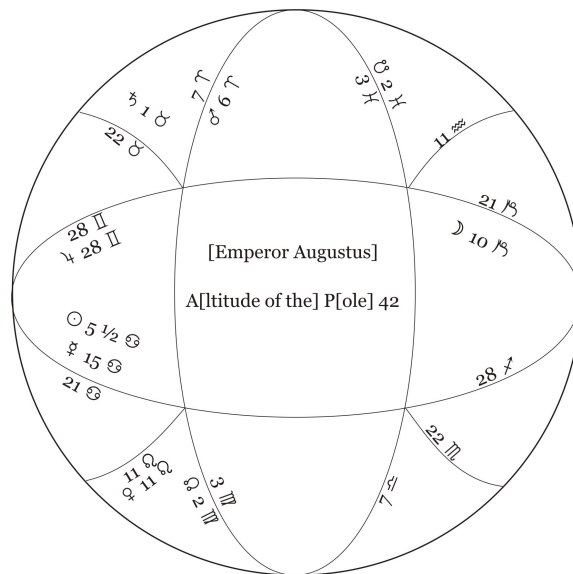
²⁰ Germanicus Julius Caesar (15 BCE – 19 CE), popular general and great-nephew of Augustus. In addition to his military pursuits, he also translated Aratus' *Phaenomena* into Latin.

²¹ See more on this below.

Cancer or Leo, that much can be known. From this, it follows that the Moon had to be in Capricorn. As one still says today, for ‘in the sign of Capricorn’ one should understand ‘was the Moon’. Furthermore, Scaliger proves that the ancient astrologers spoke like that and often looked to the Moon. Cicero, Book II, *De divinatione*: ‘Since, as they say, the birth (ortus) of the natives is regulated by the Moon, the Chaldeans notice this and jot down the birth stars, whichever seem to be joined to the Moon.’²² Therefore Augustus, according to the present Julian calendar, if one extends it back, was born either on [OO 8.1, p. 333] 2, 3 July or on 29, 30 July. But 2 July is more credible, so that kindly Jupiter is rising before the Sun, and the Moon stands in the seventh house in Capricorn; the nativity must have been good because it was highly regarded by the astrologer Theogenes.

[GW 21, 2.2, p. 486] Next I have erected a celestial theme as follows.

Figure 1. Drawing of Augustus’s Nativity according to Kepler’s positions [Pulkovo XVIII, 178v]²³



²² ‘As one still says ... Cicero II. ... joined to the Moon’ added in the margin.

²³ The GW editor (p. 486, n. 1) says this chart was drawn in round form, with oval house boundaries, which I have tried to duplicate here. I have used the positions in the transcription. The chart’s date is 2 July. Material in square brackets not in original.

Here Kepler gives a brief analysis of the 2 July version of Augustus's nativity.

[*Pulkovo XVIII, 178v*] Both the luminaries are in angles, and Jupiter in the eastern cusp (*in cuspid orientis*) [*i.e. the Ascendant*], oriental from the Sun, and its attendant, the full Moon, in opposition to Jupiter, the Sun, Mercury. Mars striking both luminaries by square. Jupiter in sextile to Saturn. In the Midheaven, the place of the great conjunction. The Sun in sextile to Saturn. Since this nativity looks like an imperial birth, the time also fits well. Since from the 2nd of July, 63 B. C. until the 25th of March, 44 B.C., in which the Julian calendar started, there are 6476 days. Since it was supposed to have been the 23rd of September in the Popilian year, deduct the remaining days until the end of the same Popilian year (altogether 95), which results in 6381. Also deduct the beginning of the first Julian year until the 25th of March (altogether 84 days). This results in 6297 days which are equal to 17 old Roman years, among which the last, or Year of Confusion, is supposed to have had 445 days. Therefore deduct 445 days and 5852 days remain for 16 Popilian years, since 16 Julian years have 5844 days. There should have been 5860 days, because 4 Popilian [years] are 4 days, and 16 [years] [*Pulkovo XVIII, 179r*] 16 days, too long, when they were still using the old system: *i.e.* alternating between 22 and 23 days. Since they often eliminated individual days for other reasons, this also should have happened several times during those 16 years, or they had 21 and 22 days alternating.

Therefore, even if my presupposition that the Moon was in Capricorn were false, it would still be plausible that our mistake does not exceed eight days.

So if someone else can give your Imperial Majesty a more certain report, I will praise him and be happy to learn from him.

The following charts and calculations were placed, by folio number, after the second letter to Rudolf, but appear between the first and second letter in GW. Boockmann notes (p. 621) that this extra page goes with the first report, not the second.

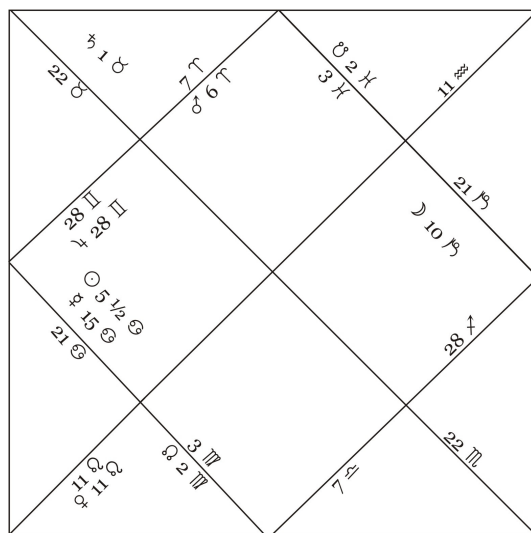
[*Pulkovo XVIII, 183r*]

Nativity of Augustus

29 July in these times (*hodierni*), with Jupiter oriental before the Sun

But on 2 July thus:

Figure 3. The 2 July 63 B.C.E. nativity of Augustus again, in square chart form
 [Pulkovo XVIII, 183r]



Margin notes on the right:

Thus it is under Capricorn, and a little before sunrise. Even so, nevertheless, it is a good nativity. For Jupiter is rising, the Moon is setting, Sun in the first, a sextile of Saturn and Sun [♄☉], a sextile of Saturn and Jupiter [♄♃], Jupiter attendant (*doryphoros*)²⁶ of the Sun, opposition of Sun and Moon [☉☾], both in square to Mars [☉♂]. In the Midheaven [MC] is the place of the preceding great [conjunction].

$$\begin{array}{r}
 3 \text{ n} \quad <28>.20 \\
 28 \text{ n} \quad \quad \quad \text{--} \quad 23.53 \\
 \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \underline{8.4} \\
 5 \frac{1}{2} \text{ f} \quad \underline{\quad 6.24} \quad \quad \quad 7.57 \text{ --} 27\text{f} \quad , \text{ at } 22 \text{ years} \\
 \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad 8.4
 \end{array}$$

²⁶ Lit. 'spear-bearer'. See Part I.2.1, p. 83, note 9.

Though much of this next section is in German, there is a substantial amount of Latin also, especially in the parts dealing with the astrological details of the various nativities under discussion.

Second Report to Rudolf II on the Nativity of Augustus²⁷

[GW 21, 2.2, p. 488] [*Pulkovo XVIII, 180r*]

Most gracious lord,

Your Imperial Majesty suspected me of a lack of diligence, as if I had not sufficiently investigated the birth of Augustus, and indeed you have the opinion that Augustus was born with a Capricorn Ascendant.²⁸

I want to counter this with the words of the authors. And turning first to Scaliger for a list of those who have written on this topic, since he is very diligent and does not overlook any author who writes on a certain topic. He now writes in his Book *De Emend. Temp.*,²⁹ fol. 415, thus: ‘Augustus was born the 9th day before the Calends of October in the consulship of M[arcus] T[ullius] Cicero [and] C[aius] Antonius, with Capricorn marking the hour’ (this is where his opinion agrees with your Imperial Majesty’s) ‘in the authors Suetonius and Germanicus Caesar, on the silver coins of Augustus.’³⁰

What these authors testify has to be believed. They do not testify, however, that either Capricorn marked the hour (*horoscopirt habe*) or

²⁷ My title.

²⁸ One begins to wonder if the reason that Rudolf persisted in thinking that Augustus had a Capricorn Ascendant was because he himself had one, and wanted to find astrological similarities between himself and Augustus.

²⁹ Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609), Dutch historian and philologist. Among many other works, he wrote *Opus de emendatione temporum* (1583), about which the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2005 edition, s.v. ‘Scaliger’) says: ‘Scaliger’s greatest work is the *Opus de emendatione tempore* (1583; “Study on the Improvement of Time”), a study of previous calendars. In it he compared the computations of time made by the various civilizations of antiquity, corrected their errors, and for the first time placed chronology on a solidly scientific basis.’

³⁰ The Latin as per Kepler: *Augustus natus est IX. Cal. Oct. M. T. Cicerone, C. Antonio Coss. Capricorno horoscopante auctoribus Suetonio, nummis argenteis Augusti et Caesare Germanico*. Scaliger took this information from Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, II, 5 and 94.

was in the Ascendant [*i.e.*, *the first house*]. For Suetonius was the first to use this expression: ‘*He stamped a silver coin with the mark of the constellation Capricorn, under which he was born.*’³¹ This mentions Capricorn, [OO 8.1, p. 334] [*Pulkovo XVIII, 180v*] but it does not say that Capricorn was in the Ascendant, only that Augustus was born under this constellation. But in common language, someone is born under that constellation in which the Moon was. In the notes in the latest edition of Manilius, fol. 296: They said that the sign in which the Moon is, marks the hour (*horoscopare*).³² And Scaliger declares in Manilius³³ that ancient astrology also observed this rule.³⁴

Likewise on ancient coins there is only the figure of Capricorn, but it is not said whether it was in the Ascendant or whether merely the Moon was in it.

The words of Caesar Germanicus were thus: ‘*Capricorn in the heavens bore the divine godhead into your body at birth, [...] and carried it to the mother-stars*’,³⁵ that is, Capricorn is your birth-sign, which has made you into a god, so that all peoples are amazed and your country trembles. It is a poetic way of saying (perhaps going too far) that Capricorn could not have done it had not Jupiter helped him with the Sun, and Saturn configured with Jupiter. Neither does Germa- [*Pulkovo XVIII, 181r*] nicus say that Capricorn was in the horoscope.

Manilius saying ‘Happy Capricorn shone on the birth of Augustus’³⁶ means the same as what has been quoted before, and there is no word about the Horoscope or Ascendant, since ‘*ortus*’ (birth) always means nativity (*nativitas*), and nowhere ‘rising’ (‘*oriens*’). For it would not be Latin, *Augusti ortus*, that is, *Augusti horoscopus*.

³¹ *Lives of the Caesars*, II, 94.

³² ‘In the notes ... marks the hour’ added in margin.

³³ *I.e.*, in the *Astronomica*.

³⁴ Scaliger made an edition of the *Astronomica* with the title *M. Manilii Astronomicon libri quinque* (Paris, 1579).

³⁵ Germanicus Caesar, *Aratea*, 558-560: *hic (Capricornus), Auguste, tuum genitali corpore numen / ... / in caelum tulit et maternis intulit* [sic; critical edition has *reddidit*, ‘gave back’] *astris*.

³⁶ *Astronomica* 2.509: *Capricornus .../... in Augusti felix cum fulserit ortum....*

[GW 21, 2.2, p. 489] So, Your Majesty sees that no author says that Augustus was born with Capricorn rising. It is easy to come to the conclusion that this also could not have been the case. ‘*He was born*’, in the words of Suetonius,³⁷ ‘*at sunrise*’; therefore he was born with Gemini or Cancer rising, since the Sun was in Cancer or Leo.

That it is not important whether the planets are in the first house, or the horoscope, or the seventh, tenth or fourth, is proven by rules and examples. Ptolemy thus writes: ‘*If both luminaries are in masculine signs, and in angles*’ (of which there are four, Ascendant, Medium Coeli, Seventh, Imum coeli) [Pulkovo XVIII 181v] ‘*and attended by five planets, matutine with respect to the Sun, vespertine with respect to the Moon, they will be Kings. But if the attendants themselves are either in angles or configured to the superior angle of heaven, they signify an emperor of the world.*’³⁸

Therefore Augustus had the Sun in the Ascendant, the attendant Jupiter in sextile to Saturn, and Mars in square to the Sun, all three oriental, Mars also in the Midheaven, according to my calculation, and the Moon in Capricorn in the angle of the seventh [house].

Nero had the Sun rising in Sagittarius, Jupiter and Mars oriental in Scorpio, Saturn oriental in square to the Sun, the Moon in Leo. Mahomet I had the Sun, Jupiter and Mars in Aries in the Medium Coeli, oriental [and] in square to Saturn, and the Moon in Taurus.³⁹ Suleiman had the Sun in the Midheaven in Aries, Jupiter oriental in Pisces, the Moon, Saturn, Venus in Taurus in the angle of the Midheaven, Mars in Gemini, all occidental. Frederick IV, Emperor, had the Sun [Pulkovo XVIII, 182r] in Libra, Mars oriental in Virgo and both in the Ascendant. Saturn in the seventh in Pisces, the Moon in the angle of the fourth in Sagittarius. Maximilian I had Jupiter in the Ascendant retrograde in Virgo, the Sun in

³⁷ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, II, 5. ‘In the words of Suetonius’ are in the margin of the manuscript.

³⁸ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* IV, ch. 3, sentences 1-2.

³⁹ These positions do not match those in the delineation Kepler made of Mohammed (see **Part I.3.1** in this volume). A chart-form with birth data of 23 April 596, but no positions, exists (GW 21, 2.2, p. 267, No. 621). These positions also do not match those of the 594 C.E. birthchart proposed by Sutorius and cast correctly by Röslin (see **Part I.3.1, Figure 1**, p. 142 in this volume). Possibly Kepler meant Mehmet I, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1413-1421. (Thanks to Cornelia Linde for this suggestion.)

the angle of the seventh in Aries, Mars in Leo occidental, Saturn in the angle of the fourth, Capricorn,⁴⁰ in square to the Sun. Charles V had Capricorn rising, and the Moon in the angle of the first in Capricorn, Jupiter oriental with the Sun, Venus, Mercury in Pisces in the second house, not even in an angle. Ferdinand [had] Saturn and Jupiter in the Ascendant and Gemini, occidental to the Sun, Venus, **[OO 8.1, p. 335]** Mercury in Pisces, Mars oriental in the Medium Coeli, the Moon in the angle of the fourth. Maximilian II [had] the Sun in the angle of the fourth in Leo, Jupiter oriental in Cancer, attendant of the Sun, Saturn oriental in square to the Sun, Mars occidental in the angle of the seventh, the rising sign is Gemini. Rudolf II [had] the Sun and Jupiter occidental in the angle of the seventh and in sextile [*Pulkovo XVIII, 182v*] to Mars oriental, the Moon oriental and in trine to Saturn.

Therefore Capricorn was nothing more than a name in the nativity of Augustus and did not mean anything particularly lucky. Because it's not the forest which is important but the wildlife which runs therein; the twelve signs are only the forest and the planets which move in them are those which have to act.

[GW 21, 2.2, p. 490] I would like to wish Your Imperial Majesty a Happy New Year in most devoted obedience, and commend myself to your imperial Grace most obediently.

⁴⁰ Taking 'Capricorni' as in *OO*, agreeing with 'quartae'; *GW* has 'Capricorno'.