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Translations of Kepler's Astrological Writings

Part I. Kepler as Practising Astrologer

Section 1. Kepler's Personal Practice of Astrology

Subsection 1. Helisaeus Röslin's Delineation of Kepler's Birthchart, 1592

Translated by Cornelia Linde; edited and annotated by Dorian Greenbaum

Helisaeus Röslin (1544-1616) was a doctor and astrologer from Strasbourg who also studied astronomy, geography, cartography and numismatics. Kepler wrote to him, perhaps in the summer of 1592,¹ asking for a chart delineation (but withholding his name). E. Rosen describes Röslin as 'a widely recognized authority on astrology.'² (In an interesting development, Kepler and Röslin later became intellectual

¹ This letter has been lost, but the time frame for it has been conjectured by Edward Rosen, 'Kepler's attitude toward astrology and mysticism', in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge/London/New York, 1984), pp. 253-72, here p. 254. It is Röslin's reply that is translated below. *OO* 8.1, pp. 294-95, either mistranslates or mistranscribes '1593' (as Rosen says, p. 269, n. 11).

² *Ibid.*, p. 255.

*adversaries in the matter of the appearance of a nova in 1604.)*³ This letter is written in a combination of Latin and German.

Taken from *Opera Omnia* 8.1, pp. 294-95;⁴ *Gesammelte Werke* 19, pp. 320-321

[OO 8.1, p. 294; GW 19, p. 320]

[*Pulkova XIX*, 85r-v] The most learned Master of arts was born in the year 1571, 27th day of December, 2.30 hours⁵

Manners are adduced⁶ from Mercury [☿], while the lord of the Horoscope⁷ is setting,⁸ and since it is goaded (*stimuletur*) both by the square with Mars [♂] and the Moon [☾] in the eye of Taurus [♉],⁹ a star of the nature of Mars [♂] and Mercury [☿], I judge his manners to be Mercurial and Martial, speedy and somewhat choleric. Mercury in Capricorn [☿ in ♑] swift in motion confers swiftness of intellect and tendency toward deep and hidden arts (*artes*).

Mars [♂] goading (*stimulans*) Mercury in a square aspect signifies precocious intellect.

³ For more on this, see M. A. Granada, 'The Discussion between Kepler and Roeslin on the Nova of 1604', in *1604-2004: Supernovae as Cosmological Lighthouses*, eds Massimo Turatto, Stefano Benetti, Luca Zampieri and William Shea (San Francisco, 2005), pp. 30-42; also Miguel A. Granada, 'Kepler v. Roeslin on the Interpretation of Kepler's Nova: (1) 1604-1606', *Journal for the History of Astronomy* (2005), vol. 36, pp. 299-319.

⁴ The title in *OO* 8.1, p. 294: 'Nativity of Kepler, written by H. Röslin in the year 1593'.

⁵ This chart is for the time rectified by Kepler.

⁶ *Sumuntur* in *GW* 19, p. 320; *sequuntur* ('follow') in *OO* 8.1, p. 294.

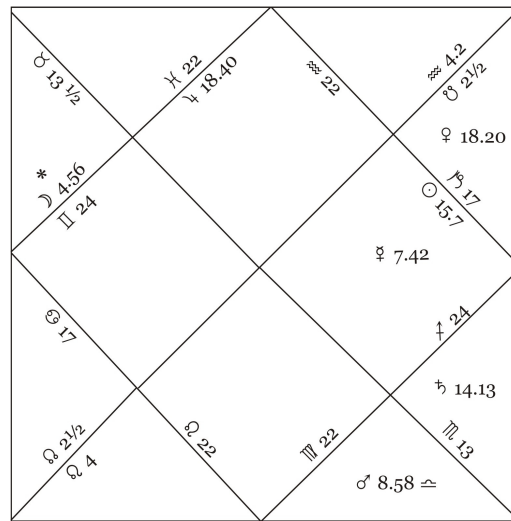
⁷ 'Horoscope' here and elsewhere in the letter means the Ascendant. Its Lord is Mercury because Gemini rises in Kepler's chart (Mercury rules Gemini).

⁸ I.e., in the 7th house.

⁹ Aldebaran. Ptolemy, in *Tetrabiblos* I, ch. 9, says that this star is of the nature of Mars only.

The nativity seems to be rather violent (*violenta*), since one luminary, the Sun, is in a violent sign,¹⁰ and the other, the Moon, is with a violent fixed star, the eye of Taurus [S]. And one of the malefics, Mars, damages the Sun with a square aspect.

Figure 1. Facsimile of Kepler's birthchart transcription in *GW 19*, p. 320¹¹ (*Pulkova XIX*, 85r)



Likewise Mercury, the lord of the Horoscope [*Ascendant*], is in a violent sign and afflicted by Mars [♂].¹² The dispositor of the sect

¹⁰ I have not been able to find any references in Renaissance astrology to Capricorn (the sign of Kepler's Sun [and Mercury]) as a violent sign. It is, of course, a bestial sign (the goat-fish), so perhaps that is where Röslin supposes violence.

¹¹ These positions duplicate those in Kepler's final rectified birthchart ('Tertio', *Pulkova XXI*, 457v), with the exception of Mars, which Kepler emends in his 'Tertio' chart to 8.33 Libra. The house cusps here mostly lack minutes, which appear in the 'Tertio' chart.

¹² The planet Mars is often associated with violence.

luminary, Saturn, is also in a violent sign.¹³ But Venus and Jupiter cancel all this violence, shining light together in their aspects with the Sun, Mars and Saturn [☉, ♂ et ♃¹⁴].¹⁵

As for the Lord Master's objection that he is not able to discover [the cause]¹⁶ from directions¹⁷ why, in the Bacchanals of 1591, he endured such a sharp and burning fever,¹⁸ [GW 19, p. 321] I say indeed that the cause shows itself even in the first aspect of the natal chart, without even applying the calculation, i.e. Mercury [☿] coming to¹⁹ the Horoscope from the square aspect with Mars [♂]. Likewise, from direction, by the meeting of the Sun with the Dragon's tail.²⁰

But the Lord says that those meetings, according to calculation, did not fall in the 21st year of life. I reply: I have learned this much in astrology, that one can't tie these things to years, let alone days, especially when we

¹³ *OO* 8.1, p. 294, omits *dispositor Luminaris conditionari*. Kepler's is a day chart, so its luminary is the Sun in Capricorn, which is ruled by Saturn. Saturn is in Scorpio, which is occasionally referred to as violent (the scorpion's sting).

¹⁴ Glyphs in *OO*; planetary names written out in *GW*.

¹⁵ This is testimony to Röslin's belief in the power of benefics to cancel out effects of malefics.

¹⁶ 'causam' in *GW*, absent in *OO*.

¹⁷ I think this is not a reference not to primary directions, which are done by moving a planet or chart point according to its diurnal motion until it comes to an aspect with another planet or chart point (they are based on the primary, or diurnal, motion of the celestial sphere, which moves through the entire zodiac in one day). Instead, I think Röslin means secondary directions, a.k.a. progressions, where the planetary and angle positions for the 21st day of life represent the 21st year.

¹⁸ See the correspondence with Fabricius, *OO* 1, p. 310 (**Part I.1.2** in this volume). Kepler tells Fabricius that the fever was due to (progressed) Mars squaring his natal Sun. Rosen (as in n. 1) also discusses this passage, pp. 253-55. (But Rosen unaccountably writes that Kepler was born at 2:30 a.m., which cannot place the Sun in Kepler's 7th house, above the horizon. Kepler's standard practice was to count hours from noon, so 2:30 is 2:30 p.m.)

¹⁹ 'accurrere' in *OO* 8.1, p. 294; 'occurrere' in *GW* 19, p. 321.

²⁰ The Moon's South Node.

may not be sure of the minute of birth. And if the Lord were reckoned to have been born even 20 minutes before, 19 II 30 [will be] rising, and the Horoscope will meet Mars's square aspect in the 21st year of life.²¹ This meeting could certainly cause a burning fever of this nature. But I shall reckon that the Lord was born at the hour I have²² in the present chart; still, it could be that the square of Mars delays the effect because of another direction, that of the Sun, to conjunct the South Node [♁L],²³ which happens only in the 23rd year of life.

Furthermore, I have learned that when two directions come this close to each other, that they pour out their effects together, the one delaying and the other speeding up, in due time. Anyone wanting to pinpoint the effects which come out of directions to a certain year, let alone month and day, would be very much deceived. One thing is certain: stars (*astra*)²⁴ have an effect, especially in such prominent directions as here,²⁵ of Mars's square [□] to the Horoscope. [OO 8.1, p. 295] But the method is not that certain that one can pin it to a certain time, as many particulars

²¹ 'Et si Dominus ponatur natus per 20 saltem minuta ante[quam] ascendit 19Ge30, et sic horoscopus occurret quadrato Martis aspectui 21. anno aetatis currente...'. (OO 8.1, p. 294 has 'antequam', GW 19, p. 321 has antè quam.) I have made an emendation of *ante[quam]*, for the following reason: if the chart is cast for about 20 minutes earlier than the time Kepler has sent to Röslin (at 2:10:56, to be exact), 19°30' Gemini will indeed be the rising (Ascendant) degree. Rosen (as in n. 1) has also translated this passage; though Rosen even says, after he gives his translation, that the birth data given by Kepler yields a 24° Gemini Ascendant, he still does not understand that his translation misreads this information: 'And if the master [of arts] is assumed to have been born only 20 minutes before 19°30' Gemini rises, the nativity will occur with Mars in the aspect of quadrature while the master is in his 21st year...'. Furthermore, Rosen has mistaken *Horoscopus* for the entire 'nativity', when it is clear that only the Ascendant is meant; and obviously did not understand that the use of the words 'occursus' and 'occurro' are referring here to the astrological technique of directions.

²² 'quam habeo in figuram' in OO 8.1, p. 294; 'quam habet figuram' in GW 19, p. 321.

²³ The South Node is traditionally malefic.

²⁴ I.e., planets.

²⁵ 'sonderlich solche firmeme Directiones' in GW 19, p. 321; '...sonderlich solche schönen directiones' in OO 8.1, p. 294.

will take effect and interrupt heaven's universal laws, so that their effect is either to speed up or delay.²⁶ Also, the stars' movements haven't been sufficiently investigated, so there are errors with respect to degrees, let alone minutes. But a one-degree difference means a whole year in directions; and a quarter of an hour produces four years in the Horoscope.²⁷ Therefore it is important to remember²⁸ that, in prediction, the astrologer [should] stay with universals; so that [when] he says that there may be a high fever at this time, and that the person may be in danger of losing his life around this or that year, it could happen earlier or later.²⁹

Thus, the fever suffered by the Lord Master in his 21st year was caused by the square of Mars [♂] meeting the Horoscope, which according to calculation ought to have come at the age of 15½. And while the square has caused this effect, not everything is over yet, especially because the Sun is meeting the Dragon's tail, making it that the Lord Master has a weaker bodily constitution now than at other times; thus he could easily fall victim to sickness again. For these meetings of directions often take effect on humans over a period of several years, so that the Lord has not yet left these meetings altogether behind him. Around the 34th year of age, the Moon [☾] will meet the square aspect of Mars [♂], then around age 38 the Sun comes to the square aspect of Saturn. Around these times he is in danger of being greatly inconvenienced by illness and other mishaps. It could even happen that these two meetings have a joint effect, which should fall in the middle period around the 36th year of age.

The illnesses are alleviated by Mercury, lord of the Horoscope, though he is hurt by Mars, [as well as] by Saturn placed in the 6th house in the

²⁶ 'dass Ir Effectus eintweder anticipire oder postponire' in *OO* 8.1, p. 295; 'daß jer effectus eintweder anticipiert oder postponiert' in *GW* 19, p. 321.

²⁷ A new degree rises in the Ascendant approximately every four minutes (depending on the ascensional times of each sign), so 15 minutes would equal roughly 4 degrees, and thus 4 years in directions.

²⁸ 'Ideo ist zu erinnern' in *OO* 8.1, p. 295; 'Ideo tutussum [sic] est' in *GW* 19, p. 321.

²⁹ This paragraph has also been translated by Rosen (as in n. 1), p. 255. But note that Rosen has translated 'directiones' as 'configurations', incorrectly, I believe. He failed to realise that the point of Röslin's commentary was to discuss directions and their effects, not merely the general configuration of the chart.

sign of Scorpio; as this placement of signs denotes the bladder,³⁰ it may sometimes even cause a flow of blood in the urine. However, Venus shining in a good aspect on Saturn, and Jupiter also, make the illnesses curable.

I have written this down very quickly, to bring some kind of satisfaction to your request; and I haven't reread it.

Hagenau, 17 Oct 1592.³¹
Helisaeus Röslin, Physician, etc.

³⁰ 'in qua signorum constitutione vesica denotatur' in *OO* 8.1, p. 295; 'in quo signo vicina vesica denotat' in *GW* 19, p. 321.

³¹ *OO* 8.1, p. 295, has '1593' in error.