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## Editorial

In most histories of astronomy astrology is almost invisible even though many reference books acknowledge the extremely close relationship between the two disciplines until the seventeenth century. Indeed the words *astrologia* and *astronomia* were often interchangeable. The dominant attitude to their relationship in medieval and Renaissance Europe would have been shaped by Claudius Ptolemy's introduction to the *Tetrabiblos*, in which he defined what we would now regard as separate disciplines as parts of a single intellectual inquiry. He wrote

Of the means of prediction through astronomy, O Syrus, two are the most important and valid. One, which is first, both in order and in effectiveness, is that whereby we apprehend the aspects of the movements of sun, moon and stars in relation to each other as they occur from time to time; the second is that in which by means of the natural character of these aspects themselves we investigate the changes that they bring about in that which they surround.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the fact that it is almost a century since Lynn Thorndike's *The Place of Magic in the Intellectual History of Europe*<sup>2</sup> made the strongest case for the history of astrology's inclusion in the history of ideas, histories of astronomy still generally maintain the view that astrology was essentially peripheral. This view has again recently been challenged by Michael Molnar's *The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magi*,<sup>3</sup> reviewed in this issue by Robert Hand. The publication of this work stirred up a controversy on the HASTRO E mail list in which a trenchant statement of the importance of the history of astrology was put by Bradley E. Schaefer. On 8 December he wrote,

Molnar's work has two very deep morals for historians of astronomy. Modern historians should seek what was important to the culture of the time and not what is important to modern historians...Modern astronomy historians have a strong tendency to avoid astrology, and this is all wrong. Sure, some discussion of astrology exists, but nowhere near as much as should exist. The apparent cause is that

modern astrology is bunk and historians want to avoid being associated with something that (in modern times) is bunk. But historians are trying to understand ancient people (it does not matter whether ancient astrology is bunk) and here astrology is de facto an important force. So my second moral from Molnar's work is that we must overcome our bias against astrology so as to add this as a powerful and relevant tool to understanding how people used to think.

In his review of Molnar's book in *Sky and Telescope* Schaefer argued that 'the new paradigm forces the realization that astrology was an important force in historical times so that the disregard of the topic by most historians is blatant chauvinism'.<sup>4</sup>

In the *Concise Cambridge History of Astronomy* Michael Hoskin and Clive Ruggles acknowledge the problem when they honestly write that 'This *History* will concentrate on the emergence of the science of astronomy as we know it today'.<sup>5</sup> This clear statement suggests that, if astronomy continues to evolve, a history of astronomy in 2099 might contain different information about, say, the seventeenth century to one written in 1999. It also opens the way to histories of astronomy written from the perspective of former ages and hence to the reintegration of astrology into the history of astronomy.

#### References

1. Claudius Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. F.E.Robbins (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass., 1940), I.1, p 3. See also Claudius Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, Book I, trans. Robert Schmidt (Golden Hind Press, Berkeley Springs WV, 1994), p xi, p 2. n 1.
2. Lynn Thorndike, *The Place of Magic in the Intellectual History of Europe* (New York 1905).
3. Michael R. Molnar, *The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magi*, (Rutgers University Press, Piscataway, NJ, 1999).
4. Bradley E. Schaefer, 'A Messianic Revolution', review of Michael R. Molnar, *The Star of Bethlehem*, *Sky and Telescope* December 1999, pp 77-79.
5. Michael Hoskin and Clive Ruggles, 'Astronomy Before History' in *The Concise Cambridge History of Astronomy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999) p. 1.

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