

Astrology in Antiquity, in the Renaissance, and Today

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An alleged science, astrology, and an alleged form of magic, cartomancy, have had an upswing almost as tremendous as that of electronic technology in Germany within the last decades. This seems to be the case also in other European countries as well as in the USA and in Asia. I must ask you to evaluate the situation in Australia for yourselves. Esoteric practices like gazing at crystal balls or belief in chiromancy and in talismans also have increasing numbers of followers, who venture into the public arena. According to an opinion poll, more than 50 per cent of Germans believe that there is something in astrology. It has acquired the reputation of being a respectable science of a special kind. Not only illustrated magazines and television channels propagate it seriously as a reliable instrument of foretelling the future. Even some prominent persons confess their adherence to it without hesitation. One reads about politicians in the USA and in Russia who have been counselled by astrologers. And investors at the stock market, managers, and even physicians, are said to rely on their help.

The spread of belief in astrology during the twentieth century is an astonishing phenomenon which demands an explanation. This development and its causes deserve more scholarly attention than they have so far received. It seems that the more our world changes, the greater the attraction of mysterious astrological statements becomes. The more complicated and

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incomprehensible technological products become, the more incalculable the perils that threaten us seem, the more the teachings of Christianity lose their binding power; then, the more believers in astrology find there hope and a sense of security. Age-old experiences seem to be combined with precise science, mythological wisdom with deep psychological insights. Astrology regards itself as immune from scientific criticism in the same way as religion, and it sees itself as being on another level of thought, refusing to give explanations and referring to its alleged confirmation by experiences accumulated over a great length of time. On the other hand, the astrological system is so absurd in the eyes of astronomers that for the most part they are not willing to waste time in demonstrating its absurdity.

If our only choice were between science and humbug, astrology would obviously belong to the latter. But this dichotomy is in fact too simple. The system of astrology is, second to Christianity, the most influential bequest we have from the Greco-Roman world of antiquity. Considered as an historical phenomenon, it is fascinating in its mythological, symbolic and scientific complexity. In our times, astrological statements made in everyday life like 'I am a Capricorn' may give the speaker the feeling of an identity and may win sympathies. An astrologer with experience of life and the ability to empathise may help in decision-making and in overcoming strokes of fate by investing his insights and inventions with the authority of the mysterious stars.

In public discussions about astrology we find again and again arguments that the ancient sceptics already collected, for instance, the simultaneous death of many different people in a particular disaster or the different fortunes of twins and other people born in the same place at the same time. On the other hand, astrologers refer again and again to alleged age-old experiences which in their view make rational explanations superfluous, or they point out that they represent a science beyond science. In the media, one often finds the views of astronomers and astrologers opposed to each other, and the reader is then given the choice between two apparently equally justified persuasions. A look at the early

history of astrology would very quickly show the reader that it is refuted by its own historical foundations, because these foundations are clearly so far removed from having a basis in reality that no experience of fulfilled forecasts can ever confirm astrology as a science. But in modern discussions the historical perspective, curiously, is almost totally neglected, except that astrologers like to point to Babylonian and Egyptian wisdom. The argument that experience provides the evidence for the reliability of astrology reminds me of the comet in 1618 that was interpreted as the sign of an immediate outbreak of war, because comets were always regarded as signs of war. And the interpretation was fulfilled: the so-called Thirty Years War followed in Germany.

Modern astrology has developed numerous complicated additional methods and terms, but it is grounded in the same concepts as in Hellenistic times, when the astrological horoscopes, which are basically still used, were invented. These concepts follow a series of assumptions which are for the modern observer evidently erroneous and which are not remedied by any refinement of the system.

At the beginning, in the foundation of astrology, lay not experiences but mythical identifications, deductions from products of fantasy, metaphorical transfers and arbitrary schematism. I should like to explain these terms by a few examples.

First, the mythical identification: because a particular planet glows reddish and the colour of blood is red the Babylonians identified this planet with their god of plague, of war and of the underworld, with Nergal. The Greeks followed and called it Ares or the star of Ares. The consequence was that its rays were credited with the power to shape the character of a man according to Ares (Mars). In this way, the Olympian gods have survived down to our times.

Second, the fantastic deduction: in Mesopotamia a group of stars was imagined to show the figure of a lion. This lion was thought to transfer the notorious characteristics of lions to men.

And when the lion had moved from its original place because of the precession of the equinoxes—which runs full circle within 26,000 years—it was still the original place that was thought to transfer leonine characteristics to men.

Third, the metaphorical transfer: because something that rises seems in everyday life to be stronger than something that falls, the star that rises at the moment of a man's birth, that is, the star that is in his 'ascendant', has the strongest influence upon him.

And finally, the arbitrary schematism: in order to determine which sign of the zodiac has the strongest influence on a part of the human body, one began with Aries, the first sign after the vernal equinox, referred it in a cosmic analogy to the head and then matched each sign after the other with a lower part of the body until one had reached the feet with Pisces. The mathematical symmetries in the horoscope are the result of such arbitrary schematism too.

Although the edifice of astrological teachings rests on these unfounded columns of mythical identification, fantastic deduction, metaphorical transfer and arbitrary schematism—four pillars of unwisdom—many people with no knowledge of these foundations put their trust in this house because it is so comfortable. Religious faith is rarely shaken by rational criticism.

In contrast to the universities of early modern times, in which the possibility and reliability of the various methods of prognostication were often controversially discussed, the universities of our time do not usually deal scientifically with these matters, settled a long time ago, and rarely discuss the contemporary growth of esoteric and occult beliefs. In my view, they do not at present pay enough attention to their task of enlightening the public in these matters, although the forms of superstition and the history of astrology have been and are being very successfully researched within the universities themselves.

While working on the arts of prognostication in the Renaissance, I became aware of a circumstance which has not been stressed enough so far. As is well known, the humanists of the Renaissance were very interested in all questions related to

the foretelling of the future. Interested in ancient literature in general, they studied intensively the astrological literature of antiquity too, especially, that of Manilius, Firmicus Maternus, the *Centum Sententiae* (the *Hundred Statements* allegedly written by Ptolemy), and Ptolemy himself, and the humanists often accepted their sayings because of their respect for ancient literature.

Although Greco-Arabian astrology had infiltrated western Europe already in the Middle Ages, it can be assumed that astrology would not have become so important in early modern times and in our own day if the humanists had not accepted it in the Renaissance and if it had not in this way become part of the convictions both of the educated and of the common people. Humanism made astrology respectable in modern times. And although it steadily lost ground in the eighteenth and especially in the nineteenth centuries as a consequence of enlightenment and of astronomy, it has regained a foothold and acquired increasing numbers of adherents again since the First World War. Thus, humanism played a pivotal role, had a decisive function in the fortunes of astrology from Greco-Roman antiquity to modern times. This does not mean that all humanists believed in astrology, but for a long time the sceptics were a minority. In the sixteenth century, many Catholics were positively disposed towards astrology, although it was repeatedly condemned by the Popes, and many Protestants, too, were counted among its adherents. Melanchthon defended it against Luther's rejection.

A sixteenth-century manuscript which I found in the Duke August Library in Wolfenbüttel may serve to show how admired, but also how controversial, astrology, magic and prognostication of the future were at the beginning of that century.¹ The manuscript was written by several scribes in 1522–25 for a pharmacist named Hans Heubler who lived in the imperial city of Ulm on the Danube. The manuscript contains astronomical, astrological, medical and magical texts in German, Latin and Greek. Heubler ordered a German translation of the instructions for the fabrication of talismans from a Latin copy of the *Picatrix*, a

magic book which had been translated from Arabic into Latin in Spain in the Middle Ages. The pictures of planets inscribed on certain stones at certain times were supposed to have particular magical, and also possibly medical, effects. They allegedly brought about a long life, many children, an easy birth, contraceptive and styptic effects; they suppressed fever, gastritis and melancholy, and prevented children's diseases, loss of memory, and dementia.

At the same time, the pharmacist's brother-in-law, the physician Wolfgang Reichart, had no regard for such products. In a letter from the year 1534, preserved in the State Library of Hamburg, he severely attacks superstitious belief in the possible effects of pictures (I translate from his Latin):

Pictorial representations do not belong to the category of potentially effective agents and they have neither anything good in them nor a goal in the philosophical sense. They cannot produce certain effects by reason of themselves. They do not have effects on real things. There are only the effects they have on our reason. There are also physicians who are proud to follow this superstition. They draw milk from the astrological udders and are content to fertilize the Hippocratic field with such childish things. There was a drawing of a lion inscribed on a stone which a pharmacist sold to an abbot as a remedy against urinary calculus. It was supposed to heal him and bring him luck. But no effects whatsoever became evident. They also use a seal with a scorpion which they impress with incense against poison. A day would not suffice for me to remind you of all the frivolous and superstitious things that have invaded the art of medicine from the belief in pictures.

Talismans and pictorial representations cannot have natural effects according to Reichart's philosophically founded conviction. If talismans and pictures seem to have effects, one should according to him seek the cause either in the magic of devils, with whom he will not deal because they belong to the province of theologians, or in the beliefs of the common folk, who put their trust in talismans. One should not underestimate the effects of such trust, according to the ancient physician Galen.

The pharmacist Heubler thought otherwise and ordered nativity-horoscopes in the German language as well. In addition,

he wanted German translations of the instructions given by the astronomer Regiomontanus on how one could determine the positions of stars and of the comments of Firmicus Maternus on the effects of the moon and the degrees of the zodiac signs. In his letters, Reichart greeted his brother-in-law's faith in astrology with mockery and scepticism. So, for instance, when Heubler constructed a horoscope for Reichart's son and deduced from it the son's qualification for the study of law, Reichart sent it to his son, who was a student of medicine, so that he would have something to laugh about. And in 1535 he wrote about one of the yearly prognostications highly esteemed by Heubler:

It would have been better to use times of leisure for better occupations than to waste them with this silly playing, since up to now the yearly prognostications have transmitted more falsehood than truth. The prophecies are veiled in ambiguities and conditions, like: 'Bad things will come from the stars, sterility and wars and epidemics, perhaps not in our latitudes, but in the North; sometimes the influence will be milder in the East, where the sun is stronger; and if limping old Saturn does not bring damage in spring nor fire-breathing Mars in summer, the fruits will be rich and the crops fat.' Their prognostications are full of such ambiguities, like the oracles of Apollo in olden days. This is actually the intention of the astrological professionals. I have not found in this little text anything but pompous words and boasting for the masses.

The controversy between the physician and his brother-in-law the pharmacist about the validity of astrology and astrological medicine shows that trust in the mysterious science and rational criticism were to be found in the same place and at the same time. It also makes clear how welcome investigations and representations of the various prognostic methods must have been. There were many books on this topic. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the Cartusian monk Gregor Reisch gave in his encyclopaedia of sciences entitled *Margarita philosophica* (that is, *Philosophical pearl*) a critical survey of the different types of divination,² and even at the beginning of the eighteenth century the encyclopaedic work of the adherent of astrology Daniel Georg Morhof entitled *Polyhistor* (that is, *The man who knows much*)

contained a chapter 'De artibus divinatoriis et magia' ('On the arts of divination and magic').³ The Catholic cleric Friedrich Nausea published his *Libri mirabilium septem* (*Seven books of wonders*) in Cologne in 1532. On the one hand, he attacks astrologers and other foretellers of the future like the chiromantics and the geomantics, and condemns them as frivolous and irresponsible persons who want to plunder the people; on the other hand, he recognises in extraordinary, miraculous events, in appearances in the sky, in monsters and comets, signs sent by God of the imminent end of the world.

Among Protestants, the large and systematic *Commentarius de praecipuis generibus divinationum* (that is, *Commentary on the principal types of divination*), which was published by the Professor of Medicine and son-in-law of Melanchthon, Caspar Peucer, in 1553, enjoyed the widest distribution.⁴ The work of Peucer was superior to all other representations of this kind in its systematic completeness, its convincing categorisation and its clearly reasoned evaluation of all ancient and all modern types of divination. Peucer followed Melanchthon in his convictions, and divided the types of prognostication methods into four classes to which he gave these names: the pneumatic, the physical, the diabolic and the vulgar.

The first class, pneumatic divination, is produced through the impulse and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. All prophecies of the Old and New Testament belong to it, for instance, the prophecies of Daniel on the sequence of the four world monarchies, the prophecies of John's Apocalypse on the Antichrist and the signs of the ultimate Judgement, and also the prophecy believed to be from the school of Elia, and propagated by Melanchthon, that the world would exist for 6,000 years at the most, but probably for less than that because of our sins. The prophets and the apostles had been confirmed as true teachers by many miracles and by the exact correspondence of their prophecies with testimonies earlier revealed for the one god and his essence. Peucer does not recognize a pneumatic inspiration outside the Biblical field, in contrast to the many Christian visions of the Middle Ages. He only accepted

pneumatic inspiration outside the Bible in certain dreams.

The class of physical divination contains those types which Peucer regards as scientific and permitted to the Christian by God. Here the circumstances and signs of nature which was created by God are investigated. Astrology belongs to this class. Peucer defines it as follows:

It is the doctrine which shows the powers of the stars recognised by continuous experience, and demonstrates the characteristics, the temperaments and the tendencies in the elements and in men which have been caused by the light and the movements of the stars and which lead to certain actions if they are not prevented by God or by other stronger causes.

God's will, being a universal power, could naturally have stronger effects than the particular powers of the stars. Therefore, astrology is part of physics, founded not on deductions from principles, but on long experience. Its inevitable errors are the fault of the interpreters, not of the science. Peucer tries to confute the learned who erroneously want to refute the foundations of astrology, the common people who often make fun of astrology, and the pious who wrongly regard certain statements in Holy Scripture as prohibiting astrology.

Astrology is followed by meteorology, the science of the area between the moon and the earth. On the one hand, meteorology is weather forecasting on the basis of weather signs, which has become the basis of modern meteorology; on the other, it is the science of unusual events such as strong rainfalls, storms, floods and comets, which were regarded as sublunar phenomena. Peucer assumes that it is assured *consensu gentium* ('by the unanimous conviction of the nations') that unusual events announce disaster. He explains:

Unusual, terrible events of nature do not cause instant disaster, but announce it, and not disaster of a special kind, but disaster in general, by whatever causes it is produced, by those that are natural, but transcend the natural measure, or by God, by the angels or by the devils, who are especially powerful in the air. The ancient philosophers tried to explain unusual events in nature rationally

from natural causes. We cannot agree with that on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. They confirm that much happens by the direct intervention of God in the natural course of events and that God wants to announce and express something by such unusual events and also that many disturbances of the natural order are caused by devils with God's permission.

Anthropological sciences investigate human nature. One of them, physiognomy, deals with foretelling the future from the face or the hands of a person. These methods are called metoposcopy and chiromancy. Peucer stresses the dependence of chiromancy on astrology and regards it again as a science permitted by God, but not yet fully investigated. The same is the case with medicine and its prognostications based on fever, pulse and urine. And medicine has in his view its connections to astrology too, because it recognises the special influence of certain signs of the zodiac and planets on certain parts of the human body. Normal dreams follow the four temperaments, but prophetic dreams are, according to Peucer, conditioned by the effects of certain planets in certain positions or, if their announcements agree with the Holy Scriptures, are sent by God; or, in the case of the pagans, the Anabaptists, the enthusiasts and the fanatics, caused by the devil.

Teratoscopy also belongs to the prognostications from signs of nature permitted by God. It is the observation of new, unusual events which are contrary to the normal course of nature. They are produced by God or by angels or devils with God's permission. They consist, according to Peucer's definitions, of *monstra* like Siamese twins, of *ostenta* like clouds which appear in the form of certain figures, of *prodigia* like rivers with a reddish colour, and of *portenta* like the apparitions of ghosts. Although we often cannot explain such phenomena, we should observe them as signs of God's anger and follow his admonitions, because God may mitigate the announced evil or cancel it altogether if men repent of their sins and beg insistently for His grace.

The third class are the diabolical divinations. They embrace almost all the other types of divination known from antiquity or

used in Peucer's day. He lists and discusses almost 70 different types of divination which he condemns. Whereas the first and second class of divinations contained prophecies delivered by God, or prognostications permitted by Him, which were only obscured by the Fall of Man, the third class contains the methods devised by the devil mimicking God's creation. Therefore, they are forbidden for the Christian. They bring no success in most cases anyhow, although the devil occasionally fabricates the truth in order to disturb men and to seduce them to believe in him. Some customs are explained by Peucer as erroneous variations of the old Jewish religion. The devil instituted *oracula diabolica* like the oracle in Delphi, imitating the inspiration by the Holy Spirit. The pagan oracles and other forms of diabolical possession like that experienced by Pythians and Sibyls, ventriloquists, enthusiasts and ecstasies allegedly separated from their bodies, show the frenetic ecstasy of prophets possessed by the devil, whereas prophets inspired by God remain tranquil and rational when they receive the Holy Spirit.

Also all magicians, necromants and spiritualists, and those practising divination by mirror, crystal ball and pendulum are diabolic, and so too are spells and incantations, miraculous remedies and prophecies from the pecking of a cock. Peucer unfolds a multitude of practices in these chapters. He condemns the profanation of God's name by the cabbalists. He states the ineffectiveness of talismans, because pictures produced by men cannot give the depicted objects additional energies. He narrates how the pagans developed their rites of sacrifice from the various Jewish rites of sacrifice sanctioned by God and thus came to practise *extispicium*, that is, the inspection of entrails, the observation of fire and smoke, and prognostications from other elements of sacrifice, until the emperor Heliogabalus went so far as to use the entrails of men for prophetic purposes. Divination from the flight or the cries of birds and from lightning and thunderbolts is diabolic too in Peucer's opinion. These signs will not be due to God or nature, but will be either fictitiously invented by men or come from the devil. Therefore it would not be pious

to practise their observation.

But there are, according to Peucer, certain exceptions regarding the observation of animals. You may meet unusual animals in the field, at home or on a journey. In many of these cases you are being deceived and terrified by demons announcing bad luck, but often such occurrences are the work of angels who want to warn us of imminent perils. But one should not anxiously search for such signs and should not look everywhere for *omina*. In any case, experience, Peucer says, will have confirmed that certain sequences of events happen for which we cannot give rational explanations.

Another group of diabolic divinations comprises the use of dice and of several forms of lottery for prognostication. These Peucer saw as not at all defensible. God, who tells us the future by means of the stars, does not need any detour through lotteries. The fulfilment of some few prophecies by lot is a trick of the devil, who wants to make men believe in him and admire him. In geomancy, prophecies are made with the help of lines on which points are distributed by chance. The duke and elector August of Saxony liked this practice, which had been taken over from the Orient. His subject Peucer rejected it vehemently, because the patterns would not have been produced by God's power. His description of diabolic forms of divination ends with divination by letters. The letters are connected with certain numbers or they are written in ashes and partially blown away by the wind. A book may be opened at random as in the case of the *Sortes Virgilianae*, in which the works of Vergil are used for this purpose. Verses may be written on slips of papers and drawn as lots. Peucer confesses that he did this himself as a child for fun. Another method using letters is anagrammatism, the rearrangement of the letters of a word to produce a new one. That is permitted as a game if no superstitious thoughts are involved. These human inventions become a deceiving work of the devil if they are used for telling the future.

In his fourth class, the vulgar divinations, Peucer placed popular prognostics, for example peasants' rules for forecasting

the weather. If these are based on the observation of many generations it is, according to Peucer, possible that they are caused by certain constellations in the sky. In this case they are to be regarded as belonging to the physical divinations which are permitted. But if the rules come not from the observation of nature, but from superstitious concepts like the view that it would be possible to foretell the weather of the following twelve months from the weather of the twelve nights after Christmas, then these rules belong to diabolical divination.

Thus, Peucer accepted only the prophecies of the Holy Spirit, which are always true and may be found only in the Bible, and the prognostications based on the natural sciences, which are often true but sometimes faulty. He rejected the many other prognostic methods and practices. According to his conviction, they do not lead to reliable results and are the work of the devil. This rejection of all ancient and modern methods outside the natural sciences left only scientific forms of prognostication for his own times. This seems to have a strong potential for enlightenment. But Peucer, following his teacher Melanchthon, included in the natural sciences not only meteorology and medicine, but also astrology, chiromancy, astrological medicine and teratology. A distinction between these sciences and the other natural sciences which would cause their adherents to locate them beyond or above the natural sciences, as is the case today, did not yet exist.

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries astrology, being linked to astronomy, was usually regarded as a recognised science, which was condemned several times by the Catholic church, but otherwise only occasionally attacked. It was regarded as the oldest physical science and still improvable by experience.

In the seventeenth century, numerous writings were published in which attempts were undertaken, on the one hand, to demolish astrology and other methods of divination by using religious, philosophical, physical or historical arguments, and, on the other, to legitimise them with arguments drawn from these same areas. The arguments of Catholics and Protestants centred almost

always on the question of whether or not astrology can be reconciled with God's word in the Bible. The objections against astrology were frequently directed against some of its concepts and methods, whereas its foundations and its basic errors remained untouched. This is also the case in the antiastrological Jesuit writings.

A basic, rational criticism that does not operate with Christian arguments is to my knowledge not found before the book *De annis climactericis et antiqua astrologia diatribae* (that is, *Essays on the climacteric years and the old astrology*), which the French Classicist and Professor in Leiden Claude Saumaise, latinised Salmasius, published in 1648.⁵ In this book Saumaise wanted to refute two favourite humanist notions, prognostic astrology and the climacteric years, that is, the conviction that human life is divided into periods of seven and nine years. It was believed that at the end of these periods, and especially in the 63rd year, the product of seven and nine, men are threatened by the peril of death more than at other times.

With regard to astrology, Saumaise already formulated the main points of his criticism in his preface in the following way:

It is absolutely certain that prognostic astrology can only be maintained if two concepts are regarded as being true. It is the end of astrology, if the celestial pictures of the so-called zodiac are not a reality and if the seven planets are not gods.

Constellations were the product of fantasy, produced by taking together certain stars. The same stars could have been differently combined to give totally different pictures. The sign of Leo allegedly made men and beasts noble and magnanimous by analogy. The reality of the picture would be a necessary prerequisite for such a possibility. And even then could we assume that the celestial lion would instil the courage of a lion in earthly creatures? For that case, the celestial lion would have to possess divine power. Analogous statements could be made about the alleged influence of planets.

Saumaise states that the length of life is not dependent on

stars, but only on climatic and local conditions, heredity and diet, and that the colour of skin and the behaviour of nations has nothing to do with the stars. He explains:

If the stars determine the length of life for all creatures, the power of the stars must be immense and simply godlike, and even more so, if they move the spirit of men, change their will and direct their plans. If they decided so many things for which a godlike power is necessary, they must be gods. The Chaldeans, Egyptians, Greeks and all who believed that they determined human fate believed that they were gods. In the opinion of the ancient philosophers they are either celestial bodies without a soul or natural beings with souls or gods. If they do not have a soul, they have no other power than to give light and warmth, since they seem to be fiery. If they are living beings, they still cannot form the spirit of a man and move his will. If, in addition, they possess godlike power, they should act like gods, but this is not the case. Besides, an innumerable multitude of gods would then exist impeding each other, since one or several usually act against the effects of others at the time of birth. And if the stars are separate worlds in themselves, they cannot have effects on our world and cannot operate causally on change and rule what is born in it. The sun which is the mightiest of the stars and which has a royal power among them has no other power than to bring light and warmth and to brighten other planetary bodies. The moon which is believed to have power second only to the sun has only a power to humidify [in this even Saumaise follows an astrological concept]. The other fixed stars have little or no effects in regard to light and warmth. From this we may deduce that there is no such thing as prognostic astrology since the stars are not gods. If prognostic astrology were possible, the stars would have to be considered gods, and the most powerful and most present as well, as the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Greeks and the astrologers of all nations have indeed believed. Civic religion venerated the gods, whom poetic religion transferred to the sky and about whom astrology then believed that they caused human fate. If Venus is no goddess, the star of Venus produces no children of Venus, Mars no murderers, Mercury no clever people and thieves, Jupiter no magnanimous men, Saturn no unfortunates. All forms of divination depend according to the ancients on the stars, augury, the interpretation of dreams, prognostication by lightning, lots and other methods. If the stars had godly power, we would have to examine whether they act through influences or, like gods, by decisions. But they possess

none of these powers and are neither efficient beings nor signifying signs. The rise and fall of stars do not even produce storms and only with great uncertainties is it possible to predict from them times of rain, wind or snow. Astrology is supported neither by reason nor by observation.

Saumaise attempts to persuade his readers of the unfoundedness of astrology in this way. It is significant for his way of argument that he does not make objections to particular errors of judgement but that instead he refuses to recognise certain basic assumptions of astrology. He denies the precondition for the possibility of astrology. If the constellations are products of human fantasy and if the planets, being lifeless material bodies, are not able to convey to earthly creatures the characteristics of mythical gods and goddesses, astrology collapses and no observations, no fulfilled predictions, can save it. Astrology is no longer a physical science, it is not a science at all but a human invention devoid of truth, no *scientia physica*, but an *imaginatio phantastica*.

Saumaise stands at the beginning of an epoch in which the reputation of astrology declined more and more, against strong resistance. His arguments were recognised by some, by others severely rejected. In Protestant areas of Germany in the seventeenth century the question of whether astrology is permitted or forbidden by God continued in general to be more important than the secular arguments of Saumaise. The seventeenth century saw several attempts to re-establish astrology on physical and scientific foundations and to reconcile it with the doctrines of the Catholic church. This was the intention of authors such as Thomas Campanella, Placidus de Titis and Jean Baptiste Morin, who still have good reputations among astrologers today.⁶ The defensive character of their works already appears in their titles. Nevertheless, they basically repeat the traditional astrological concepts which partly they deduce even from an oral teaching of God to Adam. Morin confirms in this way the doctrine of the twelve houses of the horoscope.

The critical voices of the seventeenth century and the

development of astronomy diminished the acceptance of astrology. But their representatives defended astrology so energetically and so self-confidently that Catholic as well as Protestant intellectuals could still believe in horoscopes around the turn to the eighteenth century. The further decline in the reputation of astrology in the eighteenth and, especially, in the nineteenth centuries could not be prevented. At the beginning of the twentieth century the reputation of astrology was at its lowest point. In 1917 the German Classicist and historian of astrology Franz Boll could write:

Enlightenment pushed astrology down among the curiosities of the history of human foolishness. It did this so radically that today an educated bourgeois will prefer to concede that he is afraid of the number 13 than to say that he has any respect for astrology, although it was formerly so powerful.⁷

How different is the situation nowadays! When Boll wrote these words the reversal of astrology's reputation was just beginning. In the twentieth century, when one could suppose that prognostic astrology was at an end, it resurrected like a phoenix from the ashes until it had again the multitude of faithful adherents which it commands today.

It is desirable that the increasing practice of old methods of divination in our time should, to a greater extent than has so far been the case, become the object of scientific discourse so that the modern public may become better aware of the foundations on which faith in astrology and similar prognostic practices is based. It has been the aim of this lecture to contribute towards that goal.⁸

Notes

- 1 *Codex Guelpherbytanus 17.8 Augustanus 4∞*, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, and see Walther Ludwig, 'Die Interessen eines Ulmer Apothekers: Eine deutsch-griechisch-lateinische astronomisch-astrologisch-medizinisch-magische Sammelhandschrift des 16. Jahrhunderts', in W. Ludwig, *Miscella Neolatina*. Ausgewählte Aufsätze 1989–2003, Vol.3, Hildesheim, 2005, pp.163–93.
- 2 Gregor Reisch, *Margarita Philosophica*, 1st edn, 1503, here Bâle, 1535, pp.665–67.

- 3 Daniel Georg Morhof, *Polyhistor*, Lübeck, 1708, Tom.II, Lib.III, pp.485–97.
- 4 Caspar Peucer, *Commentarius de praecipuis generibus divinationum*, Wittenberg, 1553 (numerous editions until the end of the sixteenth century).
- 5 Claudius Salmasius, *De annis climactericis et antiqua astrologia diatribae*, Leiden, 1648.
- 6 Thomas Campanella, *Astrologicorum Libri VII. In quibus Astrologia omni superstitione Arabum et Judaeorum eliminata physiologice tractatur secundum S. Scripturas et doctrinam S. Thomae et Alberti et summorum Theologorum*, Frankfurt am Main, 1630; Placidus de Titis, *Physiomatica, sive coelestis Philosophia naturalibus hucusque desideratis ostensa principiis*, Milano, 1650; Johannes Baptista Morinus, *Astrologia Gallica Principiis et Rationibus propriis stabilita atque in XXVI Libros distributa*, Den Haag, 1661.
- 7 Franz Boll and Carl Bezold, *Stern Glaube und Sterndeutung: Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie*, 1st edn, 1917; in the 5th edn, Darmstadt, 1966, p.42.
- 8 For a more extensive and detailed German version of this paper, see Walther Ludwig, 'Zukunftsvoraussagen in der Antike, der frühen Neuzeit und heute' in K. Bergdolt and W. Ludwig, eds, *Zukunftsvoraussagen in der Renaissance*, Wiesbaden: Wolfenbütteler Abhandlungen zur Renaissanceforschung, forthcoming. This English version was idiomatically improved by Dr James O'Sullivan, *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, Hamburg.