

An Astrological Prognostication to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici of Florence

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Abstract. The Italian High Renaissance saw the high point of the use of astrology in the timing of both military and political events. It is known that Cosimo I de' Medici, Duke of Florence, delayed the decisive battle in his war against Siena in 1554, against the advice of his commanders in the field. A previously unpublished astrological prognostic may have influenced his military strategy which, in fact, led to his eventual victory at Marciano on 2 August 1554. This paper presents a discussion of the circumstances surrounding the campaign, and a translation and analysis of the prognostic sent to Duke Cosimo in March 1554 by the astrologer Francesco Formiconi.

A. The Commentary.

On 30 September, 1537, the eighteen year old Cosimo de' Medici was confirmed second hereditary Duke of Florence by Emperor Charles V. This unexpected event occurred less than two months after Cosimo's military triumph at Montemurlo over the *fuorusciti*, a group of exiles who had tried unsuccessfully to stage a coup against Medici rule and, effectively, against imperial control of the city. Not long after this, Cosimo I commissioned a medal bearing his astrological *impresa*, the goat-fish symbol of Capricorn facing left, with the constellation of the Crown of Ariadne above it (fig. 1). This personal symbol would become the core image of a rulership propaganda that would make continuous reference to a destiny that had been indicated in the positions of the stars at his birth. The theme, remarkable for its consistency, and dependent on an interpretation of specific astrological data from the Duke's actual natal map, was absolutely central to his manipulation of that propaganda as it appeared in repeated literary and artistic expressions from the beginning of his career to its end.¹

In the very early years of his reign, a crucial aspect of Cosimo's attempts to improve his image were similarities between the natal chart of

Figure 1. Domenico de' Vetri, Medal for Cosimo I de' Medici, reverse. Capricorn/Crown of Ariadne/ ANIMA CONSCIENTIA ET FIDUCIA FATI, 1537-38, Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello. (Photo: Gabinetto Fotografico Soprintendenza Beni Artistici e Storici di Firenze.)



the young Duke and that of the Roman Emperor Octavian Augustus, as well as to that of Emperor Charles V, that were observed by contemporary astrologers. Cosimo was seen to possess a similar level of *felicitas*, good fortune and divine protection by virtue of the fact that the angles of his chart paralleled those believed to have been those of Octavian and known to be those of Charles. This provided Cosimo's image makers with an essential and, in the sixteenth century, credible basis for further comparison between them, especially with Augustus, mostly based on the then widely known biography of Suetonius. The astrological parallel was seen as the cause for the apparent repetition of events in their lives at the very same ages and on the same calendar days, the most important of which was their sudden rise to power from relative obscurity, their eventual bringing of peace, political stability, and an end to civil war, and the fact that the crucial military victories that had enabled each of them to consolidate their power were achieved on the same calendar day: 1 August. Nothing was, in fact, more compelling than the latter parallel, and Cosimo's propagandists, biographers, and image makers made sure that these 'coincidences' did not go unnoticed--not only early in his reign, when his power was far from substantial, but consistently throughout it, up to and after his elevation as Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1569.²

The first of these was the victory against his enemies at Montemurlo, achieved on 1 August 1537, the same day that Octavian had decisively defeated Mark Antony and Cleopatra at Actium.³ This was generally interpreted as a formidable omen, and a clear indication that Cosimo, like Octavian, was destined to receive the rulership of a former republic, in this case the ill-fated Florentine Republic that had been briefly resuscitated after the murder of the first Medici Duke, Alessandro I. The idea that Divine Providence had intended Cosimo to rule Florence was perhaps also underscored for them astrologically by the fact that on the day of his victory at Montemurlo the Sun had been found in the same degree of the sign of Leo as propitious Mars had been in Cosimo's birth chart.⁴ Mars, the ruling planet of Florence because the city was traditionally held to have been founded under Aries, was parallel the star Regulus, the 'heart of the Lion'. Indeed, the placement of Mars with the Lion's Heart in Cosimo's nativity may itself have been seen as an omen of his future victory, suggestive as it is of Florence's 'ruler' with the legendary Florentine Lion symbol, the *Marzocco*.⁵

In 1554 Cosimo came to another pivotal military campaign in his push to conquer Siena, and thus finally to crush the Florentine exiles, now led

by Piero Strozzi, who, like the *fuorusciti* in 1537, had accepted French aid in a desperate bid to overturn the Medici regime. Despite the stunning victory over them at Montemurlo, where they had been led by Piero's father, Filippo Strozzi, and the harsh treatment publicly afforded the captured rebels at that time, many of the *fuorusciti* still harboured hopes for a coup and continued to be encouraged to rebellion by promises of support from the French. The threat they represented would not be suppressed, nor would Cosimo truly consolidate his own power as an independent ruler in Tuscany, until the victory over them at Marciano, again on the *calends* of August 1554, was finally achieved.

The document which follows, an unpublished prognostic addressed to Duke Cosimo late in March 1554 by the astrologer Francesco Formiconi, may provide us evidence that Cosimo delayed the pivotal engagement at Marciano at least partly on the basis of astrological predictions.⁶ As the advice of the astrologer seemed at least to confirm the possibility of another victory on the same calendar day as Augustus at Actium, the political advantage of which was, of course, enormous, then such a scenario is likely. The Duke's biographers, both contemporary and later, would consistently point to his 'superior fortune' at Marciano as having signified nothing less than divine approval and support.⁷

If this prognostic were, as it seems, actually solicited by the Duke, then it would appear that earlier in the year, when the war had been going badly for him, and when critical decisions had to be made, Cosimo did not proceed on military counsel nor political expediency alone. Instead he appears to have specifically asked for the advice of an astrologer then residing in Rome with whom he may well have had previous contact. This latter point is strongly suggested in Formiconi's address of the prognostic to the 'Most Illustrious, Most Excellent Lord, *my Patron* [*italics mine*]...', as though he were already in the Duke's employ, rather than the more general 'to the most illustrious, etc., Duke Cosimo', which would have been the usual format of an unsolicited dedication.⁸ This was certainly not the first time that Cosimo had requested prognostics from astrologers, and he was hardly alone in his reliance on the science which was, it is not an exaggeration to say, at a historical apogee in this period. It would seem that he employed a fair number of astrologers, some of them located in different parts of the Italian peninsula. At age 18, that is, at the time of his accession to the Ducal throne, he requested and received a natal chart with a long interpretation and various other divinatory material attached from Fra Giuliano Ristori, a Carmelite, whom he later appointed to the Chair of Astrology at the Studio in Pisa.⁹ It should be

noted, in addition, that Cosimo was not totally ignorant of the scientific aspects of astrology, particularly by that date. By the early 1550s, the mathematician Ignazio Danti, Cosmo's cartographer, is reported to have taught him the basis of the science.¹⁰

It is probably more than simply coincidental that every surviving document of such activity can be seen to coincide with a particularly difficult period in the Duke's life. These go beyond the ordinary progressions and transits that were usually requested on a yearly basis by sixteenth century princes in Europe, not only with regard to their own natal charts, but also for those of other rulers, as well as to the foundation charts of their own and other states.¹¹ The latter were seen as very significant in planning a propitious attack, or in predicting the outcome of an ongoing conflict. From about 1530 on they were often published in astrological texts, as were the horoscopes of contemporary rulers, often with commentary referring to why this or that prince was lucky or unlucky in war.¹²

It is noteworthy that Formiconi has placed the sixteenth century astrologer's axiom *Sapiens dominabitur astris* at the top of the first page. In theory, this motto emphasized the importance of free will with respect to the influence of the stars on the life of an individual, necessary in a period of increasing scrutiny by the Inquisition. In practice, of course, it meant that the more one knew concerning the augury of his stars, the better prepared he was to play an active role in the outcome of his affairs. This awareness was equated with self-knowledge, or the virtue of prudence, in utilizing the special knowledge gained from the interpretation of what the stars portended. This latter was nothing less than Divine Providence, as the stars and planets were ministers of God's will, an idea which was behind the image in fig. 2, a census book cover, showing the Dove of the Holy Spirit sending its rays down on Cosimo's Capricorn and stars emblem, the celestial Signs under which God caused Cosimo to be born, so that for the '*greater good fortune of Florence, he could lead this Excellent State to a perfect life*'.¹³

Francesco Formiconi sent his prognostic to Duke Cosimo I on 27 March 1554, a moment when the Duke had arrived at a critical juncture in the already 10 month-old war against Siena. The text begins with a partially retrospective discussion of the progressed and transiting aspects of the planets for the previous 'revolution' (i.e. horoscope for the Sun's return to its exact position at birth), which began on Cosimo's birthday, 11 June 1553, and continues with consideration of his next astrological

Figure 2. Capricorn, 8 stars (Crown of Ariadne), and the Dove of the Holy Spirit. Census book made for Cosimo I, Florence, 1552, (Florence, Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Medicea Misc. 223, c. 7v.)



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year which would begin on 11 June 1554. In this way, Formiconi's comments cover the period from the late spring of 1553 to the late summer of 1554. They are clearly intended to respond to the Duke's preoccupations during February and March of 1554, when he apparently made the request for astrological advice. This is the period immediately following the second failed attempt on the part of Cosimo's forces to take Siena in late January. While the astrologer predicts the Duke's eventual victory and acquisition of Siena, prudence and patience are advised.

Typical of such communications in the sixteenth century, much of Formiconi's text is very technical, but summaries for each group of astrological statements are provided. The commentary is of particular interest because it testifies to the kinds of astrological information important to princes in Cosimo's situation. For example, since the ruling sign of Siena was Taurus, actual planetary conditions were against her. The astrologer's observations and interpretations are, in fact, quite specific, warning the Duke of initial setbacks and risks of losses, but promising success if these are overcome. He predicts the attainment of *maggiore dominio* by the end of summer. Also intriguing are the large number of predictive techniques employed by the astrologer, from progressions to directions of various kinds, as well as a solar revolution. His terminology is not always the clearest, and there do seem to be some inconsistencies in the data. No charts were apparently sent with the prognostic, and all references are verbal. Formiconi makes a number of references to the radix, or natal chart, which he may have had previously, although it appears to have been different from other surviving charts of the Duke. These errors were apparently not significant, nor did he expect Cosimo, despite having a keen interest in the subject, to be in a position to perceive them. Formiconi must have had an excellent reputation for Cosimo to have consulted him, rather than depending on astrologers in Florence. An anticipated neutrality on his part in the war with Siena and the exiles may also have been an issue.

The sequence of events in the months immediately following receipt of the prognostic in Florence certainly suggests that the Duke took Formiconi's advice very seriously. It may well have had a strong influence on his strategy, which he took pride in devising himself, in the later stages of the conflict which would, in fact, reach culmination by mid-summer.¹⁴

On the night of 26 January 1554, Cosimo's first commander, Giangiaco­mo de' Medici, the Marchese di Marignano, had been poised under Siena at the head of a division of 4,500 infantrymen, 400 cavalry,

20 pieces of artillery, and 1,200 *guastatori*, men trained in the destruction of fortifications. An attempt was made two hours before daylight to take the city by storm. The attack failed, despite the advantage of surprise, largely because of insufficient intelligence, and because of the hardships endured by the soldiers during the march on Siena in torrential cold rain. The frustration was hard on Marignano, who had wanted to take Siena at a single strike, and had already tried and failed to achieve this goal on the first of January. The head of the Florentine exiles, Piero Strozzi, had arrived in Siena immediately after this first failure, and Cosimo was bent on overcoming him. On 21 January the Duke wrote to Pope Julius III, informing him of his plans, citing the full support of the Emperor, Charles V. Strozzi had been received in Siena with popular celebrations, but his presence in the city actually caused internal problems in the Siennese government, which Cosimo had anticipated would weaken Siennese organization against another attack staged at the end of the month. Apparently mistaken about the strength of Siennese resistance at this point, the strategy proved misplaced. Still pushing a winter engagement, the Duke then ordered his army divided into three parts to save money and time. On 28 January Cosimo sent a letter to the Siennese telling them that he was forced to make war on their city to liberate it from French oppression.¹⁵ Strozzi and his Siennese friends answered that Cosimo was a hypocrite, and that all he really wanted was satisfaction of his desire for dominion of Tuscany. After this provocation, the Florentines resumed a tight siege of Siena, but by early May, two months after Cosimo had received Formiconi's counsel, the investment had been relaxed to the level of a desultory and ineffective blockade. As the weather improved nothing appeared to be happening and the Florentine will to attack seemed to have weakened considerably. On 12 May Cosimo felt constrained to write again to the Siennese, this time through the Pope, telling them that their cause was futile, and that Strozzi was lying to the people when he encouraged them to defy the siege. Again Strozzi replied through the French ambassador in Rome that Marignano's blockade was so weak as to be imaginary, a situation which is actually confirmed in contemporary diaries.

Contrary to expectation then, no significant fighting occurred during the remainder of the spring, and on 11 June, Cosimo's birthday, Strozzi was able to march out of Siena with an army of 8,000 infantry and 1000 cavalry. The Duke's order to Marignano on this day to move back, and the gradual relaxation of hostilities since late March, had been bitterly opposed by Cosimo's field commanders who had repeatedly demanded a

return to an aggressive strategy. Letters between the Duke and Marignano, his elder by many years, are full of accusation and open enmity, conforming precisely to Formiconi's warnings about the loyalty of older men in the Duke's service during this period. Despite this pressure, Cosimo continued to restrain his forces until early July. This is the moment when Formiconi had predicted a change in his fortune.

Now urged on by the Duke, but *against* the advice of Marignano, from 12 July the Florentines again took up the war in earnest. The military campaign culminated on 2 August in Cosimo's victory at Marciano. The battle resulted in serious losses among the French and Sienese, and hardly any among the Florentine and Imperial armies. Piero Strozzi was mortally wounded. This amazing success within a day of the Duke's victory at Montemurlo was celebrated by Cosimo's eulogizers as a 'fated thing', again recalling the uncanny parallel with Augustus' victory at Actium. It seems clear, however, that the Duke had not deliberately delayed the pivotal engagement merely for the propaganda value of another victory on the calends of August - notwithstanding how impressive this might have seemed. Fortified in spirit with the predictions of his astrologer, Cosimo had been able to bide his time, even though it meant challenging the loyalty of his most trusted commanders. Waiting for the propitious moment, the day brought him the final defeat of his enemies which he had so long desired.

References to the Commentary

1. For a full discussion of this astrological image and of the issues surrounding it, see C. Rousseau, *Cosimo de' Medici and Astrology: The Symbolism of Prophecy*, Columbia University, Ph.D., New York, 1983 summarizing previous literature, and 'The Pageant of the Muses at the Medici Wedding of 1539 and the Decoration of the Salone del Cinquecento,' Chapter 11 in *Art and Pageantry in the Renaissance and Baroque*, B. Wisch and S. Munshower, eds., 1991, Vol. II, pp. 416-457.
2. The title was especially created for Cosimo and granted by Pope Pius V in a ceremony in Rome, later ratified by Philip II. On the propaganda and imagery of Duke Cosimo I, see Rousseau, 1983, Chapters 1 and 3.
3. Although some modern histories give the date of Actium as 2 September 31 BC (e.g., *An Encyclopaedia of World History*, ed. William L. Langer, London, Harrap, 1972, p 111), in the middle ages and the Renaissance, the date of Octavian's victory at Actium was taken to be first day of August, based on Suetonius, the primary source at this time. Every Renaissance (i.e. 15th-16th C)

source I have read about this issue, without exception, repeats this as the date of the famous victory, and every apologist of Cosimo's also seems to mention the famous coincidence of dates: Actium, Montemurlo, and then Marciano within a day of the other two. The primary astrological comparison between Cosimo and Augustus was based on the presumed horoscope of Augustus and that of Cosimo. Obviously, much favourable propaganda could be and was based on such an impressive astrological precedent, but this was not all. History actually appeared to have repeated itself as the planets and stars had given both young princes equal *felicitas*. Like Augustus, and at the same young age of 18, Cosimo had come to power in January, and his decisive victory at Montemurlo in 1537 fell on the same day as that of Augustus at Actium. For example, in 1556, the Renaissance historian Paolo Giovio wrote, 'Et parve cosa fatale, che'l Duca Cosimo, quel medesimo di, di Calendi d'Agosto, nel qual giorno Augusto conseguì la vittoria contra Marcantonio et Cleopatra sopra Attiaco promontorio, et quel giorno anch'egli sconfisse et prese i suoi nemici Fiorentini à Monte Murlo'. [And it seemed a fated thing, that Duke Cosimo, that same day, of the calends of August, on which day Augustus achieved victory against Mark Antony and Cleopatra above the promontory of Actium, that on that day he also defeated and took his Florentine enemies at Montemurlo.] (Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo dell' imprese militari et amoroze di monsignor Paolo Giovio...*, Rome, 1556, p. 33.) This book went into many editions throughout the 16th and early 17th centuries. The coincidence of dates as evidence of divine favour is very much stressed in Mario Matasiliani's later book (still during the Duke's lifetime) called *La Felicità del Serenissimo Cosimo Medici*, Granduca di Toscana, Florence, 1572, in which the by then well known astrological parallels between Octavian and Cosimo are given as the cause. These 'coincidences' were generally understood to be signs of the will of Divine Providence for the good of the Tuscan people. For further consideration of these issues, including their messianic implications, and for the extensive propaganda campaign based on them that was expressed in countless works of art throughout Cosimo I's career, see Rousseau, 1983.

4. In charts surviving from the 16th century for the Duke, both printed and in manuscript, Mars is consistently located in 20^0 Leo. Francesco Giuntini's chart (figure 3), published with commentary in his *Speculum astrologiae...*, Lyons, 1581, I, p. 127, shows Mars at 20^0 Leo 19. The commentary in this edition of the *Speculum astrologiae* is a summary of that published by the same Florentine astrologer in 1573; that is, a year before Cosimo's death. Another chart (figure 4) and prognostic made in June 1537 for the Duke by the Carmelite astrologer Giuliano Ristori (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Plut. 89, sup. 34, fols. 133r-186r) similarly shows Mars at 20^0 Leo 13. For Ristori's chart, which is rectified from the archivally recorded birth time, see Rousseau, 1983, pp. 17-21, and n. 28. The nativity was first cited in *Astrologia, magia e alchimia nel*

Rinascimento fiorentino ed europeo, Catalogue to the exhibit at the Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza, Florence, 1980, pp. 379-380.

5. Mars, as ruler of Aries, the sign under which Florence was founded, was the planetary ruler of the city. The name of the *Marzocco*, or Florentine lion symbol, seems to make linguistic reference to this rulership. According to medieval sources, Florence was founded by the Romans on the advice of astrologers on 25 March, when the Ascendant was at 6° Aries, in the planetary hour of Mars, with the Sun also in Aries, and Mars and Mercury in good aspect to the ASC. See N. Rubinstein, 'Vasari's Painting of the Foundation of Florence in the Palazzo Vecchio,' in *Essays in the History of Architecture*, New York, 1967, I, p. 71, quoting Francesco Villani, and Rousseau, 1983, pp.395-396; 1991, pp. 420, 430.

6. Francesco Formiconi to Cosimo I, 27 March 1554, located in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence, MS Palatino 1022, fols. 5r – 6r.

7. Rousseau, 1991, pp. 424-425, n. 68.

8. It may also be noted that BNCF MS Palatino 1022 is an archival manuscript containing papers from the Medici principate, including many other documents of different kinds directed to Duke Cosimo as well as later papers addressed to his son and successor, Francesco I de' Medici. No further biographical information about Formiconi is presently available.

9. Nativity and prognostic for Cosimo de' Medici by Giuliano Ristori, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Plut. 89 sup. 34, fols. 133r-186r (see note 3 above). On the election of Ristori to the Chair at Pisa, which the Duke created, see D. Mellini, *Ricordi intorno ai costumi, azioni, e governo del Sereniss. Gran Duca Cosimo I*, ed. D. Moreni, Florence, 1820, p. 134, n.65: "...e nell'Astrologia, Cattedra pur da esso eretta, Fra Giuliano Ristori da Prato, Carmelitano, accreditato molto in quest'arte...". Ristori also cast a chart for Cosimo's election day, 9 January 1537, contained in the above mentioned manuscript. The great Florentine astrologer, Francesco Giuntini's *Speculum Astrologiae*, 2 vols., Lyons, 1581, was posthumously dedicated to Duke Cosimo, suggesting some specific, but as yet undocumented, connection between them. Giuntini was perhaps the greatest astrologer of the second half of the century, and author of the *Speculum astrologiae*. After the first edition, published in a single volume in 1573, the author expanded it into two huge folio volumes published in 1581. A second and final edition was published in 1583. This work, in its expanded form, can be considered a culmination of up-to-date sixteenth century astronomical-astrological understanding before Galileo, and is replete with both technical, explanatory, and conceptual material. Another edition was planned for 1585, but was compromised by the censors of Pope Sixtus V.

10. M.L. Ringhini-Bonelli and Thomas Settle, 'Egnatio Danti's Great Astronomical Quadrant', *Annali dell' Istituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza di Firenze*, 4, 1979, pp 3-13.
11. Rousseau, 1983, pp. 3-4, and n. 4. An unpublished example of such a prognostic was directed to Cosimo I on 4 December 1552 by the Florentine astrologer, Don Basilio Lapi, entitled *Discorso astronomico di quasi tutti li principi cristiani e del Turco*. (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Plut. 89.36, fols. 201r - 206r).
12. As, for example, in numerous works of Luca Gaurico, the Italian astrologer prominent in the first half of the century, published in Latin and Italian (e.g. *Tractatus iudicandi conversiones sive revolutiones nativitatum...*, Venice, 1525; Rome, 1560; *Trattato d'astrologia iudiciaria...*, Rome 1539; *Tractatus astrologicus...*, Venice, 1552, etc.). Also, Francesco Giuntini, *Spec. astrol.*, (cf. n. 8).
13. Florence, *Archivio di Stato di Firenze*, Medicea Misc. 223. Census book made at Duke Cosimo's request, by Antonio di Filippo Danti Gianeti, and completed 25 February 1552. The illustration is on c. 7v. The census divides Florence into four *quartieri*, beginning with that of Santo Spirito. Each section is headed by an illustration of the name of the quarter. Only the first which directly follows Antonio's laudatory preface, specifically refers to the Duke in this astrologically symbolic way: '*...Et sotto quello segno celeste Nel quale segno Tu nascesti p[er] la n[ost]ra Ventura et per ridurre a perfetto vivere q[uesto] Ex[cellen]to Stato*' (cc. 3v-4r).
14. The historical information concerning the war with Siena used in this article is based on the accounts given in R. Galluzzi, *Istoria del Granducato di Toscana sotto il governo della Casa Medici*, Florence, 1781, I, pp. 225ff., and R. Cantagalli, *La guerra di Siena (1552-1559): I termini della questione senese nella lotta fra Francia e Asburgo nel '500*, Siena, 1962, pp. 159-307.
15. '*...costretto a muovere guerra alla loro città per liberarla dalla oppressione francese.*', Galluzzi, *ibid.*

B. The Prognostication

1a The Italian Original: Formiconi's text

(Francesco Formiconi to Cosimo I, 27 March 1554, Florence, Bibliotheca Nazionale Centrale, Ms. Palatino 1022, fol. 5r. 3.2 fol. 5v. 3.3 fol. 6r.)

Sapientia dominabitur ^{1^{mo}} et Ecc^{mo} 5^{or} Patron mio Colendissimo

Comincio l'anno ¹⁵⁵⁴ nel 1553 al 11 di giugno hor
in equinozio di estate, quando in hora di venere et e s^o del detto anno
stato il sole a prima retrograde, et ricomuto da mercurio, et e d. oppo
sito di saturno, la quale singula costellazione li ha lte et inimicite con popo
li con notitia di guerra et tumulto gravissimo di morte. Et non
poco l'occasione facche di perder lo stato, se infra essi parimente in casa
della luna non si trovasse offa con mercurio ripigliando l'anno di festi
da esso mercurio et ritornandolo di trino a saturno doue placa, et con
tempo l'ora del infiammato Marte, et la malicia de lo iniquo saturno.
Et il ritorno di Giove, et venere quarta ricomuto dal sole parimente
afferma la stabilita del stato. Et s'offere passato qua gran parte del
detto anno la carta di dire il che e stato, et dire breuemente l'esperance,
che torcendo i progressi della parte della fortuna et mer
curio, et uenire et il sole in tauro, il quale con resolutione in duodeci
hora di mercurio in quarta, minaccia solitudine di gloie, celebrati
di eta et morte, perche la fortuna uero pariente, in frangendo dubito
di vita, perche prodigiosa, et grandata, et la fortuna non dimora
succedere l'anno uero di giugno, perche la lettera degli ministri di v. ecc^{mo}
con consiglio fara il tutto scouito, et in breve quieto. Perche offa
da detto tempo l'eleuazione della luna, et da essa et mercurio illumina
di solida, et da mara di trino, come ha detto poco d'ora tale cosa,
con la prima miracolosamente promissa. Hauer v. ecc^{mo} gran dubbio
et perche li luoghi, con danni de fuoco et bruciamento, et molti amici
lii restano contra, Et delli danni et diffiaceti li faranno da
la destra, et dureranno tutto maggio, et finalmente l'anno
superando mala costellazione del presente anno.

Comincio l'anno 36 nel 1554 di giugno a i 12 hore 19 m 3 m 19
ad horiole comune, et e s^o li detto anno Giove, et diuore saturno

il quale e p corpo in pesce, et p progressione in significatione li quali sono
case di esso Giove, per il che scoglio i reami del male natura di sa-
turno, et la sua demora, et bivio. Et offrendo offerendo calice
to in vergine in seconda si offre grato et bivio graduatore,
et donatore d'honori nel suo present governo, et non solo per la
favorevole nella sua detta rivoluzione, ma ancora in quella del sol
sizio di cancro, nel quale ascende 23 gradi di cancro, et
Giove in quarta in vergine al loco di morte del precedente
anno per il quale Giove canger l'impresa de gl'anni in popoli
contra v. ecc. Anzi tornando esso per progressione in terza
significando et a scibile con la luna, la quale si ritrova in quarto
quale in grado fortunato in casa di mare, et in ricorre in
undecimo cielo sua galathea, et con scibile vivere s. della
cassa, et il solo s. della ascensione casa di dragone, et il luogo per
torre a a nobile mare congiunto con mare di angelo al principio
di detto anno in casa fortunata, et l'istesso gli altri in casa fortunata
et racquistera il perduto et muore l'anno v. et a la morte
et li succedera tutto prospero et fortunato. Breve si vuole
da i. di luglio in sino al x. disposto sopra perche di questo che
gli eserciti, et a v. ecc. di tradimento, e castelli in casa v. ecc.
20 gradi di leone, nel quale e l'opposito di mare in grado
et l'ascensione di detta rivoluzione, et il quadrato dell'istesso nel
la rivoluzione, et stando ancora, fare l'istesso di perduto et vi-
danno. Alcuni ministri li faranno tradimento, e che perdo-
ranno alcuni luoghi, ma non faranno di male danno, e in
breve si racquisteranno. Et tutto auente e essere, mare, et ve-

nere parte del detto anno alfidarij, et nel restante Marte, et Mercurio, li
 quali in rivoluzione si ritrovano in undecima in casa di esso Saturno.
 ne però potranno uincere il uictorioso fine, e che tornando Marte a propof
 sione alla radice della parte della fortuna, et di Mercurio et di Venere
 et di Sole dichiara et dimostra senza dubio ch' v. ecc.^{ha} hauera uic
 toria contra suo nemici, ma non senza gran timore, et gran spofa
 et sangue. Gli promette anchora et dona la uictoria certa
 Il tornare la parte de la fortuna al trino di quore, et al 6^{to} di Marte,
 et in essa hauera proprij principi ecclesiastici et temporali, ma uic
 chi di eta. Poco v. ecc.^{ha} adpri ministri giouani, e uic
 dior fama et dominio in detto anno e tornare la luna professional
 et professional alla decima della radice, et il tornare cauro nel
 decimo cielo in detta rivoluzione gli promette dominio in Siria,
 la quale edificata et fondata sotto esso cauro. Si troua il sole
 a quadrato co Saturno in detto ano minaccia a v. ecc.^{ha} infirmita frigi
 da et humida e abundancia d'humori crudi, Et e il quadrato, che
 da morte alla progressione della luna facila la patria ne gli occhi
 et alla fflera consorte e minacciata infirmita grauissima co perico
 lo di uita, et dette cose succederano auanti finisca maggio 1555.
 Dopo questa quiete di guerre et hauera lieto et maggiore do
 minio che al presente non ha. Così piaccia a idio effettuare illo
 che il mio giudicio ha concesso ne pianeti ministri della sua in
 finita provvidentia, et ministro della piu profonda intelligenza
 alla sua diuina eta la qual facci felice v. ecc.^{ha} Di Roma
 alli 27. di Marzo 1554
 Di v. ecc.^{ha}

Humilis^{mo} suo
 franco formiconi

1b The Italian Original: Transcription

Sapiens Dominabitur Astris' Ill.mo e Ecc.mo Patron mio Colendiss.mo
Cominci

lanno 35 della felice eta di v. ecc.tia nel 1553 alli 11 di giugno hor. 7. m. 14 et 2m. 33 la notte seguente in hora di venere, et e s.re del detto anno Marte, il quale e in quinta retrogrado, et ricevuto da Mercurio, et e al opposito di Saturno, la quale iniqua constellatione li da lite et inimicitie con popoli, con mortalita di persone et travaglio gravissimo di mente: Et non poca suspetione sarebbe di perder lo stato, se infra essi parimente in casa de la luna non si trova essa con Mercurio ripigliando lume di sestile da esso Marte, et riferendolo di trino a Saturno, dove placa, et con tempera lira del infiam.ato Marte, et la malitia de lo iniquo Saturno. Et il ritrovarsi Giove, et Venere in quarta ricevuto dal Sole parimente afferma la stabilita del Stato. Et p. essere passato gia gran parte del detto anno lasciero di dire il che seguito, et diro brevemente il restante. Dico dunque, che tornando p. progressione la parte della fortuna, et mercurio, et venere et il sole in tauro, il quale e in rivoluzione in duodecima, et in radice in quarta, minaccia sollevation di plebe, et trattati in citta et terre poste da Firenze verso ponente, in fra lo quali dubito di Pistoia p. essere perdomitata, et fondata sotto Tauro. Non dimeno succedere loro vano ogni disegno, per che p. lettere dagli ministri di v. ecc.tia in ta. luoghi sara il tutto scoperto, et in breve quietato: Perche essendo detto Tauro esaltatione della luna, et da essa et mercurio illuminata di sestile, et da marte di trino, come ho detto poco durera tale cosa, anzi parera miracolosam.te provista. Hauera v. ecc.tia gran dubbio et perdita de luoghi, con danni de fuoco et brugiamento, et molti amici sili rivolgeranno contra. Et detti danni et dispiaceri li seguiranno da i. x. daprile, et dureranno tutto maggio, et finalmente l'ecc.tia v. superera la mala constellatione del presente anno.

Comincera lanno .36. nel 1554 di Giugno ai 12, hore. 14. m.3. 2m 19 ad horiolo comune, et e s.ore di esso anno Giove, et divisore Saturno il quale e p. corpo in pesce, et p. progressione in Sagittario, li quali sono case di esso Giove, per il che scoglie i legami del mala natura di Saturno; et lo fa clemente et buono: Et essendosi esso Giove collocato in Vergina in seconda, si offere grato et benigno governatore, et donatore d'honori nel suo presente governo, et non solo si li fa favorevole nella su detta rivoluzione, ma anchora in quello del solstitio di cancro, nel quale ascende 23 gradi di Tauro et S Giove in quinta in vergine al loco di Marte del precedente anno, per il quale Giove toglie l'iniquita da gli animi de

popoli contra v. ecc.tia. Anzi tornando esso per progressione in detta vergine, et a sestile con la luna, la quale si ritrova in quarto angulo in grado fortunato in casa di marte, et in ricevere in undecimo cielo sua esaltatione, et con sestile venere s.ra della de cima, et in sole s.ore dello ascendente capo di dragone, et il venire, per direttione a radice marte congiunto con venere dimostra al principio di detto anno mostrarsi fortuna, et hauera eserciti in fra favore et racquistera il perduto et mutera l'animo et si quiete la mente et li succedera tutto prospero et fortunato. Bene noto che da i 15. di luglio in sino al X. dagosto sara pericolo di danno ne gli eserciti, et a v. ecc.tia di tradimento, p. cascarli il sole alli 20 gradi di leone, nel quale e l'opposito di marte in radice: Et l'ascensione di detta rivolutione, et il quadrato della luna nella rivolutione, et stando avertita, fara lieve il lieve il pericolo et il danno. Alcuni ministri li faranno tradimento p. il che perdera.nosi alcuni luoghi, ma non saranno di molto danno, et in breve si racquisteranno. Et tutto avviene p. essere Marte, et venere parte del detto anno alfridarij, et nel restante Marte, et Mercurio, li quali in rivolutione si ritrovano in undecima in casa di esso Mercurio. No pero potran.o vietare il vittorioso fine, p. che tornando marte p. progressione alla radice della parte della fortuna, et di Mercurio et di Venere et d.l sole dichiara et dimostra senza dubbio ch. v. ecc.tia hauera vittoria contro suo nemici, ma non senza gran timore, et gran spesa et sangue. Gli promette anchora et dona la su detta vittoria certa il tornare la parte della fortuna al trino di Giove, et al sestile di marte, et in essa hauera propitij principi ecclesiastici et temporali, ma vecchi de eta. Poco v. ecc.tia adopri ministri giovani. Accrescera dico fama et dominio in detto anno p. tornare la luna profettionale e progressionale alla decima della radice, et il tornare tauro nel decimo cielo in detta rivolutione gli promette dominio in Siena, la quale edificata et fondata sotto esso tauro. Il trovarsi il sole al quadrato co. Saturno in detto an.o minaccia a v. ecc.tia infirmita frigida et humida p. abundantia d'humori crudi, et p. il quadrato che da marte alla progressione della luna facilme.te patira ne gliocchi et alla Ill.ma consorte e minacciata infirmita gravissima co. pericolo di vita, et dette cose succederan.o avanti finisca maggio 1555. Dopo vincera quiete di guerre et hauera lieto et maggiore dominio che al presente non ha. Così piaccia a iddio effettuare q.llo che il mio giuditio ha conosciuto ne pianeti ministri della sua infinita providentia, et mirimetto della piu profonda intelligentia alla sua divina M.ta la qual facci felice v. ecc.tia.

Di Roma alli 27. di Marzo 1554. Di V. Ecc. tia Humiliss. mo suo fran.co
formiconj

2. Translation¹

The Wise Man Dominates his Stars. To my Most Illustrious, Most Excellent Patron, Most Revered.

The 35th year of your Excellency's most fortunate life² began in 1553 on the 11th of June, at 7 hours, 14 minutes, and 33 seconds of the succeeding night, in the hour of Venus,³ and the lord of that year is Mars,⁴ who is found in the 5th house, retrograde,⁵ and received by Mercury,⁶ and in opposition to Saturn, which evil aspect means struggles and the enmity of the people, with the death of certain persons and much mental stress. There would also be a possibility of losing the State if Mercury were not found among these planets, in the house of the Moon,⁷ taking sextile rays from the aforesaid Mars, and sending them in trine aspect to Saturn, where they calm the anger of the inflamed Mars, and the bad influence of the iniquitous Saturn. Finding Jupiter and Venus in the fourth⁸ received by the Sun⁹ also affirms the stability of the State. And because much of the said year is already past, I will speak about only what is yet to come, and then only briefly. Therefore, I say, that with the Part of Fortune turning by progression, and Mercury, and Venus, and the Sun in Taurus,¹⁰ which is in the revolution in the twelfth,¹¹ and in the fourth in the radix,¹² there is a threat of rebellion among the people and conspiracies among the cities and lands west of Florence. Among these the one in greatest doubt is Pistoia because she is dominated by, and founded under, Taurus. Nevertheless, every design of theirs will come to nothing because through letters from the ministers of Your Excellency in these places, everything will be uncovered, and settled in a very short time. This is because Taurus, being the exaltation of the Moon, and Mercury being illuminated by her in sextile, and Mars by trine, as I have said, these things will last but a short time, and indeed, they will seem miraculously anticipated. And Your Excellency will have much uncertainty concerning the loss of lands by fire and burning, and many friends will revolt against you. And the said injuries and problems will follow you from the 10th of April, and will go on all through May,¹³ and finally Your Excellency will overcome the evil constellation of this year.

Your 36th year will begin in 1554, on 12 June, at 14 hours, 3 minutes, and 19 seconds by the ordinary clock,¹⁴ and Jupiter is the Lord of this year, and the divider is Saturn.¹⁵ The latter is by transit in Pisces, and by progression in Sagittarius,¹⁶ which are both domiciles of the said Jupiter. This undoes the constraints of the evil nature of Saturn, and makes him mild and good. With Jupiter being located in Virgo in the second house,¹⁷

he is an agreeable and benign ruler, and a giver of honours in your present government. But you have favourable aspects not only in the above mentioned revolution, but also in that of the solstice of Cancer, in which 23 degrees of Taurus¹⁸ is ascending, and Jupiter is in the fifth house in Virgo in the place of Mars in the previous year.¹⁹ By this Jupiter will take away all iniquity from the spirits of the peoples against Your Excellency. Moreover, [Jupiter] turning by progression in the said sign of Virgo, is in sextile to the Moon,²⁰ which is found in the fourth angle²¹ in a fortunate degree in the house of Mars,²² and received in the eleventh house in its exaltation,²³ in sextile, Venus, ruler of the tenth,²⁴ and the Sun, lord of the rising head of the dragon.²⁵ And there is coming, by direction of Venus to Mars in the radix,²⁶ a conjunction between them, demonstrating from the beginning of the said year how you will have good fortune. And your armies will have favour and will retake that which was lost, and will change your spirit, and quiet your mind, and everything will continue to be prosperous and fortunate. It is, however, important to note that from the 15th of July until the 10th of August²⁷ there will be a danger of harm from the armies, and betrayal of Your Excellency, because of the Sun falling in 20 degrees of Leo, in which degree it is in opposition²⁸ to Mars in the radix. And the ascendant of the said revolution, and the condition of the Moon in the revolution, and yourself being warned, will make light of the threat. Certain ministers will betray you, because of which you will lose certain places, but they won't harm you very much, and in a short time they will be retaken. And all this happens because of Mars and Venus being for part of the year in alfridaria,²⁹ and for the rest Mars, and Mercury, which latter are found in the revolution in the eleventh,³⁰ in the house of the said Mercury. None of this, however, can prevent a victorious end, because Mars turning by progression to the radix position of the Part of Fortune,³¹ and of Mercury, and of Venus, and of the Sun, will declare and will demonstrate, without a doubt, that Your Excellency will have victory over your enemies, but not without much fear, great expense, and much blood. Certain victory is also promised and given by the return of the Part of Fortune to a trine with Jupiter, and to a sextile with Mars, and these aspects will have a propitious influence with regard to ecclesiastical and temporal princes, but of older age. Few young ministers are in the employ of Your Excellency. I say that your fame and dominion will grow in this year through the turning of the Moon, by profection and by progression,³² to the tenth of the radix, and the return of Taurus to the tenth house in the said revolution, promises you victory over Siena, which was founded and

built under Taurus. The placement of the Sun in square to Saturn in the said year threatens Your Excellency with diseases of a cold and humid nature because of an abundance of raw humours, and the square of Mars to the progressed Moon³³ could easily affect the eyes, and threaten your Illustrious Consort with grave illness with danger to her life, and these things will happen before May 1555 is out. After you win the peace and achieve an end to war you will have happiness and greater dominion which at present you do not have. May it please God to effect that which my judgement has understood from the planets, ministers of His infinite Providence, and I submit myself to the much greater wisdom of His Divine Majesty, which I pray will be favourable to Your Excellency.

From Rome, 27th day of March, 1554.
Your Excellency's most humble, Francesco Formiconi

Note on Data and Horoscopes

The Florentine civil time system began the hours of the day at sunset, as well as the turning of the calendar day. Normally, most of the nativities, forecasts, etc., from the sixteenth century that I have seen, certainly those published, as in Giuntini, have used a clock that begins the day at 0 hours at meridian passage, i.e. midday rather than midnight. This is the time system assumed in all Renaissance ephemerides. In Giuntini's tract called *La sfera del mondo*, published in Lyons in 1572, he explains this: '*Dal Meridiano...gli Astrologi incominciano il giorno, et non dall'ocaso del Sole, o dal suo nascimento: per esser punto stabile et fermo: che cosi non adviene delle altri punti di Oriente et Occidente che sono sempre variabili*'. In Giuntini's nativity for Cosimo the birth citation is 11 June at 9 hours 13 minutes and 56 seconds post meridiem'.

But in this prognostic, Formiconi refers first to the 'notte sequente' (for 1553) and the 'ad horiolo comune' for 1554. This suggests to me that he is referring to the Florentine time system. The way that this is calculated is to get the sunset time from a contemporary ephemeris (in PM time) and then to count the hours from there. For example, Cosimo's birth citation in the Florentine archives was given as 'addi 12 hore 1 2/3'. (Archivio dell'Opera del Duomo, Libri dei battezzati in Firenze, Maschi dal 1512 al 1522, fol. 140v, (June 1519): Lunedì adì detto [20 June] Cosimo giuliano et Romolo del Signor Giovanni de' Medici pop. di S[ant]o Lorenzo. Nato adì 12 detto ho[re] 1 2/3'; (I am grateful to James Beck for this reference.) As it was Florentine custom to count the calendar day from sunset, hence 'day 12' in the citation. The reference tells us that Cosimo was born on the Julian calendar day of 11 June 1519, at 1 2/3 hours past sunset. According to a table published by Johannes Schoener (*Opusculum astrologicum*, Nuremberg, (1533), 1539, unpaginated, Part I; Tabula quantitatis dierum) the semi-diurnal arc when the Sun is at 29° Gemini at 43° N. Lat. is given as 7:36. So, we must add the hours in the citation to this to get the PM time. Using this

chart, Cosimo's birth time works out at 9:16 rather than the 9:13:56 used by Giuntini, although the margin of difference is slight. Confirmation of this calculation may, however, be found in a note in Ignatio Danti's *Trattato dell'uso et della fabbrica dell'astrolabio*, Florence, 1569, p. 118, which gives the Duke's birth time on 11 June at 9.16 pm. (for other references confirming this citation, see Janet Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art*, Princeton, NJ, 1984, pp. 295-299).

As no horoscope was included with Formiconi's text we do not know what birth data he was using, although they are likely to have been closer to Giuntini's than Ristori's as applying the prognostication to Ristori's data results in a series of errors. It is possible that Formiconi reckoned that Cosimo's natal Sun was in Cancer rather than Gemini, a possibility suggested by notes 10 and 30. Both Giuntini and Ristori appear to have used Regiomontanus houses.

Formiconi's prognostication is a vivid illustration of astrology in practice rather than in theory. Notably he uses cross aspects between charts as between the 1554 Cancer ingress and the 1554 solar return. Progression as a general term lacked the specific meaning it carries in 20th century astrology and generally means either profection or transit.

Some of Formiconi's calculations, as for the Cancer ingress of 1554, were inaccurate, in this case out by six hours. It is unclear whether this was due to his own error or inaccurate ephemeris.

References to the translation

(With acknowledgements to Robert Hand, Graeme Tobyn and Robert Zoller. The computerised horoscopes were calculated using Janus software.)

1. Translation by the author.
2. This is Cosimo's solar return chart, or *revolution*, for 1553.
3. This is correct if we count the planetary hours from dawn on Sunday 11 June 1553, as is the usual custom, rather than from sunset on the day, following the Florentine civil time system.
4. Cosimo's profected Ascendant aged 34, entering his 35th year, is Scorpio, with Mars lord of the year. The profected ascendant will return to its natal sign two years on, i.e., 1555, when Cosimo is 36, entering his 37th year. For a good, modern account on the use of profections see Lee Lehman, *Classical Astrology for Modern Living*, Whitford Press, Atglen, PA., 1996, pp. 261-285.
5. Incorrect. Although Mars is in Virgo in the 5th house, it is not retrograde.
6. Mars is in Virgo, ruled by Mercury.

7. Cancer.

8. Correct for 2:50 am confirming the timing according to Schoener's chart.

9. Jupiter and Venus in Leo, ruled by the Sun.

10. These planets, by profection, will fall two signs behind their natal positions for Cosimo's 35th year. Although the Sun will fall at the end of Pisces at the beginning of the year, using Ristori's rectification of Cosimo's chart, it will spend almost all of it by profection in Taurus.

11. Formiconi is here referring to the sign Taurus, not the Sun. The Italian text can be taken both ways, 'il quale' referring equally to planet or zodiac sign.

12. Although the Sun was in the 5th house, Taurus is on the cusp of the natal 4th house.

13. This appears to be a period in the solar return year corresponding to the place of Taurus in the return horoscope as counted from the ascendant.

14. Formiconi's timing is incorrect.

15. In Cosimo's 36th year, i.e. age 35, the profected ascendant is one sign behind the natal ascendant sign, i.e., Sagittarius. Thus Jupiter is lord of the year. Saturn is the divider because the directed natal ascendant, by Formiconi's calculation, presumably falls in the terms of Saturn in this year. The 'divider' is the technical term referring to the planet in whose terms the directed natal ascendant falls.

16. Saturn is in the natal ascendant sign and so is in the same sign as the profected ascendant, namely Sagittarius, for the solar return of 1554.

17. Jupiter was on the cusp of the second house.

18. Incorrect. At the Cancer ingress in Florence (8:15 am, 12 June 1554), 16° 52' Leo was rising. 23° Taurus was rising at 2:10 am at which time the Sun was at 29° 46' Gemini. Hence in Formiconi's chart all the planets would have been in the wrong signs (see n. 19). 25° Taurus was rising in the correct Cancer ingress chart for 1553. This suggests that Formiconi might have mistakenly calculated the 1553 houses for the 1554 Cancer ingress, but calculated the correct planetary positions.

19. Mars is in Virgo in the 5th house in the 1553 solar return.

20. Formiconi obviously calculated the Moon to be in Scorpio in this return. It is thus sextile to Jupiter in Virgo. Progression here means the sign position of the planet as found in the solar return. Actually Jupiter and the Moon are also in these same signs by profection.
21. In the solar return chart.
22. In Scorpio.
23. The sign Cancer on the 11th house cusp of the 1554 solar return is the exaltation of Jupiter.
24. In the solar return chart.
25. Incorrect. The Moon's north node was in Cancer ruled by the Moon, not the Sun.
26. The profection of natal Mars in Leo in Cosimo's 36th year begins in 21° Cancer, conjunct natal Venus. Formiconi's Italian might be better translated as 'and a coming by direction (i.e. profection) to/by radical Mars conjoined with Venus'.
27. These dates seem to have been marked out by the transit of the Sun in Leo, with its usual traditional orb, of the natal Mars.
28. The aspect is actually a conjunction. The word 'opposition' here seems to be used figuratively rather than technically, as in 'reflected'.
29. The fridariae for a nocturnal birth, according to Giuntini, give a period of Mars, sub-period Venus, for age 34-5, and sub-period Mercury for age 35-6.
30. This should be the 10th house.
31. The profection of Mars for Cosimo's 36th year is in Cancer.
32. The natal Moon in Sagittarius is by profection in Scorpio and by progression, i.e., transit, according to its sign position in the solar return chart for that year, also in Scorpio.
33. This refers to the Moon falling in Scorpio in the 1554 return chart in square to natal Mars in Leo.

Figure 3. Francesco Giuntini, Nativity of Cosimo I de' Medici, *Speculum Astrologiae*, vol. 1, Lyons 1581. Recomputed with modern software the ascendant is 23°05' Capricorn.

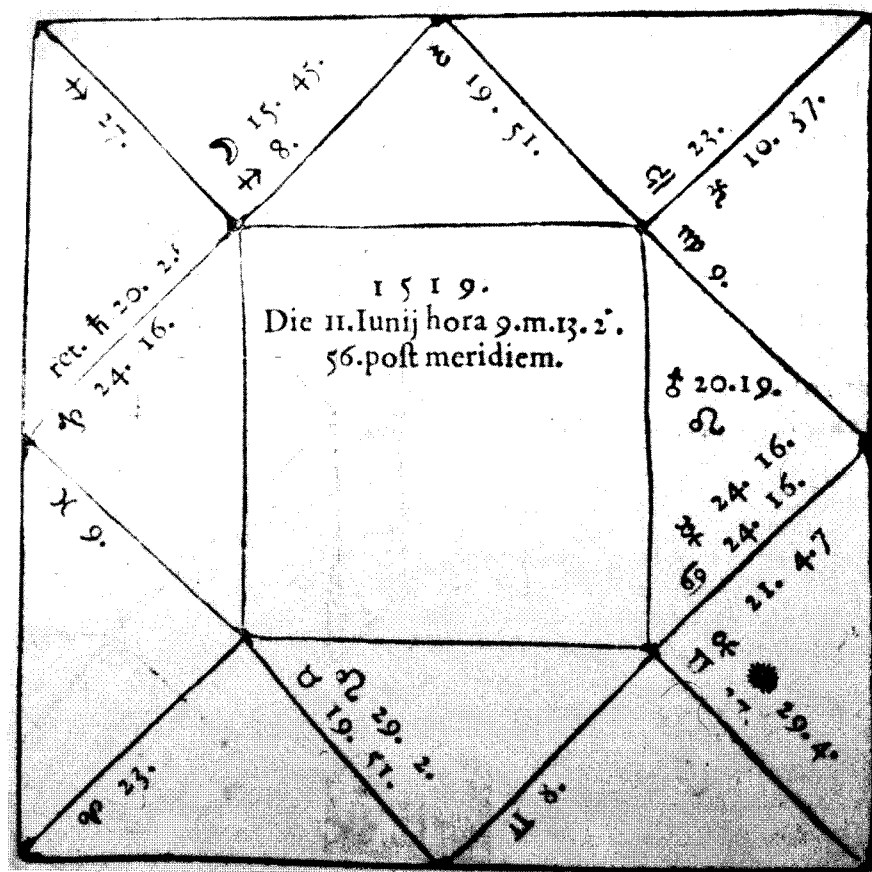


Figure 4. Giuliano Ristori (1492-1556). Nativity for Cosimo I de' Medici, dated 28 June 1537. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Plu. 89 sup. 34, fol. 133r.

*che il peso nella nativita dall'ora della Luna, per
la regola dello ammodar. Ma di questo fa più fede
il consenso de molti effetti, che particolarmente nel
Cap. della vita si vedranno.*

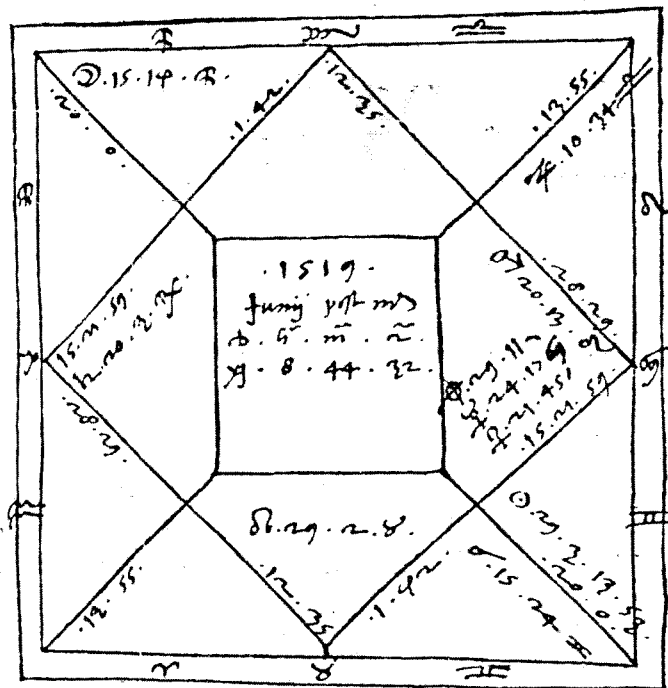


Figure 5. Cosimo de' Medici's revolution (solar return) for 1553, using the birth data given by Giuntini.

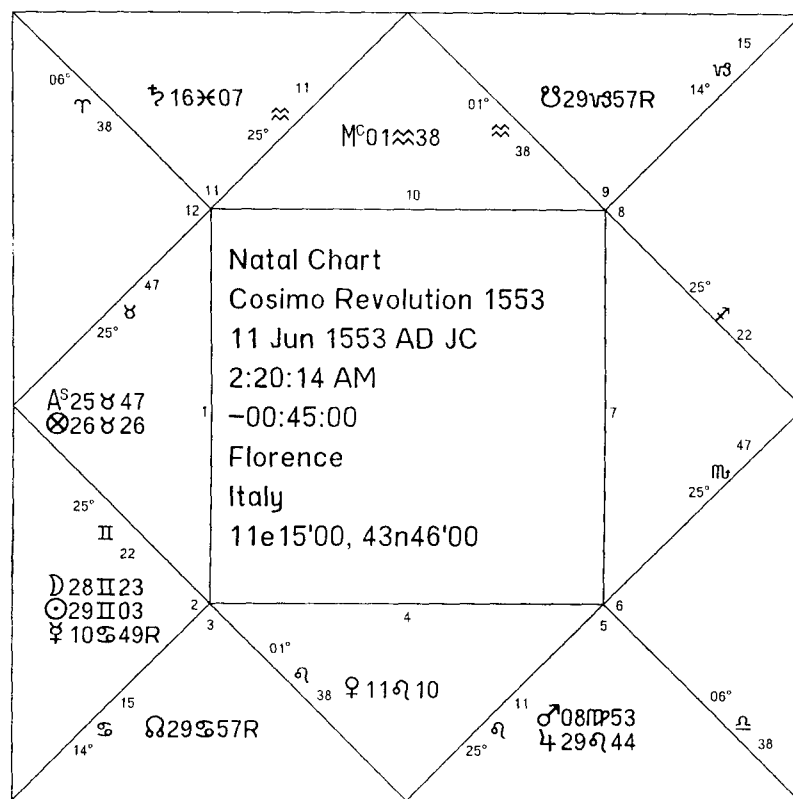


Figure 6. Cosimo de' Medici's revolution (solar return) for 1554, using the birth data given by Giuntini.

