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PRIFYSGOL CYMRU LLANBEDR PONT STEFFAN

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1

Introduction

This Book

Astrology has long aroused strong feelings. In a millenia-long history, it has attracted as many as it has repelled, springing up afresh after every apparent defeat whether by science, religion, or simply 'reason'. Astrologers have even made bold to claim those attributes for their own. Is it then unrecognized science, or divinatory magic? Prophecy or prediction, or simply placebo? The very impossibility of supplying a single or definitive answer has lent astrology much of its longevity, and its interest. Such adaptability and elusiveness is thus not simply a problem; it is what makes astrology worth studying.

I became interested at an early age. Since then, my attitude has changed radically several times: from partisan, to sceptic, and finally to historian. Like Ellic Howe, I eventually realized that 'the answers to the questions that interested me most – these questions had nothing to do with validity or otherwise of astrological beliefs – would not be discovered by casting horoscopes, but by a process of historical research.'[1] In this process, I found the positions of both partisan and sceptic equally unhelpful; not only do I lack the necessary hubris to declare the transcendent truth about astrology, but also I believe that neither attitude can begin to do justice to astrology's rich and subtle complexity. For that, one must learn to remain (in the words of an aptly placed literary critic) 'faithful to the ambiguity of opposing demands . . . [refusing] any single place or position which would permit the illusion of a final solution.'[2]

After all, what we call astrology has itself changed many times, and radically so, since its Babylonian and Greek origins. To put it another way, astrology has never been just one thing. But the period and place

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discussed in this book – from 1642 to 1800, in England – offer particular problems and rewards. As the astrologer William Lilly remarked in 1666, 'The English of all nations are most taken with prophecyes.'[3] Throughout the last six centuries, English men and women have considered the meaning of the stars, cast horoscopes, and consulted astrologers. In the late seventeenth century, however, a dramatic transformation took place. Astrology fell from unprecedented influence, during the English Revolution, to what is often described as its death, after the Restoration. Yet this phenomenon is seldom discussed by historians. The obvious exception is Keith Thomas's pioneering *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) – for very good reasons, still an indispensable introduction to the subject. A mark of its fruitfulness, however, is that Thomas's book raised as many questions as it answered. One purpose of this book is therefore to take them on, and suggest answers: did astrology really die, or decline; in so far as it did, why and how did that happen? What happened afterwards? And what can we learn here?[4]

Taking such questions seriously – and their human subjects – is also part of a larger project: that is, to recover astrology from what E. P. Thompson memorably described as 'the enormous condescension of posterity.'[5] He was referring to posterity's neglect of the labouring poor and powerless, but it seems to me that the point is the same: to contest the notion of history as fundamentally about the 'winners', by making room for those now deemed to be its 'losers'. In any democratic view of history, this is just as important whether we are looking at people's beliefs and world-views, or their ways of life; they cannot really be separated.

I have tried to bring a forgotten cast – the astrologers (of whatever kind) and their clients, as well as the critics – to life. They deserve no less, and our common history would be poorer without them. An equally vital part of history-writing, however, is to hazard risky (but fruitful) explanations. Only in this way can we arrive at a deeper understanding of the past, and, by implication, the present.[6] In the case of astrology in early modern England, the potential rewards extend well beyond a better grasp of the 'precise sociological genealogy' of its decline.[7] For example, this history throws new light on the interactions between patrician, middling, and plebeian cultures – especially the dynamics of hegemony, whereby the ideas and values of the first class dominated (to various degrees) those of the other two. Again, seeing astrology in its historical context brings out the intimate relationships between highly specific social

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and political events, on the one hand, and enduring mental attitudes or 'mentalities', on the other. Paradoxically, a more historical approach to such issues can sharpen our thinking about them in general.

It is not really surprising that the history of astrology should offer such rewards. The stars were widely considered to be God's handiwork, and therefore a source of divine guidance; so astrology overlapped with religion. As part of natural knowledge, their study fell within the ambit of natural philosophy, medicine, and early modern science. Astrological predictions frequently had political repercussions. In all these ways – as with any system of knowledge and belief (that is, epistemology) which is rooted in the lives of real people, living in a material world – astrology was inseparable from considerations of power.[8] It can therefore act as a sensitive historical instrument, its rejected and forgotten 'truth' throwing new light on that of the dominant, successful and mainstream.[9] But, as I learned myself, in struggling to find the right approach, such insights are lost if astrology is seen as simply one of history's 'losers'. Although speaking *de haut en bas*, such an historian is reduced to demonologist and hagiographer, chronicling the ignorant believers and prescient critics of a delusion. This approach is what I regard as teleological – the idea that history has a goal towards which it is marching, aided by heroes and obstructed by villains – and anachronistic: the willingness to re-enter history as a vicarious participant, rewarding and punishing with hindsight.[10]

For reasons that lie partly in the very period under study here, such an attitude (in more or less sophisticated variants) is a particular problem in the study of the occult, magic, or 'pseudo-science'. As elsewhere where it appears (usually among certain adherents of the Marxist left and New Right), the primary purpose is to use history in order to advance points of contemporary ideology. With astrology and the like, that usually means scientific ideology; and its commonest marker is an uncritical use of the word 'superstition' and its synonyms. There is no reason why the historian should try to deny contemporary political or social interests; they are unavoidable, even desirable, and better explicit than suppressed. But they do not justify bad scholarship. And that is unavoidable, if the historian insists on taking up an exclusive position inside the very historical debate that we are trying to understand. Conceived as popular religion, astrology was first stigmatized as superstition (mystification, ignorance, and so on) by the Reformation churches; most recently, this label has been adopted and adapted by scientific apologists. But as James Obelkevitch put it,

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'Before popular religion can be understood at all, it has to be understood in its own terms, not as a failed version of something else.' The same principle applies with equal force to astrology considered as a so-called 'pseudo-science.'[11]

Another purpose of this book is therefore to offer an alternative example of the social history of such ideas, based on a critical pluralism. In both subject-matter and approach, a premise is that truth, rationality and progress are never self-evident. Rather they are themselves the valued prizes contested (usually with distinctly unequal resources) among historical subjects: astrologers, divines, scientists, politicians, plebeians, patricians alike. None had, or have, privileged access to their possession; or, to put it another way, their truth-claims must be treated identically. As G. E. R. Lloyd stated: 'The explanandum is not, in any case, the victory of rationality over magic: there was no such victory: but rather how the criticism of magic got some purchase.'[12]

Partly to this end, I have adopted a working definition of astrology to include any practice or belief that centred on interpreting the human or terrestrial meaning of the stars. This definition is sufficiently flexible to allow the full phenomenon to flower, since astrology was no more a single entity with a transcendently fixed character than was, or is, 'science' or 'religion'.[13] Any move to make it appear so substantively, beyond semantic convenience, is therefore a rhetorical intervention in a particular debate, whether one in history or now.

Astrology does have a central feature, however, which such a defi brings out. That is the act of interpretation – in this case, of the sta. from astral plant and weather lore of the simplest and most popular kind, or the divinatory revelations of judicial astrologers, to the cosmic speculations of eminent natural philosophers. Such interpretation did not take place in a vacuum; as we shall see, it was intimately connected to other considerations of knowledge, values and power. It is not, therefore, an example of autonomous or free-floating cultural 'discourse'.[14] On the other hand, astrological interpretations unavoidably embodied ambiguity and contingency. For that reason, they were always open to re-interpretation and re-articulation by others, for different ends. Thus, despite their connectedness, astrological interpretations were never fixed, or uniquely and finally determined (whether by economic or other supposedly isolated factors). Personally, I see this kind of openness – which applies equally to historical and other acts of interpretation – not so much as a problem as a sign of life and hope.[15]

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Astrology in Historical Context

I have space for only the briefest sketch of the economic, social and political setting in early modern England. Throughout this period, England was a predominantly rural and pre-industrial society. In the mid-seventeenth century, the total population was four to five million, of which about 80 per cent (according to the pioneering demographer Gregory King) lived in villages or in the countryside. The exception was London. But even with a population of just under half a million, in 1665 – at least twenty times greater than any of its British urban rivals – London could claim only about eight out of every hundred people in the country. Nor was the capital immune from rural afflictions; plague swept through it in 1603, 1625, and, most disastrously, in 1665.

The social world in this period was finely and hierarchically structured, with huge differences in conditions and styles of life between those at the top and the bottom of the social ladder. Although there were no mature social classes of the kind we associate with modern industrial society, it would be highly misleading to suggest that England was a classless or so-called 'one-class' society. Accounts by contemporaries such as William Harrison and Gregory King suggest the following broad social groups: at the top, the aristocracy and landed gentry (a very small number, with a great deal of status, wealth and power); next, the professional and mercantile class, composed of clergy, lawyers, physicians, and the wealthier merchants, and largely based in the towns; and, at roughly the same 'level', the rural parish gentry; then, rural freeholders, the better-off tenant farmers, yeomen, and the tradesmen, shopkeepers, and artisans; after them, labourers, servants, poor husbandmen, and common soldiers (a very large class, with very little); and finally, an underclass of paupers, beggars, and vagrants. King estimated that the landowning and professional elite received a larger share of the national income than all the other groups added together.[16]

Here too, London was unusual, without radically breaking the overall pattern. From the late seventeenth century onwards, it was the setting for a dramatic rise in the number of people of 'middling' status and wealth, especially among the professions and trades. Illiteracy too was much lower in the capital than elsewhere. With its concentration of political power and cultural influence, London played a disproportionate role in those aspects of the country as a whole.[17] Nonetheless, English society

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in general was still more local and varied than can easily be imagined today.

The second half of the seventeenth century in England saw extraordinary events. They involved and eventually transformed the entire country, through probably the most traumatic thing that can befall one (short of subjugation): a civil war. That war broke out in 1642, and lasted until 1649, when the reigning monarch, Charles I, was beheaded – a deeply shocking event, even for many of his opponents, and one which reverberated through the following century of English history. Almost as disturbing (or exhilarating) was the displacement of Anglicanism as the national Church. Following rule by Parliament, then the army, then Cromwell (as Lord Protector), monarchy, Church and Lords were restored in 1660.

The significance of the Restoration, against the backdrop of the preceding two decades, is likewise difficult to overestimate. On the one hand, it was a real restoration of royal and clerical power; on the other, that power could never again be as 'natural' and impregnable as it had been before the war. The intervening changes ruled out any simple return to the previous period, and the subsequent strife-torn rule of the Stuarts ended in the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, bringing in its train a new settlement that cemented the marriage of monarchy, a national Church, and middle-class mercantile muscle. As we shall see, these momentous events and processes affected astrology no less strongly than everything else in the life of the country. Nor can other developments be ignored, such as the appearance of institutionalized natural philosophy in the the Royal Society (itself deeply implicated in the politics of the age).

Events in the eighteenth century can be seen in large part as a continuing response to those of the seventeenth. The consolidation of agrarian capitalism (including enclosures) accelerated the historic division between labour and capital, and the growth of a new entrepreneurial commercialism. The social analogue of these changes was the emergence and strengthening of a new gulf between patrician (upper and new middle classes) and plebeian (labouring class). Increasingly, the metropolitan literati became an effective voice of the former, and, through the rapidly growing metropolitan and provincial press, another instrument of London's political and cultural dominance. Politically, the brief Tory rule under Anne was followed by the long and increasingly conservative Whig and Low Church ascendency after the accession of the Georges in

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1714. By this time, the Anglican Church was deeply divided between High and Low, and mainstream politics into Whig and Tory. In mid-century, the Church united in the face of new competition from popular religion, especially Methodism; and the two parties, too, moved closer together after the passing of Jacobitism as a serious threat. Popular disturbances in the 1760s failed seriously to shake the ruling elite, but late in the century, Jacobinism and popular millenarianism raised new fears of sectarian radicalism – never very far from the surface, in any case.

Existing accounts of English astrology in this period agree that the mid-seventeenth century was a high-water mark. Astrologers and their almanacs flourished as never before. Beginning with the Restoration, however, an abrupt and serious decline apparently set in. In his discussion of the reasons, Thomas cites intellectual changes brought about by new scientific discoveries and technological advances, urbanization, and finally a new 'ideology of self-help'. At the same time, however, he admits the weakness of these explanations,[18] which indeed becomes apparent under close scrutiny: many well-informed astronomers and mathematicians were also astrologers; astrology adapted eagerly to newsprint and increased literacy, in the city no less than the countryside; and it was a personal weapon of advancement in the armoury of more than one self-made man of the times. Nor does religious criticism alone explain any decline; clerical hostility was more or less a constant throughout the entire period. Bernard Capp's later work underlines the problem. He emphasizes (correctly) that astrology lived on among the labouring classes of the eighteenth-century, but admits that 'we can point to no new or compelling argument or discovery to explain why astrology lost its hold over the educated classes.'[19]

I think this particular mystery can now be laid to rest. Astrology did see a rapid and striking change between 1660 and 1700 – although nothing that could, in good conscience, still be called a death[20] – and in what follows, we shall first concentrate on the late seventeenth century in order to bring out the dynamics of this transition. Then we shall look at the world of eighteenth-century astrology as a (reconstructed) whole. As will emerge, the latter period simply cannot be understood without the former. This approach will involve enlarging the relatively narrow definition of astrology used by most historians – mostly what I call judicial, which was the site of the more dramatic changes – in order to recognize and appreciate its popular and elite uses. Two caveats: first, in

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order to present and explore a neglected subject, I risk giving the impression of going to the other extreme, and implying that astrology was everywhere; clearly it was not; second, this study is intended to map the terrain and leave some reliable signposts. Along the way, I hope it will emerge that the history of astrology in early modern England is richly rewarding, and far from entirely inexplicable. But there is still much to explore, particularly in relation to the eighteenth century.

Astrological Theory and Terminology

My goal here is to provide the reader with a sufficient minimum grasp of astrology for this book. Much fuller guides are available.[21] Even the theoretical part of astrology's history is millenia-long and highly complex; what follows is therefore a bare but, I hope, useful outline.

It was a medieval and early modern commonplace that, broadly speaking, there were two kinds of astrology: natural and judicial.[22] The former concerned astral influences on 'natural' phenomena, such as the weather and agriculture, and (an indication of intellectual assumptions rather different to our own) human events of a mass nature, from epidemics to sweeping political and religious changes. Supposedly, only general and probable (as opposed to supposedly certain) predictions were undertaken. The close relationship of this astrology to natural philosophy or early science – with its emphasis on causal and law-like determinism – is obvious, and has been stressed by historians such as Thorndike and Neugebauer.[23]

Judicial astrology, on the other hand, embraced relatively precise astrally derived predictions or advice, concerned with specific individuals. ('Predictions' and 'prophecies' were, in this context, effectively interchangeable terms; whether one or the other was used depended on the intentions of the astrologer or critic, but no clear distinction was sustainable.) The branches of judicial astrology divided into the following: nativities (also called 'genethliacal' astrology), based on a map of the planets' positions at the moment of a person's birth; horary, which endeavoured to answer questions (usually practical, often urgent) based on a map of the planets' positions at the moment when the question was asked, or received; and elections and inceptions, which concerned the beginning of an enterprise. In all cases the map was called a 'figure' – in the case of maps for persons, 'nativities' or 'genitures' – and later,

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'horoscopes'. Considered as a practice, judicial astrology was further removed than natural astrology from natural philosophy, and was more a pragmatically oriented craft. (Bearing in mind that then, as now, any philosophy had practical implications, and, conversely, that practices were inseparable from philosophies, in this case cosmology in particular.)

The natural–judicial polarity, however, crossed with another important distinction: natural vs supernatural. This consideration derived largely from the unstable mixture of Aristotelian and neo-Platonic ideas that astrologers had inherited from the Renaissance and antiquity. The former contributed the order of the planets, descending from the primum mobile and the fixed stars through Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon, down to the sublunary Earth. ('Planets' were commonly understood to include the Sun and Moon, and 'stars' was a generic term for both stars and planets.) The Earth was thus the maximum recipient of celestial influence, which acted through the four elements (fire, earth, air and water) and their corresponding Galenic humours in the human body (choler, black bile, blood and phlegm).

Whereas this contribution to astrological discourse tended towards naturalism, the more supernatural neo-Platonic strain appeared in concepts of sympathy and antipathy. These were vital to astrological magic and, arguably, divination. They were also used in physic, indicating (for example) that an illness with Saturnian symptoms (cold, stiffness, and so on) should be treated by herbs or medicines ruled by the opposite planet, the Sun, which therefore possess warming, relaxing virtues; and so on. The same ideas were also influential in attaching numerological significance to certain numbers in astrological interpretation, particularly the aspects (see below).

A strain-line thus ran among astrologers, roughly dividing adherents of Aristotelian naturalism from those of neo-Platonic magic. (This situation was further complicated by the rise of the new experimental philosophy in the late seventeenth century.) And judicial astrology, more than natural, tended to be seen as operating more by supernatural, or at least extra-natural, means. (This assertion was often hotly, if predictably, contested by its practitioners.) Even within judicial astrology, horary was held to be closer to the supernatural end of the scale. The inability of astrologers to produce a convincing naturalistic rationale for why the heavens should be able to answer a question from their arrangement at the time of asking pointed to horary astrology as a magical, divinatory art – and as such, in the opinion of most divines, one condemned by Scripture.

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(In addition, it was widely held to be the invention of Arab infidels – somewhat misleadingly, in view of its much older and very similiar Greek antecedents.)[24]

By contrast, nativities – viewed as an examples of astral influence – seemed to retain some of the law-like determinism of natural astrology. That was not only the thrust of Ptolemy's presentation; it was also the opinion, however disputed by their clerical critics, of many early modern astrologers. To quote one,

> pretty it is to observe, how a Child, as soon as it draws breath, becomes Time-smitten by the Face of Heaven; and receives an impression from all parts of Heaven, and the Stars therein, which taking rise from the Ascendent, Sun, and Moon, and other significant places, does operate as the Impressors stand in distance, nearer or farther off: and this seems to be a concatenation of many knots which untie by course, and by distant turns; and as every knot unties, different times seem to fly out, and to do their errands; and of these sometimes you shall have two or three or more lucky knots opening together, and otherwhiles as many unlucky ones.[25]

Of course, such naturalism (even put as poetically as this) could equally well land astrologers in trouble with the Church for transgressing the freedom of the human will. For obvious reasons, divines also did not take kindly to attempts (however 'natural') to deduce the fate of churches and religions from astrological considerations.[26] At the extreme natural end of the scale, therefore, astrologers courted charges of atheism as dangerous as those of sorcery and diabolism stemming from the supernatural end. The only time astrology was quite free of official suspicion, in fact, was when it was applied in a general way to general or physical phenomena, such as epidemics or the weather.

In practice, the line between natural and judicial astrology was constantly blurred. Even in theory, the difference was never clear; given the endless variations in individuals and circumstances, it was impossible to specify a fixed point separating mere astral influence on the will, via the humours, from outright determination. Yet the need for such a distinction was a vital part of the synthesis of Christian theology and Aristotelian natural philosophy wrought by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas's solution to the conflicting demands of both systems purchased a crucial niche in mainstream medieval Christian orthodoxy. In effect, it legitimized the basis of astrology by granting the efficacy of Aristotle's descending spheres of celestial influence, but simultaneously delimited it

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by stressing the freedom of the will. In medieval Europe, this compromise became widely accepted; it was a regular part of the scholastic curriculum. Only a very few (such as Nicholas Oresme and Nicholas of Cusa) questioned its legitimacy and implications.

Beginning with the sixteenth century, however, astrology came under new intellectual and moral pressure both from Renaissance humanism, as prefigured by Pico's concern to save the freedom of the will from astral influences, and from the Reformation determination to force recognition of a direct and unmediated relationship between God and man. In the latter view, astrology clearly constituted a form of idolatry. Although defended by Melanchthon, it was attacked by Luther and (above all) Calvin. At the same time, the influence of the stars on natural phenomena was still almost universally accepted. One result was that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the line supposedly dividing natural from judicial astrology became heavily policed. The distinction was still useful to all sides; it enabled divines to attack most astrological practices, and particular predictions they did not like, as having exceeded the bounds of proper natural astrology. By the same token, it provided astrologers with a relatively safe haven, since predictions could be defended by describing them as probable and natural. But both sides, more than ever divided, became committed to an interminable struggle to push the boundary in one direction or another – a contest which neither side could win outright, although (unsurprisingly, given their relative strengths and resources) astrologers were mostly on the philosophical defensive. Both the boundary and the struggle over its location, of course, were predicated on the reality of astrological influences as such. From the second half of the seventeenth century, this premise itself became increasingly problematic – a development which obliged both astrologers and divines to adapt to a new intellectual universe.

Early modern astrology varied greatly in its sophistication and modus operandi. At its most basic and popular level, the important considerations were the phases of the Moon and relatively spectacular phenomena such as comets, eclipses, and conjunctions. These were visible to the naked eye, and needed no further astronomical calculation or elaboration. At the other end (popular sharing a keen interest in comets), astrology joined natural philosophy in considering cosmic phenomena as affecting all life on Earth. Somewhere between popular and philosophical astrology were the judicial astrologers, whose interpretations of the cosmos far

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exceeded in complexity those of the former, but were applied – unlike those of the latter – to the lives of individuals. In what follows, it is necessary to spend a disproportionate amount of time discussing their astrology, the arcana of which otherwise invites misunderstandings.

Fundamental to judicial astrology was the 'figure', which (in a concession to modern parlance) we shall call the 'horoscope'. Astronomically speaking, this was simply a map of the planets' positions for the moment concerned, as seen from the place concerned. A particular place and time (however it is determined) are thus indispensable minimum requirements. Since the locus of the horoscope was a place on Earth, the displacement of a geocentric conception of the universe by a heliocentric required no changes in either the erection of the horoscope or its interpretation.

The planets were precisely situated in the figure in two ways: in signs of the ecliptic, or zodiac (measured from the vernal equinox at 0° Aries); and in houses, which are also divisions of the ecliptic but based on the Earth's diurnal (daily) rotation. Tackling the technical details would not be helpful here, but the following points can be noted. The zodiacal signs should not be confused with the constellations that form their starry backdrop, despite the shared names – Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces. The signs in Western astrology have nothing to do with the stars; they are derived purely from the Sun–Earth relationship. Seen against the constellations, they are moving very slowly backwards (taking about 25,800 years to complete a full cycle). This phenomenon, stemming from the wobble in the Earth's axis and known as the precession of the equinoxes, has been a perennial criticism of astrology (e.g. 'the signs are no longer where they used to be'). Like heliocentrism, however, precession is tangential to horoscopic interpretation, since the signs are independent of the stars or constellations. Astrologers have therefore, equally perennially, remained unimpressed by this criticism. (This is not to say that it did not figure importantly in other contexts, such as astronomy, and the perception of cycles in history.)

Regarding the houses, there were two points or areas whose importance astrologers universally agreed upon: the 'Ascendent', or horizontal angle, and the 'M.C.' (for Medium Coeli), or vertical angle. Apart from this consensus, however, the 'correct' method of house division has been disputed among astrologers for centuries. In the second half of the late seventeenth century, English astrologers could choose between at least four methods, named after their originators: the so-called Ptolemaic,

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which simply assigned the same degree of the sign on the ascendent to the cusp (or beginning) of each subsequent house, and the more sophisticated systems of Porphyry, Campanus, and Regiomontanus. As we shall see, the introduction of a new system by Placidus, late in the century, aroused intense controversy. In all cases, the mathematics involved were complex, but in the sixteenth century tables became widely available which permitted the necessary trigonometry to be taken for granted.[27]

The final astronomical calculation needed was that of the aspects, or the degree of angular separation (measured along the ecliptic) between each planet. Traditional (Ptolemaic) astrological theory held five aspects to be significant: the conjunction (0° separation), the sextile (60°), the quartile or square (90°), the trine (120°), and the opposition (180°). These aspects were permitted a certain inexactitude (usually a few degrees).

This was the astronomical or formal part of judicial astrology. We now come to the matter of interpretation – less straightforward, but more important. As Ann Geneva has correctly pointed out, 'Precise knowledge of geocentric astronomy was crucial in calculating the initial figure, but the true skill of the astrological practitioner resided in interpretation.' That skill consisted of translating the symbolic system of astrology into the vernacular, in a meaningful way. Given the extent to which judicial astrology became the knowledge (or if you prefer, science) that dares not speak its name – and remains so, for modern heirs of the divines, scientists and intellectual castes who found against it in the late seventeenth century, for reasons that are in part the subject of this book – it is very difficult for us to recognize this as a real skill. For its historical appreciation, however, that is what is required.[28]

I intend to mention only the most basic rules, common to all judicial astrology. They quickly develop into an intricate and arcane body of doctrine, much of which varied in its application between astrologers. To begin with, each planet was considered to have a unique nature and meaning. The basic qualities were conceived as a particular combination of masculine or feminine, hot or cold, and wet or dry. From this was derived a considerable amount of further detail pertaining to the planets' associated Earthly phenomena – temperaments, physiques, professions, illnesses, colours, herbs, weather, etc. In this way, each planet was held to signify or 'rule' an extensive range of phenomena, the connection being an agreed appropriateness of symbolism. (Thus, for example, the Sun 'ruled'

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and thus related gold among metals to the lion among animals, the heart among organs, the King in the civil sphere, and so on.)

The meanings of the planets were then qualified and specified in three basic ways. The most important in early modern practice was to consider what house each planet occupied. The houses were organized in four groups of three (angular, succeedent and cadent). In addition, each had its own character, relatively friendly or hostile to each of the planets, thus providing their 'accidental dignities and debilities'. Perhaps most importantly, the houses provided crucial circumstantial guidance. (Thus, for example, Saturn in the seventh house indicated delays or hindrance to marriage and partnerships; but in the ninth, to long-distance voyages, and so on.) The second way involved the signs. The twelve signs were organized in overlapping groups of four elements (fire, earth, air and water) and three qualities (cardinal, fixed and mutable), and each was ruled by a planet. Thus, each sign had a distinct individual nature, and the nature of each was again considered to be felicitous or otherwise for particular planets, providing their 'essential dignities and debilities'. (Thus, for example, the Sun was considered to be well-placed in Aries, but badly in Libra, and so on.) The third refinement was that of aspects between the planets. Basically, those based on division of the ecliptic by an odd number, such as the trine and sextile, were considered fortunate, but those based on an even number, such as the quartile and opposition, unfortunate. (Thus, Mars in quartile to another planet would indicate disputes and violence; Venus thus badly aspected, fickleness, and so on.)

These procedures by no means exhausted the repertoire. One could further consider such planetary conditions as lord of the geniture, peregrine, cazimi, void of course, and a host of others – fine points, but potentially (for the astrologer) decisive factors. It was also possible mathematically to advance a horoscope in time to any future date, in order to predict events or conditions then, or to see when a potential event indicated by the original horoscope would come to pass. The techniques for doing so were called 'directions'.

Finally, some general points about astrological interpretation should be stressed.[29] The tenets of astrological reasoning, which are developed by selective analogy, have been described as irrational. Logic of whatever kind, however, contains no guarantees as to the correctness of premises; and premises (especially assumptions) that appear arbitrary, or even irrational, to people of one age, place or class may appear just the reverse to those of another. 'Rationality' in this context is therefore an historically

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variable construct, signifying acceptability or plausibility. Astrological premises may lack the latter (for everyone?), but that cannot be considered an inherent defect, pointing to the irrationality of the whole enterprise.[30]

There is an apparent paradox respecting the degree of certainty (that is, degree of consensus) possible in astrological delineation. On the one hand, it was not an arbitrary procedure; a horoscope in which Saturn is the dominant planet, for example, will be found so by almost any astrologer whose competence is accepted by the majority of his or her fellows.[31] In other words, it is false to maintain that the astrologers could see in the horoscopes, and therefore predict or predicate, 'anything they pleased'; in the experience of the astrologer, there were real internal constraints. On the other hand, these constraints were never completely determining, so the horoscope was never interpretively closed. Within limits, its complexity, the lack of close consensus about which rules take precedence over others, and human ingenuity always allowed a horoscopic interpretation to be challenged or refined. As a corollary, it was also always possible for astrologers to blame the more blatant mis-predictions on (in Ptolemy's words) 'the mistakes of those who are not accurately instructed in its practice, and they are many, as one would expect in an important and many-sided art.'[32] Nor does the last point, in itself, clearly distinguish astrology from science, and establish the former as a pseudo-science, or even a 'mere' art. The under-determination of theories by facts (or by data) is now well recognized in the philosophy of science, as is the importance in scientific prediction of the condition 'all other things being equal'. And in their actual practice, scientists are far quicker to blame the application of a theory and/or the competence of its appliers, than a favoured theory itself.[33]

Finally, non-astrologers might easily underestimate the potential richness and elegance of astrological symbolism in the hands of a skilled practitioner. This was one of astrology's principal intellectual and aesthetic attractions. Yet in the case of judicial astrology, its application, given the nature of the demand from the public, was often to questions of a highly pragmatic nature. In a parallel way, astrological practice combined objective elements – the positions of the planets at a moment in time – with the different subjectivities of the astrologer's (constrained) interpretation, and the most personal and sensitive concerns of the client. For these reasons – being neither art nor science, but partaking of both – the practice of judicial astrology is best thought of as a craft.

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