

Moving Forward, Looking Back:

Future Directions in Post-Modern Astrology

February 25th, 2010 in Cambridge, MA

Robert Hand - Mesopotamian Astrology

This talk will present a general outline of Mesopotamian Astral Divination as it came into being, developed and began to evolve toward the horoscopic astrology of the Hellenistic Era. It will cover three stages of evolution. 1) Origins and early period up to the first millennium BCE. 2) The Assyrian and Second Babylonian Empire period. 3) The Persian and Sassanian Periods and early birth charts. Issues to be dealt with will concentrate on 1) The differences between Mesopotamian Astral divination and true horoscopic astrology. 2) The evolution of the zodiac and the sidereal-tropical issue. 3) How far along toward true horoscopic astrology did Mesopotamian astrology get.

Chris Brennan – Hellenistic Astrology

Hellenistic astrology (ca. 1st century BCE-7th century CE) appeared in the Mediterranean region towards the end of the Roman Republic, with the particular locus of activity being centered on Alexandria, Egypt throughout the course of its long history. The origins of the system of astrology that developed during this time are somewhat obscure due to the loss of early source texts, although the most frequently cited foundational compendiums were issued under the names of legendary figures. Many of the later astrologers whose texts have survived from this time were either compiling or reworking parts of the earlier tradition which they had inherited.

From a technical perspective the system represents a synthesis of the earlier Mesopotamian and Egyptian astrological traditions, with numerous technical and conceptual advancements. Of particular note are the development of aspects, houses, complicated zodiacal and planetary classifications, and complex timing techniques known as time-lord systems.

The primary focus of the system was on natal astrology, and the fundamental philosophical presupposition was that the courses of our lives are predetermined from birth. While there were debates about the extent to which the future was fully fated, the majority of the practicing astrologers appear to have adopted a more deterministic approach that was largely influenced by the philosophy of Stoicism. Only the magical traditions and the later naturalistic Ptolemaic tradition represented serious philosophical rivals to the Stoic strain.

Any future synthesis of astrology will be enriched by the internal cohesiveness of the technical and conceptual apparatus of the Hellenistic system, as well as its more deterministic philosophical approach.

Ronnie Gale Dreyer - Indian Astrology

Jyotish is the mathematical, astronomical, and astrological system that has been utilized in India since at least the Vedic Era (approx. 1500-500 BC), when planetary positions and moon mansions (nakshatras) were mentioned freely in the Epics, Vedas, and omen literature. Hosocopic astrology, using the zodiac, probably began some time in the common era, and this lecture will briefly map out the development of horoscopic astrology in India and how it became the system that is still used today in an unbroken lineage. We will begin with what may be the earliest surviving manuscript, *Yavana Jataka* (late 3rd century), a versified adaptation of a Sanskrit translation of a Hellenistic text. This supposition was set forth (and is widely accepted) by David Pingree from what is mentioned in the text, though neither the original Sanskrit translation nor the Hellenistic text have ever been recovered. Next we will consider a later version of this text, *Vriddha Yavana Jataka* by Minaraja (4th century), and then Varahamihira, whose classic text *Brihat Jataka* (6th century) was clearly derived from the other two, but with still more changes. He is considered to be India's greatest astrologer, and his text is considered by most Indians to be the definitive one that Jyotish emanated from. We will touch upon some of the changes that Jyotish went through in the centuries before Varahamihira, as by the time he wrote his books, the foundation was laid down for the definitive astrology used in India today. The question of Jyotish's use of first the sidereal zodiac, then the tropical zodiac, and then back to the sidereal will be touched upon as well.

Benjamin Dykes – Medieval and Renaissance Astrology

Medieval astrology (ca. 750-1400 AD) can be divided into two phases. The first phase (750-1000) is defined by Arabic translations of Pahlavi and Greek texts, made by and practiced primarily by Persians. Major figures in the first few centuries of this phase include: Masha'allah, Sahl bin Bishr, 'Umar al-Tabari, Abu 'Ali al-Khayyat, al-Kindi, Abu Ma'shar, al-Qabisi, 'Ali al-Rijal (Haly Abenragel), Abraham ibn Ezra. The second phase (1100-1400) is largely defined by Latin translations and compilations of the Arabic texts, but also by scholastics commenting on astrology: John of Spain, Hugo of Santalla, Guido Bonatti, Albertus Magnus, St. Thomas Aquinas, Campanus. In both phases, its philosophy tended to synthesize the Stoic, Aristotelian, and Platonic streams already in the literature (Abu Ma'shar), favoring the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmos of natural laws and a causally more remote God. But there were also gestures toward a harmonizing with scriptural religion (Bonatti, Albertus Magnus, Aquinas) or with more technical physics of the day (al-Kindi). Already in its first phase it added horary practice as a well-formed distinct branch of astrology, and introduced Persian mundane techniques concerning Saturn-Jupiter conjunctions and other notions. Also notable is its use of the concept of a "root" chart to distinguish more and less valid or powerful horary and electional charts, as well as a minimal dependence on the theological concept of the "free will."

Renaissance and early modern astrology (ca. 1450-1700 AD) begins roughly with the Renaissance and re-introduction of Hermetic texts into the West after the fall of Constantinople, continues through the Age of Discovery and the Reformation, and ends with the 17th Century scientific revolution. Major figures include: Cardanus, Johannes Schoener, Luca Gaurico, Junctinus, Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Regiomontanus, Placidus, Lilly, Morin, Kepler, Galileo, John Dee. It was a tumultuous period with several astrological trends: (1) the political/intellectual belief in a pure Greek astrology represented by Ptolemy, slowly rejecting material seen as having an Arabic taint; (2) the attempt to harmonize astrology, natural magic, and Hermetic-Platonic theology with Christian thought; (3) a gradual rejection of astrological concepts as incompatible with the new, increasingly materialist scientific model of metaphysics and knowledge. The primary impulses of this period were reformation, innovation, and rationalization. In astrological terms, it contributed several methods for determining physiognomy and temperament, especially for medical purposes. But the tendency to “rationalize” and favor what is “modern” often meant rejecting techniques and concepts not clearly understood, or developing new house systems, directive systems, and so on. The encounter with Hermetism-Neoplatonism and the adoption of modern scientific concepts has influenced 19th and 20th Century astrology in important ways.

Richard Tarnas – Modern Astrology

The larger time frame I will be looking at is basically the twentieth century, extending into the first decade of the twenty-first, but clearly the later twentieth century is the pivotal era. Modern astrology can be seen as emerging gradually in the course of the twentieth century, intensely surging in breadth and depth very rapidly from the 1960s and 1970s on, and receiving in the past twenty years a new level of self-reflective awareness and complexity. Above all, the task of modern astrology has been to integrate the tremendous psychological, philosophical, and cosmological transformations of the modern age, and this it has increasingly accomplished, in highly creative, I believe largely authentic, but often problematic and now still unfolding ways. The larger practice of astrology in the contemporary world does not yet fully reflect this historical metamorphosis, but certain fundamental changes have been established. These include the psychological turn associated with the forging of the autonomous modern self -- the new sense of interiority, subjectivity, and volitional self-responsibility; a more sophisticated grasp of the multivalence of symbol, archetype, and principle; a shift from concrete literal prediction to archetypal and evolutionary understanding; and on the astronomical and technical levels, such critical advances as the deep integration of Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto into the astrological understanding; a new recognition of the central role of aspects, cycles, transits, and midpoints; and at an often implicit but still effective level, a grasp of the recursive and participatory nature of the human/cosmic field. Moving from its largely theosophical matrix in the early twentieth century, with a deep Platonic-Pythagorean metaphysical background, astrology gradually became more and more assimilative of depth psychology, above all Jung (archetype, synchronicity, the collective unconscious), and more generally of the emancipatory, humanistic, existentialist, and eventually transpersonal impulses at work in the life of the late twentieth-century mind and psyche.

Gary Christen - Uranian & Cosmobiology

Uranian Astrology and various schools associated with it (notably Cosmobiology) represent a modern Central European approach to astrology through the development of complete systems during the 20th Century. They are the product of a complete revision of astrology as derived from its historical roots resulting in a workable language of astrology in sync with modern thinking and conceptualization.

The concepts underlying these ideas are highly compatible with modern thinking regarding data organization, modern conceptualization of theory, psychological outlook, language of the work and world-wide systems with their world-wide events (both were inconceivable in ancient times).

In addition to standardizing the astrological theories involved, these systems clean up ambiguous areas of orthodox astrological thought and present clear, specific guidelines for practice such as where to look, what to look for, hierarchy of material, etc. presented in an integrated and highly structured form.

If one were to make a reductionist comparison of orthodox astrology and the Central European systems, one could say the Central European systems reject symbolic association that is a common principle of orthodox astrology and succeeds in “throwing out the dirty bathwater while preserving the beautiful baby” of astrology.

While this differentiation would seem to take an elitist approach, the Central European schools are inclusive of other forms of practice and are clearly not an exclusive system. This makes these concepts ideal for testing and observation, not only in the research sense, but also for evaluating old and yet to be discovered forms of astrological conceptualization.

Demetra George - Asteroids and the Mythic Tradition

With the publication of Eleanor Bach's seminal work *Ephemerides of the Asteroids* in 1973, some astrologers began to include the zodiacal positions of the asteroids Ceres, Pallas, Juno and Vesta in both natal and mundane horoscopes. The advance of computer technology in the next decade made possible the generation of ephemerides for thousands of other asteroids, many of which were also named after gods and goddesses from a variety of world traditions. Bach set the precedent to look to the mythological attributes of the deity that shared the same name with the asteroid in order to derive an interpretive principle that could be tested in chart delineation.

This talk will explore the use of myth as a foundation for the astrological interpretation of celestial bodies as evidenced in the Babylonian, Hellenistic, Arabic, Medieval, Renaissance, and Modern traditions. Which early cultures affirmed an explicit relationship between planets and gods, and why did the planetary god connection go underground in later historical periods? How did the birth of psychology in the 19th century facilitate the reintegration of myth into astrological practice, and what role do the asteroids play in this mythic revival? As contemporary astrologers race to keep abreast of the discovery of new celestial bodies and their ongoing reclassification in rapidly expanding solar system, how can they utilize ancient myth to help make meaning of the gods in the heavens.

Nick Dagan Best – Data Collections

Collections of birth data for use in astrology have a long and inconsistent history. Substantial collections have existed since ancient times, with notable contributions by astrologers such as Vettius Valens (circa 150-175 AD), Jerome Cardan (1547) and John Gadbury (1662), all of whom included between 100-150 birth charts in their published works. In the 20th Century Maurice Wemyss' small booklet *Famous Nativities* (1938) is among the first modern collections. Magazines like *Wynn's Astrology*, published in the United States during the 1930s and 40s, included regular articles that reported birth data on famous names of the day. However, it is only in the past half century that large scale collections and systems for organizing them have become available. Michel Gauquelin's *L'Influence des astres* in 1955, which included an appendix listing all the birth data he had used in the book, was a turning point in quality and quantity, and helped to inspire a new wave of serious astrological researchers. In 1970 he published an expanded set of the birth data collection he used for research, quoted from Western European birth records, followed in 1982 by his *Book of American Charts*. Lois Rodden's *Profiles of Women* (1980) was the first of her published collections of birth data, a spark that ignited what eventually became Astro Databank, today's central resource of collected birth data available online. Astro Databank established community wide standards for the collection and classification of birth data, which continue to be used to this day.

Ken Irving - Statistical and Scientific Research

Like Caesar's Gaul, the modern horoscope is divided into three parts, though in this case they are three intertwined layers. Most basic is the “metric” layer, which is purely astronomical, as it includes the celestial sphere and the planets; a second, the “mantic” layer, consists of the zodiac and the topic house framework, with the interconnected rulerships used to bring out the basic themes and underlying details of a person's life; a third, more modern layer, the “mythic,” gives the planets and other astrological elements interpretive significance through their connection with mythological or psychological frames of reference.

Over many decades of astrological research, studies that engage the second two layers have produced little of substance. On the other hand, research aimed at the “metric” layer of the horoscope has produced clear evidence for the interaction of the cosmos with human beings, some of which has silenced even arch skeptics. Three examples of this type of research are: Michel Gauquelin's work on professions, Didier Castille's demonstration of a pattern relating the birthdays of children and their parents, and James Spottiswoode's studies showing a connection between “psi” ability and the orientation of the celestial sphere.

Though such intriguing studies do not seem to support the mantic and mythic layers of the traditional horoscope, the recent investigation of a skeptic study from 25 years ago, suggests that we can interpret a person's birth pattern in a meaningful way. A bright light on a gray horizon?