

CHAPTER TEN

PICTURING THE STARS:
ASTROLOGICAL IMAGERY IN THE LATIN WEST, 1100–1550

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Despite the famous title of the book by Jean Seznec—“The survival of the Pagan Gods”—in the field of astrology there was indeed no survival of the ancient gods.¹ In the earlier Middle Ages there existed no veritable occupation concerning astrology until a new interest arose forcefully during the 12th century. It wasn't until the 13th century that a new tradition of astrological imagery evolved based on the Latin translations of Arabic handbooks for this new “science”. But before following the line of this cultural development I would like to discuss the prominent part that the German scholar Aby Warburg played in the research of Renaissance astrology.

Aby Warburg and Astrology

The question of Astrology's significance for Renaissance art is indissolubly bound to the name of Aby Warburg. He gave a key interpretation of the cryptic frescoes that had been uncovered in the early 19th century in a room of the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara. His speech at the tenth International Conference of Art History in Rome in 1912 made him famous and had a formative influence on our idea of astrology-based iconographic programs, although the frescoes happened to be a particularly learned special case.² We will thus turn now to these paintings and especially to Warburg's role.

After the publication of his essays on Florentine painting (on early Netherlandish painters in Florence and on Francesco Sassetti) around

¹ Jean Seznec, *La Survivance des dieux antiques*, Studies of the Warburg Institute, vol. XI (London: 1940), English translation as *The survival of the Pagan Gods: Mythological Tradition in Renaissance Humanism and Art* (Princeton: 1953).

² Aby Warburg, “Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoia zu Ferrara,” in *Atti del X congresso internazionale di storia dell'arte in Roma* (1912), *L'Italia e l'arte straniera* (Rome: 1922), pp. 179ff; reprinted, among other places, in Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften, Studienausgabe*, vol. 1, 1 (Berlin: 1998).

1908 Warburg began looking at astrological themes. He travelled to Rome in October to consult manuscripts in the Vatican Library. In his diary we find that he was particularly fascinated on this trip by the Cupola mosaic of the Chigi chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Popolo, drawn by Raphael.³ The mosaic (Fig. 10.1) depicts God the Father in the Zenith as the one who, with a dramatic gesture, governs the motions of the heavens.



Fig. 10.1: Raphael, Dome of the Chigi Chapel in Rome, S. Maria del Popolo

³ Ernst H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: 1970), p. 248.

In the compartments below there are angels who direct the planets and their course. The planets as the pagan rulers of the cosmos appear in their ancient habit, but are integrated in the hierarchic edifice of the Christian heaven at a subordinate position. The Renaissance here has not only replaced the ancient Gods in their original form, but has managed to connect in harmony ancient cosmology and Christian faith. A year later, in October 1909, in a book by the humanist Franz Boll who specialized in ancient classical scholarship, Warburg ran across a text that unlocked the significance of the Palazzo Schifanoia frescoes at a single stroke. Boll had in his recently (1903) published book *Sphaera*, undertaken to study the reception of Greek astronomy in Middle Eastern culture and to reconstruct the lost work on the *Sphaera barbarica* by the Persian writer Teukros.⁴ For the appendix the orientalist Karl Dyroff had translated the descriptions of the various decans made by the Arab astrologer Abu Ma'shar. Franz Boll's book must have fascinated Warburg for several reasons, because here he found explained, with philological precision, how the mythical figures of the Greek constellations had been taken up by other cultures and subjected to ever greater variations. Boll was able to demonstrate the reflections of the *Sphaera barbarica* in Western medieval manuscripts and their illuminations. From this it was clear that much knowledge of Greek astronomy and astrology had come to the West only indirectly, through the filter of oriental adaptations and revisions. Much that had previously seemed to be incomprehensible now made sense. There now appeared to be a tradition that arose from Greek astronomy and meandered across countless intermediaries in Persian, Arabic, Hebrew and following some crude translations during the Middle Ages, passed into the European Renaissance. In spite of all modifications, demonising and magical practices, there remained, so Warburg thought, an ancient core that in the Renaissance would appear again and would shine once more with new splendour, for example in Raphael's drawing for the Chigi chapel.

The Palazzo Schifanoia

Borso d'Este, duke of Ferrara from 1450 to 1471, in the 1460s had a two-storey palace built as a summer residence on the outskirts of the city. The great hall was painted by the Ferrarese artists Francesco Cossa, Ercole

⁴ Franz Boll, *Sphaera: Neue Griechische Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Sternbilder* (Leipzig: 1903).

Roberti and others between 1469 and 1470.⁵ The decoration program of the frescoes transformed the room into an open loggia resting on richly decorated ancient pilasters and presenting fictive vistas over the city and countryside. There we see the duke in the act of carrying out the business of enforcing his rule as well as a variety of courtly pleasures, wherein the various types of hunt occupy a significant portion. In the background we see farmers engaging in their country occupations, such as harvesting grapes, making hay, etc. Above this layered landscape panorama there abruptly appears, without any intermediate passage, a zone of dark blue as the night sky, against which the bright disk of the sun stands in stark contrast. The sun is visible shining underneath the signs of the zodiac. The signs of the zodiac are portrayed as great naturalistic figures which in the examples of Aries (Fig. 10.2) and Taurus (Fig. 10.3) seem situated in a wide path springing over the sun. On their bodies the stars belonging to this constellation are depicted, in their exact positions.

The basis for the iconographical program is very obviously the course of the year. Correlated with the real movement of the sun, are the picture fields, arranged counter-clockwise so that the sequence runs from right to left. A painted decoration which shows in vivid pictures the course of the year was very widely distributed throughout European courts in the 15th century. We find something comparable for example in the calendar illustrations of the *Très riches heures* of Jean de Berry, or in the so-called “Torre Aquila” of the Castello del Buon Consiglio, the bishop’s palace in Trento.⁶ The program in Ferrara, however, is expanded in a highly learned fashion and very concretely connected

⁵ On these frescoes see recently Philippe Morel, *Mélissa, Magie, astres et démons dans l’art italien de la Renaissance* (Paris: 2008), chap. 2, pp. 102–184. Furthermore, *Atlante di Schifanoia*, ed. Raniero Varese (Modena: 1989), esp. Kristin Lippincott, “Gli affreschi del Salone dei Mesi e il problema dell’attribuzione,” pp. 111–139, as well as Claudi Cieri-Via, “I trionfi, il mito e l’amore: la fascia superiore dei Mesi negli affreschi del Palazzo Schifanoia,” pp. 37–55. *Il Palazzo Schifanoia a Ferrara*, ed. Salvatore Settis and Walter Cupperi (Modena: 2007). Interesting considerations also in Peter Bell, “Regent unter dem Himmel. Die Sala dei Mesi des Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara als Modell eines astrologischen Weltbildes,” in *Weltbilder im Mittelalter: Perceptions of the world in the Middle Ages*, ed. Philipp Billion, Nathanael Busch, Dagmar Schlüter, Xenia Stolzenburg (Bonn: 2009), pp. 1–27.

⁶ Concerning the *Très Riches Heures*, in the Musée Condé in Chantilly: Raymond Cazelles, Johannes Rathofer, *Das Stundenbuch des Duc de Berry* (Luzerne: 1988). Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: the Limbourgs and their Contemporaries* (New York: 1974), pp. 209ff. Dieter Blume, *Regenten des Himmels: Astrologische Bilder in Mittelalter und Renaissance* (Berlin: 2000), pp. 149ff. On the Adlerturm in Trento: Enrico Castelnovo, *I Mesi di Trento: Gli Affreschi di Torre Aquila et il Gotico internazionale* (Trento: 1986). Steffi Roetgen, *Die Wandmalerei der Renaissance in Italien* (München: 1996), pp. 28ff.



Fig. 10.2: Ferrara Palazzo Schifanoia, Sala dei Mesi, March with Aries

with astronomical and astrological meaning. The depiction of all the positions of the single stars in each constellation is here an important indicator. The field of each sign of the zodiac is divided by golden lines into three equal segments, in which a further very strange image is to be found. These images are clearly done in a smaller size and in contrast



Fig. 10.3: Ferrara Palazzo Schifanoia, Sala dei Mesi, April with Taurus

with the familiar zodiac signs, show no star positions. They represent, as Aby Warburg was the first to recognize, the Indian decans, as explicated in the “Great Introduction” (*Liber introductorii maioris*) of Abu Ma’shar. This astrological handbook written in Baghdad during the 9th century

did not exercise its greatest influence until more than three hundred years after its composition.⁷ In the 12th century it was twice translated into Latin and passed for one of the most authoritative astrology handbooks in the Latin West. The basis of this success lay in the joining of a detailed theoretical foundation for astrology, based on Aristotle's nature philosophy, with a comprehensive account of all the areas of astrology. In the chapter regarding the signs of the zodiac Abu Ma'shar provided a synopsis of the various versions of the decans among the Persians, the Indians and the Greeks. Although this compilation contained many lacunae and uncertainties, it nonetheless attempted to systematize the remarkable variety of the different traditions.

The decans are figures assigned to each 10 degrees of the ecliptic. Originally they were related to the constellations that rose above the horizon along with the zodiac signs.⁸ For this reason Abu Ma'shar listed for the Greek decans also the fragments of known constellations, such as the left hand of Cassiopeia or the tail of Piscis Austrinus. In more mature astrology the decans by themselves represent the power and importance of a particular section of the zodiac. They are thus only indicative signs for an astrological power and do not correspond to any constellation in the sky. Abu Ma'shar was very clear about this. Also the *Picatrix*, an astrological handbook translated from Arabic into Spanish in the 13th century and later into Latin, insists that there are two kinds of figures in the heavens. On the one hand are the constellations and, on the other, the figures used by the Indians.⁹ Marsilio Ficino, who was particularly interested in the magical aspects of astrology, went even further and distinguished between the visible figures of the constellations and the invisible but imaginable figures of the Indians, Egyptians and Chaldeans.¹⁰ These texts are all talking about the Indian decans as pictures, which only represent

⁷ Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 22ff as well as Richard Lemay, *Abu Ma'shar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century, The Recovery of Aristotle's Natural Philosophy through Arabic Astrology* (Beirut: 1962). Critical edition: Abu Ma'shar (Albumasar), *Liber introductorii maioris ad scientiam iudiciorum astrorum*, ed. Richard Lemay, 9 vols. (Naples: 1995).

⁸ Auguste Bouché-Leclerq, *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris: 1899), pp. 215ff. Compare Morel 2008 (as in n. 5), pp. 129ff.

⁹ *Picatrix. The Latin version of the Ghayat Al-Hakim*, ed. David Pingree (London: 1986), II, 2.

¹⁰ Marsilio Ficino, *De Vita*, III, 18, ed. A. Biondi, G. Pisani (Pordenone: 1991), p. 332. Morel 2008 (as in n. 5), pp. 131ff. Compare also Nicolas Weill-Parot, *Les 'images astrologiques' au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance, spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques, XII-XV siècle* (Paris: 2002) and Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London 1958).

the astrological potential of a particular portion of the zodiac. According to the astral magic that involved Marsilio Ficino and a wide range of other scholars in the 15th century, these images of the Indian decans assume a central importance and acquire the function of talismans. This is obviously also the reason why in Ferrara the series of Indian decans was chosen to accompany the zodiac signs. In any case, the great astrological significance of the zodiac is especially emphasized in these frescoes, which could also obviously be utilized for the purposes of star magic. The division into three segments, clearly marked on the zodiac with golden lines, is often taken up also in the lower picture area (and this is especially clear in the Jupiter-Cybele picture as well as in Vulcan). In each of the three picture segments that are defined compositionally and by their given function, there appears a portrait of duke Borso. Thus the deeds of the duke, illustrated in the lower register, are put in a direct correlation with the influence of the stars and the decans.¹¹

The First Decan of Aries

The prime example Aby Warburg used was the first decan of Aries (Fig. 10.4), which had the following characteristics according to Abu Ma'shar: "The Indians say that in this decan a black man with red eyes ascends, of large stature, outstanding courage and great nobility; he wears a great white garment bound in the middle with a rope; he is wrathful, stands erect, watching and observing."¹² The fresco expresses this figure almost perfectly, except that the white garment is torn in various places and the figure has the end of the rope in hand. Warburg put much effort into the idea of identifying a metamorphosis of the Greek constellation Perseus in this figure. His point of departure was the so-called *Astrolabium Planum* of Johannes Engel, which had been printed in Augsburg in 1488 with woodcut illustrations. There he found the description and depiction of a figure for each single degree of the zodiac, based on a theory of the Paduan astrologer Pietro D'Abano. The first, tenth and twentieth thus expressed the decans in question. In the first degree of Aries it was a man with a sickle and a crossbow. That has nothing to do with the Ferrara frescoes, but in addition to this there are three images referring to the single decan segments. We see a man with a turban, bearing a scimitar. Warburg considered this to

¹¹ Bell 2009 (as in n. 5), pp. 9ff.

¹² Warburg 1912 (as in n. 2), p. 184.



Fig. 10.4: Ferrara Palazzo Schifanoia, Sala dei Mesi, Detail, First Decan of Aries

be a decan figure and recognized Perseus with a Phrygian cap and harp.¹³ However, the accompanying text identifies these figures clearly as the planet Mars, to which the first decan of Aries is assigned. In an Indian text of the 7th century the first decan of Aries carries a double hatchet, just as in the Bianchini Planisphere, a Roman marble tablet. Behind all these images Aby Warburg noticed a transformation of the ancient hero, although Perseus is mentioned by Abu Ma'shar for the first time in the third decan

¹³ Warburg 1912 (as in n. 2), pp. 183f.

of Aries. Thus he seemed to see a line of tradition proceeding all the way to Renaissance Ferrara from the culture of ancient Greece, through Persia, India, Arabia, the Latin translation of Abu Ma'shar in Spain, the writings of Pietro d'Abano. He indicated all the relevant places on a map to make the transmission routes more clear. This was the map which particularly struck Fritz Saxl at their first meeting. Warburg called this line of tradition later the "for the present only marked-out route (vorerst nur trassierten Wanderstraße) Cyzicus – Alexandria – Oxene – Toledo – Rome – Ferrara – Padua – Augsburg – Erfurt – Wittenberg – Goslar – Lüneburg – Hamburg" (1926).¹⁴ Concerning Perseus henceforth he spoke of as a cultural wanderer with a seven-fold travel coat. He often used this image to represent the transformation of ancient culture, the crowding out of Greek rationality by oriental superstition and the regaining of ancient clarity in the Renaissance. Even if Warburg's considerations at this point were entirely false, it was this part of his lecture which had the greatest impact on the following generation of researchers. Warburg demonstrated the survival of ancient traditions in the Middle Ages and the especial relevance of astrology again and again by using the very series of pictures concerning the first decan of Aries in Ferrara. Thereby he made very clear the continuity of the ancient traditions across all interruptions and their long lasting formative power. Warburg's considerations opened up an entire field of research and inspired numerous inquiries. His theses contributed to an enormous widening of perspective, and entire areas that had once remained on the periphery became the centre of attention. He also redefined the formation of popular superstitions as part of the foundation of high culture within an all-embracing cultural development. In this respect he gave the study of the Renaissance a decisive stimulus.

However, the learned scholars who worked out the ingenious program of these frescoes for Borso d' Este, chose the strange figures of the Indian decans out of admiration for the superior Arabic astrology. From the reading of *Picatrix* they knew about the significance of this exotic series of figures and they were interested apparently above all in the magical applications of these representations. In the basic handbook of Abu Ma'shar they found the detailed descriptions necessary for the depiction in painting. But the decan figures in Palazzo Schifanoia do not entirely agree with the descriptions in Abu Ma'shar. In spite of intensive research,

¹⁴ Aby Warburg, "Orientalisierende Astrologie" (1926), in: Aby Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften, Studienausgabe*, vol. 1, 1 (Berlin: 1998), p. 565.

still today we do not know the exact source of these figures.¹⁵ There is a similar iconography in various manuscripts, but numerous striking differences remain. We must therefore conclude that the specific iconography of the decan figures in Ferrara was developed for this ambitious fresco decoration.

The Ancient Gods

A further particularity of this fresco cycle is the exclusive concentration on astrology of the fixed stars, where the ascendant, i.e., the degree of the zodiac that rises directly over the horizon, assumes central importance. The planets, which in astrology otherwise play the major role and which therefore may be found in prominent places in all other astrological picture programs, are here in Palazzo Schifanoia entirely displaced! In the upper register, situated abruptly over the dark zone of the heavens, ancient gods drive richly decorated vehicles, as in a pageant. They may be seen before a wide landscape, which is distinguished by bizarre and fantastic forms, very different from the landscape in the lower register of the painting. Here again, it was Warburg's merit to have indicated the relevant underlying texts. The Roman author Manilius, in his didactic poem entitled *Astronomica*, assigned a deity as a protector to each sign of the zodiac, who would rule the relevant section. The twelve Olympic deities no doubt were meant to embody the astrological power contained in the particular sign. Both Marsilio Ficino and Lorenzo Bonincontri (an astrologer in Lorenzo de' Medici's court) expressed themselves in the same way and refer likewise to the didactic poem of Manilius, which had been rediscovered by Poggio Bracciolini in the beginning of the 15th century.¹⁶ The ancient gods in the upper picture zone are accompanied by numerous figures and secondary episodes, arranged on the right and left of the triumphal wagon as well as in the background. These are mythographical elaborations, which give more characteristics of the gods, and which explain the particular gifts they offer. Thus, near Minerva we find Weaving and Learning, near Venus we find the three Graces and various lovers, near Apollo we find the nine Muses on Parnassus as well as the tripod from the Temple of Delphi, near Mercury the decapitation of Argos, and near

¹⁵ Morel (as in n. 5), pp. 120ff. Marco Bertozzi, *La tirannia degli astri, Gli affreschi astrologici di Palazzo Schifanoia* (Livorno: 1999).

¹⁶ Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica*, II, 439ff. Morel 2008 (as in n. 5), pp. 106ff.

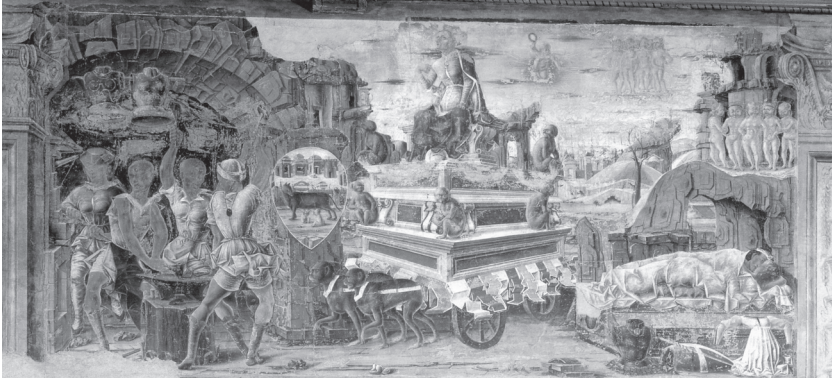


Fig. 10.5: Ferrara Palazzo Schifanoia, Sala dei Mesi, Detail of the upper Register with Vulcan

Jupiter and Cybele the story of Attis, and finally near Vulcan (Fig. 10.5) the love bed of Mars and Venus, and so forth. The information appears largely to be drawn from the basic mythological handbook by Giovanni Boccaccio entitled *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*, which circulated from the end of the 14th century.¹⁷ Here Warburg was again in error when he referred to the exactly contemporaneous depictions of the planets' children, which actually have nothing to do with the frescoes.¹⁸ Until today and even in recent publications you can find this misunderstanding.

Only a few texts were used as the bases and primary information sources for the painting cycle in Ferrara—namely, Manilius, Abu Ma'shar, *Picatrix* and Boccaccio. The descriptions of the mythographical texts as well as the astrological treatises are translated into painting with extreme detail. The texts, occasionally ponderous, rich in long discourses, with all their copious information, are thus forced into a vivid pictorial vision. On the walls of a room like this, in the context of a culture characterized by court ceremonial, humanistic learning achieves representative and finally even legitimizing character. Among the surviving wall paintings of the early Renaissance, the humanistic view of the ancient world is nowhere else so elaborately expressed.

The origins of the ancient gods, with their histories sung by the ancient poets, could be shown in all their detail since Manilius's didactic poem

¹⁷ Cieri Via 1989 (as in n. 5), passim.

¹⁸ Warburg 1912 (as in n. 2), pp. 181f. On the planets' children, Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 158ff and below.

established an astrological connection. So mythography and astrology were/are placed on an even level in these paintings. In this respect, ancient mythology was re-valued by the relation to astrology. These paintings share an argument with Giovanni Boccaccio who demonstrates by the help of astrology that the ancient poets sought to express deeper truths in the guise of myths and not just follow their fantasies. We will return to this concept.

The Revival of Astrology in the 12th century

The research of Aby Warburg made the frescoes in Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara famous; but with this special case in mind it is not easy to understand the history of astrological pictures. We would have to go down other paths and much further back in time. Since the Carolingian calendar reform in the 9th century the knowledge relating to the computus, the scientific calendar reckoning, was once more carried out intensively within European cloisters. An interest in astronomical questions growing in part out of this developed over the course of the 10th century. It was at first exclusively directed to cosmology, and aimed at gaining a rationally grounded understanding of the universe. Astrology therefore was regarded with new interest.¹⁹ The observable wanderings of the heavenly bodies, especially the planets, only through astrology received a useful role in the arrangement of the cosmos. They transmitted the will of God and his plan of Creation to the earthly realm. This led in the 12th century to an intensive involvement with astrological questions as well as to a systematic translation of Arabic handbooks into Latin. The foundation was laid for a new understanding of the starry sky, which the development of European science would powerfully influence. In the forewords by the translators the blindness of the ignorant Latin culture was decried (*latinitatis ignorantie cecitas*).²⁰ *Ex intimis Arabum thesauris*, out of the deepest treasury of the Arabs the hidden wisdom had been retrieved with great

¹⁹ Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), S. 18ff. Dieter Blume, Mechthild Haffner, Wolfgang Metzger, *Sternbilder des Mittelalters—Der gemalte Himmel zwischen Wissenschaft und Phantasie*, Part I: 800–1200, 2 vols., Berlin (in press). Dieter Blume, “Wissenschaft und Bilder—Vermittlung antiken Wissens im Frühmittelalter,” in: *Geschichte der bildenden Kunst in Deutschland*, vol. 1: *Karolingische und Ottonische Kunst*, ed. Bruno Reudenbach (Munich: 2009), pp. 522–551.

²⁰ Plato of Tivoli in the foreword to the translation of *De motu stellarum* by Al-Battani, cited in Marie-Thérèse d’Alverny, “Translations and Translators,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the twelfth century*, ed. R.L. Benson and G. Constable (Cambridge/Mass.: 1982), p. 451.

effort.²¹ Hermann of Carinthia, one of the most ambitious translators of the 12th century, in his writing *De essentiis*, criticized the simplicity of the physicians, who looked only to the four sublunary elements, as though the *ministerium*, as he put it, the “office” of the heavenly world, were entirely superfluous, and as though only the lowest portion of the universe had a useful function.²² Astrology described the law binding the earthly world to the heavens. The stars thus become the intermediaries which transfer divine power to the earth. Herein lies the particular significance that the learned of the 12th century attributed to astrology. It signified for them both as *veterum limen* and as *speculum modernorum*, as the highest art of the ancients and as a mirror to the moderns, as an anonymous translator in Sicily put it around 1160, in a foreword to a translation of Ptolemy's *Almagest* from Greek into Latin.²³

The role of astrology had above all a conceptual character that aims at a theoretical system to explain the cosmos. The circle of persons who translate these theories into practice is still relatively small. Only six can be identified in the sources of the 12th century for having drawn up horoscopes themselves.²⁴ The planets are seen in cosmological discourse of the 12th century as soul-bearing entities, whose role is to serve as intermediaries between the upper and the lower worlds. They are made of a fifth element and are considered to be higher beings. It was Bernardus Silvestris in Tours who wrote down the first and even very detailed descriptions of the planets. In the 1240s he completed his “Cosmographia,” a comprehensive and scientifically grounded portrayal of the cosmos, which very deliberately drew together the ideals of the *scientia nova* with the literary qualities of the ancient poets. The art of the astronomy was for him the key to an understanding of the world and a distinguished feature of mankind: “Simple beasts have slow understanding and bow their heads before them with their faces pointed downwards, but men alone, in a stance that testifies to the greatness of their spirit, raise their heads toward the stars,

²¹ Hermann von Carinthia, *De Essentiis*, 58r D, Edition by Charles Burnett, *Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters*, vol. XV (Leiden-Köln: 1982).

²² Hermann von Carinthia, *De Essentiis*, 74r G/H.

²³ Cited by Charles Homer Haskins, D.P. Lockwood, “The Sicilian Translators of the Twelfth Century and the First Latin Version of Ptolemy's *Almagest*,” in *Harvard Studies of Classical Philology* 21 (1910): 99.

²⁴ J.D. Lipton, *The Rational Evaluation of Astrology in the Period of Arabo-Latin Translation, c. 1126–1187 A.D.*, Diss. University of California, Los Angeles, 1978, pp. 205ff. Compare Jean-Patrice Boudet, *Entre Science et Nigromance: Astrologie, Divination et Magie dans l'Occident médiéval (XII^e–XV^e siècle)* (Paris 2006).

so they can take the laws of the heavens and their never-ending movements as a model for his life.”²⁵ In the course of a trip through the spheres, which the personified allegory of Nature takes, and which is also a lesson on the secrets of the cosmos, Bernardus Silvestris describes the planets as individually acting entities, each a sort of heavenly daemon, who rule in their own sphere. They are reasonable beings who nonetheless know neither death nor pain nor emotion. At the same time he tries to give a clear idea of the appearance of these heavenly rulers. Jupiter, for example, is described as a king: “In his council chamber Jupiter shone in kingly majesty; in his right hand he held a sceptre, in the left the set of scales wherewith brings in balance now the matters of humanity now the matters of the higher beings.”²⁶ Here we encounter not the ancient lord of the gods armed with thunderbolts but a medieval ruler with his insignia. In the astrology Jupiter is characterized by mildness and goodwill; to him is attributed the ability to counter the negative influence of other planets. This aspect Bernardus suggested in a congenial way by the attribute of the scales. Clearly, the newly developed knowledge of astrological science has influenced the idea of the appearance of the planets. So the description of this appearance can also serve as introductions to the astrological role of the planet.

Pictures of the Planets

The step to a visual depiction in the circle of Bernardus Silvestris, connected with the cathedral schools of the 12th century, was not yet taken. Special conditions were necessary, which apparently first existed half a century later in a courtly setting. As far as we know, this happened at the court of the Hohenstaufen emperor Friedrich II in Southern Italy. Friedrich II and his court are known for many particularly ambitious undertakings in the realm of science. The emperor himself wrote in a letter of 1231 to the professors of the University of Bologna, that the spice of science is necessary for establishing the greatness of a royal administration, so as to prevent justice from being diminished by ignorance and intemperance. Science, so he wrote, is an essential precondition for maintaining justice and must therefore also be an integral part

²⁵ Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, II, 10, Verse 27ff, Edition by Peter Dronke (Leiden: 1978), p. 141. Compare also Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: a Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton: 1972) as well as Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 26ff.

²⁶ Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, V, 9, Edition Dronke p. 128.

of the concept of the state.²⁷ Numerous scientific texts were copied in the environment of this court, and subsequently diffused. From some of these texts, such as the so-called *medicina antiqua* or the *De arte venandi cum avibus* composed by the emperor himself, luxurious editions with illustrations were made. These costly manuscripts were shown along with other treasures in order to raise the glory of the court and create an impression to special guests. Thus, science, in the form of precious books illustrated with gorgeous pictures, could be deployed for imperial courtly representation.

In the 1230s an otherwise unknown figure named Georgius Fendulus, who called himself a priest, philosopher and courtier, put together excerpts from Abu Ma'shar's basic astrology textbook relating to the description of the planets and the zodiac. These relatively brief texts were combined with a multitude of page-size miniatures to make up a veritable picture book of astrology.²⁸ The intention was quite obviously to develop images of the relevant heavenly bodies which correspond to the new knowledge of Arabic astrology, and at the same time to give a vivid idea of these entities, so necessary for the functioning of the world. In order to show the special power of the planets, these were shown in the guise of portraits of medieval rulers in kingly garb. A few handheld objects or attributes draw attention to their particular area of influence. Thus Venus holds a psalter and a chalice; Mercury a book; Mars a sword; Saturn refers to a vine branch. Since the power of the planets depends on their place in the zodiac and is not constant, the painter shows four different pictures of the enthroned planets. In its house the planet sits in a royal pose upon its throne (Fig. 10.6). The next miniature shows the wavering of its power in the so-called Opposite House (Fig. 10.7), and one sees the planet sliding sideways from its throne. In the following picture the Exaltation places the planet once again on its throne, where it shows its attributes (Fig. 10.8). In the concluding picture, the planet in fall goes headlong into the void (Fig. 10.9). The powerlessness of each planet in a particular point of the zodiac is thus forcefully demonstrated (Figs. 10.10, 10.11). In this series of images the planets are the astrologi-

²⁷ Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 47ff.

²⁸ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. Lat. 7330, see Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 34ff as well as Dieter Blume, "Michael Scot, Giotto and the Construction of new Images of the Planets," in *The Images of the Gods, Papers of a Conference in Memory of Jean Seznec*, ed. Rembrandt Duits and François Quiviger, Warburg Institute Colloquia 14 (London: 2009), pp. 129–150.



Fig. 10.6: Paris, bibl. Nat. Ms. lat. 7330, Fol. 42v, Saturn in his houses



Fig. 10.7: Paris, bibl. Nat. Ms. lat. 7330, Fol. 43r, Saturn in his Anti-Houses

cal rulers of the heavens and are shown in all their operations and circumstances. Apparently this ambitious picture cycle was invented in the inner circle close of the imperial court, or indeed, perhaps it originated even in a personal initiative of Frederick II.



Fig. 10.8: Paris, bibl. Nat. Ms. lat. 7330, Fol. 43v, Saturn in his exaltation

Michael Scot and the Importance of Images

Slightly later Frederick II's court produced another description of the heavens, which would enjoy enormous success in the following century. Michael Scotus was active as a scholar at court from around 1220 to his death in 1236. He composed a complete guide to the then modern science,



Fig. 10.9: Paris, bibl. Nat. Ms. lat. 7330, Fol. 44r. Saturn in his deiectio

which was dominated by astrology. The title *Liber introductorius* indicates unmistakably the propaedeutic character of the work; and in the Foreword the writer clarifies that he purposely wrote in a simplified idiom in order for non-specialists to profit.²⁹ A portion of this work is a thorough description of the heavens, with all the constellations and planets, and

²⁹ Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 52ff and Blume 2009 (as in n. 28), pp. 131ff. Silke Ackermann, *Sternstunden am Kaiserhof, Michael Scotus und sein Buch von den Bildern und Zeichen des Himmels* (Frankfurt/Main: 2009).

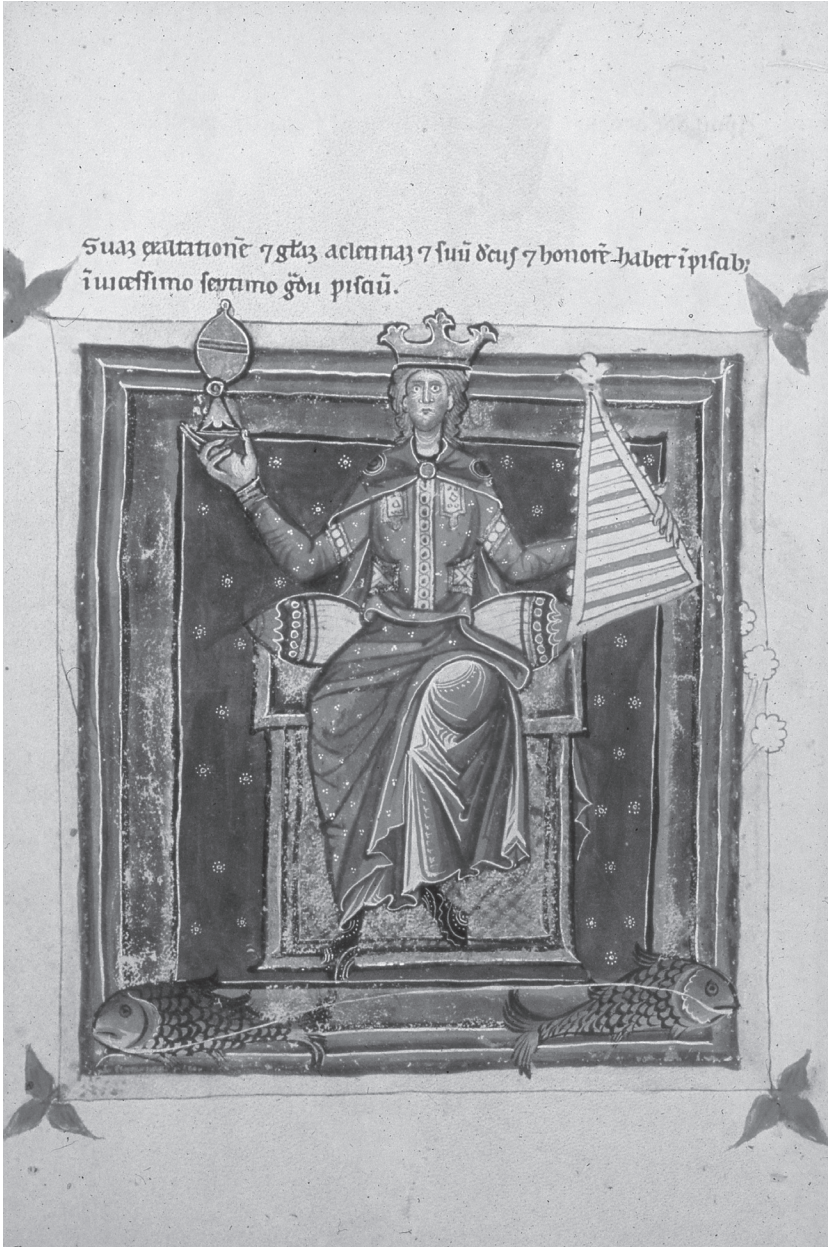


Fig. 10.10: Paris, bibl. Nat. Ms. lat. 7330, Fol. 54v, Venus in his exaltatio

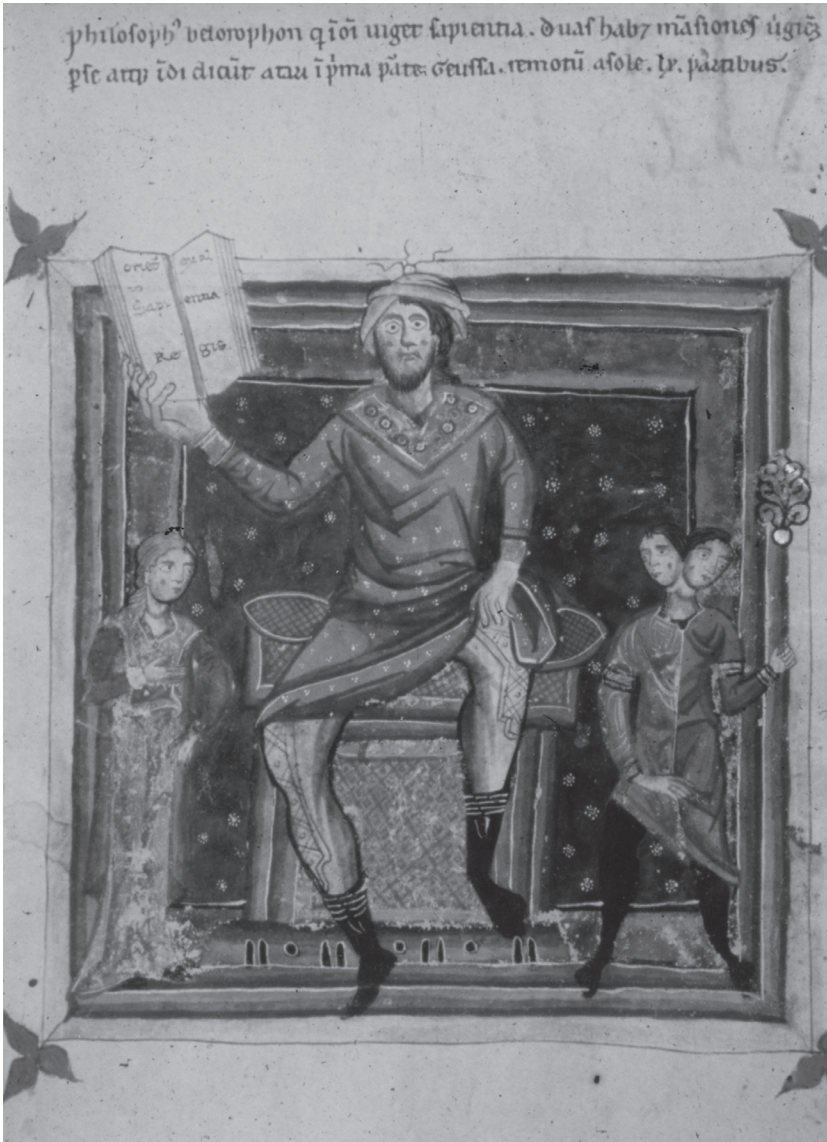


Fig. 10.11: Paris, bibl. Nat. Ms. lat. 7330, Fol. 56r, Mercury in his houses

for the first time, Michael Scotus gives also a brief characterization of the astrological influence of each constellation. In his chapter on the planets he goes through a very detailed description of the appearance and dress of each wandering star, and adds afterwards a detailed account of the astrological significance of all these elements. This description of the heavens

was copied separately in the later years of the 13th century and enjoyed a wide distribution in Italy and Northern Europe. Michael Scotus utilized a wide range of sources, and his intention was obviously to provide a synthesis of various occasionally contradictory traditions. His starting point was however an elaborate series of miniatures, which had been conceived in the abbey of Monte Cassino in the first half of the 11th century, and which Scotus perhaps took to be ancient or else at least to be a true copy from an ancient source. There is a 12th century copy of these miniatures in Madrid, which may very well be the manuscript Scotus himself used.³⁰ Here he found pictures, for instance, of the Milky Way or of the southern celestial pole, not to be found anywhere else. He also used the star catalogue known as *De signis coeli*, widely diffused in the Middle Ages, as well as Ptolemy's *Almagest*, in Gerhard of Cremona's Latin translation. From Ptolemy he drew the total number, forty-eight, of the constellations, to which he often referred. Since the Madrid manuscript of Germanicus only described forty-two, he sought alternative pictures for the missing ones in order to have a complete series, in word and image. He placed these six extra constellations mainly in the Southern Hemisphere. In Ptolemy he found also the indication "Falling Eagle," (*vultur cadens*), as an alternative name for the constellation Lyra. This "falling eagle" put him in mind of the constellation "Eagle" (*vultur volans*); and he sought an appropriate image in the available sources. In the Germanicus manuscript (now in Madrid) he found the miniature of Jupiter carried through the air by the eagle, which illustrates the invocation of Jupiter in the preamble. Since the eagle dominates this picture, he interprets this as the missing depiction of the constellation *vultur cadens*. His description of this constellation is in fact clearly based on this picture (Fig. 10.12). He obviously started from the existing picture and sought various text information to connect with it. He did the same thing with the pictures of the Milky Way, which he described as *demon meridianus*, or with the southern celestial pole (Astronothus). Both images he placed as constellations in the Southern sky.

Scotus considered the details in the pictures to be important sources of information, as we see by his rendering and description of Cassiopeia. In the Madrid miniature an undulating red line falls down from the right hand of the enthroned lady. Since Cassiopeia in the Latin translation of

³⁰ Madrid, Biblioteca nacional, Cod. 19, on which Mechthild Haffner, *Ein antiker Sternbilderzyklus und seine Tradierung in Handschriften vom frühen Mittelalter bis zum Humanismus, Untersuchungen zu den Illustrationen der "Aratea" des Germanicus* (Hildesheim: 1997), pp. 91ff. Blume, Haffner, Metzger (as in n. 19).



Fig. 10.12: Madrid, Bibl. Nac. Cod. 19, fol.55r, Jupiter on the eagle

Ptolemy is described as a figure with a wet or painted hand, Scotus interprets this painted line as a flow of blood going out from the hand. The astrological explication of the constellation is based on this detail, since all those born under Cassiopeia will die a violent death.³¹ In many cases the astrological significance of the constellations is inspired immediately by elements of the picture, and this is obviously the reason why the pictures have such an importance for Scotus. So he writes that no detail of the paintings is without astrological relevance, and that the astrologer must pay close attention to all particulars, since all these images existed in the fixed stars. But he is not interested in the ancient myths connected

³¹ Ackermann 2009 (as in n. 28), pp. 186. Compare Blume 2009 (as in n. 28), pp. 132f.

with the constellations, described amongst others by Hyginus, since, as he says, they have no significance for the astrologer.

Also in describing the planets, whose roles are so central to astrology, Scotus starts with a miniature in the Madrid Germanicus manuscript (fol. 68r). This illustration shows the busts of the five planets (Figs. 10.13, 10.14), distinguished by their clothing, but the usual ancient attributes are missing. Venus, the only woman, is prominently placed in the middle of the group. Mars is easily recognized as a warrior. Mercury bears a lance-like rod and a cloak knotted at the side and can thus be taken for a weapon-bearing figure. Jupiter has a round golden object in his hand and Saturn has his cloak pulled up above his head. The medieval painter thus gives the ancient *pallium* a hood-like extension, which recalls a monk's hood. Clearly this was Scotus' thought when describing Mercury as a cleric wearing the



Fig. 10.13: Madrid, Bibl. Nac. Cod. 19, fol. 68r, The five planets

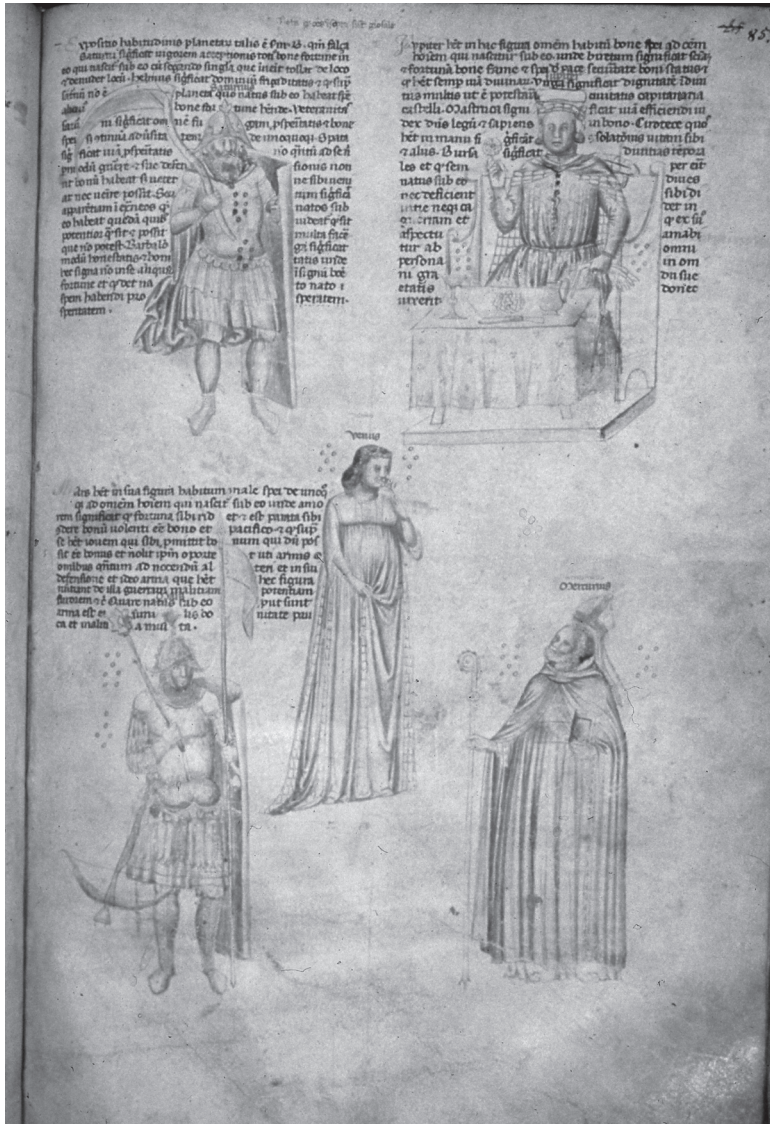


Fig. 10.14: München, Bayr. Staatsbibl., Clm 10268, Michael Scotus, Liber introductorius, fol. 85r, The five planets

costume of a bishop or abbot. Obviously he had no interest in the ancient iconography of the planet-gods: he is only interested in the astrological influence of the heavenly bodies. To explain the particular influences of each, he draws upon the astrological handbooks, such as the one by Abu Ma'shar. Also the appearance of the planets conveys this information in his description of the heavens, even to the tiniest detail of the clothing.

Furthermore he attempts to find connections with the experience of his readers in order to emphasize the vividness of these astrological powers. He describes Mercury as a scholar sitting at a teaching-chair with a book. Mercury becomes a university scholar, portrayed according to the tradition of portraits of professors. This way the aspect of scholarship, which is the realm for which this planet is responsible, is unmistakably clear, since this motif is already well known to the reader and beholder. Since the intellectuals of this time, including Scotus himself, were mainly clerics, he also gives Mercury the attributes of a bishop or an abbot.³² He does similarly with Venus, described as a crowned noblewoman in luxurious raiment smelling a rose. The smelling of the rose, he explained, signified erotic joy, the stylish headdress denoted love, and the elegant raiment the art of seduction. Scotus's notion also here comes from an already established picture type, which he merely transfers to the figure of the planet, since springtime is often represented exactly in this way. This also seems astrologically plausible, because Spring is always connected with love, and Venus has Taurus among its houses. Once again Scotus utilizes a familiar picture type to reveal clearly his intention. Mars bears a variety of very modern armaments. His helmet appears with neck and chin protectors and a decorative crown. He wears a chest protector and greaves. Such armour, which would have passed for complete at the time, defined the planet as a notable lordly warrior. He is armed by way of shield and lance as well as a crossbow, one of the period's more modern and widely feared weapons. Scotus here refers to contemporary military technology rather than to ancient traditions. In the image of Jupiter he combines the appearance of a judge, an important bourgeois and a bishop. He wears a fur-lined garment, gloves, jewelled rings and from his belt hangs a money-pouch. In his hand he holds a flower or the baton of an office-holder. On his head he wears a biretta or a bishop's mitre. The golden ball which the Jupiter of the Madrid Germanicus miniature holds in his hand is probably

³² See the descriptions of the planets in Ackermann 2009 (as in n. 28), pp. 256ff. Compare Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), S. 55ff and Blume 2009 (as in n. 28), pp. 135f.

responsible for this rich association with wealth. Saturn finally appears in the clothing of a simple farmer, in dark colours. In his hand he holds a sickle or scythe. Scotus also puts a shield and buckler in his hands as armaments in order to remind about the constantly negative influence of this planet. In this full description of the single planets Scotus pays attention to the particular differentiation in clothing and attitude. Each of the single figures represents a specific social group, so that more or less each class here has its own corresponding astrological picture. Saturn is the farmer, but as a farmer, also a wartime wanderer; Jupiter seems like a respectable city patrician, the respectable office-holder in the city and Church hierarchy; Mars is a knight or a mercenary soldier; Venus on the one hand is described as a beautiful noble woman, representing at the same time virtue and love and sexuality. Mercury on the other hand is a scholar and, like most intellectuals of the time, a cleric. All these characterizations are in accordance with the experience of the readers, who by the clues presented here may immediately gain a concrete idea of the planets. This way astrology would be all the more deeply anchored in the thinking of the time, and this must have been the intention of Scotus. At least by this point in time the connection to the ancient gods with their traditional attributes must be considered to have been interrupted. Nobody would associate these planetary figures, expressing the current state of astrological knowledge, with the classical ancient gods.

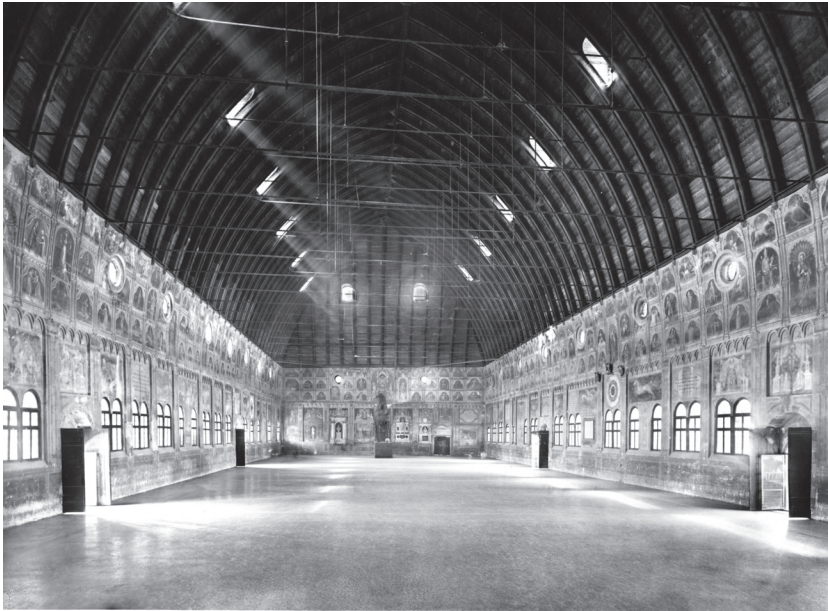
Astrology in the Italian City-States

Michael Scotus obviously planned his text from the beginning to be accompanied by illustrations; and perhaps also an original illustrated manuscript existed. In any case his work did not immediately enjoy a greater diffusion; from the 13th century survives no more than a single manuscript. However, in the last quarter of the 13th century the astrologer Bartholomaeus of Parma in Northern Italy must have known it, since he utilized portions of the text in his own writings.³³ By the beginning of the 14th century, at least the description of the planets and the constellations were known in Northern Italy. This description of the heavens was also often separately copied and became diffused north of the Alps (*Liber de*

³³ Ackermann 2009 (as in n. 28), pp. 93ff and Silke Ackermann, "Bartholomew of Parma, Michael Scot and the Set of New Constellations in Bartholomew's *Breviloquium de fructis tocius astronomie*," in *Seventh Centenary of the Teaching of Astronomy in Bologna 1297–1997*, ed. P. Battistini (Bologna: 2001), pp. 77–98.

signis et imaginibus celi). Around 1310 the text must have been available in Padua to the famous astrologer Pietro d'Abano and to the no less famous painter Giotto. Both of them at that time planned the painting of the great hall of the communal palace in Padua (Palazzo della Ragione) (Fig. 10.15). Unfortunately these once-famous frescoes have come down to us only in ruins. After a disastrous fire they were repainted and restored in the first half of the 15th century. One heavy storm in the 18th century wrought more damage, leading to a further repainting. However various copies from the 14th century give us at least an idea about how the planetary figures must have looked.³⁴

The concept of the decoration follows the times of year and shows the works of the months with the zodiacal signs. The planets may be seen in their houses, and thus in the zodiac signs where they have the greatest power. Then each planet appears twice, with the exception of the sun and moon. These repetitions are used in order to depict very different aspects of the respective planets (Fig. 10.16). Giotto uses the descriptions



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Fig. 10.15: Padua, Palazzo della Ragione, The Great Hall

³⁴ Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), S. 70ff and Blume 2009 (as in n. 28), pp. 137f.



Fig. 10.16: Padua, Palazzo della Ragione, Mercury in the sign of Virgo

from Michael Scotus in order to create nearly theatrical images which show the planets at the various activities in front of a dark blue night sky. Moments of action enrich the painting, and a great golden star on the backs of the figures indicates them as heavenly bodies. We see Mercury at a scholar's writing table, handling an armillary sphere. Venus, in a fresco by Guariento, that follows the model of Giotto, looks in a mirror, the standard attribute of *luxuria*.³⁵ The red flames of love are burning around her feet. Giotto had used the same motif shortly before in the Arena Chapel, to depict the all-consuming passion of envy and jealousy in his painting of the sin of *invidia*. Venus raises her dress in a very suggestive gesture, exposing her legs. The second picture of Venus shows the planet apparently bare, as seen in a miniature of the early 15th century.³⁶ Mars is seen as a mounted warrior, drawing his sword at full gallop. The best notion of the original image comes from an unfinished drawing in a manuscript in Chantilly (Fig. 10.17).³⁷ In the second picture the armed Mars sits on a throne and holds a tower in his hand, the recognized attribute of courage and strength. And so Giotto, just as did Scotus in his descriptions, is using well-known attributes of familiar allegories to characterize the planets. Jupiter appears in the guise of an enthroned emperor with sceptre and sphere (Fig. 10.18). Saturn on the other hand is a farmer on the way to his fields, the scythe on his shoulder, and carrying a water flask (Fig. 10.19). A miniature in the Chantilly manuscript gives a precise idea of the original painting. The second Saturn picture was probably similar to a fresco by Guariento, showing a melancholy old man leaning on his axe.

Giotto and Pietro d'Abano obviously started with the descriptions of Michael Scotus and took the basic characterizations as well as the division in basic social types. They apparently tried to show the planets in action and to demonstrate their sphere of influence in a more impressive way. These paintings fast achieved fame and dominated astrological imagery in Italy throughout the 14th century. All later depictions of the planets are in one way or another influenced by these. With this monumental pictorial decoration in a very prominent, official building, a new visual tradition was established, which would impress viewers long afterwards. In the painted decorations of the representative buildings in the Italian city-states the astrological cycle of the planets played from this time on a

³⁵ On Guariento's frescoes in the apse of the church of the Ermitani in Padua, see Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 95ff.

³⁶ Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Ms. Lat. 697, f. 6r, see Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), S. 79.

³⁷ Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. 754, f. 2v, see Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), S. 80f, 106, 206f.

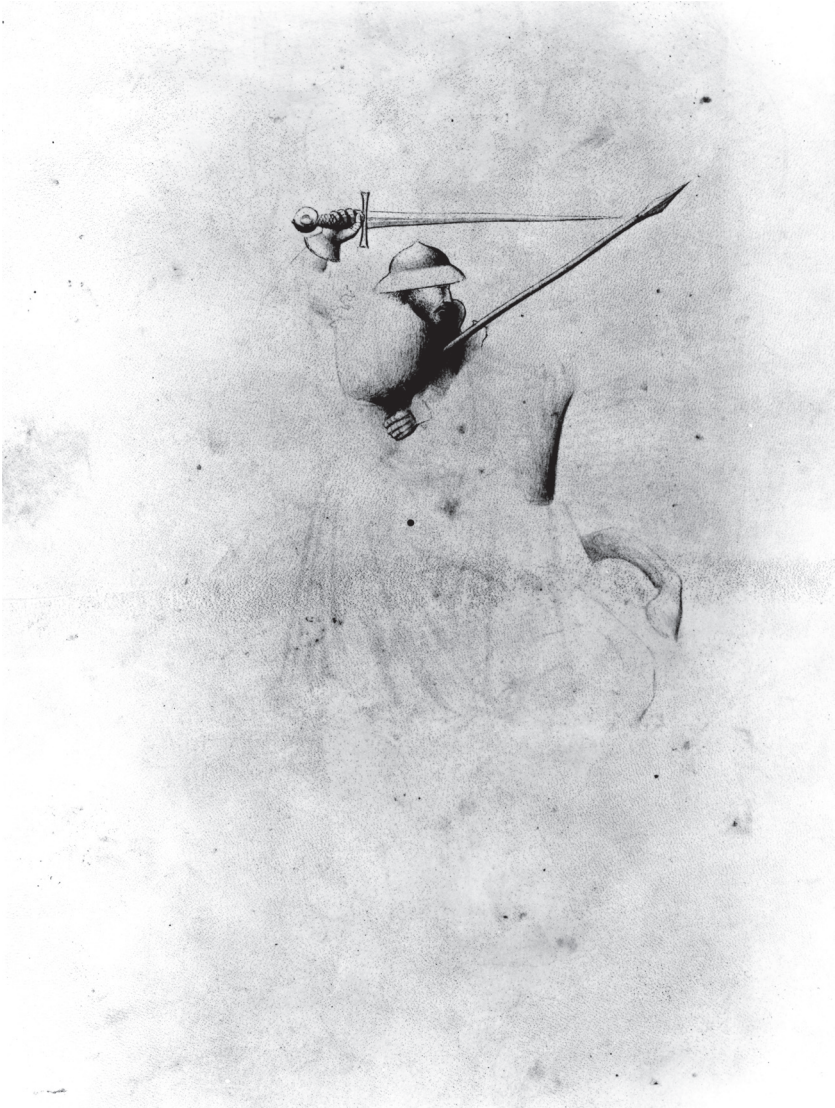


Fig. 10.17: Chantilly, Musée condé, Ms. 754, Fol. 2v, Mars

constant and often prominent role. They can be found in the relief cycle of the Florentine bell tower produced in the workshop of Andrea Pisano between 1324 and 1341, and also in the framing of the famous paintings in the Sala dei Nove in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena, completed by Ambrogio Lorenzetti between 1337–40. Likewise the capitals in the loggia of



Fig. 10.18: Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. 754, Fol. 2r, Jupiter



Fig. 10.19: Chantilly, Musée condé, Ms. 754, Fol. iv, Saturn

the ground floor of the Doge's Palace in Venice, built around 1341–1355, present an encyclopaedic program, and on the corner capital, i.e., in a key position, we find the planets with their Houses. For Giovanni Villani (1276–1348), who wrote a comprehensive Chronicle of his home city of Florence, astrology offers a logical explanation to the numerous vicissitudes of history. He saw in the changing position of the planets the natural cause of many historical events.³⁸

For the first time in the cultural environment of the Italian city states, astrological images extended beyond their origins within the restricted precincts of luxurious courtly manuscripts. In these communal programs the planets point to a cosmic pattern, within which alone the political life of the states must be able to play out.

Critical Positions

In the 14th century critical voices also ranged against astrology; the most prominent doubtlessly being Francesco Petrarca, who often stayed in Padua from 1349 and before finally moved there in 1368. He maintained strong contacts with the convent of the Augustine hermits who ran an ambitious school program in their Paduan cloister and in 1364 took part in the foundation of a Theological Faculty in the predominantly medicine-oriented University of the city. When the Paduan painter Guariento undertook the painting of the great chancel of their convent church around 1360, the Augustine hermits cited the astrological painting cycle of the Palazzo della Ragione.³⁹ In so doing they integrated astrology within a theological framework, at the same time placing strict limits for the science of the stars. Guariento's frescoes provide a programmatic alternative to the more comprehensive version in the Palazzo della Ragione.

In the pedestal zone, at eye-level, closest to the high altar, we see the planets with the exact same iconography as in Giotto's frescoes fifty years before (Fig. 10.20). By their sides stand representations of the seven ages of man. Thus the point is made that the influence of the planets fundamentally holds in regard only the decrepitude of earthly life. Inserted into the cycle in the middle sections of the polygon of the chancel are pictures of the Resurrection and Passion of Christ (Fig. 10.21), grouped around

³⁸ Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 85ff. For Villani compare also L. Green, *Chronicle into History, an Essay on the Interpretation of History in Florentine Fourteenth-Century Chronicles* (Cambridge: 1972).

³⁹ Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 95ff.



Fig. 10.20: Padua, Chiesa degli Eremitani, main chapel, Venus

a depiction of the Man of Sorrows. Thus following Christ appears to be the only way out of the bleak cycle of earthly existence. These paintings are done in monochrome and therefore clearly set off from the paintings in the upper zones. The earthly is just a pale reflection of the godly; it is allowed only the slightest degree of reality.

Above the planets there is depicted the life of St Augustine, the founder, along with the history of the Order. On top of this are the martyrdoms of the apostles Philip and James, the title saints of this church. In the upper spandrels of the side walls there was still place for the four evangelists, and in the vault, before being destroyed in World War II, there was Christ among the Heavenly Host in the context of the Last Judgment. The spatial organization of the pictures evidently expresses the idea of a systematic, hierarchically ordered world. Astrology has, in the view of the Augustinian hermits, only a humble role, since the planets can only influence the vicissitudes of earthly existence, which, before God, are merely irrelevant. The hermits here offer a clear alternative to the astrological world-view of Pietro d'Abano. The debate in which these two Paduan fresco cycles of the 14th century participate was never really concluded, and indeed, until the present time has basically not lost its relevance, even though the arguments have changed in the meantime.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Compare Eugenio Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita, La polemica sull'astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento* (Bari: 1976).



Fig. 10.21: Padua, Chiesa degli Eremitani, main chapel, Rising Christ

The Humanistic Approach

Another key text in the history of astrological artwork comes from the pen of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375). From around 1350 he worked on a fundamental treatise on ancient mythology which enjoyed wide

dissemination under the title of *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*, from the end of the 14th century. This book was for over a hundred years the basic reference for classical mythology. Boccaccio not only simply described the myths, he also offered a logical interpretation of the events transmitted in the tradition, and of the attributes characterizing each figure. Astrology thus gave him a rational grounding for the characters of the central deities, by way of their associated planets. Abu Ma'shar, along with the astrologer Andalo di Negro was among his most-cited authors. Again and again he emphasizes that the comments of the ancient poets agree in a perfect way with the statements of the astrologers. He understood the ancient myths as poetical descriptions of astrological constellations, and so the ancient poetry and the pagan myths become a role which is in complete accord with the late medieval understanding of the world. The defence of the ancient poets against critics was a major objective of Giovanni Boccaccio, an objective which particularly occupied him in the last book of his comprehensive work.⁴¹

Since Boccaccio assembled many details and even subjected the ancient attributes to a close astrological interpretation, it seemed reasonable to make the image of the planets fit with the appearance of these ancient gods. Thus by a gradual process during the course of the 15th century the astrological powers regained their ancient guise. They lost, however, the great clarity they had possessed in Michael Scotus and in the 14th century paintings, where the particular area of their influence was indicated even in their outward appearance.

The connection of humanistic knowledge about the ancient world with astrology we find already around 1410 in the paintings of the Palazzo Trinci in Foligno.⁴² The Signore Ugolino Trinci here had an ambitious iconographic program carried out that was largely based on ancient models. The accompanying inscriptions were composed by the Roman humanist Francesco da Fiano, who also worked for the court at Foligno. In one room, which probably served as a library or a study, the walls are decorated with depictions of the seven liberal arts and the planets. The observer here becomes a kind of witness to a race between the planets over a cloud surface in front of the dark blue night sky. The astrological

⁴¹ Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 112ff. Edition with Italian translations by Vittorio Zaccaria, *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. V. Branca, vols. VII–VIII (Milan: 1998).

⁴² Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 118ff. *Il Palazzo Trinci di Foligno*, ed. Giordana Benazzi and Francesco Federico Mancini (Perugia: 2001). *Nuovi studi sulla pittura tardogotica: Palazzo Trinci*, ed. Antonino Caleca and Bruno Toscano (Foligno: 2009).

powers in their heavenly dwelling place are displayed before the eye, with cosmological naturalism. The natural appearance of the heavenly bodies influences the artistic approach in many respects. Thus Luna is bathed in the same pale white light as the Moon in real life (Fig. 10.22). The crescent moon appears like a halo behind her head. She whips the galloping horse to greater haste, so that the speed with which the moon completes its cycle is represented in the fresco. The sun is a glowing red image in



Fig. 10.22: Foligno, Palazzo Trinci, Sala dei pianeti, Luna

a four-horse carriage; she holds a golden disc which shoots out golden rays. Mars is clothed in a reddish garment and a red pennant flutters from his lance (Fig. 10.23). It is in this way that the planet's reddish light is characterized.

But for the first time there are also some ancient elements. Mercury runs along, with pairs of wings attached to his boots (Fig. 10.24). A head-band with the ends streaming behind completes the ancient aspect. With



Fig. 10.23: Foligno, Palazzo Trinci, Sala dei pianeti, Mars



Fig. 10.24: Foligno, Palazzo Trinci, Sala dei pianeti, Mercury

his right hand extended he holds a sheet of paper, identifying him as the messenger of the gods. Jupiter in his raised right hand holds a bundle of three arrows, so he is returned to the role of thunderbolt-wielding lord of the gods (Fig. 10.25). The image of Venus is unfortunately lost. Saturn is portrayed with a dark hooded garment, holding a sickle and bearing what is probably a scythe over his shoulder. He moves only with tiny paces and so this picture is exemplifying the long duration of its cycle and also the



Fig. 10.25: Foligno, Palazzo Trinci, Sala dei pianeti, Jupiter

weak light coming from the planet. Beside the single planets are placed medallion paintings showing the seven ages of man in parallel to the canonical hours. Thus is emphasized the relevance of astrological influence for day-to-day matters and for the course of human life.

The planet depictions done in Rimini a few years later in the sepulchral church of Sigismondo Malatesta, the so-called Tempio Malatestiano, present yet another context. Chapels were built alongside the single nave

of the Franciscan church, and the arches were decorated from 1453 with figurative reliefs by Agostino di Duccio. These reliefs show the Virtues, the Sibyls and Prophets, the liberal arts and the muses, as well as the planet gods. The planets are presented in their cosmological order and stand between the signs of the zodiac where they have their Houses. The placement of the astrological deities within the space of a church is exceptional, as is the appearance and attributes of the single images anomalous. The influence of the learned compilation by Giovanni Boccaccio is manifest here, since the iconography is in its finest details oriented to the ancient gods. Myth and astrology are here strongly connected. Almost all the necessary information and explication comes from the *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium* of Boccaccio. But of course, the court humanist Basinio da Parma (1425–1457), who conceived the program, utilized other literary texts from Antiquity as well in order to increase the intellectual content of the program and stimulate the learned viewer.⁴³

Mercury for instance is a huge gigantic figure, whose knees are enveloped in clouds (Fig. 10.26). He holds a long staff extending down to the ground, wound round with two double-headed snakes. The lower end of this staff is planted between his feet in a circular cavity in the ground, wherein small spirits are cavorting. Some of them are scrambling up the staff, others are sliding down. These, as Boccaccio describes in detail, drawing on Virgil, are obviously souls, which Mercury, with his staff leads down into the Underworld or guides them up again. Agostino di Duccio has taken up these happenings in a very small format like attributes in his relief sculptures; he interprets the staff as a kind of climbing stick, with whose help the souls manage to overcome the steep walls of Orcus at the entrance to the Underworld. The planet god himself is conspicuously absent and uninvolved in these events. The snake-wound staff is, as well as the winged shoes, the lyre which he holds in his left hand, and the rooster by his feet, explained in the *Genealogie*. The hat of the planet god is also interpreted by Boccaccio, but the high pointed, conical form in the image given by Augustino di Duccio is very unusual. The hat of the third Mercury, operating in Egypt, symbolizes (according

⁴³ Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 139ff. Stanko Kokole, *Agostino di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of poetic invention and fantasies of personal style*, Diss. John Hopkins University (Baltimore: 1998). Stanko Kokole, "Cognitio Formarum and Agostino di Duccio's Reliefs for the Chapel of the Planets in the Tempio Malatestiano," in *Quattrocento Adriatico, Fifteenth-century Art of the Adriatic Rim, Papers from a colloquium held at the Villa Spelman, Florence 1994*, ed. Charles Dempsey (Florence: 1996), pp. 177ff.



Fig. 10.26: Rimini, Tempio Malatestiano, Mercury

to Boccaccio) the heaven which covers us all. The stripe-like decoration, which adorns the tall headgear in the relief, can in fact be seen to recall the heavenly spheres. At the same time this hat gives its bearer a foreign appearance, referring perhaps, one might think, to the god's Egyptian background.

Knowledge of Boccaccio's text is clear also from the rendition of Venus, since the goddess drives a carriage drawn by swans, as described in the *Genealogie* (Fig. 10.27). The sea shell she holds in her hand and the doves that drop down from the heavens are listed there as sexual symbols. Saturn in this series is for the first time depicted as an old man who devours his own children (Fig. 10.28). He stands slightly bent over before the viewer; in his right hand he holds the sickle and in the left he has a tiny naked child who vainly attempts to free itself.

The intention of this demanding and exceptional church decoration is apparently to promote a strong connection between ancient philosophy and Christianity. In the joining of Christian theological forms of knowledge with ancient profane forms, perhaps the point was to demonstrate the continuous perfection of man and his possible way to a close relation with God. Basically in line with Boccaccio, who clarified the meaning of the ancient myths by turning to astrology, here the focus is on the so clearly demonstrated identity between planets and pagan gods, in order to achieve a higher truth with regard to the ancient traditions. The ancient myths have their place in a Christian worldview, inasmuch as they serve to indicate the astrological influence of the stars. In this connection the scholars and poets of Antiquity truly saw and indicated much, even when lacking the decisive frame of reference of the Christian understanding of God, which reduced the planets to subordinate entities.

The paintings of Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara around 1470, which we mentioned at the outset, are dedicated to the course of a year and to the relative stellar influence; but they supplant the planets, in spite of the astrological significance of these, in favour of the twelve ancient deities, assigned generally to the twelve months in the recently rediscovered didactic poem of Manilius. Thus gods and not planets are seen in triumph in the upper zone of the painting; and so the many-figured scenes are conceived in the details of mythography. Here too the focus is the ancient mythological tradition which is connected with modern astrology—just as in Rimini.



Fig. 10.27: Rimini, Tempio Malatestiano, Venus



Fig. 10.28: Rimini, Tempio Malatestiano, Saturn

The Painted Horoscope of Agostino Chigi

Clearly in tune with humanistic learning was also the painting of a garden loggia in Rome, completed a few decades later. The Sieneese banker Agostino Chigi had a summer villa built across the Tiber between 1506 and 1510, of which the painting continued to around 1520. In one of the open loggias facing onto the garden of the ground floor Raphael in 1512 painted his famous fresco of the nymph Galatea. The vault was already painted by Baldassare Peruzzi in 1510–11, and shows in a humanistic and cryptic form, the birth horoscope of the patron.⁴⁴ In any case the architectural structure of the ceiling offered some challenges to the program. Fourteen lunettes are situated between the wall and the great ceiling panel (Fig. 10.29). Ancient decorative elements follow the architectural lines and subdivide the vault in numerous single compartments. In the centre of the main ceiling panel there was presumably the coat of arms of Agostino Chigi.⁴⁵ Beside we see Perseus decapitating Medusa, along with the allegory of Fame and, on the other side, the constellation of Ursa Major. Stars against a blue background surround the images and obviously indicate the night

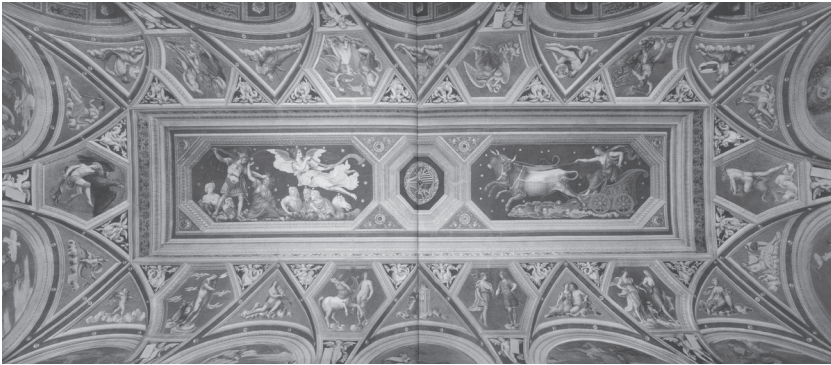


Fig. 10.29: Rome, Villa Farnesina, Loggia del Galatea, ceiling

⁴⁴ Julian Kliemann, Michael Rohlmann, *Wandmalerei in Italien: Die Zeit der Hochrenaissance und des Manierismus 1510–1600* (München: 2004), pp. 194ff. *La Villa Farnesina a Roma*, ed. Christoph Luitpold Frommel (Modena: 2003). On the astrological meaning: Kristen Lippincott, "Two astrological ceilings reconsidered: the Sala Galatea in the Villa Farnesina and the Sala del Mappamondo at Caprarola," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 53 (1990): 185–207. Mary Quinlan-McGrath, "The Astrological Vault in the Villa Farnesina, Agostino Chigi's Rising Sun," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 47 (1984): 91ff. Mary Quinlan-McGrath, "The Villa Farnesina, Time-Telling Conventions and Renaissance Astrological Practice," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 58 (1995): 52–71. Fritz Saxl, *La Fede astrologica di Agostino Chigi* (Rome: 1934).

⁴⁵ The present crest belongs to a later occupier of the villa. Chigi's crest shows a mountaintop over which a star is visible.

sky. So apart from Fame there are two prominent constellations and this should indicate that there were more constellations in the remaining picture fields. In the ten hexagonal, likewise blue coloured fields between the lunettes we can easily recognize the zodiac signs, though Scorpio and Libra as well as Aries and Taurus must be placed together in a single compartment. The zodiac signs however do not appear in the iconography that had been typical in the astronomical manuscripts since Carolingian times, but shown instead are the myths which had inspired the original formation of the constellations. The basic guide here is the text of Hyginus.⁴⁶ Thus for Cancer, Hercules' fight with the Hydra is depicted; and for Gemini, the coupling of Leda with the Swan (Fig. 10.30). For Aquarius



Fig. 10.30: Rome, Villa Farnesina, Loggia del Galatea, ceiling, detail, twins (Leda and the swan)

⁴⁶ Hyginus, *De Astronomia*, Edition with French translation by André Le Boeuffe (Paris: 1983).

we see the rape of Ganymede by Jupiter. Also the planet gods step into these pictures. They are completely assimilated into the appearance of the ancient gods and depart decisively from the earlier planet iconography discussed above. There are no features within the pictures indicating the astrological significance of these gods. Thus a great deal of mythological knowledge is necessary in order to draw the connection to the constellations and even further to the concrete horoscope. In the lunettes themselves there are further constellations, lying outside the zodiac. Here again are depicted the mythological events after the account by Hyginus.

Since Agostino Chigi's birthday is cited in the baptismal register in Siena as the 29th of November 1466, and there is also a birth hour registered, which however is not easy to interpret, the ascendant in the birth horoscope appears to lie in the sign of Taurus. Thus the prominent signs of Aquarius and Leo on the short sides of the Loggia represent the highest point of the horoscope (*Medium Coeli*) and respectively the lowest point (*Imum Coeli*). So the geographical orientation of the loggia corresponds to a certain degree with the coordinates of Chigi's horoscope. But none of which is easy to make out even for an experienced observer; so we must assume a conscious decipherment. In a typical humanistic manner we find here a deeper truth under the veil of the mythology, in this case the horoscope of the patron with its positive astrological components. The conspicuous exaltation of Perseus could have his reason in the fact that Perseus rises with Taurus, the ascendant of the horoscope, and perhaps here Agostino Chigi seemed to find his personal constellation.⁴⁷

As in the paintings of the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara, this ceiling fresco also remained without succession. It is therefore a quite extraordinary special case that combines the highest expression of humanist learning with deep astrological knowledge. Thus here was an iconographic program conceived, which only initiates were able to understand entirely. It is also one of the very few examples, in which instead of astrological principles, a very concrete single horoscope is portrayed.

Children of Planets—a German Invention

More importantly, however, for the history of astrological imagery is a vernacular popularization of astrological knowledge, which belongs to

⁴⁷ Lippincott 1990 (as in n. 44), pp. 195. Problematical is above all the significance of the central ceiling panel with the prominent position of Perseus and Ursa major as well as the role of Fama, which surely is connected to the patron.

the 15th century. The scene now moves from the Italian courts northwards to the southern German cities, which in this time enjoyed great economic and cultural development. In a series of texts which belong to this environment around 1400 there circulated the notion of the planets' children. By this is meant persons who have a practically familiar connection to a particular planet, which rules their horoscope and determines their character. This consisted in perhaps one of the most successful and long-lasting popularizations of complex scientific theories, which had yet existed. For although all the planets were considered to have their role in a horoscope, nonetheless in this case one is singled out and defined as authoritative.⁴⁸

The concept emerges first in poetry. Around 1422 Oskar von Wolkenstein composed a song regarding the seven planets and their children. Here in rhythmic verses and popular-sounding phrases the basics of astrology were explained. A comparable song comes from Salzburg, certainly slightly older, belonging to the end of the 14th century.⁴⁹ These songs were intended for public performance with a musical accompaniment. They refer to the children of the single planets and give a short character profile of the persons under the influence of those planets. Similar notions can be found in German-speaking texts on astrology from the same period. Thus for example the treatise of Johann Wissbier from Gmünd begins with the words, "This of late has been said of nature and the properties of the seven planets and their children . . ."⁵⁰ Thus a simple concept of astrological influences was established, that each individual stood under the influence of a particular planet, and this connection was described using a familiar concept of family genealogy.

The success of this idea was due to its diffusion in a new trendsetting medium: the woodcut. Around 1430 an ambitious publication was realized, in which image and poetry, in close relation, explained the seven planets and their children (Fig. 10.31). The origins in Basel are attested by the reproduction of the state crest in the depiction of the children of Venus

⁴⁸ Basically, Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 158ff. Dieter Blume, "Children of the Planets: the Popularization of Astrology in the 15th Century," in: *Il sole e la luna, Micrologus, Natura, Scienze e Società Medievali*, vol. 12 (Florence: 2004), pp. 549–563.

⁴⁹ *Die Lieder des Oswald von Wolkenstein*, ed. K.K. Klein (Tübingen: 1987), no. 22, pp. 73ff. The poem of the Salzburg monk is edited by W. Kersken, *Genner beschnaid, die Kalendergedichte und der Neumondkalender des Oswald von Wolkenstein* (Göppingen: 1975), pp. 258f.

⁵⁰ Edition by V. Stegemann, *Aus einen mittelalterlichen, deutschen, astronomisch-astrologischen Lehrbüchlein* (Reichenberg 1944). Compare also F.B. Brévar, "The German Volkskalender of the 15th Century," *Speculum* 63 (1988): 312ff.



Fig. 10.31: Schweinfurt, Bibl. Otto Schäfer, Woodcuts from Basel, Venus

(Fig. 10.32).⁵¹ The verses and images are cut from the same wood block and on each page there are the verses above and the image below. For each planet there are two pictures and two stanzas of the poem. In the verses

⁵¹ A complete series of the woodcuts is in Schweinfurt, Bibliothek Otto Schäfer, Signatur OS 1033. Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 160ff, Edition des Textes pp. 230ff.



Fig. 10.32: Schweinfurt, Bibl. Otto Schäfer, Woodcuts from Basel, children of Venus

the planet speaks directly to the reader and viewer, as in a performance of a dramatic piece. First he gives astrological information concerning his particular houses and his orbit. In the picture we see the planet within a circular medallion moving along over a band of clouds. The nudity of the depiction, relating to ancient iconography, distinguishes the figure unmistakably as a higher being. In the second stanza the characteristics and activities of the planet's children are enumerated. The accompanying

image shows all of them gathered, each busy at their expected occupation. The planet's children stand crowded on the vegetation-covered ground of earth, while their planet moves along as a single, lonesome figure above the clouds. Both pictures aim systematically to contrast and to complement in their vividness the simple German verses. An intellectually planned conception of the woodcuts is recognizable which is based on the particular effect of the pictures. The initiators of this graphic series have developed an entirely new iconographic type, with which they successfully manage to popularize complicated astrological knowledge.

The appearance of the planet gods is without any direct predecessor. For the first time they come completely naked; a star over their pubic area indicates their status as heavenly powers. Only a few attributes follow the medieval iconography which is mainly based on Michael Scotus: the corona on the sun, the pilgrim's staff and scholar's hat of Jupiter, or the flower of Venus. Most attributes come from the ancient tradition, although the moon's horn of plenty and Mercury's money purse are rather rare even in the mythographical tradition (Fig. 10.33). All these elements are present in the planet images of the so-called Calendar of 354, also known as the Calendar of Filocalus.⁵² This splendid late antique manuscript, of which only copies from the 17th century survive, must have been kept in southern Germany in those times, and was likely known to the maker of the woodcuts. We are dealing here with a deliberate act of the conscious assumption of Antiquity. In the woodcuts the pictures of the planets are simplified and systematized. The total nudity identifies them as higher entities and the stepping forwards emphasizes their movement. The figures are differentiated by their attributes, which serve them as accessories, and among which can be found also contemporary elements. For planets' children the engraver has sought to give a rendition of the spatial context, and he often outlines the entire area of action of the figures. Thus for the children of Venus he gives a scene in a bath house and for those of Mars, a war and plundering. Among Mercury's children we find scholars and artists (Fig. 10.34). There we see a painter, a writer, a sculptor, a goldsmith and a musician.

Basic for the effect of these pictures is the close connection with the accompanying verses. Through the new medium of the woodcut, these images were from its incipience targeted to a wide diffusion. No wonder

⁵² Henri Stern, *Le Calendrier de 354, Étude sur son texte et ses illustrations* (Paris: 1953).



Fig. 10.33: Schweinfurt, Bibl. Otto Schäfer, Woodcuts from Basel, Mercury

that within a few years the images and poetry in this woodcut were copied in numerous manuscripts. Above all they are found in the so-called *Hausbuch*, a kind of almanac, which included, along with calendar and astrological information, as well as medical suggestions, usually structured throughout the course of the year. Such publications were widely diffused in southern Germany and in many cases included illustrations.



Fig. 10.34: Schweinfurt, Bibl. Otto Schäfer, Woodcuts from Basel, children of Mercury

Miniatures reproducing the Basel woodcuts are almost always there, along with depictions of the months, signs of the zodiac, and images for blood-letting points on the body.⁵³

A good example is a manuscript now in Berlin that was made in Mainz around 1445.⁵⁴ In the extensive astrological part the woodcuts are reproduced on double pages. Numerous simplifications indicate the dependence of the miniatures upon the woodcuts. An artist who worked at a very high artistic level illustrated just such a *Hausbuch* for Konrad Roener in Passau in 1445.⁵⁵ The images of the planets and their children are here joined together in a great circular scheme, which also shows the connection between the planets and the single hours of the day. The planets' children move in a panoramic landscape, over which the planet gods are seen

⁵³ Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 167ff. Brévard 1988 (as in n. 50), *passim*.

⁵⁴ Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. Germ fol. 244. *Katalog der deutschsprachigen illustrierten Handschriften des Mittelalters*, started by H. Frühmorgen-Voss, edited by Norbert H. Ott, vol. 1 (Munich: 1991), Nr. 11.4.5, pp. 375ff.

⁵⁵ Kassel, Gesamthochschul- und Landesbibliothek, 2^o Ms. Astronom. 1. Ott 1991 (as in n. 54), Nr. 11.4.25, pp. 414ff.

in their own segments (Figs. 10.35, 10.36). Even though another picture concept is here at play, the single figures are all taken from the woodcuts and the verses are cited word for word.

Around 1475 an otherwise unknown master Joseph in Ulm created an elaborate handbook of astrology and fortune-telling, in which he included the usual *Hausbuch* calendar.⁵⁶ He got images from whatever sources he had available and integrated them in his manuscript. There we find various versions of planet images, zodiac signs and constellations. He also copied the woodcuts with the planets' children (Fig. 10.37) and expanded these with many-figured illustrations including numerous images from the urban context of the handicrafts and small businesses. He was also apparently influenced by a new version of the planets' children, dating



Fig. 10.35: Berlin, Staatsbibl. Ms. Germ. Fol. 244, Fol. 186v–187r, Mercury and his children

⁵⁶ Tübingen, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. Md 2. Ott 1991 (as in n. 54), Nr. 11.4.43, pp. 400ff. Gerd Brinkhus, David Juste, Helga Lengenfelder, *Iatromathematisches Kalenderbuch, Codices illuminati medii aevi* 63 (Munich: 2005).



Fig. 10.36: Kassel, Landesbibl. Ms. Astronom 1 (2^o), Fol. 64r, Luna and her children from around 1470 in the Netherlands, which grouped the planets and the images of the children all on a single large-format page.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst, Kobberstiksamling. H. Th. Musper, "Der Einblattholzchnitt und die Blockbücher des 15. Jahrhunderts," *Handbuch der Holz- und Metallschnitte des 15. Jahrhunderts* by W.L. Schreiber, vol. XI, (Stuttgart: 1976), pp. 55f.



Fig. 10.37: Tübingen, Univ.Bibl., Ms. M. d. 2, fol. 272r, Luna and her children

The list of copies and variants could easily be extended. Instead, we should emphasize the entirely new iconographic conception for depicting the planets, conceived in Basel around 1430, which soon became widely diffused through woodcuts. The close connection to the vernacular poetry, which perhaps was anyway composed with this use in mind, reveals the intentions of this remarkable publication. It attempted to extend basic astrological knowledge to a wider audience than would have been possible with scholarly Latin, and for whom the cost of large books would have been prohibitive. The interaction between pictorial representations and appealing verses showed everyone the special astrological influence of the planets, even when no other kind of knowledge was at hand. The numerous copies and reflections in other works testify to the great success of this invention, and demonstrate how well it corresponded to the interests of the urban population. This phenomenon is connected with the enormous intellectual and economic development of the south German cities in the late 14th century. The number of university graduates was increasing along with the production of books. Connected to this however is also a growing interest in paintings, which were now accessible in previously unknown numbers through the means of mechanical reproduction.

The Italian Version

The influence of these woodcuts extended well beyond this regional context. In the Italian courts there was also a fascination with the obvious appeal of this iconographic invention. Between 1450 and 1460 a richly illuminated manuscript was prepared for Francesco Sforza, duke of Milan, where the woodcuts were reproduced as magnificent miniatures.⁵⁸ Numerous details show the relation to the woodcuts. The artist has executed colourful landscape panoramas and placed the planets' children in new arrangements. He has also integrated specific elements from courtly life. Particularly prominent is this visual flourish in the case of Mars. Rather than as robbing and plundering soldiers we see a well-ordered war making of knights. In splendid armour, they ride out to besiege a city. In the end they fight hand-to-hand with equally powerful adversaries. The war is thus seen from the standpoint of the victorious condottiero, and not through the eyes of afflicted peasants or fearful city-dwellers. The accom-

⁵⁸ Modena, Biblioteca Estense Ms. Lat. 209. Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 179ff. *The Painted Page, Italian Renaissance Book Illumination 1450–1550*, ed. J.J.G. Alexander (Munich: 1994), Nr. 18, pp. 75f.

panying verses abstain from any negative remark on war, and instead, include the name of the lord—Sforza—in the rhyming scheme. Thus the patron is praised as a son of Mars.

While this manuscript converted the German iconographical invention into an exclusively court art form, slightly later in Florence the Medici did the exact opposite. Around 1460 a series of copper engravings took up the same theme.⁵⁹ Here there was chosen a newly developed technique, in various ways superior to woodcuts and capable of larger editions. The planet and the landscape with the planets' children are all placed together in a single depiction, as in the previously mentioned later Netherlandish woodcuts. Although the activities of the planets' children still refer to those in the Basel woodcuts, they are regrouped and extensively developed. Above all, the artist has situated the whole into a clearly-indicated Florentine environment. The copper engravings are usually attributed to Baccio Baldini, about whom Vasari reports that he worked also on sketches from Botticelli. These graphics take us to a many-sided depiction of Florence and its inhabitants after the mid-15th century. Thus the viewers at the time would not only have seen a vivid illustration of astrological theories, but at the same time also a representation of their own urban culture appealing at once to their urban identity and their pride.

In the depiction of Mercury's children we find the architecture of Piazza della Signoria, the central place of the Florentine self-representation. We recognize in the background the Loggia dei Lanzi and the church of San Pier Scheraggio. In the engraving with the children of Venus (Fig. 10.38) we find a depiction of a typical celebration before a villa in the environs of the city. But even the moon's children (Fig. 10.40) are depicted in a Florentine topography. We see Ponte alla Carraia and the widening Arno valley to the west of the city. This reference is particularly clear by comparison with the famous city plan of Francesco Rosselli, the so-called "chain map," made only slightly later and surviving in a woodcut from around 1500.⁶⁰ The iconography of the planet gods is completely reconceived for these Florentine copper plate engravings (Fig. 10.39). For the first time all planets drive their own wagons, not just the sun and moon. Each of these

⁵⁹ A complete series is in London, British Museum, A III 1–7. A.M. Hind, *Early Italian Engraving*, vol. 1 (London: 1938), pp. 77ff. J.A. Levenson, K. Oberhuber, J.L. Sheehan, *Early Italian Engravings from the National Gallery of Art*, Exhibition catalogue (Washington: 1973), pp. 13ff. Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 183ff.

⁶⁰ There is surviving only one woodcut copy by Lucantonio degli Uberti, in Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Kupferstichkabinett, I.N. 899–100.



Fig. 10.38: London, British Museum, Engraving by Baccio Baldini (?), Venus and her children



Fig. 10.39: London, British Museum, Engraving by Baccio Baldini (?), Mercury and his children



Fig. 10.40: London, British Museum, Engraving by Baccio Baldini (?), Luna and her children

wagons is drawn by a pair of different beasts. The figures of the planets themselves are dressed in splendid garments, calling to mind festive or theatre costumes. Each planet holds an object in hand and wears different headgear. These attributes are more or less precisely drawn from the ancient iconography.

The connections to the self-image of the Florentine elite in these engravings of Baccio Baldini are so numerous that the composition must obviously have come out of this ambience. They belong to the specific iconographic culture of the leading Florentine families, who showcased their ideals even in their practical furnishings, as we see in the Cassone or Deschi da Prato, as well as in the splendour of their festivities. Underneath the magnificent triumphal march of the planets the flourishing life and the grandiose celebrations of Medici Florence unfold, in which the viewers supposedly feel involved. Thus these series of images comprise a clear project of self-identification, which in the end might serve to help stabilize the social and political conditions of Medici rulership.

The Florentine copper engravings are a systematic adaptation of the older woodcuts from Basel. In spite of all the modifications, the main characteristics of the original iconographic concept are taken over and only adapted to a new and (if one will) more modern context. The success of the new series was enormous. For the next 200 years the notion of the planet gods and their children is based on these copper plates. Practically, there is no single astrological image that does not take up one or another element from these engravings. This is so, not only for the Italian cultural context, but also for Transalpine Europe. Most of the woodcut illustrations used to accompany astrological texts in the early printed books likewise take the planets and the details from these prints by Baccio Baldini. Here we see the decisive influence of this new medium. The great diffusion of book and graphic printing determined an unprecedented burst of iconographical imagination. Thus we find a starry sky painted in the vaulted ceiling of the university library in Salamanca, where the images are taken directly from the woodcut depiction of the publisher Ehrhardt Ratdolt, which had been printed in the Venice, 1482, edition of Hyginus.⁶¹

⁶¹ Gisela Noehles-Doerk, "Die Universitätsbibliothek von Salamanca im 15. Jahrhundert und ihr kosmologisches Ausmalungsprogramm," in *Iconographie der Bibliotheken*, ed. Carsten-Peter Warncke (Wiesbaden: 1992), pp. 11–41.

Summary

Thus in conclusion it seems clear that in images, only general astrological principles were depicted. Among the most widely disseminated was the image of the seven planets with their houses, either in the sequence of the weekday gods or in their cosmological order. Sometimes these are combined with the course of the year through a depiction of the series of the zodiacal signs and the works of the months. Specific constellations or horoscopes are only very rarely found. Exceptions are the cupola paintings over the altar of the Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo in Florence, serving as the burial chapel of the Medici family, which we have not discussed here.⁶² A further exception may be found in the garden loggia of Agostino Chigi in Rome from the beginning of the 16th century, described above. Depictions of the planets and along with them, astrological imagery can be found after late Antiquity, for the first time at the court of the Hohenstaufen emperor Friedrich II in Southern Italy at the beginning of the 13th century. Later the Italian city-states take up this theme in their communal iconographic programs. Most important is here the fresco decoration by Giotto in the town hall (Palazzo della Ragione) of Padua at the beginning of the 14th century. Starting with the work of Giovanni Boccaccio, and proceeding through the whole 15th century, we can observe something like a return to Antiquity in planet iconography. This leads to various connections between astrological and humanist interests. Decisive novelties again appear in the Basel woodcuts around 1430. The copper engravings based on these, done around 1460 by Baccio Baldini in Florence, coin the features of the iconography of the planets for centuries. Thus the newly developed graphic media of the 15th century made a visual idea of the astrological powers accessible for most people.

⁶² Blume 2000 (as in n. 6), pp. 126ff. Dieter Blume, "Astrologia come scienza politica—Il cielo notturno della sagrestia vecchia di San Lorenzo," in *L'art de la Renaissance entre science et magie*, ed. Philippe Morel, Collection d'histoire de l'art de l'Académie de France à Rome / Villa Médicis, vol. 5 (Paris: 2006), pp. 149–164.