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WHAT'S YOUR SIGN?**ASTROLOGY: WHAT'S REALLY IN THE STARS**

ASTROLOGY IS HAVING A RESURGENCE, sort of. Not only because of mystical reasons that ebb and flow over the years, but also because of the abundance of astrological material accessible everywhere, including software, the Internet, etc. Throughout the history of the lore, exacerbations and remissions are common, although remissions are not quite so common as exacerbations. Although evidence is abundant refuting the lore and revealing numerous flaws and fallacies, statistical and otherwise, it seems to be marching along unscathed. Why? I discuss this with friends, and they nod, acknowledge my criticisms, and ask, "By the way, what's your sign?"

It is as if people are slightly brain dead. As though one's sign is preordained. Dissociated from one's body, and reason. People evidently feel it is simpler to be a Leo, for example, rather than evaluate the evidence. "Relax and enjoy it" is the attitude. Besides, look at all the positives about the sign. And even the negatives are not all that bad...

Computers and statistics, once thought to be the death rattle for horoscopic astrology, have not shaken the faith of the believer, or even the dabbler. The suspicion is that statistics may be slanted. For the believer, the faith is being attacked and no amount of statistics will alter his conviction. The dabbler does not care as long as he can read the horoscope from time to time.

HOW OLD IS ASTROLOGY?

Who thought it up and why? Astrology developed from mistaken relationships of cause and effect, the genesis of which took place in Mesopotamia under the Akkadians and early Babylonians, was perpetuated by the Assyrians using omen reports, and later refined by the Greeks.

Astronomy and accompanying lore (astrology) originated in the area of southwestern Asia between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers called Mesopotamia (now Iraq). Cuneiform clay tablets with lists of

star names appeared around 2000 BCE. Notations of phases of the moon and the rising and setting of the sun followed.

Tablets have been uncovered dating from reign of King Ammisuduga (1654-1633 BCE) bearing omens about the rising and setting of the planet venue.

Extensive forecasting took place under the Assyrians (1275-600 BCE). Examples: "When the Moon's horns point away from one another, there will be an overthrowing of fortresses and downfall of garrisons," or "When Jupiter goes out from behind the Moon, there will be hostility in the land." Omens took on significance and were linked to the fates of kings, favorable and unfavorable waring conditions, the weather, earthquakes, catastrophes and other important events. Examples: "When a fetus has eight legs and two tails, the prince of the kingdom will seize power." "When Mars approaches Scorpio, the prince will die by a scorpion's sting, and his son after him will take the throne." The wandering stars (planets) were thought to be gods, possessing powers that were cyclical, awesome and final.

Astronomer-astrologer-priests of the main city-states would retire to a special chamber in the temple called bit tamarti (house of observation) or climb up to the flat roofs of ziggurats and observe the heavens all night long. Nowhere in the northern hemisphere must the sky have looked more beautiful on a clear night, or more ominous on a bad one, than along the shores of the eastern Mediterranean, lending itself to a wealth of speculation and fantasy.

Omen reports were presented to the court, or king, at various intervals by the priestly astronomer-astrologers, who were men of rank and position. The office was hereditary. The prophet who could foretell favorable things for the nation, or disasters and calamities for one's enemies, was a man whose words were regarded with reverence and respect.

Around 600 BCE, 12 zodiacal constellations (not the signs) had been mapped. The zodiac, 12 signs of about 30 degrees each, was invented around 418 BCE (astronomical diaries for 419 and 418 BCE still used the constellations). The oldest horoscope is a crude tablet dated April 29, 410 BCE (FIGURE 1). It says little except data about the moon beneath the horn of Scorpio and the statement "things will be good for you."

Sixteen Babylonian horoscopes (from 280 to 68 BCE), nine Egyptian horoscopes (from 37 BCE to 93 CE), and 180 Greek horoscopes (from 61 BCE to about 600 CE) have been found. One individual, Vettius Valens, who lived in Ptolemy's time, wrote nearly all (130) of the Greek horoscopes. Considering the fact that cuneiform writing was fully developed by 2600 BC, and that hundreds of thousands of non-astrological tablets have been recovered from earliest down to the latest Babylonian, Egyptian and Greek periods, this paucity of horoscopes (with one prevalent writer) suggests that zodiacal astrology was a new and experimental idea. The Greeks, having developed mathematical astronomy, merely placed the old lore into the new scheme.

PTOLEMY

Claudius Ptolemaeus, or Ptolemy (100-170CE), was not, strictly speaking, a Greek. He was also not, strictly speaking, even Ptolemy. He was a Greco-Egyptian scholar who lived in Alexandria. Egypt had been a Roman province for over a century. Many Greek rulers of Egypt were named Ptolemy, taking the name of the original Alexandrian general. Ptolemy was an astronomer, mathematician, geographer, and may have been affiliated with the Library and Museum at Alexandria, although no evidence has been found to support this. Using data derived largely from Hipparchus, he correctly mapped the positions of 1028 stars, listed 48 constellations, described fairly accurately the lines of longitude and latitude of the earth, and devised an erroneous earth-centered system of planetary motion. These were described in an astronomical work *The Almagest* and in a geographical composition, *The Geography*. Ptolemy also transcribed star lore in a large work, *The Tetrabiblos*. Modern western astrology is based, with surprisingly little modification, on Ptolemy's writings in *The*

Tetrabiblos.

Ptolemy's astronomy and astrology were based on an earth-centered (geocentric) universe using an elaborate system of cycles within cycles (epicycles) for movements of planets and the sun around the earth. Accepted by astronomers for centuries, the concept was finally overthrown in the late 1500s by Copernicus and Kepler, who demonstrated that the planets, including the earth, revolve in elliptical orbits around the sun.

In The Tetrabiblos, Ptolemy compiled remarkably odd and bizarre ideas. Examples: Mars rules signs and countries, such as Britain, Gaul and Germany. "The inhabitants are fierce, headstrong and bestial." Venus rules signs and countries such as Macedonia, Hellas and the coastal regions of Asia Minor and Cyprus. "They are lovers of music and of learning, fond of contests and clean livers." Mars rules the left ear, kidneys, veins and genitals. Venus rules smell, the liver and the flesh. (Note: interestingly, Mars is actually cold. The reddish hue is from iron oxide dust in the Martian atmosphere. Venus, on the other hand, is hot--about 900 Degrees Fahrenheit. The glow is from sulfuric acid-covered clouds of carbon dioxide). Saturn rules the right ear, spleen, bladder and bones. Constellations of human form produce well-proportioned people (the Water-bearer, Gemini). Those of animals make the upper parts of people robust and larger; the lower parts weaker (Aries, Taurus, Leo), and so on.

AFTER PTOLEMY

Christianity suppressed astrology, then embraced it from time to time. The Arabs kept it alive in the early centuries CE. During the Renaissance, chairs of astrology were founded in Paris and Florence. After Copernicus and Kepler, a remission occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries--the Age of Enlightenment. In the 1800s, an Englishman named Robert Smith saw monetary possibilities, called himself Raphael, and began publishing astrological manuals that became quite successful. In 1874, the Theosophical Society was founded in New York by Madame Blavatsky, and the Rosicrucian Fellowship was established in Los Angeles. The London Sunday Express in 1930 discovered sales potential and began printing forecasts. American newspapers soon followed.

CONSTELLATION VERSUS SIGN

Because the earth wobbles like a top, the constellations no longer coincide with the seasons in which they were noted in Ptolemy's time (150 CE). They have shifted forward 30 degrees, about one sign (more correctly it is the earth that has shifted backward--one degree every 71.1 years). In the days of Ptolemy, the sun was about five degrees in the constellation of Aries at the vernal equinox, March 21st.

Today on March 21st the sun is about nine degrees in the constellation of Pisces. This is known as the precession (moving back) of the equinoxes. Thus, constellationally speaking, those individuals born, for example, between March 21st and April 20th are no longer Arians but Pisceans, and so on back around the zodiac.

Advocates of sidereal (constellation, precessional) astrology, rare in the western world, maintain that the constellation in which the sun travels during a particular month is the important thing, and go by the precession. The problem here is that the Babylonians used seasonal events for sign interpretation (the lion prowling in late summer, the scales at the harvest season, the stinging scorpion in late fall, the fish in the winter, etc.). Sidereal astrologers have trouble with this. Some ignore it.

Traditional (sign, tropical, western) astrologers have a difficult time with sidereal thinking. They maintain that the seasons are all important and do not recognize the precession. To reclassify an outgoing Aquarian, for example, as a flinty, wintry Capricorn just because during the centuries the constellation of Capricorn has moved forward to February is unthinkable.

Western astrology is faced with another problem. The seasons differ according to latitude. Those

described in Mesopotamian literature lie within a belt of about six degrees in the northern hemisphere. South of the equator they are all reversed. In Australia, South America and South Africa, for example, the sunny season is December, January and February. Sunny Leo becomes Wintry Leo. Wintry Capricorn becomes Sunny Capricorn. Thus the seasonal system, the foundation of traditional astrology, becomes meaningless.

Astrologers of both camps suggest that lingering effects may exist from the "original" constellations. But what are the original constellations? The vernal equinox in Ptolemy's time was in Aries, in ancient Mesopotamia in Taurus, before that in Gemini, and so on. With this logic, there are no original constellations. Either all are the original ones or none are. So we are either all signs of the zodiac or none.

One may ask, was the precession known in Ptolemy's time? The answer is that it was known but never acted upon. Three centuries before Ptolemy, Hipparchus (~ 180 BCE) described it. Ptolemy discusses it in *The Almagest*. In order to further the epicycle theory, Ptolemy ignored it, then falsified data and diverted clarification of a sun-centered system by several hundred years. Ptolemy's earth-centered epicycle theory haunted astronomy for 14 centuries.

TWINS

Occasionally a fertilized egg cleaves into two, three, or more separate units in the Fallopian tube and after implantation in the uterus each develops into a fetus. These are identical twins (or triplets, etc.). They are always of the same sex because the 46 chromosomes containing identical genes are duplicated.

Sometimes two eggs are expelled during ovulation and each is fertilized by a separate sperm. Such fertilized eggs implant and develop into separate embryos and fetuses. These are nonidentical or fraternal twins and may be of either sex, the same as any brother or sister. The genes are different, since they come from different eggs and different sperms.

Astrology maintains that individuals born at the same time will have similar destinies because all celestial formations and magnetic force fields are the same.

Identical twins pose no problem in astrology since, as evidenced by thousands of multiple-birth case studies, it can be shown that most have similar life styles. The problem arises with non-identical twins. They are not nearly so similar. Rather, they are as similar as any two sisters, brothers, or brother/sister might be. They do not lead the same kinds of lives and do not have similar life styles. Behavioral geneticists has shown that this it is because identical twins are genetically the same and non-identical twins are genetically different.

STATISTICS: DOES AS ASTROLOGY WORK?

Although astrologers vehemently deny it, horoscopic prediction has been shown to be at the statistical "chance" level, about 10 to 11%. Dean and Mather in 1977 studied predictions from 1900 to 1976 (over 1000 investigations) and found 10% correct. Culver and Janna in 1984 surveyed 3011 predictions from 1974 to 1979. Only 11% were correct.

A psychologist from Evanston, Illinois, Vernon Clark, in the 1960s had 20 astrologers match 10 horoscopes with 10 case histories with equivocal results. The test was repeated by Dean and Mather in 1977 with stricter controls, at the chance level.

Dean in 1996 indicated that the reliability of astrology is quite low. For instance, IQ tests are about 90% reliable, personality inventories are about 85%, palmistry is 11% and astrology is 10%. An interesting corollary presented itself regarding horoscopic interpretation. Agreement between astrologers showed a correlation of 0.10 (10%). In other words, there was almost no agreement between astrologers on the interpretation of charts.

The simplest kind of test with which to deal, besides prediction, is to differentiate various extremes from one another, such as mass murderers or serial killers from normal people. The French researcher Michel Gauquelin, in *The Cosmic Clocks*, told of confusion when he asked astrologers to place the charts of 20 criminals and 20 non-criminals in the appropriate pile. "The astrologers invariably select a mixed bag of criminals and peaceful citizens in about the same proportions that a machine would by picking randomly."

Statisticians feel that a sample size of about 60 people (such as 30 violent criminals and 30 normal people) is required for validity. The astrologer should be able to identify 27 of the 30. No astrologer has done this, or as far as I know has even attempted it. Both Culver and Dean have standing monetary offers for those who wish to try.

WHAT'S YOUR SIGN?

The answer to this question may startle many, since everyone wants to know about his sign as well as compatible and incompatible signs. Sign actually means "sun sign," as proclaimed by Linda Goodman. Or, to put it another way, one of the 12 seasonal arcs through which the sun, moon, and planets appear to pass each year.

The Sumerians, Akkadians, and Assyrians were acquainted for a long time with the ram, the bull, the twins (the stars Castor and Pollux), the crab and fish (at the Euphrates river and in other costar areas), the lion, the virgin, the scales, the scorpion, the archer-warrior, the goat, and the water bearer.

Sumerian and Akkadian priests merely named star patterns in an offhand way with seasonal events as reference points for months/seasons in order to construct a workable calendar, since the solar year does not coincide with the lunar months. The reader might reflect for a moment on the profundity of this revelation. The naming of a star cluster to coincide with a season in order to construct a calendar is the only reason you are a Taurus or a Capricorn. Nothing more.

MAN'S VERSATILE MIND

One of the interesting aspects of astrology is that it shows us how adaptable, or versatile, is the mind of man. For most of us, we are what we are told we are. This is illustrated by the P.T. Barnum effect, named after the famous circus entrepreneur. It is the tendency to accept vague, ambiguous and general statements as descriptive of one's unique personality. If a statement is purported to be for Cancers, it will be accepted by Cancers. If for the King, it will be accepted by the King. It is frequently seen in the arena of public relations. Succinctly: 1) have a little something for everyone, and 2) there's a sucker born every minute.

Barnum effect thinking was not unfamiliar to Babylonian priests. They became quite adept at the skill in order to preserve credibility and occasionally their lives. The omen report was an example of first-rate Barnum reporting. For example, if we look at a random report of the early first millennium BCE:

When the Moon occults (eclipses) Jupiter, that year a king will die. When Jupiter enters the midst of the Moon, there will be want in Aharru. The king of Elam will be slain with the sword. When Jupiter enters the midst of the Moon, the market of the land will be low. When Jupiter goes out from behind the Moon, there will be hostility in the land. After two hours of the night had passed, a great star shone from north to south. Its omens are propitious for the king's desire. The King of Akkad will accomplish his mission.

--From Asharidu (the greater),
the king's servant

Analysis: a great many kings ruled in 1000 BCE, and every year one or two died. "Want" is universal. The most common way to be slain, including a king, was with the sword (no time frame is given for

the slaying). The marketplace is always low to most citizens at most times. Hostility is another safe occurrence, somewhere in the land. The scribe, Asharidu, concludes with two obsequious positives and declares he is the king's servant. If you were the king to whom Asharidu wrote his clay message, you might be impressed.

In recent times, the magician James Randi illustrated this concept artfully when he interviewed a biorhythm expert on his radio talk show. Randi requested a biorhythm chart for himself and his secretary, and selected a listener who agreed to accept a free chart in return for a report at the end of two months stating how successful the chart was. The listener promised to keep a day-by-day diary and rate the chart for accuracy.

At the end of two months, the listener phoned and told Randi that he should take this matter very seriously, that her chart was "at least 90% accurate." In reality, purposely, she had been sent Randi's own chart. He blamed the error on his secretary. He then sent her his secretary's chart, which he told her was the correct one. She was thrilled and reported that this one was "even more accurate." He then told her she had received his secretary's chart. He relates, "There was a short pause, then a snort, and the woman hung up."

The French researcher Gauquelin once put an ad in the paper and gave 150 people a 10-page computer interpretation supposedly of their own natal charts, but in reality that of a mass murderer: 94% found it accurately described their character, personal problems and cycles of events.

In other words, it is possible to trick people into the realization of a delusion. It may not seem fair, but the depth of falseness of the belief may require drastic measures to illuminate the fallacy.

Another case of the adaptability of the mind is the believer on the border (cusp) of two signs. He must perform mental gymnastics to keep pace with both, which he does with amazing alacrity. Or the believer who has been incorrectly told his birthday. Perhaps he was adopted as a child. After many years, he learns his correct birthday. What will happen? Answer: he will shed the ways of the old sign and adopt those of the new. He will say he was never "comfortable" with his old sign. He will open the new horoscope and point out if you look carefully at the progression of Saturn in the 12th house....

Unfortunately, I have not come across a case of this. The closest was when a friend of mine had himself in the wrong sign, living for many years as a Scorpio. He would comment about the power and intensity of the sign. One day by chance he told me his birthday. I told him he was not a Scorpio but a Sagittarius. He was silent. I could feel wheels working. Since he knew I was writing an "astrology" book, I took advantage of this and offered to draw up a horoscope. Sure enough, he was a "typical" Sagittarius. No planets in Scorpio. Three in Sagittarius. I presented my finest anti-astrology argument. He was thoughtful. I observed him over the next few months. He never discussed astrology, but his wife told me he occasionally reads the horoscope in the newspaper. Which sign does he look at, I inquired? Both of them, she replied. I have no doubt he will gradually embrace his new sign.

CONCLUSION

No less than 421 books are available in bookstores proclaiming the validity of astrology. Only three exist critical of astrology. One is out of print. One is the author's.

Many reject the idea of having to "prove" astrology. "Astrology is the language of individuality and uniqueness," says Caroline Casey. "Statistics by their very nature are about non-individuality and non-uniqueness. So what if astrology doesn't stand up to scientific testing? What about music? What about poetry? What about religion? Do you want to put music and poetry to a double-blind test?" The answer for music and poetry is no. The answer for astrology is yes.

Some astrologers concede that genes are important, but so are the stars. The stars "impel," they do not "compel," whatever that means. During his research in the 1960s, Gauquelin came across an odd event. It appeared that more major athletes in France were born with Mars rising, or culminating, than the general population (called the "Mars Effect"). A Belgian Committee reviewed the material and found the study ambiguous. A selective bias was found. Faulty reporting placing birth dates and times in clusters due to court houses in small French provinces being closed on weekends and holidays skewed the results--hence, the reason for the Mars Effect. The study was repeated in this country and American athletes came out at the chance level. Unfortunately Gauquelin died in 1991. In 1992, J.W. Nienhuys, a Dutch mathematician, starting from scratch, found that the Gauquelin tests of over a thousand sports champions showed no evidence for the Mars effect.

Astrologers, initially buoyed by the Mars Effect, have refused to accept the fact that the study is not valid. Perhaps they are awaiting a future similar study, or perhaps an uncovering of tablets showing centuries of painstaking horoscopic research that will vindicate astrology. One of the reasons for my book, in addition to pointing out obvious gross astronomical errors, is to clarify the fact that these ancient tablets not exist.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): FIGURE 1--"Things will be good for you" proclaims the oldest known horoscope dated April 29, 410 BCE.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Claudius Ptolemaeus, or Ptolemy (100-170CE)

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