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Intertwining the Classical and Modern Receptions of Astrology

Astrology is a concept that is commonly known in the modern world. One can look in any magazine and find the horoscope section or see articles online about traits of the zodiac signs. One can see personality traits, relationship compatibility and even career suggestions. Although these tools can be interesting and subjectively beneficial, not many people are educated on how astrology began. When diving deeper into the origin of astrology, one will realize that the zodiac cycle is an ancient, sacred and worshipped system. Originating in Babylon, astrology grew and developed as it was studied by many cultures. Astrology evolved from being a method of predicting weather to a tool used for observing the earth's yearly rotation (Evans 15; Koch-Westenholz 78). As the Chaldeans or Neo-Babylonians worked with these ideas, they discovered many connections with what happened in the sky to occurrences on earth involving human destinies and fates. These ideas carry over into today's knowledge of astrology. There is a relevant connection between a planet's energetic demeanors in a natal chart and the Greek and Roman deity with the same name. Modern astrology is deeply intertwined with the discoveries made by ancient civilizations. Greek and Roman mythology are the roots of these astronomical concepts. By utilizing information from ancient texts and modern studies, this paper will explore the origin of astronomy and astrology, why ancient civilizations worshipped the sky and the connections and associations between the planets in natal charts and Greek and Roman mythology.

Babylon is known to be the mother of astronomy, astrology and star-worshipping. The oldest records of astronomy stem from 1700 BC (Evans 15). "The Babylonian division of the night sky into the ways of Ea, Anu and Enlil and the selection of thirty-six stars to mark the months of the year" (10). At the beginning, astrology was mainly used to predict weather. Connecting the division of the night sky to the weather, Old Babylonians created the *Anuma Anu Enlil* that was developed from 1500-1200 BC (15). The *Anuma Anu Enlil* contained 70 clay tablets that consisted of 6500-7000 weather omens (Koch-Westenholz 78). "*Anuma Anu Enlil* are weather omens of a celestial divination series. When translated, the tablets contain thunder, wind and rain omens. Some also deal with mist, clouds, dawn and twilight" (Steele 879). Later in 650 BC, Babylonians created the *Mul.Apin*, which is a "compendium of information about the motions of the planets [which] were believed to provide important signs for the future of the state" (Evans 297, 298). The *Mul.Apin* contained many other types of omens based on fixed stars, the winds, and the behavior of animals (298). As time passed, more observation and studies by other cultures began to take place. From Babylon, these sciences and beliefs spread all over the world (Cumont 20).

“When the Greeks conquered Mesopotamia under Alexander, they found a deep substratum of mythology a learned theology, founded on patient astronomical observations, which professed to reveal the nature of the world regarded as divine, the secrets of the future, and the destinies of man” (42). The Greeks “eventually produced a complex system of planetary astrology, but this was a development of the Hellenistic period, after Greek contact with Babylonian astronomy and astrology” (Evans 298). Greeks and Romans believed that what happened on earth was due to divine powers, so this astral concept of activity relating with the gods in the heavens affecting humans on earth aligned with their beliefs. This divination by the stars lead to a new transformation of understanding the correlation of the sky and what happened on earth. The Greeks and Romans began to observe a “scheme of correspondences between phenomena in the heavens and occurrences on earth” (Cumont 20). The origin of astronomy and astrology along with who created the foundation becomes clear in these texts. Babylonians initiated a study that would evolve from predictions of weather to the prediction of human destiny.

Once different cultures discovered astrology, new interpretations and ideas built upon the origin. They began to make new connections and discovered the significance of numbers with this topic. Cumont describes how “astrology is only a branch of mathematics” (39). Associating the gods of heavens to the laws of mathematics can seem like an incomprehensible relationship, but when one looks at the big picture, our whole universe is flowing through an infinite cosmic cycle of numbers. A primary example of this is living through a full year; this cycle will always be reproduced in the precisely the same manner as the year before. Cumont describes how at regular intervals, the moon and the sun both have their mathematical starting-points that are believed to be naturally governed by a divine power: “Each of the periods marked in the unending flight of time shared the divinity of the stars, particularly the seasons” (39). All four seasons fit perfectly into the 12-month year, with each season being approximately 3 months long. Evans elaborates on how “the motion of the Sun was intimately connected with the annual cycle of agricultural labors. The phases of the Moon governed the reckoning of months” (297). The moon not only shows us the cycles of each month, but also influences “the earth’s tides, as well as its apparent correlation of the lunar cycle with female menstruation” (Mishlove 57). Society’s behavior is believed to shift during full moons, and one can even be called a “lunatic” if one’s behavior changes. These well-known modern concepts of the moon show us how the planets influence our earth and bodies, whether physically or mentally. Along with traditional astrology predicting our weather and seasons, these ancient astronomers began to connect more significant relationships. Cumont shares how the Chaldeans admitted that the principle of life was of the same essence of the “fires of heaven” (41). From these, the soul received its qualities at birth, and at that moment, the stars determined its fate. They believed that this intelligence was divine and allowed the soul to enter relations with the gods above; by contemplating the stars, the faithful received from them the revelation of all knowledge as well as all prescience (41). Cumont describes how “by a logical and fully justified development of primitive belief, which attributed to the sun and moon a powerful effect upon the earth, a preponderating influence over the determination of destiny had also been assigned to the five planets, which like the former traversed the constellations of the zodiac” (34). Cumont states how “if all the movements of the heavens inevitably have their

reactions upon the earth, it is, above all, the destiny of man that depends upon them” (40). The most important conceived planets were the moon and the sun, followed by the five planets known at the time. These findings describe how the concept of time, the four seasons and the moon and the sun are worshipped because of the significant effect they have on the earth. That is why these ancient civilizations believed these sacred concepts, along with the notion that a human’s destiny is decided by the heavens at one’s time of birth. This belief is where the zodiac signs and birth charts stem from.

As knowledge advanced, these planets all gained an association with the divinities of mythology (Cumont 40). Astrology began to connect the greater gods and goddesses with planets and minor ones with fixed stars. Through these connections and associations, one can better predict one’s fate through calculating what constellation that planet was in at the time of one’s birth. This technique of connecting planets to constellations at one’s time of birth is called a natal chart, a map showing the positions of the planets at the time of one’s birth, and which zodiac sign each planet is under. “Planets in a birth [natal] chart represent particular energies, or modes of action, and the signs show the way in which these energies are expressed” (Cavendish 67). There is a significant association between the function of the planet and the Roman deity with that name. For example, the planets Mercury, Venus and Mars all follow the same ideology as their equivalent Roman god/goddess. Evan argues that “these parallels are too striking to be due to chance” (297). In *The Complete Handbook of Astrology*, Marshall Cavendish illustrates how “Mercury, in his mythological role as Messenger of the Gods, was responsible for conveying information between mortals and the deities residing on Mount Olympus” (75). The Roman god Mercury is also known as the Greek god Hermes. The planet Mercury in a natal chart fulfills the same functions that Hermes does, that is, “reveals the mental frequency on which we operate – how we think and generally communicate” (Cavendish 75). Cavendish describes how Mercury in the natal chart symbolizes the power of wisdom and self-knowledge, but also the mind of the trickster (75). Some even “call an unpredictable person mercurial, . . . referring to the planet, and Roman god, Mercury” (Mishlove 57). Along with this, Mercury corresponds to the rational and objective mind, reading, writing, languages, discussion, travel and general communication (Cavendish 75). The Greek goddess Aphrodite, also known as Venus, is known to be, “one of the great divinities of the Greeks, the goddess of love and beauty (Smith 74). In natal charts, the planet Venus refers to our needs for harmony, affection and relationships. “At a more fundamental level, however, Venus is concerned with what attracts and repels us, and how we respond to these influences” (Cavendish 77). The goddess Venus directly relates with the energetic qualities of the planet Venus. Cavendish states that the planet Venus also represents physical attraction, close partnerships of all kinds and women and feminine sexuality (77). The Greek god Ares, as Smith states, is the “Greek god of war” and the “personification of bold force and strength” (88-89). The Roman name for Ares is Mars, and there is a strong connection between the god Mars and the planet Mars for this reason. Cavendish illustrates how “at an instinctive level, Mars represents our determination to battle for survival” (79). Mars shows how to obtain and preserve what we value. With this, Mars symbolizes all the qualities which help one achieve desires, and therefore, self-image, initiative, courage, physical strength and stamina (79). The association between the god Mars and the planet

Mars continues to show as Cavendish states how on other levels, the planet Mars is associated with athleticism and sport, war and all military affairs and men and male sexuality (79). By learning about these Greek and Roman deities, and having modern knowledge on the planets' demeanors in a natal chart, one will discover a significant connection among the associations between mythology and astrology. These findings connect the associations with ancient mythology and modern astrology to prove that the observations and discoveries made by ancient civilizations have carried over into today's studies.

In conclusion, astrology is a study that has been developed over many years. The classical reception of the sky connects to the modern concepts of astrology. The zodiac cycle is more than just personality traits, relationship compatibility and even career suggestions. Ancient texts and scholarly studies illuminate the origin and history of astrology to show that these concepts spread among ancient civilizations over thousands of years. The reasons these ancient civilizations practiced astrology are extremely relevant to the modern world we live in. Without fall, winter, spring and summer, our earth would have no cycle for agriculture. The sun and the moon together govern the time we spend in our yearly rotation, breaking it down into months. Without this persistent ancient knowledge, we would not understand our world today. From all the evidence presented on ancient astronomy and astrology, and their associations with Greek and Roman mythology, it becomes apparent that these ancient concepts about the stars, planets, time and the seasons all deeply intertwine and connect to the present-day knowledge of astrology.

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