

A JUNGIAN VIEW OF ASTROLOGY

by Enzo Barillà

One of the first associations the word ‘astrology’ tends to conjure up is foretelling the future. Yet such a link to a sort of *ars divinatoria* immediately vilifies and reduces it to the vulgar fortune-telling suffix so familiar to all in words like cartomancy, chiromancy, geomancy, to name but a few of the more well known ones. In point of fact, however, astrology is far more than this.

Franz Cumont, who gave a series of American lectures from 1911 to 1912 that were later collected in the volume *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans*, branded astrology as “That most monstrous of all illusions...daughter of superstition...[an] hallucination, the most tenacious to have seized the human mind...absurd doctrine...a desperate mistake on which the intellectual energies of countless generations have been spent.” Yet in spite of it all, and himself, this distinguished scholar was forced to admit its sacred origins: “It’s point of departure was faith, faith in heavenly divinities that wrought a certain manifest influence on the world,” and “Babylon was the first to erect the edifice of a cosmic religion based on science that guided man, his actions and his relations together with the heavenly divinities in the general harmony of an ordered nature.”

At this point we can call upon the Assyriologist Giovanni Pettinato for assistance by citing from his *Manuale dell’Astrologo* (‘Astrologer’s Handbook’), where he discusses the tablets making up the *Enuma Anu Enlil*, which literally means “When the god of Heaven when the god of Earth,” Anu being the former and Enlil the latter.

«Heaven and Earth both send univocal signs. Each does so of its own accord, but not independently, for Heaven and Earth are interconnected. A bad sign in the Sky is also bad on Earth. A bad sign on Earth is also bad in the Heavens.” (1)

According to the German scholar and Assyriologist Carl Bezold, the 70 tablets making up the series surely date back beyond 600 BC, although others repute it to be much older, and represent a corpus of celestial omens for Chaldaean astrologers.

Let me say a few words here about the structure of these omens. Each omen begins with a conditional proposition that yields the result of the prophecy. In other words, a protasis or subordinate ‘if’ clause introduces the proposition as the necessary condition for the fulfilment of what is expressed in the adopsis, or main proposition. So let’s take a look at one to get a clearer grasp. Take the omen of Tablet Two, “If an eclipse begins in the South and the South clears up, fall of Elam.” Here we have a single conditional proposition that, if fulfilled, will yield the posited result. This is the structure. Another example of the simplest kind of omen, a condition and its result, is the following: “If there is an eclipse of the Moon and the weather darkens, hard times shall befall the king and the people of the country will experience a terrible famine.” This is how the book is structured.

One peculiarity of the Assyrian kingdom was that the observation of the stars was the purview of a particular circle of experts specifically charged with protecting the king. Yet this task did not mean protecting him from physical harm. Rather, the mission of the court astrologers was to make sure the king did not stray from the straight and narrow path of righteousness the gods had laid out for him. The astrologers acted as advisers to the king and the king was to act in harmony with what the gods commanded. Obviously, understanding the will of the gods meant interpreting the celestial signs. The court experts were thus commanded to observe and interpret the various signs the gods emanated and suggest the rites the king should observe to avoid any harm presaged by the stars. It was also their duty to ensure the king carried out all his priestly offices, that he committed no sin

whatsoever against the celestial divinities and that he purify himself of even the slightest hint of impurity so that perfect harmony should reign between the celestial gods and the king, their vicar on earth. It is thus equally as obvious just how closely astrology verged upon the religious.

It was from these beginnings in Mesopotamia that astrology later arrived in Greece through the teachings of Berossus, who established a school on the island of Kos around 280 BC. While it would take too long to follow the recondite path this ancient art took in its development, for our purposes it is sufficient to recall that Greek science is an affirmation of the world's essential and substantial unity. It is the furnace that astrological dogma was forged in—the solidarity between man and the universe in the interdependence of the part and the whole.

Many have wondered when and why mankind began to attribute a particular meaning to celestial bodies, or when and why they turned from objects into symbolic images. Psychologically speaking, we can venture that it took place in conjunction with the rise of consciousness.

Erich Neumann wrote that “the development of consciousness led to a series of manifestations of the unconscious, which proceeds from the complete ‘invisibility of the archetype per se’ to an initial **flowering of the image, which paradoxically is hard to distinguish because the images** seem contrasting and in appearance mutually exclusive, until the primordial image itself is made manifest.” (2)

For greater insight into this particular issue let me suggest turning to Neumann's masterly *The Origins and History of Consciousness*.

The same opinion seems to be shared by Nicola Sementovsky-Kurilo, who with his usual acumen and insight remarked that, “Man's imaginative capacity gradually broadened as his consciousness rose to ‘greater heights.’ Yet, despite this, the *firmamentum internum*, the ‘inner firmament,’ remained intact and unchanged in its essence, the form it was created in once for all eternity; it appears over and over again in countless variations, developing through life. It's what can be called the very essence of astrology, around which formed all the ideas and concepts stemming from it. Yet this raises a pressing question for our modern cast of mind: has the essence of astrology achieved its efficacy because early man has, so to speak, projected his emotions and experience upon the heavens, thus ‘humanising’ the stars, or, on the contrary, was it that he had discovered in their visible image the mirror of his own nature and linked their changes to the events marking his own existence?” (3)

According to Giuseppe Bezza, “the Zodiac is the most universal of symbols. It is found in substantially identical form everywhere, with its round shape, twelve signs and seven classic planets. Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, India, Tibet, the Americas, Scandinavia, Madagascar, and even among such African peoples as the Dogon and Bambara in Mali, all are familiar with it and have used it as a matrix of a divining art.” (4)

All of what we have seen so far leads us naturally to suppose that astrology corresponds to a genuine symbolic system whose roots run deep into mythic consciousness.

Indeed, André Barbault, when looking at the rise of astrology, said “Its symbolic origins coincide with the monument of mythology, which represents a real gospel of astrology. From the remotest of times up to Hellenic civilisation, astrology was bound up with a mythology and celestial rite that were at the same time science, poetry, religion”. (4) Later, in commenting on a passage by Esther Harding regarding the moon as universal symbol of woman, Barbault remarked that “When

you look at these myths and legends of such dissimilar origins, for they were conceived by peoples as different as they were distant from one another, yet so extraordinarily similar as to constitute a universal symbol, the only explanation possible is that this body of mythology represents a psychological reality, a sort of ancestral substrate of the collective anima, or collective unconscious—the archaic image of myth projected upon the cosmos in the likeness of an entity endowed with divine attributes.” (6)

According to Robert Amadou, astrological doctrine is based on “the unity of the cosmos and the inter-dependency of all the components of this vast complex, components that have been conceived and are perceivable by analogy. It is this doctrine that justifies and shapes astrology.” (7)

Here Barbault adds that “The doctrine of an astrological cosmos that Robert Amadou mentions casts man as a small world, or microcosm, comparable to the large world, or macrocosm. The cosmos is an immense being all of whose parts are linked, are subject to the same laws and work analogously. The energy that animates the celestial bodies is of the same nature as that which animates mankind. A single principle governs planetary deities and electrons, the passions of Jupiter and incestuous love. The same élan vital circulates from one to the other, from microcosm to the macrocosm, and since mankind is made in the image of the world, we can come to know both through the study of one thing only. There is a perfect synchronism between these two worlds, and that’s why things in the heavens and on earth proceed in parallel.” (8)

The finest expression of this mystery is surely found in the *Tabula Smaragdina*, or Emerald Tablet: that which is below is like that which is above.

Let us now move on in our endeavour with the help of the instruments that depth psychology has to offer.

Jolande Jacobi notes that “the divine images of the great mythologies are nothing but projected intra-psychic factors, nothing but personified archetypes.” (9)

During his *Dream Analysis* seminars, Jung dedicated the conferences on 12 April 1929 and 12 November 1929 to an explanation of certain concepts in astrology, vigorously asserting at one point—and perhaps he was the first to do so—that “astrology was the first form of psychology, it’s an extremely young science, having been developed only since the 19th century.” (10) Again, in referring to Rodolphus Goclenius, he observed: “This author was practically the last of officially appointed professors of astrology, which was a kind of psychology but with all the characteristics and qualities peculiar to a projection. It was our psychology in its oldest form.” And then: “In Schiller’s *Wallenstein* there’s a conversation between Wallenstein and an astrologer in which the latter says: ‘In your heart abide the stars of your fate.’ This is a translation of astrology in psychological terms.”

Barbault too turns out to be a perfect Jungian when he writes that “Thus, insofar as our epistemological enquiry is concerned, astrology is originally and diachronically, that is in the sense of how it arose and has come down to us, a system created *by* the human anima *for* the human anima. In it, the Psyche is in fact searching for and configuring itself with respect to the universe, its mirror...This suggests to us that the unconscious is the realm of the phenomenon called astrology: it is the ‘place’ where astrology came into being, where popular astrology draws its faith from, where learned astrology forges its philosophy of life, where the practise of astrology is perpetually at work...It is thus only natural that the system for decoding and interpreting the astral language comes under, essentially and above all, the rubric of a psychoanalytical hermeneutics.” (11)

With the Cartesian revolution and the triumph of reason, astrology was banished from university lecture halls and left to wander an outcast in disgrace and oblivion. Are the gods of mythology dead at last? Not quite. Towards the end of the 19th century we witnessed a resurgence of the Art of Urania, and the discoveries of psychoanalysis informed it with new vigour. “Astrology is a primordial experience similar to alchemy,” Jung states in his *Psychology and Alchemy*. (12) Commenting on several passages of Paracelsus, the *Meister* of Zurich noted in 1946: “He considered the psyche to be as dark as the night sky sown with stars, a sky where the planets and constellations of fixed stars are represented by archetypes in all their luminous and numinous nature. The starry sky is in fact an open book of cosmic projection, the reflection of mythologems, of archetypes. In this view astrology and alchemy, the two ancient representations of the psychology of the collective unconscious go hand in hand.” (13)

We briefly mentioned the numinous character of astrology and the power of its symbolic language. Here again Jung proved to be both insightful and admonitory: “The main danger is to succumb to the fascinating influence of archetypes, an especially concrete peril if we do not make the archetypal images conscious to ourselves. Since there already is a predisposition to psychosis, it can actually happen that archetypal figures, inherent in which is a certain autonomy by virtue of their numinous nature, break free of any conscious control, thereby acquiring full independence and engendering phenomena of possession.” (14)

It is not uncommon to hear people ask how much ‘sway’ over their lives do our astrological signs at birth have. In other words, are we predetermined? How much freedom of action do we have?

Asked if she believed in predetermination, Marie-Louise von Franz replied in *The Way of the Dream* that “Many lives bear pre-existing models. You are born either male or female, white or black, in a certain place and not in another, of a certain family and not another. There is indeed a pre-constituted model but there’s also a margin, a certain freedom. If this were not the case, we could put paid to therapy and conclude that each person runs true to his life-model and nothing can be done about it. By reading the model, making it conscious and interpreting dreams we do not escape our fate but, simply put, we can impress upon it a positive sense. There’s a difference between accepting one’s destiny and living it positively and denying it and being subservient to it against one’s will. We can thus conclude that, although there is a certain degree of predestination, it is not absolute. This has nothing to do with the fatalistic idea of an Allah who decides everything and everything proceeds as he has decided. We can change things, and this gives meaning to therapy. We can change things by virtue of understanding the model of our existence and, hence, avoid certain negative consequences. We can impress upon destiny a more positive spin in this connection.” (15)

It seems to me that in addressing the issue of freedom in this book-length interview von Franz expressed in simplified terms what she had written about the substantial unity of psyche and matter in her book of the same title (*Psyche and Matter*), and it would be useful to recall it here. “In both poles, the absence of freedom and a certain automatism are dominant. The more psychic processes flow into models of behaviour and into physiological processes, the less freedom there is. Reactions become automatic and necessary. The same thing also happens in the ultra-violet pole of the spirit... Only at the centre of the psychic spectrum, within the conscious Ego, is there a certain freedom.” (16)

Yet this still does not enlighten us about the existence or the importance of any specific ‘astral determinism.’ But first we must clear away a misunderstanding that is blocking our view. “So called ‘astral determinism’, which is thought to be detectable by the nativity figure, is altogether alien to the external conditions the newborn is subject to social class, geographic climate, family

milieu, and economic, social and cultural circumstances...The nativity figure cannot take into account what all these factors, taken together, represent in the life of the person because the celestial 'mechanism' 'turns' disinterestedly for all individuals on the planet." (17)

If we recall that the unconscious is both the 'place' and the origin of the phenomenon of astrology, and if we subscribe to the idea that the newborn is not a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate on which the environment impresses its indelible fingerprints, then 'astral determinism' ends up representing nothing but a structure of origin, an ensemble of innate tendencies, a steamer trunk of inner predispositions. Astrologers can thus know only "an individual's inner constellation but not what hand the external environment of lived experience has had in shaping the 'acquired character,' which neutralises or amplifies the innate character." (18)

This view also seems to be authoritatively corroborated by the 'acorn theory' James Hillman posited so engagingly in *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*. "We all come into the world bearing the impressed image of a precise individual character endowed with indelible traits." (19)

Now that astral determinism and its influence has been brought into proper perspective and freed of a fatalistic aura that, we think, has nothing to do with it, let's take a look at the question of individual freedom vis à vis an individual's greater or lesser awareness, as well as in terms of the 'quality' of the relationship the Ego establishes with the unconscious.

Doing astrology means working with archetypes and symbols, and that's a good thing, at least from a Jungian point of view. "For Jung the sum of archetypes thus means the sum of all the human psyche's latent possibilities—a vast, inexhaustible trove of ancient insights about the deepest ties linking God, man and the cosmos. Discovering the contents of this trove in one's psyche, arousing it to new life and integrating it into consciousness means nothing less than suppressing the isolation of an individual and putting him into the flow of eternal becoming. What we have talked about so far thus becomes something more than knowledge and psychology. It becomes a doctrine and a way. The archetype, that primordial font of the universal human experience, resides in the unconscious, whence it powerfully invades our life. Resolving its projections and raising its contents to consciousness is our task and our duty." (20)

Since my remarks were intended as an overview, I'd like to conclude with the words of my mentor «It is thus not surprising that Jung, along with several other psychoanalysts, were struck by the realisation that there is an identity between what a psychoanalytic quest unveils and what an analysis of a zodiac figure reveals. It is the same inner universe being explored, and so it contains the same psychic products—symbolic language, analogic keys, repeat automatisms, transference, condensation, over-determination, substitution. It can thus be seen how it is that astrology deciphers a nativity figure in much the same manner as an analyst interprets dreams." (21)

FOOTNOTES

- 1) Giovanni Pettinato, *La scrittura celeste*, Mondadori, Milano, 1998, p. 106
- 2) Erich Neumann, *La Grande Madre*, Astrolabio, Roma 1981, p. 18.
- 3) Nicola Sementovsky-Kurilo, *Der Mensch griff nach den Sternen*, Werner Classen Verlag, Zuriich, 1970, p. 17.
- 4) Giuseppe Bezza, *L'astrologia - Storia e metodi*, Teti editore, Milano 1980, p. 115.
- 5) André Barbault, *De la psychanalyse à l'Astrologie*, Seuil, Paris 1961, p. 84.
- 6) *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- 7) Cited by André Barbault in *De la psychanalyse à l'Astrologie*, **Idem**, p. 19.

- 8) Ibid., p. 20, 21.
- 9) Jolande Jacobi, *Complesso, Archetipo, Simbolo*. Boringhieri, Torino, 1971, p. 100.
- 10) Carl Gustav Jung, *Analisi dei sogni*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2003, p. 415.
- 11) André Barbault, *L'Astrologie certifiée*, Seuil, Paris 2006, p. 184.
- 12) Carl Gustav Jung, *Psicologia e Alchimia*, Boringhieri, Torino 1981, p. 257.
- 13) Carl Gustav Jung, *Riflessioni teoriche sull'essenza della psiche*. Opere di C.G. Jung, vol. VIII, Boringhieri, Torino, 1983, p. 213.
- 14) Carl Gustav Jung, *Gli archetipi dell'inconscio collettivo* - Opere di C.G. Jung, vol. IX, tomo I, Boringhieri, Torino, 1983, p. 37.
- 15) Marie Louise von Franz, *Il mondo dei sogni*, Red edizioni, Como, 1990, p. 215.
- 16) Marie Louise von Franz, *Psiche e Materia*, Boringhieri, Torino, pag. 10
- 17) André Barbault, *L'Astrologie certifiée*, cit., p. 204.
- 18) Ibid., p. 217.
- 19) James Hillman, *Il Codice dell'Anima*, Adelphi, Milano, 1997, p. 18.
- 20) Jolande Jacobi, *La psicologia di Jung*, Boringhieri, Torino, 1982, p. 68.
- 21) André Barbault, *L'astrologia, psicologia del profondo dell'antichità*, Klaros n. 1-2 (giugno-dicembre 1995), Mozzon Giuntina S.p.A. – Il sedicesimo – Firenze 1995, p. 22