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Book Review

Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, *The Daimon in Hellenistic Astrology: Origins and Influence* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), xiii + 573 pp., €186.00 (hbk), ISBN: 978-9004306-20-2.

To invert a saying, this book delivers much, much more than it promises. Ostensibly, it is about one component, albeit an important and complex one, of Hellenistic astrology. Actually, it is the entire story of Hellenistic astrology, told from the narrative ground of that component. It is also a remarkably full and proficient technical manual of Hellenistic astrology and it draws extensively on the entire corpus of horoscopes now extant and recovered from the period, both 'literary' (i.e. from texts, principally Vettius Valens' *Anthologies*) and original (principally from Egyptian papyrus fragments). All serious students of ancient astrology, whether their interests are cultural-historical or whether they stem from engagement with astrology today, will want to have access to Greenbaum's work.

Who or what is the *daimon*? 'Intermediary' is perhaps the best one-word answer: intermediary between the world of god(s) and the world of men, or intermediary between the higher and the lower levels of the *kosmos*, the ordered whole. Before astrology arrived on the Greek scene (more precisely, the Greek-*speaking* scene), *daimon* was present as 'the veiled countenance of divine activity' (Burkert 1985: 180, appositely quoted by Greenbaum on p. 299). Likewise, '*Daimon* does not designate a specific class of divine beings, but a peculiar mode of activity' (Burkert 1985: 180, quoted in Greenbaum, p. 300).

The Western tradition knows the *daimon* best as the voice of conscience that spoke to Socrates, and which, many centuries later, Plutarch explored in his essay *On the Genius of Socrates* (note the Latin term, which in Christian times shifts into something approximating a 'guardian angel'). Burkert again is relevant:

> When Socrates sought to find a word for that unique inner experience which would compel him…to stop, say no, and turn about, rather than speaking of something divine, he preferred to speak of something daimonly, the *daimonium*… This was open to misinterpretation as dealing with spirits, as a secret cult. It cost Socrates his life. (1985: 181)

It did indeed. Fortunately, the astrological *daimon* was usually less exacting. Ethically, it could be good, bad, or indifferent.

The *daimon* is best considered not as a primary astral agent, like the planets, but rather as something that works through (a) its 'place' (*topos*—modern 'house') and (b) its 'lot' (*klêros*). In astrology, there is a circle of twelve celestial (and infernal) places

that runs counterclockwise from the all-important ascendant or rising point in the East, first underground for a semicircle of six places, and then above the horizon from the setting point in the West back to the ascendant. The celestial bodies and the signs of the zodiac revolve daily through all twelve places. The eleventh place is the Good Daimon, the twelfth the Evil Daimon. Diametrically opposite them on the circle are Good Fortune (fifth place) and Bad Fortune (sixth place). (On the logic of the disposition of these four places in the great circle, see Chapter 2.)

The pairing of Good Daimon and Good Fortune (*agathos daimôn* and *agathê tychê*), and likewise of their opposites, is crucial, not simply because one would expect—or hope—that someone with a good *daimon* (whatever that is) might enjoy good fortune, but because of the connection between fortune and *character*. *For your daimon is what you choose*. Here, for Greenbaum, lies the importance of Plato's Myth of Er at the end of the *Republic* (p. 394). The choice of *daimon*—and of a personal *daimon* at that (see Chapter 7)—introduces into a universe of inexorable celestial revolutions causing inexorable terrestrial outcomes an element of choice and change, whether for better or for worse. This easing of Greek determinism was 'influenced by Egyptian and Mesopotamian ideas' (p. 391; on Egypt see Chapter 3). 'In this view, fortune is not blind or random, but a goddess who controls destiny. Fate is not utterly predetermined; its judgements can be appealed' (p. 391).

If the places are relatively straightforward, the lots are anything but. The lots (with all of the connotations of 'rolling the dice') are points on the zodiac determined by arcs added to or subtracted from the ascendant. The 'lot of the *daimon*', for example, is determined, in some circumstances, by calculating the longitudinal distance between the Sun and the Moon and adding it to the longitude of the ascendant. There are several lots, of which, not coincidentally, those of the Daimon and of Fortune are the best attested (Chapter 9). Other lots are those of Eros (Love) and Ananke (Necessity) (Chapter 10). Again, note the interplay of what is or might be and what has to be.

In the context of her chapter on 'Allotment, the Daimon and Astrology' (Chapter 8), Greenbaum provides as succinct a statement of the positives and negatives of the uses of the lots in Hellenistic astrology as one could wish. The principal negative is the apparent imposition upon the chart of 'needless clutter and confusion' by the addition of the lots to the planets (p. 301). But this can also be claimed as a positive. 'If the planets themselves do not show a particular outcome in a life, the lots can provide another layer of interpretation for that life' (p. 301). The danger, as Greenbaum wittily remarks, 'is not a *reductio* but a *multiplicatio ad absurdum*' (p. 301).

In Chapter 5, under the heading 'Divergent Paths', Greenbaum discusses 'Daimons and Astrology in Gnosticism and Mithraism'. Her assertion that Gnosticism in general viewed the celestial powers as malevolent, while Mithraism viewed them as benign, is uncontroversial. This reviewer, as a student of Mithraism, would like to comment further on Greenbaum's take on Mithraism. Not unpredictably, I commend her analysis in Chapter 5, sections 3.1 and 3.2, noting her sympathy to my filiation of the cult through the politically powerful astrologer Balbillus and the Commagenian dynast C. Iulius Antiochus Epiphanes Philopappus of Athens, whom I identify with the astrologer Antiochus of Athens (pp. 183-84). I am also in awe of her hypothesis (pp. 185-92) that the nativity of Mithras, represented on the relief from Housesteads (Northumberland), encodes the horoscope of a god—and of the universe—intimated by that same astrologer Antiochus.

All in all, this is a remarkable work that explores not only the concept of the astrological *daimon* as it developed in the early centuries CE in the context of the religions and cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean but also the development of the complex systems of nascent astrology as a whole. It is a demanding study, but an essential one for those seeking to understand the ideas of fate and fortune current in antiquity.

Reference

Burkert, Walter. 1985. *Greek Religion* (John Raffan, trans; Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

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