



A Hitherto Unnoticed Criticism of Astrology: Liber de reprobatione iudiciorum astrologiae

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Source: *Isis*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (Nov., 1939), pp. 68-78

Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of The History of Science Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/226020>

Accessed: 15/07/2008 16:46

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A hitherto unnoticed criticism of astrology

Liber de reprobatione iudiciorum astrologiae

In a Vatican manuscript of the second half of the fourteenth century or the early years of the fifteenth is an anonymous criticism of astrology which seems not to have been hitherto noticed. (1) It is the second item in the manuscript and from the fact that it is preceded by the *De configuratione qualitatum* of NICHOLAS ORESME, which is also anonymous here (2), and that it shares some of the characteristics of ORESME's several known attacks upon astrology, might be thought to be by him or HENRY OF HESSE or someone of their school. It may also be recalled that WALTER CATO, penitentiary to JOHN XXII, is said to have written a work against astrologers (3) that does not seem to have come to light. Or our work may be by BERNARD OF VERDUN, since, as we shall see, an anonymous astronomical treatise which immediately follows it is by him. If the criticism of astrology is also by him, it would date about 1300, long before ORESME and HENRY OF HESSE.

In the previous paragraph we alluded to our text as a criticism of astrology, and it so starts off in the Vatican manuscript. But the title, *Book of Reprobation of Astrological Judgments*, really does not apply to the entire text. Towards the end there begins a "Third Part on Natural Astronomy (or, Astrology), How God Disposes Inferior Bodies by Superiors" (4). Moreover, a first part is

(1) Vatic. lat. 3097, fols. 23r, col. 1-50v, col. 1 : "Incipit liber de reprobatione iudiciorum astrologie. Distinctio prima de reprobatione iudiciorum astrologie in generali per auctores et rationes sacre scripture. Nunc ad intelligendum qualiter iudicia sint spernenda penitusque repudianda stilum nostri sermonis vertimus.../... virtus fortitudo potestas et imperium per infinita secula seculorum. Amen." The remainder of fol. 50v is blank.

(2) *Ibid.*, fols. 17-22v, col. 1.

(3) WADDING, *Scriptores ordinis minorum*, editio novissima, Rome, 1906, p. 102.

(4) Vatic. lat. 3097, fol. 45v, col. 2 : "Tertia pars de astronomia naturali

missing in which the anonymous author set forth the method by which astrologers arrived at their judgments. The opening words of the present text (5) suggest a transition from a preceding section, and later on the author refers to what he said on the natures and significations of the fixed stars in Distinction 6 and on the places of nativity and habitation of diverse nativities and their movements in Distinction 10, first chapter (6). These references do not fit any of the divisions of our present text and apply to sections of the aforesaid missing first part (7). Briefly then the plan of the work was as follows. First, the methods of judicial astrology were set forth as a basis for subsequent criticism of the art. Then came the second part of reprobation of judicial astrology. But then in conclusion the edge was taken off this criticism by approving natural astrology and censuring only superstitious astrology.

The extant text in our manuscript is divided into thirty-three Distinctions, of which the first twenty-six deal with the reprobation of astrology, while the last seven (27-33) expound natural astrology. Some are subdivided into chapters. I list herewith their Latin titles where these are given, with the opening words of each chapter and indication of the page and column of the manuscript where each begins.

Dist.	Cap.	Fol., Col.	
1	23r-1		De reprobatione iudiciorum astrologie in generali per auctores et rationes sacre scripture.
	1		Nunc ad intelligendum qualiter iudicia sint spernenda penitus...
2	23r-2		Beatus Augustinus libro de doctrina christiana ubi arguit de artibus magorum...
3	23v-1		Quod autem non a constellationibus sed a voluntate hominis...
4	24r-1		Idem Augustinus 5 de civitate dei non immerito creditur cum astrologi multa vera...

quomodo deus per superiora corpora disponit inferiora. Postquam de astrologia superstitiosa processit narratio consequenter de indagacione astrologie naturalis."

(5) Quoted in note 1 *supra*.

(6) *Ibid.*, fol. 47r, col. 2-47v, col. 1.

(7) Once reference is made to a Distinction of the Second Part, but first must be meant: *Ibid.*, fol. 35v, col. 2, Dist. 15 opens, "In distinctione 3a secunde partis agitur de significationibus 12 signorum et in divisione zodiaci per 360 gradus."

Dist.	Cap.	Fol., Col.	
	5	24 ^v -1	In supradicta vero auctore Augustino de civitate dei sequitur nota horoscopi notati...
	2	24 ^v -2	De reprobatione vero tam eorum qui iudicia tradiderunt quam ipsorum iudiciorum probando eos esse fidei nostre blasphematores et infideles mendaces...
	3	25 ^r -2	Utrum stelle actus humanos habeant significare tantum secundum astrologos autem efficere.
	1		Illud quoque pretermittendum non est quod astrologi blasphemando dicunt...
	2	25 ^v -1	Quibus resistendum est probando stellas non ita efficere in inferioribus ut posse immutare hominis voluntatem...
	3	26 ^v -1	Et quod operatio corporum superiorum sit naturalis et non per electionem...
	4	26 ^v -1	Utrum omnia de necessitate contingant.
	1		Dicunt etiam astrologi blasphemando quod omnes actus humani et mores...
	2	27 ^r -1	Nudatis (?) blasphemii sicut est iustum eos rationibus communicamus...
	3	27 ^v -2	Auctores etiam astrologi aliquando sibi ipsis sunt contradicentes...
	5	28 ^r -2	Utrum corpora celestia sint animata.
	1		Quidam autem philosophorum dixerunt animas esse creatas ab intelligentiis...
	2	28 ^v -1	Quod autem non sint animata corpora celestia probatur sic...
	6	28 ^v -2	Utrum sola virtute divina miraculose an etiam aliqua virtute possint impediri ea que predicuntur ab astrologis ne eveniant. Fortasse dicet aliquis astrologorum...
	7	29 ^r -1	Utrum de futuris contingentibus sit scientia et an huiusmodi valeant ab astrologis veraciter pronuntiari.
		29 ^r -2	Et quod de futuris contingentibus ad utrumlibet non possit esse scientia...
	8	29 ^v -1	Utrum gratia et virtutes animi necnon et bona exteriora que agunt homines constellationibus sint attribuenda.
	1		Hoc solum de precedentibus apparat (<i>sic</i>) infidelitas eorum qui iudicia tradiderunt...
	2	29 ^v -2	De predictione vero dicit Alkabitius quod Mercurius (?) est significator...

- | Dist. | Cap. | Fol.,
Col. | |
|-------|-------|---------------|--|
| | 3 | | De elemosinarum largitione dicit Cahel ben Bisr israhelita in libro suo... |
| | 4 | | De cultu unius dei Alkabucius (<i>sic</i>) secunda differentiarum sic dicit... |
| 9 | 307-2 | | Utrum scelera ex dispositione syderum perpetrentur. |
| | 1 | | Contra stellis malivolis attribuunt scelera de vitio sodomito dicit Ptolomeus... |
| | 2 | 307-1 | De cultura ydolorum dicit Alkabitus secunda differentiarum libri sui... |
| | 3 | | Et sicut de peccato ydolatrie ita de ceteris facinoribus... |
| 10 | 307-2 | | Quod vanum et superstitiosum est fundamentum iudiciorum que a fabulis poetarum ducunt originem. |
| | 1 | | Est preterea sciendum ad astrologorum infidelitatem monstrandam quod superstitiosum... |
| | 2 | 317-1 | Est miranda dementia gentilium qui non solum pisces... |
| | 3 | 317-2 | Ex predictis apparet dementia et infidelitas astrologorum.. |
| 11 | 317-1 | | De reprobatione magni anni. |
| | 1 | | Nunc superest investigare de questione magni anni quidam namque... |
| | 2 | 317-2 | Contra quos obicitur a privatione adah bitum non est regressus secundum naturam... |
| | 3 | 327-2 | Iterum ex magni anni positione sequitur alius error scilicet quod mundus sit eternus... |
| 12 | 327-1 | | Quod auctores iudiciorum sunt mendaces sibi que invicem contradicentes. |
| | 1 | | Deprobatis astrorum iudicibus tamquam infidelibus et blasphemis... |
| | 2 | 337-2 | Deinde in tertia differentia subiungit Albumazar supra-dictus... |
| | 3 | | Et sicut Albumazar dixit Ptolomeum esse mendacem ita ipse Ptolomeus dixit alios auctores esse mendacissimos... |
| | 4 | 337-1 | Preterea in exaltatione planetarum plurimum discordant... |
| | 5 | | Contradicunt etiam sibi Dorotheus et Ptolomeus sicut dicit Omar in libro nativitatum... |
| | 6 | | Amplius inter antiquos fuerunt multe opiniones de effectibus planetarum... |

- | Dist. | Cap. | Fol.,
Col. | |
|-------|-------|---------------|---|
| 13 | 33v-2 | | Quod doctores seu auctores magisterii astrorum fuerunt insipientes ac ydiote ac multa puerilia et irrationabilia risuque digna in scriptis suis relinquentes. |
| | 1 | | Postquam probavimus eos fuisse infideles et mendaces consequenter manifestanda est eorum insipientia... |
| | 2 | 34r-1 | Deinde subiungit Albumazar quod gemini est signum magnatorum... |
| | 3 | 34r-2 | De significatione vero partium humani corporis the question marh should go with scelerata(?) est eorum traditio.. |
| | 4 | | Amplius inveniuntur multa in scriptis eorum tam pueriliter et insipienter tradita... |
| | 5 | | Alkabicus prima differentia dicit in ariete saturnus habet pectus iupiter... |
| | 6 | 34v-1 | Albumasar vero dicit quod mercurius significat delectationes et habundantiam... |
| | 7 | 35r-1 | Zahel autem mirum stolide ac insipienter et nichilominus malitiose loquitur... |
| 14 | 35r-1 | | De reprobatione proprietatum et significationum 12 domorum. |
| | 1 | | Postremo ad reprobationem in generali tam iudiciorum quam eorum qui iudicia confinxerunt... |
| | 2 | 35r-2 | Inchoemus a reprobatione eorum que dicuntur in distinctione (x) partis secunde huius operis... |
| | 3 | 35v-1 | Rursum Ptolomeus dicit libro 2 ^o de iudicii capitulo 24 cum planete in medio celi fuerunt... |
| | 4 | | Deinde assignatur ratio domorum et assignaverunt primam domum... |
| | 5 | 35v-2 | De morte vero redditur talis ratio Mars est in tertio circulo et ipse et Saturnus sunt similes... |
| 15 | 35v-2 | | De reprobatione positionis et significationis duodecim signorum. |
| | 1 | | In distinctione 3 ^a 2 ^o partis agitur de significationibus 12 signorum et in divisione zodiaci... |
| | 2 | 36r-1 | Amplius Zahel dicit quod 6 sunt signa masculina et 6 feminina Albumasar vero... |
| 16 | 36r-1 | | De reprobatione aspectuum.
Consequenter ad reprobandum regulas de aspectibus accedamus... |

- | Dist. | Cap. | Fol.,
Col. | |
|-------|-------|---------------|---|
| 17 | 36r-2 | | De reprobatione significationis planetarum. |
| | 1 | | Predictis adiciendum est de significationibus... |
| | 2 | 36v-1 | Rursum Albumasar ostendit quis trium planetarum i.e. Iovis Veneris et Mercurii. |
| | 3 | 36v-2 | [Z]ahel quoque dicit quod planeta retrogradus significat inobedientiam et contradictionem... |
| 18 | 37r-1 | | De reprobatione dignitatis et potestatis planetarum in signis. |
| | 1 | | Sciendum est etiam quod planete dicuntur habere quasdam potestates et dignitates in signis... |
| | 2 | 37r-2 | Albumasar vero ponit rationem Ptolomei de domibus Cancer est domus lune quia... |
| | 3 | 37v-1 | Illud quoque diligenter considerandum est quod astrologi in suis argumentationibus probant ignotum per ignotius... |
| | 4 | | Zahel insuper dicit quod fortuna in 8 ab ascendente non operatur neque bonum neque malum... |
| 19 | 37v-1 | | De reprobatione fati et casus. |
| | 1 | 37v-2 | Postquam premisimus de iudiciorum reprobatione in generali nunc ad ipsorum confutationem secundum diversos rationes... |
| | 2 | 38r-1 | Nichil igitur in mundo fit preter intentionem et providentiam cause prime... |
| | 3 | 38r-2 | Quod autem deus benedictus regat ac gubernat totam machinam mundialem... |
| | 4 | | Nunc autem specialiter de corporibus universis quod regantur non per fatum... |
| | 5 | 38v-1 | Item quod humani actus divine providentie subdantur... |
| 20 | 38v-2 | | De reprobatione fatalium siderum inspecta nativitatis hora per rationes sumptas ex dictis sanctorum Augustini Gregorii et Ambrosii. |
| | 1 | | Sancti quoque doctores ecclesie Augustinus Ambrosius Gregorius validissimis rationibus... |
| | 2 | 39r-1 | Contra primum modum obicitur secundum beatum Augustinum... |
| | 3 | 39r-2 | Ceterum (?) dicit fatalium siderum assertor quod propterea inter geminos invenitur diversitas... |
| | 4 | 39v-2 | Ex premissis colligitur quod secundum eorum falsam opinionem de inveniundo puncto... |

- | Dist. | Cap. | Fol.,
Col. | |
|-------|------|---------------|---|
| | 5 | 40r-1 | Beatus vero Ambrosius in exameron multipliciter ipsorum redarguit insipientiam... |
| | 6 | 40r-2 | Ad idem beatus Gregorius in omelya ephyphanie... |
| 21 | | 40v-2 | De reprobatione iudiciorum qui dantur considerata conceptionis hora. |
| | 1 | | Quia vero maiorem vim constituunt astrologi in cognitione hore conceptionis... |
| | 2 | | Ceterum (?) dicit astrologus cognita nativitatis hora per novem menses integros... |
| 22 | | 41r-2 | De reprobatione regularum in speciali super conceptionibus et nativitatibus hominum.
Quedam insuper astrologi rimantur in conceptionibus et nativitatibus... |
| 23 | | 41v-2 | De reprobatione dictorum Ptolomei circa mores diversarum gentium...
Quot autem leges varie secundum provincie diversitatem necnon et mores... |
| 24 | | 42v-2 | De reprobatione iudiciorum que procedunt inspecta interrogationis hora. |
| | 1 | | Post predicta contra inspectiones interrogationum procedendum est... |
| | 2 | 43r-2 | Obicitur similiter contra hoc quod Cahel et Messahalla dicunt... |
| 25 | | 43v-2 | De reprobatione iudiciorum que investigantur per modum electionis. |
| | 1 | | Nunc superest investigare qualiter electiones valeant reprobare (<i>sic.</i>)... |
| | 2 | 44r-1 | Amplius totam vim electionis constituunt in puncto vel inchoationis vel... |
| | 3 | 44r-2 | Preterea velit nolit homo corpus eius calescit sole existente in leone... |
| 26 | | 44v-1 | Quod multum falluntur astrologi non recte de accidentibus aeris et de quibusdam aliis rebus corruptibilibus iudicantes.
Confutatis per supradicta iudiciis Caldeorum que sunt contra fidem catholicam... |
| (27) | | 45v-2 | Tertia pars de astronomia naturali quomodo deus per superiora corpora disponit inferiora (8). |

Dist	Cap.	Fol., Col.	
			Postquam de astrologia superstitiosa precessit narratio consequenter de indagatione astrologie naturalis...
28	46r-2		De investigatione accidentium aeris. Incipientes aeris actus precognoscere considerant que signa sunt ignea vel aerea aquea vel terrestria...
29	46v-2		De multiplici effectu signorum zodiaci. Restat nunc particulares rerum naturas assignare sicut dicit Ptolemeus...
30	47v-1		De signaculis circa stellas quid significant. Postquam premisimus de effectibus quos habent stelle per naturam producere...
31	47v-2		De signaculis circa solem et quid significant. De signaculis vero que sunt circa solem Ptolomeus ultimo capitulo libro 2 ^o quadripartiti...
32	48r-1		De signaculis que apparent circa lunam cuiusque multiplici effectu in istis inferioribus.
	1		Postremo de signaculis que apparent circa lunam eiusque multiplici effectu in inferioribus...
	2	48r-2	Insuper circa materiam istam traditur hec doctrina...
	3		De multiplici vero effectu lune dicit Ptolomeus...
33	48v-1		De proprietate significationis lune super accessum et recessum maris.
	1		Quoniam magis universalis significatio lune est super aquam et terram...
	2	48v-2	Idem quoque Albumasar 3 ^o libro differentia 5 assignat plures causas...
	3	49r-2	Ad sciendum vero fortitudinem accessionis et eius debilitatem 8 sunt consideranda...

As the foregoing captions indicate, our author repeats the arguments of the church fathers against astrology, he charges the art with teaching fatal necessity—which most astrologers would deny,—he maintains that future contingents and acts of intellect and will are not under the stars—which most medieval astrologers would admit,—he rejects the doctrine of the *magnus annus* or history repeating itself, he attacks the personal character and intellectual ability of astrologers, and he makes an elaborate onslaught upon the methods, rules and technique of astrology

(8) This seems to take the place of *Distinctio* 27, which I could not find indicated.

worthy of ORESME or PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA. On the other hand, some of the arguments advanced by ORESME in his various writings against astrology find no place in these captions : for example, its uncertainty because of our inexact and incomplete knowledge; the limitation of celestial influence to heat and light and denial of any occult or qualitative influence; the emphasis upon the tricks and deceits of astrologers. However, ORESME did not give all his arguments against astrology in each treatise that he wrote on the subject, so that the omission of some of them in our present treatise is no sure proof that it is not by him. Perhaps the most original position of our anonymous work is its criticism of PTOLEMY's dicta as to the characteristics and morals of different peoples and races.

Our anonymous author shows a wide acquaintance with astrological literature, citing ALBUMASAR, MESSAHALLA, ZAHHEL, AL-CABITUS, and DOROTHEUS. Perhaps he is inclined to judge astrology too much by its ancient and Arabic exponents. He quotes AUGUSTINE and AMBROSE repeatedly against astrology but passes over in silence the much more favorable attitude to the art of ALBERTUS MAGNUS and AQUINAS. He does, however, criticize "the venerable father, master RAYMOND" (DE PEÑAFORT?) "illustrious for his admirable knowledge of sanctity and religion," for having said in his *Summa* that possibly thefts could be investigated by inspection of the astrolabe without invoking demons or other superstition (9). He notes that GAUFREDUS in his *Summa* contradicts RAYMOND on this point. (10)

When our author turns from "superstitious" to "natural" astrology, he sings a different tune. Now he cites AUGUSTINE as accepting the influence of superior over inferior bodies, and himself grants that celestial bodies move terrestrial ones (11). Now he quotes with approval ARISTOTLE as stating in his *History of Animals* that all diversities in conceptions are from the celestial bodies, and RABBI MOSES (MAIMONIDES) as saying that the sky functions in the universe as the heart does in the body (12). Now

(9) Vatic. lat. 3097, Dist. I, cap. 5, fol. 24v, col. 1.

(10) *Ibid.*, fol. 24v, col. 2.

(11) Vatic. lat. 3097, fols. 45v-46r.

(12) *Ibid.*, fol. 46r, col. 2.

he follows MESSAHALLA on conjunctions (13) and PTOLEMY'S *Quadripartitum* (14). Before he had criticized the significations of planets and signs of the zodiac, the doctrine of aspects, and the dignity and power of the planets in the signs. But now he writes that beginners in weather prediction should consider which signs are fiery, which aerial, watery or terrestrial, and the conjunctions of the planets in those signs, and should especially consider the status of the moon when it is joined with Saturn or is in the head or tail of the dragon. For then the weather is apt to change, and the more if the moon or Saturn and the sun are in a cold sign, and still more so if one of them is next to the Hyades and Pleiades. Or instructions are given for drawing up a *figura coeli* (15). The discussion of "natural" astrology is limited to weather prediction and the influence of the moon on tides. Our author apparently does not care to face the question of celestial influence upon the body of the human animal. However, he quotes ALBUMASAR and AMBROSE as to the influence of the moon upon crops, fruit, trees, the clarity and purity of metals and gems, oysters, the brain and humors, as well as upon the tides.

Our text is followed in the manuscript by an anonymous astronomical work (16) which proves to be the *Speculum celeste* or *Liber super totam astrologiam* of BERNARD OF VERDUN (17), an able astronomer and Franciscan professor of about 1300. Thus the author of our text is in excellent company, although none of them is named in our manuscript, ORESME on the one hand and BERNARD OF VERDUN on the other. There then follows in our manuscript—and, like the others, anonymously—a short astrological tract which I have not identified or met before. (18) After several blank leaves comes a commentary on some such work

(13) *Ibid.*, fol. 46v, col. 1, et seq.

(14) *Ibid.*, fol. 46v, col. 2.

(15) *Ibid.*, fols. 46v, col. 1-2.

(16) Vatic. lat. 3097, fols. 51r, col. 1-72v, col. 2 : "Quia ex scientiis fructu dignioribus et ex loco ordinis .../... Explicit tractatus optimus super communia astrologica."

(17) *Histoire littéraire de la France*, 21, 317-20, and *Isis*, XIII (1929), 65-66, for the author and other MSS of the work.

(18) Vatic. lat. 3097, fols. 73r, col. 1-77r, col. 1 : "Scito quod ex revolutione anni mundi hoc est in introitu solis in caput arietis .../... infirmabuntur non tamen multi morientur. Explicit hoc collectum."

as the *Sphere* of SACROBOSCO (19); another commentary on ARISTOTLE'S *De generatione et corruptione* (20), and the *Summa naturalium* (21), as it is here called, or *Philosophia pauperum*, which is often attributed to ALBERTUS MAGNUS and at least is based upon his books of philosophy (22). But these treatises are anonymous in our manuscript like all their predecessors. The last is in a later hand of the fifteenth century.

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(19) *Ibid.*, fols. 82r-102r.

(20) *Ibid.*, fols. 103r, col. 1-146r, col. 2. It opens, "Circa primum librum de generatione et corruptione notandum quod..." At fol. 141v, col. 2, we read: "Et sic dei adiutorio terminantur questiones super totum librum de generatione. Tota questio sequens pertinet ad primum de generatione aut illam questionem utrum generatio differat ab alteratione." The work ends, "Et sic complentur questiones super librum de generatione," rubric, "Expliciuunt questiones super totum librum de generatione."

(21) *Ibid.*, fols. 147r-184r: "Phylosophia dividitur in tres partes scilicet loycam ethycam phisicam .../... Est liberum arbitrium facultas rationis et voluntatis qua bonum eligitur gratia assistente et malum gratia desistente et sic est finis istius summe. Explicit textus summe naturalium."

(22) See M. GRABMANN, "Die Philosophia Pauperum und ihr Verfasser ALBERT VON ORLAMÜNDE," *Beiträge z. Gesch. d. Philos. des Mittelalters*, XX (1918). P. MANDONNET, "ALBERT LE GRAND et la Philosophia pauperum," *Revue néo-scholastique*, XXXVI (1934), 230-62, reasserts ALBERTUS MAGNUS' authorship, regards *Compendium de negotio naturali* as ALBERT'S own original title, and dates the composition of the work in 1244.