

Aby Warburg **The Renewal of** **Pagan Antiquity**

Aby Warburg
The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity:
Contributions to the Cultural History
of the European Renaissance
Introduction by Kurt W. Forster
Translation by David Britt

Texts & Documents

Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther (1920)

Preface

The author, who fell gravely ill at the end of October 1918, has consented to the publication of this fragment at the instance of his friend Franz Boll, although he has been unable to carry out necessary emendations, not to speak of the important additions that he had intended to make from a wealth of hitherto unknown material already worked through and prepared. He has nevertheless allowed this fragment to appear, partly in the expectation that this initial attempt will be of use to a later researcher, and partly because, however good or bad the present weaver, the opportunity of threading in new strands from abroad will long be denied to German scholarship. He therefore asks those friends and colleagues who have so tirelessly aided him in the past—Franz Boll foremost among them—to take his consent to this far-from-adequate publication as a mark of his gratitude to them.

Without the extensive help of libraries and archives over many years—and the author is not now in a position to name them all: let us mention only Berlin, Dresden, Göttingen, Hamburg, Königsberg, Leipzig, Munich, Wolfenbüttel, Zwickau; and also Oxford, Madrid, Paris, and Rome—his studies could never have been carried out. The following individuals have assisted him far beyond the immediate call of duty: his late friend Robert Münzel; Professor Paul Flemming, of Pforta; Professor Ernst Kroker, of Leipzig; Dr. Georg Leidinger, of Munich; Father Franz Ehrle, formerly of Rome; Professor Richard Salomon, of Hamburg; and the late Professor Gustav Milchsack, of Wolfenbüttel. Wilhelm Printz and Fritz Saxl, who have remained at his side over the years, deserve his heartfelt thanks. He was unfortunately unable to deliver the paper in person, and in the promised form, to the members of the Religionswissenschaftliche Vereinigung (Association for the study of religion) in Berlin. He hopes that they will nevertheless accept the present publication as a token of his sincere and lasting gratitude for the meeting of 23 April 1918.

I dedicate this study to my dear wife, in memory of the winter of 1888 in Florence.

Hamburg, 26 January 1920

I. Reformation, Magic, and Astrology

Es ist ein altes Buch zu blättern:

Vom Harz bis Hellas immer Vettern.

—Goethe, *Faust*, Part 2

There's an old book for browsing in:
From Harz to Hellas all are kin.

The standard work on "The Bondage of Superstitious Modern Man" remains to be written. It would have to be preceded by a study — also as yet unwritten — of "The Renaissance of the Spirit World of Antiquity in the Age of the German Reformation." A lecture delivered by the present writer at the Religionswissenschaftliche Vereinigung in Berlin, on "Pagan-Antique Prophecy in the Age of Luther in Words and Images,"¹ was intended as a highly provisional contribution to this question. That lecture forms the basis of the present essay.

The images that it examines fall within the scope of the history of art in the widest sense (insofar as that term covers image-making in all its forms). However, with the single exception of the portrait of Johann Carion (fig. 121),² they stem from prints or printed books; they lack aesthetic appeal; and without the texts that relate to them (whether printed with them or not), they are unpromising material for the purely formal concerns of present-day art history, in that their strange illustrative quality stems from their content. The idea of examining a mere "curiosity" for its relevance to the history of human thought is one that comes more naturally to historians of religion than to historians of art. And yet it is one of the prime duties of art history to bring such forms out of the twilight of ideological polemic and to subject them to close historical scrutiny. For there is one crucial issue in the history of style and civilization — the influence of antiquity on the culture of Renaissance Europe as a whole — that cannot otherwise be fully understood and resolved.

Only when we bring ourselves to consider the figures of the pagan gods — as resurrected in early Renaissance Europe, North and South — not merely as artistic phenomena but as religious entities, do we begin to sense the power of the determinism of the Hellenistic cosmology, even in Germany, even in the age of the Reformation. The pagan augur who assumed the mantle of scientific learning was a hard adversary to contend with, let alone to defeat.

A classically rarefied version of the ancient gods has been so successfully imposed on us, ever since Winckelmann, as the central symbol of antiquity, that we are apt to forget that it was entirely the creation of humanist scholars: this "Olympian" aspect of antiquity had first to be wrested from its entrenched, traditional, "daemonic" aspect. Ever since the passing of antiquity, the ancient gods had lived on in Christian Europe as cosmic spirits, religious forces with a strong influence in practical affairs: indeed, the cosmology of the ancient world — notably in the form of astrology — undeniably survived as a parallel system, tacitly tolerated by the Christian Church.

The astral deities were faithfully transmitted through a long migration from the Hellenistic world by way of Arabia, Spain, and Italy to Germany (where after 1470 they enjoyed a peripatetic Renaissance, in words and pictures, thanks to the new printing houses of Augsburg, Nuremberg, and Leipzig). They lived on as time gods, mathematically defining and mythically ruling every chronological unit in the annual round: the year, the month, the week, the day, the hour, the minute, and the second. These were beings of sinister, ambivalent, and indeed contradictory powers: as star signs they expanded space, marking the way for the soul's flight through the universe; as constellations they were also idols, with whom, as befitted the childlike nature of man, the mere creature might aspire to mystic union through devotional practices.

The astrologer in the age of the Reformation accepted these opposite poles of mathematical abstraction and devout self-association—irreconcilable though they seem to a modern scientist—as the pivots of one vibrant, primordial psychic state. Logic sets a mental space between man and object by applying a conceptual label; magic destroys that space by creating a superstitious—theoretical or practical—association between man and object. In the divinatory workings of the astrologer's mind, these two processes act as a single, primitive tool that he can use both to make measurements and to work magic. That age when logic and magic blossomed, like trope and metaphor, in Jean Paul's words, "grafted to a single stem,"³ is inherently timeless: by showing such a polarity in action, the historian of civilization furnishes new grounds for a more profoundly positive critique of a historiography that rests on a purely chronological theory of development.

Medieval astrologers brought the Hellenistic inheritance to Northern Europe from Baghdad by way of Toledo and Padua. And so the writings of the Arab and Italian astrologers were among the very first illustrated books to be printed in Augsburg.

In Germany at the turn of the fifteenth century, as in Italy, two attitudes to antiquity confronted each other: one ancient, practical, and religious; the other modern, artistic, and aesthetic. In Italy the latter seemed at first to have gained the upper hand; it also had its adherents in Germany. But it was in Germany that the astrology of antiquity underwent a distinctive (and hitherto insufficiently noticed) Renaissance of its own. Those astral symbols that had survived in the literature of divination—the seven personified planets, above all—gained a new lease on life from the social and political upheavals of the day and became, as it were, the presiding deities of contemporary politics.

Alongside these anthropomorphic rulers of destiny—the astral symbols that are the basis for the systematic, interpretative method of "artificial" (or scientific) divination—we must also consider those terrestrial monstrosities and other portents that formed the subject of "miraculous" divination. We must keep this distinction between "artificial" and "miraculous" divination clearly before us:⁴ as will be shown, it marked the parting of minds between

Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon. We shall take as our point of departure a hitherto unnoticed letter from Melanchthon to the astrologer and historian Johann Carion of Bietigheim, who held an influential position at the court of the elector of Brandenburg.

II. Elements of Pagan Antiquity in the Cosmological and Political Worldview of the Reformation Period: Astrology and Teratology in Luther's Circle

II.1. Melanchthon's Letter to Carion on the Comet of 1531

In my search for the letters of Carion, the volume of correspondence published by Johannes Voigt⁵ directed me to the Staatsarchiv in Königsberg, and I am grateful to that institution for making it possible for me to work in the Stadtbibliothek in Hamburg on a batch of his letters. Inserted into the sequence I found a letter in Latin, sent to him by Melanchthon on 17 August 1531. Thanks to the kindness of Professor Flemming, of Pforta, I was able to profit from the textual emendations made by the late Nikolaus Müller and thus to establish the correct reading of the Latin text (see appendix A.1). I shall give a free translation of the entire contents of this document, because every detail is a vivid revelation of Melanchthon's character and of the conflict to which he bears witness—a fateful one for Germany—between humanistic intellectualism and the theological and political desire for Reformation.

Addressed to the most learned Master Johann Carion, philosopher, his friend and dear countryman, “to be placed in his own hands.”

... I have tried to adorn <the text> with the most authoritative quotations. It is for others to judge what I have achieved.

The Dictum of Elijah is not to be found in the Bible but in the rabbinical literature, and it is extremely famous. Burgensis⁶ quotes it, and bases himself upon it in arguing against the Jews that the Messiah has already appeared. It is a saying that is widely current among the Hebrews, and I have placed it at the beginning of your history <Carion's *Chronica*>, both to make it better known and to lend commendation to your work. I shall add many more such quotations later. But you see how the prophetic voice points to the future: so aptly <*concinna*: harmoniously?> does the division of the ages fall.

I hope that we shall finish the History this winter; for hitherto I have been prevented by the revision of my *Apologia*, some parts of which I have improved. You will hardly believe how delicate my health is, for I am consumed with cares and toil.

My wife, by God's grace, has been delivered of a daughter, whose nativity <*Thema*> I send you, but not in order to put you to any trouble. I can see that she will be a nun.⁷

We have had sight of a comet for more than a week now. What do you make of it? It seems to be stationary above Cancer, as it sets directly after the sun and rises shortly before dawn. If it were red, it would cause me greater alarm. Without a

doubt, it signifies the death of princes; yet it seems to turn its tail toward Poland. But I shall await your verdict. I shall be most grateful if you will tell me what you make of it.

Now I come to today's tidings. If I knew anything of our adversaries' doings, I would write it all to you, whatever it might be. For we have no need to conceal the plans of our adversaries; rather, it is in our interest to expose them.

So I have long had no certain news of any preparations—apart, that is, from the misgivings harbored by our own people concerning the <not> inconsiderable force of infantry now in Frisia. It may be that on the pretext of war with Denmark they intend to attack us, too. But the electors of the Palatinate and of Mainz are already treating for an end to hostilities; though I hold out no hope of peace, in view of the astrological predictions and the prophecies alike. Hassfurt predicted that King Christian would enjoy an honorable return. Schepperus says he will not return at all. But Schepperus does not trouble me. He is often wrong. Hassfurt also predicted great victories to the landgrave.

A certain citizen of Schmalkalden, known to me, had a wonderful vision concerning all these upheavals, in which I place great credence. It predicts a fairly uneventful outcome, but it does intimate that our terrified adversaries will yield to that Lion <the landgrave of Hesse>. A woman of Kitzingen has foretold terrible things of Ferdinand, how he will wage war against us, but that it will go against him. In Belgium a maiden has even given a prophecy to the emperor, but I have yet to inform myself in detail. All in all, I think there will be some commotion, and I pray to God that he may direct it to a good end, useful to church and state alike.

I was laboring a year ago, to the end that they might make peace with us. If they had done so, there would now be less unrest in Swabia, which has now largely embraced the Swiss theology and effrontery <licentia>. Campeggio wants to involve and ensnare the emperor in a German war, to drain away his strength, and there are some who approve Campeggio's counsels out of personal hatred for us. But God's eye is just. We have certainly taught nothing that was evil, and have freed many good minds from many pernicious errors. Sabinus is sending you my preface in praise of astronomy and astrology, on which I await your verdict. Farewell. On the Thursday following the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1531. I return the letters to you... Φίλιππος.

This letter allows us to look over Melanchthon's shoulder at a critical moment in his life. We find him engaged in literary work in three capacities: as a humanist, as a theologian, and as an astropolitical journalist. First, by introducing the so-called Tradition of the House of Elijah, according to which the course of universal history is divided into three periods, each of approximately two thousand years, he defined the structure of the earliest German history of the world, Carion's *Chronica*, which owed its great influence on German historiography entirely to Melanchthon's involvement with it.⁸

Melanchthon was required to do this at a time when he also bore the massive responsibility of revising the Confession of Augsburg; for the emperor's ultimatum to the Protestants had expired on 30 April, and there was

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an imminent threat of armed conflict between the emperor and the Schmalkaldic League—the very eventuality that Melanchthon was striving with all his might to avert. Clearly, Carion, who was a diplomatic agent in the service of Brandenburg, had asked for more precise information on this, and Melanchthon treated him—it is worth noting—entirely as a partisan of the Schmalkaldic cause.

However, Melanchthon here is no dry political chronicler; for in his desperate desire to keep the peace he has suffered an acute attack of cosmic susceptibility to omens and portents. In this connection he no longer addressed his correspondent from a position of superiority, as a learned dispenser of good advice: he approached the artless Carion⁹ in the guise of a patient in need of comfort, and consulted him as a magus skilled in all matters prophetic and astrological. He sent Carion the natal chart of his own newborn daughter, surely not without hoping for an interpretation of it, and expressly solicited a verdict on his (Melanchthon's) own astronomical and astrological views—as lately published, for example, in his preface to Johannes de Sacro Bosco.¹⁰ Above all, however, he wanted Carion to set his mind at rest concerning the comet—it was Halley's—that had appeared in August and had frightened all Germany, not least Melanchthon himself: it was the first he had ever seen.

In return, he retailed to Carion the current prophecies of other noted astrologers of the day. The warnings of Johann Virdung of Hassfurt had pursued Melanchthon ever since birth: for Virdung, at his father's request, had cast Melanchthon's own natal horoscope. This included a warning against travel to the North and to the Baltic, which—as Melanchthon himself was to admit in 1560—deterred him from ever visiting Denmark.¹¹

As he was at pains to stress, however, it was not these "scientific" predictions that troubled him most, but the *vaticinia*, the directly inspired, "unscientific" prophecies, of the man from Schmalkalden and the woman from Kitzingen. He had first mentioned these considerably earlier, at the end of March, writing to tell both Cordatus and Baumgärtner that the Kitzingen woman was prophesying a great war against the Protestant party, launched with French support, within six months.¹² Her tidings were less bad for the emperor than for King Ferdinand. Again, as early as 11 April, Melanchthon had mentioned the Schmalkalden man's horrendous vision in a letter to Camerarius.¹³

And so, at a moment when his sole salvation lay in an unshakable inner detachment from the age and from its agonies of conscience, the spiritual leader of Protestant Germany stood bereft of all his zest and his resolution—like some pagan augur—by celestial signs and human voices. At least his prophetic voices left him some room for hopes of victory, which he pinned on "Leo," the Lion of Hesse.

Nevertheless, if Melanchthon's own keen critical and philological sense of fact ever gave him pause, he had an answer ready: astrological method, for him, represented a practical survival of the harmonizing worldview of the

ancients, which was the very foundation of his own cosmologically oriented humanism.¹⁴

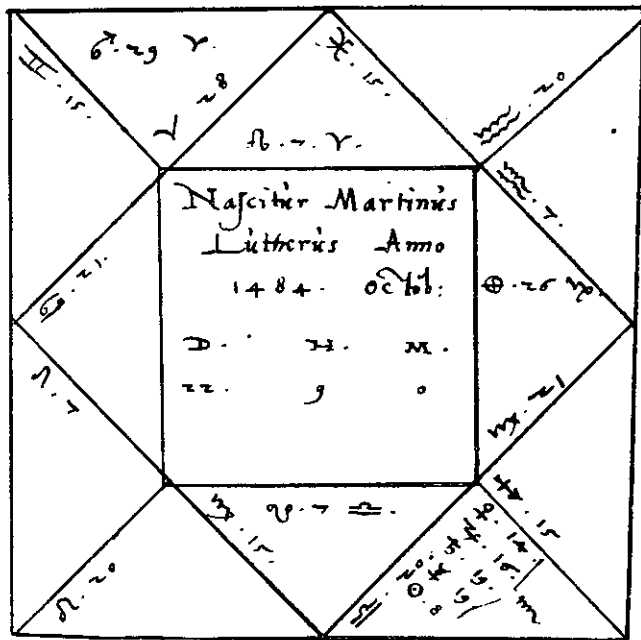
II.2. Astral Divination: Luther's and Melanchthon's Opposing Views of Ancient Astrology

In North and South alike, the Italian civilization of the Renaissance had preserved and revived types of ancient pagan divination composed of so potent and heterogeneous a mixture of elements—rationalism and myth, the mathematician and the augur—that they engaged the attention even of the Wittenberg community, the main bastion of a Christian Germany that was fighting against Rome for its spiritual freedom. Even here, where feelings ran so high against the Christian paganism of Rome, both the Babylonian-Hellenistic astrologer and the Roman augur gained a hearing and—with certain curious reservations—assent. The reasons for this involvement with the arcane survivals of paganism—a paradox in terms of any rectilinear view of history—emerge from the very different responses of Luther and Melanchthon to the superstitious belief in signs and prophecies.

Luther accepted only the mystic and transcendent nucleus of the idea: the miraculous cosmic event, sent by the Christian God in all his inscrutable omnipotence as a prophetic intimation of the future. Melanchthon, for his part, adopted the astrology of the ancient world as an intellectual defense against a cosmically predetermined earthly fate. So strong, indeed, was his faith in the stars that in this matter he constantly risked—as elsewhere he avoided—a confrontation with his more powerful friend. For even when an Italian astrologer, Lucas Gauricus, challenged the great Reformer on the most intimate level by arbitrarily “rectifying” his horoscope to show an entirely false date and time of birth, Melanchthon—together with Carion and other Wittenberg astrological experts—sided with Gauricus, despite the latter's undoubted hostile intent, and despite Luther's own vehement refusal to accept the entirely mythical, astrological birthdate of 22 October 1484.

Luther versus the Astropoliticians, Italian and German—Melanchthon's Attitude to Lucas Gauricus

From Italy, and from Padua in particular—where, to this day, the immensities of the Salone are sacred ground for astrologers—the theory and practice of astrology flowed ever northward into the learned world of Germany; and from time to time Italian practitioners crossed the Alps in person. In 1531, the very year of Melanchthon's letter to Carion, the celebrated Southern Italian astrologer Lucas Gauricus was invited to Berlin by Elector Joachim I of Brandenburg;¹⁵ from Berlin, Gauricus went on to Wittenberg, where he stayed four days and was cordially and respectfully received by Melanchthon, as we know from the latter's letters to Camerarius. This will have been in April 1532. In May of that year, after Gauricus's departure, Melanchthon composed a letter of introduction for him to his friend Camerarius in Nuremberg.¹⁶



hanc regis
 veram esse
 Lutheri ge!
 nitem Cardu
 nis, & aliam
 subfinit
 tub. p. de
 genibus
 fol. 114. v.

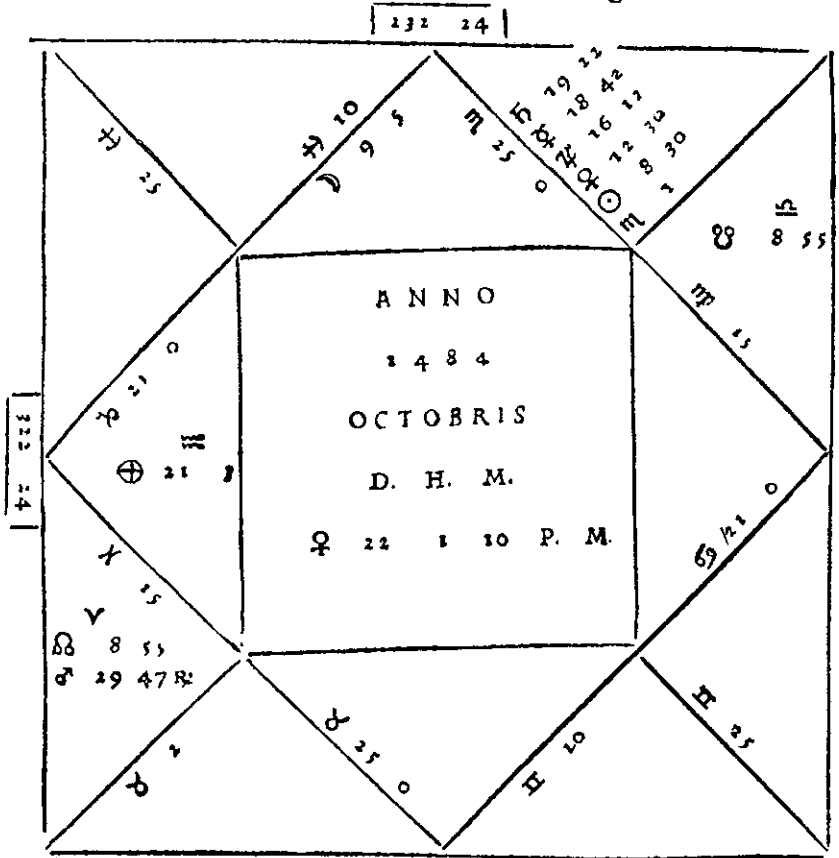
Comētaratis

♄. 29. γ. facit heroicis viros. & bonum est
 b. nos ipse emittit.
 b. in II. Indi est illa eliquia.

Fig. 121. School of Lucas Cranach
 Johann Carion
 Berlin, Preussische Staatsbibliothek
 (see pp. 598, 648)

Fig. 122. Horoscope of Luther by Erasmus Reinhold
 Leipzig, Staatsbibliothek, Cod. 935, fol. 158
 (see pp. 606, 610)

TRACTATUS
 Martinus Lutherus Monachus sancti Augustini.



Martinus fuit imprimis Monachus per multos annos, demum expoliavit habitum monialem, duxitq; in vxorem Abbariffam alæ staturę Vittimbergensem & ab illa suscepit duos liberos. Hęc mira fatiq; horrenda. s. Planetarū coitio sub Scorpij asterismo in nona cœli statione quā Arabes religioni deputabant, effecit ipsum sacrilegum hereticum, Christianę religionis hostem acerrimum, atq; prophanum. Ex horoscopi directione ad Martis coitum irreligiosissimus obiit. Eius Anima scelestissima ad Inferos nauigauit; ab Allecto, Tefiphone, & Megera flagellis igneis cruciata perenniter.

hanc nigra
 vocam esse
 Lutheri qd
 natus Cardu
 nis, & aliam
 subfinit
 sub. p. de
 geminis
 fol. 114. v.

& bomin est

of Luther by Erasmus Reinhold
 nek, Cod. 935, fol. 158

Fig. 123. Horoscope of Luther by Lucas Gauricus
 From Gauricus, *Tractatus astrologicus* (Venice, 1552), fol. 69v
 (see pp. 606, 627)

At the beginning of March 1532, Melanchthon sent the *Norica* of Camerarius (a treatise on the significance of portents)¹⁷ to Gauricus, with a fulsome dedicatory epistle in which he hailed him as the “Prince of All Philosophy” and thanked him, in particular, for letters enclosing horoscopes that had been of vital importance to him, Melanchthon, in the furtherance of his own studies.¹⁸ The true political significance of those horoscopes emerges in a letter that Melanchthon wrote to Camerarius later in the same year, on 29 June 1532, sending him at his request the nativities of Emperor Charles V and King Ferdinand.¹⁹ This makes it clear that Melanchthon had made a comparative study of Gauricus’s collection of horoscopes and of those of Carion and de Schepper.

Surviving collections of this kind include one in Munich and another in Leipzig;²⁰ and, on close scrutiny, both turn out to be based on horoscopes by Gauricus, only some of which were printed in the 1552 Venice edition of his work. This is significant, since the Leipzig manuscript, compiled—as Ernst Kroker has convincingly shown—in the 1540s by Erasmus Reinhold, professor of mathematics at the university of Wittenberg,²¹ leads us straight to the Reformers and specifically to Luther himself. The horoscope of Luther given by Reinhold²² (see fig. 122) is based not on his true birthdate of 10 November 1483 but on Gauricus’s date of 22 October 1484. The pagan and astrological birthday is thus allowed, in the full knowledge of its conjectural nature—as Reinhold’s note, “*Coniecturalis*,” makes quite clear—to usurp the place of the true, calendric date.

In the 1552 edition of Gauricus (fig. 123), Luther’s horoscope is captioned with a stream of vicious Counter-Reformation abuse.²³ Of course, we can assume that when Gauricus visited Wittenberg in 1532 he did not adopt any such tone of sectarian fanaticism, let alone the spiteful reference to Luther’s death; but there can hardly be any doubt that even then he interpreted Luther, astrologically, as a malignant force. In 1525—as has not hitherto been sufficiently noticed—Gauricus had sent Pope Clement VII a prediction of Luther’s downfall as a heretic;²⁴ and, as early as 23 March 1524, Luther had surely had him in mind in sending the facts of his own nativity to Georg Spalatin:

*Genesin istam meam jam ante videram ex Italia huc missam, sed cum sic sint hoc anno hallucinati astrologi <a reference to fears of a deluge; see below>, nihil mirum, si sit, qui et hoc nugari ausus sit.*²⁵

I had already seen that horoscope of mine—it had been sent here from Italy. But since the astrologers have been having such bizarre visions this year <a reference to fears of a deluge; see below>, it is no wonder that there is someone who has dared to produce this nonsense.

Hence, also, no doubt, the mention of him in Luther’s letter to Veit Dietrich on 27 February 1532:

*Sed...astr...quam ominoso Mathem<atico> quem toties falsum convici, convincam adhuc saepius falsum.*²⁶

But...astr...than that portentous mathematician, to whom I have often given the lie in the past and shall often give the lie in the future.

Luther's attitude to Gauricus springs from the aversion to all astrology that was deeply rooted in his religious faith—an aversion that inevitably led him into forthright disagreement with his friend Melanchthon. In August 1540, Luther said:

*Nemo mihi persuadebit nec Paulus nec Angelus de coelo nedum Philippus, ut credam astrologiae divinationibus, quae toties fallunt, ut nihil sit incertius. Nam si etiam bis aut ter recte divinant, ea notant; si fallunt, ea dissimulant.*²⁷

No one will ever persuade me—neither Paul, nor an angel from heaven, nor even Philipp—to believe in the predictions of astrology, which are so often mistaken that nothing is more uncertain. For if they forecast correctly even two or three times, they mark it; if they are wrong, they conceal it.

In the same year he claimed that Melanchthon had admitted to him that there was no certain art of astrological divination; for which reason, said Luther, he left him to trifle with it as he pleased: "*Es ist ein dreck mit irer kunst.*" (That art of theirs is so much manure.)²⁸ And when Master Philipp again ventured—as he did in 1537, when traveling at New Moon seemed too dangerous—to give Doctor Martinus the benefit of his astrological advice, Luther recalled the incident with some annoyance, as an uncalled-for intrusion on the part of "*der heilosen und schebichten astrologia*" (the unholy drivel of astrology).²⁹

In these circumstances, how was it possible for Luther's friends to tolerate, let alone to advocate, Gauricus's entirely arbitrary displacement of his date of birth? We have it from Luther's own lips, as reported by Heydenreich, that Melanchthon himself subscribed to the mythical birthdate; the same source reveals how the astrological believers were enabled to do so with a clear conscience. Heydenreich records the following exchange:

"Domine Doctor, multi astrologi in vestra genitura consentiunt, constellationes vestrae nativitatis ostendere, vos mutationem magnam allaturum."

*Tum Doctor: "Nullus est certus de nativitatis tempore, denn Philippus et ego sein der sachen umb ein jar nicht eins. Pro secundo, putatis hanc causam et meum negotium positum esse sub vestra arte incerta? O nein, es ist ein ander ding! Das ist allein gottes werck. Dazu solt ir mich niemer mer bereden!"*³⁰

"Doctor, many astrologers agree concerning your birth that the constellations of your horoscope show that you will bring about a great change."

The Doctor: "Nobody is certain of the time of my birth, for Philipp and I differ

by a year on the matter. What is more, do you believe that our cause and my whole enterprise are subject to your uncertain art? No, this is something quite else! This is God's work alone. You will never persuade me of that!"

The astrologers were thus seeking to make Luther's reforming mission contingent on a date on which Luther and Melanchthon could not agree even within a year; and this Luther emphatically refused to accept. The disagreement "by a year" clearly refers to Melanchthon's preference—following Gauricus—for 1484 as against 1483. For 1484 was the year of a great conjunction of planets, calculated generations in advance, and expected to herald a new epoch in Occidental religion.³¹

The natal chart given by Reinhold relates closely—a fact that has escaped previous researchers—to an attempt at astrological compromise, made by Melanchthon at the precise period when, according to Heydenreich, he was still arguing with Luther about the latter's year of birth. Melanchthon was later to acknowledge 1483 as the official year of Luther's birth, both in his biography and in the *Dekanatsbuch* of the University of Wittenberg;³² but even as late as 1539 we find him still uncertain. As he wrote to Osiander:

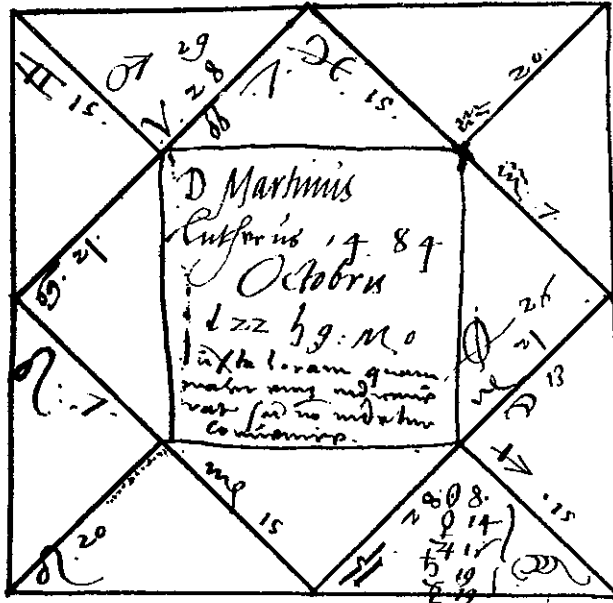
*Über Luthers Geburtszeit sind wir in Zweifel. Der Tag ist zwar sicher, auch beinahe die Stunde, Mitternacht, wie ich selbst aus dem Munde seiner Mutter gehört habe. 1484 meine ich, war das Jahr. Aber wir haben mehrere Horoskope gestellt. Gauricus billigte das Thema von 1484.*³³

On Luther's nativity we remain in doubt. The day is certain, and almost so the hour: midnight, as I myself have heard from his mother's lips. I believe 1484 was the year. But we have cast a number of horoscopes. Gauricus supported the 1484 nativity.

So Melanchthon had consulted Luther's mother in person. He now knew the day, and the hour—midnight, albeit with the qualification "almost"—but he was still in favor of the year 1484, and thus still under the influence of Gauricus.

In the Munich manuscript horoscope collection (Cod. lat. 27003; see fig. 124), there is a copy of a fragment of a previously unknown letter from Melanchthon to Schoner, probably written around the time of Gauricus's visit to Wittenberg. This shows Melanchthon even more inclined toward drastic astrological intervention in the birthdate controversy, influenced in this case by Carion. The fragment reads as follows:³⁴

Philippus ad Schonerum Genesim Lutheri quam Philo³⁵ inquisiuit transtulit Carion in horam 9. Mater enim dicit Lutherum natum esse ante dimidium noctis (sed puto eam fefelli <sic>). Ego alteram figuram praefero et praefert ipse Carion. Etsi quoque haec est mirrifica <sic> est propter locum ♂ <Martis> et ♂ <coniunctionem> in domos <sic> 5° quae habet coniunctionem magnam cum ascendente



Philippus ad Schonerum Canonicum Lugdunensem quendam
 ph. lo. mag. sine translati Carion in hora
 Martini in die Lufforii nati. 1550
 ante le domi di. un. in dies. C. sud. puto. a. a. n.
 fo. illi) Ego alba figura. propterea &
 propterea ysa. Carion. Ego. ymag. huius est
 in infra. est propterea locum. O. & a. n.
 domos. si que ha. bar. in mense. in magna. in a. p. d. i.
 le. Carion. ysa. Carion. huius est. huius mense. 6 in d.
 no. p. m. h. u. a. h. u. i. u. a. r. i. u. m.

Fig. 124. Horoscope of Luther
 Munich, Cod. lat. Monac. 27003, fol. 16 (see p. 608)

*Caeterum quacunq[ue] hora natus est hac <sic> mira ☿ <coniunctio> in ♏, <scorpi-
one> non potuit non efficere uirum acerrimum.*

Philipp to Schoner. Luther's nativity, which Philo was inquiring about, Carion has changed to the ninth hour. For Luther's mother says that he was born before midnight (but I think that she was mistaken). I prefer the other chart, and so does Carion himself. Although this one also is extraordinary, it is because of the position of Mars and the conjunction in the fifth house, which has a great conjunction {sic} with the ascendant. But, whatever the hour of his birth, this unusual conjunction in Scorpio could not fail to produce a man of great mental vigor.

Carion's leading part in elaborating this compromise formula, still Italian and pagan in origin, is entirely in keeping with the fact that his initial attitude to Luther had been highly skeptical. We have it on Luther's own authority that, in the days when Carion was his enemy, the astrologer had actually predicted to him the day and hour of his burning as a heretic.³⁶ At one stage in his life, then, Carion had largely shared Gauricus's opinion of Luther.

As the letter shows, Carion was Melanchthon's principal authority for the alteration of the birthdate; and Carion in turn relied on the authority of the physician Philo, Johann Pfeyl,³⁷ who had long resided in Italy: there are thus two clear connections with Lucas Gauricus. The variations proposed by Carion and Pfeyl concern the hour of birth only: Carion favors 9 a.m., and Pfeyl favors 3:22 a.m., whereas Gauricus proposes 1:10 a.m. But the date of 22 October 1484 remains untouched. Pfeyl essentially retains Gauricus's great conjunction (in the ninth house). Carion, on the other hand, by moving to the ninth hour of the day, creates a decisive change. The fateful conjunction shifts from the ninth house to the fifth; and Mars is no longer in the first house but in the tenth. Luther is thus freed from the odium of a diabolical mission without losing any of his role as a bringer of religious change.

Melanchthon thus accepted Carion's horoscope; so we must assume that at one time he was inclined to take this alternative, hypothetical, astrological birthdate seriously. He ultimately came to reject it, presumably as a result of Luther's own opposition to it; but the view adopted by Reinhold, the official Wittenberg mathematician, reveals to us the stubborn persistence of the false Gauricus dating in Carion's horoscope, which—as a close comparison with the Munich manuscript shows, although this can be no more than indicated here—Reinhold took in every detail from the revision by Carion and Pfeyl (fig. 122).³⁸ As the inscription "*Coniecturalis*" proves, Reinhold was well aware that the horoscope was based on a mere conjecture, but he included it because it placed the great conjunction, in which he believed, in a more favorable light than Gauricus did. Here, Jupiter and Saturn are so conjoined in Scorpio as to produce "heroic men"; and the unaspected Mars in Gemini, in the auspicious eleventh house, has no malefic effect but gives rise to eloquence.³⁹

The most striking proof of the decided stamina of this Italian-devised horoscope is that even Garcaeus,⁴⁰ who at long last gives the true date of

Luther's birth, 10 November 1483, persists in exactly reproducing the planetary positions of the Gauricus horoscope, as redrawn by Reinhold and Carion.⁴¹

At the time of Gauricus's visit to Wittenberg and thereafter, a milder version of the Gauricus horoscope was in circulation, whether cast by Gauricus himself or, more likely, in the reformed Carion-Reinhold version given here. This is corroborated by the commentary written to accompany the horoscope of Luther cast by the Italian astrologer Hieronymus Cardanus (Giralamo Cardano), who changed the natal year to 1483 instead of Gauricus's 1484, while going out of his way to complain of the lack of due Counter-Reformation asperity in the 1484 horoscope then in circulation:⁴² Cardano disperses the planetary conjunction from Scorpio into other signs, including that of Virgo, which presides over religion. At all events, we can take it that, in the 1552 edition of Gauricus, the vituperative commentary, at least, was a late addition inserted under Counter-Reformation pressure.

In all its sectarian hostility, the Cardano horoscope was well known to Luther, who of course dismissed it out of hand. In 1543 one of his table companions showed him a version of his natal chart printed in Nuremberg, together with those of Cicero and others (see appendix III.3; this must have been the Cardano horoscope):⁴³

Ich halte nichts davon, eigene ihnen gar nichts zu, aber gerne wollt ich, dass sie mir diess Argument solvireten: Esau und Jacob sind von einem Vater und einer Mutter, auf eine Zeit, und unter gleichem Gestirn geboren, und doch gar widerwärtiger Natur, Art und Sinn. Summa, was von Gott geschicht, und sein Werk ist, das soll man dem Gestirn nicht zuschreiben. Ah, der Himmel fraget nach dem nicht, wie auch unser Herr Gott nach dem Himmel nicht fraget. Die rechte christliche Religion confutirt und widerlegt solche Mährlin und Fabelwerk allzumal.

I think nothing of them, and set no store by them; but I would be glad if they would solve this problem for me: Esau and Jacob were born of one father and one mother, at the same time, and under the same stars, and yet they were completely contrary in nature, demeanor, and mind. In short, what comes from God and is his handiwork is not to be ascribed to the stars. The sky pays no heed to this, just as Our Lord pays no heed to the sky. The true Christian religion altogether confutes and repudiates such tales and fables.

The fact is, therefore, that the Italian astrologers Gauricus and Cardano arbitrarily altered Luther's date of birth in order to make more or less hostile political capital out of it; and that two distinct birthdates were therefore current in Luther's own lifetime. His biographers had, as it were, two calendrical "truths" to deal with—one historical and one mythical—and at the same time two very different kinds of natal patron: on the one hand a German Christian saint, Saint Martin, and on the other a pair of pagan planetary spirits, Saturn and Jupiter.⁴⁴

Almost more remarkable still is the fact that—for a time—even Melancthon and his friends argued in favor of reassigning Luther's birth to 1484, the year of the great conjunction: the date so firmly rejected by Luther himself.

The stubborn survival of pagan astrology among those closest to the astrology-hating Reformer himself begins to seem somewhat less baffling in the light of the evidence, supplied above, that the Carion-Reinhold horoscope was an attempt at astrological compromise on behalf of the Reforming party. It was a serious effort, on the part of Luther's friends, to disable the hostile planetary configuration—as manipulated by the Italians and introduced by them into Wittenberg itself—by means of a further arbitrary alteration of the hour of birth, and thus to lessen the force of the cosmic decree that German astrologers, too, believed to reside in a great conjunction. The continued potency of a pagan culture is demonstrated by the arbitrary manner in which these Wittenberg astrologers—entirely rooted as they were in Gauricus's world of late medieval belief—were prepared to commit a falsification of their own by variously altering the hour of birth, thus disabling the objectivity of history and subordinating it to a mythic pattern of causation.

So cosmically defined, and thus so authentically Hellenistic, was the late medieval theory of historical epochs that it crucially depended on the appearance of certain planetary conjunctions at specific intervals.⁴⁵ A new prophet required the cosmic sanction of a conjunction of superior planets, and of Saturn and Jupiter in particular. How vivid and immediate such a native affinity with Saturn was felt to be, and how vigorously Luther resisted attempts to foist Saturn on him even as a single patron deity, is shown by a remark he made between 26 and 31 May 1532: that is, a few days after Gauricus's visit to Wittenberg. Luther said:

*Ego Martinus Luther sum infelicissimis astris natus, fortassis sub Saturno. Was man mir thun und machen soll, kan nimmermehr fertig werden; schneider, schuster, buchpinder, mein weib verzihen mich auffs lengste.*⁴⁶

I, Martin Luther, was born with the most inauspicious stars, perhaps under Saturn. The things I need done and made for me will never be completed; the tailor, the shoemaker, the bookbinder, and my wife keep me waiting forever.

This mockery of the supposed Saturnian influences in his natal planetary configuration illustrates how stubbornly—if often good-humoredly—Luther had to defend his own passionately held principles against constant efforts to define him as a “child” of his planet. To understand what it meant to reject the prevalent belief in planetary influences, and the fear of Saturn in particular, it will be necessary to attempt with the aid of pictorial examples to understand the commanding position occupied by the planetary deities in the late medieval cosmos. It was a position that made it possible—even in the age of the Reformation—to maintain two parallel chronologies, with historical

scruple and the pursuit of truth on one side and the "as if" of an astrological fiction on the other.

The Theory of Planetary Conjunctions, Prime Factor in Astrological Divination, as Reflected in German Illustrative Art—Fear of Saturn in Words and Images—Parallel with Italy

It is an incontrovertible fact that in astrology two entirely antithetical mental forces, which might logically have been expected to be in conflict, combine to form a single "method" (see fig. 129). On one side is mathematics, the subtlest operation of the abstract intellect; on the other is the fear of daemons, the most primitive causative force in religion. The astrologer, who comprehends the universe through a clear and harmonious system of linear coordinates, and can precisely compute and predict the relationships of the fixed stars and planets to the earth and to each other, is gripped, as he pores over his mathematical tables, by an atavistic and superstitious awe of those very star names that he wields like algebraic formulas: to him, they are daemons, of which he lives in fear.

Illustrations will be necessary if we are to gain a clear idea of these linear-mathematical and mythical-imaginative entities as they appear to the mind of a medieval astrologer. By what system do they rule the world; and what do they look like? Planets can exercise their rule either singly or jointly. As single rulers, in accordance with an ingenious system worked out by the astrologers of antiquity, they are patrons of the individual months in turn, together with the zodiacal signs that appear therein. All the planets, with the exception of the Sun and Moon, hold sway over two months each. Saturn, for example, rules December with the sign of Capricorn, and January with that of Aquarius; we shall take Saturn as our guiding star through this astral labyrinth, because in the age of the Reformation the fear and awe of Saturn stood at the very center of astrological belief.

In accordance with a further set of tables, every planet also rules over particular days and hours. The days of the week still wear the badges of this ancient servitude; thus, as the name indicates, Saturday stands under the influence of Saturn. This nonmathematical, mythic, iconic identity of the planets, which so perturbed the astrologers, is clearly exemplified in the illustrated planetary almanacs of medieval times.

In his book on the "children" of the planets, our lamented friend Hauber excellently described the survival and evolution of antique calendrical imagery, both verbal and pictorial, through the Middle Ages.⁴⁷ One page from a German manuscript in Tübingen (fig. 125) shows Saturn as the ruler of his month. The Greek god of time, and the Roman seedtime spirit, have here amalgamated into a rustic oaf wielding a mattock, a shovel, and a sickle; in keeping with his earthy nature, his mortal subjects labor on the land, plowing, hoeing, digging, and working grain into bread.

At first sight, this rough-looking Swabian peasant family seems to have nothing to do with classical antiquity or with its spirit world. However,



Fig. 125. *Children of Saturn*
Tübingen, Cod. M. d 2, fol. 266^v (see p. 613f.)

Saturn is revealed as a planetary ruler, in authentic antique style, by the presence of his two zodiacal signs, Capricorn and Aquarius. The Goat is clearly visible on the right; the Water Bearer partly conceals his allegorical nature by doing the baker the practical service of pouring the necessary water into his tub. In his left hand, however, he holds three dice: a surprising detail. For this figure, in however corrupt and derivative a form, is none other than the dicer who was part of the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia.

Proof of this is supplied by the real Saturnalian dicer who happens to survive as the symbol of December on an antique almanac, the Calendar of 354 (fig. 126); he stands before a table with the dice on it. This detail affords a vivid instance of the persistence of antique traditions even in so iconographically "naive" a work as a medieval popular almanac.

In another almanac, produced by the Hamburg-born printer Steffen Arndes in Lübeck in 1519—which is to say during the early part of Luther's active career—the outward aspect of the figure of Saturn (fig. 127) has already begun to look more authentic. On one arm he holds the dragon-serpent of Time, in remembrance of his identity as the Greek Chronos; furthermore, as the mythical ancestor of the pagan gods, he is engaged in swallowing his own offspring. The Low German verse below summarizes the joyless life and horrid disposition that are to be expected of those born in December and January.

This Saturn owes his more antique air to Italy: for one set of Northern Italian engravings (fig. 128) was the source that greatly influenced (by way of Burgkmair in Augsburg) not only this Low German almanac but also the monumental art of the German Renaissance. Thus we find the same Italian planetary deities, life-size, on the walls of the Rathaus in Lüneburg (1529), on the Brusttuch-Haus in Goslar (1526), in Hildesheim, in Brunswick, and on the Junkerhaus in Göttingen.⁴⁸

Nor must we allow the German or Italian bias in the appearance of the figure to obscure the truth that it retains all the essential attributes of this weird and ancient spirit, reinforced by the transference of his name to the remotest, the dimmest, the slowest-moving, and hence apparently the most mysterious of the planets. From that heavenly body, Saturn received an added measure of ponderous inertia; and so the Christian mortal sin of *acedia* (sloth) became associated with him. Hamlet, too, is a Child of Saturn.⁴⁹ Such is the background of "popularized" Hellenistic antiquity that lies behind one sarcastic remark made by Luther in 1532.

Strong as was the influence of the planets in the course of their shared rule of the annual cycle—their rotation of the chairmanship, as it were—they became gods of the moment, world rulers in an entirely "topical" sense, whenever they could be observed or calculated to be operating jointly and simultaneously: that is, when they were in conjunction. Only at long intervals, known as revolutions, were such conjunctions to be expected. Great and greatest conjunctions were systematically distinguished: the latter, *stellia* of all three superior planets, Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars, were the most perilous of all, but were very infrequent.



Saturnus



¶ Als toll vnde vneine
 Deseit vnvise yet ocl mine
 Also sint mine synt
 De vnder my gebaren synt.

¶ Saturnus dyn yet aere al befan
 Wyne natur ys tolz mye dachis vortans
 Hart vnde quat ys al myne wyse

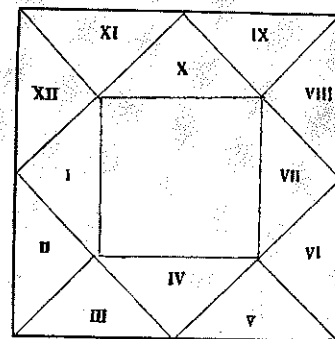
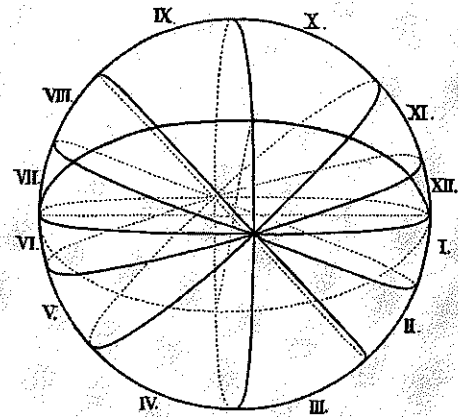


Fig. 126. Chronographer of A.D. 354
 December: Saturnalian Dicer (see p. 615)

Fig. 128. Saturn
 From Tarocchi, Series E. Northern Italian engraving
 (see pp. 593, 615)

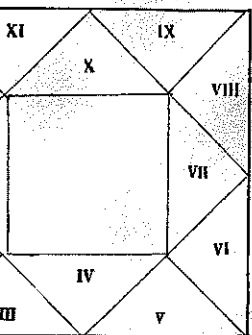
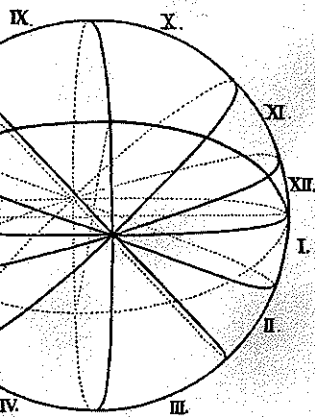
Fig. 127. Saturn
 From Nyge Kalender (Lübeck, 1519)
 (see pp. 593, 615)

Fig. 129. Astrological cosmos and horoscope chart
 After A. Drechsler, Astrologische Vorträge (Dresden, 1855)
 (see pp. 613, 617)

Saturnus



uerine
oel meire
en synt.
ure al befant
pe docht u pomans
myne wyf



nder (Lübeck, 1519)
(15)

ogical cosmos and horoscope chart
er, *Astrologische Vorträge* (Dresden, 1855)
(7)

The more planets there were in the conjunction, the more alarming it was, although those known as benefics might exert a moderating influence on the malefics. Such an influence might, for example, be exerted by Jupiter—who tended to be pictured as a benign and studious elderly cleric—on Saturn.

The other decisive factor governing the effect of the conjunction was its location in the sky. The entire celestial globe was divided mathematically into twelve segments, known as houses, each of which was represented on the conventional horoscope “map” by a triangle.⁵⁰ (See fig. 129.) Leonhard Reymann’s almanac of natal astrology (1515; fig. 130)⁵¹ clearly shows how these houses are assigned to the various departments of human life: thus, the first house pertains to Life, the second to Business, the third to Brothers, the others, respectively, to Parents, Children, Health, Marriage, Death, Religion, Government, Beneficence, and Imprisonment.⁵² The division of the cosmos among the members of the astral hierarchy is thus made plain.

In an essay on the astrological interpretation of history in the Middle Ages,⁵³ Friedrich von Bezold has shown us, with exemplary scholarship, how seriously—and with what encouragement from the Christian Church—the belief in the power of such planetary configurations influenced historical thinking all over medieval Europe. A generation earlier, Johann Friedrich, in his work on astrology and Reformation,⁵⁴ was the first to make the arduous but meritorious attempt to work through the vast, scattered, and obscure corpus of prophetic literature, both in Latin and in German, in which he believed that he had found the causes of the social and ecclesiastical unrest that led to the Reformation and the Peasants’ War. A welcome complement to these studies is supplied by G. Hellmann, who in his essay “Aus der Blütezeit der Astro-meteorologie”⁵⁵ affords a penetrating and accurate view of the mass literature that evoked the flood panic of 1524.

That panic was itself rooted in the fear of planetary influences. For many years past, it had been believed that in the month of February 1524 twenty planetary conjunctions—sixteen of them in the watery sign of Pisces—would inevitably bring in their train a catastrophic, universal deluge. All of the most learned astrological scientists of the day either eloquently confirmed this idea or found themselves enlisted by the spiritual and temporal authorities to deny it with equal emphasis, publishing semiofficial messages of reassurance to still the panic.

The same Reymann who composed the 1515 natal almanac was one of those who foretold the worst for 1524.⁵⁶ The illustration for his *Practica* for that year (fig. 131) shows a gigantic fish; from its star-studded belly (the planets in conjunction) a devastating flood descends on a city represented by a few buildings. Under the impact of this cataclysm, the emperor and the pope confer on the right; from the left come the peasants, including *Hans mit der Karst* (Jack with the mattock); their one-legged standard-bearer wields a scythe, for the ancient god of seedtime was the natural emblem of his rebellious children.

The contrasting literature of official reassurance is typified by the refutation published by the imperial astrologer, Georg Tannstetter, with a dedication to Archduke Ferdinand.⁵⁷ Here the seven planets look down from a raincloud on the peasants beneath, rather like spectators in a box at the theater; they are held in check by the hand of God, which emerges from the clouds above (fig. 133).

Also in 1521 Johann Carion, whom we have already encountered as the mathematician to the court of Brandenburg, brought out his own message of reassurance, *Prognosticatio vnd erklerung der grossen wesserung*—in which, however, he simultaneously prophesied all manner of other calamities.⁵⁸ On the title page of the first edition of this work,⁵⁹ now among the treasures of the Berlin library, there is a woodcut showing three separate scenes (fig. 132). On the left we see the threatened storm; on the right a comet, shining on a city, with the date 1521; and below five figures in contemporary costume, engaged in what looks like armed conflict. A pope, down on his knees, is threatened by a knight with drawn sword whose companion, a bare-headed man, also raises his sword. A cardinal throws up his arms in lamentation; the emperor, with crown and scepter, covers his face in horror.

Were it not for the text of the book itself, this might be taken for a premonition of the Sack of Rome by the German lansquenets. On closer scrutiny, however, the emperor turns out to be accompanied by the planetary symbol for the Sun; the pope's mantle bears the sign of Jupiter; and behind the knight is the symbol of Mars. These figures, as emerges from the allegorical verses printed within ("Reymen der Planeten"), illustrate the planetary configuration that accompanied the comet of 1521. For purposes of political prophecy, the planetary figures are identified with conflicting forces within contemporary politics. Sol is the emperor, Jupiter the pope, Mars the nobility; and the man with the sword is an ill-characterized Saturn, the peasant.

Carion's book casts significant light on the history of the press in the period. He denounces a number of sensational illustrated publications as attempts to manipulate the Diet of Worms through the deluge scare propaganda of Seytz⁶⁰ and his like. We sense the impact of woodcut illustration as a powerful new means of working on an uneducated public.

Did not irrefutable evidence compel the historian to take such banal costume groups seriously as part of the history of religion, he would very soon lay such an illustration aside with a superior smile—and thus, as so often, block the deep wellspring of insight into collective psychology that such mere "curiosities" have to offer. The planetary spirits were perceived as real forces: which was why they took on a human shape.

It seems—but is not—paradoxical to say that this group of gods possessed greater immediate numinous power than did the Olympians whom Raphael depicted at much the same time on the ceiling of the Villa Farnesina. So serene and straightforward is the beauty in which the Italian Renaissance clothes the gods of its ancient world that any art historian would reject—as mere antiquarian and philological wrongheadedness—the attempt to discern a trace of

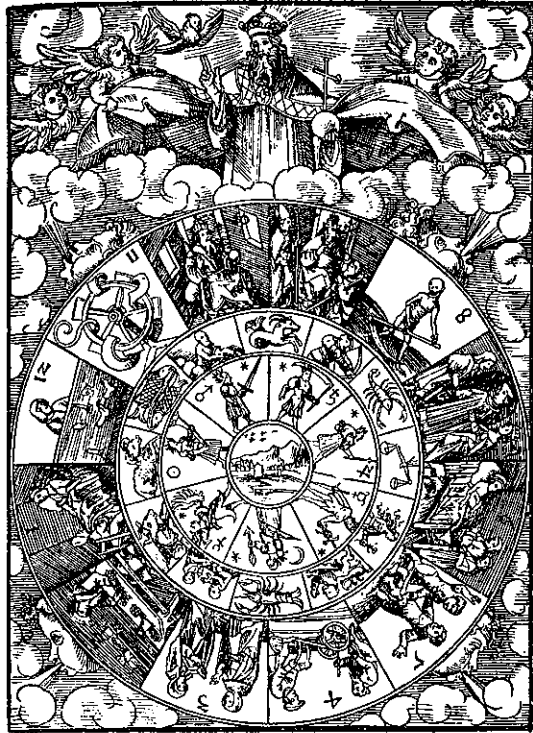


Fig. 130. Erhard Schön
Frontispiece to Leonhard Reymann, *Nativität-Kalender*
(Nuremberg, 1515)
(see p. 617)

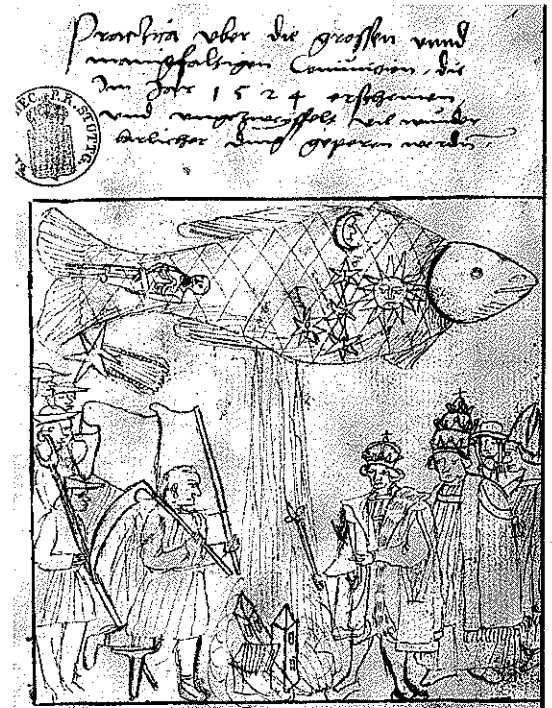


Fig. 131. Title leaf of Leonhard Reymann, *Practica* for
1524
Stuttgart, L.B., Hs. Math. Q. 3 (see p. 617)

Prognosticatio und er-

klärung der grossen wesserung / Auch anderer erschrockenlichen
wütungen. So sich begeben nach Christi vnfers lieben hern
geburrt / Sunffzehen hundert vñ xxiiij. Jar. Durch mich
Magistru Johānem Carion vō Buerikaym / Chur
fürstlicher gnaden zu Brandenburg Astrono
mū / mit fleysfiger arbeit zusamē gebracht.
Ganz erbermlich zulesen / in nutz vñ
warnung aller Christglaubis
gen menschen ꝛc.



Fig. 132. Title page of Johann Carion, *Prognosticatio*
(Leipzig, 1521)
(see p. 618)

true pagan divinity in Raphael's figures. Even so, he should remember that only a step away, in an adjoining room of the Farnesina, Agostino Chigi simultaneously commissioned Peruzzi to fill the ceiling with pagan astral deities—planets and fixed stars alike—in a set of relationships that are not artistically defined but represent the positions of the stars on the day of Chigi's own birth. For Chigi chose to spend his hours of rural leisure beneath the protection of his own auspicious horoscope, which—deceptively—promised him a long life.

Even in death, Agostino Chigi remained a patron of astrological art. His tomb in S. Maria del Popolo is surmounted by an openwork dome, designed by Raphael, from which the seven planetary deities of antiquity look down, their pagan temperament held in check by an escort of Christian angels commanded by God the Father. The formal beauty of these figures of the gods, and the exquisite taste with which the artist reconciles pagan and Christian belief, must not be allowed to obscure the truth that even in Italy, around 1520, at the time of greatest artistic freedom and creativity, the antique was—as it were—revered in the form of a Janus-faced herm. One face wore a daemonic scowl, exacting superstitious awe; the other face was Olympian and serene, inviting aesthetic veneration.

Luther and the Theory of Planetary Conjunctions: The Deluge Panic of 1524—Luther's View of Johann Lichtenberger's Prophecy That a "Minor Prophet" Would Be Born of the 1484 Conjunction

This panic terror of a deluge was part of Luther's own psychic experience. His response to it, as to all manifestations of systematic astrology, was unequivocally hostile. We possess a humorous and highly dismissive comment that he made some years later:

D. M. L. sagte von der Narrheit der Mathematicorum und Astrologorum, der Sternkicker, die von einer Sündfluth oder grossem Gewässer hätten gesagt, so Anno 1524 kommen sollte, das doch nicht geschach; sondern das folgende 25. Jahr stunden die Bauren auf, und wurden aufrührerisch. Davon sagte kein Astrologus nicht ein Wort. Er redete aber vom Bürgermeister Hohndorf: derselbe liess ihm ein viertel Bier in sein Haus hinauf ziehen, wollte da warten auf die Sindfluth, gleich als würde er nicht zu trinken haben, wenn sie käme. Aber zur Zeit des Zorns war ein Conjunctio, die hiess Sünde und Gottes Zorn, das war ein ander Conjunction, denn die im 24. Jahre.⁶¹

D. M. L. spoke of the folly of the mathematicians and astrologers, the stargazers, who had talked of a deluge or great flood, which was to come in the year 1524, but which did not come to pass; however, in the following year, '25, the peasants rose up in arms. Of which not one astrologer had a single word to say. He went on to speak of Burgomaster Hohndorf, who had a quarter of beer hauled up inside his house to wait there for the Deluge, as if he would not have had plenty to drink when it came. But at the hour of wrath there was a conjunction, which was

II=
 Kenlichenn
 Ben hern
 omich
 huc
 o



that of sin and God's wrath; and that was a very different conjunction from that of the year '24.

At the time of the panic itself, Luther was thus not at all disposed to believe in a deluge occasioned by astrological influences; he did, however, express the view that the conjunction of so many heavenly bodies might well signal the approach of the Last Judgment. For although Luther never accepted that astrology was an exact science, his objections of principle were directed * against its intellectual and not against its mystical aspect:

Denn die Heiden waren nicht so närrisch, dass sie sich vor Sonn und Monden gefürcht hätten, sondern für den Wunderzeichen und ungeheuren Gesichten, Portenten und Monstris, dafür fürchten sie sich, und ehreten sie. Zudem, so ist Astrologia keine Kunst,⁶² denn sie hat keine principia und demonstrationes, darauf man gewiss, unwankend fussen und gründen könnte...⁶³

For the heathen were not such fools as to live in fear of the Sun and the Moon, but of signs and wonders, monstrous sights, portents and omens: those they feared and worshiped. Furthermore, astrology is not an art, for it has no *principia* and *demonstrationes* on which to take a sure and certain footing.

The fear of natural signs and wonders, in the heavens and on the earth, was shared by all Europe; and the press of the day exploited it for ends of its own. The invention of printing from movable type had lent wings to learned thought; and now the art of pictorial printing enabled images—their language an international one—to fly far and wide. These stormy petrels darted from North to South and back again, and every party sought to enlist in its own cause the “pictorial slogans” (as they might now be called) of cosmic sensationalism.

On the Protestant side, it seems that Spalatin, a trusted ally both of Luther and of Elector Frederick the Wise, employed astrological and teratological images of impending disaster as part of a press campaign based on both “artificial” and “miraculous” prophecy. As early as 1519, he commissioned an expert opinion on the great conjunction of 1484,⁶⁴ and it was he who asked Luther for clarification of his Italian horoscope.⁶⁵ These two facts alone show that Spalatin was at home in the intellectual context of the prophecies of Johann Lichtenberger, which Luther issued as a pamphlet with a foreword of his own. Translated from the Latin by Stephan Roth, and with woodcuts by Lemberger, this was published in Wittenberg by Hans Lufft in 1527.⁶⁶

In his foreword,⁶⁷ Luther played down the strongly astrological character of the text, presenting the forty-three images in isolation as warnings for delinquent Christians, with the express intention of shaking up the clergy, who, having emerged unscathed from the Peasants' War of 1525, were no longer intimidated by threats of chastisement. The clergy and the princes—all the “bigwigs”—had every reason to fear this book, which presented the ideas

of the Reformation of church and state through a strange blend of obscure pictorial riddles and plainspoken threats and demands. Originally published in Latin, the text was reissued countless times in a variety of languages from around 1490 onward, and was seriously consulted as an oracle in difficult times. It was still being consulted after the battle of Jena in 1806.⁶⁸

Lichtenberger's prophecy had its roots deep in astrological soil. In a spirit of superstitious fanaticism, it connected a specific conjunction of planets, foretold for 23 November 1484, with the expected emergence of a cleric who would bring about a revolution in the Church. In fifteenth-century Italy, as we know from Pico della Mirandola,⁶⁹ this same prophecy had caused distress and agitation for decades on end, very much as the deluge prophecy of 1524 was later to do.

In 1484, when the expected spiritual prophet—like the later deluge—failed to materialize, the first response, Pico tells us, was one of relief. But astrologers are incorrigible. There emerged in Padua a professor of astrology, one Paulus van Middelburg (fig. 134), a Dutch-born cleric, who simply “stretched” the influence of the 1484 conjunction over a period of twenty years and extended its application from the anticipated advent of a monk to embrace every department of human life.⁷⁰ Middelburg firmly predicted the coming of this revolutionary “minor prophet” while making, at times, slavish use of the writings of the Arab astrologer Abū Ma‘šār (died 886).⁷¹ The prophet would be born nineteen years after 1484, i.e., in 1503; he would remain active for nineteen years; and he would be forced to leave his native land—because the Bible says that a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country.

For the historian of prophetic literature, it is both philologically and psychologically instructive that—as no one has yet remarked—Lichtenberger's prophecy is lifted, word for word, from Paulus van Middelburg. His mystic edifice thus rests upon a stolen foundation. In 1492 Middelburg himself indignantly drew attention to this in his *Invectiva*,⁷² which must be one of the earliest printed denunciations of plagiarism. Lichtenberger, of whose personality very little is known,⁷³ does not seem to have replied.

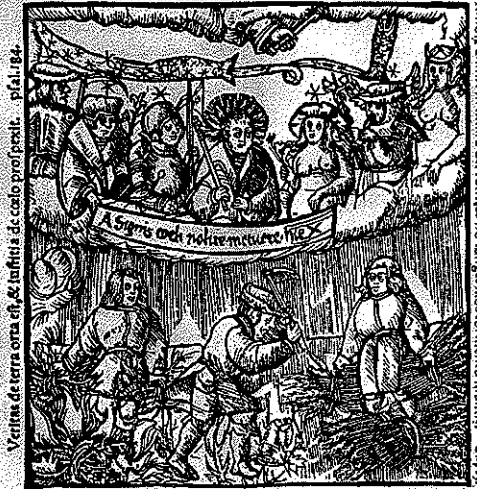
The terror of the great conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter (fig. 135), and the figure of the “minor prophet,” were thus old-established images, dating from the pre-Reformation period. For various reasons, even so, they inevitably took a new lease on life in Luther's day. At a time of conflict between rulers and peasants, any scene showing Saturn and Jupiter together was bound to look like a topical episode from the Peasants' War; and the astrological text itself acquired curious overtones of humanity when it spoke of the motions of heavenly bodies as if they had been human beings in conflict. Uncannily and spontaneously, the spirit world of antiquity derived new life from the passionate and vibrant age of the Reformation—and so, at a time of true ecclesiastical revolution, did Lichtenberger's image of the prophet monk (fig. 136).

Despite discrepancies in the account of the prophet's birth and exile from

In gratia serenissimi ac potentissimi Prin-

cipis & dñi, dñi FERDINANDI Principis Hispaniarum, Archiducis Austriæ, ducis Burgundie, &c. Cæs. & catholice Mæ. loci tenens generalis &c. & ad consolationem populorum suorum, ac postmodum ditioni subiectorum, Georgij TANNSTETTER Collimatoris Lycorisæ Medici & Mathematici libellus consolatorius, quo, opinione jam dudum ante hominum ex quo runda Astrologorum, divinatione insidentem, de futuro diluvio & multis alijs horribilis periculis, XXXIII. anni a fundamentis extirpare conatur.

Præcipit Soli & non ortur, & stellæ claudite quasi sub signaculo. Qui facit Arcurum & Orionem & hyadas, &c. Job. 9.



Gloria in excelsis deo, & in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis. Lucæ 2.
Cum Cæs. Maiest. grā & privilegio.

**Magistri pauli de middelburgo prognostica
ad viginti annos duratura ..**



mag. particulam amplecti vellem: scio, pfero, oq. uecum ferue deficeret ingeniu. cu tot tantiq. sint q. angelicam potate q. hu mans oratione requirant, p. i. c. e. n. a. ergo z. silemto pot. p. m. n. da arbitror. cu ampliatu dñi tue paze oratioe p. p. e. n. a. t. e. n. o. p. o. s. s. i. t. m. u. s. d. u. b. i. o. e. i. u. n. e. s. a. n. t. a. a. u. d. i. e. n. t. i. b. u. s. i. l. l. a. s. v. i. o. e. r. i. f. a. c. i. a. t. q. u. a. n. t. a. i. p. s. e. v. e. r. b. i. a. r. e. f. e. r. r. e. q. u. e. a. c. u. i. n. v. e. r. i. t. a. t. e. l. o. n. g. e. s. i. t. m. a. i. o. r. e. c. u. l. l. a. m. o. s. e. r. g. o. z. s. i. l. e. n. t. i. o. p. i. m. a. m. A. l. i. o. t. e. r. g. o. r. e. d. e. o. d. u. r. i. m. i. t. i. c. i. s. s. i. m. e. d. i. u. e. & d. i. x. i. m. i. l. i. t. a. n. e. c. u. i. n. t. e. s. p. i. r. i. t. u. s. o. m. n. i. u. m. r. e. t. u. c. a. t. e. x. e. m. p. l. a. r. p. e. r. g. e. v. i. c. e. p. i. s. t. i. e. r. a. b. o. n. o. p. o. s. s. i. t. o. d. e. s. i. s. t. e. r. e. u. o. l. i. d. o. c. t. i. s. f. a. c. i. t. A. l. i. o. i. o. s. a. d. m. a. i. o. r. e. d. e. b. i. t. o. s. i. n. t. e. n. t. i. a. a. l. i. i. r. o. l. o. g. o. s. o. b. s. e. r. u. a. t. s. o. l. i. e. n. t. i. s. i. n. t. e. r. m. o. r. t. a. l. e. s. q. u. i. t. e. s. t. a. n. t. i. q. t. u. o. i. n. c. o. l. u. m. e. p. r.æ. f. e. r. u. a. r. e. p. r.æ. s. e. l. i. g. i. t. n. a. n. q. b. e. n. i. g. n. i. s. s. i. m. e. t. e. r. i. o. e. m. o. p. t. i. m. u. s. a. c. l. o. q. u. i. t. i. s. s. i. m. u. s. d. e. u. s. b. o. n. i. t. a. t. i. o. n. e. z. s. a. p. i. e. n. t. i. e. s. u. e. d. i. s. p. o. s. i. t. i. o. n. e. i. n. r. e. b. u. s. p. r.æ. c. u. m. p. r.æ. c. a. u. s. i. s. m. o. t. u. s. a. r. q. i. n. s. i. l. i. u. s. i. n. a. o. l. l. e. n. t. e. r. e. v. i. s. i. b. i. l. i. s. i. p. s. i. a. s. t. r. o. l. o. g. i. a. d. e. o. q. u. o. d. d. e. l. i. c. i. t. i. a. i. m. o. t. e. r. e. t. Q. u. e. c. u. i. t. a. s. i. n. t. d. u. x. t. a. r. i. s. t. i. n. e. q. u. i. a. i. n. t. u. o. p. e. c. t. o. r. e. i. p. s. e. l. i. b. e. r. a. l. e. s. a. r. t. e. s. i. p. s. a. v. e. r. a. f. a. p. i. e. n. t. i. a. i. p. s. a. d. e. m. u. c. a. r. i. t. a. s. i. n. h. a. b. i. t. a. n. t. a. t. e. i. n. c. i. p. i. e. n. t. i. u. n. i. f. e. r. e. n. t. i. s. s. i. m. o. d. i. s. z. h. o. m. i. n. u. m. g. r. a. t. i. s. s. i. m. o. m. i. n. u. s. h. o. c. p. e. r. s. u. a. u. i. s. s. i. m. u. s. v. i. u. e. q. u. a. n. t. i. s. B. e. n. i. g. n. i. a. r. e. s. t. o. e. n. t. i. n. t. u. o. q. u. a. n. t. o. f. i. d. e. i. s. s. i. m. o. s. e. r. u. i. t. o. z. c. o. l. l. o. c. a. r. e. p. i. g. r. i. e. r. i. a. z. m. e. e. x. c. e. l. l. e. n. t. i. e. s. u. e. d. e. o. i. s. t. i. s. s. i. m. u. s. m. e. a. q. i. s. t. r. a. C. a. q. u. a. n. d. o. r. i. b. a. z. i. n. c. u. l. t. a. z. l. i. b. e. n. t. i. a. n. i. m. o. s. u. s. c. r. i. p. t. a. s. Q. u. o. d. n. o. s. i. t. a. r. e. m. u. s. h. o. c. g. r. a. t. i. s. s. i. m. u. i. m. p. e. t. a. s. s. e. m. e. s. e. r. o. c. u. a. m. i. n. c. r. e. d. i. b. i. l. e. m. h. u. m. a. n. i. t. a. t. e. i. n. a. u. d. i. a. m. a. g. c. l. e. m. e. n. t. i. a. p. r.æ. c. i. o. c. a. r. e. n. o. n. d. e. s. i. n. a. m. V. a. l. e.

Editum per Paulum de Middelburgo Zelandie bonarum artium z. medicine doctorem illustrissimi ducis Urbini p. p. h. c. In marcuriali oppido antwerpensi impressum. Per me Gerardum leeu Anno salutis M. d. ccc. lxxxiii. quarto kalendas Octobris.

Fig. 133. Title page of Georg Tannstetter, *Libellus consolatorius* (Vienna, 1523) (see p. 618)

Fig. 134. Title page and last page of Paulus van Middelburg, *Prognostica* (Antwerp, 1484) (see p. 623)

his native land—and in that of the birthmarks and signs on various parts of his body that had already been listed by Abū Ma'sar—the gist of the prophecy fitted the emergence of Luther: for a monk had indeed arisen and assailed the clergy. Luther himself was fully aware of the danger that the illustrations in this book of prophecies might be taken to apply to him; and he took steps to avert it, in one place at least, by supplying Lichtenberger's image of a false prophet with a caption saying "*Dieser Prophet sihet dem Thomas Müntzer gleich.*"⁷⁴ (This prophet looks like Thomas Müntzer.) This did nothing to dissuade either friends or foes from applying Lichtenberger's image of two monks to Luther and Melanchthon.⁷⁵

In the Stadtbibliothek in Hamburg there is a copy of the early Latin edition of 1492, published in Mainz (fig. 137). Above the two figures—a tall monk with a hood that reaches to the ground and a devil on his shoulder,⁷⁶ and a smaller monk in a frontal pose—an early hand, probably in the sixteenth century, has written in Low German: "*Dyth is Martinus Luther*" (This is Martin Luther) and "*Philippus Melanton.*" Given that this is an image that appears to show a monk in a state of diabolical possession, such an inscription might—in the absence of a contextual science of culture—seem to reveal nothing but the malice of a declared enemy of Luther. This is not necessarily so: friends as well as foes were able to apply the image to Luther, using a favorable interpretation based on his own words.⁷⁷

As is well known, however, Luther's papist adversaries strove ad nauseam to associate Luther as closely as possible with the devil, who was even said to have begotten him in the guise of an incubus. The fiercest anti-Lutheran of all, Cochlaeus, has left us a vicious attempt to identify Luther with Lichtenberger's prophet monk. In his book *Von neuen Schwermereyen*, of 1534, Cochlaeus cursed Luther as follows:

*Hoff auch / er sols auf XX. Jahr nicht bringen / Sonder im XIX. jar (wie Liechtenberger von jm schreybt) sol er zu boden gehen / der vnselig Münch / der den Teuffel auff der achseln tregt / in Liechtenbergers Practica.*⁷⁸

I hope, too, that he never reaches the twentieth year. But (as Lichtenberger writes of him) may he meet his downfall in the nineteenth: the unholy monk who bears the devil on his shoulders, in Lichtenberger's *Practica*.

Cochlaeus thus applies both the image and its content to Luther as if it were an entirely familiar allusion; it sounds, in fact, as if he were trying to counter some other interpretation more favorable to Luther.

One year later Cardinal Vergerio visited the feared and excommunicated monk in Wittenberg and described his impressions as follows, in a letter to Ambrogio Ricalcati dated 13 November 1535:

... et veramente che quanto più penso a quel che ho veduto et sentito in quel monstro et alla gran forza delle sue maladette operationi, et coniungendo quello che io

culam amplecti vellem: scio pfecto opus meum tene
genitū. cū tot tanteq; sint q; angelicam potius q; hu
manā requirant p̄ticeia ergo e silentio pot' p̄men
tū. cū amplius iūni me patē oratioz p̄ticeia nō possi
o esse nē tantū audentib' illaz videt' facia: quāā
referre queā. cū in veritate longe sit maior. oculū
silētio p̄mam'. Ad te ergo redeo hūc unicit'
Daximiliāne cū in te virtutū omnīū reluceat exem
pt' cepisti era bono. p̄posito. desistere noli. bochia
fosa aduua. debica sustenta. astrologos oblerua.
inter mortales: qui te statuq; tui incolumē p̄fer
oluit nāq; benignissim' et idem optim' ac sapien
t' bonitatis et sapientie sue dīp̄ositiōne in reb'. p
ausa: moris atq; influy' ita ostēdere: ut fōhis ip'
ia deoq; delictis innoteret. Q. ne cū ita sint dūc
quia in tuo pectore ipse liberalis arces. ipse p̄tra fa
a demū caritas inhabitant. a te p̄ncipe. equifficē
s e hominib' gratissimō. manus hoc p̄to suauiss'
quāq; in Italia restitente: in tuo numero f̄sēf̄
itoz collocare dignitas. e me exellenēcie debiti
q; t̄p̄ta. C. quāq; p̄tiosa e inculta. libenti animo su
uos si te mui'. hoc gratissimū impetrat' me fer'
incredibilem humanitatē: in auctōritatē clemētia:
non desinam. Vale.

Edunt per Paulum de Astoburgo
Zelandie bonarum artium e medicine docto
rem illustrissimi Ducis Vrbini phisicu In mar
curiali oppido antwerpiensi impressum. Per
me. Hieronymum leeu. Anno salutis. M. DCCC.
LXXXIij. quarto kalendas Octobris.

and last page of Paulus van
ca (Antwerp, 1484)



Fig. 135. *Jupiter and Saturn*
From Johann Lichtenberger, *Weissagungen*
(Wittenberg, 1527)
(see p. 623)



Is sind vnd werden die zeichen sein / da bey man yhn wird erkomen / Er wird schwarze fleckchen haben am leibe / vnd wird einen heolichen leib habe von braunfleckichten manchfarbichten mackeln ym der rechten seiten / beym schoß vnd an der huffen / Er stehet an teil des glücks / zur rechten hand des hymels / vnd ym zehenden vom horoscopo / doch / das der ascendent der beider beste weiblicher sey / vnd werden sich auff das hinderste teil des leibes am meisten neygen / Er wird auch noch ein ander zeichen an der brust haben / aus dem teil des zeichens / wilchs ym sechs- sten grade des Leuens erfunden ist. Dieser Prophet (wie das selbige Firmicus bezeuget) wird erschrecklich sein de Göt- ten vnd den Teuffeln / er wird viel zeichen vnd wunderwerck thun / Seine zukunfft werden auch die bösen geiste fliehen / vnd

P die

¶ Monach? i alba cuculla z diabol? i scapulo eius retro
habens i capitulo legum sedens cum amplis cucullis diabolus i scapulo eius retro.



Fig. 136. *The Two Monks*
Ibid. (see p. 623)

Fig. 137. *The Two Monks*
From the Mainz, 1492, edition of Lichtenberger. Copy in
Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek
(see p. 625)

*so della sua natività et di tutta la passata vita da persone che li erano intimi amici sino a quel tempo che se fece frate, tanto più mi lascio vincere a credere che egli habbia qualche demonio adosso!*⁷⁹

...and, truly, the more I reflect on what I have seen and heard both of that monster, and of the great power of its accursed operations, and adding what I myself know of his nativity and past life, from persons who were his close friends before he became a monk, the more I am inclined to suppose he has a devil on his back.

Even the wording of Vergerio's description reads like a startlingly apt caption to Lichtenberger's image of the prophet monk; and Vergerio proves that he also has Lichtenberger's actual text in mind by claiming to have heard all manner of suspicious things about Luther's "natività." I do not think that this word should here be translated by "birth"; in this context, Luther's "nativity" is his natal horoscope.

When Vergerio wrote his letter, an Italian astrologer in Wittenberg had recently traced a link between Luther's nativity and Lichtenberger's prophecies: for these may very well have suggested to Lucas Gauricus, on his visit to Wittenberg in 1532, the choice of 22 October 1484 as the birthdate (see pp. 606 ff., fig. 123). Vergerio is all the more likely to have heard of this, on inquiry, because the use of that date had all along been motivated by political animus against the Reformers—the same animus that eventually inspired Gauricus, in publishing his horoscope of Luther in 1552, to supplement it with a vicious denunciation.

The connection between Lichtenberger and Gauricus can be traced through matters of detail. Closely scrutinized, in ways that can only be touched on here, the Gauricus horoscope reveals an indubitable affinity with Lichtenberger's predictions. This agreement may possibly be explained by supposing a common source, itself Northern in origin. For Paulus van Middelburg, who was Lichtenberger's unavowed source, lived in Italy and was in close personal contact with Gauricus: both men were among those commissioned by Pope Leo X to undertake the reform of the Julian calendar.⁸⁰ We know that Gauricus knew and esteemed Middelburg's work, because he cited him in his *Encomion astrologiae* as one of the leading lights of astral science.⁸¹

Gauricus has simply twisted around the basic idea of the prophecy in order to use it against Luther, so that not merely two planets—as in Lichtenberger—but all the planets, with the single exception of Mars, meet in the sign of Scorpio. Other features of Lichtenberger's prophet-making conjunction are retained by Gauricus: Jupiter and Saturn conjoin in the ninth house—that of religion—and the malefic, Mars, stands in his own sign of Aries, as Lichtenberger explicitly requires. Gauricus adds to this the grouping of the remaining planets in the ninth house. Whether the need to coincide with this event, or some other specific astronomical calculation, underlies his rejection of Lichtenberger's date of 25 (or 20) November, which he replaces by 22 October, is a matter for further examination.⁸²



93. xxxij. Capitel.

und werden die zeichen sein/ da bey man
ird erkennen/ Er wird schwarze fleckchen
am leibe/ und wird einen heelichen leib habe
traronfleckchen/ manchfarbichen macheln
eyen/ bey dem schos/ und an der huffe/ Er ste
licka/ zur rechten hand des hymels/ und ym
roskopo/ doch/ das der ascendent der beider
y/ und werden sich auff das hunderste teil des
meygen/ Er wird auch noch ein ander zeichen
aus dem teil des zeichens/ wilchs ym sech
wens erfunden ist. Dieser Prophet (wie
aus bezeuget) wird erschrecklich sein de Göt
sein/ er wird viel zeichen und wunderwerck
iff werden auch die bösen geiste fliehen/ und
p die

da cuculla ⁊ diabol⁹ i scapul eius retro
mad rca. am am ple eua bruchta die allspulien fanten.



Monks

Monks

1492, edition of Lichtenberger. Copy in
und Universitätsbibliothek



Fig. 138. Scorpio
Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana,
Cod. Vat. Reg. lat. 1283, fol. 7^v (see p. 625)

Luther on Johann Lichtenberger's Prophecies of the "Foul Fiend"

In his foreword, Luther goes to some lengths to stress the shortcomings of astrology; and he would certainly have given short shrift to any attempt to identify him with Lichtenberger's prophet monk on astrological grounds—if for nothing else, because of the imp of hell on the monk's neck (figs. 136, 140). Even so, however, a story first recorded by Herberger in the early seventeenth century, but attributed to reliable sources, goes some way to suggest the contrary:

Von S. Martini vnd D. Martini Feinden

S. Martino haben die bösen Geister viel schalckheit angeleget / wenn sie jhm in mancherley form vnd gestalt sind erschienen. Vornemlich hat er geklaget / dass Mercurius unter dem hauffen der schlimmeste sey. Jedermann hat seine plage / wie es Christus selbst muss erfahren / Matth. 4. Zur zeit kam S. Martino der Teuffel entgegen / da er wolte sein Ampt verrichten / vnd sprach: Alle Welt wird dir gram werden: Da antwortet Martinus eben wie Ritter Gordius: Dominus mecum, non timebo mala, ist Gott mit vns, wer wil wider vns: Also hat der Teuffel auch D. Martino viel schalckheit durch seine Werckzeug angeleget / Vornemlich die Mercurialischen geschwinden Köpffe vnd Sophisten haben jhn greulich geplaget.

Hier muss ich etwas denckwürdiges erzehlen. Herr Johan Lichtenberger hat geweissagt / es würde ein Münch kommen / der würde die religion scheuren vnd pantzerfegen / demselben Münch hat er einen teuffel auff den nacken gemalt / nu macht sich Lutherus ein mal uber Lichtenbergers Buch / vnd wil es verdeutschen / D. Iustus Ionas kömpt dazu vnd fragt was er vorhabe: D. Luther sagets. Da spricht D. Ionas: Warumb wolt jhr jhn deutschen / ist er doch wider euch. Lutherus fraget vrsach. D. Ionas sagt: Lichtenberger sagt / jhr habt den Teuffel / nu habt jhr ja keinen Teuffel. Da lächelt der Herr Lutherus, vnnd spricht: Ey Herr Doctor / sehet nur das Bild ein wenig besser an / wo sitzt der Teuffel? / Er sitzt nicht dem Münche im hertzen / sondern auff dem nacken / ey wie fein hat ers troffen / Jm hertzen da wohnet mein HErr JESVS / da sol mir der Teuffel nu vnnd nimmermehr hinein kommen / aber ich meyne er sitzt mir auff dem nacken / durch Bapst / Keyser vnd grosse Potentaten / vnd alles was in der Welt wil klug seyn. Kan er nicht mehr / so macht er mir im Kopff ein abscheulichs sausen. Wie Got wil / er mag mich eusserlich plagen / es ist / Gott lob vnnd danck / nur ein aussgestossener aussgeworfener Teuffel / wie Christus redet / der Fürst dieser Welt werde jetzt aussgestossen / Ioh. 12.

Diese wort hat D. Iusti Ionae Diener / welcher hernach ein berühmter Prediger worden / ad notam genommen vnd oft erzehlet. Es ist war / der Teuffel gehet herum von aussen / 1 Pet. 5. Lass jhn prüllen wie er will / im hertzen gleubiger Christen hat er nichts zu schaffen / vnser Hertz ist Christi Königlicher eigner Sitz / da wil er Regent vnd Platzmeister bleiben.⁸³

On the Foes of Saint Martin and of Dr. Martin

Saint Martin was much plagued with the mischief of evil spirits, which appeared to him in many forms and guises. He complained that Mercury was the worst of them all. Everyone is tormented in his own way, as Christ himself had to learn: Matthew 4. On one occasion, the devil came to Saint Martin as he was about to say his Office

and said: "The whole world will be wroth with thee." Martin gave the same answer as Sir Gordius: *Dominus mecum, non timebo mala*; if God be with us, who shall stand against us. Likewise, through his henchmen, the devil made much mischief for Dr. Martin; and it was the mercurial quick-brains and sophists who tormented him worst of all.

Here I must recount a memorable fact. Master Johann Lichtenberger prophesied that a monk would come who would cleanse religion and sweep it clean; and he portrayed that monk with a devil on his back. One day, Luther was studying Lichtenberger's book and making ready to translate it into German. Dr. Justus Jonas came along and asked what he was intending to do; Dr. Luther told him.

Dr. Jonas said: "Why translate him? He is against you." Luther asked him why. Jonas said: "Lichtenberger says you have the devil; and you have no devil."

Then Master Luther smiled and said: "Now, Doctor, look more closely at the picture. Where does the devil sit? Not in the monk's heart but on his back. That is quite right! In my heart dwells my Lord Jesus, and there the devil shall never enter, now or hereafter. And yet I think he does sit on my back, through the agency of the pope, the emperor, and the great potentates, and all those in the world who claim to be wise. If he can do no more, he makes a fearful roaring in my ears. As God will: he may torment me outwardly, but God be praised and thanked, this is no more than an outcast devil; as Christ says, now shall the prince of this world be cast out, John 12."

These words were noted down and often recounted by Dr. Justus Jonas's servant, who later became a celebrated preacher. It is true: the devil walketh about, 1 Peter 5. Let him roar as he will, he has no power over the hearts of faithful Christians. Our hearts are the royal throne of Christ himself, and there he is sure to remain as ruler and governor.

This tradition rings true. We possess very similar remarks from Luther about his battle with the headache demon, which for him was a highly personal being.⁸⁴ Herberger's humorous telling of the tale cannot conceal this; for however firmly Luther may have rejected the anthropomorphic planetary spirits, the foul fiend himself remained a vivid and indubitable presence. He went so far as to concede, in his foreword to Lichtenberger,⁸⁵ that on occasion the fiend might speak true prophecy, if only concerning the affairs of this world. We are fortunate enough to have another remark of Luther's, on Lichtenberger's own relationship to the devil. On being asked whether Lichtenberger communed with a good or an evil spirit, Luther replied:

*Fuit spiritus fanaticus et tamen multa praedixit; denn das kan der Teufel woll thun, quod novit corda eorum quos possidet. Praeterea novit conditionem mundi, er siehet wie es gehe.*⁸⁶

It was a fanatical spirit, and yet he foretold many things; for this the devil can certainly do, because he knows the hearts of those whom he possesses. He also knows the condition of the world; he sees how it goes.

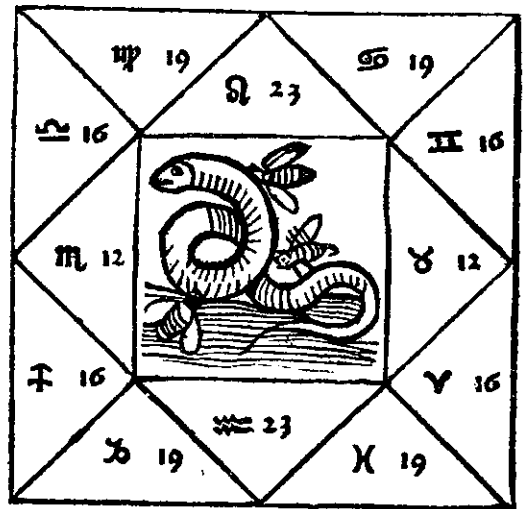
Viriscorpionē tenēs cū collo.

¶ Homo inuidus erit.



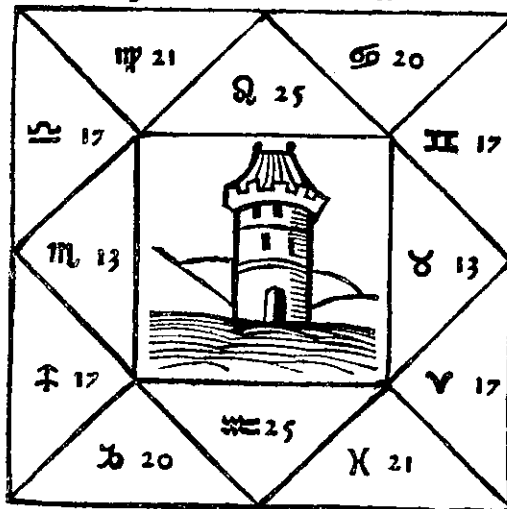
Serpentē magnū musce pugentes.

¶ Homo pudēs erit sed malus.



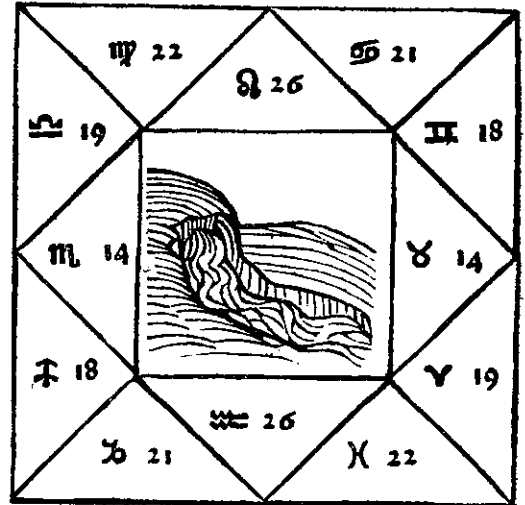
Turris pulchra ac fortis.

¶ Fortis laborator erit.



¶ Puteus ex quo manat aqua.

¶ Homo instabilis erit seuu.



Scorpio
11-14

Fig. 139. Degrees 11-14 of Scorpio
From *Astrolabium Magnum*, ed. Engel (Augsburg, 1488)
(see p. 625)

Luther thus considered demoniacal possession to be entirely compatible with a gift of accurate prophecy in earthly matters. And he accordingly wrote in his foreword:

Denn Gotts zeichen und der Engel warnunge / sind gemenet mit des Satans eingeben und zeichen / wie die wellt denn werd ist / das es wust unternander gehe und nichts unterschiedlich erkennen kan.

For God's signs and the angels' warnings mingle with the inspirations and signs of Satan; for the world deserves no better than to sink into blind confusion.

And so Luther's own friends were able to use the image of the devil-ridden monk in their woodcut press campaign; for, in that age of pictorial polemics, Luther himself gave credence to Lichtenberger—if only as the harbinger of natural signs and wonders.

II.3. The Prophetic Interpretation of Portents: Antiquity and the Use of Prodigies in Luther's Press Campaign

Luther's Portrait in the "Wunderliche Weissagung" of Joachim, by Hans Sachs, and the Leonine Oracle—Luther's and Melancthon's Political Monsters: Pope Donkey and Monk Calf

In this area, Luther and his friends were working with quite different images, and employing a partisan virulence in controversy that can be excused only by the need for a literary counteroffensive.

Once more, it is possible to detect the influence of Spalatin behind the scenes. In 1521 he took a particular interest in the *Passional Christi und Antichristi*, published in that year with illustrations by Lucas Cranach, which dared to attack the pope as Antichrist.⁸⁷ By the following year,⁸⁸ he had knowledge of the Italian original of the *Wunderliche Weissagung*, which Osiander and Hans Sachs were to publish in Nuremberg only in 1527: this † Italian publication was based on a pseudo-Joachimite catalog of popes invented for divinatory purposes. Luther was delighted to find himself represented, in Sachs's publication, as a figure with a sickle in his right hand and a rose in his left (fig. 141). He wrote to Wenceslaus Link in Nuremberg on 19 May 1527:

*... libellus vester imaginarius de Papatu, in quo imaginem meam cum falce valde probro, ut qui mordax et acerbus tot annis ante praedictus sum futurus, sed rosam pro meo signo interpretari dubito, magis ad officium etiam pertinere putarim.*⁸⁹

... your little book of emblems concerning the papacy, in which I very much like the image of myself with a sickle—as one who, for so many years previously called cutting and pitiless, am about to be so—but I hesitate to interpret the rose as my own sign: I should rather have thought that it, too, pertains to the office.

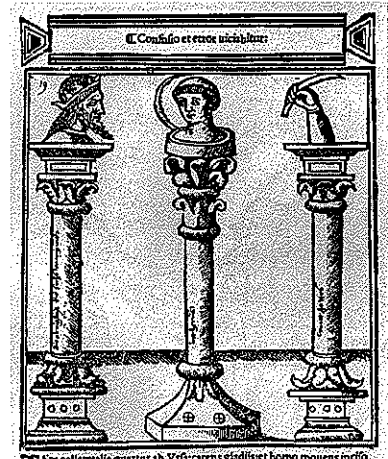


Darmit man als
ber sehe: was d
Mönch sey: so
stehe er da ym
seiner Kleidung
und has sein zel
chen die Kofen
ym der handt/
ich meyn ia co
sey der Luther.
Die weyl aber
Johanns spruch
am. 21. Alles
fleysch ist rote
gras: Stehet er
da mit einer si
ckel: on schnei
dett ab: nicht
gras: sondern
fleysch: und al
les was fleysch
lich ist: Des da
widder predige
er: und wen es
ausgeratet ist
wird er mit de
fweyssen: das fwey der Ehrlichen liebe: das erlöschet: ist
widder auff: schlagen und anzuhaben.

Das thet der heilte Matthias Luther
Der mache das Euangeli Lauter
All menschen leet er ganz abbatte
Und selig spruch: der Coer vertrawt.



Uide nec illa nū exultans modum falcem magnam et rotam manuum. fa
Proterit et illi autem duplicatam primo elemento dicitur fons. Item est
iuncta falciferi quatuor messia scribo erit. Principatus autem omnis que estur
pili est gladio in Tempus dolorum post paululum refectiabitur: res annos in
mundo uiderentur: ualde in infimum duabus: tribulationibus: in medio cor
ruet.



Sto colossalis quartus ab Vttravens gadisset homo mouens mella
Lum foveitibus focabatur sicut solis et incidens rotam annis motus
subiit et omnia littea: terciae et certam de uentum: illud uiderentur: cum
principatus incederet: flos non mis: rebus tui: suis in principatu manes
Vide enim ille incipit colligere rotam: factus in hominibus habens finem
in quo letare multum fructu.

Fig. 140. *The Two Monks*
From *Propheceien und Weissagen... Doctoris Paracelsi*,
Joh. Lichtenbergers, M. Joseph Grünpeck, Joan. Carionis,
Der Sibyllen und anderer (Augsburg, 1549) (see p. 629)

Fig. 141. *Luther with Sickle and Rose*
From Osiander and Hans Sachs, *Wunderliche Weissagung*
(Nuremberg, 1527) (see p. 632)

Fig. 142. *Corresponding image from Vaticinia Joachimi*
(Bologna, 1515)
Copy in Wolfenbüttel, Bibliothek (see p. 635)

Fig. 143. *Jupiter, Saturn, Sol (?)*
Ibid. (see p. 635)



Fig. 144. *Oraculum V*
From *Leonis oracula*, ed. Lambecius (Paris, 1655)
(see p. 635)



Figs. 145a,b. *Pope Donkey and Monk Calf*
From Johann Wolf, *Lectiones memorabiles* (Laingen, 1608)
(see p. 635)

The Italian book, illustrated with woodcuts (Bologna, 1515), that served as Sachs's source (fig. 142) is still to be found, with his verses copied in Osiander's hand, in the library at Wolfenbüttel.⁹⁰ It is unfortunately impossible to go into detail. The severed human leg demands mention, however, as it also appears in connection with Luther. It survives in the historical list of popes as the canting arms of Pope John XXIII (*Coscia*: thigh).

As has not previously been noticed, the figure itself derives from an effigy of a Byzantine emperor in the celebrated twelfth-century Leonine Oracles (fig. 144).⁹¹ Given the astrological character of those predictions, it is conceivable that somewhere behind all this there lurks an image of Saturn.⁹²

In 1523 Luther's and Melanchthon's political use of prophecy found joint expression, as is well known, in two celebrated broadsheets: Melanchthon's *Papstesel* (pope donkey) and Luther's *Mönchskalb* (monk calf). In these, the report of the discovery of a hideous freak said to have been cast up on the banks of the Tiber in 1495 (fig. 145a), and of the monstrous progeny born to a German cow in Saxony in 1523 (fig. 145b), were given a political interpretation that made them into weapons of raw aggression.⁹³

III. Prophecy Based on Applied Hellenistic Cosmology in the Age of Luther, in the Context of the Revival of Antiquity in German Humanism: Oriental Intermediaries and Sources

Luther and the Teratological and Astrological Ideas of Scholars and Artists in the Circle of Maximilian I: Signs and Wonders, from Sebastian Brant to Albrecht Dürer—Babylonian Practices

Such broadsheets or flysheets on prodigies of various kinds are like detached leaves from the vast—and in spirit entirely antique—annalistic compilation of prodigies⁹⁴ made in the sixteenth century by Conrad Lycosthenes,⁹⁵ who was also the editor of the illustrated *Julius Obsequens*.⁹⁶ Here, both the pope donkey and the monk calf⁹⁷ reappear; but alongside the pope donkey—and this casts considerable light on the question of sources—there are other monstrosities of Maximilian's reign, as recorded in contemporary depictions and descriptions by such members of the emperor's own immediate circle as Sebastian Brant, Jakob Mennel,⁹⁸ Joseph Grünpeck, and Albrecht Dürer.

Luther saw these monstrosities with the eyes of a classical augur, in keeping with the German early Renaissance revival of the ancient spirit world; but at the same time, he reinterpreted them in Christian and eschatological terms by reference to the Tradition of the House of Elijah, mentioned above. This is made startlingly clear by a passage from his *Chronica deudsch*, in which he says, of the period 1500–1510 (i.e., the years 5460–5470 “*von anfang der welt*,” from the beginning of the world):

Eine neue kranckheit / die Frantzosen / von etlichen aber / die Hispanische seuche genant / komet auff / Vnd wie man sagt / sie ist aus den newgefundenen Insulen in Occidente / in Europam gebracht. Ist eins von den grossen Zeichen vor dem



Donkey and Monk Calf
Lectiones memorabiles (Lauingen, 1608)

Jüngsten tage. Vnd unter diesem Maximiliano sind im himel wunderbarliche zeichen / vnd derselben viel / geschehen / dazu auch auff erden / vnd in wassern / von welchen Christus sagt / Es werden grosse zeichen sein etc. Also / das von keiner zeit gelesen wird / darin mehr vnd grössere zugleich geschehen weren / Die vns gewisse hoffnung geben / das der selige tag hart fur der thur sey.⁹⁹

A new sickness now arises, the French, or—as some call it—the Spanish plague. And it is said that it came to Europe from the newfound islands in the West. This is one of the great signs of the Last Day. And under the reign of this Maximilian there were wondrous signs in the heavens, and many of them; also on earth and in the waters; of which Christ speaks: “There shall be great signs,” etc. So much so, that we read of no age in which there have been more or greater signs. And these give us a certain hope that the blessed day is close upon us.

An image like that in which Grünpeck shows a collection of freaks from the reign of Maximilian I (who, in a portrait likeness, stands by as a spectator),¹⁰⁰ might well have lain before Luther as he wrote these words.

The divinatory arts of men, directed as they are toward the things of this world, remained for Luther no more than a subordinate instrument by comparison with the highest form of divination, the inner vocation and religious gift of prophecy, which he himself assumed when confronting his enemies at moments of greatest danger:

...weil ich der Deutschen Prophet bin (Denn solchen hoffertigen namen mus ich mir hinfurt selbs zu messen, meinen Papisten und Eseln zur lust und gefallen).

...for I am the Prophet of the Germans (for such is the high-flown title that I must henceforth assume, to divert and please my papists and donkeys).

These were his words in 1531, in his *Warnung an seine lieben Deutschen*, when it fell to him to inspire the waverers in his ranks with courage to resist the bullying excesses of the Imperial camp. So steeped in a pagan reverence for portents was the later Protestant historiography of Johannes Wolf's *Lectioes memorabiles*¹⁰¹ that its cosmic history runs, as it were, on railroad tracks, with cosmic portents for block stations.

In the Germany of the humanistic age, this prophetic vein of imagery—habitually dismissed as, at best, a relic for the religious historian or folklorist, toying with images but unconnected with art—found its way, against all the odds, into the work of a great artist: Albrecht Dürer. So deeply rooted is one part of his work in archetypal, pagan cosmological belief that without some knowledge of this we have no access, for example, to the engraving *Melencolia I*, that ripest and most mysterious fruit of the cosmological culture of the age of Maximilian I.

The prodigies of Maximilian's reign, later used historically by Luther, thus also lead us to Dürer's early works, which testify to his knowledge of the

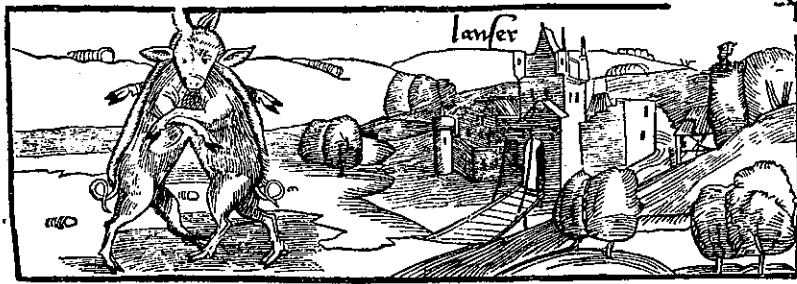
“modern”—or rather the revived ancient—practice of divination. Dürer’s woodcut of a man suffering from the “French sickness,” drawn to illustrate a medical prophecy made by Ulsenius in 1496, at once transports us to the world of teratology and of terrifying astrological prophecy: the world of Lichtenberger’s great conjunction of 1484 (fig. 146). The upper third of the image is occupied by a celestial globe, in which we see the number 1484. A closer look at the zodiacal sign of Scorpio reveals the menacing planets, all assembled. This is the awesome great conjunction of 1484, as astrologically interpreted by Paulus van Middelburg in his *Prognostica*; for the book is identical in content—and here I refer to Sudhoff,¹⁰² who was the first to establish this—with the chapter of the *Prognostica* that describes the medical consequences of the great conjunction.

In the same year Dürer’s engraving of a monstrous sow—at first sight hardly very ominous, politically or otherwise (fig. 147)—shows how much at home he was in the world of prophetic freaks. The engraving shows the prodigious sow of Landser, littered in the Sundgau district in 1496,¹⁰³ with only one head but two bodies and eight trotters. It has been shown that Dürer’s source was a broadsheet of 1496 (fig. 148), published in Latin and German by the learned early humanist Sebastian Brant.¹⁰⁴ Like other, similar sheets, this bears a dedication to Emperor Maximilian I, and its prophecies support his policies. In the text—significantly for the present argument—Brant is at pains to present himself in the guise of an antique augur: he relates his own political predictions to the omen of a sow that appeared to Virgil’s Aeneas:

*Was wil diss suw vns bringen doch
Gdacht in mir eygentlich das noch
Das man durch Suw in der geschicht
Lisst / kunfftiger ding syn bericht
Als die Su die Eneas fandt
Mit jungen an des Tybers sandt...*

What does this sow betide for us?
It puts me in mind of what we read
In history of prophetic news
Given by sows of things to come;
As with the sow Aeneas found,
With young, upon the Tiber’s sand...

This is really a “Natural Horror Sensation Late Extra,” written to serve immediate political ends. Brant had every right to point to even more ancient and venerable antecedents: for this up-to-the-minute sensation of his was already there, in cuneiform script, on the clay tablets of Assyria. We know that in the mid-seventh century B.C. the augur Nergal-ētir informed Prince Asarhaddon of the birth of a pig with eight legs and two tails; on the strength



An den großmechtigsten aller durchlichtigsten herren

Maximilian Römischen Künig Von der wunderbaren Su zu Landser im Suntgaw des jars M.CCCC. XCVI. Vff den ersten tag des merzen geboren Ein verflüch vbligung Sebastiani Brant.

Om Römischen rick du heilige kron Was wil zu krest doch nachter gō So man tēglic empfunde vnd siehē So wil wunder so sldo geschiehe So mit vns vnder arge an By wunder/wunderwert verstan Vnd das gotte etwas zu erkennen weiß Das die natur vns zergien (solt) Also hant lūglic gesehen wie Das zwifach kinde mit hendē vier Zwēyn köpffē/doch zwen sūß allēn Das zu Kortwil im lāwartz walt scheyn Zu Rom hat man des selben gluck In kurtzen gesehen wissenlich/ Vñ wissen von dem kint zū legen Das by Wurmß ist in kurtzen tagen (Mit eyn houbt/iben zwēyn geborn (Van weis noch das inn nā dīsten ioten Der wundersteyn by Landser schōß Der iber gmeren kouff was grof/ Sie wunderfalken naß dar by Gesehen/meyn ich das es sy Noch vilten wiffend kuntlich gar/ Des gluck die māng der vogel schaz Sie man naß by der selben stat Im Schwental gesehen hat Von fremden voglen grof vnd fleyen Als vns vafnachst zū nācht erscheyn Hant manchen in eyn schreckēn bracht Der mit forgen fremde gefgedacht/ Was sol ich von dem tier nūn sagen So man auch hant in kurtzen tagen Gān Lādlingen gefangen bracht Wie ich vor hab in gliche gemacht/ Des gluck auch vil gesehen hant Vñ Cometen im oberant Der aie eyn halber wißbaum scheyn/ Vil haben gēbt in der gemeyn Im Sūngaw nachē eyn sturm vnd stit (Mit blūden scheyffen lange zit Als ob eyn heerzug do beschickē (Manchen ducht gluck als ob ero silt/ Wan seit das in Jūlien sy Des gluck geschē in Lombaroy/ Wir hant empfunden auch dar mit Den erwidern zū nachtes zit Im frūg nach Jmoocaut Hant vnd bajel die erd erscheyt Ist wortlich on bedürtnis nirt/ Ich wil gefwogen andere vil Sat vñ man nāmen möchtē wyle Anseyg zū forz/voicht/angstbarleyt So blüch yett all kristen heyre Betrachten soll gang inmenslich Vñ gegen gotte erlözen sich

Der vff die so vff alle erd Ist noch forz das er größter werd Des gibe dich Su anzeygen mit Das wollich ist eyn wunder isier/ So mit vñ Landser gendē hat (Wm herr Cristoffel von hantlar Im merzen vff den ersten tag/ Sat ab ich junderlich erschreckē (Es was zū sehen grufam gnūg (Der oren vnd achē sūß sie trūg Wm köpff dar inn zwen rachen stont Vñ eynēn halz zwo zungen gont Vñ Su vereynt was obman so Als eyn allēn/doch vñdman zwo Sann noch dein herzen fell sie sich Das hyn der teyl/wo Suwen glick/ Ich gndt hiffē gott von hymel rich Wie sint din geschöpffo so wunderlich Was wil dich su vns dīngen doch Gdacht in mir eygentlich das noch Das man durch Su in der geschichte Lilt/kunstiger ding syn bericht Als die Su die Lencas fande (Mit jūngen an des Tylers sande Sat durch der künig zal bediē Die Warm regierten zū zit/ Durch su man etwan dūneiß macht Wann man eyn gmeinen freid bracht/ Wan oppfert Cererē eyn Swyn Sie des kornes schyrmerin ist gunt/ Aber was dīse Su bediēt Weis ich nit ganz/es gfalt mir nit Das sie so zwifach jūngen hat Vñ gēder vil eyn suw köpff stat (Wich ducht lūdlicher vber eyn Das hinc by wurms mit liden zwēyn Wie wol es willich geborn wart Hant es doch menschlich gestalt vnd art/ Vil gēder vnder eyn houbt syn (Eitel mit/ wann dīe nit wer eyn scheyn/ Die jūngen vnder eyn houbt stan Loderich/ das nit wer Suwisch gan Saromb vdracht ich dīe Su bediēt (Eyn oder teyl der Suwischen lue Als Tuercken/ die man halt diltē (Das ir wesen der Su fry glick/ Wm Su ist eyn wilt vnteyn thier Sie in vnstat sacht allē zier/ Als dāt der Tuercken vnteyn schaz In allem vnstat leben gar/ Sie Su der Tuercken bructer ist/ Wol wued verglichē sie dem enderist Wann uff dīe yett syn zū kunst wer Das doch allēn weygt gotte der her/

Der all dīng noch dem besten lobyß So mit das scheyffen vff rechte blūß Vnd die Su nit eyn köpff geweyn (Wan würd funst ianers liden inn/ Wann aber vnterinsting gmeinen Durch dīe sūmānen sich vereynt Vñ iren houbt dūnt widerstand So ist die wunder Su im Land/ Das ist das eygen richtig vuch Das hand vouch/ das me weis wie (Es sich haltē ober stellen müß Das wurd eyndeliche veruolst/ Doch frewlich das vns wundersteyn Sie leng nit ist in leben geyn (Dann sie nit mer dann vff eyn nachē Gēliche hat do man mit sie bracht/ Als hofflich das/ ob liltē glich wolt (So vor vns gort behütten sol) Wm Suwisch rumot vff der entsping Das es des glich auch bald ab ginge (So liltē welle wir empseyen gort (Ob der yett durch vil wunder hat Vñ anders nūnt geseger an So mögen wir doch liltē verstan (So yett dem heylgen Römischen rick Vñ tūnscher nacion des glich Gēschēn ist zū dīser fact Durch abgang herzog Lberhart Von wirtenberg des fūsten milt Der des ricks sturman in syn schilt (Mit groffen erten hat gesturt/ Durch des vernunft bliltē regiere (Werē all Land vnd künig rich (Gozel dem fūsten zugentrich By im freud in des hymel tron (Wollich ist er der rufschē tron Vnd spugel aller tugene geyn (Gort geb im wue er ist do hyn/ Ich weis wol edler künig her Das die nit wol möchtē leid es mer Gēschēn syn an bhēnem man (Lberhart dīe lieblich gēhan Vnd ist dīn oug vnd herz geyn (Sin gnad hat solcho gemacht wol scheyn (Vor hyn mit erten/ yett mit klag (Hie mit kum ich yett vff myn sag (Gort geb dir edler künig her (So vil gluck heiles liltē vnd ere Das mit freud werd egege dīn gnad (Als ungeschelē lerd schmerz vnd schad (So dīner gnaden widerart (Gort geb dir was der dichter gert Vnd vns fryd selig yett vff erd (So mit eyn trostschē Su dar vñ wart (Wm cō rick

Fig. 148. The Monstrous Sow of Landser Broadsheet by Sebastian Brant, 1466 (see pp. 637 ff.)

of this, he prophesied that the prince would accede to the throne, and added that the butcher Uddanu had salted the creature away, evidently to preserve it for the dynastic archive.¹⁰⁵

It has long been established that the Roman arts of divination bore a direct connection, by way of Etruria, with the divinatory techniques of Babylon. That this connection remained so much alive as to span the interval between Asarhaddon and Emperor Maximilian, over two thousand years, was due partly to the efforts of scholarly antiquaries but overwhelmingly to the inner, primeval, compulsive human need to establish a mythical causation.

To some extent, even so, Dürer had already put this Babylonian mentality behind him. His engraving bears no inscription: Nergal-etir, alias Brant, is given no space for prophetic interpretation. The impulse that guided Dürer's burin was his scientific interest in a phenomenon of nature.

The Arab Astrological Handbook "Picatrix" and Dürer's Belief in Planetary Influences: Saturn and Jupiter in "Melencolia I," in Lichtenberger's Prophecy, and in Luther

Before his untimely death, my friend Carl Giehlow¹⁰⁶ earned our gratitude for the selfless scholarship that has made it possible for us to identify a single Hellenistic astrological notion, transmitted by way of the Arabs, as the common foundation of Dürer's *Melencolia I* (fig. 149) and of Lichtenberger's *Practica*. The connection lies in the countervailing influences of Saturn and Jupiter.

First, a superficial point of contact: Maximilian I was familiar with Lichtenberger's ideas, to the extent that the latter's literary source, the *Prognostica* of Paulus van Middelburg, had actually been dedicated to him. He had had occasion to form a view of his own on the remedy for saturnine melancholy, apropos of his own mythical ancestor, the Egyptian Hercules, on whom Konrad Peutinger had written him a memorandum with reference to the *Problemata* of Aristotle. In later years¹⁰⁷ Maximilian was much troubled by a menacing, ill-aspected Saturn,¹⁰⁸ which—in the opinion of the doctor who treated him, Georg Tannstetter—actually led to his death.¹⁰⁹

Aside from these direct, personal connections, however, Giehlow has demonstrated the basis of the medical treatment of saturnine melancholy in Maximilian's day. The physicians of antiquity distinguished two forms of melancholy, heavy and light. The heavy melancholy was derived from black bile and led to maniacal states—as in the case of the madness of Hercules. Against this, the Florentine philosopher and physician Marsilio Ficino advocated a combination of therapies: psychological, scientific or medical, and magical.¹¹⁰ On the one hand, his remedies included mental concentration to enable the melancholic to transmute his sterile gloom into human genius; on the other—aside from purely medicinal treatment to counter excessive mucus formation ("sniffles") and thus facilitate the transmutation of the bile—the benefic planet Jupiter must be enlisted to counter the dangerous influence of Saturn. If the influence of Jupiter was lacking in the patient's true horoscope,



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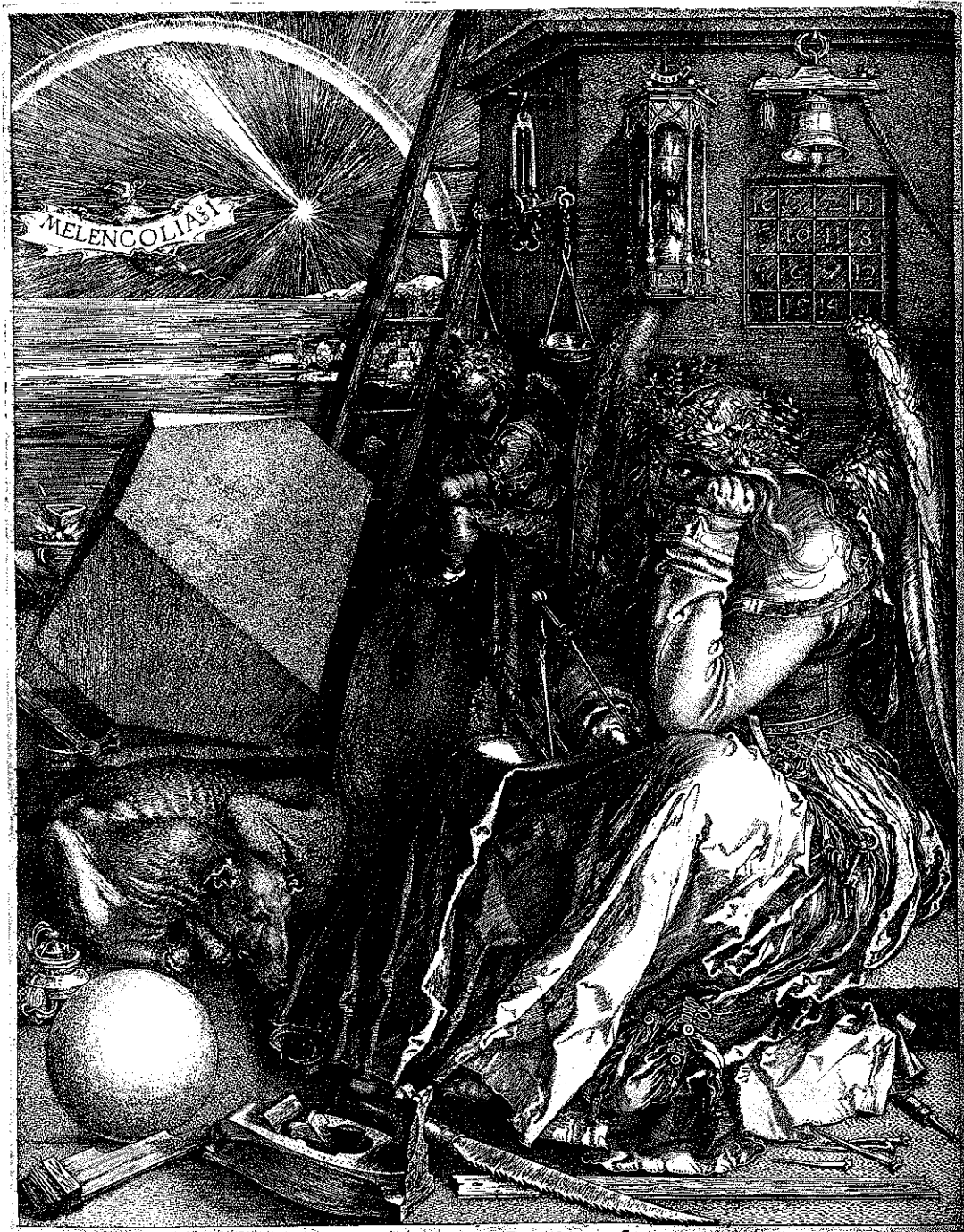


Fig. 149. Albrecht Dürer
Melencolia I
Engraving, B. 74 (see pp. 641, 644, 645 f.)



the favorable aspect could be borrowed by using a magical image of Jupiter; and this, in turn, might be replaced, according to the doctrines of Cornelius Agrippa, by the magic square of the planetary god. And so the magic square of Jupiter (of which more shortly) can be seen built into the wall in Dürer's engraving.

Giehlow, who so acutely and clearly expounded the use of planetary aspects in the treatment of melancholy by the Western occultists of the Renaissance, nevertheless shrank from taking his discovery to its conclusion. He sought to interpret Dürer's magic square of Jupiter, in defiance of Ficino and Agrippa, not "primarily" as an amulet against Saturn but as a symbol of the inventive genius of the saturnine individual. Giehlow failed to carry his discovery through to its ultimate, and most enlightening, conclusion because he was unaware of one crucial factor in the prehistory of the ideas involved: the vast importance for the occult sciences—as practiced by Ficino, Agrippa, and others throughout Europe—of the book known as *Picatrix*, a typical representative of the Arab transmission of late antique astrological and magical practices.

With the assistance of Wilhelm Printz, of the late Erich Gräfe, and of Fritz Saxl,¹¹¹ the present writer has been able to supplement Giehlow's researches and can demonstrate that this Latin work, a prime text of late medieval cosmological occultism, is a translation of a text written by an Arab in Spain in the tenth century and known only by a pseudepigraphic title (itself a misinterpretation of Hippocrates): it is the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* of Abū al-Qāsim Maslama ibn Aḥmad al-Majrīṭī.¹¹² The library of Maximilian I contained two manuscripts of the *Picatrix*, one of them a magnificent illuminated copy, of which we can gain some idea from a manuscript now in Cracow.¹¹³ Ficino himself, in his chapter on magical images, wrote of the Arab intermediaries, whose lapidaries had preserved through the Middle Ages, as an essential component of iatro-astrology, the Hellenistic and Hermetic therapeutic magic of astrological amulets. The *Picatrix*, the most important of these intermediaries,¹¹⁴ furnished Ficino himself with his descriptions of the health-bringing icons of planetary deities. In a manuscript in Rome, supplemented by others in Vienna, Wolfenbüttel, and Cracow,¹¹⁵ all of which derive from the *Picatrix*, these degenerate but fundamentally authentic antique figurative icons are accompanied by magic numerical tables, complete with precise instructions as to their use. Ficino's own magical use of images, and the magic squares of Agrippa, thus essentially belong together as offshoots of very ancient, pagan practices; for both have their roots in Hermetic therapeutic magic, as transmitted by the Arabs.

Giehlow's interpretative caution lays him open to a further objection: if the Saturnine individual was meant to display this magic square, with its unique mathematical rhythms, simply as a symbol of his own inventive genius, then surely he ought to have adopted the square of Saturn and not that of Jupiter. Only the tradition of iatro-astrology gives the square of Jupiter its true meaning here.

The truly creative act—that which gives Dürer's *Melencolia I* its consoling, humanistic message of liberation from the fear of Saturn—can be understood only if we recognize that the artist has taken a magical and mythical logic and made it spiritual and intellectual. The malignant, child-devouring planetary god, whose cosmic contest with another planetary ruler seals the subject's fate, is humanized and metamorphosed by Dürer into the image of the thinking, working human being.

That such an analysis of *Melencolia I* is entirely in the spirit of Dürer's age has since been confirmed for the present writer by the discovery of a passage in Melanchthon, who regarded Dürer's own genius as the highest type of true melancholy, spiritualized by a favorable planetary configuration. Melanchthon wrote:

*De Melancholicis ante dictum est, horum est mirifica uarietas. Primum illa heroica Scipionis, uel Augusti, uel Pomponij Attici, aut Dureri generosissima est, et uirtutibus excellit omnis generis, regitur enim crasi temperata, et oritur a fausto positu syderum.*¹¹⁶

Of melancholy types, as aforesaid, there is a wonderful variety. First, the heroic (melancholy) of Scipio, of Augustus, of Pomponius Atticus, or of Dürer is the noblest type, and excels in virtues of every kind; for it is governed by a tempered mixture and arises from a favorable position of the planets.

This assessment of Dürer's artistic genius is caption enough in itself for *Melencolia I*, for elsewhere we learn the nature of the astral influences to which Melanchthon attributed this transforming power. He derived the loftier melancholy of Augustus from the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in Libra:

*Multo generosior est melancholia, si coniunctione Saturni et Iouis in libra temperetur, qualis uidetur Augusti melancholia fuisse.*¹¹⁷

Melancholy is far nobler if it is tempered by the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in Libra, as would seem to have been the case with the melancholy of Augustus.

We are now looking into the very heart of the process of renewal that we call the Renaissance. The classical version of antiquity had emerged to compete with the Hellenistic-Arabic version. Access to the ancient writers had breathed new life into the mummified *acedia* of the Middle Ages. For, to Ficino and Melanchthon alike, the train of thought had its source in Aristotle and his *Problemata*.

The history of the influence of antiquity, as observed through the transmission, disappearance, and rediscovery of its gods, has some unexplored insights to