

Zitierhinweis

Ness, Lester J.: Rezension über: David Brown, Mesopotamian Planetary Astronomy-Astrology, Groningen: Styx Publications, 2000, in: Journal of Ancient Civilizations, 16 (2001), S. 139-141, DOI: 10.21245/rec.ant.1236109388



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been more useful than providing individual bibliographies for each contributor, in addition to their notes. Likewise, the chapters could have been reordered along more clearly defined topics, but these represent only minor points in an otherwise well crafted volume.

Sheldon Gosline

DAVID BROWN, *Mesopotamian Planetary Astronomy-Astrology*, Styx Press: Groningen, 2000.

This has to be the most creative book on the history of astrology I have read in a long time. If anyone has a serious interest in this discipline, especially if they would like to know when and how the horoscope was invented, I cannot think of a better book to recommend. At the same time, readers ought to be warned that this is a doctoral dissertation, only slightly revised. This means that it is enormously detailed and quite difficult to read, even if one is already an Assyriologist.

The book is divided into four chapters, each elaborately subdivided. The introduction appropriately shows Brown's materials: the reports and letters on astral omens from the academic astrologers of Assyria to the Assyrian kings between 750 and 612 B.C. The author hopes to demonstrate that the tools used to predict what the planets would do were invented during this period, and that this invention was a Kuhnian paradigm shift, a fundamental change in the assumptions of most scientists, or in this case, of most astrologers and diviners.

Chapter One introduces the astrologers and diviners themselves, whom Brown calls the Scholars. It is a fairly detailed analysis of the careers, family relationships and guanxi-like connections between all the men who wrote the reports and the letters. Brown shows that most were the sons and grandsons of Scholars. In a general way, their sociology was more like that of early Chinese scholars and scientists than Greek natural philosophers. The Scholars worked primarily for the royal court, subsisting on gifts or jobs in temples given by the Assyrian kings. Hence, the competition between them for royal favour was fierce, perhaps much like that for academic jobs today. Brown believes this fueled the paradigm shift.

Chapter Two tells about the planets and the omens (messages from the gods) they potentially provided. The most useful feature is a detailed five part categorization of the ways the names are connected with the planets. I have seen

nothing like it elsewhere and it will be useful to all students of Mesopotamian astronomy, whether they agree with his other ideas or not.

Chapter Three explains the Enumu Anu Enlil (EAE) paradigm, the assumptions of all astral diviners for a thousand years before 750, particularly as revealed in the major collection of astral omens, Enumu Anu Enlil. This time, the author divides the assumptions into only three varieties: "rules," the "code" and "categories." Rules are primarily analogy and contrast, used for inventing new omens by comparison or contrast with old ones. In contrast with earlier researchers, Brown asserts that nearly all omens were invented, not observed. More than a few could never occur. The "code" is the automatic connection assumed, e.g., between directions, colors and countries. For example, north was always Assyria and eclipses always meant a dead king. The "code" served to decide whether an omen was good or bad, and for whom. "Categories" refer to the few events out of the many possible which "counted:" only four colors out of all possible shades, for example. The most important "categories" were the ideal period schemes, perhaps part of Marduk's original creation, such as 360 days in an ideal year or 30 days in an ideal month. Reality never fit the ideal but how far off was it? This also served to create new omens. Works such as MUL.APIN, which contain such ideal periods, were never meant as simple astronomy, but were always meant to create omens.

Chapter Four brings forward the rival, the Prediction of celestial Phenomena (PCP) paradigm, as found in mathematical texts such as the cuneiform ephemerides and procedure texts, as well as related nonmathematical texts, such as the cuneiform almanacs, Goal Year texts, the Diaries and the Planetary and Eclipse records, none older than the Neo-Assyrian dynasty (750-612 B.C.). The non-mathematical texts were records of what the planets actually did, providing some genuine and reliable periods, unlike, for example, MUL.APIN. The mathematica texts contain a great variety of formulae analysing the information in the non-mathematical texts, and allowed genuine predictions of omens. For example, if an astrologer could reliably predict an eclipse a day in advance, he could hope for advancement from the king, perhaps like a president's successful economist today. Thus, the invention of the PCP paradigm. Because there were many different competitors, there were many different formulae, with slightly different values, assumptions etc.

Chapter Six summarizes the dissertation and explains how and why the shift took place. The flow chart which begins the chapter shows the shift graphically. The following text supplements the chart. What made the change a paradigm shift was that it was a completely new approach. Prediction was an addition to traditional interpretation. The old EAE paradigm was solely based on waiting and seeing. It only allowed the Schola to promote the thoroughness with which he knew the tradition. The new PCP paradigm allowed an astrologer to promote himself with his

correct predictions. Many different schools and the decline in royal patronage after the fall of the neo-Assyrian dynasty guaranteed the continuance of the many different formulae. Mesopotamian astrologers continued to be employed by later dynasties, even the Hellenistic ones. The astrologers were apparently organized in hereditary guilds, comparable to the scientists of ancient China. EAE came to be known in India, PCP throughout the Old World Oikoumene. The chapter ends with a discussion of the place of Mesopotamian astronomy-astrology in the history of science.

Three appendices follow: a chronological bibliography of the cuneiform sources, comments on the dating of the Neo-Assyrian Letters and Reports, as well as an analysis of the published EAE planet omens. This is followed by a good bibliography and three indices, including cuneiform texts, a subject index and Sumerian and Akadian words.

As stated in the beginning, this is a very creative book. The prosopography of the astrologers known from the Assyrian state records is unprecedented. The detailed discussion of the various names given to the planets will be useful to many besides historians of astrology. The key idea, that a paradigm shift took place in the thinking of astronomer-astrologers under the Neo-Assyrian dynasty is argued convincingly. It is a very good book for specialists.

However, the dense style of writing will limit the number of people who will actually read the book, which is a shame. It is possible for good scholarship to be written clearly. One could not recommend this book to a beginner, as one might Cumont's *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* or C. S. Lewis' *The Discarded Image*. Perhaps Bown will achieve this style in future books.

Lester Ness