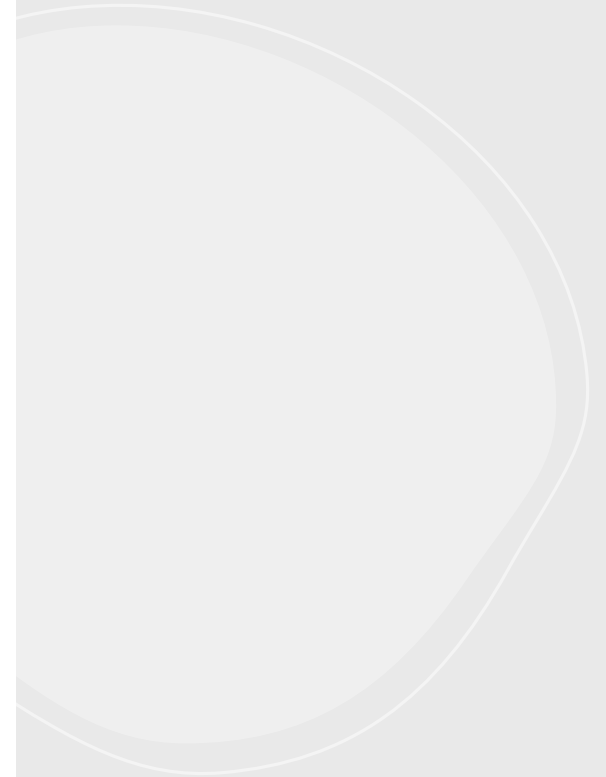


Political Influence of
Astrology in the Medieval
Courts of Europe



Introduction

Sources of Astrology

Divisions of Astrology

Political Influence

Examples

Shawne



Astrology in England,
1000-1600

Pre-Conquest

12th cent.

13th cent.

14th cent.

15th cent.

Nathaniel

Astrological Knowledge Comes to Europe

- ❖ Astrology/Astronomy was studied in ancient India, Persia and Mesopotamia.
- ❖ The rise of Islam saw Bagdad become a centre of learning.
- ❖ Islamic knowledge travelled to the Byzantine Empire and from there to Charlemagne's Empire.
- ❖ The expansion of Islam spread across Northern Africa, Sicily, and the Iberian Peninsula.

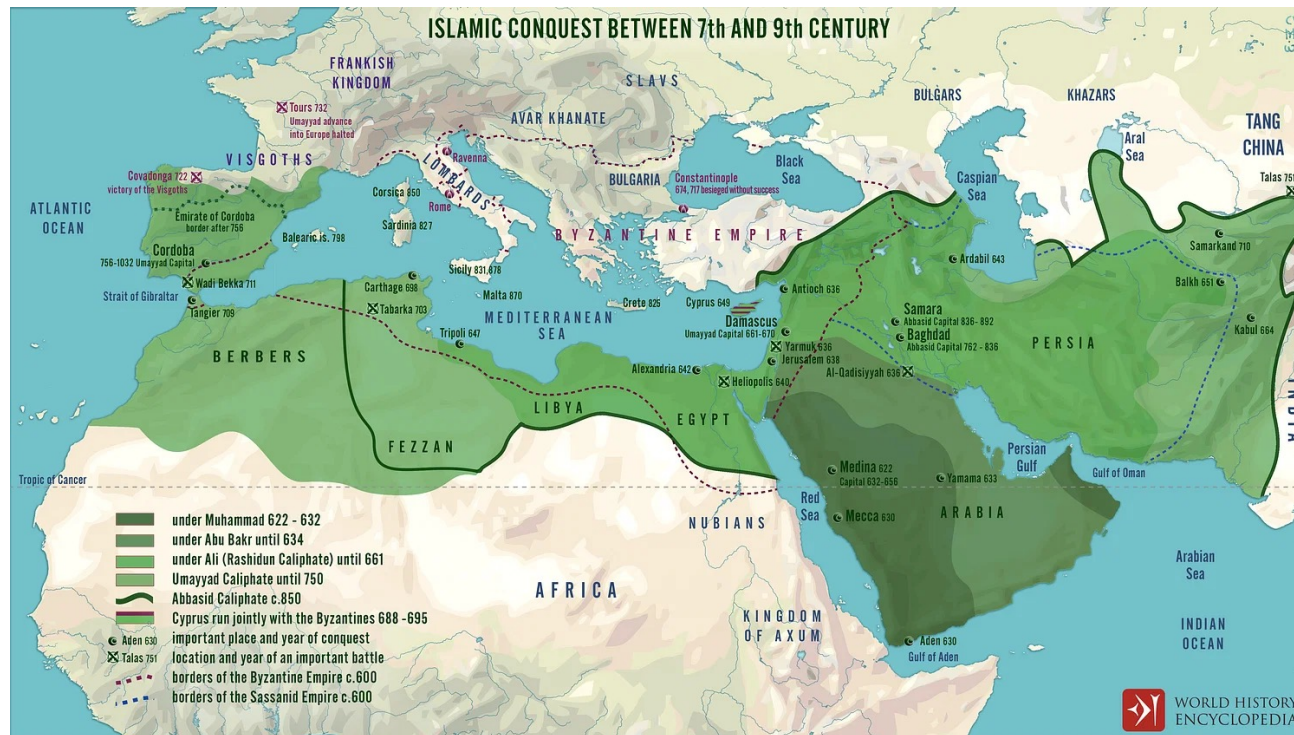


Image 1 World History Encyclopedia worldhistory.org

❖ Astrology and Astronomy were indistinguishable. Both were considered to be scholarly pursuits.

❖ Astrology was roughly divided into judicial and natural.

❖ Judicial included nativity (birth horoscopes), interrogation (specific questions) elections (auspicious times), and revolutions, (annual forecast)

❖ As early as the eighth century, Charlemagne realized he needed a court astrologer to produce the liturgical calendar. (Campion Ch 2 page 2).

A Court Astrologer could exert influence by:

- ❖ Predicting military outcomes (not very successful).
- ❖ Producing favorable horoscopes prior to coronations.
- ❖ Psychological support for the ruler to assure him his decisions are “in line with the stars”.
- ❖ Adding to the intellectual prestige of the court.

Astrology was studied primarily at universities and in royal courts rather than in monastic institutions.

There was an ambiguous relationship between the church and astrologers/astronomers in that they were needed to calculate, for example, the date of Easter and the solstices but the deterministic belief of predictions clashed with the Christian idea of free will.

The following slides are some examples of royal courts that favoured astrologers.

Gerbert of Aurillac

- ❖ Studied mathematics and astrology at the court of Catalonia.
- ❖ Later, became Pope Sylvester II.
- ❖ Promoted the study of Moorish mathematics and astrology.

Pere Ceremonius of Aragon

- ❖ Employed the famous court astrologer, Tresbens, sent to him by the king of Naples.
- ❖ He used astrology in only minor ways: when to lay first stone of a building, when to schedule a wedding celebration.
- ❖ His major contribution was commissioning translations of astrological works into the vernacular. (Giralt p 6).

Pedro I of Castille

- ❖ It was said that Pedro never went into battle without consulting an astrologer.
- ❖ He was also known to complain about the accuracy of the predictions he received.
- ❖ In 1369 he suffered a disastrous defeat.
(Giralt p 23).

Frederick II of Sicily

- ❖ Prominent supporter of Astrology.
- ❖ Employed Guido Bonatti, the most famous astrologer in Europe at that time.
- ❖ Also employed Michael Scot, mathematician and astrologer.
- ❖ Michael Scot accompanied Frederick on military campaigns. (North p 17)

❖ Historical records show an astrologer provided Queen Marie of France with a calendar. (North, p 18).

❖ Richard of Wallingford wrote nativities and a calendar for Phillipa, wife of Edward III of England.

Charles V of France

- ❖ A court astrologer very likely advised a ruler on military matters, but these predictions were seldom written down, (for good reason).
- ❖ An indication that a monarch favoured astrologers is the existence of horoscopes for the ruler and his family.
- ❖ Five such horoscopes have been found for Charles V of France (North p 20)

Astrology in English Courts



Image 2: Bayeux Tapestry

“A.D. 1066. Then was over all England such a token seen as no man ever saw before. Some men said that it was the comet-star, which others denominate the long-hair'd star. It appeared first on the eve called "Litania major", that is, on the eighth before the calends off May; and so shone all the week.” (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle)

Pre-Conquest England

Classical (Greek) sources uphold the virtuous and noble nature of astrology.

Omens and signs are sought after in the sky. Comets in particular are seen as harbingers of ill-tidings.

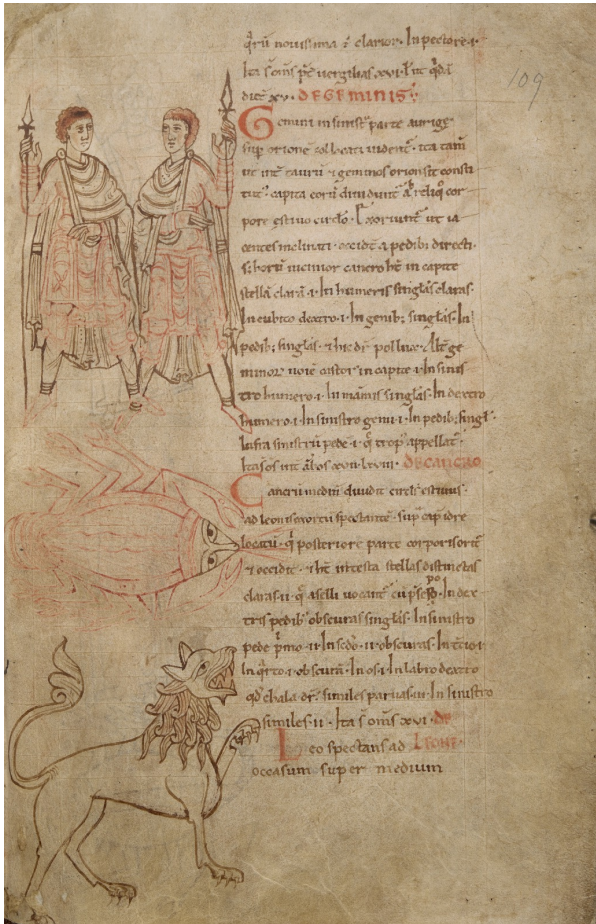


Image 3: Gemini, Cancer, and Leo
Royal MS 13 A XI, f.109r

11th Century

The English were slower to adopt astrology than other European powers. Why?

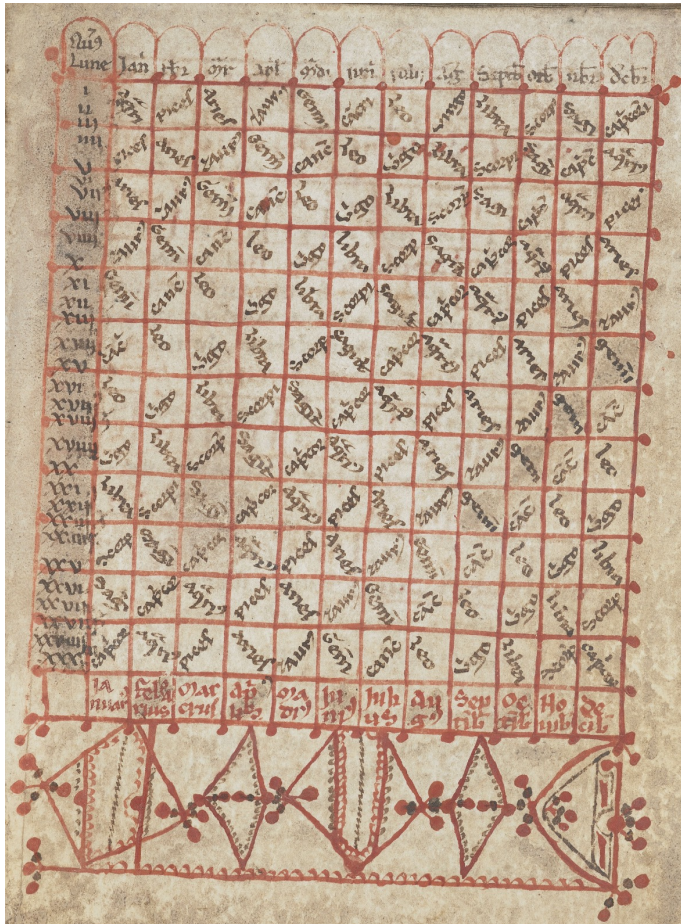


Image 4: Zodiac Chart
Egerton MS 821, f.16r

12th century
Adelard of Bath and Daniel of
Morley are two English scholars
who travel to Muslim-controlled
Spain to learn Arabic and Greek
sciences.

The *Secreta Secretorum*
becomes one of the most
widely-copied and read books in
Europe.
(Carey, 33)

Oxford and other universities are
established in England;
Astrology is among the chief arts
learned.

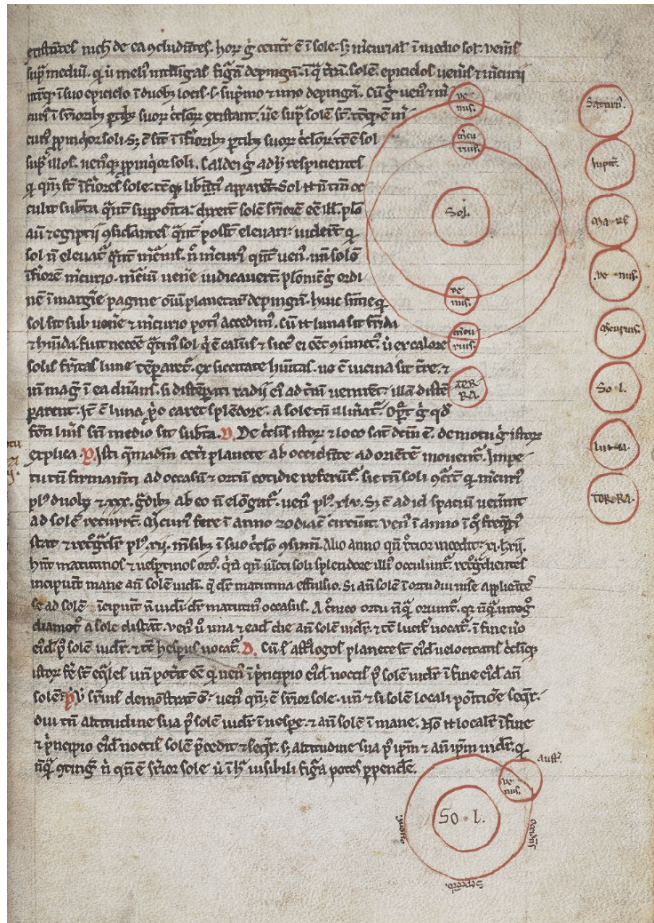


Image 5: The Planets
Arundel MS 377, f. 119r

13th century Growth

Paris University Condemnations
(1270 & 1277) were attempts to
stop the learning of heretical
arts. (Piché, 913)

English polymath Roger Bacon
compiles the *Secreta
secretorum*, a copy of which
belonged to Edward IV (Carey,
33).



Image 6: Dante and Virgil observe the False Counselors, such as Micheal Scot

14th century

The Black Death and Hundred Years' War ravage England.

Astrologers are lumped in with witches, facing accusations of sorcery and poisonings. (Carey 17)



Image 7: Henry VII is given a book
MS Arundel 66, fol. 201.

15th century

Printing press revolutionizes learning; astrology is much more accessible.

Astrology becomes a more strictly medical practice in court.
(Carey 163)

To Summarize:

- Pre-Conquest (1066): Superstitious practices, few learned men in England.
- 11th Century: Secular opposition to the Arabic/Pagan arts.
- 12th Century: Universities institutionalize astrology: a Royal art.
- 13th Century: Interest in the field outpaces resistance.
- 14th Century: Astrologers find their way into courts, facing scrutiny.
- 15th Century: Astrologers are a mainstay in English courts.
- Beyond: Astrology becomes a popular art, and is rejected by science

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