



PEETERS

SOCIAL HISTORY IN ASTROLOGY

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SOCIAL HISTORY IN ASTROLOGY

In an article now long forgotten¹, Lynn Thorndike set himself the question, What social history can be mined from astrology? The possibilities of the question are still inviting. From the period of the Roman Empire alone, the surviving astrological corpus matches in bulk the entire historical corpus; and though examined in detail by students of ancient religion, language, and science, it has been quite neglected by the social historian.

How much of the corpus can be used? Astrologers defined the positions of the stars at a given time and place, and then indicated the sort of person and event that should result. Astronomical calculations, as well as the theory justifying connections to some future outcome, constitute the greater part of our texts. Much else is blurred and general: this or that astral conjuncture «will lead to ill-health, domestic tribulations, pain in the joints, sudden reverses, and death by misadventure», *vel sim.* There remains, however, that fiftieth part (let us say) offering more specific illustration. Here the ancient reader looked for facts that answered to his sense of everyday possibilities. He was, to be sure, not interested in the humdrum. Thus spectacular turns of fate received undue emphasis in what was served up to him. Further, the tradition of the science carried down, from generation to generation of practitioners, out of date terms and examples. But when both dramatic and tralatitian elements are pruned away, something remains from which to form a true picture of the past.

That formed the foundation of astrology: fact as tested by inquiry. Astrologers — some of them, at least — kept records of the horoscopes they calculated and the fate of their clients as it actually developed. We can sometimes connect their casebooks with our history books. We are told, for instance, of a man twice consul, subsequently exiled, father of a son who was himself exiled on charges of adultery, later restored to favor, placed in charge of Campania, next of Achaea,

¹ «*A Roman astrologer as a historical source: Julius Firmicus Maternus*», CP 8 (1913) 415f., dealing with only two books of the author's *Mathesis*. I had finished research and begun writing on the present subject before tracking down the sole — wrong — reference to Thorndike's article that I have seen.

then of Asia, and last of the prefecture of Rome. « Whose *genitura* this is, noble Lollianus », says the astrologer to his dedicatee, « you know best » — because it is Lollianus' own ancestors that are described ². Again, we are told of a man fleeing from a battle, who fell wounded from his horse. The enemy overran the field but left him for dead. He survived to take over command of the army. His horoscope dates these events to 163-4, and history provides a likely setting : the Parthian campaigns of those years ³. Finally, we are presented with the governor of a province, whose position and popularity aroused envy. His tenure of office was cut short by riots and disturbances, and he subsequently died of a painful disease. Dating suggests that he may be Valerius Eudaemon, prefect of Egypt in 142 ⁴.

We may now turn to the last quarter of the second century, and to three writers of the time, Vettius Valens, Claudius Ptolemy, and Artemidorus of Daldis. In all we find much derivative material ⁵, much timelessly vague terminology to describe various careers and vicissitudes, much repetition. They apologize for their prolixity without being able to amend it, « for many and innumerable are the things that befall men » ⁶.

If you are well-schooled and eloquent, they say, then you may become rich and prominent through a distinguished acquaintance, or through the opportunities that await the learned, as teachers, professors, surveyors, astronomers, poets, political speakers, « of a good disposition, moderate, well disposed » ⁷. « Such a one will enjoy good fortune from letters and learning — beloved and eminent, deemed worthy of offices, honours, gifts, and fame » ⁸. Another line of proba-

² FIRMICUS MATERNUS (henceforth F.M.), *Math.* (ed. Kroll-Skutsch, 1897-1913) 2.29.10 and 19f.; cf. A. CHASTAGNOL, *Les fastes de la préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (1962) 66, 68, 114f.

³ VETTIUS VALENS (henceforth, V.V.), *Anthologiae* (ed. W. Kroll, 1908) p. 275; O. NEUGEBAUER and H.B. VAN HOESSEN, *Greek Horoscopes* (1959) 119f.

⁴ V.V. p. 270; Neugebauer and van Hoesen 86 n. 5.

⁵ W. KROLL, *Cat. Cod. Astrol. Graecorum* (henceforth CCAG) V, 2 (1906) pp. 143-5; W. and H.G. GUNDEL, *Astrologumena* (1966) 202, on the date of Ptolemy, and 206f., on his sources; 216-20, for V.V.; O. NEUGEBAUER, *Harvard Theol. Rev.* 47 (1954) 66f., for the date of V.V.

⁶ V.V. 226; cf. 95, « lest we write too repetitively about the same things », and ARTEMIDORUS (henceforth Art.), *Onirocriticon* (ed. R.A. Pack, 1963) p. 100.

⁷ PTOL. 3.13.163; 4.4.178; V.V. 39 and 40.

⁸ V.V. 60, 88; ART. p. 119.

bility leads out from education to business, to control of great men's affairs ⁹. But intellectual gifts may be abused. They may produce the type that takes his neighbor before the judge on a false charge, that forecloses on debts, that forges documents, perjures himself, and sets traps for others ¹⁰. The picture of the educated person is a thoroughly mixed one, then. Marked by fame and fortune, it may also include, in a strange company, « merchants, interpreters, surveyors, lawyers, philosophers, but all mischievous, keen, clever liars » ¹¹.

A man of this sort turns to the law courts as his natural hunting ground. « He will trump up lawsuits and charges and not only divorce his wife but also convict her of adultery » ¹². Anxieties about contracts, bequests, property (especially land), or civic status appear throughout our three authors ¹³. Artemidorus records an unusual trial for crimes while in municipal office, as a result of which the defendant lost all his estate and suffered banishment ¹⁴. Something still more serious must account for the seizing of a man's property by the fiscus, after his death abroad or in exile ¹⁵. But fugitives from the consequences of incest, forgery, « rash remarks » (i.e. treasonous?), and weight of debts are all attested, too ¹⁶, along with the clear reason for their flight: dread of punishment. Beatings for slaves, long jail terms, beheading, and fines are sometimes mentioned; crucifixion brings perfect nightmares ¹⁷. If it is easy to understand why retributive violence should figure thus in the responses of dream- and horoscope-analysts, it seems clear also that their clients were prepared from their life's experience to accept predictions of drastic justice.

⁹ PTOL. 4.2.174, 178, and 179 (lawyers, treasurers, magistrates, teachers, and party-leaders, *ἄλλων προεστῶτας*); V.V. 37, 39, 58, 72f.

¹⁰ V.V. 37, 42f., 48, « a scandal among the people », « leading a shameful life », « cunning in other greedy ventures, good-for-nothing, wily ».

¹¹ V.V. 74.

¹² P. Mich. III 148, an anonymous horoscope of the first century, but typical: see, e.g., ART. p. 41, or V.V. 231, *ψευδοκατηγορία*.

¹³ V.V. 37f., 268, 282; ART. 30, in the form *δίκην ἔχων* or *φεύγων*; on land-suits, e.g. ART. 66; on *ἐπιτιμία*, 112.

¹⁴ ART. 13; for exile, cf. 306 (to an island).

¹⁵ ART. 285; a similar, real case, *Cod. Just.* 8.51.18.

¹⁶ ART. 93 (incest), 262 (forgery; cf. V.V. 40), and 317 (rash remarks).

¹⁷ V.V. 68 (jail); 283 (condemnation to quarries; cf. ART. 66); ART. 303 (decapitation); manacles or bonds common in ART., e.g. 15 or 209, « poverty, slavery, or bonds »; on crucifixion, R. ΡΑΟΚ, *ΤΑΡΑ* 86 (1955) 283 n. 9.

Political prominence comes from friendship with rulers, education meaning eloquence, knowledge of law, but most often sheer wealth ¹⁸. Army commands and imperial posts as governor or procurator seem to lie outside normal expectation, though they do receive occasional attention ¹⁹. Much more within the reach of ambition — it is, after all, the Greek provinces that our authors dwell among, with only an occasional glance at Italy — are civic eminence and offices. These bring salaries, honorific statues and decrees ²⁰; they indicate one's good standing with the populace — purchased, it must be added, by lavish expenditure on public needs. That explains the connection between wealth and office ²¹. But popularity could quickly turn into its opposite. For all their glory, city magistrates, even a governor, could be conceived of in the darkest terms, involved in violence, base arts, and wickedness ²², and one group, the market-dues collectors « always stationed at exits » and in the center of « continual disputes about tolls », is the target of particular contempt ²³. Artemidorus, speaking of the invidium and criticism that a citizen may encounter, adds that « one cannot be a Market-supervisor without these » ²⁴. In this author as in others we hear of frequent riots, « disturbances and opposition » ²⁵, though only once in any detail : the theater claque supporting a popular dancer raised a storm, and he escaped punishment for it at the hands

¹⁸ V.V. 39, 66; PTOL. 3.13.163; 4.4.178; 4.4.180; ART. 26: « a rich man not yet in office », implying that office is to be expected; cf. *ibid.* 149.

¹⁹ V.V. 39, 42, 45, 59, 73, 78 (tribunes and centurions; cf. ART. 265); PTOL. 4.3.176; ART. 265, a works-supervisor becomes an imperial treasurer, and an imperial procurator (p. 305) imposes a *corvée* (*ἀργαρεία*).

²⁰ V.V. 39, 45f.; P. *Mich.* III 148.

²¹ V.V. 46f., « catering to the pleasures of the people »; cf. *ibid.* 82, benefactions to cities, perhaps including the gladiatorial combats implied *ibid.* 75, 79 and in CCAG VIII, 2, p. 85f., which dates to 113, according to Neugebauer and van Hoesen p. 109; ART. 252, « a rich man must spend freely »; *ibid.* 149, « ever ambitious for honor, he will spend *εἰς τὸ δημόσιον* ».

²² V.V. 48, 283.

²³ ART. 229 and 270.

²⁴ ART. 152; cf. the Inspectors of Weights and Measures found in bad company, in Artemidorus' list, p. 171.

²⁵ V.V. 60; cf. 42f., 45, 74, 230, 283; PTOL. 3.13.163, *στασιασταί, ἐμπρησταί, θεατροκόποι*; CCAG VIII, 1. (F. Cumont, 1929) 168, *δχλων ἐφόδους, κινδύνους, ἐμπρησμούς*; ART. 26, 59, 102, 139, 148, 252.

of the governor only through the intercession of influential friends and the entreaties of the populace ²⁶.

Another characteristic source of trouble was the brigand and pirate ²⁷ — who in turn imply travel. Indeed, the clients who wish their horoscopes or dreams to be interpreted seem to have trips often on their mind, or even long absences abroad. Their concern is timeless, responses to them usually vague ²⁸. A single point emerges : though the life of the uprooted or exile was a wretched one, sea-voyages liable to shipwreck, and foreign trade a chancy business, affairs at home might go still worse ²⁹. Sufficiently hard-pressed, a farmer might turn shipper, while a shipper, « gaining much money, repaid his creditors who held a mortgage on his ship » ³⁰.

Wealth occasionally came from high office, as we have seen, and from export and import ; from money-lending, too, and tax-farming ³¹. Toll collectors and peddlers enjoyed little respect ³². Wealth might be inherited, regularly in the form of land ³³, about which the references carry us into different kinds of land use : for livestock, vineyards, oleiculture, and cereal production. It is, however, surprising to find nothing on large-scale proprietors in one writer, Artemidorus, and silence about the small farmer in Vettius Valens and Ptolemy ³⁴.

²⁶ V.V. 231, dated to 123 by Neugebauer and van Hoesen p. 121 ; many similar, real cases, e.g. Philostr., *Vita Apollon.* 1.15 ; Dio 57.21.3.

²⁷ V.V. 74, 77f., 231 (dated to 113 by Neugebauer and van Hoesen p. 109), 288 (dated to 154 by Neugebauer and van Hoesen p. 125) ; *P. Mich.* III 148 ; ART. 170, 175. 209, etc.

²⁸ It would be pointless to assemble references, but note travel beyond the empire (V.V. 165), and the topic in such other sources as *CCAG* VIII, 2, p. 240, in Balbillus' lost work, the section entitled « On sojourns abroad », and in MAXIMUS, *Περὶ καταρχῶν* (ed. A. Ludwig, 1887), of the second century (?), the sections III and IV titled « On sailings and business trips » and « On journeys ».

²⁹ Chancy : for example, V.V. 165 ; wretched life, *ibid.* 65 ; foreign trade (*ναυκληρία*), 73 ; and gains from the like, *ibid.* 38, Ptol. 4.2.174, and Art. 12.

³⁰ Art. 319 (cf. 305 ; 141). A similar, real case, Synes., *Ep.* 4 p. 640 (Hercher). The terms are the expected ones, in our sources : *ναύκληρος*, *ἐμπορος*, *κυβερνήτης* (for example, in Art. 97).

³¹ The *τραπεζιτής* is often mentioned, the *ἐπανάρχης* and *δανειστής* less common ; see e.g. Art. 44 and 230 ; V.V. 38.

³² Above, n. 23 ; Art. 30.

³³ For example, V.V. 69, 76 ; Ptol. 4.2.176.

³⁴ No peasants in V.V., unless Kroll's Index and I have missed a reference ; twice in Ptol. 4.4.179f. ; but a dozen times in Art. 79, 109, etc., and adressed in Maximus, lines 456-543. For shepherds and vinegrowers, see Art. 167, 169, and half-a-dozen times elsewhere.

Tradesmen and artisans, per contra, make up a long list in the last named — as smiths, masons, builders, perfume- or dye- or drug-sellers, jewelers, weavers, carpenters, etc. — without being of much interest to Vettius Valens or Artemidorus³⁵. It is idle to speculate on the reason for these differences, concerning in any event the occupations so often passed over in other genres of ancient literature.

As to the ways of losing wealth, some have already been touched on. Litigation must involve a loser to each suit; the presence of the money-lender implies borrowers; hence the fear of « judgements and debts, disturbances arising from documents and money matters » — all « notorious scandals »³⁶. The unfortunate scraped a living in noxious jobs such as tanner or grave-digger, as miserable drawers of water or bailers on a treadmill³⁷; faced unemployment and poverty³⁸; and shuddered at the thought of being reduced to servitude by condemnation or capture³⁹. From that, flight alone offered hope, and we must suppose, from many passages, that the runaway slave was no uncommon figure⁴⁰.

A very few hints indicate resentment felt by the « have-nots » for the well-to-do. A person's slaves might be his enemies — small wonder — and « a rich man must ... encounter plots and envy »⁴¹; but there is nothing to match the passion of a fragmentary third-century prophesy : « ... tumult and war ... and it will go badly for the rich. Their arrogance will be cast down and their goods confiscated and delivered over to others ... And the poor will be exalted and the rich humbled »⁴². The source and period of this latter document recall

³⁵ Vaguely implied in V.V. 69, « contemptible work; » Art. 242, a carpenter flees his country for debts; 59 (tanner), 136 (potters and tanners), 267 (fuller), 140 (unguent- and perfume-sellers); but a full list in Ptol. 4.4.179; cf. 180f.

³⁶ V.V. 37, 42, 43; cf. references to seizure of property, *λήψεις* or *νοσφισταί* or *ἐπιθυμηταί ἀλλοτρίων*, in numerous passages of V.V.

³⁷ *Ἀντληταί* in Ptol. 179 and Art. 54.

³⁸ *Χειροτέχναις δὲ ἀργίαν καὶ σχολήν*, in Art. 102, 128, 140, 142, etc. Cf. mentions of poverty and beggars, *ibid.* 83, 166, 226.

³⁹ Condemned to slavery, V.V. 68 and Art. 288; captive, and-or sold into slavery, V.V. 58, 68, 71, 77, 84.

⁴⁰ MAXIMUS p. 4, section VIII, *Περὶ δραπετῶν* e.g., lines 332-336; H. STERN, *Le Calendrier de 354* (1954) 64; but a single reference in V.V. 283, and none in Artemidorus or Ptolemy.

⁴¹ V.V. 181, 222, 269, etc., trouble from slaves; envy of the rich, several times in Artemidorus, e.g. p. 252.

⁴² *P. Oxy.* 2554.

another, of which M. Rostovtzeff with his unerring eye saw the significance : a list of questions submitted to an oracle in Egypt, including the desperate inquiries, « Am I to become a beggar ? », « Shall I take to flight ? », « Shall my flight come to an end ? » ⁴³.

Though nameless, impossible to date to a year or even a decade, and addressed to persons whose condition can only be guessed at, all evidence of this sort nevertheless has a peculiar value. It trades in everyday assumptions — which is to say, *generalizations by contemporaries*. Whether a prophesy or oracular response, whether the interpretation of a dream or a birthday, its very unselfconsciousness insures its veracity. Its prime quality is, in the word that scholars choose to describe it, « empirical » ⁴⁴.

That term especially applies to Firmicus Maternus ⁴⁵. Writing toward the year 337 with a style and vocabulary quite of his time, the more closely tied to the contemporary scene by his relatively shallow immersion in the technical aspects of astrology, his work contains far more specific illustrations and terminology than can be found in any of his predecessors ⁴⁶. If we arrange the material in his *Mathesis* in the same order that we followed in discussing the second century writers, it will serve to bring out the changes wrought over the intervening hundred and fifty years.

⁴³ *Social and Economic History of the Roman World* ² (1957) 479.

⁴⁴ Neugebauer and van Hoesen 162, of Vettius Valens; PACK, *art. cit.*, p. 284, of Artemidorus.

⁴⁵ W. and H.G. GUNDEL, *Astrologumena* 210 and 384, emphasize F.M.'s dependence on earlier sources and (p. 227f), with A. BOUCHÉ-LECLERCQ, *L'astrologie grecque* (1899) 400 n. 1, 402 n. 1, criticize his confused and amateurish methods. But this (against Gundel 234 and with Thorndike 421 and *passim*) does not prevent F.M. being manifestly up-to-date in many items of terminology, as we shall see. W. KROLL, *CCAG* V, 2 (1906) 143-8, detects various derivative items in F.M., which should rule out his use as a source for his own period. But two exceptions test the rule. F.M. speaks of kings, a difficulty to Kroll p. 148. The word, however, may be tralatitium without invalidating its contexts; note its certain equivalence with « emperor » in V.V. 21 and 268 (and, we may add, 281), through the dating of Neugebauer and van Hoesen pp. 86 and 121f., to A.D. 74 and 122, and similarly in Artemidorus, where (pp. 192, 265) βασιλεύς and βασιλικός can only mean σέβαστος. Again, F.M. speaks of heralds — typically Ptolemaic, a *scandalum* to Kroll p. 148, but a feature equally characteristic of the fourth century (AMM. 28.2.11; the *ius praeconum* for certain officials, *Cod. Theod.* 12.1.74).

⁴⁶ So rich is his *Mathesis* for our purposes that some sort of statistical analysis may be attempted, not in the exact numbers that Thorndike offers, but by a system of asterisks, one or two to indicate whether a given item is quite frequent, or extremely often referred to.

The educated man is found at the center of a group who « gain the greatest of fortunes from their trained facility in speaking, from legal advocacy, from business, or from priestly incomes », « the associate of rulers for their literary training and teaching »⁴⁷. In many such overlapping lists, three types of career may be discerned. One, with an academic quality, includes « long-haired philosophers », rhetors, teachers, professors, physicians, priests, astronomers, and surveyors, men upright and detached, « learned and famous ». Little new here, save the prospects of profit in such occupations and the mention of public chairs for professors⁴⁸. Another group of skills less honored has to do with numbers, with accounting, with business records and secretarial positions to men of importance, *magni viri*⁴⁹; and we should just note the presence of money-changers, money-lenders, custodians of warehouses and deposits, and public notaries⁵⁰. As to the legal profession, though Firmicus had entered it himself, he had quit it with disgust at its mercenary eristics⁵¹ — a disgust highly characteristic of his century, as often to be found in private individuals' writings as in the law codes⁵². « Fear of law suits seemed terrible to the unfortunate », Firmicus recalls from his experience⁵³. At the same time, the « accusations, incarcerations, and frequent convictions », the exiles and fines, seem not only a more recurrent motif in the *Mathesis* than in earlier astrologers, but involve a new danger : outlawry⁵⁴. Criminal cases now in the fourth century overshadow the civil.

⁴⁷ F.M. 3.7.11; 4.14.16; 3.5.37 (tralatitician? cf. V.V. 72, φιλόσοφοι καὶ μουσικοὶ καὶ φιλόλογοι καὶ βασιλικῆς φιλίας ἔντος γινόμενοι); Thorndike 425 on various kinds of education.

⁴⁸ Profit, e.g. F.M. 4.10.9; 5.1.3; chairs, e.g. 3.12.1 and 4.9.8.

⁴⁹ F.M. 3.7.4; 3.7.7; 3.9.10; 3.10.1; 3.12.1; 4.14.1; 5.2.15; agents, stewards, or secretaries to *potentes** or *magni viri**, 3.3.18; 3.7.21; 3.10.1.

⁵⁰ *Mensae feneratores**, etc., in F.M. 3.7.3; 3.7.13; 3.10.1, gaining thereby glory and riches (4.15.8); *publici tabelliones*, 4.12.4.

⁵¹ F.M. 4 pr. 1, venal lawyers exploit the « conflict in law cases »; cf. 3.7.11, *ex advocatone ... fortunam sibi maximam comparare* (cf. 4.10.8), in contrast to the ruin of the litigants (5.3.31; 5.3.41).

⁵² The most telling references are to Synesius, *Ep.* 2 and 101 (ed. R. HERCHER, *Epistolographi graeci* pp. 638, 699); LACT., *De mort. persecut.* 22.5; and ANON. *De rebus bell.* 21.1.

⁵³ F.M. 4 pr. 1; cf. Thorndike 428, « Sixty-eight passages predicting accusations, judicial sentences and forms of punishment also give a sinister impression of his age », marked by beheading, torture, incarceration, and so forth (cruxificion rare, e.g. 6.31.73).

⁵⁴ *Proscriptio** and attendant *mendicitas*, F.M. 3.4.22; 3.6.16; 5.3.31; etc. Compare the material in A. CALDERINI, *JEA* 40 (1954) 19f.

The third type of career open to educated men may be defined as the governmental. While Firmicus knows of city magistrates, occasionally specified as owing their positions to *litterae* ⁵⁵, and while the urban scene of the second century survives at least in outline, with its offices won through public benefactions, its rich leaders shouldering their community's burdens, its popular enthusiasms for this or that nobleman, and its recurrent riots ⁵⁶, yet on the other hand a number of Firmicus' terms appear fixed to his own day : « top-ten men », the higher municipal aristocracy that increasingly in the later Empire bore the responsibility for local government ⁵⁷; the city « defenders », an invention of Constantine's reign ⁵⁸; and the curators of cities, representing at the same period « the summit of a curial career » ⁵⁹. More generally, we can see the cities now quite bereft of their autonomy. Not only are defenders and curators appointees of the emperors, but entire cities are described as subject to « men great, powerful, formidable, vigorous, who master the largest cities by virtue of some authority », *qui maximas civitates potestatis alicuius licentia subiugent* ⁶⁰. *Civitates* are lumped together with regions, peoples, and provinces, as being « under » some one official ⁶¹, in contexts and phrases quite alien to writers of the earlier Empire. The central authority is evidently treating municipal magistracies as so many extensions of itself.

The men who enjoy power and influence may exert it over more than one city; they have their own secretarial staff, their slaves, rural estates, great mansions like palaces; they are patrons to fine craftsmen;

⁵⁵ F.M. 4.12.4; 4.21.5 (gymnasiarchs).

⁵⁶ The rich win high office (4.9.2; 4.11.8; etc.) by gifts (6.2.4) and assumption of *munera* (3.10.9; 5.1.12), gaining favor (3.4.33; 5.12.19; etc.) or risking *seditiones** or *rizae* (3.3.16; 6.11.2; etc.).

⁵⁷ *Decemprimi**, F.M. 3.3.1; etc.; cf. *Cod. Theod.* 9.35.2 (376).

⁵⁸ *Defensores civitatum* in F.M. 4.14.8; otherwise, first in 322, according to A.H.M. JONES, *Later Roman Empire* (1964) 1299; but he omits *Cod. Just.* 6.1.5 (319).

⁵⁹ *Curatores civitatum* : Jones 726; F.M. 5.2.15;

⁶⁰ F.M. 4.4.4. cf. 3.5.21.

⁶¹ In phrases such as *provinciis civitatibus praepositi*** (or *principes*, in F.M. 3.10.7; 3.12.4; etc.; with *regiones*, 4.10.1; 7.22.1; etc.). Cf. the phrase διοικηταὶ πόλεων in Paulus Alexandrinus, *Apotelesmatica* (ed. A.E. BOER, 1958) p. 65, dating to a little after 378 (p. 136). The same author, though much under the spell of second-century astrological traditions, contains elsewhere some limited material such as we have been using thus far — references to factions, exiles, court convictions (p. 25), profits from education (67, 70), magistracies and priesthoods (65-7, 69f.) — without, however, meriting quotation.

they trail a retinue of hangers-on and dependents ⁶². Their hostility is a thing to dread, their favor the key to wealth, fame, promotion ⁶³. They live among secrets and intrigues, liable to sudden fall from office through the abuse of it — « the highest judges, magnates, holding power over life and death, but rapacious thieves who seize the property of others with the clutching instinct of greed; though still, for these same men, after the widest pillage, the widest thefts and vast robberies, (their *genitura*) yields banishment or a violent death » ⁶⁴.

No distinction can be made between *potentes* or *magni* or *maximi viri* and imperial officials. In the *Mathesis* they blend into each other, as equivalents, at least as equals, connected in the author's thoughts and, he tells us, by their very *genitura*. « It produces commanders and tribunes of soldiers, but terrifying and raised up on tyrannous powers, or defenders or chiefs of cities, but those who never remain within the bounds of those powers, and who in various ways always offend » ⁶⁵. Every city cowers under their scowl ⁶⁶. A striking glimpse, this, of the baneful weight of government pressing on the emperor's subjects, baneful because of its rapacity and omnipresence in an age of bureaucratic despotism. It weighs upon Firmicus' mind. He devotes an extraordinary number of passages (that is, assigns a quantity of horoscopes) to careers in the imperial service, military, gubernatorial, judicial or financial ⁶⁷. Some lie in the secretariats — *notarii*, for example ⁶⁸ — but the majority concern taxation and money matters ⁶⁹. A good portion of the funds collected as tribute clearly reverted to the pockets of the bureaucrats, to whom office promised *bonorum*

⁶² F.M. 5.1.8; 3.10.1; 5.3.55; 3.6.19; 5.1.24.

⁶³ Hostility, e.g., 5.3.12 and 3.14.7 (*factiosi*); their *gratia** and *amicitia** prepotent, e.g., 3.5.38; 5.2.13.

⁶⁴ F.M. 3.5.10; cf. 4.19.27; *secreta* and confidences, 5.1.12 and often; *machinationes et callidae circumscriptiones*, 6.11.9; fall from office, 5.1.27; crimes, 3.7.26; 3.11.16.

⁶⁵ F.M. 4.14.8; *terribilis*** for army officers in 4.11.8, etc.; *gloriosi*, 4.11.9; *efficaces*, 4.14.11, etc.; *terribilis* for governors, 3.13.10; cf. *local* magistrates described as noble, wise, good, etc., in 6.25.5.

⁶⁶ F.M. 3.4.2 and 3.4.28.

⁶⁷ Thorndike 421 n. 3 and 422 nn. 3f. indicates the numbers involved.

⁶⁸ F.M. 3.10.14; cf. PAULUS ALEX. p. 67, *σκρινιαρίους ἢ ἀντιγραφείας ἢ νοταρίους*. Other technical terms of the bureaucracy occur scatteredly, e.g. 3.4.8 and 3.5.26. Note *curiosi* (3.11.3) and vocabulary datable to F.M.'s own day, stressed by Thorndike 421.

⁶⁹ *Administratores*** (3.5.4 etc.), *rationales*** (3.3.8 etc.), and references to the *fiscus*** (3.5.14; 6.3.3; cf. PAULUS ALEX. p. 65, *φορολόγοι βασιλέων*).

incrementa non modica ⁷⁰. Further, the emperor had it in his power to reward his servants with direct gifts, too, or to admit them to the luxurious life of the court, as his intimates and agents ⁷¹. Nothing similar to Firmicus' emphasis on the style, size, and ubiquity of the central government can be found among earlier writers in the astrological tradition; where in the second century the city occupies the centre of the stage, and abuse or admiration is fixed on municipal officials, these have later been replaced by larger figures, living in a larger, harsher, more predatory world.

The ways to wealth, other than wealth gained through public positions, were strewn with difficulties. Trade meant long absences abroad ⁷², while business, except for its links with usury, remains a very fuzzy concept in Firmicus' mind ⁷³. A wife might bring a fortune with her, but the most common fortune of all, by far, is acquired through inheritance ⁷⁴. The less lucky must work. Dozens of crafts and jobs are mentioned, among them a special number given over to luxury ⁷⁵. Agriculture appears rarely, and then mostly livestock farming.

To our surprise, considering the hardness of the times, the lowest classes arouse active charity, and draw from Firmicus descriptive passages filled with pity for « laborers bound to eternal toil, who are forever hiring out their bodies to some task » ⁷⁶. He knows « the straits of poverty, supported in wretched beggary », « the wretched burden of beggary », « the begging poor covered with rags and sunk in wretched calamity », « pressed down in the wretched filth of want, vagrant and never at home » ⁷⁷. These are not the only sufferers.

⁷⁰ F.M. 3.5.13; cf. 3.13.5; 4.10.8; and 4.14.5.

⁷¹ Imperial largesses : F.M. 5.1.10, *habebunt sane vitae substantiam ex publicis vel ex regis locis quibus vitae illis substantia conferetur*; compare Paulus Alex. p. 63; on imperial friends, see F.M. 3.6.24; court luxury, *ibid.* 3.6.3 and 19; 5.1.4.

⁷² *Peregrinationes** for unspecified reasons, 3.13.4, etc.; for trade, 4.10.10; 5.2.21; etc.

⁷³ *Negotiatio*** and *faeneratio**, 3.7.3; 4.14.6; etc.

⁷⁴ Dowries, 3.12.7 and 18; 5.2.12; *patrimonii heredes***, 3.7.17, etc. — of land and cash, 3.10.2.

⁷⁵ Thorndike 427; F.M. 3.3.14. (*aurifices** and others), plus perfume-dealers, embroiderers, and the like.

⁷⁶ Charity, F.M. 5.3.22; laborers, 4.14.2 (cf. 3.3.11).

⁷⁷ F.M. 4.8.1; 4.10.2; 4.14.3; 4.14.15, with other similar passages; *paupertas*** unadorned, 6.31.2, etc. Thorndike 433 draws attention to the note of genuine sympathy, in F.M.

Many children are exposed at birth, many orphaned; free persons are made captive, and sold into servitude ⁷⁸; and there are scores of references to loss of property, *amissio patrimonii*, for the most part unexplained, sometimes attributed to spendthrift generosity or to conviction and subsequent confiscation ⁷⁹.

The rise and fall of fortune, touching so many occupations, only matches the migration of people from one place to another. There is much wandering about, preyed on by highwaymen and pirates, patiently endured by outlaws, rewarding to traders « carried hither and yon on various enterprises ⁸⁰ ». A final reminder, here, of the profit to be found in the « empiricism » of astrological treatises, against the distortion of our other sources. From literary writers, we learn only of an upper-class world that never heard of beggary; from the legislators in the law codes, we learn of a static world, fixing every man in an inherited home and condition ⁸¹. But clients resorted to Firmicus Maternus for a truer picture of the fourth-century empire.

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⁷⁸ *Exponere natos**, F.M. 3.6.13; 7.2.1, etc.; orphans, 4.15.1 and 4 (cf. PAULUS ALEX. pp. 54, 59, 71); *captivi**, 4.14.4, etc.; for slaves bringing danger or trouble on their masters, 3.7.26; 3.2.26; etc.

⁷⁹ F.M. 3.4.1; 3.4.22; etc.

⁸⁰ *Latrones** 6.31.6, 58, 60, etc.; *piratae*, 3.13.2, etc.; *grassatores* and *abactores*, 3.11.10; 6.31.6; *frequenter mutare domicilia* or the like, 3.9.5; 3.13.4; 4.10.10; 8.6.2; traders on the move, 5.2.21.

⁸¹ On « empiricism », above, n. 44; on distortions in the laws, MACMULLEN: *JRS* 54 (1964) 50f.