

Astrology Assignment: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do you want us to cite the sources for this paper?

A: All the secondary sources in the class readings are listed in the course bibliography (on the Moodle site), but the primary sources are not. I want you to focus, not on the modern translation of the text, but on the ancient text divisions, which are the best way to guide a reader to the citation in all the standard editions. In making reference to these, you should be as precise as possible, including the book number, the chapter or section number, and the subsection number whenever possible. (In poetic texts or the Greek Magical Papyri, you should cite the line numbers, but that is not as relevant to this particular assignment.) Thus, for Firmicus, a citation should look something like this: Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis* III.XI.5. Dorotheus should be cited as, e.g., Dorotheus Sidonius, *On Interrogations* V.16.33, and Ptolemy as, e.g., Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* IV.5 184, where the last number represents the ancient page divisions of the long section 5 of Ptolemy's fourth book. I have given you only parts of book five of Dorotheus, of book four, section 5, of Ptolemy, and, for Firmicus, a little bit of book two and large portions of book three. You do not need to create a 'Works Cited' list if you are only using these texts; if you end up making references to secondary literature (Turner or Barton or even Gordon or other supplemental readings), then you should indicate the works you have cited.

Q: I am confused about the different things termed 'Houses'; what are they all?

A: Firmicus and Dorotheus refer to what I termed Places (*topoi*) as Houses, that is, the twelve divisions of the chart counting counter clockwise from the ascendant. What I termed Domiciles (*oikoi*, which Barton calls Houses), Firmicus tends to refer to as 'exaltation' or 'in his house or terms'. Remember that the location of a planet within its Domicile means that its effect is amplified; the zodiac sign of the planet's Domicile does not substitute for the planet itself in, for example, Firmicus' calculations of whether a planet is within a particular Place (house).

Q: Are we supposed to use the chart we were given, or construct a totally new one ourselves? I am assuming that in order to begin properly casting the chart we need to pinpoint the exact day and hour for the fictional wedding?

A: Actually, while you are correct that to "properly" cast the horoscope, you would need to construct a new and much more accurate chart, I nevertheless want you to use the one I gave you. I chose to omit much of the data you would need to calculate many of the more complicated elements of a chart (such as precise degrees for the location of planets, phase of the moon, etc.) so that you could focus on the interpretation rather than the calculation issues. Because I made the signs of the zodiac coincide perfectly with the places/houses, there is no need to calculate in that matter, either. Indeed, astronomically speaking, the chart is impossible (Venus and Mercury are never that far from the sun), but I put this together so that you could go through Firmicus (and Dorotheus and Ptolemy) with some concrete data. So, if the chart I gave you does not provide the data you need to figure something out, simply omit it from your calculations. Remember the hierarchy of means - different diviners use different methods and different levels of complexity of method. You can presume that the horoscope I gave you shows the time and day of the wedding from the position of the sun and that this is as precise a timing as you and your client can handle. The reading you give must omit things like the calculation of the lot of fortune (and the other lots), the influence of the decans, and the phase of the moon. Nevertheless, you should have plenty of things to work with;

the placement of the planets in the places alone provides a good deal of material. One of the key parts of the assignment, however, is to reconcile all this interpretive data (as culled from Firmicus and others) and explain how you would present it to the client. If Firmicus and Dorotheus provide contradictory indications, what will you tell your client and how do you explain your choice to your apprentice? By reducing the level of technical complexity, I hope you can spend more time thinking about the social interactions involved in the consultation.

Q: Dear Professor, I am somewhat confused about how to proceed with the astrology assignment, mainly because the Firmicus document appears to deal with birth charts, should we interpose that information with the information in Ptolemy and D?

A: Firmicus Maternus is indeed concerned with birth charts, but it is important to remember that all horoscopes are images of the heavens at a particular significant moment. Birth is one obviously important moment in a person's life, but all katarchic or horary astrology deals with other moments, be it setting off on a sea voyage or getting married. The influence of the heavenly bodies is calculated in the same ways, regardless of what kind of moment is being considered. So the start of the new marriage at that particular moment can be considered for the client like the start of a new life for a baby born at the particular time, and you can transfer Firmicus' predictions from the "native" to the marriage and the people in it. Dorotheus is already working with katarchic/horary astrology, so you don't need to make such adaptations.

Q: I think I've managed to get through Firmicus Maternus fairly well, but I'm having more problems with Dorotheus. I thought Firmicus Maternus was hard to understand, but I've decided he's nothing compared to Dorotheus. I'm not sure what the tropical signs and twin signs are. Are they Aries and Gemini respectively or is there something more to it? That's the only thing I've been able to come up with, but I get the impression that there's more than one of each type of these signs. The section on the corruption of the moon is really hard to follow – hard enough that I'm not entirely sure it's even possible with the knowledge I have. If you've got some hints in regards to that, I'd certainly appreciate them.

A: Well, Firmicus is the one to provide most of the information you need, but it is worth trying to unravel the complexities of Dorotheus to get a sense of katarchic astrology proper. The tropical signs are those at the turning points (tropics) of the sun's journey, that is the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, whereas the equinoctial signs are those at the equinoxes, Aries and Libra. The twin or double signs are those whose symbols or names indicate some kind of doubleness. Gemini is obviously twin, but authorities differ on which others should be considered twins - Pisces, Libra, Capricorn, or even Sagittarius. If you want to include some calculation from twin signs, just make sure you explain to your apprentice why you consider the sign double. The section on the corruption of the moon is indeed more complicated than you really have the data to make use of, so you may omit it, just as you may feel free to omit anything else for which you do not have sufficient data. Indeed, I limited the data on purpose, so that you would not have too many variables to deal with in your paper.

Q: Ok, so here's the problem, I've been going back over the various texts for the paper and have become somewhat confused about some of the terminology. In Firmicus I was unsure what he meant by the term 'anafora' also exactly what he meant by the term 'aspect'. in Ptolemy what does he mean when a planet 'applies' to another planet, and what does it mean when to objects are 'in familiarity.' I tried to find all of these terms in the secondary sources and so forth, but frankly either missed them or they are not to be found there. I'm getting confused and am trying to write my paper. Help!

PS. do we need to know about which planets are exalted in which of the various signs?

A: Astrological terminology can indeed be bewildering. The anafora (anaphora) of a particular sign is the sign that is carried up (ana-pherein) before it. This is defined (parenthetically) in your translation of Firmicus at III.ii.2. Aspect is the relation between planets (trine, quartile, sextile, or opposition), the way in which they look at one another (ad-specto). Barton has a good discussion of the aspects. Ptolemy's term "applies" is a variation of this idea; the moon "applies" to another planet if it is in some significant aspect with it or is in conjunction (i.e., in the same sign) with it. "Familiarity" is another way of expressing the same idea of relationships between the planetary powers. Even in Ptolemy, who is less inclined than most astrologers to anthropomorphize the planets and their relationships, such variation of terminology is indicative of the personalized conception of the planetary deities. As for exaltations, if a planet is in the sign of the zodiac that is its exaltation (see the chart in Barton or on the handout), its effects will be magnified. Some astrologers draw more specific conclusions than that, but you needn't get too detailed.

Q: we have the chart for the day and hour of the wedding, and this is fine for Dorotheus, but in the sections we read from Firmicus and Ptolemy, they make predictions based on the nativities of the people involved. How should we use these texts? Should we make up rough birthcharts for Tlepolemus and Charite? Or should we consider the wedding itself as a "newborn," and predict its future accordingly? Or are there sections in Firmicus and Ptolemy that deal more specifically with interrogations?

A: You should treat the wedding itself as the "native" in Firmicus and Ptolemy, since you don't have any information for the couple themselves. Katarchic astrology (determining the influence of the stars at a significant moment) functions in much the same way as genethliological, which is really nothing more than the particular significant moment of birth. Firmicus does not deal with interrogations about significant moments other than birth, while Ptolemy does so only theoretically, in sections like the excerpt on marriage I provided. Dorotheus, in the fifth book, is really the only extensive treatise extant to deal with such katarchic astrology.

Q: Firmicus makes some distinctions by saying "if Mercury with Venus... is in a morning rising" and I need a point of clarification. I know that the chart for this project is a daytime event, but I'm not sure about the morning/evening distinction. Is it "evening" when the sun is past due North (noon) or is it "evening" only when the sun is in the descendant?

A: The information about the visibility of Mercury and Venus at sunrise or sunset is not something you have on your chart, so you should feel free to omit any such calculations. Actually, because of the impossible way I constructed the chart, with Venus and Mercury farther apart from the sun than they could ever be in nature, the calculation is even more impossible. Let it go as a level of complexity you cannot deal with.

Q: If Saturn is in the ascendant with the moon, is it considered on the "ascendant by night" because the moon is below the horizon with it while the sun is above the horizon or is it on the "ascendant by day" because when it rises the sun will still be above the horizon?

A: The sun determines whether it is day or night, so whatever is on the ascendant while the sun is above the horizon is on the "ascendant by day".

Q: Another question: Mars is in a square aspect to the moon. Firmicus gives information about Mars being in a square aspect to the "waxing moon." Do I disregard this association because I do not know the phase of the moon or do I pretend that it is waxing?

A: Since the chart does not give you information about the phase of the moon, you can really do either - you can treat it as applicable, since it pertains to Mars in square aspect with the moon, or you can disregard it, since it only pertains to Mars and the moon in a certain phase. You just need to explain in your paper what you are doing.

*Q: How do I relate the "Lots/Parts" mentioned in Barton to the chart in the assignment? I noticed there is a Marriage Lot, which would probably be relevant if I could just figure out how it corresponded to the assignment chart... Do we need to take the waxing or waning of the Moon into account? If so, how can I tell whether the Moon in the chart is waxing or waning?
What is the Lord of the Moon?
How do I determine where the Moon is flowing from?*

A: These are all things for which I (deliberately) did not provide you enough data. You cannot, with the information given, calculate the lots nor do any of the calculations that involve the phases of the moon. I made the chart simple so that you could use a relatively uncomplicated procedure for interpreting it. There are still plenty of complexities to make things interesting, and, without all the extra layers to complexity, you can use the time/space/energy to figure out how your reading of the chart will play out in terms of magician-client interactions.

Q: I am confused with some of the terminology Ptolemy uses. When he says certain planets are with each other or near one another, is he saying they are in aspect with each other or that they are in the same place? Also, when Maternus says planets are in conjunction, this means they are in the same place, right?

A: The terminology is tricky, not just because of its complexity, but because everyone uses different terms. Part of the confusion here lies in the varying levels of precision. Planets that are in the same sign of the zodiac, i.e. within 30 degrees of each other, can be considered to be in conjunction, but they might also be considered to be only with each other or near each other, depending on how close they actually are - 10 degrees apart or 5 or 25. Conjunction is one type of aspect (at least in some astrologers' terminology), a relation of 0 degrees apart, instead of 90 (quartile) or 120 (sextile), etc.