

“Rhetorius” on the systematic interpretation of nativities

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The following chapter, which is now the only known Hellenistic exposition of how to interpret nativities systematically, is extant in three versions.

Version 2 constitutes chapter 22 of the *Revision* of “Rhetorius’s” *Explanation and Interpretation of the Entirety of Astrology* (Ἐπίλυσις καὶ διήγησις πάσης ἀστρονομικῆς τέχνης). This *Explanation* was probably written in 504, and based on circumstantial evidence, scholars have attributed it to Rhetorius of Egypt; in an [article](#) to appear in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (“Rhetorius, Zeno’s Astrologer, and a Sixth-Century Astrological Compendium”), I challenged this view and proposed that the authorship should be attributed to the anonymous astrologer working for the Byzantine emperor Zeno (474–475 and 476–491). This uncertainty is the reason why I put the name between quotes.

“Rhetorius’s” *Explanation* has not survived intact, and it is assumed that chapters 12–23 of the *Revision*, which lack their parallels in the extant version of the *Explanation*, are also based on the compendium. Since version 2 appears to be an abbreviated and supplemented variant of version 1, it is likely that version 1 is the variant that was originally found in the *Explanation* or at least closer to it.

In turn, version 3 is based on version 2 and, therefore, must have been composed after the ninth century. In all its manuscripts, version 3 is followed by a chapter that contains a case inception for 21 September 1002; consequently, version 3 may have been written by an astrologer living around 1000.

Version 1 is found on ff. 240v–241 of ms Vatican City, BAV, Vat. gr. 191 (**X**). In the 1370s or 1380s, Isaac Argyrus wrote down his slightly revised variant on f. 103–103v of ms Paris, BNF, gr. 2507 (**P**), but as his exemplar occasionally had a better text than **X**, his reworked variant cannot be dismissed. Version 1 has never been edited or translated.

Version 3 is extant in the same manuscripts as version 2; for the manuscript sigla, see Part 2 of this series. Version 3 is found as ch. 218 on ff. 73v–74 of **B**, ch. 2.143 on ff. 82v–83 of **Z**, and ch. A229 on f. 170–170v of **H**. These two versions were edited by Franz Cumont in *CCAG* 8.1, 243–248 from **B** and **H**. I collated the readings of **Z**, the second scribe of which appends some readings of version 1 as interlinear or marginal notes, and even fills a lacuna with the text of version 1; I used these snippets to establish the text of version 1 better. Version 3 and a few sections of version 2 were translated by Robert Schmidt (*Project Hindsight Companion to the Greek Track*, 11–14) from Cumont’s edition.

Finally, there is a curious variant on ff. 26v–30 of ms El Escorial, RB, Ψ. II. 17 (Andrés 452) and elsewhere, which I have not been able to inspect yet. Its title is identical with that of version 2, but the incipit resembles version 3, and the explicit is found in none of the known versions. In a later revision of this translation, I will make use of this manuscript as well.

I used the same brackets as before: recovered lacunas and restorations are in [square brackets], while words inserted to facilitate understanding in (round brackets). There is an obviously corrupt passage, which is †daggered†, and a whole section that seems to be an insertion is secluded in {curly brackets}.

An exposition of instructions on how to interpret births

(1) After you have ascertained the positions of the stars to the degree, the natures of their signs, their bounds according to the Egyptians, their trigons, participations,¹ exaltations and depressions, their decans and the faces of these decans, their individual degrees and bright degrees, their twelfth-parts, their latitudes in reference to the winds and the steps, their obliquities – that is, their distances from the Ecliptic, just as from the Meridian –, their appearances, additions or subtractions or stationing, and, according to the degree, the co-risings of the fixed stars that are close to them, with reference to their magnitude, winds, and temperaments, then come to the Hour-Marker and the Midheaven, and the pivots, succedents, and declines to the degree. (2) And when you have already ascertained the seven stars in respect of their places, cast the seven lots that are subjoined in the introduction of the book,² and ascertain the appearances of Selene – that is to say, the conjunction or whole moon before birth –, her

22. Instructions how nativities must be interpreted

(1) After you have ascertained the positions of the stars to the degree, the natures³ of their signs, their bounds according to the Egyptians and Ptolemy, their trigons, participations, exaltations and dejections, their decans and the faces of these decans, their individual degrees and bright degrees, their twelfth-parts, the latitudes of their winds and steps, the obliquities, the appearances and stationing, and, according to the degree, the co-risings of the fixed stars that are close to them and their temperaments, then come to the Hour-Marker, the Midheaven, and the pivots of the twelve places to the degree – as you have learned in chapter 15⁴ –, then to the seven lots and the appearances of Selene – that is, the conjunction or whole moon before birth –, her third, seventh, and fortieth days, and her applications and separations by longitude and latitude.

How to examine (nativities)

(1) After you have set out the Hour-Marker and the remaining places of the chart, fixed the stars in these places – that is, signs – where they are making their journey, and written down their longitudinal positions, you must examine their domiciles, trigons, exaltations, and bounds; that is, who of the stars is on his own throne, exalted, in his bounds or those of a benefic, additive, out of the beams; or the opposite, who of them is in the domicile, exaltation, or trigon of another star, or opposing his own domicile – that is, himself –, depressed, and whether he is under the beams and subtractive. (2) Then examine their decans – that is, the faces –, participations, individual degrees, bright degrees, twelfth-parts, the latitudes of their winds and the steps, their appearances and stationing, and, according to the degree, the co-risings of the fixed stars that are close to them and their temperaments, the familiarities and antipathies – that is, belonging to the same and the other sect –, then examine the appearances of

¹ ‘Participation’ (μετοχή) is a concept rarely encountered in astrological literature. I am aware of three different usages, of which the one probably originating from Antiochus of Athens (*Epitome of Antiochus’s Introductory Matters* 1.16; “Porphyry”, *Introduction* 26; Hephaestio 1.13; “Rhetorius”, *Explanation* 5.30) is best known; however, the context suggests that either of the two other versions must be understood here. According to one definition, which is implicitly embedded in the birth chart of Eutocius of Ascalon (dated to 28 October 497, found in “Rhetorius”, *Explanation* 6.52), the participating star is the out-of-sect triangular lord, while only the in-sect triangular lord is considered as the lord of the trigon. The other version appears in an undatable birth extant in a late second-century or early third-century papyrus (P. Oxy. 4277); here Kronos is the participating star in the Goat-Horned One, the Bull, and the Water-Pourer, Ares in the Lion, and Zeus in the Scorpion, but the logic of this system remains unclear in the absence of its description.

² A reference to “Rhetorius”, *Explanation* 5.47.

³ Reading φύσεις with version 1 and the second scribe of **Z** for φάσεις, ‘appearances,’ of **BH** and the first scribe of **Z**.

⁴ It is chapter 12 of the *Revision*.

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third, seventh, and fortieth days, and her applications and separations by longitude and latitude.

(3) Then, after setting the general fixity of the birth and the pivots, succedents, and declines to the degree, examine the domicile-master of the birth according to the aforementioned methods.⁵ (4) Then, after considering and calculating the conception, cast the leading and following trigonal, tetragonal, and hexagonal sides of every star to the degree, note them down separately, and keep them at hand in order that when during the interpretation of the circumambulations of the stars, we are making the adherences, we should not only take the trigonal, tetragonal, and hexagonal sides according to the sign but also to the degree; for they are more forceful, especially in the signs of short and long ascension.⁶ (5) After noting down all these said sides, examine the lifetime from the domicile-master of the selected releaser, but when you are making the circumambulations of all the stars, do not forget that the adherences of the stars, the Hour-Marker,⁷ the Midheaven, and the lots that occur with the fixed

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(2) Then examine the domicile-master of the birth and consider the conception based on the writings of Valens⁸ in the manner we shall teach you after these instructions.⁹ (3) Consider the trigonal, [tetragonal,] and hexagonal sides to the degree – as you learned them in chapter 16¹⁰ –, both the right and left ones. (4) Keep these separately after noting them down in order that when, during the interpretation of the circumambulations of the stars, you are making the adherences, you should not only take the sides according to the sign and place but also to the degree; for they are more forceful, especially in the signs of short and long ascension. (5) Then examine the matters of the lifetime based on the writings of Ptolemy and Valens.¹¹ (6) And in the circumambulations of the stars, the adherences of the stars, the Hour-Marker, the Midheaven, and the lots occurring with the fixed stars have enormous performance in accordance with their

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Selene – that is, the conjunction or whole moon before birth –, her third, seventh, and fortieth days, and her applications and separations by longitude and latitude.

(3) Also, examine the Hour-Marker of the conception as the ancient Egyptians do, the domicile-master of the birth, and the trigonal, tetragonal, and hexagonal sides to the degree, both the right and left ones. (4) Keep all these separately after noting them down in order that when, during the interpretation of the circumambulations of the stars, you are making the adherences, you should not only take the sides according to the sign and place but also to the degree; for they are more forceful, especially in the signs of short and long ascension. (5) For in the circumambulations of the stars, the adherences of the stars, the Hour-Marker, the Midheaven, and the lots occurring with the fixed stars have enormous performance in accordance with their temperaments as long as they have the same latitude.

⁵ Perhaps referring to the original of what is now chapter 16 of the *Revision*. There the procedure described in Valens 3.3 is recommended.

⁶ **P** omits the signs of short rising.

⁷ **XP** add: “the hour.”

⁸ Valens 1.21.

⁹ A reference to the following chapter 23 of the *Revision* (to be translated as Part 4 of this series).

¹⁰ It is chapter 14 of the *Revision*.

¹¹ Ptolemy, *Apotelesmatics* 3.11 and most of Book III of Valens.

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stars have enormous performance in accordance with their temperaments, especially if both of them have the same wind.

(6) For Ptolemy says about this subject the following:¹² “We shall begin with the peculiar productive characteristics of each wandering star, but first we make the following general statement as a summary reminder. (7) When we speak about the five wandering stars in general, the temperament and productive power of the nature equivalent (with that of the star) must be understood, no matter the star himself in the condition appropriate to him or one of the fixed stars or the places of the zodiac¹³ is observed in accordance with its peculiar temperament—as if the appellations (normally used to wandering stars) refer to natures and their productive powers and not to stars. (8) Moreover, in the commixtures, not only the mutual combination of the wandering stars must be examined but also the combination with those that share the same nature – that is, with fixed stars or places of the zodiac – in line with their affinities with the wandering stars, which has already been shown¹⁴.”

(9) After examining the matter of the lifetime, even if there should not be found a domicile-master beside the releaser,¹⁵ examine the

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temperaments as long as they have the same latitude.

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¹² A verbatim quotation of *Apotelesmatics* 2.9.3–4.

¹³ By ‘places of the zodiac’, the areas belonging to different constellations are meant; these are described by using the names of the wandering stars in *Apotelesmatics* 1.9.

¹⁴ In *Apotelesmatics* 1.9.

¹⁵ Following **X**; **P** has “... the length of life, which is shown by the releaser – that is, the domicile-master.”

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circumambulation of the Hour-Marker, the Midheaven,¹⁶ the Lot of Fortune, Helios, Selene, and the (remaining) five stars. (10) For the circumambulation of the Hour-Marker indicates the reckoning about life and the psychical ailments, and the circumambulation of the Midheaven indicates the reckoning about activity, reputation, livelihood, and children. (11) The circumambulation of Helios indicates the reckoning about reputation, honor, high rank, fathers, rulers, higher positions, or older brothers. (12) The circumambulation of Selene indicates the ailments of the body, companionships, mothers, mistresses, and older sisters. (13) The (circumambulation of the) Lot of Fortune indicates good luck and honor or loss and fine resulting from acquisitions, and the ailments of the body¹⁷. (14) The circumambulation of Kronos indicates destructions of things, injuries, ailments, [misfortune,] grandfathers or fathers, older brothers, gains or losses from inheritances, and dangers related to water. (15) The circumambulation of Zeus indicates honors, gains, acquaintance with people of high rank, patronages, and beneficial acquisitions. (16) The circumambulation of Ares indicates military services, public affairs, temerity, punishments, confusions, unexpected conflicts, ardent affections, and wounds caused by iron or falling¹⁸. (17) The

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(7) The circumambulation of Kronos indicates destructions of things, injuries, ailments, misfortune, grandfathers or fathers, older brothers, gains or losses from inheritances, and dangers related to water. (8) The circumambulation of Zeus indicates honors, gains,¹⁹ acquaintance with people of high rank, patronages, and beneficial acquisitions. (9) The circumambulation of Ares indicates military services, public affairs, temerity, punishments, confusions, unexpected conflicts, ardent affections, and wounds caused by iron or falling. (10) The circumambulation of Aphrodite indicates marriage,

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¹⁶ P adds: “and the remaining pivots.”

¹⁷ P writes “accidental ailments.”

¹⁸ P adds: “from height.”

¹⁹ Reading ὠφελείας with version 1 for φιλίας, ‘friendships’ of the manuscripts of version 2.

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circumambulation of Aphrodite indicates marriage, friendships, erotic love, intercourses, prosperity, gains or losses from women, mothers, and younger sisters. (18) And the circumambulation of Hermes indicates younger brothers, education, commerce, servants, and freedmen.

(19) You must judge²² each of the stars by their peculiar nature and according to their adherences to the stars, both the wandering and the fixed ones, and the Ascending and Descending Nodes, and according to the qualities of the bounds and you must give a judgment about how they describe the outcomes in this manner. (20) After this subject, make the ascensions of the signs in accordance with the proper zone, the periods of the stars according to their greatest, middle, and minor years – first by making days, then months, and finally years – and then, after this subject, examine the subjects of the

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friendships, erotic love, intercourses, prosperity, gains or losses from women, mothers, and younger sisters²⁰. (11) And the circumambulation of Hermes indicates [younger] brothers, education, commerce, servants, and freedmen.

(12) Regarding the circumambulations of Helios, Selene, the Hour-Marker, the Midheaven, and the Lot of Fortune, what each of them indicates is exposed by Ptolemy.²¹

(13) You must judge each of the stars according to the adherences to the wandering and the fixed stars and the Ascending [and Descending] Node[s], and according to the qualities of the bounds and you must foretell the future in this manner. (14) You must take the ascensions of the signs in Ptolemy's methods according to the *Handy Tables*, in the methods of the Egyptians according to the Egyptian tables, and in Valens's methods according to Valens's tables²⁴.

(15) Then make the examination concerning parents following the methods of Ptolemy, [Valens,] and Dorotheus²⁵ and, following other ancients, from the lots of parents, and concerning siblings,

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(6) You must judge each of the stars [according to] the adherences to the wandering and the fixed stars and the Ascending and Descending Nodes, and according to the qualities of the bounds and you must foretell the future in this manner. (7) You must take the ascensions of the signs in Ptolemy's methods according to the *Handy Tables*, in the methods of the Egyptians according to the method of the Egyptians, and in Valens's methods according to Valens's methods.

(8) Then make the examination concerning parents following the methods of Ptolemy, Valens, and Dorotheus and from the lots of parents, and concerning siblings, following Ptolemy and from the

²⁰ Reading ἀπό γυναικῶν ὠφελείας ἢ βλάβας καὶ μητέρας καὶ μικροτέρας ἀδελφᾶς with version 1 for ἀπό γυναικῶν ὠφελείας ἢ βλάβας καὶ μητρὸς καὶ ἀπὸ θηλειῶν ἀδελφῶν, “gains or losses from women, also those of the mother, and from female siblings” of the manuscripts of version 2.

²¹ *Apotelesmatics* 4.10.14.

²² Reading κρίνειν as suggested by Cumont and the second scribe of **Z** for κινεῖν, ‘move,’ of the manuscripts of all the three versions.

²⁴ Valens 1.6.

²⁵ Ptolemy, *Apotelesmatics* 3.5, Valens 2.32, and the Arabic Dorotheus 1.13–18 Dykes (= 1.12.15–16 Pingree) with the related fragments.

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conception, the childbirth, and the rest as they are given below in the table.²³

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[following Ptolemy²⁶ and] from the third place and the lots of siblings. (16) Then, concerning the appearance and the quality of the soul, make the examination following Ptolemy, concerning injuries and ailments, following Ptolemy and the others in the manner we have expounded,²⁷ concerning fortune related to honors, following Ptolemy and the others,²⁸ and then make the examinations concerning marriage, children, and travel. (17) Then examine the indications of the table of the twelve-turning, as it is written in chapter 5²⁹, the indications of the applications and separations in the manner I shall teach after these instructions,³⁰ and the indications of the decans of the Hour-Marker, Helios, Selene, the five stars and the lots following Teucer of Babylon. (18) Then examine the indications of the trigons, tetragons, diameters, hexagons[, and conjunctions] of the stars following Dorotheus³¹ and the others, the distinctions of the places of the stars and their bounds,³² and the indications of the Ascending and the Descending Nodes as in chapter 5, the quality of the death following

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third place and the lots of siblings. (9) Then, in this order, make the investigations concerning the birth, the lifetime, the bodily form, disfigurement, injuries, the quality of the soul, the psychical ailments, acquired fortune and fortune related to honors, livelihood, activity, marriage, children, friends, slaves, travel, but conjoin with them the indications of the table of the twelve-turning; furthermore, the indications of the applications and the separations of Helios, Selene, and the remaining stars, and the indications of the Hour-Marker and the lots following Teucer of Babylon.³⁴ (10) Then examine the indications of the trigons, tetragons, diameters, hexagons, and conjunctions of the stars following Dorotheus and the others, the distinctions of the places of the stars and their bounds, and the indications of the Ascending and the Descending Nodes, the quality of the death following Ptolemy, Dorotheus, and Valens, and then the division of the lifetime.

²³ This table is missing in both manuscripts; perhaps in version 2, its abbreviated form is read.

²⁶ *Apotelesmatics* 3.6.

²⁷ In chapter 4 of the *Revision*, which corresponds to “Rhetorius”, *Explanation* 5.61–62.

²⁸ These topics are treated in *Apotelesmatics* 3.12–15 and 4.3.

²⁹ It is chapter 1 of the *Revision*, corresponding to “Rhetorius”, *Explanation* 5.57.

³⁰ This is missing from the surviving from of the *Revision*.

³¹ Arabic Dorotheus 2.14–23 Dykes (= 2.14–19 Pingree) and the related fragments.

³² The ‘distinctions of the places’ (τοπικαὶ διακρίσεις) are the descriptions of what the seven stars in each other’s domiciles and bounds indicate.

³⁴ See the corresponding section in version 2 for what exactly constitutes the teachings of Teucer of Babylon. I will publish the untranslated fragments and testimonies of Teucer soon.

Ptolemy, Dorotheus, and Valens,³³ and then the division of the lifetime.

(19) Before all, examine the ruler of the year and his position and testimonies, and whether he sees his domicile and how he was situated in the birth. (20) Then examine the Hour-Marker of the year based on the degree of Helios's return – that is, from the exact hour of the birth-substitute –, the stars regarding the Hour-Marker, and its lord. (21) Then make the distributions of (the Lots of) Fortune and Daimon in the manner of Valens, the transmissions and acquisitions of the stars as Valens does,³⁵ and then make the decennials as the Egyptians do, and after these, make the distribution of the year.

{(22) (Examine) the particularities as follows. In the birth, cast the years from the Hour-Marker, the Midheaven, Helios, Selene, and (the Lot of) Fortune; concerning the father, from the Lot of the Father or, [concerning the mother, from the Lot] of the Mother † or from each place or from the lot of the year or from Hermes†.}³⁶

(11) Before all, examine the ruler of the year and his position and testimonies, and whether he sees his domicile, how he was situated in the birth, and whether he observed the same figure as in the birth, and examine the Hour-Marker of the year based on the degree of Helios's return – that is, from the exact hour of the birth-substitute –, the stars regarding the Hour-Marker, and its lord. (12) Then make the distributions of (the Lots of) Fortune and Daimon in the manner of Valens, the transmissions and acquisitions of the stars as he does, and then the decennials as the Egyptians do.

³³ See Ptolemy, *Apotelesmatics* 4.9, Arabic Dorotheus 4.3 Dykes (= 4.1.143–184 Pingree) with the related fragments, and Valens 2.41.

³⁵ These are treated in Book IV of Valens.

³⁶ The section, which looks out of place here, is a rearranged and partly unintelligible version on *Revision* 21.12–13, so I secluded it.