

Articles by Willi O. Sucher

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The Modern Mystic and Science Review

Article by Willi Sucher, April 1938

THE ZODIAC

In the present phase of human evolution the old traditional wisdom of the stars is fading away ever more and more, and we are bound to look for new ways of knowledge of our relation to the stars. The study of the constellations of death can be a very great help in this direction. One might almost say that the dead, who for a long time remain connected with the constellation in the heavens at the moment of their death, are the true astrologers of our time. If the living find their right relation to the dead, they will gain new and fruitful knowledge of the cosmic relations also.

This aspect shall be developed further in the present essay. Above all, we wish to gain renewed insight into the nature of the Zodiac and its twelfold differentiation. We must somehow reach a wider vantage point; therefore, we shall consider quite a number of historic characters, and how in their horoscope of death they came into relation to the universe of stars. No single horoscope can embrace the full, twelve-fold character of the Zodiac. Napoleon's horoscope of death emphasizes, in the main, only a single constellation, that of Pisces. For this reason we shall have to study several horoscopes, bearing in mind especially how the upper planets—those beyond the Sun: Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn—are related to the constellations of the fixed stars.

We will begin by going far back in Western history to the time of the Middle Ages and the era of high Scholasticism. St. Thomas Aquinas, undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Scholastic movement, died on 6 March, 1274. The constellation of the stars on this day will give us a picture of the relation of his work on Earth to the starry heavens. It is a most impressive picture. The Sun is in Pisces, and half-way between Jupiter is in Aquarius and Mars is in Aries. Jupiter is side by side with Venus, and the Moon also is in that region, while on the other hand Mercury is near to Mars. It is like a painting in the cosmos, harmonious in composition, balanced and centered in the forces of the Sun. Yet the Sun in this picture also has another aspect, Saturn is in Virgo and in opposition to it.

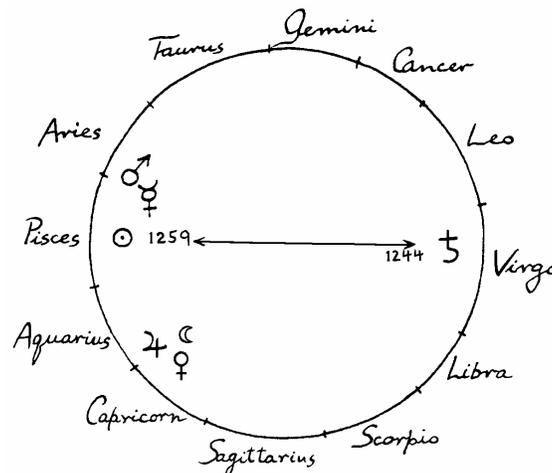


Fig. 1: St. Thomas Aquinas - Horoscope of Death - 6 March, 1274

This gives the horoscope a peculiarly twofold aspect, and we shall find that this duality pervades the entire work of St. Thomas in his life on Earth. On the one hand he represents the Scholastic stream in its finest essence. Seeking to apprehend the inmost essence of this important epoch in our spiritual history, we may have recourse to a historic picture created by this very era, the architecture of the Gothic cathedral reaching its highest perfection in that of Chartres. In the strong emphasis on the vertical line, with its heavenward aspiration, the spiritual mood of the people of that time finds characteristic expression. By fine and subtle thought, disciplined in an unmeasured devotion to the spirit and developing an elaborate technique in the forming of pure

concepts, people of that time sought and found contact—often it was a very real and near contact—with the divine and spiritual. Even as the upward-striving spires of their cathedrals reached out into the infinite of the universe, so in the upward orientation of their own being, in pure thought they still had a delicate thread uniting them in a very direct way with the divine-spiritual world. For as they raised their thought in receptivity to the spiritual world, they felt the divine revelations lighting up in them. The purest and most powerful exponent of this attitude of soul, Thomas Aquinas, appears upon the scene of history. Doctor Angelicus was the name given to him by the people of his time. He, most of all, was imbued with this virginal being of the soul, able to open out in an unparalleled degree in pure thought to the divine. So he became one of the greatest spiritual figures of his age. His extant works, the so-called *Summae*, bear witness to his greatness.

This character of soul, subtly developed, highly trained, yet still directly open to the spiritual, is well expressed in the position of Saturn in Virgo at the time when he passed through the gate of death. Saturn, the highest of the seven planets, is in the virginal constellation. Into this constellation there goes forth that aspect of the being of St. Thomas wherein he was so well able to receive into his soul the spiritual revelations. This becomes still more evident when we pay attention to the past transits of Saturn. For we then recognize what period of his life it is which, as it were, goes out into this constellation. It is about the year 1244-5. A year before, Aquinas had been received into the Dominican order. In 1245 he was called to Paris to the school of Albertus Magnus. Saturn in Virgo in the horoscope of death is thus a picture of his rise, of the essential step he took which led him out into the spiritual horizon of his age. Virgo stands out in the horoscopes of other representatives of the time. Albertus Magnus, teacher and friend of St. Thomas, had Jupiter in Virgo at the moment of his death (15 November 1280), at the same place where Saturn stood at the passing of St. Thomas. At the death of Duns Scotus—Doctor Subtilis, as he was called—Mars was in Virgo (8 November, 1308).

A very different world from this one, so tenderly, so intimately devoted to the experience of the Divine and spiritual, is that inscribed into the constellations of Aquarius, Pisces, and Aries in St. Thomas' horoscope of death. In point of time—that is to say, as regards the transits of Saturn—it represents the period in Aquinas' life when he was already a far-famed personality at the University of Paris and throughout Western Christendom. Yet we must look a little deeper. It was the time when he was struggling with spiritual tendencies which he considered detrimental to the true evolution of humanity. These tendencies were concentrated, above all, in the ideas of the Moorish philosopher Averrhoes. The conflict, once again, was in the sphere of life wherein the people of that time had to wrestle with the great spiritual truths—the element of thought. As an essential starting-point for the discipline of thought they took the Aristotelian philosophy. Thus on the surface it appears as though the bone of contention had been the true interpretation of the extant writings of Aristotle. Yet behind this a far greater struggle lay concealed. The spiritual reality and substance of one's eternal being was the point at issue.

Aristotle had lived and worked in the 4th century before the Christian era, yet his philosophy remained a vital thing even into the Middle Ages. To begin with, his works had been transmitted by the Greek schools of the philosophers. In the early centuries of Christianity, when these old schools of wisdom were sorely pressed and persecuted, even annihilated, the works of Aristotle found their way into the civilizations of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Western Asia. Translated into Oriental languages, they suffered numerous distortions. One such translation came into the hands of the Moorish philosopher Averrhoes. True to the character of the Arabic soul, Averrhoes gave his own commentary of the philosophy of Aristotle. From his description, one might easily conclude that in the view of the Greek master a person does not bear within itself an immortal, spiritual core of being; only a spark of the divine is kindled within that merges after death without continued personal existence into the ocean of divine being. Thomas Aquinas had to refute this interpretation, for it lay not along the line of normal spiritual development of the Western world. Against the Latin Averrhoists, he caused a fresh translation of certain portions of Aristotle's works to be made from the original Greek and wrote voluminous commentaries. This was the time when he was working as Magister at the University of Paris and, notably, the time of his sojourn at the court of Pope Urban IV, 1261-4. It is this period which is inscribed by the transits of Saturn into the constellations of Aquarius, Pisces, and Aries. The height of his activity was recorded, above all, in the Sun in Pisces; namely, the time when he went from Paris to the Papal court—in some sense the acknowledged spiritual leader of Western humanity.

Thus in his horoscope of death two tendencies reveal themselves, concentrated respectively in the constellations of Pisces and Virgo. To Virgo belongs the quiet inner bearing of the soul, hearkening to the voice of knowledge of the divine secrets of creation of the world and humanity; knowledge that will arise in deeper regions of the soul if we are serene enough to hear it. Likewise the constellation of Virgo is associated with one's entry into the inner, spiritual life of nature. Pisces, the opposite of Virgo, is associated with the great spiritual battles of humanity. We see it in St. Thomas' horoscope of death in another way than we did in Napoleon's. Yet we shall also recognize the tremendous difference of the two horoscopes. Great as the battles of Scholasticism were, Thomas Aquinas by his life and work inscribed them in the cosmic sphere of Pisces with serene harmony. This cosmic region in his horoscope of death is like a picture wherein the past and the future of the world are most harmoniously united; the planets by their several positions leading from Aries, through the Sun in Pisces, into Aquarius. In Napoleon's horoscope, on the other hand, we found Pisces blocked by the conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars and Mercury. Here too we had to do with one of the great battles of humanity. Beginning in the French Revolution, like a clenched fist it thrust its way into the Western world. Seen in a cosmic light, as in these horoscopes of death, the events of Napoleon's time appear more tangled and convulsive, by no means harmoniously resolved as in the lifework of St. Thomas, where Pisces is irradiated by the Sun. It is the Sun, this time, which gives its character to the constellation of Pisces, filled as it is with the prototypes of spiritual battles.

There is a picture of St. Thomas Aquinas by Gozzoli, most illustrative of this fact. From his heart a Sun is raying out, beneath his feet crouches Averrhoes whom he has conquered, while from the heights above him Christ is speaking: *Bene scripsisti de me, Thomma!* It is a most impressive fact that in Averrhoes' own horoscope of death (12 December, 1198) the planet Mars is at the very place where the Sun is in that of Aquinas; namely, once more in Pisces. The Sun of the heart in St. Thomas over-rays the Mars-like impulse of Averrhoes.

The age when these developments took place was a great turning-point in the spiritual life of the West. Seen in a cosmic light, it took place along the line from Virgo to Pisces. The Virgo forces, the impulses toward a deepened inner life of soul belonging to the cosmic sphere of the Virgin, were battling for their existence with those other forces which were taking shape in Pisces. Pisces itself became transformed while the virginal world of pure thought also underwent an essential change. Scholasticism was still able, in stern discipline of thought, to rise to the divine and spiritual—the secrets of Divine Revelation. Yet at this turning-point in human evolution the faculty was slowly vanishing. A tragic event of the time reveals it—I refer to the destruction of the Order of Knights Templars, during the seven years from 1307 to 1314.

Founded with the avowed object of protecting the sacred places of Christianity in Palestine against the Mohammedans who ruled in the Holy Land, the Order of Knights Templars had yet a deeper meaning. It labored to preserve deep spiritual secrets cultivated long ago in the ancient Mystery-centers of the East and shedding light upon the spiritual evolution of the world and of humanity. The esoteric task of the Order was to carry over the old Oriental Wisdom-treasures and unite them with all that which had arisen in the West out of the Christian stream. So in the depths of its mysteries the order bore within it mighty treasures of wisdom—the gold of wisdom of the spiritual Sun. To some extent it was a misunderstanding on the part of the outer world, imagining the secret treasure of the Order to consist in fabulous amounts of material gold, which led to its eventual destruction.

Philip the Fair of France was the protagonist. Greedy and jealous of the Templars' gold, he wanted to destroy them. In 1307 he ordered the arrest of the leading Templars in France. About this time, Saturn was in the constellation of Libra, Jupiter was coming into Scorpio, and Mars was in Sagittarius. Yet this event was but a prelude to the seven years of dire conflict which now ensued. Awful reproaches of unchristian life were leveled against the Templars. False confessions were wrung from them by torture. There followed blow on blow. In the year 1310, fifty-four of the Knights Templars were burned alive. Then at the last the Master of the Order, Jacques de Molay, died at the stake. This was on 11 March, 1314. The destruction of the Order was now complete.

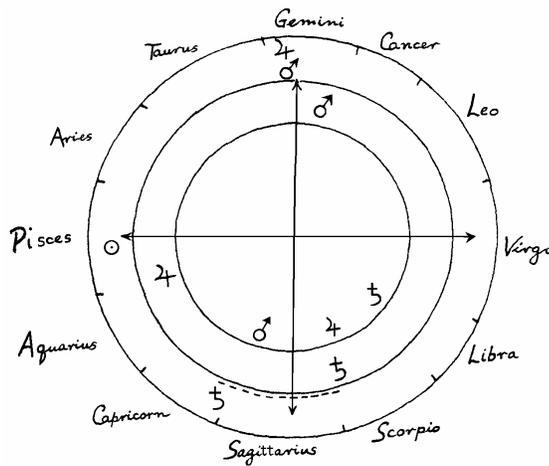


Fig. 2: In the Inner Circle: Beginning of the Trial of the Knights Templars with their arrest on 14 September, 1307.
 In the Middle Circle: 54 of the Knights Templars burned at the stake 24 May, 1310.
 In the Outer Circle: Jacques de Molay burned at the stake 11 March, 1314.

Strange were the constellations at these points of time. In 1310, at the destruction of the fifty-four Templars, Saturn was entering the constellation of Sagittarius, Jupiter was in Pisces, and Mars in Gemini. Then at the death of Jacques de Molay, Saturn was passing from Sagittarius to Capricorn, while Jupiter and Mars were in conjunction in Gemini. Herein we see a certain line, clearly marked out in the cosmos. At the beginning, in 1307, Saturn is in Libra, having but recently emerged from the direction of Virgo and Pisces with which the spiritual conflicts of Scholasticism were associated. Then at the time of the final annihilation of the Order—between the death of the fifty-four Knights and the martyrdom of the last Great Master of the Order—Saturn was passing through Sagittarius. Yet at the same time, very strongly in these two historic moments, the constellation of Gemini is bespoken, as our drawing shows (Figure 2). Thus the direction in the cosmos from Sagittarius to Gemini is most especially connected with the destruction of the Templars Order, and yet the former direction also—Virgo to Pisces—plays a certain part.

It is like a cosmic cross into which the spiritual events of this epoch are inscribed. Scholasticism was wrestling in the Spirit, striving to find connection with the Divine Revelation by purity of thought. Yet in the sequel, precisely this connection was destined to be lost. All this took place along the line from Virgo to Pisces. Meanwhile the Order of Knights Templars sought to establish continuity with the wisdom-treasures of the ancient Mysteries. The Order was destroyed; its annihilation is associated with the cosmic line from Sagittarius to Gemini. Herein is manifesting the turning point of cosmic time wherein humanity became involved in the 13th century. Slowly at first and then ever more quickly in the succeeding centuries a new mode of thought arose, directed rather to the outer world of the senses. The deeper spiritual streams now took their course more in the hidden background of external history.

One man experienced this spiritual turning-point of history in a quite intimate and human way. This was the German mystic, Meister Eckhardt. Brought up in the Scholastic discipline of thought, he was already one of those whom the old faculty eluded, i.e., to find connection with the divine-spiritual by dint of thought alone. He now could only find it beneath the region of full consciousness, in mystical experience in the purified life of feeling. Out of this mood of soul he came to such a thought as this one: “Whatsoever man is able to think concerning God, it is not God. What God is in Himself no man can attain to, save that he be transported into that very Light which is God Himself.” This kind of spiritual experience was altogether new in that time; so then it came to pass that the Church would not tolerate it. They only wanted to preserve the Scholastic method. In a trial for heresy, Meister Eckhardt's views were condemned. He himself died during the trial in the year 1327.

It is remarkable that in his horoscope of death (Figure 3; the exact date is not known) the Sagittarius-Gemini direction is again brought out, for Saturn in that year was in Gemini, Mars was in Taurus, and Jupiter in Cancer. It is the cosmic counterpart of what was there at the time of the destruction of the Knights Templars. This time we see the same direction from the other side, from the sphere of Gemini.

We thus gain a more complete picture of the cosmic cross: Virgo and Pisces, Sagittarius and Gemini. Above all, in this way the essential nature of the Zodiac becomes for us more real and more substantial, both humanly and spiritually. We are enabled to experience it as something near to our humanity, not only in the sphere of unapproachable, inexorable powers of fate.

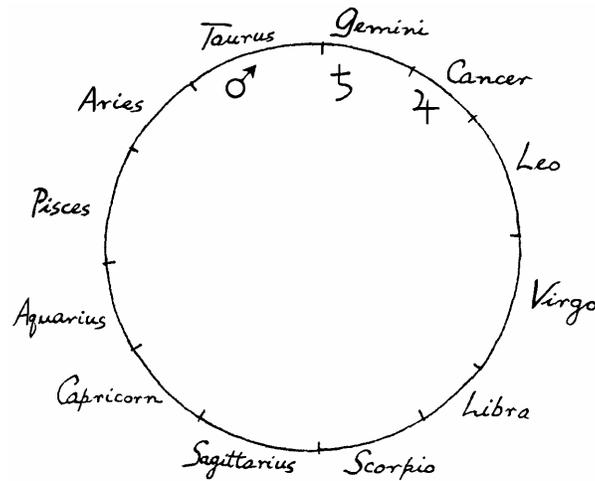


Fig. 3 Horoscope of Death - Meister Eckhardt, 1327

Thus it belongs more to the constellation of Virgo, how one may seek and find by inner paths of the soul the spiritual being of nature and of human life. In Pisces we have the counterpart of this, the cosmic picture of great spiritual battles in human philosophy and world-outlook. Sagittarius is connected more with humanity's wrestling for its own human development: the periodic rise and fall of different streams in history; the struggle of the higher spiritual human with the lower, more animal and instinctive life. The influence of Gemini in one's experience of destiny has to do most of all with one's dual nature: buoyant and tending to fly away from the Earth upon the one hand, and on the other hand tending to be dark and earthy, rigid and uninspired.