

Development of Psychology in Western Astrology: A Critical Review of Three Sources

By Lucie Provaznikova

By contrasting three astrological primary sources, this paper brings an insight into the development of the psychological approach in astrology from the ancient times until today. The three discussed sources are *Anthology* by Vettius Valens, *Astrology for All* by Alan Leo and *Archetypes of the Zodiac* by Kathleen Burt. It has been found that all of them are unanimous in the basic characteristics of the zodiac sign and thus it can be argued that the meanings of the zodiacal signs in western astrology are constant. However, remarkable differences in form and approach have been found, such as belief in fate and length of the explanation, but of particular interest is psyche. The latter is the major topic of this paper and it is suggested, that the interest in psychological conditions of the individual is implicit in Valens's *Anthology*, but explicit in the two later works. This leads to the conclusion that psychological astrology could have existed in other forms much earlier, only being overshadowed or hidden behind much more concise and concrete descriptions. It is also suggested that the development of the form of writing and transmission is subject to cultural conditioning.

Introduction

This paper is a critical review comparing and contrasting the treatment of the astrological zodiacal signs in different sources, focusing on three main primary sources to demonstrate and analyse differences. The zodiacal sign Virgo was chosen. The first source is *Anthology*, written by a practising astrologer of the second century, Vettius Valens (c.120–175 CE).¹ The *Anthology* consists of complex and logically organised instructions to students of astrology. The second source is *Astrology for All* by Alan Leo (1860 – 1917) first published in 1899 in London.² It aims at the wider public in order to spread the wisdom of astrology and it thoroughly describes the behaviour of Sun and Moon in each of the zodiacal signs. The third source is *Archetypes of the Zodiac* by Kathleen Burt, a contemporary practising astrologer.³ This book was first published in 1988 in

¹ Vettius Valens. *Anthology*, trans. Mark Riley. <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/r/rileymt/Vettius%20Valens%20entire.pdf> [accessed 21 July 2014]. [Hereafter, Valens.]

² Alan Leo. *Astrology for All* (London: L. M. Fowler & Co., 1899). [Hereafter, Leo. *Astrology for All*]

³ Kathleen Burt. *The Archetypes of the Zodiac* (MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1988). [Hereafter, Burt. *The Archetypes of the Zodiac*]

USA and again aims at the wider public. It focuses on descriptions of the zodiacal signs, having a Jungian approach based on myths and archetypes. The reason for choosing these sources is their supposed relation to modern psychological astrology and the intent of this review is to examine and demonstrate this relationship.

Vettius Valens: *Anthology*

Valens describes the nature of the zodiacal signs by giving simple keywords for each of them. He describes the sign of Virgo as follows:

Virgo is the house of Mercury, feminine, winged, anthropomorphic, luxurious, standing like the figure of justice, bicorporeal, barren, a feedman, with no offspring, downward-trending, earthy, common, semi-vocal or mute, concerned with the body, incomplete, changeable, industrious, two-natured.⁴

This informs us about the basic qualities of the sign itself: it is ruled by Mercury, it is feminine and belongs to the earthy triplicity. By 'common', the author may refer to what is today usually called mutable, meaning the third of three signs belonging to the same triplicity (element) and being between two seasons (in this case summer and autumn). Valens then provides a description of men born with their Sun in the sign of Virgo:

Men born under this sign are noble, modest, religious, burdened with care, leading a quite varied life, administrators of others' goods, trusted, good stewards, secretaries, accountants, actors, practitioners of curious arts and seekers after mystic lore, spendthrifts in their early years but prosperous later in life.⁵

Here he no longer delineates the characteristics of the sign itself, but he depicts the most typical behaviour and character traits of men born under this sign. Additionally, Valens divides the sign of Virgo into five unequal parts, or terms, saying that each of them belongs to another planetary ruler. For people born under each one of these five terms, he provides a short, even more specific description. He writes about the last two degrees belonging to Mars, 'masculine, harsh, public, demagogues, night prowlers, counterfeiter, imposters. These degrees assault men and lead them to chains, mutilation, tortures and imprisonment'⁶, which suggests that the interpretation of personal horoscopes according to Valens was not only a character delineation, but it also lead to very specific predictions of life events.

⁴ Valens, Book 1.2.

⁵ Valens, Book 1.2.

⁶ Valens, Book 1.3.

Alan Leo: *Astrology for All*

Leo treats the sign of Virgo in the section called ‘The individual and personal character of the sign Virgo’,⁷ which itself implies a more psychological approach. Like Valens, he establishes the basic attributes of Virgo as belonging to the earthy triplicity and being a mutable sign. He gives a short depiction of the sign itself, ‘this sign represents the virgin soil, the spirit-matter, as it were, which yields the most readily to the vibrations passing through it from the other signs.’⁸ Leo then moves on to characterising individuals born under the Virgo sign. He describes them as constructive, practical, critical, having large reasoning powers, cautious, punctual and selfish.⁹ He also characterises the general health conditions of people born under this sign, saying they are very sensitive physically, absorb drugs easily and their bodies act like barometers.¹⁰

Kathleen Burt: *Archetypes of the Zodiac*

This book deals with the problems of the twelve signs of the zodiac by using archetypes and myths. The author defines *archetype* as an ‘unconscious behavioural pattern contained in the collective unconscious...that extends the individuum and its form is independent on the collective level.’¹¹ She herself points out that her approach is based on the concept of Carl Gustav Jung,¹² who describes ‘archetype’ as follows,

The term “archetype” thus applies only indirectly to the “representations collectives”, since it designates only the psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration and are therefore an immediate datum of psychic experience...The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived.¹³

Therefore, by using archetypes, Burt describes the sign of Virgo by delineating an unconscious content which is a necessary part (one twelfth) of the whole. She brings this to a practical level by specifying the psychological traits and behaviour of individuals who have a strong accent on the particular archetype – that is with Sun or Ascendant in Virgo. This psychological framing is

⁷ Leo. *Astrology for all*, p.25-27.

⁸ Leo. *Astrology for All*, p.25.

⁹ Leo. *Astrology for All*, p.25-27.

¹⁰ Leo. *Astrology for All*, p.26.

¹¹ Burt. *The Archetypes of the Zodiac*, p.10.

¹² Burt. *The Archetypes of the Zodiac*, p.7-15.

¹³ Carl Gustav Jung. *The Archetypes and the collective unconscious* (NY: Princeton University Press, 1969), p.5.

Careful and allows for various alternatives, which makes the treatment of this sign extend to the length of 34 pages.

Burt also uses myths to better delineate the character of this archetype. She defines myth as an 'archetype of a particular form that undergoes a development in a story.'¹⁴ By interspersing the psychological delineation of Virgo with the myths of Isis, Hermes, Merlin and others, she uses mythological symbolism to show a practical manifestation of the archetype.

Comparison

All three sources are unanimous in the basic characteristics of the sign – they all mark it as mutable, earthy, negative (feminine) and ruled by Mercury. Thus the theoretical underpinning of the meaning doesn't differ, which may point to an underlying conservatism and continuity in Western astrology. The sources discussed also all focus on the practical use of the meaning of the sign in interpretation, but their approach is distinct. Valens's *Anthology* provides a brief depiction of the character of the people born under the sign of Virgo in form of keywords and delineation of their life. Valens mentions possible events, conditions and situations that they may find themselves in. It is worth comparing *Anthology* to other ancient sources. For example, Ptolemy (c.100–178 CE) in his *Tetrabiblos* doesn't provide any complete description of the signs or characters of people born under these signs.¹⁵ This finding can be supported by what Nicholas Campion says about Ptolemy, 'Ptolemy had been primarily concerned with the systematic attribution of particular qualities to the signs in order to allow their use either in the analysis of individual horoscopes, or in the prediction of specific events'.¹⁶ The same approach can be found in *Matheseos*, a book by the fourth century astrologer Firmicius Maternus.¹⁷ Similarly, the seventeenth century astrologer William Lilly in his book *Christian Astrology* only mentions the basic qualities of the sign of Virgo and not the psychological characteristics of people born under this sign.¹⁸ Campion writes that Valens's character descriptions 'constitute the world's oldest psychological model which remains the most widely known form of personality analysis' and Leo deepened this attempt – only

¹⁴ Burt. *The Archetypes of the Zodiac*, p.11.

¹⁵ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*.

¹⁶ Campion, Nicholas. *A History of Western Astrology: Vol.2* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.233

¹⁷ Firmicius Maternus, *Matheseos*.

¹⁸ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (London: John Macock, 1659), p.96.

1700 years later.^{19 20} However, compared to Leo, Valens is more specific, determinative and thus concise. Valens describes character which is given to the individual and then focuses on the life such individuals will lead, their career and prosperity. He doesn't leave much space for interpretation. Although Valens shows interest in psyche, this interest is only marginal and very brief, perhaps rather implicit, seen more as a necessary step towards the delineation of life events. A similar statement was made by Nicholas Campion about Ptolemy, saying that Ptolemy's analytical astronomy, set out in *Tetrabiblos*, analyses the condition of the individual soul to provide foreknowledge of predetermined events.²¹

Leo focuses on the psychological aspects of personality, the space dedicated to the sign of Virgo is larger than in Valens's *Anthology*, and thus the character is examined in more detail. While Valens mentions character, behaviour and possible fate, Leo focuses on the inner psychological life and is less deterministic than Valens. By using words like 'almost', 'may' or 'often', Leo leaves more space for various manifestations of the qualities of Virgo to arise and doesn't delineate fate. His character delineation is marked by the possibility of choice and change, 'when living more in their individuality, or becoming what is termed more self-conscious, they are really splendid characters'.²² Leo is also concerned by spiritual growth, saying that 'they are capable of making wonderful progress in spiritual development'.²³ Similarly to Leo, Burt treats the topic at a deep, psychological level. Both Leo and Burt try openly not only to describe, but also to understand the individual characterised by the sign. This may be an example of what Glenn Perry, the contemporary psychological astrologer, presents as a 'modern psychological astrology, which tries to recognise complex psychological problems, instead of making predictions, advice, warnings and simplistic solutions'.²⁴ This is what traditional (ancient and medieval) astrologers used to do according to Perry. However, it could be argued that it is not so clear whether it is the goal of understanding rather than only the nature of description, which has changed. Valens and other ancient authors may have wanted to understand the individual

¹⁹ Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology, Vol.1* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.184.

²⁰ Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology: Vol.2* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.233

²¹ Campion, 'Astronomy and Psyche in the Classical World: Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Ptolemy', *Journal of Cosmology*, Vol 9, 2179-2186 (2010), p.2182.

²² Leo. *Astrology for All*, p.26.

²³ Leo. *Astrology for All*, p.26.

²⁴ Glenn Perry, 'The Birth of Psychological Astrology' <http://www.aaperry.com/index.asp?pgid=20> [accessed 1 July 2014].

at a psychological level as well, but as a result of custom, cultural and other conditions, in their writings they may have relied on the interpretation skills of the reader more than authors of modern times. This could be supported by the fact that the practice manuals of horoscopic astrology in the times of Valens were designated to a limited, highly educated audience due to the necessity of knowledge of astronomy and in the absence of book printing. While Leo's and Burt's books are readily accessible to the wider public, which may be reflected by more thorough explanations. It is necessary to keep in mind the gap of approximately 1750 years between Valen's *Anthology* and Leo's *Astrology for All* and also the different cultural conditions under which they were written – it would be foolish to think that the custom and culture of the time would not be reflected in the form of writing. The distinction in the form, however, does not necessarily imply any difference in the intended purpose of the writing.

Nevertheless, a significant difference between Valens and the two other authors can be pointed out. Both Leo and Burt mention possible spiritual development of the soul, supported by secondary progressions, which is a technique equating each one day after birth to one year of life. Thus, the Sun moving approximately by one degree per day, will progress by thirty degrees from its original location at birth by the age of thirty, and thus will be in the sign of Libra. Burt therefore includes also the signs following Virgo (Libra and Scorpio) and their manifestation and integration in Virgo's life. In fact, Leo wrote a whole book dealing with this topic called *The Progressed Horoscope*, where he states,

Man may become master of his destiny, being himself in essence inseparable from the Divine Ruler... It is from this standpoint that all the directions given in this work are made, and all its rules are based upon the idea that the stars condition, they do not compel.²⁵

In this quote Leo stresses the importance of free will and the fact that the (progressed) horoscope, as well as planetary transits through the natal chart, only give the limits of self-development and are not an irreversible plan of life. He does this by describing the natures of all possible aspects between natal and progressed and transiting planets. Burt, on the other hand, is being more general by only dealing with the secondary progressions of natal Sun as it progresses through following signs. For instance, she writes about integrating the energy of Libra and becoming more stable during the thirty years period in Virgo's life when the progressing Sun advances through this sign.²⁶ Another point arising from the deeper psychological interest of Burt is that she depicts not only the character and likely profession, she also states a reason for this,

²⁵ Leo, Alan. *The Progressed Horoscope* (London: L. M. Fowler Co., 1906), p.v.

²⁶ Burt. *The Archetypes of the Zodiac*, p.206.

A meaningful and useful job is more important for Virgos than a lucrative one; they are often appreciated as social workers, scholars, teachers...because it is more important for them to be useful and helpful, than to do a better-paid work which is not related to service.²⁷

Moreover, she explains the reason for the traits of character bearing the qualities of the ruler of this sign – Mercury. Unlike Valens or Leo, she depicts possible manifestations of these qualities in much detail, considering also other possible variations depending on further factors of nativity,

On account of their nervous, hypersensitive character, the mercurial types would be more comfortable living as...common employees than employers. If only these individuals could or would be able to deal with stress through another type of energy in the nativity, for example the cardinal...or fiery...they would deal with their stress better.²⁸

Additionally, unlike Valens and Leo, Burt stresses the necessity of a holistic approach by saying that all twelve archetypes of the zodiac are more or less contained in each individual. She also uses a comparison to the opposite sign Pisces which is, as she says, just the opposite polarity of the same quality and therefore also needs to be considered.²⁹ The difference between the ancient and the most modern source is remarkable. Valens only deals with the raw meaning of the sign and its pure effect on character and life, while Burt extends her treatment of the topic to a complex, holistic understanding of individual.

Conclusion

In reviewing the sources, no major differences were found in the core themes. It can be concluded that the two modern sources build on the ancient, traditional meanings of the zodiacal sign Virgo, which have stayed the same for nearly two thousand years. However, the review showed that although the core theme is continuous, there are considerable differences in the form and approach to fate and psyche. The three main sources showed evidence of a continuous development in astrology, although three remarkable differences can be stated. The first difference exists in the attitude to human psyche; the interest in psychological conditions of an individual set by his or her horoscope can be seen as implicit in Valens's *Anthology* and explicit in Leo's and Burt's works. According to Campion, the development which is visible in Leo's work can be credited to the late nineteenth century influence of theosophy, the Hindu idea of karma and

²⁷ Burt. *The Archetypes of the Zodiac*, p.189.

²⁸ Burt. *The Archetypes of the Zodiac*, p.189.

²⁹ Burt. *The Archetypes of the Zodiac*, p.206.

personal spiritual development, and the striving for union with the One.³⁰ To achieve this, the brief ancient descriptions of zodiacal signs and the inevitable fate they implied were not satisfactory, so Leo's work is naturally more focused on reflecting inner character.³¹ Burt's work continues in this natural development which started in the late nineteenth century and is underpinned by the teachings of C. G. Jung, and so her work describes the signs even in more detail in order to better understand the individual. The two modern sources show more interest in human psyche in terms of the inner state of mind of an individual and develop the ancient knowledge into a complex understanding of an individual born under the sign of Virgo. Another difference is found in the approach to fate because the two modern sources are both more concerned with psychological characteristics and processes rather than with external events as in the ancient source. The third noticeable distinction is the difference in length of the three sources, the oldest being the shortest and the most modern the longest. This is probably implied by the above explained two differences. It is a reflection of customs in each particular period of time, of the difference in aimed audience and the necessity to explain more thoroughly but also of the different attitude to psyche and fate. It can be concluded therefore, that the meanings of zodiacal signs are constant, but their interpretation and application changes continually, depending on current cultural influences.

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³⁰ Campion, *A History of Western Astrology, Vol.2* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 231-233.

³¹ Campion, *A History of Western Astrology, Vol.2* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 233.