

# The Greek contribution to astrology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

by Alina Apostol

By contrasting three modern astrological primary sources, this paper explores the ways in which Greek classical cosmologies or practices have contributed to contemporary astrology. The three researched sources are Alan Oken's 'Esoteric Astrology and the Houses of the Natal Chart', *The Twelve Houses: An Introduction to the Houses in Astrological Interpretation* by Howard Sasportas and *Temples of the Sky*, by Deborah Houlding. This research is anchored in the astrological reform of the last century and the choice of the modern texts reflects on the main themes of this reform – the esoteric approach, the psychological and the traditional revival. Further, the paper explores the Greek astrological worldview and the fundamentals of Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic cosmology with the purpose of contextualising the three modern texts in relation to philosophical sources. It has been found that common themes, such as the interconnected cosmos, negotiating fate through self-awareness and Aristotelian teleology are evidence of the Greek contribution to the contemporary psychological and esoteric astrology. Although the traditional pathway shows remarkable differences in form and approach, the paper offers evidence of transmission of the Aristotelian sympathetic cosmology and Stoic's views on fate.

It is general agreed amongst scholars that a revival and transformation characterised astrology in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Campion quotes Geoffrey Dean and Arthur Mather, who, in their critical review of twentieth-century astrology, argued for 'a renaissance of interest in astrology'.<sup>2</sup> Further,

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<sup>1</sup> James R. Lewis, 'Approaches to the Study of the New Age Movement' in *Perspective on the New Age* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), ed. by James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, p.4; 'Objections to Astrology: A Statement by 186 Leading Scientists' in *Philosophy of Science and the Occult*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990) ed. by Patrick Grim, p.18; Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement* (London/New York: Routledge, 2016), p.82.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Campion, *Prophecy, Cosmology And The New Age Movement: The Extent And Nature Of Contemporary Belief In Astrology* (PhD thesis, Bath Spa University, 2004), p.108.

Campion, writing from the historian viewpoint, argues that the rediscovery of astrology in the twentieth-century western world is one of the principal phenomena in popular culture.<sup>3</sup>

Acknowledging the transformations within astrology that occurred in the twentieth century, this paper will explore the ways in which Greek classical cosmologies or practices have contributed to contemporary astrology. The essay will review three primary contemporary astrological texts, examining the attitudes of the astrologers and their techniques. The choice of these primary sources reflects three of the main astrological approaches of the last century, as argued by Patrick Curry: the esoteric, exemplified by Alan Oken's text 'Esoteric Astrology and the Houses of the Natal Chart', published online on the author's website; the psychological approach of Howard Sasportas in *The Twelve Houses: An Introduction to the Houses in Astrological Interpretation*, second edition published by Flare Publications in 2007; and the traditional discourse of Deborah Houlding in *The Houses: Temples of the Sky*, published in 2006 by The Wessex Astrologer Ltd.<sup>4</sup> This paper will first cover themes in twentieth-century Western astrology, move onto the astrological worldview and finally review primary contemporary texts.

### Themes in Twentieth-century Western Astrology

There is a wide range of meanings attributed to astrology, which according to astrologer Dennis Elwell, is 'big enough to accommodate many complementary, and even contradictory opinions'.<sup>5</sup> Campion further supports this view when writing that 'there may, in fact, be no one such single thing as

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<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Campion, 'Astrology in Babylonia', in *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures* (Springer Netherlands, 2008), 248-262 (p.248).

<sup>4</sup> Roy Willis and Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down The Moon* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2004), pp. 65-75; Alan Oken, *Esoteric Astrology and the Houses of the Natal Chart*, < <http://www.alanoken.com/index.php?page=esoteric-astrology-and-the-houses-of-the-natal-chart> > [23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016]; Howard Sasportas, *The Twelve Houses: Exploring the Houses of the Horoscope* (London: Flare Publications, 2007 [1985]), kindle edition; Deborah Houlding, *The Houses – Temples of the Sky* (Bournemouth, UK: The Wessex Astrologer Ltd, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Ellwell, 'Astrology: An Alternative Reality', *The Astrological Journal*, XXVIII.4 (1986), 143-149 (p.143).

astrology but rather different astrologies'.<sup>6</sup> This variety is visible in the astrological reform of the last century, which enabled the emergence of three main astrological pathways: the esoteric, the psychological and the traditional revival. The essential understanding of astrology, which has been defined by Patrick Curry as 'the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to life and events on earth and the tradition that has thus been generated', appears not to have been altered by the existence of different themes in astrological theory and practice.<sup>7</sup>

In his extensive exploration of the history of astrology, Campion attributes the twentieth-century revival of astrology to two theosophical astrologers, Alan Leo (1860-1917) and Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985).<sup>8</sup> Through Leo's involvement with the Theosophical Society in England and Rudhyar's engagement with Alice Bailey's Arcane School in America, the transmission of esoteric and New Age ideology was facilitated, leading to reform in astrology. Campion names Leo 'the seminal figure in the incorporation of New Age ideology into astrology', while Rudhyar is called 'the second most important astrologer in the twentieth-century English-speaking world after Leo'.<sup>9</sup>

Leo's aim was to reform the application of astrology, moving the focus from what he called 'exoteric', an astrology that was more fatalistic and concerned with the prediction of outward reality, to 'esoteric astrology' that pointed towards the immortal soul's actions and latent possibilities.<sup>10</sup> For Leo, 'character is destiny', and the horoscope can facilitate personal development and spiritual growth.<sup>11</sup> 'Character' for Leo meant more than personality or psychological dispositions; 'character' was described as 'spirit' or 'will'; character belonged to the soul.<sup>12</sup> In Leo's words, 'Character plays the most prominent and important part in making of Destiny'.<sup>13</sup> One's destiny was to outgrow the innate weak attributes of their inner character and free oneself

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<sup>6</sup> Campion, *Prophecy, Cosmology And The New Age Movement*, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Curry, 'Astrology', in *The Encyclopaedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, Volume I (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), ed. by Kelly Boyd, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Campion, *Prophecy, Cosmology And The New Age Movement*, chapter 6.

<sup>9</sup> Campion, *Prophecy, Cosmology And The New Age Movement*, p.111.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Leo, *Esoteric Astrology: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Modern Astrology, 1925 [1913]), p. xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Leo, *Astrology for All* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2006 [1910]), p.185.

<sup>12</sup> Leo, *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 109.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Leo, *The Progressed Horoscope* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005 [1905]), p.4

from the fated predispositions which were seen in the horoscope.<sup>14</sup> In Leo's view, soul was fated, and one's current life was an expression of the past lives.<sup>15</sup> While 'spirit' is free, the individual soul is imprisoned in the matter, which is fated.<sup>16</sup> He writes: 'The soul brings its various faculties with it when it is born...because character determines fate...the type of body decides what the man's career will be, his good and evil fortune, his success and failures'.<sup>17</sup> Although Leo considered the soul and matter, or body bound together, through the right use of the horoscope, one was able to rise above one's fate and allow the soul to purify itself in its ultimate goal of unifying with the divine.<sup>18</sup>

While Leo's astrology focused on the soul, karma and reincarnation, Rudhyar developed a psychological astrology, integrating the esoteric principles with Jungian depth psychology. Rudhyar's astrological development encompasses his concept of 'Humanistic Astrology', an attempt to transform traditional astrology into 'a living and practical philosophy of psychological fulfilment and integration'.<sup>19</sup> Influenced by Aristotle (384-322 BCE) teleology, or the final cause – 'in the sense of end or "that for the sake of which" a thing is done', Rudhyar believed in innate potentials that are contained in seed form at birth, just as the acorn contains within it the possibility of the fully-grown oak.<sup>20</sup> Thus, he understood the birth chart as a map or blueprint of human potential. In a similar vein to Leo, Rudhyar's astrological focus was on revealing meaning and achieving well-being, rather than predicting events. When discussing the reform of astrology within the cultural and historical context of the twentieth-century, Campion argues that these new forms of astrological theory and practice were shaped by the New Age ideology, as they emphasised the existence of the divine within the individual and the value of personal transformation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Leo, *The Progressed Horoscope*, pp.4-7.

<sup>15</sup> Leo, *The Progressed Horoscope*, p.xiv.

<sup>16</sup> Leo, *The Progressed Horoscope*, p.11.

<sup>17</sup> Leo, *Esoteric Astrology*, p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> Leo, *The Progressed Horoscope*, p.350.

<sup>19</sup> Dane Rudhyar, *The Astrology of Personality* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1936), p.6.

<sup>20</sup> Dane Rudhyar, *The Astrology of Transformation* (Illinois: Quest Books, 1980), p.40 and Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, Book II, Part 3, <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.2.ii.html>> [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2016].

<sup>21</sup> Campion, *Prophecy, Cosmology And The New Age Movement*, p.130.

Alongside these esoteric and psychological approaches, another reform took place around 1980. Campion states that this reform emerged as a reaction against the dominance of post-New Age psychological astrology.<sup>22</sup> Campion named this the 'traditional revival' to denote the resurrection of medieval and classical astrology.<sup>23</sup> Significant names that influenced this development are Olivia Barclay (1919-2001) in the UK who restored William Lilly's (1602-1681) horary astrology, and Robert Hand, Robert Schmidt, and Robert Zoller in the USA, who initiated Project Hindsight with the aim to translate into English the entire corpus of writings in the western astrological tradition, surviving mainly in Greek, Arabic, and Latin.<sup>24</sup> Thus, as Campion has stated, the western astrology of the twentieth century was enriched with technical accuracy and/or philosophical depth, traits perceived as absent by critics of psychological and esoteric astrology.<sup>25</sup> This return to traditional astrological texts and the study of the primary sources could be seen as a historical project, an endeavour of collecting ancient astrological data; this echoes Richard Evans statement that 'objective historical knowledge is both desirable and attainable'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, during the twentieth-century astrology was characterised by three main strands: esoteric, preoccupied with soul's spiritual journey towards evolution; psychological, oriented towards personality's growth and self-actualisation; and traditional, a practice that draws on medieval and classical methods.

### The Greek Astrological Worldview

The diverse astrological discourses emerge from the cosmology or worldview that, as Campion states, presupposes a significant relationship

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<sup>22</sup> Campion, *Prophecy, Cosmology And The New Age Movement*, p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Campion, 'The Traditional Revival in Modern Astrology: A Preliminary History', <<https://theafi.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/nick-campion-the-traditional-revival1.pdf>> [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> June 2016].

<sup>24</sup> Campion, 'The Traditional Revival in Modern Astrology', p.4 and 'Welcome to Project Hindsight' <<http://www.projecthindsight.com/index1.html>> [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June 2016].

<sup>25</sup> Campion, 'The Traditional Revival in Modern Astrology', p.5.

<sup>26</sup> Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000 [1997]), p. 220.

between celestial objects and life on earth.<sup>27</sup> Referring to historical evidence, the foundation of a complex, codified astrology is dated to the last two centuries BCE, during the period of Greek rule in Egypt; it draws on Mesopotamian astral divination, Egyptian religion, and Greek philosophy.<sup>28</sup> This connection between the heavens and earth has been developed into two main doctrines: the naturalistic doctrine based on the Aristotelian physics of celestial influences; and the theory of correspondences, based on the Mesopotamian omens revealed in celestial patterns.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the underpinning cosmology that favoured the emergence of a systemised astrology in the Greek-speaking world considers a mathematically ordered cosmos, in which all things are interrelated.<sup>30</sup> This worldview has been proposed by the main classical Greek philosophies belonging to Plato (429 - 347 BCE), Aristotle and Zeno of Citium (334-262 BCE), founder of the Stoic school.

These streams of thought posited that the cosmos is alive, meaningful and interconnected.<sup>31</sup> Diogenes Laertius wrote that the cosmos, in Stoics' philosophy 'has no empty space within it; it is one united whole'.<sup>32</sup> Thus, everything is bound together by sympathy and tension. The Stoic theory of sympathy states that all parts of cosmos are interlinked and everything in the universe emits some physical influence on everything else. In Diogenes's words, 'for this is necessitated by the sympathy and common tension of heavenly things in relation to earthly things'.<sup>33</sup> For Plato, the human soul

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<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (New York/London: New York University Press, 2012), p.1.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology, Volume I The Ancient World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.36.

<sup>29</sup> Campion, *A History of Western Astrology, Volume I*, pp. 206 – 219; Willis and Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down The Moon*, p. 49.

<sup>30</sup> Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology, Volume II* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. xiv – xvi.

<sup>31</sup> Nicholas Campion, 'Astronomy and Psyche in the Classical World: Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, Ptolemy', *Journal of Cosmology*, 2010. 9, 2179-2186 (p.2179).

<sup>32</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans.by R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005 [1925]), 7.140-143

<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0258%3ABook%3D7%3Achapter%3D1>> [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016].

<sup>33</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Book II, 140.

originated in the stars and the soul of the universe had priority over matter.<sup>34</sup> Champion argues that the Platonic universe was psychological; it was permeated with psyche and was driven by manners, habits, pleasures, pains and fears.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, in Aristotle's universe soul belongs to matter, it loses its transcendent quality. In *De Anima*, he wrote that 'soul is substance' in the sense of being the form of a natural body.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the soul animated the body, and it is the 'cause' of life within a body. Similar to Plato, he believed that the stars and planets were alive and determined movement on the sub-lunar world.<sup>37</sup> Aristotle's physics is explained by the motion of the heavens and their effect on humans - the reflection of the qualities of hot, cold, wet and dry. He wrote: 'For a man is disposed in one way or another with reference to these [dispositions], but quickly changes, becoming cold instead of warm, ill instead of well'.<sup>38</sup> Aristotle's formal cause, which shows the essential nature of a thing and the final cause, understood as the 'end' or the purpose of the object are important legacies for astrology.<sup>39</sup> These two causes applied to astrology, signify, as argued by Champion that the specific configuration of planets under which one is born represents both what one is and what one might become.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Plato, 'Timaeus' in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9, trans. by W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1925), 30b/34b/34c and 41d.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0180%3Atext%3DTim.%3Asection%3D41d> [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016].

<sup>35</sup> Champion, 'Astronomy and Psyche in the Classical World', p.2179 and Plato 'Symposium' in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9, trans. by W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1925), 207E, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DSym.%3Asection%3D207e>> [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016].

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle *On the Soul*, trans. by J. A. Smith, book II, part I, <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.2.ii.html>> [accessed 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016].

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Meteorology*, trans. by E. W. Webster, book I, part I <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/meteorology.1.i.html>> [accessed 25<sup>th</sup> June 2016].

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Categories*, trans. by E. M. Edghill, section II, part 8, <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/categories.2.2.html>> [accessed 25<sup>th</sup> June 2016].

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by William David Ross, Book X Part 7, <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.12.xii.html>> [accessed 25 June 2016].

<sup>40</sup> Champion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, p. 156.

The practical application of these ancient philosophies was put forward by Claudius Ptolemy (90-168 AD) in the *Tetrabiblos*, which Campion refers to as 'one of the core texts of medieval and Renaissance astrology'.<sup>41</sup> Adopting the sympathetic cosmology, Ptolemy wrote, in a naturalistic manner, about the physical and psychological effects of the stars and thus, he facilitated the transmission of the celestial correspondences doctrine, as well as the idea of the interconnected cosmos into the practice of astrology.<sup>42</sup> Further, Ptolemy's work was transmitted to the Islamic World and from there many of the Arabic astrological works were translated into Latin and found their way into Christian Europe, continuing to model the astrological worldview.<sup>43</sup>

### Howard Sasportas - The psychological perspective

In the Foreword to the 2007 edition of *The Twelve Houses*, Liz Greene defines Sasportas' astrology as 'rooted in the sub-soil of a profound understanding of astrological symbolism, conjoined with a penetrating insight into human nature'.<sup>44</sup> In his astrological description of the houses, which the Greeks called 'places' or 'spheres of life', he emphasises that these should not be seen as separate and isolated, but rather as an unfolding process of life itself.<sup>45</sup> 'Wholeness', Sasportas writes, 'is everything'.<sup>46</sup> Thus, it could be argued that Sasportas' philosophy was mainly Platonic, concerned with wholeness and connection. Moreover, in many instances throughout the book, Sasportas mentions Aristotle and his final cause. From his introduction: 'a rosebud opens

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<sup>41</sup> Campion, *A History of Western Astrology, Volume I The Ancient World*, p. 208 and Claudius Ptolemy, *Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*, trans. by J.M. Ashmand (1822) <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/astro/ptb/>> [accessed 26<sup>th</sup> June 2016]

<sup>42</sup> Ptolemy, *Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos* and Mark Riley, 'Science and Tradition in the "Tetrabiblos"', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 132.1 (1988), pp.67-84.

<sup>43</sup> Burnett, Charles and Andrew Mendelsohn, 'Aristotle and Averroes on Method in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: The "Oxford Gloss" to the Physics and Pietro D'afeltro's Expositio Proemii Averrois' in *Method and Order in Renaissance Philosophy of Nature*, ed. by D.A. Di Liscia, E. Kessler and C. Methuen (Aldershot: Aldershot, 1997), pp. 53-111.

<sup>44</sup> Liz Greene, 'Foreword To The 2007 Edition' in Howard Sasportas, *The Twelve Houses*, kindle edition.

<sup>45</sup> Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, *The Daimon in Hellenistic Astrology: Origins and Influence* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p.400 and Sasportas, *The Twelve Houses*, kindle edition.

<sup>46</sup> Sasportas, *The Twelve Houses*, kindle edition.

into a rose, an acorn grows into an oak, and a caterpillar emerges as a butterfly from its cocoon'.<sup>47</sup> This appears to be the rationale for Sasportas' view of astrology as the evolution and completion of an innate potential. His ideas are permeated by the Platonic inner divine and are dependent not on outside influences, but on an inward need for self-actualisation. He writes that 'our being is not only given to us, but demanded of us, and it is up to us to make of ourselves what we are meant to become'.<sup>48</sup>

Fate is another main theme in Sasportas' work. Fate can be understood, according to Bernadette Brady as 'a semi-compelling or a compelling force in someone's life which has intent or purpose'.<sup>49</sup> When talking about fate, Sasportas follows another Platonic and Stoic argument - that individual fate can be changed through the use of reason. While the form of language differs from the ancient philosophers to Sasportas, it could be argued that the meaning is similar. Thus, in psychological terms, Sasportas notes that 'awareness brings change', and he illustrates this statement with a chart showing Pluto in the seventh house, writing that once the person becomes 'consciously aware' of the meaning of Pluto in that particular place, alternatives become available.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Plato argued that by learning the revolutions and harmonies of the heaven, man could adjust and transform the troubles of his soul.<sup>51</sup> When writing about the Ascendant (the degree rising on the eastern horizon at the time of birth), Sasportas uses the Platonic term 'becoming' to describe the process of growth or the journey through life.<sup>52</sup> The Platonic doctrine of Being and Becoming describes the higher realm as unchanging and eternal while the lower realm contains 'that which is always becoming' passing into existence and changing.<sup>53</sup> This doctrine is reflected in Plato's words, 'What is that which is Existent always and has no Becoming? And what is that which is Becoming always and never is Existent?'.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that Sasportas' writing echoes the main Greek classical strands of thought, such as the

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<sup>47</sup> Sasportas, *The Twelve Houses*, kindle edition.

<sup>48</sup> Sasportas, *The Twelve Houses*, kindle edition.

<sup>49</sup> Bernadette Brady, *Theories of Fate among Present-day Astrologers* (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2011), p.9.

<sup>50</sup> Sasportas, *The Twelve Houses*, kindle edition.

<sup>51</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 90d.

<sup>52</sup> Sasportas, *The Twelve Houses*, kindle edition.

<sup>53</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 27-28b.

<sup>54</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 27-28b.

interconnected and whole cosmos and the Platonic idea of time, with the particular distinction between Being and Becoming, the Aristotelian teleology and the classical Greek view of negotiating fate through reason.

### Alan Oken and esoteric astrology

Following the main astrological perspectives of the twentieth-century, this essay will continue with the review of Alan Oken's text: 'Esoteric Astrology and the Houses of the Natal Chart'. Oken draws on the esoteric ideology proposed by Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) and later developed by Alan Leo. While Sasportas rarely mentions the word 'soul' in his writing and instead focuses on terms like 'psyche' and 'psychological', Oken's shorter text on the houses includes the word 'soul' sixty-seventh times.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the narrative, Oken uses esoteric language, visible in words like 'rays', 'consciousness', 'soul-centered', 'aura', 'karma', 'chakras', but there are also themes that allude to the ancient Greek cosmologies.<sup>56</sup> Plato stated that soul was composed of a rational part which manifested through reason but also contained parts of the soul enslaved by desire; similarly, soul in Oken's view is structured on the lower and the higher selves. These selves 'meet, blend, and sometimes conflict in the present incarnation'.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, in opposition to the Aristotelian view that soul is substance, for Oken, who again echoes Plato; the body is an extension of the soul. This view is exemplified in the way he delineates the first house as the body of the soul, in contrast with the traditional definition as the house of the physical body.<sup>58</sup> According to Plato, the soul had a reflective and contemplative quality, and through the gift of reason could fight the vices.<sup>59</sup> Conversely, Oken argues for the development of consciousness as a way to balance the inner reactions with the outward demands.

In a similar vein to Sasportas, when discussing the sixth house, Oken touches upon the topic of wholeness. He further refers to the 'Anima Mundi', the Soul of the World that contains all animate and inanimate parts of the

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<sup>55</sup> Oken, 'Esoteric Astrology and the Houses of the Natal Chart'.

<sup>56</sup> Oken, 'Esoteric Astrology and the Houses of the Natal Chart'.

<sup>57</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, Project Gutenberg,

<<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1636/1636-h/1636-h.htm>> [accessed 27 June 2016] and

Oken, 'Esoteric Astrology and the Houses of the Natal Chart'.

<sup>58</sup> Oken, 'Esoteric Astrology and the Houses of the Natal Chart'.

<sup>59</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*.

world.<sup>60</sup> Oken thus mirrors the Platonic idea of the infusion of the soul throughout the universe, as well as the Stoic interconnectedness. As Campion argued, in the Platonic philosophy, and to a lesser extent in Aristotelian theory, soul was an integral part of the nature and function of the cosmos.<sup>61</sup> Thus, reviewing his text on astrological houses and his esoteric approach towards astrology, it can be argued that Oken echoes classical Platonic themes. As Campion stated, these themes were part of the theosophical ideas that permeated astrology at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>62</sup>

### Deborah Houlding, the revival of traditional techniques

Alongside the astrology focused on soul and personality that have dominated astrological theory and practice during the last century, there is an active interest in the revival of 'traditional' astrology. Astrologer Demetra George touches upon the problem of translations and misinterpretations of ancient astrological texts.<sup>63</sup> These discrepancies in translation, a problem Richard Evans pointed to while asking 'how do we know which translation is "correct"?' were being avoided by the twentieth century traditional astrologers through contact with Greek, Hellenistic, and Arabic primary sources.<sup>64</sup> Deborah Houlding, the founder of the School of Traditional Astrology, is one of the astrologers that aimed to bring traditional techniques back to the forefront of contemporary practice, and she wrote a historiography on astrological houses, *The Houses: Temples of the Sky*.<sup>65</sup>

In his foreword to this work, Robert Hand highlights the importance of history and traditional knowledge, stating: 'With this book, I believe that there is no excuse for ignoring the history of the tradition'.<sup>66</sup> In contrast with Sasportas' and Oken's interpretation, Houlding focuses on analysing the

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<sup>60</sup> Oken, 'Esoteric Astrology and the Houses of the Natal Chart'.

<sup>61</sup> Nicholas Campion, 'Was There A Ptolemaic Revolution in Ancient Egyptian Astronomy? Souls, Stars & Cosmology', *Journal of Cosmology*, 13 (2011), 4174-4186 <<http://journalofcosmology.com/AncientAstronomy118.html>> [accessed 27 June 2016].

<sup>62</sup> Campion, *A History of Western Astrology, Volume II*, p. 230.

<sup>63</sup> Demetra George, 'A Golden Thread: The Transmission of Western Astrology Through Cultures' [http://www.demetra-george.com/Transmission\\_Western\\_Astrology.pdf](http://www.demetra-george.com/Transmission_Western_Astrology.pdf) [accessed 28 June 2016].

<sup>64</sup> Evans, *In Defence of History*, p.78.

<sup>65</sup> Houlding, *The Houses – Temples of the Sky*.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Hand, 'Foreword' in Houlding, *The Houses – Temples of the Sky*, p. 2.

techniques and the symbolism of the houses. Her main primary sources are Marcus Manilius with *Astronomica*, written around 10 AD, Firmicus Maternus (4 century AD), Al-Biruni (973-1048) and William Lilly (1602-1681). Her book is a clear synthesis of the traditional and medieval techniques on house interpretation, enriched with explanations on the principles of house division. She presents an in-depth analysis of traditional house rulerships (the planet that 'rules' a sign or a house), referring to classic features, such as planetary joys as the places where the planets 'rejoice' because the house offers a celestial environment that is appropriate to the natural influence of that planet.<sup>67</sup> Her approach to restoring the traditional meaning of houses is revealed by her conviction that 'the key to successful astrology' lies in 'a confident and unambiguous application of its symbolism'.<sup>68</sup>

In the chapters 'House Rulership in Practice', Houlding's writing style is very similar to Lilly's practical and rational list of astrological features, which has been influenced by the naturalistic and Aristotelian qualities of the planets, as well as by the Ptolemaic system of correspondences.<sup>69</sup> Thus, when discussing the fifth house, Houlding's writing style is very pragmatic, devoid of philosophical or mythological details: 'Main rulerships: children, pregnancy, sex of the unborn child. The health and condition of the children. If afflicted trouble and distress from the children'.<sup>70</sup> Lilly's text on the fifth house is similarly descriptive: 'By this house we judge of Children, of the state of a Woman with child [...]'.<sup>71</sup> Although Houlding's text is centred on historical research rather than creative suggestions, from the text that expresses her view on houses it could be argued that she echoes Stoic themes, such as acceptance of one's fate. Thus, Houlding writes: 'The 8th house remains the house of death, loss, and grief, no matter how pleasantly we wrap that up in digestible phrases such as 'personal-transformation'.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, she stresses the role of the astrologer, illustrating another Stoic feature – the idea of developing a proper mental state, or what the Stoic Epictetus (55 – 135 AD) called 'to deal rightly

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<sup>67</sup> Houlding, *The Houses – Temples of the Sky*, p. xxiv.

<sup>68</sup> Houlding, *The Houses – Temples of the Sky*, p. x.

<sup>69</sup> William Lilly, *Christian Astrology: Book One* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005 [1647]).

<sup>70</sup> Houlding, *The Houses – Temples of the Sky*, p. 71.

<sup>71</sup> Lilly, *Christian Astrology: Book One*, p.53.

<sup>72</sup> Houlding, *The Houses – Temples of the Sky*, p.21.

with our impressions'.<sup>73</sup> For Houlding, the astrologer's language should reflect both the positive and negative aspects of life in order to present its true nature; therefore she argues for the importance of a negative terminology in astrological symbolism.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, it can be asserted that Houlding's work on the astrological houses facilitates the transmission of classical Hellenistic astrological interpretations and that her cosmology echoes the Stoic determinism, as well as the naturalistic Ptolemaic approach, transmitted to her through the work of Lilly.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to answer the question of whether there is any evidence for Greek contribution to the astrology of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The research involved reviewing three primary contemporary astrological texts that each reflects on the main themes visible in the present astrological framework – the esoteric approach, the psychological and the traditional revival. In light of the classical cosmologies of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics that underpin the astrological worldview, this paper analysed the works of Howard Sasportas, Alan Oken and Deborah Houlding.

The analysis of both Sasportas' and Oken's texts shows a minimal discussion of astrological techniques. However, the evidence presented indicates that their astrological interpretation echoes the Greek classical cosmologies. Common themes presented are evidence of the Greek contribution to the contemporary psychological and esoteric astrology, such as the interconnected cosmos, negotiating fate through self-awareness - the equivalent for 'Reason' in classical language, and Aristotelian teleology with its message of the completion of the seed seen as innate potential.

In contrast, Houlding's book focuses mainly on classical techniques, such as rulerships and the analysis of astrological symbolism. This essay has argued that Houlding's text serves as a channel of transmission for the work of Manilius, Firmicus, and other medieval and Renaissance astrologers. The evidence suggests that Houlding's text is influenced, among the already mentioned classics by the Ptolemaic natural scientific framework and

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<sup>73</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses Books 1 and 2*, trans. by P.E.Matheson (New York: Dover Publications Inc, trans. 2004), p.4.

<sup>74</sup> Houlding, *The Houses – Temples of the Sky*, p.23.

Aristotelian sympathetic cosmology. Moreover, it was suggested based on evidence that Houlding's astrological attitude echoes Stoic views on fate.

Therefore, it can be argued that the findings presented support the idea that there is a prominent Greek contribution to contemporary astrology. This is visible not only in the revival of classical techniques but also in the transmission of cosmological and philosophical themes that underpin the esoteric, psychological and traditional approaches.

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