

## Review of three source documents on the astrological planet Mars.

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The following textual analysis of three primary source documents on the astrological planet Mars seeks to elaborate how the range of meanings and functions ascribed to this planet has evolved throughout the history of western astrology. Beginning with Ptolemy's scientific and naturalistic approach in the second century CE, followed by Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonic and magical frame of reference in the Renaissance, and finally leading to the exploration of Liz Greene's psychological perspective in the early twenty-first century, the astrological interpretation of Mars varies. In spite of the established consensus among astrologers on the energising aspect of the planet, each interpretation appears to be rooted in the philosophical and cosmological context favoured by the astrologer in question, to such an extent that the nature of the 'Red Planet' can be radically transformed and reinvented throughout each document.

### Introduction

This paper reviews three source documents on the astrological planet Mars, each one anchored within a different philosophical and cosmological context. In the first place, Mars will be examined in the scientific and principally naturalistic perspective of the *Tetrabiblos* (meaning 'Four Books' in Greek), also known as the *Apotelesmatika*, written in Greek around 120 CE by the Graeco-Egyptian mathematician, geographer and astrologer Claudius Ptolemy of Alexandria (c.80-c.158 CE).<sup>1</sup> The Stoic and Aristotelian dimension of his interpretation of Mars will be put forth, as well as Pythagorean and Platonic aspects of it. Secondly, Mars will be explored within the Neoplatonic, Hermetic and magical frame of reference of *The Book of Life (Liber de Vita)*, composed in Latin in 1489 by the Florentine scholar,

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<sup>1</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, ed. and trans. by F. E. Robbins (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 2001 [1940]. [hereafter, Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*]

priest, astrologer and magus Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499).<sup>2</sup> Finally, Mars will be viewed in its psychological and archetypal dimensions within the framework of the seminar 'Thugs and Warriors', given by the contemporary American-British astrologer and Jungian analyst Liz Greene, and held on 18 March 2001 at Regents College, London as part of the seminar programme of the Centre for Psychological Astrology.<sup>3</sup>

The primary concern of this analysis is to gather insights into the perceived nature of the astrological Mars in different philosophical and cosmological traditions. Mars, often described as the 'Red Planet' because of its reddish colouring, was named after the Roman god of war. The mythological association of the planet with warlike divinities, such as the Babylonian *Nergal* and the Greek *Ares*, matches the prevailing astrological interpretation of Mars as the planet of energy and aggression. In the twentieth century, the eminent British astrologer Alan Leo qualified Mars as 'the Energiser', while the influential Australian astrologer Bernadette Brady has suggested that the key principle for this planet lies in 'focused action, directed motivation, [and] drive'.<sup>4</sup> In spite of the established consensus among astrologers on the energising aspect of Mars, the range of meanings and functions ascribed to this planet throughout the centuries can be quite extensive.

### Claudius Ptolemy

Acclaimed by Owen Gingerich as 'one of the major figures in early science', Ptolemy can be viewed as a genuine observer who managed to reconcile discordant philosophical and cosmological models into one unified astrological theory.<sup>5</sup> Ptolemy adopts in his astrology the naturalistic perspective set out by Pliny the Elder in *Naturalis Historia* (first century CE) and transposes it within an Aristotelian *cosmos* in which, as Nicholas Campion argues, 'nature, through such

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<sup>2</sup> Ficino, M. *The Book of Life*, trans. by Charles Boer (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1980). [Hereafter Ficino, *The Book of Life*]; Ficino, M. 'On obtaining Life from the Heavens', ed. by Angela Voss, trans. by Carol V. Kaske and

John R. Clark in *Marsilio Ficino* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2006). [Hereafter Ficino, 'On obtaining Life from the Heavens'].

<sup>3</sup> Bell, L., D. Costello, L. Greene and M. Reinhart. *The Mars Quartet: Four Seminars on the Astrology of the Red Planet* (London: Centre for Psychological Astrology Press, 2001). p. 167-249 [Hereafter, Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors'].

<sup>4</sup> Leo, A. *The Art of Synthesis* (Edinburgh: International Publishing Company, 1949 [1912]) p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Gingerich, O. 'The Trouble with Ptolemy' in *Isis*, Vol.93, N°.1 (March 2002), pp. 71.

primary qualities such as hot, cold, wet and dry really mattered'.<sup>6</sup> Hence, as Ptolemy asserts, 'the nature of Mars is chiefly to dry and burn, in conformity with his fiery colour and by reason of his nearness to the sun, for the sun's sphere lies just below him'.<sup>7</sup> According to these four humours, which give the planets their benefic or malefic character, Mars is considered along with Saturn as malefic because of its excessive dryness.<sup>8</sup> Equally because of its dryness, Mars is regarded by Ptolemy as a masculine planet.<sup>9</sup> However, in his assignment of the planets into 'sects' (ἀἴρεσις) that classify the planets as either diurnal or nocturnal, despite his assertion that moist is nocturnal and heat diurnal, Ptolemy followed the established astrological tradition and assigned Mars to the nocturnal sect.<sup>10</sup> Ptolemy justified this assignment by suggesting that the evil effects of Mars' dryness would be lessened in the moisture of the night.<sup>11</sup> As Mark Riley remarks, 'it is clear that Ptolemy did not invent this system, but he does try to make it plausible'.<sup>12</sup> The scientific foundation for astrology that Ptolemy attempts to establish through the humours, taken as principles of physics, is further developed in the assignment of the planets to their signs.<sup>13</sup> Due to its dry nature and the occupation of the sphere below that of Jupiter, according to Ptolemy Mars rules, 'Scorpio and Aries, having a similar nature, and agreeably to Mars' destructive and inharmonious quality, in quartile aspect to the luminaries'.<sup>14</sup> The influence of the mathematician Pythagoras, who attributed theological and philosophical resonances into numbers, is accentuated in Ptolemy's chapter on the triangles, in which Mars dominates the fourth triangle of Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces through his house in Scorpio.<sup>15</sup> The exaltation of Mars in Capricorn is based on the rationale that this sign is the farthest south and therefore suits the planet's fiery nature.<sup>16</sup>

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- <sup>6</sup> Campion, N. *A History of Western Astrology Vol.1: The Ancient World* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), p.207-9.[hereafter Campion, *A History of Western Astrology Vol.1*]
- <sup>7</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.4.18, p. 37. [The order of the heavenly bodies followed by Ptolemy is Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon: see Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, p.37, n.1].
- <sup>8</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.5.19, p. 39.
- <sup>9</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.6.20, p. 41.
- <sup>10</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.7.20-21, p. 43.
- <sup>11</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.7.20-21, p. 43.
- <sup>12</sup> Riley, M. 'Science and Tradition in the "Tetrabiblos"', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol.132, N°.1 (Mar. 1988), pp. 70.
- <sup>13</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.17.37-38, pp. 79-83.
- <sup>14</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.17.38, p. 81.
- <sup>15</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.18.41, p. 87.
- <sup>16</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.19.42, p. 91.

Throughout the *Tetrabiblos*, Mars is viewed principally as a malefic planet producing calamitous effects by means of its destructive hot and dry nature in various fields of life. When he assumes rulership of the predicted event alone, the planet brings about wars, capture, fevers, violent deaths, murder and robbery.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, under certain astrological configurations, Mars is mainly or partially implicated in weakness or loss of the father, sickness or sudden death of the mother, the birth of monsters, or of children who do not survive.<sup>18</sup> Mars can equally shorten the length of life, render foreign travel dangerous, kill by means of fever, sudden strokes, haemorrhages, miscarriages, or pestilences, and is associated with the fifth age of life, between 41 and 56 years of age, introducing misery, severity and troubles in the soul and the body.<sup>19</sup> Besides the fatalistic character of his views that link Mars to unavoidable external events or situations, Ptolemy was further influenced by the Stoics through their concept of *cosmic sympathy*, the organic interrelation of all phenomena in the universe. Consequently, he associated Mars with diseases resonating with violence and heat, such as 'blindness from a blow, a thrust, iron, or burning'.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, in his chapter on the quality of action, Ptolemy maintained the room is now so that Mars 'sympathises' with professions whose essence relates to fire, mines, iron, the military, and various crafts.<sup>21</sup> Last but not least, the Platonic legacy of an ensouled *cosmos* is indicated in the connection of celestial mechanics with the quality of the soul.<sup>22</sup> As Campion suggests, 'when Mars dominated the soul, Ptolemy argued, the individual would display the planet's qualities, whether positive or negative, either blind aggression or great courage'.<sup>23</sup>

### Marsilio Ficino

During the High Italian Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino's principal inquiry throughout *The Book of Life* was the harmonisation of physical and spiritual existence within the divine heavenly order. Following Ptolemy, Ficino often groups Mars with Saturn as mostly malefic. As Thomas Moore remarks, '[Ficino] warns against the influence of Mars and relatively few times this planet is

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<sup>17</sup> Ptolemy. *Tetrabiblos*, II.8.85-86, pp.183-185.

<sup>18</sup> See respectively; Ptolemy. *Tetrabiblos*, III.4.115, p.245; III.4.116, p.247; III.8.122, p.261; III.8.125, p.265-267.

<sup>19</sup> See respectively; Ptolemy. *Tetrabiblos*, III.10.132, p.283; IV.8.195-198, p.423-427; IV.9.199, p.429-431; IV.10.206, p.445-447.

<sup>20</sup> Ptolemy. *Tetrabiblos*, III.12.149, p.323. See also, Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology. Vol.1*, p. 210.

<sup>21</sup> Ptolemy. *Tetrabiblos*, IV. 4. 179-180, p.385-389.

<sup>22</sup> Ptolemy. *Tetrabiblos*, III.13, and especially for Mars, III.13.163-164, p.353.

<sup>23</sup> Campion, *A History of Western Astrology Vol.1*, p. 215.

mentioned'.<sup>24</sup> Mars signifies for Ficino the animal nature in men, 'affects and actions common equally to man and to the other animals'.<sup>25</sup> According to Ficino, one is subjected to Mars through anger and struggles, and, 'too many Martial things are like poison to the spirit', because of their extreme dryness.<sup>26</sup> Ficino stresses that Mars can, in certain astrological configurations, dissolve the intestines, and indicate that a sick person should be separated from their doctor.<sup>27</sup> Ficino follows the tradition established by some Platonists and the Hebrew astronomers, 'who put harmful, Martial daemons in the North, and kindly, Jovial ones in the South'.<sup>28</sup> As Ficino claims to have learned from the theologians and from Iamblichus, '[those] evil daemons often take on the illusions of images and deceive us'.<sup>29</sup> However, he doesn't regard Mars as unilaterally malefic. Ficino remarks that, 'if anyone wishes to convict Saturn and Mars of being harmful by nature, which I never would believe, still they also are to be used as doctors sometimes use poisons'.<sup>30</sup> As a matter of fact, martial substances like euphorbium and hellebore can be profitable, advances Ficino, and Mars can be of service to the spirit as a kind of medicine, by heating it up when necessary.<sup>31</sup> Sometimes Mars can even imitate the Sun in certain benefits.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, Ficino doesn't view Mars exclusively in its raw animal dimension, which mostly poisons the spirit even though it can reanimate it in the long run. Besides the appreciation of Mars established by Ptolemy as primarily a transmitter of ominous physical effects due to its heat and dryness, Ficino highlights the divinity associated with this planet that once resonating with the inner realm can indicate a spiritual ascent of consciousness and may additionally give rise to the practice of astral magic. Influenced by the Hermetic mythology of creation in which the powers of the planets are mirrored in the soul and the Platonic inheritance of an ensouled divine cosmos where everything is interconnected, Ficino affirms that, 'this machine of the world is so connected that heavenly things are on earth in an earthly condition, and earthly things are in

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<sup>24</sup> Moore, T. *The Planets Within: The Astrological Psychology of Marsilio Ficino* (Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books, 1989 [1982]), p.183.

<sup>25</sup> Ficino. 'On obtaining Life from the Heavens', p.117.

<sup>26</sup> Ficino. *The Book of Life*, p.93, 118.

<sup>27</sup> Ficino. *The Book of Life*, p.105, 113.

<sup>28</sup> Ficino. *The Book of Life*, p.134.

<sup>29</sup> Ficino. *The Book of Life*, p.134.

<sup>30</sup> Ficino. 'On obtaining Life from the Heavens', p.118.

<sup>31</sup> See respectively; Ficino. 'On obtaining Life from the Heavens', p.118; Ficino. *The Book of Life*, p.119.

<sup>32</sup> Ficino, 'On obtaining Life from the Heavens', p.133.

heaven in a heavenly dignity'.<sup>33</sup> According to the theory of the 'great chain' of correspondences every existing thing in the universe had its 'place' in a divinely planned hierarchical order, which was pictured as a chain vertically extended, and each object's 'position' in it depended on the relative proportion of 'spirit' and 'matter' it contained. Through that universal interdependence one can operate sympathetic magic, that is, argues Campion, 'the harmonisation of one's life with the cosmos through ritual, meditation, the use of talismans, colour, music and herbs'.<sup>34</sup> According to Ficino, 'magic can even unite the celestial bodies to us through the celestial things overhead, or work them inside us, where one can finally see them'.<sup>35</sup> Since, for Ficino, Mars governs effective motion, in order to get something of him through magic one should use 'materials which are fiery or red, red brass, all sulphurous things, iron, and bloodstone'.<sup>36</sup> By fabricating images of Mars armed and crowned, in the hour of Mars, when the first face of Scorpio is rising, one can fight against timidity.<sup>37</sup> According to Ficino astral magic attracts powerful celestial gifts through seven steps each corresponding to a planet.<sup>38</sup> The force of Mars is suggested by strong concepts of the imagination, such as forms, motions and passions.<sup>39</sup> As Ficino asserts there are hidden powers in the stars which produce heavenly force into the spirit and, 'for a Martial power, in order to do much, [it] needs a lot of matter. When it has a certain kind of form, however, even when there is very little matter, it works very strongly'.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps, as Angela Voss suggests, 'we have to understand Ficino's humanistic astrology as part of an intensely personal quest to overcome himself and in so doing to lift it out of the deterministic model inherited from the classical tradition to a new "psychological" level'.<sup>41</sup>

### Liz Greene

In the early twenty-first century, Liz Greene proceeds in her exploration of Mars by means of mythology and Jung's depth-psychology.<sup>42</sup> According to Patrick Curry, psychological astrology is 'a development and renewal of neo-Platonic/

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<sup>33</sup> Ficino. *The Book of Life*, p.135.

<sup>34</sup> Campion, N. *History of Western Astrology Vol. II: The Medieval and Modern Worlds* (New York and London: Continuum, 2009), p.90.

<sup>35</sup> Ficino. *The Book of Life*, p.135.

<sup>36</sup> Ficino. 'On obtaining Life from the Heavens', p.118.

<sup>37</sup> Ficino. 'On obtaining Life from the Heavens', p.139.

<sup>38</sup> Ficino. 'On obtaining Life from the Heavens', p.153.

<sup>39</sup> Ficino. 'On obtaining Life from the Heavens', p.153.

<sup>40</sup> Ficino. *The Book of Life*, p.123.

<sup>41</sup> Voss, Angela, 'Introduction' in *Marsilio Ficino*, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.168;

Hermetic astrology with its emphasis on self-knowledge and transformation'.<sup>43</sup> In that context Mars is no longer recognised as a divinity but rather as a psychological function permeated by the realm of the unconscious and the archetypes. As Greene argues, the war-god, 'symbolises an archetypal pattern of life - what the ancients understood as gods'.<sup>44</sup> From that viewpoint, the myth of the Babylonian fire-god *Marduk* destroying his water-mother *Tiamat* stands for the struggle to emerge as an autonomous individual, which first occurs, according to Greene, at the age of two, during the first Mars return.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the French astrologer Andre Barbault links Mars to the so-called Freudian 'oral-sadistic' phase, occurring at the same age, during which the first appearance of teeth marks the desire to hurt or destroy the loved object.<sup>46</sup> Inspired by the Greek war-god *Ares*, the only god who fights in the *Iliad* as an ordinary human warrior and who is conceived by *Hera* alone without recourse to male seed, Greene advances that 'Mars belongs to the realm of the instincts and the body'.<sup>47</sup> Mars remains malefic argues Greene, only to the extent that family ties and social norms impose repression of the archetype and thus a pathological relationship to it.<sup>48</sup> According to Greene, Mars gets castrated when emotional manipulation or the imposition of guilt around any demonstration of self-assertion takes place. This results in a feeling of impotence, which often breaks out in blind violence, either against oneself or against others, and can even lead to cruelty, depression and to drug or alcohol addiction.<sup>49</sup> The most creative face of Mars arises, argues Greene, from service to the solar principle since Mars represents the fighting instinct, which the solar inner hero uses to make his vision manifest.<sup>50</sup> However, advances Greene, 'when Mars feels completely incapable of fulfilling its function of service to a central solar principle, it can indeed become "malefic"'.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Curry, P. and R. Willis. *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), p.73.

<sup>44</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.168.

<sup>45</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.169-170.

<sup>46</sup> Barbault, A. *De la Psychanalyse a l'Astrologie [From Psychoanalysis to Astrology]*. (Paris: Seuil, 1961), p.114-117.

<sup>47</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.175-176.

<sup>48</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.177-186. [For the notion of the archetype; Jung, C.G. 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious' in *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, [CW9i], trans. by R.F.C. Hull (New York: Princeton University Press, 1969 [1959]).]

<sup>49</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.186, 196-197, 204-5.

<sup>50</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.205, 215, 249.

<sup>51</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.205.

What is more, Greene examines Mars through the elements in synastry and in relation to the collective. She maintains that Mars in the element of air needs a rational justification for the self-assertive instinct; Mars in water is subtle and imaginative; Mars in earth is realistic and pragmatic; while in fire 'it's a very clear, direct, and unequivocal Mars'.<sup>52</sup> In synastry, which is the astrological practice of comparing how the planets and houses in two people's charts relate to each other, Mars raises issues of dependency, freedom, rivalry, the expression of anger and can easily be projected upon the other person.<sup>53</sup> Jung considers that projections transform the world into the replica of one's unknown face or *shadow*. As Jung argues, 'the effect of projection is to isolate the subject from his environment, since instead of a real relation to it there is now only an illusory one'.<sup>54</sup> Greene holds that in the case of projecting Mars, especially if the planet is triggered by someone else's Saturn or Chiron, 'the other person may become a means of waking us up to the fact that we are not sufficiently connected with Mars in ourselves'.<sup>55</sup> From that perspective, Ficino's 'Martian evil daemons' could be interpreted as inner sub-personalities of repressed anger and frustrated desire that haven't yet been sufficiently elaborated, in order to be fully integrated into the conscious personality. Concerning the implication of Mars in wars, Greene cites Jung's belief that, 'the only antidote to inundation in collective madness is the formation of a solid individual centre'.<sup>56</sup> Liz Greene seems to adopt the Stoic belief that everyone is subjected to the laws of Fate, and has to somehow cope with predetermined bodily desires and passions, inherent to the human condition, which often remain unconscious. As Curry maintains for the whole 'school' of psychological astrology, 'one's fate is only "transformed" by recognising and accepting the pre-existent unconscious forces revealed by the birth chart'.<sup>57</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has reviewed a range of meanings and functions assigned to Mars in three astrological documents. Mars has initially been presented within the naturalistic and Aristotelian framework of Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* as hot and dry. The principally malefic character of the planet has been

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<sup>52</sup> See respectively Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', pp. 189-191, 217-217, 225, 230.

<sup>53</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.235-237.

<sup>54</sup> Jung, C.G. 'The Shadow' in *Aion* [CW9ii], trans. by R.F.C. Hull (New York: Princeton University Press, 1969), p.17.

<sup>55</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.242.

<sup>56</sup> Liz Greene, 'Thugs and Warriors', p.249.

<sup>57</sup> Curry, P. and R. Willis. *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), p.74.

put forward, along with Ptolemy's syncretism combining equally Stoic, Pythagorean and Platonic influences in the astrological interpretation. Mars has subsequently been explored in the Neoplatonic and Hermetic context of Marsilio Ficino's *Book of Life*, not only as a malefic planet but primarily as a divine entity mirrored in the soul. Also, the importance of astral magic through which one can obtain celestial gifts has been additionally examined here. Finally, Mars has been regarded as a Jungian archetype of self-assertiveness and autonomy. In the psychological and mythological perspective of Liz Greene's seminar, 'Thugs and Warriors', the analysis has focused on the pathologies related to the planet on individual and transpersonal levels, which constitute its so-called 'malefic' aspect when Mars is in difficulty for the planet to emerge as a solar ally. The richness of the primary documents, their similarities and their cosmological and philosophical divergences on the nature of Mars can highlight the passionate temperament of the Red Planet in western astrology.

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