

Historical Link Between Medicine and Astrology

Babylonian Astrology

The history of astrology can now be traced back to ancient Babylonia, and indeed to the earliest phases of Babylonian history, in the third millennium B.C.

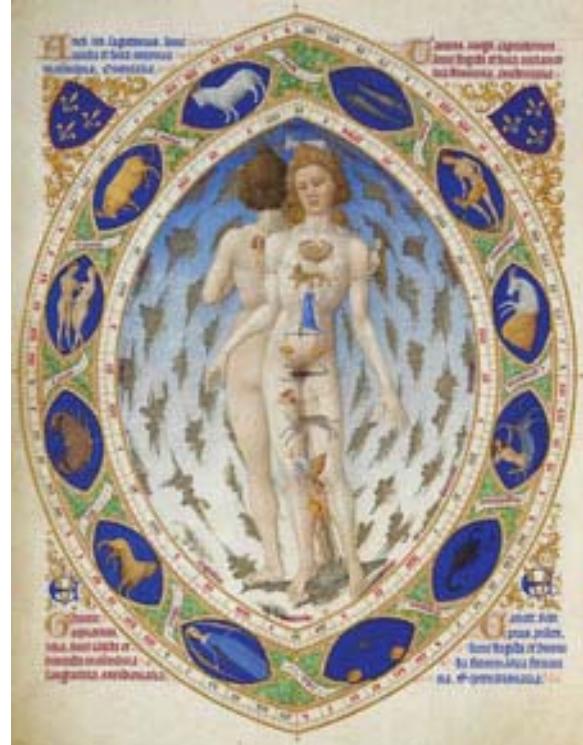
In Babylonia as well as in Assyria as a direct offshoot of Sumerian culture (or in general the “Mesopotamian” culture), astrology takes its place in the official cult as one of the two chief means at the disposal of the priests (who were called bare or “inspectors”) for ascertaining the will and intention of the gods, the other being through the inspection of the liver of the sacrificial animal (see omen).

The earliest extant Babylonian astrology text is the *Enuma Anu Enlil* (literally meaning “When the gods Anu and Enlil...”), dating back to 1600 B.C. This text describes various astronomical omens and their application to national and political affairs. For example, a segment of the text says: “If in Nisannu the sunrise appears sprinkled with blood, battles [follow].” Nisannu is the Babylonian month corresponding to March/April in the Western calendar.

Astrology and the Sciences

Astrology played an important part in Medieval medicine; most educated physicians were trained in at least the basics of astrology to use in their practice. Partly in further development of views unfolded in Babylonia, but chiefly under Greek influences, the scope of astrology was enlarged until it was brought into connection with practically all of the known sciences: botany, chemistry, zoology, mineralogy, anatomy and medicine. Colours, metals, stones, plants, drugs and animal life of all kinds were each associated with one or another of the planets and placed under their rulership.

By this curious process of combination, the entire realm of the natural sciences was translated into the language of astrology with the single avowed purpose of seeing in all phenomena signs indicative of what the future had in store.





From the planets the same association of ideas was applied to the constellations of the zodiac. The zodiac came to be regarded as the prototype of the human body, the different parts of which all had their corresponding section in the zodiac itself. The head was placed in the first sign of the zodiac, Aries, the Ram; and the feet in the last sign, Pisces, the Fishes. Between these two extremes the other parts and organs of the body were distributed among the remaining signs of the zodiac. In later phases of astrology the signs of the zodiac are sometimes placed on a par with the planets themselves, so far as their importance for the individual horoscope is concerned.

With human anatomy thus connected with the planets, with constellations, and with single stars, medicine became an integral part of astrology. Diseases and disturbances of the ordinary functions of the organs were attributed to the influences of planets and explained as due to conditions observed in a constellation or in the position of a star.