ASTROLOGY IN ANCIENT EGYPT

THE 'CONCEPTION AND BIRTH' OF HORUS AND THE ASTRAL BIRTH OF THE PHARAOHS:

Was the temple of Edfu dedicated to the birth of Alexander the Great?

Did the ancient Egyptians practice astrology?

Egyptologists do not think so. But some independent researchers, notably American Egyptologist and writer John Anthony West, firmly believe that the Egyptians did have astrology as part of their 'sacred science'. According to West: "*Astrology was an integral part of the Sacred Science of the ancient Egyptians and is today a vital legacy of our ancient origins and wisdom…"*

So who is right?

All agree, however, that the ancient Egyptians had a 'Star Religion' since very early times. But did this include astrology i.e. the link between the birth of humans and the stars? In other words did the Egyptians believe that the stars could influence the birth date of humans and their lives?

In the Hermetic Texts (tracts written in Alexandria, Egypt, in c. 100 BC) we are told that,

"…God arranged the Zodiac in accord with the cycles of nature… (and)…devised a secret engine ('viz. the system of the stars') linked to unerring and inevitable fate, to which all things in men's lives, from their birth to their final destruction shall of necessity be brought into subjection; and all other things on earth likewise shall be controlled by the working of this engine…"

"God who rules alone, the Fabricator of the universe, bestowed on the earth for a little time your great father Osiris and the great goddess Isis…It was they that established upon earth rites of worship which correspond exactly to the holy powers of heaven. It was they that consecrated the temples…"

The above passages clearly express the belief that the stars and constellations, especially the zodiacal constellations, influenced the lives of humans and events on earth. This, by definition, is 'astrology'. But the pertinent question, however, is whether this belief which dates to the 1st century BC can be projected several millennia back to ancient Egypt.

West of the Nile Valley is the vast desert known as the Eastern or Egyptian Sahara. In prehistoric times it was not an arid and waterless region but a grassy savannah very hospitable to animals and humans. Prior to 5000 BC the monsoon rains of Central

Africa reached the southern parts of Egypt and drenched the Sahara for several weeks during June and July. Temporary lakes formed in the depressions, and as early as 12,000 BC nomads and their cattle came to settle when the lakes were full from June to January. These nomads are referred to as the *Ru'at El Baqar*,[1] the Cattle People. They were black-skinned, tall and slender, and their origins still remains a mystery to this day. In order to be able to travel in the vast Sahara and also to know the time of the monsoons, these nomads used the sun by day and the stars by night. Eventually, around 8000 BC, they found a way of settling permanently by digging wells near the temporary lakes. One such temporary lake was Nabta Playa, 100 km. west of Abu Simbel. In this region the nights are crystal clear, and here the Cattle People turned to stargazing. Century after century they refined their astronomy and, at about 4500 BC, they constructed a vast 'ceremonial complex' which comprised a central structure of stone from which radiated lines of megaliths aimed at the rising of bright stars. They also built a 'calendar circle' and several shadow clocks. The Cattle People thus also became the *Ru'at El Asam*, the *Megalithic People*. Around 3500 BC the climate dramatically changed and the desert became arid and the lake and wells dried up. The mysterious Stone People almost certainly migrated into the nearby Nile Valley and, as many now think, kick-started the pharaohnic civilisation. were forced to abandon Nabta Playa.

Jim McKim Malville, a professor of astronomy at the University of Colorado who studied the megaliths of Nabta Playa realised that they were astronomically aligned to the rising of the sun and stars at specific times of the year, and that they were the oldest Astronomical Megalith Alignments in the world, predating Stonehenge by at least 1000 years. Other than the 'calendar circle' and the 'sun dials', there are six lines of megaliths that radiated out from a central point towards specific stars. According to Malville,

"Our evidence of attention to the prominent stars, Sirius, Dubhe and those of the Belt of Orion, coupled with the recurrent symbolism of cattle on the earth and in the sky, suggests cultural connections across both space and time in southern Egypt. The astronomical tradition of Nabta may have been part of the inheritance of the nomadic culture that was passed to populations of the Nile Valley."

The tracking of the rising of stars coupled with the ceremonial burial of cattle strongly suggests the application of a 'religious astronomy' or as type of 'astrology'. Could this star-cult have been brought to into the Nile Valley after the Sahara became dry?

Astronomers estimate that we can see some 2500 stars with our unaided eyes. The brightest of them is Sirius,[2] a first-magnitude star that is 'practically in our backyard' at only 8.5 light-years away. Other stars are hundreds and even thousands of light-years away. Sirius is part of the constellation of Canis Major which follows Orion. The ancient Egyptians called Sirius *Spdt*. It is mentioned as early as 2300 BC in the Pyramid Texts and was probably observed much earlier, as we have seen from the Nabta Playa alignments. Its first (heliacal) rising at dawn was seen as the herald of the yearly flooding of the Nile. The Nile flood came in early June spilling billions of gallons of water onto the land. In ancient times the flood was a crucial to the survival of Egypt, and was eagerly awaited each year. If the flood was too 'weak' crops would fail and there would be famine. If the flood was too 'strong' the rushing waters would destroy villages and the crops. The flood had to be just right. A rise in the level of the Nile of about eight metres measured at Aswan in early June would signal an ideal

flood. Understandably, the ancient priests paid particular attention to the 'signals' that preceded the flood, and observed the celestial bodies to understand the mechanism that regulated the cycle of the seasons. They studied the cycles of the sun and the constellations. By watching sunrise from the same location (such as a temple) throughout the years, it would not have taken long for them to notice that the point of sunrise changes on the eastern horizon so that it reaches a maximal northerly point in mid-summer (the summer solstice, 21-22 June) and a maximal southerly point in midwinter (the winter solstice, 22-23 December), and that it crossed the mid-point at in spring (vernal equinox, 21-22 March) and in autumn (autumnal equinox, 22-23 September). It would thus have been deeply ingrained in the collective mind of the ancient Egyptians that when the sun approached the summer solstice the flood season would start and a full 'rebirth' of Nature would take place. As French Egyptologist Jean Yoyotte explains,

"…the year is called *rnpet*, which derives from the word *rnep* "to be young, to rejuvenate" in the sense as does the world of plants and animals, of men and the gods and stars, and which is often interpreted as "new" in the context of the return of the flood of the Nile.'

The summer solstice, then, signaled a cornucopia of 'rebirth' witnessed by the swelling of the river and the breaking of its waters over the land as being akin to the swelling of a womb and the breaking of the waters from the placenta. Not surprisingly, the summer solstice was originally taken as the marker for the first day of the year and was called *mswt-re*, literally 'The Birth of *Re*' i.e. the birth of the Sun-god. But there was something else in the eastern horizon at that same time of year, however, that was even more striking and more evocative than the summer solstice, something the Egyptians called *prt-Spdt* ,literally '*the coming forth of Sirius'* or 'The rebirth of Sirius', for it is a quirks of Nature that the yearly cycle of Sirius very much resembled the cycle of human gestation and birth. The duration of the true solar year, called the *tropical year*, is measured from one spring equinox to the next, and is exactly 365.242190 days, or 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, 45.2 seconds. The yearly cycle of a star, which is measured from one meridian passage to the next on the same date, is called the *sidereal year*, and is 365.256363, which is about 4 minutes longer than the tropical year. This difference is due to the phenomenon called *precession of the equinoxes*, a very slow gyrating motion of the Earth which has a cycle of about 26,000 years. A star, therefore, will rise about 4 minutes earlier each night. It follows that there is a time during the year when the star will rise after sunrise and set before sunset, and thus will not be visible. This 'period of invisibility' lasts for about 70 days for Sirius. It will begins at sunset when Sirius is last seen in the west, and its ends 70 days later when it rises for the first time in the east at dawn. This first rising is known as the *heliacal rising*. The impression one gets during the 'period of invisibility' is that Sirius has entered the 'underworld' i.e. it 'dies' in the west, undergoes a 70-days period of magical rituals of preparation, and finally is 'reborn' at dawn in the east. The unseen starry underworld where the magical rituals took place was called *Duat.*[3] It is thus not surprising that the mummification process to prepare the human corpse for 'rebirth' took 70 days in the embalming-house, as confirmed in the so-called Carlsberg Papyrus I texts inscribed in the cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos (c. 1300 BC) and the tomb of Ramses IV at Luxor (c.1163 BC):

"Orion (sah) and Sirius (Spdt), who are the first of the gods, that is to say they customarily spend 70 days in the Duat (and they rise) again… it is in the east that they celebrate their first feast… Their burial takes place like those of men… that is to say, they are the likeness of the burial-days which are for men today… 70 days which they pass in the embalming-house…its duration in the Duat indeed takes place. It is the taking place of its duration in the Duat… every one of the stars, that is to say 70 days… this is what is done by dying. This one which sets is the one which does this…"

In the much older *Pyramid Texts* (c. 2300 BC) that are inscribed inside pyramids of the 5th and 6th dynasties at Saqqara, we find that there is a feminine Spdt as well as a masculine form Spd. The Egyptologist Natalie Beau has cleverly suggested that the feminine, Spdt, is the constellation Canis Major which contains the star Sirius, Spd. This perfectly concords with the triad of divinities found in the Pyramid Texts, namely the god Sah (Orion), his wife the goddess Spdt (Canis Major) and their son Spd (Sirius). Their mythological earthly counterparts were Osiris and his wife Isis, and their son Horus. In these texts we can see that there was a 'stellar' ritual involving the conception and birth of Horus:

"O Osiris, arise, lift yourself up… Your sister Isis (i.e. wife) comes to you rejoicing for love of you. You have placed her on your phallus and your seed issues into her, she being ready as Spdt (Canis Major), and Horus-*Spd* (Sirius) has come forth from you as 'Horus who is in Spdt' …" (PT 632).

There are inscriptions in the tomb of a 4th dynasty princess called Mersyankh III, the daughter of Khufu (2450 BC) that give the date of her death and also the date when her corpse was put into her 'tomb':

> "King's daughter Mersyankh, *Year 1, I Shemu 21*: the resting of her Ka and her proceeding to the House of Purification.
>
> "King's daughter Mersyankh, *Year 2, II Peret 18*: her proceeding to her beautiful tomb."

Sir I.E.S Edwards duly noted that the time between the two dates is 273 days (9 months) which clearly allude to the human gestation period. Could this be a sign of some complex 'astrology' practiced in ancient Egypt?

The Egyptian calendar was made up of 12 months of 30 days, totalling 360 days, to which then an extra 5 days were added at the end, giving a 'year' of 365 days. There were three seasons each of 4 months: *Akhet* (Inundation Season; months I to IV); *Peret* (Coming forth Season, months V to VIII); *Shemu* (Harvest Season, months IX to XII). The months were called (I) *Thoth* (II) *Phaopi* (III) *Athyr* (IV) *Choiak* (V) *Tybi* (VI) *Mechir* (VII) *Phamenoth* (VIII) *Pharmuti* (IX) *Pachons* (X) *Payni* (XI) *Epiphi* and (XII) *Mesore*. The five days that were added are known as the *epagomenals*, and were dedicated to the deities Osiris, Horus, Seth, Isis and Nephtys.

In 1959 by the French Egyptologist Serge Sauneron examined an inscription from the temple of Horus at Edfu in Upper Egypt that speaks of the 'Feast of Hathor':

"Horus was conceived on the 4th Epiphi and born on the 28th Parmouthi…"

Sauneron worked out that these two dates are separated by a period of 299 days. Now in ancient times the period of gestation was often said to be 10 months i.e. 30 days x 10 = 300 days. Sauneron concluded that the dates given in the inscriptions at Edfu defined the gestation period of the god Horus in the womb the goddess Hathor, the latter an alter ego of Isis the mythological mother of Horus. Hathor had her main temple at Dendera some 140 km south of Edfu. These two temples, Dendera and Edfu, were very closely associated by a very important feast known as the 'happy union' which involved a mystical 'marriage' between Hathor of Dendera and Horus of Edfu. Hathor, like Isis, was identified to the star Sirius and more especially to its heliacal rising at dawn. This implies that the dates for the mythical 'conception' and 'birth' of Horus at Edfu was derived from observations of the cycle of Sirius which mimicked the cycle of human gestation (365 days less 70 days of invisibility = 295 days, i.e. 9 months). Every year in the month of Epiphi a statue of the goddess Hathor was taken from the temple of Dendera, and transported on the Nile upstream to the temple of Edfu. The voyage was deliberately planned to reach Edfu on the day of the new moon. The statue was then placed in a chamber next to a golden statue of Horus, where they were 'married'. They understood a sort of pharaonic 'honeymoon' that lasted fourteen days, that is from new moon to full moon. Then the statue of Hathor was returned to Dendera. There, nine months later, the goddess gave 'birth' to a son called *Ihy* lso known as *Hor-mau*, 'Horus the Uniter of the Two Lands' i.e. Upper and Lower Egypt. According to the archeoastronomer Ed Krupp there are inscriptions at Dendera that also 'describe metaphorically the heliacal rising of Sirius which was an astronomical event watched from the roof of Dendera temple'. This concords with the discovery in 1975 by the French Egyptologist François Daumas of an inscription at Dendera that stated that the temple was founded on the 14th day of *Epiphi* in the 27th year of the reign of Ptolemy XII *Néos Dionysos Aulète* (80-51 BC), a date that which was calculated by the French astronomer Eric Auborg to be the 16th July (Julian) of the year 54 BC, and which, not surprinigly, corresponded to the heliacal rising of Sirius seen from the latitude of Dendera.

A fortuitous astronomical coincidence is that the 'year' of Sirius, called the Sothic Year (not to confuse with the Sothic Cycle of 1460 years), is 365 ¼ days. This means that the heliacal rising of Sirius remained fixed to the Julian calendar 'year' which is also 365 ¼ days. At Dedera this event would take place on the 16th July (Julian). But we recall that the Egyptian 'calendar year' was only 365 days. This meant that the heliacal rising of Sirius moved one day ahead every four years. According to the calculations made by Eric Aubourg, he found out that when the temple of Dendera was founded, the heliacal rising of Sirius fell on the 14th Epiphi of the Egyptian calendar, as given in the inscriptions at Dendera. Now for the heliacal rising of Sirius to have fallen on the 28th Parmouthi, the date given at Edfu for the 'birth of Horus' we have to go back (76 x 4) 304 years to the year 358 BC. Since the heliacal rising of Sirius remains on the same date in the Egyptian calendar for 4 years, then a window from 360 to 356 BC must be considered. So who was the mysterious 'Horus' king who was born in window 360 – 356 BC as stated on the Edfu Temple?

Because both the temple of Dendera and the temple of Edfu are from the Ptolemaic Period, it would be logical to look for a king associated to the Ptolemaic Dynasty.

Although the founder of the Ptolemaic Dynasty was Ptolemy son of Lagos, the person who is the true originator of the Macedonian era in Egypt was Alexander the Great.

When Alexander became king of Macedonia in 336 BC he appointed Ptolemy son of Lagos as general for his army. After Alexander's death in 323 BC, Ptolemy became satrap (governor) of Egypt. In 305 BC Ptolemy was crowned king (pharaoh) of Egypt and took the name Ptolemy I Soter. The 'Ptolemaic Dynasty' that he created lasted till the death of Cleopatra VII in 30 BC. Ptolemy I was extremely keen to promote the myth that Alexander was the 'son' of the Egyptian god Amun. Another popular myth that Ptolemy I also encouraged was that Egypt's last native king, Nectanebo II, was the 'father' of Alexander.

When the temple of Edfu was built in 237 BC by Ptolemy III Euergetes, he dedicated the naos in which was placed the statue of Horus to Nectanebo II, the 'father' of Alexander the Great. We recall how an inscriptions at Edfu states that the 'birth' of Horus was on the 28th Parmouthi, and we have seen how in 360-356 BC the heliacal rising of Sirius took place on the 28th Parmouthi. Could the 28th Parmouthi mark the mythical 'birth' of Alexander the Great? The ancient author Plutarch, who wrote a biography of Alexander the Great, tells us that,

"Alexander was born on the sixth of Hecatombaeon, which is the month the Macedonians call Lous…"

Acording to historians Alexander the Great was born in the year 356 BC. Now the month of *Lous* was the first month of the ancient *Attic calendar* which began on the new moon after the summer's solstice. In 356 BC the summer solstice fell on the 10 July and the new moon on 14 July, thus making Alexander's birth fall on 20 July (Julian). This date immediately draws attention to the heliacal rising of Sirius as witnessed from the city of Alexandria in Ptolemaic times. In the famous Canopus Decree by Ptolemy III, the grandson of Prolemy I Soter, we are informed that the heliacal rising of Sirius took place on the 1st of Payni in year 9 of Ptolemy III Euergetes, which has been calculated to be the 20th July (Julian) of the year 238 BC, the year after Ptolemy III Eueretes founded the temple of Horus at Edfu. Plutarch statement begs the question: was Alexander's 'birthday' astrologically fixed on the 20th July (Julian) to link it to the heliacal rising of Sirius and, consequently, to the celestial event that marked the 'birth' of the divine Horus-kings of Egypt? Because of the difference in latitude between Alexandria (31° 12' N) and Dendera (26° 10' N), the heliacal rising of Sirius at Dendera took place *4 days earlier* on the 16th July (Julian). And we have seen how, in 360-356 BC, the 16th July fell on the 28th Parmouthi of the Egyptian calendar, the date given in the Edfu inscriptions as being the 'birthday' of Horus. Was the temple of Horus at Edfu dedicated to the supernatural 'birth' of Alexander the Great?

There is a small chapel at the temple of Hathor at Dendera called the 'birthroom' which is oriented 18.5° south of east, marking the spot where rose the star Sirius on the 16th July (Julian), the 'birthday' of Horus-kings. The temple of Horus at Edfu , on the other hand, is oriented almost due south. Could this orientation at Edfu denote the 'conception of Horus' on the 14th Epithi as given in the Edfu inscriptions? The 14th Epithi converts to the 20th September (Julian). Egyptologists tell us that the ancient Egyptian considered the day to start at dawn. A reconstruction of the sky at dawn for

the 20 September (Julian) 237 BC (the date of the foundation of the Edfu temple) shows that the constellations of Canis Major and Orion, the astral 'parents' of Horus, were positioned near the south meridian, thus in alignment with the temple. According to the Egyptologists Zbynek Zaba and Margaret Murray the temple of Horus at Edfu "is not oriented by the sun, but in accordance with the inscriptions in the temple itself, the orientation lay from Orion in the south to the Great Bear (Big Dipper) in the north." Another inscription at Dendera related to the orientation ceremony for the temples was performed *'in the manner of ancient times."*. This ceremony entailed the participation of the king and a priestess impersonating a goddess called Seshat. Wearing a tight leopard-skin and donning a headdress made up of a golden tiara on which was fixed a seven-pointed star, Seshat was regarded as the 'lady of builders', 'lady of the stars', the 'protector of scribes' and 'goddess of the library'. Astrologer pf ancient Egypt par excellence, Seshat would assist the king in aligning monuments to the stars. Both would hold a rod with a cord looped between them. The cord was then stretched and aimed at a star in the constellation of the Big Dipper. When the precise alignment was achieved, the rods were hammered into the ground with a mallet and thus the axis of the monument was fixed.

It is well-known that the Great Pyramid of Giza has two shafts that were directed to the south meridian and deliberately aimed towards Canis Major (containing Sirius) and Orion, while two other shafts were directed north to the circumpolar region of the sky where is found the Big Dipper.

It has often been argued that the precision of the orientation of the Great Pyramid was achieved by aiming at a star in the Big Dipper. Now in c. 2500 BC when the Great Pyramid was built, the brightest star in the Big Dipper, Dubhe (alpha Ursa Major), culminated at the north meridian at the same time that Sirius and Orion were near the south meridian. This 'simultaneous meridian transit' of Dubhe in the north and Canis Major and Orion in the south took place at dawn on the 20-24 September (Julian)…the date of the 'conception' of Horus'! Here is how this clever architectural astronomy of the Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx is to be matched to the Pyramid Texts:

20-24 September, Orion/Osiris and Canis Major/Isis at in the south at dawn in alignment with the shafts of the Great Pyramid: "O Osiris (Orion)… your sister (wife) Isis comes to you rejoicing for love of you. You have placed her on your phallus and your seed issues into her, she being ready as *Spdt* (Isis-Canis Major)… PT 632

And 299 days later:

16-20 July, dawn, Horus/Sirius rising heliacally at dawn in the east, in alignment with the Great Sphinx (an symbol of Horus): "…Horus-*Spd* (Sirius) has come forth from you as 'Horus who is in Spdt (Canis Major)'…" PT 632; "Let the sky brighten, let *Spd* (Horus-Sirius) live…the son of Spdt (Canis Major)." PT 458 a (Unas). "'My beautiful one!' says his mother; 'My Heir!' says his father of him whom the sky conceived and the dawn-light bore. O King, the sky conceives you with Orion, the dawn light gives you birth with Orion." PT 820-1

In consideration of the inscriptions at the temples of Edfu and Dendera, as well as the astronomical alignments of these temples, and also in consideration of the astral 'conception' and 'birth' of Horus described in the Pyramid Texts and the astronomical alignments of the shafts in the Great Pyramid, it is my opinion that the ancient Egyptians practiced an esoteric form of 'religious astrology' related to the conception and birth of their kings. It is also my opinion that this 'religious astrology' originated many millennia before in prehistoric times in the Eastern Sahara, as the astronomical alignments of the megaliths at Nabta Playa suggest. If this is true, then the stellar observations that originated in the Western Desert of Egypt sometime between 8000 – 5000 BC events on earth lies at the root of "astrology".

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